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**EVIL HAD A THIRD EYE**

# **SIEGE OF THE UNSEEN**

**A. E. VAN VOGT**  
Complete Novel







## THE THREE EYES OF EVIL

"The crash was over, the car on its side. Slade sprawled dizzily on his back, while something warm trickled from his forehead into his left eye. He wiped it away, and saw with a start that it was blood. The skin was torn raggedly . . .

"A third eye was plainly visible. The eyelid of it was closed by a surplus of sticky matter, but abruptly he grew aware that it was pulsing with a vague perception of light . . . "

At first it was a grotesque discovery, when the accident revealed that young businessman Michael Slade was a bizarre freak — a man with three eyes. But the impact of what it meant to *see* with three eyes was even more macabre. For Slade, that shocking third eye was his entry into a strange new dimension of terror and adventure — a fearful new world that would wrap itself about him forever!

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Acc Books have published many of his novels, of which *The Pawns of Null-A* (D-187) and *Empire of the Atom* (D-242) are still available.

# **SIEGE OF THE UNSEEN**

by

**A. E. VAN VOGT**

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**THE WORLD SWAPPERS**

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## CHAPTER I.

### BEFORE THE CORONER'S JURY STATEMENT OF THOMAS BARRON

MY NAME is Thomas Barron. For nine years I have been a partner in the brokerage firm of Slade & Barron. I never suspected Michael Slade was abnormal. He was a strong character, and I always thought him rather a superior individual.

I saw him a dozen times after the car accident that precipitated events, mostly in connection with my purchase of his share of the business. He gave me no inkling of anything wrong, and I have no idea what actually happened.

The crash was over, the car neatly turned on its top. Slade sprawled dizzily on his back, conscious that he had lost his glasses. Something warm trickled from his forehead into his left eye.

He wiped it away, and saw with a start that it was blood. He mustered a smile for his wife, who was sitting up. He said:

"Well, we survived. I don't know what happened. The steering gear broke, I think."

He stopped. Miriam was close enough for his near-

sighted eyes, even without glasses, to see that she was gazing at him in mixed horror and alarm.

"Michael, your forehead—the soft spot! It's torn, bleeding, and—*Michael, it's an eye.*"

Slade felt blank. Almost automatically, he bent towards the rearview mirror, tilting it upwards to catch his head. The skin was torn raggedly starting about an inch from the hairline, and coming down about two inches.

A third eye was plainly visible.

The eyelid of it was closed by a surplus of sticky matter, but abruptly he grew aware that it was pulsing with a vague perception of light.

It began to hurt.

### LOCAL MAN HAS THREE EYES

A car accident, which tore a layer of skin from the forehead of Michael Slade yesterday revealed that the young business executive has three eyes. Mr. Slade, when interviewed in the hospital, where he was taken by a passing motorist, seemed in good spirits, but could offer no reason for his possession of a third eye. "I always had that soft spot in my forehead," he said. "The eye itself seems to be a thoroughly useless appendage. I can't imagine Nature's purpose."

He admitted that it was very likely that he would have the skin grafted into place again. "People," he said, "go to sideshows to see freaks. Otherwise they don't like to look at them."

The discovery of a three-eyed man in this small city caused a buzz of interest in local scientific circles. At Technical High, Mr. Arthur Trainor, biology teacher, suggested that it was either a mutation, or else that a third eye was once common to human beings, and this is



a retrogression. He felt, however, that the latter possibility was controverted by the fact that two eyes were normal throughout the entire animal world. There was, of course, the gland known as the pineal eye.

Dr. Joseph McIver, eye specialist, thought that it would be an interesting experiment to bring all three eyes back to perfect vision. He agreed that this would be difficult, since Mr. Slade's third eye has a bare perception of light, and also because the famous eye training systems now in existence have a hard enough time getting two imperfect eyes back to focus together and work perfectly.

"Nevertheless," Dr. McIver concluded, "the human brain is a strange and wonderful machine. When it is relaxed, everything balances. But when it is tensed for any reason, eye, ear, stomach and other organic troubles begin."

Mrs. Slade, whom our reporter tried to interview, could not be reached.

### BEFORE THE CORONER'S JURY STATEMENT OF MRS. M. SLADE

My name is Miriam Leona Crenshaw. I am the former Mrs. Michael Slade. I divorced Mr. Slade and have legal right to use my maiden name. I met Michael Slade about six years ago, and had no suspicion that he was anything but a normal individual.

I saw my husband only twice after the car accident that revealed his abnormality. The first time it was to plead with him to change his mind about keeping all his three eyes visible. But he had been profoundly influenced by a comment in the press by a local eye specialist concerning the possibility that he might recover the vision of his three eyes. And he felt that publicity had

then been so widespread that any attempt at deception was useless.

This determination was the sole reason for our separation, and it was to sign the separation papers that I saw him the second time.

I know nothing special of subsequent events. I did not even look at the body. Its crushed condition having been described to me, I refused to view it.

Slade sat palming and glancing at the Snellen charts, waiting for the eye specialist.

The sun was shining down on the chart, but he himself was in shadow, and comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair. Relaxation, that was the secret.

Only, after nearly three months of doing it on his own from books, his progress had been comparatively tiny.

Footsteps crunched on the walk. Slade looked up at the eye specialist curiously. Dr. McIver was a tall gray-haired man of fifty-five or so; that much was visible to Slade without glasses.

The doctor said: "Your man told me I would find you here."

He did not wait for a reply, but stood at ease, looking across the lawn at the three charts, respectively five, ten and twenty feet from the chair in which Slade sat.

"Well," he said, "I see you're familiar with the principles of eye training. I wish a billion more people would realize how satisfactory it is to have a light of ten thousand candlepower shining from the sky into their back yards. I think," he confided, "before I die I shall become a sun worshiper!"

Slade found himself warming to the man. He had been a little doubtful, when he had phoned Dr. McIver,

about inviting even a specialist into his problem. But his doubts began to fade.

He explained his trouble. After nearly three months his third eye could see the ten-foot line at one foot, but with each additional foot that he drew back from the chart, its vision became worse out of all proportion to the extra distance. At three feet he could barely see the two hundred foot C.

"In other words," Dr. McIver said, "it's largely mental now. Your mind is suppressing images with which it is familiar, and you can be almost certain that it is suppressing them because it has been in the habit of doing so."

He turned, and began to unpack his bag. "Let's see," he said confidently, "if we can't persuade it to give in."

Slade could literally feel himself relaxing before the glowing positivities of this man. This was what he needed. For long now, tensions must have been building up inside him. Unconsciously he must be resenting his slow progress.

"A few questions first," said Dr. McIver, straightening with a retinoscope in his hand: "Have you been reading fine print every day? Can you 'swing' the letters? Have you accustomed your eyes to direct sunlight? O.K.! Let's begin with the right eye without palming."

Slade was able to read at twenty feet the line that should have been visible at fifty. He was aware of McIver standing eight feet away studying his eye through the retinoscope. The eye specialist nodded finally.

"Vision of right eye 20/50. Astigmatism of two diopeters." He added; "Do you practice looking at dominoes?"

Slade nodded. Up to a point he had made considerable progress with the muscle imbalance that caused the astigmatism which affected all three of his eyes.



"Left eye next," said Dr. McIver. And a little later: "Vision 20/70, astigmatism of 3 diopters."

"Center eye, vision 3/200, astigmatism of 11 diopters. Now palm."

Palming produced long flashes of 20/20 vision in his right and left eyes, and a bare instant of 5/70 vision in his center eye.

"I think," said Dr. McIver, "we shall start by trying for a better illusion of black. What you see may seem black to your imagination, but you're fooling yourself. Afterwards, we'll do some whipping and shifting, and bounce a few tennis balls."

He fumbled in his bag, and came up with a roll of black materials. Slade recognized a black fur piece, black wool, black cotton, a square of black cardboard, black silk, a piece of black metal, a hand-engraved ebony ornament, and a variety of familiar black items including a plastic fountain pen, a bow tie, and a small book with a black cover.

"Look them over," McIver said. "The mind cannot remember any shade of black more than a few seconds. Palm, and switch your imagination from one to the other of these items."

After half an hour, Slade had improved noticeably the vision of each eye. He could see the large C with his third eye at twenty feet, and the R and B below it were recognizable blurs. But perfect vision was still a long, long way off.

"Again, palm," said Dr. McIver. This time he went on talking softly as Slade closed his eyes. "Black is black is black. There is no black but black. Black, pure, unadulterated black is black black."

It was nonsense with a pattern of reason in it. Slade

found himself smiling, as he visualized the black in the various articles that McIver had placed on his lap. Black, he thought, black, wherefore art thou, black?

As simply as that it came. Black as black as the black of a moonless, starless night, black as printer's ink, black as all the black that the mind of man ever conceived. The black.

He opened his center eye, and saw the ten line on the twenty-foot chart. He blinked, but it was still there as bright and black as the print itself. Startled, he opened the other two eyes. And still there was no blurring. With 20/10 vision in all three of his eyes he looked around his back yard.

*He saw!*

At first, the fence and the other residences and the charts and all the shrubbery remained as a part of the scene. It was like looking at two pictures, with one super-imposed upon the other, like two images coming through two different sets of eyes. But images of different scenes.

The familiar one—his own back yard, and the hill to the right and the rooftops of his neighbors that made up his horizon—had the effect of blurring the other, stranger scene.

Gradually, however, its outlines pushed through. To his left, where the houses fell away into a large shallow depression, was an enormous expanse of marsh, thick with brilliant growth. To his right, where the hill had always hidden his view, were scores of caves with fires burning at their openings.

The smoke from the fires rose up in curling tongues of black and gray, and intensified the blur that already half hid the Morton and Gladwander mansions, which domi-

nated the hill. They kept fading, fading. And now, Slade saw that the hill with the caves was somewhat higher and steeper than the hill with the houses. There was a wide ledge that ran along in front of the caves. And it was on this ledge that he suddenly noticed something else.

Human beings! They moved around, now bending over pots that hung above the fires, now adding wood to the fires, or disappearing into the caves, and then emerging again. There were not many, and most of them had long hair characteristic of woman, or else they were small and childlike. Their primitive clothes—clearly visible even at this distance—made the reality of them unnatural.

Slade sat there. He had a remote impulse to get up, but it was too soon yet for reaction or even understanding. At last memory came that this was happening as a result of improvement in his vision; and the lightning thought followed: What in the name of sanity had happened?

It was too vague as yet, that tugging amazement, and besides there was still the scene of the cave dwellers becoming clearer and clearer to his vision. The houses and his own yard were just shimmering images, like fading mirages, like things dimly seen through an all-enveloping haze.

For the first time Slade realized that his eyes had been straining to hold those two scenes, but that the strain was lessening, as the second one took stronger and stronger hold of his attention.

The paralysis left him. Quite automatically, he stood up.

He noted, with enormous and developing interest, that, where the marsh ended, a rolling meadow began, spotted



here and there with bright splashes of gigantic flowering shrubs, and in the distance trees that looked amazingly tall.

Everything was as clear and bright as a summer sun could make it. A warm, glowing wilderness, almost untouched by man, spread before him. It was like a fairy land, and he stared and stared.

At last, with wondering delight, he turned to look at the other horizon—and the girl must have started the same instant around the tree that was there.

She was tall and very straight. She must have been intending to swim in the stream that babbled into the marsh a few yards away because, except for a rather ornamental silvery belt around her waist, she had no clothes on.

She had three eyes, and all three of them appraised Slade with amazement but without a shade of embarrassment. There was something else in her manner that was not so prepossessing, even a little repellent. It was the dominating look of a woman accustomed to think only of herself. He had time to realize that she was older than she looked.

The woman's eyes were narrowing. She spoke in a violin-toned contralto, meaningless words, but offensively sharp in tone.

She began to fade. The trees, the great marsh, the hill, partly visible to his left now, faded perceptibly. A house showed through her body, and all around, the earth as he had known it for years took swift form.

Suddenly, there was the yard, and himself standing beside his chair. There was Dr. McIver, his back to Slade, peering around the corner of the house. The eye specialist turned, and his face lighted as he saw Slade.

"Where did you go?" he asked. "I turn my back, and you're off without a word."

Slade made no immediate reply. The pain in his eyes was like a fire.

It burned and burned.

### BEFORE THE CORONER'S JURY STATEMENT OF DR. McIVER

I had personal contact with Michael Slade over a period of about two and a half months. For an hour a day I assisted him with his eye training. It was a slow process, as, after apparently recovering the first day, he had an unusually sharp retrogression.

When I asked him about any particular effects he had observed during his brief spell of good vision he hesitated a long time, and then shook his head.

At the end of ten weeks his third eye had a normal vision of only 10/400. He decided then that he was going to take a holiday on his farm at Canonville, in the hope that his childhood surroundings would relax his mind, and so effect a cure.

I understand he later returned to his home, but I did not see him again until I was called to identify his smashed body in the morgue.

## CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST day on the farm! It was distinctly cooler. A September breeze was blowing over the pasture, when Slade settled down with his eye charts. He glanced at the sun, already low in the west, for he had arrived late.

And he sighed. The day was almost gone.

It had to be today. That feeling was strong in him. This afternoon he was still convinced that it would be easy to recall the relaxed days of his childhood on the farm. By tomorrow, if he failed today, the tension of doubt would have set in.

Then, too, there had been the anxious feeling way in the back of his mind about the cave dwellers. He was just a little reluctant to appear within a stone's throw of a primitive tribe. Here, on this prairie, it was different. It was very unlikely that any inhabitants of that obviously sparsely settled world would be anywhere in the vicinity.

*What the mind wants to see, Slade thought, it will see if it is there to see.* He was creating conditions where his mind would again want to see.

He palmed, and then looked at the chart with his center eye. He could see the big C at twenty feet; the R and B below it were a blur, and the T F P a blotch of gray. As an improvement it was practically worthless.

He palmed again. The eyeball, according to the eye training theorists, was a round organ, which elongated for near vision, and flattened for distance vision. Some of the practitioners were willing to concede the possibility that the ciliary muscles did, in addition, change to some extent the shape of the lens.

But whatever the explanation behind the reality that the system worked, if the muscles pulled disproportionately, vision was poor. The fact that those muscles were controlled by the imagination, a difficult part of the mind to train, made the problem all the more intricate for people who had long worn glasses or had eye trouble.

*The solution, Slade thought, is in me. I have got rid of all the astigmatism in my right or left eye, yet my*



*center eye persists in being astigmatic, sometimes to the point of blindness.*

It was of the mind, his trouble. His eye had proved that it was able to function normally.

About an hour before sundown, his brain was still refusing to work with the third eye.

*Perhaps, Slade thought, if I went to the various spots, of which I have particularly vivid childhood memories, I'd be able to recapture the mood and—*

First, the creek beside which he had hidden so often in the brush, and watched the cars go by to their remote and wonderful destinations.

The grass had grown deep where he had once worn it down with his small body. He knelt, and the scent was a tang in his nostrils. He pressed his face to the cool, green softness of it, and he lay quiet, conscious of his weariness and of the sustained effort he had made during the past months.

*Am I a fool?* he wondered. *Did I turn my wife against me, break off with my friends, all in order to follow a will-o'-the-wisp?*

And had he really seen that other world, or was that some fantastic illusion which his mind had experienced during a profound organic readjustment?

His mood of depression intensified. The sun went down, and twilight was yielding to darkness when he finally started back along the bank of the creek towards the farmhouse.

In the darkness he couldn't find the path, and so he struck across the pasture, stumbling once in a while through thicker patches of grass. He could see the light of the end window of the farmhouse, but it seemed farther away than he remembered. The first alarm came with that realization, but it wasn't until five minutes

later that a far more telling fear struck into him. The fence! He should have come to the fence long ago.

The light seemed to be only a few hundred feet from where he stopped short.

Slade sank slowly down onto the grass. He swallowed hard, and then he thought: *This is ridiculous. I'm imagining things.*

But there was an empty sensation in the pit of his stomach, as he strove to penetrate the intense darkness all around him. There was no moon, and clouds must have been heavy overhead, for not a single star showed. The light in the near distance glowed with a hazy but bright steadiness. It failed, however, to illuminate the building from which it came.

Slade blinked at it with a gathering fascination, his tenseness draining before the consciousness that it would probably be easy to get back to Earth. After all, he had *thought* himself here. He should be able to get back without too much trouble.

He climbed to his feet, and began to walk forward. As the light drew nearer, it seemed to him that it was coming from inside a doorway. Vaguely, he could make out that the doorway was inset under a curving sweep of metal, that bulged far out. The metal gleamed dully, and then merged with the general blackness without leaving a hint of the shape of the whole structure.

Slade hesitated about a hundred feet from the entrance. He was even more fascinated than he had been, but his desire to investigate was dwindling. Not now, in this dark night of a strange plane of existence. Wait till morning. And yet he had the uneasy conviction that before dawn the tensions would have reasserted in his mind.

*One knock at the door, he thought, one look inside.*

*And then off into the darkness.* The door was metal, and so solid that his knuckles made only the vaguest sound. He had some silver coins in his pocket, and they tinged with a sharp sound as he used them. Instantly, he stepped back, and waited.

The silence grew tremendous, like a pall pushing at him. Dark and silent night in a primitive land inhabited by cavemen and—

And what? This was no caveman's residence. Was it possible he had come to a plane of Earth entirely separate from that of the nude girl he had seen?

He retreated into the shadows away from the light. He stumbled, barking his shins. On one knee, he felt the object over which he had nearly fallen. Metal. That brought a thrill of real interest. Cautiously, he pressed the button of his flashlight, but it wouldn't light. Slade cursed under his breath, and tugged at the metal thing in the ground. That was the trouble. It was in the ground. And held hard.

It seemed to be a wheel attached to a boxing of some kind. He was still fumbling over it, tugging tentatively, when it began to rain. That sent him to the nearest brush for cover. But the rain grew heavier, until finally the bush poured water on him. Slade accepted his fate, and headed back for the doorway. He tried the latch, and pushed. The door opened immediately.

The interior was brightly lighted, a long, high wide corridor of dully shining metal. About a hundred feet away, the massive hallway ended in a cross corridor. There were three doorways on each side of the corridor.

He tried the doors one after another. The first one opened into a long, narrow room that was all shiny blue mirror. At least it looked like a mirror. Then he grew aware that stars were shining in its depth.

Slade closed the door hastily. It wasn't that he felt fear. But his mind had hesitated, unable to interpret what it was seeing. Its hold on this world was far too precarious for him to subject it to incomprehensible strangeness.

He moved across the hall to the first door on his left. It opened onto a long, narrow room half filled with cases on cases of goods. Some of them were open, their contents spilled out on the floor. Instruments glittered up at him, a quantity array of miscellaneous gadgets of all sizes. Some of the boxes were haphazardly pulled aside, as if a searcher had been looking for some specific item.

Slade closed that door too, puzzled but without any threatening strain this time. A storeroom was a recognizable thing, and his mind accepted it without there being any necessity for him to identify what was in the boxes.

The two middle doors revealed identical interiors. Massive machines that towered three quarters of the way to the ceiling. In spite of their size Slade recognized them for what they were. For more than a year American papers and magazines had shown pictures of the atomic engine developed at the University of Chicago for rocket ships. The design was slightly different, but the general tenor was unmistakable.

Slade closed each door in turn, hastily. And stood in the hallway, dissatisfied with the situation. A spaceship settled on a lonely moor in an alien plane of existence brilliantly lighted inside, and a solitary light outside like a beacon in the night beckoning to wanderers like himself, offering surcease from the darkness—was that the reality?

Slade doubted it, and a grisly feeling came that he had willed himself into a nightmare, and that any instant he would wake up, perspiring, in his bed.

But the instants passed, and there was no waking.

Gradually, his mind accepted the silence, the brief panic faded, and he tried the fifth door.

It opened into darkness. Slade stepped back hastily. His eyes grew accustomed to the shadows, and so after scant seconds he saw the shape. It was pressed against the darkest wall, and it watched him alertly from three eyes that gleamed brightly in the vaguely reflected light. One swift look Slade had, and then his mind refused the vision.

Instantly, the ship, the light, vanished. He fell about three feet to a grassy embankment. Half a mile away was a yellow glowing light. It turned out to be his own farmhouse.

He was back on Earth.

Slade remained on the farm, undecided. The vision of all three of his eyes had deteriorated this time, and besides he was a badly shaken man. It couldn't have been the same woman, he told himself. Standing there in the shadows of a corridor of an old, seemingly deserted spaceship, the same young woman—watching him.

And yet, the resemblance to the nude cave girl had been so apparent to his brain that he had instantly been under an abnormal strain. His mind proved that it recognized her by the speed with which it *rejected* the logic of her presence.

The question was, should he continue his exercises? For a whole month he walked the reaches of the farm, unable to make up his mind. And the main reason for his indecision was his realization that his return to the two-eyed world had not been absolutely necessary.

Normal vision was a product of many balancing factors, not only mental but physical. Muscles weakened by glasses or by disuse lacked the endurance to resist the shudderingly swift impulses of the mind. Properly



strengthened, they would withstand far greater shocks than he had experienced.

*A demonic woman, he thought, standing in the shadows of a shadow ship in a shadow land.* He was no longer sure he wanted to commit himself to that other plane of existence—to a woman who was aware of him, and who was trying to lure him.

After a month, the first snowfall whitened the foothills. Still undecided, Slade returned to the city.

### STATEMENT OF PROFESSOR GRAY

My name is Ernest Gray, and I am a professor of languages. Some time ago—I cannot remember the exact date—I received a visit from Michael Slade. It seems that he had been away on his farm, and that, on returning to his city home, he learned that, in his absence, a three-eyed woman had visited his home.

From the account Mr. Slade gave me, I understand that his manservant admitted the woman to the house—she seems to have been a very assured and dominating individual—and permitted her to remain five days as a guest. At the end of that time, the day before Mr. Slade's return, she departed leaving behind her nearly a score of phonograph records and a letter. Mr. Slade showed me the letter. Although it is to be shown to the jury as a separate exhibit, I am herewith including it in my statement to clarify my own account. The letter read as follows:

Dear Mr. Slade:

I want you to use the phonograph records to learn the language of Naze. The key record will dissolve in about two weeks after it is first played, but during that time it should have helped you to gain complete mastery of Nazia.

The situation on Naze is very simple, as you will discover, but it is also very dangerous. Here is what you must do. As soon as you have learned the language, drive to the plateau two miles west of the city of Smailes, and park your car beside an abandoned granary several hundred yards from the road at midnight of any night.

In all your ventures on Naze, beware of Geean and the hunters of the city.

Leear.

By the time Mr. Slade brought the records to me, the key record had dissolved, but after listening to those that remained I am able to say without qualification that the language is a fraud, possibly an artificial creation of the three-eyed people for secret intercommunication.

I am assuming, now that a three-eyed woman has turned up, that there is more than one three-eyed freak in the world. My first reaction was that the name, Naze, might have some connection to the Nazi party, but the pronunciation of the word as given in the records, rhymes with faze and daze.

It is unfortunate that the key record was destroyed. Without such a key there can be no translation of a language which, in the ultimate issue, is nothing but a product of the imagination of three-eyed neurotics.

I am told that Mr. Slade's body was found near the city of Smailes, about a mile from the granary outhouse referred to in the letter of the woman Leear. But I know nothing about that, and did not myself see the body.

## CHAPTER III.

AT FIRST Slade sat in the car. But as midnight drew near, he climbed out and examined the granary with the probing beam of his flashlight. The bare, unpainted interior was as empty as it had been in the afternoon when he had driven out for an exploratory look.

The stubble field stretched off into darkness beyond the farthest ray of his flash. A quarter moon rode the eastern sky, and the stars shone with a pale radiance, but the resulting light failed to make his surroundings visible.

Slade glanced at his watch. And though he had known the hour was near, he felt a shock. II:55. In five minutes, he thought shakily, *she* would come.

Not for the first time, he regretted his presence. Was he a fool, he wondered, to come here—risk himself on an abandoned farm, where his loudest shouts for help would merely echo mockingly from the near hills? He had a gun of course, but he knew that he would hesitate to use it.

He shook himself. She had been cunning, had the woman Leear, not naming a date for him to come. *Any* midnight, she had said. She must have known that that would work and work on the mind of the only three-eyed man of Earth. If she had named a time as well as a place, he could have made up his mind against it.

The indefiniteness nullified his resistance. Each day that passed brought the same problem: Would he go tonight? Or wouldn't he? Each day, the pro and con, with all its emotional overtones, racked his mind and body. And in the end he decided that she wouldn't have

taught him the language of Naze in order to harm him in the night that he came to keep their rendezvous.

She was interested in him. What she wanted was something else again, but being what he was, a three-eyed man, he could not but be interested in her. If talking to her tonight would bring him information, then the risk was more than justified.

Here he was, for better or worse.

Slade put away his flash, and glanced at the illuminated dials of his watch. Once again, but even more tinglingly, the shock ran down his spine. It was exactly midnight.

The silence was intense. Not a sound penetrated the night. He had turned off the headlights of his car. Now, abruptly, it seemed to him that he had made a mistake. The lights should be on.

He started towards the car, and then stopped. What was the matter with him? This was no time to desert the shelter of the granary. He backed slowly until his body touched the wall. He stood there fingering his gun. He waited.

The sound that came to him there was almost not a sound at all. The air, which had been quiet, was suddenly gently agitated. But the breeze was not normal. It came from above.

*From above!* With a jerk, Slade looked up. But he saw nothing. Not a movement was visible against the dark, dark-blue of the sky. He felt a thrill akin to fire, a sense of the unknown stronger than anything he had ever experienced, and then—

“The important thing, Michael Slade,” said the resonant, familiar voice of Lear from the air almost directly above him, “is for you to stay alive during the next twenty-four hours while you are in the city of Naze. Be cautious, sensible, and make no unnecessary admis-

sions about what you do or do not know. Good luck."

There was a dazzling flash of light from about a dozen feet above. Slade blinked, and snatched his gun. Then he stood tensed, and looked around wildly.

The granary was gone, and his car, and the stubble field. He was on a city street. Buildings loomed darkly all around him, spirelike shapes that reared up towards a haze of violet light which half-hid the night sky beyond. The light spread like a great curving dome from an enormously high spire in the distance.

Slade saw those details in one flashing glance. Even as he looked, understanding came of what had happened. He had been transported to the city of Naze.

At first the street seemed deserted, the silence utter. But then, swiftly, his senses began to adjust. He heard a vague sound, as if somebody had whispered to somebody else. Far along the street, a shadowed figure raced across the road, and vanished into the darkness beside a spire.

It struck Slade with a pang that his position here in the center of the street put him at a disadvantage. He began to edge carefully towards the sidewalk to the right. The roadbed was uneven, and twice he stumbled and almost fell. The greater darkness under a tree enveloped him, and he had barely reached it when there was a human screech about fifty yards away.

The sound was jarring. With a spasmodic movement, Slade flung himself onto the ground, simultaneously raising his gun. He lay very still. He waited.

It took a moment for his brain to gather together. And several seconds passed before he could locate the direction of what was now a noisy struggle. Cries and groans and muffled shouts came from the darkness. They



ended abruptly, and there followed a curious silence. It was as if the assailants had been worn out by their struggle and were now resting. Or—what was more likely—they were silently and greedily engaged in searching their victim.

Slade's brain had time to catch up with his reflexes. His first thought had in it a blank, amazed quality. What had he run into? He lay quiet, clutching his automatic tightly, and after a moment the second thought came: So this was the city of Naze.

Briefly, then, he felt overwhelmed. He thought, *How did she do it? How did she transfer me here?* There had been, he remembered, a flash of light. And instantly he was in Naze.

She must have used the same mechanical means as she had employed to transfer herself to the Earth plane. An instrument the light of which somehow affected the visual center behind each eye. There seemed no other logical explanation, and that logic, with the spaceship as an additional example, pointed to a highly developed science, that included a thorough understanding of the human nervous system.

The question was, would the effect of the light be permanent? Or would it wear off?

His thought was interrupted by a cry of rage. "Give us our share of the blood, you dirty—"

The words were shouted in the language of Naze, and Slade understood them all except the last one. It was that instantaneous, easy comprehension that thrilled him for a moment. Then the meaning penetrated also. Blood. Share of the blood.

Lying there, it seemed to Slade that he must have misunderstood. His doubt ended as another, even more furious cry came, this time from a second voice:

"The thief has a double-sized container. He got twice as much blood as the rest of us."

A third voice, obviously that of the accused, shouted, "It's a lie." The man must have recognized that his denial would not be accepted. Footsteps came racing along the street. A tall man, breathing hard, flung himself past Slade. Rushing after him, and strung out behind him, came four other men, all smaller than the first.

They charged past where Slade was lying, vague, manlike shapes that quickly vanished into the night. For nearly a minute he could hear the noise their feet made, and once there was a loud curse.

The sound faded as had the sight. There was silence. Slade did not move. He was realizing the full import of what he had seen and heard. A dead man, drained of blood, must be lying on the street a few hundred feet away. Realizing—Naze at night was a city of vampires.

A minute, two minutes, dragged by. The thought came to Slade, *But what am I supposed to do? What am I here for?*

He recalled what the woman Lear had told him just before she flashed the light at him. "The important thing, Michael Slade, is for you to remain alive during the next twenty-four hours while you are in the city of Naze."

Twenty-four hours! Slade felt a chill. Was he expected to remain in Naze for an entire day and night with no other instructions but that he remain alive? No purpose, no place to go, nothing but—this!

If only there were street lights. But he could see none in any direction. Not that it was pitch dark. An alien shiningness glowed at him, different from the night-lit cities of Earth. The sky glowed palely where the violet

haze trailed down from the central tower, and lights flickered from the slitted windows of a dozen spires that he could see.

It was definitely not pitch dark, and in a way that might be to his advantage. It seemed clear that he couldn't just continue to lie where he was. And darkness would provide protection for an uneasy explorer.

He climbed to his feet, and he was about to step from under the tree when a woman called softly to him from across the street:

"Mr. Slade."

Slade froze. Then he half turned. And then he recognized that he had been addressed by name. His relief left him weak.

"Here!" he whispered loudly. "Here!"

The woman came across the street. "I'm sorry I'm late," she whispered breathlessly, "but there are so many blood seekers abroad. Follow me." Her three eyes gleamed at him. Then she turned, and headed rapidly up the street. And it was not until Slade was swinging along behind her that the startling realization came to him that this woman was not Lear.

Swiftly, he and his guide headed deeper into the city.

They climbed one of the darkest stairways Slade had ever seen, then paused before a door. The girl knocked, a measured knock. Three times slow, two fast, and then after a short interval, one.

The pause was long. While they waited, the girl said:

"Mr. Slade, we all want to thank you for coming—for the risks you are taking. We will do our best to familiarize you with Naze. Let us hope that this time the ship will be able to destroy the city."

"Uhl" said Slade.

The exclamation could have been a giveaway, but at last the instant he had an awareness of the danger of his surprise. He choked the sound down to a contorted whisper.

There was the click of a lock. The door creaked open. Light poured out into the hallway. It revealed a heavily built woman slowly making her way to a chair.

Inside, Slade examined his surroundings. The room was both long and wide. For its size, it was scantily furnished. There were three settees and two lounges, end tables, tables, chairs and rugs. The drapes could once have belonged to his divorced wife, Miriam.

Once? A very long time ago, Slade decided after a second glance. They looked as if they had originally cost a great deal. They were so shabby now that they actually seemed out of place.

Slade let the room recede into the background of his tired mind. He walked over, and sat down in a chair, facing the older woman; but it was the younger woman he looked at.

She had paused a few feet away, and was now standing smiling at him. She was a lean, olive-complexioned girl with a proud smile.

Slade said: "Thank you for the risks *you* took."

The girl shook her head with an easy smile. "You'll be wanting to go to bed. But first I want you to meet Caldra, the Planner. Caldra, this is Slade of the ship."

There it was, definite, stated. *Of the ship.* He, Michael Slade! Lear was certainly taking a great deal for granted.

The older woman was looking at him with strange, slow eyes. The impression of slowness was so distinct that Slade looked at her sharply for the first time. Her eyes were the color of lead, her face colorless, pasty,

unnatural. Lusterless, almost lifeless, she stared at him. And said in a dead slow voice:

"Mr. Slade, it is a pleasure."

It was not a pleasure to Slade. He had to strain to keep the repelled look off his face. Once, perhaps twice, before in his life, people had affected him like this, but neither of the other two had matched this creature for the unpleasant sensation they made him feel.

Slow thyroid, he analyzed. The identification made her presence more palatable to his soul. It freed his mind. Memory came of what the girl had called the other. His brain paused. Caldra, the Planner.

He relaxed slowly, and made a conscious concession. She might be very good at that. Slow brains could be extremely thorough.

His interest began to sink. The strain of his experiences weighed suddenly on him. In his teens and early twenties, he had been a night hound, a hunter of cocktail bars and clubs. At thirty he had started to go to bed at ten o'clock, much to Miriam's disgust. Midnight usually found him yawning and sleepy. And here it was—he glanced at his watch—five minutes to one. He glanced at the girl. He said:

"I can use that bed."

As the girl led him towards a corridor door, the older woman mumbled:

"Things are shaping up. Soon, the hour of decision will be upon us." Just as Slade went out the door, she said something else with the faintest suggestion of a laugh. It sounded like, "Don't get too near him, Amor. I felt it, too."

The words seemed meaningless. But he was surprised, the girl opened the bedroom door, to notice that the color in her cheeks was high. But all she said was:



"You're reasonably safe here. There is a very large group of us who believe in the destruction of Naze, and this is our part of the city."

In spite of his weariness, a gathering excitement kept Slade awake. He had been too tense to realize his situation. The thoughts that had come were simply the first unfoldings of his mind. But now, in bed, slowly relaxing, the tremendousness of what was happening penetrated.

He was in Naze. Outside the walls of this building was a fantastic city of another plane of existence. And tomorrow he would see that city in all its strangeness. Tomorrow!

He slept.

## CHAPTER IV

NAZE seen under a brilliant morning sun was a jarring spectacle. Slade walked beside Amor along a wide street. Shabby city, he thought, distressed. And old, oh, old!

He had realized the night before that Naze was ancient and decadent. But he hadn't grasped the extent of the disaster that had befallen the city. The buildings that he saw looked older than all his imaginings. Five hundred, perhaps even a thousand years had dragged by since those buildings were built.

For hundreds of thousands of days and nights, the city had rotated under its sun. Its streets and sidewalks had borne the load of daily living. The strangest building materials could not but be worn out after such a lapse of time. And they were.

The sidewalks were almost uniformly rubble, with

only here and there a patch of smooth hardness to show what the original had been like. The streets were a little better, but they, too, were largely dust packed down by the pressures that had been put on them.

Not a single vehicle was visible anywhere, only people, people and more people. Evidently, all wheel machines had long ago been worn out.

What had happened? What *could* have happened? There was, of course, the war between the city and the ship—but why? He half-turned to the girl to ask the question, then abruptly remembered that it would be unwise to show ignorance. Lear had warned him to make no admissions.

The city that surrounded him, so obvious a relic of an ancient culture, drained the fever of that fire out of him. Never anywhere had he seen so many people on the streets of a metropolis. With this difference. These people weren't going anywhere. Men and women sat on the curbs, on the sidewalks and on the roads. They seemed unmindful of individuals who brushed past them. They sat, staring vaguely into nothingness. The mindlessness of it was awful to see.

A beggar fell into step beside Slade. He held up a metal cup:

"A few drops of your blood, mister," he whined. "I'll slit your throat if you don't give it to me."

Amor's whip lashed out, and struck the ghoulis thing in the face. The blow raised a welt on the man's face. Blood trickled from the welt.

"Drink your own blood!" the girl snapped.

Her color was high, Slade noticed, her face twisted with almost unnatural hatred.

"Those beasts," she said in a low, intense voice, "lurk in alleyways at night in gangs, and attack anybody who

comes along. But, of course," she broke off, "you know all about that."

Slade made no comment. It was true that he knew of the night gangs, but what he didn't know would fill a book.

The continuing reality tore his mind from that very personal problem. The streets swarmed with people *who had nothing to do*. And again, and again and again, fingers plucked at Slade's sleeve, and avid voices whimpered:

"Your blood is strong, mister. You can spare a little, or else—"

Often and often, it was a woman's face that leered up at him.

Slade was silent. He was so appalled he could have spoken only with difficulty. He looked down side street after street, boiling with lecherous beings; and he saw for the first time in his life what utter depravity was possible to the human animal.

This city must not continue to exist. It was clear now why Lear had lured him into the city. She wanted him to see, and she must believe the actuality would end any doubts in his mind. Doubts, for instance, about the reasons for the immeasurably horrible conditions—unquestionably due to the war between the ship and the city. Understanding the origin of a plague was a side issue.

The plague itself must be wiped out.

He had no doubts; so great was his horror. He felt sick with an absolute dismay. This, he thought, going on day after day, year after year, through centuries. It mustn't. The girl was speaking:

"For a while we thought if we could get the chemi-

calized cups away from them, we could end the blood craze. But—”

She stopped; she shrugged, finished: “Of course you know all about that. Except in rare cases, depravity only sinks to new depths; it does not rise.”

There was nothing to say to that. It was easy to see that his NOT knowing “all about that” was going to be a handicap to his understanding of the details of hell. He didn’t really need the details though; the overall hell was enough.

End it! Destroy it! Help the ship if he could, help these fifth columnists. But destroy Naze.

He grew calmer. He analyzed her words. Chemicalized cups! Then it wasn’t the blood itself, but some chemical in the metal of the cup, that made it so intoxicatingly attractive.

Removal of the cup apparently had channeled the craving into something worse. What? Well, he was supposed to know.

Slade smiled wearily. “Let’s go back,” he said. “I’ve had enough for today.”

The early part of the lunch was eaten in silence. Slade ate, thinking about the city, the ship and the cavemen, and of his own part in the affair. In a way he now knew the essentials of the situation. He had seen the ship, and he was seeing the city.

The question was, just what was he supposed to do? He realized abruptly that Caldrea, the slow, was about to speak.

The woman was laying down her fork. That movement alone required many seconds. Then she lifted her head. It seemed to Slade that it took her eyes an unnaturally long time to focus upon him.

The next step was even more prolonged. She opened

her mouth, sat considering her first sentence, and finally began to articulate the syllables. Over a period that seemed longer than it was, she said:

"Tonight, we raid Geean's central palace. Our forces can guarantee to get you to the fortieth level as agreed. The apparatus Leear asked for is already there, ready to ease you out of the window, so that you can focus your dissembler onto the controls of the barrier. You no doubt saw for yourself when you were out this morning that they are located at about the ninetieth level.

"We assume, of course, that the ship will rush in the moment the barrier is down."

Long before her measured words reached their end, Slade had grasped their import. He sat motionless, eyes half closed, startled. Tonight. But that was ridiculous. He couldn't be expected to rush into an attack as blindly as that.

His opinion of Leear went down a million miles. What was a dissembler anyway? Surely, he wasn't expected to learn how to operate an intricate mechanism during the heat of a battle. His consternation reached a peak as Caldra fell silent, and looked at him expectantly. Amor, too, he saw, was watching him with eager anticipation.

Slade parted his lips, and then closed them again, as another, greater realization struck him. The realization that he had been given an immense amount of information. It was all by implication, but the import was unmistakable.

The haze of light he had seen the night before, radiating from the skyscraper central tower—and which he recalled suddenly had been vaguely visible during his morning walk as a faint mist—that was the barrier. What



kind of a barrier? Apparently, a barrier strong enough to keep the spaceship at bay. A barrier of energies potent beyond anything on Earth.

But that meant the city was under siege, and—judging from the decay—had been for hundreds of years.

Slade's mind poised. "This," he told himself, "is ridiculous. How would they live? Where would they get their food? They can't possibly be living on each other's blood."

He stared down at his plate, but there was very little left. The remnant looked like a vegetable, though it was covered by a sauce or gravy that hid the details. He looked up, a question about the food quivering in his throat—and realized that this was no time for such things. If he was going to prevent a major disaster, he had better say something, and fast. Before he could speak, Amor said:

"One bold surprise attack and"—she smiled with a savage excitement—"finish!"

For a moment, the play of emotions across her face held Slade's attention. She was quite a deadly creature herself, this tall girl who carried a whip for the vampires of Naze. It was the old story of environment of course. The mind shaped by its physical climate, and in turn shaping the body and the expression of the face, and setting fast the capabilities of the senses.

For the first time it struck him that, if he committed himself to this plane of Earth, here was a sample of the kind of girl he would eventually marry. He looked at her with interest, prepared to pursue the thought further. And then, once more he realized that his mind was striving to escape from its only immediate problem, the attack. Tonight! He said:

"I'm sorry to have to tell you that the ship will not be here tonight."

Amor was on her feet, her eyes widening. "But all our plans!" she gasped.

She seemed overcome. She sat down. Beside her, Caldra emerged from her stupor, and showed that Slade's words had finally penetrated.

"No ship!"

Slade said, "The ship was to signal me this morning." He felt as if he were sweating, but it was a mental sensation, not a physical one. He went on, "There was no signal."

It was not bad, he realized, for ad lib. He relaxed, in spite of not having solved his basic problem. He watched Amor head for the door. She paused on the threshold.

"I'll have to call off the attack."

The door banged behind her, leaving, after a moment, silence.

Amor having failed to turn up, Caldra and Slade ate dinner shortly before dark.

It was late when Amor came in. She slumped into her chair, and began to pick absently at the food that Caldra set before her. Several times Slade caught her looking at him from under her lashes with speculation. And with something else. He couldn't quite decide what.

Slade decided not to let that disturb him. He walked over to the great window of the living room. He was aware of Amor joining him after a while, but she said nothing; and so he, too, held his peace. He looked out at Naze.

Shadowed Naze, night enveloped. Seen from the spire window, the city drifted quietly into darkness. It seemed almost to glide into the shadows that crept in from the east.

Slade gazed and gazed. At last except for the flickering lights and the almost invisible barrier, the darkness was complete.

Realizations came: His was surely the strangest adventure in the history of the human nervous system. Born in the foothills of western United States, brought up on a farm, quickly successful as a broker in a small western city. And now here! Here in this dark, doomed city of a planet the civilization of which was in desperate straits.

And yet it was not an alien planet; simply another plane revealed to his brain and body because he had three eyes instead of two.

The thrill of excitement that came was connected with his companion. She stood beside him, a woman of that world, young and strong, perhaps still unspoken for by any man.

It was possible. He was sure of that. The marriage state was almost meaningless under present conditions.

It was some time since he had given serious thought to the subject of women. Now, he was fairly easy prey. During the afternoon he had thought of Amor in a very possessive fashion, and his previous realization—that IF he stayed, he would have to marry a girl of this world—had sharpened.

It was possible that there would be other women on this plane of existence more attractive than she was, but they were far away.

Slade said: "Amor."

No answer.

"Amor, what are you planning to do afterwards?"

The girl stirred. "I shall live in a cave, of course. That is what we must all do."

Slade hesitated, torn from his line of approach by the

implications of her words—*Must* all do! Why? It had not struck him before that Amor and her group accepted the idea of a primitive existence.

He remembered that in a kind of a way, he was trying to make a girl.

"Amor."

"Slade."

She seemed not to have heard him, for her tone was not an answer, and showed no awareness that he had spoken.

Slade said, "What is it?"

"This will sound terrible to you, but I was once a blood drinker."

It seemed a futile confession. It brought no picture at first; the words themselves made him uneasy, however.

"And so was Caldra. And everybody. I don't think I'm exaggerating. There's never been anything like it."

A picture began to come. And thoughts. Slade licked his suddenly dry lips, repelled.

And still he had no idea what she was getting at.

"It was easier for me to break off," the girl said, "and to say off—until today . . . last night. Slade," her voice was tiny, "you have strong blood. I felt it all day."

Abruptly, he knew where she was heading. He thought of the men and women she had lashed with her whip that morning. In a twisted fashion, those blows had been aimed at her own craving.

"You can't imagine," Amor was saying, "what a shock it was to Caldra and me when you said the attack was not tonight. It meant you would be around at least another day. Slade, that was terribly unfair. Lear knew our situation only too well."

The repulsion was greater. It seemed to Slade that in

another moment he would be sick. He said in a low voice:

"You want some of my blood."

"Just a little." Her tone had the faintest whine in it. Enough to make vivid a picture of her begging on the streets. Slade felt mentally nauseated.

The thought came that he had no business making any remarks. But he was emotionally past that stage of common sense. This was the girl he had tentatively intended to offer marriage. He said harshly: "And you were the one who used a whip on the others this morning."

In the darkness of the room, he heard the sharp intake of her breath. There was a long silence. Then she turned, and her body was a slim, shadowed shape that disappeared into a corridor towards her bedroom.

And so the night that was to be long began.

## CHAPTER V

AFTER SEVERAL hours, Slade still couldn't sleep. He had been unfair to somebody he liked; and it was disturbing.

She had rescued him from almost death, restored his health; and, surely, surely, he could spare her a little of his blood. Out of all the people in this fantastic city, she and her group had fought hardest against the craving that had destroyed the soul of Naze.

It must have been a fight to make the very gods take pity. But he had had none. He, supermoralist Michael Slade, the perfect man, had cast stones and created pain.

Actually, the true explanation was worse than that, rooted as it was in his own physical desires. And, be-

sides, it was possible that his blood did *feel* stronger to people who were aware of such things.

In the morning, he would give Amor AND Caldra a half cup of blood. And then, somehow, he must get out of this city, back to Earth if possible, but out in some way. It was already after midnight, and clear, therefore, that the end of the twenty-four hour period, which Lear had mentioned, would not automatically return him to the vicinity of his car, near the city of Smailes.

Why, if it meant nothing, had she mentioned a time limit? He dozed, still thinking about that. And wakened to the realization that someone was in the room.

He lay rigid, striving to penetrate the darkness. The fear that pressed on him was the ancient fear of a man in a hostile land being stalked in the blackness. His straining eyes caught a movement against the silhouetting wall, a shadowy figure.

*A woman.* Amor. The identification brought a measure of pity.

Poor girl! What deadly hunger that desire for blood was. In a blurred fashion, he had had in the back of his mind an intention of using a cup to taste his own blood. But her coming under such desperate circumstances ended that intention for the time being. He was only a normal human being. He couldn't afford to be caught in the toils of so potent a drug.

He made an effort to sit up. And couldn't. He was held down by straps.

He lay back, the first annoyance sharpening his temper. It was all very well to feel sorry for her, but this was a pretty raw stunt she was pulling.

He parted his lips to say something scathing. He didn't say it. Memory came that this girl was in a bad way. Let her have her blood.

He wouldn't say a word. In the morning he would pretend that nothing had happened. The determination gave him a temporary satisfaction.

In the darkness, the vague movement continued. The girl seemed to be in no hurry. Just as Slade's impatience reached the vanishing point, a thin needle of light pointed down at his left arm. Almost simultaneously a hand came into view. It held a syringe, which it inserted deftly into the largest visible vein. Slade watched, interested, as the blood drew up darkly into the transparent body of the instrument.

The seconds slid by, and still the avid needle strained at him. Slade thought of the eeriness of what was happening, an Earthman in a strange world being bled by a likable vampire girl in the secret dead of the night.

The picture faded with the passing seconds, too many seconds. Slade said gently:

"Don't you think that's enough?"

For several moments after his words broke the silence, the syringe held steady; and there was no sound. At last, the hand and the syringe jerked slightly in surprise.

It was the time gap between his speech and her reaction that brought to Slade his first understanding of the truth. His gaze fixed for the first time on the hand holding the instrument. It was hard to see in the reflections from that narrow band of light. But seeable it was. And recognizable.

It was a woman's hand. Slade sighed as he stared at it. Here was one more proof that the mind created its own illusions. He, who had had so much experience with that reality, whose very presence in the universe of the three-eyed was a living evidence of the importance of mind over matter, still continued to be fooled.



His mind had jumped to the conclusion that it was Amor who had come to his room. When the hand had first come into the light minutes ago, he had noticed nothing unusual. Now he did.

It was a woman's hand all right, but rather worn. And not young looking at all. How he could have mistaken it even in the reflected light, was a puzzle.

This was Caldra the mysterious, Caldra the Planner, Caldra who, apparently, was now breaking her blood fast. The realization came to Slade that he was participating in a personal tragedy. A woman whose craving for blood had once nearly destroyed her was drinking blood again.

He was aware of the syringe being withdrawn from his arm. The light winked out. A pause. The sound of thick liquid squirting heavily into a container came next, and then once more silence.

Slade pictured the hand slowly raising the cup towards the fumbling lips. His timing was perfect. As his mental picture of her hand reached her lips, there came an audible gulping.

The sound made Slade a little sick. But pity came too. The emotion died, as fingers touched the bed. He thought with a scowl: More?

But it was the straps that let go their constricting hold on his chest and arms. Footsteps shuffled towards the door, which closed softly.

Silence settled. After a little, Slade slept. When he awakened, a great paw was pressing down on his mouth, and a beast as big as a bear, but with oddly catlike features, was looming over him. Its strong, big, hairy body was illumined by a light held by men in uniform.

Other uniformed men were holding Slade's arms and

legs. And he had a dismaying glimpse of still more men in the corridor outside the bedroom.

The animal's great paw withdrew from his face. He was lifted, and carried. There was a light in the living room. He saw Caldra lying face down on the floor, a knife driven to the hilt into her back.

Slade had a horrible, empty sensation. Amor! What about Amor?

It was that thought that must have done it. Under him, the floor dissolved as if it were made of nothingness. He fell about fifteen feet, and struck hard. He lay dizzily for more than a minute before understanding came.

He raised himself slowly, scratching his hands on the frozen stubble of a wheat field. About two miles to the west the lights of the city of Smailes blazoned the night sky. Slade climbed to his feet, and headed for the granary where he had left his car. It was still there, silent and lightless.

He waited a few minutes, but there was no sign of Lear. Tired though he was, he drove all the rest of that night, and part of the next morning. It was 11:00 a.m. when he turned up his private drive.

A letter was in the mailbox, in the familiar, masculine handwriting of Lear. Slade frowned at it, then tore it open. It read:

Dear Michael Slade:

Now you know. You have seen Naze. You must have wondered why nothing happened at the exact end of the twenty-four hours. Nothing could happen until after that time, and then only if you received a sufficiently strong shock.

This shock, of course, was provided when one of the

women came in and attempted to obtain some of your blood. It was regrettable that such a situation had to be forced, but there was no alternative.

It was unfortunate, too, that I had to let the group in Naze think that there would be an attack. They have no conception of the kind of man they are fighting. Against the immortal Geean, any plan of theirs would fail automatically. Their inability to understand the nature and strength of the enemy is proved by the fact that they accepted without question that the barrier could be destroyed by an attack with a so-called dissembler on a protuberance at the ninetieth floor of the central tower of Geean.

There is no such instrument as a dissembler, and the protuberance on the tower is a radiator. Geean will never be defeated except by an attack into the heart of his stronghold. Such an attack cannot be made without your help, and this time you must come by yourself, as the device which I used beside the granary has only temporary effects.

Do not wait too long.

Leear.

In the daytime, he read and remained within the limits of his yard. At night, hat pulled low over his third eye, head hunched down into the collar of his overcoat, he walked the frozen streets. Slowly, the fever went out of him, and he became grimly sardonic in his attitude to what had happened.

"I am not," he decided, "the stuff of which heroes are made. And I have no desire to get killed in the war between Naze and the ship."

He had better adjust himself to the idea of remaining on this earth.

The half decision made it possible for him to consider Lear's letter from a less emotional viewpoint than when he had first read it. The rereading after three weeks was even more interesting than he had expected, now that his lips did not tighten with anger at the ruthless way Lear had precipitated him into Naze, and so, callously, caused the death of Amor and Caldra.

The letter was basically far less irritating than he had thought. And it certainly lacked the commanding tone that he somehow expected from her. In addition, her frank admission that his help was necessary mollified Slade tremendously.

He was vaguely pleased, too, that she had underestimated him. Her analysis of the kind of shock that would send him back to Earth had been wrong. Caldra coming for blood had scarcely ruffled his nerves. And it had taken the sight of her dead body and a mental picture of Amor similarly murdered to affect him.

After three weeks, he felt himself immune to shock. Caldra and Amor begin to seem just a little unreal, like figments of a dream. Slade knew that he had come a long way out of a dangerous mental state when he could think of Amor and feel satiric about his impulse to ask her to marry him.

He did not feel contemptuous of the emotions involved. They were human basics, and it struck him that it might be a sound idea to marry again right here on Earth. If he could persuade Miriam to come and live with him again, that would be a decisive act not easily overthrown by any sudden impulse to rush off to that other plane of existence.

He must resume old relationships, return to a normal Earth existence.

It was easier decided than done. One night, while

•

he was still planning the proper approach to make to Miriam, he met two friends of his business days. They nodded and hurried past, and stopped only when he turned and called after them. The conversation that followed was one of those lame, horrible affairs but Slade was persistent. It seemed to him in his dogged frame of mind that if he was going to live on Earth, he had to have friends and a wife. Those were the concomitants of a sane existence, and he knew better than even to attempt to do without them.

Slade did not enjoy the conversation any more than the two men. They were by turns uneasy, jocular, unhappily silent, eager to impart information, and finally, they hurried off with a "Glad to have met you, Mike, but we're late now for an engagement. Be seeing you."

Slade walked home his lips curling ironically, but there was a vague chill in his backbone. He had learned, among other things, that Miriam had had a "new" boy friend for several months, and there was something strangely final about that fact. As if his last escape route was closing inexorably.

He did not give up so easily. He phoned Miriam the next day, and the day after that, and each day for the week following. Each time her maid said, "Who is calling?" Then, "Miss Crenshaw does not care to speak to you."

Slade wrote her a letter, in which he said, "After all I can have the eye covered with grafted skin." He followed up the letter with a personal visit. But Miriam was "out."

It was fairly ultimate. Particularly when a detective called the next day, and asked him to cease his "persecution" of his former wife. The officer was considerably impressed by the beautiful residence, but he was a

man who knew his duty. "We have received a complaint, y'understand. We'll have to take action if it continues, y'understand?"

Slade understood. His little dream was over.

STATEMENT MADE TO  
CORONER'S JURY BY  
WILFRED STANTON

I was first employed by Michael Slade as a houseman about five years ago. I was with him, with only a brief holiday, throughout the past year.

My employer was away from home several times during that period. He always seemed in an upset condition after each such absence, but he did not take me into his confidence. Before his final departure, I noticed a new air of decisiveness about him, as if he had finally made up his mind about something after a long uncertainty. He bought a second automatic, a match to the one he already had, and a great deal of ammunition for both weapons. He also purchased other items, but I did not see what was in the packages that arrived for him. He read almost continuously. I remember one book dealt with metallurgy, another was a volume on physics, and a third about the new rocket ships.

All this time, too, he was sitting out in the yard with his eye charts. These exercises were unusual in that he wore a light durable hunting suit made of waterproof materials, which he had had made. In addition he carried two automatics, a hunting knife and a pouch of ammunition. His pocket's also seemed to be stuffed, but I don't know what was in them.

Mr. Slade was aware of my awareness of the unusualness of this get-up, and he seemed amused at my anxiety.

One day, he told me not to be alarmed if he went away without warning.

It was the day after that that I called him for lunch, and he was gone. His disappearance was unusual in that the chair and the charts were just as he had left them, and particularly unusual in that there was snow on the ground, and his tracks should have been visible leading out of the yard. I saw no tracks that would indicate a departure.

I can only say that I was not surprised when Mr. Slade's dead body was discovered last week two hundred miles from here. He was obviously expecting something to happen. And it did.

## CHAPTER VI

THE CHANGE this time was like the click of a camera shutter. He felt his eyes working, then his house vanished, and then—

It was raining, a warm but heavy rain. The water came down on the marsh near the caves in a multitude of slanting drops, like millions of tiny knives cutting the surface. Under that blurring curtain of water, the landscape looked wilder, less civilized. Its very green lushness made it primitive, but the green was there, ornamental and gorgeous.

Slade, who had started to mull over the problem of rain in one plane of existence and snow in another, under the same sun, felt a warm, wet trickle of water run down inside the collar of his waterproof suit. It didn't bother him, but it took his mind off of the why of the rain. He stepped automatically under the overhanging



branch of a nearby tree, and from its uncertain shelter—the water poured from it—peered up at the ledge.

Some of the excitement died out of him. The hill looked lifeless. All the fires were out, and not a human being was in sight. It was the rain, of course. They'd be inside the caves.

Since he had no intention of climbing to the ledge until he had been discovered—spears and knives might flash just a little too swiftly if he surprised them in their caves—his problem was to find shelter. He constructed himself a crude house of dead branches overlaid with large, fronded leaves. Then he scraped away a heavy layer of dead wet leaves, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the ground underneath was comparatively dry.

He slept fitfully throughout the afternoon and evening. During the night he was awake for a long time. Just before he finally slept, he thought sharply, "I'll have to wake up before they do."

When he opened his eyes, the sun was shining from a blue sky. And several three-eyed men were kneeling around the open end of his shelter. Beyond them were other men, and in the farther background, women and children.

Very slowly, Slade sat up. He pushed the shelter over on its side, and climbed to his feet, but that too, was an automatic movement. The convulsive thought came that the strain inside his head and in his muscles would produce organic tensions strong enough to precipitate him back to the United States.

But nothing happened. The people and the marsh and the cave hill remained in his vision as steady as sanity itself. He was welded to this plane of existence as if he had been born here.

It was not until that thought had come and gone that he noticed none of the men carried arms of any description. The relief that came was almost as tremendous as had been the first shock. Before he could speak, one of the men nearest him said gently:

"Careful. You're not completely stable yet."

The man reached forward and placed his palm over Slade's center eye. The movement was too unexpected for it to be resisted. The delayed reaction, when it finally came, was half-hearted. Slade started to take a step backwards, and then, realizing the meaning of what was happening, he stopped in amazement.

These people knew that he was not of this plane. *And they knew why.* The next thought followed hard on the first:

The cave dwellers were NOT primitives.

It was too big an idea to grasp all in one instant, particularly as the man who had touched his forehead now stepped back with a smile, and said:

"I think you will be all right."

Slade hadn't noticed the fellow's voice before. Now, he did. It was calm and melodic, without harshness, the words so easily spoken that they were like a flow of music produced by a master.

That fact, also, held his mind only a moment. He stood looking around him at the men and at the women, and his relief grew second by second. They were smiling, friendly; they were good-looking and alert, a high physical and mental type. Slade allowed himself a flashing memory of the degenerate blood addicts of the city of Naze, and comprehended with finality that, whatever was the basic reason for the deadly siege of the city by the ship of Lear, these clean and decent-looking cave dwellers were evidence in favor of the ship.

He realized that it was time he said something. He said, "Thank you. I am a friend. My name is Michael Slade."

The tall, eagle-eyed man who had already spoken nodded. "My name," he said, "is Danbar."

They shook hands. It was so simply, so generously done that Slade was not sure then or ever afterwards as to whether shaking hands was a common custom among these people. Or whether Danbar had instantaneously and without hesitation responded to the habits of a stranger.

As their hands separated, Slade noted for the first time that the man was inches taller than himself, and marvelously strong-looking. He had a lean, handsome face. Except for his extra eye, he would have been good-looking in any group of two-eyed human beings. He seemed about thirty years old.

He smiled. He took Slade's arm, and led him to another man, a splendid-looking chap who had been watching the proceedings from the background.

Danbar indicated the other, "Malenkens," he said.

The way he said it made it sound a distinctive and important name. And, looking at the man, Slade did not doubt but that he was being introduced to one of the leaders of the tribe. With Malenkens, too, the handshake was warm, but his smile was sterner, more aloof.

Danbar said, "You can meet the others later. Now, let us return to the ledge for breakfast."

Contact was established as easy as that.

The winding path that led up to the caves was made of cement steps flanked by ornamental shrubs. A cement sidewalk ran along the entire length of the ledge, with smaller sidewalks leading into the caves. In between the

sidewalks, green, velvety grass grew in neat plots that could only have been planned by skillful gardeners.

Slade, pausing before the first cave, peered into an interior at least as uncavelike as what he had already seen. The floor was of cement, but it was covered with throw rugs. The walls and ceiling were plastered over a base of cement. The chairs, tables and bunks that he could see were of unpainted wood, but they were well-designed and had been sandpapered to a smooth polish. The overall result was astonishingly modern.

Danbar touched Slade's arm, and motioned him to follow Malenkens, who was proceeding along the ledge. As he walked, Slade found himself surreptitiously looking for Lear. He was not greatly surprised when he failed to locate her, but neither did he accept her absence as final. She had been here once. There was no reason why she should not come back. And, besides, she must know that this would be his point of entry into the three-eyed world.

Malenkens stopped, and spoke for the first time. "In here," he said.

The cave was a structural duplicate of the one into which Slade had peered. The three men sat down in chairs, and Malenkens spoke again.

"Slade," he said, "we have been estimating your situation from the time you awakened, and in my judgment it will take about six years to adjust the rhythm of your life to our group. That takes into account your untrained resistance, and the fact that it will probably require several months for you to help Lear destroy the barrier of Naze and Geean. And, of course, it assumes that you will not be killed or dangerously injured."

He added, "I am not trying to alarm you. I am merely

stating the facts as I see them. Now, Danbar will take over."

Danbar did not move, but continued to sit in his chair. He looked at Slade speculatively. "You will be wondering," he said, "what Malenkens was talking about. Watch."

He vanished.

For a minute, Slade sat where he was. He had no particular thoughts, though the memory came that, when Lear had hovered above him near the granary, he had not been able to see her against the stars. She, too, must have been invisible.

At the end of the minute, it struck him that perhaps he was expected to do something. He stood up, bent over Danbar's chair, and gingerly moved his arm through the space where Danbar had been sitting. There was no resistance to the movement. He glanced over at Malenkens, but the man did not look up.

Slade sat down again, heavily this time, trembling a little. There was no reason at all why Danbar, having rendered himself invisible, had not climbed to his feet and walked in a leisurely fashion to the cave entrance, or perhaps he was standing beside his chair, watching his guest's reaction. There was no reason why he shouldn't have done one of those things, but Slade had the vaguely sinking conviction that Danbar had done nothing of the kind, and that in fact he was still sitting in the chair.

*Primitives*, Slade thought. *And I believe they were primitives.*

These people had learned the innermost secrets of the human nervous system. They were so far ahead of their two-eyed cousins that comparison seemed almost

ridiculous. Or wait a minute—what was it Malenkens had said? “. . . . *It will take you about six years to adjust the rhythm of your life to our group—*”

The first burning excitement stirred Slade. Did he mean that at the end of six years, he, too, might be able to render himself invisible at will? Or did he mean—?

Slade pressed the thought back into his mind. He forced himself to lean back in his chair. He parted his lips to speak to Malenkens, then closed them again. The man was looking the other way. The moments dragged, and there was no sign of Danbar. His absence began to be disturbing. For the second time the possibility occurred to Slade that he was expected to do something.

He stood up uncertainly. On a sudden impulse he seated himself in Danbar's chair. That didn't last long. The thought came that it would be a very humorless situation if the man chose to materialize in the chair.

Slade walked to the entrance of the cave on the doubtful expectation that Danbar would be outside. The ledge was a veritable hive of activity, fires burning brightly, women stirring caldrons, children already becoming nuisances with their games and noise. But of Danbar there was no sign.

Slade stood for a moment peering out over the marsh. The view was gorgeous beyond all imagination. The water gleamed in the sun, and it was alive with colorful growth. Far out, he caught a glimpse of birds fluttering, and he thought with a thrill: Three-eyed birds! In the distance beyond the marsh trees reared to amazing heights, and he could see the haze of mounting hills beyond. Everywhere was the green of perpetual summer.

Slade turned back into the cavern, quivering inside. What a wonderful plane of Earth he was on. Never,

surely, would he have the slightest desire to return whence he had come.

There was, of course, the problem of Naze— That brought Slade back to reality with a start. He saw that Danbar had still not rematerialized. He thought, "Invisibility? If I had to figure out some way of making myself invisible, knowing what I do now about the art of seeing, I would try to disturb in some way the vision centers of those who were looking at me. Perfect vision is possible only when the mind is relaxed. Therefore I would try to tense their minds in some way."

The rationalization brought a sudden startled thought. Why, of course. He *was* expected to do something. He drew a deep, slow breath, and let it out with a sighing sound, simultaneously letting all his muscles go lax. The eye specialist, Dr. McIver, had always maintained that the human body could relax with one breath.

In that instant Slade proved it. As he started to draw his second breath, Danbar reappeared in his chair. The man looked up earnestly at Slade.

"Very good, my friend. I was hoping that you would manage to figure that out for yourself." He went on, "You have experienced for yourself one of the basic truths of the human nervous system. During the next few months you will be taught the ultimate secrets of relaxation, relaxation so complete that, even in the final issue, there is no limit to the control that can be exercised over it. But now—"

He stood up, smiling. "Let us," he said, "take our chairs outside and have breakfast."

Slade followed the two men out into the brilliant sun.



## CHAPTER VII

On the thirty-second day of his stay with the tribe, Slade lay at ease on a knoll above the marsh. From his position, he could see the caves about a mile away. It was a marvelous day. It had rained a little in the morning, but now the sky was as clear and blue as could be. Before him, in a garden-like vista, the green, green grass and shrubbery still sparkled with raindrops that hung heavy on every blade and sprig and leaf and branch.

The whole world around him was as wonderful as ever, and yet Slade was conscious of dissatisfaction. "I'm an active person," he thought. "My nerves are still afflicted with the neurotic desire to do things."

He even had an impulse pushing at him. That odd metal device that he had found half-buried in the ground near his farm the night he had seen Lear in a shadowed corridor of an old spaceship—it would be interesting to go and get it, and examine it.

He did not move. He had to admit that the previous month had, in its way, been exciting. The world of relaxation was an inward world of unending discovery. His knowledge began with the muscles, lectures about and exercises with. Exercises? It was not exactly the right word for what he was doing. Slade had decided, but he continued to use it for want of a better. Exercise suggested physical activity, but the relaxation exercises were the reverse of movement. They were stillness. They were inhalation and exhalation as effortlessly as possible. They were long minutes of lying upon carefully arranged pillows while the mind concentrated gently upon certain

muscles, and always the message his brain sent was: "Let go, let go, let go."

Gradually, over the weeks, he learned the basic philosophy behind the relaxation. A correct posture, and good breathing habits. When at fault, those two things alone caused tension repercussions that affected the entire body. Tension made for bad vision and poor hearing. Tension was responsible for quick fatigue, for lack of strength and for narcotic cravings. Tension caused the kidneys to inject a fluid into the blood which caused high blood pressure, melancholy and a negative attitude towards life. Tension subtly changed the acid content of the digestive fluids. Tension was literally, the devil of the nervous system, but getting rid of it was merely the first, preliminary step to the control of the body.

The second phase was normalization of the nerves. Every nerve, individually and collectively, was capable of a positive or negative action. It could pass an impulse to seek another path to the brain. It was doubtful if more than five percent of an ordinary person's nerve impulses followed direct routes. It was true, of course, that many of the detours were used over and over again, but it was no justification for a bad habit to point out that it was repeated endlessly, particularly when the cumulative results were *unsanity*, early old age and a confused mind.

The entire ninety-five percent of misdirected nervous energy had to be re-channeled along direct routes and this was done by concentrating on key nerve paths. In every case, positive training was necessary. As with muscular relaxation, one could not just seek out a lazy environment and take it easy. Definite things had to be done. Muscles consistently relaxed by a system eventually stayed relaxed. Nerves repeatedly told to establish

a direct channel, with a picture of that channel clearly visualized, did eventually make the exact channel demanded.

Nerve control led to the third or molecular phase, about which, when Slade had asked him, Danbar merely said, "You will see. You will see."

Lying there on the knoll above the marsh, it seemed to Slade that he knew the muscular relaxation exercises sufficiently well to be able to do them for a short time without an instructor standing by. He should be able to walk to the area where his farm existed on the Earth plane, and get the machine buried in the ground there.

He climbed to his feet with sudden decision. *I'll ask Danbar or Malenkens*, he thought.

Danbar, to whom Slade made the request, after the evening exercises, looked disturbed. Then he glanced questioningly at Malenkens. It was the latter who said:

"Leear told us you would be restless." He paused, frowning. Then he looked at Slade from under lowered lashes. "I've decided to be fairly frank with you, Slade. We are training you to help Leear against Naze. You must not think that we are parties to her plan. We merely exercise certain restraints upon her. You may wonder what that means, so I will explain.

"It is Leear's intention," he went on, "to involve you again in Naze. We have no power to prevent her from doing that, nor actually do we want to. Somehow, Geean must be killed, and the people of Naze freed. According to Leear, only you can do this, how she has never explained.

"What we did was to delay her plans until you could be given at least preliminary training in our marvelous system."

He finished quietly, "I think you will agree that, under

these circumstances, you would be wise not to involve yourself in minor side issues."

Slade was shocked. The more he thought about it the greater grew his shock. It was curious but, though he had not for a minute forgotten Lear or Naze—incredible Naze—somehow the long sweet month of pastoral existence had blurred the darker potentialities of that memory.

Now, here it was, plainly stated. On occasion in his past life, he had had a reputation for facing facts with a brutal honesty, and his comparisons had startled his business associates. That was the way he finally looked at his present position. The comparison that occurred to him was that he was like a pig being fatted for the slaughter.

He spent the night, narrow-eyed, sleeping fitfully, and in a fury every time he woke up. By morning his mind was made up.

So Malenkens and the others had only persuaded Lear with difficulty to delay putting him immediately in jeopardy. Well, that was just fine. He owed her nothing anyway but a punch in the nose for being indirectly responsible for the death of Amor and Caldra.

Since her intention was to use him without so much as a by your leave, his purpose could only be to prevent her by every possible means from involving him.

The determination gave him considerable satisfaction until near morning, when it occurred to him that it might not be any too easy to prevent her machinations. The trouble was he knew so little, so desperately little. He had not the faintest idea what methods might be available to these people who knew the innermost secrets of the human nervous system, and in addition had a

spaceship loaded with gadgets, one at least of which was capable of transmitting material objects from this plane of the Earth plane and back again.

The new possibilities calmed him. He would have to be very clever indeed, to ensure that she didn't get him into Naze again. And anger would be his poorest asset in carrying out that purpose.

At breakfast time, he emerged from his cave, seated himself beside Malenkens, and said:

"I think it's time that I find out something about the history behind the war between the ship and the city."

Malenkens said, "I see that you have been thinking of what I told you last night." Slade waited, and Malenkens went on, "I do not regret having said it, but I cannot say more. We promised Lear that we would let her tell you the entire story."

"Then tell me," said Slade savagely, "who is Lear?"

"She is one of the silver belts."

"One of the what?"

Malenkens was grave. "Her personal plans for you would suffer a psychological defeat if I told you more. You must wait. I can say this. If you survive the destruction of Naze, the universe will be yours for the taking."

Temporarily that silenced Slade. Coming from Malenkens, those were momentous words. They brought his first sense of exhilaration at the greatness of the adventure into which his destiny had brought him.

The exhilaration was brief. The tremendousness of the reward implied by Malenkens suggested an enormous compensating sacrifice. Slade stiffened slowly. He disliked the thought of being on an unfriendly basis with these kindly people, but it was time he stated his position without equivocation.

He did so, pretty much as he had already decided. No

co-operation with Lear until he was good and ready. It was ridiculous for her to assume that a man could be shoved blindly into a situation, again and again, and told to get out as best he could, each time without having more than a sketchy idea as to what was going on. He for one refused to have anything to do with such a plan. And if he ever went in, it would be on the basis of full information with his eyes wide open.

"You will have to kill a man," said Malenkens in a strangely drab voice. "You have never killed a human being. It is Lear's unalterable conviction that you could not bring yourself to commit a cold-blooded murder, and that only under the stress of violent danger could you be nerved to kill. Such is her opinion, and, having observed you for an entire moon period, I agree with her."

"Thanks," said Slade dryly. "I'm still not interested."

He finished his meal in silence. He felt uncertain as to just what his position was with the tribe, but he decided in the end that what had happened was not a breakup. He would remain for a while at least, and make his plans on the basis of careful thought. There was no use rushing off, half cocked.

He attended his morning relaxation exercises as usual.

During the second month, the tempo of his life seemed faster to Slade. He realized what it was. He was more alert, more wary, eager to learn things. He kept a watchful eye on the men, and slept with a gun under his pillow.

Towards the end of the month, it struck him that no one in the tribe had ever seen the automatics in action. And that it might be a good idea to fire one of his precious bullets as a sort of a deterrent. He hesitated about that, because even one bullet might be important

in a crisis. And yet, it seemed clear that Lear would never get him into Naze against his will unless male members of the tribe trussed him up; and gave him into her power.

It was a month of several discoveries. He had been wondering about the animal life of this plane, "It's there," Malenkens assured him, with an odd smile. "It all depends on whether they decide to find out your reaction to seeing them."

That didn't quite make sense, but over a period of four weeks he had glimpses. And, finally, every time, the glimpse revealed the animal watching *him*. There was a tiny, dark creature too fast for a clear picture to form of its shape. A long, slim, spotted beast, too thin to be well muscled, and resembling a dog, trotted off disdainfully into the brush, after looking Slade over with an aloof eye. There was a horselike beast that peered at him thoughtfully for several seconds, and then galloped off snorting. And then, finally, there was a really shocking meeting with an animal.

Slade was walking along in a pathless valley adjoining the valley of the caves when a chance glance to the rear revealed a beast bigger than himself trotting along not more than ten yards behind him. It had a head that had both cat and bear features, and its body was long, and sleek, and grayish-brown.

*It was the same type of beast that had bent over him that night in Caldra's and Amor's apartment.*

Slade felt a thrill as sharp as fear, and snatched at his automatic. The animal's teeth glinted like knives as it snarled at him. Its great paws came up. It whirled, and dived into concealing brush.

A nith, Danbar told him, and then was silent when Slade described what had happened in the apartment



in Naze. Later, Slade saw him talking earnestly to Malenkens. The two men fell silent as Slade approached, so he was pretty certain they had been talking about him.

It was startling, that sudden discovery that he was being discussed. It emphasized the unsatisfactoriness of his position, and made immediately necessary, it seemed to Slade, a demonstration of his powerful weapons.

He had been thinking about the best method for doing that, and finally it seemed to him that he had it. A bird. For two months he had watched birds with gay plumage frisking through the foliage over and around the marsh. Wary were those birds. He could spend an hour crawling towards a flock. And then, just before he got close enough for a good look, the birds would take off towards a remote destination. Gradually, his desire to have a close look at a winged creature with three eyes became almost an obsession.

It seemed to him, now that if he could shoot one from the ledge, he would, figuratively, kill two birds with one stone.

On the following morning, he brought a chair out of his cave, laid one of his automatics on his lap, and sat watching the brush below. After ten minutes, he noted that people were glancing at him from the corner of their eyes. A few minutes after that, Danbar pulled up a chair and sat down beside him.

"What makes you think," he asked, "that your weapon will fire in this plane of existence?"

"Eh!" said Slade.

After a moment, the possibilities stunned him. He took careful aim at a distant flock of birds. He paused to say, "This gun makes a loud noise, so prepare yourself." Then he squeezed the trigger.

*Click!*

It was an empty sound. It left Slade with the chilled feeling that he was naked and helpless. The sun was as warm as ever, but for two months his two automatics had given him confidence and courage. They buttressed his spirit every time he thought of how easily the several dozen tribesmen could overpower him and give him to Lear.

Now, that buttress was gone.

For a moment, Slade sat quite still, then he ejected the cartridge into his palm, and began to pry out the bullet. He spilled the powder onto the cement sidewalk in a little pile, and then walked over to the nearest fire and picked up a burning faggot. He touched the flame to the powder. It burned with a slow sputter, like thick paper. Beside him Danbar said:

"The chemical combination will have to be slightly different. I have no doubt it could be made to work."

Slade had no intention of waiting to find out. His protection was gone. Without a word, he entered his cave, strapped on his second automatic, stuffed into his pockets the smaller articles he had brought from Earth—and returned to the outside. Danbar fell into step beside him.

"You are leaving us, Slade?"

Slade said, "Where is Malenkens?"

"He's gone."

That was the second great shock. "Gone! Where to?"

He saw that Danbar was looking at him oddly. "Malenkens is not one of us, Slade. He visits us occasionally. He is one of the . . . silver belts."

Slade was silent. He realized what had happened. He had been handed over to one of the Lear hierarchy. For the first time it struck him how consistently Malen-

kens had been in the foreground of his tribal life. Danbar was speaking again:

"Do not blame us too severely, Slade, for anything that happens. None of us here have attained further than the molecular phase of body control. We are helpless in this struggle between the ship and the city, and so long as the city exists we can never attain the final stage of self-control.

"It is a jarring factor. Its existence prevents certain basic rhythms. The *thought* that people like ourselves are caught behind its barrier, forever unable to escape—and that is the main purpose of the barrier—to keep those people there under Geean's control—weighs upon our spirit, and makes it impossible for us to realize our potentialities. And the result of that is that we, too, are at the mercy of Geean."

Slade had the impression that he was listening to an apology. It thawed him. "Thank you," he said, "I have nothing but friendship for your people here."

Danbar said, "Go with luck, my friend."

It took more than an hour before the cave ledge was finally out of sight.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE SCENE grew wilder by the hour. He saw no animals, but birds by the hundreds squawked in the brush and in the trees, on average a very different type of bird than those that had been in the vicinity of the caves. They were less wary. Frequently, he could walk right past them without disturbing them. Towards evening, he picked up a stick and knocked two pigeonlike creatures

out of a low shrub, and had his first three-eyed birds.

In that dusk, with his fire sputtering defiance at the gathering darkness, with the cries of night birds all around, he ate fresh fruit and pigeon roasted over a spit.

After eating, Slade pondered the problem of two-eyed and three-eyed creatures, and the worlds they lived in. There must be common ancestry. The human form would not have repeated easily. Way back, various creatures of the two-eyed world had developed a third eye, and had one automatically, without their even being aware of it, into this special universe.

Actually, like sight and sense itself, the explanation probably went to the very roots of reality. What didn't exist for the mind, the senses ignored. And in some intricate fashion, the object or objects ceased to affect the body as a whole.

It was not a new idea. But the old formulation expressed by the phrase, "Is the cat sleeping under the stove while I'm not around?" failed to take into account the certainties of the human mind. The absolute conviction that the cat was there whether the observer was present or not. Blind folk acquired certainties from hearing and touch.

The mind alone counted.

As the night wore on, Slade began to think, in the uneasy periods between dozes, of guns that wouldn't shoot. It was a thought that was to occur again and again during the days that followed. It almost but not quite altered his plans.

He had intended to get the metal device, then turn sharply southward, and so walk entirely out of the territory of Naze and Lear. It was an unheroic role that he proposed for himself and it made him a little defensive, a little ashamed.

*Here am I, he thought, in the strangest adventure a man ever got into, and I'm playing it cautious.*

There were men, he knew, who would not hesitate a minute about plunging deep into the affair. Such men would now be on their way to Naze with the intention of bearding Geean in his great central tower.

Lying in the darkness, Slade's lips tightened. It was no use kidding himself. Not for him was the bold course. The important thing was that he do not let caution send him southward without the metal object. It might prove without value. But it was a clue, and who could tell, it *might* still be in a workable condition. He couldn't leave it behind him.

The forests were quiet, the valleys long, the hills gradually higher. A great, virgin continent spread before his footsteps, but the amazing realization was the sensational familiarity of the route. There was a slight difference in the depth of the canyons and the height of the hills. The extensive marshes, the trees and the forests of shrubs were absolutely different. But the general contours were the same. And he had made the hundred mile trip to his farm so often that he wasn't lost for a minute. It was a wonderful feeling.

He came finally on the sixth morning to the long, hilly plain at the end of which—on the Earth plane—was his farm. Very cautiously, using every possible cover, he approached the point where the spaceship had been that night. From afar, he saw that it was not there, but his caution did not relax for a minute.

Within ten minutes of reaching the area, he found the machine. He used a sturdy branch he had picked up en route as a crowbar to pry it out of the ground. It was deeply imbedded, and it took considerable perspiration and twenty minutes to loosen it.

It came up finally, and showed its shape. A boxlike affair, with a wheel attached to one end. It was not too small in size, but its lightness was amazing. Pure magnesium, or even lithium, might have matched it, but little else.

He estimated the weight of the box and the wheel together at something less than thirty pounds. It glittered in the sun, untarnished by its long exposure. Slade made no effort to examine it immediately.

All that day, he carried it on first one shoulder, then another. About an hour before dusk he came to a burbling creek, and decided to stay there for the night. It was rather exposed, but he was tired, and the nearest forest looked many miles away.

He ate hurriedly, then, his curiosity as strong as ever, he bent over the machine. Atomic and magnetic power, Malenkens had told him once, were the energy sources of old Naze. "Naturally," the man had pointed out, "they will work a little differently here than where you came from."

After his experience with his automatics, Slade could appreciate that. Nevertheless, he decided that he preferred this one to be magnetic.

He studied the machine intently.

It was the wheel that puzzled him. Only one wheel. And so large, too. The metal box, into which the shaft of the wheel disappeared, was only about a foot cube. The wheel was a little over two feet in diameter, and it curved out from the shaft like a flower with long petals that formed a cup shape. It was big enough to be a small cornucopia. It could have acted easily as a small mixer, so spacious was it.

"Hm-m-m!" said Slade.

Perhaps the angle was not to think of it as a wheel

just because it rotated easily on a shaft.

Still, it looked like a wheel.

He spun it. It whirled and finally came to a stop. Nothing else happened.

He fumbled over the box, searching for a control device. In a way he had done that before. Now, however, he was thorough. But there was nothing.

He noticed three brighter spots on one shiny side of the machine. They looked like dents made in the hard substance. But there were no dents. His probing fingers sensed not the slightest depression.

Puzzled, Slade examined the brightnesses. He brought them close to his eyes. Glitter, glitter, glitter, he thought. Wonder what—

Something caught at his eyes.

He jerked back, letting the machine drop.

It didn't drop. It hung a foot from his face, the wheel facing up, the three bright spots like tiny blazing fires poking at his three eyes.

He closed them, then blinked rapidly. The blaze points pierced through his eyelids. In a panic, Slade shoved at the box.

The machine glided a hundred feet through the air, and came to a stop. The three bright spots poured fire towards his eyes, as bright as if he was still a foot away. The extra distance made no difference.

Slade raced towards the machine. Have to turn it away from him, or the thing would destroy his vision. He caught it with trembling hands. And turned it upside down.

It spun around without resistance. And its mind-frightening connection with his eyes broken, it wafted gently, almost balloonlike, to the ground. Slade hid it in the brush beside the creek. Then, still shaking from his

experience, lay down on the grassy bank. It was only slowly that he realized that nothing damaging had happened. His vision was as good as ever. His eyes felt cool and rested, and quite untensed.

He slept dreamlessly and without waking all night. When he opened his eyes, the sun was just coming up. He busied himself gathering fruit from nearby trees, and he had just finished eating when a thin whistling sound rent the air to one side of him.

Slade jumped a foot as something struck the grass where he had been.

## CHAPTER IX

He whirled, and stared at the object. A noose made of metal looking rope. It was alive in a mechanical fashion. It shuddered and narrowed, tightening as he watched it. Its two ends withdrew into a little metal box.

Before Slade could examine it further, there was another hissing sound. The second noose struck his shoulder, as he twisted aside. It bounded away like a rubber ball, almost hitting a nearby tree.

"What the—" said Slade. And dived behind a shrub. By the time he reached it, two more nooses were lying on the grass, writhing shut. Slade slid his gaze around the horizon—and saw their source.

Flying things! They were too far away to be clearly visible. They seemed to have legs but no wings. He caught a glint of scarlet, then dazzling silver, then green, and of humanlike arms clinging to something that shimmered above them. It was the shimmering objects that flew. The creatures merely hung on.

And every little while, though the motion that caused



it was lost in the distance, one of the creatures would send a noose hissing towards Slade's head.

He felt a horrid thrill. What was this? With an absolutely gruesome fascination, he remembered the girl's letter. Geean and the hunters of the city.

But the hunters were keeping their distance.

A thousand yards, he estimated shakily. Even if they had worked, his automatics would have been useless at that distance. He looked around frantically for a way of escape. But the nearest forest was about ten miles behind him. There was brush, there were shrubs, and by heaven, there was no reason to lose hope until he was actually caught.

Five nooses sprang around him while he observed and had the thought. He began to gather them up frantically. They were probably accustomed to retrieving them, and they couldn't have too many.

He darted behind a shrub. From its shelter he flicked his gaze calculatingly towards every horizon, counting the creatures. One, two . . . seven.

Slade thought jerkily, "If I can keep them off till dark."

A glance towards the sun showed that it hadn't moved a fraction of an inch, seemingly, from its position low above the eastern horizon.

Night was a long, long way off.

His lips tightened. Some of the fever went out of him. His body grew calm with determination. Straight ahead. There was no reason why, with a show of bravado, he shouldn't be able to make it—straight ahead to that distant forest.

As he twisted towards a second shrub, a noose came down from the sky, ringed him, spun a little as it struck his shoulders. And then settled down over his arms,

tightening with irresistible strength.

Slade grabbed for his sheathed knife. But his hands were pressed too tightly against his body. He jerked at the snare, and stumbled over a stone, fell hard, rolling over and over.

The noose was like a steel spring. It cut into his flesh with a strength that made Slade gasp. There must be a releasing catch— Have to release it.

He strained to get his fingers up to it, but its hold was too cunning for him. As he struggled, Slade caught a movement in the near sky. It was hard to see through the pain tears that had started into his eyes. But he blinked the tears aside, and, after a moment, he saw the silver-clad hunters clearly. They were about a hundred feet away, and swooping closer.

He ceased his hopeless fight.

The seven hunters of the city dropped from their flying devices twenty feet away. Slade looked them over briefly, wondering if Geean was among them. It seemed unlikely. Swiftly, he forgot the men. It was the reddish flying instruments that snatched all his attention. They clung for a minute to the air above the men. And then, like slowly deflating balloons, they collapsed to the ground. One man carried a spare flyer.

Each instrument was a red-frosted, glasslike extrusion about three inches in diameter and three feet long. There was a sling attached to it, and at the end of the sling some handgrips.

Nothing else. No machinery, no apparent source of energy—Slade had an impulse to make it a closer examination. He repressed it, partly because the noose held him as tightly as ever. And partly because he had his first *close* look at the men.

The day he had seen the soldiers of Geean in Caldra's

and Amor's apartment, he hadn't really had time to note character. Now, with these henchmen, he did.

They were intent faces, dissipated looking, very light in color. They bent over him, and two of them were smiling sardonically. One of the men said something, and there was a quick general laughter, that ended, and left the faces intent again. Slade didn't catch the words.

Slade felt the automatics taken from the holsters, and other articles removed from his pockets. Each item was swiftly scanned, then stuffed into a canvaslike bag. Before the search was finished, one of the men fumbled at the noose. It loosened promptly, and came up easily over his head.

And, again, there was speed. Even as Slade climbed to his feet and started to rub the numbness out of his arms, another man shoved the handgrips of the spare flier into his fingers, and pointed at a third, who was just picking one of the fliers off the ground.

"Watch him," he said curtly.

As Slade watched, the third man swung the bar up in front of him with an easy rhythmic swing. And, simultaneously, with dexterity, leaped into the air.

The glasslike bar caught at something. It stiffened, straightened, and pointed like an arrow from a bow. It began to glide forward with the man clinging to the handgrips—as the man beside Slade said curtly, "Now, you."

He expected the thing to come crashing down on his head. And, simultaneously, paradoxically, he expected his arms would be half torn out of their sockets when the device caught "onto" the air.

But it wasn't like that. It wasn't like that at all. It didn't fall. There was no tug, no jerk. Something, a

current, a—lightness—saturated his body. And it was that current, and not the machine, that lifted him. Lifted him like thistledown borne on a climbing breeze.

Strong as metal, the flying device rode above him. But it was only a catalytic agent, *affecting* his body not transporting it. His body flew with the machine, was of the machine. The two became one. He remembered how the bars had dropped a few minutes before, after the hunters let go, and it was clear that neither could remain airborne without the other.

A great basic force welded a union between his nervous system and the machine. And the dead weight of gravity let go of him. It was like the wheel machine, he recalled with a start. He glanced back towards where he had hidden the machine, but it was not visible from the air.

The relief that came had mixed in it a great wonder. What incredible secrets of the nervous system had these people discovered, both natural and mechanical? He saw that the other six hunters were swooping up to him. They clustered around him, clinging to their fliers effortlessly. And somehow the sweep of their machines became the direction and speed of his. It was as if his flier was guided by a sympathetic union with the other machines.

They soared low over the land and over a whole series of marshes, in and out along valleys and through forests. Slade noticed that the fliers had a tendency to remain near the ground. Not once was there a real attempt to climb high. They went around and between trees, not over them. They avoided the towering, snow-capped mountains that flanked their course. Like a river, they flowed along the easiest course, and in the end he decided that the motive power was derived from the magnetic currents of Earth. Nothing else, in view of what he

knew, could explain the evenness of their course, and the *type* of transportation.

In a surprisingly short time, the clustered group of them came within sight of a city of shining spires. Slade stared at it with glistening eyes because it was one thing to have seen it from inside, quite another to view it like this. It was about four miles wide at the mouth of a widening valley. He couldn't see how long it was. The fliers were too low, and the city stood on a plateau.

Its towers and roofs glinted in the brilliant rising sun. Clearly now, its design was apparent. The whole city sloped up towards the central tower of Geean, that reared like a pylon into the lower heavens. The height of that pylon seemed greater than he remembered it. It rivaled the near mountain peaks, and from its silvery eminence, a hazy, violet glow spread like a mist covering the whole city. The color was remarkably sharp seen from this angle. It was a mist of light that curved like a carefully worn robe onto the grass a mile from every outskirt of the city.

The fliers poised before the barrier. For a moment only. A signal flashed mirror-bright from the distant tower, and the red-frosted devices flowed forward and through the barrier like so many knives cutting through thin gauze.

They almost grazed the rooftops of low built homes. They evaded several spires, and then they began to swoop lower. They were twenty feet, then ten feet from the ground. A man reached over and grasped one handle of Slade's machine.

"Let go," he said curtly. "Drop."

Slade looked at him, amazed and uncomprehending. The surly face, so close to his own was venomous.

"Drop!"

Slade glanced down. A cobbled street was below. He hesitated, then let go. The instant return of weight made a thrill in his nervous system. He struck the ground harder than he liked. Twice, he rolled over, and then he was up. The fliers were already disappearing around a nearby spire.

Abruptly, he was alone.

## STATEMENT TO THE CORONER'S JURY

By John Alden, Farmer,  
Smailes County

It is my custom to arise at 5 a.m. every morning. On the morning of the 19th I got up at my usual hour, and I was doing my chores when I observed what seemed to me a strange spectacle.

A woman and a large bearlike beast were walking in a westerly direction across my stubble field. Since bear are frequently dangerous, the fear came to me that the woman did not know she was being followed by so large and formidable an animal.

I ran and procured my gun, but though I was inside only a minute, and there was no place where anybody could have gone to in such a short time, when I came out of the house, there was no sign of either woman or beast. Almost literally they disappeared into thin air.

It was a little after noon that same day that the smashed body of Michael Slade was discovered in the high valley two miles from my place. According to the doctor, he had died about half an hour before he was found. So it is very likely his death had no connection with the woman and the bear, whom I saw earlier.

But I report the incident for what it is worth in clearing up the mystery of the three-eyed man.

Except for the foregoing, I had never seen Michael

Slade until his dead body was brought to my farm by the doctor.

One more thing: When the police from Smailes County and I examined the tracks of the woman and the animal, we discovered that they ended abruptly in the middle of the field.

I am not prepared to offer an explanation for this.

## CHAPTER X

SLADE WALKED slowly along, examining his position. His automatics were gone, but his knife was still in its holster. His handkerchief had been left in his pocket as well as a small case of fishing tackle and a box of morphine tablets, which he had brought along in the event of a violent accident befalling him.

Abruptly, he discovered that the side street he was on was not quite so deserted as it had first appeared. An old woman sidled hurriedly out of an alleyway, and muttered:

"Blood! or I'll murder you tonight." Slade brushed her aside, thinking: *Why had they released him? What did they expect him to do? Do! That was it of course. Geean thought he knew about the plotting that was going on, and somehow the great man of Naze expected him to lead his forces to the plotters.*

Slade laughed grimly. There was a great deal of cunning common sense in Geean's plan, but it had a basic fault. Geean was wrong in his belief that Slade knew anything.

But that didn't matter now. His purpose before the fall of night must be to find the apartment that had once been occupied by Caldra and Amor. And since Geean

was aware of its location, he didn't have to be the slightest bit stealthy about it.

He must assume for the moment that he couldn't escape from Naze, and that Geean would arrest him whenever it pleased him.

The sun was high in the heavens when he reached the fifth columnist part of the city. He recognized a street, then another, then he realized that he was near the apartment. As he hurried eagerly forward, a young woman's familiar voice whined:

"Your blood, mister."

Slade was walking on, when a gasp escaped the girl. He whirled, and stared at her. Her face was already stiffening to the encounter.

"Well," she said with a faint sneer, "if it isn't the man who was going to destroy Naze."

Slade said, "Amor!" Then he remembered Geean, and that his movements were probably being observed. "Quick," he said, "meet me at Caldra's apartment. I'll give you some blood then. But now—slap my face as if you're mad at me."

She *was* quick. Her hand came up and dealt him a stinging blow on the cheek. She swaggered away, and he walked on, for the first time beginning to realize the implications of what had happened. Amor—on the streets.

He had a sudden sense of personal degradation. Then anger against Lear. She was responsible for this.

He wondered bleakly if the girl would turn up at the apartment.

She was there ahead of him. She opened the door for him, and began to talk even as he crossed the threshold. She chattered with a mad speed. Her face was flushed, her eyes wide and staring. Her hands shook. She looked on the verge of a nervous breakdown.



She had escaped death the night Caldra was killed because she was not in the apartment. She had spent the night with a girl friend.

"I was afraid that I would go to your room if I stayed."

The feverish way in which the words were spoken reminded Slade. He climbed to his feet, and went into her bedroom. The syringe and the cup lay on the table beside her bed.

He thought *sickly, To such depths can the potential Homo Superior sink.*

He took the syringe into the kitchen, boiled some water on one of the curious energy elements, and then sterilized the syringe needle. He inserted the needle into a vein in his left arm. The blood glittered darkly as it flowed into the transparent syringe. When it was full he squirted it into the cup. The liquid hissed a little as it touched the metal, but there was no other reaction. With a steady hand, he set the cup down on the table beside her.

The girl licked her lips, but she did not look at the cup. Her face was stiff, her body rigid. Her eyes were looking fixedly at the floor. She said in a monotone:

"Why have you come back to the city?"

So she was beginning to think things over. It was a good sign. Slade began to talk. He was completely frank, though brief. When he had finished, Amor's eyes were gleaming. She stood up. She was suddenly enormously excited.

"This is it," she said. "*This is it!*" She looked at him, wide-eyed. "Don't you see, it's not an accident your being here. Everybody's being terribly clever but determined. Geean has let himself fall into the trap. Why? Because he feels safe behind his silver belt, but he's desperately anxious to find out how Lear thinks she can

use you to destroy him. And in his bold fashion, he'll take risks now so that he'll know in the future."

She had started pacing the floor, as she talked. Now, she stopped, directly in front of Slade. She said in an intense voice:

"Go straight to him. That will baffle him. He's expecting you to do something. He's expecting somebody to tell you to do something. Very well, I'll tell you. Lear has said that only you can kill Geean. That means that nothing can happen until you are present.

"That means that you, under the present circumstances, have to seek him out. You can't escape it in the long run anyway. There is no escape from Naze except through Lear. And you may be sure that she'll keep you here now until you do what she wants. Besides, Geean will have you brought before him sooner or later anyway and—*Here!*"

She had raced off across the room. She came racing back carrying the cup of blood. She held it out to him. She said in feverish tone:

"Take a sip of this. It will give you courage. The effect of a sip won't last longer than an hour."

Slade took the cup curiously. He felt overwhelmed. He had always intended to taste the stuff, though the idea of drinking his own blood was repellent. Nevertheless, he was not going to be rushed so swiftly into putting himself into the clutches of Geean. His impulse was to temporize.

He brought the cup to his lips, hesitated. And then he took a little swallow—

"Get in there," the officer of the tower guard said insolently. "If his excellency Geean decides to speak to you, he'll let you know."

The door shut with a bang.

Slade staggered as he moved farther into the room. The sense of ecstatic, almost unbearable pleasure that had burst along his nervous system within seconds of his swallowing the blood, was gone now. What remained was a blurred memory of mad pleasure-dreams, and a gathering fury.

*That little wretch, he thought, that scoundrel, Amor. She knew what would happen.*

A sort of hypnotism it had been, driving him resistlessly through a mist of streets on wings of joyous excitement straight to the central tower of Geean. Blood drinkers must give their brains directional thoughts just before they drank. *His* directions had been to go to Geean, and here he was.

Still dizzy, Slade looked around the room. There was a bed in one corner, and a large window slashed across the opposite wall. Slade peered shakily out of the window, and blinked. He was looking down into a depth of distance. He estimated seventy stories, and he was leaning forward to verify the height when the realization struck into his brain that he was *able* to lean forward.

There was no glass in the window.

He retreated back into the room, shocked by his mental condition, that had made it possible, however briefly, for him to be unaware that the window was a hazard. Better lie down, he thought shakily.

He dreamed a miserable afterdrug type dream. In the dream, his body was flung out of an open window, to fall seventy stories to the ground below. He awakened, shivering, and then grew rigid:

A nith was standing beside his bed, its long powerful head projecting above him. Its three eyes staring down at him were pools of unnatural light. It saw that he was awake, but made no effort to move away. It said:

"Who told you to come here?"

It stood there waiting.

Vagueness. Slade's brain had been tensed for almost anything. But not language, not speech. The surprise was too great for ordinary adjustment. Caught completely off guard, his conscious mind temporarily suspended function.

It was not funny. His metabolism was affected. There was a rush of loose nervous energy through his body. Nausea came, followed by an inability to perform certain normal releasing reflexes like swallowing and blinking. The blood seemed to congeal behind his eyes, and his vision blurred sharply.

He had an acute conviction, not a thought but a fear, that he was going to be precipitated back to the other earth. The fear grew so monstrous that his first thought was able to come through. His dream— He would fall seventy stories if he was knocked out of this plane. The picturization of that fall almost petrified his reason.

But the seconds passed, and nothing happened. His confidence returned. The nith's bear-cat head was only a foot away from his face, as it said:

"What is the plan to destroy Geean?"

There were several things about the speech that almost got Slade going again. It was not a speech. There was no sound at all. The creature was thinking at him. This was mental telepathy.

Slade lay stiff, striving to grasp the implications of a beast that had a better than human system of communication. Memory came of the wild animals that had watched him, and the wariness of the birds near the caves. Was it possible that they were all mind readers?

The thought ended. The nith was snarling threateningly. A great paw came up.

*"What is the plan?"*

In a synchronized jerk, Slade flung himself to the far side of the bed, and snatched his knife. Horribly afraid, he tumbled off the bed. Then he was on his feet, knife ready, backing towards the nearest wall.

"Careful," he said, "I'll sink this knife into you six inches at least."

Afterwards, Slade was not clear as to what happened then. He was partly facing the window when a second nith walked in from the empty air of seventy stories above ground. It carried a foot-thick transparent weapon, which cast a pale reddish radiance towards the first nith. The beast must have died instantly, but it took more than a minute for the radiance to dissolve its great body into nothingness. The newcomer looked at Slade. It thought at him urgently:

"A traitor. We've been waiting patiently for Leear to give the word to kill him. But now, there's no time to waste. First, I'd better get rid of this—" Slade didn't get the word it used to describe the weapon.

He watched as the animal dextrously split the instrument in two. Inside was a simple set-up built around a loose strip of metal about an inch by three inches by four. The nith's paw clutched the small object.

"Quick," it said, "put this in your pocket. Like this."

It was not something about which Slade had any say. The animal bounded towards him. Before he could decide whether he was going to resist, it had slipped the metal strip into his left coat pocket. Slade watched as it jammed the two sections of what remained of the weapon under the bed.

It came erect with a jerk. "They're coming for you," it said tensely. "Remember, there's no victory yet. What we have done so far we could have done years ago.

*"This is the crisis."*

The door opened, and half a dozen soldiers came in. Without a word they led Slade out into a long, dim corridor and into an elevator. The nith followed. The elevator creaked upward about ten floors. Another corridor, then a door that opened into a spacious apartment.

A tall thin man with a powerful physique was standing looking out of a glassless window. He was dressed in the silver shining clothes of a hunter of Naze, and until he turned Slade had no sense of familiarity. It was that that made terrific the shock of recognition.

Geean was Malenkens.

## CHAPTER XI

IT WAS a morning of devastating shocks for Slade. He was aware of the great man watching him with a faint smile, and it was the contemptuous texture of that smile that finally pulled Slade out of his desperate turmoil.

In a burst of thought, he saw the picture. Danbar's apology. Explained now. Geean's nith that night at Caldra's apartment must have read his mind, and on the basis of the information it secured, Geean had been enabled to lay in wait for him at the cave village. There, without asking any questions, he had learned from Slade the detailed story of what had happened.

Bloodthirsty threats must have been used to silence so completely men like Danbar.

The other's smile was more satiric. "You're quite right," Geean said. "That is what happened."

The words, so accurately reflecting his thoughts,

startled Slade. He looked at the nith, and its mind touched his instantly:

"Naturally, I am giving Geean a censored version of your thoughts. That is why he used the traitor nith. He had to have somebody who could read minds, and I was selected as a substitute because of my overall resemblance to the dead-one. But now, you must be on the alert."

It went on with ill-concealed haste: "Geean is not as calm as he appears. He has a tremendous respect for Lear, and something has already happened to make him realize that this is the crisis. If he should suddenly become afraid, he will kill you instantly.

"You must accordingly be prepared to act on a flash thought from me."

"But what am I supposed to do?"

There was no answer to that intensely thought question. Slade licked dry lips, as the realization penetrated how completely he was involved in the moment by moment developments. He thought, "I've got to convince Geean, persuade him that I'm no danger." Before he could speak, Geean said:

"Slade, you are alive at this moment because I am undecided. A woman"—his voice grew savage—"named Lear, the only other silver belt immortal, has claimed that she can use you to kill me. I could murder you out of hand, but she would soon be able to produce another person like you with which to threaten me, and the next time perhaps I might not find out about it in advance. This is the time I must take any attendant risks. You are the man who benefits for the moment. Slade, I must find out what her method is. To me, nothing in the world matters as much."

It was impressive. Geean's face had changed as he

talked. Earnestness was in every line. The man was fascinated to the core of his soul by the threat to himself. He, who was immortal, was suddenly menaced, and the startling thing must be the vagueness, the lack of detail of that all-embracing menace. Hundreds of years had probably passed since Geean had experienced such an excitement of interest.

Slade's private thoughts ended, for Geean was continuing, his voice harder, his manner more intent:

"Slade, it is clear to me that you are an unwilling pawn in this affair. But I can do nothing about that. Here you are. The issue has been forced despite all my warnings to Lear. At this moment, and there is no question that it is her doing, an atomic fire is raging on the fortieth level of the tower. It will not be long before it reaches us up here."

Briefly, Slade's attention wandered. He stood, startled. An atomic fire. Why, that meant the tower would be destroyed, the barrier would come down forever. Naze was already doomed.

In his mind's eye, he visualized that fire of fires. He began to tremble. The others undoubtedly had methods of escape, but what about him. The implacable voice of Geean went on:

"It has always been possible for Lear to start such an uncontrollable atomic reaction among the machinery of the barrier, but long ago"—his tone grew remote—"long ago, I warned her that if she ever did I would murder every human being on the planet."

His eyes, as cold as glass, fixed Slade. The change in the man absolutely astounded Slade. At the beginning, he had had something in him of the stern kindly appearance of Malenkens. All gone now. His face was transformed. It was like a mask, so deadly, so cruel that



Slade was taken aback. In the space of a few minutes Dr. Jekyll had become Mr. Hyde. Geean said in an infinitely savage voice:

"At all times Lear has known that if she destroyed the barrier I destroyed the race. She has made her choice. So it shall be."

The words were so ultimately meaningful that they did not immediately make sense. Slade was thinking that the spectacle of Geean changing had been like being in the presence of a man who was drinking himself into a piglike state, like having a sudden glimpse of sewer, like being compelled to watch an obscene picture. Slade shivered with repulsion, and then, abruptly, his absorption with physical things passed. In one jump, the immense meaning of the man's words penetrated.

He felt half paralyzed, and then, stronger than before the realization came that he must convince Geean, must persuade him that Michael Slade would do nothing to injure him. He parted his lips to speak—and closed them again.

A shape was walking into the window behind Geean. It was a woman's shape, momentarily insubstantial. The nith must have warned Geean, for he turned mustering a grimace of a smile. The smile became a broad sneer as Lear came into the room.

Slade looked at her stiffly. He had an idea that his life was hanging in the balance. Now that Lear had arrived, Geean must be tensing to the necessity of dealing swift death to the one man who was supposed to be able to kill him. The nith's tremendously anxious thought impinged upon his mind:

"Relax, man, for your sake and ours. Surely, you have enough experience now with the nature of the nervous

system to realize that an unrelaxed man is at a terrible disadvantage. I assure you that I will give you some warning. So be calm, and face this deadly situation."

Relax! Slade clutched at the hope. Relaxation should be easy to him now. The hope went deeper, farther. What a tremendous and terrible joke on Geean was the presence of this nith.

Slade looked at the animal in a great wonder. There it sat on its haunches, a gigantic cat bear, reading everybody's thoughts, passing on to each person a censored version of what it saw. And Geean believed—stood there, cold and confident, and *believed*—that it was his nith.

If he was really unkillable, then that delusion meant nothing. But if Lear had a method of killing him, if there was a weakness in his impregnability, then Geean had made the mistake of his career.

Slade drew a long, deep breath, and let it out—long. Relaxation was as swift as that. Standing there, he had his first good look at Lear.

It was a different Lear than he remembered from his brief glimpses. She had been nude beside the marsh, and little more than a shadow inside the spaceship. Somehow, he had taken it for granted that she wore the rough and ready clothes of the cave dwellers.

He was mistaken. No cavewoman was here. Her hair was a braided marvel, not a loose fringe, not a straggling curl. And it glowed with a lacquer-like luster. She wore a silkish garment that seemed brand new. And it must have been designed for her. It showed off her figure with an almost demure good taste. Even her dominating attitude was softened, for she sent a quick warm smile at Slade, and then, as she faced Geean squarely, the smile faded. If she intended to speak, she was too slow. Geean it was who broke the silence:

"All decked out in your bridal finery," he sneered. He began to laugh. It was a loud, insulting laughter. He stopped finally, and turned grinning to Slade. "You will be interested to know, my friend, that you are the last hope of this ten thousand year old spinster. It is a little difficult to explain, but the cavemen, by very reason of their type of nerve training, are adversely affected by the aura of a woman who gains her nerve power by mechanical means. Accordingly, she cannot get a husband for herself among them. That leaves my blood drinkers out there"—he waved a hand towards the window—"and you."

The grin was wider. "For reasons of morality, she is not interested in a man who has formed the blood drinking habit, which of course narrows the field down to you. Amusing, isn't it?"

The grin faded. Abruptly savage, the man whirled on Lear. "And you, my dear," he said scathingly, "will be interested to know that Slade is on my side, not yours. The nith has just informed me that he is desperately anxious to convince me that I have nothing to fear from him. Since it will inform me when and if he changes his mind, I find myself in a unique bargaining situation."

He didn't realize. It was amazing, it was almost staggering to see him standing there accepting what the nith was telling him. Not that it had told a lie about Slade's intentions and desires but the fact that it was quite coolly giving him real facts emphasized in a curious fashion how completely at its mercy he was for information.

For his own sake Geean had better be unkillable. Otherwise, he was right behind the eight ball.

"We want to show you," the nith's thought came. "If Geean will let us, we want to show you what is behind

this fight of the ship and the city. That is why I told him about your determination not to kill him."

It went on swiftly, "It will be a postponement only. You cannot escape the necessity of choosing between the two worlds at war here, the two people standing before you. I can tell you this much. When the moment comes your choice will be free, but only in the sense that anything in this universe is free.

"But now, we must persuade Geean to let you hear a brief history of Naze."

Geean was quite willing. He looked genuinely amused. "So it's really come down to persuading Slade to do something. I think I ought to warn you that at the moment. I am the one who is the most likely to win him over. I've just been remembering some of the things he told me about his country. Only a few years ago they dropped atomic bombs on major cities of some enemies of theirs. The parallel to our own case is most interesting, and augurs so ill for you that I would suggest you simply open your mind to the nith, and so get the whole affair over with as swiftly as possible. All I want to know is, how did you plan to use him to kill me?"

He smiled. "You won't do it? Very well, let's get it over with. It always amuses me to hear biased accounts of events in which I have participated."

He walked over to a couch, and sat down. And waited.

Leear turned towards Slade. "I shall be quick," she said.

It was not a long story that she told then. But it was the picture of the end of a civilization that had attained mechanical perfection. The immortal inhabitants of Naze were indestructible by virtue of their silver belts, which gave them nerve control. There were machines for every purpose, and all worked on the same principle—

control of the human nervous system by means of inorganic energies.

As the slow years passed, the very perfection began to pall. It was discovered that individuals were beginning to commit suicide. Boredom settled like a vast doom over that ultimate materialistic civilization, and with each passing day men and women sought surcease in voluntary death.

It became a mass tendency. In the beginning, the planet had been well-populated, almost overcrowded. At the end a handful of millions lived in eighteen cities. It was into this impasse that new discoveries about the human nervous system projected a whole new outlook on the future of man.

Experiments were performed on animals and birds. In an amazingly short time various breeds were able to read minds, something which man, with all his machines, had never been able to accomplish. They reacted marvelously in other ways also, and so a plebiscite was held, and it was decided by an overwhelming vote to put aside artificial immortality and give the new wonderful science a chance.

Leear paused and looked at Slade gravely. "There could be no half measures. It was all or nothing, no volunteer system could be permitted, no exceptions. The new discoveries proved that man, in his primitive simplicity, had followed the wrong road to civilization, and that he must retrace his steps and make a new beginning. He must go back and back away from the materialistic gods he had followed so long away from his cities and his machines. You yourself have seen what men like Danbar can do, and he has attained only a part of the third or molecular phase of control. The final, electronic phase, impossible of attainment so long

as the city of Naze exists, goes completely beyond anything that has ever been envisaged by man. With our mechanical belts, our silver belts, we have had tantalizing glimpses, but that is all. Men will be as gods, almost omnipotent, and naturally immortal.

"Do you hear me? *Naturally immortal!* In your world and my own, long ago, thousands of generations of human beings have died unnecessarily. All of them had within their own bodies the power of powers, the innate capacity to realize their every desire."

The picture had been growing on Slade, as she talked. The existence of the cavemen was explained. Odd pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of this world were beginning to fit into place, and he had a sudden dazzling vision of what she was getting at.

Leear was continuing, swiftly: "Think of your own experience," she said in an intense voice. "You came from one plane of existence into another because your mind suddenly accepted a new reality. And then there is a comparison that shows how completely wrong appearances can be. Light. The people of the two-eyed world must have a definition of light as something materialistic, something external."

She stared at him so demandingly that Slade nodded, and gave the wave and corpuscular theories of light.

"Light," said Leear triumphantly, "is a perception of the reactor, not an activity of the actor. Out there in space is a great body we know as the sun. We and every object in this room, whether organic or inorganic, are aware of the presence of that sun. We all react to its presence, just as it reacts to ours. But it sends us no heat, no light, *nothing*. The awareness is inside ourselves, inside the molecules of this table and that chair. To us, that awareness manifests as a perception which we call

light. Now, do you see, now do you realize that primitive man, unaided, followed the wrong course. He had no way of understanding the true nature of his world."

Slade hadn't expected to grasp her meaning. But he did. Only a few months before, he had attended a lecture by a disciple of Einstein. And in a distorted fashion, *this* was the famous scientist's latest theory of light. He had forgotten all about it.

He was frowning over the visualization, when he happened to glance at Geean. That brought him back with a start to an entirely different kind of reality. He said:

"Where does Geean fit into all this?"

Geean said dryly, "I was just going to ask that question myself."

Leear was silent for a moment. Then, in a low voice:

"There was opposition, of course, to the great plan. All silver belts had been destroyed except those of myself and my companion who had been chosen by lot to man the ship which you saw, to watch over the experiment, to chronicle its progress, and—"

She stopped. "There was opposition," she said, flatly. "A small, selfish minority led by Geean—"

Again, she stopped. This time Geean laughed, but the laughter ended abruptly. He said somberly:

"They had no idea how far I had decided to go."

Something of the remorselessness of the decision he had carried out then came into his face, and into his voice, as he went on:

"My forces struck one night at the seventeen cities, and wiped them out with atomic bombs. By a trick we secured the belt of Leear's companion, and killed him. That is the belt I now wear. We had planned also to destroy the ship, but by pure accident Leear had taken it from its berth."

He breathed heavily with the memory of what must have been the shock of shocks of his long, ruthless life. His eyes were narrowed to slits, his body tense.

"She attacked our storehouse in Naze. By the time we got the barrier up, she had destroyed all chance of our ever making more belts."

Geean gave a final reminiscent shudder, and then straightened slowly. He looked around belligerently. "Enough of this," he said. "I can't quite imagine a stranger to this world getting so heated over something that happened more than a thousand years ago, that he will risk his life to avenge it."

So quickly did the conversation sink to practical verities.

## CHAPTER XII

IT WAS TOO LONG, Slade thought gayly. Too many centuries had passed since that colossal crime had been perpetrated. And yet, in spite of the vast time gap, something of the horror of it reached across the years and touched him.

For the problem was still here. *Here*, in this room. The struggle for ascendancy between the ship and the city. That collective entity the ship was going to defeat the entity that was the city. But Geean would survive; and, by that very survival, he would retain the power of death over all the defenseless people of this plane.

But life centered in the individual. A man must save himself.

"You are wrong," thought the nith. "Life is the race. The individual must sacrifice himself."



That was too deep for Slade. He grew aware that Geean was still speaking, at him now:

"My mind reading animal," he said, "has been keeping me in touch with your thoughts. I'm happy to note that you dismiss Lear's arguments as so much impractical metaphysics. It's possible," he went on, "that you and I are closer together mentally than I have suspected. The nith has also told me of the arguments you are marshaling to convince me that I ought to keep you alive. Frankly, I hadn't really thought about your ability to go to your earth as being valuable to me, but I can see how it might be."

Slade, who hadn't even thought of any arguments to save himself, stared at the nith in amazement. It was startling to realize that the beast had been using a skillful psychology to save his life.

"I told you," the nith thought into his mind, "that, when the moment came, your choice would be personally free. He has decided that, if no crisis occurs, he will let you live."

Slade's answering thought was grim. "But how am I going to get down to the ground?"

"That," flashed the nith, "comes under the heading of what I said before. No choice in this universe is absolutely free. You can trust yourself on our side, or you can make arrangements with Geean."

So that was it. They thought they were going to force him to take one risk to avoid another. And when you got right down to it, they pretty well had him. Slade thought savagely:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Geean must die. Only you can kill him."

"I've heard that all before." Impatiently. "What I mean is—"

He stopped. For weeks he had known that this was what would be required of him. The realization had lain there in the back of his mind, to be occasionally brought forward and pondered in an unreal fashion. It was altogether different to think suddenly, "*This is the moment.*"

He who had never killed a man must now kill Geean. How?

You have in your left hand pocket an instrument. Turn slowly until your left side is pointing at Geean. Put your hand surreptitiously into your pocket and press the button that you will find right at the top of the device.

That instrument has now had time to integrate itself to your nervous system, a nervous system which, as you know, is not yet completely stabilized in this plane. When you press the button, it will transmit to Geean in a very concentrated form your present instability. He will be instantly projected to the two-eyed plane of existence, and will fall eighty stories to the ground. Just as your bullets would not work when you first came here, so his silver belt will be valueless there.

Slade could feel himself changing color. He was vaguely aware that Lear and Geean were talking sharply to each other, but his mind couldn't begin to focus on them. *Do that*, he was thinking, *to anybody.*

He remembered his own fear of such a fall. And suddenly a horror came.

Just a minute. If I'm involved in this process of transferring from one plane to another, then I'll fall too.

No, you won't.

He didn't believe it. With a hot terror he saw the whole picture. This was what all that stuff about sacrificing the individual for the race had been leading up to.

In his mind, he saw the bodies of Geean and himself hurtling down and down. And it built a curious kinship between himself and the man.

"I swear," said the nith, "that you will not die."

Utter disbelief came.

And utter dismay.

The nith was desperate. "You are forcing us to extremes. Lear has decided that either she or Geean dies here today. If you do not kill Geean, then, unless he wins a complete victory, he will carry out his threat to destroy every man and woman and child on the planet. You can see that Lear cannot permit that to happen. Accordingly, the choice is yours. What you do will determine finally whether the people of this planet shall become slaves of Geean or whether they will have the opportunity to realize their natural potentialities."

Slade thought hesitantly, "You mean Lear is going to kill herself."

The nith was satirical. "Please do not concern yourself about Lear. Concern about her is a moral characteristic, shall we say a racial as distinct from an individual, think-only-of-oneself characteristic. It is purely in your mind, having no external reality. What does it really matter if this woman and all that she stands for dies, provided you live?"

It must have despaired of convincing him in time. It must have projected a thought towards the woman. For she turned even as Geean, narrow-eyed with suspicion, was saying, "Unless you leave here this minute, I shall have to revise my decision about not killing Slade." She turned, and she said to Slade:

"Please, my friend, think of the generations that have been imprisoned in this city. Think of Amor, of—"

She stopped hopelessly. "You force me," she said, "to the final sacrifice."

Her hands moved to her waist, and disappeared under her blouse. They came out again instantly dragging a thin belt. She flung it viciously. It flashed with a silvery metallic fire as it fell to the rug.

*"Your silver belt!"*

It was Geean who shouted the words, piercingly. Never in his life had Slade heard such a yell of mixed triumph and unbelief. The man literally staggered forward and snatched up the belt. His eyes were glassy and, briefly, quite myopic with ultimate pleasure. He began to run towards the wall to Slade's left. There was a coneshaped gadget in the near corner. With trembling fingers Geean stuffed the belt into it. It flared with a vivid fire, and was consumed in one puff.

Slowly, then, the man's sanity came back. He shook himself. He faced the room, and looked from Lear to Slade, and his face showed a mounting consciousness of the extent of his victory.

"Ah," he said ecstatically, "I am at last in a position to decide what I'm really going to—"

Slade never learned what Geean was in a position to decide. He was shocked to the core of his being. Actually, Lear's appeal on Amor's behalf had convinced him. The memory of Amor's degradation had brought a vivid picture of a people held down by a devil-like egotist.

He had turned automatically to follow the man's movements. His hand was in his pocket, and his left side towards Geean. He was thinking that under certain circumstances a man's free choice must include the possibility of personal death.

With a tiny pressure, he pressed the activating button of the gadget in his pocket.

STATEMENT TO THE CORONER'S JURY  
By DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT JIM MURPHY

When the body of Michael Slade was discovered last week in the foothills near the city of Smailes, I was dispatched to the scene. It was at my request that the inquest hearing was transferred to Mr. Slade's home city, where most of the witnesses lived.

About these witnesses, I wish to say that all of them, without exception, were doubtful about identifying the deceased as Michael Slade when they were first shown the body. Later, on the stand, they were more positive, having apparently resolved their earlier doubts on the basis of "The dead man is three-eyed. Therefore it must be Michael Slade."

One of my reasons for going to Smailes was to make some attempt to find out where Michael Slade had been during the past few months.

I have considerable experience at locating missing persons, but my usual methods produced no results whatever. While the time elapsed since Mr. Slade's death has been very short, I am almost prepared to say that further search will only emphasize the following fact:

Michael Slade walked out of his own back yard in this city several months ago, and his body was discovered last week near the city of Smailes. There is no record of his whereabouts during the interval.

They climbed towards the top of the spire ahead of the ominous hum and crackle of the fire. The direction worried Slade. How were they going to get down, with flames barring the lower levels? And suppose that the fire ate through the main walls, and the upper part of the immense building toppled to the ground far below.

There was a possibility, of course, that she and the nith could get down as easily as they had come in through the windows. But Lear shook her head when Slade asked if that was to be the way.

She had stopped near a window. "We came," she said, "by means of my silver belt. I've been hoping to run into a storeroom of fliers. If we don't find any, then you are our only hope."

"Me?" Slade was startled.

She said, "Tell me, can you visualize in your mind the wheel machine which you hid in the brush near where you were captured by the hunters of Naze?"

Slade gave her an astounded look. So she had known about that. At last, he said, "I think so."

She persisted, "Including the three bright spots?"

This time he merely nodded, for he was beginning to remember what it could do.

"Then be quick," said Lear. "It's top speed is limited, something under two thousand miles an hour. It will take several minutes to get here."

Slade stared at her, and swallowed hard. But he walked with her to the window, closed his eyes, and pictured the wheel machine. The memory was blurred for a moment, then it came sharp and clear.

Standing beside him, Lear said softly, "Blink slowly, and don't strain to hold the picture of it. Let it wax and wane. All this is unimportant in a way, because, during the next six years, both you and I must learn the natural ways."

That pulled him. That caught at his brain. That tore him from his concentration. He pictured himself as he might be six years hence—it was her gentle, almost hypnotic voice that pressed him back.

"Hold it," she said quickly, "*hold* it! It will sink to

Earth if you don't, and there is no time to waste. Any minute now the main barrier machinery will be reached, and then the barrier will go down. After that, even the tough materials of the spire will not stand long."

Her words steadied Slade. Away in the back of his mind was a memory of what Geean had said about bridal finery. An edge of worry shadowed his mind. Because, when you came right down to it, a man did not marry a woman ten thousand years older than himself. Amor, yes. Her failings were human, normal, forgivable. He had a feeling the girl would be willing to become his companion. He would certainly ask her.

He was so intent on the wheel machine that he missed entirely a little byplay beside him. The nith informed Lear of what Slade was thinking. The woman hesitated, then her features began to change. Her face was taking on a startling resemblance to the face of Amor when a fierce thought from the nith arrested the process:

"Don't be a fool," it said sharply. "At the moment he will not take kindly to the idea that you were Amor. You assumed that role in order to give him a sympathetic picture of a girl of Naze. He would have been shocked by the character of a real blood-drinking girl. At the moment he might blame you for the death of Caldra, even though you had gone away expecting that Caldra would try to take blood from him, and so precipitate him back to his own plane.

"Another thing," the nith went on, "I have noticed in your mind that you are responsible for his having been born a three-eyed mutation in a two-eyed world. Do not tell him that immediately either. Let him discover later that you have controlled his life from an early embryo stage. Let him find out later that you can be all woman—"

The woman was hesitating. Abruptly, she became Lear again. She saw the wavering of the purple carrier. She let out a very femininelike squeal. "The barrier," she cried, "it's down."

Her words were like a cue. There was a flash of metallic brightness in the distance. The wheel machine came through the open window, and jerked to a stop in front of Slade's eyes.

"The nith first," said Lear urgently. "Then me, then you. And don't worry. It floats swiftly."

It was almost not swift enough. The last time he brought it towards his eyes the roar of the fire was a hideous sound in his ears. He climbed into the flower-shaped wheel, shoved hard—and hung on.

The sun was a bright glory almost directly overhead. There were many people below, but as Slade drew near to the ground, he could still see no sign of either Lear or the nith. A tall, slim young woman put up her arms towards him, and with a start Slade recognized Amor. He shouted at her, and she waved back, frantically.

He came down presently into a city that was already quaveringly conscious of its destiny.

## THE VERDICT OF THE CORONER'S JURY

It is the unanimous decision of the jury that there can be no doubt that the dead body is that of Michael Slade. The unusual clothes cannot be regarded as important, and the jury therefore finds that Michael Slade met his death as a result of a fall from a height, very possibly from an airplane. There is no evidence of foul play or murder.