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SPACEWAY

STORIES OF THE FUTURE

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contents

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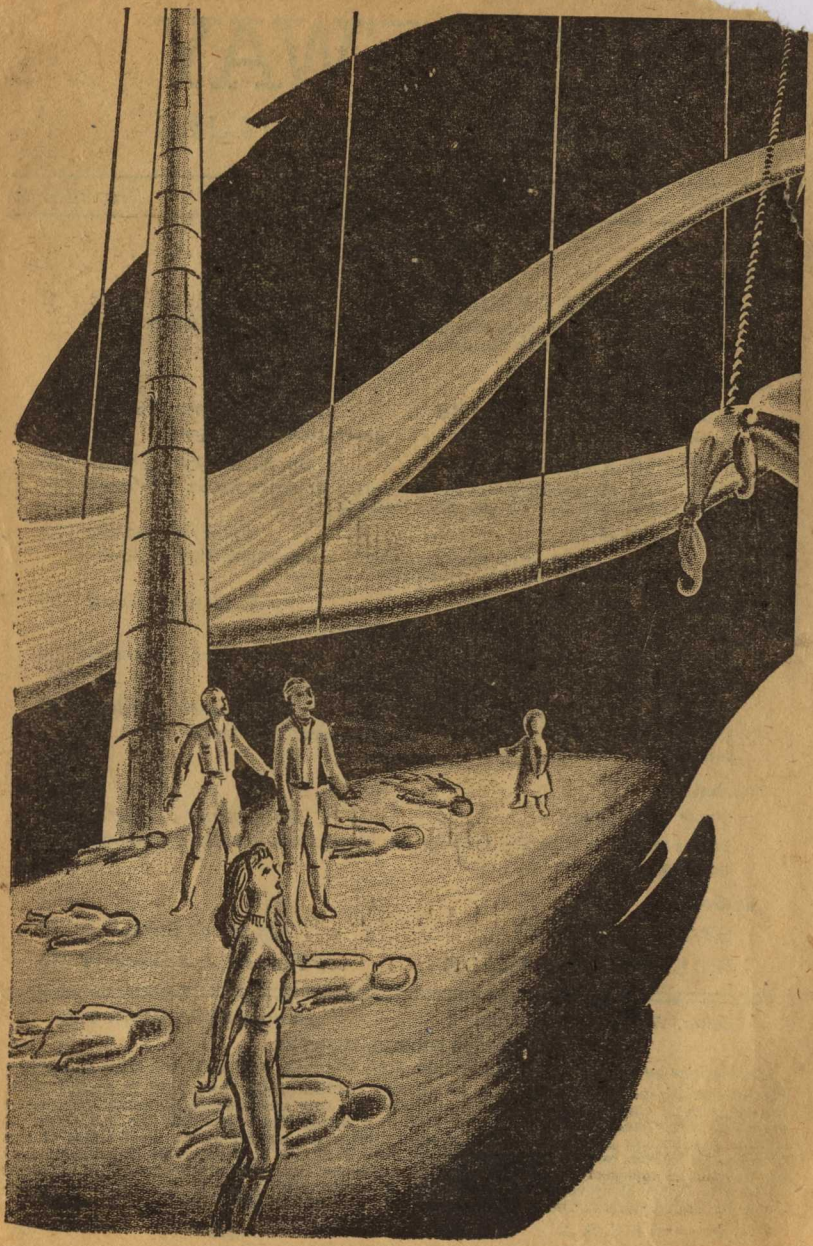
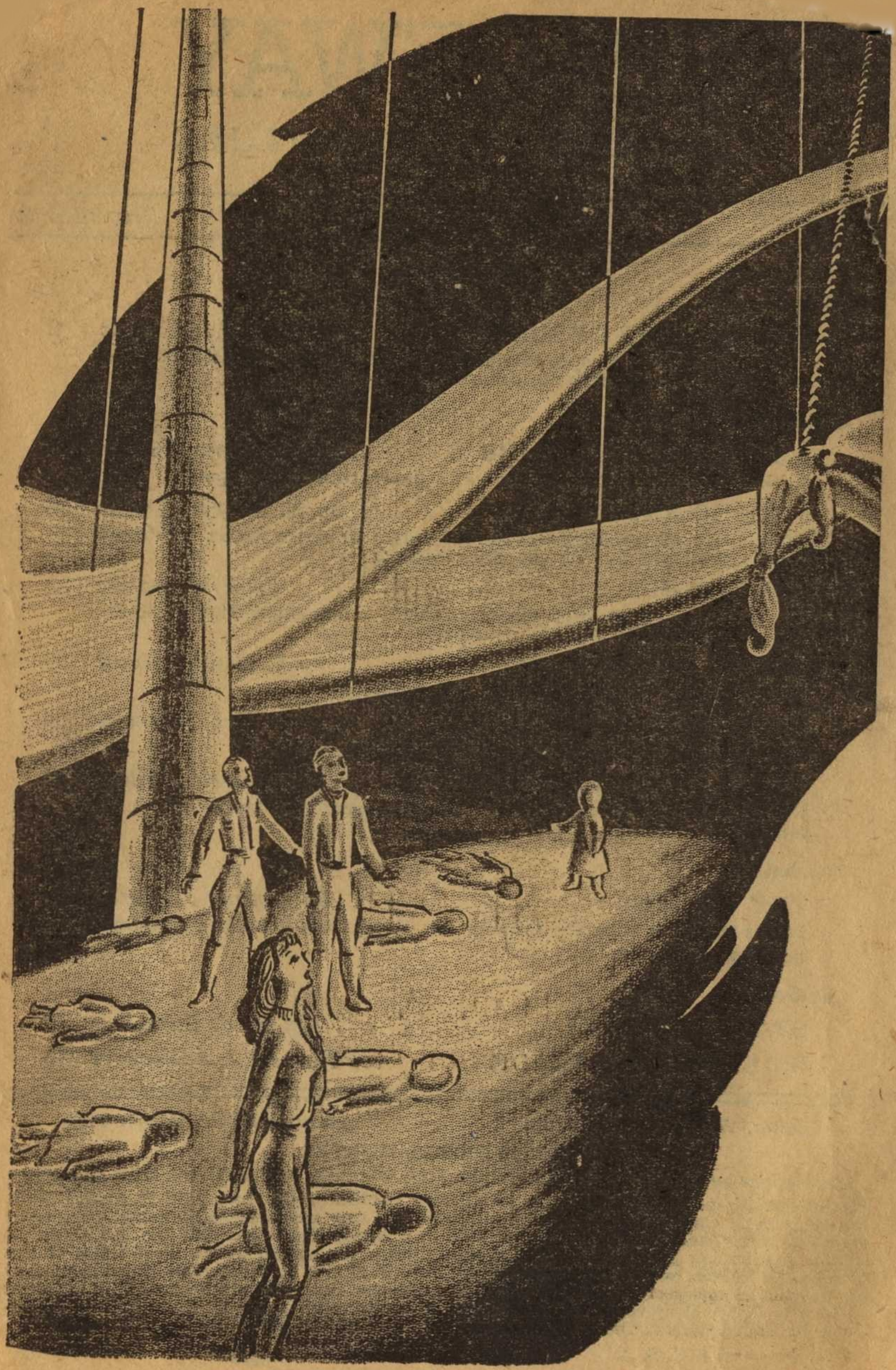
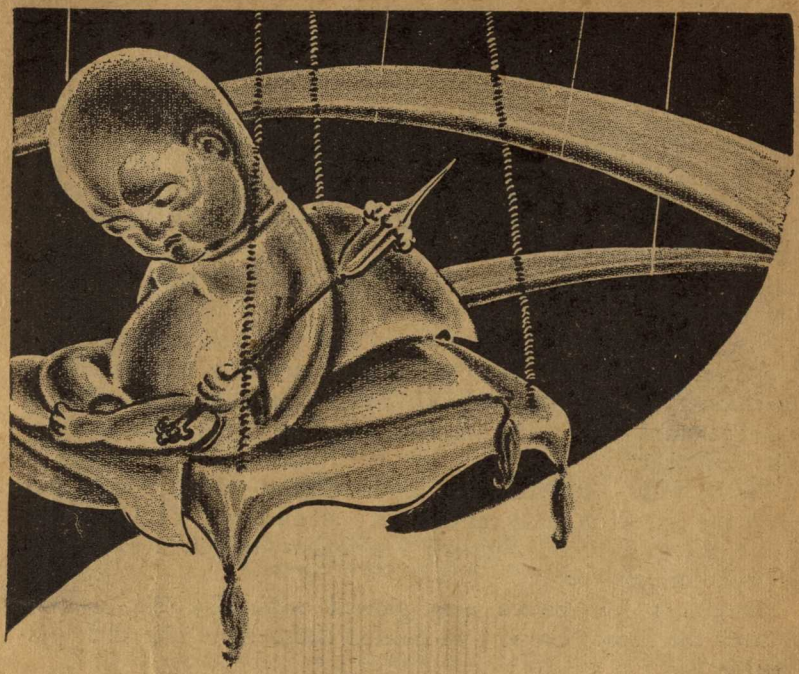






The MIDGETS *of* MONOTON

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

FEATURE NOVEL

ILLUSTRATED BY MARION KYLE

¶ It is a pleasure to be able to present this complete short novel by a master of satire in science fiction. We believe that you will be horrified, yet fascinated by the picture he paints of the underground realm of the Monotonites—where originality is the worst of all crimes.

CHAPTER I

A Plunge Into the Dark

Amid the rolling, cactus-dotted vastness of the New Mexico desert, a series of queer structures had arisen. The traveler who passed by airplane (and no traveler would have passed in any other way) would have been amazed at those huge cylinders jutting from the earth; the cluster of low sheds, vomiting smoke and steam; and the gaping shaft, about six feet across, which slanted sharply into the earth.

Near the tunnel entrance, two men and a woman were gathered. Ray Gale, reed-like, scholarly and slightly stooping, was bent above the stockier, sturdier figure of Ed Dennison; and both were glancing eagerly toward Caroline Hayes, whose clear violet-blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Well, folks," exulted Gale, as he eagerly waved a black box about the size of a small camera, "it's all finished! Yes, believe it or not, the great bore is finished! I'm sure we can enter now. Shall we make our first try?"

Dennison's live brown eyes glowed with adventurous ardor beneath the brushy brows that beetled above them like dark precipices.

"I'm game," he asserted, in a resonant voice.

The girl, a tall and slender creature in her early twenties, tossed back her abundant free-flowing honey-colored hair. Her comely cheeks, tanned by the southern sun, flamed with the zest of life."

"I'm just dying to begin."

A brief silence followed.

"You know," recalled Dennison, thoughtfully, "it's just over a year since I crash-landed in this spot. I'll never forget the day—April 11, '54—nor what a lucky devil I was to come through with my skin whole, even if I did lose my plane."

The minds of all three reviewed the strange series of episodes that had led to their being here now. When Dennison, veteran pilot for Trans-Western Air Lines, had crashed on the desert, he had accidentally ploughed up some blue-clay statuettes, multiple-branching candlesticks and other articles belonging to no known civilization. Six months later, he had enlisted the aid of Gale, visionary and inventor, whose record-breaking new atomic-powered

tunnel borer had made it possible to dig a long exploratory shaft, down which the party was now to descend in quest of further relics. Funds for the expedition had been provided by various philanthropists; while an active force of twenty was now on the scene, including Caroline, who had been Gale's laboratory assistant.

"Look here, Ed! I've a surprise for you!" reported the inventor, after fishing in his pocket for a grayish article that looked like an X-ray plate. "Just see those dark lines there!"

Dennison took up the plate, and peered at it like a belwildered patient being shown a dentist's X-ray.

"In Pete's name!" he let out, with a low whistle. "They—why, they just can't be what they seem!"

"Subterranean galleries, or I've missed the boat!" Gale proclaimed, triumphantly, "We'll have to track them down, if it's the last act of our lives!"

There was a wrinkling of fine lines about the corners of his blazing deep-blue eyes, which seemed to pop out preter-naturally above the lean, aesthetic face.

"Now here, Ed, is a secret I've held in reserve," he rushed on, holding up the little black camera-sized box. See this! I call it the Radio-Photescope."

"Radio what?"

"Radio-Photescope. It's purpose it to take time exposures that record the rays emanating from opaque matter. In a way, it's like the astronomical camera, which captures exceedingly faint beams of light—stars no human eye has ever seen; it acts by photographing the feeble emanations which, I've found, all substances throw off at all times. Thus the depths of the earth may become visible."

Sounds good," conceded Dennison, running a bewildered hand through his mat of coffee-colored hair. "But why in the name of the old Willies have you waited all this time to tell me?"

Gale hesitated just long enough to throw a happy smile at his laboratory assistant.

"Oh, merely a little surprise Caroline and I had prepared for you. Matter of fact, she had the most to do with it, didn't you, Carrie?"

A faint flush came to the girl's cheeks, but the shapely head shook in vigorous denial.

"Nonsense, Ray! You know very well the ideas were all yours. I only tagged along."

Dennison told himself that he was being ridiculous, idiotic; but as he noticed how confidingly the young woman returned Gale's smile, a pang of jealousy streaked through him. For almost a month the three of them had been here in the desert, along with the laborers and assistants and the supplies transported over an improvized road; and Ed's mind, perversely, had been as much upon Caroline as upon the project which he had thought the focus of his life. The installation of the tunnel machinery, the boring of the shaft by iron hands, and the incidental new finds that confirmed the belief in an extinct civilization—all these were far outweighed by the presence of one bright, friendly, gracefully formed being whose violet-blue eyes and firm but meltingly soft features haunted his nights and his waking hours. And yet—had she ever shown one sign of anything beyond comradely good will?

"Well, folks, if you're ready, let's get going!" he heard the inventor's hearty bass. "I'm anxious to find out about those mysterious galleries. My suspicion—I may be wrong, of course—is that they're burial vaults of some ancient people."

No one noticed the shudder that passed through Dennison. He would not, he felt sure, have blinked at any danger beneath the sun; but somehow—he knew it was foolish of him—he felt something profane, horrible about the idea of entering old burial vaults.

However, he could not be held back by fantasies.

"Hey, Cotrerri!" he called to the foreman of the laborers. "We're going into the shaft, all three of us! If we're not back in two hours, send a search party down."

"Okay, Boss," acknowledged Cotrerri, coming up. "Say, ain't you taking nothing along—in case something goes haywire—"

"Nothing's going haywire!" Gale denied, with an emphatic toss of his head. "We'll all bring strong flashlights, of course, with extra sets of batteries. . . . Also," he added, hastily, "I'll take my Photescope, just in case—"

"Just in case of what?" challenged Dennison.

Gale did not answer. Gingerly he wheeled aside, to procure the flashlights. And a few minutes later the party, fully equipped, turned toward the tunnel, which slanted down at an angle of fifteen degrees.

No matter how he tried, Dennison could not keep from shivering, with an uncanny sensation, as the darkness of the six-foot bore closed

above him. He saw how Gale, to avoid hitting the ceiling, had to stoop slightly; how Caroline plunged in with a face of glowing expectancy; and how the shadows flickered and wavered and withdrew eerily before them as their flashlights advanced. The air was hot and musty-smelling, and the tunnel seemed to slow down indefinitely, straight and unbending, though they knew it was but a mile long. But why had Dennison that sense of dark, inimical forces?

At any point along these walls, folks, we may run into what we're looking for," Gale pointed out, as he swung his flashlight at the walls, floor and ceiling. "Unless I miss my guess, relics of the lost civilization will be popping out almost anywhere."

Down and down, step by step, for more than half a mile, they took their painful way; and discovered nothing to repay their quest. Dennsion's head reeled; he had never felt so uneasy when guiding an airplane on the most hazardous maneuvers. He noticed, also, that the others had become less talkative; they looked graver, and even, he thought, a little apprehensive.

"Well, don't know as we'd better push any further today. Atmosphere's getting pretty stuffy, don't you think? Next time we'll bring something to purify it," Gale at length proposed.

"No, I'm game to go on!" Caroline dared him, as she started forward again.

But even as she made a challenging spurt ahead of the men, something so astonishing, so terrifying occurred that neither observer was able to say quite how it happened. Suddenly she shrieked. She threw up her hands, striving wildly to support herself; and then, as if seized from beneath, she vanished from sight—vanished straight through the tunnel floor!

With her screams still in their ears, the men lunged forward simultaneously. But at the same time the floor seemed to disappear from beneath them. They too cried out in terror and plunged into darkness.

With a thump, Dennison landed on something hard and flat. Immediately a weight which he knew to be Gale sprawled halfway over him; and he heard an oath he had not known Gale to be capable of. All the while, other sounds were in his ears—whirrings, gratings, rumblings, thumpings as of machinery. For a moment,

everything seemed to whirl about him; there was a buzzing in his head; his muscles ached excruciatingly.

"God damn it all!" Gale was swearing. "God damn it! I've just about broken every limb!"

"Where in hell's name are we?" Dennison mumbled. "What the devil's that noise?"

The whirrings, gratings, rumbling and thumpings continued with a sort of rude rhythm. A brisk wind brushed the men's cheeks; they had the impression of moving, though everything was so dark that they might have been without eyes.

"Caroline! Where on earth's Caroline?" Dennison gasped, as he recovered his equilibrium.

"Here I am!" her voice rose above the confusion of machine-like noises. "Here! Here!" But the words seemed to come from a distance.

"Are you all right? You all right?" both men called back.

"A little shaken up—nothing much. How about you?"

"Just shaken up."

"Heaven help us, where's that flashlight?" Gale grumbled, as he threshed about in the blackness. And then after a moment, fervently. "Ah, here it is, thank God!"

But the relief of a ray of light was partial only. Their bewilderment, their alarm only grew as they stared into the dimness. They were in a gallery about eight feet wide and equally high, with a flat floor and arched ceiling. The walls were straight and dark, and—was it possible?—seemed to be racing past!

"The damned floor's vibrating too! Don't you notice it?" yelled Gale.

"Yes, by the devil!" Dennsion threw back with a resonance that echoed uncannily along the tunnel. He, too, had become aware of the faint jerks and tremblings of the floor, a little like those of a smooth-running railroad car. "Either I'm nuts, or we're on a moving platform!"

"Moving plenty fast, too! Going straight down to hell, from the looks of it!"

Their motion was indeed downward, at a fairly sharp angle. And their speed was considerable, as was shown not only by the apparent movement of the walls past them, but their experience upon turning a curve, when they had to hold tight to small projections in the floor, so as not to be dashed against the wall.

Where were they? What had happened to them? In their nightmarish horror, they did not even try to decide.

"Don't you think we'd better locate Caroline?" Gale asked. And they gave every effort to crawling along the platform on hands and knees, progressing so slowly that it took them minutes to reach her.

The girl, looking oddly white by the rays of the flashlight, greeted them with an effort at good cheer. "I don't know why, but I feel safer, now that you're with me. It would be almost fun, wouldn't it, if you could forget to be afraid?"

"Well, if we're going down to visit old Nick, might just as soon do it all together," Gale muttered with grim humor.

After a moment Caroline explained.

"Don't know what happened to me—I just seemed to drop through the floor. It was so thin, it was just like breaking through ice."

They were silent for a moment, while the floor seemed to vibrate more rapidly, and the grating and whiring grew more pronounced.

"Growing hot as a bake oven," mumbled Gale, mopping his perspiring brow.

"Yes, and who ever concocted that funny smell?" added Dennison. "Reminds me of a doghouse."

"Gracious! What's that ahead?" Caroline broke in sharply, and pointed toward a faint radiance, like an illuminated window, which had appeared far in the distance.

All three gazed in silence, while the illumination swiftly approached. At first of a pale jade, it grew to an apple-green brilliance blinding to eyes adjusted to the gloom of the tunnels. "By Jove! there are open spaces beyond!" Dennison discovered, as he squinted through the glare.

With startling rapidity, they reached the applegreen window, passed it, and had the sensation of soaring in space; like travelers in a train on a trestle above a ravine, they found themselves on a tall elevated platform inside a gigantic cavern.

Unbelievable impressions now came crowding over them all. Could it be that they had entered a cavern a quarter of a mile high and miles long? What were those gracefully branching columns, grouped to resemble groves of colossal trees, which supported the roof on their forking boughs? What those clusters of green lamps in the upper limbs— lamps which gave the illusion of leaves, and spread the queer illumination that suffused the entire place?

"God in heaven! Is that a city down there?" gasped Dennison? "Or am I just plain looney?"

From the floor, two hundred yards below the travelers, huge greenish structures arose to a height of three or four hundred feet. Each was shaped, roughly, like a flight of stairs, with eight-foot tiers, one set behind the other, so as to bring reminders of early American cliff dwellings. These edifices, whose only windows were little openings like portholes, were arranged in apparently endless rows, with narrow spaces between.

"Mercy! Look at the people!" Caroline shrilled, her eyes on the multitudes that blackened the ground, and crowded the air with flying devices. Some, with swooping condor wings, circled above the intruders; others buzzed past on transparent dragonfly pinions; still others remained almost stationary in air, while immense fans on their shoulders made a whirring gray blur. And others were canoe-shaped craft whizzing through the air so rapidly that it was a wonder they did not constantly collide.

"Alive in Wonderland sure didn't have anything on us!" Gale muttered, breaking a dumbfounded silence. But before the others could reply, the platform shook convulsively; passed beneath a broad covered shed at the center of the trestle; and rattled to a halt.

All three travelers, after leaping to their feet, started back with gasps of astonishment. Facing them, were scores of extrordinary creatures.

CHAPTER II

The Blue Bolts

"Are they human?" Dennison wondered, as he started at the gaping, gesticulating crowd that surrounded him, layers deep. In a way, they looked like men; they each stood on two legs, and man-like limbs. But they were so small and pudgy that they evidently belonged to some new race; they were all rotund and flabby-looking; few of them were five feet tall; their legs were short, and their arms mere shrivelled sticks.

Their faces, however, were stranger still. Beardless and hairless, they had bald pates polished like the proverbial billiard ball. There were no lashes above the small pinkish eyes half enveloped in bags of fat; their pallid gums were toothless; their thick necks bulged

with double chins; their complexion, perhaps because of the peculiar lighting, was of a faint greenish tingue. And as if to complete the grotesquerie, their stump fingers were nailless; and it was hard to say which was man and which woman, for they all looked alike, and were all dressed in the same leaf-green shirt-like mantles that fell almost to their ankles.

For several seconds the strangers stood gazing in a thunder-stricken silence. And meanwhile the pgymies' mouths yawned wide; their whole forms trembled like gale-stricken boughs as they clutched at one another with agitated movements.

Then, in a sudden chorus, they all began to speak. Their high-pitched, squeaky tones rasped queerly—so queerly that Dennison and his companions, forgetting their predicament, burst into laughter.

"Why, good heavens," Caroline exclaimed, as she listened to the continual rap, tap, tap, rap, tap, tap, "it sounds like a telegraphic code."

But as the girl's clear tinkling voice reached the midgets, their own tones changed to a thin cackling of merriment and they began to nudge one another, as if enjoying a good joke.

"Guess we look like weird funa!" noted Gale. But he could not help observing the wide-mouthed awe of the crowd as they stared up at his six-foot frame.

As he spoke, he took a step forward; while the dwarfs, with cries of alarm, began backing away. But before he could advance another step, one of the men reached into the folds of his garments, and drew out a small tube, about as large as a pocket flashlight. This he pointed pistol-like at Gale's head; and instantly a faint whirring was heard, and a lavender light flickered along the sides of the instrument.

Caroline shrieked. At the same time, a bewildered expression crossed Gale's face; his hands dropped to his sides; his movements became stiff and automatic. Like a recruit obeying a drill sergeant, he began to move his legs up and down, up and down with mechanical precision, and commenced to march away after the holder of the little tube.

"Hell and damnation!" he swore. "What, in the name of—"

"Watch out, Ed!" Caroline screamed. A whirring tube had been pointed at Dennison, likewise with lavender fires playing along it. And something hard and tight took hold of him; some invisible force, vague and formless as electricity, was drawing him after

the tube-holder with a whirlwind's irresistible power; while, just to his rear, Caroline was trailing along at the command of a third tube-wielder.

"I—I just can't do anything I want," she attempted to explain. "My God! what will they do with us?"

Progress was slow; but their captors, puffing along on their undersized legs. all moved forward with the mechanical regularity of an army corps, without a word or a smile, their faces set in wooden expressions.

After passing down a long rolling platform or escalator, they entered one of the huge greenish buildings, with its eight-foot tiers set one behind the other, like a giant's stairway. The interior was a labyrinth; long corridors, six to eight feet high and wide, branched and inter-branched with every manner of loop, bend and twist. And along most of these galleries two columns of natives were moving, one in each direction, at a steady mechanical pace as unvaried as the ticklings of a clock.

"Why, great Lord," burst out Dennison, "we're in a regular anthill!"

"I'd call it a beehive," Gale corrected.

No beehive, however, possessed such scientific squipment. The walls, translucent with a greenish effluorescence, radiated a constant pale light; purple and yellow lanterns, at many of the crossways, flashed on and off at intervals of a few seconds, as if to guide traffic; while, on some of the wider thoroughfares, thousands of the pudgy inhabitants were whirled along on rumbling platforms.

The prisoners could not say just how far they advanced into the twisting mazes. But at length, abruptly, the entire company halted; and one of the party pressed his foot against a little lever on the floor. Immediately, a bell rang, a siren blew three blasts, and a panel in the wall clattered open, leaving a passageway wide enough to admit the crowd.

As they pushed on, the natives fell down on their hands and knees, and began to crawl. All three captives meanwhile were still slaves to the weird compulsion, and had to crawl along with their captors. Their eyes were fastened on the floor, which shimmered opalescently; and a continual loud buzzing was in their ears. But it was minutes before they were able to look up and see where they were.

Finally they found themselves in a great six-sided vaulted chamber

suffused by an olive-green light. There were no windows; the air was tormentingly hot; and the odors were those of a kennel. About them, on the floor, scores of natives lay full-length, their eyes upturned in adoration; upturned to a sort of cushioned throne suspended by long cables from the domed ceiling a hundred feet above.

"What the devil's gotten into me? Am I wearing magnifying glasses?" mumbled Gale.

"Maybe I'm wearing them too, old fellow," concurred Dennison. "That fellow up there just doesn't seem real."

The occupant of the throne did appear preternaturally large. In every respect except one he seemed just like in his countrymen; he had the same rotund body and stubby, flabby-looking limbs, the same beardless face and polished pate, the same lashless pink eyes and nailless fingers. His single point of distinction was his size; he was nine or ten feet tall, and wide in proportion. There was something monstrous about him as he sat suspended fifty feet in air, peering weakly down at his people, whose mingled voices of adoration made the buzzing that the strangers had noted.

But should the creature be called "he" or "she"? The observers could not say; like all his people, the giant appeared sexless. It was, however, Gale who was to characterize him. "Why, if it isn't the Queen Bee!"

They saw how, from where he sat on his royal-green throne, he was straining down to see them clearly. But the effort being too much for his shortsighted pinkish eyes, he seized an instrument resembling a pair of opera glasses, although several times as large; and with its aid he sat inspecting the new arrivals. At the same time, he uttered grunts of wonder and alarm; then took up a tube that looked like a megaphone, through which he began shouting in such piercingly shrill tones that Dennison's eardrums ached.

Instantly some of the pgymies ran about in high excitement, their stumpy legs carrying them hither and thither apparently without aim, while they panted like overworked dogs and the figure on the throne pointed at Dennison and his companions with shaking fingers.

Thereupon the tube-wielding attendants arose and started toward the door; and the three strangers, irresistibly following, trailed after them out of the room into intricate twisting corridors, which constantly narrowed and descended.

"Where the deuce are they taking us? To a concentration camp?"

wondered Gale, as the air grew hotter and fouler and they still wound downward through the palely-lighted green tunnels.

After a time, they were forced into a little car, which resembled an elevator, but moved at a forty-five degree angle and was not supported by any visible cables. On this they were whirled downward a long distance at what seemed super-sonic speed; and finally jolted to a halt in a room that appeared to confirm their worst apprehensions.

Low-roofed and black-walled, it was illuminated by dull-red bulbs in a sepulchral half-light. The captives could make out vaguely the tubes and levers of a huge metal machine about fifty feet away; and could distinctly see the line of cowering wretches that stood beside them along the rear wall. Even in the dimness they noticed how these creatures, who in all other ways looked precisely like other natives, were shivering, while their toothless mouths gaped in terror.

Before any of the newcomers could give voice to their alarm a blast as of a steam whistle sounded from across the room. Several of Dennison's neighbors shieked in horror; there came a whirring as of an immense electric fan; and a forked blade of blue lightning shot out from the half-seen machine across the room, accompanied by a booming of thunder. And three natives at Dennison's side threw up their arms, and fell in lifeless heaps. By the blaze of a second lightning-burst, which took three more lives, the watchers could see the purple-black burns on the victims' foreheads.

During the interval of comparative quiet that followed, Dennison and his companions stared at one another in consternation. Thanks to the weak light, he could not see the trembling of Caroline's lips, the deathly whiteness of her face; nor could he observe the angry clenching of Gale's fists, though he could hear his muttered oaths.

At last all but two of the pygmies lay crumbled upon the black floor. Their own turn, Dennison knew, would come in a minute. His lips moved half unconsciously in prayer, although he was not a religious man; his right hand, clutching on a wild impulse at the darkness, closed on something soft and warm, which returned the pressure. Was it only her desperate need of comfort and reassurance that made Caroline hold his hand so firmly?

An instant later, he was startled by a clattering in the great machine, and saw it being trundled forward by some unseen power. A few seconds went by; he observed several of his captors flitting about in front of the machine; heard them exchange excited words

in their squeaky rat-tat-tat; and felt within him a flaming, savage, maddening desire to break away, to escape before he too lay crumbled and lifeless. But the invisible force still held him like iron.

At length the dread machine had rolled halfway across the room. "Looks like they want to make dead sure not to miss," Dennison told himself. But this thought had hardly crossed his mind when Gale did the unexpected.

"Damn it all," he growled, "if we're going to be killed, might as well see the murderer!"

And he lifted the flashlight, which he had carried with him unnoticed; and switched its rays full upon the machine, revealing tubes, wires, batteries, lenses, and prisms linked together in bewildering profusion.

As he made this motion, sudden cries came from his captors—yells of wonder, amazement, terror. They stood huddled together, staring at the flashlight as if fascinated.

Gale, realizing that they had never seen this invention before, turned the light on and off several times in rapid succession, while the natives looked on with sharp little grunts and squeaks. Then one of them, warily approaching, observed how Gale produced his effects by pressing the button, and excitedly reached for the device, which Gale was unable to keep from him. And when he too had turned the light on and off, he opened his mouth in a series of little triumphant screams, and began to hop about the room as gustily as his stubby limbs made possible.

Almost afraid to breathe, the three condemned ones listened and waited while the midgets crowded together in a heated conference, accompanied by all manner of squeaks, grunts, groans, squawks and yells, along with agitated arm and foot movements. But more than half an hour had passed before they appeared to have come to a decision.

Another interminable interval followed after one of the dwarfs, bearing the flashlight in his hands like a trophy of war, went out through a little side door. He was gone, it seemed, for hours; and meanwhile his companions amused themselves by playing a game with little rectangular chips of rock, on which black and red notations had been inscribed.

"Well, thank the Lord, looks like the flashlight gave us a reprieve," Dennison muttered, during the apparently endless wait.

"Won't do much good if it's not more than a reprieve," grumbled Gale.

But Caroline, her lips moving as if in prayer, said nothing at all.

Weary with waiting, hungry, thirsty, oppressed by the close atmosphere, the heat and their own forebodings, the prisoners were resigned to almost anything . . . when at last the side-door opened and the flashlight-bearer returned.

As he slouched in, his pale, sandy-looking lips let out a jubilant squeak. Instantly the players threw down their chips of rock, and sprang to their feet; and three of them, bringing the lavender-fire tubes back into action, led the captives off into the elevator-like car.

CHAPTER III

The Queen Bee Disposes

The Queen Bee sat on his throne, yawning and twiddling his fingers. Life in high places was so boresome! There was nothing to interrupt its majestic sameness. He was tired of watching his subjects groveling full-length, fifty feet below, with a continual buzzing of adoration; their reverence was annoying when one got it on a twenty-four hour ration. If it had not been such a wild, radical idea, he would have wished for something to happen, just for the sake of variety. But, of course, nothing ever did happen here in the Land of Monoton. The Fathers of the country had been careful to rule out that possibility.

A little doubtfully, the Queen Bee let his mind return to the three Surface Aborigines who had been discovered a short while before. They had been interesting-looking, even if grotesque; the hair on their heads and faces had been horrible to look at; and they had had teeth in their gums and nails on their fingers, like the monsters which, it was said, formerly prowled on Earth. Still, they had vigor; they had evidently not all been compelled by law to act exactly alike. What was most disgusting was that they were clearly of two sexes—a reminder of their barbarous condition, no doubt. Every Monotonite, thanks be to the Fathers! Had to take Neutralizing Capsules, which obliterated the more obvious signs of sex.

Too bad, the Queen Bee reflected, that an ancient law required the immediate execution of all Surface Aborigines who entered Monoton. The law was, of course, in many ways wise, as Surface

Beings were known to be of such low intelligence that they couldn't even regulate their own lives; they passed their time in continual quarreling; and when they couldn't start fights enough with neighbors and friends, they organized into nations, in order to destroy each other wholesale. Such, at least, were the reports of the Surface World brought to them by the Visualscope, which told of the main happenings above. And so it was a sound precaution to exterminate all Surface Primitives.

Nevertheless, the Queen Bee was tormented by a regret. There were only three Surfacites after all, and they would have been amusing to have around the palace; probably they wouldn't have spread much contamination. And even if they had, what of it? No one but the commoners would have had to suffer—that was the law.

As this thought came to him, the Queen Bee began to wish for an excuse to save the strangers. And then it dawned upon him very slowly, because he was conservative at heart and very respectful of tradition that he didn't need any excuse. Was he not the ruler? If the law stood in his way, who was to prevent him from changing it?

As this wildly revolutionary idea seeped into his head, he reached down for a long synthetic rubber tube, resembling a hose for letting petroleum into a tank; and drank in long draughts of the super-vitamized omni-glandular extract which he was required to absorb every hour or two, so as to maintain his stature as the greatest of his people. Ugh! It was ugly stuff! How he loathed the taste! But to be the head of a Kingdom one must make sacrifices.

Letting his thoughts return to the Surface Aborigines, the Queen Bee decided that he could find uses for them—yes, excellent uses. It was a question—very much of a question—whether they would be willing, but that was beside the point. Why hadn't he thought of all this before? By now the torn, lifeless bodies had probably been hurled into the coal pits.

Just as this realization came to him, a panel in the wall opened, and a Monotonite entered, carrying a small shining article. After making the proper obeisance, by throwing himself full-length upon the floor, the new arrival looked up reverently toward the figure yawning on the throne.

"O Exalted One," he declared, "I have something to show you."

"We will let the stairways down, that you may rise to our level."

Automatically the Queen Bee touched a little button at his side. And immediately, with a rustling sound, a little silken rope-ladder

unrolled from the ceiling. And the attendant, at the risk of his neck, climbed to the height of his sovereign.

"Here, O Exalted One," he said, holding out Gale's flashlight, "is a ray machine. See!" And he switched on the light, while the Queen Bee looked on with bulging huge pinkish eyes.

"We found this on one of the Surface Aborigines. You know, O Exalted One, we have nothing like this down here. It would be useful in exploring the dark crannies of our land. If the Surfacites were spared for a time, they might show us how to make these little engines. So after a long conference with the other executioners, O Lofty One! I have made bold to let them live while awaiting your further orders. After all, there will always be time to slay these heathens."

"Just so. Just so," agreed the Queen Bee, as he examined the flashlight, turned it over and over in his hands, and switched the power on and off like a child with a new toy. So here was his chance to carry out his secret plans!

"Postpone the executions until further word!" he commanded. "Meanwhile have the Surfacites guarded and watched, fed and clothed, and civilized by the Hothouse System. As soon as this is done, see that I am notified!"

Half an hour later, Dennison and his two companions were led out of the execution chamber and up the sloping galleries. Reaching a long straight corridor lined on both sides with regularly spaced little triangular doorways, they were each escorted into a separate room, or, rather, cell. The compartments, all about eight feet square, were bare-walled, and unfurnished except for the mats on the floor; and they were windowless, the light being provided by clusters of green bulbs near the ceiling, while slow currents of air offered ventilation as they blew through minute perforations.

Now began a long, trying period of adjustment. To all three, it seemed that the worst deprivation was in being barred from the others—and in not knowing how they fared. But there were many things to irk them: for example, the lack of exercise, an unintentional cruelty, as no Monotonite ever exercised if he could help it. Then they were annoyed by being made to don the green skirt-like native mantles and the native sandals, and to surrender their own clothes to a museum; and they could not quite adjust themselves to the native food, a pre-digested mush, in which the functions of the salivary glands and the gastric juices had been performed in the fac-

tory. Synthetically made from water, air, and a few common minerals, it sufficed for all the needs of life—at least, for a Monotonite. But the prisoners found it to taste like straw.

Despite the confinement, they had no difficulty in passing their time; the Hothouse System of Education gave them plenty to do, particularly in learning the local language.

At the time of their imprisonment, a little whirring device, a sort of television-phonograph combination, was brought in to each of them and placed high on a wall; while a greenish-white screen was spread opposite. Then the whirring device began to speak, with the high-pitched squeaky native accent; and at its lower end a focus of white light appeared, from which pictures flashed upon the screen in illustration of the meaning of the words. The native alphabet was taught in the same way; and the captives, each assisted by sheets of thick yellowish synthetic paper and a thin pointed rod for writing with green ink, were encouraged to copy and pore over the notations.

By these means, and by repeating the sounds spoken by the phonograph, they were able in a few weeks to speak and write Monotonese.

Dennison's first conversation was with an unseen speaker through a megaphone-bearing machine on one wall of his cell. In essentials this invention resembled a telephone, although there was no need for him to come within several feet of it; while the sound was borne through a tube, and not by means of wires.

He could already speak fluently enough, since Monotonese was a very simple language. His main trouble was in giving his voice the proper squeak; also, he had a bad habit of modulating his tones, which his instructor tried hard to correct, since the people of Monoton disliked nothing more than variety.

He began by asking the question uppermost in his mind. "How do your people come to be living underground?"

Immediately the answer rattled back, toneless as the clatter of an adding machine.

"The natural environment of man, as scientists have proved, is underground. We have been here long—very long. More than a thousand Cycles."

"How much is a Cycle?"

"Over seven years, as the Surface reckons time. Originally we took refuge down here because the Earth was imperiled by a terrible mind-disease, which turned men crazy, and made them plot to take one another's lives in great massacres or *murkildos*."

"You mean, wars?"

The unseen squeaked on without regard to this question.

"The chief massacre-tools were fiery engines, which came flaming out of the sky. These had been invented by an island named Aetlantus, or Etlantis, or maybe Aetlantis—etymologists have never agreed on the correct variation. But we too had powerful machines; and one of these tapped the Earth's internal energies and scooped out great caverns, in which we took shelter from the attacks of the winged massacre-robots. All who remained above ground were exterminated; but those who bored beneath flourished."

"How, then, did you get your food?"

The speaker gave a particularly loud, angry squeak, as if to say, "What a foolish question!"

"Everything, including clothes, was made synthetically from minerals, air and water. Our great rock-deoxygizing plant produces a synthetic atmosphere. Consequently, we lead synthetic lives. Since all things are done for us by machines, we have seen the folly of doing anything for ourselves. We have tried to imitate the machines, which, as our great prophet Tin-clix has proclaimed, are made in the image of God. Our ideal is to be as much alike as machines; hence we have developed the Termite System of politics and economics. Originality is prohibited; all mutants showing signs of this vice are mercifully electrocuted—"

"Oh! So that explains the blue-bolt executions?"

"Precisely!" shrilled the Unseen, in severe, reprimanding tones. "But I warn you, Surface Aborigine! you show dangerous tendencies. Do not come to any conclusions of your own! That may be taken as evidence of originality!"

Intimidated, Dennison said nothing; while the speaker clicked on.

"Our people found that they liked it underground. They did not have to reckon with the uncertainties of the weather—ugh! what a barbarous thing that must be! Besides, they threw off other barbarities; gradually our present shapely forms replaced the ungainly figures of you Surface Primitives. We lost our fingernails, teeth, hair, eyelashes, and other vestiges of savagery. Also, fortunately, we became unadapted to life above ground—"

"Unadapted?"

"Yes, our skins lost their resistance to the bombardments of that terrible center of radiant energy that drenches the Surface with its killing beams."

"Good Lord! Not referring to the sun, are you?"

"Don't intrude any ideas of your own, Surface Man!" rebuked the invisible speaker. Then, with a low mechanical buzzing, he continued, "A few minutes' exposure to the beams of that monstrous light would inflict us with incurable wounds. So, for the last five hundred Cycles, no one has ever broached the question of rising to the Surface. No one, that is, except the Klagargalites."

"And who are they?"

The unseen one uttered a squeak that, somehow, struck Dennison as profane.

"Aborigine!" he chided. "You show signs of unlawful curiosity! All I can tell you is that the Klagargalites are a forbidden sect. Many Cycles ago they developed a serum to immunize us against the sun; they actually wanted to go to the Surface. They claimed that life in Monoton was too uniform; they preferred freedom, self-expression, and such nonsense—which needless to say, was recognized as an assault on the foundations of the State. And so the Klagargalites, being too numerous for the blue bolts, were locked up in immense caverns beneath Monoton, behind impregnable machine-guarded bars, where they cannot infect our country. True, they are said to be still plotting against us—but we pay no attention to such fools' stories. The rumors have been declared officially dead by His Resplendence, the Most High and Monotonous Lord of all the Monotonites—"

"You mean the Queen Bee?"

Apparently not hearing this question, the speaker went on to describe various Monotonite customs: how all people were regulated to the last detail from birth to death: were told how and where to live, what and when and how much to eat, when to sleep, when and how to work, who and when to marry, and how many if any children to bring forth. To be sure, none of the citizens—not even the Queen Bee—were entrusted with such delicate decisions, for that might involve the danger of originality. But everything was decided by a master machine, in which all citizens were represented by numbers on little capsules; and the capsules having been shuffled, the machine picked them out, and assigned each person his activities, according to an elaborate system developed in ancient times, before originality had been recognized as a crime.

"This is the basis of our whole social order," squeaked the unseen, proudly. "It is what we call the Selective Draft." Other ques-

tions had been puzzling Dennison. For example, how had he happened to reach Monoton? The speaker explained that the gallery entered by the three Surfacites, before their accidental plunge into the underworld, had been dug just above one of the tunnels containing an "Ever-Moving Platform" for passenger transportation; and the gallery floor, being very thin, had been broken by the weight of the explorers.

"How about the relics of your race which we found near the surface?" Dennison asked. And the Unseen, after again reproving the questioner for showing curiosity, answered that some of the Klagargalites, many Cycles before, had escaped, and that the relics were the remnants of the civilization they had tried to establish on the Surface, before being overwhelmed by bolts from Monoton.

Dennison's next question was as to the little lavender-fire tubes, which had bent him and his companions to the will of the tube-wielders.

"The principle is very complicated," stated the speaker. "I myself am not so viciously original as to want to know the secret. But it is common knowledge that it discharges ultra-violet rays which penetrate the head and spinal column, and so affect the nervous system as to paralyze the will power. It is a very old weapon, and the chief means by which the Secret Guardians, or Disgustapos, have been able to stamp out originality."

These words had hardly come squeaking out of the void when three siren-shrill blasts sounded in rapid succession.

"Ah, there's the signal!" shrieked the Unseen. "You are wanted at the throne of His Most Monotonous Majesty, the Head Monotonite!"

"Wanted where? What for?" Dennison jerked out, with a sinking sensation.

"There you go again—showing curiosity! His Most Monotonous Majesty will tell you everything necessary!" the answer shrilled back, angrily. "The Official Escorts are waiting!"

CHAPTER IV

"D — Z. 148609"

Once more the Queen Bee sat on his throne; through his binoculars, he blinked down in disgust at the three new arrivals. These

Aborigines did not look quite human, he thought, even when dressed in Monotonite clothes. What was more, they did not know how to crawl. The way they threw themselves on the floor, as if their hearts were not really in saluting him as he deserved, showed that their upbringing had been rude, not to say boorish.

However, the Queen Bee's greenish face wore a smile. He had been impatiently awaiting this opportunity, while the foreigners were being instructed in Monotonese. And now that the time had arrived, he rubbed his fat bags of hands together with the pleased anticipation of an animal trainer about to put his charges through a new trick. The Surface Barbarians might not like what he had in mind for them, but that would make things all the more interesting.

Meanwhile, on the floor fifty feet beneath, the prisoners were able to greet one another after their separation of several weeks. True, there was not much that they could say; whenever they tried to open their mouths the Monotonites squealed, "Silence! Have you no reverence in your hearts?" But, at least, they could exchange gestures. Each of the three noticed with a shock how thin and pale the other two were looking; and how odd and uncomfortable they appeared in their jade-green Monotonite mantles.

"Look up, Surface Folk! You may rise, and gaze upon my magnificence!"

These words, proclaimed through a megaphone from the august lips of the Queen Bee himself, summoned the new arrivals to their feet.

"A high honor awaits you, Surface Savages. I have called you here for an illustrious end. You are to be initiated into citizenship of Monoton!"

The honored trio stood gaping at the Queen Bee.

"O Exalted One," Dennison protested, after a weighted silence, "we are grateful, most grateful. But all that we ask is to go back to our own land—"

The Queen Bee's face clouded and darkened. His head bobbed with a fury of emotion; his double chin worked irately up and down. His lashless eyes glared with a pink fire.

"What is that, you hairy ingrates?" he screamed. "Is that how you would pay me back, after I saved you from zeroization? Well then, by my throne! Take your choice! Citizenship, or the blue bolts!"

"Let it be citizenship, O Exalted One!"

All the fierceness went out of the Queen Bee's eyes.

"I thought you would be wise, and accept of your own free will. Now then, after the initiation ceremony, you will have another duty to perform. A duty that every good citizen must be prepared to carry out at the command of the State!"

The Queen Bee's voice had risen to a squawking crescendo. Gale's face had gone white, and Caroline's hands were trembling. Dennison could feel a chill running down his spine.

"In our country," the speaker clattered on, "we have felt one slight lack. No one would dare deny that the Monotonite civilization is the best ever devised. No one would question that we are the most intelligently unoriginal people, and lead the most beautifully monotonish life. However, having been isolated for a thousand Cycles, we begin to feel the effects of inbreeding. A slight infusion of outside blood, even from primitive veins, might be beneficial, despite the danger of atavistic survivals such as hair, fingernails, eyelashes, and ugh! I hesitate to say the word—teeth!

"In any case," he went on, unbaring his naked pale pink gums, "I have decided on the experiment. You Surfacites are to be Eugenicized."

"Eugenicized?" chorused the victims, not liking the sound of the word. "Eugenicized?"

The Queen Bee, missing no expression of the honored three, was peering hard through his binoculars.

"Eugenicized!" he repeated, with menacing shrillness. "That is to say, given in a eugenic commingling, for the sake of the next generation."

"You mean, married?" Dennison roared up at the speaker.

"Married? Is that your word? It has an ugly sound. No matter, though. Eugenication is a beautiful thing. You will be assigned official mates."

While the chosen three stared at their persecutor in growing dismay, he took up a little whistle and blew a shrill blast, in answer to which a particularly fat, flabby-looking Monotonite came waddling in.

"Surface Folk," introduced the Queen Bee, "this is Tixif, the Seventh Sub-Minister of Eugenication. He will attend to the little matter of your mates."

Only now were the victims able to raise their voices in united protest.

"But you can't!" screamed Caroline, hysterically. "You can't do this!"

"I assure you, Exalted One," protested Gale, "we have no desire or intention to get married."

"Desire or intention?" flung back the tormentor, with a gurgling laugh. "By my most monotonous father, blessed be his memory! I have never in my life heard anything so funny! As if anyone except me is permitted to have desire or intention! Be off with you, and do not talk nonsense! You remind me of the old private-rights radicals, who, fortunately, were zeroized seven hundred Cycles ago."

"What is zeroized?" asked Dennison.

But the Queen Bee had turned aside. In tones so like the clicking of a typewriter that the others could discover no meaning in them, he gave a few instructions to Tixif. And then, in company with this especially repulsive Monotonite, they were escorted away, traveling miles on a movable platform like the one which had brought them to Monoton.

While rattling along their way, they at least had the benefit of being able to speak to one another.

"What the devil do they think we are?" swore Dennison, his vivid brown eyes seeming to pop out in defiance from beneath his brushy brows. "Breeding cattle?"

"By God, they won't get away with this!" glowered Gale, his long stalks of arms waving combatively in air. "Not so long as I have a fighting fist left, curse them all! No, not if I have to wreck the whole damned country!"

"I'm with you there!" growled Dennison.

"I just don't understand it," wailed Caroline, in a voice that trailed off toward a shriek, then rose with a bitter steadiness. "Those disgusting Monotonites—ugh! they're just like slugs! Why, I believe I'd die if I had to go near one!"

Both men could see how pale and frightened Caroline looked in the greenish light. And both, beating the air with clenched fists, swore secret oaths that the Queen Bee's orders would never be carried out.

Tixif, however, seemed to have no doubts.

"We will arrange it all quickly and smoothly," he announced, in the lifeless tones that were considered good form in Monoton. And even as he spoke, they halted in a great room lined with dozens of tall steel contrivances looking a little like linotype machines.

In the manner of a practiced operator, he began tapping at the nearest keyboard and meanwhile went on speaking, in a voice hard to distinguish from the clattering of the levers.

"All selections, you see, are machine-made. Nowadays we marvel that people ever endured the barbarous ancient system of optional matings. It was all so unscientific. It lacked technical precision—efficiency. No wonder they had domestic troubles. Of course, that was long ago, before machines had supplanted personal inclinations. One can forgive the aberrations of pre-civilized days. After all, the people didn't know any better. . . . Now see this lever here. When I press it, it will register a number—I haven't any idea what number. And notice that lever there; it will register a letter—I haven't any idea what letter. The third lever, over there, will register another letter. The combination of the three will give us our result."

Tixif pulled out a rod, pushed in another rod, turned a wheel that hissed like a rattlesnake, and then, with a triumphant jerk, drew a little card from a slot in one corner of the machine.

"Ah, here it is!" he clicked. "D—Z. 148609."

While the others looked on bleakly, Tixif turned mechanically to Caroline. "This is the official registration number of the male whom you will have the honor of Eugenicizing. The Head Monotonite sends greetings!"

Tixif, as he turned back to the machine, seemed not to notice Caroline's gasp any more than he observed the men's bellicose expressions. Within a few minutes, he had produced two more numbers: "—LX 464649" and "X—Y. 034340."

"These," he reported to Dennison and Gale, "sound like most desirable selections. They are the numbers of the females whom it will be your privilege to Eugenicize."

The intended victims muttered oaths which, being in English, were fortunately beyond Tixif's understanding. There were tears in Caroline's eyes.

"Now," the Monotonite rattled on, lifelessly, "perhaps you will want to see your partners. Not that this is necessary, scientifically speaking; but it is usually done, in deference to a stupid old custom. Wait! I will summon them."

The victims raised deterring hands, which Tixif seemed not to see. "D—Z. 148609!" he squeaked into a megaphone at one corner of the room; and then, in succession, called out the other numbers. "Have them delivered immediately to the Selection Room!"

"It will be only a few minutes," he whirred; and began pacing the room in slow circles, in the way of most Monotonites when they had nothing better to do.

"I'm a son of a jackass if I even want to look at them!" blazed Dennison.

"They can go pitch themselves into the ocean!" grumbled Gale.

"Oh, God, what are we going to do?" lamented Caroline, her violet-blue eyes glaring like a hunted creature's. "I'd almost sooner —oh, I'd almost sooner they'd used those dreadful rays—"

"Silence!" shrilled Tixif. "Wait till you see your partners before you rejoice!"

The three prisoners showed no signs of rejoicing when at length "D—Z. 148609" and the other chosen mates arrived. They merely stared, and groaned. And then they stared some more, and groaned some more. The men mumbled under their breath. Caroline let out a long, deep-drawn sigh.

Afterwards they admitted that their mates were not much more repulsive-looking than most Monotonites, though at first they seemed the most odious ever—shorter and fatter than the average, with heavy jowls and flabby double chins, oily bald pates, lashless pink eyes blinking beneath low foreheads, and toothless gums that gave them, like most of their countrymen, a look of premature age.

Dennison, glaring at his assigned partner, saw that her left eye had a peculiar squint, making her seem always to look to one side. And Caroline found that her prospective mate walked with a slight limp, and spoke with a bear-like grumbling. As for Gale—he saw everything through a red mist, which blurred all details. To think of Caroline in the arms of that zoological specimen was enough to make him want to run amok.

Dennison, on the other hand, was able to maintain a touch of grim humor. "Doggone it all," he observed, "they don't seem any better pleased than we are!"

The fact was that "D—Z. 148609" and the other two Monotonites were scowling fiercely at their Eugenication partners. Their lips were wrinkled in disgust; one of the women spat like a cat; they muttered beneath their breath, until Tixif had to reprimand them.

"Quiet, there! Don't you know it's unpatriotic to show indications of a private opinion?"

The trio lapsed into a sullen silence.

"I regret to inform you," Tixif went on, in tones as well modu-

lated as the ticking of a clock, "that the happy unions cannot be consummated just yet. The Surface Barbarians must first be initiated into citizenship."

"Thank God!" sighed Caroline.

"This," Tixif continued, reassuringly, "is a simple matter, but will take a little time. Here, you"—he designated Caroline with a jerk of one stumpy finger—"you come this way!"

He led her to a huge black-mantled apparatus at one end of the room; drew off the covering; and revealed a steel box equipped with a network of long rubber tubes, each of which widened at the end to a disk about two inches across. These disks he fitted to various parts of Caroline's body: one to her forehead, one to each wrist, shoulder and ankle, and one above her heart. Then he pressed a lever, and there was a whirring inside the machine, and orange-red flares.

"This is the Nerve Camera," he explained, as he motioned Dennison to take the test. "It registers details enabling the Citizen-Picking Machine to determine the state of her mind, conscious and subconscious, since the nervous reactions are accompanied by minute electrical changes, which this instrument records. Thus we will be able to judge if she is the right kind for citizenship."

"And suppose I'm not the right kind?" asked Caroline, with a rush of hope.

"In that case," remarked Tixif, "zeroization will be as merciful as possible."

After submitting Gale and Dennison to the Nerve Camera, he rattled on.

"Now, while the plates are being developed and passed on by our Citizen-Picking Machine, you will be free for a day or two to get acquainted with your future mates. Not that this is really necessary, either, though we permit it out of foolish recognition of an old pre-Monotonite custom. So consider yourselves at liberty, except that you must be in your quarters every night when the Sleep Bell rings!"

The Sleep Bell, the hearers all knew, rang once every twenty-four hours, and signalled the beginning of the compulsory eight-hour slumber period.

"In two or three days," promised Tixif, "you will learn the results of the examinations." He bustled out pompously, and left the Surface people to glower in a morose silence at their designated mates, who glowered back at them like sulky dogs.

CHAPTER V

The Path of the Purple Lamp

"Heaven help us, our problem now is to find our way out of this accursed place!"

"It's do or die—now or never!"

The two men and the girl, still seated in the Selection Room, were bitterly appraising their situation; while across from them sat "D—Z. 148609" and the other mates-to-be, who still scowled upon them out of their lashless small pinkish eyes, and once or twice spat contemptuously.

"Just can't see anything that looks like domestic bliss ahead," commented Gale, in an ironic drawl.

"No, and can't say I'd greatly prefer zeroization," either," remarked Dennison.

"For myself, I'm not so sure," contributed Caroline, as she glanced with a shudder at the stumpy runt selected for her.

"Well then, what we going to do?" snapped Gale, rising. "Obviously, we'd better try every exit from this hell."

"I'm with you there," concurred Dennison. "But you'll have to be quite an optimist to expect any exit to be unguarded."

Nevertheless, their plans were quickly formed. They would snatch as much as they could of the native compressed food, along with some water; would equip themselves with whatever else of value they could find, including the two remaining flashlights and the Radio-Photescope, which the Monotonites had been too incurious to take from them; and would make every effort to fight their way out to the Surface.

"Don't let's fool ourselves," Dennison warned, grimly. "Maybe we'll never get out. Maybe we'll starve or die in any one of a thousand pitfalls. Maybe we'll be zeroized. But are you game?"

"You bet I am!" asserted Caroline, with a firm clenching of her teeth.

"You can say I haven't the nerve of a scared pup," muttered Gale, "if I ever let myself be taken alive!"

An hour later, having hastened back to their living quarters and secured provisions, they set out together.

"Say, where in Saint Peter's name are we going?" asked Gale, as they left the long straight tunnel where they had lived with thou-

sands of Monotonites, and dived into a gallery which, lit by faint green lights, looped and twisted like a mountain road.

"Looks like here's a chance for sheer intuition," decided Dennison, with a shrug. "The thing we need is what they call clairvoyance."

For a few minutes, their every sense alert for hints of pursuers, they plodded on in silence; and then halted doubtfully.

"Now what do you know about that?" burst out Gale. "My kingdom—if I had one!—for a guide-book!"

They had reached a junction, at which the tunnel forked in three directions. Over one of the branches, a dull red light hung; over the second, a sultry yellow; and over the third, a vivid purple.

"Well, friends," questioned Dennison, "what's our lucky color?"

"Looks like a toss-up," decided Gale.

"The purple—well, it does sort of seem more appealing," suggested Caroline.

Without another word, they began following the path of the purple lamp. And thereupon their troubles began.

After a few hundred yards, the gallery dipped sharply; and they almost fell over one another. Then it rose steeply, and they had to climb on hands and knees. Then it crossed a wider corridor, where the Monotonites flew on swift whirring wings in such numbers that the fugitives had difficulty to avoid being run over. Next they had to pass a roaring river or canal, on a narrow foot-bridge that creaked as if ready to collapse. Beyond the stream, they entered a pit of foul-smelling gases, as of the exhaust from many motor cars; and as they emerged, coughing and gasping, the earth shook with continual thuddings, thumpings and poundings.

"If this is the best road," grumbled Gale, "it's darned lucky we didn't try the red or yellow." By the pale greenish light, his long thin face was looking drawn and haggard.

A few minutes later, as if to give real cause for complaint, the gallery lights ended, and they had to push on with flashlights, while the tunnel grew constantly narrower, closer and hotter.

"You know, it seems to descend as much as it rises," noted Dennison. "At this rate, we'll reach the surface, if we're lucky, in about a thousand years."

"Strikes me," Gale proposed, stopping in his tracks, "we'd be wise to start back before we get in deeper and darker."

"You've got something there, boy!" agreed Dennison. When did you study mind-reading?"

"Three minds with but one thought!" chimed in Caroline, doing an about-face. . . . "Goodness! What's that?"

A heavy clattering and clanking, echoing portentously in the narrow corridor, seemed to have originated a hundred feet to their rear.

Speechlessly they switched their flashlights toward the source of the disturbance. All three stared, and stared—and then stared some more. Gale groaned. Dennison cursed beneath his breath.

"Just our luck!" the latter finally broke out, as his eyes strained through the dim light. "It looks like a solid wall."

"The damned thing's made of steel, or some heavy metal," Gale reported a minute later, after groping to the barrier. "There's no way around it, either."

In the long, breathless moment that followed, all three seemed to feel a bruising weight crushing down upon them.

"Hell and damnation!" swore Dennison. "We're trapped! Just plain trapped!"

"Do you think—think the Monotonites did it on purpose?" Caroline questioned. "Or was it just an accident?"

"If it's an accident, it's beautifully timed!" growled Gale. "Excuse my pessimism, but we'd better not waste time guessing. Nothing to do now but keep right on going."

And so, while the sweat rolled from them and their lungs panted in the heavy atmosphere, they continued to drag themselves forward. The flashlights, throwing uncanny shadows along the gallery walls as they pressed ahead speechlessly in single file, were like lanterns in a tomb.

It was not long before the tunnel forked, then forked again, not once but fifty times. Up and down, up and down the travelers wandered; choosing their way at random; twisting now right, now left, without the faintest idea where they were going. Hours passed. Finally, in an unlighted winding corridor which they had been following for miles, they all on a common impulse sank wearily to the ground.

"Mercy, I'm just about exhausted," sighed Caroline.

"No wonder," Dennison testified, in a voice like a groan. "You've gone through enough to kill an Alpine climber."

"Don't you think we'd better keep our voices down?" cautioned

Gale, in a half-whisper. "These cursed holes in the ground have a thousand ears."

A gloomy silence followed.

"Well, people, let's not try to gloss over the facts," Gale's tones came through the darkness in a low doleful drawl. "We're plumb lost. Talk about a needle in a haystack!"

"But who the deuce said we'd have it easy?" challenged Dennison. "I know we'll have to fight like hell. But I'm positive we'll get out!"

"So am I!" seconded Caroline.

"There's the right spirit!" approved Dennison, edging an inch nearer the girl. He well knew that she, like all of them, needed encouragement; and an all but irresistible longing had come to him to put a soothing arm around her; speak to her gently; assure her that all was well. In the coaly blackness—they used the flashlights only when necessary, in order to conserve the batteries—what harm to give way to his impulses? And so he reached out one hand—reached it toward the place, just to his right, from which the girl's voice had proceeded.

An instant later, with a curse, he had snapped back his arm as if he had touched an adder. His hand had indeed closed upon another, but not a small and tender one.

At the absurdity of it he let out a low, short laugh, and scarcely noticed the oath that Gale shot into the darkness.

"How about a little water?" he heard Caroline asking, as innocently as if nothing had happened.

They allowed themselves a gulp each from the jug Gale carried; then moved forward again on the slow, weary search. It seemed long, long afterwards when, mounting a steep rise in the gallery, they saw a faint gleam a few hundred yards ahead.

Warily they paused.

"Gracious! What if it's the way back to the Surface!" effervesced Caroline.

"Maybe it's where we broke through to this damned underworld," surmised Dennison.

"More likely some new trap," grumbled Gale, pessimistic as usual. "You know, folks, it's funny—here I've been praying to the merciful gods to let me see just a spark of light, just one spark! and now that we do see it, the darned thing has got me worried."

As they stumbled on, the light rapidly brightened, taking on the

usual greenish Monotonite tinge, along with traces of purple and yellow.

"Maybe it actually *is* the Surface!" Caroline hazarded a second guess.

"Yes, or maybe some deeper pit!" drawled Gale.

But they were all poor guessers. As they approached the tunnel's junction with a wider gallery, they saw a purple lamp hanging above the exit; and observed other forking corridors, one with a dull-red light above it, and one with a sultry yellow. And at this sight Dennison steadied himself against a wall, and let out a low mirthless laugh. "Lord in heaven! If we're not the prize boobs! We've been traveling in circles!"

"Yes, we ought to congratulate ourselves," rasped Gale, ironically. "After hours of struggling through the pits of hell, we're safely back where we started!"

Exhausted, they dropped to the floor, and helplessly mopped their steaming brows. But even as they did so, they were startled by a chorus of squeaking voices, vaguely suggesting laughter. And looking up, they saw three Monotonites, who, with a little difficulty, they recognized as "D—Z. 148609" and their other appointed mates.

For some time the squeaking continued, while the Monotonites nudged one another and rolled back and forth hilariously, in a manner quite unusual among their people.

"I don't blame them for laughing," mumbled Gale. "We must look about like a dog chasing its own tail."

With a merry and contemptuous squeal, "—LX 464649" drew near and explained.

"O Aborigines! you have been following the mazes of the Sub-World!—roaming the Industrial Basements on the Emergency Byways, where no Monotonite would go except in case of need, in order to repair the machinery."

"Ah, now at last," Dennison muttered, "I understand all those noises and smells."

"Yes, and I think I can explain the steel wall," Gale added. "It's part of some machine that works automatically. We didn't have the brains to realize it had nothing to do with our coming."

The Monotonite went on with a file-edged derisiveness.

"We have followed you, O Surface Barbarians, ever since you left the Selection Room. We wished to see what you would do

with yourselves; to be honest, we wanted only to be rid of you. We have never in our lives laughed so much as when we saw you descend into the Sub-World, ignoring the purple light of danger. We knew that you would wander around and around, and come out just where you went in. And so we waited for you here. You should thank us for that. As we have no wish to defile our good old Monotonite blood by a mongrel union, we will show you the way back to the Surface."

The Monotonite's eyes shot out pale pinkish sparks that somehow filled all three Surface people with an undefinable suspicion.

"If you hunted more days than there are cells in your bodies, O Savages! you would not find the way out, for all our paths lead back like the rim of a circle. That is why you were left free to roam. But my friends and I—we know a secret exit. Come, we will show you."

Again that vaguely disconcerting light, those pale warning sparks in the Monotonite's eyes.

"Best keep our wits alert and our hands ready," cautioned Gale, as the three began to follow the Monotonites. "I wouldn't trust any of that gang out of sight."

"I wouldn't trust them even in sight," contributed Dennison.

"The fact is," Gale went on, "they have every reason to want to drop us into a bottomless pit. On the other hand, they'd accomplish their ends just as well if they did lead us to the Surface. So why not give them the benefit of the doubt?"

"Especially as there's not another blessed thing to do," Caroline summarized the views of all three.

Side by side with their promised mates, they stepped aboard a movable platform, and let themselves be whirled through an underground maze—up and down, around curves, over dim watercourses, across breath-taking ravines, and through tunnels so narrow that they had to stoop to avoid the ceiling.

Finally, after rushing across a trestle with a roar that drowned all conversation, they halted in a cave-like hollow, whose roof, fifty feet above, bristled with icicle-sharp stalactites. The place was damp, in a hot, steamy way; and was faintly lighted, in the usual fashion, with greenish orbs.

"It smells—why, just like a swamp," complained Caroline, holding her nose.

"As for me, I don't care so much how it smells as where it

leads," muttered Gale. And then, to the Monotonites, "How does this get us back to the Surface?"

The natives hesitated for a long suspicious second. Then "—LX 464649" stepped forward.

"You'll have to travel along that gallery to your right," she designated, pointing. "After a time you'll reach a tall dull-orange oblong doorway. It will open at a push, and you'll be on your way back to the Surface."

The watchers did not miss the faint twinkle in the Monotonite's eyes, the remote suggestion of eagerness that varied the usual tonelessness of her voice. And did this all bespeak her joy at the prospect of getting her unwanted mate back to the Surface?

"If we don't take the chance," Gale pointed out, "our only choice will be Eugenication."

"All right, let's find that orange-red door!" decided Dennison. But as a precaution, he flung a demand at the Monotonites. "Come, you three, take us as far as the entrance to the Surface World!"

The Monotonites recoiled as from a disgusting odor.

"We cannot, O Surface Primitives. The Frontier Tunnels are forbidden. We do not wish to be zeroized."

"Evidently, however, it's all right if we're zeroized!" Dennison grumbled under his breath. And while the Monotonites re-seated themselves on the platform and went clattering away without even a "Good-bye!", the fugitives turned doubtfully toward the gallery to their right.

CHAPTER VII

The Orange-Red Door

For half an hour they pressed on uneventfully. The air was hot and foul; their heads and muscles ached more painfully than ever. But misery had become their accepted lot.

"Wonder if those beasts weren't just stringing us? Don't see any orange-red door!" Dennison had just complained . . . when, reaching a turn in the gallery, they cried out with relief. Directly before them an oblong partition loomed, dully orange-red.

"So far, so good," Gale acknowledged. "But I'm still a skeptic."

"If they only did tell the truth, we'll be out—why in no time at all! hopefully exclaimed Caroline, here eyes shining even in the

dim light. "Oh won't it be just heaven to breathe the clean open air again!

Muttering something about "not counting your chickens before they're hatched," Gale gave the door a shove. And surely enough, it did move on its hinges, opening with a long dismal groan. But what were those noises from within?—that pandemonium of yipping, yapping, braying and barking, as from a pack of enraged dogs?

"Christ's sake! they're bigger'n tigers!" shouted Gale, peering in through the half-open door.

The others, as they crowded close, cried out in alarm. Half a dozen swift forms were bounding toward them, with heads like mastiffs, and ferocious wide-open jaws. It was as if four or five wolves were rolled up in each of those rushing beasts, whose immense eyes glared as they leapt forward.

At the first terrified glance, the intruders knew that they could not stand up against those plunging monsters. Yet if they fled they would be overtaken, and torn limb from limb.

With electrifying clarity, it came to Dennison that they had one chance: to swing the door back before the beasts could reach it. But was there time? Already the attackers, with fierce snapping jaws that unbared the mighty fangs, were within yards of the partition. Dennison, in his heated imagination, could feel their scorching breath. With a lunge, he hurled himself toward the door. By a fraction of a second, he was too late.

One hand, in a wild fling, grazed the orange-red metal just as the foremost attacker launched its final spring.

Ear-splitting and sudden, Caroline's scream rent the air.

But as Dennison touched the metal, something unexpected happened. All at once the great springing beasts halted—halted as if against an invisible wall. The growls and barks died inside their throats; they dropped clattering to the floor, and lay still.

Simultaneously, a shout of mighty relief went up from the three watchers.

"Whew! That's a good one on us!" laughed Dennison, as he regained his breath and started toward the monsters. "Believe it or not, they're not dogs at all!"

"No, only mechanical toys," Caroline discovered.

"Mechanical, all right. But not toys," corrected Gale.

"Looks to me," Dennison diagnosed, "like I hit some switch

or hidden spring in the wall, and turned the power off from Cerebus and his brood."

Closer examination showed the beasts to be of metal, cleverly contrived to make them look like dogs, and covered with a black-and-white composite resembling hair. Their eyes were electric bulbs; their jaws, moving on steel hinges, were fitted with rows of white glass teeth.

"Heaven help us all, what do you make of it?" questioned Caroline, while the three stood soberly inspecting the mechanical dogs.

"I make of it," pronounced Dennison grimly, "that we had a darned narrow escape."

"Yes, and I wish," rumbled Gale, "we'd wrung those damned Monotonites' necks when we had a chance!"

"I'm with you there!" swore Dennison. "Those pie-faced devils were plotting the easiest way to get rid of us. If we were torn to death by the dogs, nobody would ever connect them with the accident."

"They'd better say their prayers, if I ever lay hands on the fiends—" Gale raged on.

"Oh, come, come, forget them, please, and try to figure how how to get out of this dreadful place," pleaded Caroline. "You know, a few minutes ago I could almost smell the fresh air and green fields—and now—"

Her words broke short in something approaching a sob, and the men vied in the effort to console her.

"Poor kid!" soothed Dennison. "I know it's mighty tough on you!"

"A blamed sight harder than for a pair of leathery old tramps like us," seconded Gale. "And you've been taking it like a queen!"

But the girl turned from them both. With chin well forward and head upthrown, she begged. "Don't think of me—please! Really, I should be very, very thankful we've all escaped. I think some guiding providence must watch over us."

The men attempted no reply.

"One thing's evident," Dennison reflected, after a long pause. "Those dogs weren't put there just as ornaments. Most likely they're meant to guard something pretty valuable."

"Well, they're cleverly made, all right," remarked Gale, as he examined one of the animals. "Look here! Down its throat they

have some sort of electrical loud-speaker and amplifier. Listen!" And he prodded the monster's neck, so that a muffled barking was heard.

"What's more, they're probably run a little on the principle of robot planes, by radio waves. The electrical vibrations given off by living beings attract them, so that they automatically run down anyone who comes too near. I tell you, I give the Monotonites credit!" Gale finished with an inventor's admiration for inventive genius.

"Don't you think it would be more to the point," Dennison reminded him, "to try to find out what those dogs were guarding?"

"Huh! You find out, if you want to!" advised Gale, grumpily. "Personally, I'd rather clear out of this confounded place than bump into all the treasures of El Dorado!"

But Dennison had started impatiently ahead, with Caroline at his side. And Gale, muttering to himself, moodily followed.

"Well, think you'll be getting enough pretty soon?" he gibed every now and then, while the others pushed resolutely on.

Out of the floor, at one point, a score of sword-like blades threshed back and forth with rapid rhythmic motions. Next they had to dodge a battery of heavy rods that pounded from the roof, with up-and-down strokes like pile drivers. Then arrow-like darts whizzed from the walls, one of them brushing Gale's hair, and another ripping a hole near the knee of Caroline's mantle. At the same time, they could see steel pillars rising ahead, enormous and many-branching, planted in huge rock supports, and meshed together by two-inch cables.

"Well, once more," cautioned Gale, "I'd advise a quick about-face."

"Now listen here, Ray," argued Dennison, "who ever made a discovery by turning tail? My idea is that there's something pretty much worth going after, if those characters take all this trouble to keep us out."

"Well, then, what's your plan? To batter your head against the steel walls?"

"No, take it from me, Ray, I'm fond of my old bean. But maybe you've forgotten the Radio-Photescope?"

"That's so," took up Caroline, with sudden enthusiasm. "Why can't we make a few exposures, and find out what's around us?"

"Oh, all right," Gale conceded, begrudgingly, as he unstrapped the pack containing the Photescope. "Let's go right on wasting

valuable time. Believe me, I wouldn't have invented the thing, if I'd known the damned fool use we'd make of it."

Nevertheless, he adjusted the machine to the gallery floor; put in a plate; focussed the camera-like lens toward the wall to their right; and then, still grumbling, seated himself cross-legged on the floor, in an attitude of sullen resignation during the half-hour time exposure.

The wait was seasoned by several shocks, of earthquake intensity, and accompanied by a low distant roaring. On one occasion, a rock was dislodged from the roof, missing Gale by inches.

"I think we're crazier than the Monotonites!" snorted the inventor. But finally after consulting his watch, he reached for the Photescope. "Well, let's see what we have!"

Dennison, pressing forward for a glimpse of the plate, let out a low whistle. And Caroline, leaning over his shoulder, stared and gasped.

"Damned if I know what it is," rasped Gale. "A nightmare come true, I'd call it."

"Well, it does look like a bad dream doesn't it?" confirmed Caroline, with a shudder. "Maybe the machine's out of order!"

On the top and bottom of the plate, there were streaks of coal-pocket darkness. But in the center was a lighter patch, varied by strange markings. Two squat beings, with flat wide heads above neckless shoulders, stood near the center, like two-legged monstrous beetles—apparently motionless, considering that the picture was a time exposure. Near them was another statue-still half-human shape, supported on all fours like a beast. And in the background there loomed an assortment of curious machinery: thick, ugly tubes, like the muzzles of howitzers; long vials tapering to razor-thin points; great curving scimitar blades; and immense, bristling rods like the pikes and halberds used in Europe's wars several centuries ago.

"Know what this looks like to me?" Dennison ventured.

"What? A madman's vision of hell?" conjectured Gale.

"Well, almost. A section of the Cave of the Klagargalites."

"Cave of what? Oh, you mean those rebels against the Monotonites, who were locked underground ages ago?"

"That's it. Listen to me, Ray," Dennison hurried on, warming to an idea. "Maybe it's just our luck we've come across them. Maybe they'll help us get out. Being opposed to Monotonite rule—"

"How can they help us get out if they can't get out themselves?"

"Why, they're held by impassable walls," Caroline chimed in.

"So we're told. But it looks like we're halfway through the walls already," Dennison maintained, in an enthusiastic rush. "Now here's what come to me in a flash. If we can get down to the Klagargalites —and we do have a fighting chance—won't they be glad to help us overthrow the Monotonites and return to the Surface? Why, they're our natural allies!"

"Yes, if they don't start by zeroizing us," reasoned Gale.

"You're too damned scared of being zeroized!" fired back Dennison, with sudden resolution. "I tell you what! I'm so completely sold on the idea of enlisting the Klagargalites that I'm going down to them, whether anybody come along or not!"

"Oh, for God's sake, Ed!" protested Gale. "Don't be a babbling idiot!"

"Please, Ed!" entreated Caroline.

Dennison straightened his broad, sturdy frame; threw out his powerful shoulders; set his square jaws grimly; and spoke in a low, determined bass.

"I don't want to seem pig-headed, folks. You know I've always cooperated. But now it's a matter of life or death. I tell you, it's just as if some voice is crying out inside me, 'Go on down! Go on down! No matter who opposes, still go on! It's your only chance!' I hope to God both of you will come along. But I'll never be able to look myself in the face again if I let you talk me out of this."

"Your head's cracking under the strain, Ed," diagnosed Gale, scornfully. "However, it's your own head; you can do what you want with it. But I'm not going to jump into the fire just on your advice. What do you say, Caroline?"

There was a shrill note in Caroline's voice, a thin wail suggesting approaching nervous exhaustion.

"Oh, after all we've been through, I just can't bear going down to those frightful Klag—those frightful whatever-you-call-them. It just doesn't make sense, butting our heads into more trouble."

"My idea, to the last syllable!" concurred Gale. "What do you say now, Ed?"

Dennison felt all the fighting fibre within him stiffening. He knew that he was contemplating a foolish, a desperate thing; he knew that it was bull-headed, probably inexcusable; yet that powerful tug inside him made only one course possible.

"Don't want to urge you folks against your will. Looks like you're

right, and I'm crazy with the heat. I hate like hell to be separated from you, even for a little time. Just the same my mind's made up. I'm going down to the Klagarglites, or die in the attempt!"

He did not miss Gale's look of dismay, the astonishment and anger in Caroline's glance as he went on. "If I come through, I'll meet you by the orange-red door. Hope to God it won't be long."

"Never thought we had a turncoat in our midst," growled Gale.

But Dennison, after reaching for his flashlight and a small share of the provisions, was already waving a determined good-bye.

CHAPTER VIII

Mazes . . . and More Mazes

"Guess I'm the damnedest fool in fifty-seven counties. Now I've lost her for good," Dennison reflected, as he pressed through mazes of steel pillars and meshes of two-inch cables that hedged him around like jungle lianas. "Don't suppose my chances were exactly brilliant at best, but she'll never forgive me now—not even if any of us do come out of this hell alive."

But Ed had little time for regret. His eyes searched the pale greenish labyrinths keenly, eagerly; his senses were tuned to a hair-trigger alertness as he slipped beneath some of the cables and over others, and around columns as massive as the trunks of giant redwoods. As he moved forward, a whirring, a pulsating as of vast machines in operation, gradually grew louder in his ears, along with a hissing as of steam exhausts and an occasional explosive booming. But disregarding the fear that sent little chilly tinglings down his spine, he gritted his teeth and pushed on.

The steel meshes were becoming so dense that in places he could hardly force his way through them, and in places had to climb them like a fence. He tried not to think what his fate would be if he were caught in one of the pitfalls bristling all about him: the wide holes that opened in the floor, and closed like steel traps; the weaving wire nooses that swung from the ceiling, as if to lassoo him and choke him to death. "No need to worry about these," he reassured himself. They all work automatically. If I have my wits about me, I ought to get the best of any machine."

But another thought distracted him.

"Now wasn't it plain dumb leaving her alone with him?" he

kept asking himself. "Not that he has any idea in his head now but getting out of this Inferno. Still, wasn't it a bit like throwing them into each other's arms?"

But at the same time that persistent voice vibrated within him: "Go on! Go on! It's your only chance!"

Finally, after fighting his way over the tallest and thickest cable barricades, he reached the last steel pillars, and gazed out at an immense wall of stone or concrete. Like most of the Monotonite world, it was lit with pale green orbs; but its vast surface, reaching upward about fifty feet and curving gradually outward in both directions for hundreds of yards, was covered with a great variety of machinery: clocklike dials, their little hands visibly rotating; glass tubes like those of old-time radio sets; moving wire ladders that led to the ceiling, from which head-sized bulbs were suspended in pairs and revolved on long axles with an incessant whizzing; and engines as large as locomotives, which thumped up and down along the walls on triple rails, with the aid of supporting cables from above. These monsters, Dennison judged, had caused the whirring, pounding, pulsating sounds, the hissings, and the explosive boomings, which now and then came from within them like warning blasts.

And these, apparently, were the guardians of the Cave of the Klagargalites!

But Dennison, remembering the rout of the mechanical dogs, fought back his sense of numbling hopelessness. "After all," he consoled himself, "this machinery also operates automatically. If I can only locate the right screw or button, most likely I can control the whole works."

But how find the right screw or button? What help that he was a skilled mechanic? Nevertheless, with the recklessness of desperation, he began the search, boldly pressing levers, turning bulbs, and shifting the hands on dials.

But apparently nothing happened. The pairs of bulbs continued to revolve as before from the ceiling; the wire ladders moved up and down with a dull rattling; the locomotive-sized machines thumped along their triple rails on the walls.

A few minutes later, he was examining one of the larger dials, which was covered with hieroglyphics . . . when, to his terror, something stirred just behind him. He turned, and stared into several pairs of pinkish eyes, and heard a squeaking voice above the din of the machinery.

"There he is! There! There! He's the beast that caused the alarm!"

"Catch the fiend!" screamed another, bringing out one of the flashlight-sized tubes that crackled with faint lavender flames.

In a flash, Dennison understood. By his blind handling of the levers and bulbs, he had set off an alarm—no doubt somewhat like a burglar alarm. And this time, he knew, not even the Queen Bee would save him if he were caught.

Fortunately, a few yards separated him from his nearest enemy. And at this distance the little lavender-fire tube would not take effect for several seconds. But it needed no more than a small fraction of that time to start Dennison forward like a bolt from a steel spring.

As he darted off among the steel columns, a shrill cry rang after him. "Stop the spy! Stop him! In the name of the Exalted One, stop him!" And dodging behind the great pillars, he came face to face with a second pink-eyed band, likewise wielding the lavender-fire tubes.

From these too, by doubling back deftly, he escaped. But no matter where he turned, he ran into steel barricades, from which he would dash almost into the arms of a new band of natives. With all his skill and daring, he could not keep up the unequal struggle. Great beads of perspiration stood out on his skin; his breath came hard and fast; his lungs seemed to be bursting, and his heart hammered warningly.

Meanwhile his enemies, no longer in a hurry to capture their prey, seemed to be playing a cat and mouse game with him. He could read the evil enjoyment in their little lashless eyes as he still rushed hither and thither, panting over more heavily, while with slow, deadly certainty the Monotonite bands drew closer.

If only he had a pistol to turn upon himself! At last, exhausted, he halted with his back to one of the great steel columns, while half a dozen Monotonites, with tantalizing deliberation, gradually surrounded him. The foremost held out one of the little tubes, its sides flickering with lavender fires; in a few seconds. Dennison's will would be paralyzed.

"God help me, how wrong I was!" he groaned. "Why didn't I stay with Ray and Caroline?" And at the rememberance of the girl, with her violet-blue eyes beneath the free-flowing light-brown hair, a moistness dimmed his lids.

"At least, if it's to be *finis,*" he thought, "let's pray it comes fast."

At that instant he heard a clattering to his left. And a section of the floor opened automatically, as he had seen happen numbers of times already. A black abyss, about two yards across, yawned a few feet away—a mechanically regulated pitfall, operated by clockwork, and having nothing to do with his approaching enemies! To fall into it, he knew, might mean death. But he took one glance at the cavity and another at the Monotonites who, their faces taut with determination, were closing in upon him. And unhesitatingly he plunged into the pit, just as its jaws began to shut with a deathly clanging.

For the fraction of a second, he was aware of falling. His hands, clutching instinctively at emptiness, grazed some hard, cold surface. Then, with a stunning shock, he struck. Pain, fierce and all-consuming, shot through him; he lay writhing on something rough and solid. But as he staggered back to his feet, he felt at his limbs and found that, aside from a few bruises and cuts, he was uninjured.

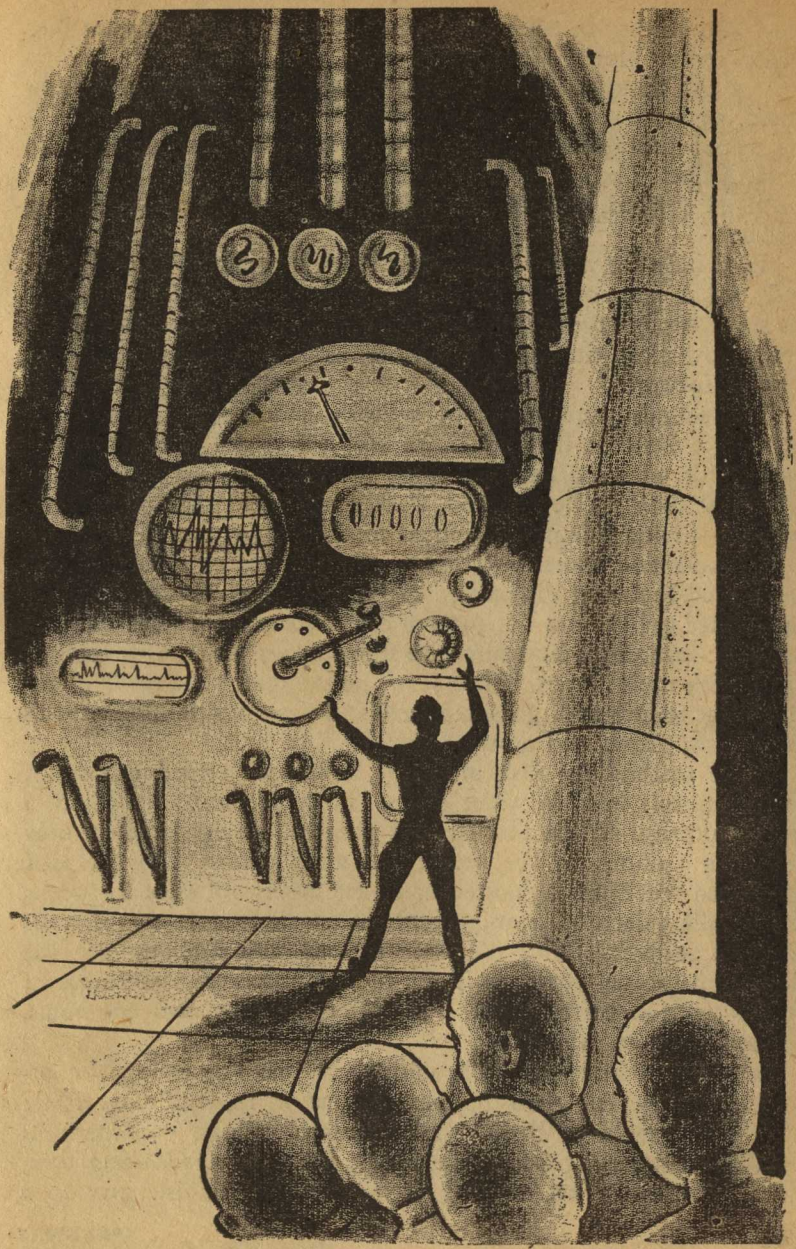
The blackness was absolute. Yet above him, as from a distance, he could hear voices squealing in excitement. "Damned lucky I didn't break my neck," he told himself, as he felt at his aching shins. "What sort of a coal cellar am I in, anyway?"

Realizing that the trapdoor would re-open and the Monotonities try to recapture him, he began feeling his way through the gloom, his first thought being of course for the flashlight. But after groping for it in the darkness, he cursed beneath his breath—the bulb was broken! Then, blind-man-fashion, he began feeling his way. He was not, as he had half supposed, at a pit-bottom. He was in a gallery stretching for an indefinite distance on both sides of him.

As he proceeded, the floor bristled with knife-like projections. The air became hotter and more fetid. Dennison's head ached, and swam deliriously; he had the feeling of walking in his own tomb.

Then before long the corridor began to slope downward, and the walls drew closer together; in places he felt like a cat squeezing between fence posts. Was it that he was lost in the interior of some abandoned mine, whose galleries would in the end lead out? Yet what exit would be clear of the Monotonites?

Still, better to die than be zeroized! Better to die than live in slavery! But what of Gale and Caroline? What would happen to them



now? Would they be taken, and condemned to death? Or must they finally accept Monotonite mates?

As those thoughts rushed to his mind, his ears caught a faint sound, ominous and vaguely warning. He paused, and listened—the sound continued, a shade louder, and the growling a little more distinct. Then it died down, and he pushed on his way. Then the noise revived, not like one beast, but like several grumbling together.

"Lord help me now!" he thought, with a clutch of terror. "If I only had a gun, or even could see my way!" Should he retrace his steps through the twists of the narrow corridor? "No, not unless I'm yellow clean through!" he swore, gritting his teeth; and still crawled forward.

"The sounds were varied by squeaks, snorts and hisses when, reaching a bend in the tunnel, he saw a dull red glow ahead—a ruddy disk which, after a time, he identified as the gallery exit. Now and then, as he watched, dark streaks and shadows crossed the disk—living things in a lighted corridor beyond!

On hands and knees, wary not to stir a pebble or make a sound, he covered the short distance to the red radiance. Fantastic visions had flocked to his mind—pictures of caves where prehistoric monsters survived: lumbering dinosaurs with spiky tearing teeth; sabre-toothed tigers with rapier fangs. These fears, he thought, were made plausible by the sounds as of gnashing teeth and claws which mingled with the groans, grunts and growls from ahead of him.

As he reached the disk of ruddy light and peeped cautiously, very cautiously into the wider gallery, he could hardly hold back a cry of surprise. At the first startled glimpse, his eyes took in only the main features of the scene: the great cavern with the roof a hundred feet high, supported by a steel meshwork as of a modern bridge; the galaxy of crimson lights which beamed from the walls and roof supports, filling the place with an eerie luminescence; the elevated pathways where, as in the Monotonite caves, multitudes of objects were in swift motion. The gallery, he saw, was enormous, perhaps miles in extent.

But even as he stared in bewilderment into this strange underworld, his gaze fell upon the creatures just in front of him. There were six or eight of them—squat, rounded beings, with neckless shoulders supporting beetle-like heads; black, savage-looking eyes; and varicolored skins, ranging from a faintly pinkish gray to a

carrot yellow. Their clothes—tight-fitting robes that scarcely reached their knees—were of red, or red chequered with black. Their gorilla forms were but an inch or two over five feet tall; one of them rested on all fours, while another crouched ape-fashion.

In the background, Dennison noticed a mass of machinery: thick, ugly tubes, like the muzzles of howitzers; long vials tapering to razor points; great curving blades like scimitars; and immense, deadly-looking projections like pikes and halberds.

Now, with a shudder, he remembered. He had seen just such things as these before; had observed them on the Radio-Photescope plate! So he knew where he was! He had fallen into the Cave of the Klagargalites!

As this knowledge flashed over him, one of the squat creatures pointed him out with a scream. An the others, their black eyes glittering suspiciously, started edging toward him. Their thick scarlet lips drew apart in warning grunts and growls; their pugnacious jaws, outthrust to show the rows of heavy teeth, opened and closed with a portentous snapping.

CHAPTER IX

The Scarlet Lord

Ominously the monsters ringed him around, and slowly drew the circle tighter. Growls as of watchdogs still rumbled from their lips; their claw-like hands clenched and unclenched menacingly; one of them slipped to the rear for one of the scimitar-like blades, which he brandished like a sword,

At about ten feet, the scimitar-bearer halted, while several of his companions began to address him in high-pitched squeaky voices. Where had Dennison heard such tones before? Was not the language a dialect of Monotonese?

Emboldened at this thought, he opened his lips for the first time, crying out in Monotonese as the scimitar flashed perilously above his head.

"Friend! Friend! I'm a friend!"

The Klagargalites uttered startled cries, and stared at Dennison strangely; incredulous amazement glittered from their black eyes.

"Friend! Friend! I'm a friend!" Dennison repeated. "I mean no harm! I came to help you!"

They may not have understood all that he said. But the threatening blade came down harmlessly; and the monsters gathered into a little agitated group, debating with wild gesticulations of their stumpy arms. Several minutes had passed before one of them drew loose from the crowd, and slouched ape-like toward the intruder.

"Who are you? Where do you come from? How did you get here?" he demanded in harsh uncouth tones.

"I came by accident," Dennison explained slowly. "I came from Monoton—"

At that word, a startling change overcame the hearers. Angry grimaces contorted their faces. They gnashed their teeth, spat, and growled. Their jaws snapped; their eyes glared; two or three of them approached, with hands threshing above their heads.

"Monoton? Monoton?" they repeated sullenly. "Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!"

"Monoton! Monoton!" Dennison exclaimed after the natives. "Ugh! Ugh!" And he too gnashed his teeth and spat.

But the Klagargalites still stared at him suspiciously.

"How do we know you are not a spy?" one of them squealed. "As we hate those cave-rats the Monotonites, we ought to put you to death without any questions. But we Klagargalites are civilized. So we will take you before the Supreme Klagar, who will put you to death legally."

The speaker muttered to a companion, who disappeared for a quarter of an hour, while the remaining Klagargalites guarded their prisoner. When the absentee finally returned, he was accompanied by half a dozen attendants, who carried a red wire apparatus resembling a bear cage.

Having set the contraption down with an ostentatious clattering, they opened a little door at one side, and motioned Dennison to enter.

He glanced at the device with about the liking of a dog for the poundman's wagon; and broke into protest.

A series of snarls and growls was his answer.

"Get in—it's for your own good!" one of the Klagargalites snapped. "It's necessary to shield you from the mob. It's what we call protective custody."

Impatiently the monsters had edged closer, pushing and shoving. They were surprisingly strong; after a few seconds' struggle, he was thrown bodily into the cage. And the Klagargalites, paying no heed to his oaths and groans, lifted the cage to their brawny

shoulders, and, amid harsh laughter, began slowly bearing it away.

Jolted like a captive beast through the weird red-lighted cavern, Dennison had to crouch on hands and knees in the narrow compartment, with barely room for his head. As he went rocking on his way, he caught glimpses of wide side-galleries; tall tiered structures like those of Monoton; and intricate mechanical devices, including huge churning wheels, whirring machines like Gargantuan printing presses, and chutes on which the natives lay full-length and whizzed back and forth with express-train speed.

Meanwhile the news of Dennison's capture had been spread by some secret means. The people had gathered by the hundreds about his cage, hooting and screeching, and pointing at him with wild gestures. Some of them shambled with arms dangling ape-like; others loped on all fours; but all gaped and gibbered, howled and chattered, thrust their fingers at him through the cage-bars, and turned to one another with hideous grimaces, as if to say, "What a horrid beast!"

After a time, his carriers entered a wide passageway at one side of the cavern, and plunged into a hall with a savage ruby-red illumination. Dennison shuddered. There was something barbaric about that light streaming down from clusters of great bulbs on the ceiling a hundred feet above. Somehow it suggested blood, blood dripping and flowing. Everything about the place—the floor, the walls, the massive roof-supporting pillars—was of red; the ponderous tables, around which dozens of natives sat, were of deep garnet; the very faces of the people looked crimson; while, on a geranium divan at the further end of the hall, a scarlet-robed dignitary half sat and half reclined, like an Oriental despot.

Dennison's attendants, their faces turned down in token of obeisance, walked backward toward the figure on the divan. Then solemnly they placed the cage before him; and mumbled a few words, among which Dennison thought he could make out, "O Supreme Klagar! . . . O Master of the Earth, even to its red center!"

When they had finished, the Klagar coughed out something unintelligible; rose from his divan; crouched forward toward Dennison's cage; and began peering through the bars with hard inquiring hostile black little eyes. Knowing that his fate was in this creature's hands, the captive was as near as he had ever been to praying.

After a minute, the Klagar returned to his divan, and plunged

into conversation with his followers, while frequently gesticulating in Dennison's direction. A long time had passed before finally he turned to the stranger, and ordered his release from the cage.

"Intruder!" he demanded sharply. "Where do you come from?"

"From the Surface," replied Dennison, stretching his cramped limbs in the delight of new-won freedom.

Several of the onlookers smirked and cackled. A faint smile overran the heavy-jowled face of the Supreme Klagar.

"In all the Cycles of our history," he snorted, "no one has ever come from the Surface. Yet to judge from the pictures I have seen of the Surface monsters—big, gawky brutes with horrible, lean connecting bands between their heads and shoulders—I half believe you speak truth."

The Klagar paused long enough to jerk his neckless head toward Dennison with an imperious twist.

"The only way to enter our land is through that nest of devils, Monoton!" he continued, shrilly. "And he who enters Monoton is our enemy!"

"I am not your enemy," protested the prisoner. "I came to help you."

"How am I to know that? You have been in Monoton for some time, to judge from your Monotonese accent. Why should I suppose you are not a spy?"

A chorus of growls came from the dozens of natives seated around the tables. "Spy! Spy! Kill the spy!"

"You are the second visitor in our history to reach us from Monoton," the Klagar went on. "The first, who fell through a trapdoor in the Narrows of the Upper Levels, was a criminal fleeing from justice. Just to be safe, we immediately neutralized him."

"Neutralized?"

The Klagar's tomato-red lips drew wide apart as he grimly explained, "That is to say, we neutralized his effect in this world, by sending him out of it. Maybe you would like a demonstration?"

"Neutralize him!" pleaded dozens of eager voices. "Neutralize him! Neutralize him!"

Of course, Dennison swore that he loathed the Monotonites, and had come to the Klagargalites in order to lead them back into Monoton. But at this statement the Klagar rocked with laughter.

"Surface monster, do you think we Klagargalites have not the sense of children?" he demanded, rising and drawing himself erect

in offended dignity. "Do you suppose we would not have forced our way long ago into Monoton had we been able? Why do you imagine we have been making deadly weapons for hundreds of Cycles? But why have we not neutralized the Monotonite lice? Because they have foreseen our purposes, and built fortifications which all our science has been unable to pierce!"

"How is it, then, that there are trapdoors—like the one I fell through?"

"Those are one-way trapdoors, with steel jaws that would automatically crush anyone attempting to ascend through them. We know that, O Surface whelp! For we have tried."

"Neutralize him! Neutralize him! Neutralize him!" cried the creatures around the tables, as they pointed accusing claws at Dennison.

In his scarlet robes, in the deep red light, the Supreme Klagar looked like Satan incarnate. About his hostile, down-curling lips, vindictive black eyes and jarring voice, there was something fiendish as he leaned forward, and shrilled,

"If you were our friend, Surface brute! and not a spy from those Monotonite vermin, would you not have found a way for us to enter Monoton? Would you not have pressed one of the Barrier Levers, and thrown the gates open?"

"What are the Barrier Levers?"

"Neutralize him! Neutralize him! Neutralize him!" the figures at the table again insisted, more stridently than ever.

"That I shall do—by a super-painful method!" growled the Klagar. "Let him be neutralized in the Fifth Degree!"

At these words, one of the creatures at the nearest table arose, and held up a ghastly carmine object shaped like a fishing reel. There came a whirring, followed by a ruddy flash; something thin and glittering clove the air; and before Dennison had had time to dodge, he was caught in coils of vermilion wire, which lashed his arms against his sides and clutched his neck in a strangle-hold.

"Let the neutralization proceed!" ordered the Klagar, chuckling.

Now surely, Dennison decided as he was being dragged toward the exit, his last moment had come. Oh, why had he put faith in the Klagargalites? Why had he not remained with Ray and Caroline?

But even as these thoughts darted over him, a native dashed in panting, his eyes almost bulging out of his red face. Scarcely able to speak, he omitted the usual formalities as he puffed his way up to

the Supreme Klagar, and, bending low, whispered several words.

"By the Red Imps!" exclaimed the Klagar, so shrilly that everyone stood stockstill, listening. "Are you sure?"

The messenger again bent low and whispered to the sovereign.

"My robe! that's too much to believe!" burst out the ruler, even more shrilly than before. "If you speak not truth—"

"May I be neutralized, and my father and sons and the sons of my sons, if I speak not truth!" swore the intruder, still panting. "I saw it, O Scarlet Lord, with my own eyes I saw it—"

"Enough! I believe you!" snapped the Klagar. "For all these Cycles, Nunun, you have been my trusted scout, and never have spoken false!"

Then, in a rapid, trembling voice, the Klagar addressed the dozens of his subjects seated about the tables. Because of his hasty enunciation, Dennison could not make out what he said. But the effect upon the natives was electrical. In a gesticulating mob, erect or crouching like apes or springing on all fours, they surged up from their seats. They screeched, shouted, and gibbered. But their dominant note was of jubilation—fierce, sudden, overwhelming jubilation, as at some prodigious good news.

And then a still more amazing thing happened. While Dennison stood looking on in bewilderment, the Klagar flicked a finger in his direction, and the wires were removed from his arms and neck. And all the natives joined in a triumphant yell, "All hail our Surface Friend! All hail, hail, hail our Surface Friend!"

Had the Klagargalites gone crazy? Could it be that they were gathering about him with gestures of respect, and almost of worship? What had he done that they should crowd close, repeating that cry over and over again?

"All hail our Surface Friend! All hail, hail, hail our Surface Friend!"

CHAPTER X

The Eleventh Hour

"It was a very brave act, Surface Man. One of the bravest in our history. But of course you could not tell us about it, or we would have neutralized you for speaking big lies. But now that we know, you will be suitably honored."

The softening look in the Supreme Klagar's black eyes showed that he was not jesting.

"From the time of my father, and my father's father, and my father's father's father," continued the ruler, "we have tried to find a way to force open the Barrier Gates between us and Monoton. Thousands of our sons have sacrificed their lives in the attempt. Our most adroit scientists have schemed in vain. And now you come, O Surfacite! and turn the rods that release one of the gates!"

All at once Dennison understood. Could it be that, in meddling with the bulbs, dials and levers of the tall curved wall at the borders of Monoton, he had unwittingly opened the gate? Knowing that this was the machinery that guarded the Klagargalites, he had attempted to operate it in about the way of a non-driver trying to run a car. But evidently he had succeeded better than he had realized!

"Yes, now one of the gates is wide open!" repeated the Klagar. "We have always hoped that someone in Monoton would turn the levers; the act is simple, but requires immense courage. So now, now at last we begin the invasion of Monoton!"

"Now, now we begin the scarlet invasion!" echoed the bystanders, in tones so fiercely vindictive that Dennison shuddered.

"And you, O Surface Hero! shall be our banner-bearer. You shall march in the vanguard of our triumphant troops! I, the Supreme Klagar, decree this honor!"

Turning to Nunun, the leader rattled out an order.

"See that a thousand troops are posted near the gate, to keep it open! Go! At once!"

Even as Nunun bowed a hasty retreat, an attendant strode forward with a crimson pole that opened into a long, dragon-shaped, blood-red flag. Dennison felt a chill in his veins as the Klagar, with a condescending bow, presented it to him.

"Here, O Surface Seer, is the Banner of Bravery, the emblem of victorious war. Wave it boldly aloft, and our forces will follow you to victory!"

Dreading to refuse the honor, Dennison mumbled a few words in acceptance.

"Come now, let us prepare the attack!" the Klagar abruptly went on. "Give the enemy no time to defend himself! In up-to-date warfare, he is bravest whose foe is least prepared!"

The Klagar's followers were still scurrying in all directions, shouting, giving orders, dashing out and dashing in again, tripping over

one another and falling across their own feet. The Klagar himself, at the same time, had started away with Dennison on a little car so responsive to vibrations of the air that it could be stopped or started by the tones of the driver's voice.

"Unfortunately," stated the ruler, "it will take us a day or two to mobilize our army. Meanwhile you will be our guest."

Dennison was, accordingly, lodged in a blood-red apartment, which, except for its color, was exactly like his prison room in Monoton; and was fed on synthetic food which, aside from its cherry complexion, did not seem to differ at all from the tasteless mush he had been fed in Monoton. Noting the winding galleries precisely like those of the Monotonites, and hearing the people talk with the same squeaky chattering as the Queen Bee's subjects, Dennison began to wonder if the Klagargalites were very different after all from their enemies.

"There are three divisions to our army," explained the Supreme Klagar, as he sat at Dennison's side in a flesh-red cavern, watching a review of his troops. "The Stand-Uppers, the Crouchers, and the Crawlers."

Dennison did not need to ask what this meant, for the first division, which was very small, stood erect; the second waddled in a crouching position, with arms dangling gorilla-like; while the third, which was in the vast majority, crept forward on all fours.

"These last," announced the Klagar, smiling with proud self-satisfaction, "are our shock troops. They can creep in where upright men wouldn't dare to go, and hence are, if I may say so myself, perfectly adapted to advanced warfare."

But what most interested Dennison were the weapons. Truly, the Klagargalites were inventive geniuses! There were, for example, the little balls which they threw along the ground, and which, wherever they touched, started rivulets of fire that grew to Amazons of flame. There were the blue bolts that flashed through the air in zigzags, converting everything they struck to smoke and steam. There were the harmless-looking capsules which, if handled or even stepped upon, would electrocute the victim. And, most menacing of all, there were the radio-operated robots that, having entered the hostile lines and been mistaken for living warriors, which they closely resembled, would explode upon being captured or assaulted.

As the day of battle approached, the soldiers did everything possible to increase the hideousness of their looks. They painted their

heads and faces beet-red; donned uniforms of a lobster brilliance; provided themselves with gloves shaped like crab-claws, and helmets streaked with red and black; and fixed proboscis-like tubes to their noses, to connect with the oxygen tanks on their backs in case of poison-gas assault.

While Dennison watched the preparations, he was racked by anxiety. What would happen to Gale and Caroline during the invasion when the Klagargalites scattered fire and ruin? As he thought of the girl, an emotion, deep yet gentle, swept him continually and left him no peace.

There was only one thing to do. And so Dennison sought an audience with the Supreme Klagar.

"Your Scarlet Lordship, I ask a favor," he appealed. "There are two other Surfacites in Monoton—both my close friends. They too are heart and soul against the Monotonites. May I not go up to find them?"

The Klagar scowled. His eyes gave out red flashes.

"To go up to Monoton now," he shrilled, "would be to imperil our cause!" And then, noticing Dennison's disappointment, he continued, in milder tones, "Have no fear, Surface Man! Our army will spare and protect any friends of yours, and do them high honor. I myself will order it!"

Dennison, still scourged by anxiety, had to smile his thanks and accept this assurance.

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Among the Monotonites, all was storm and excitement. For the first time in five hundred Cycles, their way of life had been disturbed. The open gate to Klagarland had been discovered and reported to the Queen Bee, who had immediately dispatched a corps of workmen with an automatic wall-sealing machine. But the men had not returned; the machine had been found shattered near the wall; and investigators declared that they could see the red Klagargalite banners through the breach, along with enormous masses of soldiers.

This news was like the report of a break in the dikes at a time of threatened flood. For hundreds of Cycles, Monoton had relied upon its fortifications to keep out the Klagargalites; confident in this bulwark, it had prepared in no other way. It had no army; it had few weapons of defense. And so now the whole country was in a

turmoil. The Queen Bee, on receiving the news, was so overwhelmed that he almost fell off his perch. Having recovered his balance, he soothed his feelings by ordering the bearer of the tidings to be electrocuted. He then called his chief scientists into consultation, and was assured that they had inventions which, within half a Cycle, would smash the Klagargalites limb from limb in the most satisfying way. The one drawback was that in a few days, the Klagargalites would be swarming all over Monoton.

The masses meanwhile, despite the legal penalty of zeroization for the crime of "fear-mongering," were quick to learn the news. Forgetting all their regular, monotonous habits, they rushed about in circles on their stump little legs. They took to the air on their flying machines, only to collide with one another by the hundreds; they screeched and they screamed, they stamped their feet, and lifted their arms imploringly to the green-lighted ceiling of their central cavern; they crowded over one another in a dash to the Upper Levels; while, for the first time in more Cycles than any of them could remember, they cursed freely. But none of them acted to meet the menace.

At about this time, a rumor arose. No one could say how it started; it was merely one of those wild reports that always spring up at moments of great disturbance. "The Surface Barbarians! Surface Barbarians! They've caused all our trouble! They've betrayed us, betrayed us to the Klagargalites!"

To hear was to believe! No need for evidence! The Monotonites needed a scapegoat—and what better scapegoats than the Surfacites, with their monstrous, unmonotonous appearance? Instantly the popular fury boiled over. "Kill them! Stamp them out! Zeroize them!" And mad throngs began to thresh hither and thither, thirsty for blood. All that stood in their way was the mysterious disappearance of the Surface Aborigines.

And while the pink-eyed mobs stormed up and down the green galleries and through the tiered buildings, what had happened to the hunted ones?

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When Dennison had set out for the Cave of the Klagargalites, the others had stood staring after him in half incredulous astonishment.

"Well, damn him!" Gale swore, giving an angry toss to his bul-

bous head, with its crown of touseled reddish brown hair. "So the cur had to desert us!"

Caroline's eyes had filled with tears. But even through their dimness, they showed a flash of anger.

"Cur? How dare you? I'm almost sorry we didn't go with him!"

Gale glanced at her in surprise. "Why, what in heck's getting into you, Carrie? A few minutes back, you didn't want to go—"

"Yes, but all at once it's come over me how brave he really is, pushing on like that, all by himself. So when I hear you calling him a—a cur—"

She paused, almost speechless, and stamped against the stone floor. Noting her flushed cheeks, her sorrowful flooded eyes and the passionate inconsistency of her manner, Gale read her secret with a pang.

Tempted to call Dennison something much worse than a cur, the inventor bit his underlip; then went on, with an effort at self-control.

"Well, maybe it was brave of him—magnificent—abandoning us to fend for ourselves. Anyhow, we've got to get out of here, you and I, so from now on let's just drop him out of our reckoning."

"I don't see why!" she denied, hotly. "Didn't he say he'd meet us by the orange-red door?"

"And what in tarnation will you do if he doesn't come back? Just sit down and starve?"

"What will *you* do?" she challenged. "Go back to that pretty little fiancee of yours?—I forget her number!"

"No, good Lord, I'd rather shoot myself!" groaned Gale. "We're sure in a fine pickle, both of us, Carrie. Listen! I'll compromise with you. We'll go to the orange-red door and wait a few hours, and then if that jackass doesn't show up, we'll try to find some road back to the Surface. At least, maybe there's a chance in a thousand. What do you say?"

"Well, I don't know," reflected the girl.

But after some hesitation, she reluctantly accompanied him to the orange-red door. And there they waited for a few hours, which they passed mostly in much-needed sleep. But Dennison did not return.

"Guess he's left us, sure enough!" muttered Gale. "Or else, to give the devil his due, he's beyond returning."

Caroline made no effort to hold back something between a sigh and a sob. But she did not protest as he led her away through a long, dark, winding gallery.

About an hour later, as they approached the junction with a bright-green broader thoroughfare, he stopped short with a start. From ahead of them, they could hear a din of shouting; and, after a minute, could make out the words, in the shrill, squeaky Monotonite tones.

"Kill them! Crush them! Drive them out! Unlimb them! Murder the traitors! Zeroize the Surface spies!"

Gale and the girl, gasping, stood stockstill as the cry was repeated. Then the man snatched Caroline's arm; and spoke in a thick, hasty voice.

"Quick! Back to the dark! For heaven's sake, quick!"

CHAPTER XI

Invasion

Wave after wave, the Klagargalites crawled, crouched and stalked through the open doorway to Monoton. Company after company, squadron after squadron, their beet-red faces gleaming and their crimson uniforms taking a strange glint from the green Monotonese lights, they surged across the frontier. Then in wide columns they spread out, squeaking in fury. Their blue bolts zigzagged about them, causing eruptions of smoke and steam where the great tiered greenish buildings had stood. Their little capsules rolled ahead of them; and torrents of carmine fire, writhing like giant snakes, enveloped the buildings and elevated platforms, and licked at the graceful branching columns.

In the vanguard, waving his blood-red dragon flag, Dennison marched like one in a crazy dream. He saw the Monotonites rushing ahead of him in panicky mobs, squealing like pigs. He observed great crowds fighting to escape on the movable platforms, or attempting to whizz away on condor wings, or on dragonfly pinions or canoe-shaped flying craft; and he saw how these machines were struck by the blue lightnings and burst into flame, or collided with the tree-like columns or the sides of the buildings and disappeared in puffs of fire and smoke.

The din meanwhile was like that of the world's end. The uproar of falling bricks and crashing columns was mingled with the hissing and crackling of the blazes, the sizzling of steam and the booming of almost incessant explosions. The advancing army shouted in triumph,

and their feet made a mighty thudding against the stone floors; their weapons crashed and clattered, reinforced by the tumult of gigantic rattles, whose only purpose was to add to the commotion. And all the while, in an undertone, a sort of sob, a ululation, a wailing and weeping of many voices arose.

One by one the buildings of Monoton were crumbling. In great twisted heaps, smoldering an angry dull-red, their remains lay beneath the titanic columns, many of which, scorched and warped, seemed ready to collapse. And in places the very stones, owing to some chemical action that released chlorine and other reagents, were being consumed in the conflagration.

Choking and gasping, Dennison wished that he had been provided with a gas mask, like the Klagargalites. But still he stumbled forward. Here and there, limp as abandoned sacks, motionless forms lay sprawled on the floor. And here and there the invaders, finding a little knot of refugees hidden in some side-gallery or the corner of a building, would flash their blue bolts; and the victim would shriek, pitch forward, and be still.

How would it all end? What would be left of Monoton? Had it been right, after all, to seek the aid of the Klagargalites?

While these thoughts flashed through Dennison's mind, more personal questions tormented him. What of Ray and Caroline? How could they survive this chaos? If the Klagargalites, in their blood frenzy, did not slay them, would they be spared by the Monotonites? And if they paid for the invasion with their lives, would he not be to blame? He had no desire but to rush off in search of them. Yet on and on he must march, still dragging that gory banner.

As they went storming forward, Dennison peered into the ruins of a building, whose broken center showed him a familiar sight: a six-sided immense vaulted chamber, more than half exposed, and bathed in an olive-green light. Suspended fifty feet in air, a cushioned throne still hung. But it had no occupant; on the ground beneath, a lifeless form lay hunched.

Meanwhile the warriors still strode ahead, killing and destroying. Hundreds disappeared in pitfalls in the floor; hundreds were caught in the wreckage of collapsing buildings. Thousands died in agony beneath the flaming acids which their foes, in last-minute desperation, had distributed amid the leaf-like upper decorations of the great columns, and which fell when the columns were jarred. But these losses seemed to have no effect at all on the main masses of

red-clothed, neckless fighters, who after a time, began to surge above the central cavern, pursuing the Monotonites along the causeways and viaducts, over the ruins of movable platforms, and through sloping side-galleries.

At the head of the shrieking, squeaking troops, Dennison had pushed his way through a steep narrow corridor into a cavern he had never seen before. Hundreds of yards wide, several miles long, but only twenty-five feet high beneath the dark-green lanterned ceiling, it was as dismal a place as one could imagine. And here a grim drama was to be enacted.

In the recesses of this foul-smelling cave, all the surviving Monotonites appeared to have gathered—scores of thousands of pale, pudgy beings pressed together like maggots squirming. Still panic-driven, they fought and shoved, all trying to squeeze their way to the far end of the cavern, from which there appeared to be no exit. The whole vast multitude was trapped; and their ear-splitting squeaks showed that they realized their frightful position.

Little as he liked the Monotonites, Dennison felt a wave of pity, and did his best to hold back the neckless troops.

"Halt!" he shouted at the top of his voice, and waved his red dragon banner. "Let's take the Monotonites prisoners!"

The Klagargalites howled with fury and disappointment. But their impetuous masses still swept forward.

Then, from somewhere in the rear, there came a crashing of wheels. With deferential bows, the soldiers began to back away as a heavy-joweled figure, dressed in a scarlet robe, rode forward in a car steel-plated like a battleship.

"My brave soldiers, I come to praise your holy victories!" shrilled the Supreme Klagar, through a tube resembling a magnified megaphone. "All honor to you, my heroic followers! You have covered your native caves with glory! But now, my knights, let us finish the work! Let steel and fire wipe out the last Monotonites!"

These words were spoken with a hissing and a gnashing of teeth whose effect was instantaneous. The blue bolts flashed from the ceiling in a pandemonium that, it seemed to Dennison, should have cracked the heavens. Robot fighters, looking exactly like Klagargalites, plunged into the shuddering, convulsive masses of Monotonites, and exploded with red flashes and tremors like an earthquake. The very floor seemed to rock, the walls seemed to bend. And then, sudden as a bomb-blast, there came the most stunning blow of all.

The splintering, rending crash was almost too much for human eardrums. The shrieks of terrorized thousands, in one wild blended wail, made but a feeble undertone to the descent of avalanches. There were flashes of unbearable light; and, from the depths of the earth, a deep rumbling groan. Hurled face forward on the ground, Dennison did not even notice the pain in his lacerated elbows, the thin rill of blood trickling out of his nostrils. It was a minute before he had begun to regain his wits.

Then, all at once, he understood. He saw the piles of rock and rubble on the cavern floor. And his eyes were dazzled by an unaccustomed glare. What was that strange, dazzling white light flooding down in torrents, in seas of brilliance? He had become so used to the underworld that at first he did not recognize the sunlight!

Battered by blue lightnings, part of the cavern ceiling had collapsed. And the open air, originally separated from the gallery by a mere few yards, had entered! The sun, blazing down with noonday fury, was for the first time in history looking in upon a Monotonite cave!

But Dennison's amazement did not compare with that of the Monotonites and Klagargalites. Shielding their eyes, they stared at that overflowing radiance, such as none of them had ever seen before. Murmurs of awe and squeals of wonder went up from their lips; an irresistible fascination had clutched them all. Forgetting their ghastly plight, their peril, the crushing of thousands of comrades, the Monotonites began surging forward beneath the gaping aperture in the roof, bathing themselves in the sun-rays.

But their training had betrayed them. Men taught to reason, to act for themselves, might have known what to do; might have foreseen the probable effects of sunlight upon organisms that had lost all inherited resistance to it. But in the Monotonite minds, only impulse could rule.

It was not many minutes before the results began to be evident. The soft greenish skins of the midgets, bombarded by the solar radiations as by batteries of small powerful guns, began to break and crack and puff out in monstrous sores. Black spots appeared, with red fringes, and rapidly widened—the victims were, literally, being burnt alive! But in their reverence for the light they did not realize this at first, but still peered upward spellbound, until by degrees their murmurs of awe gave place to cries of pain, and they fell to the ground, twisting in agony. Thus great multitudes perished.

The Klagargalites meanwhile had forgotten their foes. "What is that big blueness, that big blueness above?" some of them cried, astonished. "What is that hot, sweet-smelling wind?" But the majority merely stood staring upward. It required an imperious command from their leader to remind them that they were fighting a war.

"Forward, my brave soldiers! Forward! Make an end of these low Monotonites!"

With a grating and a clattering, the Supreme Klagar rolled forward. And his followers, shaken out of their daze, roared belligerently, and attacked such of the Monotonites as had not yet died of the sunlight.

But they had not learned from example. By sweeping forward, they exposed themselves to the full rays of the sun; and before many minutes they too were attacked by the puffing sores and black spreading spots, which covered all exposed parts of their skins (owing to the heat, they had discarded their face and head apparel, and had unbared their legs from the knees down).

And so friend and foe fell side by side. Amid those scenes of wholesale death, hardly a Monotonite escaped. But a few Klagargalites, less drilled to a thoughtless routine, began to stagger away; though most of these, before they had gone far, threw their hands up with wild cries, and groped and stumbled like drunken men. The unaccustomed brilliance had blinded them!

As he watched those crazed scenes, one thought was constantly in Dennison's mind. Could he not take advantage of the confusion to slip away and hunt for Ray and Caroline? Now that the roof had broken, they could surely escape, if he could only find them!

And so he waited for his opportunity; waited until Klagargalites and Monotonites, insanely intermingled, lay writhing and dying by the multitudes beneath the bright beams of the sun. And then, crouching low to avoid any stray Klagargalite, he darted toward an oblong of green light—the doorway to the depths of Monoton.

As he sped on his way, he passed a familiar, scarlet-robed figure, with a neckless head and heavy jowled face. But he did not pause to greet the Supreme Klagar. For that dignitary, staggering about the wrecked cavern and tapping on the floor with a rod, met his gaze with two lusterless, unseeing black eyes.

Down through the ruined world, Dennison wandered, calling and calling. "Ray! Caroline! . . . Caroline! Ray!" But his voice sounded

hollow and mocking as it echoed through those empty halls amid the crackling of flames and the crash of tumbling masonry. . . . "Caroline! Ray . . . Ray! Caroline!" The galleries were empty except for contorted heaps of the fallen, and here and there some Klagargalite sightlessly groping and fumbling.

In places, only the glare of the conflagration enabled him to find his way. In other places the green lights still burned, like tapers in a tomb. The smoke tormented his nostrils and eyes; the yawning caverns in the floor, whose edges crumbled perilously, constantly threatened his life. But he still pushed on, around the broken and battered buildings, through corridors with bulging walls and caved-in roofs, and among mazes of tottering columns. Where was he going? He did not know. Some force within him was driving him on and on, down and down through the sagging galleries, shouting himself hoarse. "Ray! Caroline! . . . Caroline! Ray!"

Vaguely he thought of seeking the deep tunnels near the Cave of the Klagargalites, and, in particular, the orange-red door, where he had promised to meet the missing two. But what chance of finding them at this late hour?

It may have been some obscure sense of direction, like that of a homing animal, which guided him on his way . . . until, hours later, weary and nearly ready to sink, he reached the cavern of the mechanical dogs. The monsters now lay harmless and still, fallen on their sides as if they too shared the doom of their universe. And the orange-red gate moved unresistingly on its hinges. But still no sign of the long-sought pair!

A moan escaped Dennison's lips. Then once more he lifted his voice. "Ray! Caroline! . . . Caroline! Ray!" And once more the echoes came back, thin and taunting. He had reached the end of his resources; he was about to collapse against the stone wall, convinced that he would never find any trace of the man or girl.

"Ray! Caroline! . . . Caroline! Ray!"

He had made one last despairing effort. And at that final call, he heard a rustling and a scurrying down a dark side-tunnel. With a madly fluttering heart, he listened; then, delirium-driven, set off in pursuit. But in his eagerness, he forgot caution. He caught a glimpse of something jade-green from the dimly lighted recesses; then reeled, and breath seemed to desert his body. For these were—some Monotonite refugees!

So great was his disappointment that he did not notice where he

went as he backed away. He did not see the empty black space in the floor; he only knew that suddenly he felt himself slipping. Clutching at emptiness, he fell. He screamed; there came a sickening crash; his whole being was a fiery torment of pain—and unconsciousness swept over him.

When he opened his eyes, minutes later, he seemed to be dreaming a strange dream. Above him, in a dim open space, a yellow light was wavering; but seconds had passed before his dazed senses had recognized the beams of a flashlight. Then, framed in the illumination, a tall slender figure descended a rock stairway; and he could make out a face, vaguely familiar; and beside it another face, also familiar in a misty sort of way.

"By God, Ed! Where the devil do you come from?" he heard a rumbling well-known voice.

"Thank heaven! Oh, thank heaven! I thought we'd never find you!" came in trembling feminine tones.

"Hurt very much, old fellow?" inquired the rumbling voice, as the tall figure bent over him. "Good Lord, man! We heard that scream and crash, and came running!"

In a stunned manner, Dennison staggered up. He was still not quite certain if all this were real. But as he regained his feet, his mind recovered its clarity; he remembered his fall, and all at once he knew who had greeted him.

If tears came into his eyes; and if he seemed never done with shaking the man's hand and the girl's, he only expressed a mutual emotion.

"By George, we were waiting for you, but I never expected you to come. Caroline, though, had faith," explained Gale. "Those damned Monotonites were out for blood, so we've been sticking to the deepest, darkest caves, never far from the orange-red door, but careful to keep out of sight. Provisions were running pretty low, though. What the deuce was getting into you, Ed—not even noticing an open trapdoor, and falling into a pit six feet deep?"

In broken sentences, Dennison told his story; told of the invasion of the Klagargalites, of which Gale and Caroline had not even known. "We did hear some faint distant rumblings," Ray admitted, "but never guessed the cause."

Their one concern now was to return to the surface. There was no one to interfere as they wormed their way up through the smoking labyrinths to the cavern with the caved-in roof, where the Klagarga-

lites had waged their last fight. In hideous multitudes the fallen lay about them, thousands upon thousands, the green-clad warriors beside the red, as if death had signed an armistice. Climbing around the victims, and over great mounds of earth and rock from the collapsed roof, the fugitives finally scrambled back to the surface, where they found themselves less than a mile from the site of their excavations.

Minutes after emerging they were greeted with a shout by foreman Cotrerri.

"Goddammed lucky you came out now!" he blared at them. "Me and the boys—we look everywhere. Tomorrow we pull up stakes. Say, you sure look like you've been through hell."

"Yes, and we've come up into heaven," testified Gale.

But even as they rejoiced in their deliverance, Dennison's mind was on another matter. He had not missed the kindling light in the girl's violet-blue eyes; and a new hope had leapt to life within him.

"Will you ever forgive me, Carrie?" he pleaded. "Will you ever forgive me for leaving you and Ray?"

She smiled enigmatically; averted her gaze; and replied in low emotion-packed tones.

"Forgive you, Ed? Why, that was the bravest act I ever saw—the way you went all by yourself down to those terrible Klagargalites!"

He gave a gulp; hesitated a moment; then went on, embarrassed.

"You and Ray—I've sort of thought you two—well, if you don't miss my meaning—"

She laughed lightly; tapped a little nervously at one knee; and answered with assumed casualness.

"Ray and I—yes, we've been very good friends. But only that. He realizes it's best to go back to his inventing without any encumbrance. As for me—" She bent her gaze still further away, and spoke in low tones that he had difficulty to follow. "As for me—"

But he did not wait for her to finish. He had seized her unresisting form in his arms. "Thank God!" he muttered. "Thank God for the nightmare of Monoton!"

* * * * *

A LOOK *at the* STARS

By GENE HUNTER

ILLUSTRATED BY TOM WRIGHT

Mike had inherited his father's love of space— but space ships were rusting in the junk-yards.

The planet Marley was dull that spring. It was, of course, dull the year round, but there is a certain time of life when dullness takes on a special meaning. There is a time when the heart is filled and heavy and presses against its imprisoning ribs like a struggling wild thing. There is a time when the mind shrieks in silent pain at being held to its boundaries, when the lungs refuse to fill because the air they breathe is the air of depression and confinement.

This is the time when the heart stirs with an unnamed urging. This is the hour of youth, and it is the same the Universe over. It is the same on old Terra, on Tarko Sil in Alpha Centauri, Ackerman's world in Arcturus—or on a little spatial dust mote in the great farm region of the solar system of Antares.

The boy lay, sleepless on a bed meant for the deepest, most scientific rest. His eyes—eyes that should have held only the delicate light of childhood—were filled with some vague anguish. His mouth—a mouth that should have been pursed in boyish firmness—was twisted into a mockery of cynicism and bewilderment.

The eyes and the mouth—and the rest of the features as well—were second-hand anyway, though he did not know it. A spaceman's face, now at once boyish and adult and thus a mockery.


WRIGHT

The boy reached out a hand and savagely flicked a stud and the curving one-hand of the room darkened and lost its transparency and the view of the green and fertile farm world was obliterated. Then, at the press of a second stud, the ceiling seemed to melt away and the restless figure was bathed by ten million billion lights.

Very quietly, the boy was watching the stars.

"He's sick," the woman told the old man. "It's nothing. He'll get over it."

This was the mother. This, too was a young face, but a face of youth tempered with maturity. A face crowned by waves of blue-black hair, a face with a complexion like faded ivory, a face that, except for slight lines at each corner of the full mouth, was beauty and good nature incarnate.

"Aye, he's sick," the old man agreed. "We all got sick at Mike's age."

This was the grandfather. This was a face that, with all its years, still held a rare, masculine beauty. A face topped by waves of snow, a face with deep-grooved lines set in leather-like texture, the face of a man who had learned all there is to know about the mind and the flesh and the soul and had found all three wanting.

"He's growing up," the old man went on. "He's found the threshhold of manhood, and it's scaring him. And that's a sickness, Lora."

The woman snorted. "He's only eight years old!"

"And this is Antares. Back in my day—back on Terra or Venus—he'd be a typical eight-year-old with skinny legs and buttocks and arms that were just beginning to make muscles. Out here, he's an adolescent." He shook his head, and the crest of snow waved gently. "You've got to pay the price for longevity by seeing the young ones suffer too soon."

"He's sick," the mother repeated.

"He's sick," the old man agreed again, nodding. "Sick because he's dreaming, by God. He's had a dream. Maybe he dreamed about a woman, for the first time. Maybe he's dreamed about the stars. He's his father's son, Lora. With his heritage, he's probably dreamed about both."

Lora Calhoun's face hardened. "Dirk was your son," she reminded the oldster. "Don't debase him."

"*Debase* him? God A'mighty, Lora—it wasn't Dirk who made

himself what he was. It was the age he was born into and the looks he inherited from his mother and the things people did to him from the minute the doctor whacked him until the day he—went away. But he left a son. That's him, over there in his room. That's Dirk's son. Don't forget it."

"Oh, Gramps—you're an old barbarian! You know damned well that boy hasn't inherited any racial or family memories or traits—that he isn't carrying anybody else's blood or habits except his own. You're saying the child's inherited a desire, and you know that isn't possible."

"Science and eugenics and Mendel be damned," Gramps spat. "That boy's Dirk—face, hair, body and brain. He's got the same devil in him that Dirk had. They were taking the rockets away from Dirk, and he couldn't stand it. That's why he—he left."

The woman was very, very solemn. "I wish I could believe that," she said, and her face was plaintive. "You know what I've lived with all these years."

"I know. Dirk's blood in your veins, and all that. Dirk and the Custer woman, Dirk and Mari Kyle, Dirk and whatever woman he could find."

"Dirk didn't love me, Gramps. I never could get over that."

"I know he didn't," the old man answered. "Just like his mother didn't love me. He was looking for something. He thought he wanted to settle down, out of space, and he thought you and a farm and Antares could bring him the peace of mind he wanted so badly." The old face was strained, but it held no bitterness. "Give him credit for trying to find a way, the same as I gave credit to his mother."

"I let him suppose he was getting away with something all those years," Lora said, only half-hearing. "Then I couldn't take it any more and I faced him with it all at once and—and . . ."

"I'll tell you again," the old man said patiently. "It wasn't you *or* the other women. All of a sudden there weren't any more rockets—that's what Dirk couldn't face. It hit a whole generation of them, but what with Dirk being the way he was to begin with, he was one who just couldn't take it."

"Maybe," Lora said. "Maybe. But science advances, Gramps. You can't hold back science."

"No," the oldster admitted, "that you can't. But who's to say it's advancement, Lora? Teleportation! Immediate Transition! It may be

advancement that a man can work on Venus or Mars and go home to SoCal or Hawaii or Tahiti or Rio at night by pressing a button, but is it advancement when a whole complicated transportation system is scrapped overnight and they send the hulls that were once respected spaceships to the junk yards? When a whole generation of men—and women too, for that matter—find themselves without purpose?"

"It's happened before."

"And it'll happen again—because science keeps metals and dials and tubes twenty-five years ahead of the human mind. It's wrong, but nobody would think of doing anything about it. It leaves derelicts in its wake. Dirk was one—so's his son."

"No," Lora said, shaking her head determinedly. Then, more softly: "Let's go take a look at him, Gramps."

With a sigh, the old man lay down his pipe.

Mike lay looking up at the stars. He was oblivious to the bed, the transloid walls, the furnishings of a boy's room, the two adults watching from the doorway.

"He's looking at the stars," the old man whispered.

The woman said nothing.

"Like Dirk, when they took the rockets away. Only *he* doesn't know why he feels like he does. Dirk did—or at least he had a glimmer of understanding. They were taking something away from him. . . ."

"Men can still go to the stars."

"But not in ships. Not in the rockets."

They watched. Finally the boy's trembling hand reached out and the ten million billion lights looking down at him were gone. There was a sharp, clear sound of animal-like pain from his throat. He whirled over and buried his head in the pillow. Their eyes not yet accustomed to the darkness, the old man and the woman could not see him now, but they heard his sobs.

"You see," the mother insisted. "He's sick."

"Yes," Gramps agreed softly. "He's sick."

* * * * *

The days of Inter-Planetary travel are not far distant, and space-trained young men will be at a premium

SPACE ACADEMY

By H. J. CAMPBELL

¶ When we decided to run this article by the editor of England's "Authentic Science Fiction," we believed it to be both timely and of interest to science fiction readers. Since then we have been informed that such an Academy actually exists at White Sands, New Mexico.

The light of a new dawn is creeping over the world's horizon—the dawn of the Space Age. Already rockets have been fired to a height of over 280 miles, and the larger countries all have active interplanetary societies composed of eminent mathematicians, engineers and scientists who are forging ahead, finding answers to the problems of space flight. There can be no doubt in serious minds that space will be conquered, and very soon!

When that time comes there will be a great need for young men to pilot and navigate the space ships. Just as there are aviation schools today, so there will be Space Academies in the future. Let us take a look at one and see how boys will be trained to carry humanity to the stars.

The building, of course, will be a superb piece of architecture, made of durable materials and designed especially for its purpose. It will be located some distance from the large towns and will be a complete little world in itself. It will have bedrooms, classrooms, an observatory, shops, cinema and recreation rooms.

Educating Space Cadets

Spacemen will have to learn considerably more than present-day airmen learn. The Space Academy will take cadets when they complete their primary education and will put them through courses in all the subjects that are essential for the men who are to take charge of vessels in the void of space. Mathematics, physics and engineering will be the most important subjects. Astronomy, too, will play an important part, being as it is, the geography of space.

Perhaps, to help cadets to become familiar with heavenly bodies, the Space Academy will have a large planetarium filling the whole centre of the building up to the first floor. Here, the planetary models will circle a model sun in imitation of the Solar System and the cadets may study them when they please.

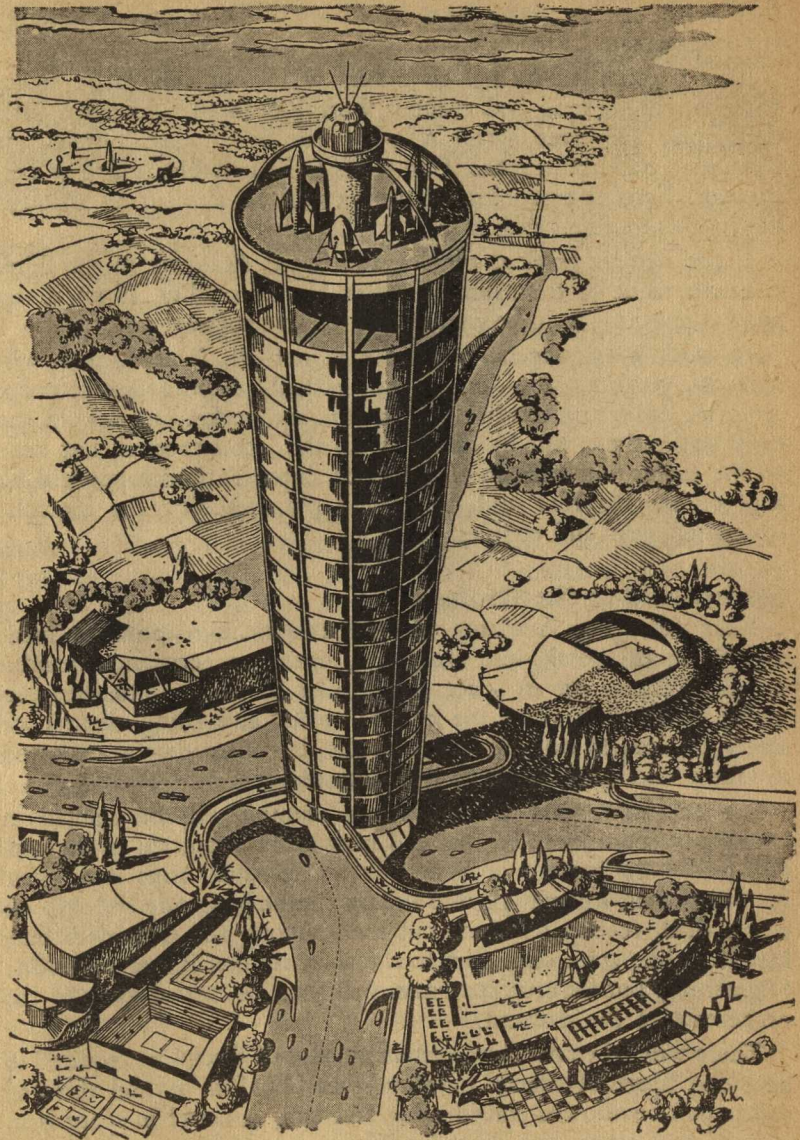
Above all, space cadets must be physically fit. A sick man, or even a rather weak man, might crack up under the rigours of space flight; he might endanger the whole ship. So, the Space Academy will be amply provided with sports grounds, a gymnasium and swimming pool. Athletic pursuits will be a regular and compulsory part of the curriculum, with inter-class competitions and matches.

One good reason for maintaining perfect health is that all spaceship crewmen will have to withstand very strong forces when the ships take off and land, due to the tremendous acceleration necessary to escape from Earth's gravity field. Escape velocity is seven miles per second, and the effect of this is that the men will be pressed down into spongy mattresses by what seems like a giant hand.

Up the Wall!

To prepare cadets for this experience by easy stages, the Space Academy will have a centrifuge room. In this, for so many minutes a day, the cadets will be spun round on the revolving walls, centrifugal force pushing them outwards and simulating the drag of gravity. Gradually they will become used to the experience and when they graduate from the Academy they will take blast-offs and landings in their stride.

Naturally, there will be terrific competition among boys for places in the Space Academy, and the authorities will have a very stiff entrance examination for weeding out the unsuitables. We can be certain that the wealth of the boy's parents will count for nothing. Successful candidates will be those who have shown their ability



at the primary school, who are willing to work extremely hard while they are at the Academy, and who possess the correct personality for a spaceman.

This question of mental characters will loom very large. Space voyages will be long and arduous, boring perhaps, and not a little dangerous. However clever a man may be at, say, physics, he becomes a liability in space if he tends to be irritable, selfish or belligerent. Careful psychological testing will be applied all through the courses to detect such mental weaknesses.

If the man *is* good at physics, the Space Academy might think it worth while to treat him to better his personality. If he is *not* good at physics—well, he would have to leave anyway!

As with most careers, bookwork is not all. Every course will have its practical side—cadets will actually handle the complex air-locks, radio and television apparatus and rocket engines. In the early stages these will be mock-ups in the lecture rooms, but later on the cadets will train in actual space ships. Various types will be kept on the flat roof and cadets will practise using the controls, navigation gear and engines.

Springboard to the Stratosphere

Near the Space Academy will be a launching apron—a great disc of strong metal—and from this, under supervision, advanced cadets will take off in space ships, pilot them out into the void under instructions from the control tower and bring them back safely. All cadets will eagerly await the day when they are allowed to take a ship up without the instructor present.

An important part of the cadet's training will be slanted at emergency conditions. To this end he will be instructed in the care and use of the space suit. When he makes actual trips into space, he will put his knowledge into use by climbing outside the ship on repair drill, feeling all alone out there among the stars with only his safety line connecting him to the ship. At first it may be a little frightening, but the true spaceman will soon be carried away by the excitement of the moment.

There will, of course, be a certain amount of discipline required to keep the Space Academy running smoothly. But beyond this the cadets will be allowed considerable freedom. A vessel in space is so isolated that every man must be able to act on his own initiative,

without needing someone to tell him what to do. The Academy will train cadets to obey orders—and to act sensibly and quickly when orders are lacking.

We can imagine a space cadet, rising early in the morning because there is a lot to be done, leaving his private room and going along to the bathroom for his morning wash. There he joins in a conversation with his chums about the best way to land a ship on Jupiter.

After his wash, he goes down to the dining-room for breakfast, smart in his uniform, with the space-ship flash gleaming on his arm. Here he continues the conversation, learning something from his friends and teaching them something in return.

During the morning he works at mathematics, physics and chemistry. A little before lunch the whole class goes off to the football field or the tennis courts and works up a fine appetite. After a shower there is lunch—and another discussion.

New Laws to Learn

In the afternoon, our cadet attends classes in botany, zoology and space law. Then in the early evening he joins some friends at the swimming pool or in the games room. Another shower and he goes to dinner, only this time he talks about football or table tennis or the breast stroke!

Dinner over, he may take a stroll in the grounds or watch the planetarium for a while, memorizing the relations between the planets. As soon as it is dark he goes up to the observatory under the roof and spends an hour or two looking through the telescopes and taking photographs of the stars.

Finally he goes back to his room and reads up a little rocket engineering in preparation for a lesson next day. When that is finished he climbs into bed, tired but happy and looking forward to the day when he graduates. Besides, to-morrow he is actually going up into space!

Unfortunately, no such Space Academy yet exists. But already the American Air Force has a rocket station at Bort Bliss, Texas, with a Department of Space Medicine. And the British Ministry is working on rocket craft at Westcott, Surrey. Be sure that this Space Academy is no idle dream—it may well come to pass in our lifetime.

* * * * *

TIME *to* RETIRE

By E. EVERETT EVANS

For more years than he cared to remember Professor Calloway had looked forward to retirement from his teaching profession at the Space Academy. . . .

Professor Captain Eugene Calloway stood on the rostrum for the last time, while this latest class of Cadet Pilots assembled to march to graduation. How glad he was that at long last he had reached sixty-five, and could retire.

Thirty-five years of teaching, he thought, and it seemed an eternity in retrospect. Thirty-five years of growing older and older, while always in front of him was a never-ending, never-changing sea of fresh, young eighteen-year-old faces.

The cadet captain reported, "All present and accounted for, sir."

Professor Galloway looked at his wrist-chronom. "We've nearly ten minutes. Is there, perhaps, some final question?"

No one spoke for a moment, then from the rear came an exaggerated simper, "Please, Professor sir, just how *do* our rockets work out in the vacuum of space where there's no air to push against?"

Oh, Lord, not again! That silly question had come to be almost a tradition in Astrogation. At the crescendo of laughter, Galloway made his face smile, but his heart was bitter. He was supposed to have made *men* out of these cadets, but they were still thoughtless boys with a childish sense of humor. This time his tired nerves just couldn't take it.

What's the use of it all, his brain wanted to scream? If each new generation can't show some advancement over the one before, why

continue the race? You'd think there would be some basic improvement in man's brain. Yet each year's crop seems more stupid.

That young Jacobs, for instance; son of the best spatial computer in the Corps. Surely the boy should have inherited some math ability. Or at least absorbed a little just by being around his father. But if even the simplest theorem had ever penetrated, it must now be lying back in some undusted corner, covered with lint.

"Thank God I'm retiring before I grow into an old fogey," he thought gratefully. "Or, have I, already. . . .?"

Without answering the cadet's question, he stalked from the room and away from the building. Almost blindly he walked along one of the old ways, not noting where he went.

His mind searched back over the span of forty-seven years to his own student days. Had *he* been that callow? Had asking stupid questions seemed "smart" to him then? He couldn't remember. Piously, he hoped not.

Becoming a space pilot had been his boyhood dream. The romance of it lured, but the actuality seemed an unattainable goal. Yet he had made it, and following his schooling had been in space until, at thirty, he had to retire from active duty. For space pilots must be young. It takes fast-thinking, agile minds and the fine dexterity of trained youthful muscular coordination to pilot space vessels.

Then when, at his grounding, he was offered a post as instructor here at the Academy, he felt a vast enthusiasm and exaltation at thought of molding fresh, young minds.

"Fresh young minds, phooey!" he grumbled to himself. "I certainly am glad I'm retiring before what little mind *I* have left mildews and sloughs off around the edges."

The entire race must be going downhill. Must have reached zenith before he was born, and been steadily regressing since.

"Are our memory cells dying on the vine," he wondered, "and this the beginning of the end of man's vaunted greatness?"

What a fool ever to want to be a teacher. If I'd realized how dumb boys can be, I'd've become a plumber, or something useful.

Funny what life does to one, isn't it? Funny, hell, it's tragic. . . .

He became conscious of his surroundings slowly, noting he had reached the edge of the New Campus, facing the quadrangle of splendid new buildings for the greatly-enlarged Academy. For the Corps was expanding the fleet, and more officers were needed.

For some moments he gazed at the new school, then turned and

retraced his steps. There were some good-byes he wanted to say, and his desk to clean out.

In the faculty room professors were busy closing their semester's work, or planning for the new one starting next week.

Galloway went up to one man he had known many years, and held out his hand. "Well, so long, Sam. Take it easy."

"Why the good-bye? I'll see you Monday, won't I?"

"No. Don't you remember? I'm retiring. Sixty-five, you know."

"Oh, yes. Yes, that's right. Too bad. Well, have a good time." The professor shook hands briefly, then turned away, leaving Galloway standing there with a foolish feeling.

He made no more efforts to bid farewells. That once was enough. He had half-expected some joshing, perhaps, to cover up their deeper feelings at losing him. Perhaps a farewell gift, and the gang cheering him and singing "Old Lang Syne." But that brusk brush-off. So that's all it meant, then, growing old here. Wasting his life, trying to pound some sense into thick, eighteen-year-old skulls full of fluff . . . and no one caring. The hell with it!

As he started down the hall an orderly met him. "The Commandant wants to see you, Captain Galloway."

"Oh, Gal, glad you came in. I'm rushed, but wanted to tell you you're still to be Senior of the new school. Here's your new ten-year contract. Read it and sign when convenient. You'll notice a nice raise is included."

"But . . . but Admiral, I'm retiring. Sixty-five a couple of weeks ago, remember?"

"You? Retiring? Poppycock! An out-moded custom from days when men had a life-expectancy of seventy. You've at least fifty good, useful years left. Forget that silly retirement business. We need you." He shook hands briefly, then turned gruffly back to his work.

Galloway slowly walked out. He'd be damned if he would teach any more. He was old, and tired. Thirty-five years was all they had a right to ask of any man.

Besides, he had such wonderful plans for the immediate future. Five years in the Martian deserts, studying the ancient ruins. Another five in the jungle-swamps of Sirius Three, examining those strange marine growths. Then to Alatire Four, to climb those stupendous mountains.

Wear himself out teaching another ten years? Not him. Not for

brainless pups who thought only of playing silly tricks and asking stupid questions.

The balance of the afternoon he wandered aimlessly, or sat despondently in his quarters, thinking . . . thinking. . . .

He had not intended going to the Annual Banquet that night, but habit took him there. The huge crowd surprised him until he remembered the dedication of the new school tomorrow. Hundreds of officers who seldom bothered to come back were here for that.

He found an inconspicuous place near the rear. He gave desultory greetings to those at his table, but was in no mood for light banter. Yet hardly was he seated when a Junior Lieutenant rushed over from a nearby table.

"Professor Galloway, sir," he grabbed his hand and shook it exuberantly. "It's wonderful to see you again, sir."

Galloway recognized a student from last year's class. "Ah, yes, Trevarthon. Glad to see you."

A moment later a captain spied him and came over. "Galloway, you've no idea how much I appreciated your patience when I was a cub. It's men like you, sir, who make our Corps great."

"Oh, you exaggerate, I'm sure." But Galloway couldn't help feeling pleased.

And it went like that all evening. An almost steady stream of former students now become lieutenants, commodores, captains, admirals, all genuinely glad to see their one-time teacher. Each so patently sincere in his respect, his admiration; all expressing thanks for his many kindnesses and patience with their youthful stupidities and exuberances.

Galloway was moved in spite of himself. Maybe . . . possibly . . . it had been not all in vain, after all. But he was still glad it was over. Now for a life without strain. That fool commandant, having the nerve to ask him to keep on and on . . . fifty more good years, indeed.

The merriment was at its height when a tall, grizzled, broad-shouldered man at the Honor Table stood up. At first glance his uniform seemed all gold braid and medals. In a stentorian voice he called, "Ten-shun!"

There was instant silence, and a quick hiding of bottles. For there was only one voice like that in the galaxy. It was "Bull" Clapham—Grand Fleet Admiral Clapham, tactical genius, hero of the Jovian and Sirian wars, martinet, strict disciplinarian, ogre. Galloway, how-

ever, remembered him best as a brash, high-spirited, gold-bricking cadet in his very first class.

"I'd like to ask the Senior Instructor in Astrogation a question."

The commandant struggled to his feet. "Galloway! Captain Galloway. Stand up."

At his rear-corner table the surprised educator rose hesitantly. What could Clapham possibly wish to ask?

"Why, it's my old teacher, the man who worked so hard to teach me the rudiments of astrogation." But the Admiral's smile was brief and cold, indeed.

There was tense silence in the great room. All eyes swivelled from the hapless instructor to the feared admiral, who stood there, glaring again with that look that made men of all ranks quail. But Galloway was not afraid. He had retired. There was nothing the Grand Admiral, or any other brass-hat, could do to him now.

Suddenly that stern face cracked with a broad grin, and in a squeaking voice Grand Fleet Admiral Clapham asked, "Please, Professor, sir, just how *do* our rockets work in the vacuum. . . .?"

A roar of laughter and a storm of applause drowned out the rest.

But Professor Captain Eugene Galloway did not seem to notice. With a quiet smile of complete understanding, he took the new contract from his pocket, and signed it with a bold, proud flourish.

* * * * *

GOING HOME

By KRIS NEVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GAUGHAN

¶ The jets roared...and Joe Wolfe came back from memory to find that he was plunging toward the sun in that last fatal orbit of the Down.

There were years that over-reached themselves: a compacted infinity of endless stretches of space memory. For no man can stand before a port, peering out into the jet and awful loneliness of space where diamond hard spits of fire blaze unceasingly, without feeling the continuity of the past and the future, of the now and eternity. All things, all ages, all, meet for a moment. A thousand thousand threads converging into the knot of the present; a thousand thousand threads radiating outward into the tomorrow.

He thought: Space makes all men immortal in the moment. Everything is caught and mirrored in brief self.

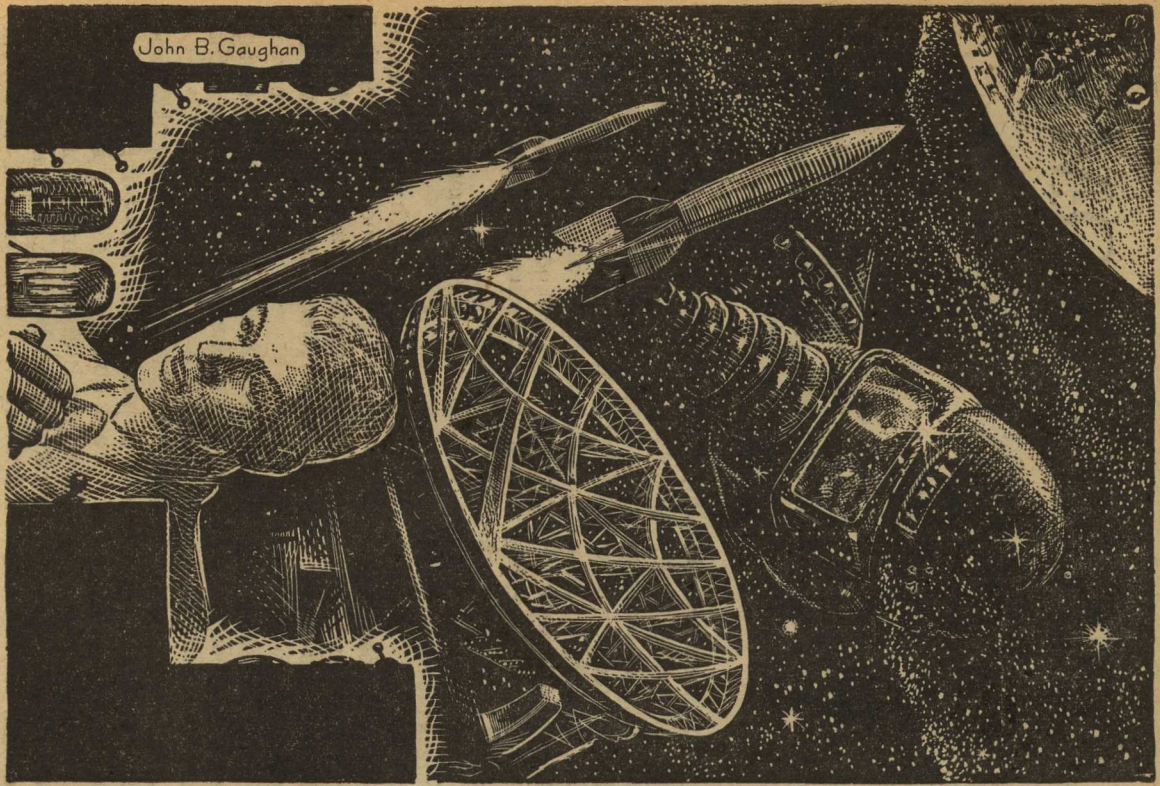
The jets roared.

Behind was Lunar, covered by the mantle of sparks his ship let fall. A bright-hard diadem set in velvet emptiness. Ahead of him, around him, within him, eternity.

"You are old," they had told him. And he had waved his huge knuckled hands, shot through by time, like a wounded bird in flight: frantic and aimless. And retired.

Then he had sat in the swivel seat behind the shiny desk and watched the fleet of silver birds leap skyward in a mist of fire, singing the song of the jets, going upward, and the song dying into silence.

He had looked out of the windows of Administration and seen the ant hill movement concentrated on pouring a stream of cargo outward. He had counted them away, like an old sea captain the


John B. Gaughan

passing ships; he had counted them back in again, seen them scarred and dented, and known the ones who never returned. The shuttle of activity in which he was an observer, processing unreal paper slips that bore no relation to the great play of passions unfolding beyond the walls.

The jets roared.

He thought: And I am alone with her again. With space, the dark lady of the soul sonnets: the unknowable love. . . .

There is a lethal attraction in space: like the haunting thought of death. Fear intermingled with an indefinable ecstasy: peering down from the orbital esplanade into the infinite. Spacemen love space for what she is, and fear her for what she does: for sending prowling fingers of alien thought that knead the fertile soil of mind, planting strange seeds, and, in the ripeness of time, cultivating exotic blossoms.

That is why one man is never left alone in the control room. That is why the pilots divide their time between the scanner and their fellow pilot. Men intent upon the business of navigation, and also alert for the first glassy-eyed sign of space fever in the man next to them.

A wave of insanity can flutter across a nation: a man jumps from a building, and dozens imitate him. Suicides employing identical means: the tenuous power of suggestion.

In space it is not called suicide: it is called space fever. And there is a pattern.

"When you come to love space, leave her." That is the classic precept. Because only those who love space can know the fever. But the profound gentlemen who search in the innermost recesses of the mind have never explained how you can leave the thing you love. Or if the aching loneliness in separation is better than the final embrace.

The jets roared.

For three years he had waited in mechanical inactivity, while space called plaintively, like the sea to the retired and rhuemy-eyed Captains of yesteryear. Then Tri-Planet developed the single, ship, whose cargo had a margin of profit greater than the ship itself. One trip was enough: and they could afford to lose a ship now and then.

They needed experienced spacemen. And experienced spacemen will work a single ship only when they can find no other job. The

Tri-Planet dealt in human lives; but there was a cloak of legality: for each man is free to pursue his own profession. Each man works his own way through the web of life, and each man weaves his own destiny.

And an old, retired spaceman can ignore the psychiatrists when they say: "If you keep going back, it will eventually get you." For they do not give you a time limit: how many safe trips are still left within your clay form: how much flight living remains?

He had seen the stars on a clear winter night: from Earth, calling to him through the heavy atmosphere, twinkling to him like a million mistress' coy eyes. And his own eyes had misted, watching, with memory, with the vague, indefinable longing. . . .

He had said: "One more trip. One last trip. . . . Once more." But three times, on the single ship, alone with his destiny, the moon had faded behind him, and Mars had spread like a map unrolling, before him.

The jets roared.

There was an inner excitement; and a restful quiet: interconnected in a way beyond all description, which only the old spacemen can know.

"I'll quit next trip," he told himself, speaking aloud, apologizing to her out there, and knowing that he lied. For, unable to prevent it, he would keep coming back.

Love is stronger than fear.

And he knew that space—how was the line?—"never did betray the heart that loved her." He laughed, not wildly, but deeply, for he had nothing to fear.

The jets roared.

He adjusted the controls with his long experienced hands and relaxed. The long practiced art of spacemen. Letting his thoughts eddy like drifting smoke.

Memory is easy. But the time relationship is painful. Memory without time.

"You're a spaceman now, Joe," she had said.

He had seized her around the waist, twirling her around until her careful hair fluttered loose in a golden rain. He had set her down, both laughing.

Laughing eyes: for her eyes glittered and laughed like the farthest

stars. Laughing hair: for it shone like the spring-time sun, overbrimming with secret glee. And the darkness and light played on her yet young face.

"Your uniform is beautiful," she had said, fingering the shining lapel insigna. She had looked up at him with eyes turned serious. "We can be married now," she had whispered.

That was when he had been graduated from the Academy: how long ago?

But better not to think of time, for out here it is not. But Earth-bound, time has no meaning until suddenly you're old, and you fear to think of it, least you come to treasure the last minute-drops of life that fall swiftly, oh, so swiftly, into the placid lake of the past. You look ahead where there was once a river, and now you see only a tiny stream: you look behind to see where it has all gone, finding it there, clear, deep and cool, and forever untouchable. But here it has no meaning. Here is a timeless dream of what was and what might have been.

But dreams aside, there had been his dull-death Earth life of three years, where he had remembered the unnumbered years flowing past. He could not dam them with his body, nor speed nor retard the flow. He was unsubstantial before them, filtering out only memories that lodge in the fine screen work of his mind.

He could afford to remember once more, as it was, before he began to build the new yesterday.

He thought: You don't see your wife often, a spaceman.

He forced himself to face it, for the last time. And the memory of pain was sweet, for it would soon be gone.

Eventually, laughing eyes, no longer childlike, had left him.

She had herded in the children: gathering them from him. Remarried.

"They need a father," she had said. "And I need a husband, not a fleeting shadow and a memory."

He had known it would happen. And it hurt, as he knew it would. He had tried to shrug it off: "I can't stand it any longer, Joe."

But a spaceman needs to come home to love. Otherwise there is only the cosmic loneliness that separates the visitor from the new world. And gradually he had come to look more to Her, out there, than to fellow men and women.

He had met and passed shadow figures in the dread night of humanity: "Buy me a drink, huh, big boy," and later, "I'll be waiting

for you, honey, when you come back." The unsubstantial substance of spaceport women. Where there is no love, but only hollowness.

No one loves a spaceman.

People forget: Emotions sputter out in the vacuum of time.

He thought: I saw Laughing Eyes ten times in twelve years.

And now, in this temporal moment, it was no consolation that she had lasted longer than most.

The last time: there had been the barrier of worlds between them. Neither were what they once were: strangers only. They could no longer go back to the bright day at the Academy. The insigna was tarnished, now.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Joe."

"I know, Laughing Eyes," he had said, putting his head in his hands; and his Earth tears of the moment had been borne along by time to mingle in that glorious pool from which no mortal, however thirsty, may ever drink.

The past.

And strange, too, how first he had feared space: not understanding. Remembering the first trip with fatherly emotion. How easy to recreate, for spacemen live with memory, peer out into the void where time unfolds, reeling back.

Time to remember again, before the past is forgotten.

The jets roared.

Memory came clear. . . .

Out of the mists, and he was smiling wryly. Long ago.

His stomach began to surge; his heart expanded and blood pounded in his ears like the break of waves on the beach.

He lay back on his bunk. Things had that swimming green. . . . "Yah feeling ok, kid?" came the voice from the sickness around him.

"Sure," he gulped. "Sure. Just—fine." And sickness was clawing its way up from his stomach, rising. He shut his mouth. Tight.

The Second stretched out full length, smoking a cigarette, enjoying the bottomless feeling of accelerating movement.

"I know how you feel: if they don't stop the ship you think you'll die. Things rising to a climax in you."

"I—" he gasped, "all right."

"You'll live: they always do. Coupla days an' you're over it."

The Second sucked in the smoke.

"Take me:" he said, brooding, "Hell, free flight is second nature

to me. Couldn't live without it. . . . And don't go getting any ideas, either: it's not the Fever. Not ol' McMinn, Wolfe, my boy; that's for loonies."

Joe Wolfe tried to steer his mind: "What'cha suppose causes it?"

"The Fever?" The Second squirmed on the bed, getting comfortable. "Don't know: guess nobody does." He stared at the overhead. "Don't even like to think much about it. You wouldn't either, if you ever saw one of the poor devils, afterwards."

Joe Wolfe muttered something.

"I'll tell you," the Second continued. " 'Gotta go back,' they keep sayin', over and over: 'Gotta go back.' They somehow think they've left something out here. Mindless, pathetic."

He blew a lazy smoke ring.

"They seem convinced that they have to die out here: horrible."

He shuddered, peering sightlessly upward, lost in grim thought.

Joe Wolfe unhearing, struggled, trying to master the sickness. He closed his eyes and time passed. He could not measure it, minutes or hours. All encompassed by spacesickness.

The Second slept and there was silence. Broken, finally by the harsh roar of the jets, long since silenced, now that the orbit was set.

Almost immediately the alarm bell chattered harshly and the Second's feet hit the deck in automatic response.

"Helmet," he cried. "Get your helmet. We must be trying to blast clear of a meteorite storm."

He was already struggling into his awkward suit.

"I'm—I'm sick," Joe Wolfe answered.

"You ain't got time," the Second roared. "Get that helmet on." And the Second was out of the cabin.

Joe Wolfe pulled on his space suit, stomach quivering. He buckled down the helmet and heard an unreal conversation chatter ringingly in the steel confines.

He weaved toward the bridge.

There, before the control room, stood a jam of officers, all talking into their open mikes at once, all bulky in their tin union suits.

A charged voice crackled: "Quiet!" And then, "Helmets off." Unmistakably the voice of the Skipper.

Joe Wolfe unbuckled his helmet with a flood of relief: no leak, then. He flipped it back over his head, where it bobbed wildly between his shoulder blades.

"Wrecking bar!" the Skipper barked.

He felt himself helping to unlimber it from the wall rack.

Then, with other officers, he was slamming it against the sealed control room door. The door buckled. It screamed piercingly, and then, with a final plunge of the wrecking bar, crashed inward.

There was a single, shocked moment while everyone waited.

The Skipper broke into smooth motion, hurling himself into the room.

He grabbed the assistant third by the shoulder and spun him around. The man was old, and the Skipper hurled a right hook into his face; it sent him, like a spinning feather, across the room. One of the officers caught him.

The Skipper had to step over the other half of the watch, who was lying before the central control board. His head had been cut open with a wrench; it leaked blood onto the floor panneling.

The Skipper's hands moved in practiced rhythm.

"We're not far on the outward swing," he said tensely. He cut the power by jamming the firing lever back savagely.

Silent and white-faced the officers watched.

How far along the dread orbit?

The Skipper's eyes flew from dial to dial.

"Go to the crew: form them at escape hatches," he said calmly.

There was silence for a moment as the Chief moved to comply.

" 'Gator," the Skipper snapped. The astrogator stepped forward. The Skipper reeled off a series of figures on the recorder, reading them from the dials.

The 'Gator ripped the paper from the machine and sat down at his desk. He fed the numbers into the calculator.

Joe Wolfe stood motionless, sickness forgotten.

"Twenty-seven on one," the 'Gator barked.

"Twenty-seven on one," the Skipper echoed.

"Power two-oh-three."

"Power two-oh-three," said the Skipper, adjusting the firing lever.

A whirl of tape was issuing from the calculator with calibrated sections overlaid by the flight line.

"Now!" the 'Gator snapped.

The Skipper threw the lever and the ship shuddered.

The calculator clacked and hummed.

Without taking his eyes off the tape, the 'Gator asked: "Fuel?"

Joe Wolfe's eyes strayed to the indicator: it wavered on the red.

"Nine-point-seven," the Skipper hissed.

The 'Gator fed this information into his machine.

"Partial deflection," he said. "We can check her to escape and head outward."

The Skipper looked up. The fuel indicator was in the red. "Check," he said tiredly. He turned. "Sound the alarm. You"—he pointed to Joe Wolfe, "see this man out." He referred to the man on the floor.

They crowded into the escape ship. Everyone was tense. The Skipper cut the ship free, but it continued, by the grim hand of inertia, to cling to the mother ship.

Velocity was well below escape. The Skipper nursed the blast, conserving fuel. The tiny craft pulled free.

They had checked the mother ship before the acceleration had become too great to permit escape with their limited fuel, and they were free.

The Skipper nursed the little craft into the Mars orbit.

He glanced at the fuel gauge. Plenty. And they had avoided the horrible, and easily set orbit of the Down: the final plunge men with the Fever try to make.

The Second peered out the port, musing. "It would have been a hell of a way to die," he said, shuddering. "Roasted. Your skin turning red, and metal getting too hot to touch. . . . God!"

Joe Wolfe came back from memory. His jets had sputtered and died. The powerful roar, coughing like an old man, deeply, and silence. The silence of space. Of Her, out there.

He glanced languidly at the fuel dial. Posted across the red. Empty.

He did not need to tell himself to relax. For his mind was caught up with the strange dreams of space, the flimsy web of Eternity.

Only his body, dull and empty, was roaring now toward the sun in the orbit of the Down, toward the maw of the hungry sun, like a moth into a flame.

And his ego, that indefinable essence of man, unweighed, unmeasured, and unknown, was—almost—floating free. Was waiting eagerly for its last contact with reality, to be consumed by purifying flame.

And he would be finally and irrevocably lost, not in the inexpressible loneliness, but in the quiet womb of the first mother.

* * * * *

BATTLE *of* WIZARDS

By L. RON HUBBARD

ILLUSTRATED BY JON ARFSTROM

¶ The Galactic Council wanted mineral rights on Deltoid—but the situation was so explosive that even the Galactic Navy refused to touch it!

The humans were outnumbered and the council was grave. No one had asked them here to this dark valley on the galaxy's rim. No one had pleaded for their arts. They had come and nothing short of miracles would let them stay.

The Mineralogy Service wanted Deltoid. Their chief had reported to the Galactic Council that Deltoid contained an almost unlimited supply of catalyst crystals in a natural state, a fact which would reduce the cost of freighter fuel manufacture by two-thirds. No one had argued with the need. The Galactic Council had sent for the navy and had told the navy to "safeguard" a mining expedition to Deltoid. The navy had refused. A shot fired in the presence of catalyst crystals would wipe out the planet and therefore the project.

An order, then, had wandered through dusty corridors to a small, forsaken office in the Military Defense Building of the capital to lie amongst fly-specked papers on a scratched desk. A bored chief of section had given it to Angus McBane and Angus had offered a few faint suggestions about overdue leave. But the leave was two standard years late anyway and Angus took the smudged sheet to supply. The office of Civil Affairs did not rate very high and what he got was third and fourth hand.

They loaded the *Argus* 48 with five months supplies, put aboard thirty marines and eighteen sailors who had been found a disgrace to the service and gave the ship routine clearance.

Rusted and dented amid the fine, shining vessels of the important

classifications, the *Argus* 48 lay for twelve standard hours after release patching up a starboard port which had connected with a meteor and then fifteen more trying to get circulation into the jet cooling system. There was some raillery from the mechanics of the government base: the *Argus* 48 was sailing under a CA and couldn't expect anything more.

Twenty-three days later they landed on Deltoid, in a valley indicated by the original survey, "high walled and impossible of land assault, sparse in game but containing the bulk of the beings that inhabit this system." The valley was about a hundred and fifty leagues in diameter. They made their preliminary salutations and then Angus McBane came to council with the high chiefs of the realm.

Angus was a Civil Affairs officer. Nominally he was a colonial officer, but three years of special training and five more of service in CA had somehow removed him from the ordinary. He forgot to polish his buttons now. He had become gentle with years of dealing with less sentient races. He had spent a long time out beyond the last scout field and the life had changed him from the ordinary.

He clung to a stick as a symbol of a gentleman. But his *topee* was a disgrace and his tunic pockets bulged and he had found that mastodon hide boots were best.

He squatted down at the council, cross-legged, his black and gold stick across his knees, his bold Scot face sharply white in contrast to his uncut hair, his wise eyes bright in the firelight. Behind him knelt Dirk who had the largest mechanical sense and the least conscience of any non-com in the service.

The place smelled bad and the people smelled worse. They were humanoid and one would have thought them more than that until he looked at their feet and hands. Where there were claws, there should have been nails. And there was much too much hair on them. But they were sentient, oddly so, and their speech, filtered through the translating filter, was full of startling strength.

"You say you come to bring us blessings," said the ruling chief. "We have blessings. You say you can teach us many things. We know many things. You say you have much to give and you give nothing!"

The chief threw the trinkets into the fire, a magnifying glass and a chain of gold coins. Angus McBane showed no emotion about it. He looked at the men there, saw signs of disease and malnutrition, looked back at the chief.

"I can show you many ways to grow good food. I can cure a thousand sicknesses. I can prepare aids which will make your work less. I bring peace and plenty. Do not despise my gifts."

"You want this valley," said the chief, rearing up seven feet tall and glaring. "You want my people should enter your slavery. Your looking-over vessels came. This was not the first time we had seen your race. Five men of the looking-over vessel did not go back. We have no reason not to detain six."

"You must not talk like children," said Angus, aware that knives had shifted. "We want the rights to mine a rock on your planet. You may retain your own government. But I have many things to give. I can show you how to raise food, good food, lots of food, food that is good to eat, I can build you ways to bring water into your villages. I can take away your sicknesses. I can do many powerful things for you and you will not have to pay."

The tribal chief expanded his chest and glared around him at his fellow councilmen. He read their mood.

"What power do you have that we do not have?" said the chief.

"It is a thing we call science," said Angus patiently. "With it we build such things as the ship in which we came. It will do many great things. It can make light appear in the night and it can keep beds dry when it rains. It can produce better children and it can make everyone wise. It can—"

"You say this *science* is powerful. Perhaps," said the chief, glowering, "you do not know that we also have a thing which is power."

"What is this thing?" said Angus.

A queer, clacking sound came and a sleek, fat fellow rose from beside the fire. He grinned with superiority and then, with a glance at the chief, waved his hand through the air.

Instantly a banner of light glowed there and then began to materialize into a form. Several near the fire scuttled back. Sergeant Dirk's rum-bleared eyes shot wide. A woman was taking form there, comely save for her claws. She floated upon the air and then abruptly dropped to the floor. She sat up, dazed, looked at the fire-painted faces, at Angus and hurriedly rushed from the council hut.

The sleek, fat youth sat down.

"Power," said the chief. "We have power. Is science greater than this magic?"

Angus McBane pushed at a live coal with his cane. He looked up after a little and there was a smile on his mouth. "Science is more

powerful than this. It is more powerful than any magic. Its laws are greater laws than magic's laws. Science is more powerful than this."

Some seemed afraid of him then. But most of them were cued by the chief who was arrogant with disdain.

"If science is so great, I would know it. But nothing is greater than magic. I would like to see a thing greater than magic."

"I would be glad to show you," said Angus. He took out a pocket light and turned it on, lighting up the entire hut. But when he shut it off, the sleek youth waved his hand and the hut became twice as light.

The chief laughed. "Is there no more to your science?"

"There is much more," said Angus. "Science can do anything which this young man's magic can do."

There was a titter of disbelief. Sergeant Dirk moved back a pace, the better to wield a morning-star of his own manufacture in case the going got rough.

"Magic can drive people mad," said the chief.

"Science can make people sane," said Angus.

"In any contest with magic," suddenly announced the fat young man, grown very proud, "your science would lose."

Angus looked straight across the fire at the round, greasy face of the self-styled magician. "If we were to engage in a contest, I should beat you."

The young man leaped up in triumph. "He has declared it. He has called the challenge and he is the challenger. Behold, I call you all to witness. These people would come upon us and rob and kill us but their science is not great. Here is one who challenges me! I accept the challenge!" He sat down promptly.

The chief smiled and his eyes glittered with a sporting thirst. "You have challenged, newcomer. It shall be arranged. When two warriors of our people disagree, they fight before all. You shall fight against our Taubo, he whom you have challenged. You have your rights. You shall fight."

Angus sighed but he nodded.

"You are aware of our rules?" said the chief.

"I am not," said Angus.

"Then I shall dictate the rules of this contest. Taubo shall have the morning in which to destroy you with his magic. You shall have the afternoon to destroy him with your science. Then so shall it be proved."

Sergeant Dirk tugged at Angus' shoulder. "Pull out, sir. It'll be poison and no chaser. I'll—" He stopped at his boss' quick glance.

Angus thought for awhile and poked a coal with the end of his cane. Then he looked at the chief and said, "I accept this 'contest.' " He stood up and bowed to the young man. "I wish you every success," he said ironically and, turning on his heel, left the hut.

The word raced across the gigantic valley and for a week outlanders poured into the center, bringing with them scanty provisions but a voracious curiosity. They came (dragging children and weird animals, to aid in the erection of a brush amphitheater, to gossip all day and dance all night, and to gawp about the *Argus* 48 and be kept at a distance by the marines.

The dust was thick, even within the ship, and Angus McBane wore a bandana across the lower part of his face as he read. He had to lift the bandana to sip at a drink and he occasionally had to lift his eyes from print to make some answer to Sergeant Dirk toiling in the room beyond.

Dirk had come into the marine corps under sentence never to be seen in civilian clothes again. He had left his right name behind but he had brought his ingenuity. Now and again some glimpse of his past would come up when a job needed to be done. But it was only a glimpse, like a curtain flicked back for an instant upon a long and gore-spattered corridor, and Angus never inquired.

Too tough even for the corps, Dirk had been shunted to Civil Affairs, that catch-all for odd men and odder jobs, and under Angus McBane he had managed to keep reasonably out of trouble. This was because he had found in his calloused and sin-choked heart, an affection for the officer. Time and again Angus had raked him out of drunk tanks and sent him back to duty without a tour in the infamous "dancing school" and Dirk, out of continually mounting gratitude, fondly supposed that he had shielded Angus from the facts of life.

When he lifted his eyes, Angus could see the jagged peaks which bounded the north of the valley and the rolling, dusty, scrub-covered lands which intervened. The place could be fertile, if these people could be coerced into the practices of agriculture. It was a wonder they had not discovered that their hunter society had begun to fail a century or two ago. They practiced infanticide and senicide to keep their population down to near food production level and yet they

left untended better than ten thousand square miles of arable land. Such things irked Angus. Professionally, he was supposed to be indifferent to these things. But he was not. They distressed him.

"—so I says to this girl, 'Baby, if it's money that's worryin' you, take a look.' And then I found myself in a gutter with a headache and that's how I come to distrust wimmen," narrated Dirk. "The more sweet and beautiful they appear, the more I distrusts 'em. You got to be careful." He was busy with a small set of cogs which were entirely swallowed in his enormous hands. "Aw, you ain't listenin'."

"Sergeant," said Angus, "We can do a lot for these people."

Dirk looked out the port at the dusty land and the throng of gaping, multi-colored "goonies." He looked at his officer. "If you ast me, a dose of ray would cure 'em best. Sir, they got about as much heart as a Jack Ketch. They revels at the sight of blood and howls in glee at the screams of the dead and dyin'. They're an outlandish and immoral lot of swine!"

"I am sure you are an authority on morals, Sergeant. But the dose of ray you suggest would turn this place into a new nova."

"You kiddin'?"

"I am sure I am not," said Angus.

"Then you better not let Edwards run that guard by hisself. *He* ain't got any sense."

"There isn't a loaded gun on board," said Angus. "And not one round."

Dirk looked through the port at the crowding, jostling humanoids. He looked at the dangling weapons, the filed teeth and the rolling eyes. He swallowed, coughed his chew of tobacco back up and spat in confusion. "That's why the scouts left their dead behind!"

"Right," said Angus. "Here comes the chief."

That dignitary was being carried on a litter of animal skins to the ship. His guards clubbed the crowd away, walked on a body or two and came to a halt at the airlock.

The chief lowered his seven foot bulk to the ground and entered the ship. He was not dismayed by the machinery. You couldn't hunt with it and so it was subject only to contempt.

"Taubo ready in the morning."

"That is a day early," said Angus.

"Taubo ready in the morning," said the chief.

They bowed. The chief got back on his litter and was carried away.

The stricken lay where they had fallen, trodden down again by the curious.

"Civilize 'em!" said Dirk. "Give me twenty men and fixed bayonets and I'll civilize 'em. We won't be ready by morning!"

"We will," said Angus, putting the book aside. "Indeed we will."

The brush arena was jammed, presenting a wall of faces and a surge of odors which would have overpowered a lion. Three thousand humanoids had turned out this day to witness Taubo present a display of his powers and to howl over the downfall of the strange invaders. Deltoid had turned Mandrel's light above the rim and the far mountains were washed with pink. The dust had been settled by sprayings of water and pennons hung at either side of the arena.

Taubo came with his assistants. He was a wily young man, Taubo. He had succeeded his teacher and the former head of his profession by a very effective dose of poison and his followers, knowing it well, served him with deference which, while it was not devotion, was at least efficient dignity.

The group toured the arena and then, in the center, Taubo leaped up, flung wide his arms and let loose a dreadful screech. It was a well practiced screech and it would nearly deafen at five feet. It started high and went higher and it had volume enough to satisfy the most savage. But it had more purpose than mere satisfaction. Many a victim had been paralyzed into complete obedience by that screech.

The crowd was instantly silent.

"I am Taubo!" cried the magician. "I come to show the invader of my power so that he will forever be afraid to come to us again from beyond the mountains. I am Taubo! I drink fresh blood and I dine on new-born children! One sight of my magic and the strongest sicken. One blast of my breath and men die. I am Taubo. My magic protects us from becoming slaves. *I shall conquer!*"

That was most satisfying to them all and, when they had recovered a little from fright, they cheered and cheered, beating wooden lances against hide shields and waving skins in the air.

But this had to end. They expected something very spectacular from the other pennon. A small knot of human beings had been gathered there since the first streaks of dawn. They had a raised curtain and from time to time one or another glanced into it.

Taubo became brave. He capered toward the humans, shouting

for them to come forth and let him have his will of them, promising things which were truly blood-laking. Taubo ran back again to the seated chiefs.

"Make them come forth! They are cowards. Make them come! I will strike them where they are if they do not start!"

A chief raised a hand and a horn blew for silence.

"Come forth, invaders!" commanded the chief.

Three thousand pairs of humanoid eyes watched the curtain. It twitched. A form walked forth, calmly, certainly, carrying a chair and a book, and the crowd recognized the leader of the invaders.

The invader's cane was tucked under his arm and he seemed to be neither impressed nor hurried. He put the chair down in the exact center of the arena and sat upon it. He put the cane across his knees and he opened a book. And then calmly, very calmly, he began to scan the pages with a quiet eye.

Taubo leaped forward. He paused only long enough to wave his arms in salute to the crowd and then he went to work. Coming to within a foot of the invader's ear he let loose a screech which rocked the first rows. It was long, loud and deafening.

The quiet eyes continued to scan the pages.

Taubo let go a howl of disappointment which was not part of his program. He backed up. Then he reached a hand toward a follower and took a wand.

Two of his people began to beat upon a drum and the shocks of it were physical. Close up they were enough to stop a heart, properly directed. Taubo waved the wand. A curtain of fire began to play about the invader's head.

After a few minutes of this, a woman and an old man in the near rows fell out of their seats, insensible.

The drumming continued, grew louder, the whole force of it solidly directed at the breast of the quiet reader. The lightning played and crackled, set fire to a tunic of one of Taubo's followers and had to be put out.

For half an hour the beating continued.

The invader turned pages calmly.

"You Angush!" screamed Taubo. "You wait. I fix you!"

Taubo was becoming angry. He pulled forth an incense pot and he put some coals into it from a fire near his pennon. His followers knew now not to get downwind of that pot. One whiff and a man

would die. Taubo dropped some powder into it and blue flames and dense clouds began to roll, clouds which Taubo avoided.

The engulfing smoke bore down upon the seated invader, swallowed him up from sight, drifted across the field and abruptly and with agony killed a wandering dog. It reached the arena edge and a man leaped up and clawed, his throat bleeding. The area of the smoke was hastily cleared.

The charge in the pot sputtered out. Taubo stared.

Another page was being turned!

After a frenzy of rage in which he beat two followers, Taubo came back to his business at hand. He made a number of incantations, driving them home with flashes of light from his wand. He did not expect these would have any effect but they were good showmanship. Then he trotted back and gingerly scooped up a small spade of gray powder. He carefully touched none of it. It was culled from a certain bush and when distilled, a pinch of it on the skin caused an exquisite and rapid dying.

Taubo capered, careful of the powder, and made further loud incantations, interspersed with numerous shrieks and wailings which were orders to the demons of the place to do their worst.

He dashed in suddenly, tipped the spade and showered a cascade of violent poison over his enemy.

Gleeful now, Taubo capered back, expecting an instantaneous effect, since the powder had touched the face and the hands.

The invader tipped the book to clear the print, put the volume back on his knees, and went on reading!

The crowd was becoming a little restless. The sun was rather high now and they had not come to see a magician dance but an invader die. That imperturable figure was beginning to wear upon them almost as much as it did on Taubo. They had seen magic operate before!

Taubo withdrew. For a long time he took advice with his followers and finally decided upon the final trick.

He had planted, that morning, a number of very tindery bushes underneath the sand and he had saturated them with an oil which burned furiously. He had not thought he would have to use this trick, but the time was at hand.

Taubo marched forth with a loud beating of drums and delivered a wailing chant which again captured his audience. He capered about

the reading invader and raced to the points of a star he was drawing on the ground with a wand.

When he had finished a long show of this, he gave an imperceptible signal to a follower and suddenly pointed his wand at a point of the star.

Flame burst.

To the crowd it appeared as though the ground itself was on fire. The smoke rolled and the flames rose pale yellow and smoking in the daylight. At the exact center of the star sat the reader of books.

The fire swept forward, leaped higher. It came to the invader's toes. The drums rolled a heavy, rising storm. The flames went under the invader's feet! Then the smoke was thick and the crowd could not see. But the chair was charring. The entire star was burning in the sand. It was obvious that nothing human could live in that "magic" fire!

Slowly the spent flames died down. The smoke blew aside. Taubo stared.

The invader turned another page!

The entire area came to its feet with a moan. Taubo started forward. He was becoming red in the face. He had his wand lifted to strike and the shaking tension within tore at him. He moved another step forward, wand still raised. And then he fell, headlong, dead.

If those three thousand humanoids could have moved they would have done so. They could not. From terror they stood as though tied.

The invader glanced up at the sun, saw that it was overhead and rose from the chair. Finger keeping his place he walked straight toward the pennons which marked his side. He passed into the curtain and out of sight.

The crowd, chiefs and all, would have run away if Angus had not instantly come out. He marched straight to the bank of notables.

His hair was wet with sweat, his face was black with grime. He stopped and looked at the chiefs.

"You have seen how impervious science is to magic," he said. "I ask you to concede that I have won and that all my demands must therefore be fulfilled. I shall not kill you. I shall help you, for science does not kill, it saves. Do you acknowledge my sovereignty on this planet in the name of the Galactic Council and the Civil Affairs Branch of the Military Defense?"

They took in his words. They realized that he was not that instant going to kill them. And then they looked at the body of Taubo and

sensed somehow that they were free of a thing they could not describe.

They looked at Angus McBane with his lank black hair and his soiled tunic and his cane and suddenly, as the chiefs rose to assent, the humanoids began to cheer. They cheered louder and louder and babies cried and dogs barked and sound rose in an enthusiasm which was loud enough to be physical force.

"You hear the people," said the high chief. "I hear the people. We acknowledge your science and assent to your rule. You are our lord and your person is sacred unto us forever more."

Angus bowed and walked back through the swelling din to the curtains and the enclosure.

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That evening Angus McBane, Civil Affairs, sent off a laconic dispatch to his superiors.

"DELTOIDS WILL NOT OBJECT TO MINING OPERATIONS. EQUIPMENT MAY BE SENT AT ANY TIME. McBANE."

In the machine shop, meanwhile, of the *Argus* 48 Sergeant Dirk finished his careful neutralizing, according to McBane's directions, of the robot McBane had designed and he had built. It was not a very good likeness of McBane anyway and besides they needed the parts. McBane regretted the destruction of one perfectly good book.

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SCIENTIFILM PARADE

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

SPACEWAY is pleased to present a special feature by the man who is not only internationally known as "Mr. Science Fiction" but who is unquestionably the world's authority on science fiction films. A quarter century ago in the first issue of the first s. f. fan magazine, *The Time Traveler*, he wrote the lead article about the "scientifilms" which had appeared up to that date. Since then he has not missed one. Two future s. f. movies emanated from his Agency: "Target—Earth!" and "This Island Earth." In succeeding numbers of *Spaceway* he will regularly review current productions and preview those forthcoming.—*Editor.*

Ring Around the Moon

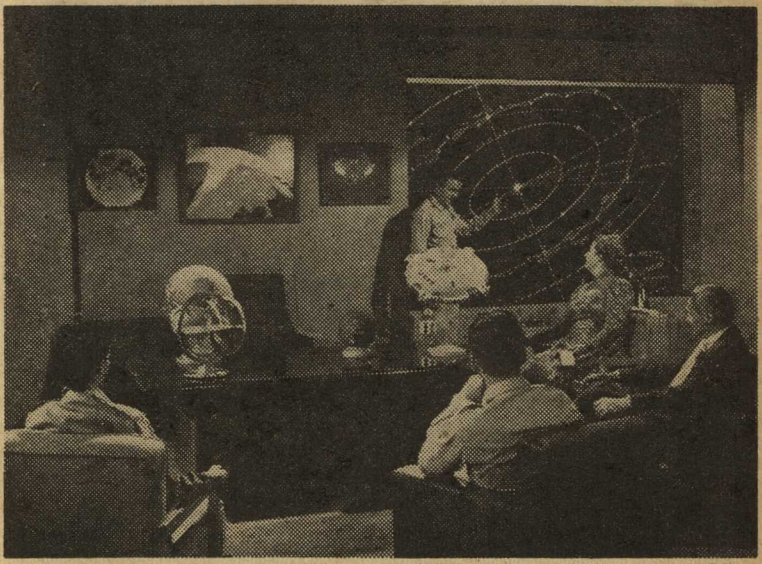
The time is 1970. The place: Earth—and space. The picture: Galaxy Production's PROJECT MOONBASE, an original screen collaboration between Robert Heinlein and producer Jack Seaman.

Sixteen years hence Space Station No. 1 has been established and the American Space Force prepares to stage the first flight 'round our satellite. The trio to make the hazardous trip are Col. Briteis (called "Bright-Eyes"), a beauteous and brainious brunette; co-pilot Major Moore, a previous acquaintance resentful of the young woman's authority; and "Dr. Wernher," who is in actuality a doppelganger, a spy who has replaced the real astronautic scientist.

En route Lunar, the deception is discovered and the imposter and Major Moore fight. The rockets are inadvertently fired, the ship thrown off course, and a landing forced on the moon.

The *R. S. Magellan* lands approximately 10 miles beyond the terminator and 125 miles behind crater Grimaldi. There is not enough fuel to leave the Moon, and the Earth cannot be contacted from this position.

TAKEOFF! The R. S. Magellan heads for Space Station #1 in Galaxy Pictures' PROJECT MOONBASE. —Lippert Photo.



SIXTEEN YEARS from now the U. S. Space Force readies for the first circumlunar rocket flight in the Heinlein film PROJECT MOONBASE. —Lippert Photo.

Major Moore forces the spy to accompany him in an attempt to set up a relay TV aerial on a mountain and SOS earth. During the exploration, the enemy falls to his death.

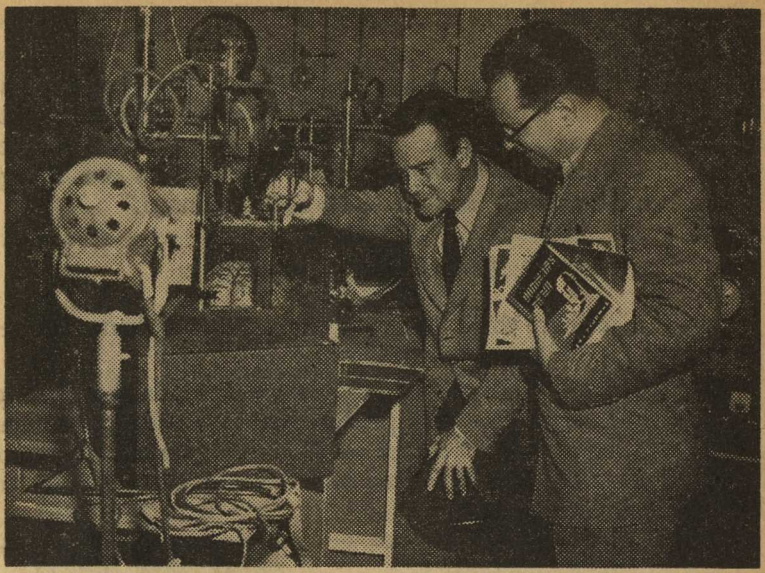
After contact with the parent planet is re-established, the two survivors are informed that their mission has been changed and they are now recognized as Moon Base No. 1. Oxygen, food, et al will soon be sent them.

And, to please public opinion, a tele-marriage is arranged for the Moon's transplanted Adam and Eve, Col. Briteis and *Brigadier General Moore.* Madame President of the United States adds interplanetary congratulations.

Released by Lippert Pictures. Running time, 63 mins. Starring Donna Martell, herself interested in s.f. Produced by a long-term s.f. fan, a man who knew Nikola Tesla. Models by Jacque Fresco, interplanetary backdrops by Morris Scott Dollens. Musical score featuring an all-electronic string section.

The Great Brain Robbery

When cortexperimenter Patrick Cory removed the brain from a fresh-dead man, he did not realize there had come into his hands the most famous brain in the world—at least the world of science fiction: *Donovan's Brain.* This was the dangerous *cerebrum excarnate* created by Curt Siodmak in 1942, destined to become famous 'round the world thru the medium of magazines, books, pocketbooks, radio dramatizations, and its first film version, "The Lady and the Monster," now being re-vidicast. "This time," producer Tom Gries told me on the set during a special interview, "we're playing it straight. We think the modern science fiction film audience will appreciate it that way." Felix Feist, who wrote the screenplay, added: "We're not developing this story in the old, heavy-handed Frankenstein way, or turning Dr. Cory into another Jekyll & Hyde. True, when Cory (played by Esperanto-speaking Lew Ayres) comes under the influence of Donovan, he acts antisocially; but we make him a straightforward, not mock-scientist, who's intent on unlocking the secrets of the mind. He wants to cure neurotics, not conquer the world; find the electro-combinations responsible for success and happiness, not enslave his fellow man." In the plot of the picture the sentient brain grows and glows, radiating thot-tendrils that con-



STAR LEW AYRES discusses DONOVAN'S BRAIN with "Mr. Science Fiction" (Forrest J. Ackerman) on set of picture of same name. —United Artists Photo.

THE MARTIAN war machines devastate Los Angeles in Paramount's production of THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, the H. G. Wells classic. —Paramount Photo.

trol the scientist so that he is mesmerically forced to live the vicarious life of the dead Donovan.

A Dowling Production, released by United Artists. Producer Tom Gries evidenced a sincere interest in science fiction when he recently addressed the members of the Sixth Annual Western S. F. Conference. Other Siodmak scientifilms include "F.P.I. Does Not Reply," "TransAtlantic Tunnel" and "The Magnetic Monster."

Peril to Our Planet

The Martians have come! In technicolor. And in darkened theaters throughout the land, adrenalin is flowing.

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, long a classic in the realm of imaginative literature, has been produced by Geo Pal as a first-class motion picture. Its preview earned my accolade; I am morally certain that were H. G. Wells alive today, he would have nothing for "WOW" but encomiums.

In a quarter century of movie-going, this picture emerges as the greatest sustained scientifilm footage my eyes have ever beheld, my ears have ever heard.

The word early came through from England that Arthur C. Clarke was ecstatic over the production, and here in Hollywood advance-viewers Ray Bradbury and Milt Luban (of the *Hollywood Reporter*) echoed my personal enthusiasm.

With anachronisms of plot modernized, the whole emerges faithful to the spirit of the original.

The technical effects are Oscarful! Fen will jump for joy when they *see* force-screens on the silver screen for the first time in their lives, and the disintegrator rays too are a triumph.

The Martians, but briefly (and wisely so) glimpsed, are alien. Just what was it one saw—an animated oyster or a featherless owl with attenuated appendages and exterior lungs?

The *war* is overwhelming.

And that beautiful bonus, right in the beginning, for all s.f. enthusiasts, as we are treated to a Bonestellian tour of the solar system with thrilling views of Saturn, Mercury, Jupiter, et al!

Warning to anyone who hasn't yet seen this masterpiece: bring your own oxygen bottle. It's that breath-taking!

In future issues of *Spaceway* Forrest J. Ackerman will give advance reports on "Riders to the Stars," "The Men from Earth," "Duel on Icarus," "This Island Earth," "Space Fortress," "Target—Earth!", "The Man Who Saved the World," "The Man Who Stole the Sun," "GOG," "The Martian Chronicles" and all the great scientifilms that lie ahead.

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RATING SPACEWAY

¶ We had hoped to be able to present here the result of your reaction to the stories in the first issue of SPACEWAY. But at the time this is written SPACEWAY has been on sale only a few weeks. We have, of course, received a number of letters, but certainly not enough as yet to select any one story as being outstanding. As a matter of fact there has been a considerable difference of opinion in the letters we have received. A number of readers rated only three stories—and many of them did not choose *any* of the same stories. It is obvious, therefore, that we will have to wait until the third issue before we can give you any ratings on the first.

There *was* one thing on which *all* the letters agreed—and that was on the general excellence of SPACEWAY as a magazine. This is something that *should* make us very happy. Actually it worries us. If we receive no criticism, how can we improve SPACEWAY?

We've reached no decision about the letter column. We have received a number of letters in favor of it. None against. But in order to make this decision we must have more than a few letters. We must have YOUR opinion. If one had unlimited space, there'd be no problem. But if we develop too many departments our fiction wordage will drop. As of now we believe that we have struck an excellent balance between long and short material—one which will permit us to publish eight to ten stories per issue without having to avoid the longer story. We are reluctant to upset this balance unless we are *certain* you want it.

We *have* added something new. Because we believe that most of you will be interested in what is being done by the movie industry, we've asked Forrest Ackerman to conduct a department covering the late science fiction movies.

The Editors.

DEADLY WEAPON

By LOU TABAKOW

ILLUSTRATED BY RUSS MANNING

The battle was stalemated—and Earth needed a new weapon. . . .

**Since the first sub-human crushed his enemy's skull with a rock, men have sought deadlier and more efficient weapons to use against the enemy of the moment.*

The bow and arrow was a deadly weapon against an opponent who knew only how to throw rocks. But when that enemy developed an efficient shield, the bow and arrow was no longer deadly.

The atomic bomb was a deadly weapon against a nation possessing only conventional explosives. But when the enemy also developed the atomic bomb, neither side dared use it for fear of retaliation. The same thing held true for a large number of highly-poisonous synthetic gasses, and artificially-cultured germ and virus diseases.

For a time during World War III, the battles were fought with that old stand-by, the indispensible infantry, augmented by supersonic jet and rocket planes, using only conventional explosives. Meanwhile, the combatant nations feverishly developed newer and deadlier weapons which they dared not use, for fear of retaliation. It mattered little, which side struck first, if the attack and the counter-blow were separated only by minutes.

To be truly deadly, a weapon had to be devised which could end a war at one stroke, totally immobilizing the enemy.

***As the war dragged on, the propaganda departments became*

more and more specialized and efficient. From them sprang the Departments of Psychological Warfare, staffed by groups of experts.

Every military maneuver or tactic was first studied for the psychological effect on the home front as well as on the enemy, before being employed. As more and more data was gathered and classified, the Departments of Psychological Warfare became the most important branch of the military. To them is credited the eventual armistice and the formation of The Confederate Nations of Earth.

Lawson's Weapons of War
**Pgs.* 14-27
***Pgs.* 642-644

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General Allen Wentworth, Chief of Staff for Earth's Forces, pushed back his chair in preparation for adjourning the meeting.

"I assume then that we're all in accord." He looked around, and hearing no dissenting voice, continued, "From the data which we've been able to gather, the outcome seems inevitable. The only question raised has been about the time element. No one is more anxious than I am to avoid useless bloodshed, but our war effort seems to be headed for a climax, and if we're too late. . . ." he left the sentence hanging.

A bushy-browed professional-looking man who seemed ill-at-ease in his uniform, raised an index finger for attention.

"Yes, Dr. Manfried?" encouraged the general, nodding at him.

"I was only about to add that since our findings are statistical in nature, we can never claim 100% accuracy in our forecasts. In this case, however the outcome is 97% certain within a year. The certainty falls off as the time is shortened, but I should say there's a fifty-fifty chance of the affair being wound up within a three month period."

He looked around for confirmation, and as the others nodded in agreement, he continued, "I should say that we'd be pretty safe in predicting six months as the outside figure."

"I'll do my best to hold off an all-out attack for that period of time," put in General Wentworth, "but military contingencies

might arise which would make that impossible. However, under the circumstances, all we can do is hope for the best."

He glanced at his wrist watch. "I'm due at the council chamber in twenty minutes, so if there are no more questions the meeting stands adjourned."

General Wentworth hesitated for a moment before the door to the council chamber, and straightened his tie. He stood there, involuntarily humming the chorus of the song over and over again. The melody was one without any particular beauty, but with an insistant rhythm that had fastened on his mind and recurred over and over again. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't shake it from his mind.

Bracing his shoulders, he resolutely stopped humming, and strode past the motionless sentries into the council chamber. The Council Chairman, with an almost imperceptible nod, motioned him toward the only vacant seat at the huge table.

He moved toward the designated place, looking straight ahead, as he sensed the sixteen pairs of shrewd eyes following his progress. He seated himself quietly, feeling like a specimen under a microscope.

There was a restless rustling of papers as the Council Chairman brought the meeting to order. General Wentworth shifted uncomfortably as he noticed ferret-eyed Gilbert Lang, regarding him distastefully. He reflected on Lang's open enmity, and gazed around at the council members, wondering if Lang had finally ranged a majority against him.

Wentworth remembered the fierce battle to prevent his appointment as Chief of Staff. Lang had insisted that to entrust the security of Earth to a thirty-eight year old—*stripling* had been the word he'd used—was criminal folly. He had insisted that a man of mature years should get the post—a regular Army man with years of experience behind him. He had sneered at Wentworth's previous post as Chief of Psychological Warfare, insisting that what Earth needed was a fighting man, and not a theorist who thought he could win a war with words.

Since Lang was Old Army himself, his position was perhaps understandable. He believed in forthright military action. To his mind, the deploying of a company of cavalry on a battlefield, was different only in degree from the tactical maneuvering of war rockets in interplanetary space.

Lang had all of the high ranking military man's respect for protocol and tradition, and distrusted the bloodless victories won by diplomatic maneuvering. He sneered at the teams of psychologists, who worked out charts on the enemy's probable reaction to various stimulae.

To his mind, an enemy wasn't defeated until it had been beaten to its knees and subjugated by superior force. He felt that if an enemy didn't *fear* the military strength of the victor, it would patiently gird its loins and await a new opportunity to strike.

When the Office of Psychological Warfare had been established he had been one of its bitterest foes. Then when Allen Wentworth, the brilliant head of the department had been commissioned a general, and later elevated to Chief of Staff, Lang found a *personality* on which to vent his spleen. Like most of the Academy officers, he resented the usurpation of supreme command by a civilian.

General Wentworth hoped that his decision had been the right one. He had had only a limited amount of information with which to work, but his consulting teams had agreed that the data was sufficient. He looked across the table at his opponent, and ruefully reflected that Lang bestrode his back like The Old Man of the Mountains, waiting only for a slight mis-step to bring him to his knees.

Lang cleared his throat and leaned forward on his elbows, cupping his chin in his palms. "We'd like to hear your *explanation* of Else Tarrana's escape," he said mockingly.

"Miss Tarrana's escape relieved us of a problem," answered Wentworth, smoothly.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Lang.

"She possessed no military information of any value," answered Wentworth. "To hold her would have gained us nothing, but it might have led to a wholesale capture and slaughter of hostages by both sides."

"I *thought* her escape pleased you," sneered Lang. "I might remind you, *General* Wentworth, that we are at war with a dictator-controlled planet. It's common knowledge that the girl is Premier Farlow's mistress. It's *always* been the custom to intern enemy aliens and in this case it would be like holding a club over the Premier's head.

"Do you think Farlow could be bargained with, through fear for her safety?" asked Wentworth, gently. "No! Gentlemen—I've studied

him carefully, and like all dictators, *his* Universe revolves *egocentrically* about himself."

Wentworth faced the group. "As you all know; the Office of Psychological Warfare has developed a number of . . . shall we say mechanical aids to our work. We can introduce false synapses in a brain which will force the actions we desire in so logical a manner that the brain tampered with, rationalizes away its divergence from normal thinking."

"We *all* know about artifically implanted synapses," interrupted Lang. "We also know that a skilled psychiatrist can easily discover whether or not a brain has been tampered with. Farlow is no fool. When the girl returns he'll have her checked."

"We also have tracer pellets, which are not so easily checked," put in Wentworth.

"We *know* where Farlow is," said Lang. "If he appeared in the open, the Venusian Underground would no doubt find plenty of martyrs who would be glad to exchange their lives for his. We also know that he uses doubles for most of his public appearances and that his quarters are invulnerable to anything less than an 'H' bomb. Knowing *where* he is does us no good if we can't reach him."

"The Psychiatric Corps is aware of Farlow's habits," answered Wentworth. "We know him perhaps better than he knows himself. His relations with Else are merely a sop for his vanity. It pleases him to think that he possesses the most beautiful woman of two worlds. If it suited his interests, he would have her executed, without a qualm."

"Perhaps our *young* colleague feels faint at the thought of a beautiful woman's death," sneered Lang.

"I'll answer for my actions," retorted Wentworth, angrily. He knew that Lang was intentionally goading him on, hoping to show the emotional instability of a younger man—but he was so angered by the sly insinuations, he did just what Lang had hoped for—let his emotions overcome his reason.

"If the council disapproves of my actions, my resignation is ready," he barked. He saw Lang settle back with a smug smile as the other council members began to whisper to each other.

Chairman Voorhees rapped for order. Turning to Wentworth, he said, "The council doesn't question your *integrity* nor your *ability*, General Wentworth. We just want the facts. Perhaps, as you say, the detention of Miss Tarrana would have gained us nothing, but

some of the council members feel there was an unwarranted laxness in the guarding of an important enemy prisoner."

"Would the general be kind enough to inform the council just *what* was done to Miss Tarrana before her escape was . . . ah . . . arranged," put in Lang, slyly.

"Miss Tarrana wasn't tampered with in *any* way," replied Wentworth, stiffly. "As for her escape—Are you accusing me?"

"Certainly *not,* general," retorted Lang, smugly. "I'm sure that Miss Tarrana's escape was just an . . . ah . . . oversight."

As Wentworth jumped to his feet angrily, Chairman Voorhees rapped his gavel for order.

"This wrangling will get us nowhere," he said, crisply. "Since General Wentworth *is* our Chief of Staff, I propose that we go on record with a vote of confidence in him."

The motion carried fourteen to two, with only Lang and dour old McClung against. At Voorhees's suggestion for unanimity, they switched their votes, but Wentworth, glancing at Lang, knew it was only a gesture on his part, to avoid antagonizing the chairman.

"Let's proceed with the meeting," continued Voorhees. "Perhaps, though, I'd better recapitulate first. Premier Farlow has one advantage on our council. He is responsible to *no one,* and can act on a moment's notice, without taking into consideration the desires or beliefs of anyone else. We, on the other hand, must meet and come to a mutual agreement on policies, and even then we are responsible to the citizens of Earth who elected us.

"However, we have one great advantage which more than offsets this. We are able to draw on the best brains of our planet, and their help is voluntarily and gladly given. Farlow must keep even his closest advisers partially in the dark, to lessen the chances of being deposed by an ambitious underling. This leads to jealousy and petty bickering among them as they strive to elevate themselves at the expense of their colleagues. His subjects are even divided on the advisability of war. A great many Venusians feel that defeat at our hands is *one* way to get rid of Farlow.

"If Farlow were removed, Venus would collapse into bitter civil war, as different factions tried to seize power. Six of our best agents have been executed on Venus, presumably while trying to arrange for Premier Farlow's assassination. Farlow seems to have a very efficient espionage system, so as much as we'd like to end hostilities by the simple, relatively bloodless method of removing

Farlow, it seems that we'll have to depend on a military victory. Perhaps Dr. Terrell has something to add?"

Dr. Terrell, a thin-faced little man, with piercing black eyes and nervous mannerisms, looked about with quick bird-like nods of his head, and spoke in terse, clipped sentences.

"Technology of two planets at same level. Military capacity about equal. 'H' bombs and germ warfare not feasible. Enemy *could* and *would* retaliate. Stalemate. Need a *new* weapon—that would end war at *one* blow—*A deadly weapon.*"

"Anything new on Barker's Molecular Arrester?" asked General Wentworth.

"Don't know for sure, yet," answered Dr. Terrell. "As you probably know, Dr. Farnum reached absolute zero back in '87. No practical application found. Peculiar secondary effect observed, though. When substance was cooled slowly, energy leaked away as heat. Surrounding apparatus warmed. When molecular motion was arrested instantly, energy spread out in wave. Triggered a sort of chain reaction. Nearest surrounding molecules stopped. More distant molecules slowed, as wave weakened with distance.

"Barker produced this wave effect artifically. Stepped up power. Mathematically proved effective in two-hundred kilometer radius. Projector can't be built until way can be found to insulate it.

"Barker called just before this meeting. Thinks he has idea. Stopping at lab after meeting. Come along if you want."

"Well, gentlemen," interrupted Chairman Voorhees, "It seems that all we can do at the present time is strengthen our defenses and hope Barker perfects his projector. There are rumors that the enemy is working on a new weapon that will make all our defenses obsolete. Probably just propaganda planted especially for *us*, but . . . *Anyway* let's hope some of our other teams of scientists come up with something."

Else Tarrana stood in the shadow of the huge boulder. About her stretched the shimmering white sands of New Mexico. She shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun and turned slowly, surveying the horizon uneasily. Her contact had assured her that he had shaken off any Earth agents who might have been shadowing her.

She had no recollection of her brain being tampered with, but how could she be *sure?* As far as she could tell, her feelings were the same, but she had heard that a skillful operator could implant

false synapses so cleverly, that the person affected, never realized it. She dreaded the ordeal of checking and mind-probing she would have to undergo when she returned to Venus. With a shudder, she realized that if she were found to be different in any way, Farlow wouldn't hesitate in ordering her execution.

She loved the Premier, after her fashion—intrigued by his strength and ambition, and his restless, eager drive. In all fairness she realized that if their positions were reversed, and Farlow proved a possible source of danger to her, she was capable of ruthlessly removing the danger. "We're quite alike, really," she mused.

It had been decided that there was less danger of the Venusian scout rocket being spotted at high noon in the glaring solitude of the desert, than at night, when its exhaust would be visible for miles.

She strained her eyes upward, shielding them from the glare with cupped palm. She thought she noticed a faint flash in the distance. No! It was only an after-image of the blinding sun. Then a faint sound like the deep rumbling of distant thunder was brought to her ears. The sound increased in volume until a reverberating roar shook the ground under her feet—then rose in pitch until a shrill whine rang like a banshee shriek from directly overhead. As it passed the sound dropped quickly in pitch until a dull rumble faded into the distance ahead—and the silence of the vast desicated solitude settled down once more like a soft muffling blanket.

Her companion raised his tiny wrist transmitter to his lips and whispered a few terse instructions. A short time later, a two-wheeled lectrobike came bouncing and bumping to a stop beside them.

Else's companion helped her up to the saddle seat behind the driver, and stood watching, as the cycle disappeared over a dune. He smiled to himself as he thought of the bonus awaiting him. Premier Farlow would be grateful for the safe return of his mistress.

Barker led Dr. Terrell and General Wentworth into the laboratory and like a child showing off a new toy, proudly pointed to a two-foot square box. From it projected a metal funnel whose open end flared outward in a wide curve. The inside of the funnel was interlaced with fine wires. The whole thing looked for all the world like an antique phonograph.

"In the original model," explained Barker, "echoes and secondary waves bouncing back, caused our trouble. Trying to heterodyne

a wide wave-front proved ineffective. On this model though, the grids in the funnel will scramble the echoes as they bounce back, rendering them harmless. This model is effective only in a radius of about a meter, but doubling the diameter of the coils squares the effective range, so that a transmitter about sixteen times this size would blanket an area of two hundred kilometers in radius. This is the practical limiting range as after this the effective range begins to fall off in the same ratio.

"Though this wave is very effective against materiel and machinery, certain plastics would be unharmed. However these would form no barrier to the wave as it will pass through any material with the possible exception of a few rare short-lived radio-actives, which of course needn't concern us.

"However its most effective use will be as an anti-personnel weapon. No form of protoplasm can exist for even a fraction of a second in the field."

With a start, General Wentworth realized that a tall red-haired woman, wearing a lab smock was standing next to him. She's evidently been in the lab when they'd come in, but he'd been so interested in Barker's explanations he hadn't noticed her. He looked questioningly at Barker.

"Oh—Sorry!" said Barker hastily. "My daughter, Blanche. She's been helping me here."

"And this, my dear," he continued with a twinkle in his eye, "is the *fabulous* General Wentworth."

She extended her hand in a man-like gesture, and Wentworth found himself looking into a pair of deep-blue eyes, flecked with green. A full, good-humored mouth and a pert nose liberally sprinkled with freckles, completed her features. Tell-tale laugh wrinkles around the corners of her eyes and mouth placed her age at about thirty. He noted that even the soiled smock failed to hide the mature rounded contours of her graceful figure.

"Do I pass *inspection,* General?" she asked with a smile.

With a flush he released her hand, realizing he'd been standing there holding it while he appraised her.

"You'd better get the guinea pig," broke in Barker, chuckling. "You're not too old to spank *yet,* you know."

She grinned at him, ruffled his sparse hair and then walked over to a far corner of the lab, returning almost immediately with a small bundle of trembling white fur in her hands.

Barker meanwhile had lifted off the top of the transmitter and, with a tiny electric soldering iron, touched a couple of connections and replaced the lid.

Blanche deposited the rodent on the plastic table directly in front of the tunnel, where it hunched shivering and blinking its pink eyes, but otherwise motionless.

Barker trailed a wire across the room and, when they all stood around him, plugged it into a wall socket. Immediately a haze formed above the table and Wentworth felt a strong gust of air fan his cheek. A loud crack was heard and then a tinny, splintering sound. Barker pulled out the plug and warned them about touching anything that had been in the field. They cautiously approached the transmitter and saw that the table was sprinkled with a layer of fine granulated bluish-looking snow, which gave off a hissing sound like frying grease.

"Well;" said Barker slowly. "The demonstration was a little more spectacular than I expected, but it seems to work perfectly." He tapped the transmitter with a pencil.

"What happened? Where's the guinea pig?" asked Dr. Terrell.

"When the transmitter was turned on, it immediately froze and condensed the air over the table," replied Barker. When the air precipitated, a vacuum was created, and the cracking sound was caused by air rushing in to fill the vacuum. A miniature windstorm over the table was the result and it blew the frozen carcass of our little martyr off the table. When the body struck the cement floor, frozen brittle. . . ." He bent and with the pencil probed at some red and white shards on the floor.

Dr. Terrell, a little sick, turned and regarded General Wentworth.

"This is it!" he said in a quiet voice. "The Deadly Weapon!"

Else Tarrans walked regally down the ramp gazing disdainfully about. She recognized one of Premier Farlow's aides hastening across the field toward her.

"We've got to get you out of the Capital," he gasped. "The Premier will see you at his hunting lodge tomorrow. Come on! We've got to hurry."

She curled her lip, scornfully. "Is the Premier *afraid* of his own people? Who's the *ruler* here, anyway? Is he *ashamed* of me?"

"Please come quickly," he implored. "I'm only following orders."

She looked around at the gawking crowd rimming the perimeter

of the field and, tossing her head haughtily, followed the aide to his official lectrocar.

General Wentworth found himself visiting Barker's lab almost every day. He tried to convince himself that it was necessary for him to be present, in order to thoroughly familiarize himself with the Zero Ray Transmitter; but whenever he entered the lab, his eyes automatically searched for a pert good-natured face framed by a mass of titian hair.

He found himself confiding more and more in Blanche. In her he found the sympathy and understanding that was lacking in the materialistic militarists and practical politicians with whom he dealt daily.

He found excuses to stop in the evenings and, over a cup of coffee, discuss the progress of the large model transmitter with Barker. Since Blanche was familiar with every phase of the work in progress she invariably joined the discussion.

"How did Farlow ever get control of Venus?" asked Blanche one evening. "I understand he's really a native of Earth."

"Farlow was just a minor government official here on Earth," answered Wentworth. "His brazen play for personal publicity and popularity antagonized his superiors to the point where *less* able men were promoted all about him. To a man of his temperament this was intolerable, and when a fluke of politics placed him in an advantageous position, he wangled the appointment as Earth Administrator of Venus.

About this time the colonists, sweating under what they considered Earth's mismanagement and indifference to their problems, were seething with resentment. Shortly after Farlow's arrival on Venus they seized control of the government there.

"One of the leaders of the revolution was a fiery young girl, who considered herself a sort of modern Joan of Arc.

"Here Farlow showed his talent for intrigue; for in a few months his status changed from that of a political prisoner to that of an *intimate* of the girl, who was now the leader of the insurrectionists.

"Finally Farlow married her, and together they consolidated the rival groups, while he became an absolute ruler in the process. By the time the people realized what was happening, they had exchanged Earth's more or less benevolent bungling policy, for a

dictator who entrenched his position by bloody purges and other measures reminiscent of Nazi Germany.

"When Earth granted Venus her independence, Farlow wasn't satisfied to rule just *one* planet. By playing his cards carefully, he maneuvered a declaration of war against Earth. Subconsciously he realizes his limitations and seeks power and recognition to assure himself that he is one of the great men of history."

"Well, let's hope the Zero Ray Transmitter will put an end to Farlow and his dreams," said Blanche. "Anyway I'm tired of war and talk of war." Then smiling at him, "Do you think I could induce you to take me to the theramin concert?"

"Try!" he grinned.

It had been decided that the transmitter would be mounted on a heavy cruiser. A ten kilometer sphere of fast fighter rockets equipped with scrambler grids were to surround the cruiser. After much argument Wentworth had convinced the council that he should be in command because of his thorough knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of the transmitter. Barker had been hastily commissioned, and would be in charge of the actual operation of the transmitter. The council had finally agreed to let the two valuable men go, because no danger could be anticipated to a battleship surrounded by a two-hundred kilometer curtain of death.

The fleet was to proceed towards Venus at top speed. This of course would bring out the Venusian defense force which could be wiped out on sight. The butchery was deplored by some, but in the long run it was felt that this course would save the lives of millions of men, as Venus could not hope to continue the struggle without a defense fleet.

Z day finally arrived and Barker and Wentworth stood before the lock of the shuttle rocket which would take them to the huge cruiser lying just outside the atmosphere.

Blanche embraced her father, whispering to him, while Wentworth stood nearby waiting. Finally she turned from her father and looked at Wentworth.

"Take care of Dad," she said in a low voice. Then suddenly throwing her arms about Wentworth, she kissed him *hard,* on the mouth. "Take care of *yourself,* too," she whispered fiercely, and turning, fled down the ramp.

Wentworth touched his fingers gently to his bruised lips, staring

after her retreating form until it was lost in the crowd. He turned and followed Barker into the air lock.

Eight days out, an enemy fleet of four cruisers and several hundred fighter rockets was picked up by radar. They were headed directly toward the Earth fleet.

Wentworth signalled Barker, and the transmitter was turned on. It had worked perfectly in preliminary tests, but its full effectiveness couldn't be checked until the enemy fleet passed through the field.

Wentworth kept his eye to the magnivisor, and now he saw a flurry of flashes, as a score of enemy fighter rockets flashed into view. Their exhaust trails grew longer and brighter, and then, with a suddenness that was startling, they winked out. Wentworth swept a ninety degree arc with the magnivisor, but all he could see was the i[illegible] backdrop of space flecked with myriads of brilliant points of light.

He turned to the Captain who stood at his elbow. "This is it! Get ready to follow the rest of them as they run, when they discover our field and what it's done to their advance scouts."

"What do you make of this, sir?" asked the Second Officer, who now had his eye peeled to the magnivisor.

He stepped aside, and Wentworth looking through the eyepiece, saw a gleaming, silvery sphere approaching. A slice of Earth far behind them was reflected from an edge of the burnished sphere, and the light beams from the distant stars were thrown back with startling clearness.

Their radar showed the dimensions of the sphere to be unbelievably huge. It encompassed over a hundred cubic kilometers of space. Worse yet—It was now well within the field of the Zero Ray and seemed unaffected by it.

The sphere pulled up, about twenty kilometers from the Earth fleet. Wentworth studied it through the magnivisor, but could see no opening or projection of any kind. It presented a perfectly smooth mirror surface.

Barker came up beside him and he stepped aside to let the physicist view it.

"I think I know what it is," said Barker, after a moment. "The sphere isn't *matter* at all, but some kind of force screen that reflects *all* vibrations. Probably it's impervious to any *material* weapons also. I imagine the enemy fleet is inside the sphere."

"Yes, but they haven't fired on us," put in Wentworth. "That

must mean they *can't* without opening the screen, and if they open even a tiny crack, our Zero Ray will seep in." Then struck by a sudden thought, "We can't let them proceed to *Earth,* but—We can't *stop* them."

"They can't stop us from approaching Venus either, as long as our transmitter is on," put in the Captain.

For hours the deadlock continued. The two fleets hung motionless in space, poised and ready for action, but each afraid to make the first move.

The tension mounted. The men on the cruiser were growing restless at the forced inactivity. General Wentworth paced up and down. Finally he turned to the Captain.

"Back off slowly toward Earth," he ordered.

"But what if the Venusians follow us?" asked the Captain. "We could go on to Venus and . . ."

"Do as I say!" barked Wentworth. "If they follow, come to a stop again."

The cruiser and its encircling rockets backed slowly toward Earth, while Wentworth glued his eye to the magnivisor. The gleaming sphere sat stolidly as the distance between them increased —Then with jerky bursts that soon accelerated to a smooth flowing motion, it was flashing back toward Venus. Wentworth watched until it disappeared from view and then gave the order for full acceleration back to Earth.

Else Tarrana paced the floor of the hunting lodge, her sheer robe trailing open and exposing her white gleaming thighs.

"I can't *stand* being hidden away and only seeing you at odd moments," she cried. "I want to be *near* you."

Premier Farlow smiled sardonically. "You make a lovely picture in that dramatic pose."

She moved closer and cradled her head on his shoulder. "I'm *sorry,* Darling, but . . ."

He covered her lips with his fingers and stroked her hair gently. For a moment the harsh lines of his face softened, and he looked down tenderly at her tear-streaked face.

". . . And so, there was nothing else to do," continued General Wentworth, gazing about uneasily at the Council Members. *"Our*

weapons were powerless against their screen, and if they lowered the screen to fire on *us,* our Zero Ray would seep in."

"If they couldn't fire on you, why didn't you go on to Venus?" asked Lang. "You might have been able to wipe out their Capital at one blow."

"Do you *realize* the ruthless effect of the Zero Ray?" asked Wentworth. "Millions of non-combatants would be killed instantly. In fact, every living thing, plant or animal, in an area of thousands of square miles, would be frozen solid. A blow like that would *unify* Venus overnight. Even if they then surrended through *fear,* it would only be an *uneasy* truce. The Venusians to a man would harbor an undying hatred and desire for revenge, that a hundred years of propaganda couldn't overcome. They would pass this hatred on to their children and when the time came—when we least expected it—*They would retaliate.*

"Study your history. Did the Arabs ever forget the Crusaders? Did the victims of Ghengis Khan ever forgive? Twenty years after Hiroshima—when the United States was tottering in an all-out war with Russia—Japan, supposedly an ally, levelled the coast cities of California as a solemn debt to their ancestors who had died in the blast at Hiroshima.

"I agree that military victories are necessary for short term gains in the prosecution of a war, but lasting peace can never come, if the victor has ruthlessly slaughtered great numbers of civilians."

Lang jumped to his feet angrily, but Voorhees motioned him back with a wave of his hand. He looked sadly at General Wentworth.

"I agree with you from a humanitarian standpoint," said the Chairman. However we *have* no choice now. It's *either* Earth or Venus! *Now* Venus will have time to shield their cities and installations. The Zero Ray is primarily an *offensive* weapon. We can't very well throw a field around the *entire* Earth. The engineering difficulties of shielding ourselves from our own field on so large a scale would take *years* to work out. And Gentlemen—we haven't *got* years!

"Shortly before this meeting I was handed a message from one of our most trusted agents on Venus. Venus has succeeded in nullifying the binding force of the atom. The beam from their transmitter focused on any matter causes it to literally *disappear.* The 'H' bomb is a *toy* compared to this weapon. A beam from a thousand

miles out could be focused on this city leaving only a huge *hole* to show where it had stood. In fact, the entire *Earth* might conceivably be destroyed in a moment if the projector were powerful enough. This isn't just a *theory* or a *hypothetical weapon.* Our agent saw the demonstration of the model himself, and he says—*We have only weeks!"*

The meeting broke into a babble of excited voices, as the Chairman sat down heavily.

A courier entered and handed Voorhees a message. He glanced listlessly at it—then sat up straighter. His face lost its ashen hue as he read farther. It was as though twenty years had slipped from him. He rapped his gavel energetically on the table and the hubbub slowly subsided.

"Gentlemen," he began, "we may *still* have a chance. The scientists at Kaiser Tech have perfected an Artificial Gravity Generator. By twisting sub-space and causing an effect analagous to acceleration a warp is produced in normal space, and the gravity field is the result. It can be intensified to almost any degree, crushing everything in the field with an irrestible pressure. The tests indicate that no energy screen can stop it, since it works, or I should say it exists *only* in sub-space."

Lang jumped to his feet. "We should be able to make a large transmitter and equip a protective fleet in possibly two weeks. Eighteen days to Venus, would make it about a month. We have no choice. *We* must attack Venus before they attack *us."*

"A large transmitter will be ready in a week," said Voorhees. "Have the fleet equipped and ready to leave the *moment* the transmitter is ready."

"Can't we send an *ultimatum* first?" asked General Wentworth. "The slaughter—Without any warning. . . ."

Lang glowered at him. "We can't *risk* warning them. We don't know how far advanced their large scale Matter Disrupter is. If they even *suspect* we have another new weapon they'll certainly attack *us* without any warning."

Then he added, "While I have the floor, I suggest that we replace our *psychologist* with a *military* man."

Chairman Voorhees interrupted. "We're not safe *yet.* We have no way of knowing when *Venus* plans her attack. All we can do is hope *we're* first."

Then looking at Wentworth apologetically, "It's *either* Venus or Earth!"

"Else Tarrana twined her white arms around Premier Farlow's neck. "Darling!" she whispered softly.

The Premier stroked her lovely hair and gazed into the distance.

General Wentworth sat dejectedly in Barker's living room. Blanche sat quietly beside him.

He turned to her fiercely. *"One week!"* he shouted. "In one week our fleet will arrive at Venus. We know Venus has perfected the Matter Disrupter. Maybe we don't even have *that* long here. Joke on us both if the fleets arrive at their destinations at the same time. This is probably the end for both planets anyway. I suppose Voorhees was right. Should have someone like Lang at such a critical time."

He smiled wryly. *"I* was the one who was going to win the war *bloodlessly*. Guess people just don't react to pattern. It would have been less bloody if I'd *wiped out* half of Venus when I had the chance. I *couldn't* explain my actions to the council. They wouldn't have understood *why* I was so sure. Consultants spent months gathering data. It *all* pointed to *one* outcome. Couldn't be sure of the *time,* though. I figured if I could just fight a delaying action for a little while longer, it would *all* be over."

"What made you think that?" asked Blanche, puzzled.

The buzzer of the visiphone interrupted her. She flipped the switch listlessly and the face of Chairman Voorhees blurred, then sprang into sharp focus on the screen.

"Ah, there you are! I've been trying to reach you for the past hour," cried Voorhees, excitedly. "Listen closely—*The war is over! Venus is suing for peace!* That's right! Suing for peace! The People's Party is in power. Of *course* the fleets have turned back. What? How did you know? Yes! Killed by his wife. Stabbed him—in a jealous rage—with a pair of *scissors*. We're releasing the news now. Wanted to let you know personally." The image faded from the screen.

Blanche was laughing hysterically.

"What's wrong?" asked Wentworth, concern in his voice.

"Funny!" she said. "All your super-deadly weapons, and a *jealous woman* stops the war with a *pair of scissors*. While men like Lang

search for newer and deadlier weapons, and you search for psychological weapons, a *jealous woman stops the war with a pair of scissors*. It sure was *lucky* for Earth that that woman went back to Venus."

Wentworth was humming softly to himself in a monotonous repetitive pattern.

She shook him. "You're not even *listening* to me. What *is* that you're humming anyway?

He smiled and pulled her close, burying his face in her fragrant hair. It's an old ballad resurrected from the middle of the twentieth century. It's called—*'A Pretty Woman Is a Deadly Weapon.'* "

* * * * *

The ROSE *of* VENUS

By ATLANTIS HALLAM

¶ The military had ordered destruction of the Rose of Venus—but not even the military could control a man's heart.

It was the last day of the search. And even as he rounded the hillock, Dale Jordan once again felt the guilt that had first swept over him with the words of Commander Cord that morning. *They must die, be exterminated finally and forever.*

He paused on the gently sloping path, breathing deeply of the warmly rich and mildly misted air, as he adjusted the murderous cutlass that hung from the belt of his brief khaki shorts. Even the weather is friendly, he thought, on this young and mighty Venusian star. No need for helmet and space suit. He started off again, up the flowered slope with its eternal dewdrops glittering, ever forming, from the virgin mists. He stopped abruptly. He *was* imagining things. He had heard no voice. Then it came again, and something deep down within him told him this was the moment, the long-awaited time, his moment in all space. The lilting voice came clearer, closer, near beside him.

"Man of Earth," the delicate voice of charm repeated. "Man of Earth."

Dale Jordan clenched his fists slowly, then relaxed them. He stood very still, staring at the indescribably beautiful source of the voice, the magical plant standing there—against the background of lace-like willowy bushes. It was the Rose.

As he stared at her, he realized in his tumbling thoughts that he would have passed her, had she not called. She stood very still too, looking back at him. Then she swayed slightly, a touch of the color coming back into her rose-tinted ivory features. Fear had flown, its momentary blight now gone. The Rose of Venus smiled, an almost imperceptible smile, as she looked back at Dale Jordan. He smiled too.

"Man of Earth . . ." she repeated, fondling the words in the very way she said them, "you have come back to me."

About to step closer—Dale Jordan withheld the urge, recalling the Flight Commander's morning words. *I must warn you,* he had told the inspection party before they spread out, *there is not a man among you who can withstand their beauty, their Lorelei call. Under no circumstance remove your protective glasses. To do so, you will destroy Earth's plan for the colonization of Venus. One physical contact, and their life-form, the Rose species, will cover Venus once more. We cannot allow that.*

Dale Jordan's thoughts tumbled wildly, Earth logic trying to make him carry out his dreadful order, to exterminate this Rose. And with it, he felt the burning urge to remove the protective goggles, to look upon the full color and beauty of this Rose female.

You must destroy the last trace of the Rose species, the words of Commander Cord raced through his mind. *We destroyed the male and left the female to die. They still go on, and Earth cannot wait forever. You must not feel pity for them.*

"You're only semi-human," Dale Jordan said aloud, more to himself than to her.

His hand closed on the hilt of the cutlass. He drew it quickly, not wanting to think or reason why.

"Man of Earth," she repeated gently, "won't you come closer to me? I, too, am human. Just like you."

"You're not," he replied, steeling himself, "you're *not* human!"

Even as he raised the cutlass, the Rose, nearly as tall as he, put both slender arms to her green clustered ivory throat. Unwinding the creeper vine clasps, she opened the brilliant green cloak that nature had made to protect her delicate form from even the mild climate of her star. Dale Jordan inhaled quickly, holding off the raised cutlass, staring as he beheld the slim girlish form, the gentle curving of a woman's body. The green cloak, now parted, came down only to the Rose's thighs; her two long-stemmed ivory legs were

bare and spread apart in stance. Suddenly embarrassed, Dale quickly looked back to her wide eyes, the pale unsmiling face of the Rose. The face that was exquisitely carved on the side of the bud that formed her head. His eyes went to the top, and still in wonder, he noted the curled crown of the Rose, its cluster of petals. Still pale, she watched the raised cutlass he held.

"You're—you're not—" but he did not finish.

"I *am* human!" she told him, suddenly a little angry. "The people of the Rose are just as you, Man of Earth. We are warm-blooded, we eat, we also sleep. We delight in life, we feel, and live in peace, desiring no other world. Are we not entitled to the right to live and love? Cannot we, like Man, look up and see the shining stars that light the night?"

Dale Jordan looked at her a long time without speaking. He lowered the cutlass slowly.

"I am the last of my people," the Rose girl told him. The others are gone, and I am very lonely. If you destroy me, perhaps it will be best for—"

"Gone?" Dale repeated. "All the others like you?"

"Yes, Man of Earth. We have been deprived of the opportunity to mate."

A slow feeling of guilt passed over Dale Jordan, as he thought of the expedition years before that had killed off the males of the Rose people.

"You're the *last* Rose of Venus?"

"The last," she said softly. "And you would destroy me."

He shifted his position uneasily, then looked back at her. Trying hard to make the decision, Dale Jordan took absent passes at the flowers about his feet, with the tip of the dangling blade beside him. Then he stopped it, noticing that the Rose's face was pale as she silently watched him.

"What color are your eyes?" he asked, frowning a little.

"Pale, like the space above you."

"Blue, huh?"

"Why not remove your glasses," she suggested, "so that I might see your own?"

"Aw, they're only gray," he said, feeling awkward at her eager sincerity. "Just plain old gray."

Then he grinned a little as she begged him again, and reaching up, he yanked the goggles off, rubbing his eyes as he looked at her.

"There!"

"Your eyes are nice," she told him. "Cool, like the mist."

"You are nice, too," he said.

Even as he replied, Dale Jordan's thoughts raced back to the romantic stories that had come back to Earth, when as a boy he had dreamed of space, and heard the tales of the spacemen who had first met and discovered the people of the Rose, and befriended them. But that was before Earth wanted to colonize the planet Venus with its own overpopulation. That was when the first spacemen taught the Rose people their own language, when the two races had blended as one.

"I'm supposed to finish you off," Dale Jordan said shyly. "I guess you know. . . ."

"I know it," she whispered back.

He reached out a hand and touched her shoulder. Then he withdrew it slowly, smiling at her.

"I—I just wanted to see. To see if you're real."

"I am real, Man of Earth."

"Call me Dale," he told her quietly. "Just Dale."

"You're not going to—"

"I can't," he whispered. "I *couldn't* hurt you . . . any part of you."

As he moved still closer, the cutlass fell. And with it, fell the plan to destroy a people. They stood together for a long time, whispering to each other, the Man of Earth and the Rose of Venus. Long after the giant sun cushioned in the Venusian west, tinting the eternal mists with flecks of golden snow, Dale Jordan said good-bye.

As the great Earthship *Albatross* shot homeward through the blackness of space, Commander Cord addressed his officers.

"The search and inspection has been a complete success. Not one man reported finding a trace of the Rose species. The unwanted lifeform, the Rose of Venus, no longer exist."

But even as Commander Cord nodded to the applause of his science officers, Dale Jordan turned over in his bunk in the crew's quarters. A small sigh of happiness escaped his sleeping lips. And on a distant star, a sleeping Rose sighed too, swaying gently, safely, in a passing breeze. She would live on. As long as men will love, and lose their heart to a pretty face.

* * * * *

The OSILANS

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

SERIAL—PART TWO

Jay Bard disobeys the Osilans—and becomes more and more enmeshed in the plans of this strange group.

SYNOPSIS

JAY BARD is interested in electronics and frequently experiments with a home-made oscillograph. He keeps it tuned-in to his radio so that the "shadows" of the voices of celebrities, speaking or singing over the air, appear on the oscillograph as wavering green graphs, which Bard has learned to read.

But one day the "shadows" *do not match* the voices on the radio. The oscillating green lines of the graph develop a bulge, as if something were moving through them. Experimenting further, using magnets, Bard discovers that he can pull the green bulge entirely off the screen of the oscillograph. In fact, the "shadow" flies off the screen, ducks under the magnets, flits across the room, and disappears! Fascinated, he performs this experiment six times.

He soon discovers that he is somehow in contact with the intelligence responsible for the strange patterns on the oscillograph. He realizes that they are not the result of any *human* voices or sounds, but come from *somewhere else*. He catches a word, thrice repeated: "Albino! Albino! Albino!"

That evening, as he is walking the streets of Lancaster, Pa.—near his home—a man directly in front of him turns and Bard realizes that he has found his albino. The stranger beckons for Bard to follow him. They enter an Alley, then a secret room, where Bard meets three male and three female albinos. They inform him that he is expected to start uncovering the real solution to unsolved crimes.

In the ensuing argument he threatens to go to the police. To his surprise, this seems to suit the albinos perfectly. The next moment he has exited from the secret room and finds himself on the street, while around him are shouting, screaming people. He learns that he has abruptly materialized out of a solid brick wall! Police appear, question him. To befuddle them he utters the names of persons of whom he has never heard—who he is certain do not exist. He finds, instead, that he has mentioned several people who were murdered a number of years ago and, as subsequent events bear out, given the police names of those who committed the murders.

Late that night Bard is released and returns to his home. In the morning he receives a visit from Police Lieutenant Roth. He quickly realizes, however, that this is not the real Lieutenant Roth, but another "stranger."

The imposter confesses that he comes from the same place as the albinos, but is opposed to them. He informs Bard that his name is "Emden 5716," and he requests to be taken to Bard's workroom. But when they descend the steps into the basement it is no longer there. They have, instead, entered a tremendous underground world which is filled with row after row of huge machines, each of which is operated by an exact duplicate of Emden 5716.

The original Emden gives Bard a piece of metal and sends him back to his home. There he finds the police looking for him. They are mystified by his sudden appearance, but he offers no reason for his actions. He does show them the strange metal, which is later examined by scientists at Franklin and Marshall College—who insist that it came from the ocean's depths. They demand an explanation, and without realizing how he knows, Bard cries: "*We're experiments, you and I, just experiments. Every mother's son and daughter of us. Just experiments. By whom? Who can possibly know?*

* * * * *

—VII—

Master Gadget?

I finally convinced Bud Roth that I couldn't tell him the name of Blythe's murderer. He had to work with what I *had* given him, which I hoped, and believed, was nothing at all. I am no naive believer in telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience—or any of those products of wishful thinking to which most people are likely to turn if given the slightest excuse.

I didn't believe that the metal I had received from Emden 5716—whoever or whatever he was—came from the depths of any ocean, though men of science, four of them, had agreed that it *must* have. I didn't believe in the six albinos, in my own ability to pass through walls.

And I didn't believe that time could be collapsed like an accordion! If I believed any of those things I'd have to believe not only that time could be collapsed, *but that space itself could be collapsed!* All this takes some explaining; but first I must explain it to myself, starting with my own sheer unbelief.

The albinos, Emden 5716, my passage through a brick wall in Lancaster, the alley that couldn't be found, the changing of my cellar into some vast cavern of infinite gadgetry, hints dropped by

various people I might have *dreamed,* all were fingers pointing, and I could never tell Bud Roth of any of them, not and convince him that I was sane. And if I turned up murderers for whom the police had been hunting for a quarter of a century—at least on paper—he didn't care whether I was sane or not. After all, didn't police, finding themselves up against dead ends, sometimes make use of mediums, of psychometrists and charlatans of various kinds—striving in desperation for *hints* on which to build? I didn't know, but I had heard and read about such things.

Many court cases were decided on the basis of handwriting—experts' testimony—which to the aborigine would have been an eerie species of witchcraft. There was so much we didn't know.

When Roth finally let me go home, after a night and day of heckling, I took with me the morgue files of the local newspaper, with all it could give me on the German cruiser *Emden.*

But I didn't start reading right away, for I needed sleep, plenty of it. It must have been seventy-two hours since I had more than blinked. So, I slept, with the Rakes standing guard over me, throttling the telephone which never ceased ringing—reporters don't care whether people haven't slept for *days!*—and virtually barricading the doors. I slept for forty-eight hours. Was that chance? I don't know. I simply record.

I had an airmail letter from Ricardo Nunes!

It threatened me with dire consequences, even death, if I didn't discontinue my efforts to lure Helena away from her lawful husband! It *begged* me, as from a husband of a woman deeply loved, to do everything I could to kill in that woman any lingering affection she might still have for me! It asked me to do something base, if necessary, to remove myself from her bosom as an ideal!

I am afraid my vanity was but slightly stirred, for here was the evidence I needed to prove I had indeed talked to Helena Nunes. She lived in San Jose, Costa Rica, with her husband, children and in-laws. I had reached her via some pulsating mechanism I didn't understand, had spoken to her, been *answered!* And I had been but a few moments previously, far away in Pennsylvania! Certainly I hadn't been in Costa Rica! Or *had* I been? There was no way, by the fastest known transportation, the voyage, to and from, could have been made.

I set up my own version of a Mercator's Projection. Every school boy knows what it is. Mercator, the Flemish Geographer, worked it

out first for navigational purposes. He devised a chart on a flat surface, of the entire world, putting in lines of latitude and longitude as parallels instead of starting at the poles and diverging toward the thickest diameter of the earth. The latitude and longitude lines were so mathematically affixed that distances could be measured almost as accurately—save at the poles—as on the sphere representing Earth.

On my chart I drew a straight line between Paradise, Pennsylvania, and San Jose, Costa Rica. I started the project with some hope. When I had worked it out, all I had was a chart. When I drew that straight line it showed me nothing of importance—unless knowing just where such a line would cut, from Paradise to San Jose, were valuable knowledge!

Next, I remembered what the graybeards of Franklin & Marshall College had told me, that the material—which I now realized they hadn't named!—Emden 5716 had given me had come from the depths of the sea. They hadn't told me *what* sea. There weren't *too* many Deeps, I suspected, near the six thousand fathom mark. It was hard to think of water over six miles in depth—and what good would *that* information be, anyway?

Nevertheless, I began checking—only to discover an ancient truism, that the thing you seek is always on the bottom of the trunk, closet, or even the bottom of the ocean!

I checked first on Barlett Deep. Something told me that wasn't it. I recalled, I *thought,* that I had *approached and entered* the house in San Jose from the west!

I began digging again.

Four of the so-called "trenches" in the Pacific have depths over 4,000 fathoms. The Japan Trench, Bonins Trench, Marianas Trench and Western Carolines Trench. Four thousand fathoms means 24,000 feet—and all four were deeper. Yet none of the four was deep enough, if the graybeards had been right.

I kept on hunting, suddenly remembering that the professors had mentioned Mindanao Trench. Then memory began stirring in me with such force that I got the hunch that what I had suspected all along were true; that I was getting all this stuff out of my subconscious—*even Helena Nunes and the threatening-begging letter from her husband!*

Since I'm a former military man, I receive many periodicals from various service branches, among them the Navy's *All Hands.* I glance through them, but seldom read them. I hate nostalgia, and I

was past military usefulness. But occasionally things interest me, and one especially, weeks before, had dealt with the Navy's suggestions to *all* naval vessels within cruising distance of the Pacific's deepest deeps—the Atlantic's too, of course—that they check on them with sonic equipment whenever opportunity offered, and that such information to sent to the Hydrographic Office for filing.

In the article resulting from that I found this odd fact, (quote):

"It was in Mindanao Trench that the German Cruiser *Emden* found a record depth of 5900 fathoms in 1927, and until recently this was believed to be the world's deepest. But USS *Cape Johnson* made recordings in 1944 that disproved the accuracy of the *Emden's* sounding, then returned the following year to find a new record deep. Inserted of 5900 fathoms, as reported by *Emden,* the greatest reliably recorded depth today is 5741 fathoms in *Cape Johnson* Deep."

"I drew lines on my own Mercator Projection, connecting each of the deeps with San Jose, Costa Rica—and all I had were lines. I wasn't getting anywhere, but I was becoming more and more excited, more and more convinced that I was headed in the right direction.

It all come from pulsations—which, of course, everything did. But something *different* in pulsations. I had sensed that when I had blurted out to the professors about all of us being "experiments." It had been a hunch, no more, but using that hunch as a basis, I was ranging far afield for the proof.

How had I approached San Jose? That question, absurd on its face since I, as a person, hadn't approached it from any direction, became vastly important. I had to have an answer. I thought back to the measureless cavern from which I had, in some fashion I did not yet know, projected myself into Costa Rica, into San Jose, into a house I had once occupied, where a woman of whom I had fond memories, still lived.

I had come in from the west?

As soon as I asked myself that question I realized how utterly ludicrous it was. If I had entered San Jose, or Helena's house, from a navigationally accurate direction—which I didn't know at all—what did that get me? If a line drawn perpendicular to the plane formed by my back, extended horzontally along and parallel to the surface of the earth, passed over some "Deep" or other . . . but no,

that got me nowhere, for I had no such reading. And I knew that if I turned, ever so slightly, the extension of such a line halfway around the earth—or something over six thousand miles—would throw me north or south of any of the known deeps by thousands of miles.

Yet there must be a way to attain accuracy. I knew San Jose, just how it lay. I knew directions in the sleepy city. I knew directions in and around that memorable house. Hadn't I, months at a time, followed the sun's light, the house's shade, around the cool, soothing patio, while listening to liquid Spanish, or the lazy strumming of a loved guitar?

I tried again. I had, I realized, actually come in from the west. But there was an awful lot of the west. . . .

I must have surprised Ricardo Nunes when I got him on the long distance telephone, picking the time when he was home for lunch and siesta.

"Don't become hysterical, Ricardo," I said in my best Spanish, "for you have Helena and I have only loneliness—and a great problem. The other night you heard my voice in your house, in which I used to live. You were sitting in my favorite corner. You must tell me, at once, from what direction you think the voice came!"

As I spoke I was making another kind of projection on a chart beside me, that of the house in San Jose, that is, of the ground plan of the room in which I had "visited," invisibly.

"Over my left shoulder," said Ricardo, so amazed at my words he forgot to splutter or be jealous.

"Have you discussed the strange visitation since?" I asked next. That made him remember his grievance.

"We have discussed little else, of course. You know Spanish families. It has been an endless argument, with much accusation. . . ."

"Please call your wife, your children, your in-laws, back into the room, to spots they believe they occupied when I spoke to Helena! Believe me, Ricardo, this may be a matter of life and death, not just to you, to Helena, to me, but to millions of people around the world!"

"How did you manage to come. . . ."

"Please, Ricardo, get your people in!"

He managed it, while the telephone toll mounted.

"Where, Helena," I asked, "did you think you heard my voice? In what spot in your room, I mean?"

"In the southwest corner, Jay!" she said, putting rather more expression in my name than a wife should, with her husband listening— but Spanish gals *like* to make their husbands jealous.

"And the children? Where did they hear the voice?"

It was a crude way of getting at it, I grant you, but by the time everybody had talked at once, I knew—and it checked more closely with my memory than I had any right to expect—from about which direction I had *addressed* Helena.

Getting a compass bearing from my new information—starting which I hung up on the Nunes family without explanation or saying goodbye or thanks—was simple enough. So was the extension of a line intersecting longitudinal lines across the Pacific to roughly 10°N. 127°E.

It wasn't good enough or close enough, but the line I extended did cross the Mindanao Trench. However this deep is some 600 miles long, fifty miles wide, and extends from south of Mindanao to north of Samar, a tremendous area for error!

Had "Emden 5716" forseen my puzzlement and given me a hint? Had it been planned that I should thus be challenged intellectually, and so tested? By whom, and why?

And what was I looking for if I did find a spot around 6000 fathoms deep?

Was I hunting, as excitement made me suspect with increasing surety, a master gadget, hidden somewhere under the deepest part of the ocean? A gadget far and away superior to the gadgetry by which pictures can be transmitted by wireless? Did this gadget contain panels in which the colors of the Universe, *as* colors, could be localized, analyzed, studied? Each with its *vibration?* Could this gadget impale on its panels the world of capsicum red, and open it to analysis by "Emdens" like the false Lieutenant Roth?

Was everything above the waters of the sea a projection of some sort—*of the master gadget?* If so, who were the albinos, and the "Emdens?"

I discovered a curious thing while studying the various established depths of the world's deepest deeps, as shown on a graph in ALL HANDS. *Cape Johnson* Deep, 5741 fathoms; *Snellius* Deep 5555; *Planet* Deep 5352.

The Cruiser *Emden* had found a depth of 5900 fathoms in *Emden* Deep. This had been corrected to 5532 by the *USS Cape Johnson.*

I noted the difference: 368.

I caught myself halving the difference; 184.

I found myself subtracting 184 from 5900—5716!

I found myself adding 184 to 5532 .....5716!

I fancied I could hear "Lieutenant Roth" chuckling—though I have never actually heard him make any sound so human as a chuckle.

—VIII—

The Strange Way Back

I fumbled mentally with the idea of a master gadget operated by ultra mechanics, located—*where?* It led me into many strange by-paths which, however, I felt *belonged.* There were strange things in and under the earth and the sea and I was convinced that I was being introduced to some of the strangest.

The cruiser *Emden* had found a "deep" of 5900 fathoms, in a place in the Mindanao Trench later named for the *Emden.* The reading of depth had been checked and found to be incorrect, by 368 fathoms, over two thousand feet. Was it mere concidence that "Emden 5716" had given me a number, ostensibly part of his name, indicating some area in the Emden Deep midway between the two sonic readings?

How extensive was the area in Emden Deep which approached the 5900 abyss? Was there . . . could there be. . . .

I harked back to myths of ancient continents which had sunk. I *knew* of peaks in the Rockies around whose tops were the remains of sea creatures, proof that those very peaks, in far-off times, had been under the ocean. When they had been down, something else must have been up as a matter of balance.

An old account, probably apocryphal, said that Atlantis had sunk overnight, ten-twelve thousand years before, taking sixty million people with it. But Atlantis, according to all "records," aprocryphal and otherwise, had been in what is known now as the Atlantic.

Other continents had been in the Pacific. The moon was said by ancient Chinese scholars to have been thrown out of what is now the Pacific. Continents? The continents of Mu, Lemuria, Pan, Gondwondaland? Had people found some way to live under the sea?

I began to get the shivers from this speculation. Had the people of the old lands had sufficient warning that they had created self-

sustaining areas far underground, so constructed that no twisting and turning of tortured earth, no pressure of miles-deep water, could injure them?

If the scientists of my time knew that the earth was going to be inundated, could they find asylum underground where they would be safe even if all the earth were covered? I choked on that one—and wondered about the story of Noah's Ark. Had it been a boat, after all, or some "measureless cavern?"

I felt that even I could find a way to security far underground, even under the ocean. Didn't ordinary engineers go under rivers with their tunnels? Didn't engineers plan and almost complete a tunnel under the English channel?

How would people live in such caverns?

I was convinced, finally, that it was possible, that I had in some mysterious fashion been taken to the place of the master gadget by which "drowned" peoples had managed to survive the sinking of continents.

I knew better than to ask anybody else to believe it.

There was an awful lot one had to swallow. Why should such a race, automatically proving itself by the simple fact of survival, pick out *me,* as a tangible contact with the land above the seas? *How did I know they had?*

Thors and Zeda, or one or the other, had snapped that there were as many Osilans as there were people!

Maybe I had to go still further back in time—maybe back to the super-mythical race of the Will Born?

"What do you know about time?" Emden 5716 had asked me.

I tried to remember what I had read of the far off days of the Will Born, when "men" projected themselves, and produced forms by acts of will. I knew the legend of such forms becoming *sentient,* and rebelling against their godlike "parents."

Suppose that we were such projections? Something of the kind had been in the back of my mind when I had told the graybeards that we were all "experiments;" but I had to run it down further to clarify the idea in my own mind. I got "flashes" and then had to experiment to see whether they had validity.

In time the "projections" of the Will Born race became "men" and "women" and so humanity as we know it came into being. I didn't hold with that idea at all. It wasn't scientific. But when you couldn't get people like Zeda, Thors and the others out of your

mind, and "Emden 5716" was remembered as such a *reality,* it made the old ideas worth reshuffling. And I was setting out to do that.

How did *anything* "project?"

By vibrations? By waves? By oscillations?

Wherever I had been while I had been away from my basement among the Emdens, I had been able to project myself to San Jose, Costa Rica, to Helena, Ricardo and their children, so strongly, so certainly, that the entire family had heard—but not *seen*—me. Our exchange of letters, my later telephone call, proved it, unless there were still other things in heaven and earth of which I was utterly ignorant.

I must find the six albinos, who probably weren't albinos at all. They said I had "freed" them. Had they been the six small green rings I had drawn out of my oscilloscope with the two magnets? I believed so, at this point, at least until I could prove otherwise.

I spent a day in my basement, trying to get some word from Zeda, Thors, Emden 5716—anything or anybody that would help solve the mystery. Nothing happened. Every oscillogram was boringly familiar. Boringly? How could I say that when I had spent so many weeks of concentration learning to read them? But since then I had experienced something dwarfing every possible human experience.

I knew that I was being observed, *as was every human being on the face of the earth* if my suspicions proved correct, and it was almost as if the "osilans" were laughing silently at me. Creatures bred in abysmal darkness! That's what I thought of them, I told myself. They had the unhealthy look of potato sprouts grown in dark cellar corners! I didn't care if they knew what I thought.

* * *

I found no albinos, no alley, no secret meeting place. Nor in all Lancaster could I find a piece of furniture resembling the chairs in which the Osilans had sat with me to talk. I could find no floor like the mosaic of the alley floor. . . .

Had the meeting place itself been in Lancaster at all?

Maybe I had walked up against a brick wall in Lancaster and through it—into an anteroom in some vast undersea cavern, in which entities like Emden 5716 served creatures like Thors, Zeda, and the others I had called albinos? If I could step into my cellar

and with no feeling of movement, of distance-annihilation, appear in the measureless cavern, why couldn't I have done the same thing to talk to the Osilans?

But the entity called Thors had preceded me along the street of Lancaster, *Queen* street, *North* Queen street. But when I came to think it out—I couldn't recall that a single man or woman on that street paid the slightest attention to Thors. They certainly would have done so if he had really been an albino—*or they had seen him, albino or not!*

Before I returned to Paradise I stopped in to see Lieutenant Bud Roth. He looked at me queerly.

"The John Blythe killing has been solved," he said quietly, "thanks to you!"

"Thanks to me?"

"We make it a rule to record every telephone call, every message received at headquarters. Never know where it will lead—as has just been proved. You said that the murder of John Blythe was among those who had demanded that since you had solved the Hyslop and Peters kills, you should solve the Blythe bludgeoning, too. We checked on every such demand, began a process of elimination. . . ."

"Don't tell me her name!" I said.

"I don't recall telling you it was a woman," said Roth. "A big man-like woman who could really wield a bludgeon!"

I hurried out. Roth called after me.

"The police of the nation, perhaps even of the world, will beat a path to your door!"

I turned back.

"Wait," I said, "wait until you start trying to prove, before a court of law, that Xon Van Khmer killed Hyslop and Peters, and Hazel Purr killed John Blythe!"

"I didn't say Hazel Purr!" said Roth. "However, knowing that courts, juries and judges, don't go in for black magic, or even white magic, for clairvoyance or anything of the kind, naturally we won't even call you as a witness! We just follow the leads you give us, same as we'd follow an anonymous telephone call—and dig up evidence as we always have. It'll work, *you'll* see!"

I went home.

George Rake sat at the telephone. Minna sat beside him. She had been a stenographer before she married my assistant. She was taking down telephone telegrams.

"From all over the United States," said Minna.

She had a tablet's pages filled with them.

Inside me I whispered a weird apostrophe: "Well, Thors, Zeda, are you satisfied?"

I had kept certain secrets, if that's what they were waiting for. I had spoken of six albinos. I hadn't given their names. I hadn't voiced my growing belief that the epigeal folk of the earth were connected with undersea people *by vibrations*—vibrations upon which the Emdens, servants of the Osilans, played terrestrial tunes to which all of us danced! *To whose tunes did they dance?* What if the skipper of the *Emden,* reaching into Mindanao Trench with his sonic probers had known that down there ancient peoples lived who were virtually in his cabin at will, by vibrations akin to his sonic techniques? Maybe he would not have been surprised, at that!

I'd never be satisfied until I got back to the area of the master gadget, to find out just how far wrong all our scientific "knowledge" of vibrations, oceanography, navigation, was. I wanted to delve deeper into the machinery of color—which must play some part in the close contact of the Emdens of Level 5716 with the Helena Nunes' of the sunlit world!

But how?

William Beebe had gone into the sea in his bathysphere—a few hundred fathoms! There was no way, in modern science, that I was aware of, that I could find my way down to the crust of earth immediately below the floor of Emden Deep.

If I were ever to go there again I must go as I had already gone!

I would never sleep again until I knew more. Pandora beside the box of the closed lid could not have been more lost than I was. *She had to open the box!* I had to get back to the area of the "Emdens" or somehow assure myself that none of it was so.

There was just one contact—*at least for me.* There might be many others in the world who had similar contacts, but I knew none of them; if there were they also kept their secrets. My contact was my oscilloscope. There I had been contacted, there I would make contact—or really go crazy with unsatisfied curiosity. Zeda had really read me like a book!

Why had the Osilans left me mystified for so many hours?

"You're going to have to pay a stiff price to get back!" I told myself. "And you know very well you're going to pay it—*even if it involves criminology, as Zeda hinted!*"

I telephoned the newspapers and told them to run a story, and send it around the nation, to the effect that my apparent solution of the Hyslop, Peters and Blythe cases had been pure coincidence, that I wasn't a criminologist, a seer, a psychic, a stargazer, and would take no investigative jobs of any sort.

Then I went down into my basement, first telling George Rake that nobody was to come down for me, that not even Roth was to enter the basement, though he could tell Roth I had gone down, and ask him to help keep everybody else out until I reappeared, *if* I did!

Zeda sat in my work chair, waiting for me. She half smiled at me. Her slender hand caressed the dials of my radio.

"You're on the right track, Jay," she said, her voice silken, "but you've a long way to go. This time I'll give you a glimpse of the Upper Levels of Ja!"

"I'm charmed," I said, bowing, "to have such a beautiful companion on my journey!"

"Oh, I'm not going with you! I might never get back *here*—and I find people of the sunlight so amusing! To think that we ourselves were once so awkward—*but never so unreal!*"

Zeda produced Emden 5716, like a rabbit out of a hat! By radio!

Zeda disappeared as Emden 5716 materialized! How? I don't know, but I caught a glimpse of a darting, dollar-sized green ring, swooping from my chair to vanish through the cellar wall!

—IX—

The Deep Experimenters

He took me to the door and left me; Emden 5716 was not allowed to enter. There was no passage of time. One second I was in my basement in Paradise, Pennsylvania; in the same second I was in the area which Zeda had called Ja! The "Ja" had no known reference to the German affirmative.

I tied the room of reception in with the albinos because it was the same room! No wonder I hadn't been able to find it in Lancaster! I knew, though I could not instantly prove it, that in no time at all I had gone down through the sea and the floor below it, from my basement to the long-vanished land of Ja. Experiments were needed before I would have the proof.

There were no albinos in the room now. There were no *albinos!* It is difficult to describe the entities with which I came in contact in Ja. Back in the beginning—my *conscious* beginning—of my contacts with Zeda, Thors and the other "albinos," I had been given a glimpse of them through their camouflage. Now there was no camouflage, and that which I saw was the Will Born.

The Will Born were the *First,* if in humanity there can be said to be a first; if, beyond that which is called "first" there can be found any stopping place—beyond which it is possible to answer the question, "what lies beyond," with the answer "nothing at all!"

I knew I was in the presence of *something.* Perhaps several somethings, though I felt instantly that the common separation which makes for individuality and personality among the people of sunlight, was lacking. The entities here were both *individual* and *one.*

I donned the adjusted spectacles—and saw the saurians! How shall I describe any one of the things I saw? I can only go back into my childhood nightmares, to the shapeless black shadows I used to see, just after turning out the light in my bedroom. They were creatures with eyes, fangs, sulphurous breath, deep grunting sounds, but no color, and no shape, unless "saurian" could describe it. But I could never pin them down as a child; when I had fixed a shape in mind it *changed,* and so it was with *these.*

I knew they were powerful beyond any entities I knew. I knew they were evil; rather that good had been left out of them. I watched the play of shape in the first who met me. . . .

"I am Rda, brother of Zeda!" said the black shapelessness, taking the outward shape of Zeda as he spoke, even to the white clothing she wore when last I saw her, even to the albinism which distinguished her and her fellows from people I knew.

He did not *talk,* exactly, but I knew as well as if he had.

But I talked. . . .

"What do you want of me?" I demanded.

"More freedom for more of the Osilans!" came the unspoken answer, the thoughts of Rda playing on my brain as if it had been a musical instrument. "More of us would join Zeda and Thors in the sunlight world!"

"But why *don't* you? What is to stop you?" I demanded.

"The law! The *Great* Law of the Universe! Your people have lost sight of it, have never known it, in fact—*because they are not and never have been, except as we will them!*"

"I don't understand you!"

As Rda spoke of "willing" us, his shape changed from that of Zeda to *mine!* For a brief moment I seemed to be looking into my mirror. Then the shape was neither I, nor Zeda, nor saurian—but complete shapelessness, *a formless thought.*

"You are here to learn. Then, it is expected of you that you will free those of us who would be free!"

The shadow-shape changed again but still lacked describable form. Abstract thought had no form, I supposed.

"Just where is 'here'?" I asked.

"You have already been told. You have discovered, worked it out. It is simple when it is known. The land of Ja is just above the level of the 'Emdens', those slaves of the Osilans who carry out our physical requirements. They are like the people of sunlight because they were projected first—but *here* instead of *there.* They remained in our *close* power; you were in our power, but beyond the vast barriers which we could not pass with our bodies, though we could with our will!"

"Gibberish!" I snapped. "Gibberish! Where am I *now?"*

"The graybeards told you, thanks to the piece of orichalum Emden 5716 dared to give you! The Emdens have been trying to attain freedom and release to the sunlight for untold ages. Emden 5716 seized the moments when we also were striving to be free!"

"There is no place in world history for the Will Born!" I said.

"We were before and beyond history. We were in your world first, until the oceans rose. But we had warning and we prepared."

"And sank with your continents, but, having warning, arranged for abysmal sanctuaries. . . ."

"Even this one!" the thought of the other struck my brain, interrupting.

"And I am right in assuming that at this very moment I am alive, a son of sunlight, over five thousand fathoms under the sea, somewhere in what is known among us as Mindanao Trench?"

"And the Germans called 'Emden Deep'!" came the other's thought. "This is true!"

"How did I get here without passage of time?"

"By our technique of time collapse and space contraction! It never, however, removes the barrier, which for us remains as thick as you on earth find it. We contracted it so that you stepped from your basement through no-space into Jaland—*here!* Our will is

supreme, save where it affects space and time *for ourselves!"*

"You can do everything except free yourselves?"

"That's it!"

"Then who is your master?"

The result of this question was mental confusion. I could get nothing from the entity. I could catch no thought at all. It was also clear that this was the intention—I was not to know. Many minutes must have passed before I caught the thought, faint as though very far away:

"We may not name it!"

"Another question: if we of the sunlight are the results of your experiments, and thus are in some fashion your projections, *are we likewise echoed somewhere?"*

I expected chaos again. Instead I got what might have passed for a human chuckle.

"Not exactly, but you *try!* You construct rockets which reach scores of miles into your atmosphere, seeking. You dream of reaching the planets of your system. Some day you'll do it—*if we permit our projections thus to carom off our sunlight children!"* When we are ready, you will cruise among the planets, touching them at will! *But not before!"*

"Why have we not so far done it?"

"We have not permitted."

"How have you prevented?"

"Through entities on the earth's surface whom others regard as 'evil!' Cain, Hitler, Judas Iscariot, Pilate, Nero, Xon van Khmer, Hazel Purr!"

"I make no sense of it!"

"When you would travel too fast, when you would know too much, we confound you! Build a Tower to reach too far and we confound your tongues, so that *you prevent one another,* seemingly, though we are the preventers!"

"But why is it necessary, if *you* project us?"

"Down the ages you've got out of hand, because, not knowing the Great Law, you have more often obeyed than disobeyed it! We can guide you, influence you, make you say things you would not say, inspire you by many subterfuges to do what you would not do —such as killing your neighbor in war when, in peace, you would not kill even for food!—but we have lost the power to compel

exact, complete obedience, because we are still the slaves of the Great Law, not its masters!"

"I understand even less than I did, but I realize that I am here for a purpose. If I might travel through Ja, *slowly,* knowing time and space as I know them above, perhaps I might learn."

"My will, the will of Rda, goes with you. Go wither you will, even down among the Emdens, and discover what you will. . . ."

"Suppose, when I have done, I decide against working with you in any way, against even reporting your existence to my people?"

"Then you, like us, are here forever! Remember, you were *brought* here, you did not come of your own free will! You cannot return merely by willing, any more than we can; you can return only if you are *taken!* If we elect not to take you. . . ."

"I may have to sell my soul, and the lives of millions, then, to pay for my return to Paradise, Pennsylvania?"

"The compensation will be greater than the worth of what you call the soul!" said Rda. "You will be rich, very rich; powerful, *very* powerful, *respected, feared,* a *master.* You will be our *fleshly* authority on the surface we cannot reach."

"And the channel of freeing for those who are scheduled to go to the surface to join Zeda, Thors and the others?"

"That is our hope and design."

"And by keeping me here you will keep yourselves here—save for the six I have already freed—as well?"

"I am afraid that is also true!"

"Then I'm certainly in a position to bargain, am I not?"

There was no answer to this obvious question. But I did not feel sure of myself. If, as the first Osilans had said, there were as many individual Osilans as there were people on earth, then each of us was the projection of an Osilans, whose plans for us, while we did not have to obey them in detail, were nevertheless so tied to us that we could never completely escape their drag, their pull and influence.

We were still experiments! Rebel though we might, we must still be affected. One might hate the weather, but one must endure it just the same. We were, it seemed at this point, in much the same relation to the Osilans.

But I didn't know, not of my own knowledge—*yet!*

With the "will" of Rda as my passport I turned to the door I remembered, by which Thors had bidden me leave and make such report to Lancaster police as I might care to—and exited, not into

an alley this time, or a corridor, but into another vast apartment.

How can one describe the richness of the ultimate in richness? This apartment, in which there seemed to be no one at all, contained all the luxuries I could possibly have desired, had I been wealthier than Croesus. There were what I regarded as chairs, tables, beds, tapestries, rugs, shades—*and lights.*

"Whence are the lights?" I asked the emptiness softly.

"Trapped sunlight," came the answer in a silken 'thought' that reminded me of Zeda again. "We can bring here anything we wish, though we cannot go out to it! When we first rebelled against the Great Law, the sunlight was ours, also—millions and millions of your years agone! We took and held what we needed of it. The Emdens are in charge of it. They circulate it, keeping it always even. It lights us here. As it wanes it returns to their level to be refreshed, revivified—then comes to us again!"

I thought of the thinker as feminine, and a feminine form began to take place beside me. I felt danger in it, and thought it out of form again, moving on through a door into another vast area.

Why go on? I soon knew myself in the area—called Ja, or Ja-land, by its denizens—of will, of thought-projection, where entities called Osilans, by working upon the Emdens which were their servants, projected their thoughts, plans, their *wills,* out of Ja, through the earth in all directions. . . .

Any one of them could fill the world with a word!

Might it be *The* Word? The Creative Fiat? I shuddered at the very suggestion. Then I took comfort in the knowledge that the Osilans could not really break the Great Law. They could only tug and twist at it. We, too, were ruled by it. We tugged and twisted at it. We broke it. We paid for breaking it, sometimes with years of our lives, sometimes *with* our lives.

I was beginning to suspect just why the Osilans wished to make a "criminologist" of me!

After I had grasped the situation better, I allowed myself to be transported as quickly as the individual Osilans traveled—and so in *hours* I made the discovery that the land of Ja encompassed the earth, *literally,* that its entities, while one in spirit, *were* as many as people above.

Their "channels" of communication were . . . *the "Trenches!"*

When I knew, I went down to Level 5716, to the chief rebel of the "Emdens."

—X—

Orders From the Will Born

"I have orders about you from the Osilans, Jay," said Emden 5716, before I had a chance to make a study of the area I had once before visited. "Your duties above are piling up, getting out of hand. There is confusion of thought among my masters! They need a focus before they are lost! Before they lose all influence over their projections again."

"Projections?" I repeated, knowing, but wishing Emden 5716 to put it into words.

"You and your people on the surface," said Emden 5716, nodding. "My people and myself, down here!"

"You and I are the same?"

"Akin. We were first, willed into being here. We are the archetypes. We were the first experiments, the first projections of the Osilans, who hold us more tightly in subjection than they do you. They formed us as models for their projections in the sunlight!"

"You were really the model for Lieutenant Roth, then, "I managed a wry smile, "rather than Roth serving as a model for you?"

"It could be put like that," said Emden 5716. "And my friend Jay Bard—*do your real duty, as decreed by the Great Law!* Do it, and one day your people shall be free. We shall also be free!"

"But what shall we be when we *are* free?"

"No more pests. No more volcanic eruptions, killing millions. No more tornados, floods, earthquakes. *No more wars! No more crime."*

"You're trying to tell me that *men* are responsible for what we have always regarded as 'acts of God'? For life destroying floods? For earthquakes?"

"Indirectly, yes. The fault began here, ages ago, when 'here' was on the surface as your land is now. Never since has the balance required by Great Law been met. You are responsible as you allow yourselves to be influenced by the Osilans!"

"Then what am *I* to do?"

"What you believe to be right, regardless of the pull of influence! There are many about your house now, waiting, with many questions to ask. You will answer them truthfully. *No snap judg-*

ment! For snap judgment is likely to be of the Osilans—*and utterly confounding,* in accordance with ancient Osilans planning!"

"I'll try," I said, humbly. "What do I do now?"

"The Osilans brought with them to the bottom of the sea," said Emden 5716, "a massive black stone which I cannot name because it would not be understood by you or any of your people. It is the key to a master vibration such as you have no word for. But it arranges all your own vibrations into a perfect, harmonious whole. It effects you like a soothing bath. It causes your emotions to cooperate with your body. Your nerves are in perfect coincidence when you have passed through the tunnel in the black stone—*the stone of truth. For you it shall be a stone of good judgment!* In the days of Pan, Lemuria and Mu, criminals exposed to the vibrations of the stone of truth must tell the truth about their crimes. For many days after you have been influenced by the stone of truth, you will know the correct answers to all questions. Come!"

Just what was the stone of truth? The Lodestone? The Philosopher's Stone?

It was black, which was all I could tell about it. I knew, though, when I stood before the opening of the tunnel which led through it, in some area which may have been near to or far from the area where I had briefly studied some few facets of the master gadgetry, that all that Emden 5716 had told me was the truth!

I had often wondered what it would be like to be able to look at a man or woman and know the exact truth about that one, for all his life—as if one read an open book of his most detailed past.

Now, it seemed, I was to find out.

I was diffident as I stood before the bore which led through darkness into light. But with the first step confidence, personal surety, came to me. I had never been bathed in ethereal mist, but knew that it would have felt like this. There was a supreme sense of well-being that grew as I walked. I felt my shoulders straighten. The years seemed to fall away and I was super-youth. There were no aches, no pains, no doubts. I walked on, "bathing." I was unconscious of Emden 5716. I wanted the journey through the black stone to last always, for with each forward step I became more nearly superhuman. I knew I could do no wrong. I knew I did not wish to. More and more as each step carried me forward, I knew that *I could* think wrong thoughts only with great effort.

It *wasn't* vanity that bathed me in the black stone. I didn't feel

godlike, or superior, and yet the growing feeling became more and more akin to these. I wasn't, and knew I wasn't, a superman. But the tendency was in that direction, an ego-feeding directly attributable to the black stone of truth.

I kept trying to recall where I had read or heard of this stone of the strange vibrations. It came from nature, like pitchblende, uranium, any other ray-radiating material. But Atlanteans, Lemurians, Muians—had done something to it. They had super-magnetized it, had somehow brought its rays under control, to do their bidding. . . . .

No, I couldn't recapture the knowledge of it, which was like a memory hammering at the door of mind, yet not quite able to get the door open to become a thought, a *knowing,* a faceted *recollection.* I knew what the stone was, if only I could remember.

I was as sure it had been somehow "treated" as if I had treated it myself—treated so that its natural power obeyed the will . . . of the Will Born? *My* will, once I had experienced its full impact of radiation?

There was no use turning, when I got through, to look for Emden 5716.

I stepped out of the black stone into my basement! Above me I heard the sound as of many bees buzzing. I heard the clicking of telegraph instruments where none should be. I heard many people talking on many telephones, and I had but one.

I heard many cars all around my place and knew that my neighbors' garages, yards, lawns and fields had become parking places for people who were, as Lieutenant Roth had promised me, "beating a path to your door."

I was undisturbed. My new confidence was impregnable.

I smiled as I made up my mind how I would trick the Osilans. I had no illusions that the black stone of truth would work *in my favor.* I had gone through it, not for my own good or that of the peoples of the earth, *but because it had been ordered by the Osilans!* I knew I had been brought more nearly perfectly into full rapport with the Osilans, to be their most efficient tool; but I had another string to my bow, my own personal integrity which no stone of truth, of any color, could alter in any way.

I knew exactly what I was going to do.

I walked up my cellar steps, opened the door into my kitchen. Once again there were police, making free of my cupboard, aided

and abetted by Mima Rake who was never happier than when she was inducing men to stuff their stomachs.

The officers stared at me. I went on into my reception room. There were several telegraph instruments set up. There were radio mikes representing all the major stations. Lieutenant Bud Roth nodded at me.

"I told them you would be back. They're here, some of them, to get your story. I haven't told them."

"Why not?" I smiled at him.

"I didn't know. I don't know."

"Maybe I don't either, but if it's what I'm almost convinced it is, nobody will believe it! Therefore, I'm not telling. I seem to have company, full up and running over."

"From Canada," he nodded, "from Mexico, from every state in the Union. More are enroute from the Latin-American countries. Nobody believes in clairvoyance or clairaudience. . . ."

"But if some fake psychometrist solves a crime that the stupidest flatfoot should have solved, everybody thinks the fake may have something—and goes asking foolish questions!"

"The world doesn't believe that Xon Van Khmer, Hazel Purr, Mary Dean Peters, John Blythe, and Martha Hyslop were coincidence. They don't know how you do it, and don't care—if only you *do* it?"

"If I had the instincts of a charlatan," I pointed out to Roth, while telephonists and telegraphers went silent to stare at me, "I could turn the criminal world topsy turvy."

"You forget," Roth shook his head, "that whatever you say has to be checked with or against the facts. A miscarriage of justice is possible but not probable."

A line was forming, as if a word had been passed. George Rake was pulling a table out into the middle of my reception room, placing my favorite chair behind it. No such word had been passed, I was sure—and shuddered as I thought: *"Zeda and the other Osilans are influencing these people, each Osilans influencing his own projection, so that, unless I rebel, each is a lamb being led to the slaughter!"*

I needed some reassurance from Roth.

"There's no mistake about Xon Van Khmer?" I asked. "Nor about Hazel Purr?"

"Material evidence," he shook his head, "surrounds both of them

—and has since you pointed at them!—with an impregnable wall of proof. Their confessions are buttressed by new evidence that must convince any jury, however stubborn, however proof-demanding!"

I could not prevent a sigh of relief. I did not mind if justice triumphed, with my help, but I would never sleep again if I were the instrument of even one judicial miscarriage.

"Bring my oscilloscope up here," I told Rake. "Attach the whole set-up to my table, where everybody can see it. Only, I have to have room."

I sat behind the table while George Rake brought my stuff up. He knew everything about it except how it had resulted in the freeing of the Osilans. I had not told him about that. If he had experimented in my absence he either had been given no inkling of what I had experienced, or had kept it from me—none of which was like George, whom I regarded as utterly, completely loyal to me.

I adjusted the radio-oscilloscope set-up. I turned on a broadcast. I stared at the oscillograph. It coincided with the broadcast. The Osilans were, for the moment at least, not giving me any hints—or else were making sure they hid from discovery by the people who packed my reception room. Yet who, among all my visitors, could possibly read the oscillograms?

I didn't know the answer to that! For all I knew every last one of them might have had exactly my experiences; each might have followed or preceded me through the black stone of truth!

For all I knew the Osilans might have chosen me as merely one of their *most recent* "connections" and all these people might have been Osilans stooges since time immemorial!

But I fought back the uncertainty.

The Osilans would give me signs when I erred, or was correct—error and correctness depending, I felt sure, on the viewpoint.

"First?" I said softly.

First in line at my table was a bulky, sweat-stained man with "sheriff" written all over him. I'd wager that no longer ago than yesterday he had been riding a horse across western bad lands. . . .

"I'm sheriff Lab Jurgens of Park County, Wyoming, I've spent the better part of two years hunting the Absarokas for a man who murdered his wife and two children in Ishawoca. He has to be in the Absarokas for he'd have been nabbed had he come out. . . ."

Clearly before my eyes, as if given me by Jurgens himself, I saw

a young, harrassed man—of twenty-five, perhaps, with fear in his face, and guilt. I saw his name across his front, like a prison picture of a felon, including his number. I saw him deep in a rampart-locked crater in the mountains, hiding away. . . .

"Look nearer Ishawoca," I told Jurgens. "Publius Logan is not your man! He left his family to hunt uranium. He has found it, but hasn't yet been able to get out of the jam he worked himself into. Give him time and he'll return of his own accord. He doesn't know that his wife and children are dead! *Look closer to his home for the guilty man, who molested Logan's wife. She spurned him. He killed the family because its members knew the truth!"*

"And the name of the murderer?" said Jurgens softly.

"If I give it he will also flee, and be lost to you for years," I said. "You know it, for you investigated him thoroughly—believing at first that he and he alone could be guilty—largely because Publius Logan is a friend!"

"I know," said Jurgens softly, a grim glint in his eyes. He turned and went out, without saying thanks.

I stared at the oscillograph. It was going crazy! I knew it wrought the "voice" of Zeda of the Osilans:

"Traitor! You *know* Logan killed his wife and children! You think you can trick the Osilans! Go on as you've planned—*if you dare!"*

"Next!" I said softly, aware that no one else, even Roth, paid the slightest attention to my oscillograph. Only Jackie Loos, whom I noticed for the first time, noticed the crazy graph and glanced at me questioningly. I smiled at him reassuringly. After all, no miscarriage of justice was possible in the Logan case—for evidence on the ground must prove or disprove. My position was impregnable—*I thought!*

—XI—

Target-Osilans

I was to remember that day and night as the strangest sequence of events in all my experiences with the Osilans. I was opposing them, deliberately. If, as Emden 5716 had said, they did not obey the Great Law, which I took to be the law of balance, justice, by which men were *supposed* to live, then I must oppose them. If we human beings were experiments, if we were projections of disobeyers of the law—

as our general conduct now seemed to prove to me, knowing what I *believed* I knew—then the sooner we utterly disconnected with them the sooner we would make progress toward whatever nebulous goal men really strove for.

The oscillograph was mad. In the green graph Zeda expressed her hatred of me—*and her fear*. I knew, before I had solved the problems of half a dozen of my visitors, that while Zeda, Thors and their "albino" pals might not wish to return just now to Ja-Land, they feared being forever shut off from it. If I were the channel of their "freeing," as they had told me, was I not also the channel of return? And if I were rebelling before I had even started to cooperate with them, how would they get back? I felt that I had plenty of winning cards in my own hands. I was going to play them for all I was worth.

But pressure all about me was being built up. I felt myself being pushed away from everything I attempted, every word I would utter, every plan that came to mind.

"Next!" I said.

This time it was a woman criminologist.

"Mine has to do with vanishing young women," she said. "I'm from New York City. There hundreds of young women vanish from the streets every year. We know what happens to them, are able to get our hands on some of them, but there must be higher-ups. . . ."

As the tired, distrait woman put her problem I could see the streets of New York, the *dark* streets, outside the lighted areas of Times Square and Forty-second Street. I could see the back streets where discontented young women from all over the United States, Canada and Mexico, occupied poor lodgings because they could afford no better. I could see the young women, their heads lifted as they proudly set themselves the tasks of winning niches in woman's hall of fame for themselves. I saw them discouraged, drooping. I saw them hungry, wilting, desperate. . . .

And I saw the men who waited for them to reach that desperate last ditch feeling. . . .

I saw the men so clearly, as clearly as if they had emerged from vision to stand before all of us there. I saw how they were dressed, their sizes, their ages. I could have drawn them had I been a painter or cartoonist.

I saw their offices, their consultation rooms, their names on their windows . . . on their doors. . . .

I saw their families, so carefully excluded from this side of their "business. . . ."

I saw several of these men in consultation with men of other races, other nationalities, other lands. . . .

I saw young women who still believed themselves struggling against New York's indifference, being sold like coffee, tea, sugar, or any other commodity, while they did not know—yet—that they were doomed.

As I saw each name I wrote on a piece of paper the woman criminologist held under my hand, but as I wrote this thought was uppermost in my mind: *"These pictures, these names, these addresses, are what the Osilans want me to see! These, for some reason, are the jobs they want me to do! Therefore these pictures cannot be true. I shall tell this woman something else."*

There were many names which came down from past occupations of the families of those men: Smith, Cooper, Wainwright, Driver, Shepherd, Plumber, Saylor and others. These were the names I saw, but in order to thwart the Osilans they were not the names I gave the woman from New York. And when a street was, say, Twelfth Street, I gave her instead, the same address on Twenty-first Street. I confused the issue as much as I could. For instance, this name on a door was *very* clear, as West Twelfth Street:

Peter Smith, furrier. . . .

I did not give this name to the woman. Instead I reached into my mind for the opposite, as nearly as I could find it, and gave her instead:

Samuel Driver, chemist, West Twenty-first Street. On second thought, to more confound the issue, I changed the address to *East* Twenty-first Street. As I did I chuckled to myself. And opposition, irritation, invisible anger, surged around me, almost tangible.

I was fighting against all the power of the Osilans. I would not have been surprised had Zeda and Thors and their four counterparts, appeared in my house to accuse me of all sorts of terrible crimes.

"These men," I told the woman from New York City, "are behind the disappearances of countless young women from the streets of New York City!"

Instantly, when I had finished with the names and made the above pronouncement to the woman from New York, I was given a glimpse of a young woman, so close before me that I felt I could hear her cry out; I could see the resigned terror, the accusation, in

her face. It was night and she was passing along the dark street enroute to her cubicle of a room, where her landlord waited for the back rent—or for the girl to make some other arrangement with him no decent girl could make.

Two men were walking abreast, to meet the girl. As they parted to let her go between them, they grabbed her. One got a hand over her mouth, but the hand slipped off long enough for her to look right into my face and say:

"This happens to me because you would play God!"

So real was the impression I looked about me to see whether anyone else in the room had heard the words. None had. I was much shaken. But the face of the woman, just at the last, reassured me—for it was clearly the fading face of Zeda! Moreover, the face of one of her "captors" was that of Thors! The Osilans were certainly going all out to keep me from spoiling their schemes for their ancient projections!

Now I was surer than ever. I went through the woman's list again, checking it, giving the phantoms a chance to make themselves clear to me—and often they did. Understand, this was a matter of instantaneous projection. It happened between heartbeats while I listened to questioners, picked up names, ages, places, solutions.

The woman went away.

Next in line was a young boy, sixteen perhaps.

He whispered in my ear. He had grown to almost manhood amid an aura of discomfort because people, his neighbors, called him a "woods colt," though that wasn't the way they pronounced it. They said that his mother *pretended* to be married, but had never been married to his father!

Here I was faced with a dilemma. I could see that his parents *had* been married, that this was, therefore the correct thing to say. But I knew that by saying so I would, in this instance as well as in all others, play into the hands of the Osilans. But how, when a boy hoped so hard, when he believed so much in his mother, could I slap him across the face with all my might, then fetch him a backhander. If he were actually illegitimate, would I *lie* to him?

But the indicated "facts" seemed to be that he was legitimate. . . .

"It doesn't matter what people say," I told the boy. "What matters is what *you* are! People who attack you, sneer at you, have shames of their own, not too well hidden in their closets. Keep your head up. Don't let slander hurt or scar you."

"You're telling me," he said quietly, "that what people have always said is true after all? My mother was no good, and I am a nobody, a nameless. . . ."

"Don't say it!" I said sharply, tempted to sway from my determination but knowing that if I once allowed the Osilans to sway me, I must do it again and again until, soon, I would be their creature completely.

"I'm not saying it," said the boy. "You're saying it!"

"I'm more sorry than I can tell you," I told him, not, you'll notice, quite using the words that branded him and his mother—*and* his father.

Slowly he turned away. Our conversation had not been overheard. The boy moved like one in a trance. I watched him go outside. I turned to the next in line.

"I divorced my wife," this man said, "in New York State, on what I, the judge and the jury regarded as perfect evidence. But I have never been satisfied. Inside me there has always been deep doubt that a woman could be a perfect wife for fifteen years, then. . . ."

I got a fast glimpse of a sad-faced woman, a woman lost to what she held dear. She had, for five years, been a divorced woman. I saw also that she had been divorced on evidence that was not true. But could, I asked myself, a home be repaired that had been broken like this? Could either ever forget the horror that had come between them?

"The judge, the jury, the witness," I said to the man softly, "did not err. The evidence was conclusive."

For a long moment the man stared at me. I had, as far as it went, told him the exact truth. But I did not tell him that his wife had been faithless, for she never had been. *He told himself that she had been proved faithless and I allowed him to do it!* Did my actions, after all, alter the situation enough to matter?

No—and I also opposed the Osilans once again.

I began to wonder, as I delved into the scores of "cases," whether men were *ever* properly convicted; whether the Osilans might not have invisible fingers in every "wrong" pie, in order to maintain themselves. But I realized that I must go further back than this to find the right answers:

What made men, women and children commit crimes in the first place?

Was it because of environment—or because of Osilans?

Was it because of hunger—or the Osilans?

Was it because of weak characters—or because the Osilans were strong?

Did necessity, or resentment, or hatred, or desire for revenge cause men to rape, murder, burn, destroy—or were the "projections" of the Osilans simply unable to hold out against the endless urgings of their "creators?"

I knew I must go even further: *were the Osilans the creators of necessity, resentment, hatred, desire for revenge, greed, lust, jealousy?*

There was much I would, of course, never know—about, for instance, that place in human history when men had become "living souls" and escaped somewhat from the Will Born into "men" and "women" capable of reproduction; and what did the Osilans have to do with *that?*

I didn't try to think this out; it didn't seem to be necessary. What did seem to be necessary was this: I must free men from the influence of the Osilans!

Was I the only direct contact between men and Osilans? Were there thousands of others like me?

Did I even *know* the truth about the Osilans, as I now saw it? I could not be sure, but whatever came of what I was doing, the results would give me some idea.

If I were wrong in all my solutions, I realized, such a furore of accusation as no man had ever endured would shortly be directed at me—when those whom I told tried to prove what I had told, through "evidence!" I hated to think of it, but I also felt sure that this very thing would make another attempt of the Osilans, soon, out of the question. It would exile me from public notice and I could go on about my business, my experiments with radio, television, and oscillograms—which could forever hereafter go as crazy as they liked for all of me. I'd never rise to the bait again.

In the midst of my "investigations" a shot barked outside. Roth went out to get the explanation; his face was grave when he returned.

"That young fellow who whispered to you," he said. "He just snatched a pistol from a policeman and shot himself to death!"

That almost did it! I *almost* gave in to the Osilans then, but did not.

I saw what the Osilans apparently *insisted* on, the rest of that day and night, and did what I believed was best to thwart their plans.

When the last one had gone, Roth said:

"Strange, but the body of that boy who shot himself has vanished!"

Then I *knew*. He, like the woman who had been captured by white slavers in New York, had been a "projection" trick to whip me into line—and I hadn't allowed myself to be whipped. There had been no such person.

When all strangers had gone and the Rakes had retired to their quarters over the garage, I went down into the basement again, whither George Rake had restored my oscilloscope.

I shouldn't have been surprised, I guess.

Zeda waited for me, there in the dark. When I switched on the light she smiled at me—*her expression one of complete triumph!*

My body began, slowly, to grow cold.

(*To be concluded*)

* * * * *

FUTURE FARE

● In addition to the short stories, features and the serial, the April issue of SPACEWAY will contain three novelets.

● H. J. Campbell, author of the article "Space Academy," makes his fiction debut in SPACEWAY an exciting one with THE ALIEN—in which the discovery of an unconscious but lovely blonde aboard an abandoned space ship is but the prelude to an attempt at intergalactic conquest.

● UNWANTED HERITAGE, by E. C. Tubb, tells of Earth's outpost on Venus—and of the tiny group of several hundred men who are attempting to hold a beachhead until the arrival of Earth colonists.

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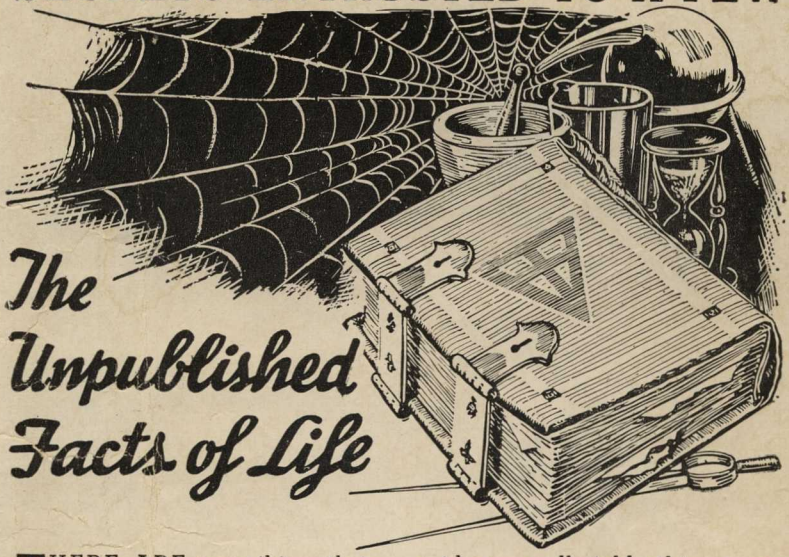

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