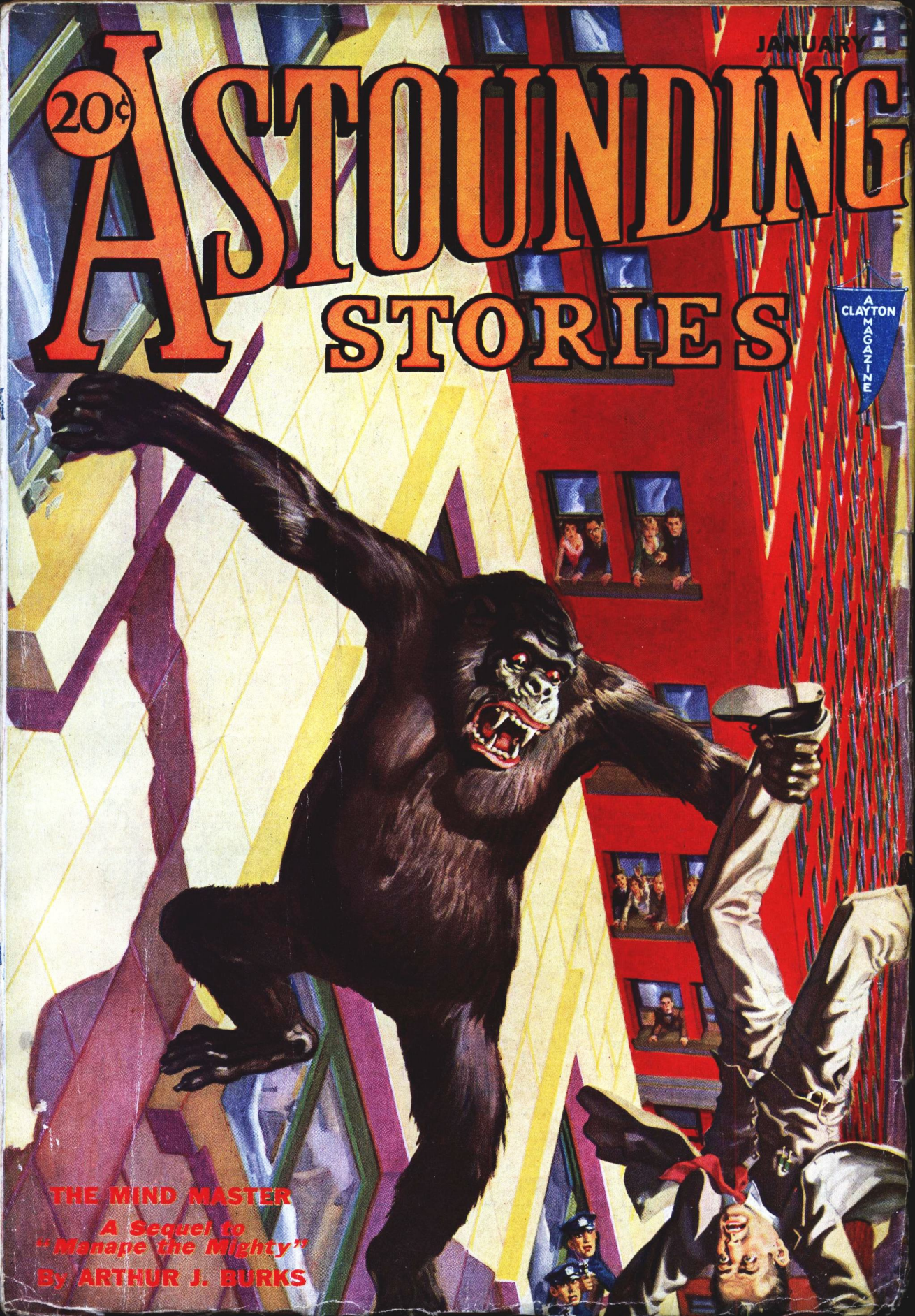


JANUARY

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ASTOUNDING STORIES

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*A Sequel to
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By **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

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Patented

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Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and
BRINGS AGENTS UP TO \$6 AND \$8 IN AN HOUR!

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without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen have sold to every house in the block and have made up to \$8 in an hour.

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VOL. IX, No. 1

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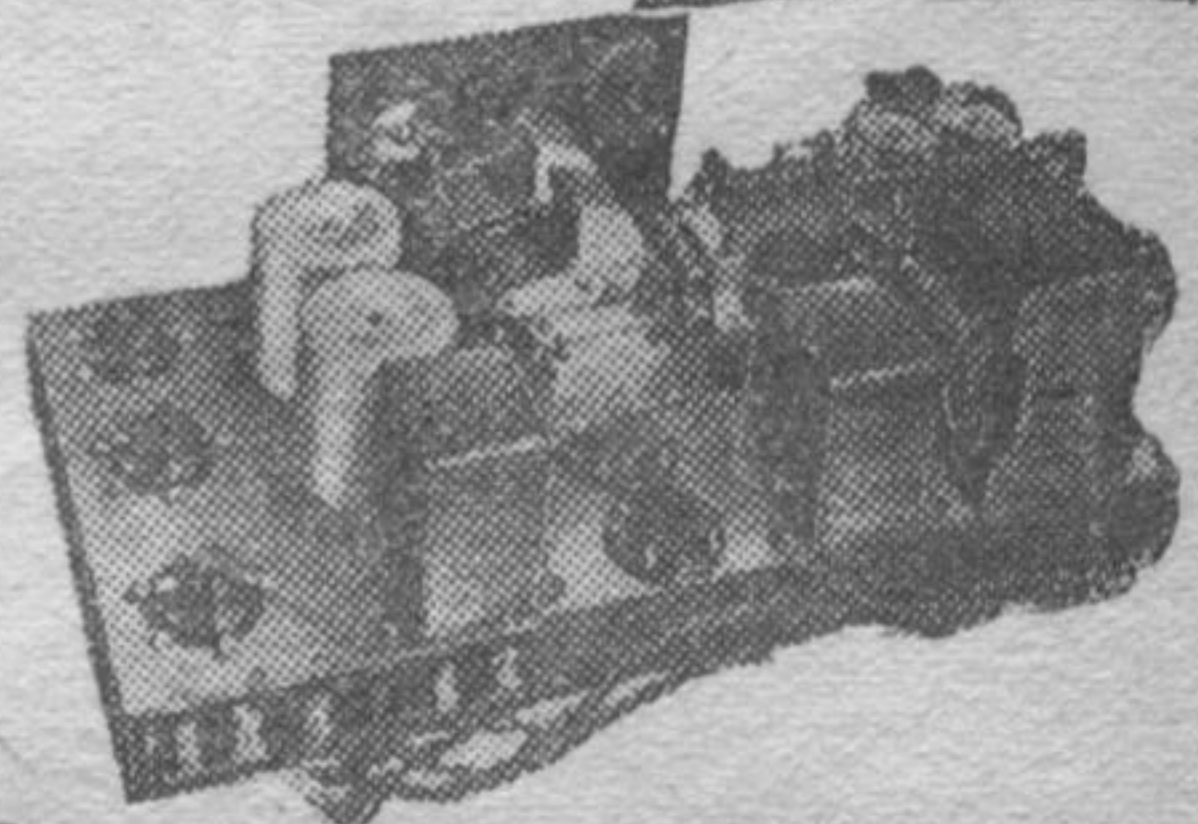
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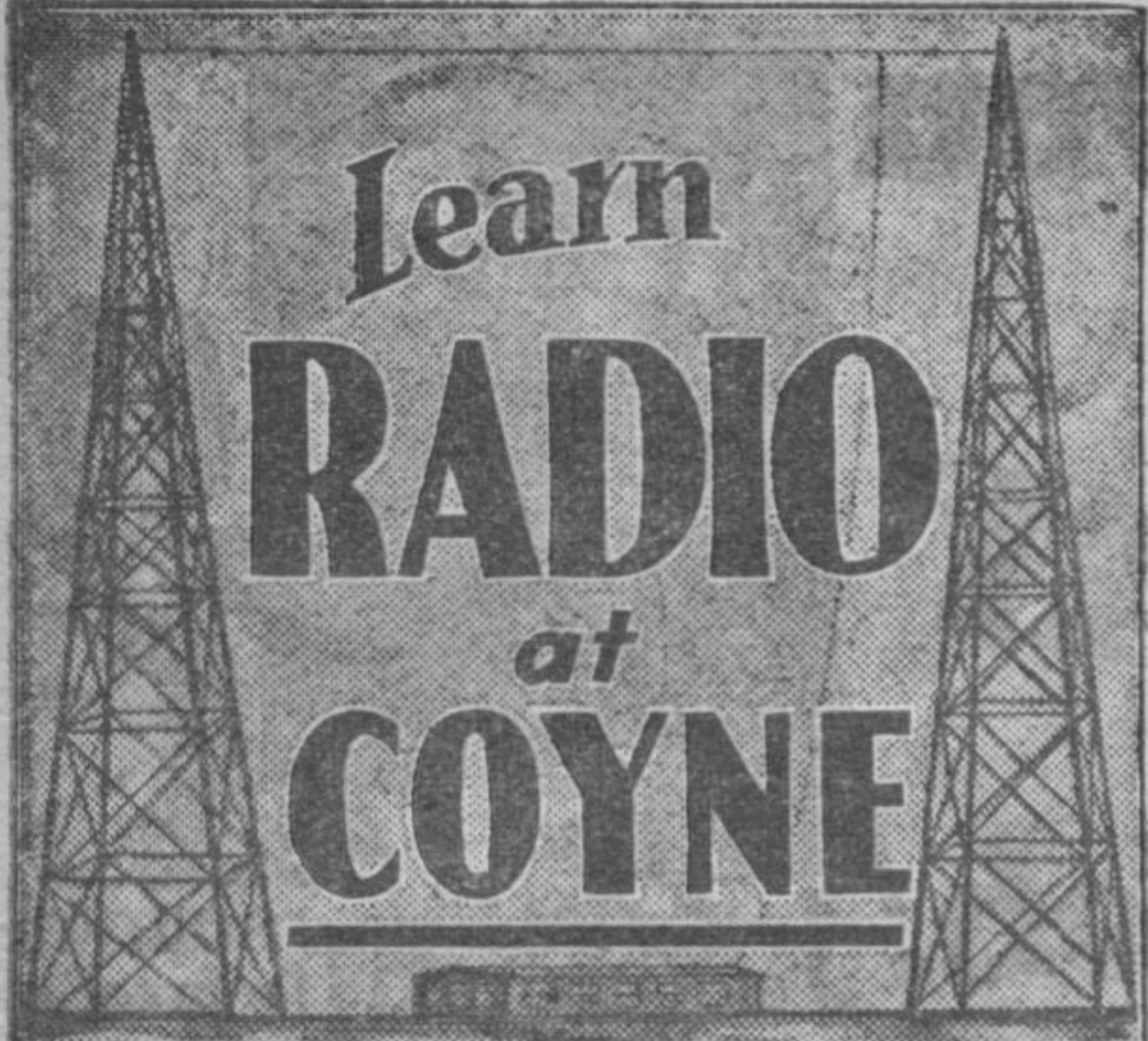
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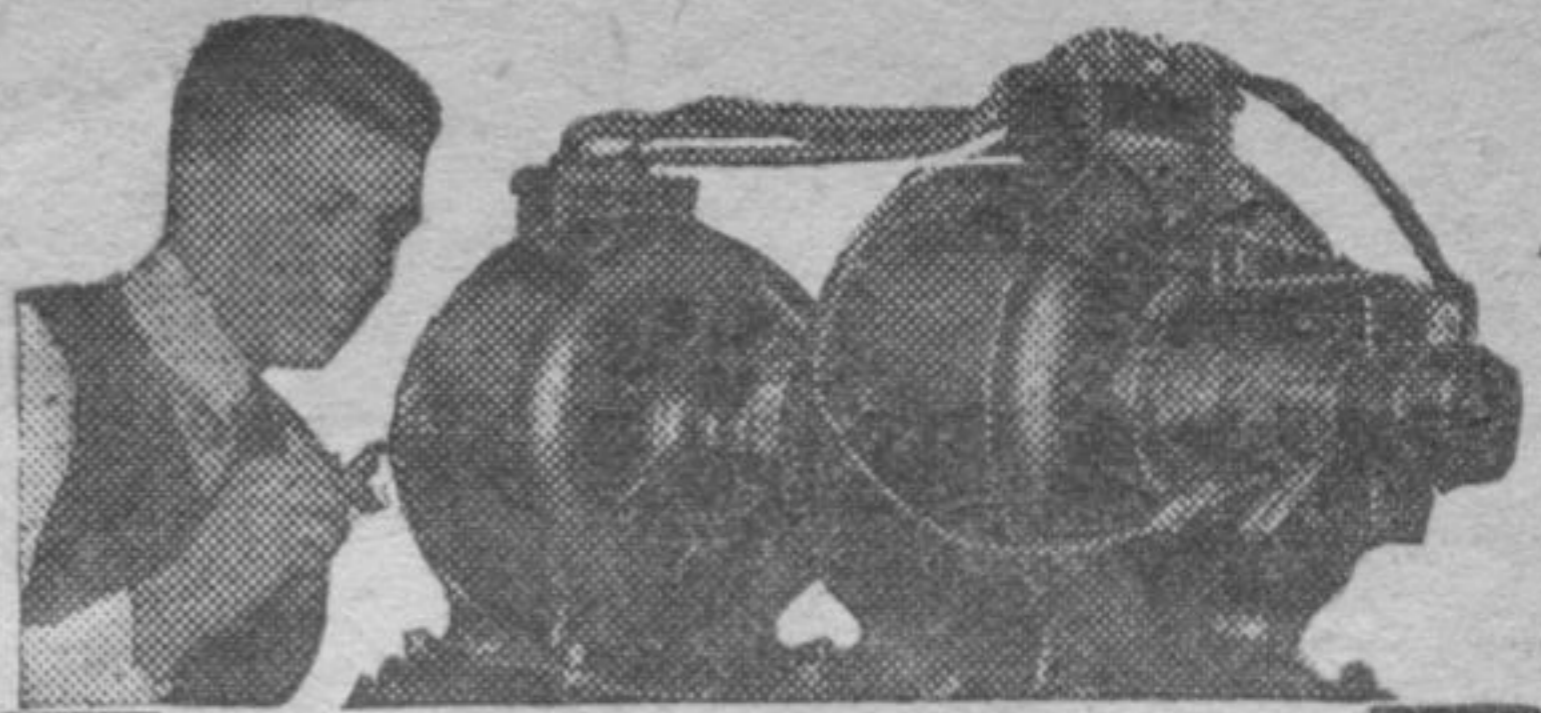
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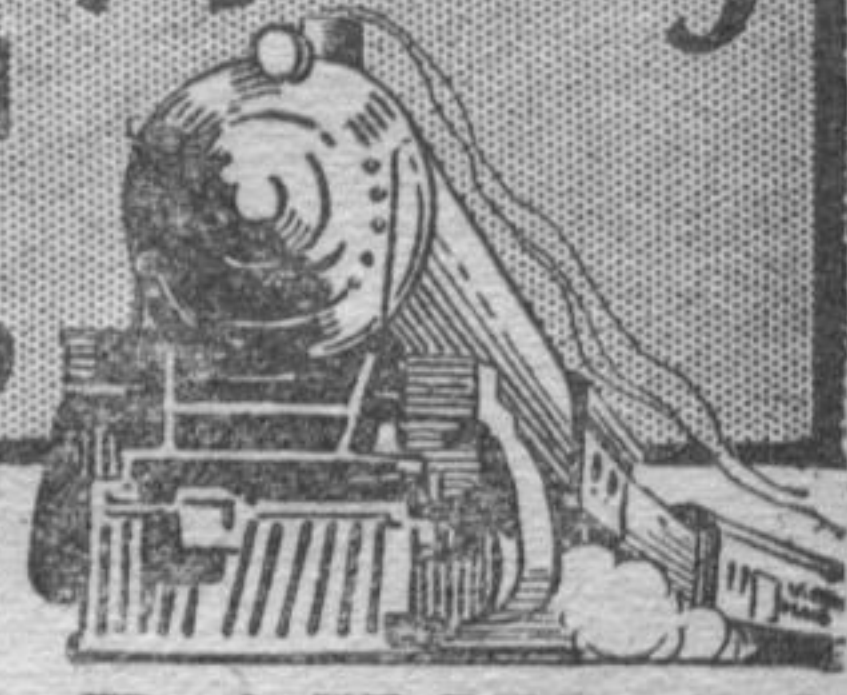


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"But, until times do loosen up, we've got to have a little help.

"So I'm asking *you* to give us a lift, just as I would give one to you if I stood in your shoes and you in mine.

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"The best way to help us is to give as generously as you can to your local welfare and charity organizations, your community chest or your emergency relief committee if you have one.

"That's my story, the rest is up to you.

"I'll see it through—if *you* will!"

—Unemployed, 1931

THE PRESIDENT'S ORGANIZATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF

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The President's Organization on Unemployment Relief is non-political and non-sectarian. Its purpose is to aid local welfare and relief agencies everywhere to provide for local needs. All facilities for the nation-wide program, including this advertisement, have been furnished to the Committee without cost.

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Gargle twice daily—keep well— stay on the job

Don't be one of those thousands who every year suffer colds needlessly. Who pay the penalty in discomfort, lost health, and lost wages due to absence from work.

Get plenty of rest. Don't overeat. Avoid severe exposure. And gargle with full strength Listerine morning and night *every day*. Because controlled tests on 102 persons now show Listerine's amazing ability to prevent colds and to reduce their severity, once contracted.

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Of 102 persons observed for a period of seventy-five days, one-third, known as "controls," did not gargle with Listerine at all; one-third gargled twice a day; the other third five times a day, the full strength solution.

Now, note these amazing results:

Those who did not gargle, contracted twice as

many colds as those who gargled Listerine twice a day. The colds were four times as severe and lasted three times as long.

Three times as many colds

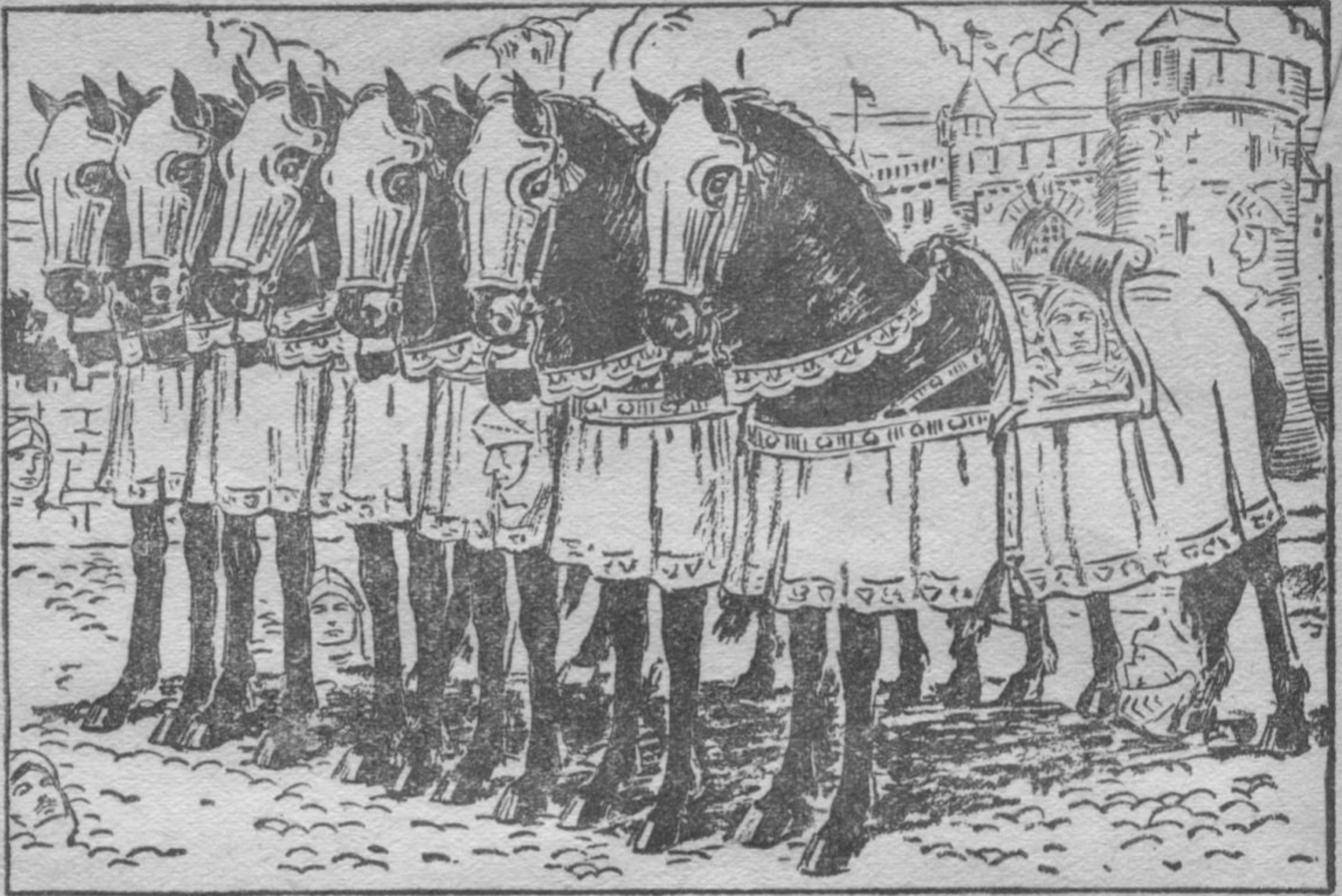
Those who did not gargle Listerine had three times as many colds as those who gargled five times a day. The colds were four times as severe and lasted four times as long.

The secret, germicidal action with safety

Such results are due to Listerine's amazing germicidal action. Used full strength it kills germs in the fastest time accurately recorded by science. So it reduces mouth bacteria 98% or more, and maintains substantial reduction for hours.

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Can You Find the King's Men?

The King's Horses stood in the Court Yard of the great Castle. But where are the King's Men? Can you find them? The faces of the King's Men are shown in odd places about the picture. Some are upside down, others look sideways, some look straight at you. Mark on the picture as many faces as you can find and mail to me at once. Sharpeyes will find them. Can you?

We are giving \$7,500 in more than 100 prizes in a sensational new plan to advertise our business. Also thousands of dollars in cash rewards. In a former campaign, Mr. Dennis Beemer, Utica, Mich. won \$4,740. Miss Helen Schick won \$2,565. Many others won big prizes. In our new campaign someone wins latest model Buick Sedan delivered by nearest dealer and \$1,000 cash (or \$2,500 total if all cash is preferred)—why not you?

\$1,000 Extra Just for Promptness

We want this advertising campaign started at once. Therefore, \$1,000 extra cash will be given the first prize winner for being prompt. Send your answer today—take no chance of losing the \$1,000 extra promptness prize.

Mail Coupon Today

The money to pay all prizes is already in a big Chicago Bank waiting for the winners. If you answer now, and take an active part, you are sure to get a cash reward.

You may win a new Buick 8 Sedan delivered by your own dealer and \$1,000 cash (or \$2,500 if you prefer all cash). Duplicate prizes given if there are final ties. You are under no obligation if you answer. It doesn't require a penny of your money to win. No matter where you live in the U. S., if you want to win a big prize send your answer today and you will qualify for the opportunity. Someone will win! Find the King's Men.

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Mr. C. H. Essig, a farmer, RR3, Argos, Ind. wrote: "Received your \$3,500 prize check. 3,500 thanks for it! This is the most money I ever had in my life. It is indeed a fortune to win."



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He was running toward the crater's edge.

Creatures of Vibration

A Sequel to "Vagabonds of Space"

By Harl Vincent

CARR PARKER sat day-dreaming at the *Nomad's* controls. More than a week of Earth time had passed

since the self-styled "vagabonds of space" had left Europa, and now they were fast approaching the

great ringed orb of Saturn with the intention of exploring her satellites.

Behind him, his Martian friend, Mado, was manipulating the mechanism of the *rulden*, that remarkable European optical instrument

The Vagabonds of Space are cast into the hands of the vibration-maddened natives of Titan, satellite of Saturn.

which Detis had installed in the vessel before they left. Mado was utterly fascinated by the machine, having spent most of his time during the voyage searching the surfaces of Saturn's moons for signs of human habitation. Now, as they headed directly for Titan, the sixth satellite, he was completely absorbed in an examination of the heavy cloud layer that covered it.

But Carr's thoughts were of his bride, who still slumbered in their stateroom amidships. In his bachelor days he never had imagined he could find such contentment as had come with his marriage to Ora. He had fought shy of the fair sex on Earth. Somehow, the women he knew back home had bored him; angling for a man's money and position, most of them, and incapable of giving real love and companionship in return for the luxuries they demanded. He was resigned to his single state.

But all that was changed by the little blue-eyed girl he had met in Paladar. She was a different sort; worth a hundred of those others and fulfilling to perfection the ideal he had always set up. On her world, Jupiter's satellite, Europa, he had neither wealth nor influence; he'd left these behind when he deserted Earth for a life of vagabondage among the stars. But, to the daughter of Detis, this lack meant less than nothing; his love, and hers, meant everything.

AND, what a good sport she had been! When they were threatened by Rapaju and his minions; when they barely escaped being swallowed up by that monster of space which Mado had likened to the Sargasso Sea of Earth; when she herself proposed joining them in their roving throughout the universe.

She was a companion of whom even the phlegmatic Martian was

proud, she brought with her presence on the *Nomad* a subtle something that made of the coldly mechanical space-ship a thing of new beauty and a place of cheerfulness—a home. And, to think he had won her for his own. To think. . . .

"Carr!" Mado's sharp exclamation startled him from his pleasant thoughts. "Come here and take a look at this," the Martian demanded, his voice betraying an excitement unusual for him. "Something is wrong on this satellite we're heading for."

Locking the controls in the automatic position, Carr turned to join his friend at the viewing-disk of the rulden. Mado had found an opening in the heavy cloud layer, and before them was an unobstructed view of a rugged countryside where huge boulders had been scattered by the mighty hand of creation and where the sun shone weakly on the rim of a yawning crater in which sulphurous vapors curled. They saw this strange land as from an altitude of a few hundred feet, though the *Nomad* was still more than a million miles from the satellite.

"What's wrong about that?" Carr grunted. "Excepting that it's just another of these barren and useless bodies that doesn't even provide us with an attracting interest."

"Wait," Mado replied, "You'll see in a moment. Something—"

AT that instant there came a puff of blue flame from out the pit, carrying on its heated breath a drifting sheet of incandescence that fluttered and pulsed like a thing alive. Mado switched on the sound mechanism of the rulden and the roaring of the pillar of flame came to their ears. There were other sounds as well; the babble of alien voices and the rumble of drums.

Immediately the rough ground in

the vicinity was filled with creatures of human mold, half naked red-skinned beings that rose up from behind the boulders and rushed toward the pit of fire and the uncanny heat mantle that wandered ghost-like along its rim. Two of them carried something between them, a struggling writhing something which they stood erect at the crater's edge. It was a girl!—a slim, bronzed figure that swayed there an instant uncertainly as the throb of the drums rose high and the voices of the assembled savages swelled in a monotony of exultant chanting.

"Good Lord!" Carr gasped. "A human sacrifice!"

A quick push, a piercing scream immediately drowned out by the cries of the multitude, and the girl was flung headlong into the welcoming folds of the white-hot ghost-mantle which hovered there like some greedy monster of the lava pools of Mercury. The thing closed in around the wildly struggling body, enwrapping it with exultant constrictions of its hell-born substance and diving, flapping, smoking heat devil, into the flame from whence it had sprung. Mado touched a lever with quick trembling fingers and the rulden's disk went blank.

SICKENED by what they had seen, the two friends stared at one another, white-faced.

"No place for us," Mado said, after a moment. "Not with Ora."

"Right!" Carr agreed grimly. "But I'd like to get in close enough to see more of Titan. How high is this cloud layer?"

"About a mile above the surface. We can dive through and look them over; perhaps give them a taste of the disintegrator."

"Attaboy! You took the words out of my mouth. The devils! Who'd ever dream of such a horror

in the twenty-fourth century—even out here?"

"What's the reason for this serious discussion?" The voice of Detis broke in on them from the door of the control room.

"Plenty!" Carr exclaimed. And the European listened gravely as he described the awful thing they had witnessed.

"I am not surprised," he said calmly, when the Terrestrial ended his recital. "There are certain emanations from the mother planet that most certainly will affect the mentality and baser instincts of a race living within their influence. I have been studying these vibrations for several hours."

They turned to the forward port as the scientist indicated the great orb of Saturn with its gleaming rings. Now, as they drew near to the enormous planet, it did indeed seem that there was a sinister quality in its shifting luminosity. Carr shivered, thinking of Ora.

"You mean," Mado asked, "that there are vibrations in the ether hereabouts that are set up electrically by the planet?"

"Precisely. Or rather I should say they are set up by the vast number of whirling particles of which its encircling rings are composed. The wave form propagated is of a characteristic that is in tune with those portions of the brain which control the savage impulses. We may certainly expect to find superstition-ridden ignorance and all manner of vice prevalent in the races of Titan."

"You think these vibrations will affect us?" Carr inquired anxiously.

"Not if we make our visit short. The intensity is quite low."

"It'll be a short visit, all right. We'll be in Titan's atmosphere in about forty minutes now, and, if I have my say, we'll be out of it and away again inside of an hour."

"Best thing you've said today," Mado approved. "But let's have another look in the rulden. We may find other gaps in the clouds."

THE mechanism of the radio telescope whirred into life as he spoke and its disk shone bright with the reflected light of Titan as it pictured the body. The *Nomad* was speeding toward the ill-omened satellite at the rate of more than a thousand miles a second.

But the surface was nowhere visible and Mado adjusted the focus so that the view of the billowy cloud-covering fell rapidly away. Though actually they were approaching the satellite with tremendous velocity, it receded swiftly in the rulden's disk until the entire body showed as a perfect sphere of uniform brilliancy. All surface markings were concealed by the blanket of clouds.

"Just a moment, Mado," said Detis. "I believe I saw something."

The Martian pressed a button and the image was stationary. A tiny black spot had appeared near one edge of the satellite's disk and this now spread rapidly like a blot of spilled ink. Then it stretched out into a wriggling line that quickly streaked its way across the equator, completely banding the body as they watched. A moment it lay there like a great serpent encircling the globe, and then it vanished in a flash of intense light that left them blinking in amazement. It was as if a trail of gunpowder had been laid across the surface and then set off by a torch in the hand of some unseen giant of the cosmos. A strange electrical storm that agitated the cloud blanket mightily, then left it more densely closed in than before.

Through the forward port the satellite could be seen with the naked eye, growing larger now and resolving itself into a tiny globe.

To Carr it seemed that the diminutive moon winked provocatively as he turned to regard it without the rulden's aid. Off to the west, Saturn and her rings almost filled the sky, and their baleful light shone cold and menacing against the black velvet of the heavens.

MADO took the controls when the *Nomad* entered the atmosphere of Titan and drifted over the sea of clouds. He corrected the altimeter for the mass of this body of three thousand miles diameter, and noted that they were up about six thousand feet. Test samples indicated that the outside air, although thin, was pure. But they did not open the ports as they had no intention of landing.

Ora had not yet awakened and Carr hoped fervently that she would not do so until they had left the immediate vicinity of Titan. It was vastly better if she missed seeing anything of the barbarians of the cloudy satellite. Besides, with her adventuresome and fearless nature, she'd not be satisfied merely to look on from afar—she'd want them to land. And that must not be done.

Something tinkled metallically against the hull plates of the vessel. Again and again the sound was repeated, and soon they saw that the air was filled with driving particles which clattered on the thick glass of the ports and contacted resoundingly with the hull. A vast cloud of black loomed directly ahead, springing up from the tossing cloud banks; and Mado yanked at the controls, swerving the *Nomad* sharply from her course.

But there was no escaping the fury of that sudden squall; they were in the thick of it in an instant, and the ship was buffeted and tossed about as if it were a toy. Millions of the driving particles battered the *Nomad* and the din of their pounding was terrific as the

ship was whirled deeper into the midst of the tempest.

CARR saw that the black particles were piling up around the rim of the port, sticking fast to the metal of the hull. They were bristling in fantastic array, like iron filings adhering to the poles of a magnet. In a flash it came to him that these particles were magnetic; the *Nomad* was covered with them and they piled on ever more thickly, soon weighting her down so heavily that she lost altitude. They were at the mercy of a furious electrical storm of mysterious nature.

"Imps of the canals!" Mado shouted above the din. "We're finished! The machinery is paralyzed. This iron hail is charged."

The viewing port was completely covered over now with particles that arched across from rim to rim, slender rod-like things about two inches long and of the thickness of heavy wire. Black, they were, as black as graphite. Detis worked frantically with Mado at the useless controls, vainly endeavoring to stabilize the pitching vessel.

Dazed by the suddenness of the calamity, Carr turned to look at the altimeter. Five thousand feet, forty-five hundred, four thousand! Nose down, and reeling drunkenly, the *Nomad* was diving to certain disaster on the rocky ground of Titan. He dashed from the control room, calling distractedly to Ora as he raced along the passageway.

She staggered from the state-room and into his arms, a slim, boyish figure in her snug leather jacket and breeches. Together they were flung violently against the partition by a heavy lurch of the vessel.

"What is it?" she gasped, clinging to him for support.

"A freak storm, in Titan's atmosphere. Guess the *Nomad's* done

for." Carr drew her fiercely close as an awful picture flashed across his mind—of Ora's body mangled in twisted wreckage; of the savages finding it, down there. . . .

The metal floor-plates seemed to buckle and hurl themselves aft with a grinding crash of disrupted joints. Holding desperately to the precious little body within his arms, Carr was thrown off his feet. There was a detonation as if the universe had been blasted into oblivion—then darkness, and numbed silence.

"CARR, you're hurt!" Ora moaned.

He was—a little. His head was splitting and the taste of blood was in his mouth, but it was nothing serious. He'd been half knocked out, but his head was clearing already. Of far greater importance was the fact that Ora was unharmed; he satisfied himself of that immediately.

"I'm all right," he grunted, struggling to his feet and feeling around in the blackness.

The lights in the passage were out and he groped blindly along the partition, the metal of which had suddenly become very hot to the touch. There was a curious feeling of lightness as if his body had no weight at all; the ship rolled gently and he knew they were falling swiftly to the inevitable crash. Yet he clung fast to Ora, and, together, they made their way to the control room.

Faint daylight streamed in through the ports there and he saw Mado and Detis, both bleeding from injuries they had received when the mysterious shock hurled them amongst the control mechanisms. They were working furiously with the exciter-generator, which had stopped. The *Nomad* was without power and helpless to exert her anti-gravity energy.

"The iron hail!" gasped the European scientist. "It gave up its charge, Carr—exploded. Here, give us a hand and see if we can get the generators started."

The ports were clear of the black particles and Carr saw that the outer surface of the glass was cracked and darkened from the heat of the blast. He understood, remembering the black band and the flash they had seen across the cloud layer from afar. And in the instant of remembering he saw that the ground was very near, rushing upward to meet them. A coil of the exciter-armature broke away in his fingers; the thing had been burned out by the electric storm, and the *Nomad* was doomed.

The altimeter needle moved with sickening speed and already registered but little more than five hundred feet. Four hundred! Carr braced himself for the impending crash and gathered Ora in his arms.

And then a strange thing happened. Four light rays, dazzling in intensity, stabbed up at them from the forest beneath them and converged on the vessel's hull. The *Nomad* staggered, then came to an even keel and slackened in her mad dash to the surface. She vibrated from stem to stern under the mighty conflict of energies and they felt themselves pressed hard against the floor-plate. But the mysterious energy beams had come too late to save them. A densely wooded slope loomed directly ahead. There was a crashing of branches and the rending of mighty trunks, and the *Nomad* came to a jarring stop.

"DEVILS of Terra!" Mado ejaculated. "We're in a fine fix now. We'll have to set foot on Titan whether we want to or not."

Carr had laughed, somewhat shakily, in relief. They were safe, all of them, and no one much hurt.

And the generator coils could be rewound. But he sobered instantly at Mado's words; they'd have to produce copper and insulating materials for the job.

"Right," he agreed. "And that's not so good."

"What's so terrible about landing here?" Ora inquired. "I thought we were expecting to explore this satellite." She looked up from her ministrations to Detis, who had a nasty scalp wound.

"The people here are dangerous savages," Carr answered gravely. "At least some of them are; we saw them in the rulden. You'll have to remain aboard while we look up the ones who projected those rays and do some bargaining with them."

"What! You expect me to hide in the vessel while you're at work outside? Not much! I want to see something of Titan while we are here." Her pretty chin was set in that determined manner she had.

"I tell you it's too risky!" Carr was firm, but he looked at Mado beseechingly, signaling for his support.

But the Martian only grinned owlishly. He knew as well as did Carr that Ora would have her way.

"Risky—pooh!" she returned. "I'm not afraid. We have our ray pistols and the funny torpedoes you brought from Mars. Besides, I don't believe it's as bad as you think."

Carr shrugged his shoulders. After all, they probably would not encounter any of the savages here in the forest. Beings of far greater intelligence were responsible for those rays, that much was certain. Besides, they'd be three able-bodied men out there to watch over her, and he'd make sure she didn't get too far away from the ship.

CARR was first to step from the opened manhole to the soft carpet of the Titanese forest. He

found the air cool and crisp, with a tang of ozone assailing his nostrils. There was a pulsating motion in it that he could hardly define; it seemed that it massaged his cheeks and raised the short hairs at the nape of his neck and on his forearms as if they were electrified. Those vibrations Detis had told them about were actively at work.

The gravity was even less than on Mars, though slightly greater than that of Europa. Mado was entirely at ease, and the Europeans would not be bothered by the slight change in their weight. But Carr would have to take it easy, as he'd done ever since leaving Earth. His muscles were too powerful for his body on these smaller worlds, though this was a mighty advantage if he took care not to over-exert.

A melodious whistling note rose high somewhere in the depths of the forest and trailed off into eery silence. The sky was overcast with gray clouds and the light was poor, of little more than twilight intensity on Terra, this being partly due to the masking of the sun by the clouds and partly to their tremendous distance from that radiant body. Odd that it was not colder, he thought. Probably those vibratory radiations of Saturn's rings had something to do with the temperature in addition to their other effects.

Detis was on his knees, examining a queer specimen of purplish moss which had drawn his eye. The eternal scientist in the man could not be downed. Mado had come out armed with one of the bulky kal-bite torpedo-projectors and was looking around belligerently.

Ora drew herself erect and took a deep breath as soon as her feet touched the ground, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed with excitement. "Oh, Carr," she breathed, "it's marvelous; an honest-to-good-

ness virgin forest. We've neither of us ever seen one, you know. Aren't you thrilled?"

"We-e-ll," he admitted, "I've always looked forward to wandering in just such places. But, with you along, and thinking of those barbarians we saw—"

"Silly. I'm as capable as any of you. And, even if I couldn't look out for myself, I know that you will be at my side." She pursed her lips and tossed back her head provocatively.

What was a man to do?

A DEEP-TONED booming note came then from the hills, commencing like the warning siren of a space liner approaching its berth and swelling to a bombilation of ear-shattering sound that set the steel of the *Nomad's* hull vibrating and their very flesh and bones a-tingle. Then it died away as had the bird note which was the first sound of this world to greet them.

"Jupiter! What's that?" Mado unslung his torpedo-projector.

As if in answer to his startled question, a weird object drifted over the treetops and poised directly above them, about fifty feet up. An egg-shaped thing, six or seven feet in length, and seemingly made of white metal. It swayed there gently, without visible means of support, and they could make out a transparent disk on its side, back of which there was a human head with eyes that regarded them curiously.

Mado raised his torpedo tube and took aim.

"Hold it!" Carr warned him. "This fellow's no savage. Probably he's one of those who tried to break our fall. Friendly, perhaps."

Two more of the ovoids drifted in from the woods and joined the first one, all three settling a few feet lower and their occupants staring intently at the intruders.

"I'll get the psycho-ray apparatus," Detis said excitedly. "We may be able to get thought contact with them." He dived through the *Nomad's* entrance-manhole as he spoke.

"Nothing so frightening about these creatures," Ora murmured, her eyes reproaching Carr. "Why, they seem anxious to know that we are not enemies."

And, indeed, this seemed to be the case, for the strange ovoids wafted still lower, dropping until a faint humming of the internal gravity mechanism came to their ears. These were a highly developed people of scientific attainment; civilized beings. But Mado kept firm hold of his torpedo tube, and Carr fingered the ray pistol at his belt.

The booming note from the hills came then, frightfully near this time, and the three ovoids moved with sudden roaring of their motors, literally hurling themselves skyward. But the menace they sought to escape was real, and not to be outdone in speed. A vast black something whirred out from beyond the treetops and flung itself upon them.

"A pterodactyl!" Mado gasped. "One of the prehistoric monsters of Terra!"

"Carr, there are men riding it!" Ora exclaimed. "Red men!"

IT was true; the pteranodon, a horrid bat-like thing with a wing-spread of fully twenty feet, carried three of the bronzed savages clinging to a sort of harness that encircled its body just back of the crested head. The huge flying reptile whistled raucously as it flew and one of the savages was whirling a sling which held a stone as large as his own head. They watched in amazement as the swift aerial steed flapped its way after the rising ovoids. And then the sav-

age let loose an end of his thong and released its missile, which crashed full against the transparent disk of an ovoid and tore its way through.

The damaged ovoid careened violently and then fell end over end, crashing in the forest. With a bellow of fury, Mado fired with the kalbite tube at his hip. There was the twang of the propelling ray, and the slender arrow-like torpedo sped forth on its message of death, singing spitefully as it cleaved the air of Titan.

It was a fair hit, catching the pteranodon just ahead of its trailing legs and exploding with the characteristic screaming roar of the deadly kalbite. The monstrous reptile and its crew of barbarians vanished in a blaze that lighted the clouds above them and brought a babble of excited shoutings from the depths of the forest on all sides. They were surrounded by the uncivilized ones of Titan! And those of the ovoids had run off at the first sign of danger.

The din from the forest was augmented by the whistlings of a second pteranodon which darted after the remaining ovoids, following swiftly as these retreated with ludicrous, wabbling haste.

ORA screamed and struck out at something with her fist. A naked arm had reached out from the underbrush and grasped her wrist. Carr wheeled and his ray pistol spat crackling flame. The savage, an undersized red man with an enormous head, rose unsteadily from his hiding place, a look of terrible hate in his contorted features. Then, like a punctured balloon, his body collapsed into the nothingness of complete disintegration.

"Back, back to the *Nomad!*" Carr roared, dragging Ora with him and leveling his pistol at a group of

the bronze brutes who rushed into the space where the vessel lay amongst the trees.

Mado was busy with his torpedo tube and a vast explosion shook the ground beneath them as a trio of the savages were blasted out of existence. A great tree toppled and crashed across the nose of the *Nomad*, its roots ripped from the soil by the concussion.

Ora had whipped out her own pistol and was firing as they fell back. Game kid, she was! Carr gloated as he saw she was making each shot tell. But this couldn't last; there were hundreds of them now, long-armed and big-headed red devils swarming in from every direction. Carr dodged none too quickly to save his skull from a swift-flung stone, which clanged against the *Nomad's* hull. There was a perfect hail of the missiles now: one struck his left arm a numbing blow, and he heard a sickening thud and Ora's moan as she was hit. And there were winged darts, from blow-guns.

A dusky moon-face leered into his own, horribly close, and he yelled his rage as he drove it back with a swift uppercut. But the horde of savages came on in ever increasing numbers and with renewed vigor.

"Quick—inside!" Carr hissed in Ora's ear as his fingers found the rim of the manhole. He'd have her safely within in a moment.

Detis clambered out with the thought machine in his arms, and a singing dart from one of the blow-guns pierced him through and through. A look of astonishment spread over his kindly features, and he fell forward, dying.

And then Carr looked up into a grinning face behind a huge club that was swinging downward. He threw up his arm to break the force of the blow, but the club fell too swiftly; the enormous weight of it

crashed down on his skull, and he knew no more.

WHEN he awakened it was to stare for a dazed moment into a pair of blue eyes that looked down upon him in a place of dim light and stuffy atmosphere. The eyes were only vaguely familiar in his befuddled memory. Beautiful eyes, though, and incredibly dear. . . .

"Ora!" he exclaimed, in wondering remembrance, trying to sit up as he grasped her hand.

"Hush!" she warned him, placing a finger-tip to his lips. "Be quiet now and perhaps they'll leave us alone for a while."

"They! Did they capture us?" he whispered. "Are you hurt?"

"We're prisoners, all right, excepting poor father. But they didn't harm *me* much, outside of the rough handling."

"The devils. What of Detis?" He was growing stronger by the minute and now saw that they were in an open-mouthed cave and that Mado was sitting hunched dejectedly in a corner, his massive shoulders drooping and his proud head bowed on his chest.

"Father—they killed him," Ora sighed almost inaudibly. "Have you forgotten? We saw the dart strike him and I—I saw it sticking from his chest. Oh, Carr!" A dry sob caught in her throat.

"Yes—yes. Lord!" Carr groaned, sick at heart with the sudden recollection and full of compassion for the stricken girl.

He patted her hand with clumsy tenderness as she turned her head and gazed out through the cave mouth in silence that was fraught with intense pain. She would take it like that; with little to say but with much inward suffering.

And then he noticed a fourth occupant of the cavern, a young lad of Titan. Like one of the sav-

ages in his small stature and in the large size of his head, he was much lighter in color and his body was encased in a snug one-piece garment of shimmering material of silky texture. And there was a different light in his eyes, the light of intelligence and culture.

"Who is that?" Carr whispered.

Ora stared when she saw that the stranger was on his feet. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I'm glad he has recovered. He's one of the civilized ones; they captured him with his ovoid when the second pteranodon went out after them."

MADO was standing now, endeavoring to communicate with the lad by means of signs and the drawing of crude pictures in the red sand of the cavern floor. The graceful little fellow watched him with understanding and with a smile of amused tolerance. Then he halted the big Martian with an imperious motion, addressing him in velvety voice.

"Nazu," he said simply, placing a forefinger on his breast and bowing before the astonished Mado.

"Imps of the canals!" the Martian exclaimed, grinning delightedly as he cast a swift look at Carr and Ora. "He's telling me is name." "Mine's Mado," he said, turning his eyes to the keen gray ones that smiled up at him. "Mado," he repeated, placing a huge fist against his own chest and bending his body in awkward imitation of the lad's courtly gesture.

They made no attempt to converse in tongues that would convey no meaning, but there was no mistaking the quick friendship that sprang up between the incongruous pair. Mado was the boy's slave from that moment, and Nazu looked up to the Martian with all of youth's admiration for his vast bulk and rippling muscles.

Suddenly they were without light

and Carr saw that a curtain of woven rushes had been dropped over the mouth of the cave. There were soft padding footsteps on every side and he drew back against the rock wall with Ora clasped in his arms. A sinewy hand grasped his wrist and twisted his right arm free. He lashed out in the darkness and was rewarded by a grunt of pain as his fist contacted with an unseen face. Nazu's voice rose in anguish, and Mado's wrathful bellow was followed by a frightful commotion as he tore into his assailants.

They were everywhere in the blackness, these slippery little savages of Titan, their half naked bodies crowding him and stifling him with their sweaty nearness. Again and again Carr struck out, but it was like fighting a horde of squirming and clawing feline creatures that swarmed over him and bore him down by sheer weight of numbers. They dragged Ora from his arms and quickly overpowered him. Thongs of rawhide twisted deeply into the flesh of his wrists and he was hauled forth into the daylight.

SECURELY tied, hand and foot, Carr was propped sitting with his back to a huge boulder. He saw they had been carried to the place they had viewed in the disk of the ruden. A dozen paces away, Ora and Mado sat similarly bound. The Martian had been gagged as well and Carr was forced to smile despite the seriousness of the situation. His mad bellowings must have proved as painful to the ears of the red dwarfs as had his fists to their bodies.

Nazu, unbound and walking proudly erect, was being marched to the edge of a smoking fissure by two of the savages. No others of the red men were in sight.

Carr shuddered. It was the place

of sacrifice they had seen in the ruiden, and the natives were in hiding as before. Nazu would be first to go; then Ora, most likely. He strained desperately at his bonds when he realized the awful significance of their position. It was incredible that Ora was here and in the hands of these unspeakable monsters. Why, she'd be thrown into the incandescent folds of the flapping fire-god, along with the rest of them! He groaned in an agony of self-recrimination; he should not have allowed her to come on this mad voyage.

Then came that roaring column of flame from out the crater, and the weird fluttering thing whose intense heat radiated across the intervening space like the breath of a blast furnace. The rumble of drums commenced, and thousands of the red men dashed over the rocky area to worship at the shrine of their pitiless god.

As their monotonous chant rose high, Nazu was rushed to the edge of the pit. The ghastly, shimmering heat-ghost drifted hungrily to await the flinging of the slight form into its consuming embrace. Carr was glad to see that Ora had turned her head.

AND then there came a sucking noise from the depths of the crater, and the pillar of blue flame vanished abruptly, the incandescent ghost-shape flapping disconsolately in its wake. The chant of the savages trailed off into a chorus of disgruntled murmurings and the booming of the drums died down in disappointment. The worshippers had been cheated of their sadistic pleasure. There was something wrong with the timing of the rite; their mysterious fire-god had granted the captives a reprieve.

But the prisoners were not deceived by the solicitous treatment

accorded them by their captors when they were returned to the cave and their bonds were severed. For well they knew that at the next appearance of the phenomenon of the pit they would be dragged off to the sacrifice. Sooner or later all of them were to meet the fate of those given into the embrace of the heat-demon.

A guard of fifty or more of the savages, armed with blow-guns and stone hatchets, paraded continuously before the mouth of the cave as one of their number returned with a huge woven container of fruits and nuts of strange form and color. This was set before them and the bearer withdrew.

"Humph!" Mado grunted. "Seems like they want to fatten us up for this heated sheet of theirs. Like hogs fattened for the market."

But he reached for the striped yellow melon atop the heap, and, at a bright nod of approval from Nazu, bit into its smooth skin.

Carr's stomach rebelled when he looked at the food. He could not bear the sight of the stuff, sitting there in the damp cavern with Ora's blue eyes regarding him in the dim light. Those wide eyes held a gleam of hope and trust that would not be discouraged.

HE gazed out through the cave mouth and calculated their chances. There were none. Not against that horde of barbarians; there were too many of the devils to fight with their bare hands. If only they had their ray pistols, or a torpedo projector. At least they could sell their lives dearly. His eyes narrowed speculatively when they came to rest on a peculiar egg-shaped object that stood out there in the open. It was Nazu's ovoid. Here was an idea!

But he saw that its entrance door was open and that the space inside was too small for any of them ex-

cepting one of the small stature of the Titanese. It was crammed with machinery. Nazu was the only one of their number who could squeeze into the thing; in fact he alone knew how to operate the queer flying machine. There must be others of his kind, plenty of them; another country, or a city full of them at least. Perhaps he might obtain aid if only he could be made to understand, and if they could get him out there safely somehow.

"Mado," he called, pointing. "do you suppose we could dope out a way of getting Nazu aboard his sky vehicle to go for help?"

The Martian stared, his mouth stuffed with food and his jaws in full action. He strained suddenly to swallow the huge mouthful so he could make reply.

"Not a chance," he grunted. "Why, there's a million of them out there. You won't catch them napping."

But he turned his attention from the basket of fruit and made a desperate effort to convey the idea to Nazu, whose bright eyes took in his every significant motion and whose sensitive fingers traced images in the sand that conveyed his own thoughts to the mind of the Martian in rapid succession.

"He's got it!" Mano gloated. "The game little cuss would go in a minute if we could get him to the ovoid. He's got a picture of a big island here, so help me! An island covered with circular dwellings, made of metal like the ovoids, he indicates. Look here."

CARR and Ora moved over to watch the swift sketching of the Titanese lad. By means of pantomime and his carefully drawn pictures, he told them of his people, making it clear that they were forced to live in insulated dwellings and travel only in the ovoids, which likewise were insulated against the devastating vibrations that emanated

from Saturn's rings. He sketched those rings, illustrating the vibrations and tapping his own forehead in explanation of the effect on the brain; pointing to the savages to indicate the ultimate fate of his kind. The protective insulation, it appeared, was not permanent; sooner or later, all of them would become barbarians like the others.

The savages out there were their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers, gone mad; their skins darkened by continued action of the vibrations after they fled their insulated homes. His pictures of the family life were meticulously drawn. His people never warred upon these savage kin of theirs—naturally—though the reverse was not always true. However, Nazu pointed to the ovoid and showed his willingness to help the strangers. But he shook his head sadly as he counted the barbarians on his fingers, multiplying the number endlessly by clapping his hands. There were too many of them; the thing was impossible.

"Good Lord!" Carr exclaimed. "He's a marvel at communicating his thoughts without words. But I'd think his people would beat it for the hills without waiting. Might as well have it over with."

"But, they're still working on the problem," Ora objected. "With their wisdom, they'll finally get the thing under control. And they probably hope to discover a way of restoring their maddened relatives."

She was doing something with the red sand; wetting her fingers in a trickle of water that oozed from the wall and making a red paste which she smeared on her white forearm and then rubbed off.

"I guess you're right," Carr admitted. Then, watching her strange performance, he asked, "What are you doing?"

She looked up with sparkling eyes and stretched forth her arm.

"It stains, Carr, see!" she exclaimed excitedly. "We can fix up Nazu to resemble one of the savages. It is the exact color of their skin."

"Mado!" he called, sensing at once the possibilities of her discovery. They could make up Nazu to perfection. Mingling with the barbarians unsuspected, he might get possession of the ovoid.

THE Titanese lad fell in with the idea at once and the two men started work on him with water and the powdery stuff they had taken for red sand. They stripped him of his silken garment and smeared him from head to foot, Carr taking especial care to see that his upper body and face were thoroughly covered. Then, after using his own clothing to swab off the coating, they stepped back to view the result. He was exactly like one of the red men in color now, and he stood there twisting his face in a wicked grin to heighten the similarity.

"The little devil!" Mado chuckled. "He gets the idea perfectly. We'll have to muss his hair now and fix him up with a kirtle like theirs."

Removing his suede jacket and turning it inside out, the draped it about the slim hips of Nazu, then slapped his chest approvingly. "There you are, lad," he told the grinning youngster. "A tough-looking kid we've made of you, too."

The words were lost on the young Titanese, but his bright eyes showed that he fully comprehended the humor as well as the gravity of the situation. The improvised covering would pass without question as one of the untanned hides the barbarians wore dangling from their waists. The disguise was faultless.

Ora had been watching at the mouth of the cave. Now she called out in low-voiced warning, "Hurry! One of them is coming."

Carr moved forward swiftly to face the opening, while Mado stood with his great bulk hiding the now unrecognizable Nazu. The savage entered, proceeding directly to where Carr was standing. He bent over the fruit basket and then the Earth-man was upon him.

The wiry red man struggled furiously, but Carr had a grip on his windpipe that stopped his attempts to cry out and quickly reduced him to a state of flabby subjection. Then he bound and gagged his captive, tearing strips of linen from his own shirt to provide the necessary material. In a moment they had bundled the trussed-up dwarf into a dark corner of the cavern, and Nazu stepped forth blithely to lift the basket to his shoulder.

EVERYTHING seemed to happen at once after that. Nazu stalked boldly out among the savages, who paid him no attention whatsoever. He passed out of their field of vision for a moment, and then they saw him at the circular door of the ovoid. In a flash he was inside and the thing soared speedily into the air and out of sight. The red men broke forth in a babel of excited jabbering and then they were crowding into the cave, hundreds of them it seemed, shrieking their rage as they attacked the hapless prisoners.

Carr went down fighting madly but to no avail. He hadn't counted on this; he should have known better. A crushing weight of them was upon him, clawing and beating at him as he struggled to rise. They were suffocating him with their rank animal odors.

And then he was dragged into the open air. Battered and dazed, he saw they had found their fellow, the one he had bound and gagged. Ora was considerably mussed up, but unharmed, he observed with relief;

but Mado lay there inert. This was the first time Carr had ever seen him take the count at the hands of man.

When they had untied the one whose place had been taken by Nazu, he came straight for the Earth-man and would have brained him with a huge stone had not his fellows interfered. He objected strenuously, his eyes red with hate and a torrent of harsh gutturals pouring from his lips. But the others held him off; this strange white giant from the machine of the skies was to be saved for the embrace of the fire-god.

WITH the entire blame for Nazu's escape thus placed upon the Terrestrial, Ora and Mado were returned to the cavern and left unmolested. But Carr was prodded into moving over against a boulder and was surrounded by a semi-circle of the dwarfs who squatted calmly to watch him, blow-guns in their hands and stone hatchets on the ground within easy reach. They were taking no more chances with this one.

The long day of Titan dragged interminably but the watchful eyes of his guards never strayed from their prisoner. At any moment the fire-god might make an appearance and the rite of sacrifice take place. Carr supposed that the thing made more or less regular appearances, like a geyser of Earth. And, next time, there would be no escape.

Night fell, and still those eyes watched intently in the light reflected against the low-flung clouds from the seething crater nearby. Nothing had been seen of Nazu or any of the ovoids. Probably it was useless to expect them; they could not bring themselves to do battle against these savage kin of theirs. Anyway, he was glad the little fellow had gotten away; he hoped he was safely in bed—if they

had beds in those insulated dwellings.

He could not sleep. All through the night he sat with bowed head, alternately planning rescue attempts and cursing himself for bringing Ora to this horrible end. Detis was dead; the *Nomad* was hopelessly beyond repair for many days, even if they could make their escape and locate it; Nazu had saved his own skin, and they were left to the mercy of these vibration-crazed brutes who waited there in the flickering red twilight all around him. It was a revolting ending for an adventure that had started so auspiciously.

WITH the first faint light of dawn came the roaring of the pillar of flame from out the crater. Instantly there rose the hollow booming of the drums and the chanting of thousands of the barbarous worshippers. The place was swarming with them almost instantly, and Carr's guards closed in on him with evil glee.

Ora was brought out into the open, her arms held fast by two of the red devils who yanked her roughly along between them. Carr roared out in blind rage and in awful fear for the girl. He struck out viciously into the first grinning face that pressed near. Something in his brain seemed to snap then, and he became a snarling, fighting animal, battling against overwhelming odds in defence of his mate. A dart buried itself in his arm and a stone hatchet bit into his shoulder, but he scarcely felt the hurts. All that mattered now was Ora; they were taking her away—taking her to the folds of that incredible hot thing that flapped there at the crater's rim. An arm snapped like a pipestem in his fingers and he heard the squeal of pain from somewhere in the tangled mass of savages around him.

And then they were falling back; easing up on him. The din was increasing, but it seemed that a note of fear had crept in to replace the exultant frenzy of those chanting voices. The drums were stilled.

Wiping the blood from his eyes with the back of his hand, he saw the barbarians running everywhere; they were screaming in superstitious terror and fighting one another in their desperate anxiety to escape the vicinity of their precious fire-god. A tremendous voice boomed out over the hubbub, a voice that came from the crater in vast commanding gutturals that struck terror into the souls of the panicky barbarians. Yet somehow that mightily sonorous voice carried a familiar ring.

Carr raised astonished eyes to the pillar of blue flame and was seized with a well-nigh uncontrollable impulse to flee with the red men. For a monstrous image of Detis swayed there in the hot vapors, a massive arm raised menacingly and an equally Brobdingnagian voice issuing from his lips in fierce syllables of the red man's tongue!

"Detis!" Carr shouted. "Detis! Ora—Mado!"

AND then he was running toward the crater's edge in bounding strides that carried him twenty feet at a leap. He understood now. Detis had recovered from his wound and was reversing the rulden's energy. He was projecting his own image and voice, many times amplified, into the column of fire to terrify the savages!

Ora was lying there, on the rim of the pit. She had fainted at sight of the ghost-shape, whose white-hot folds flapped there, reaching to engulf her in their all-consuming embrace. Carr babbled like a madman as he pulled her away from the horrible thing that pulsed with eager flutterings not three feet

away, its hot breath singeing her silken lashes and brows.

Mado was there, encouraging him and yelling something else he couldn't understand; pointing skyward. And then he saw it; the *Nomad*, with its sleek, tapered cylinder of a body nosing down toward them with the silvery aura of its propulsive energy gleaming like a beacon of hope against the dull clouds of the satellite of terror. And there was something else: one of the ovoids of Titan, clinging there to the vessel's hull plates, alongside the open manhole. Nazu had not failed them after all. His mind refused to question the miracle further.

Somehow, when the vessel landed, he managed to reach the manhole with his precious burden. He staggered through the passageway and into their stateroom, tenderly stretching Ora on her own bed. In the next instant he was rummaging in the medicine closet. He found ointment for her burns; smelling salts; damp cloths. With trembling fingers he ministered to her, a great joy welling up within him as he saw she was recovering. Another minute, back there at the crater, and he'd have lost her forever. He swallowed hard at the thought, his eyes misty as he looked down at her and remembered.

Impatiently he jerked the barbed dart from his arm and poured a powerful antiseptic into the open wound, unmindful of the pain. As best he could, he disinfected his other cuts and bandaged them. Ora had raised herself and now sat there, swaying weakly and regarding him with anxious gaze.

A LITTLE later they made their way forward to the control room. The *Nomad* had taken off and was drifting slowly higher. At the controls sat a strange, be-daubed figure. Nazu!

Mado was peering through the coils of a helix of silver ribbon that had been erected beside the rulden.

"Father!" Ora darted past him and dropped to her knees on the floor-plates at the Martian's side. The body of Detis was slumped there a ghastly corpse within those gleaming coils. But his kind features were fixed in a serene smile. He had gone to his reward with content in his heart.

Only then did Carr remember. One could not subject his body to the reversed energies of the rulden without certain expectation of death. A few short seconds with those terrible oscillations surging through his being, carrying the amplified visual and oral reproduction through the ether, and the European scientist had perished. Knowingly, willingly, Detis had given his life that the rest of them might live! Recovered miraculously from his first serious injury, he had done this magnificent thing deliberately and gladly. . . .

A great lump rose in Carr's throat as Ora's sobbing came to his ears. With his vision blurred by tears, he turned to the pilot's seat, where Nazu faced him with solemn eyes.

"Nazu go now," the amazing young Titanese stated. He spoke in halting syllables of Cos, the language of the inner planets!

CARR stared agape, scarcely believing his ears.

"Detis great man," Nazu continued, relinquishing his seat to the dazed Earthman. "Nazu find him in ship. My people already there with him. They want to help when you come. Return after capture and heal dart wound of Detis. Bring wire and help him fix motors. Work very quick, my people. Detis have brain machine. Talk with Nazu; teach him words, also very quick.

Nazu tell where you are and we come to help. Then he scare away red men—and die. That is all. Now I go—and you go also. Quickly."

"So that's how it happened," Carr muttered, slowly mulling over the amazing things he had heard. He watched the Titanese lad keenly as his eyes wandered in Mado's direction. He saw the admiring light that came into them as the big Martian removed the body of Detis from the helix and carried it gently away.

"Wait a minute," he interposed, as Nazu made as if to leave. "Mado would like to talk to you."

"Must go soon." The youngster drew himself up proudly. "Nazu is prince of his people. They need him. And you—you must go at once. Vibrations of mother planet's rings work on you too long already. Must be quick. Else you be wild men—like those down there."

He waved his arm in a gesture that embraced all Titan. Anxiety was written large on his countenance and his gaze traveled nervously to the door through which Mado must return.

The big Martian was not long in coming. He had carried the body of Detis aft, leaving Ora there with her dead. Carr's heart ached for her; he knew how silently and terribly she suffered. Knowing that her father had been healed of his deadly wound by the friendly Titanese, only to be taken from her afterwards by his own heroic act, made the blow doubly hard.

Later they would give Detis a decent burial, sending him through the airlock to drift aimlessly in space, preserved through the ages by the intense cold and the absence of air. A fitting tomb for the noblest of the vagabonds!

MADO chattered endlessly with Nazu, who was impatient to be off. Seeing that it was impos-

sible to detain him, and realizing at last the stern necessity of hastening their own departure, he finally let him go. The youngster bid Carr a sober, friendly farewell and followed Mado to the airlock.

Carr heard the clang of the man-hole cover as it swung home, and was bolted to its seat. The ovoid drifted away from the vessel and dropped toward the forest beneath them. Nazu had gone to rejoin his people.

His fingers strayed to the controls. They must get away from the evil influence of those vibrations; he had felt something of their degrading power in the fighting down there. He had almost become a savage himself, he remembered with a revulsion of feeling.

The feel of the levers brought to him a renewed sense of confidence and responsibility. A while back he thought he'd never perform such simple duties again. The *Nomad* responded instantly and rose swiftly to hover over the pit of the fire-god. The flame had partly subsided and the ghost-shape wobbled there, changing form rapidly with darkening colors. Some weird phenomenon of nature that those brutes had set up as a deity.

Carr increased the repulsion energy once more and the *Nomad* shot skyward like a rocket. Through the floor port he saw Nazu's tiny ovoid scudding over the treetops. Then it had vanished.

"We're getting away none too soon," said Mado, rejoining him.

"Right." Carr watched the temperature indicator as he increased speed to the maximum they could withstand in the atmosphere.

They were out above the cloud layer then and he cast apprehensive eyes on the enormous flat disks encircling the great globe that was Saturn. Something like a hundred and seventy thousand miles across them, he remembered. But the

astronomers of the inner planets had little actual knowledge of their composition; they knew nothing at all of their terrible power or their strange inhabitants.

THE *Nomad* left Titan with tremendous acceleration now, as he increased the speed of the rejuvenated generators. They'd go on, on toward Uranus, Neptune—anywhere, away from this ringed planet that was responsible for the death of one of their number; away from the region that was soon to become the tomb of Detis.

There was silence then as the *Nomad* raced on through the blackness. Mado gripped the rail of the port and peered long and earnestly at the tiny pinpoint of light that now was Titan.

"Great kid, that Nazu," the Martian said, after a while. "Too bad he couldn't come along with us."

"Yes." Carr was thinking of the different life there would be on board the *Nomad*; and well he knew that Mado was thinking of the same thing. The Martian had missed the close companionship of his Terrestrial friend since his marriage to Ora; missed it more than he would admit, even to himself. And the lad, Nazu, had appealed to him; he would have fathered him as only a lonely bachelor can. Suddenly Carr's own friendship for the big fellow seemed a wonderful thing.

"Never mind, old man," he whispered, reaching over and gripping Mado's hand mightily, "We'll be a three-cornered family, Ora and you and I. And, who knows but that you'll find the one and only girl yourself, some fine day?"

"Oh, shut up!" Mado grunted.

But a big hand closed down hard on Carr's fingers, and the Earthman knew that their friendship was more firmly cemented than ever before.



*A sequel to
"Manape the Mighty"*

The Mind Master

Beginning a Two-Part Novel

By Arthur J. Burks

CHAPTER I

The Tuft of Hair

LET'S hope the horrible nightmare is over, dearest," whispered Ellen Estabrook to Lee Bentley

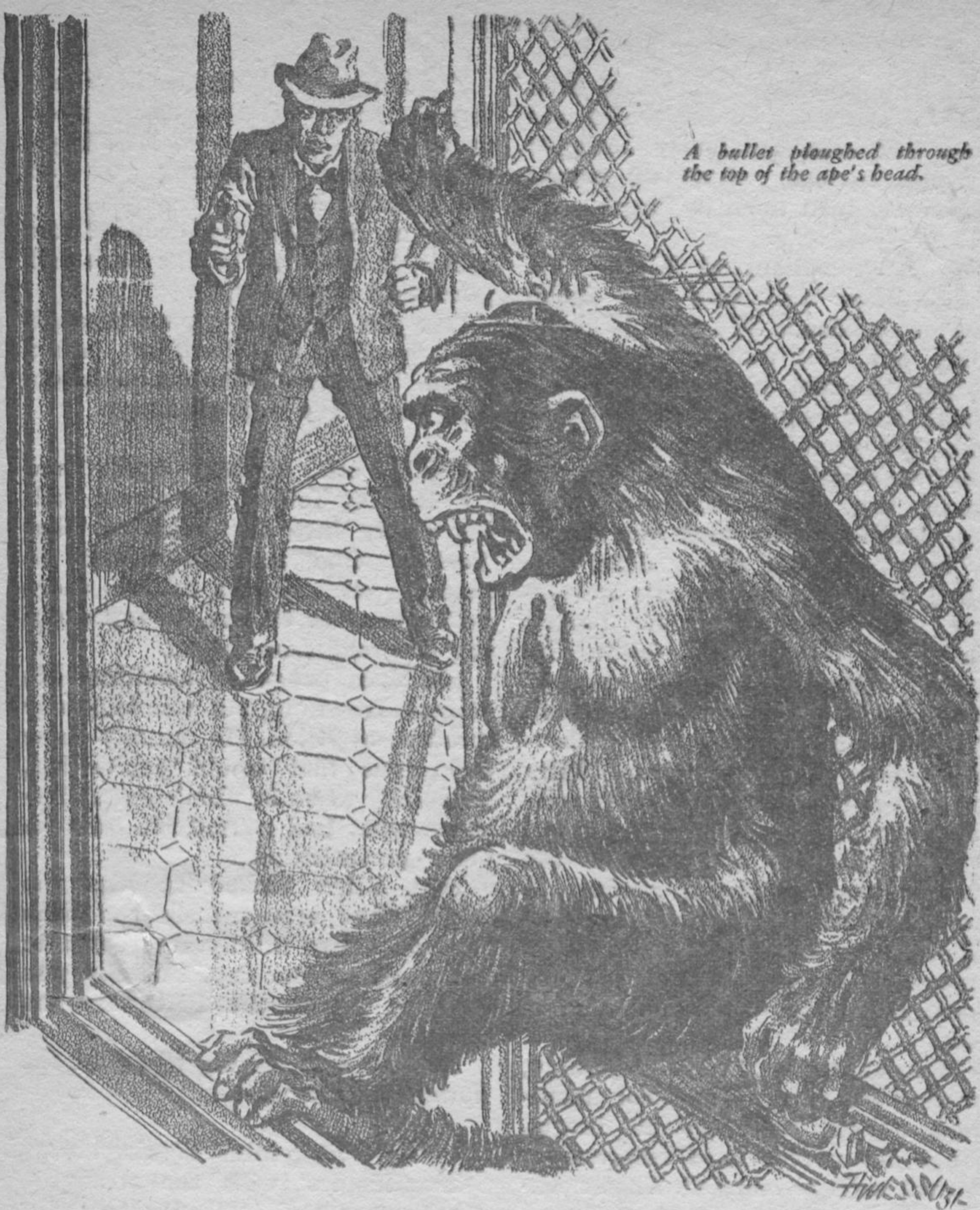
as their liner came crawling up through the Narrows and the Statue of Liberty greeted the two

with uplifted torch beyond Staten Island. New York's skyline was beautiful through the mist and smoke which always seemed to mask it. It was good to be home again.

Certainly it was a far cry from the African jungles where, for the space of a ghastly nightmare, Ellen had been a captive of

Once more Lee Bentley is caught up in the marvelous machinations of the mad genius Barter.

*A bullet ploughed through
the top of the ape's head.*



the apes and Bentley himself had had a horrible adventure. Caleb Barter, a mad scientist, had drugged him and exchanged his brain with that of an ape, and for hours Bentley had roamed the jungles hidden in the great hairy body, the only part of him remaining "Bentley" being the Bentley brain which Barter had placed in the ape's skullpan. Bentley would never forget the horror of that grim awakening, in which he had found himself

walking on bent knuckles, his voice the fighting bellow of a giant anthropoid.

Yes, it was a far cry from the African jungles to populous Manhattan.

As soon as Ellen and Lee considered themselves recovered from the shock of the experience they would be married. They had already spent two months of absolute rest in England after their escape from Africa, but they found it had not

been enough. Their story had been told in the press of the world and they had been constantly besieged by the curious, which of course had not helped them to forget.

"LEE," whispered Ellen, "I'll never feel sure that Caleb Barter is dead. We should have gone out that morning when he forgot to take his whip and we thought the vengeful apes had slain him. We should have proved it to our own satisfaction. It would be an ironic jest, characteristic of Barter, to allow us to think him dead."

"He's dead all right, dear," replied Bentley, his nostrils quivering with pleasure as he looked ahead at New York, while the breeze along the Hudson pushed his hair back from his forehead. "He had abused the great anthropoids for too many years. They seized their opportunity, don't mistake that."

"Still, he was a genius in his way, a mad, frightful genius. It hardly seems possible to me that he would allow himself to be so easily trapped. It's a reflection on his great mentality, twisted though it was."

"Forget it, dear," replied Bentley, putting his arm around her shoulders. "We'll both try to forget. After our nerves have returned to normal we'll be married. Then nothing can trouble us."

The vessel docked and later Lee and Ellen entered a taxicab near the pier.

"I'll take you to your home, Ellen," said Bentley. "Then I'll look after my own affairs for the next couple of days, which includes making peace with my father, then we'll go on from here."

They looked through the windows of the cab as they rolled into lower Fifth Avenue and headed uptown. Newsies were screaming an extra from the sidewalks,

"Excitement!" said Bentley enthusiastically. "It's certainly good to be home and hear a newsboy's unintelligible screaming of an extra, isn't it?"

On an impulse he ordered the cabbie to draw up to the curb and purchased a newspaper.

"Do you mind if I glance through the headlines?" Bentley asked Ellen. "I haven't looked at an American paper for ever so long."

THE cab started again and Bentley folded the paper, falling easily into the habit of New Yorkers who are accustomed to reading on subways where there isn't room for elbows, to say nothing of broad newspapers.

His eyes caught a headline. He started, frowning, but was instantly mindful of Ellen. He mustn't show any signs that would excite her, especially when he didn't yet understand what had caused his own instant perturbation.

Had Ellen looked at him she might have seen merely the calm face of a man mildly interested in the news of the day, but she was looking out at the Fifth Avenue shops.

Bentley was staring again at the newspaper story:

"An evil genius signing his 'manifestoes' with the strange cognomen of 'Mind Master' gives the authorities of New York City twelve hours in which to take precautions. To prove that he is able to make good his mad threats he states that at noon exactly, to-day, he will cause the death of the chief executive of a great insurance company whose offices are in the Flatiron Building. After that, at regular stated periods, warnings to be issued in each case ten hours in advance, he will steal the brains of the

twenty men whose names are hereto appended:" (There followed then a list of names, all of which were known to Bentley.)

He understood why the story had startled him, too. "Mind Master!" Anything that had to do with the human brain interested him mightily now, for he knew to what grim uses it could be put at the hands of a master scientist. Around his own head, safely covered by his hair unless someone looked closely, and even then they must needs know what they sought, was a thin white line. It marked the line of Caleb Barter's operation on him that terrible night in the African jungles, when his brain had been transferred to the skull-pan of an ape, and the ape's brain to his own cranium. Any mention of the brain, therefore, recalled to him a very harrowing experience.

It was little wonder that he shuddered.

Ellen noticed his agitation.

"What is it, dearest?" she asked softly, placing her hand in the crook of his arm.

HE was about to answer her, desperately trying to think of something to say that would not alarm her, when their taxicab, with a sudden application of the brakes, came to a sharp stop. Bentley noticed that they were at the intersection of Twenty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. The lights were still green, but nevertheless all traffic was halted.

And for a strange reason.

From the west door of the Flat-iron Building emerged a grim apparition of a man. His body was scored by countless bleeding wounds which looked as though they had been made by the fingernails of a giant. The man wore no article of clothing except his shoes.

Apparently, his clothing had been ripped from his body by the same instrument which had turned his body into a raw, dripping horror.

The man staggered, half-running, at times all but falling, toward the traffic officer at the intersection.

As he ran he screamed, horrible, babbling screams. His lips worked crazily, his eyes rolled. He was frightened beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals. His screams began and ended on the high shrill notes of utter dementia, and as he ran he pawed the air with his bleeding hands as though he fought out on all sides against invisible demons seeking to drag him down.

"Oh, my God!" said Ellen. "Even here!"

What had caused her to speak the last two words? Did she also have a premonition of grim disaster? Did she also feel, deep down inside her, as Bentley did, that the nightmare through which they had passed was not yet ended?

Bentley now sat unmoving, his eyes unblinking, as he saw the naked man stagger over to the traffic officer. The color drained from his face.

He looked at his watch. It was exactly noon.

Even without further consideration Bentley knew that this gruesome apparition had some direct connection with the newspaper story he had just read.

UNOBTRUSIVELY, trying to make it seem a preoccupied action, he folded the newspaper again and thrust it down at the end of the seat cushion. But Ellen was watching him, a haunting fear gradually coming into her eyes.

She quickly reached past him and snatched the paper before he realized her intent. The item he had read came instantly under her eyes because of the way he had auto-

matically folded the paper. She read it with staring eyes.

"So, Lee," she said, "you think there's a connection with—with—well, with *us*?"

"Absurd!" he said heartily, too heartily. "Caleb Barter is dead."

"But I have never been sure," insisted Ellen. "Oh, Lee, let's get away from here! Let's take the first boat for Bermuda—anywhere to escape this terrible fear."

"No!" he retorted harshly. "If our suspicions are correct, and I think we're unwarrantedly keyed up because of our recent experiences, the officials of New York may need my help."

"Your help? Why?"

"I know more about Caleb Barter than any other living man, perhaps."

"Then you *do* have doubts that he is dead!"

Bentley shrugged his shoulders.

"Ellen," he said, "drive on home without me. I'm going to drop off and find out all I can. If we're in for it in any way it's just as well to know it at once."

"You'll come right along?"

"Just as soon as I can make it. And I hope I'll be able to report our fears groundless."

Bentley stepped from the cab. He ordered the chauffeur to turn right into Twenty-second Street and to proceed until Ellen gave him further directions.

Then Bentley hurried through the congestion of automobiles toward the traffic officer who was fighting with the naked man, trying to subdue him. Other men were running to the officer's assistance, for it could be seen that he alone was no match for the lunatic. Bentley, however, was first to arrive.

"Give me a hand!" gasped the officer. "I can't handle 'im without usin' my club and I don't wanna do that. The poor fella don't know what he's a-doin'."

BENTLEY quickly sprang to the patrolman's assistance. Between them they soon reduced the stranger to a squirming bundle and dragged him to the sidewalk; another officer was phoning for an ambulance. The stricken man was now mumbling, babbling insanely. Blood trickled from the corners of his lips. The sight of one eye had been destroyed.

Bentley watched him, sprawled now on the sidewalk, surrounded by a group of men. The man was dying, no question about that. The talons, which had scored him, had bitten deeply and he was destined to bleed to death soon even if the wounds were not otherwise mortal.

Bentley noticed something clutched tightly in the man's right hand—something that sent a chill through his body despite the heat of a mid-July noon. The officer, apparently, had not noticed it.

Soon a clanging bell announced the arrival of an ambulance, and as the crowd stepped aside to clear the way, Bentley bent over the dying man. The man's lips were parted and he was trying with a mighty effort of will to speak.

Bentley put his ear close to the bleeding lips through which words strove to bubble. He heard parts of two words:

". . . ind . . . aster. . . ."

Bentley suddenly knew that the man was trying to say. The half-uttered words could mean only—"Mind Master."

Bentley suppressed a shudder and extended his hands to the closed right hand of the dying man. Carefully he removed from between the fingers three tufts of thick brown hair, coarse and crude of texture. There was a rattle in the naked man's throat.

Five minutes later the ambulance interne hastily scribbled in his record the entry, "Dead on Arrival."

Bentley, more frightened than he

had ever been before, entered a taxicab as soon as the body had been removed and the streets cleared. He stared closely at the tufts of hair in his hand. Maybe he had been wrong in taking them before detectives arrived on the scene, but he had to know, and he felt that these hairs proved his mad suspicions.

Caleb Barter was alive!

The hairs came from the shaggy coat of a giant anthropoid ape or a gorilla.

CHAPTER II

Ultimatum

HOW terribly far-fetched it seemed! It was unbelievable enough that Bentley had once reposed in the body of an ape. That had been in the African wilds. But the idiocy of the thing now rested in Bentley's belief that here, immediately upon landing, he was again facing something just as horrible.

But the coincidences were too clear. The palaver about "brains," and "Mind Master"—and those ape hairs in Bentley's hands. He wished he knew all that had led up to that story he had read in the paper just prior to the appearance of the naked man from the west door of the Flatiron Building. However, the killing would get front page position now, due to the importance of the dead man—Bentley never doubted it was the man whom, in the paper, the "Mind Master" had promised to slay.

Great apes in the heart of New York City! It sounded silly, preposterous. Yet, before he had gone through that dread experience with the mad Barter, Bentley would have sworn that brain transplantation was impossible. Even now he was not sure that it hadn't all been a terrible dream.

Should Bentley go at once to the

police to give them the benefit of whatever knowledge he might have of Caleb Barter? He wasn't sure. Then he decided that sooner or later he must come out into the open. So he caught a cab and went to police headquarters.

"I wish," he said, "to talk to someone about the Mind Master!"

If he had said, "I have just come from Mars," he could scarcely have caused a greater sensation.

BUT his calm statement got him an instant audience with a slender man of thirty-five or so, whose hair was prematurely gray at the temples, and whose eyes were shrewd and far-seeing.

"My name's Thomas Tyler," said the detective. He certainly didn't look the conventional detective, but Bentley knew instantly that he wasn't the conventional detective. "I work on the unusual cases. If you hadn't sent in your name I wouldn't have seen you, which means that as soon as you leave here you are to forget my name and how I look."

He motioned Bentley to a seat. Bentley sat back. Suddenly Thomas Tyler was around his desk and had pushed back the hair from Bentley's temples. He drew in his breath with a sharp hiss when he saw the white line which circled Bentley's skull.

"It's not exactly proof," he said, as though he and Bentley had been in the midst of a discussion of that awful operation Barter had performed on Bentley, "but I'd take your word for it."

"The story, in the main, was true," said Bentley.

"I thought so. What made you come here?"

"I saw that naked man run across Fifth Avenue from the door of the Flatiron Building. I saw the officer subdue him, helped him do it in fact, and saw the man die. Since there was no detective there, I took

the liberty of removing these from the fingers of the dead man."

Bentley gave Tyler the coarse hair, stained with blood. Tyler looked at it grimly for a moment or two.

"Not human hair," he said, as though talking to himself. "Not like any I know of. But . . . ah, you know what sort of hair, eh? That's what sent you here!"

"It's the hair of an ape or a gorilla."

"How do you know, for sure?"

"Once," said Bentley grimly, "for several horrible hours . . . I was a giant anthropoid ape."

TYLER'S chair legs crashed solidly to the floor.

"I see," he said. "You think this thing has some connection with your own experiences. How long ago was that?"

"Slightly over two months."

"You think the same man . . . ?"

"I don't know. But who could want, as a newspaper story I just read says, to steal the brains of men? What for? It sounds like Barter. I've never heard of anybody else with such an obsession. I'm putting two and two together—and fervently hoping they'll add up to seven instead of four. For if ever in my life I wanted to be wrong it's now."

Tyler pursed his lips. Bentley saw that his eyes were glinting with excitement.

"But there's a possibility you're right. Do you know what the Mind Master's first manifesto said? It was published by a tabloid newspaper as a sort of gag—a strange crank letter. Here it is."

Tyler tossed Bentley a newspaper clipping a week old. Bentley read quickly:

"The white race is deteriorating physically at a dangerous rate. In fifty years, if

nothing is done to prevent it, the world will be filled with men whose bodies are so soft as to be almost worthless. But I shall take steps to prevent that, as soon as I am ready. I need a week. Then I shall begin my crusade to make the white race a race of supermen, whom I alone shall rule. They shall keep the brains they have, which shall be transferred to bodies which I shall furnish.

(Signed) The Mind Master."

TYLER squinted at Bentley again.

"You see? Brains are all right, he says, but the white race needs new bodies. If he isn't suggesting brain substitution, what is he suggesting? Though I confess I never thought of your story until your name was sent in to me a while ago. For the world thinks of Barter as having been killed by the great apes."

"Yes, I told newspaper reporters that. I thought it was true. But this Mind Master must be Barter. There couldn't be two persons in the world with mental quirks so much alike."

"Tell me what Barter looks like. Oh, there are plenty of pictures extant of the famous Professor Caleb Barter who disappeared from the world some years ago, but he'll know that, of course, and he won't look like the pictures.

"Alteration of his own features should be easy for a man who juggles brains."

"He may have changed his features since I saw him, too," said Bentley. "But I'm sure I'd know him."

Tyler's telephone rang stridently. He took down the receiver. His mouth fell slackly open as his eyes lifted to Bentley's face. But he recovered himself and slapped his hand over the transmitter.

"Anybody know you came here?" asked Tyler.

Bentley shook his head.

"Well," went on Tyler, "I don't know how it happens, but this telephone message is for you!"

Bentley's heart seemed to jump into his throat. One of those hunches which sometimes were so valuable to him had struck him, as though it were a blow between the eyes. His lips tightened. His face was pale, but there was a grim light in his eyes.

He hesitated for a second, the receiver in his hand, his mouth against the transmitter.

"Well, Professor Barter?" he said conversationally.

THERE came a gasp from Thomas Tyler. He jumped to the door and motioned to someone. A man in uniform came to his side. Bentley distinctly heard Tyler tell the man to have this telephone call traced.

From the receiver came a well-remembered chuckle.

"So you were expecting me, eh, Bentley? You never really believed that one of my genius would fall such easy prey to the great apes did you?"

"Of course not, Professor," said Bentley soothingly. "It would be an insult to your vivid mentality."

"*Vivid* mentality! *Vivid* mentality! Why, Bentley, there isn't another brain in the world to compare with mine. And you of all people should know it. The whole world will know it before I'm finished, for I have made tremendous strides since you helped me to perform that crowning achievement in Africa. By the way, tell your friend Tyler, who just called the officer to the door, that it's useless to try to trace this call!"

Bentley jumped as though he had been stung. How had Barter known what Tyler was doing? How

had he guessed what Tyler had told the man in uniform? How had Barter known Bentley was visiting Tyler? How had he discovered even that Bentley was back in the United States? Why, besides, was he so friendly with Bentley now?

"You speak, Professor," said Bentley softly, "as though you could see right into police headquarters."

"I can, Bentley! I can!" said Barter impatiently, as though he were rebuking a schoolboy for saying the obvious.

"You're close by, then?"

"No. I'm a long way—several miles—from you. But I can see everything you do. And you needn't look at Tyler in such surprise!"

BENTLEY started. He had looked at Tyler in a surprised way and, clever though he was, he didn't think that Barter could have *guessed* so accurately to the second the gesture he had made. Barter chuckled.

"It's a good jest, isn't it? But listen to me, Bentley, I've a great scheme in hand for the amelioration of mankind. I need your help, mostly because you were such an excellent subject in my greatest successful experiment."

"Will it be the same sort of experiment as the other?" Bentley's heart was in his mouth as he asked the question.

"Yes, the same . . . but there are improvements I have succeeded in perfecting since the creation of Manape. My one mistake when Manape was created was in that I allowed myself to lose control of him—of you! That will not happen again. Oh, if you'll help me, Bentley, that operation will not be performed on you until you yourself request it because I shall have proved to you that it is better for you. You shall be my assistant and obey my orders, nothing more."

Lee Bentley drew a deep breath.

"If I prefer not to work with you again, Professor?"

A chuckle was Barter's answer. The chuckle broke off shortly.

"You should not refuse, Bentley," said the scientist at last. "For then I should find it necessary to remove you. You might stand in my way, and though you would be but a puny obstacle, you still would be an obstacle. For example, consider Ellen Estabrook, your fiancée. I can find no use for her . . . and she knows as much about me as you do. Therefore, at my convenience, I shall remove her."

"CALEB BARTER," Bentley's voice was hoarse with anger as he dropped his soothing mode of address toward the man he knew was insane, "if anything happens to Miss Estabrook through you I shall find you no matter how well you are guarded . . . and I shall destroy you bit by bit, as a small boy destroys a fly. For every least evil thing that happens to Miss Estabrook, a hundred times that will happen to you at my hands."

"Good!" snapped Barter, no longer chuckling. "I am happy to know how much she means to you. It shows me how easily I may control you through her. It means war then, between us? I'm sorry, Bentley, for I like you. In a way, you know, you are my creation. But in a war between us, Bentley, you haven't a chance to win."

Bentley clicked up the receiver.

"Could you trace the call, Tyler?" he snapped.

Tyler shook his head ruefully.

"We couldn't locate the right telephone, but we could tell which exchange it came through, and the lines of that exchange cover a huge section of the city."

"Can you find out exactly the section and the address of each phone on every line?"

"Yes. The exchange is Stuyvesant."

"That gives me some help. I used to live in Greenwich Village and I had a Stuyvesant number. I'm going after Barter. Say, Tyler, how do you suppose Barter knew exactly what was going on in this room?"

Tyler's face slowly whitened as his eyes looked fearfully into the eyes of Lee Bentley. He shook his head slowly.

Bentley squared his shoulders and spoke quietly and determinedly.

"Mr. Tyler," he said, "I am in a great hurry. May I be conducted in a police car? Might as well. I'll be working with you hand and glove until Barter is captured."

Bentley rode behind a shrieking siren to the home of the Estabrooks . . . while from a distance of two miles Caleb Barter watched every move and chuckled grimly to himself.

CHAPTER III

Hell's Laboratory

THE huge room was absolutely free of all sounds from anywhere save within itself. The walls, the floors, the doors were of chrome steel. The cages were iron-ribbed and ponderous.

The long table which ran down the strange room's center was covered with retorts, test tubes, Bunsen burners—all of the stock-in-trade of the scientist who spends most of his time at research work. The man who bent over the table was well past middle age. His hair was snow-white, but his cheeks were like rosy red apples. He literally seemed to glow with health. He was like a strange flame. His hands were slender, the fingers long and extraordinarily supple. His lips were redder even than his cheeks, and made one, strangely enough, think of vampires. His eyes were coal-black, fathomless, piercing.

On the bronze wall directly across the table from the swiftly laboring man was a porcelain tablet set into the bronze, and in the midst of the table were a score of little push-buttons. Above each was a red light; and below, a green one.

Several inches below each green light was a little slot which resembled a tiny keyhole, something like the keyhole in the average handbag. There was a key in each hole, and from each key hung a length of gleaming chain which shone like gold and might have been gold, or at least, some gold-plated metal. On the dangling end of each chain was another key which might have been the twin of the key in the hole above.

In the space between the keyholes and the green lights there were the letters and figures: A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4 . . . and so on up to T-20.

Plainly it was the beginning of a complicated classification system with any number of combinations possible.

BEHIND the working man the row of cages partially hid the brooding horror of the place. There were twenty cages—and in each one was a sulking, red-eyed anthropoid ape. Plainly the fact that the number of apes coincided with the number of push-buttons, and with the number of keys, to say nothing of the red lights and the green lights, was no accident. The apes were sullenly silent, proof that they feared the man at the table so much that they were afraid to move.

At last the white-haired man stopped and breathed a sigh of satisfaction. Carefully he placed in the middle of the table the instrument which he had been examining. It looked like a slightly concave aluminum plate or tympanum, save that on the apex appeared a tiny ball of the same metal. Except for the color

and the fact that the thing was almost flat, it looked like a small Manchu hat.

"Naka Machi!" said the man suddenly in a conversational tone of voice.

The chrome steel door swung open swiftly and silently and another man entered. He was about the same height as the first man, but he was younger and his eyes were blacker. His hair was as black as the wings of a crow. He was a Japanese dressed in Occidental garb.

"Naka Machi," said the white-haired one again, "I have examined every bit of the infinitesimal mechanism in the ball on this tympanum. It is perfect. You are a genius, Naka Machi. There is only one genius greater—Professor Caleb Barter!"

Naka Machi bowed low, and as he spoke his breath hissed inwardly through his teeth after the Japanese manner of admitting humility—"that my humble breath may not blow upon you"—which never needed really to be sincere.

"I am merely a genius with my fingers, Professor Barter," said Naka Machi in a musical voice. "The smaller the medium in which I work the happier I am, Professor; and in that I am a genius. But the plan for this so marvelous little radio-control, as you call it, came entirely from your head, my master. I did exactly as the plans bade me. Will it work?"

CALEB BARTER'S red face went redder still. His eyes shot flames of anger. His lips pouched. Almost he seemed on the point of striking down his Japanese assistant.

"Will it work?" he repeated. "Have you not just told me that you followed my plans exactly? Have I not just now checked your every bit of work and pronounced

it perfect? Then how can it fail to work? Have you another one ready?"

"Yes, my master. Now that I have perfected two, the work will become monotonous. If the master wishes, I can create still another radio-control, inside the head of a pin, which I should first render hollow with that skill which only Naka Machi possesses?"

Caleb Barter almost smiled.

"It will not be necessary. But it will be necessary for you to make eighteen additional radio-controls of the same size as this one, or say make twenty-four so that we shall have some extra ones in case of accident. These two will be put into action at once. Naka Machi, bring me Lecky, completely uniformed as a smart chauffeur! Have you laid in a store of clothing, as I bade you, to fit every conceivable need of Lecky, Stanley, Morton and Cleve?"

"Yes, my master."

"Then bring in Lecky accoutered as a chauffeur."

Ten minutes later a young man entered behind Naka Machi. He was slender and his chauffeur's uniform fitted him like a glove. He looked like a soldier in it. Indeed his bearing, his whole stance, spoke of many years as a soldier—and a proud one. The fellow was brimful of health. His cheeks were rosy with vitality. He looked like a man with health so abundant he never found means to tire himself to the point where he could sleep dreamlessly.

But, nevertheless his arms hung listlessly at his sides. His eyes seemed empty of hope, dull and lifeless, and one looked into those eyes and shuddered. One tried to gaze deeply into them and found oneself baffled. There was no soul behind them.

"Come here, Lecky," said Barter coldly.

LECKY glided effortlessly forward to stand before Barter.

"You've no brains, Lecky," said Barter emotionlessly; "no brains of your own. You have a splendid body which moves only at the will of Caleb Barter. I need that body for my purposes. But a man with brains is dangerous. That's why you haven't any."

Barter now took the silvery tympanum with the ball atop it and set it on the head of Lecky. On top of it he placed the chauffeur's cap, bringing it down tightly to keep the tympanum in place.

"If I had it to do again I'd insert the tympanum under the skull as part of the operation, Naka Machi," said Barter as he worked. "We'll do that hereafter. And we begin work immediately. I'm going to send Lecky out now to get the first subject."

"The first subject, sir?"

"Yes. Manhattan's richest man. A man must have brains to become Manhattan's richest man, and I need men with brains. His name is Harold Hervey. He will be leaving his office in the Empire State Building in about half an hour. I want Lecky to be on hand to meet him."

On his own head Barter placed a second tympanum which Naka Machi had brought him. Over it he pulled a rubber cap, like a bathing cap with a hole cut in the top.

"Now, we'll try it out, Naka Machi," said Barter. "Which one of these lights is Lecky's?"

"B-2, my master."

Barter sat down under the light marked "B-2" and lifted the key which dangled from the end of the golden chain. This key he inserted in a tiny orifice in the ball atop his head. Then he turned in his chair to look at Lecky. Barter's face was a mask of concentration as he gazed intently at the young man.

LECKY stiffened to attention. His right hand shot to his cap visor in salute. His lips twisted into a travesty of a smile. For a few seconds he went through a strange series of posturings. He stood in the attitude of a boxer preparing to attack. He danced smartly on his toes. He bent double and touched the floor with the palms of his hands. He jumped up and down with his legs stiff. He stopped suddenly with his right hand at rigid salute. But his eyes were still vacant through every posture.

Barter's face showed a glow of satisfaction.

"He did exactly what I willed him to do! I am his master. He is my slave—even more abjectly than you are my slave, Naka Machi!"

"But that would be impossible, my master," said Naka Machi, hissing again through his teeth as he sucked in his breath. "None could be more abjectly your slave than I."

"Do not say anything is impossible," said Barter peevishly, "when I say otherwise. Anything is possible to me! Now, we'll send Lecky forth. I'll watch him through the heliotubes and control his every move. While I am directing Lecky you will prepare the table behind me for the first of our world-revolutionizing operations."

"Yes, my master," said the Japanese humbly.

"But first, it's just as well that Lecky is in a good humor, even though he is my slave. Where are the walnuts, Naka Machi?"

The Japanese tendered a large walnut to Barter. Barter rose and approached Lecky who still stood at salute. He stopped a couple of paces in front of the soldierly man and held up the walnut as a man sometimes holds up food to a dog, bidding him "speak" before he may be fed.

THEN Lecky did a strange thing.

He began to jump up and down like a pleased child. His jumping caused him to lose his balance, but he recaptured it by pressing the backs of his hands against the floor. His hitherto expressionless eyes lost their dullness. Saliva dribbled at the corners of his mouth. Barter tossed him the walnut. Lecky held it under his right forefinger, against the *heel* of his thumb, instead of between thumb and forefinger, as he lifted it to his mouth.

Barter chuckled.

"Even the human casement cannot wholly hide the ape, eh, Naka Machi?" said Barter.

Naka Machi hissed.

Barter returned to the porcelain slab banked with the lights and the keys. He readjusted the keys and his face became thoughtful again.

Lecky turned smartly, still nibbling at his walnut, strode to the bronze door and let himself out.

Through the heliotube directly above the key marked "B-2," Caleb Barter watched him go, and kept watching him as he made his way to the street. Barter looked ahead of his puppet, noting the cars which were parked at the curb. He saw a stately limousine. He grinned. The chauffeur was not in sight. Barter looked for him and found him at a table in a nearby restaurant, his back to the window.

Barter looked back at his puppet and his face became serious with concentration.

Lecky walked blithely along the street and turned right when he was opposite the limousine. Without a moment's hesitation, he stepped into the limousine, pressed the starter, shifted gears, turned in the middle of the block and started swiftly uptown.

After Lecky had shifted gears he drove with his left hand alone.

His right was still busy with the walnut.

Barter now looked like a man in a trance, so deeply did he concentrate on his task of guiding his soulless, ape-brained puppet, Lecky, through the heavy traffic of Manhattan.

CHAPTER IV

The Opening Gun

"**T**HAT list, Tyler," said Bentley, after he had somewhat calmed the fears of Ellen Estabrook and had returned to the task of tracing Barter, "is headed by Harold Hervey, the multi-millionaire. I know Barter well enough to know that he'll go down the list methodically, taking each person in turn. We'd best take immediate precautions to guard the old man's home. For Barter, if not entirely ready to take drastic steps, must be almost ready, else he couldn't issue his manifestoes and take a chance of some slip-up before he could get really started."

"Why do you suppose he named Hervey on the list?" asked Tyler.

"Because Hervey is a financial genius. Barter wishes not only to carry out his plan of creating a race of supermen, but wishes at the same time to maintain personal control of them. And to control Manhattan, from which he logically hopes to extend his control to the whole United States, then to the whole world, Barter must also control the money marts. Hervey is the shrewdest financier in the world."

"But won't we frighten Hervey's family if we take steps now?"

"Better to frighten them now than to be too late entirely. However, we can place his house under surveillance without the knowledge of the family for the time being. And you'd better send a couple of men to his office in the Empire

State Building to see that nothing happens to him on the way home this evening. I talked to him by telephone and he pooh-poohed the whole thing. Hard-headed business executives have no imagination."

Bentley and Tyler rode uptown in the back seat of a speeding police car driven by one of the best chauffeurs Bentley had ever ridden behind. He edged through holes in the traffic where Bentley could scarcely see any holes at all. He estimated the speed of cars which might have collided with the police vehicle and slipped through with inches to spare. In his way the man was a genius. But Bentley was yet to see the driving of a master genius. . . .

FAR out in the residential district the police car came to a stop. Other police cars arrived at intervals to disgorge men in plain clothes who immediately entered upon their guard duties as unobtrusively as possible. If Hervey's family noticed at all they would scarcely attach any importance to the arrival of cars and the discharging of passengers who seemed to have nothing to do except dawdle on the sidewalks.

But all the way uptown a hunch had ridden Bentley. He had the feeling that no matter how fast the police car traveled, no matter how skilfully the chauffeur inched his way through the press, they would be too late to save Hervey. The feeling became an obsession. Many times he called through the speaking tube.

"Faster, driver, for God's sake, faster!"

Now near the home of Harold Hervey, Bentley found himself unable to walk slowly, with the air of nonchalance, which the other police officers wore like a cloak.

"Something's happened," said Bentley, "I'm sure of it. I feel that

Barter is so close to me that I could touch him if I knew in which direction to extend my fingers."

Suddenly a speeding car, with horn bellowing, came crashing up the street toward the Hervey residence. It was traveling at great speed, careening from side to side like a ship in a storm at sea.

"There comes Hervey's car," said Tyler. "And something has happened to make him travel like that. Old man Hervey doesn't allow his chauffeur to go faster than twenty miles an hour.

TYLER and Bentley were near by when the car squealed to a stop before the Hervey residence and a hatless, disheveled man leaped out almost before the car stopped rolling.

"That's not Hervey," said Tyler. "That's his private secretary. Something's up. It's time we took a hand in things."

Tyler and Bentley grasped the young man by the elbow.

"What's up?" demanded Tyler.

"It's Mr. Hervey, sir," panted the secretary. "It just happened. He's been kidnaped!"

The secretary was a slight man, but fear had given him strength. He almost dragged Tyler and Bentley off their feet as he strode on up the walk leading to the home of Hervey.

"You'll scare his family half to death!" said Tyler.

"It'll have to come sometime, Tyler," said Bentley. "It might as well be now. They'll have to know. We'll have to sit inactively from this moment on. Tyler, there's nothing that can be done for Hervey. Barter has scored. We couldn't catch him now to save ourselves from perdition. But his next step will involve the Hervey menage. We'll have to wait there for his next move."

Tyler and Bentley entered the

vast gloomy structure of the old-fashioned Hervey domicile on the heels of the frightened secretary. Mrs. Hervey, a faded woman of sixty or so, met them at the door. Her head was held high, her lips grimly drawn into a straight line.

"So," she said evenly, "they've got Mr. Hervey. I begged him to take those threats seriously. He's been either killed or kidnaped."

"Kidnaped," said Bentley, continuing brutally because of the courage he saw in the old woman's face. "And that means he'll be dead within the hour, if he isn't dead already. We've got to stay here for a few hours, to await the next move of the madman calling himself the Mind Master, in the hope that we can trace him when he makes his next move."

Mrs. Hervey lifted her head still higher.

"We'll place no obstacles in your path, gentlemen," she said, "if you are from the police. The family will confine itself to the upper floors of the house."

TYLER and Bentley took possession of the living room. Outside a dozen plain-clothes men were to patrol the grounds during the hours of darkness.

Other men were at every adjacent street corner. A rat could not have got through unobserved.

Tyler and Bentley took seats at a table facing the door. The police car in which they had arrived stood at the curb, with the chauffeur at the wheel, the motor humming softly.

"Timkins," said Bentley, addressing the private secretary who stood in the most distant corner of the room, his eyes fearfully fixed on the street door, "how was Mr. Hervey captured?"

"I was accompanying him to his car, sir," replied the young man, "when a dapper fellow in a chauffeur's

feur's uniform confronted us on the sidewalk. He stood as stiff and straight as a soldier. He didn't say a word. He just looked at Mr. Hervey. Mr. Hervey stopped because the man was blocking the sidewalk. I looked into the chauffeur's eyes. They seemed utterly dead. I shivered. I'd have sworn the man had no soul, now that I look back at it. Suddenly he lashed out with his fist, striking Mr. Hervey on the jaw. Mr. Hervey started to fall. The man caught him under the arms and tossed him into the tonneau of a limousine at the curb. The car was away before I could summon the police."

Bentley nodded.

"Which way did the car go?" he demanded.

"Downtown, at top speed," replied Timkins.

Bentley turned to Tyler.

"The Stuyvesant exchange is downtown," he said. "Now Timkins says that the kidnaper's car went downtown. And the naked man was killed in the Flatiron Building, which is well downtown in its turn. Tyler, fill all the area covered by the Stuyvesant exchange with plain-clothes men. Telephone Headquarters to see whether a stolen limousine has been reported from somewhere in the area. Barter wouldn't have cars of his own for fear they could be traced. He'll use stolen cars when he uses cars at all. And he had his puppet pick up the limousine close to his hideout."

TYLER nodded and quickly spoke into the telephone on the table at his elbow.

The telephone reminded Bentley of Ellen Estabrook.

When Tyler had finished issuing pointed instructions Bentley called the residence of the Estabrooks in Astoria, Long Island.

Carl Estabrook answered the telephone.

"Is Ellen all right?" asked Bentley. "May I speak to her?"

Carl Estabrook's answering gasp came plainly over the wire.

"Are you crazy, Lee?" he asked. "Not ten minutes ago you telephoned Ellen and told her to meet you near the arch in Washington Square. I asked her if she was sure the voice was yours, and she was. . . ."

But Bentley, white-faced, had already clicked up the receiver.

"Tyler," he said, "Ellen Estabrook, my fiancée, is walking into a trap. It's Barter again. He'd know how to imitate my voice well enough to fool Ellen. It would be simple enough for a man like him. He probably had that long conversation with me at headquarters to make sure he hadn't forgotten the timber and pitch of my voice . . . and to hear how it sounded over the telephone. Please have plain-clothes men pick up Ellen in Washington Square. And that, Tyler, if you'll notice, is also downtown."

Bentley felt that he would go mad with anxiety as he awaited some news from the plain-clothes men Tyler had ordered to look for Ellen Estabrook.

He had asked Tyler to issue rather unusual instructions to the plain-clothes men around the Hervey residence. They were to make no attempt to halt anyone who might approach the house, but were to permit no one to depart. It was a weak plan, but knowing the supreme egotism of Barter, Bentley felt that the old scientist would deliberately accept such a challenge. He wouldn't mind risking the loss of a minion.

HE controls his puppets from his hideout, Tyler," Bentley explained, "and won't hesitate to send them into danger since it can't touch him. And he watches every

move they make, too. He's made some television adaptation of his own. I'll wager, if he so desires, he can see us sitting here right now, even perhaps hear what we say. I can fancy hearing him chuckle, and Tyler. . . ?"

"Yes?"

"I can see old man Hervey on an operating table with Barter bending over him, working fiendishly. Behind Barter are cages of apes."

"But how could he transport apes to his hideout?"

"He could manage to smuggle anything anywhere. Money paves the way to any accomplishment, Tyler. We needn't concern ourselves with how he does it, but with the fact that he must surely have apes in his hideout."

There came suddenly an imperious ringing of the doorbell.

Bentley and Tyler leaped to their feet, their hands streaking for their automatics which they had placed within easy reach on the table. Side by side they sprang for the door, and flung it open.

A chill of horror ran through Bentley.

"Mother of God!" cried Tyler.

"Mr. Hervey!" shrieked Timkins. The secretary, noting the figure which toppled so grimly into the room, fainted. The thud of his body followed the thud of the old man's body to the floor.

In that first moment of overwhelming terror, all three men noted that Hervey's skull-pan was missing.

"Look after details here, Tyler!" cried Bentley, quickly recovering himself. "I'm after whoever brought the old man home."

Bentley was racing down the path for the street, where a man in chauffeur's uniform was hurling himself into a limousine, while bullets from half a dozen plain-clothes men, racing to head him off, sang about his ears. But the stranger

gained the driver's seat and the limousine was away like a shot. The police car was rolling as Bentley leaped upon the running board, then eased in beside the driver.

"Don't stop for anything!" cried Bentley. "Keep that car in sight!"

The car headed downtown at breakneck speed.

CHAPTER V

To Broadway's Horror

BENTLEY would never forget that nightmarish ride downtown. It was a dream as terrifying and ghastly as had been his experience in the African jungles when he had been Manape. Added to the utter fear of the ride was his fear for the safety of Ellen Estabrook. Caleb Barter, so far, was utterly invincible. It seemed he could not be beaten or outwitted in any way. But Bentley set his lips tightly.

Caleb Barter must have some weak spot in his insane armor, some way by which he could be reached and destroyed—and Bentley swore to himself that it would be he who would find that weak spot.

The limousine ahead was going at dangerous speed. The police chauffeur beside Bentley crouched low over the wheel as he drove. His eyes never left the speeding limousine. People on the sidewalks stared in astonishment as the two cars flashed downtown.

The leading car sped on, the driver obviously expecting ways to open in the last second before threatened collision. He passed cars on the left and the right. There were times when his wheels were up on the curb as he went through lanes between cars and sidewalks. He was determined to go through.

Only Bentley understood that the driver ahead was an automaton, a man whose brain did not know the meaning of fear. He knew that

from his hideout Caleb Barter was directing the flight of the escaping car. He could fancy the old man of the apple-red cheeks, sitting in a chair in his hideout, his hands in the air as though they gripped the wheel of a car, sweat breaking forth on his cheeks as he guided his puppet through the press of cars.

But by now in that uncanny way that sometimes happens the streets were being cleared as if by magic before the flight of one whom all observers must have thought a madman. Only Bentley knew that the driver ahead was not a madman.

HIS own car careened from side to side. Bentley wondered what the chauffeur would think if he knew he was driving a race against one of Barter's supermen. He would perhaps have realized that no man could possibly follow with any degree of success. The police driver had succeeded so far only because, Bentley guessed, he felt that where any other man could drive, so could he.

Only Bentley knew that the driver up there was not a "man" in the normal meaning of the word. He wondered who "he" really was—not that it mattered greatly, for the entity required to make "him" a normal man had perhaps been destroyed, or had become part of some giant anthropoid to be used later in Barter's ghastly experiments.

"I wonder if Tyler will send out calls for police cars in other parts of the city to try and cut off the runaway," shouted Bentley above the shrieking of the motor and the wailing of the siren. "Are any police cars equipped with radio?"

"Several," answered the police chauffeur. "And they are able to cut in on various public radio stations, too. By this time warnings are being heard on every blaring radio in Manhattan."

The two cars sped on. For a brief space the car ahead took to the sidewalk. Suddenly a human body was tossed violently against the side of a building, and the fleeing car passed on. As the pursuing car passed the spot Bentley knew by the shape of the bundle that the enemy had killed a woman. At that speed he must have crushed every bone in her body. In a matter of seconds the information would be telephoned to radio studios and people would be warned to take to open doorways when they saw cars traveling at undue rates of speed.

"I'm a better driver than he is!" yelled the police chauffeur, out of the side of his mouth at Bentley. "I haven't killed anyone yet."

The words had scarcely left his mouth when a blind man, tapping his way with a cane, came from behind a building at an intersection and stepped into the gutter. The fool, couldn't he hear the shrieking of the siren? But perhaps he was deaf, too.

THE police chauffeur turned sharply to the left and for a second Bentley held his breath expecting the careening car to turn over. If it did it would roll over a dozen times, and destroy anything that happened to be in its path. But with a superhuman manipulation of the wheel the police chauffeur righted the car, got it straightened out again, and was on his way. The old man had not been touched, but there was no doubt that he had felt the wind of the great car's passing.

The fleeing car was gaining now. It rode madly down Broadway. The great pillared intersection where Broadway cuts through Sixth Avenue was dead ahead. The fleeing car continued on, crashing through, while cars evaded it in every direction, and into Broadway beyond. After it went Bentley, all

other matters forgotten as he prayed to the god of speed to guide them through.

Two cars came out of Thirty-first Street. Their drivers saw their danger at the same time. But they turned different ways, and as Bentley's car flashed past them the two cars seemed welded solidly together. They were rolling across the sidewalk toward the huge plate glass window of a restaurant. Just as the pursuing car lost them as they swept past, the two cars went through that plate glass window. Bentley, in his mind's eye, saw the two dead, mutilated drivers, and the passengers with them, he saw the wreckage of the restaurant, the mangled diners who sat at the tables nearest the fatal window.

"More marks against Barter," he muttered to himself. "How long will the list be before I'll be able to drag him down?"

ON and on went the two cars. People packed the sidewalks, but they kept close against the buildings. The streets were almost deserted now, for that warning had got ahead. Three other police cars were careening down the street, too. Bentley saw them with pleasure. Other cars would be coming in to head off the fleeing limousine. This one puppet of Barter's, at least, would be pocketed before he could find time to leap from his car and escape.

"Barter's sweating blood as he saws with both hands at an imaginary driver's wheel," thought Bentley. "When will he give up—and what will his driver do when Barter relinquished control?"

For the first time the grim thought came to him. He knew that the creature there had the brain of an ape. What would an ape do if he suddenly found himself at the wheel of a car going down Broadway at eighty miles an hour? He would

chatter, and jump up and down. The plunging car, with accelerator full on, would be out of control.

"God Almighty, I never thought of that!" yelled Bentley. "As soon as he sees he can't save his puppet he'll let him get out the best way he can, himself . . . and that car will be traveling, uncontrolled, at eighty miles an hour."

As though his very statement had fathered the thought, two police cars swept into the intersection at Twenty-third Street and Fifth Avenue. The fleeing limousine was turning right to go down Fifth Avenue.

The police cars were brought to a halt to effectively stop the further progress of the speeding limousine. Three other cars plunged in to make the box barrage of cars effective. The fleeing car was trapped. Barter must know that, if he did know, it proved that he could see everything that transpired. The next few seconds would show.

BENTLEY gasped as he put his hand on the driver's arm to have him slow down to prevent a wholesale pile-up in the busy intersection. He gasped with horror as he did so, for the fleeing car was now going crazy. It zigzagged from side to side. Now it rode the two right wheels, now the two left.

And suddenly the driver swung nimbly out through the left window, his hands reaching up over the top, and in a moment he was on the roof of the careening car.

"I've seen apes swing into trees like that," Bentley thought.

While the car plunged on, the creature stood up on the doomed limousine, and in spite of the fact that the wind of the car's passing must have been terrific, the ghastly hybrid jumped up and down on the top like a delighted child viewing a new toy or riding a shoot-the-chutes.

Suddenly the creature's right leg went through the top's fabric. It struggled to regain its footing as an ape might struggle to regain position on a limb in the jungles.

At that moment the fleeing car crashed mercilessly into the two nearest police cars ahead. The men inside had expected the driver to slow down to avoid a collision. How could they know what sort of brain lurked within the driver's skull? They couldn't . . . and three policemen paid with their lives for their lack of knowledge as their bodies were hurled beneath a mass of twisted wreckage, crushed out of human semblance.

THE hybrid atop the fatal car was hurled through the air like a thunderbolt. His body passed over the railing of the subway entrance before the Flatiron Building and Bentley knew he had crashed to his death on the steps.

The police car had already come to a stop, and Bentley was running toward the subway entrance.

The shapeless bleeding bundle on the steps no longer even resembled a man. Fortunately nobody had been struck by the hurtling body; and, miraculously enough, Barter's pawn was not yet quite dead.

Moans of animal pain came through his bleeding lips. The eyes scarcely noticed Bentley, though there was a slight flicker of fear in them. Then, in the instant of death, even that slight expression passed from them. Bentley saw the scarline about the skull.

And now Bentley knew that Barter was missing no slightest move, that he saw everything. . . .

For the ghastly hybrid on the steps raised his right hand in meticulous salute . . . and died. It was an ironic, grotesque gesture.

Plain-clothes men gathered around.

"Take his fingerprints," said

Bentley quickly. "Then telegraph the fingerprint section, U. S. Army, at Washington, for this man's identity."

An ambulance was taking aboard the three mangled policemen as Bentley stepped back into his car for the ride down to Washington Square to see what dread thing had happened to Ellen Estabrook.

CHAPTER VI

High Jeopardy

ELLEN ESTABROOK was almost in hysterics when Bentley reached her. She had been immediately picked up by plainclothes men and had thought herself captured by minions of Barter. She had been panic-stricken for a moment, she told Bentley, and it had taken her some little time to be persuaded that she was in the hands of police.

But Bentley's heart was filled to overflowing with gratitude that he had been able to safeguard Ellen against Barter. He never doubted it had been Barter who had telephoned her. And even now he fancied he could hear Barter's chuckle of amusement. Barter was watching, perhaps even listening. Bentley felt that the madman was just biding his time. Barter could have taken Ellen in this attempt, but hadn't tried greatly, knowing himself invincible, knowing that he could take her at any moment if it was necessary. And he might take her even if it were not necessary, since he had warned Bentley she must be removed.

The police car raced back uptown so that Bentley could inform himself of any new developments in the Hervey case. Ellen snuggled against him gratefully. "You'll have to stick close to me," said Bentley, "until something happens, or until the exigencies of service draw me away from you. Then it will be up

to Tom Tyler to look after you."

"I can look after myself," she retorted spiritedly. "I'm over age and not without brains. . . ."

"Yet you went to Washington Square," said Bentley gently. "Didn't it even seem strange to you that I would have selected such a place as a rendezvous?"

ELLEN turned away from him and her lips trembled. His gentle thrust had hurt her.

"But I would have sworn it was your voice, Lee," she said. "And—I still think it was!"

"I tell you I didn't phone you to meet me in Washington Square!"

"But you told me you had talked with Barter for a long time on the headquarters phone, didn't you? Remember that you are dealing with the cleverest and maddest brain we know of to-day. What if he had merely talked with you to get a record of your voice? Suppose a voice were composed of certain ingredients, certain sounds. Suppose these ingredients could somehow be captured on a sensitized plate of some kind! Edison would have been burned as a sorcerer a few centuries before he invented the wax record. Twenty years ago who would have thought of talking pictures . . . voices permanently recorded on celluloid?"

"But the talkie films merely parrot, over and over again, the words of actual people. When I talked with Barter this morning I certainly said nothing about meeting you at Washington Square."

"But the tone, the timber, the frequency of your voice! Lee, suppose he had gone a step further than the talkies and had found a way to break the voice apart and put it back together to suit himself. . . .?"

"Good Lord, Ellen! It sounds crazy . . . but if you would have sworn that voice was mine, then

mine it may have been, speaking words with my voice that I never spoke personally. But wait until we find out for sure. We're just guessing."

But the idea stuck in his mind and he believed in it enough to tell Tyler, upon arriving at the Hervey residence, to warn every man named on the list of the Mind Master to make no appointments over the telephone, no matter how sure they were of the voices at the other end of the wire.

It sounded wild, but was it?

THAT night Ellen and Bentley occupied rooms which faced each other across the hall in a mid-town hotel, and plain-clothes men were on duty to right and left in the hall. There were men on the roof and in the lobby, in the garage, everywhere skulkers might be expected to look for coigns of vantage from which to proceed against Ellen Estabrook. Bentley knew quite well that Barter would not drop his intention against Ellen, especially since he had failed once already.

Tyler and Bentley sat in Bentley's room drinking black coffee and discussing their plans for the next day. The latest paper had contained another manifesto of the Mind Master! the second man on his list was to be taken at ten o'clock the next day. The man was president of a great construction company. His name was Saret Balisle; he was under thirty, slim as a professional dancer, and dark as a gypsy.

"But what does Barter want with all these big shots?" asked Thomas Tyler. "Just what is the point of his stealing their brains and putting them into the skull-pans of apes, if that's what you think he has in mind?"

"The Barter touch," said Bentley grimly. "At first he probably in-

tended to kill just any men and make the transfer, and then use his manapes to send against the men he wished to capture, and through whom he intended to gain control of Manhattan. Then he decided, since he had learned to control his manapes, by radio I suppose, that it would be an ironic touch to make virtual slaves of the "key" men he had chosen for his crusade."

"But why the transplantation at all, even if the man is mad? He reasons logically. Only his premises are unthinkable . . . and he builds successful ghastly experiments on top of them. . . ."

"**H**E claims he wishes to build a race of supermen," Bentley answered. "His reason for the brain transference is therefore plain. An anthropoid ape has a body which is several times as hardy, durable and mighty as that of even the strongest man, but the ape has not the brain of a civilized man. A specialized man, one with a highly developed brain, generally has a very weak body. He's constantly put to the necessity of taking exercise to keep from growing sick. Therefore the ape's body and the man's brain would seem, to Barter, an ideal combination. That nature didn't plan it so troubles him not at all. He will make a fool of nature!"

"I wonder if we'll get him. Nobody knows how many lives have been lost already."

"We'll get him, Tyler. I'll bet anything you want to name that your men have walked back and forth across his hideout. I'll bet that decent, respectable people live within mere yards of him and do not know it. We'll get to him the second he makes a mistake of any kind. Maybe he'll make his first one when he tries to get Saret Balisle—Good Lord, I forgot something. Tyler, phone again and ask Head-

quarters if the coroner found anything strange about the head of the men I chased down Fifth Avenue."

Tyler phoned.

"Yes," he said, clicking up the receiver, "he had bits of metal which looked like aluminum in his scalp; but the autopsy shows that it came from outside somewhere."

"It's part of Barter's radio control," muttered Bentley, "it *must* be! It has to be . . . and I didn't think of looking for it at the time."

LONG before sunrise Bentley and Tyler repaired to the office of Saret Balisle, letting themselves in with keys which had been furnished them last night. It had been decided that Balisle would not try to run away from the threat of the Mind Master, but would be in his office as usual. If he ran, and got out of touch with the police, Barter would get him anyway and nobody would be the wiser.

Balisle had grinned and shrugged his shoulders, but the wanness in his cheeks showed that he didn't take the threats lightly, considering what it was thought had happened to Harold Hervey.

"I wonder," said Tyler as they walked through the cool of the morning to the Clinton Building on lower Fifth Avenue, where Balisle had his offices, "how Barter keeps his apes with men's brains from trying to break away from him when he has to divert his mental control to other channels?"

Bentley hesitated, seeking a logical answer. It seemed simple enough when the answer came to his mind.

"Suppose, Tyler," he said, "that you wakened from a nightmare and looked into a mirror to discover that you were an anthropoid ape? That you were incapable of speaking, of using your hands save in the clumsiest fashion? When it came home to you what had hap-

pened to you, would you rush right out into the street, hoping that the people on the sidewalks would understand that you were a man in ape's clothing?"

"Good Lord! I never thought of that!"

"You would if you'd ever been an ape. I know the feeling."

"Then Barter's manapes are more surely prisoners than if they were sentenced to serve their entire lives in the deepest solitary cells in Sing Sing! How horrible—but still, they yet would have a way of escape."

"Yes, simply break out and start running, knowing that the crowd would soon take and destroy them. Right enough—but even when one knows oneself an ape it isn't easy to destroy oneself."

THEY entered the offices of Saret Balisle and looked about them. It was just an ordinary office. They looked in clothes closets and in shadowy corners. They took every possible precaution in their survey of the situation. They looked for hidden instruments of destruction. They looked for hidden dictaphones. They were extremely thorough in their preliminary preparations for the defense of Saret Balisle.

At five minutes of ten o'clock Balisle was at his desk, pale of face, but grinning confidently.

There were men in uniform in the hallways, on the roof, in the windows of rooms across the avenue. Bentley and Tyler should have felt sure that not even a mouse could have broken through the cordon to reach Saret Balisle. But Bentley was doubtful.

He went to the window nearest Balisle and looked out. Sixteen stories down was Fifth Avenue, patrolled in this block by a dozen blue-coats and as many more plain-

clothes men. Saret Balisle seemed to be impregnable.

But at ten o'clock exactly, a blood-curdling scream came from the room adjoining Balisle's, where some insurance company had offices. The scream was followed by other screams—all the screams of women. . . .

For just a moment Bentley and Tyler whirled to stare at the door giving onto the hall, their hands tightly gripping their automatics.

"God Almighty!" It came in a choked scream from the lips of Saret Balisle, simultaneous with the falling of a shower of glass in the room.

TYLER and Bentley whirled back.

A giant anthropoid ape stood on the window sill, and the brute's left hand held tightly clasped the ankle of Balisle, holding him as a child holds a rag doll.

The ape swung Balisle out over the abyss.

Tyler flung up his automatic.

"Don't!" shouted Bentley. "If you shoot he'll drop Balisle!"

Bentley felt sick and the bottom seemed to drop out of his stomach as the anthropoid, still holding Balisle as lightly as though he didn't know he held extra weight at all, dropped from sight.

Tyler and Bentley leaped to the window, looked down. The ape had dropped safely to the ledge of the window just below. He held on easily with his right hand while Bentley and Tyler swayed dizzily. The anthropoid still held Balisle by the ankle.

A head looked out of the window to the right. A frightened woman.

"God!" she choked. "That beast came out of the clothes closet. We've been wondering why we couldn't open it. He must have been inside, holding it."

A hundred men, all crack shots, stood helpless on roofs, in windows across the street, in the street below, while the anthropoid ape dropped slowly down the face of the Clinton Building toward the street.

How would Barter lead his minion free of this tangle when, as was inevitable, the brute reached ground level?

CHAPTER VII

Strange Interview

BENTLEY and Tyler were to learn in the next few minutes how great was the executive ability of Caleb Barter. He had created a mighty puzzle, each and every bit of which must fit together exactly. Time was important in making the puzzle complete—and the puzzle changed with each passing second. As the anthropoid went slowly down the face of the Clinton Building, Bentley was sure that Barter controlled every move and saw every slightest thing that transpired. He knew very well that of all the great organization which had been set to prevent the taking of Saret Balisle, not a man would now shoot at the ape for fear of jeopardizing the life of Balisle.

And yet Balisle was being spirited away to pass through an experience which would be far worse than a merciful bullet through the brain or the heart. Bentley knew he would be justified in the eyes of humanity if he ordered his men to fire upon the anthropoid, even if he were sure that Balisle would die. But as long as there was life there was hope, too, and he couldn't bring himself to give the order.

The ape dropped down the face of the building as easily as he would have dropped from limb to limb of a jungle tree. The sixteen stories under him did not discon-

cert him at all. Bentley had a suspicion about this particular ape, but he wouldn't know for a time yet whether his suspicion had a basis in fact. He couldn't think of a man—especially an old man like Harold Hervey—making that hair-raising descent. Yet . . . if he were controlled, mind and soul, by Caleb Barter the Mind Master. . . ?

"Tyler," said Bentley tersely. "The instant the ape reaches the street I'm going to order your men to fire. You will shout out to them now, designating which ones shall fire. Be sure they are crack marksmen who will drill the ape without hitting Balisle—and, by all means, have them wait so that the ape's fall won't send Balisle crashing to death."

"Maybe I'd better tell them to rush him?"

"Maybe that's better, but remember they're dealing with a giant anthropoid, in strength at least, and that somebody is likely to be fatally injured. In addition the ape may tear Balisle apart as soon as men start to close in on him. Barter will have thought of that, and all he'll have to do to make his puppet perform is to will him to do it. No, they'll have to shoot—and tell them to aim at his head and heart."

TYLER leaned out of the window and shouted to the men across the street.

"Shoot as soon as the ape reaches the sidewalk!" he cried. "Be careful you don't hit Balisle."

And from Balisle himself, muffled and frightened, came a sudden cry.

"Shoot now! I'd rather fall and have it over with!"

There was a moment of silence. Bentley almost gave the order to fire when the ape was at the twelfth story, but he held his tongue by a supreme effort of will.

Balisle looked down. It must have been a terrifying experience to swing above such a horrible abyss by one leg, and for a moment Balisle lost his head. He screamed and started to grapple with his grim captor.

"Don't, Balisle!" shouted Tyler. "You'll make him lose his balance. Hang on as you are and we'll get him when he reaches the street."

"What good will it do?" screamed Balisle, his voice taking on a high keening note as the ape dropped again, this time from the twelfth to the eleventh floor. "He slipped it over a hundred men to get me this far. He'll find a way to beat you when he reaches the street, too."

Bentley had a sinking feeling that Balisle spoke the truth; but even so, he could not see how anybody, even Barter, could walk through the trap which was being tightened around the descending anthropoid.

It made Bentley dizzy to watch the slow methodical descent of the anthropoid. He could fancy himself in Balisle's position and it made him sick and faint. He understood the desperation which caused Balisle to make yet another attempt to battle with the ape.

Then the ape did a grim thing.

He paused on the eleventh floor, and crouching on a window sill, deliberately snapped Balisle's head against the wall of the Clinton Building! In his time Bentley had slain rabbits exactly like that. Balisle hung now as limp as a rag and blood dripped from his mouth and nose. But Bentley knew, as his face went white at the sound of that sharp, thudding blow that Balisle had not been killed by it.

SAVAGE oaths burst from the lips of policemen who saw the action of the ape.

"He acts like a human being! An ape wouldn't have thought of that!"

The words came hysterically from the lips of a woman who, frightened though she was, could not tear herself from the window to the right of where Bentley and Tyler leaned out to stare down.

Bentley smiled grimly. What would she think if he told her gravely that the creature crawling down the face of the building was not quite an ape?

So far the public didn't know what the Mind Master schemed. He'd spoken of stealing brains, but that had meant nothing to the general public. Just the maunderings of a madman, perhaps.

At the third floor the anthropoid hesitated. He seemed to be gazing all around, noting the preparations which were being made to trap him at the street level.

"An ape wouldn't do that," muttered Bentley. "A man would. The man in that manape is showing through—but he won't be able to force himself free of Barter's domination. If he could he'd probably throw Balisle down now to keep him from being . . . well, treated as Barter intends to treat him."

The ape dropped to the second floor. Silence seemed to hang over Fifth Avenue. Ugly gun muzzles protruded from every window across the street. Scores of rifles were aimed down from windows in the Clinton Building, to drill the ape through from above.

At that instant a limousine whirled into Fifth Avenue, traveling fast, and ground to a stop under the ape.

"What's this?" cried Bentley.

"That's Saret Balisle's car," said Tyler. "There's nobody in it but his chauffeur. The fool! Does he think he can take his master away from the ape singlehanded?"

"That looks like foolhardy loyalty, but I'm not so sure that it's Balisle's chauffeur at the wheel. Tyler, send somebody down to

wherever it is that Balisle parks his car."

BUT before Tyler could move to obey, the anthropoid ape made his surprise move, and did a thing which no ape would have thought of doing. He hurled Balisle toward the limousine. The somersaulting body struck the roof of the car, crashed through the fabric, and dropped into the tonneau.

At the same instant the limousine leaped to full speed ahead.

A shower of bullets smashed windows and scored deeply and menacingly the brick walls all around the giant anthropoid which for a second still crouched on the second-story ledge. The ape whirled and crashed through the window at his back.

"Tyler, send half a dozen cars after that limousine. They simply have to catch it. But they mustn't fire for fear of killing Balisle. Have the car followed right to Barter's hideout. The men in this building will scatter at once through the building. We must trap that ape!"

The whole police organization was in a turmoil.

Sirens screamed as police cars flashed after the fleeing limousine which carried Saret Balisle away. Doors slammed and windows crashed as two score policemen scattered through the building, armed with riot guns and pistols, seeking the ape.

Tyler, after barking the staccato orders which set his men in motion, turned to Balisle's secretary.

"Quickly, the number Balisle calls when he wants his automobile sent around."

The girl gave it, and Tyler called the number.

"Are Mr. Balisle's car and chauffeur there?" he asked.

He swore explosively and hung up the receiver.

"Another killing," he said. "Balisle's car is gone and the garage people have just found his chauffeur, almost ripped to pieces, in another car left at the garage for storage.

"That means this ape is armed with metal fingernails, just like the one that killed the insurance man in the Flatiron Building. That means he'll be doubly dangerous when caught. The murdered chauffeur will have to wait for a few moments while we capture the ape."

SHOUTS and shots rang through the Clinton Building. The ape was going wild, crashing through doors and windows as if they weren't there. His mad bellowing sounded terrifying in the extreme, so deep and rumbling that the air seemed to tremble with its menace.

But in the end there came a chorus of triumphant shouts which told that the giant ape had been surrounded.

Bentley and Tyler raced in the direction of the sounds. From all directions came the sounds of footfalls as other plain-clothes men raced to be in at the death. Bentley held his automatic tightly gripped in his right hand. He knew exactly where he was going to aim if the ape were not dead when he reached him.

The creature had been cornered in the areaway between two banks of elevators and had climbed up the cage as high as he could go. He was just out of reach of human hands, even had there been any men there with the courage to try to take him alive. A white foam dripped from the chattering lips of the anthropoid. His red-rimmed eyes flashed fire. Bentley noted the little metal ball on top of the creature's head.

Deliberately he stopped, raised his automatic, and held it steady while he pressed the trigger with

the extreme care which a sharpshooter knows to be necessary . . . and a bullet ploughed through the top of the ape's head.

The little ball vanished, and the ape released his grip suddenly. His chattering died away to an uncertain murmur, the fire went out of his eyes, and he fell to the floor. No bullet had yet actually struck him, for he had whirled into the window from the second-story ledge simultaneously with the barking of the policemen's rifles and pistols. He had escaped there—but here he was not to escape.

Bentley and Tyler both lifted their voices to shout warnings to the policemen, but their voices were drowned in the savage explosions of a dozen weapons, in the hands of men who probably thought the creature was in the act of charging . . . and the ape sprawled on the floor, his legs and arms quivering.

HALF a dozen men rushed forward, weapons extended.

"Keep back!" yelled Bentley, rushing in.

He stood over the ape, staring intently at his glazing eyes.

"Tyler," snapped Bentley, "have everybody fall back beyond ear-shot."

Tyler issued the orders. Bentley shouted, "Quickly, quickly!" knowing he had little time.

Then, with Tyler beside him, he knelt beside the ape.

"I know you can't talk, but you can answer me by nodding or shaking your head. You are Harold Hervey, aren't you?"

The eyes of the ape were hopeless. Tyler gasped, staring at Bentley as though for a moment he thought him crazy. But in the next

instant he doubted his own sanity, for the ape, slowly and ponderously, nodded his head.

"I'm going to name a number of places where I think you might have been taken," went on Bentley. "In each case nod or shake your head. Is it near Sixth Avenue?"

Slowly the great head moved, more slowly even than before; but it nodded.

"Where? Below Twenty-third Street?"

Again the ponderous, agonizing nod.

Bentley went on.

"Below Fourteenth Street?"

Again the nod, barely perceptible this time.

"Below Christopher Street?" asked Bentley.

This time the head shook from side to side, ever so slightly.

"Two blocks above Christopher?"

But this question was never destined to be answered. The giant anthropoid in whose skull-pan was the brain of Harold Hervey, entirely controlled by Caleb Barter, until Bentley had shot the little metal ball from his head, had died.

Bentley rose and looked down at the anthropoid for several seconds.

"Barter will hate to lose this creature," he said. "He probably has just the number of apes he needs—and Tyler, here's a hunch: he'll need an ape to take the place of this one! Get me the best surgeon to be found in Manhattan, and get him as fast as you can!"

"Good God!" ejaculated Tyler. "What do you want a surgeon for? What are you going to do?"

"Barter needs an ape to take the place of this one. I shall be that ape!"

(Concluded in the next issue.)

Have You Tried
STRANGE TALES?



The Winged Men of Orcon

A Complete Novelette

By David R. Sparks

CHAPTER I

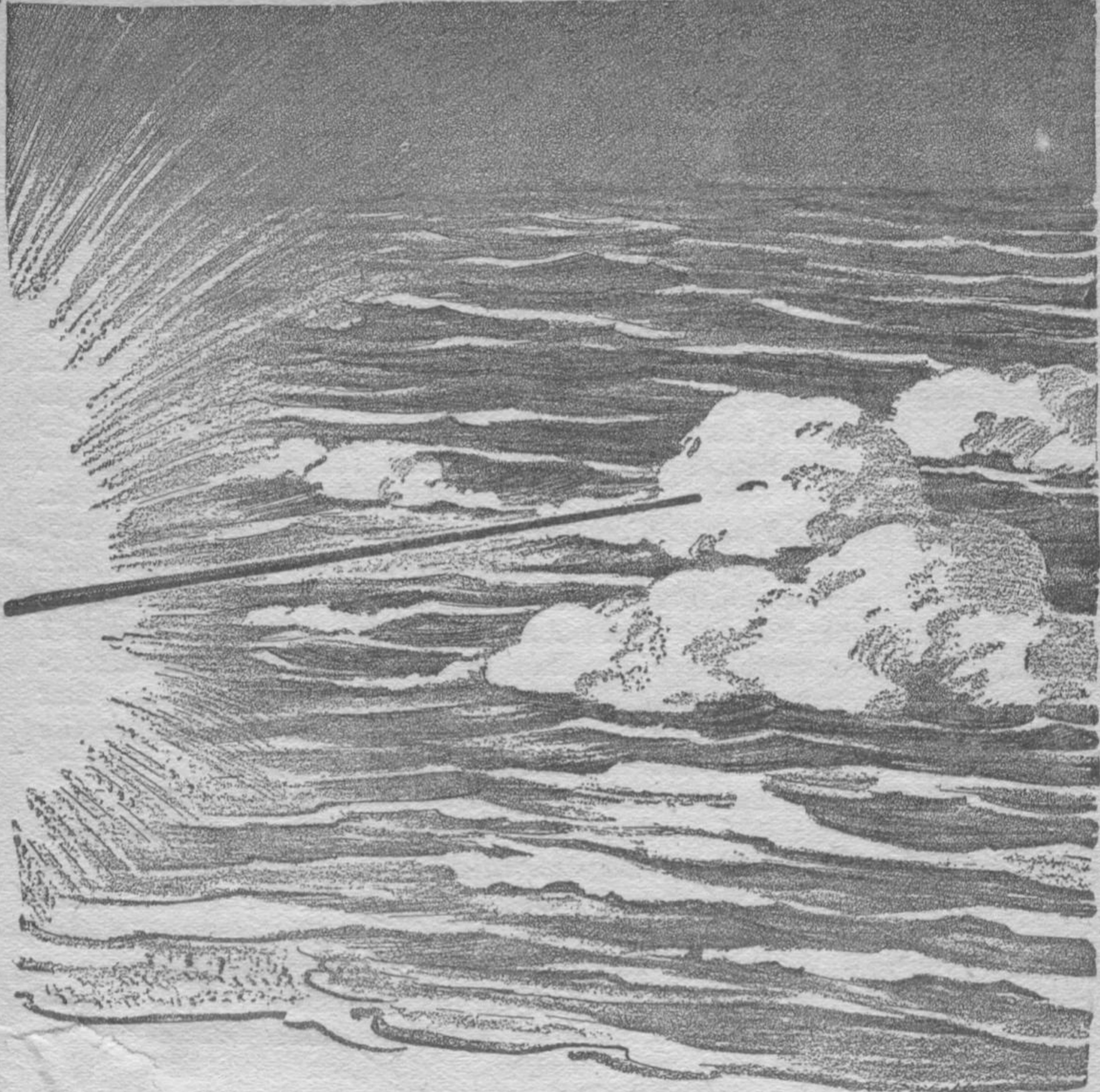
The Wrecked Space-Ship

WHEN I came to, it was dark; so dark that the night seemed all but fluid with black pigment. Breathing was difficult, but in spite of that, however, I felt exhilarated mentally. Also I felt strong, stronger than I ever had in my life before. I tried to

raise my hands, and found that I was handcuffed.

I lay sprawled out on a sharply canted floor of metal, and from outside the house, or whatever it was I was in, I could hear the screeching and howling of the wind. I touched my face with my fettered hands, and the act gave me a feeling of comfort, for the scar on my cheek was still there and I knew that I was myself.

Far out at the edge of the Universe two scientists play a game of wits—Earth to the winner.



A flash of blue light played about our ship.

Twisting around, I sat up, and with great difficulty drew a lighter from my trousers pocket. The flame glimmered up. I knew then that I was lying in the control room of a great flying machine!

All about me I saw crumpled human forms clad in glistening gray flying jumpers. It was very, very hot. I thought I caught the sound of waves crashing on a shore. Through a broken port blustered a hot wind laden with an odd odor suggestive of garlic and kelp. It was just as dark outside as in. I stirred about a bit, and found that I was in good shape except for the handcuffs.

A low moan came from behind

a bulkhead door at one end of the control room. I listened, and again the sound was repeated. With the lighter still flickering in my hands, I got to my feet. The bulkhead door was jammed, but I found a heavy telargeium spanner-wrench on the floor, and with a strength which frightened me—a strength which could have come only by some upset condition of gravitation—I soon crashed the door open. I had no sooner done it, however, than I forgot about the moan which had fetched me.

WHAT I saw first, hanging on a hook on one wall, was a bunch of keys, one of which

readily opened the lock of my handcuffs. Then there was a long-barrelled, gleaming atomic gun, undamaged, and a couple of the new cold-ray flashlights. Free, I caught up one of the flashlights, and placed back on their hook the keys which had opened the cuffs. Then I stooped over each corpse, and confirmed my first impression that two of the dead men were strangers to me, but that I half recognized one.

The vaguely familiar man was clad, under his gray jumper, in the uniform of a rear admiral of the U. S. W. Upper Zone Patrol Division. He wore a medal of high honor, the Calypsus medal. I knew that he was Wellington Forbes, the man who had defeated the planet Calypsus three years before.

Wellington Forbes! And I with him!

I think I may be excused my temporary forgetfulness of the moan which had brought me to Forbes' death chamber. Uppermost in my mind was the manner in which I had been brought here. For it was he, approaching me through the medium of letters and messengers, who had begged, implored me to help him against Orcon, the eccentric planet of my own discovery, the planet which belonged to a solar system at the other end of the Universe from ours. Because of my knowledge of Orcon, with its bubbling seas, its brooding nightmares, and lastly, its queer conduct toward Earth, he had wanted to take me away from my telescopes to fight. And I had refused.

Now I understood how I came to be here.

I knew that this dead man had kidnaped me after drugging me with one of the new amnesiacs. Yorildiside, I reckoned it. And just because I knew that Admiral

Forbes had seized me by force, I knew almost to a certainty that I was shipwrecked on that very Orcon which I had discovered two years before.

I WAS enraged at this high-handed treatment. For if danger was indeed threatening Earth from Orcon, my place of all places was at my telescopes. I could do with them, for the civilizations about me, what no one else could. Too, I was actuated by selfish motives. I loved my telescopes and my isodermic super-spectroscopes. And there was still much work I had to do! Already I had discovered three new elements, and that had showed me I was but at the beginning of a knowledge of cosmological chemistry. Forbes! He had brought me by force out here on this beastly little planet whose orbit was like that of a snake with the Saint Vitus' dance! He had taken me to this wretched planet which lay at such a remote end of the Universe that not even explorers had been tempted to visit it!

"Oh, damn the whole business!" I groaned aloud. I was thoroughly angry and bitter.

In a little while I experienced a sudden change of mood. I'd no sooner spoken than a moan came from directly behind me, and I remembered why I'd got going in the beginning, and was ashamed. I entered a small compartment which opened from Forbes' cabin, and discovered immediately three more people.

The strides I had taken made me realize that I had to be careful, for I was indeed endowed with a terrific strength—an extraordinary strength and lightness. One of these three new people was obviously dead, for his neck was broken. The other two still breathed. The first of the two was

a short man, a Japanese by the look of him. His arm was broken. The other person was, to my surprise, a woman. She, like the dead Forbes, wore the insignia of the U. S. W. Upper Zone Patrol. Her insignia was that of a navigating officer.

So it was she who had caused the crash!

It was also she who had moaned. My feelings as I lifted her to a bunk were mixed. Being a reactionary, I still felt that woman's place was not in the Army or Navy. Yet I confess that the woman—or girl, rather—was ornamental. She was of the Iberian type. She was beautiful, and looked helpless. Some atavistic trait of the protective instinct in man made me take a little more pains in caring for her than I might have taken with a man.

"**D**OCTOR WEEKS," were the first surprised words she murmured when I had bandaged a cut in her head and she came to.

Weeks being my name—Frederick Weeks—I grunted and wondered just how much *she'd* had to do with my being here. I noted that the eyes were gray with violet lights.

"You were handcuffed and drugged," she announced wonderingly.

"I was," I answered, "but I'm not any more. Thanks to my own efforts."

She dropped that subject.

"Take me to Admiral Forbes, Doctor Weeks. I am Captain Virginia Crane."

I acknowledged curtly her introduction of herself and told her the admiral was dead. Her cheeks, already pale, grew white. I asked her the number of the space flyer's crew. She said ten. So far, four were dead, three alive, including myself, and the rest unaccounted for,

I told her. She winced. In a moment, though, she pulled herself together with a grit which I could not deny, despite my disapproval of her being here.

"I suppose you wonder why you're here," she said suddenly, "and where we are."

"I don't need to be told where I am," I said coldly, "but a little information as to who was responsible for my coming to Orcon wouldn't be amiss. I suppose it was Forbes."

She cut me off with a look.

"It wasn't the admiral." Her really beautiful eyes narrowed. "It was I who planned your abduction and got him to execute it."

"You!"

I drew back. My manner was formal and cold.

And after that I guess I pretty well boiled over. But did it gain me anything? Before I had said half enough to soothe my lacerated feelings, the girl simply shrugged and looked bored.

"Don't be a fool," she ordered curtly. "We needed you, and I, for one, was not going to see your egotistical ideas about an unimportant piece of work—your cosmological chemistry—jeopardize the safety of the world. Oh, I know the government wanted you in your laboratory. But with Ludwig Leider loose on Orcon, and you the only one in our Zone who knew much of anything about the planet, what could you expect?"

I HARDLY know what might have happened between us if she had not mentioned Leider's name when she did. The insults with which she had begun had hardly been atoned for by her half understanding of my refusal to join Forbes, and I was still in a rage. Yet, as it was, at the mention of Leider I snapped to attention.

"Ludwig Leider! Here?"

"Yes," she replied significantly.

"But that makes a difference! Why wasn't I told? Why this silly kidnaping?"

She moved a little on the couch and looked at me.

"There was not time to tell you and to chance putting up with further silly arguments on your part. When the secret service detail which had been handling the Leider case brought in word of his whereabouts, there was time only to get a ship specially outfitted for such a tremendous journey and start. We *had* to kidnap you."

I hardly heard her last words. Ludwig Leider—scientist extraordinary, renegade, terrorist. Everyone of our latter day century knew that he was the greatest example of the megalomaniac—the power-seeking genius—which the human race had produced for decades. Everyone knew that he—furious because he had been denied the high position he craved as ruler for life of the united peoples of Earth—had been the leader of the interplanetary struggle which had resulted in Forbes' brilliantly successful attack on Calypsus. And everyone knew that he had escaped from Calypsus. And that, while he was free, there could be no real safety anywhere, either for Earth, which he hated, or any of its allied planets. Leider, here! No wonder I had been observing queer goings on in Orcon!

SOMEHOW I forgot to be angry with poor dead Forbes. Almost I forgot to disapprove of the woman.

"See here!" I broke out. "If your secret service detail was right, and Leider is on Orcon, we've got to stop talking and get going. Tell me more about your expedition."

"Do you know," she said presently, "I rather thought you would make quite a leader—and fighter—

if you could ever be aroused. As for the expedition, we have only this one ship. It's that kind of a job."

"Oh, suicide party, eh?"

I ignored her remark about my ability as a fighter. I had never aspired to any sort of naval or military leadership.

"Yes," she answered; "suicide party. And I suppose, with our ship wrecked, our admiral dead, and contact with Leider not even made as yet, it's become doubly so. But we've got to do something."

She leaned forward on the couch.

"Our primary objective," she went on, "was to reach Orcon and scout, and then radio information back to Earth. But we also have two tons of the new explosive, kotomite, aboard and are to do damage if we can. What are you going to do, Doctor? The command is yours now."

I was well enough versed in the upper space tactics of our modern navy to appreciate the wisdom which had been used in sending the one ship alone on the expedition, and I could well understand the reasonable hope of success which had been promised. I confess I was staggered to know what could be done, however, now that the admiral was dead and the ship wrecked. As for my having inherited the command, I was even more disconcerted.

"I don't know what we're going to do," I said in answer to Captain Crane's question. "I doubt if Forbes would know, if he were alive, and I'm by no means the commander he was. But, as you say, we have to do something. So, since it's a little early in the game to explode the kotomite and call it a day's work, we better declare a truce between ourselves, and then check up on the ship. Come on, if you're able."

She was able.

IN the next twenty minutes we found that it was the forward end of the great flier which was damaged, and that while she was in fair shape amidships and astern, she would never fly again. We discovered that the three unaccounted-for men of the crew were lying forward, and found that two were dead and one lived—a radio man named LeConte. He had two ribs broken. Half a dozen atomic guns remained to us, and we found intact one dynamo capable of generating the new cold light in considerable quantities. It was not an encouraging check-up, though. Out of a crew of ten, only the four of us were alive; Captain Crane, the Jap, LeConte, and myself. And all of us were more or less battered. The ship was still habitable, but smashed beyond hope of repair. Around us stretched Orcon—in the control of Ludwig Leider.

I got LeConte, the radio man with the broken ribs, into the small cabin where the Jap still lay and made him comfortable. Then I set the Jap's broken arm. I gave both him and LeConte an injection of penopalatrin in order that their shattered bones might be decently knitted in two or three hours. The Jap presently came to, and I found that he was a civilian like myself, but one who had long been employed on the U. S. W. research staff as a ray and explosive expert. I realized at once that he was the inventor of the kotomite with which the ship was loaded.

All of them, including Captain Crane, told me the story of the crash. Captain Crane hadn't been responsible, after all. Their magnogravitos system had failed in some mysterious manner as they approached Orcon. In spite of the checking effect of their helium pontoons, which had expanded properly when they had come into Orcon's atmosphere, they had

slammed into a sea of light and crashed. That was all anyone knew. But everyone suspected that Leider had been somehow responsible.

"I do not enjoy the prospect," Koto said after a glance at his temporarily helpless left arm. "If Leider is able to wreck a space ship before she ever reaches his planet, he has more power than he ever had during the Calypsus war."

I SAID nothing, but simply looked at LeConte, and nodded approval when he muttered something about getting his sending set in shape, if that were possible. We were sitting in the small cabin and Captain Crane was searching my face with those discomfiting, violet-lighted gray eyes. I knew she was asking me once more what I was going to do, and I knew that, except that we might fire the kotomite, I could tell her nothing.

We sat on in silence. Then, however, before I spoke about the kotomite, a change came.

All at once I felt the space flier tremble under me. It rocked gently over on one side and began to move. Slowly, but definitely.

Koto and I were on our feet in a flash. Captain Crane stiffened and faced me, waiting.

"What is it?" Koto gasped.

"We'll find out what it is," I flung back. "Miss Crane—Captain—on deck with you. Here, Koto, a hand with one of the guns. We'll take it up out of the hatchway and through the main cabin."

LeConte, I knew, was the one we must be careful of, with his cracked ribs.

"Get to your apparatus," I ordered him, "and stay with it until you get through to Earth."

With that I jumped into the main cabin, stepped over Forbes' lifeless body, and caught hold of the nearest of the atomic guns. I was to be a leader, after all.

CHAPTER II

The Cable of Menace

IT was dark when we gained the deck; as dark as it had been when I first regained consciousness. Captain Crane was attending to that problem, however. As Koto and I floundered with the gun on the slippery telargeium plates of the outer hull, I heard her moving about. Then she uttered a cry of relief, and there came a faint click. Instantly the darkness all about—the clinging noisome darkness of Orcon at night—was shattered.

The blessed rays of our one good lighting dynamo were loosed!

I saw the girl standing braced beside a stanchion, staring over the ship's side.

"Come on, Koto!" I snapped.

I am no fighting man by trade. Nevertheless, there was a kind of instinct which told me to get the gun set up at any point of vantage along the ship's side. And Koto understood.

"There," he breathed after but a few seconds, and from the experienced way in which he touched the disintegration-release trigger with his one good hand, I knew we were ready.

The flier was still moving, slowly and smoothly. She seemed to be half lifted, half drawn by some colossal force. I leaned far out over the rail.

A long, slender, but apparently indestructible cable had been affixed to our stern by means of a metal plate at its end which I guessed to be magnetic. I saw that the cable vanished under lashing waves which broke on a not distant shore, and that we were being drawn irresistibly toward the waves.

THE light from the deck brought out dazzling scintillations from a beach composed of

gigantic crystal pebbles as large as ostrich eggs. On the beach and grouped thickly all about our hull, swarmed a legion of creatures which—

Well, they were the brood of Orcon. They were the creatures who had given Ludwig Leider refuge and allied themselves with him in his attempt to make trouble for Earth. And they were half-bird, half-human! Their faces, bodies, arms, and legs were human. *But they had wings!* Translucent, membranous structures, almost gauzy, which stretched out from their shoulders like bat's wings. And their skins, as they surged about in the beams of our light, gleamed a bright orange color, and about their heads waved frilled antennae which were evidently used as extra tactile organs to supplement the human hands. I could see instantly that the Orconites possessed a high degree of intelligence. Of all the queer breeds that interplanetary travel and exploration had produced, this was the queerest.

I swung to Koto, who was crouching beside the gun.

"Get rid of that cable before we go under!" I exclaimed.

I had already guessed that the plate which held the cable to our stern was magnetic. It was easy to see that the cable had been fastened there by the Orconites and that our ship and ourselves might be drawn to destruction. I flung myself over to Koto's side to help him with the gun.

The howling wind which had been at a lull as we reached the deck, broke loose again, and, as a gust hit us, Koto, gun, and I were all but swept overboard. The winged legion overside gave loud cries and braced themselves against the gusts. I saw Virginia Crane clinging desperately to her stanchion beside the light switches.

"More light if you have it!" I

screamed to her against the wind.

Then Koto and I got the gun going.

MY first feeling was one of intense relief. As the thing went off under our hands, and I knew from a faint trembling and a low hiss that the weapon was functioning perfectly, I felt thankful indeed for the instinct which had made me get the gun on deck. It could be only a matter of seconds now until a whole section of the metallic cable was disintegrated completely and until our ship was free.

Breathlessly I watched the greenish atomic stream play along the bright length of the cable of death, and, as Koto and I steadied the gun together, I knew he shared my relief. Despite the howling of the wind, the yells of the Orconites, the continued slow movement of the ship, and the hideous churning of the waves astern, I laughed to myself.

"Doctor Weeks!"

I saw that Captain Crane had gone aft to watch the effects of our fire.

"All right," I bellowed. "What—"

"Nothing is happening back here! Your gun! What's the matter with it?"

I was too startled to answer otherwise than I did.

"Nothing's the matter with it. What's the matter with you?"

But the next instant I knew she was right.

"My God, Doctor!" Koto cried, and I knew he had leaped to the same conclusion I had.

Suddenly I brushed Koto's hands away from the gun, and myself directed it so that its ray cut straight across one whole group of the queer creatures on the beach. Then I cursed.

Instead of being cut down, broken like so many blades of

grass, not one of the creatures showed that the ray had touched them at all. They only uttered tremendous hoarse sounds that might have been laughter.

I stood up.

"Koto, Leider's found means of protecting both raw materials and living beings against the atomic gun!"

CAPTAIN CRANE was beside us now, and I saw that she did not need to be told of the disaster. As Koto turned away from the gun, I thought of LeConte below. When the waves closed in on us, he would be caught like a rat.

The shriek of the wind and the crash of waves grew louder. I felt upon my face the sting of spray from the aqueous solution of which the lashing sea at our stern was composed. The cable held, and the ship continued to move. We were barely a hundred yards away from the shore.

All at once, though, a string of both chemical and physical formulae—the last thing a man would expect to think of in such a position—flashed into my mind.

"Here, wait a minute," I thought. "If Leider's done this thing, it means—it must mean—that he's juggled his atomic structures through production in terrific quantities of the quondarium light which I theorized about last year! But he can't have done that without playing hell with the action of magnetic forces from beginning to end! I believe if we take the gun aft and direct it at—"

That was as far as I got with forming words. I flung myself toward the gun and began to drag it to a position aft, where we might direct its ray full force, at close range, against the magnetic metal plate which held the cable to our stern.

"Help me!" I yelled at the others.

Koto was the first to close in. Struggling, slipping, hampered rather than helped by our great strength, we clawed our way aft. A combined lurch of ship and blast of wind threw Captain Crane down, but she staggered up.

We dropped the gun with a thump at a spot where the bulging curve of the stern swelled directly under the muzzle. I grabbed at the trigger just as a new surge of movement brought the flier perilously close to a great, intrushing wall of water which was not water. Koto's face was drawn, and Virginia Crane was staring in horrified fascination at the gun.

A GAIN came the faint trembling of the beautifully constructed mechanism. The green ray leaped out across the blinding whiteness of our light rays. I jammed the muzzle down until the whole force of the atomic stream was spouting against the magnetic plate which held the cable to our stern.

"Look, Doctor! Look!" Captain Crane cried.

But I was already looking.

For an instant a flash of blue light played about our ship. There was a single sharp, crackling sound; and, ringing in the night, an echoing, high-pitched twang.

Koto let out a shout. I took my hands away from the gun.

Backward the twanging cable snapped, demolishing with one touch a score of the clustering Orconites. Into the waves it snapped, and our ship, ceasing to move, came to rest upon the glittering pebbles of the beach.

I heaved a deep sigh.

"What came to me a moment ago," I said breathlessly to the others, "was the idea that when atomic structures are so juggled that they are no longer affected by

the gun, all the forces of magnetism, which usually are immune to the atomic stream, are rendered liable to disruption by it. We could not destroy Leider's cable, but we could play the deuce with its magnetic grip on us."

Koto was looking at me wide-eyed, and I saw that his interest was as keen as my own. Even Virginia Crane, scientist though she was not, was interested.

We were in no position, however, to sit still and think. The waves astern and the howling wind were subsiding noticeably, but the inhabitants of Orcon all about us were still creating a great hubbub. Our next obvious move, regardless of what they might do, was to get hold of one of them and make him talk.

AFTER a gesture to Koto and Captain Crane to stay where they were, I ran to a spot on the deck where I had seen a permanent ladder fixed to the side of the ship. Three jumps took me down to the beach, and three more took me into the very midst of the mob.

The confusion brought about by the destruction of the score or so of Orconites by the flying cable, and by our unexpected salvation, all worked for me. And another thing worked for me, too.

These people had great intelligence, but they seemed like sheep when it came to a question of physical, hand to hand encounter. Of rough and tumble fighting with fists they knew nothing—as indeed not many people do in this century, even on Earth. The result of it all was that they shrank back when I charged into them, and not a blow was struck, even when I caught up the nearest figure in my path, swung it over my shoulder, and tore back to the ladder. In two shakes I was standing on the deck again, my prisoner all safe.

"What a creature!" Virginia Crane cried as I presented her and Koto with my struggling but helpless prize.

That was just what I had thought after my first glimpse of the whole brood of them. Close inspection showed, as I had supposed, that the Orconite was a man, and yet not a man. The body, the limbs, the enormous head, the features of the orange-colored face were human; and the chap began to spout excited sounds which were certainly the words of intelligent speech. But also he was winged, and from the orange forehead waved those curious, frilled feelers!

HE was clad in a single loose garment of woven cloth which permitted free action for both limbs and wings. A small, flat black box with a mouthpiece into which he could speak, was strapped to his chest in such a position that it was almost concealed by the folds of his blouse. We were to find out presently the purpose of this instrument, but I did not examine it carefully then. As the creature glared balefully at us from his intelligent dark eyes, I glanced over the side of the ship to see whether trouble was to be expected from his fellows.

And for the moment they surged about so much, and made so much noise, that I thought trouble might come. The shouting, however, was caused by their dismay at all that had happened to them, and I saw that instead of making ready to attack they were preparing a retreat. We had whipped them temporarily.

We had thrown them into such disorder, indeed, that in another moment a whole force of them gave proof of their ability to fly, by taking off from the beach. Up and out they swept, out into the intense blackness which overhung the sea behind us. In another moment the

whole crew had vanished, and I was glad enough of it.

"Come on below," I said to my two companions. "There's no telling how long Leider will keep his hands off us, and we've got to find out from our prisoner whatever we can."

With that I turned to the companionway, lugging the winged man, and the others followed.

CHAPTER III

In the Grip of Ludwig Leider

ONCE we were below, LeConte joined us from the radio room. After taking a swift look at our prisoner, and listening to our account of what had happened above, he reported that the radio had been put out of commission by the crash but could be repaired. All of us then held a hasty conference and decided that since no one was badly in need of rest, LeConte would return to his sending set, Koto would keep a deck watch, and Captain Crane and I would see what we could learn from the prisoner.

From the start it had been certain that the Orconite's strength was not to be compared to our earthly powers. Therefore I made no attempt to bind him, but simply shoved him into a seat in the main cabin of the flier—the room in which Forbes' body still lay—and began to try to make him talk.

I knew that Leider must have some way of communicating with his allies, and I was determined that if he could, I could. But it was uphill work. The creature closed his mouth, assumed a sullen look, and sat tight. He knew what I was after—that I could tell by the expression of his face—but he met with stolid silence all of my attempts to address him in such languages as I knew of Earth and our allied planets. I got nowhere, until, in a manner as sudden as it

was unexpected, something happened which ended the deadlock.

THE way it happened was this. As LeConte, working in the radio room close off the main saloon, completed a connection which had been broken, he called to us that he was making progress, and a moment later we heard the click of his sending key and the shrill squeal of a powerful electric arc breaking across the transmission points of his set. I realized at once that this did not mean that the set was wholly in order, for the pitch of the squealing arc was too high and too sharp, but I did know that there was hope of establishing communication with Earth soon. And, too, I realized another thing.

The moment that shrill, squealing sound impinged upon the Orconite's ears, he jumped and uttered a cry of pain. There was something about his nervous organism that could not stand these sounds!

"LeConte," I shouted, "close your key again!"

After that the battle was won. By the time I had explained to LeConte why I had given him the order, and he had filled the cabin two or three times with the screech, the Orconite was ready to speak. He trembled in his seat. His mouth twisted with pain, and a look of agony seared his eyes. He burst into fluent Orconese speech. Then he made a swift pass with one hand at the black box on his chest, touched a switch there, and began to rattle his Orconese into the mouthpiece.

The result—well, one might have known that Leider would have found some ingenious means of making the difficult speech of Orcon easy. Out of the small instrument into which our prisoner spoke his hard, rattling words, came a flood of pure German.

An instrument for translating spoken Orconese into spoken German. That was what the little box was.

"Shut the accursed transmission set off!" came from the box in a clear German which I understood readily. "I will talk. Ask what you want to know. I cannot stand this!"

HIS face still contorted, the Orconese touched a second switch on the box, and indicated that I was to speak at the instrument. I did so, in German. The result was an instant translation into the prisoner's own tongue.

The rest was easy.

"What is your name?" was my first question.

"Hargrib."

"What were you and your people trying to do to us with the cable you hitched to our stern?" I asked next.

"Destroy you."

The whole story was this: In a power house on an island only a few hundred yards off the beach was kept a magnetic cable which Leider had been using in connection with some deep sea dredging apparatus he kept there. When our ship crashed, the order had come from headquarters that the cable be fastened to us and the ship drawn into the sea. I concluded that we had missed an unpleasant fate by a narrow margin.

Quickly Hargrib confirmed our belief that it was Leider who had wrecked our ship while it was still approaching Orcon through space. A ray which had crippled the magnogravitos had been used. So great was Leider's power that, after disabling us, he had even been able to direct our course so that we had crashed on the beach close to the headquarters he had set up for himself deep in the wilderness, away from the cities of Orcon.

The Orconite's free mention of

Leider's name and his open admission that the man was king and god in Orcon, made direct inquiry about him easy. Also it was plain that Hargrib, now he had been cornered, would hold nothing back because he believed we would never live long enough to make trouble, regardless of what information we gained.

TO state the rest of it briefly, we learned that Leider had come to Orcon immediately after his defeat at Calypsus. He had found ready allies here, on the crazy, distant planet which had been too remote to tempt explorers from Earth until necessity had forced our voyage. The people of Orcon knew science and machinery, and were advanced in every respect. From communication which they had had with other peoples in their own zone of the Universe, they had even heard of Earth and its allied planets. They had lent themselves readily to Leider's fierce plans to make trouble for Earth.

As to what Leider's plan of war was, Hargrib could not tell us much, for his duties kept him absorbed in other work, not connected with the campaign. He stated definitely, however, that Leider had almost completed the development of apparatus which would enable him to strike his blow without ever leaving Orcon. The whole work was being carried forward in tremendous subterranean laboratories and power rooms which had been established in a series of natural caverns only a few miles distant from the desolate beach on which we were lying at that moment. Hargrib said that with the coming of daylight, we would be able to see the mountains in which the caverns were concealed, just as we would be able to sight the nearby island whence had been shot the cable which had so nearly done for us.

At this point my natural curiosity as a scientist made me desire greatly to ask a thousand questions about the planet itself, with its bubbling chemical seas and its erratic orbit, and I did ask a few things. The answers I received confirmed the theory I had already formed that Orcon did not revolve regularly, but had days and nights which might last anywhere from a few hours to a month. I was told—what I had already guessed—that the bubbling fluid which composed the seas changed the orbit of the planet as the nature of the fluid's chemical elements changed.

Also I was told flatly and calmly, as though there were nothing at all remarkable about the fact, that Leider had penetrated so deeply into the chemical secrets of Orcon that he was able to control the coming of day and night. Finally I was told that the planet had a hot, moist climate instead of the frigid one to be expected when any sun was so remote, because of the continued warmth-giving chemical action of its seas.

I COULD have gone on seeking information for hours. Captain Crane, however, showed impatience at even the few questions I did ask, and I knew that she was justified. It was my duty to think about the position we were in and the task we had in hand.

I asked Hargrib sharply what was to be expected from Leider now that his cable party against us had failed. And he told me.

The sum of it was that Leider was working eagerly to complete his preparations for the attack on Earth. Although it was he who had sent word from headquarters that we were to be destroyed, he had not paused to attend to the matter himself. Hargrib thought, however, that the failure of the cable party might change this attitude, and ex-

pressed the belief that Leider would interview us now before he put us out of the way. He swore, and I believed, that he did not know when or how Leider would come to us or have us brought to him. Also he did not know when or how we would finally be exterminated.

I now asked a series of indirect questions which led me to believe that neither Hargrib nor his master knew of the thing I had been conscious of from the start—that we had aboard the ship an amount of high explosive sufficient to do ghastly damage not only to this section of the coast but to the whole planet of Orcon. I gathered, however, that Leider suspected we were armed against him in some way, and would watch us carefully.

BY now daylight had begun to peer in through the ports, a greenish daylight which grew out of the north, and with its coming I resolved on a plan of action.

"I am done with Hargrib," I said suddenly to Captain Crane. "We'll lock him up in one of the staterooms, and after that we'll see if we can't get busy with something that will at least help Earth, even if it doesn't help us."

Hargrib, still terrified by those radio sounds he could not stand, made no protest when I ordered him into the stateroom which had belonged to the ship's second officer, and we were rid of him in a moment.

I now called LeConte from the radio room and Koto in from the deck, and after Captain Crane and I had told them what we had learned, I made my proposal.

The plan was simply that LeConte should continue to work on his sending apparatus until he reached Earth, while Koto, Captain Crane and I set out on a reconnaissance. I said that I hoped to be

able to locate Leider's headquarters and learn what method of attack he intended to use against Earth; and that I hoped further that at least one of us would be able to bring word back to LeConte, who could send it to Earth. Finally I indicated that we would see what could be done with our two tons of kotomite as soon as we had made the attempt to send information home. I told LeConte, who would stay with the ship, to fire the explosive himself if anything happened to make him believe that we had been killed while scouting.

I did not fail to point out that since our atomic guns were useless against the Orconites and Leider, we should have to go unarmed on our expedition, and I did not fail to state that the whole effort seemed futile. But the opportunity offered by Leider's present withdrawal was one we could not afford to miss. We were drowning people, I said, and we must clutch at straws. And my friends were good enough to agree.

AS soon as the conference was ended, therefore, we disposed of our six dead by the simple process of disintegrating them with one of the atomic guns, and then LeConte returned to the radio, and Koto, Captain Crane and I went on deck to have our first look at Orcon by daylight.

The first thing we saw was the small, rocky islet just off the shore whence had come the cable. It seemed a harmless place now, with only one squat building of stone and no Orconites about, but we were glad enough to turn away from it and look toward the dark and ragged range of mountains which loomed up some five miles inland—the mountains of Leider's headquarters. Not that the sight inspired us with greater confidence. It didn't. But it was good to look

at the mountains, because the fact that we were going there meant that at least we should be acting instead of idling.

No Orconite was visible anywhere.

With the coming of daylight—the greenish daylight of Orcon—the sea behind us had calmed until its surface was disturbed only by gigantic lazy bubbles which broke with muffled, thudding explosions. The air smelled of chlorine, iodine, and sulphurated hydrogen, but was breathable. I saw that the principal characteristic of life on Orcon was an organic ability to thrive under almost any climatic conditions. Many of the huge, crystal clear boulders which covered the beach and the coastal plain which led to the hills, were covered with leafless flowers which had immense, leathery petals and sharp, fang-like spines. Other evidences of swift growing life showed on every hand. Ugly, jelly-like creatures oozed about the ship and everywhere else. In places the very rocks seemed ready to come to life.

AFTER one good look about, I issued the order to start. As we clambered down the ship's ladder to the beach and set out resolutely toward the hills, I made myself try to hope, and for a time did muster up a little cheer.

I did not keep it, though. In less than ten minutes something happened which ended our expedition in a terrible manner.

What began it was a long shout which came echoing from LeConte back on the ship. The instant I heard the cry I knew, somehow, that trouble had started. Leider had kept off us as long as we had remained quiet, but at our first move he had gone into action.

While LeConte's cry still echoed in my ears, I swung to face the ship and saw him waving fran-

tically from the deck. At that moment I also had a queer impression that the sunlight was growing brighter on all the glittering rocks, and that some new feeling was creeping into the air.

"Doctor Weeks!" LeConte cried across the distance between us. "Come at once!"

Terror had laid hold of the man. Captain Crane, Koto and I began to run to him.

"What is it?" I shouted.

"I don't know," came the thin answer. "I almost had Earth when my whole set went to pieces. Come quickly!"

"We will, if we're able," I muttered to myself, and said aloud as I ran in the gigantic bounds possible on Orcon: "Koto, Captain, do you feel anything queer in the air as if—as if—"

I never finished. Suddenly Captain Crane screamed and flung out her arms to me with the gesture of one about to fall.

"Doctor Weeks!" she gasped. "Frederick, help me!"

AND that was all. Before she could choke out another word, before I could do more than clutch at her, she had been caught up by an invisible power, caught up straight into the now dazzlingly brilliant green air, and swept away from us as if she were a feather in a tornado.

It was over before realization could sink in. Nor was her departure all. From the ship came a ringing yell, and as LeConte, in the distance, clutched a stanchion as if for dear life, the whole battered, glimmering gray shape of the flier moved, shivered, and in a flash was caught up and whisked away as easily as had been Virginia Crane!

"He's got us!" I sputtered as I turned to Koto. "He was only waiting until we started to march against him."

"God, yes. Horrible!" he muttered.

Then *his* kindly yellow face went white. Even while I stood looking at him, he, too, was swept away into space.

When my turn came, it was as if implacable fingers took hold of my wrists, the front of my coat, my shoes. I distinctly remember thinking that after all the peace we'd had, something as astounding as this was almost bound to have happened. The glittering boulders of the coastal plain fell away, and I felt myself being whirled through space. The speed was taking my breath away. A ringing came into my ears, spots floated before my eyes, a nauseating light-headedness swept me, and I lapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV

In the Caverns of Orcon

I CAME out of it to find myself lying on my back upon the rocky floor of a cavern more lofty than any cathedral. The air was warm and charged with a pungent, almost mephitic odor. Blue light filled the vast subterranean place. I heard the far-away, droning throb of machinery. Crackling sounds like static on a vast scale ripped back and forth at intervals.

Neither Captain Crane, Koto, nor LeConte was in sight, but wherever I looked as I twisted my head slowly, I saw winged Orconites staring at me. They stood back against the walls of the cavern chamber, their wings folded, the antennae on their orange foreheads waving gently. None was close, but all watched with cold, intelligent interest. I decided that I was in Leider's headquarters, a closely guarded prisoner. It was to be supposed that Leider had brought us here, as Hargrib had said he might, to interview us before he finished us off.

Fear for the others laid hold of

me, but I was still too dazed and giddy to get up and look for them. I lay still, trying to remember everything.

"He waited until we made an aggressive move," I thought, "and then he did *something* to us. He did something which brought us shooting through the air here to his headquarters!"

After I had progressed so far, it did not take me long to realize what method Leider had employed to fetch us to the caverns. Nor did it take me much longer, once I was sure of the method, to roll over heavily and begin to yank the metal buttons off my coat. Since the many guards—fully twenty of them—made no move to interfere, I did not stop until I had torn every button off my clothing, dumped from my pockets every object which had a scrap of metal on it, and even dug the metal eyelets out of my shoes.

WHAT had happened was that Leider had simply readjusted the forces of his damned power houses so as to yank us to him, ship and all, *without* the medium of a magnetic cable. What he had done was to direct at us a magnetic current so terrific that, taking hold of the few odds and ends of metal on our persons, it had snatched us bodily through space. And the ship, too! It was stupendous; incredible.

Full consciousness had returned by this time, and fear possessed me even more completely than it had before—fear for what might be going to happen to Earth and fear of what might already have happened to my friends. The Leider who had planned the Calypsus war had had no such gigantic powers as these. As thoughts of Virginia Crane and the others increased until they filled my whole mind, I sat up on the floor of the cavern and then rose slowly to my feet.

The guards never relaxed their

vigilance, but they made no move as I moved; they only stared, and I ventured to call out.

"Captain Crane! Koto! LeConte!" I shouted loudly.

No answer came. Since the Orconites still did not prevent me, I began to walk swiftly down the length of the great, echoing cathedral cavern, toward an abutment of rock which jutted out from one wall, separating the room I was in from another. Again I shouted, and the whole place rang with echoes, and my fears grew.

But all at once fear vanished. I knew that the worst had not happened and that I was not to be left alone.

"Doctor Weeks!" It was Koto's voice, and it came from behind the abutment of rock toward which I was hurrying.

"Koto!" I yelled and entered the next cavern and saw it all.

HE was lying stretched out on the rocky floor of an underground room as vast as the one I had left behind me. He was unhurt, and he was waving to me! Captain Crane, just waking up, was stretched out beside him. Our ship, a colossal bulk of battered, gleaming metal, had come to a lighting point some fifty yards beyond them. LeConte was sitting on the deck, staring groggily at me.

Guards were posted all around the walls of this new cavern, and those I had just walked away from now came crowding in to join their fellows, but none spoke to us or held us back. In another thirty seconds LeConte had slid down from the ship, Captain Crane had stumbled to her feet, Koto had flung an arm about me, and we were all babbling together.

I will not attempt to tell of our feelings during that interval. But the reunion did much for us. When I had returned to consciousness, it

had been with the thought that our puny scouting expedition had been wrecked before it had begun, and that all else had been lost to us. Now the mere fact that we were together once more changed my attitude suddenly and completely.

"Defeated?" I asked myself, and as I gripped the warm hands of friends I knew that we were not defeated at all. Rather it seemed that everything we could have hoped to gain was won.

The penopalatrin I had injected in Koto and LeConte had mended the former's broken arm and the latter's cracked ribs, so that none of us was in any way disabled. And we seemed to be free within limits. And our ship was here in Leider's caverns—our ship laden with two tons of the most terrific explosive science had ever created. And the Orconites, though they might be suspicious, knew nothing of our weapon.

Now that hope had sprung to life again, I knew that the opportunities open to us were huge. We were in great trouble, and whatever we did would probably not be easily done, but there was a strong chance that we might yet strike a blow that would help the peoples of Earth in their hour of need.

IT was not necessary to explain to the others all that was passing in my mind, for I could tell by their expressions that they were comprehending the possibilities as clearly as I.

"What's Leider up to?" Captain Crane asked after a while.

"He's brought us here to put us through an interview," I answered. "He hasn't sent for us yet because he's busy getting ready for his war. Also, since he's a Prussian all the way through, he's probably ignoring us in the belief that his absence will make us more impressed with his mightiness."

"Yes, but what are we going to do while he ignores us?" she snapped back.

"Quite a lot," I answered, and turned to LeConte. "What are the chances of getting word to Earth?"

"Impossible," he said, shaking his head. "The set was wrecked when the magnetism—or whatever it was—took hold of us."

"All right. Never mind it." I looked at Koto now. "Koto, what do you have to do to fire your explosive?"

I was sure now that the thought had already been in their minds, for Captain Crane and LeConte nodded and Koto smiled.

"The kotomite," he answered, "is packed in telargeium drums in the ship's hold, and protected against being exploded until oxygen is admitted to the drums and force applied. It was our original hope to land on Orcon, deposit the drums, and fire them by a time fuse. The quickest way now would be simply to place one of our atomic guns in the hold, turn it loose, and get out. The stream of the gun would in a very short time disintegrate the drums to admit oxygen, and would at the same time set off the explosive."

"Good," I said shortly, and without more ado glanced about the cavern to look over the situation with regard to the forty or so Orconites whom we had been ignoring, and who had ignored us, ever since we found each other.

THEY were standing motionless against the walls, eyes alert, ugly antennae waving, but with their arms folded across their chests. There seemed to be no reason why we should not all march boldly to the ship, climb aboard, and forthwith do the work that was to be done there. I had, however, a feeling that our task was not to be so easily accomplished, and

was not long in discovering that the feeling was correct.

The moment I told the others to come with me, and we all started to walk toward the ship, the whole encircling force of Orconites began to move silently forward. When we were within a few yards of the ship's ladder, a tall lithely built Orconite who seemed to be captain of the guard, flopped his wings, shot across the cavern, and dropped down before us. Into the instrument on his chest he rapped a word of Orconese which was translated instantly into the German.

"*Verboten!*" was the word.

Forbidden! The Orconites were not taking any chances with us. It was discouraging, but no more than I had expected. It simply meant that if we were to be interfered with, we should have to do something about the interference.

I quickly began to work out a plan.

First of all I shrugged at the captain of the guard and turned back from the ship as though his refusal to let us aboard was of no consequence. Next I spoke to the others.

"Come on," I said in a normal voice. "Don't make a fuss now, but pull back from the gangway."

They saw, I think, that I was planning something, and we retreated together, with the result that the Orconites ceased to threaten and once more fell back to the walls of the cavern. Their captain flew over and joined them.

"I THOUGHT for a moment," I said, "that we might tell the captain that Hargrib was locked up in the ship, and so furnish an excuse to get aboard. But that isn't good. Some of the Orconites would surely go with us, and in that case it would be next to impossible to get at the kotomite properly. What we need is at least a couple of

minutes which will be uninterrupted. We'll leave Hargrib right where he is, and get access to the ship in another way. We'll fight for it!"

"Fight?" Captain Crane shot a glance at me, and I saw that the idea appealed to her.

"So far as I can see," I said quickly, "Leider hasn't armed his guards with any unique weapon, but has merely left them to watch us. And the Orconites don't know how to fight! Think of the ease with which I got away with Hargrib last night. When it comes to dealing destruction with scientific weapons, their power is appalling. When it comes to a slugging match, they are only so many sheep. And Leider's forgotten to take that fact into account!"

I felt really sure that the guards were not armed with some mysterious weapon we could not see, and Koto felt the same.

"Doctor, you're right!" he exclaimed. "Leider's made a mistake! He's forgotten what damage can be done by physical strength, and left us alone with a mere flesh-and-blood guard. There are forty of the Orconites and their leader, and only four of us. But we have strength that they never dreamed of possessing. It makes the odds almost even!"

"Right," I snapped. "And they will be even altogether if we can get hold of some clubs."

KOTO and the others looked doubtful at that, but I had been thinking hard of the problem all the while we were talking. I motioned unobtrusively toward the end of the room, where a tunnel, blue-lighted and lined with curious, glittering dials like ammeters, gave entrance, evidently, to another great underground chamber. On the floor of that tunnel, close to the entrance, lay a pile of heavy

stalactites of some mineral which resembled jade. The spikes had seemingly been cleared off the tunnel roof and left to be carried away. They were pointed enough to be used for stabbing, and looked heavy enough to make stout clubs.

Captain Crane smothered an exclamation as she glanced at the pile, and Koto and LeConte smiled.

Our conversation all this while had been carried on with seeming casualness, and not even the leader of the Orconites showed suspicion. More than ever I felt that neither they nor Leider would be prepared to defend the ship against a sudden physical attack.

"The weak point for us," I said, "is that we'll have to make an awful row, and the alarm will go out, and eventually some weapon will be brought out to stop us. But if we work quickly, there's a good chance that we can finish everything before Leider is able to step in with some devilish freak instrument. Take it easy until we've got the clubs, and then cut loose for all you're worth. Captain Crane, it's a great pity you're a woman. In all this you'll simply have to—"

I did not finish. Something in the look she gave me stopped me quite, and somehow, whether I would admit it or not, I knew she was as fit as we were. By this time we were strolling away from the ship toward the tunnel.

BLUE-LIGHTED, brilliant, the opening loomed larger as we approached. The same sounds of static on a vast scale which filled our cavern, filled the tunnel, but the place was deserted. The pile of jade spikes shimmered right at the entrance. A few of the guards behind us sauntered at our heels without speaking, and the dozen or so about the tunnel closed in toward the opening, but no restraint was put upon us.

"We seem to have the freedom of the place and the key to the city!" was Captain Crane's dry comment.

"Yes," I answered. "I'm pretty sure it's going to be a case of lambs led to the slaughter. Looks as if— Oh, good Lord, look!"

At the moment when I spoke those last words, we had approached to within thirty or forty feet of the pile of stalactites, and from the quick movement which eight or ten Orconites made ahead of us, drawing themselves up in a line across the tunnel mouth, I knew that we had almost reached the limit of our freedom. But it was not that fact, or the movement of our guards, that brought the exclamation from me.

"Look!" I cried again, even though I knew each of the others had seen as clearly as I.

From where we were walking slowly forward, it was possible to see clear down the tunnel to the tall, lighted cavern beyond our own. In the center of that cavern, with her nose pointing toward a wide tunnel down which showed a glimmer of daylight, rested the long, needle-like, bright hull of the most beautifully designed space flier I had ever seen.

We did not need to be told that this was Leider's own cruiser. A ship of such magnitude and exceeding beauty could have been nothing else.

THE guards knew we had seen and were aware of our excitement, but contented themselves by standing fast in the line they had already formed across the tunnel. We advanced another few yards.

"Mother of Mercy!" LeConte whispered, almost in awe.

"There's a chance for us!" Koto gasped. "A chance! We'll set one of the guns going in the hold of our own ship, and then—"

Captain Crane's face was flushed with intense excitement, and her fingers were moving as though she felt the delicate controls of the space ship under them even now.

"Could you pilot it?" I asked.

"*Could* I! Give me the chance!" she cried.

"All right," I snapped, "we will!"

And in that second I enlarged my plans to take this gorgeous new development into account.

"Fight to take the cruiser," I ordered. "Captain Crane, Koto, LeConte, get aboard as soon as you can cut your way through. I'll take care of our ship and the kotomite at that time and join you, if possible. Come on!"

Thus was it decided. Thus did we enter our fight with an outlook as utterly different from our original one as hope is different from despair. Our discovery of the cruiser had been almost accidental, a thing which might never have taken place except for our trip to get the spikes of jade. Surely such a happy accident had never happened before!

THE moment I gave the command to go ahead, and we started to run, all of the ugly, bird-like faces of the Orconites across the tunnel became convulsed, and the creatures commenced to howl at us. Before we hurled ourselves against the line, swift reinforcements shot through the air over our heads and joined them, and the temporary uncertainty which had held them gave way, so that they met our advance with an advance of their own. But we did not care.

A few smashing blows which I delivered with my fists served to bring screams of agony from the several creatures immediately about me, and as one or two staggered and crashed to the floor, the others gave way a little. In a moment I was through the line to the pile

of stalactites. And the others were through with me.

"Here you go, Koto!" I cried, and stooping down in spite of the jostling bodies and clammy hands that tried to prevent us, I caught up one of the long, needle-pointed, heavy stalactites. As I shoved it at him and snatched another for myself, Captain Crane and the others armed themselves.

By this time every Orconite in the heavy guard was on the spot, and the whole mass was all over us, gasping, burbling, flapping their wings, fighting to clutch at us with their hideous orange hands and waving antennae. Decidedly the fight was on, and I was forced to admit the fact that, though these creatures might be sheep, even sheep have power. But the first skirmish was already won, and I had faith that we could win the real battle.

I balanced my peculiar weapon in my hand to get the feel of it, then brushed aside a pair of sucking paws which were trying to take it from me, and plunged the spike clean through the body of the man who held me.

He fell without making a sound. I regained my weapon by planting my boot on his chest and wrenching it free.

I swung the spike like a club and crushed two heads with a single blow at each. A downward blow served almost to hack a long, clutching arm from an Orconite's body. With four men out of the struggle, I looked to see how my companions were faring, and was assured by a single glance that they were as well off as I.

ENCOURAGED greatly, I met an advance of pressing, jostling bodies by a return to my original technique of stabbing. I stabbed every time a hand reached out to hold me, and if I did not

take a life with each stab, I at least drew a spout of greenish-colored blood.

It was not a nice business, any of it, especially as the Orconites were as fearless before our onslaught as they were powerless. But it had to be done. We were fighting for far more than our own lives.

The blue-lighted corridor with its rippling sounds of static and its gigantic ammeters became worse than a shambles. We walked upon, stumbled over, wallowed amongst the piled corpses of the slain, whose master, knowing more of the science of destructive warfare than any other being in the Universe, had nevertheless forgotten that it was still possible for mankind to fight with their hands.

Such a fight could have only one ending.

When the end came I saw that Virginia Crane was splashed with the ugly blood of the Orconites from her smooth forehead to the soles of her flying boots, but she was unhurt. The rest of us were likewise blood-stained and uninjured. We were all too excited to feel tired. The moment the pressure about us began to relax, she surged toward the waiting cruiser at the end of the tunnel, and I shouted to Koto and LeConte.

"Go and help her, you two! I'll do the work on our ship!"

They did not question my order, but obeyed.

There were only ten or a dozen of the winged ones left now, and when the two men leaped after the woman, it was easy for me to fight a jabbing, slashing battle which not only protected the retreat, but enabled me to work my way slowly toward our own ship and its kotomite.

WITH Leider's cruiser already headed toward the tunnel which led out from the un-

derground hangar, I knew that it could be taken into space with a minimum loss of time. I believed that I could get an atomic gun going in our hold quickly, too. My hopes rose high as I darted a glance over my shoulder and saw Captain Crane and Koto taking, three at a time, the gangway steps which led to the deck and control room, with LeConte directly behind them. Now there were only seven guards left instead of a dozen, and those were at last showing signs of being cowed. I cut down two, and gave a great bound which carried me away from the others in the direction of our wrecked ship.

No sooner, though, did I tense myself for a second leap than I felt a nerveless sensation in my knees, as though the bones had turned to butter, and knew that my high hopes had budded too soon. Instead of leaping, I staggered on for two short steps, then stopped because I could stagger no farther. Looking back at the cruiser, I saw that LeConte, still on the gangway, had stopped also. Captain Crane and Koto were making weak, despairing signs at me from the entrance to the control room. Both of them looked as sick as cats. I heard a laugh, a shrill, rasping sort of laugh, from the forward end of the bright cruiser, and I looked in that direction.

I saw a short man, bald headed, with frog eyes peering at us from behind thick prismatic glasses. He was clad in baggy green overalls, and was slowly waving in our direction a glistening metal tube which he held in both hands. From the end of the tube emanated a purplish light.

"You were clever, my good young friends," he chortled, "to think of fighting with your hands, but you were not quite quick enough. Not to-day goes anyone in my cruiser! What do you think of the enervat-

ing ray, heh? Ingenious, not? Ludwig Leider discovered it. I am Ludwig Leider. You shall come with me and with your own eyes watch the de-energizing of New York and Paris and Berlin. For I am ready to do away with your paltry Earth now!"

I felt the last energy ooze out of me and I sunk, all in a heap, on the floor of Ludwig Leider's cavern.

CHAPTER V

Death in a Box

NEW YORK. We did see it with our own eyes. The instrument through which we gazed was like a metal box with a ground-glass top and a mesh of slender wires leading away from the table on which the box rested. Leider touched a button amidst a long row of buttons on the table. All we had to do after that was to look at the ground-glass plate, and the picture was there.

We, in Leider's private laboratory on Orcon, saw the crowds of a mass meeting of some sort in Union Square, saw a boy and a girl kissing each other in the shadow of bushes in Central Park, saw a little fox terrier watching with only one eye open.

We could not speak, any of the four of us, as we stared at that very simple box which wrought miracles. I stood still, thinking of the things which had happened after our capture, when the cruiser had already seemed to be in our grasp.

First of all, Leider had restored our energy to us by the simple process of turning off the ray which emanated from the tube in his hands. Then a veritable legion of Orconites had come to the cavern in which the cruiser rested, and we had been marched through the very heart of the power rooms, with their hum and clack and daz-

zle of mighty machinery, to the laboratory. That was all.

The Orconites had left us outside the heavy doors of the private room, but, just as there had been no opportunity to attack while they marched with us, Leider gave us no opportunity to harm him while we were alone. Though he had forgotten once the damage we could do in a fight, he was not going to be fooled again. He kept the great table of the box between ourselves and him, and his wary hands were always closer to a certain row of control buttons than ours were to his.

IT was he who broke at last the silence which had fallen as we watched New York from Orcon, and his voice was loud in the hushed laboratory from which the noises of his subterranean power houses were shut out.

"Sit down," he commanded, "and keep away from the table and the reflector."

Then, when we had taken chairs beside the table, he began to speak to us.

"That little dog you saw—I have it in my power to withdraw from him in one second all the energy which makes him run, jump about, live. That I can do by touching controls here at my table without even leaving this marvelous, marvelous room." A frown crossed his forehead above his pop-eyes, and he exclaimed with swift anger, in a croaking voice, "And what I do to the little dog, I can do as easily to the whole population of your loathsome Earth!"

I looked up at him where he stood with the table between us, and at length found my tongue.

"And of course you will do it, you swine!" I burst out.

His momentary anger had passed as swiftly as it had come, and, ignoring my epithet, he rocked smug-

ly on the balls and heels of his feet and smiled.

"Ah, Herr Doktor," he answered contentedly, "I will destroy Earth, of course! For who has better cause than I, whom Earth would not accept as her master? All of the people there will lose the power to move, and they will die. I am ready now, in the uttermost degree. After you so neatly but uselessly saved yourselves from drowning last night, I finished. As easily can I de-energize the peoples of Earth as I can you—the four of you—if you should make the move to harm me."

CAPTAIN CRANE was staring first at Leider, then at me, and her cheeks were gray and ghastly looking. Koto and LeConte were both sitting tight in chairs beside our own, watching me rather than Leider. I looked over the shelves, the whole complex apparatus of that incredible room, but saw no weapon of any kind. And my hands were useless because *his* were so close to the damnable controls.

"But what becomes of Earth itself, after our peoples are gone?" I asked presently.

Leider shrugged and his eyes twinkled behind the thick glasses.

"Herr Doktor, you are a brilliant man. Amongst the most brilliant, I should say, of any who on the Earth have labored. Yet of science you know less than a child. What should I do with Earth except to sit here in my own room, and, with the anarcostic ray, reduce its solid structure into stardust which will drift away into space like the smoke from one tiny match? Pouf! like that."

I looked at the table, at Leider's wary hands. I knew that the man was ready, even as he had said, to do away with Earth. I guessed that we would die, too, when Earth was gone—probably here in this room.

And it seemed likely that the destruction would begin at a not distant moment, for there was some quality of fanatical evil lurking even now in Leider's face.

Then, however, I stiffened in my chair very suddenly indeed. If I could find a way to get close to the box on the table without rousing Leider's suspicion, the outlook might not be so black!

"Leider," I exclaimed all at once, and there was a vigor in my words, "it's all very well for you to be saying these mighty things, but do you know what? I don't believe you can draw the energy out of the human race or disintegrate the Earth, either!"

I THINK if I had kicked him I could not have surprised him more. Which was exactly what I had hoped to do.

"You—you do not *believe?*" he said, incredulously.

"No I don't!"

"Ach, Gott!" A black fury overcame him. Hideous fury. He was already standing beside the table. Quaking from head to foot, he pointed savagely at the box. "Get up and look into the reflector!" He choked and his voice rose to a scream. "Get up! Stoop close to the reflector and watch! Watch there, I say!"

The thing which had launched me on my course of action was the fact that the picture-making box was not screwed to the table. The only thing which held it there was the soft mesh of wires!

With a concealed gesture to the others to stay still, I rose, placed my hands on the table close to the box, and leaned forward as though to look at the glass.

"It shall come now!" Leider yelled, and at that moment took his eyes off me, while he reached with a rage-palsied hand for the twinkling line of buttons.

The instant he looked away from me, I gave a tug which jerked the heavy box away from its wires as easily as a weed is plucked from soft earth. As I made the move Leider looked up and screamed. His hand, already reaching for the buttons, darted forward. But the instant had been all I needed. Before the darting hand ever reached the table, I struck Leider a sharp blow, and hurled the box to the floor.

In a moment more the others were around me. The box was shattered to matchwood. Leider was lying on the floor behind his table with one arm doubled limply under him and dark blood welling from a forehead gash which I hoped went as deep as his brain.

Koto and LeConte kicked open the laboratory door and shot through. Captain Crane and I jumped after them.

CHAPTER VI

Through the Darkness of Orcon

GONGS clanged, blue lights flashed on and off with the lurid glare of sulphur pits burning in hell, and screaming, winged Orconites, all mixed up together, pelted toward us as thickly as the snowflakes of a blizzard. I don't suppose the destruction of one little mesh of wires had ever created such a disturbance before.

Leider's cruiser rested in the hangar two caverns away.

"Play hide-and-seek with them!" I shouted against the turmoil.

The initial wave of the attack struck us as we tore from the laboratory corridor into the first power room. Captain Crane went down under the onslaught of what must have been a hundred Orconites, and it took all the tearing strength of Koto's, LeConte's, and my hands combined to burrow through the piles of creatures who covered her,

and get her out. By the time she was on her feet again, a new legion was at us.

I had not, however, suggested hide-and-peek meaninglessly.

While the others fought, and wildest confusion reigned, I pulled off my coat, flung it aside, and crammed myself into a loose, one-piece costume of Orcon which I tore off a corpse. Then I fought while my three companions repeated the operation. We succeeded in confusing the mob to such an extent that we were able to work our way through the fringes of the melee and move clear across the first room, before we were recognized.

THE alarm of our escape, though, spread into the next room almost as soon as we reached it, and a foolish attempt we made to keep bunched together and get through with a dash, betrayed us before we got well started.

Now it was a case of being drowned again by a sheer deluge of men. While the Orconites pawed me, tripped me, and otherwise discommoded me, I broke necks, dug out eyes, tore quivering antennae from foreheads until I felt as if I had been doing nothing else for hours. And those beside me were doing the same. Yet always more bladder faces rose in front of us, and more wings beat down from above. Not even our supreme strength was great enough to stand it.

Out across the bleeding, crumpled bodies and the teeming swarms beyond, I saw as through a red mist the glittering, whirling maze of Leider's wondrous generators, and began to curse to myself.

For the steady pressure was forcing us slowly back toward the machines and toward the rugged, high wall of the cavern beyond, and I knew that once we reached the wall

we could retreat no farther and must stand there to fight until we were completely exhausted. I drew closer to Virginia Crane and did what I could to help her with her main group of assailants while still battling my own.

Oddly enough, I was remembering how, when she had been caught up by the magnetic current that had brought us here, she had cried out to me, calling me by my given name. . . . The recollection filled me with a queer emotion, partly rebellion and partly—something else. In the crisis we were facing now, I somehow lacked my wonted power to shun femininity.

SIDE by side we struggled against our enemies, tearing at them with our whole strength, yet always we were driven closer to the wall which would finally stop us.

"Oh," she finally gasped, "I—didn't want—to die!"

"No," I answered through set teeth as I hurled down an Orconite only to be confronted by two more; "but I'm afraid—we must. Well, we've done away with Leider, anyway."

"Yes," she choked. "That's—something."

Koto and LeConte were as hard pressed as we. Then, as we fell steadily back into a passage between two of the vast generators, back toward the solid wall of the cavern, a queer thing happened.

Despite the fact that LeConte was embroiled with a dozen winged men, his face became crinkled with a broad grin!

"Watch!" he yelled suddenly, and I *did* watch.

We were within a few feet of the driving gear of one of the generators. Quick as a bolt of lightning, LeConte caught a deadly firm hold on one of the ugly, squawking orange-skinned creatures, raised

him into the air, and there held him poised while he swung around to face the generator.

Genius!

There was a shriek, then a thousand shrieks. Impelled by the Frenchman's tremendous heave, the winged man shot forward and struck full, with a splashing sound, against the terrifically revolving armature. A thunderbolt seemed to explode in our faces. All in that room, we as well as the Orconites, reeled dazedly back. A stench of seared flesh and short circuited wires smote our nostrils. Darkness—smothering, thick, absolute darkness—settled over us.

"COME on!" LeConte shouted amidst the blessed inkiness of it, and I felt him tug at my hand. Captain Crane's hand slipped into my other, Koto caught hold of her, and we started forward.

Genius indeed, this stroke of LeConte's.

Clinging stoutly to each other, we pushed through the meager, floundering opposition which was all that was offered in the intense darkness, and began to forge swiftly ahead. Ten yards . . . a hundred. A slight decrease of the sounds of crying and panting and of confused flopping wings told us we had passed through the arch which separated the wrecked power room from the hangar.

"Captain," I whispered as we battered against some confused and helpless Orconites and flung them aside, "could you make anything of the control system on the cruiser before Leider got us?"

Virginia Crane said vigorously that she had.

"The light switches are all on a board to the right of the entrance door. The other controls are as readily accessible."

"Leaves us in something of a position!" I whispered.

The hand which she had placed in my own tightened its grip. I heard LeConte grunt with satisfaction as he pressed forward. I began to figure on ways and means of getting to our wrecked ship alone after the others were aboard the cruiser.

We crossed another fifty or sixty yards of the darkness, and found fewer of the badly shaken Orconites in our path. Now, in that thick obscurity, I sensed that we were nearing the magnificent, tapering hull with its fish-scale sides.

"Come on!" I urged unnecessarily. I kicked into several of the yielding bodies left from our first fight, before Leider had taken us, and in a little while the feel of cool, smooth metal under my hand told me we had reached the gangway.

"Up you go, Captain!" I snapped, and as she clutched the slender rail of the gangway and plunged upwards, "LeConte, you next. Koto—"

But Koto laid a firm hand on my arm.

"No, I do not go."

WE stopped where we were. The noises of pursuit were still around us, and I could have slugged him for making a delay.

"You fool, get aboard!" I roared.

But it did no good.

"No."

"Get the motors started!" I called to Captain Crane. "LeConte, you help her." Then I turned to Koto and in the dark waved a fist under his nose. "You idiot—"

"No, my friend," he laughed at me. "You killed Leider. LeConte put out the lights. Captain Crane will pilot the ship. Now it's my turn. You will pardon my insubordination, but you will also please to hurry up the gangway before I knock you unconscious and throw you up. Damn it, it's my explosive, anyway, isn't it? Who has the best right to fire it?"

With that he whirled away from me.

"Don't wait!" he called over his shoulder.

I laughed at him and sang out the order to Captain Crane to stand by. As for myself, I remained standing on the small platform at the foot of the gangway.

The moment Captain Crane flipped a switch which flooded the control room and a score of ports along the hull with golden light, I thought the yells which rose from the other room and the far side of this one would blow the roof off. By the time we felt a quiver run through the hull, and heard the sweet, deep-throated hum of the gigantic power plant, a mob of Orconites had formed for a new attack. It was hideous that we could not wait for Koto in darkness, but the light was essential to Captain Crane's preparations, so there was nothing to be done. I felt that Koto's chances of getting back to us were one in a thousand.

YET suddenly, as I still clung to the foot of the gangway, LeConte thrust his head from the control room door and yelled at me to hang on tight. At once the ship moved forward, and, rolling easily on her ground gear, swung left and lunged toward the swooping mob of Orconites.

Handling that space flier in the cavern was like trying to navigate a one-hundred-thousand-ton freighter in a pond. But Captain Crane did it—she whom I had once accused, to myself, of misnavigating and wrecking our other ship. The Orconites had formed themselves in a dense group. We went into them, mowed them down, stopped under the great arch which led to the inky black power rooms, backed up, and, as the screaming lines reformed, crunched terrifically into them again.

By this time I saw in the corridor leading to our old ship, where the darkness was only partially broken by our lights, a dark-headed grinning man who was bent nearly double with the speed of his running.

"He's coming!" I howled.

"He's coming!" LeConte echoed to Virginia Crane in the control room.

And again the miracle of the hundred-thousand-tonner in the pond was performed. Again the cruiser backed up and swung around. We headed toward Koto, straight toward him.

THERE still were droves of Orconites to contend with. Flocks of them had taken to their wings, and were filling the whole upper reaches of the cavern, now that a juggernaut had the floor. They had spied Koto and were swooping toward him. But they could not seize him without coming to the floor, and they could not come to the floor without contending with the juggernaut.

Now the cruiser seemed to swoop. I saw a swirl of wings all about, battering down and down about the Jap; then I clung to the gangway rail with one hand and reached far out with the other toward our friend.

He leaped, and I felt the warm contact of his hands gripping my arm. I gave a heave, and landed him on the steps as neatly as a fisherman ever netted a trout.

"All clear!" I screamed up the gangway.

It was not until we were on the deck, and the cruiser was gliding magnificently forward toward the shaft which led outside to space and light, that Koto spoke. But when he did, his words had significance.

"It's done!" he panted. "The gun is firing against the drums!"

We dove into the control room, and LeConte banged the outer door shut and jammed huge catches, battenning it down for our flight through space.

"Get out as fast as you can!" LeConte panted on, speaking now to Captain Crane as she headed us gently into the tunnel. "The kotomite's due to go off the second the first drums are disintegrated."

I dropped limply on to a seat beside the pilot and sat still.

WE passed through the tunnel in five or six seconds. In another five seconds, we had not only taken off, but had worked up a formidable speed. We barely felt the explosion when it came. But on the instrument board in front of Virginia Crane, gleamed a little box with a ground-glass top, and in that we saw, as by a magic, what happened on Orcon.

First the mountains which topped the subterranean power houses were lifted off. Then the

whole planet rocked. Finally the caverns were inundated by the deluge of the sea which, in the beginning, had so nearly swallowed us.

Orcon was not destroyed, but we knew even then that such of its inhabitants as might remain alive would not soon again dream of making an attack upon Earth.

On the way back, as Earth took form and grew round in the interminable reaches of space ahead of us, I got on well with Captain Crane. It started when she asked me if I were still so cocksure that woman had no place in the U. S. W. Upper Zone Patrol, and I was forced to answer that I was not. After that, one thing led to another.

We were photographed together when we landed beside the colossal, metal-roofed hangars of the Long Island station of the U. S. W. The snapshot was published in that afternoon's tabloids under the caption: Betrothed.

Hot-cakes by Super-science

ANOTHER restaurant added to the more than 10,000 now operating in New York City may seem of little moment. But H. Russell Brand believes the place he opened recently in that city should make a pretty big hit. It serves to introduce to the public a machine on which Mr. Brand had been working twenty-nine years—a machine which may be said to consist of practically the whole restaurant, since it both cooks and serves the food, with the aid of no human hands whatsoever.

More specifically, the machine—Mr. Brand rightly refers to it as a "system"—is composed of 500,000 separate units and is protected by more than 500 basic patents. When a patron enters he takes a seat at a table and presses a button. The button starts the machine in motion and records the patron's seat number.

Then out in the kitchen things begin to happen. Raw foods suddenly find themselves tipped onto revolving disks over a hot fire, and at the expiration of a given length of time tipped off the fire, no longer raw, onto moving belts which carry them through a long heated compartment.

This compartment, a labyrinthine affair, extends along all the tables, and at the point where the patron pressed the button a sliding door opens and out pops a trayful of food, sliding right into place before the customer. When the customer has finished and gets up, the tray and dishes betake themselves back upon the moving belt, are washed automatically and tiered in the manner of matrices in a linotype machine, ready for action again.

At this writing the machine is not yet in full operation, for waiters are used, the belts carrying the trays only to one given point, where the waiters get them and deliver them to the customers. But Mr. Brand says that will soon be remedied.

Also, for a time, the choice of food at this restaurant will be somewhat restricted. In fact, you can have only wheat cakes and coffee. Later, however, the choice will be widened to six dishes, which will be varied every six hours, and by 1935 Mr. Brand hopes to have the machine perfected to a point where it can function in apartment houses, so that those vast things called kitchenettes can be reduced to nothing but buttons.



His clutching hands closed on something small and hard.

The Seed of the Toc-Toc Birds

By Francis Flagg

TALBOT had been working that day, far up in the Catalinas, looking over some mining prospects for his company, and was returning to the Mountain View Hotel in Oracle when, from the mouth of an aban-

doned shaft some distance back of that town, he saw a strange object emerge.

"Hello," he said to Manuel, his young Mexican assistant, "what the devil can that be?"

Manuel crossed himself swiftly.

Little did Prof. Reubens suspect what his atom-tampering would set loose upon the world.

"Dios!" he exclaimed, "but it is a queer bird, señor."

Queer, it certainly was, and of a species Talbot had never before laid eyes on. The bird stood on the crumbling rim of the mining shaft and regarded him with golden eyes. Its body was as large as that of a buzzard, and its head had a flat, reptilian look, unpleasant to see. Nor was that the only odd thing. The feathers glittered metallically, like blued copper, and a streak of glistening silver outlined both wings.

Marveling greatly, and deciding that the bird must be some rare kind escaped from a zoo, or a stray from tropical lands much further south, Talbot advanced cautiously, but the bird viewed his approach with unconcern. Ten feet from it he stopped uneasily. The strange fowl's intent look, its utter immobility, somewhat disconcerted him.

"Look out, señor," warned Manuel.

Involuntarily, Talbot stepped back. If he had possessed a rifle he would have shot the bird, but neither Manuel nor himself was armed. Suddenly—he had looked away for a moment—the bird was gone. Clutching a short miner's pick-ax, and a little ashamed of his momentary timidity, he strode to the edge of the abandoned shaft and peered down. There was nothing to see; only rotting joists of wood, crumbling earth for a few feet, and then darkness.

HE pondered for a moment. This was the old Wiley claim. He knew it well. The shaft went down for over two hundred feet, and there were several lateral workings, one of which tunneled back into the hills for a considerable distance. The mine had been a bonanza back in the days when Oracle boomed, but the last ore had been taken out in 1905, and for twenty-seven years it had lain deserted. Manuel came up beside him and leaned over.

"What is that?" he questioned.

Talbot heard it himself, a faint rumbling sound, like the rhythmic throb of machinery. Mystified, he gazed blankly at Manuel. Of course it was impossible. What could functioning machinery be doing at the bottom of an abandoned hole in the ground? And where there were no signs of human activity to account for the phenomenon? A more forsaken looking place it would be hard to imagine. Not that the surrounding country wasn't ruggedly beautiful and grand; the hills were covered with live-oak, yucca grass, chulla, manzanita, and starred with the white blossoms of wild thistle. But this locality was remote from human habitation, and lonely.

Could it be, Talbot wondered, the strange bird making that noise? Or perhaps some animal? The noise sounded like nothing any creature, furred or feathered, could make, but, of course, that must be the explanation. However, it would be dark within the hour, with Oracle still two miles distant, so he turned reluctantly away, Manuel thwacking the burros from the grazing they had found. But that was not to be the end of the odd experience. Just before the trail swung over the next rise, Talbot glanced back. There, perching on the rim of the abandoned mining shaft, were not one but two of the strange birds. As if cognizant of his backward glance, they flapped their gleaming, metallic wings, although they did not rise, and gave voice to what could only be their natural harsh cries, measured and, somehow, sinister.

"*Toc-toc, toc-toc.*"

Talbot went to bed determined to investigate the old Wiley claim the next day, but in the morning an urgent telegram called him and Manuel to Phoenix, and so the matter was necessarily postponed. Moreover, on mature reflection, he decided that there was nothing much to investigate. The days went by,

the matter slipped his mind, and he had almost forgotten the incident.

IT was an Indian who first brought news of the jungle to Oracle. His name was John Redpath and he wasn't the average person's idea of an Indian at all. He wore store clothes and a wide-brimmed hat, and spoke English with the colloquial ease of one whose native language it was. It was ten o'clock in the morning, the hour when people gathered at the local store and post-office to gossip and get their mail, when he came driving into town in his Ford, his terrified wife and three children crowded into the back seat.

"What's the matter, John?" asked Silby, the constable.

"Matter?" said Redpath. "I'll tell you what's the matter."

He held the attention of the crowd which now began flocking around him. "You know me, Silby; I'm not easily frightened; but what's happened at my place has me scared stiff."

He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"When we went to bed last night, everything looked as usual; but this morning. . . ."

He paused.

"Something over night had grown up in my pasture. Don't ask me what it is. The whole hillside was filled with it. I went to the pasture to milk my goats—that's some distance from the house and over a rise; you know how rugged my land is—and there was the stuff, acres of it, twenty, thirty feet tall, like—like nothing I had ever seen before. And Silby"—his voice was suddenly low—"I could see it growing."

AT this remarkable statement, everyone in sound of his voice gaped with astonishment. Had it been any other Indian they would have said he was drunk—but not John Redpath. He didn't drink.

"Growing?" echoed Silby stupidly.

"Yes. The damn stuff was growing. But it wasn't that which stampeded me out of there. It was the globe."

"The globe!" said Silby, more mystified than ever.

"It was floating over the growing stuff, like a black balloon. Just over my place the balloon began to sift down a shower of pebbles. Like beans, they were; seeds, rather; for when they hit the ground they started to sprout."

"Sprout?" The constable was capable of nothing more than an echo.

"I'm telling you the truth," continued Redpath. "Incredibly fast. I had barely time to crank up the car and get out of there. I never would have done it if the strange growth hadn't left the way clear from the garage to the road. Silby, I had the devil of a time getting the wife and kids out of the house. When I looked back after going a quarter of a mile the house had disappeared under a tangled mass."

There was no time for anyone to question John Redpath further. Even as he finished speaking a large automobile dashed up and out tumbled a well-dressed and portly red-faced stranger.

"What the devil's the matter with the road above here? Funniest thing I ever saw. The road to Mount Lemmon's blocked. My family," he said inconsequentially, "is at Mount Lemmon for the summer and I want to get through to them."

Blocked! The crowd stared at him wonderingly. John Redpath threw in his clutch. "So long," he said. "I've a brother in Tucson, and I'm going to his place until his blows over."

As he left Oracle, John Redpath noticed several dark globes drifting down on it from the hills.

THE first inkling the outside world had of the terrible tragedy that was happening at Oracle

came over the phone to Tucson while John Redpath was still en route to that city.

"Hello, hello! Is this the police station? Silby speaking. Silby, town constable at Oracle. For God's sake, send us help! We're being attacked. Yes, attacked from the air. By strange aircraft, round globes, discharging—oh, I don't know what it is; only it grows when it hits the earth. Yes, grows. Oracle is hemmed in. And there are the birds—b-i-r-d-s, birds—"

There was a stifled cry, the voice suddenly ceased, and the wire went dead.

"My God!" said the chief of police of Tucson, "somebody's raving." He lost no time in communicating with the sheriff's office and sending out his men. They soon returned, white-faced and shaken.

"Chief," said the officer in charge of the party, "you know where the road to Oracle switches off the main highway? Well, it's impassable, covered with stuff a hundred feet high."

The chief stared. "Are you crazy?"

"No. Listen. It's the queerest growth you ever saw. Not like vegetation at all. More like twisted metal. . . ."

BUT now the city began to seethe with excitement. Farmers and their families flocked in from the Seep Springs district, and from Jayhnes, telling weird tales of drifting globes and encroaching jungle. The Southern Pacific announced that traffic northward was disrupted. Extras appeared on the streets with shrieking headlines. Everything was in confusion.

A flyer from the local airport flew over Oracle and announced on his return that he could see no signs of the town, that its immediate vicinity was buried under an incredibly tall and tangled mass of vegetation. "From the air it looks like giant stalks of spaghetti, twisted, fantastic," was

his description. He went on to say that he noticed quite a few drifting globes and large birds with black, glistening wings, but these offered no hindrance to his flight.

Now the wires hummed with the startling news. All the world was informed of the tragedy. The great cities of the nation stood aghast. An aroused Washington dispatched orders for the aerial forces of the country to proceed to Arizona without delay. The governor of Arizona mobilized the state militia. All border patrol officers proceeded to the area affected. And yet in the face of what was happening they were powerless to do a thing.

At two o'clock of the day following the wiping out of Oracle, the first black globes approached Tucson. They floated down from the north, skirting the granite ridges and foothills of the Catalinas, and were met with a withering hail of lead from anti-aircraft guns, and burst, scattering wide their contents. When some three hours later the first squadron of the air fleet came to earth on the landing field a few miles south of the city, the northern environs of Tucson, all the area the other side of Speedway, and running east and west as far as the eye could see, was a monstrous jungle a hundred or more feet tall—and still growing.

TERRIFIED residents fled before the uncanny invasion. People congested the streets. Thousands fled from the city in automobiles, and thousands of others thronged the railroad station and bus-line offices seeking for transportation. Rumors ran from lip to lip that Russia was attacking the United States with a newly invented and deadly method of warfare; that it wasn't Russia but Japan, China, England, Germany, a coalition of European and Asiatic powers.

Frantically, the city officials wired

railroad companies to send in emergency trains. The mayor appealed to the citizens to be quiet and orderly, not to give way to panic, that everything was being done to insure their safety. Hastily deputized bodies of men were set to patrolling streets and guarding property. Later, martial law was established. The south side of Speedway rapidly assumed the appearance of an armed camp. At the landing field Flight Commander Burns refueled his ships and interviewed the flyer who had flown over Oracle. That worthy shook his head.

"You're going out to fight, Commander," he said, "but God knows what. So far we have been unable to detect any human agency back of those globes. They just drift in, irrespective of how the wind is blowing. So far our only defense has been to shoot them down, but that does little good; it only helps to broadcast their seed. Then, too, the globes shot down have never been examined. Why? Because where they hit a jungle springs up. Sometimes they burst of their own accord. One or two of them got by us in the darkness last night, despite our searchlights, and overwhelmed a company of National Guards."

The flight commander was puzzled.

"Look here," he said, "those globes don't just materialize out of thin air. There must be a base from which they operate. Undoubtedly an enemy is lurking in those mountains." He got up decisively. "If it is humanly possible to locate and destroy that enemy, we shall do it."

FLYING in perfect formation, the bombing squadron clove the air. Looking down, the observers could see the gigantic and mysterious jungle which covered many square miles of country. Like sinuous coils of spaghetti, it looked, and also curiously like vast up-pointed girders of steel and iron. The rays of the late afternoon sun glinted on

this jungle and threw back spears of intense light. Over the iron ridges of the Catalinas the fleet swept at an elevation of several thousand feet. Westward, numerous huge globes could be seen drifting south. The commander signaled a half dozen of his ships to pursue and shoot them down.

In the mountains themselves, there was surprisingly little of the uncanny vegetation. Mile after mile of billowing hills were quartered, but without anything of a suspicious nature being noted. Here and there the observers saw signs of life. Men and women waved at them from isolated homesteads and shacks. At Mount Lemmon the summer colonists appeared unharmed, but in such rugged country it was impossible to think of landing. Oracle, and for a dozen miles around its vicinity, was deserted.

Though the commander searched the landscape thoroughly with his glasses, he could detect the headquarters of no enemies; and yet the existence of the drifting globes would seem to presuppose a sizable base from which they operated. Mystified, he nevertheless subjected the Oracle area to a thorough bombing, and it was while engaged in doing so that he and his men observed a startling phenomenon.

HIGH in the heavens, seemingly out of nothing, the mysterious globes grew. The aviators stared, rubbed their eyes in amazement, doubted the truth of what they saw. Their commander recollected his own words, "Those globes don't just materialize out of thin air." But that actually seemed to be what they were doing. Out of empty space they leaped, appearing first as black spots, and in a moment swelling to their huge proportions.

One pilot made the mistake of ramming a globe, which burst, and he hurtled to earth in a shower of seed,

seed which seemed to root and grow and cover his craft with a mass of foliage even as it fell. Horrified, ammunition and explosives exhausted, the amazed commander ordered his ships back to Tucson. What he had to tell caused a sensation.

"No," he said, finishing his report to the high military official who had arrived with federal forces, "I saw nothing—aside from the globes—that could possibly account for the attack. Nothing."

But none the less the attack went on. Though hundreds of planes scoured the sky, though great guns bellowed day and night and thousands of soldiers, state and federal, were under arms, still the incredible globes continued to advance, still more and more of the countryside came under the sway of the nightmarish jungle. And this losing battle was not waged without loss of human life. Sometimes bodies of artillery were cut off by globes getting beyond their lines in the darkness and hemming them in. Then they had literally to hack their way out or perish; and hundreds of them perished. One company sergeant told of a thrilling race with three globes.

"It was a close thing," he said, scratching his head, "and only a third of us made it."

FEAR gripped the hearts of the most courageous of men. It was terrifying and nerve-racking to face such an *unhuman* foe—weird, drifting globes and invading jungles whose very source was shrouded in mystery. Against this enemy no weapons seemed to prevail. All the paraphernalia of modern warfare was proving useless. And looking at each other with white faces—not alone in Arizona, but in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles—men asked themselves these questions, and the newspapers posed them:

"What if this thing can't be stopped?"

"What if it keeps on and on and invades every city and state?"

"It is only starting now, but what will it be like a month from now, a year?"

The whole nation awoke to a realization of its danger. The Administration at Washington solemnly addressed itself to the capitals of the world.

"If some power, jealous of the greatness of America, has perfected a new and barbarous weapon of warfare, and without due warning and declaration of hostilities has launched it against us, not only do we denounce such uncivilized procedure, but demand that such a power speak out and reveal to us and the world who our enemy is."

But the powers of the world, as one, united in disclaiming any hand in the monstrous attack being made on the United States. As for that attack, it proceeded inexorably. On the fourth day Tucson was evacuated. Then Winkleman awoke one morning to find that the drifting globes had reached the river. The town was abandoned. California mobilized citizen forces in cooperation with Nevada. The great physicist Miller was said to be frantically at work on a chemical designed to destroy the gigantic growths, specimens of which had been sent him. Such was the condition of affairs when, at Washington, Milton Baxter, the young student, told his incredible story to a still more incredulous Senate.

THE Senate had been sitting in an anxious session for five days, and was little inclined to give ear to the stories of cranks. Fortunately for the world, young Baxter came of an influential family and had taken the precaution of having himself introduced by two prominent financiers, who demanded that he be heard.

"Gentlemen," he said earnestly, "contrary to current opinion, Amer-

ica is not being assailed by a foreign power. No! Listen to me a moment and I shall tell you what is attacking America."

He paused and held the assemblage with compelling eyes.

"But first let me explain how I know what I am going to tell you. I was in London when I read of what is occurring in Arizona. Before the wire went dead on him, didn't the unfortunate constable of Oracle say something about birds?"

The senators were silent. "Yes," said a press correspondent at length. "If I remember correctly, he said, 'And there are the birds—b-i-r-d-s, birds.'"

"Well," exclaimed Senator Huffy, "the man was pretty well excited and his words may have been misunderstood. What the devil have birds to do with those globes and jungles?"

"More than you think," replied Baxter. "Listen!" He fixed their attention with uplifted hand. "The thing I have to reveal is of such paramount importance that I must not be interrupted. You must bear with me while I go back some months and even years in time to make myself understood.

"You all remember the mysterious disappearance of Professor Reubens. Yes, I see that you do. It caused a sensation. He was the foremost scientist in the country—it would not be exaggerating too much to say in the world. His name was not as well known among the masses as that of Miller and Dean; in fact, outside of an exclusive circle it wasn't known at all, but ask any scientist about Reubens. He was a tall, dour man of sixty, with Scotch blood in his veins, and was content to teach a class in a college because of the leisure it afforded him for his own research work. That was at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

"The faculty of the college was proud to have him on its staff and provided him with a wooden build-

ing back of the campus, for a private laboratory and workshop. I understand that the Rockefeller Institute contributed funds towards Professor Reubens' experiments, but I am not certain.

"**A**T any rate he had a wonderfully well equipped place. I was a pupil at the University and attended his class in physics. A strong friendship grew up between us. How can I explain that friendship? I was not a particularly brilliant student, but he had few friends and perhaps my boyish admiration pleased him. I think, too, that he was lonely, heart-hungry for affection. His wife was dead, and his own boy. . . . But I won't go into that.

"Suffice it to say that I believe he bestowed on me some of the affection he had felt for his dead son. Indeed I am sure he did. Be that as it may, I often visited him in his laboratory and watched, fascinated, as he pored over some of his intricate apparatus. In a vague way, I knew that he was seeking to delve more deeply into the atom.

"Before Leeuwenhoek invented the microscope,' the Professor once said, 'who ever dreamed of the life in a drop of water? What is needed now is a super-microscope to view the atom.'

"The idea thrilled me.

"Do you believe, sir, that an instrument will ever be invented that will do that?"

"Yes. Why not? I am working on some such device myself. Of course the whole thing has to be radically different. The present method of deducing the atom by indirection is very unsatisfactory. We can know nothing for certain until direct observation is possible. The atomic theory that likens the atom to our solar system, with planets revolving round a central nucleus, is very interesting. But I shall never be content, for one, until I can see

such an atomic system in operation.'

"Now I had every admiration for the capacity and genius of my teacher, but I couldn't forebear exclaiming:

"'Is that possible?'

"'Of course it's possible,' he cried irritably. 'Do you think I should be pursuing my experiments if I didn't think it possible? Only numbskulls think anything impossible!'

I FELT rather hurt at his retort and a certain coolness sprang up between us. The summer holidays came and I went away without bidding him good-by. But returning for the new semester, my first act was to hurry to the laboratory. He greeted me as if there had never been any difference between us.

"'Come,' he cried; 'you must see what I have accomplished. It is marvelous, marvelous.'

"In his workshop stood a mechanism perhaps three feet square and four feet high. It was made of polished steel and looked not unlike an Edison music box.

"'You are the first I have shown it to,' he said excitedly. 'Here, look into this.'

"Stooping over the top of the box I peered into the eye-piece indicated. It was so fashioned that it fitted the contour of the face snugly.

"'Now hold steady,' warned the Professor. 'This machine makes quite a noise, but it won't harm you at all.'

"I sensed that he was fingering and arranging dials and levers on the side of the contrivance. Suddenly an engine in the box began to throb with a steady rhythm. This gradually increased in tempo until the vibration of it shook the room.

"'Don't move,' shouted the Professor.

"At first I could see nothing. Everything was intensely dark. Then the darkness began to clarify. Or rather I should say it seemed as if the dark-

ness increased to such a pitch that it became—oh, I can't describe it! But of a sudden I had the sensation of looking into the utter bleakness and desolation of interstellar space. Coldness, emptiness—that was the feeling. And in this coldness and emptiness flamed a distant sun, around which twelve darker bodies the size of peas revolved. They revolved in various ellipses. And far off—millions of light years away (the thought came to me involuntarily at the time)—I could glimpse infinitesimal specks of light, a myriad of them. With a cry I jerked back my head.

"'That,' shouted the Professor in my ear, 'was an atomic universe.'

IT never entered my head to doubt him. The realness, the vividness, the overwhelming loneliness and vastness of the sight I had seen—yes, and the suggestion of cosmic grandeur and aloofness that was conveyed—banished any other feeling but that of belief.

"'Inside that box,' said Professor Reubens quietly, 'and directly underneath the special crystal-ray medium I have perfected, is a piece of matter no larger than a pin-head. But viewed through the magnifying medium of the crystal-ray that insignificant piece of matter becomes as vast and as empty as all space, and in that space you saw—an atomic system.'

"An atomic system! Imagine my emotions. The tremendousness of the assertion took away my breath. I could only seize the Professor's hand and hold to it tightly.

"'Softly, my boy, softly,' he said, smiling at my emotion. 'What you have seen is but the least part of the invention. There is more to it than that.'

"'More?'

"'Yes. Did you think I would be content with merely viewing at a distance? No. Consider that revolving

round a central nucleus similar to our sun are twelve planets, any one of which may be inhabited by intelligent creatures.'

"I stared at him dumbly.

"'You mean—'

"'Why not? Size is only relative. Besides in this case I can demonstrate. Please look again.'

"Not without trepidation, I did as he bade. Once more I saw the black emptiness of atomic space, saw the blazing nucleus with its whirling satellites. Above the roaring noise of the machine came Professor Reubens' voice. 'I am now intensifying the magnifying medium and focusing it on one of the planets you see. The magnifying crystal-ray is mounted on a revolving device which follows this particular planet in its orbit. Now . . . now . . .'

I GAZED, enthralled. Only one atomic planet—the size of a pea and seemingly motionless in space—now lay in my field of vision. And this planet began to grow, to expand, until beneath my staring eyes it looked like the full moon in all its glory.

"'I am gradually increasing the magnifying power of the crystal-ray,' came the voice of the Professor.

"The huge mass of the planet filled the sub-atomic sky. My hands gripped the rim of the box with excitement. On its surface began to form continents, seas. Good God! was all this really materializing from a speck of matter under the lens of a super-microscope? I was looking down from an immense height upon an ever clarifying panorama. Mountains began to unfold, plains, and suddenly beneath me appeared a mighty city. I was too far away to see it distinctly, but it was no city such as we have on earth. And yet it was magnificent; it was like gazing at a strange civilization.

"Dimly I could see great machines laboring and sending forth glowing

streamers of light. Strange buildings rose. It was all bizarre, bewildering, unbelievably weird. What creatures dwelt in this place? I strained my eyes, strove to press forward, and in that very moment the things at which I gazed seemed to rise swiftly to meet my descending head. The illusion was that of plunging earthward at breakneck speed. With a stifled cry, I recoiled, rubbed my blinking eyes, and found myself staring stupidly into the face of Professor Reubens. He shut off the machine and regarded me thoughtfully.

"'In that atomic universe, on a planet swinging round a sub-atomic sun, the all of which lies somewhere in a speck of our matter, intelligent creatures dwell and have created a great machine civilization. And Baxter,' he leaned forward and fixed me with eyes that gleamed from under heavy brows, 'not only has my super-atomic-microscope revealed somewhat of that world and its marvels to human vision, but it has opened up another, a more wonderful possibility.'

HE did not tell me what this wonderful possibility was, and a few minutes later I left the laboratory, intending to return after a late class. But a telegram from Phoenix was at my rooms, calling me home. My father was seriously ill. It was June before he recovered his health. Consequently I had to forego college until the next season.

"'Old Reubens is going dotty,' said one of my classmates to me. Rather disturbed, I sought him out. I saw that there were dark circles of sleeplessness under his eyes and that his face had grown thinner. Somewhat diffidently I questioned him about his experiments. He answered slowly:

"'You will recollect my telling you that the super-atomic-microscope had opened up another wonderful possibility?'

"I nodded, sharply curious now.

"Look."

"He led the way into his workshop. The super-atomic-microscope, I noticed, had been altered almost out of recognition. It is hopeless for me to attempt describing those changes, but midway along one side of its length projected a flat surface like a desk, with a large funnel-shaped device resting on it. The big end of this funnel pointed towards a square screen set against the wall, a curious screen superimposed on what appeared to be a background of frosted glass.

"This," said the Professor, laying one hand on the funnel and indicating the screen with the other, 'is part of the arrangement with which I have established communication with the world in the atom.

"No," he said, rightly interpreting my exclamation, 'I am not crazy. For months I have been exchanging messages with the inhabitants of that world. You know the wave and corpuscular theories of light? Both are correct, but in a higher synthesis—But I won't go into that. Suffice it to say that I broke through the seemingly insuperable barrier hemming in the atomic world and made myself known. But I see that you still doubt my assertion. Very well, I will give you a demonstration. Keep your eyes on the screen—so—'

ADJUSTING what seemed a radio headpiece to my ears, he seated himself at a complicated control-board. Motors purred, lights flashed, every filament of the screen became alive with strange fires. The frosted glass melted into an infinity of rose-colored distance. Far off, in the exact center of this rosy distance appeared a black spot. Despite the headpiece, I could hear the Professor talking to himself, manipulating dials and levers. The black spot grew, it advanced, it took on form and substance; and then I stared, I

gasped, for suddenly I was gazing into a vast laboratory, but depicted on a miniature scale.

"But it wasn't this laboratory which riveted my attention. No. It was the unexpected creature that perched in the midst of it and seemed to look into my face with unwinking eyes of gold set in a flat reptilian head. This creature moved; its feathers gleamed metallically; I saw its bill open and shut. Distinctly through the ear-phones came a harsh sound, a sound I can only describe by the words *toc-toc, toc-toc*. Then, just as the picture had appeared, it faded, the lights went out, the purring of the motors ceased.

"Yes," said the Professor, stepping to my side and removing the headpiece, 'the inhabitants of the sub-atomic planet are birds.'

"I could only stare at him dumbly.

"I see that astounds you. You are thinking that they lack hands and other characteristics of the *genus homo*. But perhaps certain faculties of manipulation take their place. At any rate those birds are intelligent beings; in some respects, further advanced in science than are we ourselves. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that their scientific investigations and achievements have been along slightly different lines. If such messages I sent them had come to our world from another planet or dimension, how readily they might have been misconstrued, ridiculed or ignored.' The Professor shrugged his shoulders. 'But the beings in this sub-atomic world interpreted my communications without difficulty.

IN no time we were conversing with one another through means of a simplified code. I was soon given to understand that their scientists and philosophers had long recognized the fact that their universe was but an atom in an immeasurably greater dimension of existence; yes, and had long been trying

to establish contact with it.' The Professor's voice fell. 'And not that alone: they were eager to cooperate with me in perfecting a method of passing from their world to ours!'

"'Yes,' he cried, 'much of what I have accomplished has been under their advice and guidance; and they on their part have labored; until now'—his eyes suddenly blazed into my fascinated face—'until now, after months of intensive work and experiment, success is nigh, and any day may see the door opened and one of them come through!'

"Gentlemen!" cried Milton Baxter, "what more is there to say? I staggered from Professor Reubens' laboratory that afternoon, my head in a whirl. That was on a Monday.

"'Come back Thursday,' he said.

"But as you know, Professor Reubens disappeared on a Wednesday night before; and stranger still, his machines disappeared with him. In his laboratory were signs of a struggle, and bloodstains were found. The police suspected me of a guilty knowledge of his whereabouts, in short of having made away with my friend. When I told somewhat of the experiments he had been engaged in, spoke of the missing inventions, they thought I was lying. Horrified at the suspicion leveled at myself, I finally left Tucson and went abroad. Months passed; and during all those months I pondered the mystery of the Professor's fate, and the fate of his machines. But my fevered brain could offer no solution until I read of what was happening in Arizona; then, then. . . ."

Milton Baxter leaned forward, his voice broke.

"Then," he cried, "then I understood! Professor Reubens had succeeded in his last experiment. He had opened the door to earth for the bird intelligences from the atom and they had come through and slain him and spirited away his machines and established them in a secret place!

"God help us," cried Milton Baxter, "there can be but one conclusion to draw. They are waging war against us with their own hideous methods of warfare; they have set out to conquer earth!"

SUCH was the amazing story Milton Baxter told the Senate, but that body placed little credence in it. In times of stress and disaster cranks and men of vivid imaginations and little mental stability inevitably spring up. But the Washington correspondents wired the story to their papers and the Associated Press broadcast it to the four winds.

Talbot had just returned to Phoenix from New Mexico. He had been out of touch with civilization and newspapers and it was with a feeling of stunned amazement that he learned of the evacuation of Tucson and Winkleman and the wiping out of Oracle. Reading Milton Baxter's incredible story he leapt to his feet with an oath. Toc-toc! Why, that was the sound the strange birds had uttered in the hills back of Oracle. And there was the noise of machinery coming from the old shaft.

Full of excitement he lost no time in seeking an interview with the military commander whose headquarters were located in Phoenix and related to him what Manuel and himself had witnessed and heard that day at the abandoned mine. Manuel corroborated his tale. The commander was more than troubled and doubtful.

"God knows we cannot afford to pass up an opportunity of wiping out the enemy. If you will indicate on a map where the old shaft is we will bomb it from the air."

But Talbot shook his head.

"Your planes would have a tough job hitting a spot as small as that from the air. Besides, a direct hit might only close up the shaft and not destroy the workings underground. If the enemy be the crea-

tures Milton Baxter says they are, what is to prevent them from digging their way out and resuming the attack?"

"Then we will land troops in there somehow and overwhelm them with—"

TALBOT interrupted. "Pardon me, General, but the enemy would have no difficulty in spotting such a maneuver. What chance would your soldiers have against a shower of jungle seed? You would only be sending them to destruction. No, the only way is for someone familiar with those old underground diggings to enter them, locate the birds and the machines and blow them up."

"But who—"

"Myself. Listen. This is the plan. About five years ago my company mined for copper and other ores about a half mile above the Wiley claim. I was in charge of operations. That is how I know the ground so well. One of our northern leads broke through into a tunnel of the abandoned mine. When copper prices were shot to hell in the depression of 1930 we quit taking out ore; but when I went through the place eighteen months ago it was still possible to crawl from one mine to another. Of course earth and rock may have fallen since then, but I don't believe the way is yet blocked. If I were dropped in that vicinity at night with another man and the necessary tools and explosives. . . ."

The general thought swiftly.

"An auto-gyroscope could land you all right. There's one here now. But what about the second man to accompany you?"

Manuel said quickly, "I'm going with the boss."

"You, Manuel," Talbot said roughly. "Don't be a fool. If anything should happen to me—well, I've lived my life; but you're only a kid."

Manuel's face set stubbornly. "An experienced mining man you need, is

it not? In case there should be difficulties. And I am experienced. Besides, señores," he said simply, "my wife and child are somewhere in those mountains . . . above Oracle. . . ."

Talbot gripped his hand in quick sympathy. "All right, Manuel; come if you like."

A MOONLESS sky hung above them as they swung over the dark and jungle-engulfed deserted city of Tucson, a sky blazing with the clarity of desert stars, and to the south and west shot through with the beams of great searchlights. Flying at a lofty altitude to avoid contact with drifting globes or betrayal of their coming with no lights showing aboard their craft save those carefully screened and focused on the instrument board, it was hard to realize that the fate of America, perhaps of the world, hung on the efforts of two puny individuals.

Everything seemed unreal, ghost-like, and suddenly the strangeness of it all came over Talbot and he felt afraid. The noiseless engine made scarcely a sound; the distant rumble of gunfire sounded like low and muttering thunder. They had come by way of Tucson so as to pick up a ten-gallon tube of concentrated explosive gas at the military camp in the Tucson mountains.

"This gas," the general had assured them, "has been secretly developed by the chemical branch of the War Department and is more powerful than TNT or nitro-glycerin. It is odorless, harmless to breathe and exploded by a wireless-radio device."

He had showed them how to manipulate the radio device, and explained that in the metal tube was a tiny chamber from which gas could not escape, and a receiving-detonating cap. "If you can introduce the tube into the underground galleries where you suspect the enemy's headquarters to be, allow the contents to

escape for ten minutes, and a mile distant you can blow the mine and all in it to destruction. And you needn't be afraid of anything escaping alive," he had added grimly.

TALBOT thought of his words as the dark and silent world slid by. He glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. Eleven-fifteen. The moon rose at eleven-twenty-four. He studied the map. High over Mount Lemmon the craft soared. He touched the army pilot's arm. "All right," he said, "throttle her down." Their speed decreased. "Lower."

Swiftly they sank, until the dark bulk of hills and trees lay blackly beneath; so near as to seem within the touch of a hand. Though he strained his ears, no alien sound came wafting upward. "Keep circling here," he directed the pilot. "The moon'll be up in a minute and then we can be sure of where we are." The pilot nodded. He was a phlegmatic young man. Not once during the trip had he uttered a word.

The east glowed as if with red fire. Many a time before had Talbot watched the moon rise, but never under stranger circumstances. Now the night was illuminated with mellow glory. "Hit the nail on the head," he whispered. "Do you see that spot over there? To the left, yes. Can you land us there?"

Without a word the pilot swung for the clearance. It was a close thing, requiring delicate maneuvering, and only an auto-gyroscope could have made it without crashing. Hurriedly Manuel and Talbot unloaded their gear.

"All right," said Talbot to the pilot. "No need to wait for us. If we are successful, we'll send out the wireless signal agreed on, and if we aren't. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "But tell the General to be sure and allow us the time stipulated on before undertaking another attack."

STANDING there on the bleak hillside, watching the auto-gyroscope run ahead for a few yards and then take the air, Talbot experienced a feeling of desolation. Now he and Manuel were alone, cut off from their own kind by barriers of impregnable jungle. And yet on that lonely hillside there were no signs of an enemy. For a moment he wondered if he weren't asleep, dreaming; if he wouldn't soon awake to find that all this was nothing but a nightmare.

But Manuel gathering up the tools aroused him from such thoughts. Not without difficulty were the necessary things conveyed to the abandoned mine back of the old Wiley claim. Their course lay along the bottom of a dry creek, over a ridge, and so to the shaft half-way down the side of a hill. A second trip had to be made to bring the gas tube.

It was two o'clock in the morning when Manuel stood at the foot of the four-hundred-foot hole and signaled up that the air was good. Talbot lowered the tools to him, and the gas container, and lastly went down himself. As already stated, Talbot had explored the underground workings of the mine not eighteen months before. Picking out the main tunnel and keeping a close watch for rattlers with electric torches, the two men went cautiously ahead. In places earth had fallen and had to be cleared away, but the formation for the most part was a soft rock and shale. They went slowly, for fear of starting slides.

At a spot taking an abrupt turn—and it was here that the newer tunnel had broken through into the older gallery of the Wiley claim—Manuel caught swiftly at Talbot's arm. "What is that?" To straining ears came the unmistakable throb of machinery. They snapped off their torches and crouched in Stygian darkness. Not a ray of light was to be seen. Talbot knew that in follow-

ing the ore stratum, the Wiley gallery took several twists. Laboriously he and Manuel advanced with the gas tube. It was stifflingly close. He counted the turns, one, two, three. Now the roar of machinery was a steady reverberation that shook the tunnel. He whispered to Manuel:

"Go back and wait for me at the mouth of the shaft. Only one of us must risk taking the gas tube any nearer the enemy. Here, take my watch. It is now two-forty-five. If I don't rejoin you by four o'clock touch off the explosive."

Manuel started to protest. "Do as I say," commanded Talbot. "The fate of the world is at stake. Give me an hour; but no longer—remember!"

L EFT alone in the clammy darkness Talbot wiped the sweat from his face. Grabbing one end of the rope sling in which the tube was fastened, he pulled it ahead. There was a certain amount of unavoidable noise; rock rattled, earth fell; but he reasoned shrewdly enough that the roar of the machinery would drown this. Beyond a crevice created by a cave-in he saw an intense light play weirdly. He squirmed through the crevice and pulled the tube after him.

His mind reconstructed the mine ahead. He recollected that when the lead of this mine had petered out, the owners had begun to sink the shaft deeper into the earth before abandoning the mine. This meant that the foot of the shaft, with the addition of an encroaching twenty feet of the southern gallery, was deeper by some several yards than the floor of the tunnel in which he stood. Here was the logical place to set the gas tube, nose pointed ahead.

With trembling fingers he loosened the screwed-in nose of the tube with a wrench. A slight hiss told of the deadly gas's escape. It would inevitably flow towards the shaft, drawn by the slight suction of ma-

chinery, following the easiest direction of expansion. Now Talbot's work was done, and if he had immediately retreated all would have been well, but the weird light fascinated him. Here he was, one man in the bowels of earth pitting his strength, his ingenuity against something incredible, unbelievable. Beings from an atomic universe, from a world buried within the atom; beings attacking his own earth with uncanny methods of destruction. Oh, it was impossible, absurd, but he must look at them, he must see.

Scarcely daring to breathe, he squirmed, he crawled, and suddenly he saw. He was looking down into an underground crypt flooded with brilliant light. That crypt had been altered out of all recognition, its greater expanse of roof supported with massive pillars, the light screened away from the shaft. But it was not all this which riveted his staring eyes. No—it was the machines; strange, twisted things, glowing, pulsing, and—in the light of his knowledge—menacing and sinister.

T ALBOT gasped. Almost at once he observed the birds, twelve of them, two standing in front of what appeared to be a great square of polished crystal, wearing metal caps and goggles, heads cocked forward intently. The others also perched in front of odd machines like graven images. That was the uncanny thing about the birds: they appeared to be doing nothing. Only the occasional jerk of a head, the filming of a hard golden eye, gave them a semblance of life. But, none the less, there could be no mistaking the fact that they were the guiding, the directing geniuses back of all the pulsing, throbbing mechanisms.

Half mesmerized by the sight, forgetful of time and place, Talbot leaned forward in awe. There was a great funnel, a shallow cabinet, and

out of the cabinet poured an intense reddish beam, and out of the beam. . . .

It was a minute before he understood, and then comprehension came to him. Those dark spots shooting from the cabinet, no larger than peas, were the mysterious drifting globes whose scattered seed was fast covering miles of Arizonian soil with impenetrable jungle. From a universe in a piece of matter no larger than a pin-head, from a sub-atomic world, the weapons of an alien intelligence were ruthlessly being hurled against man, to conquer, to destroy him.

And now it was made plain to him why the drifting globes had seemed to materialize out of thin air. Being infinitesimally small parts of an atom, these globes were released from the cabinet and soon assumed the size of peas; they were guided across the crypt, up the old Wiley shaft, and high in the air, somewhere in space, enlarged to immense proportions. How? Talbot could not guess. By some manipulation of science and machinery beyond that of earth.

Engrossed, he moved an inch forward, craned his head, and in that moment it happened. Beneath his weight a section of earth and rock crumbled, cracked, slid forward, and he plunged headlong to the floor below, striking his skull with stunning force!

HE came to himself, staring up into the dour-looking face of a tall man. He recollected pitching forward among the birds and the machines. But the birds and the machines had disappeared and he was lying in an odd room without windows but lit with a soft radiance. Bewildered, he sat up.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The man's beard looked straggly, untrimmed.

"My name," he said, "is Reubens—Professor Reubens."

Professor Reubens! Talbot gasped. "Not the scientist who disappeared?"

"Yes—as you've disappeared."

"What!"

"Through the machine."

It was a moment before Talbot understood. "You mean. . . ."

"That you are a prisoner in a sub-atomic world."

Talbot now realized with startling clearness what had happened to him. When he had fallen into the crypt the weird birds had directly placed him in the cabinet and transported him to their own world. In other words, he and Reubens and everything he saw about him were infinitely small creatures in an atom-world. He and the Professor were trapped! And when Manuel blew up the only means of return. . . .

"How long have I been here?" Talbot asked hoarsely.

"Five minutes at the most."

Then, at the shortest, the way to earth would exist twenty minutes longer. Twenty minutes. . . . Incoherently he told Reubens of what had happened in Arizona since his disappearance, of his own misadventure.

"Aye," said the Professor, "I knew as much. Nor do these inhuman birds intend stopping with the use of seed globes. More devilish weapons than that they plan using against earth. Oh, they are fiends, fiends! Already have they wiped out civilization and intelligent life on other planets in this sub-atomic system and introduced their own."

HE stopped, shuddering. "Nor is it to be wondered at that no birds were seen after the first attack on Oracle," he went on. "They do not fight in person, as do we ourselves, but through proxy, directing machines from centers of control. In powers of destruction, they are immeasurably ahead of man. Thank God you discovered their headquarters in the deserted mine and have

spread the gas for its destruction. But the rage of the birds at such a defeat will be terrible. They will undoubtedly torture me in an effort to make me reveal the basis of my invention so that they can resume the attack on earth. So we must escape."

"But how—where?"

"I have thought that out. It is one chance in a thousand. Undoubtedly we will be killed. But that is better than being tortured or living in this world. Look."

He held up a pearl-handled penknife. "The birds are smart, all right, but they don't quite understand clothes, wearing none themselves. They found your revolver, but overlooked this."

"Of what good is it?"

"To cut our way out of this cell."

Talbot laughed incredulously. The walls of the room were smooth, and hard to the touch. "They're as solid as concrete," he said.

"But cut like cheese under a steel blade. I found that out. Watch."

To Talbot's amazement the point of the penknife sank into the wall and in a moment a section of it was gouged out. The professor said tensely, "I've been months in this place, been taken back and forth, and know the lay of the land. This room is in a great building that houses the laboratory from which the attack against earth is being launched. Would you believe it, only the great scientist who picked up my messages and helped me perfect my invention, and a few of his assistants, are concerned in that attack, and they will be congregated at the machines. Follow me, and whatever I command, do it promptly."

THE Professor had been working feverishly as he spoke, and now he and Talbot crawled through the hole he had made in the wall and found themselves in a long gloomy corridor. "Quick," Reubens whispered.

They darted down the passageway. Talbot had only time to see that the gleaming sides of the corridor were beveled and etched with strange designs, before they came to its end and where a curious device like a huge five-pointed star was revolving noiselessly, half sunk in a great hole in the floor. Without hesitation the Professor stepped onto one of the flat-tipped star-points as it came level with where they stood and Talbot did the same. Up, turned the star-point, to a dizzy height, and over, but the tip swung on ball-bearings, maintaining its passengers in a perpendicular position, and from its highest point of elevation descended to another floor far below, where they disembarked.

The huge revolving star-wheel was nothing but an ingenious movable staircase. But the Professor gave Talbot no time to marvel, nor did the latter try to linger. The corridor below was wider, more richly beveled and carved, and the statue of an heroic bird stood perched in the center of it. The lighting was soft and mellow, but Talbot could perceive no windows or globes. Suddenly from an open doorway hopped a bird. There was no chance to avoid it. Its wings were spread and from its parted bill came a harsh cry, "Toc-toc, toc-toc!"

KNIFE in one hand, the Professor hurled himself forward and caught the bird in the grip of the other. Instantly from the doorway sprang a monstrous mechanism on stilts, flexible tentacles of metal reaching out and wrapping themselves around the Professor. Talbot leaped to the Professor's assistance. The mechanism fought like a live thing. In vain he strove to wrench the tentacles free of the Professor. One of them lashed out and took him by the thighs in a crushing grasp. But the Professor had the bird by the throat. Both of his hands were free.

Back, he forced its head, back. The mechanism seemed to falter in the attack, as if bewildered. Across the exposed throat the Professor drew the gleaming blade. Flesh, tendons and arteries gave, blood spurted, and in the same moment the tentacles fell away from Talbot and the Professor and withdrew with a dull clang. The Professor released the bird and it dropped to the floor.

"It is the birds' mentality that directs those mechanisms," said the Professor, pointing to the now harmless machine.

Apparently the brief but terrific battle had passed unnoticed, no alarm being given. Now the corridor twisted. The two men came to where a deep well was sunk in the floor. To one side a star-wheel revolved smoothly. Out of the depths came the steady throb of machinery. Cautiously peering over the edge, Talbot saw a sight he would never forget.

He did not need the Professor's whispered words to tell him that here was the source of the deadly attack being waged against earth. Motionless birds perched in front of bizarre machines; lights waxed and waned; a cannon-like device, or funnel, shot a column of light into a screen, and through the column of light moved a steady procession of round objects the size of plums.

"The drifting globes being shot through to earth," whispered the Professor, "and our only hope. Listen, the birds are intent on their machines, their backs to the star-wheel. We will descend, throw ourselves into the column of light, seize hold of a globe, and. . ."

HE did not need to finish. Talbot understood in a flash. They would be dragged to their own world by the weapons hurled at it.

"Of course that column of light may kill us," went on the Professor tensely. "Or we may be blown up on the other side. Your Mexican friend

hasn't touched off that explosive gas yet, because— But we've not a moment to lose. Follow me."

The tip of the star-wheel went up, over, descended. The blood was roaring in Talbot's ears. "Now!" hissed the Professor. "Now!" Together they rushed forward. Talbot's foot slipped. The heart leaped into his throat. He never remembered reaching the column of light; but suddenly he was in it, blinded, dazed. His clutching hands closed on something small and hard.

The laboratory was a pinwheel going round and round. Through a sea of darkness he floated. A distant glow grew, expanded, became the crypt in the old Wiley mine. A moment he glimpsed the gleaming pillars, the pulsing machines, the startled birds, and then— Oh, it was incredible, impossible, but the dark, crumbling walls of the old shaft were around him; the globe in his hand no larger than a pea was lifting him towards life and safety.

He wanted to shout, to sing, but even as the pale stars fell athwart his upturned face, even as the cool mountain air smote his fevered brow, the dark earth erupted beneath his feet, a whirlwind of smoke and wind beat and buffeted him, and, in the midst of an overwhelming noise, consciousness was blotted out!

It was bright daylight when Talbot regained his senses. Propped against a great rock the Professor regarded him whimsically. Reubens looked badly bruised and battered; one arm hung loosely at his side. Talbot's head ached and he knew that a leg was broken.

"Yes," said the Professor, "we got through just in time—a few seconds before the explosive gas was touched off. Thank God, my invention has been destroyed. The world is safe."

Yes, the world was safe. Talbot sank back with a sigh of relief. Overhead a white plane was dipping toward earth.



Giants on the Earth

By Capt. S. P. Meek

Conclusion

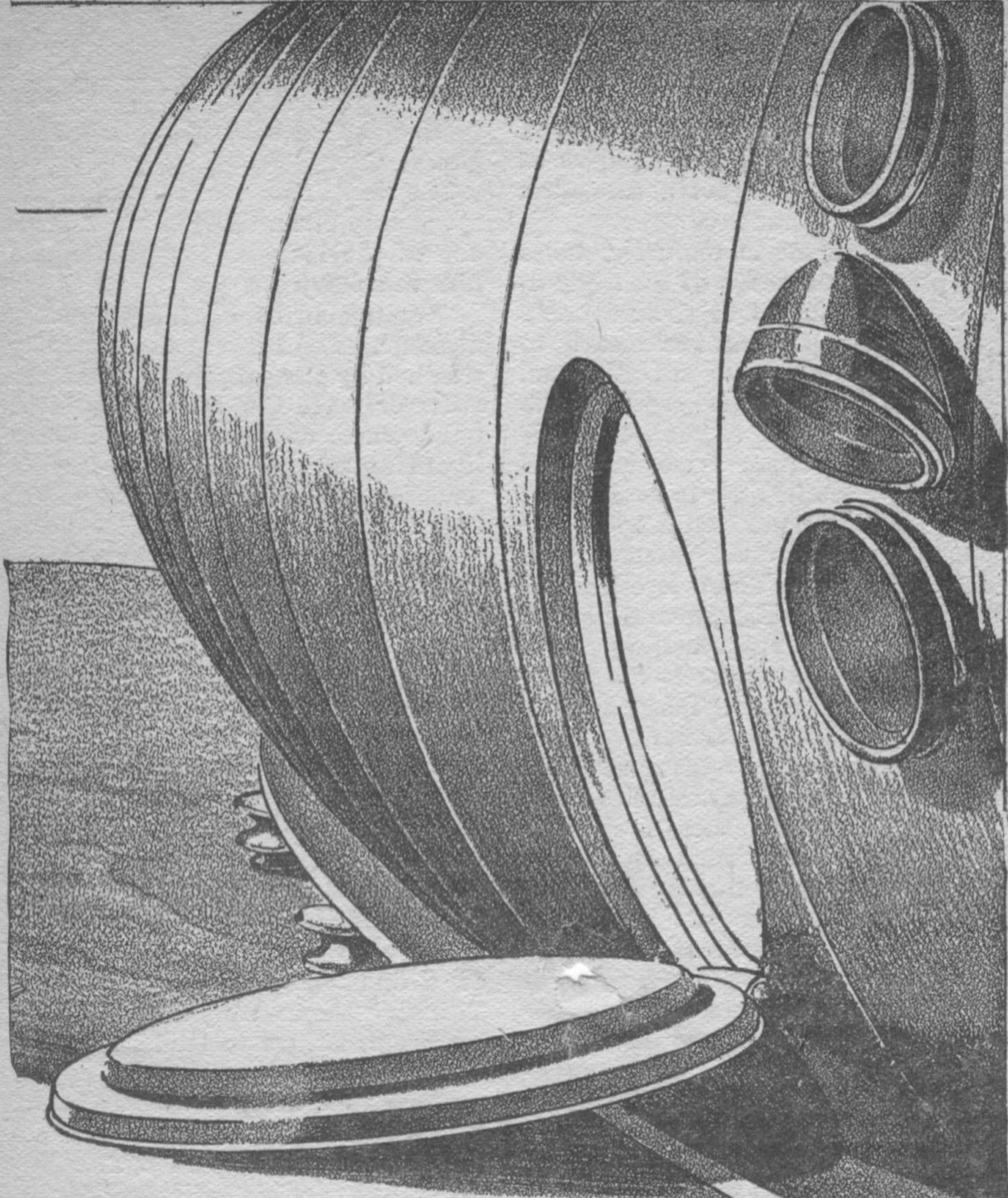
WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

BEFORE the Jovians came, the Earth was prosperous and happy. When a space ship full of the "Sons of God," as the Jovians named themselves, landed, the Earthmen mistook them for

angels and gladly submitted to their rule. Hortan, the leader of the invaders, was a just and kindly man and ruled the Earth wisely and well. He took for his wife a kinswoman of

an Earthly king and established his capital city in Central America. Others of his followers took

There is rage and grief in the heart of Earth-born Damis as he cleaves through space on his mission of vengeance and deliverance.



Damis' fist caught him under the ear.

Earthly wives and from these unions were born the race of Nepthalim, the mighty men of the Earth.

Glavour, one of Hortan's followers, plots against his chief and assassinates him and his wife secretly, giving out that they have gone to Jupiter. Damis, the infant son of Hortan, is rescued by a devoted Terrestrial. With Hortan gone, Glavour assumes the title of Viceroy and

rules in the name of Tubain, Lord of Jupiter. Once he is secure on his stolen throne, Glavour gives way to every base passion. By scores the fairest of the Daughters of Man are swept into his seraglio. The Earthmen, maddened by oppression, rebel time and again, but the disintegrat-

ing rays and other terrible weapons of the Jovians put down revolt. The Earthmen, under the leadership of Turgan, an ex-king and Kildare of a province under Jovian rule, plot and bide their time.

Damis, grown to maturity, takes his place in the ranks of the Neptholim who are loyal to their father's people. He becomes betrothed to Lura, the daughter of Turgan. Glavour, touring his capital, sees Lura one day and orders her to his seraglio. She flees from him and Damis arrives in time to rescue her. In a hand to hand battle with Glavour, he defeats the Viceroy and breaks his arm. There is a hurried meeting and the Earthmen decide to begin an organized rebellion.

Realizing that there is no safety for them on Earth, Turgan, Lura and Damis and eighteen of their followers, capture a Jovian space ship and flee to Mars. The Grand Mognac of Mars welcomes them and takes Turgan and Damis to his capital city where he presents them with weapons which will crush the Jovians on the Earth and prevent reinforcements from landing on the Earth from Jupiter. With the weapons, Damis and Turgan return to their space ship to find all of their men slaughtered and Lura kidnapped. The bodies of two huge Jovians in the uniform of Glavour's personal guards stamp them as the authors of the outrage.

CHAPTER IV

Damis' Decision

DAMIS stared at Turgan for a moment as though unable to comprehend the old man's words.

"Gone?" he repeated stupidly. "She has slain herself?"

"No," replied the Kildare, his face still working in grief; "she is gone from us. She has been captured by Glavour's minions."

"Her dagger—?" asked Damis hesitatingly.

"Is gone with her," replied Turgan.

The Neptholim started toward the space ship but a thought wave from one of the Martian envoys stopped him in mid-stride.

"Wait, Man of Earth," came the message. "The heavens are eternally watched by our people and none can enter or leave the vicinity of Mars unknown to us. My comrade is now inquiring of each of the observers whence came the Jovians and where they have gone."

Turgan and Damis waited impatiently. Presently the second Martian sent a thought wave to their minds.

"The Jovian ship approached Mars using Phobus, one of our moons, as a screen to its movements. It was close to the planet before it was seen. When challenged, the ship sent a message saying that it was captained by Toness, an Akildare of Earth and an enemy of the Jovians. The Grand Mognac was engaged and the matter was referred to the Mozar of Chinamonot, the nearest city. Thinking they were your followers, he directed them to land here. The Grand Mognac is enraged beyond measure that, after so many ages of failure, the Jovians have made a successful raid on our planet. The Mozar will pay for his indiscretion with his life."

A groan burst from Turgan's lips. Damis stood for a moment stricken with grief, and then sprang in giant leaps toward the space flyer.

"Come, Turgan!" he cried. "We may overtake them yet. At least we can avenge if we cannot save."

The Kildare followed him more slowly.

"Where, oh, Neptholim," he asked, "will we find them in the trackless wastes of space?"

Damis paused at the words.

"Why, between here and Earth,"

he replied. As he did so a thought crossed his mind which was revealed by the sudden expression of dismay which clouded his features. "Earth, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Jupiter—all are under the rule of the Sons of God," he cried.

"And to any of them, Glavour's ship may have fled," replied the Kildare. "Before we start in pursuit, it is best to find, if we can, in what direction the ship went."

FRANTICALLY, Damis strove to muster his thoughts and hurl a question at the two Martians who stood beside the transporter cylinders. Before the thought had been fully formed, an answer reached him.

"I have been inquiring, Nepthalim, why, when our observers saw that the ship contained Jovians, they were not destroyed. One of the observers who watched them tells me that their ship landed between your ship and the only instruments of destruction which could be brought to bear on them. The Jovians poured out and attacked your crew who were all out of the ship. They were so mingled that it would have been impossible to destroy them without encompassing the destruction of your men as well and we could not blast their ship into nothingness without also destroying yours. When they rose again they carried one of your crew a prisoner and so they were not blasted out of the heavens. They took a course which carried them behind Phobus where they were shielded. When next seen, they were headed away from your planet."

"If Glavour came to Mars, Lura is dead by now," said Turgan sorrowfully, tears coursing down his cheeks. "Glavour is not one to await the fulfillment of his desires and Lura had her dagger. Her soul is now with Him whom we are taught to glorify. His will be done!"

"If it be His will," replied Damis. "Don't give up, Turgan, we may save

her yet." He turned to the Martians and formed a thought message in his mind.

"Has your science any way of telling us who was in command of the Jovian ship?" he asked.

"Were your men who lie dead familiar with the features of the Jovian Viceroy?"

"Yes, all of them."

"Then we will search the brains of the dead. The pictures that are in the living brain fade rapidly when death comes, but the last impression of these men was a powerful one of fighting and hatred and some traces may remain. I will search."

THE huge slug crawled over the ground to the body of the nearest dead Terrestrial. In one of his many hands he carried a shiny metal tube from which crimson rays flickered and played over the head of the dead man. The skull disintegrated under the influence of the strange instrument until the brain lay naked and exposed to the fierce glare of the Martian sun. The Martian delicately connected two wires terminating in metal plates to the tissue of the brain and attached the other ends of the wires to a metal circlet which he clamped about his middle. For some moments he remained motionless and then crawled to the body of the second dead Earthman. One after another he examined each of the eighteen dead bodies. When he had completed he crawled over to Damis and Turgan.

"Put these bands about your brows," he commanded in thought language as he handed to each of them a metallic band similar to the one clasped about him. The two Earthmen quickly adjusted the bands. "Let your minds remain a blank and in them will be reproduced the impressions I have gathered from the brains of your dead followers."

Damis sprang suddenly upward and smote with all of his force at the

air. Out of nothingness had materialized the form of a huge Jovian clad in the uniform of Glavour's guards. His blow went harmless through the thin air and the Jovian swung a massive ax. Just before the blow landed the Jovian disappeared and a thought wave from the Martian impinged on Damis' brain.

"Spare your energies, Nephtalim," the message said. "What you saw was not a Jovian but was the last impression stored in the brain of the man who met his death under a blow of the ax which seemed to be striking at you. I am merely reproducing in you the emotions and experiences that man felt. Had I allowed the phantom blow to land, you would now be cold in death, so great was the strength of the impression. Now make your mind again a blank and I will reveal to you what was in the mind of another at the instant that his death came upon him."

BEFORE the Nephtalim's startled gaze, another Jovian appeared.

"Havenner!" he cried as he recognized the principal officer of Glavour. The equerry came forward slowly, blood dripping from a wound in his leg. He swung his ax but it went wide of the mark. Again he struck, but two Terrestrials attacked him from the rear and he whirled. For a moment, Damis had a chance to watch the conflict which was raging about him. Nine of the huge Jovians were engaged in deadly combat with a dozen of the Terrestrials who still remained on their feet. In the door of the space ship stood Lura, watching the conflict with frightened eyes. One after another of the Earthmen were stricken down. Suddenly a Jovian rushed at Damis but the scene went blank before the raised ax could strike him down.

"Have you seen enough or shall I show you the scenes in the brains of the others?" asked the Martian.

"I have seen and recognized nine

of the Jovians," replied Damis, "yet among them was not the one I feared. Let me see into the brains of the others that I may be sure that Glavour was not among them."

Another scene materialized before him. It was merely a variation of those he had already seen. In the brain of one of the Terrestrials he saw the landing of the Jovian ship and the sudden outrush of the Sons of God, armed only with the forty-pound axes they used at close quarters. In none of the scenes did he see the huge form of Glavour. He removed the band with a sigh of relief.

"I broke Glavour's arms a few days back," he said to Turgan, "and it is probable that that prevented him from following us, even if he felt that he could leave the Earth in the turmoil which Toness had undoubtedly raised. It means that Lura is safe for the present, for Havenner would not dare to do other than to bring her to the Viceroy. We must follow them and endeavor to rescue her. I will ask our friends if they can plot her course for us."

I HAVE inquired as to that," replied the Martian to Damis' unspoken question, "and find we cannot. Soon after the ship left the surface of Mars, our observers sighted a Jovian fleet of a hundred flyers in the asteroid belt between here and Jupiter. They are nearly through the belt now and are headed toward your planet. Their path will bring them within a few thousand miles of Mars and every instrument on the planet is trained on them. While the Grand Mognac believes that Earth is their destination, never before have the Jovians approached us in such force and it may be that Tubain will try to avenge his former defeats by an attack in force. We have no instruments to spare to keep track of a lone flyer unless it changes its course and approaches us. There is one more source of information. I

will examine the brains of the dead Jovians. Perhaps they know their leader's plans."

From the first Jovian the Martian turned away with an expression of disappointment.

"There is nothing in his brain but a scene of the fight with your followers, yet it may cheer you to know that at the last he felt fear, the emotion the Jovians boast is foreign to them," said the Martian. "I will examine the other."

With his crimson ray he removed the covering from the brain of the second Jovian and connected his wires. For a few moments he was motionless and then he removed the wires and crawled rapidly toward Damis.

"Nepthalim, here is what you wish," came his thoughts, jumbled in a chaotic state of excitement. "This man had a wonderful brain and the impressions of the last month are clear and distinct. Attend carefully and leave your mind a blank."

ON the Martian plain buildings suddenly materialized before the Nepthalim's gaze. With a cry of astonishment he saw himself facing Glavour in defiance. Lura, who had been crouching behind him, ran into one of the buildings. Act by act, Damis saw the fight between himself and the Jovian Viceroy repeated. The Viceroy, one arm dangling uselessly, was whisked away in his chariot. The scene faded and another took its place. The Vice-regal palace was beleaguered by thousands and scores of thousands of shouting Terrestrials. The Jovians sought with rays and with atomic bombs to disperse them, but where a score were blasted into nothingness or torn into fragments, a hundred fresh men took their place. Suddenly the Jovian rays began to fail. The Earthmen had found the secret source of power which supplied the palace and had cut it.

Again the scene faded and he was on a space ship with Havenner talking to him. The words he could not hear for the Martian could not comprehend a record of a sound. The pictures conjured up by the words were easy of comprehension and in picture forms the Martian conveyed to him the sense of the conversation. Havenner was telling him of their destination. First came a scene which he recognized as a Martian landscape. The Jovians swarmed from their space ship and struck down the Earthmen without exertion. Three were made captives: himself, Turgan, and Lura. The Jovians reentered the ship and sped away into space. Damis wondered what this last picture signified.

ANOTHER scene materialized and they were on another planet. It was not Mars and it was not Earth. For a moment he was puzzled. The sun, when it shone, was larger and fiercer than he had ever seen it, but it shone only for an instant. Blankets of cloud and fog hid it from view. Rain fell incessantly. Lush, rank vegetation covered the ground and rose in a tangle far overhead. The Jovians emerged from the space ship, the prisoners in their midst. A huge lizard, a hundred feet long, rushed at them but a flash of the disintegrating tubes dissolved it into dancing motes of light. The Jovians made their way through the steaming jungle until a huge city, roofed with a crystal dome which covered it and arched high into the air, appeared before them. Toward this city the Jovians marched.

"The crystal cities of Venus!" cried Turgan. Damis nodded in assent.

Again the scene changed and the Martian plain was before them. From the space ship the Jovians emerged, but instead of the easy victory they had had in the earlier scene, they found the task a difficult

one. From all sides the Terrestrials charged at them and Damis found himself fighting against his compatriots. A sword flashed before his eyes and the scene was gone.

"Have you learned that which you sought?" came a Martian thought inquiry.

Damis hastily formed his thoughts into an affirmative message of thanks and turned to Turgan.

"We know now where to go," he cried exultingly. "Lura is safe until they land on Venus and enter the crystal cities, for Havenner would not dare to do otherwise than carry out the orders of Glavour. The Martian weapons which we have will insure us an easy victory. Come, let us hasten."

A thought message from the Martians stopped him.

THOSE weapons on which you are planning, Nepthalim, were given to you by our Grand Mognac for the purpose of ridding your planet of your oppressors and of defending your planet against further Jovian attacks, not for the purpose of invading another planet with which we have no quarrel. If you will use them for the purpose for which they were given you, you may depart with them in peace. If you plan to go to Venus, the weapons will remain on Mars."

"We will go to the Earth and rid her of her oppressors," replied Damis, "but first we must go to Venus and rescue Lura."

"Venus lies beyond the sun," was the Martian answer, "while your planet and Mars are on the same side. It will take you five times as long to go to Venus as to go to the Earth. Meanwhile the Jovian fleet will have landed and your efforts will be in vain to dislodge them. Even now you must fly at your best speed to reach your planet before them."

"But we cannot abandon Lura. She

is the only daughter of my comrade and she is my affianced bride. She means more to us than does the fate of our planet."

"Then go to Venus after her, Nepthalim, but go without Martian aid. Only to save you from your oppressors will we help you. Never has Mars attempted conquest of another celestial body, although not even Jupiter could stand against our might if we chose to attack it."

"You cannot understand her relationship to us, Martian."

"No, I cannot. We are sexless and sex exists on Mars only for the purpose for which it was intended, the perpetuation of our species. It may be that we have been mistaken. If the fate of one member of your species means more to you than the rescue of your whole race, it is perhaps well that you be eliminated by the Jovians. In any event, our decision is final. Make your choice of whether you depart with the weapons or as you came."

"Then I will go to Venus," cried Damis. "If necessary, I will fight the Jovians with bare hands, but I will rescue Lura or die in the attempt."

AND what of the Earthmen who trusted you, Nepthalim?" asked Turgan. "Dozens gave their lives gladly to capture the spaceship in which we came here and thousands have gone cheerfully to annihilation to keep the Sons of God beleaguered in the Viceregal palace until we return with the weapons which will bring them victory. Think you that they would choose the destruction of enslavement of the whole race to the possible chance of rescuing one person from the grasp of Glavour's minions?"

"Turgan, you are mad!" cried Damis. "Have you forgotten that Lura is your only child?"

"Since the days of Hortan, Glavour has sought information as to the secret assembly room. Hundreds

of men have gone to torture and death with their lips sealed when they could have bought life and freedom by speaking."

"Were it my own life, Turgan, I would not hesitate."

"Think you that never before has an Earthman been faced with the choice of betraying his countrymen or seeing his wife or daughter violated and sacrificed in the games? All have been true to the last and yet they could have done little harm had they spoken. *You* have the fate of the Earth in your hand, yet you hesitate. I am Lura's father and I know her better, it seems, than do you. If you abandon her countrymen, she will despise you for a coward. It is better that one or that many be lost than that all be lost."

Damis bowed his head in silence. Raised by the Jovians whose only ideal of life was their own selfish pleasure, the thought that the fate of thousands whom he did not know and in whom he felt little interest could be of more importance than the fate of the one whose safety meant more than life to him was a novel one. The lifelong training he had received from the Sons of God struggled, and struggled in vain, against the ideals he had inherited from his Earthly mother and his loved sire. With a face drawn with anguish, he raised his head.

"**WE** will take your weapons, Martian, and with them go to Earth. If it be His will that Lura be safe, safe shall she be although the whole force of Jupiter threaten her. If not, His will be done. One promise I exact of you, Turgan. When we have reached Earth and I have taught your followers to use the Martian weapons, you will give me a crew and let me depart to Venus to find her."

"Gladly will I promise, and if I be spared, I will go with you, Damis," said Turgan. "Do not think that

Lura is not dear to me; she is dearer than all else in the Universe save only the keeping bright the ideal of loyalty that has been the guiding light of the Terrestrials for untold ages."

"Your decision is well made, Nepthalim," said the Martian, "and word of it shall be given to the Grand Mognac that he may know that he made no mistake when he entrusted you with the weapons of Mars. Now for your course. When you rise, direct your ship toward Deiphos. The Jovian fleet is now at an ascension of forty-two degrees and at an angle of one hundred and sixty degrees from the sun. Deiphos will hide you from their instruments. Once you reach it, our observers will plot your course and send you a bearing which will take you as far from the Jovian fleet as possible. They are now passing Ceres and will soon be out of the asteroid belt. They are larger and more powerful than the ship you are flying and they will make better speed. However, if you use your maximum power, you will easily arrive on your planet before them. Have you fuel enough for your trip at full speed?"

Damis hastily inspected the fuel supply of the ship and made some rapid calculations.

"We have enough to carry us at maximum speed to Earth and to retard us to a safe landing, but very little to spare. Can you give us some?"

"There is no tantalum on Mars except a little scattered through tons of rock. It would take us days to extract enough to do you any good. It is well that you did not plan to fly to Venus for you could have made little speed and the Jovian flyer would have reached there long before you did. Now go, and may our best wishes aid you in your flight."

DAMIS turned and instinctively held out his hand. A trace of expression flickered over the face of

the nearest Martian slug and he bent forward and clasped the proffered hand in one of the many hands with which he was provided. No further message came to Damis from the Martians and he entered the airlock with Turgan following him. As the lock clanged shut, he turned to his companion.

"Open the reserve air tanks and restore the atmosphere gradually to the pressure of Earth," he directed. "Unless you do that, we will be unable to function efficiently."

While Turgan opened the valve which allowed the reserve supply of compressed air to gradually enter the ship, Damis pulled down the starting lever of the ship. With a terrific lurch the flyer left the surface of Mars and shot up into the trackless realms of space. Abandoning his controls for an instant, Damis looked into one of the observers. The plain below them was empty of Martians, but in the distance he could dimly see two of the silvery domes which marked their cities. He made some short calculations and turned on a side motor for a moment. The ship swerved and headed for the Martian satellite to which he had been directed.

In an hour he was holding the ship less than a thousand miles from Deiphos while he received a message from the Grand Mognac as to the location of the Jovian fleet, their speed and course, and the course which he should fly to reach the Earth ahead of them. He noted down the directions and set the cross hairs of his forward observer on Alpha Centauri. His hand sought the controlling lever and the ship rapidly gathered momentum for the trip to Earth.

CHAPTER V

A Desperate Plan

FLYING the space ship with a crew of two men instead of the normal nine threw a heavy strain on

Damis. Turgan proved to be almost tireless, but while he could act as an observer, Damis devoutly hoped that no wandering celestial body would approach within the danger zone while he was alone on duty. Nothing of the sort happened. The days passed with monotonous slowness, yet daily and, indeed, hourly, the planet Mars faded to a red star and the green point of light which marked their destination grew larger. Damis cast many a longing glance at Venus, but he remained steadfast to the faith which Turgan had engendered in him. During the long hours Turgan had opportunity to tell the Nephthalim of some of the sacrifices made by Terrestrials for the cause of liberty. They filled Damis with amazement and moved him to awe to think of the loyalty and bravery displayed by those whom he had been taught from childhood to regard as a race of slaves, created solely to minister to their overlords.

Damis pushed the ship to the greatest acceleration which he dared to use, and, as they approached the Earth, he cast many an anxious glance at the diminishing fuel supply. For thirteen days he drove at high speed until the Earth seemed almost at hand. Using almost the full power of his bow motors, he checked its speed. For a time he thought he had overestimated the power of his motors and that it would be necessary to avoid the atmosphere belt, run past the Earth and return. At the middle of the fifteenth day, with the Earth less than a thousand miles away, he threw in his last notch of power.

The deceleration pressed them so tightly to the nose of the ship that they could hardly breathe. Damis lay with his hand on a side motor to throw them out of danger. Gradually the forward motion of the ship ceased and at last Damis rose with an effort and shut off the bow motors.

"We are falling under the influ-

ence of terrestrial gravity," he announced. "In another three hours, we will land."

HE was as good as his word. Three hours later he dropped the space ship to a landing at a spot half a dozen miles distant from the beleaguered capital of the Sons of God. As he landed, the sun was just peeping over the eastern horizon.

Their approach had been seen and the ship was surrounded by hundreds of Terrestrial swordsmen. As the airlock opened and Damis and Turgan appeared there was silence for a moment and then a thunderous shout of joy rose to the heavens. From the forefront of the crowd, a crimson-robed man ran toward the ship.

"Turgan, my lord," he cried as fell on his knees and strove to kiss the Kildare's hand. "You are spared to us who had given you up for lost. Our spies reported that the Sons of God had followed you to Mars and had slain you all. Havenner reported to Glavour that you had made such a resistance that it was impossible to follow his orders and bring you back alive."

"Havenner!" cried Damis. "Havenner is on Venus with Lura."

"The ship of the Sons of God returned last night," replied the Akildare, "with a loss of two men of its crew and with the Princess Lura a prisoner."

Tears of joy sprang into Damis' eyes and ran unrestrained down his face.

"And she is safe?" he cried.

"One of our spies saw her and reports that she is well although in poor spirits. She is confined in the palace and will not be harmed. A Jovian fleet of a hundred ships is expected hourly with Tubain himself in command. A message to Glavour has ordered that Lura be held for Tubain's arrival, when he will dispose of her."

"What is the situation here, Toness?" interrupted Turgan. "I rejoice with Damis that my daughter is safe, yet, unless we are victorious, her present safety will avail her little."

THINGS have gone neither well nor ill since your departure, Kildare," replied Toness. "I have followed out the great conspiracy as it was planned many years ago. Although we have lost thousands of our bravest men, we have the Sons of God besieged in the Viceregal palace and we have tapped and cut the secret source of power which Timour, the Akildare, found years ago. They have no weapons save some hand tubes that are not yet exhausted and their axes. Their most powerful weapons of offense are crippled, yet we cannot storm the palace in the face of the defenses they have left. Have you brought us any hope from Mars?"

"We have brought weapons against which all the power and science of the Sons of God are as helpless as is our feeble strength against their might," replied Turgan. "Send me men to transport these weapons, and in two hours not a Jovian will remain on the planet."

A wild cheer of joy from the assembled Terrestrials answered the words of the Kildare. A score of men ran forward and entered the space ship on the heels of Turgan. They reappeared in a few minutes carrying with the greatest of care the two terrible weapons which were the gift of the Grand Mognac. Damis suddenly looked up from a reverie in which he had been plunged.

"I have just figured it out," he exclaimed. "Despite his report to Glavour, Havenner knew that Turgan and I lived. He started away from Mars toward Venus, a destination which he had already informed his crew that they would make for. He feared the Martian weapons and he

strove to draw us away toward Venus so that he would be safe. Once the Martian instruments had ceased to watch him, he altered his course and made for Earth. With his greater supply of fuel and more powerful ship, he was able to make a higher speed and, despite the additional million or two of miles, he was able to land before us. The thing that puzzles me is why we were not seen by the Jovians as we approached."

"You came from a different direction than Havenner, oh Nephtalim," replied Toness. "All of their instruments were either watching Havenner or the Jovian fleet. But for an accident, your approach would not have been noted by us. I am confident that the Sons of God have no idea that you have returned, especially since Havenner reported that he had slain you. We will take them by surprise. Where shall we take the weapons?"

"Take the one with the blue rod to the top of the mountain which overlooks the palace and set it so that the rod points in the direction from which Tubain's fleet is approaching. That hill is less than two miles from the palace, so you had better take them both there. Point the red rod toward the palace."

AT a word from Toness, the Terrestrials started off with the weapons for the point indicated by Damis. The Nephtalim and Turgan followed them, relating their adventure on the red planet as they walked along. The shutting off of the Jovian source of power had effectually crippled all of the power-driven chariots which certain of the higher officials among the Earthmen had been allowed to maintain.

On the top of the hill overlooking the palace grounds the two Martian weapons were placed on the ground, side by side. Damis carefully aligned the red rod on the Viceregal palace. When he had it set, with a word of

warning, he closed the gravity anchor switch. The instrument settled a trifle on the solid rock on which it was bedded and then was motionless. At a word from Damis, as many of the Terrestrials as could find a handrest pushed against it. It was as though they were pressing against the mountain itself. Damis sighted along the rod and adjusted it until it pointed at the center of the building.

"So much for that one," he said. "It is the less powerful of the two, but it will be enough to destroy the Sons of God and the Nephtalim who are in the palace. The few who are scattered over the Earth, we can dispose of at our leisure. If the Jovian fleet approaches the Earth from directly above us, we will be able to destroy it easily. In any event, this weapon is to be used only when it is approximately normal to the surface of the Earth. We must have it almost under the point from which the Jovians are approaching. That may be on the opposite side of the Earth."

"I think not, Nephtalim," said Toness. "We know that Glavour and Tubain have been in constant communication since the Jovian fleet passed Mars and he expects them to land here. There would be no object in their taking a circuitous route, so they will probably drop directly down in the palace grounds."

"Let us hope so, Toness. In any event, we might as well anchor the weapon here as elsewhere."

HE set the weapon with the blue rod on another patch of bare rock and tested the rod to make sure that it revolved freely and could be made to cover the entire heavens from horizon to horizon. He closed the gravity anchor switch and again the efforts of a dozen Terrestrials were futile to move it.

"Now we are ready for their attack," he said to Turgan. "You are as familiar with these weapons as I am, but I will instruct a dozen of

your followers in using them. It is possible that we may not be able to operate the weapons ourselves."

"I can operate one weapon while you manipulate the other, Damis," replied the Kildare. "However, no harm will be done in instructing others."

"I may not be here," said Damis briefly.

Without replying to the questions of Turgan and Toness, he proceeded to instruct a dozen of the Earthmen in the use of the terrible Martian weapons. When he was certain that he had a half dozen men capable of attending to each of the weapons, he turned to Turgan.

"I may not be here when the weapons are used," he said. "When I thought that Lura had gone to Venus, I gave her up and sacrificed both her and my heart on the altar of our cause, for it is what she would have chosen. Now I have accomplished the sacrifice and returned with the Martian weapons to find that she is a captive in the Viceroy's palace. We can turn on the rays and reduce the building and all in it to a pinch of dust in a few seconds, but Lura would be immolated with the Sons of God. The weapons are here; our men know how to use them, and my usefulness is at an end. Now I stand here with no more responsibility for our success than the humblest swordsman. Since I am no longer needed, I will leave the fate of the Earth to you and follow out my private designs."

"Where are you going, Neptholim?" cried Toness. The question was echoed by all within the sound of his voice. Only Turgan smiled as though he knew Damis' answer.

"WHERE could I go, Akildare, but to one place?" replied the Neptholim. "I go to Glavour's palace. I have two errands there. One is to rescue Lura and the other is to mete out to Glavour the

death which I swore that I would accomplish. The rays can be turned on and the palace demolished at any time, but I ask that you wait until I return with Lura or until you know that we are dead."

"But if the Jovian fleet arrives before that time, Neptholim?" demanded Toness.

"Then give the word for the use of the weapons, Akildare, and Lura's soul and mine will join the thousands of others whose lives are but a part of the price the race of Earthmen have had to pay to rid their planet of the Sons of God."

"It grieves me, Damis, to see you go to certain death," said Turgan sadly to the blond giant, "yet I will say nothing to stop you. Were it not that my presence would hinder you in your attempt, I would accompany you."

"Your place, Kildare, is at the head of your men, whom you were born to rule. I can hope to succeed only by stealth, else a thousand men would come with me. Now call from the ranks one who is a barber that he may change the color of my hair and alter my face that I shall not be known."

At the Kildare's word, three men stepped forward from the ranks of swordsmen and announced themselves adepts in the art of disguise. Swift runners were sent to bring supplies and the three labored over Damis. When they had finished their ministrations, only a close observer would have known him under the bushy black beard which covered his face.

CHAPTER VI

In the Seraglio

WITH a parting word to Turgan and his followers, Damis made his way alone down the hill and into the thick tropical jungle which grew up almost to the gates of the Viceregal palace. He was well

acquainted with a secret entrance into the building. It was a matter of minutes for him to locate the outer end and open it.

For half a mile he made his way underground until a huge stone door barred his way. He felt for the hidden catches and the slab of rock rose before him. As he turned toward the doorway he found himself looking into the muzzle of a black ray tube in the hands of a gigantic Jovian in the uniform of the Viceroy's guards.

"Whence came you, Neptholim?" demanded the guard, a cold note of suspicion in his voice.

"From far Torna," replied Damis readily. "I am Durmino, Komar of the province of Capries. The slaves rose on us and all were slain except me. I have had to travel by night and hide by day to reach here. I knew not whether the slaves had conquered or not, but when I found them lying by thousands about Glavour's palace, I knew that the reign of the Sons of God was safe. What news from Tubain?"

The face of the Jovian guard cleared as Damis spoke. Durmino, a son of Glavour by one of his Terrestrial concubines, was Komar of Capries, a fact well known to Damis. There was nothing in the newcomer's story to excite suspicion.

"The fleet of the Ruler of the Universe is approaching," the guard replied. "In two hours it will be hovering above us. We would have needed no aid had not the dogs of Earthmen found our source of power and managed to destroy it with stolen ray tubes. We have been cooped up here like rats waiting for Tubain to arrive. When he comes our vengeance will be heavy."

"The heavier the better," growled Damis with an oath. "The dogs have been getting surly for a generation. I hope that Tubain will teach them a lesson that will not be forgotten for ages to come."

"He will, never fear," laughed the guard. "Already Glavour has made his plans. I am not a member of the council, yet I have heard enough to realize why Glavour is our ruler. My brain could not conceive of such a stupendous plan."

"I will go to my father now," said Damis. "What is the word for passing the inner gate? I wish to surprise my sire for he doubtless mourns me as dead."

"He thinks you are dead," replied the guard, "yet I never heard of Glavour mourning for any loss which did not affect his pleasures. He has plenty of bastards to take your place. The word is 'Tubain.'"

"I thank you, Son of God," said Damis, "and I will inform my sire of the great respect and high regard which you have for him. Fear not, your words shall be truthfully reported to him."

LEAVING the Jovian guard hastily reviewing the conversation with the supposed Durmino, Damis made his way toward the palace. Since he knew that he would not reach another door until after several of the underground passages with which the foundations of the palace were honeycombed had joined, he had little doubt of his ability to make his way unsuspected into the citadel. He debated for a moment on the advisability of killing the Jovian guard and taking his weapons, but caution prevailed, and empty-handed, save for a dagger concealed under his robes, he strode forward.

His knowledge of the password enabled him to pass the various guards he met without difficulty. There were many of the Neptholim who held subordinate positions in the outlying provinces and who were seldom at court, and the Jovian guards, who in their hearts regarded the Neptholim as little better than the Terrestrials, paid small attention

to him. He passed several guarded points before the path rose steeply and he passed through the final gate into the palace itself. A Neptholim passed him hurriedly and Damis plucked at his robe.

"I am just from outpost," he said. "What news of Tubain?"

"The fleet has entered the atmosphere belt a thousand miles east of here," replied the Neptholim. "They are dropping to an altitude of five miles and will then approach. They should arrive in an hour. It is well that they hurry."

"What rush is there?" asked Damis in surprise. "We may not be able to leave here, but, at the same time, all the forces the slaves can muster would never force an entrance."

"**Y**OU have not heard then?" exclaimed the other in surprise. "No—certainly not, if you have been on outpost—for I just learned it myself. There is a rumor that Havenner lied when he said that he killed Turgan, the Kildare and Damis, the renegade—the curse of Tubain rest on him—on Mars. It is said that they not only escaped death but have returned to Earth armed with the weapons of the red planet. Havenner is with Glavour now and no one knows what the outcome will be. Since Tubain is at hand, doubtless nothing will be done until he arrives. That is the reason why Tubain altered his course and came down so far away instead of directly overhead. He hopes thus to elude the Martian weapons if the Earthmen really have them."

"Surely that is a lie!" cried Damis.

"We hope that it is, yet Havenner would have been slain without mercy had he admitted that he left Mars without slaying or capturing Turgan and Damis. Many believe that it is true."

"Is Glavour in the council room?" asked Damis. "I have a message."

"It would be better for you to defer the message if it be ill news until Tubain arrives, brother, for Glavour is enraged beyond measure at all of us. He threatens to sacrifice us at the next games and he may do so unless Tubain alters the decree. He has not loved us since Damis broke his arm a month ago."

"Nevertheless, I will deliver my message," replied Damis. "While it may not please him, it is essential that he get it before Tubain arrives."

"Good luck go with you, brother," replied the Neptholim with a shrug of his shoulders. "The temper of the Viceroy of God is an uncertain quality at best. He is in his seraglio."

DAMIS saluted the messenger and made his way toward the inner portion of the palace where the women whom the lustful Viceroy had dragged into his harem were kept. He had no plausible excuse for passing the guards into this forbidden portion of the palace, but that was a matter which caused him small worry. There were few of the secrets of the palace which were not well known to Damis, who had at one time been major domo of the building. There were some well known to him, the existence of which was not even suspected by the majority of the Sons of God.

As he neared the seraglio, he turned off to his right and passed through a maze of little-used passages until he halted before what was apparently a blank wall. Casting a rapid glance around to ensure himself that there was no one in sight, he touched a hidden catch and a portion of the wall swung inward, opening a way before him. He entered a passage built in the thickness of the wall and lighted with radium bulbs. The door closed softly behind him. He removed his sandals lest even their quiet tread should betray him and on bare feet crept forward.

The passage bent and twisted as it

followed the walls until Damis knew that he was in one of the walls of the seraglio. Praying that it would work noiselessly, he slid open a panel of stone and found himself looking through a semi-transparent hanging into the sacred precincts of the seraglio itself. Glavour stood facing him, his heavy face drawn up in a scowl of rage. Damis noted with satisfaction that one of the Viceroy's arms was supported by a silk scarf and that he made no attempt to use it. With a pale face, Havenner stood before his ruler.

"THE word has been brought to me from a source which I trust as much as I do your own word, Havenner," Glavour was saying. "I tell you, I do not believe your story. If Damis and Turgan were dead, the Terrestrials would not see them alive again on Earth. Neither would they have weapons of which we know nothing. One of our observers admits that he saw a space ship land a few hours ago, coming from the direction of Mars. You failed in your mission, Havenner, and on you I pronounce the doom. I sentence you to the twilight of the gods."

"I appeal to Tubain from that sentence!" cried the equerry with dry lips.

"Your appeal shall be noted and laid before him at the proper time," replied the Viceroy savagely; "yet, by the time he arrives, it will be too late. Ho, Guards! Take him away."

Havenner turned as though to resist, but six of the huge Jovians answered the Viceroy's call. Two of them grasped him by the arms and started to lead him from the room.

"I appeal!" cried Havenner again. "I brought back the maiden whom I was sent to fetch, and for that reason I made no failure. To bring her was the principal item of my orders."

Glavour's face grew purple with rage.

"And who sent the message to Tu-

bain which resulted in the orders which he sent me?" he demanded savagely. "It was sent by one of your henchmen and by your orders. You slew the sender before I could question him, but I know whose orders he obeyed. Take him away!"

The guards started to drag the luckless equerry from the presence of the Viceroy, but Havenner made a final appeal for his life.

"I will confess, Viceroy of God," he cried. "No message was sent to Tubain. I dared not send such a message lest such orders would be returned as I caused to be given to you. I coveted the maiden for myself and I took this means of getting her. I had a false message delivered to you which would prevent you from taking her before Tubain arrived. In reward for my services as spy on you, I planned to ask that she be given to me. I surrender all claims to her, Glavour. Spare my life and you may have her."

FOR a moment Glavour could not speak for rage.

"So you have been the spy who has reported my every doing and my every secret council to Tubain!" he gasped. "But for you, I would long ago have conquered Venus and Mercury and declared myself independent of the Jovian overlord. In time I might have even overthrown him, but every move was known to him before I made it. Not once, but a dozen times, would you go through the twilight were Tubain not at hand. Niton, it is my order that the twilight be as slow as our instruments will allow. Give him time to learn to suffer and to pray for the blessing of death at my hand. Take him away!"

The struggling Havenner was removed by the guards despite his efforts at resistance and his cries for mercy. Glavour stared after him for a moment and an evil gleam came into his eyes.

"Sonom!" he called sharply.

A guard entered the room and saluted.

"Sonom, bring me the Daughter of Man, Lura!" cried the Viceroy. "When you have brought her here, post guards at all doors and see that no one is admitted under any circumstances until Tubain himself arrives and demands admittance."

The guard hesitated.

"Your Excellency," he faltered, "the orders from Tubain were—"

"False rumors given out by the traitor, Havenner, who has now gone to the twilight of the gods," interrupted the Viceroy. "By the crown of Tubain, do I need to repeat my orders? I am Viceroy of the Earth and am supreme until Tubain revokes my rank. Obey my orders!"

THE guard saluted and withdrew. Glavour licked his thick lips in anticipation and strode restlessly back and forth across the room. Inside the hangings, Damis' face hardened and he drew his dagger from under his robe. The door opened and Sonom returned, dragging Lura after him. The face of the Earth-girl was pale and drawn, yet, when she saw Glavour, her head rose in an expression of defiance. Sonom saluted the Viceroy and left the room, the massive door clanging shut behind him. Glavour stared at the girl with an evil leer on his heavy countenance.

"I have learned, Daughter of Man," he said slowly, "of how you seduced one of my servants from his duty to me and caused him to forge an order from the great Tubain in order that he might keep you for his own pleasure. For a time the stratagem succeeded, but now my eyes are open. When I first looked upon your face and form I swore to myself that you should be the solace of my leisure hours. Now the time is come. I was minded once to honor you as Hortan once honored a Terrestrial

and let you amuse yourself by sitting on a throne, but your treachery has changed my intention. Not even as an accepted concubine shall you rank, but only as a slave to be used as a toy and tossed to one of my guards when I am tired of you. Come hither!"

Lura made no move to obey the order, and Glavour with an oath stepped toward her, his one good arm outstretched in a grasping gesture. Lura did not move until his hand almost closed on her arm and then she sprang back. Her hand sought the bosom of her robe and the Viceroy recoiled as a glittering dagger flashed in the air.

"Back, Jovian!" cried Lura in ringing tones. "Think you that the daughter of a king of men is to be a toy for your base Jovian passions? The point of this dagger is poisoned so that one touch through your skin will mean death. One step nearer and I will strike!"

THE Viceroy hesitated for a moment and then drew from his robe a short thick tube. Lura correctly interpreted the gesture.

"Raise that tube and I will bury the blade in my own body!" she cried. "I know that you have the power to clasp me in your arms, but it will be a corpse which you clasp."

She lowered the knife until the point rested against the skin of her throat. The slightest pressure would cause it to penetrate her skin and bring about her almost instant death. Glavour watched her like a cat, the tube steady in his hand. With a grim laugh he threw the tube from him and walked a few steps away. Lura lowered the knife. As she did so, Glavour turned with a movement so swift that the eye could hardly follow it. His eyes caught Lura's and she straightened back her head, powerless against his will, caught as she was, momentarily off her guard.

"Throw down your knife," said

Glavour's voice slowly. Lura struggled to raise the weapon against herself, but she could not. Slowly her fingers relaxed and the weapon clattered on the floor. Still holding her eyes with his own, Glavour stepped forward until his huge splayed foot rested on the weapon. He averted his gaze and swiftly picked it up. Lura gave a scream of horror and strove to fly, but the heavy door was barred against her. Glavour placed the weapon in a cabinet on the wall which he locked and then turned to her, an expression of triumph on his face.

"It is useless, Daughter of Man, to struggle against the will of the Sons of God," he said mockingly. "What we desire is ours. Come to me."

Lura's face showed an expression of loathing as she looked at the huge misshapen monstrosity before her. The Viceroy forgot the momentary satisfaction of his triumph in his rage at her attitude. With a growl of anger he grasped at her. Lura avoided his rush and ran along the side of the room, Glavour in pursuit. He cornered her at last and she stopped with her back to the tapestry with which the room was hung. Glowering in his triumph, Glavour approached and reached out his hand to seize her. His huge paw descended, but before it touched her shoulder a hand with fingers of steel reached through the hangings and grasped his wrist.

WHEN Sonom had dragged Lura into the room, Damis inserted the point of his dagger into the tapestry and started to cut a slit through which he could enter the room. The keen-edged knife cut for a few inches readily enough and then stopped. Damis withdrew the blade and examined the stuff before him. An expression of dismay crossed his face, for the material was crisscrossed with stellanum wires, set six inches apart. Each juncture

was braised together and the whole made a web through which he could not force his way. Cautiously he exerted his strength. The keen blade hewed through the first of the stellanum strands, but Demis held his breath as the wire parted. It seemed impossible that the ting of parting metal which sounded like a thunder-clap in his ears would not be heard by the Viceroy. He knew that there must be an entrance into the room through the hangings and he made his way cautiously forward, testing the draperies from time to time with his knife.

When Lura laid her dagger against her breast and threatened to end her life, it took all of Damis' self-control to keep from crying out and striving to force his way into the room by sheer strength. He knew the toughness of stellanum well enough to realize the impossibility of even his enormous strength tearing apart a webbing of it. The certainty that Glavour would not push matters far enough to rob himself of his prey aided him to restrain his ardor and to pursue his systematic search.

He came at last to a corner where his knife met with no resistance as it made its way through the silken stuff on the walls. Swiftly he cut a slit through which he could rush. As he parted the material, Lura rushed past him and stood with her back to the wall to await the oncoming Viceroy. Damis raised his hand and stood ready. As Glavour's huge paw descended on Lura's shoulder Damis' hand shot out. Still holding the wrist of the Viceroy in a grip of steel, he emerged from his hiding place, tearing off the black wig and beard which disguised him.

"Damis!" cried Lura in wonder and delight as she saw him.

GLAVOUR stared with unbelieving eyes for a moment and then a hoarse cry of alarm burst from his

lips. Desperately he strove to release his wrist from the Neptholim's grip, but to no avail. He disengaged his crippled arm from the scarf which supported it and groped under his robe for a weapon. Lura cried out in warning, but Damis had anticipated such a move. With a quick effort he whirled about and drew the Viceroy's arm over his shoulder. He bent forward and exerted his full strength. The huge bulk of Glavour rose in the air and pitched forward over Damis' shoulder. There was a crash as he landed on the marble floor. Quick as a cat, Damis sprang on him and pinioned down his arms.

"Take his weapons, Lura!" he cried.

Lura bent over the prostrate form of the Jovian to take from his belt the tubes which he habitually carried there. As she stooped, Glavour raised one of his huge feet and struck her with all the force of his mighty thighs behind the blow. With a cry of pain, Lura flew half-way across the room. Damis leaped to her assistance, forgetting for a moment the potentialities for destruction which the Viceroy bore on his person. A sudden sound made him whirl about. He bent over Lura and picked her from the floor. With her in his arms he leaped to one side just as a flash of violet light stabbed through the air. It missed them by inches. He dropped Lura on a rug and turned to face Glavour.

On the Jovian's face was an expression of fiendish triumph. In his hand was a short black tube which he aimed with deliberate slowness at the crouching Neptholim. Damis shifted his gaze from the Viceroy's eyes and concentrated it on the muscles of his wrist. Glavour's grip tightened and Damis leaped to one side as the violet light again stabbed the air. With an oath, Glavour swung the deadly ray in an arc trying to reach the Neptholim, but Damis moved like a cat. Once, as the ray

almost touched him, he sprang high in the air and let it sweep by under him. With each movement he came nearer to the Viceroy. Slowly the violet began to lose its intensity of color. Glavour dropped it and reached for a second tube. Before he could draw one, Damis was on him.

CHAPTER VII

The Deluge

FEW of the Sons of God and none of the Neptholim, save Damis, could match the brute strength of the Viceroy. As Damis rushed, Glavour sidestepped and caught the Neptholim's arm in a bone-crushing grasp. Damis made no effort to break the grip, but with his free hand he gripped the wrist of Glavour's crippled arm. With a quick effort he twisted it and the Viceroy gave a shriek of pain as the newly knit bone gave way and his arm fell, dangling and useless. Damis caught his sound arm in a powerful grip and twisted slowly on his wrist. Gradually Glavour's fingers relaxed and Damis' arm was free. His hands shot up and gripped Glavour about the throat just in time to shut off the cry for help which was forming on his thick lips. The two giants strove silently for mastery in the struggle which meant life for the victor and death for the vanquished. The expression in Damis' eyes was one of confident mastery, but the face of the Jovian showed something that was strangely akin to fear. Even when he was whole, Glavour had found that his strength was no match for the power that lay in Damis' graceful limbs. With one of the Viceroy's arms useless, the issue was a foregone conclusion.

Glavour's face gradually grew purple and his eyes started out of their sockets. His tongue protruded horribly from his opened jaws. He grew weaker until it was only Damis' grip which kept him from falling to

the ground. Then Damis broke his silence and spoke slowly and distinctly into the dying Viceroy's ears.

"I WAS loyal to you, Glavour," he said, "despite your brutality and sensuality which sickened me, until you strove to add to your already crowded seraglio the maiden whom I had chosen. As a Nephthalim, you thought I had no right which you need respect and I would tamely submit to whatever you chose to do. You forgot that in my veins run the best blood of Earth and the proudest blood of Jupiter. Hortan was a MILDASH of Jupiter, a rank to which you could never aspire. I restricted your efforts and proved to you a thing which I long have known, that, man to man, I am your superior.

"Even then you might have won back my loyalty had I not learned how my father and my mother came to their death. It has always been given out that they went to Jupiter on a summons from Tubain, but I know the truth. They died under the knife of a cowardly assassin, under *your* knife, Glavour. Then it was that I swore that it would be my hand that would strike you down. When you raised your hand against me, you were Viceroy of the Earth and your power was secure, for the conspiracy against you had no hope of success. What is the situation now? You are beleaguered in your palace, holding only the ground your few feeble weapons cover. Even this ground you hold only on the sufferance of the Earthmen. Listen to what I say, for I wish your last moments to be bitter ones. On the hill east of the city sit two weapons of a type and a power unknown to both Earth and Jupiter. They are the deadly black ray weapons of Mars. Ah, you tremble! You have good cause. One of them is trained on this palace while the other searches the heavens, ready to blast into powder the fleet of Tubain when

it appears. And who, think you, brought this about, Glavour? It was I, Damis, the Nephthalim, the 'half-breed bastard' whom you despised. My only regret is that I cannot send you to the twilight of the gods as you sent that other arch-traitor, Havenner. Are your last moments pleasant, Glavour? I am increasing the pressure slowly so that you will have time to think, to think of the Earthmen you have given to sacrifice and torture, to think of your ruler, Hortan, dying under your knife, to think of the doom which is about to overcome your race. Think, Glavour, for your time for thought is short."

AS he finished, Damis thrust back on the Viceroy's chin with a sudden effort. There was a dull crack as Glavour's neck broke and Damis gently lowered the inert bulk to the floor. He felt a touch on his arm as he straightened up. He whirled like a cat and Lura shrank back with a frightened gesture. Damis opened his arms and in an instant the Earth-girl was folded in them.

"Is my father safe?" was her first question.

"Safer by far than we are," exclaimed Damis with a sudden pang of anxiety. He glanced at the time-recording device on the wall. Three-quarters of an hour had passed since he had first entered the Viceregal palace. If the estimates of Tubain's arrival which he had heard were correct, the Jovian fleet should be almost overhead. "Come," he cried to Lura, "we have no time to lose if we escape before the palace and all in it are destroyed. Where did Havenner land his ship?"

"In the yard west of the palace," she replied.

"Pray that it is still there," said Damis. "We can reach it through the path by which I entered this room. Come quickly."

With Lura at his heels, he passed

through the rent in the tapestry and entered the secret passage through the walls. The way twisted and turned interminably, but finally he paused before a door. Before opening it he slid back a panel which opened a peep-hole and looked out.

"The ship is there," he whispered in a voice of relief. "There is only one guard over it that I can see. Why didn't I think to bring Glavour's weapons? I'll have to try to catch him by surprise. When I open the door, run straight for the space ship as though you were trying to escape from me. Don't try to dodge the guard, keep right on for the ship. As soon as I overpower the guard, get in the ship and hold your hand on the starting lever. When I get on board, throw in the power at a low rate. We don't want to rise rapidly enough to get out of easy control. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Damis," she whispered.

HE watched until a sudden shout drew the attention of the sentry momentarily away from the ship he was guarding. A confused sound of cheering came from the palace and the sentry looked toward the western heavens. A moment of gazing and he raised his voice in a raucous shout of joy. Instantly Damis swung open the door.

Lura sped out like a frightened deer with Damis in close pursuit. The attention of the sentry was fixed on some distant object in the sky and he did not see the oncoming pair until Lura was only a few yards from him. The sound of her footsteps attracted his attention and he glanced down at her. An expression of surprise came over his heavy features and he reached for a weapon. His gesture was never finished, for Damis' fist caught him under the ear and he dropped in his tracks. Damis looked in the direction in which the sentry had been staring and a cry broke from his lips.

"The fleet of Tubain!" he cried.

A thousand yards in the air and a scant five miles to the west was a clump of half a dozen Jovian space flyers. Massed behind them were a hundred more. They were approaching with tremendous velocity.

Damis gave a mighty bound and leaped through the airlock of the ship. Hardly had he cleared the door than Lura pulled down the starting lever. The ship flew up from the ground. Hardly had it left its ways than a momentary flash came from the hill east of the palace. The air grew black around them and a cold as of interstellar space penetrated their very bones. In an instant the ship had flashed up into the sun above the zone of influence of the Martian weapon. The shouting from the palace was suddenly stilled. Damis looked down, but nothing could be seen save a pall of intense blackness over the ground where the building stood.

"The port motor, Lura!" cried Damis. The Jovian fleet was approaching so rapidly that a collision with the nearest flyer seemed inevitable. There was a roar from the air as Lura threw in the port blast with its maximum power. Damis was hurled against the side of the ship.

FROM the hill where the Martian weapons had been placed came a second flash of light and a beam of jetty blackness shot through the air. An edge of it brushed the ship for an instant and Lura stiffened. A terrible cold bit through the flyer and the side where the Martian ray had touched crumpled into powder. The ship sped on, and the friction of the air and the bright rays of the sun dissipated the extreme cold. Through the terrific storm which was raging, the black ray stabbed again and again. Back and forth it played and ship after ship of the Jovians was momentarily caught in the beam. When the beam passed on there was

nothing left of the ship save a cloud of dust which the terrific wind dissipated in all directions.

Damis glanced at the Earth below him. It seemed to be flying past the ship at a velocity which he could hardly comprehend. He made his way against the pressure of the movement to the control levers and strove to check the speed. As the Earth ceased to revolve beneath them, the wind rose to a terrible force.

"What has happened, Damis?" shrieked Lura in his ear.

"I don't know," he shouted in reply. "I am trying to keep away from the neighborhood of the palace for a while until the Jovian fleet is destroyed. Toness and your father might not be able to tell us from one of Tubain's ships and they might turn the ray on us."

HE bent over the control levers of the ship, but they refused to obey his touch. The stern motor still roared with enough force to keep them three thousand feet above the ground, but none of the side-motors responded to the controls. The ship was helpless and was tossed about, a plaything of the terrific wind which howled through the heavens. Damis watched the ground below them.

"Look, Lura!" he cried.

They swept over the site of the palace. The black ray was no longer playing on it, but the whole palace glistened like crystal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Frost!" he shouted. "The Martian weapon did its work well. Everything in that palace is frozen. In the name of Tubain!"

The Jovian ejaculation had burst from his lips, unbidden, at the sight which met his gaze. Racing over the land was a solid wall of water, hundreds of feet high and moving with enormous speed. On toward the palace it swept. Below they could see

the Earthmen on the hill striving to fly, but there was no place of safety. The oncoming wall of water was higher by a hundred feet than the top of the hill and it was the highest bit of land for many miles.

Nearer and nearer came the water until with a roar and a crash which they could plainly hear in the crippled space ship, it swept over the hill and the palace, burying them under a hundred feet of brine.

"Father!" cried Lura in anguish.

Damis made his way across the ship and folded her in his arms.

"He was chosen as one of the lives needed to buy the freedom of the Earth," he murmured to her. "It is hard, for I loved him as a father; but it was the end which he would have chosen. He died at the head of his followers battling for freedom."

WHAT happened, Damis?" asked Lura an hour later as she looked down on the seething tumult of water under them.

"As nearly as I can figure out, the Jovian fleet approached the palace from the west at a low elevation. In order to destroy them, we could not use the Martian weapon normal to the Earth's surface as they commanded us, but were forced to use it tangentially. The enormous counter reaction to the stream of force of almost incredible intensity which was shot at Tubain's flyers, had to be absorbed in some way. The weapon could not take it up as it was anchored to the center of gravity of the earth. As a result, the force was translated into one of increased rotation. The Earth must be spinning on its axis at fully twice its former rate. Both the air and the water had too much inertia to follow the accelerated motion of the land, so the wind blew a gale and the oceans left their beds and swept over the land. Everything must have been swept to destruction before this flood."

"And all our labor and sacrifice

has been useless," cried Lura. "We have freed a world at the cost of the lives of its inhabitants."

"The world is not lost, sweetheart," he cried as he clasped her to him. "The floods will not have overwhelmed the mountains and some men and animals will have escaped. The waters will subside in a few weeks as they take up the new rotation of the Earth. By His will, we are spared for the labor of building a new world. As soon as the land again appears above the waters, we will land and assemble those who have been spared. The fleet of Jupiter has been destroyed and we need

fear no fresh attack for ages, perhaps never. Unhampered, we will build a new world and try to avoid the mistakes of the old one.

"Look, Damis!" exclaimed Lura in a hushed tone.

From the spray and mist below them leaped a living bridge of colored light. Above the sun it arced its way into the heavens in the direction in which they knew Mars lay.

"It is His promise," whispered Damis reverently, "that henceforth the planets will live in peace and amity and that nevermore will the Jovians be allowed to invade us."

(The End.)

A Scientific Intoxication Test

AN infallible scientific breath test for intoxication and a hypnosis-producing combination of drugs which may replace anesthetics in operations were two discoveries recently made.

The chemical detector of intoxication was devised by Dr. Rollo N. Harger, of the medical school at Indiana University, in continuing an investigation begun by Dr. Emil Bogen, of Cincinnati. It makes possible, he claims, "an unerring detection of intoxication by taking a sample of the human breath and subjecting it to simple chemical tests." The device, it is suggested, may serve police authorities to convict persons of driving motor cars while under the influence of liquor.

In essence, the Harger method consists in causing a sample of the suspected breath to pass through a solution con-

taining potassium permanganate and sulphuric acid. If there is alcohol in the breath the solution changes color from red to white, even when the breath has no odor of alcohol.

More than 1,000 minor operations have already been performed upon persons in hypnotic sleep induced by the drugs described recently by Dr. H. A. Shonle, of Eli Lilly & Co., of Indianapolis. There is a prospect that the method can be developed to permit its use in major operations, as well, it was said. At present the degree of insensibility produced still is somewhat limited, but the experiments so far have been largely confined to the use of a combination of acids related to banana oil, grain alcohol and barbituric acid—this last being a product of chemical synthesis.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Astounding Stories, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1931.

State of New York, County of New York, ss.:

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared W. M. Clayton, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Astounding Stories and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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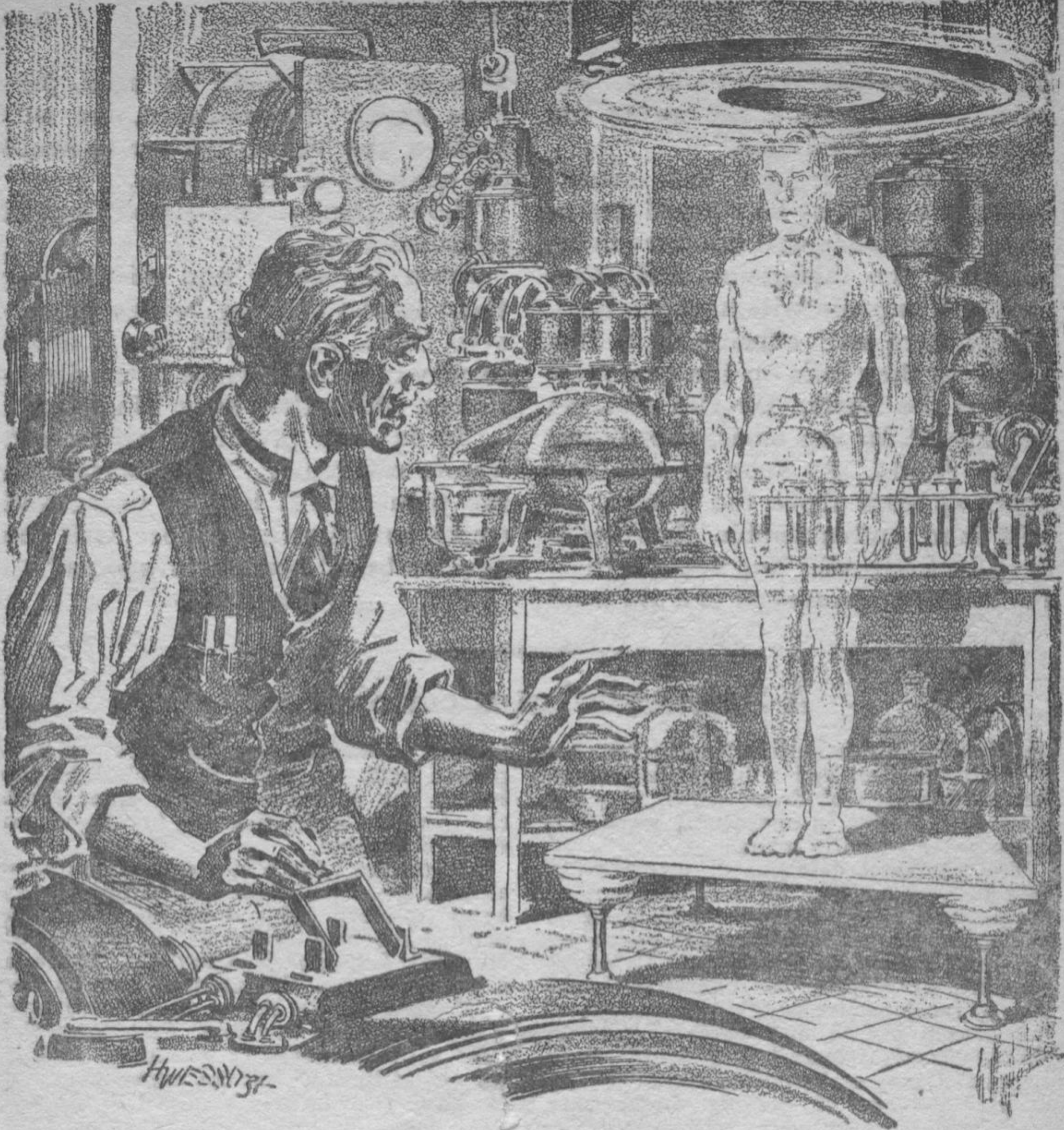
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W. M. Clayton, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1931. E. A. Boasl. (My commission expires March 30, 1933.)



The man on the metal plate was vanishing.

The Radiant Shell

By Paul Ernst

“AND that, gentlemen,” said the Secretary of War, “is the situation. Arvania has stolen the Ziegler plans and formulæ. With their acquisition it becomes the most powerful nation on earth. The Ziegler plans are at present in the Arvanian Embassy, but they will be smuggled out of the coun-

try soon. Within a month of their landing in Arvania, war will be declared against us. That means”—he glanced at the tense faces around the conference table—“that we have about three months to live as a nation—unless we can get those plans!”

There was a hushed, appalled silence, broken at last by General Forsyte.

Into the very jaws of death goes Thorn Winter on his invisible quest.

"Nonsense! How can a postage-stamp country like Arvania really threaten us?"

"The day has passed, General," said the Secretary, "when a nation's power is reckoned by its size. The Ziegler heat ray is the deadliest weapon yet invented. A thousand men with a dozen of the ray-projectors can reduce us to smoking ruins while remaining far outside the range of our guns. No! I tell you that declaration of war by Arvania will be followed by the downfall of the United States inside of three months!"

Again the hushed, strained silence descended over the conference table, while one white-faced man gazed at another and all speculated on the incredible possibility of a world in which there was no United States of America.

"We must get the plans," nodded Forsyte, convinced at last. "But how? March openly on the Arvanian Embassy?"

"No, that would be declaration of war on *our* part. The World Court, which knows nothing of the Ziegler plans, would set the League at our throats."

"Send volunteers unofficially to raid the place?"

"Impossible. There is a heavy guard in the Arvanian Embassy; and I more than suspect the place bristles with machine guns."

"What are we to do?" demanded Forsyte.

The Secretary seemed to have been waiting for that final question.

"I have had an odd and desperate plan submitted me from an outside source. I could not pass it without your approval. I will let you hear it from the lips of the planner."

He pressed a buzzer. "Bring Mr. Winter in," he told his secretary.

THE man who presently appeared in the doorway was an arresting figure. A man of thirty-

odd with the body of an athlete, belied somewhat by the pallor of an indoor worker, with acid stained, delicate hands offset by forearms that might have belonged to a blacksmith, with coal black hair and gray eyes so light as to look like ice-gray holes in the deep caverns of his eye-sockets. This was Thorn Winter.

"Gentlemen, the scientist, Mr. Winter," announced the Secretary. "He thinks he can get the Ziegler plans."

Thorn Winter cleared his throat. "My scheme is simple enough," he said tersely. "I believe I can walk right into the Embassy, get the plans—and then walk right out again. It sounds kind of impossible, but I think I can work it by making myself invisible."

"Invisible?" echoed Forsyte. "Invisible!"

"Precisely," said Thorn in a matter-of-fact tone. "I have just turned out a camouflage which is the most perfect yet discovered. It was designed for application to guns and equipment only. I'd never thought of trying to cover a human body with it, but I am sure it can be done."

"But . . . invisible . . ." muttered Forsyte, glancing askance at Winter.

"There's no time for argument," said the Secretary crisply. "The question is, shall we give this man permission to try the apparently impossible?"

All heads nodded, though in all eyes was doubt. The Secretary turned to the scientist.

"You are aware of the risk you run? You realize that if you are caught, we cannot recognize you—that we must disclaim official knowledge of your work, and leave you to your fate?"

Thorn nodded.

"Then," said the Secretary, his voice vibrant, "yours is the mission.

And on your effort hangs the fate of your country. Now—what help will you require?"

"Only the assistance of one man," said Thorn. "And, since secrecy is vital, I'm going to ask you, sir, to be that man."

The Secretary smiled; and with that smile he seemed to be transformed from a great leader of affairs into a kindly, human individual. "I am honored, Mr. Winter," he said. "Shall we go at once to your laboratory?"

IN the great laboratory room, the Secretary glanced about almost uneasily at the crowding apparatus that was such an enigma to one untrained in science. Then his gaze returned to Winter's activities.

Thorn was carefully stirring fluids, poured drop by drop from various retorts, in a mixing bowl. All the fluids were colorless; and they combined in a mixture that had approximately the consistency of thin syrup. To this, Thorn added a carefully weighted pinch of glittering powder. Then he lit a burner under the bowl, and thrust into the mixture a tiny, specially constructed thermometer.

"You can really make yourself invisible?" breathed the Secretary.

"I can," said Thorn, "if the blisters don't upset my calculations by making my body surfaces too moist for this stuff to stick to. I'm going to have you paint me with it, you see, and it was never intended to cover flesh."

He regulated the burner anxiously, and then began to take off his clothes.

"Ready," he said at last, glancing at the thermometer and turning off the burner. He stood before the wondering Secretary, a fine, muscular figure. "Take this brush and cover me with the stuff. And be sure not to miss any of me!"

And then the Secretary saw why

Thorn had said the colorless paint was never intended to be applied to human flesh. For it was still seething and smoking in the cauldron.

"Good heavens!" he said. "Don't you want to wait till it cools a little?"

"Can't," said Thorn. "It has to be applied hot or it loses its flexibility."

The Secretary dipped the brush and began to paint the naked flesh of the scientist. Not a quiver touched that flesh as an almost microscopically thin, colorless layer formed into a film after the brush strokes. But the Secretary's fingers shook a little.

"My God, man!" he said finally. "Doesn't it hurt?"

"It's a little like being boiled in oil," replied Thorn grimly. "Outside of that it's all right. Hurry, before the stuff gets too cool."

THE clinging thin shell covered him to his chest, then to his throat. At that point he reached into a drawer in a workbench beside him and drew out two small, hollow hemispheres of glass. These he cupped over his eyes.

"What are those for?" asked the Secretary.

"So my eyes can be covered with the film. If they weren't, I'd present the somewhat remarkable spectacle of a pair of disembodied eyes walking down the street."

Painfully, agonizingly, the hot film was applied to throat and face; over the glass spheres that cupped around the eyes; over a tight leather cap covering the scientist's hair; and over a sort of football nose-guard which extended down an inch below the end of Thorn's nose in a sort of overhanging offset that would allow him to breathe and still keep his nostrils hidden. The Secretary stepped back.

Before him stood a figure that looked not unlike a glazed statue

of a man. The effect was that of a body encased in clear ice—and like clear ice, the encasing shell sparkled and glittered radiantly in the sunlight that poured in at the windows.

Thorn moved. His glazed arms and legs and torso glistened with all the colors in the spectrum; while under the filmed bulges of glass his eyes looked as large as apples. The Secretary felt a chill of superstitious fear as he gazed at that weird and glittering figure with its enormous glazed eyes.

"But you aren't invisible," he said at length.

"That comes now," said Thorn, walking ahead of the Secretary while on the ceiling above him danced red and yellow and blue rainbows of refracted light.

HE stepped onto a big metal plate. Suspended above was a huge metal ring, with its hole directly over the spot on which he stood.

"Soft magnets," explained Thorn. "As simply as I can put it, my process for rendering an object invisible is this: I place the object, coated with the film, on this plate. Then I start in motion the overhead ring, creating an immensely powerful, rapidly rotating magnetic field. The rotating field rearranges the atoms of this peculiarly susceptible film of mine so that they will transmit light rays with the least possible resistance. It combs the atoms into straight lines, you might say. With that straight-line, least-resistance arrangement comes invisibility."

"I don't quite see—" began the Secretary.

"Refraction of light," said Thorn hurriedly. "The light rays strike this film, hurtle around the object it coats—at increased speed, probably, but there are no instruments accurate enough to check that—and

emerge on the other side. Thus, you can look at a body so filmed, and not see it: your gaze travels *around* it and rests on objects in a straight line behind it. But you'll see for yourself in a moment. Pull that switch, there, will you? And leave it on for two full minutes after you have ceased to see me."

Straight and tall, a figure encased in shimmering crystal, the scientist stood on the metal plate. Hesitant, with the superstitious dread growing in his heart, the Secretary stood with his hand on the switch. That hand pulled the switch down. . . .

Soundlessly the overhead metal ring began to whirl, gathering speed with every second. And then, though he had known in advance something of what was coming, the Secretary could not suppress a shout of surprise.

The man before him on the metal plate was vanishing.

SLOWLY he disappeared from view—slowly, as an object sinking deeper and deeper into clear water disappears. Now the face was but a white blob. Now the entire body was but a misty blur. And now a shade, a wavering shadow, alone marked Winter's presence.

The Secretary could not have told the exact instant when that last faint blur oozed from sight. He only knew that at one second he was gazing at it—and at the next second his eyes rested on a rack of test-tubes on the wall beyond the plate.

He looked at his watch. Sweat glistened in tiny points on the hand that held the switch. It was all so like death, this disappearance—as if he had thrown the switch that electrocuted a man.

The specified two minutes passed. He cut off the power. The great ring lost speed, stopped whirling. And on the plate was—nothing.

At least it seemed there was nothing. But a moment later a deep voice sounded out: "I guess I'm invisible, all right, according to the expression on your face."

"You are," said the Secretary, mopping his forehead, "except when you speak. Then I have the bizarre experience of seeing glimpses of teeth, tongue and throat hanging in mid-air. I'd never have believed it if I hadn't witnessed it myself! That paint of yours is miraculous!"

"A little complicated, but hardly miraculous. It has a cellulose base, and there is in it a small per cent of powdered crystal—but the rest I'll keep locked in my brain alone till my country has need of it."

The glimpses of teeth and tongue and throat ceased. In spite of himself, the Secretary started as an unseen hand touched his shoulder.

"Now,"—there was ringing resolution in the deep voice—"for the Arvanian Embassy. Please drive me there—and be as quick as you can about it. I can't last very long with this film sealing most of the pores of my body."

THE Secretary started for the laboratory door. Beside him sounded the patter of bare feet. He opened the door and walked into the hallway. Behind him, apparently of itself, the door clicked shut; and the footsteps again sounded beside him.

The Secretary walked to the curb where his limousine waited. His chauffeur jumped out and opened the door. The Secretary paused a moment, one foot on the running board, to draw a cigar from his pocket and light it. During that moment the car pressed down on that side, and as suddenly rocked back up again.

The chauffeur stared wide-eyed at his employer.

"Did you do that, sir?" he asked.

"Do what?" said the Secretary.

"Push down on the running board with your foot."

"Of course not," said the Secretary, his eyebrows raising. "You could have seen my leg move if I had. But why do you ask?"

"It felt like somebody got into this car," mumbled the man.

"Did you see anybody get in?" said the Secretary with a shrug. And, shaking his head, with a fuddled look in his eyes, the chauffeur turned away and got into the driver's seat.

The Secretary glanced at the rear seat. On the far side, the cushion was heavily depressed. He sat on the near side, feeling his knee strike another, unseen knee.

"Drive to the Bulgarian Embassy," he told his man.

Up Sixteenth Street the car swung, past the various embassies which looked more like palatial private villas than offices of foreign nations. Toward the end of the line, a smaller building than most of the others, was the Arvanian Embassy. Next to it was the Bulgarian.

THE car stopped in front of the Bulgarian Embassy, and the Secretary got out. Again he paused, while the chauffeur held the door open, to hold a match to his cigar. Again the car sagged down on that side, and slowly swayed up again.

"Hey—" said the chauffeur. But meeting the Secretary's calmly inquiring gaze, he stopped. Scratching his head, he went back to the wheel, while the Secretary walked toward the building entrance.

Behind him, moving on soundless bare feet along the sidewalk, Thorn Winter hastened, cloaked in invisibility, toward the Arvanian Embassy—and the plans that spelled America's destruction if they remained in Arvanian hands.

The embassy building was a three-storied oblong house of white

stone topping a terrace that started its climb from the sidewalk of Sixteenth Street. The doors at the head of the wide stone staircase were of bronze; and they were closed, and, Thorn surmised, efficiently barred. The windows at front and sides were also closed, in spite of the warmth of the sunny spring afternoon.

Beside the building, leading up in a short steep hill, was the driveway. Up this Thorn started. The front of the house was hopelessly barred; but at the rear entrance there might be a chance.

Up the driveway, then, he walked, a little startled at the fact that he cast no shadow—feeling as a ghost might feel. The pavement was hot to his thinly filmed feet. A little dubious as to the effect of heat on the vital shell that hid him, he stepped off into the cool grass beside the drive; and came soon to the rear of the embassy.

There was no porch or veranda, simply two stone steps leading up to a stout oak door which opened onto the embassy kitchens. From behind this door came the sound of crockery and the hum of voices. The Arvanian chef evidently was preparing afternoon tea.

WALKING boldly to the very steps, Thorn began the vigil that should end when someone came in or out of that door, allowing him to slip inside the building before the portal was barred shut again.

For nearly half an hour Thorn stood there before something happened that at once helped him, and, at the same time, nearly proved his undoing.

A light delivery van sped up the driveway. The wheels stirred up a cloud of dust. It was a very small cloud of very fine dust. Thorn at first thought nothing of it, because

he was so engrossed in the conviction that here ought to be provided an entrance into the house.

The truck driver got out, took a crate from the body of the van, and went with it to the back door. After a moment of waiting, the door opened. Thorn noticed that it was opened very cautiously, only an inch or so. He caught a glimpse of a heavy chain stretched across the inch opening, and saw a strip of bearded, resolute face.

The door was unchained. The driver walked in, while the door stood open. Thorn started to glide in after him. . . .

Mere chance made him glance at a window near the door. This window framed another bearded, resolute face. And the eyes in that face were like saucers as they stared full at Thorn!

For an instant Thorn knew icy fear. His invisibility! Had something happened to strip him of that concealing mantle? But what *could* have happened?

He glanced down at himself and saw the reason for the guard's saucer-eyed expression.

A little of the light cloud of dust stirred up by the truck wheels had settled over him and clung to the encasing shell. As he moved, these dust specks moved. The effect to the staring guard, Thorn realized, must be that of seeing a queer, fine dust column moving eccentrically over a grassy lawn where no dust column had any business to be.

QUICKLY Thorn moved toward the garage, with the eyes of the amazed guard following him. The scientist was savage at the delay; but it was vital that he rid himself of that clinging dust.

Behind the garage he broke off a feathery spray from a vine, and stroked it lightly over himself. That, too, presented a curious spec-

tacle: a leafy branch suddenly detaching itself from the parent vine and dancing here and there in mid-air.

When the all-important task was done, Thorn raced back to the rear doorway. By great good luck it was still open. He stole in, just making it as the truck driver, staggering under a load of empty crates, came up the cellar stairs and went out to his truck.

Thorn drew a deep breath. He was inside the Arvanian Embassy. The place was a three-storied stone trap in which, if the slightest slip revealed him to its tenants, he would surely meet his death. But, anyway, he was inside! And the threatening Ziegler plans waited somewhere near at hand for him to find and take!

Even had Thorn not known in advance that trouble was brewing, he could have surmised that something sinister was being hatched in the Arvanian Embassy. For, in this big sunny kitchen five men lounged about in addition to the white-coated chef and his beardless stripling of an assistant. And each of the five had a holster strapped openly over his coat with the butt of an automatic protruding in plain sight.

Thorn looked about. Across from the great range, beside which he was standing and holding his breath for fear some one of the seven men should become aware of his presence, was the door leading to the front part of the house. He started toward that door, walking on tiptoe. A shudder crept up his spine as he tiptoed across the floor directly in front of the armed guards who would have shot him down without compunction could they have seen him. He was not yet used to his invisibility; knowing himself to be substantial, feeling his feet descend solidly on the floor, he still could hardly credit the fact

that human eyes could not observe him.

HE got to the door. He put out his hand to open it, then realized just in time that he could not do that. A door stealthily opening and closing again, with no apparent hand to manipulate it? Such a spectacle would start a riot!

In a frenzy of impatience, he stood beside the door, waiting till someone else should swing it open. And in a moment it chanced that the stripling assistant chef came toward him with a tray. The boy pushed the swinging door with his foot, and walked into the butler's pantry. After him, treading almost on the lad's heels, came Thorn.

The boy sat the tray down, and turned to reach into an upper shelf. The space in the pantry was constricted, and he turned abruptly. The result was that he suddenly drew back as though a hot iron had seared him, and went white as chalk. Then he dashed back into the kitchen.

"A hand!" Thorn heard him gibbering in Arvanian. "A hand! I touched it with mine! Something horrible is in there!"

With his heart pounding in his throat, Thorn leaned close to the swing-door to hear what happened next. Would there be a rush for the butler's pantry? An investigation? He eyed the farther door—the dining room door. But he dared not flee through that save as a last resort. In the dining room sounded voices; and again the sight of a door opening and closing of itself would lead to uproar.

"A hand?" he heard one of the guards say in the kitchen. "An unseen hand? Thou art empty in the head, young Gova."

There followed some jeering sentences in colloquial Arvanian that were too idiomatic for Thorn's knowledge of the language to let

him understand. A general guffaw came from the rest; and, as no move was made toward the pantry, Thorn decided he was saved for another few moments.

Gasping, he raised his hand to wipe the perspiration off his forehead, then realized there was no perspiration there. His film-clogged pores could exude nothing; he had only the sensation of perspiring.

NOW the problem was to get through the next door. Thoughtfully, Thorn gazed at it. He saw that this, too, was a swing-door. Further, he saw that now and then it creaked open a few inches, and swung sluggishly back. Beyond it somewhere a window was open, and spasmodic gusts moved the swinging slab of wood.

The next time the door moved with the wind, Thorn caught it and augmented the movement a bit. Twice he did that, each time swinging it back a trifle further. Next time, he figured, he could open it enough to slide into the room.

Two glimpses he had had, with the openings of the door, into the room beyond. These glimpses had showed him a great oval table on which was set the debris of afternoon tea, and around which were grouped tense, eager men. Dark of hair and complexion were these men, with the arrogant hawk noses and ruthless small eyes of the typical Arvanian. Several of them were garbed in military uniforms and armed with swords. They were talking in tones too low for Thorn to distinguish words through the film over his ears. He would have to get in there to hear them.

For the third time the wind pushed at the door. For the third time Thorn caught its edge and swung it—six inches, eight, almost enough to slip through. . . .

"Shut thou the window!" crackled a voice suddenly. "Fool!

What if some of these documents blew away?"

There was a slam, and the breeze was cut off. Thorn quickly let go of the door, and watched it fall back in place again.

He was cursing his luck when he heard the same commanding voice say: "Kori, see if there be one who listens in the butler's pantry. It seemed the door opened wider than the wind would warrant."

There was the scrape of a chair. Then the door was abruptly thrust open and coldly alert eyes in a hostile, wary face, swept over the pantry.

"No one here, Excellency," said Kori; and he returned to his place at the table.

BUT with him came another, unseen, to stand against the wall beside a great mahogany buffet, and to listen and watch. Kori had, not unnaturally, held the door open while he glanced around the pantry. And under Kori's outstretched arm, so close as almost to brush against his uniformed legs, had stolen Thorn.

"Then, gentlemen, it is all arranged?" said the man at the head of the oval table—a spare, elderly individual with bristling gray mustachios and smoldering dark eyes. "The plans leave for Arvania tomorrow night, to arrive in our capital city in ten days. Then day and night manufacture of the Ziegler projectors—and declaration of war. Following that, this great city of Washington, and the even greater cities of New York and Chicago, and all this fine land from Atlantic to Pacific, shall become an Arvanian possession to exploit as we like!"

There was an audible "Ah!" from the score of men around the table—broken by a voice in the main double doorway of the dining room: "Gentlemen, your pardon, I am late."

Thorn looked at the speaker. He was a young fellow with an especially elaborate uniform and a face that appeared weak and dissipated in spite of the arrogant Arvanian nose. Then a bark came to Thorn's ears—and a cold feeling to the pit of Thorn's stomach. The newcomer had brought a dog with him!

Even as he gazed apprehensively at the dog—a rangy wolfhound—the brute growled deep in its throat and stared at the corner by the buffet where Thorn was instinctively trying to make himself smaller.

The dog growled again, and stalked warily toward the buffet.

"Grego, down," said his master absently. Then, to the spare man at the head of the table: "I have been next door, talking to the American Secretary of War. A dull fellow. Convinced, is he, that Arvania harbors only kind thoughts for this great stupid nation. They shall be utterly unprepared for our attack—Grego! What ails the brute?"

THE wolfhound had evaded several outstretched hands and got to the buffet. There it crouched and cowered, fangs showing in a snarl, eyes reddening wickedly, while the growl rattled louder in its shaggy throat.

"Perhaps the heat has affected him," said one.

All were looking at the dog now, marveling at its odd behavior. But of all the eyes that observed it a pair of unseen eyes watched with the utmost agitation.

Thorn stared, almost hypnotized, at the creature. A dog! What rotten luck! Men might be fooled by the masking invisibility, but there was no deceiving a dog's keen nose!

The wolfhound started forward as though to leap, then settled back. Plainly it longed to spring. Equally plainly it was afraid of the being

that so impossibly was revealed to its nostrils but not to its eyes. Meanwhile, one tearing sweep of blunt claws or sharp fangs—and a fatal rent would appear in Thorn's encasing shell!

The dog snapped tentatively. Thorn flattened still harder against the wall, with discovery and death hovering very closely about him. Then the beast's master intervened.

"Grego! Here, sir! A council room is no place for thee, anyway. Here, I say! So, then—"

He hastened to the dog and caught its collar. Twisting the leather cruelly, he dragged the protesting, snarling brute to the doors and slid them shut with the wolfhound barking and growling on the outside. "Someone put him in his kennel," he said through the panels. A scuffling in the hall told of the execution of the order. The council room became quiet again, and Thorn leaned against the wall and closed his eyes for an instant.

"We were saying, Soyo," the leader addressed the dog's owner, "that the Ziegler plans start for Arvania to-morrow night. All is arranged. These innocent looking bits of paper"—he thumped a small packet of documents lying before him—"shall deliver mighty America to us!"

A SUBDUED cheer answered the man's words—while Thorn stared at the packet of papers with unbelieving eyes. It had never occurred to him that the Ziegler plans might be in that very room, on the table with the rest of the welter of letters, thumbed documents, and cups and saucers. And there they were—the vital projector plans—not in a safe or hidden in some fantastic place, but right before his eyes!

Involuntarily his hand extended eagerly toward the packet, then was withdrawn. Not now. *He* was in-

visible—but the papers, if he grasped them, would not be. Clenched in his unseen hand, they would be perfectly visible, moving in jerks and starts as he raced for the door.

Like lightning his mind turned over one plan after another for making away with that precious packet. Each scheme seemed impossible of fulfilment.

"The biggest difficulty is in getting them out of the country," the spare, elderly man was saying. "But we have solved that. Solved it simply. I myself shall bear them, sewn in my clothes, to our native land. The American authorities could search, on some pretext, any other of our number who tried to smuggle them out. But *me* they dare not lay a finger on. That would be an overt act."

Thorn's thoughts whirled desperately on. Wait till later and follow whoever left the room with the plans? But he hated to let them get out of his sight.

And at this point he became suddenly aware that the man named Kori was gazing fixedly at him.

Thorn was between the section of the table where Kori sat, and the angular buffet-end. Kori could not possibly see anything but the shining mahogany, thought Thorn. And yet the man's eyes were narrowing to ominous slits as he started in his direction.

THORN held his breath. Was the shielding film changing in structure? Were the repolarized atoms slowly losing their straight-line arrangement, allowing light rays to penetrate through to his body instead of diverting them to form a pocket of invisibility around him? The film had never acted like that before—but never before had Thorn applied it to living flesh with its disintegrating heat and moisture.

"Excellency," said Kori at last, a hard edge to his voice, "look thou at that buffet. No, no—the end nearest my chair."

"Well?" said the elderly man. "I see nothing."

Thorn breathed a sigh of relief. But the relief was to be of short duration.

"Come to my place, if thou wilt, and see from here," said Kori.

The leader got up and came to Kori's place. Kori pointed straight at Thorn.

"There—seest thou anything out of the ordinary?"

"I see nothing," said the leader, after a moment. "Thine eyes, Kori, are not good."

"They are the eyes of a hawk," said Kori stubbornly. "And they see this—the vertical line of the end of that buffet does not continue straightly up and down. At its middle, the line is broken, then continues up—a fraction of an inch to the side! Like an object seen under water, distorted by the sun-rays that strike the surface!"

Thorn fairly jumped away from the buffet and stood against bare wall. Fool! Of course the light refraction would not be perfect! Why hadn't he thought of that—thought to stand clear of revealing vertical lines!

"There, it is gone," said Kori, blinking. "But something, Excellency, made that distortion of line. And something made Soyo's wolfhound act as it did! Something—"

"Art thou attempting to say a spy listens unseen in this room?" demanded the gray-mustachioed Arvanian.

"Something is odd—that is all I say."

ALL eyes were ranging along the wall against which Thorn leaned his back. All eyes finally turned to Kori. "It is nonsense." "I see nothing whatever." "Kori has

drunk of champagne in place of tea!" were some of the exclamations.

And then occurred the thing that, in Thorn's perilous position, was like the self-signing of his own death warrant.

He sneezed.

That agony of helplessness, as a man's nose wrinkles and twitches and—in spite of the most desperate attempts at repression—the betraying sound forces its way out! How many men have lost their lives because of that insistent soft nasal explosion which can be smothered, but not entirely hushed!

Thorn had felt the sneeze coming on for seconds. He had fought it frantically, with life itself at stake. But he could not hold it back. In his naked body, beginning to burn with fever from the long-clogged pores and insulated not at all by the film from the coolness of the room, the seeds of that soft explosion had been planted—and they *would* bear fruit!

So he had sneezed!

Instantly there was chaos. Men looked at each other, and back at the blank wall from which had come the painfully muffled sound. Then all sprang to their feet.

"Champagne, is it!" Kori exulted savagely. "Did I not say my eyes were those of a hawk?"

"Double guard all doors!" roared the Arvanian leader, to the guards outside. "Someone is in the house! And you in here," he went on in a lower tone, "see that this unseen one dies!"

Soyo and several other men whipped out automatics and pointed them at the wall. Thorn dropped to the floor. But with his quick action came Kori's voice.

"No, no! The sword, gentlemen. It is not so noisy, and covers a wider sweep."

Thorn shivered. Far rather would he have had bullets as his lot than

cold steel. The prospect of being hacked to pieces, of gradually emerging from invisibility as a lump of gashed and bleeding flesh, turned him faint.

THE Arvanians split up into orderly formation. Two went to guard the door to the butler's pantry, and two to cover the closed sliding doors to the outer hall. Six, with drawn swords sweeping back and forth before them, walked slowly toward the wall from which the sneeze had come.

Thorn set his jaws—only just catching himself in time to prevent his lips from opening in the half-snarl instinctive to the most civilized of men when danger is threatening. That lip motion would have revealed his teeth for an instant!

The sensation of perspiring heavily flamed over him again. There were so many trifling things to keep in mind! And each, if neglected, meaning certain death!

The nearest of the marching six stopped with his foot almost touching Thorn's hand. The dancing sword the man carried almost grazed the scientist's shoulder on its down sweep.

Thorn could not stay there. Lying flat along the baseboard, he would be stabbed at any instant by an inquiring sword point.

The six spread a little. A very little. But there was room enough for Thorn to slide between the two men nearest him and roll soundlessly under the table.

There was no sanctuary for him there. The cursed Kori, with his hawk eyes, glanced under the table after stabbing vainly along the wall.

"The carpet!" he bellowed. "See how the nap is pressed down! He is under there, comrades!"

The thrusting swords raked under the table a half second or so after

Thorn had rolled out the other side, upsetting a chair in his hurry.

"After him!" panted Soyo. "By the living God, this is wizardry! But he must not get away—"

"He won't!" snapped the elderly leader. "Men, form a line at the far end of the room and march slowly, shoulder to shoulder, to this end. The spy must be caught!"

THE move was executed. All the men in the room, save the four guarding the doors, lined up and advanced slowly, swerving and slashing their swords. Like a line of workers hand-harvesting a wheat field they came—foot by foot toward the corner where Thorn turned this way and that in a vain effort to escape.

The line reached the table. Over and under and around it the swords slashed viciously, leaving no space unprobed.

Thorn clenched his fists. He gazed at the packet containing the Ziegler plans. He gazed at the guarded door leading back to the kitchen. Then he tensed himself and leaped.

"The plans!" shouted Kori hoarsely. "Look—"

The vital packet, as far as the eye could see, had suddenly grown wings, soared from the table top, and was floating rapidly, convulsively, toward the door.

"Stop him!" yelled Soyo. "Stop—"

At that instant the heads of the two who guarded the door were dashed together. The door itself slammed open. The Ziegler plans sped into the butler's pantry.

The door to the kitchen began to open just as Kori reached the pantry. An oath burst from the Arvanian's lips. He flung his sword. In the air, shoulder high, appeared suddenly a small fountain of blood. Kori yelled triumphantly.

Thorn, feeling the warm drip following the glancing slash in his shoulder, knew the veil of invisibility had at last been rent. Abandoning efforts at noiselessness, knowing that his whereabouts was constantly marked by the packet in his hand, anyway, he fled through the kitchen to the rear door.

The bolt jerked back, under the astonished eyes of the five guards who had not yet realized precisely what the commotion was all about—and who only saw a packet of papers waving in mid-air, a trickle of blood appearing out of nothing, and a bolt banging open in its slot for no reason whatever.

THORN'S fingers worked feverishly at the chain. But before he could begin to get it undone, the guards had recovered from their surprise and had joined the Arvanians who poured in from the dining room under Kori's lead.

With a score of men crowding the kitchen, Thorn looped back in his tracks like a hunted creature, and sought the cellar door. Four men he upset, one after another, aided by the fact that his twisting body could be only approximately placed by the papers and the wound.

Then Kori's hand swept through the air above the waving packet, to clamp over Thorn's wrist.

With an effort that bulged the muscles of that blacksmith's forearm of his till it seemed they must burst through the film, Thorn whirled Kori clear off his feet and sent him stumbling into the charge of three guards. But in the meantime the cellar was barred to him by a double line of men.

Fighting for his life—and, far more important, the existence of his country—Thorn lashed out with his invisible right fist while his left clutched the plans.

A score of men arrayed in a death

struggle against one! But the odds were not twenty to one. No quite. The score could mark Thorn's general whereabouts—but they could not see his flying right fist! That was an invisible weapon that did incredible damage.

But if they could not see the fist to guard against it, they could see the results of the fist's impacts. Here a nose suddenly crumpled and an instant later gushed red. There a head was snapped back and up, while its owner slowly sagged to the floor. And all the while the still dripping wound and the packet of documents kept with devilish ingenuity between the body of some swordless guard and the impatient blades of the Arvanian nobles.

Almost, it seemed to Thorn, he would win free. Almost, it appeared to the Arvanians, the unseen one would reach the big window near the door—which the path of his wreckage indicated was his goal. But one of the wildly swinging fists of a guard caught Thorn at last.

It landed on the glass cup over his right eye, cutting a perfect circle in the skin around the eye-socket, and tearing the film over the glass!

NOW there were three things about the lithe, invisible body that the Arvanians could see: the crumpled papers, a slowly drying patch of blood that moved shoulder high in the air, and a blood-rimmed, ice-gray eye that glared defiance at them from apparently untenanted atmosphere.

Then came what seemed must be the end. Soyo appeared in the pantry doorway with a machine gun.

"Everybody to the end of the kitchen by the window!" he cried. "To the devil with silence—we'll spray this room with lead, and let the sound of shots bring what consequences it may!"

The men scattered. The machine

gun muzzle swept toward the place where the eye, the papers, and the blood spot were to be seen.

That spot was now at one end of the great kitchen range on which a few copper pots simmered over white-hot electric burners. At the other end of the range, in the end wall of the kitchen, was a second window. It was small, less than a yard square, and had evidently been punched through the wall as an afterthought to carry off some of the heat of the huge stove.

Soyo's face twisted exultantly. The machine gun belched flame. Chasing relentlessly after the dodging, shifting blood spot, a line of holes appeared in the wall following instantly on the tap-tap-tap of the gun.

Eye and papers and blood spot appeared to float through the air. One of the copper pots on the range flew off onto the floor. The glass of the small ventilating window smashed to bits. In the jagged frame its broken edges presented, the Arvanians saw for a flashing instant the seared, blistered soles of a pair of human feet.

"Outside!" bawled Kori. "He jumped onto the range and dove through the window! After him!"

AFTER precious seconds had been wasted, the rear door was unchained and wrenched open. The Arvanians, swords and guns drawn, raced out to the rear yard.

His Excellency's town car, that had been standing in front of the open garage doors, leaped into life. With motor roaring wide open, it tore toward the Arvanians, some of whom leaped aside and some of whom were hurled to right and left by the heavy fenders. . . .

Startled people on Sixteenth Street saw a great town car swaying down the asphalt seemingly guided by no hand other than that of fate; some said afterward they

saw a single eye gleaming through the windshield, but no one believed that. Equally startled people saw the car screech to a stop in front of the home of the Secretary of War. After it, scarcely a full minute later, three motors with the Arvanian coat of arms on them came to a halt.

"My dear fellow," said the Secretary blandly to the livid Arvanian Ambassador, "no one has come in here with papers or anything else. I saw a man jump out of your town car and run south on Connecticut Avenue. That's all I know."

"But I tell you—" shrieked the Arvanian.

He stopped, impaled on the Secretary's icy cold glance.

"Your story is rather incredible," murmured the Secretary. "Valuable plans stolen from your Embassy by an invisible man? Come, come!"

Dark Arvanian eyes glared into light American ones.

"By the way," said the Secretary affably, "I am thinking of giving a semi-official banquet to celebrate future friendly relations between our two countries. Do you approve?"

The Arvanian Ambassador tugged at his collar to straighten it. World dominion had been in his fingers—and had slipped through—but he would not have been a diplomat had he let his face continue to express the bitterness in his heart.

"I think such a banquet would be a splendid idea," he said suavely.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Wandl, the Invader

*Beginning an Exciting New Four-Part Novel
(A Sequel to "Brigands of the Moon")*

By Ray Cummings

Seed of the Arctic Ice

A Thrilling North-Polar Story

By H. G. Winter

The Mind Master

The Conclusion of the Exciting Current Novel

By Arthur J. Burks

—And Others!

The Readers' Corner



A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

"How . . . Please Everyone?"

Dear Editor:

I have been reading *Astounding Stories* for about a year and a half. I really don't know how I first started in this delightful field of fiction, but I suddenly found myself enjoying your magazine immensely. I have been very much interested in reading "The Readers' Corner," but until now I have not presumed to write in because I felt that if I was going to attempt to criticise or commend I should know your Authors well. I do not think that there is very much wrong with your magazine; it is well edited; it is about the right size; the paper is a good grade; the print makes easy reading, and the illustrations have uniformity of good execution.

I absolutely agree with Howard Barricklon when he protests against the other Readers throwing so many rotten tomatoes. I can see no reason for their doing so. It seems that there is some disagreement among some of the other Readers about the amount of science in your stories. Personally, I can get along without as much as you use now; but how can you please everyone at once?

Why not publish *Astounding Stories* once every two weeks? I find it so hard to wait a whole month between issues. And can't you make room for a full page illus-

tration by Wesso for each and every story? I've no fault to find with Paul, but Wesso couldn't be any better.

I will answer any letters from those who are interested in writing me.—Bob Whitney, Royalton, Vt.

Sure It Is

Dear Editor:

In answer to the inquiry of Mr. Stone T. Farmington, who asked in the October issue of "our" *Astounding Stories* if I had invented the abbreviation STF for scientific fiction—I did not. The credit goes solely to my friend, Linus Hogenmiller, whose letters sometimes appear here in the "Corner." Linus is entirely responsible for the brilliant, time-saving thought of using STF in place of the long, hard-to-spell scientific.

And now to make a brief comment on the latest issue of "our" mag. First: 'Ray for the illustration by Paul!

The three best stories, of course, are: "The Heads of Apex" (Flagg's first for *Astounding Stories*, and what a tale!), "In the Orbit of Saturn" (more excellent work by Starzl) and "The Solar Magnet" (another fine story of Dr. Bird and Saranoff). Ernst's work was very good, too, which was also true of the third part of "Brood of the Dark Moon."

I don't know what's the matter with "our" mag nowadays. Just can't seem to describe anything in it without calling it marvelous.

I know. It must be a good magazine. Yeah, that's it!—Forrest J. Ackerman, 530 Staples Ave., San Francisco, Calif.

No Kick About That

Dear Editor:

In my last letter I said that charging 50c for back numbers dated 1930 was too much. You wrote me a personal letter telling me that it wasn't. All right, then it isn't. No hard feelings. I'll take your word for it. Because who wouldn't take the word of a man who can edit a mag like *Astounding Stories*, which is truly a great magazine. But put more stories in each issue. Lately there have only been about five in an issue. Don't copy from *Five-Novels Monthly*.

The first place I turn when I receive *Astounding Stories* is "The Readers' Corner." It certainly is interesting to see all the different opinions. I realize that the changes that the Readers sometimes want cannot come so easily. Changing the format, artists, and a dozen other things require a lot of consideration and deliberation, because the majority of the Readers must accept the change.

Hurrah for *Strange Tales*! I read the first issue, and I think it came up to a pretty high mark for a beginner. One thing about the Readers of *Strange Tales* is that they can't always kick about "We want more science."—Chas. D. Hornig, 213 Orchard St., Elizabeth, N. J.

This and That

Dear Editor:

Like many other Readers, I have read *Astounding Stories* for quite a while but have never written in. I have only one suggestion to make: Cut the pages even. It surely would improve the looks of "our" magazine.

I think Harl Vincent is the best of your Authors, although his novelettes have it all over his short stories. Still I guess that his short stories aren't so bad after all. "The Moon Weed" was good, but not as good as his usual run. The rest of your authors are all good, so I find it difficult to list them.

Strange Tales! An unusual name for an unusual magazine. I got the first issue, read it through, and enjoyed it very much. "The Dead Who Walk" was the best. Then came "Dr. Muncing, Exorcist," "The Return of the Sorcerer," "The Dark Castle," and "A Cry from Beyond."

As for the illustrations, it doesn't matter to me who makes them. I read the magazine for the stories not the illustrations. But still, a good artist makes the story more interesting. Wesso is good; so is Paul.

About science in stories—I read the

stories for entertainment, not for science. Of course, some science "seasons" the story, but too much is too much.

Who wants to write to a fifteen-year-old boy? I would like to correspond with others who read *Science Fiction*.—George Lang, 319 W. 4th St., Ottumwa, Iowa.

Not Modest Enough

Dear Editor:

I have been reading *Astounding Stories* since the August issue of this year, and wonder why it is that I did not realize what an excellent magazine it was before then.

I wish to comment on the cover of the October issue. I feel that I shall not be the only one who will register a complaint against this illustration. The dress that the girl is wearing isn't modest enough to suit me. After I finished the story relating to it, I understood that that was the only dress allowed her because she was a slave, but just the same, I don't think the artist had to be so realistic! I understand the circumstances that forced the girl to wear such an immodest dress, but what must those who stand outside the newsstand window and look at the illustration think? Such things lower the standards of the magazine. I sincerely hope that this thing will not present itself again in the future. Reconsidering the illustration, aside from the above mentioned, it is excellent.

Don't start a quarterly, and keep the magazine a monthly. These are hard times, and people can't afford to buy a magazine every week or pay 50c for a quarterly every quarter.

I think *Strange Tales* an excellent magazine. The stories are immensely interesting. I shall now close my letter wishing much success to both your publications.—Ralph Bohmer, 518 Allen St., New Britain, Conn.

Another Short-Short Play

Dear Editor:

Scene: New York City.

Time: 9988 years hence.

Action: Time-traveler, alighting from vehicle of travel: "Ah, here I am in 11920. Your pardon, sir, I didn't see you." (Parade accepted) "Nice city you have here. Bigger than it was in 1931. What's this parade coming down the street for?"

XC-P6: "That, sir, is in honor of the greatest *Science Fiction* magazine on the market."

Time-traveler: "What's that, *Astounding Stories*?"

XC-P6: "Yes. You see, ever since your own time the Editors of that magazine have been avoiding reprints and quarterlies. This day, the first Thursday of the month of January, 11920, marks the publishing of the first reprint in *Astounding Stories*! Hence the parade."

Time-traveler: "Heck!"

XC-P6: "What do you mean by that?"

Time-traveler: "Well, you see, I have to go back to my own time in just a few days, and I won't be able to read any reprints during the rest of my natural life! Again, heck!"—Eugene Benefiel, *The Pioneer*, Tucson, Ariz.

Wants an Archaeological Story

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the October issue of *Astounding Stories*, and though I find the stories uniformly good, somehow, somewhere there is a sameness; an eternal stamp of dime-a-dozen thrills and escapades; a tumbling, illogical procession of events which usually characterizes the cheaper Westerns and adventure stories. The hero of such stuff (there's always one), is very daring, very brave, and sometimes not even human. He plunges headfirst into some alien surroundings and there, 99% of the time, finds some girl of his own or another race, who is infinitely more beautiful than any he has ever seen. So immediately they fall in love. She assists him to escape from a conglomeration of monstrosities who plan to annihilate the Earth. With the aid of a ray gun or so—usually some sort of rays are used—they gain the safety of the space flyer and, after destroying an entire planet by throwing a lever or crashing some mechanism, race back to Earth. Personally I believe I could put my finger on the man who started all this foolishness. He is none other than our good friend, Mr. Edmond Hamilton! If it was entirely new when he wrote his first he can at least be given credit for originating something.

You may think I'm slinging mud at Paul Ernst's "The Red Hell of Jupiter," but that is not entirely true. In fact, I am talking about the entire October issue.

"In the Orbit of Saturn" was the most original, but even that not entirely so. Can't you give us some stories situated on Earth and revolving around biological or archaeological themes?

Among the people in this world who should have tribute for perpetuating Science Fiction—that is, counting Authors, Readers, publishers—is the artist Paul. Really, I cannot see how one can doubt his superiority. While Wesso is a genius, Paul is a super-genius. His art attracted me to Science Fiction and there it holds me. If a story is poorly illustrated, I rarely read it. Another of his pictures in the latest *Astounding Stories* was a pleasant surprise to me.

For once, here is a reader who does not want a quarterly! Why have just another S. F. magazine to clutter up the now overflowing market? As far as I know the Clayton magazines have never had such a thing before. The Readers ought to be quiet because the Editors know the conditions much better.

Regardless of all the above criticism and "editorial hints," I consider that *Astounding Stories* ranks with the high-

est. It employs, without a doubt, the best of the Authors, and is improving with each issue. When a periodical does both, what more can be expected?

Anthony Gilmore returns in the next issue. That's great! His "Tentacles from Below" was superb. And then there's a future war story and Meek's "Giants on the Earth." I expect the November issue to be a wham-doodle!

A compliment for the October cover. One of the best yet. A delightful combination of the fantastic, the beautiful, and the grotesque—in fact, every essential! The mechanical background was excellent and the predominant red color must have been very attractive because the newsstands here sold out the very first day. More like it.

Strange Tales promises to become a worthy sister to *Astounding Stories*. You scored A-1 with me the first lap. If it doesn't deteriorate, I'm a confirmed Reader. And what a formidable array of authors it has! Any magazine that can fail with such writers must be poor indeed!

Having said my little say, I will close with the statement that I am 17 years of age, and would be glad to correspond with anyone young or old.—Herman Teeter, 405 So. Boulder Ave., Russellville, Ark.

Converted

Dear Editor:

Have just finished reading my first copy of A. S., and believe me I sure do mean to read many more of the same. My newsdealer couldn't supply me with my regular Science Fiction mag, but suggested A. S., and I am now quite grateful for his advice because I like A. S. better than any magazine I have ever read, bar none.

"The Red Hell of Jupiter," by Ernst, was a wow, as was "The Heads of Apex," by Flagg. Say, this fellow Flagg sure has an imagination that a man of my views must look up to. Let's have some more stories by him real soon.—Vaughan Heiner, Box 162, California, Pa.

Let's Hope Not!

Dear Editor:

Thumbs up for "our" magazine. I visited a magazine stand the other day and bought the magazine on the strength of its title. In an hour A. S. had completely won my favor. It's the kind of a magazine that you regret to lay down until you have read it from cover to cover. It's one of those few books that you are compelled to take to the dinner table and prop against the sugar bowl or salt shaker.

Astounding Stories is also very educational, and I learned a lot from "The Solar Magnet." The stories take me into the future and keep me there with all sorts of situations and complications, and that's just what I like. By a long shot, the best story was "The Red Hell of Jupiter."

Next in my judgment were "The Heads of Apex" and "The Orbit of Saturn."

I was brought rudely back to the present when R. F. Starzl had one of his pirate guards in his story, "The Orbit of Saturn" say, "Sez you." Will people still be saying that in 2159?—Milton Lee, 1117 Sixth St., N. E., Washington, D. C.

Correspondents Wanted

Dear Editor:

I must say your Science Fiction magazine, *Astounding Stories*, is all right.

A very interesting article, I thought, in the September issue of *A. S.* was that on "Two-Way Time." In this theory the cause and effect of events is changed. The event is governed or brought about by the future. If this were true it would seem as if everything were all mapped out and happened as pre-determined. Although Dr. Lewis' theory about time and the universe cycle is a new one, it nevertheless seems possible to me.

"The God in the Box" in the September issue of *A. S.* was a little different from the usual invasion and war-on-other-planets story. "The Sargasso of Space" and "The Copper-Clad World" were fair. "Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Cummings is the best Science Fiction story I've read.

I would like to correspond with Science Fiction Readers in any part of the country.—Clayton C. Craft, Ashfield, Mass.

Likes S. F. Best

Dear Editor:

I have read *A. S.* for a year. Although I read many other kinds of magazines, I like Science Fiction best. *Astounding Stories* is, I think, the best magazine of its kind. I like S. P. Wright's "John Hanson" stories best of all, but "The Man from 2072" did not rate as high as the others I have read. In this story, John Hanson argues with the time-traveler that he cannot succeed because history did not record his return; but in the end of the story John Hanson, knowing that the man cannot succeed, strives desperately to prevent the time-traveler's return.—John B. Gross, R. F. D. 1, Frankfort, Ky.

Writers Wanted

Dear Editor:

I see from your "Corner" that I am not the only English person who appreciates your stories.

I think they are awfully good, and that the Authors must have very vivid and clever imaginations to write them by enlarging on scientific facts. My one trouble is that I have such difficulty in getting the magazines: they seem to sell out as soon as they reach the book shop, which goes to prove that they are well liked.

I wonder if any of your Readers would write to me. I should love to hear from people living in other countries. I am a

girl 19 years of age.—Rhoda Atkins, Cambridge House, Flar Bourton, Nr. Bristol, Somerset, Eng.

"Phew!"

Dear Editor:

Many thanks for your letter. It is very nice of the Editor of the mag to answer his Readers personally: it cements the friendship between ye Ed and his Readers.

To comment upon the Sept. issue which I have had some time now, but have only just read: It is the best yet in every way! The stories in order of merit are: "Sargasso of Space," "Copper-Clad World," "God in the Box" and "Devil Crystals of Arret." "Brood of the Dark Moon"—judgment reserved. The cover is the best yet, and taken all round the issue is excellent!

I have not had *Strange Tales* yet, but will give my opinion when I get it.

In connection with the idea of time-traveling, as raised by "The Exile of Time"—my conception of time is that it is like a strip of motion film: the past is the part that has been exposed, the present is just in the course of exposure, and the future is as yet unexposed. Conceding that time-traveling is possible—and everything points theoretically to the fact—then, since the past is exposed and unchangeable (it is developed and printed or made positive), it cannot be altered by a time-traveler. So if a t-t went back in time he would only go back to what and where he was at the time chosen; and even then, since the composition of his body changes every so often, he could only go back as himself for very few years, and only see, know, and do what he saw, knew and did at that time. Thus there would be no object in going back at all. As for going into the future, this is a different matter altogether, as the future is as yet unexposed; that is, it hasn't yet happened. Thus our t-t has a chance to do something. He can help to make the future; but once he has got into future time he can only come back to that space and time in which he lived and from which he was projected. So all logical t-t stories can only concern the future and not the past.

But once the t-t has got into the future his own time will have already become the past; it has been exposed! He, himself, has missed out on some time, and since he has never existed in this he cannot go back—for what can he go back to? He has had no place in the happenings of that time, and so he cannot now change it. He is marooned in the future, unable to go back to a new existence as he has already lived what he could go back to! Thus no tale can come down to us, now of the past, and so no story is printed in *A. S.* However, we can pretend that "our mag" is the television screen and have the t-t tell of his adventures to the people of the age in which he is.

But what if he does go back after projecting himself to the future to a time and place in which he was in the past? Then comes the tricky part. He will live his life over again, build the time machine, project himself into the future from which he came, have his adventures in the future and then again project himself into the past at the same time as before. He will go back as before and come forward again. He will be doomed to a perpetual motion in time. What a fate for a fellow! Continual projection and re-projection back and forward and all in the same time-strip, for how long?

Phew! What a brainstorm for a chap to think out; what a story can be made out of this!

I think by now I will have set any Readers of this in a pretty plight, so I will ask apologies of ye Ed for all the space used—if he prints this—besides the time taken in sorting it out!—Leslie J. Johnson, 46 Mill Lane, Old Swan, Liverpool, Lancashire, Eng.

Whom Girls Prefer

Dear Editor:

I have been a pretty consistent Reader of *Astounding Stories* since you started and always pass my copy to the girls in the office, who are likewise Readers now.

If it makes any difference to you, we girls prefer stories by A. Merritt, R. F. Starzl, Murray Leinster and Charles Willard Diffin. It seems hardly fair to mention them, though, because you have so many other good ones too.

For October, "In the Orbit of Saturn" was one of Starzl's best. I certainly like the way this writer keeps his stories moving. "Brood of the Dark Moon," by Diffin, was very good. Somehow I can't quite believe in Dr. Bird's adventures with Saranoff, though.

I don't think "The Copper-Clad World" came up to your preliminary advertising. It wasn't bad, but neither was it very good.—Helen Huberch, 6720 Riverside Drive, Berwyn, Ill.

Why Not?

Dear Editor:

I am tired of reading letters in "The Readers' Corner" about two things:

First: If I read any more letters about printing reprint stories, I intend to start an anti-reprint crusade. Why, oh why do Readers want a reprint? If anyone likes a story so well that he or she wants to read it again, I am willing to send him or her the magazine with the story in it. Who wants to read something they have already read? I don't, for one.

Second: Please don't print the magazine more than once a month; not because I do not want to read it more often, but I know that as soon as you start that the stories will get weak. You have a fine magazine now. Why not keep it so?—

Wilson Adams, President, M. S. L., Seat Pleasant, Md.

Before—and After

Dear Editor:

Before your magazine came out, I used to read other Science Fiction magazines, and I thought your mag just a poor attempt at imitating them. However, with time your magazine has shown a wonderful improvement. At the present it is all I read. I can hardly wait for each issue, and when I do get it I read it from cover to cover. I always enjoy "The Readers' Corner" because I like to see other people's impressions of A. S. There are always some people who criticize the grade of paper or the lettering on the cover. What difference does the cover or grade of paper make as long as the stories are good?—Roy N. Feinburg, 319 W. 94th St., New York City.

Lost—One Suggestion

Dear Editor:

I've just finished reading the letters in the October issue, and gosh! if I said all I wanted to about those letters—well, you couldn't get this letter all in one issue of A. S.!

I'd like to say that Mr. John Henderson has cured me of reprints. Please don't print any. Also, I'd like a quarterly, but mostly I'm in favor of a beautiful annual!

I would like to agree with Mr. Charles Nelson that A. S. is the most interesting and educational magazine published, but can't. I think that all S. F. magazines that have good stories are interesting and that A. S. is as interesting as any of them, but as for being educational—why, it doesn't have an editorial nor a department for science questions and answers. It has even taken science out of its title! All of its educational value is in its stories, and there you can't tell truth from fiction.

Say, I've solved the problem of smooth edges! Separately, the pages of A. S. are smooth, but collectively they are the same as ever! So I'm going to get me a paper cutter and even them up myself. How's that for an idea?

Let me say three things more, please.

Mr. Thomas Daniel wishes proof that space is black. Ask him what makes night black.

And how about getting the greatest S. F. artist, Paul, to give us a story in pictures in each issue?

Goshdarnit, I've forgotten what that third thing was!—Clay Ferguson, Jr., 810 Park St., S. W., Roanoke, Va.

Russian Villains

Dear Editor:

Have read *Astounding Stories* and, suffering in silence for a long time, I must declare myself. What's the idea of filling the pages of your wonderful magazine with propaganda against Russia?

Not only in A. S. does this appear, but also in the other Science Fiction magazines.

There are four Authors especially guilty of this. They are: Nat Schnacher, A. L. Zagat, D. W. Hall and not the last and not the least, Capt. S. P. Meek. Although they write real good stories, they persist in making Russia the scapegoat. Why don't they take a trip to Russia and see for themselves what it is all about before they mix trash with fiction.

Some of the stories that arouse my ire are: "The Death Cloud," by N. Schachner and A. L. Zagat, "Werewolves of War," by D. W. Hall and "The Black Lamp" and "The Solar Magnet," by Capt. S. P. Meek.

In the story "The Black Lamp," Capt. Meek says, "The whole object of life to a loyal citizen of Bolshevikia is to reduce the whole world to the barbarous level in which they hold Russia!" Well, well. So the Russians are building up and modernizing their country so they will have the pleasure of destroying it when they turn into barbarians!

Please print this, as I would like to know how many Readers agree with me.—George N. Matyas, 1320 N. 4th St., Toronto, O.

We are genuinely sorry that you take so personally our Authors' occasional use of Russians as villains. We are sure that our Authors mean no offense. After all, for story purposes it is more effective to make the villain a foreigner than an American. Every large non-English-speaking country furnishes its quota of objectionable characters: Germany, France, the Latins and the Mongolians; yes, and the United States, too. *Somebody* must be unsocial and obstructing.

It is not likely that modern Russian literature shows a preponderance of American heroes and Russian villains.

And, as for the quotation, it should be remembered that Authors cannot be held responsible for the opinions of their characters. Only fair— isn't it?

A Large Size Fan

Dear Editor:

Congratulations to Wesso. His cover illustration for the October issue was very very good. I sometimes think that Wesso's best work is the covers for *Astounding Stories*.

As usual, I turned first to "The Readers' Corner" and was again struck by the dullness of that unromantic and unscientific name. I believe that one of your Readers, a short time ago in a letter to this department, suggested a change to a more fitting name for such an interesting factor of your magazine. I most enthusiastically second the motion and hope to see a change for the good in the near future.

As usual, I found the collection of letters very interesting, particularly those of L. G. Johnson, John Henderson, H. Fearing and B. Mulharen, although I disagreed with some in their grading of the stories.

The stories in the October issue were all very good, particularly "The Red Hell of Jupiter" and, of course, "Brood of the Dark Moon." When, oh, when will I ever again read a serial in A. S. which can be compared to this story?

Another thing. I am one of the vast majority who would like to see *Astounding Stories* published in a larger size. Of course, I realize that as all the Clayton Magazines are of the small size you would not like to change. But consider this: *Astounding Stories* is by far the finest of your magazines. Don't you think that a larger size with smooth and even edges would look more dignified and different from the usual rough-edged, small-size, trashy magazines which clutter the newsstands? And often I have to paw over the bookshelves looking for *Astounding Stories* and at last haul it out from behind a stack of *Wild West* magazines. Now if you built your magazine on a larger scale it would stand out among the trashy rubbish about it and look the passerby directly in the eyes and scream that this was— *Astounding Stories*! Then who could resist buying a copy? And after reading one copy he would become a lifelong reader of Science Fiction. Is this not a convincing argument?

Strange Tales, too, should change to the larger size.

Let me also howl for a quarterly. Why, oh why, when almost every letter in the "Corner" implores you to put out a book four times a year, of a size three times that of the monthly, with at least one long novel by a good writer, complete, and sell it for fifty cents or even a dollar—why, why can't you take heed and try it out?

Well, I had better sign off. I notice that every minute the pile of physics homework before me grows incredibly larger!—Carlyle J. Bessette, Charlotte, Vt.

Light in the Dark

Dear Editor:

Have just finished the October issue of A. S.—the best Science Fiction mag on the market. I notice one of your Readers made a challenge about the proving of the blackness of space. Well, I am neutral in the way of believing that space is "both." As generally understood, space is a void.

Since the sun is constantly shining and giving off light, then why isn't space perfectly light? For the simple reason that there is nothing in space to reflect the sun's rays. Light as we see it, I think, is merely a reflection by some particle of part of the sun's rays. Am I right? Therefore, space is apparently a black void. But, if a space ship, for instance, were launched into the apparently black void, it would be at once visible, as there is nothing to stop the sun's rays, and the space ship has a reflection value. Therefore, space could be light if there were something in it to light, but since there is nothing in space, I repeat, there is the appearance of a black void as stated in lots of your stories.

What do you think of this, Mr. Daniel? May I hear from you and some of the A. S. Readers (if this is published)?—Heyward M. Crowson, Jr., 220 N. Salem Ave., Sumter, S. C.

True Enough

Dear Editor:

More power to Science Fiction!

I devour every one of your stories with relish, especially those of Mr. Ernst. He certainly has an imagination to applaud. But—I have a bone to pick with him. Why did not he go more into detail concerning the principle of propulsion of his "atomic force motor" in his "The Red Hell of Jupiter"? Gr-r-r, I felt like chewing up the mag, though of course it wasn't the mag's fault. What he could have done with such an idea!

The mag is O. K., the paper is O. K. All those kind Readers who want to change the paper should remember that glazed paper under an electric lamp is injurious to the optics.—John Gervais, Burns, Ore.

Coercion, I Calls It

Dear Editor:

Here is a short story of an Editor who visited the year 200,000,000 in a time-traveling vehicle. He is asleep—as usual—when all of a sudden he is rudely awakened by a man of that time.

There is a murderous gleam in the man's eyes as he draws his ray pistol and points it at the Editor, saying: "Have you at last decided to give us A. S. every week, or at least an A. S. quarterly?"

Editor: "I-I-I'll g-g-ive b-b-both!"—Oscar Estes, South Second St., Richmond, Ky.

"The Readers' Corner

All readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, authors, scientific principles and possibilities—everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

Although from time to time the Editor may make a comment or so, this is a department primarily for *Readers*, and we want you to make full use of it. Likes, dislikes, criticisms, explanations, roses, brickbats, suggestions—everything's welcome here; so "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and discuss it with all of us!

—*The Editor.*

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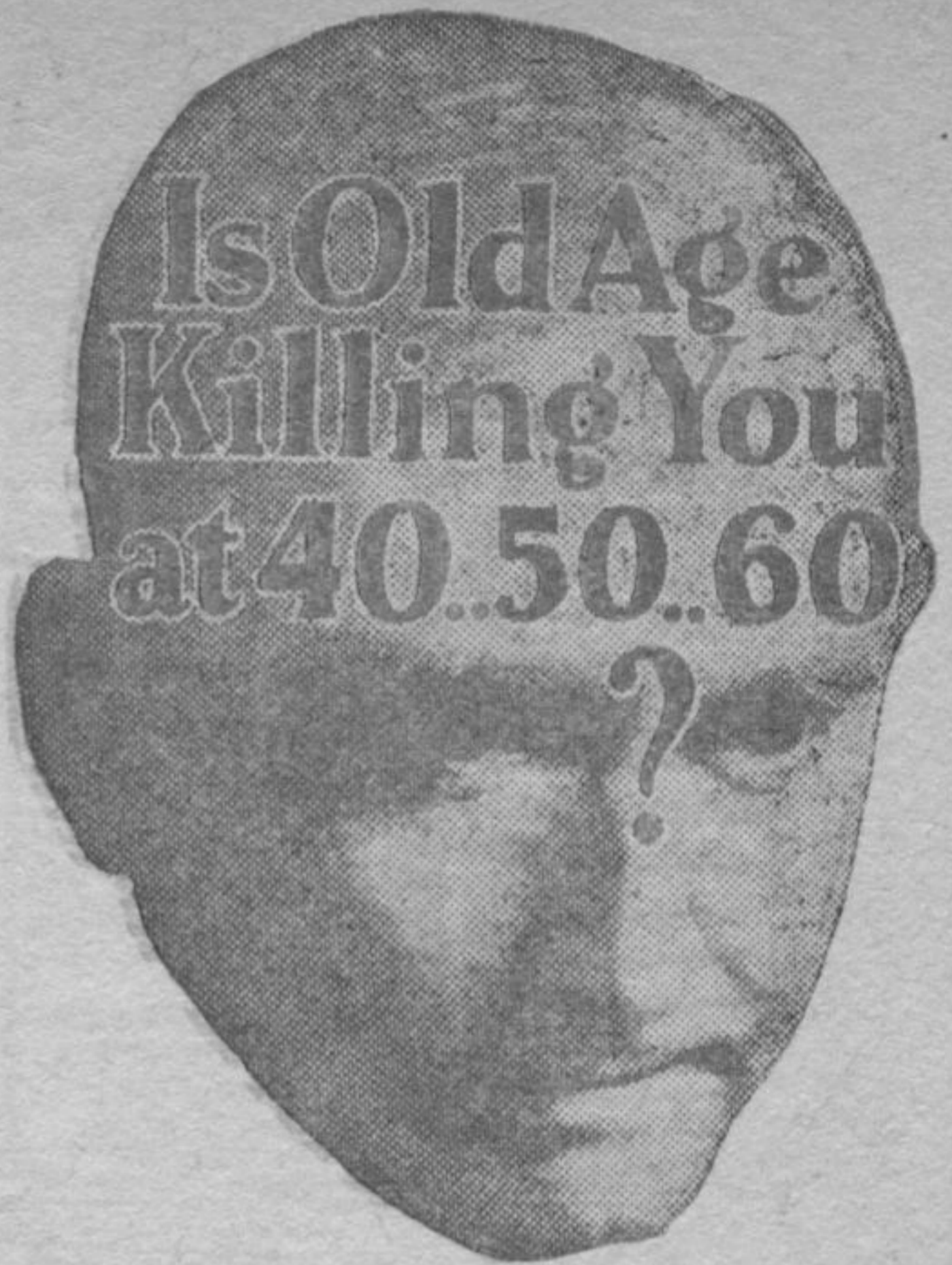
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CO-ED, INCORPORATED, will pay \$1,000.00 cash just for a girl's name—and \$500.00 extra for sending it quick. We want a name that will properly describe America's most beautiful college girl—one of those attractive, lively co-eds that you see at every college and high school. There is nothing to buy or sell in order to win this \$1,500.00 and you will not be required to do anything else but send a name. This big prize will be given just to find the right name for a lovely young lady who will sponsor a beautiful nation wide radio program we contemplate for this winter.

Send Your Favorite Name

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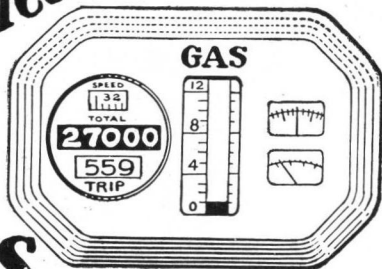
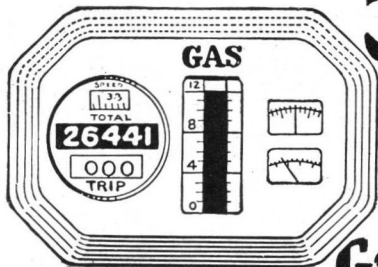
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