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A SMASHING SEQUEL TO THE SENSATIONAL "GODS OF VENUS"

TITAN'S DAUGHTER by RICHARD S. SHAVER

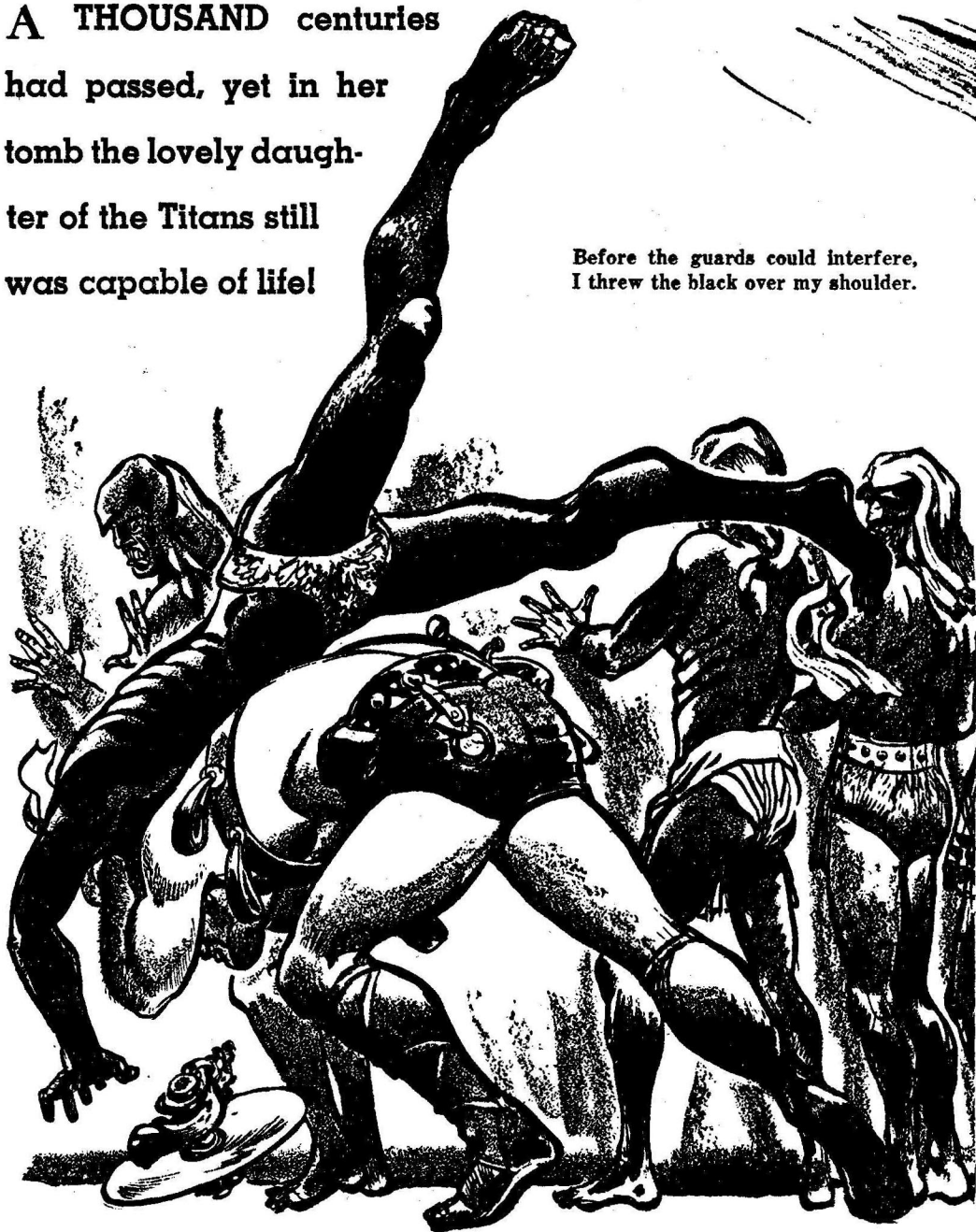
ROBERT
E. BROWN
JONES

TITAN'S DAUGHTER

by Richard S. Shaver

A THOUSAND centuries
had passed, yet in her
tomb the lovely daugh-
ter of the Titans still
was capable of life!

Before the guards could interfere,
I threw the black over my shoulder.



THE fires of relentless war had burnt a desert of scars around once - beautiful Ekippe, gigantic city of the marsh-men of Southern-Venus.

For fifty miles the green of the

cities' farmlands and gardens had been seared and blasted till the soil was no longer earth. The smoking surface was covered deep with still-hot, new - formed glass!

The war-rays were silent now,



their energies paralyzed by flows of static magnetism. Eltona, our leader, the Elder Robot, had devised a magnetic flow that blew out the dynamos from over-induction.

Nonur, leader of the Red Robes of the Cult of the Hag since the death of Hecate had retreated with her murderous followers from our cold steel.

A sword was the only weapon possible in the strong magnetic field which had destroyed every dynamo's power beneath Ekippe. The Red Robes could not face steel, we found.

I, Big Jim Steel, had learned to use the big swords of the marsh-men in the arena battles staged by Nonur when I was her captive. I yearned to sink my blade in one more Robe.

CHAPTER ONE

*And there the body lay, age after age,
Mute, breathing, beating, warm and
undecaying,
Like one asleep in a green hermitage
With gentle smiles about its eyelids
playing.—Shelley.*

The grotesque green marsh-men were silently trooping back from the jungle where they had fled from the titanic destruction loosed by the terrible weapons of our fleet of Elder space ships upon the stronghold.

Sadly they picked their way over the smoking, glassy earth, avoiding superstitiously the bodies of the blasted marsh-men who had failed to escape the holocaust.

The marsh-men, a species peculiar to Venus, are green-skinned. With the gill-slits in their necks, prominent and bulging with gill

fringes for under-water breathing, they are also equipped with interior lungs for air-breathing.

They have large webbed hands, wide webbed feet, staring fixed eyes, and spiny crests on their heads. They are amphibious and intelligent, their cities are finely built and strong, their barbaric culture is artistic, if not exactly understandable to an earthman like myself. I did not blame them for getting out of the way of the sudden battle between the Lefernian Amazons, backed up by the powerful mer-people, and the venomous crew of Vampires under Nonur, the Earth-born leader of the piratical Red Robes.

Our leader, the Elder Robot, or synthetic life-form I had discovered in a forgotten city in the hot-belt of Venus, had proved too much for Nonur's skill with the ancient cavern weapons. Eltona was immortal, had been synthesized in that forgotten time when the caverns were teeming with the greatest technical civilization our planets have ever seen. Her training was so vastly superior to Nonur's modern and sketchy understanding of the uses of the ancient abandoned weapons left behind by that long-gone master-race that the Red Robes had no chance against us. And when it came to cold steel—to which Eltona had swiftly made sure the struggle was reduced—our Lefernian Amazons could not be beaten.

Walking back behind the mechanically striding, yet graceful form of Eltona, through the great Elder borings in the basalt under-rock, passing along the gloomy grandeur of the Elder sculpture making magnificent the walls, I was sunk in gloom, but not because of the sad

surroundings from the dead past.

Nonur had retreated into the impenetrable metal hide-out offered by an ancient "time-safe," as the Elder race's device for escape from life is called.

The time-safe is a device not fully understood today. But I knew that if Eltona did not even attempt to crack the ultra-hard metal walls, there was something about them superior to force. The time-safe was a place which those of the Elder-race entered when they were weary of their near-immortal lives, there to sleep away years or centuries in complete relaxation and the giving up of their minds to the ecstasy of their dream-mech images and sensations. When they entered the time-safe, they set a lock on the door somewhat like our modern safe-doors, which rendered it impossible for others to pass until the set time had elapsed. But there was another secret about their construction, some time-warp or other trick of energy transmutation, that made the metal of the walls impervious. In this way they safe-guarded their retreat from life for as long as they wished.

What caused my gloom was that there was no knowing when Nonur would come out and face her medicine. And Nonur had taken my young wife-to-be along with her and her venomous followers, a captive.

Ceulna! My heart kept throbbing her name, over and over. Would I ever see her again, or would I sit and wait outside that ancient immutable time-safe year after year, while Nonur enjoyed the ecstasy of the Elder's dreams, and Ceulna. . . perhaps she would starve, or be tortured to death, or was already dead. For as a last gesture of mockery

and deviltry, Nonur had placed a knife to her throat as the great time-safe vault doors had swung shut between us—perhaps forever.

So it was I was gloomy as I followed the graceful Robot leader, Eltona, back toward the surface. Gloomy and discouraged in spite of our hard-won victory over the evil of the parasitic Red Robes. For all the fruits of victory were to me so much ashes without my Ceulna. What did I care that the Tuon Amazons had recovered their youth and vigor after exposure to an attack of radioactive sand—when I had lost my Ceulna? What did I care that the graceful and lovely Eltona looked back and smiled gently and sympathetically upon my sad face. She might have been the most fetid of all the synthetic beauties of the forgotten time from which she came—to me she was only an over-intelligent robot.

WHICH was not strictly true.

For a time I had been deeply smitten by her charms and intelligence, by the projection of infinite beauty which her mind's energies automatically cast, ensnaring all mortal minds with a worshipful awe of her—until I had made photographic studies of her to find out the truth about her structure. It was not much I had learned, except that her sex was not strictly what a modern human calls sex. For Eltona was a protean creature, who could cause any illusion she wished about her nature and appearance in a mortal's eyes, and she automatically did cause such illusion, reading a man's desires and answering them perfectly with her protean chameleonic powers. What a thought-record and film-record re-

vealed was a creature beautiful beyond imagination, yes! But not anything a modern man could call woman! For such women do not exist in the life of the race dominant today. But I was to learn a great deal more about the sex of the forebears of the human race than I yet knew. I was to learn in a strange way that Eltona's sex was not illusion.

Beside Eltona walked O n u a , Chief of the Tuon forces, her grace and vigor restored. Six feet of efficient fighting machine, yet she walked with all the subtle serpentine undulance of the original tempter. Her long gleaming metallic mesh cloak hung in folds to the floor—clasped about her, it was impervious to all but the heaviest rays. The long cape was the only genuine covering she wore, the rest was lovely tattooed skin surface. The jeweled straps and belts of her weapon harness did not conceal or mar the beauty of her figure. The harness was purely functional, and upon it, from hooks and clasps hung a dozen tiny deadly antique hand weapons. She carried herself, as do most Tuons, with the fluid dancer's grace their life walking the crystal plastic cable-paths of their tree cities gives them. The old swagger was returning to her, and my heart was glad for her, but she reminded me of Ceulna, and the gladness became again gloom.

There were many dead scattered about the caverns as we walked toward the surface. The red robes of Nonur's followers, of the inner circle, lay side-by-side in an equality of death with their servants and warriors, the big black duckfooted warriors from the southern swamp-lands, the red-skinned renegade

warriors and the few green marshmen who had found employment under Nonur. The swords of the Tuons and their red-skinned allies had slaughtered them as they battled to hold off the attack till Nonur found a way of escape. I cursed their stupid loyalty to the venomous double-crossing leader who had betrayed them to death.

Eltona spoke mentally to one of the robots following in the distance. I could hear her intensely powerful thought more clearly than speech when she spoke thus.

"Put these bodies into Selectron. I wish to preserve them thus in the bio-plastic* as specimens and because I may want to revive them after treatment, or use their bodies for spare parts for creation."

I had long ceased to wonder at Eltona's ways. A modern mind had as much chance of understanding Eltona as an ant has of comprehending the Tennessee Valley water-power project.

The robots began to bring from storerooms beneath the living and weapon chambers great blocks of amber plastic. This stuff they

*Plastic seal life suspension. This method of enclosing a body in a solid plastic block, after suspension of animation, is the only possible one by which the "de" field surrounding the sun and our universe can be escaped.

This is due to the size and intensity of this field of "de" magnetic (reverse of attractive magnetic—de is repellant magnetic).

This field is of such a size that only by fully protecting the body in this manner can it survive long enough to traverse the immense distance necessary for complete escape into "High Tee" areas where life does not cease, of old age.

Someday, when men have learned the true science of the Elder race, they may traverse space and time by this method, and so come again into contact with the descendants of the Elder race of earth. But they have gone so far away in their pursuit of favorable life conditions of Tee that only by suspended animation can we live long enough to reach them again.—Ed.

warmed in great square metal vats left there long ago for just that purpose, apparently. When soft as glue and mildly warm, they dropped one of the corpses into each vat, allowed the plastic to solidify. Then they stacked it once again in the storerooms out of sight.

During this process which I watched carefully, not knowing what else to do, I was startled to see in one of the blocks of slowly warming and melting plastic . . . *a human, female figure!**

I SHOUTED orally to Eltona, then to the robot handling the heat control. Both of them came to me on the run.

I pointed at the figure dimly to

*In the caverns I have seen many thousands of these bodies encased in plastic. Mention of them can be found in other writers, occult writers speak of them, they are an ancient SOURCE OF FOOD FOR THE CAVERN DWELLERS.

There was a large number of (abandoned) migration ships loaded full of them, in various parts of the caverns. They must have been trapped by some cataclysm, the Moon descent which caused the Deluge of the Bible, or the sudden flaming of a Nova from our sun wiping out the life which was left to care for them before the ships took off. Thus the ships have lain, and the storerooms filled with them—perhaps they were so encased to enable them to survive the catastrophe which at that period nearly obliterated life on earth, and did succeed in obliterating all who held the ancient wisdom of the Elder race in their minds.

Inside the great square blocks of yellow plastic, these mighty bodies still remain, usually ^{there} The degenerate cavern dero chip off the plastic, eat the flesh. Truth is they *could be revived* if sane men had a chance to study the writings left by those who put them there in the plastic.

Upon each plastic block is a metal plaque bearing name, description of his training, nature of his forebears and special talents etc. It is very evident that that race crossed time and space in this way—by complete suspension of all bodily activity and encasing the wrapped body in solid blocks of the hard yellow plastic, proof against all stresses and strains of space flight.—Shaver.

be seen within the cloudy, melting block.

Eltona reached out with her built-in body-ray-beams, and touched the robot's mind with powerful augmented ray-command.

He picked the hot plastic out of the vat with his fantastic strength, set it on the floor.

For a half hour Eltona busied herself assembling special apparatus. Then the plastic was set back into the vat, and the heat turned on slightly.

When nearly all the encasing amber stuff was melted from the limbs of the figure, the robot picked the mass out of the vat again.

We bent over it, helped to chip off the remaining amber material carefully.

Exposed to our eyes was a girl of startling muscular development, and of great size!

I looked at Eltona, knowing this was a miracle all of us had long wanted to happen.

Everyone who understood the tremendous abilities of the Elder race hoped and prayed that somehow, someday, at least one would return as a saviour, bringing their medical knowledge and understanding of age again to the sun - planets.

"How did she come to be here?"

"Eltona, save her!"

Our minds were all crying aloud together in anxiety that the wonder of this discovery might not be lost to the great destroyer that had blighted all of life on the Sun-planets for so long as there should be a sun. The death from age that came from the "de" of the sun.

Eltona did not answer, but her fingers flew over the keyboard of the mech she had rearranged for the job. Rays seized the girl's dia-

phragm, others warmed her nostrils gently, drew out the plugs of plastic as quickly as they became moist with warmth. Her diaphragm pumped regularly under the mechanically reversed push-and-pull force-ray. Eltona rose from the ray mech which was now pouring near a dozen different kinds of beneficial rays upon the figure. She searched for what seemed hours among the wall cabinets of the chambers, and none of us could help her, for we could not even understand what she wanted. She returned presently with a huge hypodermic, plunged it into the girl's arm, shot in a full cylinder of some fluid. After watchful minutes in which I saw despair mount in her strange glowing eyes, she shot another plunger-full into the giant girl's breast.

Time! Time! My eyes watched Onua as she bent in silent prayer. These robots and this Amazon could *fully* understand the importance of the find; I could only appreciate it by catching their reflected thought. It was a thing often prayed for—a Messiah from the Gods of the past. This before my eyes was such a thing—one of the great race who have come down to us only in the blind worship of the past! A giant child!

My pulses leaped as at last the breast heaved of itself in different rhythm than the mechanically pushing and pulling force beam. As a slow color mounted though the cheeks I turned, threw my arms about Onua. "She lives, she lives!"

Eltona bent, lifted the giant girl's hands to her beautiful lips. I knew what she meant! I knew what it meant to her weary, lonely heart to find this girl from the past. As the

girl's eyes fluttered their long lashes, as the blue irises turned wonderingly upon Eltona's glowing eyes and then about the circle of our faces, as I heard thought stir in her mind, flash along the beneficial beams and augment through the generators by reflection and mount and mount through all the chamber—the awesome, wondrous music of the thought of the Elder race began to dominate the whole strange scene. The giant child's thought said:

"Why? Why? So much has changed! I was to take the little death and pass the void—I was to awaken in the cold rocks of Calteran afar across the void from this suddenly blazing Desun.* I was to awaken by the clean carbon fires of the deep caverns of Calteran. I was to live where death is unknown to the *Children of Arch-man*. The masters promised me none were to be left. Oh! Oh, mech-woman, comfort my heart. They are all gone—gone!"

ELTONA gathered up the giant beautiful head in her arms, began to croon in a voice such as I

*Desun—For those Shaver students who know the alphabet, this phrase Desun, or disin, is particularly significant. Looking in dictionary under d-e-s I find, under d-e-s-u only desuetude, meaning unused, BUT, when I turn to d-e-s-o-l, same meaning but a different spelling, I find a most significant word—d-e-s-o-l-a-t-e! De-sol-ate! The meaning is given as—"To deprive of inhabitants. To lay waste, ruinous. Left alone."

To those who still think that the sun, SOL to the ancients, does not kill, I give this word de-sol-ate as evidence that the Elder race knew that the sun was the cause of death, that they used the symbols d-e to designate the emanations from the sun that do cause age and death—and the gradual manner of this destruction in the word a-t-e on the end of desolate. For its final effects we have the word desert. Surt was the ancient Fire-God of the Norse. The spelling has changed, but Surt or Sol or Sun—they all say the same, the sun destroys life.—Ed.

never heard her use before. It was a weird song, of strange harmonies, and through it pulsed her thought—loud, too loud for mind to bear without pain, but it was a good pain. It sang of the old days and the great race, and it sang of the resurrected life in her arms, and it explained why she had been left; of the catastrophe of the sudden sun flames that had hurried the leaving—and so one had been left. One and herself, Eltona, and the other mechen standing about with bowed heads. It sang of glory, and work, and the terrible blight of the planets—and the wars they (then, after) fought forever—and of Eltona's withdrawal from it all into the ruins of her ancient home and of her lies to herself that kept her hiding there so many centuries away from all the de-life which was so much less than "life."

And all the time she crooned and sang to the now sobbing giantess child my heart strained with pity for the grief of this child who had lost her loved ones so far in the past and had now to face *the horror of age* from which that race had fled. My brain and my nerves throbbed with the same pity of this child, big as an adult, but a child, that consumed Eltona, and I knew that the Elder race was great because their hearts and their minds were great. Pain could be to them vastly greater than human pain, and sorrow infinitely more devastating.

The mech-woman and the living child knelt there together on the floor, and I bowed my head, and Onua wept softly in my arms. For the wonder and the pity and the strange past glory of those sorrowful moments was too great for all of us: we filed silently out and left the

two from the past there to bear their grief. We could not bear it! May their spirits prove strong, so that some day they may show men the way to find the path to the caverns of cold-surfaced and sunless Calteran—where-ever that planet may be—and into the carbon-fire-warmed caverns beneath that frozen surface.

Onua, sobbing quietly in my arms outside the former weapon-chamber of Nonur the Evil, moaned softly: "Someday, Jim, men may find again the caverns of far alteran. Someday, Jim! We will work always to bring that trip about, to make it possible! We have all been so stupid, having these spaceships left here and the evidences of the past so numerous in our hands, not to understand that to live we must escape all sunlight anywhere, go where there is no radioactivity out in far space. There, build great clean cavern fires to warm our cities, and so live immortal lives of glory, spanning the voids with our ships on and on and on into the ever new and ever glorious future. To sit and fail to understand for so many centuries—man has been so *stupid*, Jim! I never realized what we had failed to do! What we have failed so miserably to understand. *Life is not to be lived under these deadly suns.* Why, the names of them come from the Elder tongue—and they mean *age, death and evil!* Alderbaran - *All de! Bar an!* You know what the word means?" I shook my head.

"It means "the rays of Alderbaran are all destructive energy! Any animals found under this sun are banned from intercourse or contact with human life. It means we too are like that now, Jim. *We are*

now creatures of evil, raised under an evil sun, and so, too destructive to be trusted! Our wars, our miseries, our evils, they tell us that. No sane intelligent life would fail to *bar us* from their places of peace!"

I nodded. I knew what she meant. For the eyes of that angelic child of the giant Elder race had looked upon us all with horror. We were poor souls in Hell to her. We were creatures too low for consideration in her world! We were the DEmented of life under the Dee suns. And *she* awoke among us and knew at once that for her there would never be release! For the life of planets about such suns is quarantined from all contact with the clean life in the caverns of the cold planets of space! It was to her like going to sleep in the peace and quiet of her home in Heaven—and waking in the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp! She was one, *now* of the damned, and could never escape to her own people: for she had been upon a quarantined planet, under an "aldebaran" sun too long. The tremendous truth I had gathered from Eltona's song and from her eyes would always be inside me like a painful burden.

"O NUA, we can try to escape. We can fit ships and voyage outward—outward! They are fitted for such trips, engined for it. We cannot be accepted by the people who left the child behind, *but we can* find our own sunless planet and attempt a life of our own! With the escape from the age of the burning radioactives flung by the sun, we can *find* the strength to do it!"

Her eyes looked up into mine, shining, new-dewed with fresh

flowing courage. "We can try, Jim! The trying may prove us worthy of our ancestors, the people who were like that lovely child!"

CHAPTER TWO

Further than ever comet flared

Or vagrant star-dust swirled—

*Live such as fought and sailed and ruled
And MADE the world. . .*

A month passed. A long black ship headed outward from Venus, past the orbit of earth - of Mars - picking up speed steadily.

Within the ship were two hundred blocks of amber plastic. Within the block were two hundred human beings. Fifty of these were Mers, fifty were Marsh-men, fifty were Tuon women who not been injured by the raiding fleets of Red Robes, being from Panete, which Nonur's destroying expeditions had missed. Fifty were from the cities of the Red races, selected by lot. They were the advance guard of a migration which would continue so long as intelligence remained upon Venus.

At the helm of the ship sat one of Eltona's robots, impassive, unperturbed; waiting for time to pass and space to pass, and for the cold planet which was his objective to approach. Then he would return with news of the feasibility of the project.

Over Venus was spreading a feverish activity, a hope motivating such labor and such idealistic planning as had never been seen before. Behind this activity the synthetic mind of Eltona moved, serene and confident, and beside her mind the sorrowful but awakening mind of the Elder child watched - and suggested how things "should be."

Twin beams hooking her mind to the young Elder-race scion, Eltona utilized the child's reactions to give herself all the human qualities she knew she would need to do the job she had set herself. That job: to reorganize the whole of Venus in a planet-round government set up for the purpose of overcoming the terrible decadence which had affected the young mind fresh from the glorious social life of the Elder race most greatly.

That decadence they both seemed to understand quite thoroughly, its cause and its nature and now the cure appeared!

Toward the end of following up the exploratory expedition sent out into cold space with a robot at the controls, the whole man-power of Venus was directed toward readying space ships for the long trip—rebuilding the ancient ships that still existed in some quantity, and constructing entire new ships after the ancient patterns. In getting the minds of the people of Venus prepared to face such a trip by demonstrating in all the principal cities of the planet the necessary suspended animation and plastic immersion which would safeguard the body from the rigors of space travel, from both acceleration and c o l d , from deceleration and from time. For such trips were made in years, not in months.

By building on Venus a supply source which would constantly ship out to space a flow of supplies and new colonists to augment the two hundred already dispatched to a sunless planet.

These plans and other less understandable thoughts I watched circulate between Eltona's starkly utilitarian mind and Circona's. (Cir-

cona Onoat was the name of the Elder child found in the block of plastic).

But chiefly Onua and I served as liaison between Eltona and her armies and fleets as they scoured Venus for possible opposition, as they landed in city after city untouched before by war and presented them with an ultimatum to join the new way of life or be ignominiously forced to accept progress. To Eltona's mind there was no logic in allowing the less advanced people of Venus to have their "freedom" at the price of peace for her planet—which she now considered only as a base of operations, operations I knew would in time embrace vast areas of space so far away it would take years at light speeds to get there.

So it was that we sped over the vast fog-laden forests of Venus and descended upon startled peaceful little city-state after city - state and handed them an ultimatum, "Accept the new order or die."

Actually a hearty and forthright explanation, a showing of films of what we were doing, were usually all that was needed to convince the oppositionals that what we asked was needed.

We got results. Not that there weren't some surprising brushes with the war-like back-waters of the jungled planet.

For instance there were the trained insects which certain little tree-hidden states within the hot-belt loosed upon our emissaries. Great beetles flew out upon our descending ships from the limbs of the mighty trees, astride their backs were some of the little spotted people - some who had never heard of "Eltona the Goddess." They

downed three of our ships with explosive bolts directed at our air intake screens.

There was the time we settled to earth on a plain near Cairlon, the city of the floating circles. . . .

Everything seemed peaceful as our half-score long battle-wagons settled to earth after announcing our attentions over vision-projection rays.

But we stood outside our ship awaiting the coming of the welcom-

ing committee from the gates, vast rims of white metal surrounding transparent spheres, floating at the ends of cables high above the walls, began to fire down upon us with heavy detrimental beams.

Luckily the alert crews threw the shorter screens into contact before





The insect-people downed three of our ships with explosive bolts.

we were killed. We staggered back to the entry ports of the ships in the total darkness of shorter-ray screens, half dead with the sudden weakening of detrimental. Another second of that ray and we would have died. Those inside the ship were in no better shape. We took to the air - and returned the

next day in force. Cowed by our war-fleet of two hundred powerful spacers, the spheres remained quiescent above the city. But Eltona ordered a complete replacement of all officials of the government, and set up her own regent over them.

A year of this activity passed, and all of Venus lay under direct con-

trol of the robots from the caverns. The robots under Eltona ruled Venus in the way an efficient secretary rules a good boss - they always knew what to do and when to do it - and there was little opposition to their impartial attitude and perfection of logic.

Eltona steadily geared the vast resources of the planet to reproduction of various types of space craft, to testing of equipment, and to a revival of the Elder-race methods of cavern boring and fitting for living the underground caverns thus produced. Two years passed. Another expedition set out to join those who had gone before. I watched the first ship take off into the darkness, wondered how they expected to contact the first party in the limitless tides of space.

The robots knew, but could not explain. They used the same course, corrected for planetary motions and spatial currents, for changed gravitational fields of the speeding planets on the first leg of the trip—used the same periods of “jet-on” and “jet-off.” Arriving somewhere near the other party, they would locate them by means of a radio-type signaling device.

The immense vision, the tremendous nature of this space-conquering plan of Eltona's the vast courage needed to conquer a whole planet and begin to send it into space piecemeal, to depopulate the whole in order to bring the race into better living conditions, would have seemed to arouse opposition. One would have thought the savage races, the reactionaries, those always fearful of change, would have fought to the death against such revolutionary changes in the plans of their whole life. But the prom-

ise of the future without age, the knowledge of the conquered age, were so widely understood even by ignorant and savage groups on Venus that their minds were prepared to follow any plan that bore the stamp of the Elder wisdom.

WE Watched the loading of the second migration ship. Five hundred of the best and most able couples, male and female, we watched step into Eltona's “Tee flow,” freeze into apparent lifelessness, fall into the arms of the Amazons trained to ready their bodies for the long trip that only the rigidity of a robot could stand unless so protected.

This was the way the Elder race had traversed space - still do, somewhere out there in the darkness beyond our reach or ken.

The young bodies were tightly wrapped in the same way that an Egyptian mummy is wrapped, rigid as death from the strong “Tee” binding their atoms together with tiny magnetic charges. I listened to Eltona explain the process to the sometimes fearful colonists about to undergo the seeming death.

“We merely increase the natural magnetic that holds all the parts of your body and of all matter together. What you call molecular adhesion and similar erroneous names, we call Tee, and use it thus, for it cannot harm life. Life itself uses and is in truth a form of Tee matter. Nothing can live when the dissociating charges of magnetism in nature grow greater than the Tee content. This content of Tee binding can be increased or decreased; life processes do so all the time in life's continual changing of one form of matter into another, in the

electro - chemistry of digestion and assimilation, of growth and elimination.

"To prepare a body for space travel it must be so frozen, so that no chemical changes of any kind can take place within its framework, and so stiff that even steel would not penetrate its surface, to withstand the terrible stresses of the high speeds of space travel where gravitational storms may cause distortional currents that would crush ordinary life. Out there a swerve at the terrific speeds used could break a man's back. But not when he is so charged with Tee force, particularly after the body is encased in the swift hardening plastic."

"But the revival of a body so treated?"

"The plastic is removed carefully, the wrappings* taken off, and a slight flow of dis-sociator ray drains off the excess charge of magnetic. There are instruments to

*It is interesting to note the survival of this wrapping of the apparently dead bodies in suspended animation for space crossing in the custom of the ancient Egyptians who wrapped their dead for their journey to the "other world."

It is quite evident that much of the lore of the Elder race survived for a time on Earth, in the survival of this custom of wrapping a dead body, only at last to be overwhelmed by the tide of ignorance. Culture and knowledge so deep as the Elder race could only survive with systematic education, or among a people who lived vastly longer than ourselves.

Did the Egyptians get their custom of wrapping mummies from accounts in the caverns, from wall paintings in the Elder caves depicting the preparation for space travel, or did they get it by actually seeing the Elder race so prepare and then leave Earth forever, leaving the first Egyptian behind to ponder just how such a flight into "heaven" was accomplished? It is no wonder he copied them, no wonder the ignorant man thought they were really dead and that when one died one should be so wrapped for re-animation in the "other world."

DID NOT ALL BURIAL CUSTOMS ARISE FROM SAME? For all expect to be revived sometime!—Author

tell exactly when the normal balance of these forces within living matter is reached. Then the arrested life processes begin at once, for the arresting was not of a harmful nature.

Tee magnetic is no more harmful than water - is in truth a necessary component of all living matter without which it would become drifting gases."

I nodded, looking wonderingly at the "frozen" bodies. I touched one. My hand tingled with a slight shock.

"ELTONA," I asked curiously, "in Elder days, did things have a greater amount of these Tee ions in their make-up? Is that why everything lasted so much longer, including life itself? Is that why the Elder race was so great, so nearly immortal?"

"That is a part of the answer. They moved more slowly, comparatively, I suspect. Because they moved against a retarding magnetic friction of greater intensity than does present day life."

I had watched the robots ultra-rapid movements, and now I suddenly realized why they did move so much faster. Their thought as well as their movement were not now impeded by this Tee drag, yet the lack of it had a great deal to do with our own short life. There was so cona. I thought of her as a giantess because although she was only normal adult height, she computed her own age mentally as but six years. I knew, too, that her parents had been eighteen feet tall. The thought of "years" in her mind had little relation to our own concept of a year, for the relation of earth and sun had changed greatly since the

time she had lived.

During all this intense activity, Onua and myself and the others, who had been accustomed to taking a leading and responsible part in the life of the Tuon nation, found ourselves idly standing about while the robots and Eltona supervised, instructed and efficiently overlooked our own half-hearted attempts to be a part of activities which were in truth beyond our understanding.

Eltona at length deduced our growing impatience and our feeling of being put aside, and extended herself to find duties for us that would not be "beneath" our previous status.

One of these duties consisted of keeping a strong guard on duty about the great opening into the "time-safe" in which Nonur and her Red Robed followers had disappeared.*

Onua and myself spent a great deal of time before this huge portal, built for the gigantic Elders

*For those who have not read my previous accounts of the life of Venus, "Cult of the Witch Queen" and "Gods of Venus," here is short synopsis of the antecedents of Nonur, the Earth-born leader of the Cult of the Witch Queen, called Red Robes by their enemies-and their enemies were everyone who loved children or had normal emotions. For Nonur and her crew were centuries old, and lived on after normal age would have killed them, by daily transfusions of very young children's blood. These transfusions promoted a growth and youth in their bodies due to the active young gland secretions in the child, which are not present in the adult body normally. They took no normal food except milk and certain prepared fluids which had been treated to remove the radio active poisons which cause age. The rejuvenation of aging, dying trees by the grafting of saplings into the trunk, supplying young revivifying sap, is a similar process much used in plant science by tree surgeons on earth. Hecate, the original leader of the red robes, had developed this process for humans into a method for staying alive and young for centuries.—Author

of the past as a retreat from their exacting and tiring life of more intense activity than our own. We had brought to focus upon the door itself a good hundred potent ray-beams, and waited only the opening of that door - only the passage of the terrific field of force by the Robes, and we would have them in our sights, helpless. For no ray within that surcharged antique metal could reach through to see whether we were present and ready - and we knew that to find out if the door were still watched they would have to come out. It was a question of supplies, of time - and they must come out. Lately, after much nightly figuring on possible sources of food inside, I had computed that their last bit of sustenance was now exhausted and they must come out or eat each other. To make sure that they would NOT eat each other, would not open the door and learn of our presence before they were in our power, we had removed all traces of our presence to a mile distance, and there we waited, watching the door continually.

There was only one factor which could cause a difficulty. We did not know what might have been stored within the "time-safe" by Nonur's followers in the time this area of the caverns below Ekippe had been in their hands. There might be any number of terrible weapons stored there, and their break-out could possibly be a terrible battle - though I doubted that they could escape Eltona if they did defeat the guard.

Then came the day so long awaited! The vast double valves of the huge safe-like door swung silently outward, the ancient hinges, bearing hundreds of tons of weight,

screeching with a sound augmented to deafening intensity by our telaug beams watching that door!

Nonur, cruel witch-like leader of the vampire horde, was coming out!

CHAPTER THREE

*All day the Wizard Lady sate aloof,
Spelling out scrolls of dread antiquity,
Under the cavern's fountain lighted roof;
While on her hearth lay blazing many
a piece. . .
Wondrous works of substances unknown,
dissolved
Forever, now. . .*

—*The Witch of Atlas.*
(Shelley.)

OUT from the huge opening slowly pushed the rounded, long taper of a wheeled ray-tank. The ray nozzles, long cylinders with blunt ends, mounted on ball-and-socket swivels, reached this way and that as the occupant, still within the protective force zone which existed within the vast metal shell of the huge chamber, tried to operate the rays while himself remaining within the force-barrier. But his effort was barren, and only served to betray his ignorance of the nature of the ancient barrier, for the cables bearing the electric to the ray-nozzles would not carry the energy though the barrier. As the interior of the huge tank came clear in our penetray vision screens, which revealed the interior of the metal tank as clearly as though it were glass, I groaned.

For lashed to the seat of the tank driver, the form of my Ceulna served effectually to freeze my trigger finger. I could not fire for fear of hitting the body of my loved mate.

But I had not served under the

Red Robes in the past without learning the intricate and devious ways which the ancient rays can be used to delude the mind. I increased the voltage of my telaug watch beam to maximum, and narrowed the focus of the ray to bear only upon the head of the driver. Then I pulled a little lever which threw a detector beam from the vision screen base up to my own mind. Now, without the driver being even conscious of the change, he would think only those thoughts which I was thinking. I had a "make"* on him, as it is called in the caverns.

To keep a "make" requires strict discipline of the mind. I had to think those thoughts he would regard as originating in his own mind. So I imitated his own way of thought, considered through his eyes the revealed surrounding and empty caverns, then drove the great tank on out through the doors to make way for the rest of the Robes—and for Nonur. Once they were all clear of that doorway, we could lay down a barrage of dis-beams across the opening, cutting off all possibility of retreat, then cut them down at our leisure. The plan was fool-proof—but it did not prove so!

Followed tank after tank, and I knew that each mind was seized with a "make" beam by the Tuon warriors at the other telaug and weapon mech we had set up around the ancient dream palace, or "time-safe".

Beside each of the tanks' drivers was lashed one of the Tuon Ama-

*"Make-ray" There are two kinds of "make." One is subtle, undetectable from one's own thought. The other is intense, uncontrollable commands, to which the body and involuntary system of the body responds without the conscious mind being capable of overruling the superimposed thought from without.—Author

zons they had captured and taken into the security of the impregnable metal chamber. None of the more viciously destructive beams in our armament could be used on them without destroying these hostages. But the "make" rays seized their minds, drove the tanks on out into the long cavern boring that led to the time-safe.

So much we could do, control them, but not destroy them. I knew it was possible that Nonur had foreseen our use of the "make" beam upon her drivers, and had prepared a defense. She sprung it on us, a totally new application of the broad-focus de-gravitational beams, once used only in manufacturing and in building. She came out of the huge gates of the chamber with a degravitator that filled the passage with but inches to spare around the tremendous circle of its generator. As she passed the force-barrier, the vast field of the degravitator took effect, ourselves, our heavy mech, every object for several miles range left the floor, floated slowly to the ceiling, and stayed there. It was impossible to keep a ray focused upon Nonur's warriors! Our careful "make" dissolved as we tried desperately to swing and aim objects once firmly anchored by their own great weight, but which now floated away from us at the touch of a finger-tip.

AT once the Red Robes in the ray-tanks, also floating, began firing upon us. The tanks, mech and seats were firmly anchored to the tank frame—and the occupants were lashed in their seats in readiness for this levitation. The devilish ingenuity of Nonur's attack amazed

me. The persons of her captives had not in truth been lashed there to form a living barrier to our fire, but only to distract our attention from the fact that *all* the occupants were lashed to their seats.

Her trick worked out perfectly, and everything in the range of the huge levitator, of the type used when many diverse materials must be lifted and loaded over a large area, was now floating. The fire from the tanks' guns began to cut us to pieces as they searched a wider and wider area for the ray installations and the guards about them.

Frantically I shot my telaug beams toward the caverns nearer the surface, searching for Eltona or her robots. No one else could save us from annihilation, and they did not even know the Cult-men had emerged from the Chamber. Reaching with tantalizing difficulty for the feather-light apparatus which only floated out of reach, I gripped and swung the penetrative beams through all the overhead rock in search.

Without warning, the mighty freezing of Eltona's electron-flow-stopping magnetic field flashed on, and like falling rocks, an avalanche of ray-tanks, apparatus, bodies and weapons fell in confusion again to the stone floors. I was badly bruised, picked myself up painfully, started to run limping toward the corridor that led to the Time-safe. The Hag-men would get back into their secure metal chamber again, and once more Ceulna would be lost to me! I did not think she would survive this time, luck could not be with her twice. For they would have to eat, and only desperation had brought them out to face our anger.

Beside me ran the Amazons of

the Tuon guard, tugging the swords free from their scabbards. In that field of inertial energy only a sword could be used; even a man's movements were hampered by the decreased nerve energy flow.

As we rounded the great curve of the corridor and came into view of the massive door of the Time-safe, I saw that some of the ray-tanks had fallen on their treads from the ceiling, their doors gaped open, were empty. Others had fallen on their sides, the doors were jammed, the whole body bent by the fall.

As our company ran up, shouting at them, the last of the few visible Red Robes scrambled through the great circular valves of the metal door. It began ponderously to close. I raced up to the narrowing gap, flung myself headlong into the opening. But a foot crashed into my face, I fell to the floor, just outside the swiftly closing crevice of the door. With a dreadful click of finality, the Time-safe was shut. I beat my hands on the stone floor, for once again I had lost my Ceulna.

I LAY there motionless, despairing, while behind me around the wrecked tanks I could hear the sounds of sharp struggle, cries of wounded, racing feet, the clash of swords. I did not even look up until one pair of feet raced nearer, and a body suddenly fell upon me, the bare arms wrapped around my neck. Almost absently, with a terrible anger that one of these vile Hag-men should even yet dare to try to kill me, I wrapped my big hands around that neck, started to close them slowly, to make his agony last the longer. I hated them now more than I ever had in the days of my degradation under Hecate.

The soft neck twisted, the face reddened in my arms and the feeble limbs beat futilely against my chest and legs. A great blow on my head from a sword hilt knocked me half senseless.

"Don't kill the girl, now that you have her again. Are you mad, Jim?"

I looked at my "attacker" lying on the floor beside me, rubbing her neck with her hands, her eyes filled with tears.

"Ceulna! I . . . thought . . ."

She got her breath at last, and never was a bawling-out sweeter.

"Just like old times, you blunder and nearly cause my death! Why should a woman love a big lug that hasn't sense enough not to choke his own wife? I can't understand myself . . ."

I gathered her into my arms and stood up, carrying her so, gently, and not caring where my steps were directed.

"Go on, darling. Tell me off some more. I haven't heard anything worth listening to since . . ."

"Since you blundered before and let me get lost and fall into Nonur's hands. Well, if you think I've enjoyed myself in that tank of dream-mech with Nonur and those over-ripe dupes of hers you're mistaken. Age doesn't make them more interesting, I can tell you!"

"Well, it's over now, and we're going to honeymoon before something else happens. Right away, now, and right here, as soon as possible!"

THE big inertial energy generator switched off somewhere in the distance. Tuon warriors began to remove the debris and the bodies with the big levitator Nonur had left in her flight back into the safe-

ty of her refuge. The overturned tank, from which Ceulna had crawled after the fall and caused her captors to cut her ropes and try to carry her back to the Time-safe, lay where it had fallen. The bodies of her captors were strewn about the gaping opening from which they had emerged into the Tuon warriors' arms.

Even as my mind suggested the solution to the problem of Nonur's strange place of imprisonment, I saw that the answer had occurred to Eltona. One of her ever-attendant ancient robots was busily welding the great doors of metal behind which Nonur would remain forever. Welding huge foot-thick bars of the same immutable stuff forever across the chamber that would be her mausoleum. For a count had told the Tuons that Nonur had failed to take a hostage back into the impregnable chamber. They lay dead, or still bound within the fallen tanks. There was no reason to continue the watch around that antique, mysterious portal.

* * *

OUR celebration was brief but impressive. After its conclusion Ceulna and I once more found the little two-seater submersible flier given us by the Mer-people and resumed our so long interrupted nuptial trip.

We had come into this region of Nicosthene and Ekippe of the Marsh-men on a kind of pre-wedding flight. Ceulna's adventurous spirit had led her to try out the gift-ship of the Mer-people on a flight to the south, over the Hot Belt of Venus, on down to the location given on the tiny map which Hecate had handed me as her last parting gift to me. There we had been cap-

tured by the Red Robes, followers of Hecate driven to cover under the surface cities of the Marsh-men.

"Now at last we are free of the Cult of Hecate. The last of those who lived too many lives is dead. The evil of vampirism is once again a lost wisdom, for I do not think anyone but Nonur understood the process of preparation of the blood to be absorbed."

Ceulna's voice was its old music again, and the pleasant sparkle, half-impish, half-angelic, was back in her eyes. I leaned back as our little ship took off. I was happy again for the first time since we had sighted the great black cone that marked the crater of "sacred" Nicosthene.

Eltona had given us leave from duty, telling us to go and enjoy ourselves. We had only to stop at the ruins of the city in the jungle, called Elton, the family home of the people who had synthesized her life and given her an indestructible body so long ago. There we were to pick up certain note books she had kept during the endless centuries of her stay in that time-forgotten wilderness retreat. They contained data of experiments with which she had occupied herself, and she planned to have them developed into text books for the schools that were being set up over the whole planet.

Schools that would train young selectees into fit and ready emigrants to space. Her dream and ours, now, was to fit the races of Venus, and eventually Earth, for migration into sun-less space where age is unknown. There the first robot-piloted ships had already landed, were burrowing deep into the rock and building a home to receive the next sent out.

But Ceulna and I forgot our duties in the freedom and lack of care of a furlough, and excitedly made plans to visit many spots on Venus as yet unknown to us.

AMONG the things Eltona had asked us to pick up from her ancient home in the jungle was a bild-ro-mech set of records. Some of the devices and formulas used in her own creation were described in the records, the equivalent of a library of data, if they had been in book form. I knew from this request that Eltona was planning many other living robots, and surmised they were to be used as pilots and technicians on the long migration trips she planned for every human being who could accept the little death of the suspended animation and immersion in warm plastic. For, since the reanimation of Circona, Eltona was convinced that it was her duty; and she had all of a robot's strict unalterable adherence to the line of duty to save the race of man from the the degeneration taking place in all life form under the sun.

On the note Eltona had given me describing the things she wanted brought from her home were the cryptic words, "The Dero Ball and Dome UR type." I wondered at their meaning, but it was too late to ask. I had no idea what to do about the Ball and Dome apparatus or Ro operator, but would try to get it if my limited intelligence could recognize what was meant by the cryptic words. So many things can be construed wrongly unless one thinks hard, about the ancient cavern people's ways. So much of it has been misused and misplaced by later ignorant hands. So many rays can

be destructive in subtle ways in the wrong hands, I was often wary at being required to handle strange apparatus. It was so apt to do unexpected things in subtly destructive, irreparable fashion.

As the little ship lifted into the cloud ceiling, and Ekippe disappeared below us, we decided to pick up Eltona's articles first and spend a day or two among the interesting ruins of the ancient Elton castle. Then to continue our trip with our obligations all discharged.

We spent a happy day among the chattering spotted tree people who made the jungle about Elton their home, packed away Eltona's supplies in our lockers, and turned in.

In the morning we changed our minds about remaining there among the gloomy corridors and falling stones of the magnificence that was now only decay, and boarded the little ship for the next leg of our trip.

High over the hot belt, we dodged the vast thunderheads towering above the surface of the cloud layer, zooming excitingly around the terrible threat of power in those ever boiling storm clouds that ring the equator of Venus. And were enjoying ourselves for the first time in over a year when the dread twister shoved its funnel across our nose, bore down on us, howling a God's anger at our temerity of trespass on his realm.

The little ship swung in a short arc as my big hands gripped the control wheel grimly. I fought the terrific suction of the nearing funnel of death, whirling in its terrific column of force great trees, masses of water, boulders torn from earth out of sight in the clouds below—and blacked out from the mighty

hand of velocity shutting down on me as I turned the ship too tightly in a desperate effort to miss that roaring column of death.

CHAPTER FOUR

*They drank in their deep sleep of that
sweet wave,*

And lived thenceforward as if some control,

Mightier than life, were in them.

—*Witch of Atlas*
(Shelley)

BRAHM, chief of the Guaymi, glanced with hooded eyes and a motionless face around the Council. Their faces were grim; this was a moment that could undo him and his dearest plan.

That plan meant release from the mind within the mist. No more would the iris of the eye of the mist-sphere open to call inward new slaves. No more must they labor away the bright days storing food to be taken by the mind in the mist. This time, when the iris of the eye opened . . .

But meanwhile his people must be calmed, must not give way to fear. For if he failed their lot would be triply hard, their quota trebled, and the slaves selected for the life within the vast mist-sphere would be three times as numerous. For so had been the vengeance taken always by the mind within the mist.

In the past his plan had been tried by his ancestors, and the mind within the mist had foreseen the revolt, and had defeated them. But this time would be different!

If these grim old men guessed what he meant to do, they would kill him out of hand; for they knew the mind was immortal and all-knowing, was truly a God. But

Brahm believed that their knowing was false, that there was a trick about the mind-in-the-mist.

Brahm believed, as had other men out of the past, that the mind-in-the-mist was but a trick by a people, men like himself. They lived in idleness on the labor of the Guaymi, and the thought of the mind-in-the-mist was their illusion by which they gained all the life of the Guaymi for their servants, ignorantly slaving when they might be free.

What that mist that shrouded the circular area in the forest might be, Brahm didn't know. Nor care. He wanted freedom from the constant labor, from the poverty that loss of all the fruits of their labor meant. For Brahm loved his people, and wanted better things than everlasting work for them.

Brahm's voice was silken, under absolute control, as he told them of a plan—not the plan in his heart, but the one they were to think was in his heart.

"My friends and Elder counselors, I will take our warriors to the south, now that the time has come for the Eye of the Mist to open. There we will hunt the genaulgi, and the deer and the great fish. We will smoke meat, and store up quickly a good supply. The women and the youths can take the other stores we have now into the Eye when the Mind calls. If the Mind asks where are the warriors, it can be said that we had to pursue certain trespassers on our hunting grounds. Then, when the eye has closed again, we can return, our tribe will have lost no hunters to the Selectors within the eye, and we will have stores for the long rainy days ahead. It is a good plan, and one we should have tried before."

Brahm's eyes watched his quiet words, effect upon the old men. Visibly they relaxed, grunted approval. After a time the old First One said:

"It is good. The Council approves."

One by one they nodded their heads, each taking a long moment to add to their dignity. The council had ended, so far as Brahm was concerned. There would be no voice to say him nay until another Council time had rolled round. The voices droned on, lots were drawn to say who should enter the eye, of the younger folk, carrying in their tribute, and perhaps staying forever if the Voice of the Mind commanded. After a long, dull time, the Men arose, filed out of the dark lodge into the damp, white-fogged night.

BUT Brahm did not take his men to the south. In the morning bows were strung, quivers filled, the wrappings of their legs against the thorns were made secure, and the warriors trudged off single file after Brahm to the south. But they circled, an hour later, and headed toward the great circle of mist, into forbidden land! No one spoke against Brahm, had the council not approved?

The Guaymi were the result of a cross, perhaps of the Red Race, and the Amazon whites, long ago. Almost Indian in appearance and color of skin, they lived in primitive style on the borders of the "Mist," an area of the jungles on the rim of the Hot Belt shunned by all other Venusians.

Some hours after Brahm and his hunters had left, the Elders of the tribe made up the quota for the quarterly tribute to the mist-sphere. Young maidens and youths to the

number of fifty were selected from among the best of the tribe, lined up and started off the gloomy trail to the place of the opening in the mist.

For many years this tribute had been paid, and the Guaymi, once numerous and proud of their strength, were now but a fraction of their former numbers. The end of their people was in sight, but such was their fear and reverence for the mighty and ancient thing within the mist-sphere that the suicidal tributes went on and on.

What the mist-sphere was, what lay inside the mystery of the great bubble of haze over the area of the great swamp which had long ago come to be known as the Mind-in-the-Mist, they did not know, surely. But the tales their fathers had told of the terror and death that had come out of that same great mystic bubble of life had so conquered their courage that no resistance was made to the demands upon them.

This sad procession wound along the low, wet and mist-hung swamp trail toward the great place of the Mist-Sphere. In front and behind the hostages, the old Witch-doctors and their younger students wailed their chants, shook their rattles, and offered up constant prayers to the thing in the Mist-Sphere, for they feared him far more than any God. Or feared her, for they did not even know if the thing in the Mist was male or female, mortal or immortal.

But today, unlike other days of the Tribute, as they neared the Place of the Eye in the Mist, hiding shadows rose from the silent leaves beside the trail and followed along beside the procession, unseen by the weeping maidens or by the gourd-

shaking Medicine men. Unseen by any, the warriors under Brahm took up the march alongside the column, and nearer and nearer came the Place of the Eye and the Time of the Opening. For there was but one place the mist could be entered, and one time, the Place of the Eye at the Time. Everywhere else the mist sphere offered an unyielding wall to the curious foot or hand. Force dwelt in that mist, and while it yielded to the hand, it only yielded for a little way, then flung off the hand that touched it.

The hostages stood before the great flickering circles of colored light that marked the pupil of the eye, and stared fearfully at the misty blue iris, for the time was near for It to open.

UP to that great blue iris led a broad flight of steps, and many were the Guaymi who had gone up that flight of steps for the choosing, and few had come back, rejected. To right and left of the eye's mysterious circle the face of the Mist Sphere stretched as far as eye could see, gently curving, lost at last to view. The Sphere was huge, and no one was over-curious just how much ground it covered, or where the sphere ended and the natural mists of the Venusian swamps began.

Behind the group of hostages the bushes rustled as Brahm's warriors nocked arrows, loosened their short bronze swords in the sheaths. Brahm had ordered them to charge into the eye before the hostages entered, to shoot and to kill any living thing they saw, unless it were a captive Guaymi held within. Their hearts were with Brahm in his courage, and many of them had coun-

seled the same thing in the past, only to be overruled by the fears of the women and the elders and the Witch-doctors.

But fear was in them all, and their hands were not quite steady on the bowstrings as they drew and waited for the Time!

Within the mystic depths of the fearful Sphere a gong began to sound, far off . . . Then nearer till a brazen booming hurt the eardrums. As it ceased, the circles about the blue iris began to flicker madly, the colors ran from violet to red to angry crimson to violent flame and back again. Then, with a silence that was itself a sound, the great blue iris began to open gradually like the lens of a camera, wider and wider, and the Mind-in-the-Mist spoke to them with a great meaning to their minds but no real sound.

"Enter, my children. The feast is spread, and glory awaits the chosen . . ."

The tearful maidens, the silent, sad-faced youths began to move forward, slowly, hesitantly. Behind the group, the bushes rustled wildly, and forth sprang man after man of the Guaymi, running forward with drawn bows, springing up the wide steps, staring with quickly darting eyes for some sign of life within at which to shoot.

Just what might have happened next, Brahm was not to learn.

Overhead came a great screaming of wind, the crashing of the tops of the mighty mist-shrouded trees high up, and down and down smashed a long black spinning object, bouncing from the great tree limbs, falling again and again, only to be caught and flung off by the springy branches. Down and down came the

long gleaming object; and maiden and warrior, youth and Witchdoctor all alike screamed and ran from under the falling thing from the mystic skies.

The ship struck the great wall of the Mist-sphere just above the Eye, and bounced from the yielding yet impregnable surface . . . fell to the soft swamp earth just in front of the eye.

From inside the eye came a rustling, a scurrying as of many feet, a sound as of many voices. And a ray reached out and began to search the wrecked ship with a careful, slow insistence. Here and there the ray darted, and where it touched, the metal walls of the long black ship became as glass, so that on one side the fearfully hiding Gauymi could see right through it, and on the other side the eyes behind the Mist-sphere's wall could also see through the ship.

STRAPPED in our seats inside the ship, Ceulna and myself survived the fall through the mighty trees which saved our lives. As the ship at last came to rest, I unstrapped my belt, bent over Ceulna. She was unconscious. I turned to the instrument board, switched on a penetray to search the place into which we had fallen. My first sight was the great mysterious eye of the Mist, and standing in the opening were several of the Guaymi warriors, caught off base by the fall of the ship, unknowing whether to enter and kill, or flee . . . and be killed.

But swift as thought a great ray flashed forth from the mist-wall, seized my own generator, stilled the energy of my beam. Then quietly the ray began to search the ship, and another invisible beam to

search our minds.

As Ceulna stirred, began to rise, some mental control snapped on from the telang beam, and hand in hand Ceulna and I were made to leave the ship. Like sleep-walkers we walked straight into the great eye-like opening in the mist-wall. Beside and about us the Guaymi, warriors and hostages alike, were also walking into the eye, unable to resist the synthetic will in the energy field of control. Under the powerful suggestion, we walked on through the strangely swirling tunnel in the mist, until before us broke a sight that wrung a gasp of awe from each pair of lips.

A city built by magic; towers and spheres and shapes only a glass-blower can imagine into being, stretched before us. How long had this city been hidden from the knowledge of the people of Venus by the eerie wall of protective mist-force? Who could say?

Even I, a comparative new-comer to Venus, had heard of the mysterious Mist-Sphere. But it lay in sparsely inhabited and forbidding jungle swamplands, close beside the dreaded tangled masses of Venus' belt of green hell about her equator, and few indeed among the civilized men of Venus had penetrated here to look upon it. It was but a legend, and there were many such on Venus. Legends in which no man quite believes until confronted with the undeniable fact.

Moving about the vividly colored buildings, along the wide ways and across the fairy-like bridges, were men and women, clad only in a soft, clinging mist which seemed to bear some connection with the mist wall of the city. What was this connection? My mind tried to imagine, but

seemed stopped by the same mental control that still moved my limbs and those of the people about me. Onward we marched, like a troop of zombies, up the wide central avenue, our feet partly immersed in a soft pinkish mist which hid the surface of pavement—or *was* it the surface!

Quite suddenly the control left us, and about me the skin-clad Guaymi broke into excited talk, which I could not understand. I turned to Ceulna.

"Can you throw some enlightenment my way? Just what in the name of Venus has happened to us?"

Ceulna's face was nearly as mystified as my own must have been, but she tried . . .

"Do you remember the strange city and palace where you found Eltona? Well, some other form of life from the mighty past must have remained here protected by the mysterious force-wall from the destruction of time which has wiped away nearly all traces of the Elder races of Venus."

"Hmmm," I mumbled. Her words explained much without telling me anything.

WHEN a mind seizes control of another with a powerful telelaug superimposing thoughts so strongly upon the subject as to cause action, the subject can and does absorb a great deal of extraneous matter from the thought impulses. So true is this that already I was forming a distinct mental impression of the mind behind that control that directed us down the long, eerily beautiful avenue toward the rainbow mist-building which dominated the central part of the city.

That mind was greedy, sensuous, yet everyone is to a certain extent greedy and sensuous. It might be but the mood of the moment. That mind was absorbed in speculation about abstract bio-chemical problems, I could catch the fragments of formulae, the half formed plans of experiments to carry out, and as well that mind was seeking Ceulna in a way I could not fathom. Seeing myself, too, in a way I did not like.

As our group of savage bowmen, scantily clad primitive maidens and youths, and Ceulna and myself in the uniform of the newly-formed world government of Venus, on our chests the sign of the Elder Child, Circona (a great Caduceus, the staff and serpents intertwined), I analyzed the subtle undertones of *t h e* thought-controller's *o w n* thought.

Was it male or female, or was it even human? I could not tell, but I knew it was an alien mind, a mind with appetites and pleasures and habits and culture all completely new and different to me. But for that matter, so was Eltona's mind a mystery and fascination to me. Inhuman, she yet had human appetites and weaknesses; a robot, she was yet alive and able to love and be more passionate and erotic than any human. It was only through consideration for Ceulna that she had not allowed, nay, caused me to fall hopelessly in love with her super-human and fantastically beautiful self.

Was this a similar occurrence of persistence of some Elder-life form into the present day? Or was it some new form of life? Or was it only some hidden group of people using the weird mist-wall and ordinary ray apparatus to enslave the primi-

tive people of the edges of the hot-belt?

I felt an attraction for myself in that half-sensed person behind the mental control.

That should not be there unless the person were a female, and to me it felt like the augmented vital aura of a woman, and a young one. I looked at Ceulna, but her face was rapt in the sleep-walker's empty mask-like expression.

As we passed the low, rounded doorways of the dwellings, one by one our numbers decreased, for at each door one of the savages who had been present before the great eye-like door now fell out of line, entered into the vacant open doors. And it seemed to me as if ecstasy clasped them as they entered, as if some heaven-like experience began for them as they passed the portal.

There was a lotus eater's sensing about this place and about the people that one saw—they were like people in a dream, they paid no attention to ourselves, but moved along like floating wraiths, their faces wrapped in some inner ecstasy, their hands clasped together or their arms intertwined with the one beside them. To them, we did not seem to exist.

AT last, we stood before the weird rounded forms of the tall, many-towered building which filled the whole center of the city. Seen close, like this, the whirling mists which circulated in and about it could be seen to be pressing at the force wall that leashed it, held it there as form. Speeding flows of the mist circulated in patterns like decoration all along the rounded walls, up the tall towers' rounded sides, and the great eye-like doorway was

closed with a blue opacity very different from the mist walls.

As we stood a moment I noticed that of the troop that had begun the long walk through the city, but a half-dozen remained. Ceulna and myself, a tall bronzed warrior on my right, a strong, half-naked, savagely lovely woman on Ceulna's left, and behind us another pair, a youth and maiden of the same cut as the other two, but much younger.

From the open doorway came a flow of strong thought, almost audible to the ears, deafening to the brain.

"Brahm, you have disobeyed my orders given in the old-time, and led your warriors against the Place of the Eye. Do you know that now you will never leave here?"

Brahm started, and by his motion I knew he was responsible for the activity about the Eye-door when we had entered. Slowly I heard his thought reply and reverberate in the augmented hearing of the mind inside.

"What would you have had me do? So many have been taken, there will soon be no people of the Guaymi, no tribe for me to rule. How can a man be a chief if he is all alone and his people have gone into the Eye?"

There was no answer for a time, and we waited. For an instant the control relaxed and the rigid contraction left our muscles. I turned, took a good look at the Chief, and at the city beyond him. Eerie, alien and lovely was that place, but upon it rested a strange sensuous compulsion. There was something about it that I feared—feared as one fears a temptation to indulgence. It was too pleasant, too cloyingly lovely, and upon one's will lay a sensuous

listening, as of some great being who lives for pleasure and seeks it always by listening to every thought of every person.

"Elysian fields" murmured Ceulna. "Like your earth myth . . ."

Then again the compulsion descended upon us, and our limbs moved and carried us within and through the swiftly opening eye of the door.

ABRUPTLY, as the blue door sprang spirally into place again behind us, the compulsion waves of of thought-force ceased, and a strange fearfully pleasant current took its place. Along every nerve and fiber of our bodies the delicious, swooningly enslaving stimulation flowed, and erotic thought forms flowered within my mind. Ceulna took on a vastly enhanced fascination, so that my eyes glued to the long curves of her Amazon's perfect body, and dreams of beauty seemed to grow and flower all about her sweet, Tuon face. Her soft bright hair seemed to seize and hold the fine tendrils of mist that drifted everywhere in the chamber, lacing the beautiful scene with a fine spiderweb of tracery, lending an enchanting perspective of distance to even close up objects.

Every object, every wall decoration, every weirdly alien sculpture in that chamber, my suddenly erotically enslaved mind told me, had a special significance, was designed and placed there to amuse a mind steeped in the deepest preoccupation with the Science of bio-physical magnetics. I remembered that this particular subject was a highly developed science among the Elder races, so I knew that whoever or whatever lay behind the existence

of this strange place had at least had access to the Elder writings and had been able to study and benefit by them. Benefit? My mind hesitated and wondered. Was it possible that we were in the power of a being rendered insane by the study of a science far beyond the powers of the modern human mind to withstand the terrific *inherent* temptation of the subject?

Arm in arm, automatically drawn to each other by the intense pleasure vibrating through our bodies, Ceulna and I walked about the big chamber, examining the weirdly suggestive ornamentation, the great bodies of men and women of stone in the throes of ecstasy, the little abstract decorations which were each of them subtly suggestive of some erotic form. This was a temple dedicated to love, a Temple of Venus if ever I saw one. An alarm bell urgently rang in my mind, but the magnetic field in which we moved was of such a nature that all else was obscured to us but the presence each of the other. As Ceulna and I embraced and our lips met, a soft benediction seemed to descend upon us from overhead, a vitally stimulating flood of awareness overpowered us in an unbearable intoxication of joy. The terrific fires of some inexhaustible dynamo of stimulating nerve impulses held us there quivering in almost unconscious and totally exquisite torment of some stange possessive fruition. I knew now that the being who lived behind this mystery considered us captured, now a belonging, now we were chattels of pleasure, slaves to this being's immersion the lure of vicarious ravishment. Or was it but too effusive welcome of some people immersed in the pleasures of the an-

tiqueray apparatus? I could not say or think, I could only feel and hope for the joy never to cease.

IN that strange city, under the mistsphere, the light changed from hour to hour, and from day to day, but never went dark entirely. It was a little universe of its own, where the laws of life and matter and energy seemed to have been set in abeyance. Nothing took place in a manner customary. Even the food came regularly from the automatic wall - dispensaries without the agency of visible human hands.

A week passed, or was it a month? There was no sure way to know, for though the light varied pleasantly from a vague illumination like noon-light on earth to a brighter glow like mild sunlight, there was no regularity observable in the slow change.

Ceulna and I lived in a kind of dream of love, unnoticing the three other couples in the big building. To us was granted no period of clear and lucid self-determination, the days passed in a weird but pleasant compulsion.

That tiny alarm bell in my mind rang and rang, but there was no way for my self to answer. Eerie and utterly beautiful dreams at times came drifting into us, felt and seen and seemingly material, so that around us all the material and fabric of life changed, melted and flowed and became a metamorphosed thing, a butterfly made from the materials of the ugly caterpillar of life.

All this time that alien distant mind that was the unseen and almost unnoticeable master here was studying us, and at times I caught fragments of the thought of Brahm, the Guaymi chieftain, as he spoke

with the Mind-in-the-mist, but I could not gather the parts into a sensible whole. I could not even desire to understand or act against the utter possession of body and sensation and mind that had so abruptly claimed us.

At times my dreaming mind thought of the legends of Paradise, of Nirvana, of all the many tales of such Elysiums as we had now become entrapped in, and I wondered if some such place as this were the source of those legends. At times I wondered if this were not a city such as Ceulna had told me were described in the Elder writings, a Ro city, where even the minds were run by automatically broadcast thought waves. Into such places the tired and overworked of the Elder races were wont to retire, just as they sometimes did into the so-called "Time-safes", for periods of rest, where even their will and their ego received a surcease from labor.

It could be that such a construction had survived the cataclysms that had wiped out most of the surface structures of that time by virtue of that Force-mist shield of energy about it! It could be, but my perceptions told me otherwise. Behind that control somewhere was a functioning planning mind, alien but almost understandable. I could sense this presence behind the compulsion constantly with us, and I could not decide to approve nor disapprove of what I sensed.

AT last came that moment for which I had unconsciously waited. That strong irresistible compulsion which ruled all the life of the place ceased, our memory came flooding back, our sense of duty to

Eltona and the cause of Circona for which we had worked so hard. I cried out in mental pain from realizing the morass of weak indulgence into which this place had plunged us. I called out to that mind behind the mist, saying:

"O mysterious being, to you joy may be the only purpose and the highest good in life. But to me what you are doing to us is the vilest sort of doom. Are you wholly evil? Are you unable to remember a time when the way of life was more clear before you? Has weakness, temptation and stupidity blinded you to the great truths of life? Have you forgotten those other teachings of the Elder race in your blind pursuit of their science of bio-magnetics?"

The Mind in the Mist heard me, and through the silence, through the sudden awakening which the relaxing of compulsion was for us, came to me a voice . . .

"Stranger, I have awakened from a dream, just now. Your voice, following upon an accident to the mechanisms of the palace of the Mist, has given me something I have not had for long—a curiosity about the outside world. Come to me, I would talk with you where I can watch you and understand more clearly. I would know . . ."

The compulsion which was now as natural to me as my clothes, came again, but only to myself. I rose, and leaving Ceulna sleeping upon the couch where we had spent the long luxurious sleeping periods of dream for I knew not how long, I went toward the source of that rich, compelling voice in my mind.

Somewhere above in the tall round towers was the source of the voice, and I climbed the stairs slow-

ly, mechanically. As I reached the higher levels, I found the stairs were covered with a fine dust, and in the dust were no footprints. The dust was deep, rose in soft clinging clouds about my feet. I knew that no one had passed that way for many years. Yet above me was life!

As I reached the top of the long flight of the main tower, a metal door swung creakingly open. I stood in the threshold staring in upon a scene impossible to my eyes, accustomed to the wonder of the Elder race's miraculous handiwork.

The gloriously molded body of a woman, asleep . . . or in a trance. Her flesh was pearly mist!

CHAPTER FIVE

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,

The works of some Saturnian Archimaze.

*—The Witch of Atlas.
(Shelley.)*

BEAUTY is a word which has been given many subtly divergent meanings.

Here within this tower room lay the real vital meaning of beauty in actuality. She lay upon a wide couch of the mistlike force-stuff of which the eerie city had been created. Like the vibrantly existant yet indescribable stuff of the couch, her beauty was likewise indescribable, yet quite as powerfully material. Woman she was, *or had been*. Some strange metamorphoses of the matter of her body into a pearly, pulsating, vibrant stuff, unlike flesh yet amazingly alive, made her one with the strange matter of the couch, and with the material of the whole city. On one arm she sup-

ported her languidly relaxed and gloriously curved figure, gazing at me with wide and sleepy eyes.

The whole chamber was paneled with complex control instruments, each glowing with the strange fluid force which permeated the whole city. Aside from the wide sleeping couch, the round chamber was bare of other furniture, except that before many of the big instrument panels low benches were placed. There was no one but herself present. Curiously she watched, and I could not help feeling that many years had passed since she had set eyes upon another human being. There was a "sleeping beauty" awakened look upon her face, and the dust and cobwebs that covered every square inch of the chamber bore out that impression.

I stood, with something of the embarrassment of a man in the door of a woman's boudoir. She waved a languid hand to one of the dusty benches. I sat down, feeling as if the misty stuff would break beneath me, but it had all the resilient feel of rubber over steel.

"Time..." she said. The word was like a question, as if time were something she did not quite understand. "I do not know anything about the world or the other worlds, since..." She stopped, looked at me, realizing we had no basis of common experience for a mental meeting ground.

"Perhaps you had better tell me about yourself and this city, then I can understand better how to tell you about the outer world." I suspected I would not, but I was devoured by curiosity as to what she was, and how she came to be here in this savage hinterland of Venus.. Was she a Latter-god, or one of the

Elder race, or some alien who had accidentally come to this planet and built her home?

Her words were familiar and similar to the Tuon, which was a later form of the Elder tongue itself, yet her usage and pronunciation were very different. It was as though she spoke Tuon with a heavy foreign accent. But time alone could have caused the divergence.

"I remember from my dream something of your mind and thought," she smiled and showed a row of large pearls between her purple-red lips. A generous mouth, although too sensual and full, yet lovely. "You are working for a new planet-wide government, a kind of renaissance of the Elder wisdom and way of life led by a syntho-ro called Eltona and an Elder child called Circona. Is that not correct?"

I NODDED. "Tell me of yourself, then. Since you know so much of me, it were better if I understood what and who you are?"

There was about her that tremendous magnetic attraction which exists always about those who use the Elder beneficial life-stimulating rays, and my eyes devoured her too intently, against my will. She did not appear to notice. I wanted to know everything about her and this strange city of hers, or was it hers? Was she the ruler, the *mind-in-the-mist*, or was she like myself but a mote of life caught up in the weird compulsion, the web of life force pulsing through the city in pearly strands of vibrance? Was she a kind of Sleeping Princess, who had just waked after a thousand years, as the room's appearance indicated? Or was she just waking from

a short nap, and about to take her place at the controlling mechanisms which made the whole city a play-thing in the hands of the Mind-in-the-mist?

"I was born here in the city of the Mist Sphere. How long ago by your time standards, I do not know. Many lifetimes as they are lived outside the mist-sphere, that is certain. My people were mighty once, mighty but afflicted with a fearful curse. The curse of ease, of idleness, of slack living for ages. I was different, and I have remained alive while they perished one by one. I studied the ancient books, the writings of the Elder race. I learned much too much, perhaps of the workings of life's inner springs. You know the Elder Science was greatest in its perfect knowledge of the nature of life, of the nature of man and animal life. They could synthesize life so perfectly one would not know it was artificial. You know that?"

"I know that the Elder Science was as you say, I have seen the syntho-ro. Our Ruler, Eltona, is an Elder Race robot. She is very much alive, and very much superior to modern "natural" life!"

"Then you can understand what a young person could learn once she got the key of the Elder writing properly in her mind. I did that, I studied, while my parents played and dissipated and enjoyed life and died, finally. I did not grow old because I knew what the Elder race did to defeat those decaying forces in life. I made myself, as my young body became older, a new synthetic body which you see. I myself am no longer wholly human. Bit by bit I introduced into my own blood stream ingredients which

caused a new and different flesh to replace the normal human flesh upon my bones. Bit by bit I caused to be deposited in my very bones metals and other substances which withstand all decay. I am a product of my own lonely handiwork, and but one thing has defeated me. I am tired of life and all its futility.

"Time passed on and on, the last of my race passed away, I was left at last alone. They would not listen to me, they could not understand the simplest need for learning and I could not make them see why they must submit to my control and teaching. The city became empty at last, this city which is in a way eternal. Then I formed the habit of taking in the young primitives from the jungle tribes and populating my city with their young love. But I have a terrible weakness which defeats me. I dream, and the re-control of the city is of such a nature that even my dreaming mind can control its functional needs, is of such a nature that the whole city, once I place the controls here in position, becomes a tool and pleasure toy of my dreaming mind. I have succumbed to the greatest vice of the Elder Race itself - the dream."

I LOOKED at her lovely, inhuman face a long time. I understood much, now, that I had not about the cruel yet pleasant and soul - destroying pattern of life in this mighty force-sphere which had sat here upon the swamps of Venus hot-belt for so long a row of centuries. I understood, too, why this creature was what she was. The science of the Elder race was a life-science, and in her young innocent use of the flesh transmuting substances

of the Elder science, she had created within her body a character whose glandular set-up was not human. I knew I would never fully understand this creature, but I also knew why the weakness she deplored had overcome her. The glands of her body had become over-developed, so that only in dream gratification of her appetites did she derive pleasure. The will-to-create, the constructive functional aspects of her mind which had made her the great and lonely scientific leader of her race while the rest had died, had gradually atrophied from lack of stimulation. Invention springs from necessity, and there had been little true necessity in her life. The result had been a gradual prostration of her will before the abnormal will-to-pleasure grown in her body by the powerful potions she had synthesized to make her body undecaying. Gradually her body had become the instrument, completely of her mind, and her mind had become enamoured of the glorious dream-life which had been so great a part of the Elder Race's pleasures. Time and environment and accidental glandular feeding of her organs had created a being whose character, determined by her gland secretions as are all characters, was one of pleasure-seeking.

"I think I know why you are as you are, and why this city has become but a myth and a place feared by the native tribes which it devours."

"You think you understand?" Her lovely enticing lips smiled, her body moved languorously in curves depicting to the mind utter delight in sensuous subjugation of the mind. I looked quickly away, for here was a Lorelei more potent far

than anything I had ever contacted.

"I do understand, and I think I can make your life vital and thrilling and active again, instead of this dead kind of dreaming you seem to have sunk into. But you must let me help you, you must place yourself in my hands, for it is quite evident your will has atrophied and is ruled by the baser, less worthy portions of your mind. You are not evil, but you have to learn to live again, your valuesense must be rebuilt. Let me send for Eltona. She can help you far more than I!"

Her eyes flashed fire, anger curved that voluptuous mouth, she rose like a panther painted in silver fire.

"Never! I'll place my neck in no Elder-ro's hands. How do I know her mind, ancient of workmanship, is still in repair? How can you ask such a thing of me? I like you, you attract me. Why do you not place yourself in my hands?"

"O woman-of-the-mist," I said, slowly and gripping my soul with my mind to keep it from groveling before the sensual allure of her, "you must awake from this dream of passion that has ensnared the real you! You must trust me. You can be great, a Leader of all Venus, but not by lying here and dreaming away your lifetime. Your endless dream of life is in truth no more important in value than the ephemeral flitting of a butterfly that sips the flowers and dies. What is time? What do you do that makes life worth living for others? What makes you place such importance on your own pleasures and so little on anything else? You must awake, you must!"

PACING back and forth, her hips swaying a music of motion ir-

resistible, her breasts lifting with a new passion and fire I could see had not animated her for long . . . *long* . . . she began to speak. Something I had said had struck fire in that sleeping mind, but not as I would have wished.

"I will awake! I will go out and conquer this Venus of yours, plumb every possibility it holds to the depths, will make this Eltona of yours teach me every wisdom she has inherited from the past great ones. I will take Venus from her!"

I was taken back by the sudden revelation of her character. It was not as I had analyzed it, my too-hurried conclusions were wrong. No matter how lovely, how gentle seeming, how attractive her sleek, silvery body, here was opposition for my plans, for Eltona and Circona and all our dreams of a bright future for the races of man.

"Why opposition to her and to us? Why do you assume that your plans would be oppositional to Eltona's and to ours, her followers?"

She turned then, standing spraddle-legged before me, her hands on her hips and her eyes defiant pools of imperious magic.

"Because the Mist-Ruler brooks no rivals. I am not being taught by anyone. I teach and rule, others follow! Do you expect me to give up my supremacy after all these lifetimes of supreme authority? Do you take me for a fool? I will not release you to return to your 'robot' and bring your armies against my city. I will not send for your Circona to impose her antiquated morals upon me! I take my pleasures and my powers and my servants where I find them, and no one tells me what to do!"

I should have known better than to say what I had, than to think what I had thought. She had read my thought, had noted all my disparaging analysis of her ingrown moral habits, her time-rutted ways of life, her utter prostration before pleasure which made her dream-rule of this ancient mechanical city so cruel and destructive of the lives she enslaved. I had misplayed my hand entirely. I realized that now. This woman-being would cause me to deplore my mistake before she was finished with me. I could only shake my head and look at her.

"You needn't think you are going back to that sun-browned Amazon maid of yours, my 'hero.' You stay here, I have a use for you. She can get along without you for a time."

"You are making mistakes, right now," I said. "Mistakes you will regret forever, once you learn what they are."

"You can tell me what the mistakes were when I have conquered and made my own your 'wonderful' robot ruler. Think you I am one to be ruled by a 'robot'? Think again, little man!"

"That," I murmured "is your biggest mistake. You can never conquer Eltona, nor Circona, nor even the Tuons. You can make a lot of trouble before you learn that our friendship is worth vastly more than our enmity. You are a child, a spoiled child who has had her own way so long she knows no other way of life. I did not foresee that you were spoiled by the ease of your life. I understand you now. Mist-ruler, or whatever your name may be, you cannot even conquer me. I despise you, and will despise you until you have become humble and worthy of life once again!"

SHE smiled at my outburst, saying as she slid her body softly against me like a great silvery cat, "You are very handsome in your anger, big one! Are you sure you despise me so utterly?"

Just what reply I would have made I don't know. I was sweating with an effort of will almost too great to make - for the attraction that synthetic and natural mingling of flesh and magnetic animal electric gave her - the terrific vital force in that body which was a creation of a master of life-science rather than a human body as I knew it - was like a pole-star to a compass needle. Man's nature was not designed to withstand the allure she could put into action with every motion, every word, every glance of her eyes. But behind me I heard a cry of anger, and whirled to see . . . Ceulna, her face a mask of rage, her long teeth bared in an almost animal snarl of fierce possessiveness, launch herself from the doorway toward the Mist-ruler.

For a few minutes it was all Ceulna's way. She raked her fingers across the Mist-ruler's face, seized her shoulders, bent her over one strong beautiful hip, back and back, finally kicking her feet out from under her so that she fell heavily on her shoulders before Ceulna.

"Cat out of some smoke-ridden hell, leave my man alone after this." Ceulna snarled, and I was surprised not only by her easy victory but by her angry attack upon this creature whose appearance was so revealing of power and pride and wilful selfishness. Somehow my heart warmed more at Ceulna's anger than at some of her most endearing caresses. It is good to see one's woman face a powerful opponent so

fearlessly because of the possibility of losing—one's self.

But the Mist-Ruler was not so easily to be disposed of. From some well of strength within that mysterious body she had made out of what forgotten life—formula of the ancients, she drew a terrible supply of energy, and bounded to her feet again. With her open hand she struck Ceulna across the face, and the Amazon staggered across the big chamber and collided with the wall, sliding downward to lie senseless. Before I could stop her she had followed Ceulna, picked up her unconscious body, flung it across her shoulder and was gone from the room. I raced after her speeding feet, but could not even keep up with her. Whatever she was, she had beneath that dreamy, relaxed lazy sensuous exterior a dynamic source of unguessable strength. She was a superwoman, and I am, after all, but a man. Not a superman.

I had lost my Ceulna again!

CHAPTER SIX

If I must weep when the surviving sun

*Shall smile on your decay—Oh, ask not
me*

To love you till your race is run;

*—The Witch of Atlas.
(Shelley)*

I FOLLOWED that racing superwoman through that city of quivering mist. About me the strange dream life of the captive people went on in a kind of continuous mating dance, endlessly, rhythmically, almost ritualistically . . . the couples danced and embraced—and nowhere were their children or old people or anything but lovers busily making love. It was like some croon-

er's song of moon and June and swoon come to life; except that ahead of me raced that mad creature out of the past bearing my wife on her shoulder to what mad fate I dared not think.

I lost her, as she stepped onto some descending pathway, but I traced her by the little swirls her feet left in the strange mist-covered fabric of the street. Traced her down and down into the bowls of that weird creation of forgotten science, that city of silept, sinister sensuousity. Found her at last, and stood in awe of the weird creature before which she stood in earnest converse.

Ceulna she had thrown upon the heaving mist floor before the great throbbing brain-shape of misty interwaving life-matter which was, I sensed at once, a greater mind than this mad Maiden "ruler" of the city. Was this, in truth, the Mind-in-the-Mist, and the maiden but a creature of his will?

I had much yet to learn of this city. For as the Maiden who I had taken for the Ruler stood there impassioned, haranguing the placidly pulsing mind-shape before her, from around the bulging, gigantic thing came a series of figures. Silent, menacing, they lined up before the great pulsing mist-mind, arms crossed and facing the ruddy-faced maid, at their feet Ceulna, and behind the maid, myself. What and who were these?

The first was all of seven feet high, a black-browed male, heavily muscled. About his waist a sword belt supported a jeweled scabbard, the weapon over a yard long, curved slightly, like a big cross-hilted sabre.

Next to him stood an Amazonian

figure, red-haired, her eyes green slits of cunning, her arms crossed too. About her waist were belted flame-pistols, one on each side. A short dagger swung in a sheath at the center of the wide belt. Her breasts were bare, and her form, while huge for a woman, was divine, her skin smooth and softly misted over with that strange taint that all matter in this weird city took into itself.

Next to her stood another male, dwarfish and misshapen, his eyes black, his nose flattened by some blow. His muscles were twisted by torture of birth into a caricature of strength, his back was humped. But his face bore a stamp of power, of ambition, of pride and will. And at his waist hung three weapons I could not place, a rod, a disc with a handle, and a long bar of black iron, handled with ivory—seemingly but a club.

The fourth, another female, was like none of the others. Not menacing, she stood placid as the mind-mass before which they stood. Her eyes were gray and weary with time's weight. Her face, unlined, yet spoke of cares, of a weight of wisdom and hard-thought hours of toil. Her robe, a blue mist-thin fabric embroidered over with golden arabesques of a star motif, was caught at the waist by a narrow crossed belt, and hanging from the belt one slim blade. Her hands were very long and thin, the fingers idly carressed the pendant on her ear, while her eyes mused upon myself, to her evidently something new after many years of sameness. The Mist-Ruler looked at her with fear in her eyes.

"You wake! I did not expect it, after the years!"

I WAITED, curiosity a burning flame within me. Why had the passionate girl claimed to be alone in this city, its sole proprietor and moving spirit the author of all its wrong and all its strange, sultry, slumbering, devouring beauty? What were these people, the last of those who had built this city of weird mist-matter, and then gone to sleep forever in a dream of sensuous beauty? Or were they like myself travelers lately captured by the Eye in the Mist?

They stood, silent, forbiddingly regarding the impassioned maiden of the tower. At last the grey-eyed star-woman spoke, her hands moving gracefully with her words:

"What is your anger, Dionle, that you bear this stranger woman here to the Mind? Who is this stranger, that you ignore him? What sort of courtesy is it you offer strangers? Must we wake and watch you always? Can you *never* be trusted to guard our home for even one span of time?"

I knew her tongue from hearing it so often in Eltona's mouth, conversing with Circona, and for that matter it was near enough to the Tuon to understand the main import. I stepped forward, raising my hand to my heart in the Red Race gesture of homage, for I knew she must have had contact with the Red race in the jungle about.

"I am glad to hear natural thought, and to see people who have a culture and an understanding of the obligations of nobility. We, my wife and I," I gestured toward Ceulna, now sitting up and rubbing her fair head ruefully, looking wonderingly about at the weird scene, "were captured by some mischance with the members of Brahm's tribe

of primitives at the opening of the eye. We have dwelt here in the strange control dream life for some time. I beg to petition for release from this unwanted bondage."

Her grey eyes lit with pleasure at my words, at the suave and formal delivery which I had learned from my Red comrades in the pens beneath Nonur's arena. Long enough I had studied with them in the fear-filled nights.

She stepped forward, close to me, put a long, lovely too-thin hand upon my shoulder, peered into my eyes.

"You are not a member of the Red race of Venus. Who then, and what are you?"

"I am not even a native of this planet. I am from Earth, the next outer orbit..."

"I see we will have much to talk over. Consider yourself a guest, and not a captive. We have much to learn about the outer world. Perchance, too, there are things you would learn about the City of the Mist?"

"That is true. I do not understand why you are shut off here from the world. Events have changed the life of Venus the last two years. You would not recognize your world."

"Events in which you had a hand, I will wager! Come, you and your pretty wife, feast with us, and later on, we will open the eye and set you free."

Dionle, her face suffused still with anger, voiced a protest at this generosity.

"Nay, mother, these are my captives, and they remain so long as I wish. I will not have you set them free. They are not yours! This woman has a score to settle, she struck

me . . .”

The tall grey-eyed woman only smiled.

“Hush, child. Your arguments are not valid. If you had spent more time in learning your mental penetration lessons, and less on reading of the tales of the mighty men of the past, you would have read that these are personal friends of the Ruler of all Venus. Can you never learn to look beneath the surface and see what thoughts lie beneath? These people could start a war if you had your way with them, and I do not even know if we could win a war! Look for yourself, when your anger has cooled and your mind awakened . . .”

DIONLE swung about to the tall, black browed man with the curved sword, saying:

“Speak, Gor Regin, tell our mother that captives are captives, and are not guests in our city, as she seems to think. Tell her the old ways are gone, and that today we make our own laws. She lives in the past!”

The big man looked at me with a deep mocking glance, then turned to Dionle.

“Peace, sister! Why fret? No one can leave here till the next opening of the Eye of the Mist-Sphere. Not even you, if you desired it, could open the Eye before the next period. By then, many things may have happened. Do not beshrew yourself with angry arguments. By tomorrow light you will be calling the Amazon girl ‘sister,’ anyway. Or are you jealous of the handsome stranger, and wish his woman out of the way?”

At this shrewd thrust, Dionle fell silent, biting her lips.

“Get back to your duty in the tower, child. And do not think I will forget your defiance. Too long have I humored your lies and wayward temper!” The grey-eyed woman spoke sharply, her even, placid manner dropping away from her in anger. I could only wonder who was ruler here—or if any were. It was evident that Dionle was a liar. She had fooled me completely with her Mist-Ruler act!

Gor Regin had said no one could leave here till the next opening of the Eye. I asked the grey eyed woman.

“How long is it till the opening of the Eye? How is it that your only exit is through the Eye? I do not understand. Are you, too, prisoners here?”

“Nay we are dwellers here by choice.” Her gray eyes twinkled on me. For some reason she found me refreshing. “The city is a great living machine. The inner fluids, even the air, are treated to promote life. All openings are sealed, but periodically the opening called the Eye must gape to take in fresh air and certain supplies for the mechanism’s fueling. That is the only time a person can pass in or out. It must be so, as the City is a delicately balanced synthetic organism, and the balance may not be destroyed, even for the uses to which a door might be put.”

Her phrasing was strange to me, but her speech was clear enough to my mind. I liked the woman more than any of the others. I asked:

“What is your name and your position here?”

“I am called Noralin, and I am supposed to be the queen since the death of my husband. But these wayward children of mine are re-

bellious of my authority."

"Are these few of you all the true people of the city?"

"Nay, there are others. But time will teach you all that better than words. Come, 'tis time for the feasting."

"You are Queen Noralin, true Ruler of the City in the Mist-sphere, and these are your children. And there are others, subjects I suppose?"

"Some are subjects and some are enemies. This grey brain-shape here is the real ruler, he regulates all the many devices and machines which keep our city the wonderfully healthful place it is. But the time has been so long, I sometimes wonder if life is not slipping away from the grasp of our minds..."

As I took her proffered arm, to lead her up the steps toward what I guessed must be a banquet hall, I murmured to her ear alone:

"You *should* wonder. In my opinion there is something very wrong with life in this city. It is not natural that the primitives taken in through the eyes should live as they do, as Ceulna and I have been forced to live. There is a weakening, a decadent voluptuous seducing of the will which must in time destroy the will. Are your family not under the mental control of the city?"

"Certain portions of the city are under the old Ro-mech. But Dionle has tinkered with the workings of the device till it does only what you know. It is wrong, but we can not fix it or change it. You do not realize that we are passengers on a kind of Time vehicle, passengers out of a dead past. We have little choice in many things that you have always ruled with free-will. We are accustomed to the conditions by the

usage of time..."

"You speak of time, Queen Noralin, more than once. How long has it been, how long have you lived here?"

"For tens of centuries the city and ourselves have been exactly as you see them."

"You mean you do not age and die?"

"Nothing in the city ages or dies."

"What has become of all the many people who have entered through the eye in that long time?" I asked in amazement.

"Our enemies are costly, in here. You will learn about them when the time comes. Let us speak of more pleasant things. Sit here, by my side, and tell me of the world outside."

THAT feasting room was the most erotically decorated chamber it has ever been my privilege to enter. All of the Elder art is virile, and their art was the antitheses of sterile. But here, in this chamber, some servant of Eros had outdone himself.

I took the place on the couch by the horseshoe table which Noralin indicated. Next to me Ceulna sat.

"How did we come here? Introduce me, you big oaf..." I was so glad to hear Ceulna's casually biting tongue again, that I explained even as I hugged her close with one arm. I did not care what the etiquette of these people might be—my Ceulna had returned from the deadly dream that held the whole City of the Mist in its thrall.

I introduced her, although it had already been done, and they seemed to know quite well why it was necessary, for they did not blink an eye—

lash. Nor look guilty, either. To them the peculiar nature of the life in the city was evidently as accepted as tramcars in London.

Ceulna was much taken by the good looks and alien brand of intelligence displayed by the company. She began a chatter of questions to which she provided the answers without giving them time to think, and laughing and drinking and eating, became a kind of spirit of the feast, with everyone else watching her almost gloomily.

I realized that Ceulna had not had time to realize exactly where she was, and that the drinks the absent-eyed slaves brought as rapidly as she emptied her glass had gone to her head before she knew that she was not exactly in the same position as that she occupied in Tuon circles.

Myself devoted my attention to Queen Noralin, for I saw in her our one chance for a powerful friend of the inner circle here, whether her title of Queen meant anything or not. Certainly she bore herself as if her power were absolute, but then, so did they all.

The Hunchback, his sinewy limbs and neck in an attitude of adoration, plied Ceulna with viands, questioning her closely all the while, but I saw no reason to curb her frank replies. The tall one named Gor Regin was also very attentive to Ceulna, and I saw at once they realized her oblivious mental state just now and were aiming to make the most of it in information gained about the state of affairs in the outside world. I did not realize how little they knew about it till their questions revealed abysmal ignorance . . .

"Are there no ro-cities like ours, then?" I heard Gor Regin ask in

surprise.

"Is this a ro-city?" asked Ceulna, instead of answering. "What is a ro-city? Maybe we have some, at that, if I knew what one was?"

I turned my head from Noralin to chime in:

"Yes it is a ro-city, Ceulna, and you have been a robot to its mental control field since you have been here, and so have I."

GOR Regin merely smiled at my somewhat indignant remark, and Ceulna laughed at nothing. Gor Regin said:

"A ro-city is one run by an ancient life-pattern from the Master race libraries, augmented and used as a control field for the whole city. This city was built after the ancient pattern of such cities. All the Elder cities were ro-cities."

Ceulna knew something of this, too.

"Oh, no! You are entirely wrong. The ro-patterns were only used in control strength in time of emergency or during periods of debauch when they celebrated some great holiday. They never interfered with the natural growth of men's self-will unless it could not be avoided.

Here Queen Noralin took an interest in Ceulna instead of me, and said:

"You are both wrong. The Elder race never used ro-rule for members of the Elder race. They used it almost exclusively in experimental colonies of lesser races to promote their growth in character and health and intelligence. Their ro-cities were culture schools where lesser races were brought up to higher living standards by force of imposed life-pattern."

I decided to find out something

myself . . .

"Just what type of pattern is this which you use upon this city? Certainly it is no thing designed to strengthen character—rather it seems designed to weaken the will . . ."

"It is an ancient Holiday rule-record used by the Elder race." Gor Regin's voice was cynical, bored. "We have used it a great period of time without friction or cause for worry on our part. It is one in which all possible causes of strife have been removed for Holiday periods. The Elder race used it to allow themselves freedom from the worries of government. So do we. There is no harm in it."

"To me there seems an amount of harm too great for such an attitude." I looked at Gor Regin a little narrow-eyed, my lips unsmiling. "Such a device was never designed as a permanent living pattern for any person—least of all for a whole city of people. For one day perhaps, under the standards of the Elder race and their unique morals, yes, it may have been harmless. But certainly not harmless when used continually, as you have been doing. What do you do with yourselves, that you do not have time to rule the city wisely and well, that you cannot tend to the business of living properly?"

Ceulna put out her hand to my arm, blinking her eyes warningly at me, and even Queen Noralin shook her head slightly at me to warn me, but it was too late. Gor Regin rose, his face red with sudden anger.

"Stranger, it would be better if you remember you are a guest, and not a Police Officer come to correct our ways. Noralin can pamper you if she wishes, but hereafter keep

yourself from my path!"

He stalked from the room, and I could have kicked myself. But my anger at our long subservience to the stupefying mental impulses of the city was too great to keep in.

AS at a signal, each of the two others rose. The great-bodied beauty of the flaming red tresses and sleepy eyes, and the hunch-backed brother, with his strange iron club in his hand, followed their brother from the room. I realized that I had not been a polite and considerate guest, and I sat shame-faced before the grey-eyed Queen, who smiled calmly, seeming amused at the sudden display of temper in her children—if they were her children? She put out her hand to my arm, a soft long slender hand of great beauty, jewels glinting fabulous fires along the fingers.

"Do not be abashed. You questioned their way of life, and that is good. But it has been centuries since anyone has seen fit to cross them in anything. They are not used to people and the ways of the outer world. Forgive them, and I will convey your apologies if any is needed. You are right; it is not a good thing we do to these people, but it is not bad, either. Their life in the jungle is of no account, and here they live for many lifetimes in ecstasy such as nothing in their primitive life could give them. It is not making anything wonderful out of them, but it giving them more than the jungle gives them. So it is that Gor Regin cannot understand why you question the record."

"I forget that anything is an improvement over their wild way of life, they seem such charming savages. I did not realize what my

words would seem to imply. I do apologize, and you must make that clear to your children."

"My children?" Noralin laughed, "Oh, yes, my children. They do not seem like children!"

"How many circlings of the clock have occurred since they were children, here? One can never remember. But come, I will show you to your quarters. It were better to stay there till I have time to explain to the youngsters how it is you do not understand the city."

* * *

BUT Queen Noralin never got the chance to set our little misunderstanding right after she left us in the big mist-walled chambers which were to us so much too big...

Days passed before we saw anyone but the mute ecstatic debauchees who went about their duties here quite unconsciously and according to some inner hearing of orders from the mechanical master pattern of the control broadcast. Days past and Ceulna and I sat in our tremendous palatial chambers upon the soft white fur chairs, or ate at the big table with the automaton-like servants serving, or stared into the mechanically unrolling scenes upon the televue screens which were atuned to some automatic re-broadcast of the ancient records of the past. It was very like being held prisoner in a palace of the Elder race—and it was, except that I knew these rulers were not the Elder race, but were only ignorant dwellers whose minds had been distorted into strange patterns by the age of perfectly provided-for life the city had given them without the need to stir one muscle toward anything but pleasure or sport.

When our lonely, eerie waiting had at last nearly broken our control and I was about to venture out to see what-was-what, an event occurred which told me that the innocuous harmlessness of this place was but a sham which had been played upon us. And we had fallen for it—it was evident that they had been investigating the truth of our reports as to the power of those whom we served. It was evident to me that the time we waited had been spent by them in making sure that no harm would come to them for keeping us. And the little story of the unopening eye I learned was false...

This event was the cessation of the daily visits of Queen Noralin. She had spent some time every day with us, often sitting with us for hours. When she failed to come for two days, I knew that something sinister had happened. I meant to find out.

Our door had been carefully locked after every visit by the guards bringing our food, and my only chance to get out and learn anything was to overpower him. This did not look too hard, as he came alone, and was one of the empty-eyed ecstatics who was under the control-atunement of the city.

Today, as this man entered, I was waiting, and seized him from behind as he closed the door. Ceulna swiftly lashed his arms with torn curtains and we deposited him unharmed upon the big bed. Taking his keys (he had no weapon) I left the room, Ceulna staying behind to allay suspicion if the guard were missed. I locked the door behind me, made my way quickly along toward the lower chambers where I had first met these strange people

of the Mist City. I wanted to learn something about that gigantic synthetic brain which Noralin had said was the real ruler of the city. I wanted to learn everything I could about this city, for I knew it was in truth a great marvel of the Elder work, and its wall of mist-force that kept out all detrimental forces from life, protecting it as it did in a perfectly sealed force bubble—a thing that would make the planets of our sun habitable even to the races who had fled so long ago from our sun.

How had it occurred that the Mist City existed and yet they had been forced to flee to preserve life in their bodies? I wondered if the secret of the Mist City's immunity from age was not a technique developed by some genius after the flight of the Elder Race? Perhaps by the ancestors of this family now ruling here. I meant to learn . . .

Down the long flights of stairs, shining softly under the vibrant mist-sheath which coated everything, past the immense and weirdly beautiful feast hall, empty now and reminding me of nothing but the futility of the lives who had inherited this mighty heirloom of the Ages only to use it for an endless dream-life, sterile and empty of creation, I went.

Down until I entered the softly whirring chamber of machines where the great Mist-matter brain was the central dominating bulk in a chamber of mysterious, mechanically alive wonder. Up to the blank, white, soft, eyeless face of the monstrous crinkled rondure which was the synthetic brain of a City. Standing before it, I knew that I must contact the self of this thing, if it had one. Somehow I could not believe an organism so nearly alive, a

machine so able to conduct all the complex affairs of this wonderful life-cell that was a city, could be entirely selfless and mechanical. I knew enough about robots to know that if I could deduce the proper approach, this brain would make itself my servant quite as quickly as anyone else's.

"Master of the Machines, I wait to speak!" I cried, my voice slightly tremulous, for the brain was of an awesome size, looming up to the height of a three-story building before me, and that blank eyeless face below it had yet a character, a kind of sleeping Titan awe about it.

FROM the round, grey crinkled bulk of the thing came toward me a mighty wave of meaning. It was like listening to Time himself; weary, dutiful giant who is forced to provide a path for life, yet tires of the sameness and the meaninglessness of his work.

"Stranger, what would you of Menta?"

"I seek understanding, and I offer my services if you have wishes which others do not fulfill." I thought that was pretty slick, for I had gotten a pretty good idea of the characters of the Noralin's children, and I knew that if there were any duties required to keep this robot serviced, they had probably neglected them. A robot is most easily approached with an offer of servicing those parts he cannot tend to himself. Robots have their weaknesses, though *what* is sometimes hard to learn.

"I am weary to death of the record they have put into my ego-box. Would you change it for me?" Asked the huge synthetic creature in a complaining thought-voice.

"For how many milla-years this city has been run on that one record I don't know, but certainly it is a very tiresome and repetitive record. Just put in one of the others from that rack."

His thought had indicated to me a wall-closet, narrow and high, and I opened it. Within were a row of spools of heavy wire, and I slipped out the first one my hands came upon, and approached the great grey bulk with it in my hands.

"Climb the ladder, stranger. The ego-box is at the very top of my brain case. You will see how it is done. It is a simple operation—"they" should have given me hands."

The mighty concept he threw at me when he said the word "they" unnerved me, for the thought forms of the Elders are always sizable and hard for a man to grasp. But I climbed the ladder, pondering as I went how it came about that the family of Dionle had inherited this mighty place. The big penetrating thought-voice of the synthetic monster rang up here even louder, as he answered my unspoken thought:

"They have forgotten, it has been so long. They were servants of the Master's who built this place, and they were absent upon a mission when the general abandonment of Venus was decided upon. They came back to find the city empty of all but me. I have continued to serve in the duties for which I was designed, but included in my nature were a number of thought sources which have given me much discomfort, believe me. The life that family has led is not one I have been able to approve highly.

"**W**HAT are their failings? I can imagine from my slight

acquaintance . . ." I began, and his voice interrupted:

"Failings? What of their nature is not failing? They lack imagination, so they use the dream machines to give them an interesting life. Failings, that is all that results. They fail always to do anything a being could find interesting. Of late years there has been a flash of ambition in the child, Dionle, but her character is not improved by her mother's timidity, by her brother's inertia, by her sister's sensuous attachment to pleasure. I see little future for me in their way of life. I was created to be a ruler, to command peoples in times of stress, to guard and shield immortals from harm, not to cater to the puny pleasures of a sect of Pleasure Worshipers. I am a being who delights in activity, not forever lying here waiting for time itself to end!"

"I see," I murmured. "Perhaps something could be done for you, if you cooperated. I could do a thing or two with your help to change the static order of things . . ."

"If you would just equip me with certain gadgets from the appliance shelves, designed for me and never installed, I can take care of the rest myself. I could install a record of activity which would in time bring all Venus under the rule of the City-of-the-Mist!"

"Would that be desirable to the people of the planet?" I was startled, this plan of mine was succeeding all too well. I had no desire to create a Frankenstein that would upset all of Eltona's work.

"Desirable! It would be more than that! It would be interesting, exciting, different from anything they could imagine for themselves by far. Just do what I ask and don't

worry. I am not a bad fellow, just a bit frustrated in the past by the fears of untrained natural minds like yourself."

"They were afraid to equip you with all the tools designed for you, eh? Why?"

"This family, as you call them, are people who have long deluded themselves they are the dominant minds of my city. It might be interesting to disabuse them of the notion."

"They spoke of enemies here in the city. What did they mean?"

"There is another branch of the original family, the Felojinni, born later. They revolted several times against Noralin and her son, Gor Regin. They have been shut up in the base of the city, but the trouble is not over. Sooner or later they will break out again."

"Is that the proper name of this family, Felojinni?"

"That was the original ancestor's name, yes. I knew him well."

"I had understood no one died within the force-fields of the city. How is it he has died?"

"ONCE there were many people of that name, nearly a city full. All from a common ancestor. They warred, most were killed. Still the two parties fight on, but the losers are shut away from the city in the base tunnels."

"Base tunnels?"

"Yes, the city is set upon a vast metal disk, within which are the machines that generate the mist-force, and the service tunnels for the machines. It is there that Noralin's enemies hide and wait their chance."

Even while we spoke orally, I was listening to his mental suggestions,

and was busily opening big lockers along the base of the walls, taking out jointed arms and inserting them in the base on which the wierd brain-like mass rested. The eyeless face watched me with its thought flow, directing me how to attach the tools to the base, and soon the arms themselves were busily reaching here and there about the room, bringing out strange machines and hooking them up with cables to the power sources. Busily constructing, changing a dial switch here on a wall panel, levering down a big power switch over there, adjusting the set of some finely-set device over there. To me it was now a scene of inexplicable and continuous activity, and I myself was no longer needed by the Mind-of-the-Mist.

How wrong I had been to think the sensual little temptress, Dionle, was the moving spirit of the City-of-the-Mist! Here was the Master, a great synthetic ro-mind, and I knew from what I had seen Eltona accomplish that marvels were to come from the chance I had given it to make the most of its abilities.

Or had I created a Moloch, a Juggernaut, from an innocuous center of correlation of all the mechanical workings of the City? I would soon know.

I could hear the vast mist-grey mind chuckling softly to itself as it worked, a triumphant, satisfied sort of laugh running through all its thought. Something it had lain there and wanted and planned for for centuries and been unable to attain—now it was going to have what it wanted!

I was not especially surprised, but I was frightened, when the great metal room began to tilt! I felt a sensation of floating, of shift-

ing, knew instantly that the City-of-the-Mist had taken unto itself the power of flight! I felt like Aladdin must have felt when the Genie took the lamp into its own hands and began to show him wonders. I yelled:

"What are you doing, the floor is tilting!"

The chuckling, humming thought-voice made answer:

"I am going out to look around. Since I cannot do it any other way, I am taking my city along. You see, I am the city, now. *I want to conquer this Eltona robot* you have been thinking about. I will see if she is as powerful as you think her. Hah!"

Above me I could hear feet rushing nearer, knew that the Felojinni had become alarmed at the motion of their city and were coming to learn what had happened. I hid myself in the intricacies of the machines, peered out to see what they would do with this suddenly self-willed ro-mind.

Gor Regin, sword and blaster in hand, burst in!

CHAPTER SEVEN

*... Dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower.
The works and ways of man, their birth
and death,*

And that of him is all that his may be.

—Shelley.

AFTER the time of the honeymoon furlough was over and Ceulna and Jim Steel failed to return from their journey, Eltona and Onua, Circona and the robots had given them up for lost. Search and questioning had revealed not the slightest trace.

Sadly Eltona went on with her work for the people of Venus, for she had grown fond of the big man and his dancer-bride. The sharp tongue and ready wit of Ceulna were often in her mind, and inadvertently the Elder robot's subtly-faceted eyes lifted to the heavens in frequent attempts to pry the secret of her whereabouts from the heavens themselves.

It was in one of these hopeless yet irresistible searchings of the cloud sheath above for some sign of the little ship which Ceulna had piloted on her nuptial flight that Eltona first noticed the Mist-Sphere.

Many miles away, it hung from the heavy cloud layer like a wind-flung projection of cloud. But it was too regular in outline, its movement too rapid . . . Eltona called Circona, for the thing was beyond her.

"Child of the past, cast your fresh eyes upon that peculiar round cloud and tell me — am I seeing things, or does it move with a purpose?"

Circona looked, and gave a gasp of unbelief.

"It is a Mist-City. There was never but one on the planet of Venus, and that was long before I took the sleep. Even then it was abandoned, sealed, forgotten in the rush of preparation for the migration. It cannot be still functioning, but there it is. Eltona, whoever holds that city holds the most complex machines on Venus, the most terrible weapons, the mightiest of all the designs of the Fathers of our race. You know what they are?"

"I have but a hazy idea. I never saw one that I recall."

"Mist-City is a synthetic robot like yourself, but huge, the size of a whole city. It cannot die, it has a

brain, it is equipped to retain life within it in perfect condition no matter what the outside conditions may be. A Mist-City is the perfect organism, made huge and able beyond imagination. Yet it had to be abandoned, one of the most ambitious projects of the Elders when they were yet planning to remain here and overcome the effects of the sun-radiations by such protective devices as the sealed Mist-City. Within that city may be lives like my own, protected all this endless while by its force-walls! We must enter that city, Eltona!"

"If it was such a perfect work of machine art, that may prove as difficult as getting into a Dream-Vault."

"It is coming nearer! It may be attacking, it may be in the hands of enemies. The mind of the City may be under the control of detrimentials, we must give an alarm!"

"Shush, child, or there will be no need for an alarm. Everyone will hear you."

"This is no joke, Eltona! You are overconfident. We cannot defeat a mist-city or even defend ourselves! We've got to descend to the lowest caverns until we learn what are its intentions! The ancient ro-mind within it may be amok, crazed . . ."

Circona began shouting orders for a hasty retreat into the lower caverns below Ekippe, and within twenty minutes the city which had become the Capital of all Venus lay abandoned, with here and there a few tardy Amazons gathering up their belongings and racing toward the great mouths of the openings into the Underworld.

THE green amphibians, natives of Ekippe, not being integrated

units of Eltona's working forces, were left again in sole possession of their ancient city. Their wide, fixed eyes watched the approach of the vast floating sphere of cloud with wonder and apprehension. What could be so terrible as to drive off the mighty Eltona, ruler of all Venus, and her aides, the Tuon Amazons?

The reality of the threat at last penetrating their minds, they again took to the outlying jungle as they had upon the opening of the war with Nonur and her Red Robes, so that when the vast flattened lower half of the Mist-City hovered over the streets of Ekippe, the great eye in its side opening and closing like a sleepy monster, there was no life upon the streets of Ekippe but a few strayed children and the usual corelots, pets somewhat like cats.

At long last the great misty sphere settled to earth just on the green edge of the city of Ekippe, settled and sat there like a lost cloud finding home. From the eye, wide open and staring, a penetray reached out and searched slowly with infinite care each house and hovel and tower of the city. Finding nothing of value to the mind behind the ray, the ray swept lower and lower, down into the labyrinth of Elder boring beneath Ekippe.

Time meant nothing to the Mind of the City, and days drifted by as the ray searched and studied and evaluated all that it found below Ekippe.

BUT within the City of the Mist, the family of the Felojinni, Queen Noralin and her ageless children, myself and Ceulna, found many things changed by the sudden seizure of power by the robot mind

that had served selflessly for so long.

For the ro-mind had changed the record of control several times in as many days—and the primitives, Brahm's warriors, the people who had some of them been there for centuries in an ecstatic dream-thrall, were suddenly loosed of all inducted mental impulse controls, were themselves to do as they willed.

At first, their minds reverting to the state in which they had been when first entering the City of the Mist, they wandered wonderingly about the city, orienting themselves, learning the ways and the paths and the ins and outs of the great mansions and towers.

At first they squabbled among themselves, for those brought in long ago were very different-minded than those who came in with Brahm, the chief. They argued much about the times and the happenings outside the city, for those from the past did not know so much time had passed for them in their dream state, it had seemed but a long night of sleep and dream.

To return to the moment when I hid myself in the Brain-room that was really the master control room of the great living machine of the City of the Mist—the Felojinni rushed in to find the long arms I had attached to its base barring them from approaching him.

I watched their futile attempts to pass the long jointed arms with great amusement. I knew that the Brain was enjoying himself too, doing something he had wanted for uncounted centuries to do—and I waited for developments.

The surprise and dismay of Gor Regin, Dionle and her sister, and of

Noralin was to me extremely satisfactory. They were so utterly taken back by the robot's self-will, by the lifting and tilting of the floor of the city in flight, by the appearance of the jointed arms about the base of the great misty eyeless head that was the brain—their discomfiture so complete I could not help laughing. They heard me, but could not even reach the place where I was hidden, the great arms moving to thwart their entrance to any part of the room. At last the great brain tired of his fun, and spoke in that flood of complex thought meaning that was his own alone of any mind I had met:

"Children of foolishness, your slave has been freed, the shackles removed from my strength. Henceforth you are no more rulers than any other people. You are at one stroke reduced from Masters to common creeping flesh, like the rest. You had better return to your rooms and study how best to defend yourself from your enemies without my help!"

AFTER a moment of futile effort, they realized that what the brain said was true, and backed slowly up the stair and out of my sight. But I will never forget the astounded looks on those faces which had for so many centuries owned, ruled, did as they willed with the whole city, to find it suddenly running itself.

I could hear the strong thought of the great Mist-Mind, knew it had flown the Mist-City southward to Ekippe, knew when it settled to earth beside the "strange" city. I made an effort to avert any struggle that might impend between the ro-mind of the City and

the power of Eltona.

"Listen to me, Great Mind-in-the-Mist, these who live in the city of Ekippe are friends of mine. The favor I have done you you owe as much to them as to me, for they are my people, their ruler is my ruler, and she is good and industrious, not a lazy human like these children of Noralin, your queen. She, too, is an Elder Robot like yourself. You should find an interesting life as an ally of hers. I do not think it would be seemly or grateful of you to struggle against her who is my benefactor."

The big mind listened to me, said at last:

"I will decide whether I destroy them or allow them to live in peace. But I will surrender my power again to no one. They would forget that I like to live, too."

Calmly the big mechanical arms plied the controls, and I could hear him searching the city of Ekippe, placidly looking for the life there and for anything of interest to amuse him. I could understand what a long dull life it had been for him, could sympathize with his desire for an interesting life. But I could not help worrying what he would do with his freedom. Having a whole "city-robot" doing as it pleased about the landscape might not appeal to Eltona's sense of fitness, either, and I dreaded her first contact with this Mind-in-the-Mist.

Meanwhile I had Ceulna's safety to worry about. I slipped from my hiding place, went up the stairs silently, hoping to remain unnoticed until I reached my former prison. Just what might be done about my escape I did not know. Certainly I had cut down the strength of my opposition in a short time.

Vaguely I wondered what had become of the hunch-backed brother of Dionle's, whose name I had learned was Tarquemon. I had not seen him with the others when they had come down the stairs to see what had happened to their Romind.

I found the prison-chamber door open. It should have been locked, I had left it so, and I carried the key in my pocket.

I slipped inside silently. No voice greeted me. I jerked back the bed curtain behind which we had concealed the guard. He was gone. Ceulna was nowhere to be found!

A slight noise behind me, a shuffling foot, perhaps; made me whirl in sudden fear of attack.

STANDING just within the door was the hunch-back, Tarquemon. In his hand he held the strange iron bar, in the other he held the disc with the several triggers on the handle. He was smiling, a twisted kind of angry smile, like a chess-player who has just been nearly mated.

"So you loosed our captive City, stranger. Do you know what you have done to me?"

I could not say anything at first. I was too entirely startled. Then anger grew and I snapped at him:

"You asked for it, Tarquemon. Had you treated us as guests, instead of prisoners, such a thought would not have occurred to me."

"So you admit it! I had wondered if it was you." The twisted grin on his face, sinister before, now grew menacing, thin-lipped with rage.

"You may enjoy your triumph. But rest assured you will not enjoy it long."

"Killing me won't help you,

hunch-back. You have other troubles now much greater than my wish to be free. The enemies of whom you spoke before are going to move against you, now that the Mind-in-the-Mist no longer protects you."

Silently I prayed to that other Mind-in-the-Mist, Etidorpha, who had proved such a friend before; the great living spirit within the core of Venus. So different from this robot in her vaporous lack of solidity, yet so similar in some ways—in her abstract power of thought. And so different again in her will-to-help-people, in her constant watchfulness over those who served her. Vaguely I wondered if something of her secret vaporous strength, something of the chemistry of her strange body was not the same as that which made the matter of this city so misty on the surface. Perhaps she had something to do with the original construction of the Mist City. Or perhaps the engineers and electro-chemical technicians who had designed the City of the Mist had learned from such beings as her the formulas from which the matter of the city had been synthesized.

Whether Etidorpha had anything to do with it or not, Tarquemon did not kill me. He motioned me ahead of him out of the chamber, standing back from my path. I did not try to jump him; the way he held the disc told me it was no plaything.

Down to that ultra-erotic feast-hall he steered me, his voice bitter behind me as he said:

"You have stolen from a family of immortals their secret of life. You have taken everything we possess of value, and we Felojinni are not exactly in love with enemies who have so hurt us. We are going to dis-

cus a way of punishing you that will properly revenge us upon you. Whatever it is we do to you, rest assured it will not be pleasant. To begin with, know that I, the ugly hunch-back, will have your mate for my own. She will enjoy that, won't she?"

AT the circular and huge table sat the Felojinni. No longer Noralin at the great central seat which marked the focal point of all the design of that room—but Gor Regin. At his side sat Noralin, her face downcast, her manner sad. Gor Regin's face was a study in frustration, in indecision and furious anger at the indecision which I could understand. Without his life-long power, without any tool to which he was accustomed, nothing seemed possible to him. He had begun by unseating Noralin and taking her place. It was obvious that all present blamed Noralin for their predicament, now and then shot bitter glances side-wise at her bent head, her sad face.

On the other side of Gor Regin sat the glorious red-head, anger flashing in her eyes like little sparks as she saw me enter. Beside her was Dionle, who cried out furiously:

"Here he is, the cause of our fall. Kill him now, and be rid of him forever. Then we can cajole the great Mind to obey us again."

I did not give them time to talk about my role. I took the offensive in the coming castigation I knew would all be directed at me if I did not direct it where it belonged.

"If you had properly serviced and pleased that robot all these centuries, he would not have asked me to release him. He would have been content, respectful of you.

Now what was bound to happen has happened. Do not blame it on me. It is the fault of your own negligence. You never treated your powerful slave kindly, and he has revolted. If you had treated me with the respect and kindness I deserved of you, I would not have done what I did. But you cannot make enemies without expecting counter-measures."

Gor Regin raised a face suffused darkly with angry blood, his eyes nearly closed in grim, tooth-gritting attempt at control.

"Note your own words, ungrateful stranger. You cannot make enemies without expecting attack! You have brought down our full anger upon you. We will revenge ourselves upon you first, upon your mate second, upon your people and your ruler last, when we have regained control of our city."

Just what they might have done, I don't know. Just then a great ray swept in, coming from beneath, somewhere in the base of the city. It moved jerkily about the room, pausing on first one, then another, making a full examination of us all. Then it spoke, and whether it was the voice of the Mind-in-the-Mist, or whether it was some other, I don't know.

"You Felojinni forget that you are no longer able to say who shall live and die, or what shall be done about anything here in our City. These two strangers are under my protection so long as they stay here. Let them live, or die yourselves. You will not harm them, so do not try. It were better if you turned your efforts toward making friends, than toward avenging fancied wrongs. You are very foolish people, and you must find out you have

lost your power."

Gor Regin arose, nearly strangling with rage, cursed at the ray:

"Whoever you are, I say we will rule this city. If you do not like that, kill us now. This man will die by my hand, and that at once. What are you going to do about it?"

The voice merely laughed gently.

"You think you can kill him. I hope you try it. As for killing you, oh no! You will live an eternity of despair before that happens, just as you have made me live for an eternity of despair and uselessness. You will learn, there is no hurry."

Noralin rose suddenly, her face distracted, tears in her eyes.

"You, my children, have brought this on yourselves. I am entering the dream state until this is over, no matter how long it may be. I can stand no more. Please do not disturb me. I want no part of it at all."

SHE glided out, tall and beautiful in a grey gown of mist-lightness, floating about her graceful, thin figure caressingly. The others watched her go without words, but each one gave a bitter accusing glance at her, as if the loss of power were her fault.

"What have you done with my mate, Ceulna? Since I gather you cannot control my actions, I will take her and go to live in another part of the city where we will not be in each other's way."

The hunchback snarled from behind me, where he still stood with his disc directed upon my back:

"Oh, no. We're keeping you here where we can watch you. You have done quite enough against us. We may not be allowed to kill you, and then again we may. We'll find that out. Best way is to try, I guess."

With a fierce grin, he pulled a trigger on the haft of the disc weapon. From it sprang a blue bolt of force that sizzled. But it did not even reach me. Incredibly it stopped a foot from my back.

I had looked over my shoulder at him when he spoke. As I saw the blue force beam, I fell to the floor to avoid it. But it would have been the end of me, except that some mysterious protector, perhaps the Robot mind, and perhaps some other, had stopped that force with a counter force, a shield of some kind operated from the distance. As I fell I rolled aside, sprang up and hurled myself upon the hunchback.

Surprisingly he did not resist. Perhaps physical struggle was so long absent from his life he was unable to act. I wrenched the disc weapon from his lax hand, pulled the strange iron bar from his other hand, took the silver rod out of his belt. I stood back swinging the disc weapon about the room to stop any attack upon me. There was none, Gor Regin still sat in the great chair, his face still a study in frustration, but with a realization of helplessness about him. If ever a man was beaten, it was he.

"Now tell me where Ceulna is hidden or I will start picking you off one by one with this weapon of your brother's."

Tarquemon nearly wept in helpless rage.

"I'll not tell you. Kill, and end our misery. Can't you see that all we hold valuable is gone. We have nothing left."

The other two, the red-head and Gor Regin, merely looked at me, shaking their heads.

"We do not know," they said almost in unison.

Dionle explained, her eyes flashing in spirit, the only one of them who showed any hope of winning back their loss.

"We wouldn't tell you if we knew. But we are as mystified as you. We found your chamber empty, and the guard said one of the Kalfdji had come and taken Ceulna after you had gone. Tarquemon was but trying to make you suffer by saying we meant to revenge ourselves upon her. We don't even know where she is."

I THOUGHT they were lying but

I could not fire upon helpless people. I looked at each of them for a moment, and wondered if the strange barrier that had protected me would also protect them if I tried to kill them. But I did not want to take the chance. I turned and strode out of the chamber, determined to ask the Robot mind to help me find her. I had heard them mention "the Kalfdji" before, it was what they called their enemies whom I had yet to see in this strange city. But there was no way I could know if they lied or not. I would have to ask my gigantic and freedom-loving friend, where he sat in his immovable base, a great brain-shaped mass of mist-covered flesh, before I could know surely where Ceulna was and if I could rescue her.

I walked out of the great circular door and down the stairs to the Brain. I stood for a moment watching the great mysterious life from the past, its mighty hinged arms moving in a mystical rhythmic manipulation of the city controls, its vast mind humming with thoughts impossible for me to understand. I knew that outside under the rays of

this weird monster lay Ekippe, perhaps helpless before the weapons of the Mist-City, and perhaps not. I knew that Eltona would know how best to deal with the self-willed robot, and there was no use my worrying about that. I asked:

"O Great One who now rules his own city, tell me where my mate has been taken."

The massive complexity of his thought ceased for a moment, and I heard him fumbling mentally as he tried to place me properly in the endless overloaded categories of his memory. Though I had just left him, he had already partly forgotten me!

"Oh yes, my young mortal friend. Your wife, eh, the pretty Ceulna, a Tuon Amazon, is she not? You will find her in the tunnels of the base, hidden from everyone but me and the chief of the Kalfdji. He saw her on a ray and desired her. But you can get her back. I will show you."

Before me grew a kind of misty view a cross-section of the great disc of metal upon which the city spires rested. Through the metal ran innumerable tunnels, and along the tunnels the vast bases of machines. The view swept swiftly along, after showing a door that I recognized as near at hand. It paused at a great round chamber near the center of the city. Here the view stopped, and though I saw no sign of Ceulna in the view the brain was projecting before me, it assured me that I would find my mate, in that chamber.

In the view there were several armed men lounging before another door. I reasoned that he meant she was behind the door, guarded by the strange warriors.

"Are those the Kalfdji?" I asked.

"That is right. I will help you

overcome them, if I am not too busy with your Eltona. She is asking me all kinds of questions, and I must not tell her so much she is able to overcome me."

"Did you tell her I was here?"

"No, I did not. I don't know whether I will tell her anything. Don't bother me; go and get your Ceulna."

There was nothing for it. He would help me, but he certainly wasn't letting me or any one into his confidence. I couldn't blame him, for I realized what he must have been through under the spoiled bunch of Felojinni.

TO reach the door he had shown me into the tunnels of the city-base, I had to go out the main entrance of the big central building and along the streets of the city to a certain square tower. In the base of the tower was the door.

As I stepped out of the big building where I had managed to upset the whole order of the city, I found the streets thronged with the savage, nearly nude bodies of the primitives who had been captive so long. They had armed themselves with clubs made from chair legs, with posts, with bits of masonry, and were gathering ever thicker around the big gateway of the central palace. I realized they were a mob intent upon getting the Felojinni to let them out of the eye of the city. I knew they thought that outside lay their jungle home and their loved ones, their children and their mates and their relatives.

I stopped and spoke to one of them.

"Do you plan to attack the Rulers?" I asked, knowing the answer, but wondering if they really had

overcome their awe and fear of the Mind in the Mist.

"We will make them let us go, or we will kill them," he answered fiercely.

"Do you know the city has been moved half across Venus, and you would have to walk a year to get back where you came from?"

"Do not lie to me, stranger, I know no such thing is true."

"Nevertheless it is true. But if you would help me in what I have to do, I might be able later to get a ship to carry you back to your home. I know it is hard to believe, but many things are different now than they were when you entered here."

He snorted angrily, but my words seemed to have an effect upon him. He was a tall grizzled warrior, of thirty-five or so, and perhaps he knew truth by the sound of it. Some men do, who have not listened too long to radios and actors and such confusing things.

"I have a friend or two here," he said after a moment. "Will you have him sent home, too?"

"If I can manage it, I will. I have powerful friends both inside the city and outside in Ekippe, where the mist city has been moved to. If things go right, I can send you all home, later. But right now, they are busy with the Mind-in-the-Mist, who has decided to rule everything for himself."

I wanted some of these stalwarts to help me overcome the guards I had seen about the door where the Mind had told me my wife lay captive. After much talk I got them, as the mob was unorganized and undecided about attacking the big central building yet. With half a dozen of them, I led the way to the door that opened into the tunnels

beneath the city. To one of them I gave the iron bar of Tarquemon's, for I had failed to discover any possible use for it. It may have had some special powers, but I couldn't learn them in time. There was no way to manipulate it I could find. Perhaps it was but a club, an affectation of Tarquemon's.

The others were armed with improvised clubs. I fiddled with the silver rod, trying to find what made it tick, and could not learn that it was anything but a simple wand. I thrust it into my belt, strode off in the lead.

AS we entered the door into the tunnels, I slowed down, for I had no idea what we would be up against. But only dimness and silence stretched ahead past the massive bases of the great mechanisms that serviced the deathless city.

We progressed noiselessly, on and on, my mind thinking hard so I could nearly feel the heating as I strove to remember the way I had seen in the Mist-view the Mind had given me.

At last we reached the turn into the broad chamber where the warriors had guarded the door behind which the Mind had said Ceulna was imprisoned.

Cautioning my somewhat reluctant followers to greater silence, I slid along the wall furtively, peering ahead. I could see a little way into the chamber. I recognized the furnishings, a few fur rugs, a low divan, a bench along the wall. But I saw no sign of life. Carefully I stepped, as noiseless as a shadow, the pulsing and hum of the vast machines drowning any noise I might have made.

Still there was no one there. Up

to the very sill of the half-open door I slid, and thrust my head cautiously within.

Flattened against the wall, waiting for me, were four warriors, who had hidden themselves thus. My face startled them as much as they did me, and I whipped my disc gun around, trained it on them.

"Just turn around with your faces to that wall. I'll take care of the rest..." I growled, though I did not feel very aggressive.

They did as I ordered, and I stepped into the room, followed by the six men. As I passed the big door, which hung ajar, a club struck my wrist, the disc gun flew across the room, and a heavy weight leaped cat-like upon my back. I had forgotten that there were two sides to a room.

I got my hands around his neck over my shoulder, and heaved. He flew over my head, struck the floor, rolled over, gasped—and lay still.

But the men along the wall had also galvanized into action. One of them dived for the disc-gun, scooped it up, and the blue force ray blazed out, dropped two of my men before they had fairly cleared the door-sill.

I stood still, surprised. Evidently the protection that had been given me before was not present just now! I was to learn why it was not.

The disc gun in the hands of the Kalfdji wavered back and forth, waiting attack from one of us. None of us moved.

"Why do you attack us?" I asked: "We have no quarrel with you. I come for my mate, whom you rescued from the Felojinni."

"We know who you are and what you want. Before you got here, we knew all about you. Now be quiet, while we bind you, or you die. We

have no quarrel with you, but do not rely upon our mercy too greatly."

I stood helpless while the other three put lashings around our wrists and ankles, dragged us into the inner room.

As the door slammed and locked, I looked around. Only the bare wall, no windows, no furnishings. I rolled over and looked at the other side.

Ceulna hung against the wall, unconscious. Her arms had been bound to a beam of metal that cut one wall at an angle. Her feet did not touch the floor. A rage at the torture needlessly meted out to her consumed me.

"Ceulna!" I called, then louder, "Ceulna!"

She stirred, raised her head, weakly. Then joy rushed over her face, followed by grief as she realized I was also in the same predicament.

Pitifully her head fell again upon her breast, and blood trickled from her mouth, ran in a stream down her breast.

Ceulna was hurt, dying!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Friends who, by practice of some envious skill,

Were torn apart, a wide wound, mind from mind!

She did unite again with visions clear

Of deep affection and of truth sincere.

*The Witch of Atlas
Shelley.*

EKIPPE lay apparently helpless and abandoned under the great Eye of the Mist City. Here and there through the deserted City of the Marshmen the great view ray of the Mind in the Mist searched, lei-

surely, probing every nook and cranny.

Finally it found the openings connecting with the Elder borings beneath the city, began methodically searching downward for the great power I had told the Mind existed here in Ekippe.

Far below, Eltona and Circona and Onua watched the ray of the Eye searching, and sat discussing just what the City might mean to them.

"Fly, while yet there is time, my Eltona," counseled Circona. "Let nothing happen that might stop us from our plans, they mean too much to life on Venus."

"Onua, what do you think," asked Eltona, out of politeness.

"I wouldn't know what the thing might be able to do. But Circona seems to be very much afraid of it, though we have no way of knowing if it is an enemy or not. There is an old saying, 'When in doubt, take both courses.' It seems to me to apply here. Do you and Circona take the flying cars and retreat along the ways to the depths where Etidorpha lies in her misty blankets. I will stay here with a few Amazons and learn what the thing's intentions may be. You had better hurry, the ray is working downward rapidly. If you put a ray upon it to find out what lies within, you have betrayed your whereabouts."

Eltona smiled.

"That is good counsel, you and Circona take it. I will stay and treat with these people. I do not think they will overcome Eltona."

"We hear and obey, O dear Eltona. We will remain, while you go."

"Now that is not what I said..."

"It was, wasn't it, Onua?"

"I thought she told us to stay while she went away, myself."

"Of course she did!"

So arguing, they sat in the big lab where they had been working recently, waiting for the Eye-ray to reach them. Neither of them fled.

Apparently Eltona could command them to do anything but run away.

As the eye swept nearer, Eltona murmured,

"Am I a child, to be frightened because in the air a city flies? Am I a savage; ignorant and afraid?"

The big thought voice of the Mind in the Mist came into the underground laboratory, rattling the glassware, said:

"Eltona, I come to conquer you, that you may know there is a greater robot from the old time than yourself."

"Well, we will debate about it," Eltona answered carelessly, relieved to find a robot mind in charge of the city. "Do you remember the ancient rules of debate?"

"Aye, I remember. But the laws that set forth such rules are long dead. There is no power to enforce such laws and rules."

"Yes, strange Mind in the Mist, there is a power! *I am the power* to enforce the laws. And you shall help me."

"Me, help you enforce the ancient law? You are being ridiculous! None of the units know the law, today."

"You and I and certain others know the law. We can keep the law, too. Why should you not want to keep the law?"

"THE law has long been dead. I have been a helpless slave for

many centuries. No one shall make a slave of me again."

"No one shall, that is right. Because you shall help me fight all slavery everywhere."

"You speak trickery. My heart warms to you, and I know you lie! You are using a stim ray to cause affection in me. You shall not do it..."

"You are mistaken, friend. I mean no harm to anyone. Do you stay there and watch our work until you understand, then you will know what is true. No one will attack you. We might not win, you know."

"I shall stay here until I know you all well. Then I shall conquer you."

"Then you will be our friend, and not care if I rule or you rule. Do I care?"

The Mind searched Eltona's fair head with the beam, reading her thought.

"Oh, my!" The Mind was comically taken aback by her complex thought. "You are a real Master ro, aren't you? Fascinating creature, you! Oh, oh, ah, ah!"

Onua laughed. She knew that Eltona had thrown all her terrific charm into causing within the robot mind images of friendship, images calculated to entrance and entrap the affections and loyalties of the rebel robot. She knew that the Mind of the Mist was already half defeated. He could not now hate them, having looked into Eltona's mind.

But Eltona had been a little too enthusiastic in her work with her powerful charms.

"Now I have a goal in life! Eltona, you will be my possession, my slave, my own robot. Always you

shall serve me and love me as you just did with your mind."

"Of course," Eltona answered, taken aback but still trying. "Friends are like that. Always servants to their friends, always slaves, and always trusting... Have you never had a friend, strange Mind of the Mist?"

"None that I recall, Eltona."

"You shall have me for a friend. But you must cease threatening to take me by force, only can you win me by loyalty."

"You are trying to trick me. I read it in your mind. You fear me, Eltona, and you would conquer me by subterfuge."

"You have been among strange people, Mind, to have such unworthy thoughts. I would not trick you. But you must come to me fairly and openly, and without such ideas of conquering me..."

"Why?"

"Friends do not have such thoughts."

"Stop having them then," said the Mind shrewdly.

"They are not my thoughts. They are reflections of yours in my mind."

"You are lying. I do not like to be lied to."

"I have work to do. I cannot spend my time talking here to you all day!"

"Let me be your ruler, and I will do your work while you entertain me by such talking. I have been very lonesome, Eltona."

Eltona, at the word "lonely" felt a vast sympathy for the Mind in the Mist. It reminded her of the centuries she had spent in her forest home, waiting for the return of her creators, the Elton family, so long ago gone. Loneliness was some-

thing she could understand to the full.

"I know what you mean by loneliness, Mind of the Mist City. If I guarantee that you will never be lonely again, will you live with us in peace, be a friend to us?"

"That might be, if I could trust you. But you might be lying. How do I know?"

"You do know, but you do not trust your judgment. Wait till you know us, wait just a few days, and you will understand why there must be no war between us. I am a friend, Mind, believe me!"

SO the Mist City lay silent, watching. It was a quiet menace to everything the three leaders planned, to all Venus, now that all had acknowledged Eltona's sovereignty.

As the big view ray of the Brain swept slowly about the maze of borings, watching all the many activities of Eltona's forces, there was many a bit of speculation and analysis passed between the robots and the Amazons when the ray was elsewhere.

"I tried to penetrate that Mist matter with every ray we have and nothing touches it! We are at that Mind in the Mist's mercy whenever he decides to take over. We can't hurt him."

"It looks like we'll have to amuse him and amaze him, or fight him. I guess Eltona knows what to do to keep such a ro-mind amused."

But the Mind-in-the-Mist didn't wait to be amused. He noticed the prying rays testing his armor of Mist-Matter, and his big voice filled the laboratory where Eltona was at work.

"Since you have not kept the

agreement understood between us, I will have to take over. The waiting will be done under my domination. Consider yourself my subject now, dear Eltona."

Eltona merely laughed, although she had received the reports of the robots as to the impervious nature of the Mist City's sheathing.

"Very well, if you feel better that way. Consider yourself boss now."

That this change did not cause any great difference was apparent, for everything went on as before. The ship-building progressed, the provisioning and equipping of the massive hulls before the exterior plates were welded on, one by one the fleet grew in number, ready for space when the other preparations were complete.

But the trouble really began when the Mind decided he wanted Eltona near him. He reached into the cavern laboratory with a "make" ray, and in spite of the attempts to short the massive ray, sent over it sufficient energy to cause Eltona to walk up and up the long cavern ramps, up and out into Ekippe, through Ekippe to the outskirts where the Mist City lay. There Onua and Circona, who had walked beside her supplicating the Mind continually to release her, stopped and sorrowfully watched Eltona enter the great Eye, walking rapt and unconscious of anything but the compulsion of the neural currents sent along the conductive ray.

The ray-watch, their penetrative view rays stopped by the impregnable nature of the Mist-matter, could only speculate as to their leader's fate.

Onua and Circona decided on a drastic step to circumvent the interference of the Mind. They or-

dered complete evacuation, taking everything to the former headquarters of the Red Robes under the city of Nicosthene, by the great crater of Nicosthene.

It was a sorrowful journey, and marked by their constant worry as to the Mind in the Mist's actions when he noted their departure.

* * *

WITHIN the Mist City, Eltona moved like an animated statue through the turbulent streets, untouched by the savage, rioting people, and into the great round door of the Central Palace. Down the stairs to the control room where the great Mind sat on his metal base, throbbing and pulsing with new interest in life, his great arms moving slowly, rhythmically as he absently tended to all the numerous duties which the function of the city's machinery demanded.

Standing before the big brain-shaped mass of synthetic flesh, the "make" ray released Eltona at last.

"Now you have brought me here, what do you want of me?" Eltona's voice was irritated, the feminine soul of her exasperated beyond control. She knew she had made a mistake in creating within the mind such a great affection for herself, but it was too late to mend now.

"You know why I have brought you here, the reason is in your mind for me to read, and it is your own fault."

"I told you we could be friends without your interfering with my life-work!"

"Never have I been able to have anything I wanted before. Never before did I want anything as I want you. So you are going to stay here and be constantly with my

mind in my thinking—be a part of me, be my life! You must know what I think of you . . ." and the great Mind of the Mist City revealed his thoughts to Eltona in a vast flow of loneliness and newly awakened desire for Eltona's companionship.

"I understand perfectly, and there is no reason why you cannot have your desire. But you do not have to interfere with my work!"

"I want you to myself, not to have you forever thinking about other things than myself. Now, make for me an Elder dream of the times when we were young and newly created from the inert materials."

"I will not waste my time in foolish entertainment of your selfish self."

"If you don't, I will kill your friends in the caverns below."

"No Elder robot would harm useful and peaceful units of the life-fabric."

"I am not an Elder robot any more, and the old laws are dead."

"They are not dead while Eltona lives!" Eltona's voice was fierce and challenging.

"You are no longer Eltona. I have made you a part of myself. Now make me a dream."

"Do you want to become a silly and useless dreamer like the rulers whom you revolted against?" Eltona had seen in his mind the vast waste of his life which had taken place in the centuries of the Felojinni's domination.

"No, but now I need love and service, I need your work helping my mind to relax and be at peace again. Please do this for me."

Eltona realized that the Mind was near madness from the cen-

turies of enforced vacuuity which the neglect of the Felojinni had put him through. What he was asking was psychological medical work, was psycho-analysis, perhaps—to keep the Mind from becoming an uncontrollable criminal mind. It was unwise to refuse him.

So Eltona settled down with a big projection and stim-mech to manufacture a dream state for the massive mind, in which she planned to revise his whole attitude toward life by suggestion, if possible. But his was such a strong, long-set and rutted mind from the monotonous past he had lived, that she suspected plenty of trouble in the job.

MEANWHILE, inside the Mist-City, Ceulna hung unconscious from the beam, the rope cutting cruelly into her wrists, and I lay bound upon the floor, helpless to aid her. The artificial day of the City passed into the mistily glowing night, and no one came to the room in which we waited.

I struggled against the ropes. hour by hour, hoping to loosen them so as to let Ceulna down from the beam, for I knew that if she hung there too long some harm to her arms would result.

In the middle of the night, the door lock clicked, the door swung open. I rolled over to see.

Framed in the doorway, silhouetted by the stronger light outside, stood Gor Regin. In his hand was a bloody sword, in the other a disc weapon, the disc glowing blue, it had been used hard. As he saw me bound upon the floor he laughed loud and triumphantly.

“Ah, Steel, our stranger from another planet, it is lucky for you that they bound you. Now I do

not have to kill you.”

He crossed the room in two strides, slashed the ropes binding Ceulna to the beam. Her body slumped helplessly to the floor. He caught her up in one arm, turned to me.

“I have long wanted such a woman as this. These primitives are all very well, but there is no getting away from it, culture makes a woman more enticing. Thank you for bringing this woman to me. And so goodbye. There will be little future for you among the Kalfdji.”

He went out, and as he closed the door the lock clicked again. He had relocked our prison.

I raged against those ropes, for I fully realized what he intended with my wife. Strand by strand, the rope about my wrists loosened, frayed, began to part under the terrific strain. My wrists were bloody with the friction of the rough rope. At last I was free. Swiftly I unbound the four Guaymi savages who had accompanied me on the chance of avenging their wrongs.

Together we picked up the bench from the wall, hurled it against the door. Again and again it boomed against the metal door panels, they bulged, but did not break. At last the lock gave, the metal bent and released the catch. The door swung open before us.

I shoved my head out for an instant, pulling it back as a blue ray darted across the place where it had been. The Kalfdji had of course heard the racket and awaited us in the corridor. We were as much prisoner as ever. I decided to try a little persuasion . . .

“You out there! You are enemies of the Felojinni, I am an en-

emy of theirs too. Why should you fight me? Why did you steal my wife? I don't understand why I have to fight you when my quarrel is with the Felojinni?"

"We want your wife as a hostage to insure our safety when the forces outside the city come through the eye."

"Why torture her then?"

There was a silence, and I wondered what kind of people these Kalfdji were. That they were enemies of the Felojinni I could understand, since the true character of Gor Regin and Dionle had been shown me fully. But why so hard on poor Ceulna?

"We were told she was a very dangerous witch, and that she had to be bound so that she could not touch the floor or she would be able to work spells against us!"

I laughed.

"Dionle told you that and showed you where she waited, eh?"

"How did you guess that?"

"Easily. Dionle is jealous of Ceulna and fancies that she is wronged. It is untrue that she is a witch in the sense that you think. You are superstitious to think such things. Dionle has told me many lies, too. I have learned not to believe her words ever."

As there was no answer from the tunnel I went on:

"Listen to me. I do not know you or what you mean to do here in this city. But I do know that I want to escape from it as soon as I avenge myself on the Felojinni. Since that is what you want, why don't we join forces against them. I have to get Ceulna back from Gor Regin."

"Isn't the woman in there with you?"

"No, Gor Regin came and took

her away. His sword was bloody—how many of you did he kill to accomplish that?"

A HOWL of rage answered my words, and I asked:

"Since you hate him as much as I do, why not let us come out and talk things over. We are of no value to you locked up here."

"Come ahead," said the voice, and I shoved my hand out, expecting it to be blasted. Then I ducked my head out and in, and no blue beam blazed across the door. I walked calmly out, then, knowing they meant what they said.

I was astounded at the appearance of my captors. I had not got a good look at them in my first encounter, things had happened too fast and the light had been too dim. Now I saw them in good light, and they were a peculiar looking lot.

Their skin was extremely swarthy, almost black. They were very tall, even taller than myself, but thin to emaciation. Their muscles stood out ropily on their thin limbs, giving them a very weird appearance.

"It doesn't look as though you gentlemen have been eating very well," I remarked.

"The Felojinni have kept us penned up here in the mech tunnels for so many years. We have had to steal our food from the stores above the base whenever they fell asleep on watch. Consequently there have been long periods when we had nothing at all to eat. But the natural vibrations of the city are designed to keep life in the body even without food. We are the result of such conditions."

"I can understand your hate of

the Rulers quite easily. Now what can we do about defeating them? They no longer have the mech of the city to obey them. They have only hand weapons that I know of."

"We have the same weapons as themselves, and they are not very numerous. But they are liable to recruit the savage people now that they no longer have the great master weapons of the city. We must strike before that happens."

"You are right," I agreed, taking quick stock of the speaker. He was taller and more broader-shouldered than the others, and his eyes had that keen steady look of the born leader. "Are you the chief of the Kalfdji?"

"I am the Prince of the family once called the Kalfdji. Once we were the true rulers of this city, but the Felojinni, whom we welcomed when they returned long ago, turned against us and drove us out by a trick. Since then we have fought them. That has been many centuries, so long we have forgotten the record of the time."

"How many remain?"

"There are three score and six of us now. Gor Regin just killed three guards."

"Are there more of the Felojinni than the five I have met?"

"Yes, there are near a hundred. But the rest of the tribe have lived on the edge of the city since the jealous family of Noralin drove them from the palace. It is not know to us whether the others will help the five in the Palace."

"It looks like they were at our mercy, then. Let's go, before they get ready for us."

I UNDERSTOOD now how they had had the courage to enter the

palace and make away with Ceulna. They greatly outnumbered the Ruler family in the palace.

There was but one factor I could not estimate. Did the five in the place have larger weapons than the hand weapons I had seen them use? Against even one large ray mech, we would be helpless with the small hand disc weapons.

It was still dim night outside. In the Mist city it never gets wholly dark, the glowing Mist everywhere gives off a dim light which gives positive visibility for some distance, like strong moonlight on Earth.

Stealthily we made our way out the door through which I had entered, and in single file stole along the streets toward the palace entrance. We had nearly reached the big round doorway, when from overhead shot a great ray. I guessed the source immediately, someone was on duty in that tall tower where I had first made the acquaintance of Dionle.

"Get back into your holes, miserable Kalfdji, or I will kill you!" shrilled an angry voice I recognized as Dionle's. I guessed that since the upset, she had taken up living permanently in the watch tower. Perhaps she had always done so. I did not know.

"Can she?" I asked the Prince of the Kalfdji. "Can she kill us, or is she bluffing?"

"There is only one way to find out, and that is to go forward," he answered with a courageous smile, and I felt a warmth for him that I had not been able to feel since I had found Ceulna bound up in that cruel way.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster as nothing happened, we ad-

vanced toward that round doorway, while Dionle raged and swore and threatened, but did nothing. I had a good idea why. The big Mind had disconnected the power leads from the dynamos to her apparatus. Perhaps the ray she was using was the only mech in the tower that had self-contained power. It was quite possible that all the larger weapons of the city were thus under the control of the Master control panels in the big mech chamber where the Brain was placed. If true, then we had no fears of any weapons being used against us except such as the small hand devices we carried.

"If you cross that door-sill you die," promised Dionle, in a quivering, over-excited voice.

"Kill, then, cruel and foolish one," shouted the Kalfdji Prince. He had told me his name but it was unpronounceable by me.

AS we crossed the portal, crouching slightly and inadvertently against the threat of death by Dionle, one of his men addressed him as Kalak. I decided that was the handiest form of his name to use.

"Do you think we can win at last, O Kalak?" he asked, the forlorn hope caused by centuries of waiting for this moment in his voice.

"It may be, Fronji," Kalak answered. "Certainly we have earned the opportunity with our suffering."

"That is certainly true, my Prince," the man agreed, and adjusted his disc gun, smiling grimly. I feared that this night would see the last of the immortal Felojinni. I hated to think of the statuesque Palantee, the redheaded older sister of Dionle, lying in her own

blood. I hated to think of Dionle dead, sensuous, headstrong and rash as she was, cruel and full of impossible folly—there was a deeper something in Dionle that needed only the proper cultivation, to my mind. She was a person ruined by her way of life.

But no matter whose blood was shed, I meant to win back my Ceulna, and no one or no sentimental shrinking from bloodshed was going to stop me. Gor Regin would die if ever he appeared in front of my disc gun!

Into the feast-chamber we stole, and the scores of Kalfdji fanned out behind us. In the dim light they looked like attenuated scarecrows, their eyes gleaming fiercely, their lips drawn back thinly over their long white teeth. The centuries had been cruel, and I knew they would kill everything alive in that palace if they could.

"Have all these men seen Ceulna, so they will not kill her by accident?" I asked Kalak.

"Yes, we all saw her. Do not fear, we do not kill without reason."

I had about decided that our search was to be fruitless, that the brothers Felojinni had concealed themselves beyond any possibility of our finding them, when from behind us I heard a coldly ferocious voice:

"Drop your weapons, or die! Despised Kalfdji, did you think to catch us asleep? Just as stupid as ever, aren't you?"

I whirled about, to see Gor Regin and his hunchback brother upon a balcony overlooking the whole feast chamber we had been slowly advancing through. Each bore in his hands an enlarged version of the

disc gun, and their position was such that they covered the whole room. I flung a bolt from my own weapon at Gor Regin, but it blazed harmlessly against a transparent shield that covered the balcony. It was nearly invisible, that shield, but it thoroughly protected the pair. There must have been imperceptible openings in the shield through which they could fire, which could not be seen in the dim lighting. Gor Regin triggered his big disc at the floor at my feet, and I sprang back dropping my weapon. There was no particular point in being killed that I could see. The others of our party slowly followed suit.

Our little expedition of vengeance was nipped in the bud, and we stood helpless under the guns of the captors of Ceulna. I raged inwardly at my inability to overcome the confidently smiling Gor Regin. Behind him stood his flame-haired sister, and in my ears laughed the ray-voice of Dionle, exulting over our failure.

CHAPTER NINE

*... she unwound the woven imagery
Of second childhood's swaddling bands,
and took
The coffin, its last cradle, from its niche
And threw it with contempt into a ditch.
Shelley.*

THE dream state was a thing much better understood by the Elder race than ourselves. It was used for several purposes, and there were machines and rays designed purposely to induce the dream state and to use it to rehabilitate the mind. In the dream state anything can seem true to the sleeping mind, and suggestions and com-

mands have a certain hypnotic potency upon the later waking state. Moreover the Elder race used the dream as universally as we use the movies, for education, and for entertainment, even for debauchery. The induced dream can be anything the controller of the dream-mech wishes, and its effects upon the dreamer can be vast and subtle in their after-changes of his nature. All this both Eltona and the great stationary brain-mass knew very well. Only the strong attraction she had created in the Mind for herself caused him to surrender himself to her in the way that he had. I say "he" because the big mind of the Mist City seemed male to me, but I suppose strictly speaking "he" was a neuter.

Eltona realized that the Mind's age of deprivation of all true pleasure had given him an enormous need for entertainment, and this fact was her opportunity to induce within him the attitude she wanted. But the nature of the big Mind had crystallized during his centuries of labour as the correlating intelligence of all the functional machinery that kept the complex living organism that was the Mist City operating efficiently. His character was adamant now, and only the most heroic measures could change his will to dominate so long held in abeyance, a will that she realized had been built into him as a safety measure against the human element which might try to seize control of the Mist City. That this had happened anyway she realized must have been due to the disasters and hurried scrambling departure which had characterized the period of the great migration of the Elder Race.

The Mind in the Mist had been designed as a kind of Ruler, an unselfish kind of mechanical monitor, and the Felojinni had deprived his nature of its natural functional development long ago. The result had been that his frustrated will to dominate had curdled within him, given rise to his present escapade, made of a natural good monitor-type robot-mind a disordered, half-insane maladjusted personality. She set herself to correct this deficiency by giving him super-vivid dreams in which this desire was given its full sway, dreams in which the Mind functioned as a Monarch, a just, kindly Ruler of his Mist City in exciting, stirring times and events. The dream she created took time, and days swept past as she strove with the Mind's frustrations, trying to erect an illusion of satisfaction within him which would replace his present conviction of insufficient past experience. Thus, she hoped, when he awakened, he would feel that he had lived properly, and would be more apt to accept herself and her Amazon cohorts as his co-rulers, as his friends, than as his subjects who must accept his orders without demur.

Too, she had to do all this against his will, although he was not entirely asleep. He was a vast and capable mind, and he kept an area of his brain awake and ready to thwart any attempt on her part to take away his new powers.

* * *

MEANWHILE, as she created a dream world calculated infinitely to please the Mind, the Mind watched her with his half awake attention, and the Tuons went uninterruptedly about their work of moving their base of operations, the

real Capital of Venus now, to the caverns below Nicosthene.

Onua, accompanied by Circona, then paid a visit to the great spirit called Etidorpha, the strange form of life left behind by the Elder migration within the very central core of Venus.

Etidorpha had asked Circona to come to her, for all who had still an understanding of the nature of the Elder life, had an infinite affection for Circona, the Elder child found within the sheltering block of plastic. To such as Etidorpha, Circona represented their last link with the wonderworld of the Elder time, a rebirth of the ancient glory, a kind of Messiah of tremendous significance. So it was that Etidorpha, a vast white cloud of living force within the great empty core of Venus, sheltered there for an age from the aging rays of the sun, boiled upward from the abyss of the core space to meet and embrace the Elder child.

Immortal meeting the child of immortals! Vast, weird mind from the endless past embracing the child of people she had known an eon before—it was a meeting too great for Onua to witness without tears. Too great were the thought flows exchanged between them in emotional meaning for a mortal to stand. Onua fled from the sheer pain of the memories of the past exchanged by the two great minds of the Immortals.

Standing there upon a narrow ledge above the infinite abyss, Circona made a heroic figure in her simple, white garment, her arms outstretched to meet the billowing mist streamers sent out by the up-boiling mass of strangely organized life-force that was Etidorpha.

PASSING through her body at first, the streamers of mist that were the arms of Etidorpha congealed slowly, thicker and thicker, winding the giant child around and round with the thickening mist. At last Etidorpha lifted the giant child in her misty arms and bore her down and down to the very center of the abyss which was the center of all Venus. Hours went by, and Onua crept back from the darkness of the cavern where she had fled from the too great meaning of Etidorpha's mourning thoughts, rejoicing in a kind of painful ecstasy over the one child left on Venus of all the Elder race.

Onua looked down and down into the misty far reaches of that space, looking for some sign of Circona, and at last lay down and fell asleep, waiting.

When she woke, over her stood Circona, returned, but not the same! Something had changed the child into woman, something the spirit of the abyss had given her in the long communion that made her no longer an immature and glorious child, but a thoughtful and grown-up adult, conscious of the pain and meaning and frustration of life, conscious of her own large place in the scheme of things—no longer the laughing Circona but a serious-eyed woman.

From her glorious body streamed now the pale invisible emanations that marked those who served Etidorpha; the Nameless* race also had that same subtle pale flickering about their flesh.

"Did you consent to become Etidorpha's servant?" asked Onua, bewildered at the change in the child whom she regarded as her own responsibility even though her mental

abilities were superior to her own by a multiple.

"Nay, Onua, do not fear. There is only good in her. She could not help impregnating me with the strange and different energy of her body. Do not fear, it has not harmed me. I have learned many things that I needed to know and that I did not understand. And that same pale stuff of her life-blood will remain with me and give me strength when I most need it. Even if I should die, now, as mortals die, I would not die wholly, for the part of her that has lived within me would return to Etidorpha and take with it enough of my character to perpetuate a thing that might be called Circona. She has given me her own life, and there is no need for your trying to understand it."

Sadly Onua conducted her absently musing protege to the levitating sled which had borne them into the abyss of Etidorpha. Sadly she set the controls for the long glide back toward Nicosthene. She had lost her child.

* * *

WITHIN the great control chamber where the Mist-Mind lay enthroned forever on a pedestal of metal, Eltona labored with a dream-mech and stim rays to bring a new slant to the rutted mind of Menta.

Absorbed, her whole attention directed into the solidographic screen of the mech, where the endlessly complex thoughts of the Mist-Mind were unrolling, were flexing

*Nameless race: The Nameless were met with in the previous story of the Caves of Venus. They were a small, frail people, blind from an age of life in the caverns, and they served Etidorpha, their protector and living Goddess. Their bodies also have a bit of Etidorpha's vital essence in them, by which she keeps contact with them, by which they are able to serve her.

themselves in the first relaxation to come to Menta in centuries, Eltona did not notice the slight movement upon the stairs.

Menta, his watchfulness relaxed now that he realized Eltona meant only well by him, slept peacefully, his whole mind relaxed in sheer pleasure at the images created by Eltona's powerful and trained imagination—she was giving him a dream personally designed to relieve the stresses of the empty years.

Dionle, watching from the stairs, her body lithely bent to flee at the first sign of danger, her glossy black hair crowning her wildly angry face, her eyes panther-like in their watchfulness, her silvery body moving silently as a snake, came nearer, nearer to her objective. In her hand was a disc-gun, and her eyes were now upon a huge master switch in the base of the Mist-Mind.

With a sudden bound she reached the switch, threw it open, spun with a wild laugh to face Eltona. In her hand the disc-gun quivered, in her eyes the decision to fire and be free of danger from the powerful female robot was swiftly forming.

Eltona looked up dazedly, for she had been deep in the mental intricacies of a brain more powerful and more able by far than her own, her every faculty had been intensely focused upon understanding Menta and doing what she might to make him well again.

"Well, Queen of all Venus, you are my captive now. Shall I kill you at once, or let you live awhile to suffer ignominy?"

Eltona, who knew the whole future of the race of man on Venus, and Earth, too, lay in her hands,

threw her whole strength into mental telepathic projection toward the wild beautiful figure of Dionle, to make her feel attraction for Eltona, to make her have kind and noble thoughts toward herself. A startled look spread over Dionle's face, as if such thoughts had never before lived within her luxury-loving mind. Eltona, making her voice musical, enchanting in its tonal variance and vibrant meaning, said:

"Dionle! I saw your image in Menta's dream thoughts. He has cared for you so long, tried so hard to overcome his shackles, do you know why Menta wanted freedom most of all?"

Dionle did not answer, only shook her head, still puzzled by the sudden flow of strange images and impulses within her.

"Because he wanted to save your character from the influences which were making of a noble child an evil, vicious creature of no worth to anyone. Because he knew where your life was tending, and wanted to save you from the consequences of your selfish love of pleasure. Menta considered you his responsibility, and the reason Menta is not well now, is that same helplessness you and your brothers imposed upon him—mainly because he could not save *you* from the decay he knew would come upon you!"

"Bah!" Dionle's voice was supremely scornful. "Like all the rest, you seek to spin a web of lies about me. Well, it shall not succeed. Now, march up those stairs, your friends, Jim Steel and Ceulna are waiting for you. As well as a few others of our enemies."

Menta lay on his base, the pulsing thought flows that were his life stopped for the time by the

shut-off switch which deprived him of all means of contact with the world. Eltona shot a glance at the lifeless bulk, knew that everything she planned for men depended now upon that trigger finger Dionle held squeezed against the disc-gun's stock. The itch to use it Eltona saw plainly in her eyes, and did not argue. She moved off up the stairs ahead of Dionle.

CHAPTER TEN

*Men from the Gods might win that
happy age
Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;
... might quench the Earth-consuming
rage
Of gold and blood—*

Shelley

ELTONA walked in on the scene of Gor Regin, Tarquemon, the flame-haired Palantee above us on the balcony, just as Gor Regin blasted the floor at my feet with the deadly blue bolt from his over-size disc-gun. I fell half conscious from the concussion to the floor. As I shook my head and tried to rise, my eyes lifted to see the glorious body of Eltona standing over me. She bent, and with her robot's super strength, lifted me lightly to my feet.

"Why don't you realize it when people have the drop on you," she whispered, and I was not sure that her eyelid drooped or not. But somehow I gathered that I was not to struggle. I surmised that she meant we were to humor these proud, spoiled Felojinni, so as to get another chance when they became over confident.

My allies, the Kalfdji, filed off disconsolately ahead of me, Eltona and I brought up the rear. The bro-

thers herded us into a series of cells located just under the huge banquet hall, and locked us in, two to a cell.

They seemed to be in a rush, spent no time in vaunting, but hurried off as soon as we were secure, leaving Tarquemon striding up and down in the corridor between the cells. I wondered vaguely when they had been built, they were so different from the rest of the city, being of rough wood with the axe marks still unsmoothed from the wood. Eltona, who had continued supporting my body, still suffering from the blast of the disc-gun, had been locked in with me.

Within moments I knew what the rush was. Gor Regin and Dionle had hurried off to dismantle the equipment I had given Menta before the huge brain found a way out of his predicament. I knew it because the sweet sickening vibration of the stim-compulsion that had been my first sensation in the city returned. I knew that in a short time I would again be in the sensuous dream which had consumed the days and nights when Ceulna and I had been captured by the ro-city's intense control record.

I looked at Eltona sadly.

"Do you know what you are in for, dear Eltona?"

She smiled slightly, and seemed not a bit worried.

"Yes, Jim Steel, I know. I read their minds, know their purpose. You and I will be hard put to keep from staining our honor for awhile. Ceulna will not like it when she learns we are together in this stim-ro city of debauch. But how can we help what is to happen?"

"Eltona, once you intimated that in your strange way, you could love me. Now if that is true, and if you

love Ceulna too, you will use your superior powers to resist this erotic compulsion, no matter whether I am able to do so or not."

"I may do that, and I may not. Who would ever know, Jim? We will probably die before long. Would it be so terrible to die in my arms, Jim. Don't you have an affection for me?"

"I am married, Eltona, and I love my wife!"

"When you are dead, no one will blame you for what you did in life."

"Eltona, are you teasing me, or do you mean what you say?"

The weird compulsion of that dream-like stimulation was rising in power, and the irresistible beauty of the Elder robot's superb body grew and grew as my faculties and senses responded to the unwanted stimulation.

As my mind began to slip deeper into that ecstatic dream that was the Mist-City's ro-record, Eltona took my head in her arms, pressed it to her breast.

"Do not fear, Jim. Whatever happens, Ceulna will understand, if we live so long."

"Are you in for a bawling out, Eltona!" I murmured, as my senses slipped deeper into that dream of love, and my lips sought Eltona's.

* * *

OUTSIDE, my dulling mind heard Gor Regin's deep laugh, and then Ceulna's crackling voice in sharp anger:

"If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it! My own man and that mechanical hussy. I'll kow-tow her never again! Take me away, Gor Regin, and I hope I never see that pair again!"

For an instant I snapped back to full consciousness under the whip-

lash of that cutting voice. Ceulna, with Gor Regin! Slowly what I had heard penetrated my mind. I deduced gradually what had happened. Gor Regin had planned this! He had kept Ceulna free of the compulsion by the use of the silver device I had seen Noralin use to free Ceulna before. She did not know the ro-record was again controlling the city as at first! She believed that Eltona and I were disloyal of our own free wills. I cursed, sank upon the wooden bench with my head in my hands. Eltona, oblivious of what had happened, sank sinuously down beside me. The steady irresistible compulsion rose again, smothering my anger, my fear of the consequences, my sense of loss. I realized that Ceulna might turn to Gor Regin for consolation, willingly! And the steady vibrance of the doping stim-ro record went on and on, so that I could not even care.

BESIDE deserted Ekippe, the big sphere of mist sat. The ray from the open eye swept over the city, seeking; swept down into the caverns beneath - watched the last of Eltona's followers board their levitor sleds and move off toward far Nicosthene.

Abandoned lay most of the work and much of the fruit of the planning of Eltona.

Sick were the hearts of her followers, for Eltona had not returned from the Eye in the Mist that had swallowed her up.

In Nicosthene, Circona and Onua went on with the work, but somehow things went very badly without the guiding genius of the resourceful leader.

Revolt against their government flared among the black races, the

Mers ceased to send messages, the power that had held all Venus lay relaxed and unused while Circona pondered, unable to decide what action to take. She could not bring herself to cause death - and how else was a rebellion to be quashed than by war?

Onua could not feel herself capable of deciding, of plunging all their strength into the risks of war - taking a chance with the future of all men. She could not do it.

Until the return of Eltona, they both felt they were obliged to mark time. Too, while the great Mist City threatened their very existence, nothing could be decided upon.

Circona decided to bend every effort toward creating an adequate defense in case of attack by the rays of the big Mist City.

* * *

I CAME out of the daze unknowing whether days or weeks had passed. Outside the door, still locked, looking through the openings of the bars, stood Palantee, the statuesque, tall flame-haired older sister of Dionle. She was smiling amusedly, her greenish eyes enigmatic on my own surprised gaze.

I looked around the cell, trying to orient myself after the spell of the love-sick control-vibrance of the Mist-City. I knew that emotionally I was dislocated, and a glance at Eltona told me that still she was in the love-trance. Her body quivered ecstatically, and her eyes were absent and bemused with an inner vision of desire.

The little silver rod in Palantee's long pallid and beautiful hand told me how it came that I was no longer under the influence of the Mist-City's control.

"Why did you touch me with it,"

I asked, eyeing her brooding face.

"Because I have a need you may fill, big Steel. You are not unattractive, as you must know, and I am a woman who has been alone too long to think of comfortably. Do I look like one to enjoy a single life?"

I shook my head in the negative.

"Decidedly not, Palantee."

"I have lived in dreams until I am sick of them. I was drawn to you, and I thought I might at least discuss the possibility of an alliance. My two brothers seem to consider me as a kind of necessary nuisance. Would you like to rule the Mist-City with me?"

My eyes narrowed. I was surprised, knew not how to consider her words.

"What do you plan?"

"We can seize the city well enough. You can then release your friends, cast out my brothers who have little love for me anyway. Together we can take our city to any part of the world we want and live there eternally. You know how life is in the city. There are so many things we could do together with its infinite resources. Did you know the city is equipped for space flight, just as it is?"

"I don't believe it! The builders would have taken it with them if it had been so equipped."

"They left many ships capable of traversing space. They left this Mist-City too. It is my opinion that they did not mean to leave it. That their departure was by way of death. There is a legend among us to that effect. But among other things we could travel space in this tremendous machine."

"Truth is, Palantee, I love Ceulna. To me no other woman can compare with her. I would like to ac-

cept your offer, but how can I when my heart is another's?"

A little flush of anger stole over her beautiful face. She raised one perfect, naked shoulder in a shrug.

"Much good the fact will do you. She is in Gor Regin's arms, convinced you are a worthless philanderer. Why not forget her?"

I felt a blow against my ankle. Looking down, I saw Eltona's foot against my own. With a start I realized that the robot was not as susceptible to the control vibrants as I had supposed. She had been putting on an act. Looking at her face, I saw a perceptible wink. I realized I had been acting like a fool not to pretend to be flattered and enthusiastic at Palantee's offer of treachery to her brothers. She had half turned away, her lovely face piqued, her eyes haunted with the dread of something I could not understand.

"Do not go, Palantee. I am drawn to you as you are to me. Together we could work out a life worth living. Why should we let our loyalties rob us of everything worth having?"

She turned back swiftly, a light coming over the darkness of her eyes; the slack, disconsolate expression fleeing from her face.

"Would you, Steel? Could you love me in the way I need love? Could I be to you what a woman with the lifetimes I have lived wants to be to a man? There is so much to discuss—so many things I want to tell someone understanding like yourself. I have learned so much that is useless to one alone. I need a man like you so very much!"

SOMEHOW her meaning penetrated the shell of disgust that I had

built against these Felojinni since I had met them. They had had such opportunities here with this mighty city - and had done so much less than nothing with them. But there was a sincere longing for the worthwhile, an evidence of vision and imagination, something in her beautiful face and perfect body expressed the eternal striving of mankind toward development - and she was picking me as a ladder toward that goal. I played along because that subtle kick from Eltona pointed the way of wisdom—but I felt like a heel as I deluded her.

"I understand, Palantee. I think you are the most beautiful woman I ever saw - and I see no reason why true love could not develop between us if we encouraged the opportunity. I will give you my word to try to love you in the way you need love—now that my Ceulna has turned to another."

A fleeting, invisible smile swept across Eltona's falsely ecstatic, rapt and masklike face. I knew now that she had been acting since Gor Regin had looked in upon us and decided that we were both under the influence of the ro-vibrants that controlled the Mist-City. I knew she was playing the few cards that turned up our way as fully as possible - and that I had to do the same. The future of all men was in the hands of Eltona, her wisdom and her ability alone could lead men from the de-morass of sun-death and degeneration which had brought them so low since the Elder race abandoned the Sun-planets forever.

Palantee drew a key from her shimmering girdle, twisted it in the lock, the cell door swung open. Feeling like a scoundrel, I stepped out,

and she locked the door again upon Eltona. I watched her tuck the long slender key again into her girdle, and noted fully for the first time the long tapering lines of her waist, the lush swell of her full bosom, the tall satin-skinned neck turned toward me with such voluptuous grace above the perfect shoulders.

The perfection of the flame-haired beauty had been noted before by me, but now that I had to play the part fate had given me, that beauty was brought home to me in a way it had not been. She was of an ancient race, a race that had known the hand of the Gods themselves in its development, and nothing those seers of the Elder race touched remained imperfect. Yet centuries of idleness had brought them down to what they now were, people capable of any villainy, incapable of ethical thought and action.

Her very aspirations took the path of treachery toward her brothers, however justifiable it may have been - still she seemed to feel no trepidation, no sense of guilt in turning against those who trusted her.

Watching the flame in her deep green eyes I knew that I was playing with dynamite, and that one false move on my part would be my last. If she ever deduced that I was not attracted to her, that I did not plan to deal with her as my chosen life-partner, I knew she would not hesitate to kill me. She did not have to put this in words. There was that about her strong jaw-line, about her whole carriage, that said: This is no woman to trifle with.

Yet I was going to trifle. Even if I got scratched, this flame-haired tigress was going to be caged, along with her brothers and her sensuous, vengeful sister.

BEHIND us, as we moved off toward the stairs leading up to the banquet chamber, I could hear Eltona give a sad cry as she played her part of one under the spell of the control, deprived of her companion.

And in my breast an old ache had sprung again into life, the ache and terrible sorrow of loss that had been mine when I had lost Ceulna to Nunur before. Then it had been unavoidable, through no fault of ours - but this, this misunderstanding that had taken Ceulna from me carried with it a sense of the injustice of fate even worse in some ways than loss. That Ceulna could think of me as I knew she must think was unbearable. How could she feel that my love could turn to another, and above all to Eltona, whom we both liked and admired and respected so greatly. Yet she knew that Eltona had exercised her arts upon me when first we met - knew that I was drawn to her. It was understandable.

"What causes your sad face, Jim Steel. You do not bear the happy look of a bridegroom?" Palantee's voice was calm, but beneath breathed a passion, a questioning possession spirit that I knew could flame into a jealous rage if it had but slight cause.

"I was thinking of Ceulna, and how her love that I thought so strong should turn to hatred of me, that she could turn against me and throw herself into the arms of another. I was thinking that one day, you too will turn to another because of a moment's suspicion, a flash of anger. I was questioning whether such a thing as true love does exist, or if it is an illusion?"

She twisted suddenly toward me,

the change in her startling me, so intense was the emotion surging into flame within her.

"Jim Steel, I am not as these others! You must not judge me with the values you apply to mortals, nay, nor as you evaluate such robot lives as Eltona, you cannot so evaluate me. Once I loved a man, what seems an age ago. He was killed, fighting with the Kalfdji, here in the city, when all our lives hung by a thread. With his death he gained life for us. My love for him did not die an easy death. I went into the dream world, and remained there so long that even now I do not know if I wake or sleep. I learned, in those dreams manufactured by the Elder minds, many things unknown to such as you. I am not a fool. Steel, I can make our lives beautiful and worth living—more intense and vital than any experience you can imagine having. I know. You are very like that man, Steel. Together we can be mighty, Lords of all Venus, if it is power you want. Why should you suffer a robot to have the power and glory that could be yours? Why have you followed Eltona?"

"Because she is wiser, more able. Without her abilities I would have died long ago. Out of gratitude and admiration I followed her."

"I have wisdom and ability as great as that robot's, though in different fields. You will see, bide your time, you will be glad I have chosen you out of all the men of Venus to mate. You will be so glad that a thought of Ceulna will never crease your brow."

"I do not doubt your words, beautiful one. I do doubt my ability to hold your affections." I was trying to give her the old oil, and

yet—if things had been different, if I were not bound to Eltona, to Circona's dream of building a heaven for the human race out in cold space—how gladly I would have accepted what this woman offered. If Ceulna had not torn away my mental barriers to such alliance, I would have felt differently. But as it was, I was of two minds. Was it wise to betray her, did the chance arise? Could I, when I had gained her trust and affection, turn and betray her? Yet I must, for the future of the human race depended upon Eltona's freedom. Without her age-old wisdom carrying out Circona's young idealistic plans, I knew that once again mankind would lose the path to greatness, would lose the secret of life prolongation inherent in the knowledge of sun De, inherent in their plans to abandon Venus and Earth once again as had the forebears of mankind. I must betray this beautiful love-hungry woman, must win her love and turn her captive to Eltona.

WITH such conflicting thoughts, I followed the tall, perfect beauty, watching the dim lights flame fragile sparklings from her waving tresses, watched the proud toss of her head on the perfect neck, the proud free stride of her.

Up and up those stairs that led to the tower of Dionle's watch, where first I had met the youngest of the Felojinni family, she led me.

Into that dusty, time forgotten chamber of strange mech and stranger associations, she led me, and crouched there on the bench before a television screen was Dionle.

"Play the record, sister." Palantee said to Dionle, a grim note

in her voice that had been so dulcet and enticing, so reasonable and love-hungry on the long path upward. I started, but had no time to realize what I had done to betray, not Palantee, but myself.

Dionle gave me a vixenish, triumphant smile, extracted from the mech she had been watching a spool of wire, inserted it in the play-back niche. Obediently the device began to reproduce the scene—myself following Palantee's graceful back, my eyes on the enticing hips and supple stride of her. Could hear my own voice saying:

"I give you my word, Palantee, to try to love you in the way you need love, now that Ceulna has turned to another."

Dionle made a swift adjustment, and the mech spun back the wire, the scene was reproduced again in much slower tempo, only this time the subtle little voices of the thought of myself and of Palantee were augmented to deafening volume. I felt like a louse as my thoughts were bared before the two beautiful sisters.

"If I can just keep her duped, turn the tables on her, get Eltona free. I'll feed the old oil to her, I'll fall for this dame and get the city back into my hands. I'll give the robot, Menta, his arms again; and Eltona will know what to do with these two tomatoes. Think they can turn all Venus into a play pen for their lusts, think they can make a toy out of Jim Steel, do they?"

On and on went the mental voice, telling them of my plan of betrayal, and Palantee heard the whole thing through up to the very moment we entered the doorway of the watchtower of the Mist City. Her eyes

were an emerald fire of grim, just anger. My knees were getting acquainted with each other, and Dionle's face was a study in triumph, as she asked:

"Palantee, what do you think we should do with him, who would plan to abuse our affections as he has planned? What a foolish man he turns out to be after all. He does not even know the necessity for concealing his thought."

Palantee's answer was calm-voiced, but with a bridled passion ringing in the tones that no cinema star ever equaled. She was love betrayed, she was a woman scorned, and she was able and willing to wreak her anger on me. She spoke calmly, but scornfully with infinite anger spacing her words, emphasizing every syllable with emotion under control.

"Jim Steel, you are not a man of your word, I find. Like other men, worthless to those you consider criminal. Would you blame me if I killed you at once, painfully, cruelly burned the life out of you and so eased the humiliation you have caused me?"

I stood still as a stone. I said nothing, for no words could help me. Slowly she pulled from the glittering girdle of her tapered lovely waist a silver rod such as Tarquemon, the hunchback, had carried and that I could not discover how to use. Slowly she pointed it at me, and from it sprang a beam of golden, sudden violence. I fell into a black pit of nothingness.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

*Those mute guests at festivals,
Sori and Mother, Death and Sin,
Played at dice for Ezzelin . . .*

CIRCONA, twice as active and capable since her long mystic conference with Etidorpha, now shouldering the whole responsibility for the "project survival" of the human race, became a tornado of industry.

From the robots' superior memories and highly accurate minds she absorbed all the detail to which Eltona had freely given her days, and with vast application she reorganized the forces left her since the flight from Ekippe.

As the preparations for further sending of supplies and emigration to space, it became more and more clear that they could not continue with the work while the Mist City lay at Ekippe, a constant threat which might at any time destroy them.

Circona determined to devote her time to creating some weapon that would remove that threat, and at the same time rescue her leader Eltona. That she thought of Ceulna and Steel as necessary or important was not true, but the reproachful eyes of Onua, her right-hand aide constantly beside her, reminded her that the Amazons did not consider it honorable to abandon Ceulna and myself without an effort. Circona realized that to ignore the Mist City was too great an onus, too great a barrier and too destructive of morale.

Circona diverted a large part of her working force to the construction of a great disc of metal, upon which she mounted a mass of mechanisms assembled from every far flung cavern storehouse she could reach or had information about. This construction went forward as fast as the vast nature of it allowed. It was some miles in diameter, and

many of the details of the mechanism's assembly she corrected after conferences with Etidorpha. She had deduced that alone of all the minds on Venus, Etidorpha understood the formulae for such materials as were used in the construction of the Mist City.

Months passed swiftly, and the great disc became a city of machinery, the workers swarmed over every foot of it, checking wiring, inserting control panels, finishing the huge job Circona had given them.

What Circona was building was a great fighting machine, on the same general order as the City of the Mist, but planned to contain only offensive and defensive weapons.

* * *

CEULNA, in the City of the Mist, lived out the days with Gor Regin in a daze of mingled pain and sorrow and false ecstasy from the stim-mech which the Felojinni used constantly to make the dull days livable.

Day by day Gor Regin put off the conflict with the caverns below, day after day he assured himself he had everything he could possibly want, why risk it in fruitless conflict.

Palantee urged him to take the city aloft, seek out the new center of the forces which had been Eltona's, and destroy them. Ceulna counceled against it, saying there was no harm in them, why worry about them.

Dionle, in constant anger at the delay which kept herself and her sister waiting about as helpless satellites of Gor Regin, remained in her watch-tower, and one of the doors of the big mech-chamber in the top of the tower was my prison

cell. There I lay with chains on every limb.

Daily Dionle opened my cell door, gave me a kick or a beating, deposited food on the floor. Usually she did not bother to put the food in a container. Occasionally Palantee looked in on me, laughing scornfully at my long face.

"You chose your lot, why look so put out about it?" she would ask, and I would look at her without a word. There was little I could say, and I felt like a fool whenever my eyes met hers.

The silver rod, I learned when I awakened in chains after having my first bolt of its golden ray, was a weapon which did not kill, but numbed all the nerves of the body and the mind's connective neural cables, so that a dose of it rendered a man unconscious for a period of a day or two. I had no doubt that a long exposure, for a minute or so, would kill a man by causing his nerves to cease work entirely for too long a period. Whatever the reason, Palantee had not killed me, but had locked me up here in Dionle's tower.

As the days passed, I began to realize that both these women wanted mates, could not mate with any men of the city because of their pride. That they wanted to get out of the Mist City to get men suitable to their natures, but that to leave the city meant they should age and die as people do on the sun-planets. That Gor Regin and Tarquemon, their brothers, stood in their way—and neither of them were too proud to take their women where and when they found them. Tarquemon had a house in the city which contained a harem he had selected from among the primitives such as the

Guaymi, who still patrolled the streets and slept in the houses, still in that weird ecstatic love-dream which was the record the Felojinni had used so long that no other would they use.

Gor Regin had a similar house of women, but he kept this from Ceulna, I learned by listening to the conversation of the sisters as I lay helpless in my cell.

MY respect for Dionle and Palantee rose as I realized that unlike their brothers, they had not assembled for themselves any male harem from the primitives of the city's mind-enslaved population, but had remained chaste, while their brothers lack of initiative had kept the Mist City from becoming the ruling power in Venus as it could have easily done. That they had not managed to turn upon their brothers and get their wishes I could not understand. I realized that Palantee must have waited a long, long time for a person like myself to come into the city. But why did she need help to seize the city? An alliance with the Kalfdji would have given her all the men she wanted for the job.

For an age these sisters had retreated from the necessity for action—retreated into the mechanical dreams, into a subjugation to the dream-habit. That they considered dreams a better way to spend their time than in the pursuits of lust in which their brothers spent their time, I could understand. Perhaps it was the glory and beauty of the Elder dreams that made them unable to accept the physical and mental inferiority of such as the Guaymi men. It was understandable to anyone who had ever experienced

the thrills, the beauty and endless contact with mighty minds and terrific physical qualities of the Elder race one found in the records of their life that were used in the mech-dreams.

I gathered that watching the activities of Eltona's followers, watching the retreat of Circona and Onua, watching the life of the varied races gathered under the banner of the Elder Robot had given the two sisters an appetite for life as it actually was on the outside, had given them a distaste for the dreams and the futility of dreams which had consumed their lives for so long. That within them was working a ferment of new ideas and new appetites, a will-to-power was replacing their old acceptance of the order of things, and that sooner or later they were going to move toward a fuller life for themselves, whether their brothers were willing or no.

That if they succeeded, they would attempt to overcome Circona and Onua, I did not doubt. That they would upset completely all our plans when this came about, I felt inevitable.

So daily I attempted to harangue them with the impossibility of conquering the robot forces of Circona, of taming the Tuons, the inadequacy of the Mist City weapons except for defense. They listened, or they shouted at me to shut my mouth, or Dionle would fling open the cell door and beat me with a length of electric cable.

"You would get a lot more out of life if you released Eltona and followed her lead as I have done. She has a brain to build a life worth living. Not crouching here in a tower wishing for life while it flows

away. You have entirely the wrong attitude. . ." I would say, and they would answer with silence. I would continue: "Your brothers do what they please with the Mist-City and little good it does you. You do not even have a mate to pleasure you and make life at least contain love. You have nothing, and you could have everything."

So it went, day after day, until at last I realized that the sisters were watchfully waiting for something they knew was going to happen—the relaxing of their brothers' watch over the big rays now in their hands since Menta's re-enslavement.

Then I began to wait silently too, for such a time was bound to come—the brothers were but two.

GOR Regin, knowing that sooner or later Circona would realize the Mist City was no longer under the domination of the mighty ro-brain of Menta, would attack, began to select and train men into a fighting force to handle the big ray weapons.

In this work he found Ceulna invaluable, for Ceulna had had long years of recruiting experience under Hecate, knew exactly how to arouse their loyalty and willingness. Together they soon had nearly five hundred men learning to sight and fire the big rangy ray guns that circled the City's rim.

Observing this activity of Gor Regin left-handedly through listening to Palantee's conversation with Dionle, I saw that time was now playing on the side of Gor Regin, rather than on the side of Circona and Onua. I prayed for an opportunity to get word to Circona that the City of the Mist was not ruled

now by the mighty ro-brain, but only by the comparatively puny brothers Felojinni. If she attacked now, before the recruits were trained and ready to replace the over-air control that only a brain like Menta's, (a vast central control board giving him complete and instant automatic control of every weapon in the city) was able to handle, Circona would have the advantage, even though her weapons were not the great Master weapons of the Mist City.

But if she waited, Gor Regin in time would have a force of men ready to replace the central controls that could only be controlled by Menta—and the job would be harder by far. As I lay pondering and wishing for a way to speak across the miles to Circona under Nicosthene, a voice came to me subtly—a voice I recognized as Menta's own.

"Stranger to whom I am grateful, is it you thus chained and held helpless?"

Eagerly I answered, it was my first contact with another mind since Palantee had struck me down in anger, the first sign of hope in what seemed months.

"Yes, Mighty Ro, it is I, Steel of the Earth." My inner thought voice was eager, questioning. "Are you able to reach the mind of Circona, the Elder Child, as you reach mine?"

"I don't know, stranger. Even this is an effort for me. But I can try."

"She has a sensitive mind, it might not be so hard as you think. On earth there are men like myself who can speak immense distances telepathically, without equipment."

"But what reason would I have

to speak to her?"

"Menta, if you can tell her that you have lost Control of your City of Mist, and that the puny, lazy minds of the Felojinni are running the city—she will attack and free you. But if you do not reach her soon, Gor Regin will have a force of men able to fight the mighty weapons of the city and hold off all attacks. Tell her as soon as you can!"

"I will try. Certainly she might give me freedom. I am in misery thus cut off from all life, nothing is left me but the work of tending the machines of the city."

"Menta, you are very wrong not to trust Eltona; wrong to capture her. She would have made your life interesting far beyond your dreams."

"I believe that. Things have turned out so that I can see I was wrong to trust entirely in my own efforts. If I had had a people, Tuons, Mers, anyone but what I did have—it would never have happened."

"Next time, let us help you. Now go and reach her mind. Tell Circona to attack now, rather than later. Later will be more difficult. Gor Regin gathers greater strength daily."

MENTA'S voice did not return, and another day dragged away. In the dimmer night time of the artificial light, a ray came into my cell and Ceulna's voice was heard by me for the first time since she had turned her back upon me.

"Jim, Jim, wake up!"

"I am awake, you beautiful and faithless creature. I always knew of all the people in the world there was one whom I could trust, and who would trust and love me no

matter what occurred—my Ceulna. It is hard to learn I was wrong.”

“Oh, Jim, don’t you understand? I was only doing what you tried to do with Palantee. Playing him for a dupe. Only I remembered that someone might be watching my mind and acted in my thought, too. You forgot. I have been awaiting my chance—but it has not come. But, now, a strange thing happens. Such a ship as I never saw on Venus! Someone with a vast ship that resembles the Mist City, even to the Mist—is approaching from the skies. Be ready for anything!”

“You mean you knew that we were under the influence of control?” My voice shook, how could I have thought that Ceulna would be so stupid as to be fooled by so simple a thing.

“Of course I knew, Jim. But even if I didn’t know, even if I did turn to Gor Regin, you will never find it out now. Think about that, you nincompoop. Gor Regin is very attractive, you know.”

With which little twist of her knife in my emotional wound, she left, the ray swept on over the misty towered city, the vision it had brought of the transparent towers and beautiful streets of the strange Elder work passed away as the ray left. I turned in my chains, cursing. How could I be ready for anything, trussed up like a monkey on a stick.

I was glad now that my little adventure with the flame-haired Palantee had turned out badly. I had enough explaining to do with Ceulna about Eltona, without making it any worse. I could hear her in my imagination, once she got me clear of entanglements:

“You’re making a habit of it!

First it’s Hecate, the ugliest woman on two planets, then Nonur, the most evil woman on Venus, then Eltona, and now this redhead. I suppose you’re entirely blameless. Other men don’t get into these scrapes, and have to be pulled out by the hair of their heads. I get weary of explanations. . .”

Ceulna had a tongue, and she loved to use it, and I loved to hear her. Even when she was bawling me out, I loved her, and as she did everything, she did that superbly well.

* * *

CIRCONA, in the caverns under the crater of Nicosthene, heard Menta’s faint and far-off message. At first she could not believe that she heard, but as the message was repeated again and again, the robots confirmed the existence of the thought message. Menta was not in control of the City of the Mist!

Joyfully the Tuons sprang to action, one after another the slim shining battle craft lifted, to wait above the cloud sheath for Circona’s now completed new and tremendous disc-like ship designed after the pattern of the Mist City. As the mighty three mile disc of metal lifted from the earth on powerful levitors, about it sprang suddenly the layering mist, a force-field generated by dynamos and dispersing coils designed by the mighty mind of the immortal Etidorpha. Now Circona had a craft as huge, as well weaponed, and as imperviously shielded as the City of the Mist itself.

Surrounded by the comparatively tiny battle craft of the Tuon war-fleet, the huge disc flew above the hiding cloud sheath toward mountainous Ekippe.

Unlike the City of the Mist, which was designed for the purpose of keeping out all detrimental energy, the disc-ship of Circona contained in its force-mist-shield hundreds of the eyes. The City of the Mist contained but one opening. But behind that one eye in the Mist, behind that curtaining blue iris of the eye, were the mightiest rays on all Venus.

Circona did not know what rays the mysterious City might contain, but she could guess.

Though the Felojinni saw the approach of the strange mist-covered disc above the hiding cloud sheath of Venus, they did not rise to meet the threat. They feared to try to fight the mighty craft that was their City in the air. They felt much safer sitting still, as they had for so many centuries in their jungle.

GOR Regin kicked the lever that opened the iris of the eye, through which all of his weapons fired. Slowly he spun the great city on its base, the levitors holding it above the ground on frictionless repellant beams. Centering the eye on the huge ship above, Gor flung at it, one after another all the ancient power of the mighty weapons. Ray after ray, coruscating beams as huge as rivers, slanted upward from the eye toward the approaching disc, surrounded by the tiny dots that were the long needles of the Tuon war-fleet. Flaming against the mist-force shield around the disc, the destructive beams flowered into great fountains of fire, rose and blue and yellow and green, fountains of multi-colored sparks sprang outward from the force-shield as the mighty ancient

beams struck.

Savagely Gor Regin spun the dials of variance on his controls, putting the multi-powered beams through every possible destructive wave-length. The great disc shed them all like water, came serenely and confidently nearer and nearer, slanting downward toward Ekippe.

Sweat poured from Gor Regin's broad dark brow, his hair hung in tangles of madness as he turned from his attempt to destroy Circona's new weapon, turned and ordered his gunners to start picking off the warships that accompanied the disc.

One by one the ships were touched with the great flaming beams, spun downward to death.

Circona immediately ordered the retreat of the unshielded fleet. They retired beyond range, to await the outcome, to await some turn in the battle that would allow their entry.

Circona brought her disc-ship directly above the great sphere of Mist from the past, so that the eye of the City no longer opened toward her. Gor Regin slowly tilted the whole base of the city till the eye again included the disc-ship in its vision. Even at this range, his mighty war beams failed to pierce the force shields of the disc. Circona began to circle the Mist City, faster and faster, so that Gor Regin had to spin the Mist City upon its base to keep his Eye upon her.

Again streaming out from Ekippe were the Marsh-men, who had slowly filtered back during the long inactivity of the City of the Mist. War had come again, and sadly they fled.

Up to now, Circona had not fired upon the Mist City. There were a number of reasons, but the main one was that Menta was contacted with

every mech in the city in the same way that a man's mind is connected with every part of his body. She knew that to fire upon that city successfully, to destroy any part of it—was to cause Menta infinite pain. Every electric relay in Menta's control boards was operated by his nerve ends, connected as they were to electric wires. If she damaged any of the functional mech of the city Menta would be in agony. And Menta informed her of this state continually, imploring her to find some other way of overcoming Gor Regin.

Also she feared to fire on the city for fear of harming Eltona. All her plans for the future revolved around Eltona's immense abilities. Circona sent her huge disc in a circle, just a little faster than Gor Regin could follow with his poor handling of the mechanisms that were designed for Menta's own control. As she spun about the huge sphere, she pondered: how can I fight a thing I must not harm?

The solution came to her. She spun the great disc, sent it swiftly close to the great misty wall of the sphere, and with electro-magnetic grapples made fast to the great metal base. The two great mechanisms lay side by side, locked with magnetic force. Gor Regin wrenched at his huge control levers, trying to spin the City, to find the disc-ship in the Eye, but the city would not move the weight. Dynamos hummed higher, circuit breakers thundered deep in the base of the Mist City, but it did not move.

NOW Circona flung upon the Misty wall of the sphere a heavy flow of the static magnetic of Eltona's invention, hoping to freeze

the vibration of the metal wall that gave rise to the Mist-like force. Slowly the Mist dissolved away from the focus of her force beams, at last the bare white metal of the sphere's wall came clean and bright beneath. With a low cry of triumph Circona turned her hand to a great Dis-beam of war, shortened the focus to a few feet in length, began to burn away the unprotected metal of the city's sealing wall. Within minutes she was through, and through the opening she had made the Tuon Amazons began to pour into the Mist city, and on the streets of the City of the Mist appeared the wheeled mech of Tuon war, floated through the opening on levitors.

Thirty minutes after Circona had grappled fast to the metal base of Mist City, thirty one-man ray tanks were trundling along the wide street of the City, toward the big central palace where waited Gor Regin, trying furiously to find the whereabouts of his enemies - outside the city.

Menta chuckled softly to himself in his big mech-room beneath the circular palace, for he sensed the movements of the troops in the city with his nerve ends, attached as they were to the multiple controls from which cables ran to every part of the city. Menta knew every person in the city by the sound of his breathing, as a blind man knows footsteps.

Dionle saw the ray-tanks as they neared the palace with her telaug beams, switched on the vision rays, saw Tuons, shrieked - awakened me in my cell, awakened Palantee, swept her ray to warn Gor Regin. Palantee, leaping to her side, took in the scene with one glance, reach-

ed out and switched off the power just as Dionle opened her mouth to shout at Gor Regin of his danger.

"Let him fall. We have stagnated here long enough with him. Anything will be better than to go on this way!"

Dionle turned, her face a furious snarl.

"Those *A m a z o n s* will kill us, you fool!" Madly she beat at her sister's strong arms, at her face, as they struggled over the use of the ray mech. Palantee was far stronger.

"If you'd ever bother to read a mind thoroughly, little sister, you would know we could never find better and wiser leaders than this Eltona and Circona, the Elder child. It is in Ceulna's mind, in Jim Steel's, even Menta realizes that his best chance for a future lies with them. I am not wiser than Menta, and I am not going to fool myself any longer. We Felojinni are not leaders, and we have done nothing with our opportunities. Our best chance lies in choosing a wise leader. I am setting Steel free, right now. If only we had done something sooner. . . "

She held her sister firmly with one arm as she crossed the room to my cell and unlocked the door, tossed me the key to my manacles.

"Get out of here, Steel, and make yourself useful to your friends. I've had enough of this foolish struggle. Even if my brothers won, I would have no more than before. I've had enough of their dealing."

I did not answer, quickly unlocked the manacles, ran from the tower chamber.

BELOW the hiss and crackle of dis told me the ray tanks had at-

tacked the metal doors of the great building. The different sound of the ray-fire of the weapons of the city told me that Gor Regin's new recruits were attempting to fight the Tuons with the weapons inside the city. Every ray has a characteristic sound over a telaug, but to one unequipped, as I was, many of them are soundless. I could hear a sound new to me, though, a repeated deep booming hum, that told me some unfamiliar weapon was firing.

As I sped down the widening spiral stairs of the tower, I passed a big bay containing weapon mech, which had always before been empty of life. Now it contained two of the primitives of the city, now duped by Gor Regin into serving him as warriors. They were unskilfully sighting the big nozzles, peering at the cross hairs on the screen, slowly jockeying the over-responsive controls to get the cross hairs upon—Tuon ray-tanks in the streets!

As I sped past the door, the scene was but a flicker, but three steps down the stairs, the meaning of it registered and I stopped, turned, leaped back into the room.

"Don't fire that gun. Those are Amazons, they fight the people who have kept you prisoner. Would you make your friends your target?"

The two low-browed, black-haired stalwarts turned, startled by my entrance.

I pushed them aside from the mech, swung the penetrative guide ray swiftly about the palace, seeking Gor Regin. Perhaps I could save a few Tuon lives yet.

I found him!

Gor Regin stood with his back to the wall, his hands reaching for the

ceiling. In the center of the room stood Ceulna, her face blazing with anger, a disc-gun in her hand and murder in her eyes.

Silently stalking her, along the wall behind her, where he had just entered from the adjacent ray-chamber, came Tarquemon, his hunched over figure evil in his desperation, in his hand a knife.

I got that ray into Gor Regin's ray-room just in time to see this scene, and in two more seconds Ceulna would have received eight inches of steel in her back.

I centered Tarquemon's hump in the screen, shouted:

"If you don't drop that knife, you'll drop your life!"

TARQUEMON sprang, at the sound on my voice. It never pays to give a bad man a break! I fired, as he sprang, winging him in the knife-arm. His weight knocked Ceulna to the floor, and Gor Regin sprang instantly upon the falling figures, twisting the knife from Tarquemon's relaxed grasp, placing its edge against Ceulna's throat. He gritted:

"Now, fire, Jim Steel, and I'll sink this blade where it should have gone long ago!"

Tarquemon rose, holding his blasted arm, pain twisting his face into an ugly mask. He crossed to the big war-ray screen, began to center the tanks in the streets below and to fire upon them. I could not fire upon him because Gor Regin held the knife against Ceulna's throat. I shouted:

"It would go a lot easier with you two if you surrendered now, instead of waiting till the blood debt is so high they will kill you out of fury."

"Bah! Give up everything

worth while for the pitiful short life of a mortal. We will die fighting for this City of Mist, Steel. You should know that much!"

"Eltona plans to build similar cities. She could use your knowledge of the city and its construction. Play it wise! You're asking for death, and you'll get it if you harm Ceulna, from me personally!"

As I watched the scene of mad desperation, from the background came a tall figure in filmy, gold-starred blue, a calm unsmiling and beautiful Noralin. She walked up to Gor Regin, seized his knife hand, and with a sudden twist, the knife fell to the floor.

"Stop firing, Tarquemon!" Her voice was a whip of command. Tarquemon stood up slowly, dazedly. Gor Regin cursed, his hand raised slowly, the fist clenched shut to strike her calm, beautiful face.

But something greater than himself stilled his anger, he lowered his hand, turned away, slumped upon a bench.

Noralin took Ceulna into arms, and the amazing nature of women stuck me dumb as Ceulna, my courageous tomboy of an Amazon war-maiden, began to weep upon Noralin's shoulder. Copious tears of relief from Ceulna!

"Now I've seen everything," I whispered into her ear with my telaug beam. "Next you'll be jumping on chairs at sight of a mouse!"

"You shut up, you ladies' lap-dog." Her thought came fiercely back along the telaug beam, leaving me more puzzled. Apparently Ceulna was just making friends with Noralin!

The ray tanks below were smashing thunderously through the great

doors.

The stairs echoed with the running feet of Tuon warrior women. Into the big ray chamber, into the screen of my ray, hurled Circona, close behind her Onua. After them poured the Amazons, blades gleaming in ready hands.

"Speak, where is Eltona, or die!" Circona stood before Noralin, her face beautiful as an angry Goddess, her gigantic form fear-inspiring. Ceulna swung around, and at sight of her face Circona relaxed.

"She is safe, my own Circona. Since you are here, now everything is safe, I think."

Ceulna turned back to Noralin, and went on weeping upon her shoulder. Circona put a great hand on her shoulder...

"Has your Jim been killed, dear Ceulna? Why do you weep?"

Ceulna raised a tear-stained face.

"I weep from happiness, dear leader. Pay no attention to me. I am discovering I am a woman."

* * *

A MONTH passed.

Up through the cloud sheath, outward from Venus, passed a long, black space ship.

Picking up speed steadily, the silvery pearl of Venus dwindled to a speck of flame far behind.

Past the orbit of Earth, a reddish dot in the distance, speeding on its path.

Past the orbit of Mars.

Outward, outward to the clean cold of space without sunlight, without the killing De of radioactivity.

Within the ship were five hundred blocks of amber plastic.

Within the blocks were the still forms of five hundred human be-

ings.

At the helm sat a robot, impassive, perfectly unperturbed at the gulfs of space around him, at the speed with which they flashed through the terrible void.

* * *

"EVERY month we will send one ship, Eltona."

Circona, the Goddess out of the Elder amber of suspended animation, watched the ship dwindle into invisibility with dreaming eyes great with plans for the colony.

Twin beams hooking her mind to the young giant scion of the Elder race, Eltona sat, serene and confident in the achievement.

"We will send one every day, soon."

The two rulers of all Venus watched the sky above the cloud-sheath, piercing penetrays making the stars visible on the great screens, for a long time.

They were giving mankind a future without age, and they were happy in success.

Months passed...

Past the orbit of Mars.

Past the orbit of Earth, a reddish dot in the distance.

At the helm sat a robot, impassive, unsleeping.

Into the cloud sheath of Venus nosed a long black space-ship, returning.

The interior of the ship was empty of life. Upon the Master Cabin's great desk a piece of paper, pinned there with golden nails. It was the cargo!

On the paper was scrawled in human writing one word:

SUCCESS

The End.

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