

15¢ NOVEMBER

SUPER SCIENCE

STORIES



CEPHEID PLANET

by R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

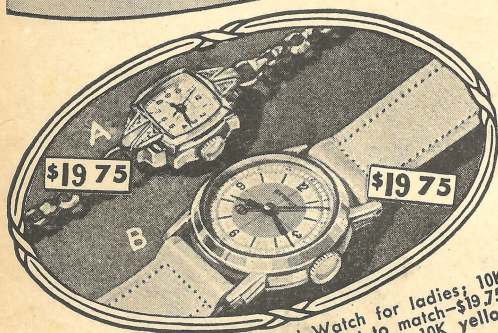
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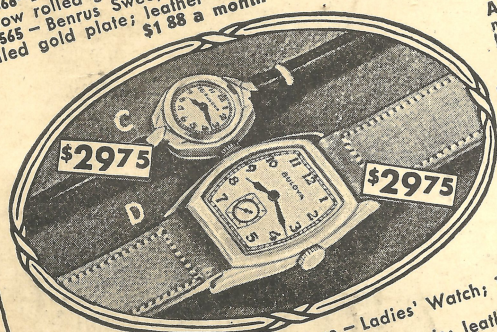
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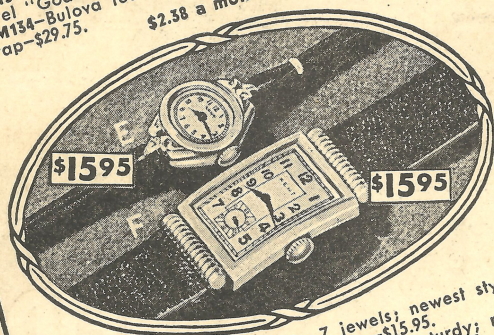
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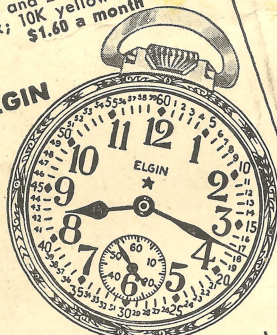
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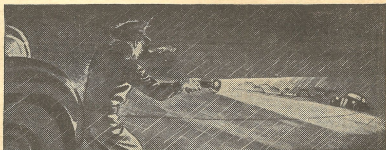


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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

VOL. 2

NOVEMBER, 1940

NO. 1

NOVELETTES

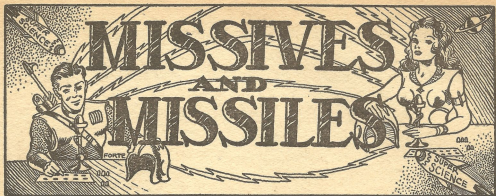
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Too Many Pictures

Dear Editor Pohl:

Concerning the September issue, I first wish to thank you for one of my favorite science fiction artists who is second only to Paul Leo Morey. Next I wish to heartily express my appreciation for the over-abundance of illustrations per issue. My rule is one full-page, framed illustration for every ten pages of text, making only ten illustrations and ten pages of pix for a 98-pages-of-story issue as was the last. Instead, you generously give us 16 drawings and what approximates almost 13 pages of same. Although I would prefer two full-page, framed pictures for each novel and one for each short, I will leave this small problem for you to balance in your own way. The "double-spread" type illustrations are strictly taboo with me. In a 128-page magazine there should be more than 98 pages of story, and by following the above advice, and also by printing all departments in the smallest type, especially the readers' pages, you will be easily able to increase the story material. The only other improvement that comes to mind is trimmed edges—and no new departments.

Williamson is first with his very good yarn, "The Girl in the Bottle," a reversal of the old Cummings atom-theme, and extremely well-written. Eron was only fair with his illustrations—there were so many more interesting things to be pictured. He and Morey demonstrate the

difference between the old and the new; his figures are most of a page tall, while Morey's are one inch at the greatest. Beautifully told new idea "Venusian Tragedy" second, with wonderful Bok work to adorn it. "Invisible One" is third with better Sherry pix than last month and a better cover, which is high up on my cover list for July. Best art work: Bok, Morey, Sherry, Wexler, Thorp, and Eron in that order. —Charles Hidley, E5, 2541 Aqueduct Avenue, New York, New York.

Peacemaker

Dear Sir,

I have just finished your July issue of *Super Science Stories*, and have decided to send in my two cents worth.

I think that by printing only short stories and complete novelettes you will satisfy more readers than any other way. Really good long serials are scarce at any time and have a tendency to contain a lot of "fill-in" hokey. Fact articles of any kind, as long as they are basically scientific, are always welcome, and all the stf readers that I know enjoy reading these very much.

One thing that I could not help but to laugh at was the way your readers disagreed about the stories in one of your previous issues. It seemed to me that the stories which one group of readers thought absolutely useless were considered the best by the other group, and

(Continued on page 6)

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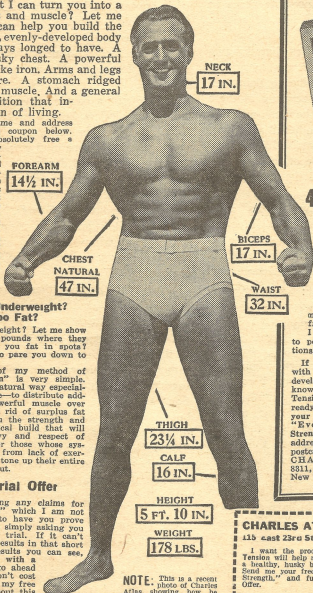
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(Continued from page 4)

vice versa. As a non-belligerent bystander (we have all the scrapping we want down here, what with the present situation in Europe), I would venture an opinion that you have a tough job to satisfy everybody and promote peace in the large and erratic family of science fiction readers.

As to those few readers that disagree with the illustrations of machinery and alien beings, I would like to point out that none of us have seen any of these things of the future, so how can we criticize the conceptions of others? One hundred years ago, if an artist had painted the present-day airplane or television set what, I ask you, would the average person have said?

The story "Sigma Lyra Passes" rates first with me. "Before the Universe" was the best novelette, having both human interest and humor. All the others were about even for merit.—George Carl Manckulen, R.R. No. 1, Lockport, Manitoba, Canada.

Sherry Did Cover

Dear Editor:

When a so-called science fiction story starts out with the handsome hero landing his space ship on an 'uninhabited' planet, and he immediately meets a beautiful girl, I usually stop right there. If, after reading a little farther, I find that the girl is the only daughter of a brilliant scientist, whose revolutionary invention is about to fall into the hands of space pirates, I *know* I should have stopped at the usual place. But for some inexplicable reason, I finished "Men on the Morning Star,"—and, by the three Pohls of Terra (North, South, and Ye Editor) I *enjoyed* it!

I must be weakening!

But Mackintosh's yarn is not the best in the issue. That place goes to "The Girl in the Bottle"—a typical William-

son tale, with an Earthman overcoming incredible odds, in epic fashion.

"Venusian Tragedy" is not far behind. Sheridan has portrayed the feelings of hope and tragedy of the ill-assorted lovers in masterly fashion; but the finest work appears in his characterization of the old Volon, Okar.

"Invisible One" is another feather in the hat for Neil R. Jones. Detailed and accurate plotting is the strong point in this story.

Asimov gets a couple of posies for his practically plotless but enjoyable short. "The Invasion" is decidedly above the average, and the remaining stories highly acceptable. Without doubt, this issue is far ahead of earlier ones,—it almost rates with No. 1 of its excellent companion magazine, *Astonishing Stories*.

Hannes Bok and Leo Morey have some fine drawings, and the cover is the best to appear so far on either SSS or its companion. Who did it?

When space permits, there should be a few more letters, with editorial comments when appropriate.

I hope this issue of SSS is a harbinger of things to come. The mag has had a rather stormy career, so far, with liberal barrages of both praise and condemnation. I even found a *little* fault, myself; but Asimov says I was all wrong. No doubt, some one will say this issue is "lousy." Editors certainly must have fun!—D. B. Thompson, 3136 Q Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

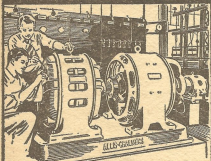
Ladies' Day

Dear Editor:

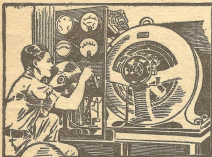
Of all the letters I have read in your magazine, I have not seen one from a girl. Well, here is one girl who reads them. I am 16 and have been reading science fiction for a long time. I enjoy the stories because they have a lot of hair-raising, breath-taking adventures. I have

(Continued on page 59)

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CEPHEID PLANET

By R. R. Winterbotham

CHAPTER ONE

Pardon from Saturn

A LONG, drawn-out wail of pent-up agony sounded in the Saturnian night. It rose, deep-throated, from within the walls of a transparent helix that housed the criminals of the solar system.

Moaning, the cry climbed the scale to a high-pitched shriek, piercing the walls of the helix and rocking the methane-filled atmosphere of the frigid planet. It expressed sorrow and loneliness, emotions wrought from ceaseless toil in Saturn's penal colony.

Traveling on Saturn's unbreathable atmosphere, the sound shot upward in greeting toward the rocket trail of sparks that settled toward the surface.

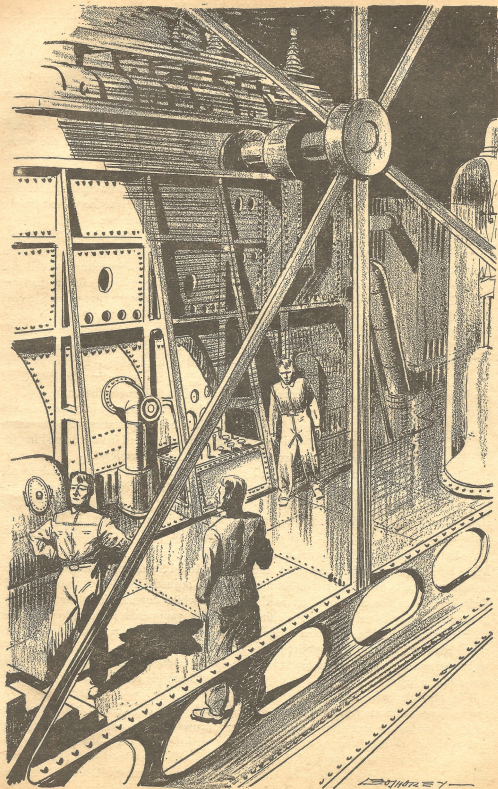
The wailing groan, the hysterical laughter, the beating of bars within the prison was nothing new to No. 12,358, a man who once had been known as Dr. Rand Seymo, and who had been in charge of the Mercurian astronomical and magnetic observatory. Thrice since Seymo's incarceration in the year 2700 he had heard the frenzy that always welcomed the prison transport from the Earth.

Twice each terrestrial year the transport arrived on Saturn with a miserable cargo of doomed men. Two times every three hundred and sixty-five days this cargo was discharged into the twilight of the ringed planet, to make its way into the helico-dome. Then the ship sailed away again, leaving those doomed men behind to bewail and to mourn their wretched fortunes.

To the men already in the penal colony, there was a trace of joy in these semi-annual visits. It was one touch with the

Dr. Seymo was offered a pardon from Saturn's Helix—but the chance to win freedom, he realized, might be so slight that even a convict would refuse it.





— 1 — 21/10/20

home planet. The transport brought letters to some of the men; sometimes there were small luxuries—tobacco and delicacies to eat.

There was also another hope brought with each visit of the prison transport. Occasionally the ship brought release to a prisoner—a pardon.

On the previous three visits of the prison transport, No. 12,358 vainly had hoped for a pardon. This time he did not hope. He had resigned himself to life on Saturn. He had almost forgotten friendships on Mercury and the Earth and the soreness of his unjust imprisonment had been eased by the sedative monotony. More and more No. 12,358 had come to feel he was doomed for the remainder of his life to live within this fortress of human dereliction.

Pardons were rare—only six in the past twenty years—and there were fifteen thousand men now living in this ice-encrusted helix.

AS THE transport soared toward Saturn's surface, the cry of the prisoners rumbled away to a chant and the men fell to polishing and scrubbing their quarters in preparation for the inspection by officials who always accompanied the craft from Earth.

At last the ship hovered over the landing field, while the prisoners crowded the transparent walls of their prison, holding their breaths as the craft crashed to the ground in an off-keel landing, sighing their sympathy as the transport's doors rolled back and another five hundred convicts filed out across the waste toward the doors of the helix.

The arrivals wore masks to protect tender lungs from methane and hydrogen which saturated the atmosphere of Saturn and to shield the men's faces from a temperature of nearly three hundred degrees below zero Fahrenheit in the polar summer. But the masks, insulated clothing,

heaters and the brisk double-time march were only mild protection against the devastating chill. These newly-arrived prisoners staggered into the locks half-frozen from their march of less than half a mile.

Within the dome, long-termers grew tense in their cells waiting for the pneumatic tubes to distribute the mail. Some beat their bars; others wept, and a few sat like dumb animals casting longing glances at the loudspeakers that might bring news of a pardon.

No. 12,358 did none of these things. He busied himself with his pile of astronomical journals. He read, expecting no mail and having abandoned hope for a pardon. Besides, he was not the type of man to beat bars or shed futile tears.

Suddenly the loudspeaker in the bullpen crackled and Dr. Seymo—No. 12,358—paused in his reading. He had not entirely given up hope that he would be cleared of an unjust conviction.

At the sound the great prison shuddered a single sob of expectancy. Fifteen thousand convicts choked in silence, waiting for the news to be broadcast.

"No. 12,358 will report at once to the warden's office!" came the rasping announcement. "The guard at the receiving chamber will admit No. 12,358 on the showing of proper credentials. That is all!"

Dr. Rand Seymo put aside his magazine and he adjusted his loose, unseemly uniform, while outside, in other cells, the convicts yammered imprecations against fate that had given a bounty to one and not to others.

With a calm, steady step, Dr. Seymo moved from his cell.

THE WARDEN lifted his bushy eyebrows and his steely glance appraised the small man in front of him.

"No. 12,358—Dr. Rand Seymo, convicted of sabotage on Mercury!" he read from a card on his desk.

"A crime I did not commit, sir!" spoke Dr. Seymo.

Warden Craven nodded slowly. He was a hard, space-bitten man, not the best example of Earth's humanity, perhaps, but as good a man as could have been selected for his post.

"That's what they all say, Seymo," he declared, without smiling and without sarcasm. "But in your case—I don't know. Tell me."

"There isn't much to tell, warden," said Seymo with a shrug of his shoulders. "The Mercurian astronomical and magnetic base was thoroughly patrolled, yet the zirconium transformers were stolen from the magnetic plant. The machinery was wrecked almost under my nose. I was charged with the crime, because officials said I was the only man who could have done it."

The warden's brow furrowed.

"Zirconium transformers would be almost priceless, as rare as the metal is in the solar system," he mused. "I suppose an offer of freedom could not induce you to change your story and to admit your guilt and tell where the transformers are hidden?"

"If I knew," laughed Dr. Seymo, "I'd bargain with you. But I know nothing—"

"I was told to make you that offer," nodded the warden with a smile. "And to expect that answer. I also was told to ask of you wished a chance to prove your innocence—a chance to win permanent freedom from here?"

WARDEN Craven watched the prisoner's face closely. Seymo did not move a muscle of his countenance, for he sensed that a chance to win freedom might be a desperate chance—one that even a convict on Saturn might refuse.

"I would like that chance—yes," said Seymo.

"You have powerful friends on the outside, Seymo," began the warden. "They

are not convinced that you are guilty of the charge made against you. Yet they concede that circumstances are very much against you. At present there is not enough zirconium in the universe for a new transformer and I have been asked if you would be willing to join an interstellar expedition for the purpose of obtaining material for a new transformer. By replacing the transformer stolen your friends believe that you can convince the world of your innocence."

"It would take years to reach another universe," said Seymo, compressing his lips tightly. "And zirconium may be rare in any nearby system."

"Perhaps." The warden smiled. "The constellation Seymo, in the fifth division of the third quadrant was named in your honor, was it not, Dr. Seymo?" he asked.

"When I revised the nomenclature of various constellations, I called it Gotha," replied Seymo. "The Astronomical Council renamed it in my honor in recognition for the service."

"It's a loosely knit constellation, small but readily visible to the naked eye," went on the warden seriously. "The stars are largely Cepheid variables with a period shorter than the average and therefore brighter than the average. Roughly, the constellation is five hundred light years from the solar system and the component stars are within fifty light years of one another."

"And spectroscopic studies disclose that Alpha Seymo in particular has an abundance of zirconium and cerium on its surface," interrupted Seymo, neither excitedly nor impatiently. Three years of imprisonment had shorn him of these traits and, besides, the astronomer sensed a game being played between himself and someone on the outside—a game in which the warden figured only as a tool.

"It also is rich in mercury and mercury compounds," added Warden Craven. "From these facts we gather that planets

in the system of Alpha Seymo are likely to have large deposits of these rare metals. Dr. Seymo, I'm authorized to offer you temporary freedom if you will undertake a voyage to Alpha Seymo!"

A bitter laugh came from Dr. Rand Seymo's lips.

"Your offer is a joke, warden!" he said. "I am a young man, barely twenty-eight, in spite of the gray hair around my temples. But even with an extraordinarily long life ahead of me I could not expect to reach Alpha Seymo in my lifetime. And I could not return in fifty lifetimes."

"If the handicap of time could be overcome, would you undertake such a trip?" asked the warden.

Dr. Rand Seymo looked quizzically at the prison official.

"In that case, I'd do my best," he declared.

Warden Craven's hand raised upward, as if to signal some hidden observer. Then, as the warden's stubby fingers waved downward, the scene faded into blackness. The prison office vanished as did the windswept wastes of polar Saturn. Then suddenly Seymo's eyes opened on a new scene. Around him were strange faces, strange machinery. He was aboard a throbbing, pulsating space ship.

CHAPTER TWO

Bonstress Deil

"Dr. Seymo, I believe?" came a pleasant voice at the astronomer's elbow.

The astronomer turned to look into the features of a slender, debonair young fellow, whose features were vaguely familiar. There was a certain handsomeness about the fellow, as well as a stamp of relentless savagery and stubborn determination. The visage bore the marks of cool resourcefulness.

"I'm Bonstress Deil, perhaps you've

heard of me?" went on the young man. "Bonstress Deil!"

Seymo repeated the name slowly. No one in the solar universe was so feared and respected as this man, who had subdued entire planets with weapons that were far beyond scientific knowledge of the time. A man with less power would have been dubbed a lawless pirate, but Deil was beyond interplanetary law—he was the law itself. He had unlimited resources at his command as a result of his conquests. Primitive Venusians worshipped Captain Deil as a god of the sky, and Deil was the only Earthman who dared set foot on savage Callisto.

"Then you are my friend—outside?" asked Seymo simply.

"I performed a service for you, in obtaining your release from Saturn," replied Deil. "I expect you to perform a service for me. If that constitutes friendship—then I am your friend."

Seymo thought he caught an overtone of mockery in Deil's voice, as if the captain were threatening him like a child: "Be good or back you go!"

Then Deil laughed and his pleasant manner returned.

"Let me introduce you to the others, Quad Lane, the navigator, and another man whom, perhaps, you know—Vincent Treeg!"

Treeg! A flush of anger crept into Seymo's cheeks. Vincent Treeg had been the terrestrial governor of Mercury who had caused Seymo to be sentenced to Saturn!

The two men stood directly behind him. Seymo turned and faced them both. Treeg, eyeing the astronomer with cat-and-mouse playfulness, did not offer his hand. He was a grotesquely slim figure, hatchet-faced and hooked-nosed. His elbows and knees were gigantic bumps in his framework of bone and his eyes were cesspools of abjection.

The other man, Lane, was small and

rather inconspicuous looking. His eyes were close together and his chin was weak. At the introduction he shuffled forward and extended his hand.

"I'm glad to meet you, Seymo," he said.

Seymo took the hand, flabby as a rubber mat.

The astronomer looked at Deil inquiringly, as if he were weighing this famous man in the balance of his peculiar companions.

"Treeg is an authority on zirconium ore," explained Captain Deil. "He is expected to help us locate the mineral in the Alpha Seymo system. Lane is one of the best navigators in the spacelanes."

"I see," spoke Seymo.

"Now, I know you will want to change your clothing, doctor," went on Deil. "Your quarters are forward. Lane will show you the way."

Lane jumped forward with the nervousness of a rabbit and Seymo followed him through the alleys of the craft toward a compact row of cabins in the prow of the throbbing ship.

"You'll find fresh clothing in there, Dr. Seymo," said Lane, indicating a small wardrobe with his thumb as he glanced amusedly at Seymo's prison garb. "The

togs will be more comfortable than those!"

"Tell me, Lane," asked Seymo. "How was I snatched from the warden's office—"

"Captain Deil will tell you in time," smiled Lane craftily. "There is a thirty-day voyage between us and Alpha Seymo. Thirty days to travel five hundred light years!"

FIVE of the thirty days passed swiftly as Seymo accustomed himself to his new environment. Two years of prison life had left many marks on him and nightly he found himself listening for the tread of the guard and the whistling gales of Saturn.

Yet in those five days, the grip of habit relaxed a little and the astronomer began to take up threads of his life where he had dropped them. His mind turned over thoughts of his conviction on Mercury and events climaxed in his sudden, mysterious semi-freedom.

Seymo did not fool himself—he still was a prisoner and Captain Deil had hinted that Seymo would be returned to Saturn unless orders were unreservedly followed. Captain Deil had wrested the astronomer from Saturn for a purpose. It might be a chance to prove Seymo's innocence, but the convict knew that even if he had been

Private Notes from Mrs. M--'s Diary



3 Slept like a top all night. Ex-Lax worked fine this morning and didn't upset me a bit. Headache's all gone now and I feel bright as a lark.



1 Suffered all day with a terrible headache. Felt dull, tired and out of sorts. Remembered that I needed a laxative and decided my headache was due to that.



2 Took an Ex-Lax tablet before going to bed. It tasted swell—just like a piece of fine chocolate.

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*. No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

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guilty of sabotage, Captain Deil had needed Seymo and would have obtained the release.

A sudden thought struck Seymo. The presence of Treeg and the release from Saturn might indicate that Captain Deil himself knew something about the theft of the zirconium transformers! The transformers might have been stolen from Mercury as easily as Seymo was removed from the warden's office.

"You're wondering about the warden's office, I suppose?" came a soft voice from behind Dr. Seymo, who was looking from a porthole in his quarters.

The astronomer turned to see the bland features of Bonstress Deil standing in the doorway, smiling at him. Captain Deil still seemed to be appraising Seymo, as if the spaceman were trying to determine something that escaped the eye.

"It has me stumped, captain," laughed Seymo. "Your ship is a puzzle, too. How can you reach Alpha Seymo in thirty days?"

The captain laughed.

"I don't have to explain anything to you, Seymo," he said. "You're here because I need you and because I couldn't get along very well without you. But I think you are entitled to an explanation and besides I'm beginning to think you may be more useful than I expected. Would it surprise you, Seymo, if I said that while I've been talking we've traversed a space equal to the diameter of the solar system?" The captain paused. "I say that with qualifications, Seymo, for there is no dimensional length in our movement."

"Ah! We're taking a dimensional short-cut?" asked Seymo.

"No!" replied the captain. "An ordinary space crossing requires computation in four dimensions: length, breadth, thickness and time. In a flight in this craft, I use a special set of constants which synchronize with the mechanics of my

specially built motors. These constants correspond to force vectors of time, length, breadth and thickness, just as in ordinary flight, but my motors are so designed that three of the constants will always cancel leaving us free to travel in one dimension only!"

"About as clear as mud," said Seymo. "Are we traveling in time?"

"No, but we may travel in time. And there are three other dimensions in which we may travel. Time exists superficially at present, but we do not enter into its direction of movement. Thus each of the other dimensions, length, breadth and thickness, may exist superficially, while we travel in one dimension.

"In charting our flights through space we can always find one favorable dimension which brings a star or planet—or a warden's office—almost within a figurative arm's length.

"For instance, the thickness of a line drawn between the solar system and Alpha Seymo is very thin indeed, while the length dimension is five hundred light years and the time dimension is the same."

"Then," spoke Dr. Seymo, "instead of extra-dimensional movement, we are utilizing intra-dimensional travel?"

"Exactly, Dr. Seymo," nodded Captain Deil.

CHAPTER THREE

The Zirconium Transformer

CAPTAIN DEIL led Seymo into the control room. The operation of the ship was carried out largely by robot devices which kept the huge, fire spewing rocket on an exact course. Lane was busy checking the course and making corrections, but otherwise the navigator's duties were light.

The control room, situated like the conning tower of a submarine, slightly forward of amidships atop the elongated

craft, lacked the comfortable warmth of the lower decks.

"The instruments must be kept at a constant temperature from the beginning to the end of the voyage," explained the captain. "Even a fraction of a degree change might cause expansion or contraction of the instruments sufficient to send us far off our course through space. We keep the temperature of the control room at freezing—zero Centigrade—because it is the most convenient temperature for constancy."

Captain Deil's visit with the astronomer was cut short in the ship's library by a call to the engine room.

Dr. Seymo amused himself among the books for a while and then stood beside the wide portholes to watch the suns loom in dazzling brilliance and flash by as the craft continued on its one-dimensional flight.

Dr. Seymo had been a seasoned space traveler prior to his imprisonment on Saturn. He had knocked about the solar universe, visiting various planets and spending a period prospecting for rare minerals on the asteroids. In these trips he had seen men perform tasks in emergencies that would seem impossible under ordinary circumstances.

The subconscious mind, Dr. Seymo knew, made supermen of dull people. In space, during tense moments when one false movement meant disaster, Dr. Seymo had seen men perform tasks beyond human endurance. He had watched men under pressure casting their lots with strange, instinctive subconscious impulses and overcoming odds where the thinking mind might have failed.

It was instinct which told Seymo first that he was being watched. This feeling beat a realization into his mind that someone was observing every move he made.

As the days passed, Seymo watched his companions on board the ship.

Outwardly Treeg was friendly, but Sey-

mo could not forget the ruthless prosecution Treeg had pressed against him on Venus.

Lane also was congenial and friendly. Yet, so were Captain Deil and other members of the crew. Lane lacked the captain's warm personality, but few men had the ability to win confidence that Captain Deil had.

Seymo failed to understand this continued watching, nor could he catch more than a fleeting glimpse of this spy who watched. Never did he see enough of this mysterious person to identify him.

One thing he did notice was a subtle guardedness in Treeg's manner when he saw Seymo watching him.

One day Seymo attempted to enter the engine room of the space craft.

"Just a minute, Dr. Seymo!" a voice called from behind him.

The astronomer halted.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you go in there," Treeg said, suddenly appearing in the passage behind him.

Seymo's eyes shifted from the vast engines of the craft. Where had Treeg come from so quickly? Was Treeg the man who was watching him?

The astronomer had no time to speculate on this. He had seen something else that whetted his curiosity. His eyes had glimpsed the engine room for an instant. He had seen its huge, shielded, shifting core motors, thrumming and rumbling with boundless might. He had seen huge fuel pipes leading downward from the reservoirs, carrying vaporized elements to power the flight. He had observed the triple combustion chambers which multiplied the exhaust velocity of the fuel and the electrical and magnetic fixtures and permitted the intra-dimensional travel.

Seymo's eyes rested on a large cabinet, too, a familiar electrical and magnetic device to the scientist. His hands opened and closed with emotion.

"That transformer!" Seymo exclaimed.



"It's—I know that machine!"

"Quiet!" Treeg ordered fiercely, "Quiet or you go back to Saturn!"

SEYMO'S body trembled with anger. He had seen the familiar metallic glint—a luster that could come only from zirconium. Now he understood why he had been taken from Saturn's helix!

The vocal chords of Dr. Seymo's neck contracted for a shout he did not utter.

Something whispered for him to remain silent. Someone else was coming down the passage.

"Stand away from that door!" Treeg ordered a second time.

Seymo obeyed.

In the passageway, Lane appeared.

"Dr. Seymo!" Lane's voice cracked cold



and hard as he caught sight of the astronomer. "What are you doing here?"

Treeg did not give Seymo a chance to reply.

"He was about to enter the engine room and I had to tell him that it was against orders," he said.

A third figure appeared in the passage behind Lane.

"Dr. Seymo is exempted from those orders, Treeg," came Captain Deil's voice, as the expedition leader strode into view.

"You—you're going to let him see those transformers?" Lane asked.

"Certainly," Captain Deil said with a laugh. "Dr. Seymo knows as much about zirconium transformers as you—although you built the one on this ship, Lane."

The captain escorted Seymo into the engine room, past the huge fuel pipes to the transformer. Seymo's eyes caressed the familiar contours of the core and coils. He noted each detail so familiar to his eyes. There was one thing that he did not recognize: a plate on the side which read:

Manufactured by Quad Lane, 2700 A.D., Martian Laboratories.

Seymo turned and saw Lane watching him closely.

"Lane," Seymo said, "you didn't build this transformer. It's mine. The one stolen from Mercury. That plate on the side means nothing."

Fury kindled in Lane's face.

"You think Captain Deil would use a stolen transformer?" he asked. "I made that transformer, with my own hands, from metal I discovered on Mars!"

"I'm sure you must be mistaken, Dr. Seymo," the captain interrupted hastily. "Lane admits he followed your plans in making the transformer. It only looks like yours."

Seymo turned away. He knew this was his transformer, but here, where he did not know who his enemy was, he had to keep silent.

When Dr. Rand Seymo threw him-

self on his bunk later that day, he laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks. He might be doomed to return to Saturn's helix if he insisted on his rights, but the transformer was his and he would prove it!

Too often Seymo had worked on the transformer not to recognize each familiar line. Yet Lane claimed to have built the transformer. Lane, that long-nosed rat who posed as a navigator for the famous Captain Deil!

Perhaps Captain Deil was in on the conspiracy. A man who could travel in one dimension would have no difficulty stealing an item of machinery from a building guarded by only one man.

If Captain Deil was not in on the theft, then he was a vastly overrated man. Was the captain such a trusting fool not to have investigated the transformers built by Lane, which appeared to have been constructed the same year Dr. Seymo was convicted for the theft of a similar machine?

If Seymo were to prove his innocence—

Suddenly a shout rang out through the craft. It was Captain Deil's voice echoing from the loudspeaker in the gangway. Bells jangled from stem to stern.

"Planet ho! Make fast for a landing!"

Dr. Seymo stepped to a porthole. Ahead blazed Alpha Seymo and the craft was soaring toward the outermost planet of the system for a landing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sabotage

BELOW the ship was the planet, green and red with rocks and vegetation and holding a cloud-filled atmosphere. It had seas, continents, mountains and polar caps.

"A twin sister of the Earth," breathed Dr. Seymo.

Beyond the planet glowed the brilliant

star, slightly larger than the sun, and much brighter, although earlier observations had shown that it had not yet reached its peak.

To the right and to the left of the Cepheid star twinkled the discs of five planets. These were blotted out as the space ship plunged into the atmosphere of the planet. There was a sickening lurch as the braking rockets were fired and the craft swerved into a long spiral that would ease its deceleration as it approached the surface.

For hours the deceleration continued and then there was a gentle bump as the craft cushioned to a stop in the center of a plain fringed by multi-stemmed vegetation vaguely resembling trees. The ship had landed in the temperate zone of Alpha Seymo's sixth planet.

With the landing ended the leisure of the flight across space. A thousand tasks stood before the crew and staff: the atmosphere and gravity were tested; landing parties were sent to seek minerals which could be converted into fuel for the return trip; exploring parties were organized to look for biological data and possible existence of intelligent life; corps of spacemen were set to work cleaning the rocket tubes, overhauling the engine and oiling the robots.

For hours the loudspeakers in the gangways shouted commands and issued calls. During this time, Dr. Seymo sat in his cabin, seemingly forgotten by all on board.

When the confusion abated he took a stroll through the ship. He even ventured outside the craft, into the fresh, ozone-laden air of the new world. Deil apparently had assigned no task for him. Nothing had occurred yet to solve the mystery of his release from Saturn.

Dr. Seymo examined the mosses which shed dew of pure mercury. From time to time he caught glimpses of short, squat-legged animals that ran with amazing swiftness over the hills toward trees on the edge of the plain. Later in the day

he ventured into the control room where he used a smoked glass to observe Alpha Seymo's rise to maximum brilliancy. Everywhere the astronomer went, he was unmolested, excepting when he tried to venture into the engine room again.

There Treeg met him at the door and ordered him away.

"But Captain Deil said the order did not apply to me," Seymo said.

Treeg shook his head. "There's a new order today," he declared.

IN OBSERVING Alpha Seymo, the Cepheid variable, Seymo noted that the entire surface of the sun was mottled with sunspots and the disc was ringed with an enormous cloud of glowing green gas, apparently thrown off in an outburst of energy from solar fires. The cloud was moving outward at a rapid rate and its expansion apparently accounted for the increase in brilliancy. As the cloud reached a distance from the sun it would cool and the brilliancy would quickly decrease.

"Busy, I see." A soft voice came from behind Seymo and he turned to see Captain Deil entering the control room.

"Hello, captain," Seymo smiled pleasantly. He had not forgotten his suspicions of the captain, but under the circumstances there was nothing to do but be pleasant. "I've been wanting to talk to you—Treeg said I couldn't go into the engine room a little while ago."

"You'll have to excuse the actions of Treeg and Lane," the captain replied, without a betraying expression on his face. "Neither of them can forget that once you were convicted of sabotage."

Sabotage! Captain Deil uttered the word with a peculiar emphasis and watched Seymo closely as he spoke.

"There was only circumstantial evidence in that case," Seymo replied. "I was innocent."

Captain Deil blinked. "You think my

transformer—the one Lane built—is yours?" he asked pointedly.

"I'm sure it's mine! I'd know it anywhere!" Dr. Rand Seymo exclaimed.

"But is that proof? The word of a convict isn't generally accepted as proof," the captain said. "You say it's your transformer; Lane says it is his. Lane claims he built it on Mars and he has documentary evidence to show he was on Mars when the Mercutian transformer was stolen and the magnetic plant wrecked. The courts would accept Lane's word before they would accept yours."

Within Seymo's brain his subconscious mind was knocking for recognition. He was being warned of something. Was it a trap?

"Why did you bring me on this trip?" Seymo asked.

"Because I needed you," said the captain suavely.

"But you haven't used me, Captain Deil. Since I left Saturn I haven't done a thing!"

"Maybe—" Captain Deil paused and looked grimly at Dr. Seymo. "Maybe I wanted a little sabotage!"

The words stung. Color drained from Seymo's face.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

There was something behind the captain's statement—something ominous.

"What have you been doing today, Seymo?" the captain asked.

"Just what are you driving at?" the astronomer asked.

"Come. I'll show you."

Captain Deil led Seymo from the conning tower down to the engine room in the bowels of the ship. Treeg did not appear this time to halt the pair as they entered the door.

Seymo's eyes widened as he stood in the room. He stared at the transformer in the center. The machine was smashed, wrecked. Pieces were scattered all over the room.

CHAPTER FIVE

Planet of Fire

HAD Seymo been given more time to think, he might not have taken the course he took.

But Captain Deil's actions appeared to be an accusation to Seymo. Once before he had seen a wrecked laboratory. He had reported it as an innocent man might have. His reward was imprisonment.

Now, for the second time in his life, he was confronted with sabotage, not his own. This time he did not intend to be punished for someone else's crime.

Seymo whirled toward the captain with surprising suddenness. He brought his fist upward with a powerful punch that landed on the point of the spaceman's chin. The captain, without a chance to defend himself, uttered a gasping cry and pitched forward on the floor.

Still acting instinctively, Seymo darted out the door. The subconscious had acted the best it knew how. It had removed the obstacle and made Seymo a free man. But the subconscious had no thought for the future.

Seymo reached the open air. It was cool and pleasant. The temperatures were those of spring on earth. It wouldn't be so bad to spend one's life in this paradise.

"I'll die before I go back to Saturn!" Seymo said, half snarling.

He darted swiftly toward a forest near the edge of the plain. Once in the shelter of these trees he would be comparatively safe from capture. He could wait for night and then put distance between himself and the terrestrial party. After that he had the whole planet to hide in.

Seymo ran swiftly, darting between the many-stemmed trees of the fantastic forest. Only after he was completely out of breath did he sit down to rest.

He sat on a rock and explored his sur-

roundings with his eyes. The vegetation was dense, but weirdly different from anything Seymo had seen on the Earth, Venus, or Mercury. There was no vegetation on Saturn, except that cultivated inside the helix, all transplanted from warmer planets.

The trees of this planet were huge, grassy reeds. Their many stems joined together at the tip in a sort of bud, or huge cone. From the cone dripped a silvery substance, which Seymo recognized as pure mercury.

All the plants exuded mercury. The element was as plentiful as silicon or aluminum on Earth. Mercury came from branches and stems of every plant, as well as from the buds and flowers. Underfoot there were tough, fibrous grasses, covered with a blackish brown ooze. On many trees there was a reddish dust, mercurous oxide mixed with a liquid that burned Seymo's skin when he touched it. The burning stuff must be mercurous hydroxide, formed biologically. The reddish dust on the trees was mercuric oxide.

An atmosphere filled with such dust would be decidedly unhealthy, since most mercury compounds on Earth are more or less poisonous. But the dust did not blow. It was held together in a sort of paste on the vegetation. But it covered everything.

A sickening realization came to Seymo that he had marooned himself on a planet where all things were poison. And mercury poisoning is never a pleasant way to die.

"But I'd face even that rather than go back to Saturn," he told himself.

The small, many-legged animals seemed hardly to notice Seymo. They were not particularly tame, but they seemed unafraid. Some of the creatures were so covered with silvery mercury that they looked like metal toys.

The animals exhibited a nervousness

that was not due to the appearance of a human being. It struck Seymo that they were afraid of something.

Several furry creatures that seemed to be without legs were scrambling like miniature tanks over rocks to places where the soil was soft. There they began digging into the ground with their tails. Others burrowed beneath the rocks and from time to time some of the creatures would run into cleared spaces to gaze upward into the brilliant light of the Cepheid sun.

THE star floated lazily across the heavens toward noon of the planet's forty-hour day. It was now half-concealed by a cloud of gas, the one Seymo had observed earlier, only now it had expanded until it filled the entire heavens.

The ghastly green brilliance of the glowing cloud tinged the landscape and caused eerie reflections in the mercury ooze of the trees and plants.

Seymo, rising from the rocks to continue his flight, looked upward into the sky. Often he paused to watch the weird astronomical phenomena, utterly beyond his experience.

The clouds of green gas seemed to be entering the atmosphere of the planet.

It couldn't be chlorine, yet Dr. Seymo couldn't understand how it could be anything else with that greenish color. Suddenly he remembered. Oxygen under certain conditions—found only in interstellar space—gives off a green band in the spectrum.

Dr. Seymo understood. The gas was in space between Alpha Seymo and the planet. It was oxygen.

The realization had a sobering effect. Oxygen, giver of life, also is donor of death. Oxygen causes fires, rapid oxidation and, in its pure state, is poison to man. If the entire planet were engulfed and its atmosphere impregnated by a superabundance of oxygen an inferno of fire would

result. On Earth oxygen is weakened in a combination with nitrogen and other gases in the atmosphere, but even then spontaneous combustion is common.

Seymo understood why the plants and animals on this planet exuded mercury. Mercury combines with oxygen and protects the animals and plants from spontaneous combustion.

Seymo had no protecting coat of mercury.

Overhead gentle peals of thunder rolled across the sky. The cloud darkened the heavens and lightning flashed in bluish streaks toward the ground.

In the distance Dr. Seymo heard cries of members of the crew from the space ship, hastening back to the craft for protection. Poor devils! If that transformer didn't get fixed, they'd be roasted alive.

A sudden thought struck Dr. Seymo. What if the transformer couldn't be fixed? Only an expert could repair it.

Dr. Seymo turned back. A minute before he had resolved to die before he would return to the craft. Now only death could keep him away. Even if the man who had framed him to Saturn were on that craft, Dr. Seymo had to get it off this planet to save the lives of the others.

A howling wind struck down from the heavens. Dead leaves on the ground burst into flame.

The atoms of excited oxygen struck his flesh with burning fury.

Seymo raced across the plain toward the space ship. Ahead he saw space-sailors crowding into the locks. Behind flames from dead vegetation were sending spirals of smoke upward. The wind shrieked and howled.

The astronomer plunged through licking flames and exerted his muscles against the pressure of the wind.

Ahead the outer locks of the craft were closing.

"Wait!" he screamed.

His voice could not possibly have car-

ried above the roar of the wind and the crash of thunder, but someone had glimpsed the fleeting figure and held open the locks.

The next instant Dr. Seymo was inside, as behind him an ocean of fire seemed to bathe the planet.

CHAPTER SIX

The Saboteur Exposed

WITHIN the ship Seymo came face to face with Treeg. The man's face was streaked with sweat and contorted with fear. His eyes rolled in their sockets and he stumbled toward Seymo.

"Save us!" he shrieked. "Fix the transformers or all is lost!"

Seymo pushed him aside. He hated this man, who had caused his court martial on Mercury.

The convict made his way to the engine room.

As he entered the door, Seymo saw Captain Deil, rubbing a bruised spot on his chin as he watched Lane working with the broken transformer.

Captain Deil smiled painfully.

"I was afraid you wouldn't get back," he said. "I forgot to warn you about these oxygen storms."

"I came back because I had to fix this transformer!" exploded Seymo. "You couldn't get off this planet unless it is fixed."

A moan sounded behind Seymo. It was Treeg who had followed him into the engine room.

"Fix it, Seymo!" pleaded Treeg. "Fix the transformer."

Lane stopped his work and rose to face Seymo with a vicious expression on his face.

"He won't fix it! He broke it on purpose!" he growled. "That's what he did to the machine on Mercury! He's got an obsession for sabotage!"

"Easy, Lane!" spoke Captain Deil. "The Mercury transformer was stolen, not wrecked. It was the other machinery that was wrecked. Isn't that right, Treeg?"

Treeg's nervous twitching halted. A look of fear crossed his face.

"You know?" he asked.

Captain Deil nodded his head.

"I don't think Seymo smashed the machinery. And Seymo won't touch this transformer until we have the truth, Treeg!"

Treeg's shoulders sagged.

"I did it!" he cried. "I smashed the machinery to throw the blame on Seymo after I discovered the transformer stolen. But I didn't steal the transformer!"

Captain Deil glanced toward two members of the crew who stood in the room.

"You men will be witnesses to that statement," said the Captain.

"I don't care!" screamed Treeg! "Fix

the transformer and get us out of here!"

Captain Deil's mouth widened in that slow smile that Rand Seymo had seen so many times.

"I've changed my mind," said the Captain. "Let Lane fix the machine. He built it!"

Lane's face whitened and he sank to his knees beside the wrecked transformer. The room was so still that sounds of the hurricane outside came through the walls. As Lane worked fumblingly with the transformer Captain Deil watched.

Seymo turned away, looking from the portholes at the flashing of the storm outside. The interior of the craft grew uncomfortable warm. Perspiration oozed from the men inside, but Lane worked on.

The gas that burned was coronium—oxygen molecules in a high state of excitement. It had been known for a long

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time that stars are machines that transmute hydrogen atoms into non-hydrogen atoms. Now it was known that Cepheids were specialized atom factories manufacturing oxygen.

The Cepheids might account for the large number of oxygen molecules in the cosmic cloud that envelopes all space.

Seymo's thoughts were interrupted by a roar from Lane as he tossed aside his tools.

"I—I can't fix it!" he roared. "What do you think I am? A miracle worker? I can't repair this damage."

"You built it, didn't you?" asked the captain.

Seymo sensed his cue.

"Let me try it, Captain," he said. "I built it, perhaps."

"You!" shrieked Lane.

"I think now I know why you needed me on this voyage," went on Dr. Seymo.

"Let him fix it," pleaded Treeg. "It's getting so hot I can't stand it!"

Lane suddenly seemed to realize that he, too, was uncomfortably warm.

"Yes," said Lane. "Fix it, or we'll die!"

"Not so fast, Lane!" spoke Captain Deil. "You realize that if Seymo fixes the transformers it might go a long way toward substantiating his story that he built them—not you!"

Lane seemed to sob out his next words:

"I'd rather live on Saturn than die in this godforsaken place!"

Dr. Seymo went to work. His hands moved swiftly over the parts, almost caressing the transformer whole again.

"It's proof enough for me," Captain Deil said, watching the repair work. "Lane, I'm afraid you've some explaining to do."

A cry sprang from Lane's throat. He stooped and seized a wrench. He spun around and brought the weapon down on the head of a sailor guarding Treeg. As the man fell, Lane wrenched a revolver

from his hand and turned it on the others in the room.

"Yes!" he screamed. "I took the transformer from Mercury. But I meant no harm to Seymo. I wanted to get even with Treeg—Treeg had promised that post to me!"

Treeg roared and took a step toward Lane. The pistol cracked and Treeg pitched forward, a little rivulet of blood coming from a hole in his forehead.

Before the body hit the floor, Lane had turned the gun toward Captain Deil, forestalling a move to overpower him.

"I took the transformer for science, captain!" Lane went on. "I wanted to be as great as the great Captain Deil. I had experimented with iron transformers and I learned how you accomplished your intra-dimensional travel. I found that a small amount of zirconium alloy increased the efficiency of the transformer and I reasoned that a machine built wholly of zirconium—like the transformers on Mercury—would be better still. I stole the transformers and Treeg wrecked the Mercury magnetic base in order to save his own hide—he would have been imprisoned for negligence otherwise."

"Then you joined my organization," Deil said. "I know the rest."

"But you won't take me to Saturn!" Lane shouted. He aimed carefully at the captain. At that moment, Dr. Seymo leaped. He sprang forward and planted a blow on Lane's jaw. The blow spoiled the aim of the revolver and the bullet flattened against the steel sides of the craft. Lane staggered, lost his balance and sprawled headlong in the doorway.

Seymo dived after Lane, intending to pin him to the floor, but he was a second too late. Lane scrambled to his feet and dashed down the companionway. A spaceman blocked his way, but with his head down, Lane charged into the sailor and sent him sprawling.

Lane raced down the corridor, to the

locks. With his back to the wall, he raised the revolver and fired twice at Seymo. The bullets plucked at Seymo's clothing, but he did not stop. He did not seem in the least afraid of the bullets.

The third time Lane pulled the trigger, the hammer fell on an empty chamber.

Lane turned and tugged frantically at the locks. The doors swung open and he sprang through the door, closing the lock behind him.

Lane's object had been only to put a door between himself and Seymo, but he had forgotten about the automatic mechanism that controlled the outer lock. With a hiss, the outer atmosphere, filled with fire and deadly, excited oxygen ions, seeped into the lock chamber.

A rush of ozone wind, a flash of flame and Lane's body was charred to ash. For an instant the figure seemed to stand upright, then the ashes slowly sifted to the floor in a grotesque heap.

Seymo watched unwillingly, unable to tear his eyes from the scene.

He felt a hand on his shoulder as he turned to face Captain Deil.

"I suspected him from the time the transformers were stolen," said the Captain. "That is why I attended your trial."

"That's why your face was so familiar to me," Seymo said. "I must have noticed you at the trial."

"Perhaps you did," the captain said. The motors were working and already the craft was cooler as it soared above the atmosphere of the flaming planet. "As soon as I could get Lane into my organization where I could watch him, I set out for proof that you were innocent. He insisted he was on Mars when the Mercutian transformers were stolen, but I knew he had the secret of intra-dimensional travel. It would have been possible for him to go from Mars to Mercury as easily as he stepped through the lock to his death."

"So you got me paroled so you could have a showdown with Lane, Treeg and myself?"

"Correct. Treeg had been more or less corrupt in his office as governor of Mercury, and I think he railroaded you to Saturn to cover up some of his other crimes, as well as negligence in allowing the transformer to be stolen."

"I suppose he committed the sabotage today, then," Seymo said.

Captain Deil laughed. "No, Dr. Seymo. I did the sabotage today."

The oxygen storm was tapering off on the planet below. The craft sailed until it had ceased entirely and then it landed again. There were hundreds of small animals, their metallic sheen now dull with the mercury in their pores changed to oxides, on the field below.

"We can finish our work and then get some freighters built with the zirconium we're hauling back to earth," said the captain.

"Freighters?" asked Seymo. "One ship will carry all the zirconium we'll need in a lifetime."

"There's something more valuable than zirconium on this planet. It's a superabundance of oxygen," said Deil.

"We have plenty of oxygen on Earth," puzzled Seymo.

"But what about Saturn and its atmospheres of methane and hydrogen? If we can oxygenate Saturn we might make it habitable and make life worth living for those poor convicts in the helix. The oxygen would burn off the methane and hydrogen to form water and some carbon. The heat of combustion would warm the planet and the carbon in the air would hold it!"

"What a job!"

"Yes," said Captain Deil. "Luckily we've a man big enough to do it."

"Who?" asked Dr. Seymo.

"You," said Captain Deil, smiling.

ASOKORE POWER

By L. Sprague de Camp

They didn't have atomic power, which they needed, so they had to invent something like it, and just as good.



THE cruel sun of southern India beat down on the walks and terraces of the royal palace, but inside the car it was cool. The tiny blower hummed, and whisked away Fernando Brown's half-formed smoke-rings. The Director of the Asokore Laboratories parked in front of the main entrance (knowing perfectly well that he

shouldn't) and got out. The hot air billowed into the car.

"His Highness will see you presently," said the orderly or doorman or whatever he was. Brown couldn't keep the elaborate mechanism of a royal household straight. He settled in a chair in the vestibule. Having been kept waiting before by His Highness General Sir Keshub Hydar Ramanija Santosh Edward Mir Daula Shah, Rajah of Asokore, he had foresightedly brought along a technical magazine to read. He finished an article and a half before the functionary reappeared and said His Highness would see him forthwith.

AS HE strode into the Presence and bowed stiffly, Brown reflected that here was one on whom his detached attitude, which his friends called fair-mindedness and his enemies called cold-bloodedness, didn't work. He hated the Rajah with all his heart. He loathed the smooth pudgy face (his own was freckled and angular, with a tendency toward squirrel-teeth) the suavely insolent manner, the excruciating Briticisms. He even hated the perfectly fitting linen suit.

His Highness raised his eyebrows in his invariable what-species-does-*this*-belong-to manner. "Mr.—Ah—Ah—"

"Brown, Your Highness."

"Oh yes, Brown. What did you wish to see me about?"

"The recent disturbances, Your Highness," said Brown, keeping a tight grip on his temper.

"What about them?"

"There was another riot yesterday, in the Northern Department. One of the Palestinian guards received a broken collar-bone, and another has internal injuries. Day before yesterday one was shot dead from ambush."

"Really? Why do you come to see me about it?" The Rajah inspected his finger-nails.

"Just this:" said Brown earnestly; "you and I know that our cattle-killing program is the only known way of ending this hoof-and-mouth epidemic. Most of your people understood the program and are back of it. But you and I know that certain religious and political interests have seized on the program to advance their own ends, which are inimical both to your present form of government and to the continuance of the research program that we've mapped out for the Asokore Laboratories."

"I and my European and American co-workers were brought in here and set up in these laboratories to give the people of Asokore a higher standard of living, and that, to some extent, we've succeeded in doing. And now Avanend and his gang are howling 'Send the foreign blasphemers back where they came from.' You know that that's merely an excuse to—"

"I know?" interrupted His Highness. "I say, Mr.—Ah—Brown, have you added mind-reading to your scientific techniques? How do you know what I know?"

Brown ignored the provocation. "You're a well-informed man, Your Highness. This movement is getting such prestige as it can from the exploitation of your name. They call themselves 'royalists', and brag of having your backing. Now, a statement from you, clearing up the question—"

"Indeed, Mr. Brown? I'm afraid you've been misinformed about my functions. I'm a constitutional monarch, you know. I never mix in politics." (Liar, thought Brown.)

"But, Your Highness, the welfare of three million Asokoris—"

"I can only repeat what I said. I don't make public statements. The question will not be discussed further."

Brown knew it was hopeless, and turned to go. The Rajah suddenly spoke:

"What's this I hear about some sort of death-ray or atom-gun your chaps are developing?"

Brown recalled that old Shastri, the Prime Minister, had asked him the same question a few days previously. He told the Rajah there was nothing to it. "We could hardly keep it a secret if there were, Your Highness. Atomic disintegration and metamorphosis go back half a century, to the 1930's. But a controllable atom-gun would be something else. It would require lots of apparatus and power. And every experimenter who's tried to produce one has blown up his laboratory and sometimes himself."

"Oh, really? And the person who had such an instrument would have another kind of—ah—power." (He pronounced it "pah".) "If such a device should be developed, I should consider it my duty to—ah—reward the inventor fittingly for his—ah—benefit to humanity, and all that rot. You see, Mr. Brown? It wouldn't do to let such pah fall into irresponsible hands."

I see all right, thought Brown, and you can bet I'll never let any atom-gun fall into *your* hands. But aloud he said: "I understand perfectly, Your Highness," and made his formal exit.

BBROWN drove his car up to the ramp joining the Bangalore Highway and stopped; the light on his instrument-board showed red. He thought as he waited, some day I'll wipe the oily smirk off your face, my foul friend. The light changed to green, and he ran the car out on the highway. As it picked up speed, the green light changed to white. Brown pushed the synchronizer lever, moved the steering-wheel up out of the way, took out his magazine, and resumed his reading. The car, no longer under his control, purred along merrily, keeping just 50 meters behind a truck. The afternoon sun blazed down on the olive-and-buff

slopes of the Eastern Ghats which whirled past him.

He reached the Laboratories, on the outskirts of the City of Asokore, after five, and went to the canteen. There, as usual, Nick Tukharev, looking like a slightly Mongoloid Santa Claus, was waving a stein and orating on the sins of Capitalism. Dark, fox-faced Benoy Kumar, resplendent in purple shorts, was listening sympathetically to Quesada, the chemical engineer, tell the well-worn tale of the Spaniard—or rather, the president of the Manila Chamber of Commerce—who had blighted his life. Quesada was weeping into his beer.

Brown caught Kumar's eye, and the young physicist came over grinning toothily. "Hallo, Fernando! I see by your face that it happened as I said it would. Don't worry, Shastri and his Cabinet will back you come Hell or—you Americans say high tide? Oh, high water. You see, it's not our jobs only they have to worry about, but theirs as well. Of course, after what we did with the hoof-and-mouth disease, Avament hasn't such a hard job. You know that to the orthodox Hindu the killing of a cow is much worse than murder or incest."

"I know all about it," said Brown wearily. "Our local equivalent of the Archbishop of Canterbury called on me yesterday and lectured me on the evils of a materialistic outlook. I tried to defend science, but got nowhere. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing much. Six sets of tennis this morning, and this afternoon I worked out some new approximate solutions to quintic equations, and then I went down to the hippo-farm and worked with Gus on our gadget."

"And now," said Brown with respect in his voice, "you'll have a hearty dinner of roast beef, thereby setting your pious Brahmin ancestors back a few reincar-

nations, and then you'll do physics all night. Wish I knew how you did it." He told Kumar in detail about his conversation with the Rajah. "I wonder," he finished, "whether your and Gus's gadget mightn't be the source of these rumors about an atomic-power gun."

Kumar frowned thoughtfully. "I don't see how—it's not anything like that. Unless—Gus has a girl-friend, you know."

"What? That old coot?"

"Sure; the prettiest little Asokori you ever saw. I say, Fernando, you must come down and see our gadget, even if you are busy."

"Well,—I'll try to. But I've got work to do tonight."

BBROWN was just finishing the last paper at midnight, when his telephone rang. He flicked the switch on his wrist. When the excited voice from the receiver on his shoulder calmed down enough to be intelligible, it identified itself as that of Brahispati, the chief engineer of the Asokore Municipal Lighting System. "They tried to steal my new generators!" the voice shrilled.

"What?" said Brown. "You mean those four new generators you ordered from Madras? Who tried to steal them? And how in hell can anybody steal a three-ton generator anyway? You can't carry it under your coat."

"I tell you. They—I don't know who they were—had a truck, maybe two trucks. The generators came today, and were sitting on a flat-car in the railroad yard. And tonight these—" here the telephone crackled with Urdu obscenity—"sneaked into the yard, and slugged the watchman, and tried to hoist the generators off the car onto the trucks. They used the yardcrane, but in the darkness they did something wrong, and they dropped the first one they hoisted. The casing is cracked!" Brahispati sounded as if he were about to weep. "And—you

know the hardware shop across the street from the depot? The cashier was down there going over the books, and he heard the noise and gave the alarm. But the thieves had disappeared, with their trucks, by the time the police came. My beautiful new generator—"

Brown finally convinced the overwrought engineer that he, Brown, had no idea what this bizarre theft meant, and went to bed swearing. Things got loonier and loonier. He wondered if he'd been wise to give up his good job at Schenectady (he was a steam turbine engineer) to come and exec in this goofy little Hindu hill kingdom. It was probably his unfortunate habit of accepting responsibilities that nobody else wanted that had gotten him into this. Maybe it would have been better if the British had stayed in India, after all, though Brown had always sympathized with the Indians' feelings on the subject.

THE next morning he had hardly gotten through his mail when he had the job of placating one of the more temperamental members of his staff. "I'm sorry, Martha," he said, "but all the labs on the east side were spoken for long ago. But look here: Tukharev and Lowrie haven't installed half their junk yet. If the view means so much to you, why don't you try your feminine wiles on them? Maybe one of them would be willing to switch. I admit the Scotchman's a hard case, but you shouldn't have much trouble with the sentimental Nikolai."

Miss Martha Livengood drew herself up, every inch a Bostonian. "Why—at my age—you suggest—" She saw he was trying not to laugh, and went on: "That's a splendid idea, Fernando. Now if you'll just help me select the right lipstick and underthings—" Brown's ears became pink. She continued: "Seriously, I didn't know we were going to move into these new laboratories for a month, and

I've been so busy with my fleas and lice—I've had six entirely new mutations—" Somebody's hoarse yell ended the discourse.

Brown's desk drawer flew open to the touch of a button, and his static pistol was in his hand. When he got to the source of the sound, Kumar and Quesada were looking at a six-foot cobra on the floor of the latter's lab. The snake's head was smashed to jelly, but its body still twitched. The little Filipino held the broken half of a mop-handle. Now that the danger was over, a reaction had begun to seize Quesada; he looked as though he were going to faint.

"Better come down and have a drink, Juan," Brown told him. Then Brown's eyes strayed to the ventilator inlet in the concrete wall. "So that's where they come from! Stand clear, everybody!" The pistol purred for a tenth of a second as its ultra-violet beam sought the ventilator, and cracked piercingly as the blue streak of the charge followed the ionized path. The visible half of the second snake's body exploded into fragments.

"Damn!" said Brown, "The place must be impregnated with cobras. The ventilating system goes all over the building; we'll have to clear everybody out."

EXTERMINATION took the rest of the morning. When Brown settled into his chair after lunch, he found Maganlal Vora, the janitor, extending one of the laboratory's printed forms. "I thenk, Sair, we have extirpated the ophemophidia. Here is a leest; any others will have been slain by the gas."

Brown read the neat typing: "1 spotted viper; 4 Russell's viper; 9 common cobra; 16 banded krait; 2 harmless." Vora coughed deprecatingly. "I thenk those harmless ones are put in by mistake. Someone was inefficient."

"Think we ought to send in a complaint about inferior merchandise?"

"Ah, no, Sair, it is a small matter—only two out of thairty-two. Next time perhaps." Brown looked hard at his dignified janitor; he could never be sure whether Vora was being serious. Vora, loftily deferential as ever, withdrew, and Brown, hoping he'd seen the last of these distractions to the orderly running of a laboratory, settled down to work.

But events were really just getting into their stride. In a few minutes General Dubin burst in. The heavy-set commander-in-chief of the Palestinian mercenaries was in field uniform, and was looking even glummer than was his normal wont. "The Rajah's gone," he snapped. "He and his gang, including his royal guard, just weren't there this morning. When did you see him last?"

Brown told him. "Why didn't you telephone, Stanley?"

The general made the short barking noise generally described as a mirthless laugh. "Have you tried 'phoning in the last couple of hours?"

"No." Brown flicked the switch on his wrist and dialled Chief Engineer Brahispati's number. The receiver on his shoulder cracked.

"Interference," said Dubin. "The whole system's out of commish. I got Shastri to order the militia mobilized. Something's going to pop, but I don't know when or where. All I can do is see that my tanks and 'planes are in order, and that the charging-stations for the static-gun condensers are working. Can't you scientific wizards help us out? All the police have been able to uncover is a rumor about some sort of atomic pow—"

"Stop it!" yelled Brown. "Stop, Stanley! The next guy that asks me about an atom-gun is going to have to eat my slide-rule, glass and all." He told Dubin about the ubiquitous rumors on the subject that he had encountered. "We'd like to help you out, Stan, but we're not doing anything in the way of atomic power."

We haven't the equipment, and Kumar's the only one of us with enough knowledge of physics."

The glum general chewed the ends of his mustache. "Maybe it would have been better if you'd put some time in on means of destroying your fellow-man, instead of being so noble and constructive. You humanitarians put through a program for uplifting the masses, and forget all about the toes you're going to step on in the process. And then when the owners of the toes—"

A Palestinian soldier, hung with gadgets, knocked and entered. Dubin frowned at the paper that was handed him. "Hm," he said, "an army of undetermined strength has appeared in the Eastern Department with tanks, artillery, and aircraft. We'll have to move quickly. Good bye, Fernando. If you do invent an atom-gun, let me know. Maybe I should have stayed in Palestine and been a rabbi, like my father wanted me to." He shook hands and clicked off down the corridor.

GENERAL DUBIN had laid his plans well, for within two hours the long line of trucks, tanks, and armored motorcycles was roaring out of town eastward. As the last of the column got into motion, an airplane snored over from the east and loosed a bomb, which blew a suburban bungalow skywards, then whipped into a turn as two Palestinian machines swooped at it. An antiaircraft battery crashed, and a puffy black cloud appeared in front of the insurgent machine. As it popped out on the far side its engine died. (The black cloud was emery powder.) But with a grunt the 'plane belched a streamer of flame and smoke aft, and raced off out of sight on its rocket-jets.

Brown collected his staff and announced that they were going to work out a program of military research. The staff seemed more concerned by the fact that

most of their laboratory assistants were being called up for the militia, and Brown had to remind them that their jobs and perhaps their lives depended on the defeat of the Rajah's attempted coup.

After it was over, Benoy Kumar came up and urged Brown to come down to the hippopotamus-farm. "I think maybe Gus and I have something for you," he said mysteriously.

"You mean for military purposes? Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I *did*, but you were busy. And we didn't know what it would do until a couple of days ago, and we only figured out how to make it work last night."

So Brown went. As they let themselves into the farm, Scheherazade, the queen of the herd, recognized Brown as a friend and started toward him, opening her gargantuan mouth expectantly. Brown hoisted himself on the steel bars of the fence and yelled "Gus! O-o-oh Gus!"

From behind the trees came a voice: "Hey, is that you, Fernando? All right, Scheherazade, you come here!" The hippopotamus waddled off.

"Gus!" shouted Brown, "How many times have I told you to keep your pets away from the gate? First thing you know one of 'em will step on a visitor's foot, and we'll have a damage suit. Or a visitor will get scared and run out leaving the gate open, and the hippos'll clean out every melon patch in ten miles. Or Scheherazade will get me against the fence and lean, and I don't think that would do me any good!"

Gus Gillenhaal, the pink top of his skull showing through his sparse yellow-white hair, apologized profusely, promising that an extra fence would be built, and so forth. Brown, who had heard all this before, walked on up the path; the Swede, arms still gyrating, followed. "And you know, Fernando, my Scheherazade wouldn't a fly hurt, and we got an order

from Bengal for six hippos for canal-clearance, and with a couple more like that we show a profit for the year, and that Tamil boy of mine is run off again, and . . ."

INSIDE the rambling concrete structure that served Gillenhaal as dispensary for his charges, shop, laboratory, and living-quarters, Kumar picked off the work-bench, littered with tools and a vast tangle of wire, something that looked like a flashlight with a pistol grip. "This is the gadget," he said; "If you'll sit down, Fernando, I'll explain.

"Gus and I thought we were inventing something new in photosynthesizers, to see if maybe we couldn't make a synthetic virus or something. But we found that, if you can form carbon-linkages with ultraviolet radiation, you can also break them down. The carbon-hydrogen bond isn't a very strong one, you know. You look at the heat of formation of the commoner hydrocarbons; they're all relatively near zero. Methane is about plus 20 kilogram-calories per gram-molecule; ethylene is about minus 6, compared to plus 94 for carbon dioxide and plus 69 for water.

"It's mostly a matter of finding just the right wave-length. It has to be a certain function of the orbits of the outer electrons of carbon and hydrogen. But once you have that, you don't need much power. You turn your beam on, and if it hits an organic substance, all the carbon-hydrogen bonds on the surface break, and you get a lot of free monatomic hydrogen floating around. That's about the most inflammable substance there is, so you don't have to worry any more about where the rest of your energy is coming from. The combustion of the hydrogen supplies that—poof!"

"I see," said Brown. "That's how these stories of an atomic gun have gotten around, though your device works by purely molecular reactions."

It was getting dark inside, and Gillenhaal flicked the light switch. Nothing happened. Muttering something about fuses, the Swede disappeared, leaving Kumar and Brown to discuss the possibilities of the projector. In a few moments he was back. "It's funny," he said, "but our power seems to be shut off. All the fuses are okay, and to make sure I tried out some of the extras."

Before he could be answered, there was a rapid series of concussions, faint with distance. The sound swelled as they listened.

Gillenhaal said: "I think that means the Rajah has pulled one of his little yokes. What do we do, Fernando?"

Brown stepped to the door for a look citywards. Something woke to life and raced down the path. Brown yelled "Stop!" and felt for a non-existent static pistol. Never having formed the habit of gun-toting, he had left his weapon at the laboratory. But Benoy Kumar pushed him roughly aside from behind and fired twice. The gate clanged, and the hippopotami bumbled with fright. Kumar fired again; the discharge grounded on a gate-bar with a shower of sparks.

"Damn!" said the physicist. "I need practice. But all I could see in this twilight was a shirt and a pair of shorts going—how do you say—Hell-bent for election. Probably a royalist spy. Where's your car, Fernando? Mine's at the garage."

"Lent mine to Tukharev," replied Brown. "What do you need to make that gadget work?"

"A few volts a. c. or d.c., to turn the generator and heat up the tube—oh, Lord!"

"Huh?"

"The power's off, probably all over the city, and we haven't a dry-cell in the place. We've been using current from the labs for experimenting, and that little motor-generator set."

"Well, come on, then," said Brown; "There are plenty of cells in the labs."

BBROWN found the gate locked. Turning to Gillenhaal, he snapped: "Gus, did you leave the key in the lock again?"

"Yudas, Fernando, I'm sorry, but you see—"

"Never mind. Where's the spare?"

"I lost it last month—I been meaning to have another made—"

Brown cocked a fist and almost let fly at the hippopotamus-breeder. But he controlled himself. "Have you forty feet of rope that we could throw over the fence?"

"I don't think so," said Gillenhaal. "But wait—I got an idea." He bellowed "Scheherazade!" There was a snuffling in the dusk, and his special pet waddled up. "See?" Gillenhaal indicated the gate. "Push!"

The hippo put her vast nose to the bars and pushed. The tortured steel groaned

but held. A second attempt also failed.

"Looks like it don't—wait! I got another idea." Gillenhaal ran back to the building, and reappeared with a hypodermic syringe the size of a small fire-extinguisher.

"Just happened to have some adrenalin," he explained. "The normal human dose for stimulus is around fifteen minims; Scheherazade weighs 3,240 pounds; that divided by 180 means 600 minims. Somebody please hold a match. Good." Scheherazade winced as the needle sank into her neck, but Gillenhaal soothed her. "Now we got to wait a few minutes for the effect."

Brown listened impatiently to the symphony of explosions and static discharges. The night-glow of Asokore City was missing but the flicker of guns showed over the trees. At last Gillenhaal said: "Scheherazade! Here, push!"

Scheherazade lunged friskily at the

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bars. The steel bent; Gillenhaal shouted encouragement; and the hinges gave way. The hippo pitched forward and lay panting. "Poor girl!" said her master, "I bet your nose got permanent grooves in it. Tomorrow I fix it. Where now, gentlemen?"

Three blocks from the laboratory they stopped as a beam from a searchlight on a truck illuminated the buildings. Men were jumping out of trucks and spreading out, directed by officers with flashlights. Somebody banged on the laboratory doors and shouted in Urdu.

"Turbans!" said Brown. "That means Avanend's private army; they're the only ones who wear 'em."

As the royalist forces spread through the surrounding blocks, the three men beat a hasty retreat, cutting across vacant lots. "Our friends are back there in the city," said Brown; "I'd like to get 'em out, but how we could do it with one static pistol—" He cursed softly.

THEY were well out on the highway to Madras. A car stopped near them with a squeal of tires. Its headlights were out; the driver was evidently using night-goggles. A spotlight beam stabbed out, and a voice said in Urdu: "Stand, you three! We want a look at you." Then it changed to English. "Why Meestair Brown! A pleasant surprise. General Avanend said to look for—"

Crack! Kumar whisked the static gun from behind his back and fired. The light vanished, and while glass tinkled on the road, the three men bolted into the woods. Behind them the blue crackling fingers of static discharges explored the bush. One struck a tree near them and showered them with fragments. Brown got a beetle down the neck of his sport shirt, but it had been safely electrocuted. He was more concerned with the possibility of stepping on a krait than of being hit; he knew that it would take some seconds for

the royalists' eyes to become adapted to the ghostly images in the infra-red goggles.

The crackling bolts and sounds of pursuit died away. After a while they came to a dirt road.

Gillenhaal said: "This goes on for about five kilometers, and joins the Madras Highway. If we went along it until we found Dubin's army, maybe we could do something."

"Good idea," said Brown. "We'd best step on it. Those birds back there will report to headquarters and send a posse out after us. Hope your bolt burned out their car's wiring, Ben."

"A posse?" said Kumar vaguely.

"Search party with hostile intentions. It'll take a couple of days for us to walk to Dubin, but maybe we can get a lift."

"If you don't mind," said Kumar, "I'd rather not get any lifts before daylight. I want to know who's offering the ride."

FOUR hours later they were still plodding through the dust, and the other two commented sarcastically on Gillenhaal's idea of five kilometers. A spot of light sent them into the bush; it was made by an Asokori sweeping the ground in front of him with a flashlight for snakes as he walked. When they came out of the shrubbery he almost took to his heels, but Kumar assured him that no violence impended. "We only wanted a light," said the physicist. "We came away without our cigarette-lighters."

The Asokori, still suspicious, produced his lighter, and Kumar offered him a cigarette and asked him how far it was to the Madras highway.

"Just a few hundred meters—I just came that way. Watch yourself when you get on the road; I was stopped twice by cars full of royalists. My name's Bhasa, Mohandas Bhasa. My cousin and I run a fruit-stand on the highway. I've just been down to my cousin's house listening

to the war-news on the radio, but we couldn't hear much because each side was blanketing the other's waves. Those dogs of royal—" He broke off, suddenly fearful again. "Which—which side are you on?"

"Same as yours, brother," Brown told

row. My nephew's going. Yes Sir, the only way we common people can keep their liberties is to fight for them! What's your name, please? You're a foreigner, aren't you? I thought so. . . ."

Brown, when he had a chance, introduced himself and his companions.

"Not *the* Brown? The Laboratory Director? Sir, this is a great pleasure, and an honor, if I may say so. . . ."

Kumar waited until their new friend stopped for breath, and asked if he could buy the flashlight.



him. "We're here because those dogs chased us."

"That's fine! I was scared for a minute. But if I didn't have a family I'd enlist in the Parliamentary militia tomorrow.

"Well—you'd be welcome to it; I wouldn't think of taking money—but the snakes, you know—my poor aunt's sister-in-law stepped on a krait one night, and she was dead before they got the serum to her—I'll tell you what; walk back to my house with me, and I'll make you a present of the light!"

Brown hated to spend the time, but he

didn't want to antagonize the man, who would be only too anxious to tell people about having met them anyway. So they retraced their steps, the garrulous Bhasa pouring out his interminable stream of Urdu. He was so glad to meet the great Director Brown and his co-workers, because he had an idea he'd long wanted to submit them. It was a scheme for exterminating venomous snakes; briefly, it comprised injecting mice with some sort of poison, and releasing them for the snakes to prey upon. It would of course have to be harmless to the mice. No, he didn't know of such a poison, but the great scientists at the laboratories would, no doubt.

Kumar said, gravely, "A very interesting idea, Mr. Bhasa. I'll look into it. It has just one weakness in its present form; it wouldn't spare the harmless snakes, which are economically valuable. However, if we can find a poison that will distinguish between snakes and mice, we ought to be able to fix the other difficulty." (Brown hoped Bhasa wouldn't know he was being kidded. Benoy Kumar took an impish delight in skating on thin ice.)

When they reached Bhasa's bungalow, the Asokori gave them the light with a ten-minute speech of presentation. They broke away finally after swearing him to secrecy. "Whew!" said Brown. "And I always thought Nick Tukharev was a talker! We'd best find a hideaway to tinker with your gadget."

THEY settled in a clump of trees in the angle between the dirt road and the Madras Highway. After a few minutes of tinkering, Kumar said sadly, "We need two lights, Fernando. When we take the cell out of this one for the projector, we can't use it to see what we're doing."

Brown yawned. "It'll be light in a couple of hours. You go ahead and work on it; I'm going to sleep."

... A rajah as big as an elephant was chasing Brown who was riding a hippopotamus. Now and then the beast rolled an eye back and said in a strong Swedish accent "I want to lie down yust a minute." Brown was trying to adjust a heat-ray device to blast the rajah who was gaining on him, but to work it he had to wind a long wire into a coil. And every time he got the thing almost wound it would pop out of his fingers. Finally it got altogether out of control and coiled around him and his mount. The hippo tripped and fell, pitching Brown off. He bounced up—up—"If I can only stay up," he said aloud. "But no, I'm falling—" The rajah's face rushed up at him, to dissolve into that of his star physicist, grinning foxily.

"Wake up, Fernando!" he said. "It's almost daylight. We're going to try the gadget."

Gillenhaal aimed the device at a small bush and clicked the switch. Brown noticed the faint sparkle of burning dust-particles along the path of the beam; the bush went *floomph* and exploded into flame.

"If we had some breakfast," said Brown, "we could cook it. We'd better put that fire out."

It was done, and they cautiously walked up to the highway. Up the road a hundred meters was a parked car, and near it were four royalists eating.

They crept half the distance through the edge of the woods, and Gillenhaal aimed at the back of a fat royalist who was just raising a coffee-cup. The man shrieked once from the cloud of flame and smoke that enveloped him. The others stared; then another one of them went up. The remaining two leaped for the car; one of them made it. As the machine started with a roar, Gillenhaal aimed at it. There was another burst of flame as paint and tires oxidized. The car wove out of sight over the next rise.

They ran after it, Brown not enjoying the sight of the three black things beside the road. When they reached the crest they saw the car standing in the road with one door open, its paint still smouldering. There was no driver.

"There he goes!" said Kumar. A receding spot far down the highway dwindled to nothing. "Another royalist on a motorcycle came along and picked him up. They'll have a—a reception committee waiting for us."

"And," said Brown, "we'd better find a suitable place to receive their greeting."

THEY settled themselves in the edge of a wood. Below the birds' morning concert and the chatter of monkeys they could hear the faint rumble of battle from the city. Evidently the garrison was holding out.

Brown adjusted a listening-device looted from one of the dead royalists.

"Quiet, everybody," he said. "Damn those birds; they sound like the Ride of the Valkyries. I can hear a line of trucks, I think, coming this way."

"They're stopping," he said. "They ought to be just out of sight. I can hear their shoes hitting the asphalt."

They waited. A dozen men, widely spaced, appeared over the rise. The rising sun reddened their brown faces.

Brown whispered: "Hand me those binoculars, Ben. Yes, they're just scouting. Let 'em have it, Gus. Get those across the road, too."

Gillenhaal aimed—and a man became a torch. There were shouts; the monkeys' chatter ceased abruptly. Another man was incinerated, then a third. The rest returned the way they had come, with haste.

"This isn't as kvick as I'd like," complained Gillenhaal. "You got to hold it on them a second or so."

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Over the rise came three tanks, and behind them a line of men three meters apart. Brown said: "All right, Gus." The nearest tank glowed with sparks; then a thin sheet of flame floomped over it. It changed course, firing wildly, and stopped. Its hatch flew open, and the crew boiled out and ran. The other tanks roared at them. One threw a suddenly sputtering track and stopped, and its crew went away. The third whirled about, zig-zagged off, and turned over, its tracks still moving. Brown muttered: "Must have been using a tung-oil paint on those things, and synthetic-rubber tracks. Most of the rubberoids won't burn, but they've got plenty of hydrogen in them."

Officers ran up and down the line of men, threatening and exhorting. Flup! flup! man after man became a yellow flare. Then there was only a line of mushrooms of black smoke, swelling lazily over the bodies of those who had not been able to get away.

IT WAS quiet again; a bird resumed his song. Small grass-fires smouldered; they crackled cheerfully as a breeze sprang up and the grass-stems nodded.

Two jarring explosions came over the rise, followed instantly by a wheet-bam! wheet-bam! as the shells crashed into the trees. Brown said, "Field-howitzers, I think; about four centimeters." The guns cracked again, and they could hear an airplane motor overhead.

Brown through the glasses saw movements in the grass that betokened the crawling of men. A black speck caught his eye; he made out an infra-red detector on a little tripod. He could just see the motion of the hand of the man lying behind it, as he turned the crank that traversed the instrument. Brown thought, with all those fires he'll get a positive reading every few degrees.

The shells shrieked and exploded. One deafeningly heaved up a truckload of dirt

near them; clods spattered through the leaves above.

The crawling men began to rise far enough to clear the muzzles of their static guns, and long blue flashes sought the edge of the wood. The grass intercepted most of the discharges as effectively as would a concrete wall, but some came close enough to make the men jump as the electric surge jerked their muscles.

"Can only see them when they rise up to skoot," said Gillenhaal. "Silly thing about those static guns; no good for skooting through grass."

"Can you give a slow traverse?" asked Brown. "We'll have to burn them out."

"Try to." The Swede pivoted like a man panoraming with a hand movie-camera. With a low roar a broad band of flame marched down the field. As the first thick cloud of smoke billowed up, the three caught glimpses under it of a few men running back over the rise. The guns did not fire again.

Brown looked at his watch. "Six-thirty-five," he announced, "and the airplanes seem to have gone away. Ben, suppose you take the glasses up a tree for a look."

Presently Kumar called, "Can't see anybody. The two howitzers are standing in the field, with a lot of stuff lying around as if it had been dropped in a hurry."

"Guess they've pulled foot," said Brown. "Wonder if there's any food in the junk they dropped?"

Thirty minutes later they sat around a little blaze, started with the indispensable projector, and toasted royalist rolls on sticks. Smoke from the grass fire drifted into the wood and made their eyes water.

"I'm sorry for those fellows," said Brown; "They were brave men, but they just couldn't face an unknown weapon. But one shell, or a whiff of gas, would have finished us. And a good coat of in-

organic enamel would protect a tank from your weapon. Of course we needn't tell anybody that, yet." His telephone tinkled.

"Hello," said the voice, "Brown? This is Dubin."

"Hey, Stanley! How come service has been restored?"

"The royalists besieging Asokore City quit, and the people got the auxiliary station going. Where are you, and what in hell's this heat-ray or atom-gun that you said you didn't have?"

"We're near the village of Little Kurnool," Brown told him, "and we just invented the device. I'll tell you about—"

"Wait a minute," said the general. After a pause, he barked, "The royalists up here are surrendering too! I'll call you back."

THEY finished breakfast before the 'phone rang again. Dubin sounded more excited than Brown had ever heard him. He even sounded cheerful. "When you burnt up the party that was sent out to get you, Avanend was watching the whole performance in his televisor, or what he could see of it, as the telecaster was mounted on a truck over the hill. Then when the detachment came back, scared to death, they spread a rumor among his troops that you had atomic power after all. And the troops decided that fighting was no fun under those circumstances, and either started home or surrendered. Some of the officers tried to make them go on fighting, but they were—ah—liquidated. Then when the insurgents up here got word of what had happened, they did the same thing. They even turned the Rajah over to us.

"You see, Fernando, as nearly as I can make out, atomic power was in back of the whole thing. The Rajah's been scheming for years to get back some of the power his ancestors held; he'd even have called the British back if he could.

"The Rajah was afraid that if the parliamentary government got hold of such a weapon, he wouldn't have a chance. You told him that you weren't working on it, and you also mentioned the great power that would be required. Then Brahispati, the engineer of the lighting system, bought those four new generators for his power-plant. The Rajah heard of their arrival, and inferred that you'd lied to him, and that the generators were really for your atomic power. He's such a liar himself that he never credits anybody else with telling the truth.

"He figured he'd have to act quickly, and he had his puppet Avanend send a gang of his cutthroats to steal the generators. That didn't work, so there seemed to be nothing for him to do but a *putsch*. He started the main uprising here, and had Avanend hide his private army in the game-reserve, to attack the city when our forces had been drawn away. Then he'd have control of the generators, which are what he was most afraid of."

Brown chuckled. "Stanley! I can't explain the apparatus over the 'phone, but I'll tell you that it does use an electric generator—a little one-mouse-power affair the size of a golf-ball!"

"Mp! You damn scientists. Anyway, Fernando, I'll fly down to Asokore City to straighten things there this morning, and meanwhile I'll have a truck sent out from the city to pick you up. So long."

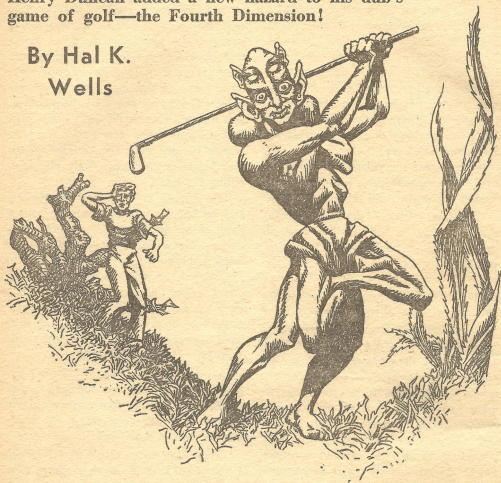
As the three men walked toward the highway, the smoke made them cough. Brown said, "Jeepers, I almost forgot." He dialled. "Hello, Little Kurnool City Hall? Director Brown calling the mayor. Hello, Mr. Gopal? Yes, I'm alive . . . The shooting you heard was some royalists. They're gone now. Say, I'm afraid we started a rather bad grass fire in the course of the fighting. Better send some of your boys over to put it out. Okay, don't mention it."

THE END

DIMENSION - HAZARD

Henry Duncan added a new hazard to his dub's game of golf—the Fourth Dimension!

By Hal K.
Wells



IT WAS at exactly fourteen minutes after three o'clock of a sunny Sunday afternoon in early July that Henry Duncan swung himself suddenly and completely into the Fourth Dimension.

The phrase "swung himself" is used advisedly. It was the act of swinging a brassie on the fifteenth hole of the Midtown Municipal Golf Course that provided both the method and the motive power for Henry Duncan's unique transit across, through, and around the unimaginable terrain of interdimensional space.

Mr. Duncan's epochal flight from a nor-

mal and mundane world was quite unintentional. The Fourth Dimension was the one thing farthest from his mind as he spread his long legs stiffly apart, waggled his club in large-knuckled hands, and in grim desperation prepared himself for what he hoped would be the shot of a lifetime.

It *had* to be the shot of a lifetime. Henry's location at the time was upon the grassy bottom of a long, deep gully one hundred and fifty yards to the right of the fifteenth tee. He had arrived there by achieving a drive with a rainbow slice that

set a new record for even Henry. The other three members of his foursome had driven reasonably straight balls and were now making their untroubled way greenward somewhere on the fairway above Henry's head.

They were playing for fifteen cents a hole and the preceding three holes had been halved. That meant that this hole shot the works for all four. The winner would get \$1.80; each loser would be out sixty cents. The difference between those two amounts is a respectable item when your weekly salary as a grocery clerk happens to be \$17.50.

Henry knew that to take a niblick and pitch safely up on the fairway meant almost certain loss of the hole. There was one possible chance to snatch victory from the gaping jaws of disaster. A long screaming brassie shot straight as a rifle bullet down the narrow gully, with a carry of at least two hundred and twenty yards and a slight hook at the end, would bring him out hole high and with a short easy pitch to the green.

It was a shot the mere contemplation of which would have blanched the ruddy cheeks of Walter Hagen, but Henry Duncan went at it with the grimness of desperation. The head of his club ceased its wagging, hovered momentarily, then started the weird and intricate sequence of physical contortions that made up the Duncan golf swing. It was a phenomenon that was in many respects suggestive of a windmill in a violent cyclone.

The club-head started back with decorous slowness, then abruptly accelerated to a whistling rush as Henry belatedly remembered to clamp his head rigidly down. As the club reached its zenith he also belatedly remembered admonitions about shifting his weight to his right foot, keeping his left arm straight, cocking his wrists, and making a full pivot. He tried to carry out all the admonitions simultaneously.

The result was both spectacular and disastrous. Henry felt vaguely that there was something horrible happening even as the brassie came hurtling downward in its incredible arc. As it passed his right knee he grimly tried to snap both wrists into it, straighten his left leg, roll his weight, keep his eye on the ball, and hit from the inside out. These contortions, added to an already appalling total, proved the last straw.

The laws of chance were about ten billion to one that it couldn't possibly happen, but when the gods of chance wrote those laws they had never seen Henry Duncan swing at a golf ball. It did happen.

If there had been any spectators watching Henry at the moment, which there were not, they would have witnessed a very startling sight. In the fraction of a second before the whistling club-head met the ball, both club and player vanished, flicking from sight with the split-second swiftness of a page rapidly turned in a book. The only thing left to even denote they had been there was the ball still reposing on the grass a yard or so from the edge of a deep little pond on the gully floor.

AS HENRY vanished from the eyes of the world, the world also vanished from Henry's eyes. There was a period of frightful blackness and cold that was both lightning short and ages long, then around Henry a new landscape burst into view. The only visible being in this new world was a figure that stood about a yard in front of Henry and surveyed him with a face that was as blankly startled as Henry's own.

Henry stared at the apparition for a frozen moment of shocked horror, then closed his eyes and shuddered in relief as he realized that such a thing couldn't really exist, of course. It was his own fault. He should have had more brains than to

have eaten that chocolate ice-cream cone on top of two hot dogs and a bottle of beer for lunch. He opened his eyes, and groaned. The incredible being was still there.

"Go away!" Henry said irritably. "All I need is a shot of bicarb!"

The figure looked like a cross between a biologist's nightmare and a Hindu artist's idea of the God of Destruction. It was about seven feet in height, with a bald shining head and skin the unpleasant hue of a green pumpkin. It had four arms, four legs, four eyes, and four ears.

Half of the creature's weird anatomy seemed to be in a state of profound slumber at the moment. The lower pair of eyes in the broad green face was placidly closed, the lower pair of arms was peacefully entwined across the enormous chest, and one pair of legs was drawn far up and folded across the abdomen. The other half of the thing, however, was very much awake.

The two upper eyes stared balefully at Henry through large irises that were the color of ripe tomatoes. The two upper arms, so multi-jointed as to be almost tentacular, flashed in the air and weird weapons of gleaming metal appeared magically in the eight-fingered hands. Then as Henry made no hostile move the other seemed to relax. The hostility faded from the tomato-red eyes, and the hands nonchalantly tossed the weapons into the air where they instantly vanished in faint puffs of tenuous mist. The act did nothing to restore Henry's badly shaken composure.

The creature's mouth opened. "Go away!" it said. "All I need is a shot of bicarb!" The words were an exact echo of Henry's, even to the definitely nasal Duncan accent. The creature repeated the phrase again, then shook its head as though puzzled. It pointed abruptly at Henry's brassie in a gesture that was unmistakably interrogatory.

"That's a brassie," Henry explained nervously. "It's a golf club, you know."

"Brassie—golf—club—know," the creature repeated thoughtfully. It pointed at Henry's head. "My head," Henry said doubtfully. The names for hands, feet, and neck quickly followed. Then pantomime gave the words for walk, stop, and jump. That seemed to suffice. The creature was silent for only a moment, then said, "That will do it all right, I think. But I must admit it is a very silly sort of language and very inefficiently constructed."

Henry's jaw dropped. "Why, you speak English after all!" he exclaimed.

"Naturally," the other said. "You just taught it to me."

"But how did I teach you?" Henry faltered. "I only told you ten or twelve different words."

"Two different words would have been enough. Some of us even argue that it can be done with one. I asked for the extra ones merely to save time. Given two or more words of any language, the deduction of all other words in that language is a simple matter of pure logic. A race that will call a certain kind of a wheeled vehicle a 'bicycle' will inevitably call the inside of a cow's stomach 'tripe.' You see that, don't you?"

HENRY didn't, but he let it go at that. "If I'm really here," he said, "which I certainly hope I'm not, where am I, and what in the heck happened to me?"

"You are on Quadruhl, a planet in what your people call the Fourth Dimension," the other answered calmly. "It isn't the ridiculous state of existence that you visualize as a Fourth Dimension, of course. The so-called dimension that you try to conceive in your tesseracts and other fourth-plane-perpendicular-to-three ideas is obviously merely the outside of the third dimension in which you already exist. Or for that matter, it is the inside, for no

complete dimension could ever have any side inside or outside any other side. I am sorry if it sounds a trifle confusing, but your primitive language simply does not contain the necessary words for me to make myself any clearer."

"Oh, you're doing fine," Henry assured him feebly.

Henry's head was beginning to ache dizzily and he had a horrible feeling that if he ever stopped long enough to realize that all this was really happening to him he would very promptly go crazy. In an instinctive effort to postpone that evil moment as long as possible he hastily tried to keep his mind occupied by asking more questions.

"How did I get here?" he demanded.

"I don't know exactly," the other answered. "There are a few scattered places between our dimensions where the wall is very thin. You were probably standing by one of those thin spots and in some manner you went through the intricate and almost impossible series of bodily movements necessary to carry you physically through the barrier."

So that was it, Henry reflected in shocked amazement. During his golf career he had done many strange things with a wooden club. He had swung himself off his feet on several occasions. He had knocked himself unconscious by wrapping the club-head around his left ear on the follow through. He had allowed the club to slip from his hands and slaughter an innocent calf that was grazing in a pasture twenty yards away. But he had now achieved the ultimate!

He had swung himself not only off his feet, but off the entire world, completely away from the Sun and the Solar System and also out of the whole sidereal universe. If he had only, he reflected bitterly, kept his head down when he swung at that ball back there on the gully floor this horrible thing would probably not have happened to him.

"Did anybody else ever do it before?" he asked forlornly.

"Oh yes, it happens every five or ten years, though you are the first to arrive on my particular place here for nearly a century. The last one I had was an Italian hermit who had a strange fondness for living in trees. So I built a fine large tree for him to live in, but I must have built it too high for he became dizzy and fell."

"It killed him, I suppose."

"No. Physical death is impossible in this dimension. His atomic construction was still more third dimensional than fourth. So while he ceased to exist here he merely flicked back into existence on your plane again. Did he not tell your people about it?"

Henry shook his head. If the Italian gentleman, or any other voyagers returning from this eldritch world, had ever been foolish enough to try to tell anybody about it there was little doubt that they had spent the remainder of their Earthly lives in nice padded cells somewhere.

"Odd," the other commented. "You must be a singularly uncommunicative people, as well as being physically deficient to the point of being a race of congenital cripples."

HENRY hastily looked himself over in some trepidation to see if he had lost any parts during his weird transdimensional flight. He hadn't.

"I'm no cripple," he protested indignantly. "I'm all here."

"Yes, what there is of you, but judged by any sane and normal standard you are scarcely more than half a man. Only one pair of eyes, one pair of ears, one pair of arms, and one pair of legs. No wonder you have to spend a third of your pitifully short lives in wasteful slumber. If you had the normal physical equipment sleep would be unnecessary for your body as a whole. You would simply do as I do and allow half the members and organs to rest while

the other half remains actively awake."

"You mean there's two of you everywhere?" Henry said incredulously.

"Oh no, that would be too complicated. We'd be fighting with each other all the time. I only have one mouth, one stomach, one pair of lungs, and all that. And I only have one brain, though it does have three major lobes; one for each of my sets of members and a large one to coordinate them. By the way, what is your name?"

"Henry Duncan."

"I am glad to meet you, Henry-Duncan. Mine, as near as it can be translated into your silly language, is George-Albert. Can I offer you something to eat or drink?"

One of the arms waved in the air and produced an object about the size of a watermelon, with a soggy looking exterior that was a not particularly appetizing shade of mottled purple.

"You must be a magician!" Henry exclaimed.

"Not at all, quite normal. Here on Quadruhl there is none of the pathetic inefficiency of manufacture found in your barren dimension. Our atmosphere is an inexhaustible reservoir of atomic material. Innumerable specialized nerve ends in our hands transform these atoms directly into the necessary molecular groupings to construct any inanimate object or even lower life form. When we are through with what we have thus made we simply reverse the process and return its atoms to the atmospheric reservoir. Very simple, really, but there's no use my trying to explain it any further. You wouldn't understand it."

"No, I guess I wouldn't," Henry agreed feebly. "Could you get me a glass of water, please? I seem to be awful dry."

"Water?" George-Albert frowned.

"That always was difficult for me. How about some wine? The Italian hermit was very fond of wine."

"No, thanks," Henry said firmly. "Wine doesn't agree with me."

"All right, I'll get you water then. But don't blame me if it tastes a little strange. Water is a liquid we do not have here in Quadruhl and the hermit could never give me a really accurate description of it."

A large glass filled with clear liquid appeared in George-Albert's hand. Henry took a gulp, and promptly spluttered. "That's gasoline!" he exclaimed indignantly. The second effort turned out to be camphor. The third had a strong tinge of peppermint but seemed drinkable enough otherwise, so Henry gulped it down.

Between large bites of the purple melon George-Albert looked speculatively at the brassie that was still in Henry's hand.

"I am very fond of games," he said. "Tell me about golf."

Henry did, and under the warming influence of having so attentive a listener he laid it on with a very liberal hand. He described a golf course of a difficulty that could exist only in a pro's nightmare, and he pictured his own prowess as combining all the abilities of the Messrs. Snead, Nelson, Jones, and Diegel, with a little added skill that none of those ever had.

"Good," George-Albert said, gulping down the last of the melon. "We'll have a game."

HE SWIFTLY made a replica of Henry's brassie and followed it with a bag and other necessary clubs from Henry's descriptions of them. Henry had his putting ball in his pocket—a cherished 75 cent Soar-Hi whose immaculate cover had never known the touch of any club ruder than a putter—and George-Albert promptly made a dozen balls like it. Then the Quadruhlian surveyed the landscape around them. It was a rolling expanse of neutral brownish hue, barren save for an igloo-shaped structure some twenty yards distant.

"Laying out a course will be a little bigger job," George-Albert said. "I'd better wake me up." He shook himself. The closed pair of eyes opened, the resting pair of arms untwined, and the spare pair of legs dropped to the ground.

"I had also better warn Alice-Ella that I am going to be using this immediate vicinity for new construction," George Albert commented. "She sometimes becomes very angry when I build new things around her without telling her beforehand."

Henry could detect no sound or even any gesture by George-Albert toward the igloo but a signal of some kind was obviously made for a door in the side of the structure opened and a female Quadruhlian emerged. In size and anatomical structure Alice-Ella closely resembled George-Albert with the exception that her eyes were the bright yellow color of a ripe lemon and there was a circle of yellowish fuzz around her head just above the upper pair of ears, above which her skull arched in a bald and gleaming green dome.

George-Albert paused for sixty seconds to teach Alice-Ella the English language, then turned back to Henry.

"This is Alice-Ella," he said. "She is my sister. She is also my mother, my wife, my daughter, and sometimes my second cousin. Our relationships are a little more involved here than they are in your world. Alice-Ella, this is Henry-Duncan. He just broke through the dimensions."

"Oh, another poor little Half-Man," Alice-Ella cooed in a voice that would have shattered plate glass windows at thirty paces.

All of Alice-Ella was awake at the moment. Her four feet carried her across the ground in a rush that had all the speed and grace of a charging rhinoceros. She swept Henry up helplessly in her four hands, stared fondly at him for a moment out of her four lemon-yellow eyes, then began violently battering Henry's fore-

head against the top of her granite-like skull.

Henry howled in indignant protest. Alice-Ella set him gently on the ground again and stared at him in apparent bewilderment.

"What is the matter, little Half-Man?" she asked. "Do not people in your world make love to each other?"

"Yes," Henry spluttered, "but we don't do it by knocking each other's brains out. We sit a girl on our lap and then we hug and kiss each other."

"Show me how," Alice-Ella said eagerly.

"Make a good strong chair for us," Henry said. Alice-Ella did. Henry started to sit down, then abruptly changed his mind. Holding Alice-Ella would be a great deal like trying to hold the Rock of Gibraltar on his lap. "I'd better sit on *your* lap," he said hastily.

Alice-Ella sat. Four legs made a lap that seemed alarmingly vast but Henry climbed up, embraced Alice-Ella's ample torso as far as he could reach, and gingerly planted a kiss upon her greenish colored lips.

Alice-Ella sighed in gusty contentment. "It is a strange way to make love, little Half-Man," she said, "but I like it! Let us do it some more."

They did. Henry had always been an ardent devotee of both plain and fancy necking, but for the first time in his life he found himself getting a great deal more than he wanted. There was not only far too much of Alice-Ella, both in number of parts and in gross tonnage, but there was also far too much enthusiasm in using those parts. It was a great deal like being necked by a cross between an octopus and a boa-constrictor.

His ribs ached from the pressure of four arms that had the sinuous strength of steel cables. His face was raw from rubbing against the sandpaper surface of Alice-Ella's cheeks. His mouth was bruised

from being crushed against lips that were as stiffly unyielding as saddle-leather. It was with a feeling of overwhelming relief that he finally heard George-Albert summoning him.

Alice-Ella held him for a moment longer to whisper a word of unexpected warning in his ear. "Be careful, little Half-Man. My brother has a very violent temper. Do not cross him in any way in this queer game that you are about to play or he will fly into a terrible rage and kill you. And I do not want you to be killed, little Half-Man. I want you to return and make love to me some more!"

She carefully set Henry upon his feet. He looked around him and saw that during his ordeal of courtship George-Albert had apparently been working all his anatomical parts at top capacity. Where there had once been a barren landscape there now stretched the first hole of a golf course.

HENRY stared at that first hole in incredulous horror. Too late, he regretted from the bottom of his heart his overdrawn descriptions of Earthly golf courses and of his own prowess thereon. George-Albert had not only included every hazard that Henry had mentioned, but he had also added others that could occur only to the triple-lobed brain of a Quadruhlian.

The green was at least five hundred yards distant. It looked to be about half the size of a small billiard table. A waist-high thicket of dagger-spined cactus behind it made a rough that was stark suicide to even enter. On either side of the tiny green yawned traps sixty feet in circumference and so deep that sulphurous vapors drifted upward apparently from the very bowels of the planet.

The terrain between the green and the tee was one that looked as though it had been designed by Edgar Allan Poe during one of his least cheerful moods. It was a

vast chasm that to Henry's horrified gaze lacked only about three feet to equal the Grand Canyon. The floor of the abyss was filled with an assortment of hazards that would have appalled the soul of Dante.

Gigantic craters in which molten lava seethed in scalding fury were side by side with vast stretches of green-slimed swampland in whose turgid ooze great scaled shapes writhed in saurian horror. Devil-trees dotted the landscape, each with scores of flesh-hungry tentacles whipping the ground around its trunk. Over to the left was a Cyclopean rock den in which dozens of great bloated pythons surged in demoniac undulation. To the right was another huge stony basin filled to the brim with monstrous hairy spiders, the smallest of which would have filled a wash-tub.

"But there's no fairway anywhere!" Henry protested through chattering teeth.

"There shouldn't be any," George-Albert answered in surprise. "This is only a par three hole, just a simple little pitch to the green. I think a seven iron will just about do it."

George-Albert selected a mashie-niblick from his bag and teed a ball up. A moment later Henry watched the awesome spectacle of a seven-foot golfer with a chest as large as a rain barrel swing a club in four hands, keep two left arms straight and punch mightily through with two right arms while he pivoted on four legs and rigidly kept four eyes on the ball. The result was phenomenal. The ball shot away with the whistling scream of a bullet, rose skyward in a colossal and incredible arc, then dropped dead on the distant green, barely a yard from the flag.

"Looks like a birdie," George-Albert said complacently. "Let's see you do any better."

Henry's fingers shook so badly that he had to take both hands to tee his ball. He

selected, not a mashie-niblick, but his brasie. Not that it made any difference what club he chose. Henry knew he couldn't reach that distant green with anything short of a 6-inch fieldpiece.

HE STOOD upon quaking legs, feebly wagged the club-head, and looked out over the chasm. For the first time in his life he wished quite sincerely that he were dead. He gazed at the swamp saurians, the devil-trees, the pythons, and finally at the spot to his right and one hundred yards distant where the monstrous spiders swarmed in their great rock basin.

Henry groaned in utter agony of soul. He was mortally afraid of even a one-inch house spider. And these bloated monstrosities had pursy bodies the size of wash-tubs! There wasn't a chance in the world of his ball landing anywhere else. From bitter experience Henry knew the arching trajectory of his inevitable slice down to the last inch, and that final inch would terminate squarely in the center of the spider-filled basin.

Henry glanced sideways at George-Albert, and what he saw brought a sudden gleam of desperate inspiration to his eyes. George-Albert was leaning over to return the mashie-niblick to his bag. His back was turned squarely upon Henry. The distance wasn't over fifteen feet, and the target looked as wide as the side of a box-car.

If George-Albert's temper were as murderously hair-trigger as Alice-Ella had warned, Henry should be sure of prompt results if he carried out his wild inspiration. Henry's jaw hardened in resolution. A hundred violent deaths would be preferable to one trip down among those sprawling spider horrors in the chasm. And anyway George-Albert had said that an Earth-dimension being couldn't really be killed here but would simply be flicked back to whence he had come.

Breathing a silent prayer that George-Albert had known what he was talking about, Henry took careful aim, swung his club back in a whistling arc, and let fly. At that point-blank distance, even Henry couldn't miss. His golf ball went rocketing into George-Albert's posterior with a sound like the crack of a pistol.

The heavens shook with George-Albert's roar of pain and fury. Four tomato-red eyes blazed stark murder at Henry as George-Albert spun around, and four hands snatched from the air every kind of a weapon they could hold. Henry had a single split-second glimpse of bullets, knives, poison gas, death rays, and battle-axes hurtling toward him.

All of the lethal missiles seemed to hit at once. There was a flashing moment of rending, tearing pain, then again the black chill of transdimensional flight. A landscape again formed around Henry but this time it was the familiar landscape of the gully to the right of the fifteenth fairway of the Midtown Municipal Golf Course.

As long as he remained a golfer he would always be in danger. At any moment, on any shot, on any course, he might again go through the weirdly improbable sequence of physical contortions that would again hurl him into Quadruhl. And there awaiting him would be the murderous fury of George-Albert, the unspeakable horrors of the chasm of hazards, and, above all, the four waiting arms of the amorous Alice-Ella!

Henry shuddered. On the gully floor in front of him a deep pool offered a simple and certain escape from his deadly peril. Henry grimly tossed his brassie far out into the water. Ten seconds later it was followed by eight more clubs, one golf bag, five balls, and every tee he had in his pockets.

Henry was completely—and permanently—giving up golf.

THE HORIZONTALS

It seemed they would have to live their lives out in the world-that-lay-on-its-side, but a microscopic organism in the blood of Andrew Dorn made their captors hurriedly release them.

By Frank Belknap Long

THE subway always soothed him. It was curious, but the rumble, the rattle, the flashing lights outside the windows of the train, lulled him to drowsiness and made him forget his misery.

Take the people opposite him now. Nice people they were, all of them. That little shop girl with plugged soles, her hair a red-gold glory above her tired but still lovely face. She was all right, wasn't she?

In the subway he could feel close to people. It wasn't as public as a flophouse. He didn't feel lonely because opposite him were all kinds of interesting people.

That guy in a monkey suit looked sort of lonely. He was past fifty, and there were pouches under his eyes. He'd been to a party somewhere. He had had "romance." A couple of dames sitting opposite him all evening. "Gracie, be nice to him. He's got plenty of dough."

Yeah, dough. Well he, Andrew Dorn, didn't have any dough. The girls didn't have to be nice to him that way. So—wasn't he luckier than the guy in a monkey suit? No one deceived him and kidded him along.

That white-haired old lady was somebody's mother. She had kind eyes; he wouldn't get a cold stare from her. The messenger boy sitting next to her might be president some day. His chances were one in a hundred million, but you never could tell. The guy in a gray business suit looked like a professional man. He was ill with dignity, swollen with it. But under the shell was a human being like himself.

He had boarded the train at 14th Street, and the Chambers Street station was long overdue. Outside the windows there was nothing but glimmer. They hadn't passed a local station for fifteen minutes.

Maybe the train was slowing up. It seemed to be roaring through the darkness, but maybe that was just a screwy idea he had. Sometimes you couldn't tell whether you were traveling fast or slow.

He was drowsy and sort of confused. He turned to the passenger next to him. "Got the time, buddy?"

A pair of shoe-button eyes glared at him out of a pudding round face. "Naw, my watch is stopped."

One thought filled his mind now. There was something wrong with the train. The guy next to him had noticed it. A guy who glared at you when you asked him a simple question was not at peace with himself.

Sweat broke out on Dorn's forehead as he returned the frightened stares of the passengers across the aisle. They all knew now. Something was horribly wrong. The train was speeding, bulleting through the darkness with a deafening roar. It was breaking all records for speed, *but it wasn't getting anywhere.*

THE red-headed shopgirl was lurching with the train's lurch, clinging to a strap and shivering. Dorn came to his feet slowly. One instant he was rising, the next—the shopgirl was in his arms. Clinging to him in terror, her arms about his shoulders.

The scent of her hair was disturbing.



He tried to untangle her arms, but she wouldn't let him.

"What's happened?" she whispered. "Why don't they stop the train?"

"Now girlie," he soothed. "Take it easy. We're going a little fast, sure, but—"

"There's something wrong! Can't you

tell? We're—we're on a runaway train."

"What's the sense in saying that?"

"It's true, I tell you. The engineer must be drunk."

There was a sudden, grinding jolt. The floor of the train seemed to quiver and rise. The girl in Dorn's arm screamed and reeled away from him.

He sat down abruptly, aware of flickering light and a throbbing pain in his temples. He was shaken, but not terrified. He had been in collisions before. This one was no worse than the others. After his first startled shock he began to enjoy it.

He sat very still, watching the passengers milling about. The train was no longer moving. Dorn straightened in sudden bafflement. Above the groans and imprecations of the passengers his ears could detect a familiar sound—the unmistakable tap, tap, tap, of a cane on cement.

A blind beggar tapping despite the confusion, his cane clicking as he brought it down! The passengers were calming down now. They were sinking limply into seats, their faces wan from shock. The man in the gray business suit had an ugly gash on his forehead. He was muttering: "I'll sue them, by God. They won't get away with this."

The sweet-faced old lady was staring at the messenger boy. "Are you hurt, lad-die? Lean on my shoulder. There, that's it." The fat man with the shoe-button eyes was sitting on the floor, his knees drawn up, his face convulsed. The red-headed girl had begun to sob.

"I knew something terrible would happen."

Dorn said: "Take it easy, girlie. The car stopped suddenly, that's all."

The blind beggar was advancing down the aisle now. A short, thickset man in shabby clothes, his eyes concealed by smoked glasses.

"All right, folks. He sez I gotta take you out. If you come peaceful I won't hafta gal—galva-eyes you."

The professional-type man thrust out his jaw. "What in hell are you talking about? What right have you—"

"Mister, I'll do the talkin'. He sez I gotta lead you out. He's lyin' flat on his back in the air, see? A big guy floatin'. All right, I ain't scared of him none—

not at first. I'm blind as a bat, see? All I can hear is his voice. I don't know he's floatin' till he touches me. Puts his cold hand right on my puss.

"Then I know, I can see him. You wouldn't want to disobey *him*, folks."

The professional-type man rasped: "We don't have to listen to this."

He took the beggar by the shoulder and started shaking him. "I'll turn you over to the police, you—"

The beggar jerked free, raised his cane and tapped the professional man lightly on the shoulder.

"I hate to hafta do this, mister," he wheezed.

THE professional-type man stiffened as though an electric current had passed through him. His skin turned a dull, leaden gray. His eyes bulged glassily.

The blind beggar lowered his cane. "He's galva-eyed," he said.

He gazed sombrely at the others. Seemed to gaze despite his blindness, seemed to see. "It's in the cane. He took it away from me and suscharged it. He sez I should use it to make you walk, if you don't come willing."

Dorn was on his feet now. "All right, buddy. We'll come."

They trooped out of the train in single file, the red-headed girl, the messenger boy and the old lady, the latter limping a little, Shoe-Button eyes, and the man in swallowtails. The galvanized man followed mechanically, his body rigid.

At the end of the car was a wavering blanket of mist. Into it they passed and out into brightness.

Dorn blinked. The light blinded him at first, but it was a merciful brightness, for there was no easy answer to anything he saw when his eyes adjusted themselves to the glare.

The floating man was suspended horizontally about three feet from the ground, on a level with Dorn's waist. His head

was bald on top and fringed with yellow hair which glistened in the sunlight. He was clothed in a sort of sleeveless tunic, pale green in hue, which hung in folds from his angular body. His knees were bare, gray and gnarled looking.

The worst thing about him was his face. It was leprechaunous, the sort of face you'd associate with a tired old ghoul or cobwebbery sprite. The nose was spatuliform, the mouth a twisted gray gash—extremely offensive. The eyes were pupilless, translucent pools which stared up at Dorn without a flicker.

There were two things which Dorn could have done. He could have denied it all, shut his eyes and opened them slowly again, on the one-in-ten chance that he would find himself back in the subway. But it didn't seem like a dream to him. So he did the wise thing. He accepted it, uncompromisingly. He didn't even blink.

The twisted mouth was moving now. "You'll find us friendly, buddy. We know all about you. More than you know about us. We speak your language, buddy."

Dorn was staring down in horror at the ground. It was spongy and white, like coagulated mist.

"Don't be scared, buddy. Everything's under control."

The red-headed girl was plucking at Dorn's sleeve. "We're suspended in the air," she murmured, awe in her voice. "If you stamp your feet you'll—sink."

Dorn didn't stamp. He wanted to hear what the floating man was saying. He strained his ears to catch every word.

"Buddy, you've been *derailed*. I'm telling you now so you won't be perplexed. We want you should be happy with us."

The man in swallowtails said: "That may be his language, but it isn't time."

"I'm aware that you speak what is called the King's English," growled the floating man. "It may sound all right to you, but I don't like it. This guy's speech is forceful and direct."

His pupilless eyes sparkled suddenly. "You're educated, but you don't think. This guy thinks."

The old lady was shivering violently. "My, but it's damp here. We'll all catch pneumonia."

"Stick a pin in me," said the messenger boy. "I want to wake up. I can't stand him."

"Quiet, all of you," growled the floating man. "This guy has something on the ball. The rest of you are just run of the mill. This guy wants to know *why*. He's troubled."

"It's getting me down too," said the red-headed girl.

"Do you want to know what happened, sister? Well, I'll tell you. We figured we could shunt a carload through if we worked it right. Kawawan whisked the train right out of your world. He didn't go to sleep at the switch this time."

"You mean—this ain't the first time you tried it?" asked Dorn.

"Of course it ain't. How d'ya 'spose we know so much about you? For hundreds of years we've been getting you guys one at a time. Now we get a whole carload."

HE STARTED to move his legs. Up and down. He rose higher, reaching the level of Dorn's chest.

"I'll feel better when my feet are on solid ground," he said. "I'm levitated now."

"What do you mean, *levitated*," said the man in swallowtails. "A minute ago you were talking like a Bowery bum. What's the idea?"

"I use the language of the people I address," said the floating man. "You have a maxim which runs: 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' You would hardly expect me to address this very virile, intelligent person in the anaemic language of your upper crust."

He sighed. "It's time we were getting

back to solid ground. Unfortunately we are differently oriented in space. Our worlds overlap at right angles to each other. That's why I had to send the blind man into the train after you. I can't walk upright from your point of view. From mine, you seem to be horizontally suspended."

Shoe-Button Eyes wiped perspiration from his forehead. "Cheese and crackers," he muttered.

"We have one advantage over you. We can levitate ourselves. I am miles above our city, but my feet are parallel with its pavements. Yours are pointing out into space."

"I'm standing on my feet, ain't I?" asked Dorn.

"From your angle, sure. But when I descend you'll get a new slant on it. You're lying flat on your back."

Slowly he raised his gaunt, bare arms, threw back his head. "I'm descending now," he said. "I'm taking you down with me."

He started moving forward through the mist. Feet foremost, his body still at right angles to Dorn and his companions. The instant he shot past Dorn's body the latter felt a tug. Amazed, he felt himself being drawn sidewise after the floating man's receding form.

Not down, but sidewise into the mist. The others followed. Eight frightened people trailing a floating leprechaun prone in the sunlit mist—eight people jerking a little as though drawn by invisible threads.

A voice drifted back to them. "Don't be scared, buddy. Smart guys use the same force where you come from. Only—you think they're screwy and put them in bughouses. It ain't so hard to pull people after once you get the hang of it."

The old lady moaned: "I wish he'd be more considerate. My rheumatism—"

"Stick a pin in me," pleaded the messenger boy. "I want to wake up."

"I can see him," said the blind beggar.

"Ain't it funny? It's like he was on fire."

"My luminous nimbus," said the voice. "Your optic disk is still sensitive to light. My nimbus burns through your eyelids and stimulates the macula lutea."

"I don't see no nimbus," said Dorn.

"It's very faint, buddy. You got to strain to see it. It ain't the sort of light you're used to."

"Where are you taking us?" asked the man in swallowtails.

"Down, sir. Down to our city. You're an educated man. Try to summon a little naked intelligence to your aid. It's asking a lot, I know, but try. You just *think* you're moving upright. From our point of view you're horizontal—lying perfectly flat."

The lawyer-type man was still moving mechanically, his eyes glassy in his mask-like face. The red-headed girl tugged at Dorn's sleeve. "I'm frightened," she murmured. "It's like—a nightmare."

DORN didn't reply. He was staring incredulously at the great, gleaming wall which was coming toward them through the mist. A mighty wall like a mountain range studded with rounded domes, a rampart of vertical grandeur sweeping toward them.

It was as though they were approaching a mountain range which had been toppled sideways in space, so that its peaks projected toward them through the mist. It was as though they were gazing down at it, but not from above. They were swirling straight toward it, moving upright over a boggy surface that kept shifting out from under them.

Dorn became suddenly aware that the rounded domes were the pinnacles of buildings gleaming through the mist. They were approaching not a mountain range but a vast and populous city, studded with parks and broad squares and little urban lakes.

Over coiling traffic lanes conical ve-

hicles plowed and the air above the tall buildings was black with flying shapes. A city that was like a wall, as if some vast upheaval of earth had lifted it vertically without disrupting its teeming life.

"Gawd," said the man with shoe-button eyes. "Didja ever see anything like that? What keeps them buildings from crashing down in a heap?"

"Why should they crash?" said the floating leprechaun.

"Why should they— Look, mister, I'm not saying they should. I'm simply asking you. Suppose I got myself a rope and let myself down on the Palisades. Could I build the Empire State right out from there? I mean, if I had cement and bricks and all the things I'd need? Wouldn't it topple?"

"It would. But these buildings are rising straight up. You don't seem to realize that you are floating on your—your belly. I'm pulling you down."

"You mean you're pulling us forward."

"No, down. You're not oriented, that's all. I'm descending feet foremost. In a moment I'll be walking on pavements and you'll be lying flat on the ground. I'll levitate you, but you'll still have to move as though you were swimming through the air. You can't change. In your world you'd be standing upright, but we're at right angles to all that. It just isn't that way here."

"But—but—"

"Look here, all of you. Can't you get it through your heads that you've nothing to worry about? We're taking care of you. Everything is going to be all right."

"**E**VERYTHING is going to be all right." Dorn paled with indignation whenever he allowed his mind to dwell on the floating man's duplicity. For three days now everything had been all wrong. Floating through the streets of an unimaginable city, his body levitated horizontally, his mind a jumble of con-

fllicting emotions, he tried to persuade himself that misery loathed solitude.

He wasn't sure that it did. But something beyond their control drew them together at nightfall. Every night they came together in a tile-paved repose chamber to discuss what had happened to them during the day.

Nothing was very clear in their minds. They were sure they had been whisked out of New York City for a purpose. But why were they left to themselves, why were they encouraged to roam?

They were all floating head to head in the repose chamber now, after a strenuous day in the city. Their heads together, their suspended bodies radiating outward like the spokes of a wheel, they were resting the only way they could.

"Boy, I've been around to-day. The things I've seen."

"They have everything we got, but it's the things we ain't got—huh, you know what I mean. Those big glass palaces where the judies dance all day long. They ain't much to look at and you've got to twist your head around. But boy, do they know how to strip-tease."

"I never saw uglier women," said the professional type man.

The man in swallowtails nodded, his head moving forward and back. "They're ugly as sin. The only thing I get a kick out of is the food. Pheasants swimming in butter, the wine—"

"When you gotta have it poured into you with a funnel it ain't so hot. Every time I go into a restaurant I get the willies. Me floating there between the tables, feeling like I had no business being there at all."

"You got to admit they treat us right," said Shoe-Button Eyes. "Everything we ask for we get."

"You're wrong, buddy," said Dorn. "I saw the guy we floated down with to-day. I asked him for little old New York. All he did was shake his head."

"Yeah, he *would*. He thinks he owns this burg. He thinks he owns us."

The red-headed girl reached out and grasped Dorn's head. "I'm so tired," she whispered. "Tired and frightened. Why won't they let us float around together?"

Her little, cool hand was very precious to Dorn. For three days their intimacy had been growing. He pressed her fingers reassuringly.

"Don't you fret, girlie. We're going back. The guy we floated down with will see to that. He knows the bird at the switch. Right now he's keeping his speaker buttoned. But I got a feeling he's a right guy. Forget what I just said—he's okay."

He was lying to calm her. He didn't trust a single inhabitant of the city, least of all the gaunt leprechaun they had floated down with. He knew too much about them already. They were friendly, sure, on the surface. But deep in their pupilless eyes a smouldering hostility lurked.

Furtive they were; evasive. All cast in the same mold, as alike as peas in a milked pod. You couldn't get close to them without feeling a chill creeping up over you.

He had covered a lot of territory in three days. Flat on his back he had drifted in and out of their public buildings, tarrying in libraries, museums, hospitals, his mind needled by an apprehension so keen it was like a physical hurt.

He hadn't always been an ordinary bum; a panhandler. He didn't have to chisel dimes here, so his mind was free to range back across the years. Yeah, he talked like a bum now. He thought like a bum. But once in a while he remembered. He had known a helluva lot about medicine.

Pre-medical school two years; three at Johns Hopkins. A damned brilliant pupil. Some flowers bloomed too soon. They wasted their fragrance and withered.

Comparing himself to a flower wasn't sissified the way he meant it. There was something flowerlike about all gifted minds, fine intellects. The flowering of the human spirit—

Hell, he was getting sentimental. Drink, bumming around—years of it. Never graduating, squandering his talents. For five years he had thought and talked like a bum.

But here the old winds were blowing through the corridors of his consciousness again. Fear walked there too, but he felt at times like he had not felt for years.

THE red-headed girl was the cause of it. He was determined to protect and reassure her. They would get back; they would escape somehow. But first he'd have to find out a few things. Why had the leprechaunous ones derailed them. Why were they *privileged* captives? They had the keys of the city; they were like arctic fliers at City Hall. Ticker tape was descending invisibly about them all the time.

"Our city is yours, buddy. Go wherever you like. Take in all the sights."

"It was just like a church," said the old lady. "They have a sewing circle. They're getting up a charity benefit. They didn't ask me to join, though. I was floating there, hoping they'd ask me—"

"How long will we get free eats," said the messenger boy. "I ain't got a job, so why should they feed me?"

"Gee, sonny, you'd look funny delivering telegrams flat on your back."

"One thing we never wear out is our shoes."

"You said a mouthful, buddy."

Dorn said: "To-morrow I'll find out."

Still spread out clockwise they slept, suspended on air that was softer than any pillow. The gray dawn came swiftly in that unknown city, filtering in through tall windows and casting long shadows on the tiled floor of the repose chamber.

Dorn pressed the red-headed girl's hand before he fared forth. "I'll have breakfast at the self-service restaurant in Eight-Tree Square," he said. "Then I'll make trouble for them."

"Don't do anything reckless," she pleaded. "Maybe the guard will let us slip out together this morning."

"No, Barbara. I'm going to find out alone."

She kissed him unexpectedly, for the first time. She turned over and floated down until her chin was directly above his forehead. He had never been kissed from that angle before. It was a trifle awkward, because their noses intervened from opposite directions. But it was wonderful all the same.

He floated out feeling as though he were walking on air, which was true in a literal sense as well as subjectively. Sometimes he seemed to be standing up and rising parallel with the city. He had been warned against that. "Keep your legs rigid, buddy. Think of yourself as lying flat on your back. That way we won't look like flies walking on a wall to you."

It didn't always work. Sometimes he moved his legs without advancing, as though he were standing on a treadmill. Then the city would rise up and the leprechauns would project out toward him and he'd feel vertical right down to his soles. Getting oriented wasn't as easy as it looked.

The self-service restaurant was crowded with early bird leprechauns of both sexes. He hovered before the counter and swallowed all the food he needed, letting the patrons feed him. They seemed eager to be of service.

"I'll get you a funnel for the fruit juice, but you'd better eat this cereal while it is hot. Would you care for a melon, friend?"

He floated out of the restaurant feeling grimly reckless and defiant. In his world he had always felt at his best right after



breakfast. He was determined to make them show their cards before his vigor ebbed. Right in the public square he'd change their evasive hospitality to indignation and rage.

He chose his first victim with painstaking care. Although the leprechauns *looked* alike they differed unmistakably in their carriage. Some strode along vigorously; others tottered as though enfeebled by age.

He singled out a vigorous young leprechaun whose face he didn't like. There wasn't much difference in their expressions either, but occasionally a latent dourness would twist their features into surly, disagreeable masks.

The young leprechaun was striding along with a transparent portfolio under his arm filled with unimaginable documents.

"All right, mister, here I come," whispered Dorn fiercely.

He shot forward like a polarized amoeba. Straight toward the unsuspecting leprechaun, his arms flailing the air.

THERE was a shrill, unearthly ululation and the leprechaun went reeling backwards, clutching at his stomach.

Dorn had butted with such vigor that his skull ached from the impact. But swiftly he twisted about and buried his teeth in wrinkled gray flesh, extracting a howl of pain from a stationary bystander.

The third leprechaun saw him coming. He tried to jump to one side, but before he could do so Dorn had him by the throat. The leprechaun's flesh was soggy, cold. Dorn kneaded it firmly, but without malice. He had no intention of destroying a single inhabitant of the city. He was merely seeking to create a disturbance by attacking several leprechauns at random.

He could tell by the turmoil on all sides of him that he was succeeding. They were all about him now, tugging at his clothes and breathing imprecations.

"That's gratitude for you. We treat you like a friend and what happens? You run amuck."

They were holding both his legs now. He heaved a deep sigh and ceased to struggle. He felt confident that he had called their bluff. He had demonstrated that he could not be trusted. He could not believe that they would release him after what he had done.

They didn't. The two leprechauns who had gripped his legs tightened their hold and began to tug at him.

"All right, buddy. Start floating."

He could have made more trouble for them by refusing to float. By simply tightening his muscles he could have become a dead weight suspended above the ground. But he had no desire to thwart them further. He relaxed completely. He didn't even make swimming motions with his arms. He simply let them tow him rapidly, feet foremost, across the tree-lined square.

They towed him toward a tall, white building with oval windows which looked a little like one of the municipal buildings at the lower end of Manhattan Island.

Into the building they pulled him and down a marble-tiled corridor to a waiting elevator. At the door of the cage Dorn stared up at them apprehensively.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"Don't get excited, buddy. We're just giving you a few tests. We never thought your mind would—would go a little wrong right in front of the medicinal building."

"Use a simpler word," said the other leprechaun. "He's from the lower crust."

"Oh, he's *that* one. I wasn't sure."

"I know perfectly well what medicinal means," said Dorn. "You think I'm crazy, eh?"

"No, no, not at all. But you've been under a strain. That's why we gave you every freedom. We thought—but no matter."

"Keep right on talking. I ain't bored."

"You're a strange human being. You seem to be educated. We knew you had an unusual brain, but we thought you were what is called a derelict. Were you pulling our legs?"

"No, but I wish you'd stop pulling mine. I want to know why I'm here."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't tell you, now. We derailed you because we needed you. All the others we've been getting across the centuries went insane. The shock was too much for them."

"We were hoping they'd be an architect or engineer on that train," said the leprechaun who was holding Dorn's right leg. "But we didn't do so badly. Malana says you have a fine, original brain."

"What's my brain got to do with it."

"It will be invaluable to us if it stays sane. Otherwise we won't even bother to remove it. We can use knowledge and we can use ideas, but your brain has got to be sound. Otherwise it's a liability."

Dorn had a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"We've learned a lot from the ones we've been getting. They've taught us how to beautify our city. Trouble was, they didn't stay sane. This time we thought we'd cushion the shock by letting you drift around a bit. We wanted you to grow accustomed to our ways. Then when we took your brain out it wouldn't—the shock wouldn't be so—"

He seemed to hesitate. "I shouldn't be telling you this. Malana will be furious. But I feel sorry for you. The way you acted just now was very disturbing. If Malana thinks your brain is unsound he won't remove it."

"What—what *will* he do? Send me back?"

"Absolutely not. He'll try to cure you. He'll give you injections."

Dorn whispered hoarsely: "I can stand the prongs but not the coals. They burn the soles of my feet."

The leprechauns exchanged significant glances. The one on Dorn's right made a rotary motion with his finger close to his forehead as the elevator shot upward.

MALANA turned out to be the leprechaun Dorn had floated down with. He was sitting motionless beneath an oval window in a white-walled room, his gaunt body hunched a little forward.

"Float him across that table there," he said. "Careful now."

His voice was as rasping as a buzz-saw; his pupilless eyes pale slivers of ice.

Dorn twisted his head about the instant they set him down. He was in a spacious laboratory surrounded by instruments of science. Of that there could be no doubt. But the long, white tables, the stethoscope-like objects in Malana's hand, the cabinets filled with implements of a surgical character brought his heart into his throat.

If Malana was the leprechaunous equivalent of a psychiatrist he had a strange conception of how to cure minds which were teetering on the brink. There were no charts here; no I.Q. building blocks or whirring hypnotic disks.

Malana did not speak immediately. He sat watching Dorn from beneath lowering brows, his gnarled face a brown study.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. He arose slowly, bent above Dorn and laid the stethoscope-like object on Dorn's chest. After a moment he straightened, his eyes lidding themselves.

"Heart cutting up a bit," he muttered. "I'll have to take a smear."

Dorn stirred uneasily. A moment later his blood was flowing into a small glass phial attached to a metal pipette.

"I hope you haven't got it," said Malana.

Dorn felt a sudden hostility surging up in him. "You hope I haven't got what?"

"Now, now, don't get excited. Everything is under control."

He pressed a buzzer and the blood specimen went out on the wrinkled palm of a leprechaunous laboratory assistant.

Malana sat down again, folded his arms and sighed. "We'll know in a moment," he said.

He sighed again. "I'll test your sanity as soon as we know. The physical comes first; it's routine. Unfortunately you are running a slight fever—"

There was a groan from the doorway. Malana raised heavy-lidded eyes and stared in consternation at the leprechaun who had departed with Dorn's blood. The returning assistant was visibly shaken. He staggered across the laboratory toward Malana, his angular body quivering.

"He's got it," he gasped. "Beyond the shadow of a doubt. We segregated the virus in that new Ellawan filter."

MALANA leapt up. For the first time since Dorn had known him strong emotion flared in his gaze.

"Oh, horrible," he muttered. "*Horrible.*"

He grasped the edge of the table where Dorn rested, swaying a little, his gnarled knuckles turning green. "The last time it swept the city thousands perished. We couldn't stop it. We must send them all back. We can't take any chances."

"But can we?" gasped the assistant. "An entire train? Will Kawawan be able to switch—"

"Kawawan will be liquidated if he fails," said Malana grimly. "It was *his* idea."

He drew himself up. "Get an anaesthetic cone. We'll drench him with disinfectants and wrap his hands and hair in sterilized gauze."

Dorn was staring up appalled.

"I told you to get a cone," rapped Malana warningly. "We've got to keep him quiet or he'll spread the germs around. Get a cone quickly."

A moment later Dorn was writhing in the grip of three leprechaunous attendants. He was struggling fiercely now, his eyes bright with terror. "What have I got?" he moaned. "What is it? Smallpox, diphtheria?"

Malana wiped his lips with a little, damp sponge, and whispered in Dorn's ear. "I suppose you may as well know. We bear you no ill-will."

The cone descended the instant Malana ceased speaking. There was a smothering blackness over Dorn's face and when he tried to breathe his throat pained and throbbed horribly. After a moment he ceased to struggle.

"Chambers Street, change for local!"

Someone was shouting it far off somewhere. A wavering blur before his vision and someone shouting: "Chambers Street, change for local."

Then—tight arms about him, warm lips pressed to his. A soft whisper above the roar of the train, a gasping sigh of relief. His heart pounding, hammering like mad.

"Darling, it is Chambers Street. The train's stopping. See, darling, people are getting off. It's real. We're back."

"It seems to be—real," he murmured, a catch in his throat. "But that city was real too. You were there with me."

"We were all there together," she said. "We caught something—horrible. Andrew, are we going to die?"

Dorn gripped her wrist tightly. "Before we get up and walk out of this train and begin a new life together I'll have to warn you that you'll be marrying a man with—"

"Tell me, dear. I've got it too."

"Yes. Well, you'll be marrying a man with a common cold."

"A common—"

"Yes. It was deadly there, a horrible blight. Worse than smallpox—to them. Oh, darling, darling, I'm going to sneeze. You'd better turn your face away."

(Continued from page 6)

just been looking through some of my science fiction magazines, and I liked best "Guardian Angel" and "King Cole of Pluto," of the stories you published in the July issue.

Bring on some more thrillers!—Mary Woods, Princeton, Indiana.

More on "Light"

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Before making any comments on the September *Super Science Stories*, a few words in defense of Lyle Monroe. I thought "Let There Be Light" was great. So there! And if all those readers who panned it think that a good story must not contain any slang or vulgarity, I suggest that they read "The Grapes of Wrath."

I believe that it sold more than a few copies.

The cover on the September issue, like that of July, is very good. Don't mind the complaints. With some readers you ought to splatter the cover with red ink and call it Mars—then what praise you would get!

Besides getting into a bottle, Rori Ron gets into No. 1 spot on my "hit" parade. Attaboy, Williamson. Keep 'em coming. No. 2 place goes to Neil R. Jones for "Invisible One."

Leaving poor Presby invisible at the ending was a pity—but a swell ending nevertheless.

Hit No. 3 is Max C. Sheridan's story, "Venusian Tragedy." This is the best story I have ever read by this author. Hannes Bok's illustrations for the story were by far the best to appear in the issue.

So much for the really good stories. Other yarns in the issue were fair—except Ackermann's super-super bolony. To Mr. A goes the booby prize of one Boston bean—and fried, at that, for today Boston is having a heat wave, 97° at 1 P.M.

Boy, would a story about Uranus come in handy now!

Orchids to you for bringing back Professor Jameson via *Astonishing*.—David Glazer, *Science Fictioneer* No. 91, 12 Fowler Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Opposes Trim

Dear Mr. Pohl:

Every time I buy your magazine I am more disappointed. With each issue, *Super Science Stories* has less and less of space travel and rocket ships in it, and more fantastic monsters. Let's have a good story by Kummer or de Camp or someone else about the beginning of space-travel, rocket-ship invention, and so forth.

Let's have one, or even two, stories an issue about "heavy science," with, as you put it, "hyper-dimensional ray-guns and the like."

I hope I do not start a civil war with what I am about to say, but if you *have* to have serials in either magazine, go monthly, and put the serial in *addition* to the regular parts that are appearing in the mag.

I have no idea why anyone would want to make either the price go up or the magazine get thinner, by advocating "trimmed edges." Silly! A magazine is to read!—Bob Sorenson, P.O. Box 237, Turner, Oregon.

This Issue It's Larger!

Dear Editor:

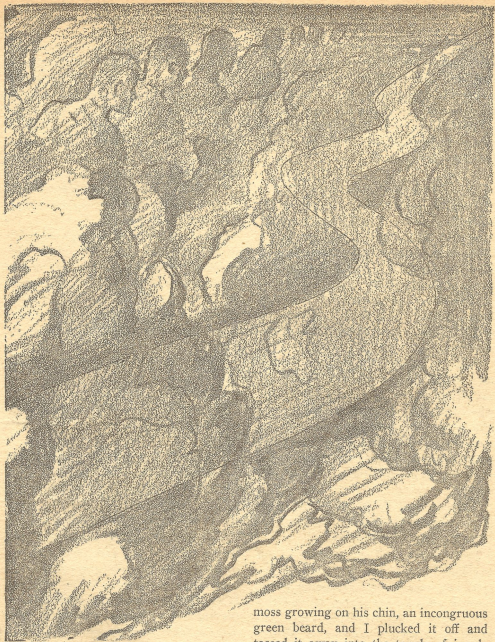
Why, in order to add an extra novellette to your contents page, you eliminated your best department; I don't know. But I very sincerely hope that you won't leave *The Science Fictioneer* out again. If you do—you can cross one reader, at least, off your list.—A. R. Logan, Hotel Adelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Monster on the Border

The fearsome and legendary Boomala had the power of turning men inside out, but it was merely the gate-keeper for the weird beings from—somewhere!

By William F. Temple





CHAPTER ONE

A Scream at Night

I FINISHED the last of the coffee, and set my metal cup down on the face of a dignified-looking brown gentleman, who was inlaid in the stone mosaic of the ancient road. There was a tuft of

moss growing on his chin, an incongruous green beard, and I plucked it off and tossed it away into the tangle of jungle which surrounded us.

Farne, squatting opposite, across the glowing fire, smiled and took out his pipe.

"Industrious sort of people, weren't they?" he remarked. "Think of it—three miles we've come along this road, and every foot of it is mosaic. Not a stone larger than a half-inch square, either."

"Don't judge the whole by parts," I admonished. "We've only seen bits of the road here and there; at least half of it is completely overgrown. But I must say the portions we've seen are pretty hot."

"Wonder if we've missed any pictures of the Boomala?" mused Farne, and I laughed.

THE "Boomala" was some terrible creature which was supposed to inhabit these parts. The Indians certainly accepted it as more than a legend, and a white trader back in the trading post of Pocado believed in it as much as he believed in the kangaroo.

"I've never seen a kangaroo, but I believe it exists," he had said. "I've never seen the Boomala, but I believe that exists, too."

And this trader, Andrews, had seen a man who had been a victim of the Boomala. The Indians had found him somewhere along this ancient road, and brought him down. He was dead—horribly so. Andrews said that quite a lot of his inner parts appeared to have been removed, but there was no break in the man's skin anywhere!

"Sounds as if the Boomala was some genius in bloodless surgery, gone native," I had commented at the time.

But Andrews had only warned us not to follow the road too far (this road, incidentally, was the only remaining monument of some long-forgotten native civilization which had flourished here) and asked us to keep a look-out for his explorer friend, Hugh Carver. Carver had set out some months ago with a small party of Indians to explore the country around the road and look for any grown-over ruins that might happen to be there. He had not been heard from since. But we had seen no sign of him along the road, save the traces of a camping spot which he might or might not have used.

"Boomala or no Boomala, some of these

mosaic patterns seem quite inexplicable to me," I said, relaxing comfortably to enjoy the after-supper pipe. "For instance, that row of little figures of men running—running for their lives; too, judging by the expressions on their faces. They all looked so identically similar that I think they were meant to represent the same man in different stages of running, if you get me. Now if we had cleared some of that undergrowth away, and dug—What the devil's that!"

I had been gazing up through the palms at the circular patch of night sky, sprinkled with stars, which was one of the rare breaks in this close-set, steaming forest. As I was speaking a queer gray-white shape had floated swiftly across the patch and vanished over the trees.

"What's what?" asked Farne, starting up.

I described what I had seen.

"Was it solid, or fairly transparent?" he asked. "Could you see the stars through it?"

I admitted that it looked rather filmy and insubstantial, but couldn't judge whether it was possible to see through it.

"Oh, it was just a low cloud," said Farne, sinking back into repose.

And then he sat up again so rigidly that I followed his gaze, and was just in time to glimpse the gray-white shape once more sweeping silently overhead. It was certainly solid enough to block out the stars, but somehow it looked fuzzy and indefinite, as if the eye had difficulty in focussing it. It had gone in an instant.

"Pear-shaped," said Farne. "Like a long, thin pear traveling horizontally. A dirigible, of course."

"If it is, then it's a mighty queer dirigible," I replied. "When I saw it, it was going the other way, traveling *backwards*, tail-first! Besides, there's no sound of engines, and there's not enough wind to carry it at that speed."

"H'm," said Farne, sucking his pipe reflectively. "Perhaps it's the Boomala!"

"Perhaps it is," I agreed, laughing a little uneasily. "But how it can float—"

We seemed fated to interruptions.

Somewhere far off in the jungle sounded a hoarse scream, abruptly terminated. This district had its share of parakeets, and a fine selection of harsh noises they made. But we had never before heard anything like that scream.

"That was human," said Farne, slowly, getting to his feet, and trying to peer through the density in the direction from which the sound had come, which was along the line of the road. Naturally he could see nothing—you could seldom see more than a few yards in the daytime, let alone on a dark night.

I picked up my rifle. Farne motioned me to remain still, and listened. There was no repetition of the cry, only the low insect hum and occasional monkey chatter of the unsleeping jungle.

"It's no use trying to look tonight," said Farne, presently. "We'll only walk into a swamp or bump into a puma or something. We'll continue along the road in the morning."

DAWN came with the screeching of a thousand howler monkeys and birds, but this clamor was dying down as we broke camp.

The ancient road vanished into the heart of a great clump of bushes festooned with bright orchids and stringy, parasitic climbing plants. It would have taken hours to cut our way through that, so we made a detour, and came back to the road again several hundreds of yards farther on.

The character of the country changed suddenly here, and the choked, luxuriant tangle gave place to a more austere forest of great cotton trees and redwoods. As we traced it, the moss-grown road ran straight as a ruler through these giant

growths, and in many places the trees had grown up on the very margin of it, bursting their way into the edge. The thickness of their trunks gave some small idea of the antiquity of the road, for they must have started to grow after the road was laid—probably long after it was forgotten.

Farne was ahead of me. We had not gone far before he stopped abruptly and pointed at one of these great trees on the verge of the road.

There, sprawling face-downwards across the gnarly ridges of its roots, lay a woman. Her sun-helmet had fallen off, and we saw that her hair was golden-yellow.

"A white woman!" exclaimed Farne.

We ran forward. Farne reached her first, and lifted and turned her over with her head resting against his knee. She was unconscious. I wiped some of the dirt from her face, and moistened her lips with water. Farne massaged her hands and wrists.

None of this seemed to have much effect. She still lay with her eyes closed and her lips slightly parted, breathing very faintly.

"Well," I remarked, "I can't think of any more tricks, except smelling salts, which we haven't got. What does the first aid book say?"

As if she had heard me, the woman slowly opened her eyes. They were an unusual dark blue, and looked very attractive, for she was quite a young woman, hardly more than a girl. For a moment those eyes were blank and expressionless, and then she focussed them on my face.

"Oh," she said, softly, and looked all at once relieved and puzzled. Then she seemed to recall something, and looked really terrified, and immediately commenced to cry weakly. She started to fumble, apparently for a handkerchief. I gave her mine, and she sobbed quietly into it.

Farne met my gaze, and gave a peculiar and complicated grimace which meant (a) this was a queer business: who was she, and how did she get here? (b) she was rather a dainty piece, eh?

I expressed bewilderment, then nodded enthusiastically.

Presently she stopped crying, and dried her eyes. She put the hand holding the handkerchief to her side and complained of stiffness and an ache. A brief examination showed that she had something rare in the way of bruises. She could hardly move her left arm.

I ASKED how that had happened.

"Oh, that's—that's nothing," she answered, sadly, and looked on the point of more tears. I hastened to divert her mind by introducing ourselves, and then asked her to tell us the whole story. Unsteadily, she began.

"I am the wife of Hugh Carver, the explorer. We were up here searching for any remains of archeological interest near the road. One night some strange shape, like a whitish airship, flew over the camp. We only saw it for a fleeting moment, and had no time to judge its height or size. But the Indians were scared nearly to death. They said it was the Boomala, and it had appeared to warn us to go back. If we went on along the road, it would kill us." She seemed about to weep once more, but continued.

"Hugh knew the uselessness of trying to argue with natives about their superstitions, but still he tried. Finally, he told them we weren't going to turn back just for that. In the morning we woke up to find ourselves quite alone. The Indian porters had deserted *en bloc* in the night, and taken most of our provisions and equipment with them. That was yesterday morning.

"Hugh said we would have to follow them back to Pocado after all, or starve. But he said we would spend the day in

a last attempt to reach the end of the road, and to return today whether we failed or not. No one has ever seen the end of the road, you see, and Hugh wanted to be the first."

She sniffed again, and wavered, but managed to go on.

"I felt rather ill and tired, however, and we didn't start till late afternoon. And then we didn't get far. Finally, we set up camp not very far from here. Hugh left me in camp to explore just a little further along the road. He promised not to be long. But night came and he had not returned. I was terribly anxious, and would have gone looking for him, only I was afraid he might come back to the camp another way and find me gone. I shall never forget the suspense of waiting. I began to imagine all sorts of things. Then all at once I heard Hugh scream somewhere in the distance."

Her voice quavered, and she stopped and hid her face in her hands.

"We heard him, too," said Farne, gently.

We waited uncomfortably.

Presently, she went on, with lowered head: "I went almost mad, and rushed out after him, along the road. It was very dark. I kept losing the road and bumping into trees. In time I came out into a clear patch, and the moon was just coming up. He was lying on the other side of the patch, just on the edge of the woods. I ran across. . . ."

It was hard to distinguish what she said after that, for she was near choking with grief and horror; but it seemed that Hugh Carver was dead, and he had died very terribly.

She had hardly grasped this awful fact when some enormous white shape suddenly materialized from nowhere, and blotted out the whole scene before her. She had a momentary impression of two terrifying dark eyes, which were so completely black that they reflected no light

at all, looking like two holes in the substance of the thing showing the night behind. These eyes were growing larger and larger, until they resembled two black plates or discs on a wall of pallid fleshy matter.

She sensed from this that the monster was growing in size as it came nearer and nearer, and was paralyzed with fright.

Without warning, the whole thing seemed to flash and vanish, like a burst balloon. She was left facing the dark jungle, and the hideous corpse of her husband.

She remembered nothing after that. She must have flown in blind terror back along the road, and fallen where we found her.

CHAPTER TWO

Poisoned Arrows

IF IT were not for the fact that we ourselves had seen that gray-white monster, with its unaccountable method of locomotion, we should have found it hard to give much credence to Mrs. Carver's story. As it was, we had to face the fact that the Boomala did actually exist, and it seemed every bit as horrible as the reputation the Indians had given it.

It was like coming up against proof that magic still flourished and was potent. I remember gazing speculatively at the forest about us, with its variety of trees, its multitude of flowering plants, birds, and droning insects. There were a million kinds of life there, and only a fraction of them had been classified and filed in the museums of our great cities. Thousands of square miles of unexplored territory lay around us, and who knew what mysteries they contained?

I looked across at Mrs. Carver, who was sleeping now in a camp bed we had rigged up. The gauze over her golden head moved gently at every quiet intake of

breath. Farne was clearing up after the midday meal. I attracted his attention.

"I'm going on to see if I can find her husband," I said, in an undertone. "You stay here and keep an eye on her."

"I was just going to suggest that I go and you stay," he rejoined. "However, you spoke first. By the way, don't you think it a bit odd that she tried to dissuade us from going on?"

I had previously suggested to Mrs. Carver that we go on and locate her husband's body, and give it a decent burial. She had not exactly welcomed the idea. She hesitated, and then said it would be very dangerous, and the same fate might befall us all.

Then apparently she realized that that put her in rather a heartless light, and added that she felt much too ill now to face that awful place again, and wished to get back to Pocado as soon as possible. Undoubtedly she was sick and in a bad state of nerves, but I could not help thinking that her affection for her late husband could not be very strong.

But I said nothing then, and said nothing now, only shook my head non-committally and prepared myself for a trek through the forest. I left my gun, and instead slung a sharp-pointed spade over my shoulder.

We had been camping in a clearing just off the old road, and I made my way through the intervening trees and undergrowth, and came out on to its thickly moss-grown, almost carpet-like, surface again. I set off steadily down the road.

In time, the moss petered out, and then, after a stretch of bare, dank stone, it was grass-grown. It was a thick, coarse grass which sprouted up in wild fountains between the interstices of the mosaic, and it often concealed tough and ropy creepers which lay across the way. It was not long before I tripped over one of them, and literally fell out into the light of day.

The road ran out across a considerable clearing here, and the sunlight was very bright after the dim light under the trees. Across the clearing the wood seemed darker than ever, and the road ran straight into it.

There was something red and shapeless on the road at the edge of the wood. Rather reluctantly, I walked over to it, and when I saw what it was, I was almost sick.

Undoubtedly it was all that was left of Carver.

I CANNOT bring myself to dwell upon the particulars of his condition. All I can say is that he had been *literally* turned inside out. A creature of unnatural abilities and gigantic strength must have been responsible for that. Bits of clothing lay around; they did not appear to be torn, but cut into geometrical patterns by shearing edges of incredible keenness. There was no sign of a rifle or ammunition.

I looked past this ghastly object into the deeps of the woods. When my eyes became accustomed again to the dimness, I saw that the road ran on down the exact center of an immensely long glade of tall trees.

For a while I gazed down this solemn aisle, wondering at some strange effect which I felt but could not define. Then I realized that in that glade there was no sound or sight of any living thing.

Neither calls of birds nor shrieks of monkeys, and the air was completely free from the humming haze of insects which had been a fixed part of my life for months now. It was really uncanny.

I peered as far down the glade as possible, without entering it, and saw that in the distance a white mist seemed to have arisen from the damp ground, and lay across the road. It may have been a trick of the bad light, I thought, but the trees in the neighborhood of that mist had

a shimmering effect of unreality, as if they were not quite stable. Moreover, they seemed to have some phosphorescent illumination of their own. And they flickered. Definitely they flickered, as if they were disappearing and reappearing with great rapidity.

I have stated this all rather coldly, without getting over my personal feelings at the time. Actually, I was very nervous indeed, unsettled of stomach since I had set eyes on the mutilated Carver, and uneasily apprehensive of the queer apparition which had so suddenly materialized before Mrs. Carver on this very spot.

Thus I stood gingerly and hesitantly at the entrance of the glade, not daring to set foot inside.

Then I pulled myself together, and remembered that I had a task to do. At the edge of the clearing I set about digging a grave for Carver. The earth at the side of the road was hard, but I hacked out a depression more than a yard deep and rolled the corpse into it, throwing the rags after it. I filled it in, and made a respectable hump over the top. When I had finished patting that smooth, I decided I had done enough.

With a last curious look at the entrance to the glade, I shouldered my spade and set out back to the camp.

FARNE and Mrs. Carver were having a pot of tea when I arrived. Mrs. Carver looked up expectantly.

"I found him, and gave him a decent burial," I said, squatting down.

"Thank you," she murmured, and gazed steadfastly at the ground.

There was an awkward pause.

"See anything at all queer?" asked Farne, always the adventurer.

I told him about the long, dark glade, omitting the strange details of Carver's condition for the sake of Mrs. Carver. The description of the place interested him greatly.

"We must go and explore it tomorrow," he said, enthusiastically.

"Please, no," said Mrs. Carver, anxiously. "That is an accursed place. We must keep away from it. Besides, you promised to start back for Pocado tomorrow. I must get back, or I shall collapse."

"That's right," I agreed. "Mrs. Carver is in no condition to delay here longer. We promised to start back tomorrow, and we shall."

Farne had to admit this, and for a moment was downcast. Then:

"Wait a minute," he said. "It's only four o'clock. You say it's not far. I can get there and back before sunset."

He jumped to his feet, grabbed his rifle.

"I'm off," he said, and went crashing through the thin undergrowth towards the road before I could say a word.

I looked at Mrs. Carver, and shrugged my shoulders. She returned me a queer, blank, empty look, as if her attention was on something far removed from this land. Then as I continued to regard her, her dark blue eyes came to life again, and she smiled slightly.

"He's very impulsive, isn't he?" she said.

I nodded. "But he can take care of himself. He's strong, and a fine shot. Still, I wish he hadn't gone. There's something pretty grim about that place."

We fell into a silence. I could not see the sun, but I judged it was no great distance above the western horizon, and mentally cursed Farne for his wild impulse. I doubted whether he could get back before dark. I was the more annoyed because I was very fond of the lad, whom I'd known since he was a schoolboy, and being some ten years older than him, had an odd paternal regard.

My thoughts turned to Mrs. Carver. She was sitting there plucking idly at the grass, and I eyed her covertly. There was



no doubt that she was the most beautiful woman I had even seen. I wondered what the late Mr. Hugh Carver had possessed in the way of looks and personality to de-

serve such a fair creature. Or had he been very rich?

It was not a very admirable line of thought, I admit, but then—well, she was unusually attractive. I could not keep my thoughts off her.

PRESENTLY we got into a hesitant sort of conversation. I told her some of my adventures in various parts of the globe, and she told me something of her roving life with Carver.

Then we began making comparisons, and got on to England and the English countryside. I remember becoming quite effusive about a farm I had lived on in Hertfordshire.

"There was a hog we called Gertie," I ambled on, "and every Friday night—"
Zip!

Something appeared suddenly, sticking in the ground between us. It was a little brown arrow, a few inches long. We sat gazing at it for a long moment, as if we were afraid it might bite us. And it just stuck there, inanimate.

Coming to my senses, I leapt to my feet, helped Mrs. Carver up, and hustled her behind a thick redwood tree, shielding her from the direction whence the arrow had come.

I made a pounce back again, and grabbed a couple of guns. Another arrow came flying out of the gloom, and pinned itself in the bark at my head-level as I slid back behind the tree.

"Indians!" whispered Mrs. Carver, clinging tightly to the tree.

I was puzzled. We had seen and heard nothing of any Indians for weeks, and although there was supposed to be a tribe somewhere in this locality, it was known as a peaceful and not a hostile one. Yet these arrows were undoubtedly aimed at us, and I judged them to be poisoned ones, for they were hardly large enough to pierce fatally. Who was responsible for them?

We waited there silently for some time, and then at last I peered out cautiously. No more arrows came.

"I think it's clear now," I said. "But I'm going to make sure. I don't think there's more than one or two of them, at most. Probably renegades. I'm going to scout around for a few minutes. Wait here, and keep your gun ready."

She nodded assent. I dodged out into the undergrowth, and warily worked my way round in the direction from which the arrows had come. I kept my eyes skinned and my rifle at the ready, and was so keyed up that I almost took a shot at a monkey which leapt a gap between the branches over my head.

But I saw nothing that was in the least suspicious.

I circled the whole clearing without seeing a sign of an Indian, and came back to the camp.

"It's all right, Mrs. Carver," I called quietly towards the tree where I had left her.

Silence.

"Mrs. Carver!" I called again, and as there was no immediate reply, strode over to the tree, a little impatient with her deafness.

The rifle lay abandoned on the ground behind the tree, its shining barrel half-hidden in a patch of mud. Mrs. Carver was gone.

CHAPTER THREE

The Boomala

I STOOD there looking foolishly around at the still forest, and before I could seriously collect my thoughts, the sound of distant screams came faintly to my ears. I listened tensely.

"Help! Help!" came the far-off cries, in a voice almost sobbing with terror. Despite that, I recognized the voice. It was Farne's.

For a moment I dithered in a state of awful indecision. What the devil had happened to Mrs. Carver? Had the Indians got her? Had she lost her nerve and bolted? Or had she heard Farne crying before I had, and rushed off to help? But then surely she would have taken the gun?

Then the voice of Farne shrieking with pain tore my heart, and I forgot Mrs. Carver, went blundering madly towards the ancient road, and finding it, went charging along it at my best speed. Before I had gone twenty yards, Farne's crying stopped abruptly on a note of unbelievable anguish.

Breathless with fear and haste, I rushed on, constantly stumbling and floundering, and bumping into branches in the deepening gloom.

Eventually I came out into the very wide clearing, and the tree-tops on the eastern side were bathed in the rosy, far-flung shafts of the setting sun. I halted, and my fear seemed to clutch at my stomach with cold hands. Then, gripping my rifle the tighter, I went resolutely out into the clearing, along the road, towards the entrance of that strange and fearful glade.

To one side of the blackness of the entrance was the mound of Carver's grave, and a shiver ran down my spine at the sight of it. But I walked past it and right up to the gloomy aperture, and stepped a yard or so inside, crouching and frowning fiercely as though I might encounter a tiger.

For quite a minute I could make out nothing at all, and any lurking beast of prey could have pounced on me from any direction without me being aware of it in time. But nothing happened. Only, as I stood trying in vain to pierce the darkness, that deathly quiet of the avenue crept up around me, and became a more nerve-racking menace than any animal snarl or growl.

Presently things began to take shape, and I made out the stone of the road

(which looked almost new here) running in a smooth, straight line down between the great trees and merging into the white mist in the distance. Those trees on the verge of the mist still seemed to be queerly flickering in a pale, mysterious light.

To satisfy myself about them, I stepped back out into the clearing. In that short space, night had fallen like the dropping of a curtain, and the sky overhead was deep blue and studded with stars. I gathered, therefore, that the trees were phosphorescent, and quite independent of daylight.

I looked at the familiar stars longingly, and had to force myself to turn my back on them and enter the black glade again. By now I was convinced that some creature outside of man's knowledge inhabited that awesome place, and that it had caught both Carver and Farne. I knew that probably I should be able to do little against it if it caught me. But I also knew that while there was a chance of Farne being alive, I had to go on.

I advanced cautiously down the road, and it was like being in an empty, lightless cathedral at night. The brooding hush, the cold stone floor, the sense of some unseen watcher . . . it was sickening. And, ahead, the trees silently flickered and seemed somehow to move without moving, and the white mist lay more like a loose, filmy screen of gauze than a dank vapor.

SLOWLY, with my heart in my mouth, I went on. As I progressed, I perceived that there was a dark shape on the road with the silken edge of the mist wavering over it like a drapery in a breeze. It was a crumpled human body. Was it Farne?

Dropping all caution, I ran blindly towards it.

I had gone only a few paces when an overpowering dizziness struck me like a blow. I reeled, and almost fell. A strong warning memory of *something* permeated

my brain, but it was vague and shapeless. I could not get the import of the memory at all, and I did not try very hard. I fought only for clearness of vision that I might see to go on.

Soon my mind began to clear, and I forced my unwilling body to run on. I reached the crumpled form that lay in the road, and knelt down in an opalescent swirl of mist to examine it.

It was Farne. Poor Farne!

His strong young body was twisted as though he had spent hours on the rack. His bones were broken almost into powder. And his face!

I got up trembling with murderous anger. My fingers were gripping, relaxing, gripping, quite involuntarily. If only I could set hands upon the thing that had done this! There was still a sense of an unseen watcher, but it was not so strong as it had been coming down the glade.

I looked about me. I was on the verge of the white mist, and it was as blank as a sheet of frosted glass. It was impossible to see any individual wreaths of mist, for the stuff was extremely fine and dense.

I gazed behind me, back along the road, and experienced a violent qualm.

For stretching all the way back to the entrance of the glade was a ghostly procession of pallid, luminous images of myself, motionless and frozen.

I stared at them in wonder and awe. It was like being at the end of an Indian file of waxed effigies, each image wearing an expression of strained anxiety and paralyzed in the act of running. I noted that each pose of myself was slightly different from the one preceding or immediately behind it.

Then I saw that every one of the great trees in the long avenue had its own retinue of replicas of itself receding behind it at a peculiar angle, apparently up an incline rising towards the sky. And the road itself appeared to be made of

glass, for through it I saw a series of innumerable layers of its smooth surface, one below the other, stretching downwards to infinity.

I became aware that every one of these manifold images was flickering in the manner I have described. Somehow this flickering effect seemed very familiar to me now, and reminded me of some previous experience I could not for the moment place.

In observing this phenomenon, my anger had subsided and was replaced by curiosity. I turned again to the wall of mist, into which the road ran and vanished, and wondered what secrets lay behind it. Should I brave it and go on? I might break through into a land of wonders. On the other hand. . . !

Gingerly I slid an investigatory foot a few inches ahead of me, so that my boot disappeared. I didn't want to step over the edge of anything—a ravine, perhaps—which might be concealed by the mist.

And then I stopped abruptly, for there was something forming in the mist just about on my eye-level.

IT WAS as if a part of the mist had bunched itself together in a handful and grown a little denser and darker in the process. The gray, round blob hung there unmoving for a space, and then lengthened slowly horizontally, becoming a bulging, unbalanced oval.

I watched it, hypnotized.

It became more definite in outline, and reminded me of a fish in an aquarium balancing itself so that it remained practically in one spot. It was certainly fish-like in shape now.

It expanded, as though it were puffing itself out. And soon I could make out the details more clearly. It was more like a gray-white slug than a fish, and it had dead black eyes which appeared to be fixed on me impassively.

I knew then, from Mrs. Carver's de-

scription and from the "dirigible" we had seen in the night, that this thing was the Boomala, and that it was coming for me.

Panic swept over me in a wave. I turned, facing the bewildering confusion of the multiplex road and the endless lines of flickering trees and the unnerving spectacle of the procession of my alter egos, and attempted to flee. A vision of that mosaic pattern of the man who was running for his life rose momentarily before my mind's eye, and now I understood it only too well.

But I could not run!

My limbs seemed to be moving freely, but I was not getting anywhere. It was as though I were suspended in gravitationless space.

I began to shout and yell for help, and instantly remembered the cries of Carver and Farne, and stopped. There was no one to help me.

All the time, I was aware of that thing behind me growing larger and larger. I dared not turn and face it. By now it must be larger than I was.

I remembered the sort of deaths Carver and Farne had died, and broke into a clammy sweat. Despite the fact that I knew I was lost and past aid, hoarse cries again began to escape me.

Presently, out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed the side of the Boomala swelling like a huge bubble towards me. It was a colossal size now, a great slaty-white whale.

Then suddenly I saw the pallid exterior of the thing sweep past my eyes, and all light was extinguished. In an instant I had been plunged into inky blackness. My cries died in my throat. Somehow the creature had grown over me. I had merged into its interior.

I floated helplessly in that blackness, with only one thought in my mind: apparently the Boomala was no more solid than the mist from which it had come, and

therefore I could not see how it could hurt me.

Violent disillusionment came immediately.

There was the terrible sensation of a great pair of claws fastening upon my very vitals. My chest and stomach seemed to be gradually drawn apart. I screamed with the agonizing pain of it, and instantly the claws relaxed and I felt them no more. The blackness rolled aside like a dense cloud of smoke before a gale, and left me floating dizzily in a blank white mist, sick and terrified.

All I was aware of at first was that the Boomala had completely vanished. The relief was overwhelming. Becoming calmer, I tried to recapitulate the situation.

I FOUND I was minus my rifle.

Whether I had left it on the ground when I had knelt to examine Farne I could not recall. But my hands were empty now.

It was extraordinarily difficult to get my thoughts straight. Some sort of mental interference seemed to be going on, and I found odd expressions and complete, irrelevant sentences coming into my mind for no reason whatsoever, and mixing themselves up with the reasoning I was trying to do.

"This little three-dimensional machine which you see is one of the more complex mechanisms from World 88. We do not know for certain who made and placed them on that globe, or for what purpose. Conjectures range from the higher radiatory coalescence to the results of superactivity in the realm of indefinable nascent error. . . ."

Pure gibberish!

And again: *"... there is a point of contact with our world found a distance away, long before I was conceived. Occasionally these machines have a tendency to wander through to here. . . ."*

Were these wanderings from my own sub-conscious? But never in my life had

I pondered upon anything remotely like this mysterious, disconnected stuff!

I gave my whole attention to these apparently extraneous comments, and soon discovered that although I could only make out fragments, the actual narrative itself was far from disconnected. It was, in fact, a highly intelligent discourse.

Seemingly, I was the subject of the discourse, and the commentator talked about me and my world in the manner of a teacher explaining to a pupil. And indeed there was a pupil, for quite another voice kept asking questions, and the teacher answered them meticulously.

Obviously the unseen lecturer and pupil took it for granted that I was some kind of "machine" or "mechanism" from a world of machines. I have since thought that possibly from their unfamiliar viewpoint, the ordinary man was really nothing more than an elaborate mechanism, with every thought and movement conditioned, governed by behaviourism. Certainly, man is not his own master.

I wondered just where these somewhat unsympathetic creatures were, and how I happened to be *en rapport* with their thought waves. It seemed that their thought waves were emanating from the white mist around me.

The pupil asked a question about the Boomala, and the teacher answered: "*We employ it to watch the region of the point of contact and turn these machines away from it if possible. If they persist in penetrating, it puts them out of action by displacing parts of their mechanism. The creature is of a comparatively low order, but it carries out its duty with a certain subtlety. . . . It can adjust three of its dimensions to any conceivable shape in a three-dimensional world, having surprising flexibility in this respect. . . . Fortunately, we were able to stop this particular machine being put out of order for a distance, and thus we can examine its working parts. . . .*"

Then the unknown entity began an anatomical lecture, describing the functioning of my body. From the way they discussed my inner organs, it was obvious that both lecturer and pupil could see all those organs quite plainly, just as though I were made of glass.

It struck me that as their thought waves came so clearly to me, I might be able to get a message over to them. I concentrated on trying to attract their attention by thinking a message to them.

I chose the sentence "I can understand you," and thought it with all my might.

There was no result whatever. The anatomical discussion went on in great detail.

I gave it up, and turned my attention to considering the situation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chase Through Time

AFTER weighing things up, I came to these conclusions:

Firstly, the ancient road (probably built by some forgotten race which may, or may not, have known exactly what it was doing) led to some unique point of contact with another world, and the Boomala was the guardian of that portal.

Secondly, this other world was one of four dimensions at least, because of the ability of its inhabitants to see me without being seen, and also see into my body without touching it. It is a quality of four-dimensional beings to be able to observe a three-dimensional world without being themselves observed, just as three-dimensional beings could observe Flat-land without being apprehended by the Flat-landers. Again, there was the ability of the Boomala to shift the inner organs of people without breaking the skin, which it could do only through hyper-space.

Thirdly, the other-world entities regarded me as a machine—were they them-

selves machines? Had they emotions, feelings, a conscience? What would happen when they had finished discussing me?

At that moment they finished discussing me.

The pupil had, it seemed, learned enough to satisfy himself, and the teacher gave the order to the unseen Boomala.

"This machine may now be stopped."

INSTANTLY, a muddy speck appeared in the mist before my eyes, and I caught my breath in terror. The Boomala was coming back!

Slowly the speck expanded, and took the sickening, slug-like form which I recognized. I realized now that this effect of growing larger was actually the creature approaching along the fourth dimension, which I could not see. There was no perspective to compare the Boomala with, and therefore it seemed to be growing slowly larger in the one place. Actually, it was coming nearer with great rapidity.

Already it was near enough to see those utterly black, pupilless eyes, like the empty sockets of a skull, turned towards me fixedly. Terror-stricken though I was, a detached part of my mind wondered whether this was the normal appearance of the Boomala, or just a fearsome shape it assumed to frighten away the unwelcome visitors from the three-dimensional world.

But I knew it had not come just to frighten me away. It had come to make an end of me—a very painful end.

And, oddly enough, directly I accepted that fact, my fear died away, and I felt the calmness of despair. I began to think of the life I was leaving. I thought of Mrs. Carver, and wondered what had happened to her, for it seemed I should never know. I thought of when I left her waiting behind that tree, and a vision of her lovely face arose in my mind's eye.

Then suddenly I noticed that the

Boomala had ceased to grow, had in fact become just a little smaller. What had made it halt?

But as I turned my attention to it again, it started once more to grow steadily.

I still felt indifferent towards it, and thought again of the attractions of Mrs. Carver, whom I would never see again. I would never have the chance to say to her some things I would like to say, I thought glumly. And realized that I had fallen rather heavily for the blue-eyed, golden-haired young woman.

Again I noticed that the Boomala had stopped growing, and again as I watched it, it began to grow once more.

This gave me furiously to think. What caused this effect? Had it any connection with my thoughts of Mrs. Carver?

I experimented, trying to think of Mrs. Carver and watch the effect on the Boomala at the same time. This divided attention was not very successful, for though the Boomala slowed up a bit, it still continued to grow nearer and larger. But it showed definitely that the memory of Mrs. Carver had some potent quality.

So I tried hard to concentrate my whole attention upon my recollection of Mrs. Carver and ignore the Boomala altogether. But the Boomala would not be ignored. For now that hope had returned, uncertainty had also, and uncertainty is fear. And this fear kept my attention glued on the Boomala, with the result that it slowly but surely gained on me and grew larger and larger.

I could hold the mental image of Mrs. Carver no longer, and relaxed. Immediately, the Boomala leapt nearer as if propelled by a suddenly released spring. It swelled rapidly up like a balloon, beginning to block out the mist, and its eyes were like two pits of charcoal.

I BECAME frantic again, and my fear-driven mind worked like lightning. It became plain to me that Time was a

dimension one could travel along in this queer limbo on the boundary of two utterly different worlds. I recalled the way the two entities had spoken of "a distance": they meant a distance of Time.

When I cast my thoughts back to Mrs. Carver I was casting my mind back into the past, and so actually traveled back into the past to some extent. That is why the Boomala had appeared to get smaller. It was actually *me* traveling away from it, back along Time.

So long as I could keep my attention in the past, I was safe. But if I dwelt in the present, the Boomala would get me.

What a nightmare of a situation!

I tried hard to fix upon the scene where I had last parted from Mrs. Carver, under the tree, but I could not get her face very clearly defined in my mind. It was only a blurred image. The trouble was that I had not been acquainted long enough with Mrs. Carver to become really familiar with her features, lovely though they were. And I could not remember them properly.

I was too distracted by the closeness of the Boomala to have the sense to concentrate on some other scene in the recent past, say with Farne, whose face I knew perfectly.

For the Boomala was looming right over me now, a great white threat. In its very shadow, I looked wildly around me for a way of escape. Unexpectedly, the mist behind me had thinned away, or else I had drifted back to the edge of it. Anyway, I could clearly see the ghostly glade again, and its processions of images.

A crazy hope crossed my mind.

I fastened my gaze on one of the distant images of myself, near the entrance to the glade, frozen in the act of running down the road. Surely an actual spectacle of myself in the past was better than an indistinct memory image! I forced myself to concentrate my whole attention on that still figure.

Two things happened suddenly and

simultaneously. I felt a dizzy sense of movement, and there was a transitory flash of jet black before my eyes, like the beat of an enormous raven's wing. I realized I had been snatched away from the Boomala at the very point when it had begun to absorb me.

Now I had a confused impression of flying backwards and experiencing things backwards. The white mist which concealed the Boomala was receding rapidly in a peculiar jerky manner, and became merely a cloud in the distance. Trees appeared to be snapping past on either side of me.

Then I was pulled up with a jerk which set my brain reeling. I felt the stone surface of the road beneath my feet, and it was tilting and swaying like the deck of a ship in a storm. I staggered, then recovered my balance.

I was standing on the road in the glade, looking at the shining mist between the trees in the distance. There on the road, half concealed in the mist, was the dark smudge of Farne's body.

I was back at that identical point in time where I had been overcome with dizziness when starting to run down the glade. But now I knew what that strong warning memory of *something* was. It was the memory of the Boomala.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lone Journey

AT FIRST sight, the camp in the clearing seemed just as it was when I had left it to rush to Farne's rescue.

The rifle I had given to Mrs. Carver still lay in the pool of mud behind the tree. I fished it out, and regarded it thoughtfully.

Then I noticed that the two arrows which had been shot at us had disappeared. That seemed to settle the mystery of Mrs. Carver's fate. The Indians must

have collected their arrows. No doubt they collected Mrs. Carver at the same time.

But had they? I distinctly recalled seeing those arrows sticking in the tree and in the ground *after* I had discovered Mrs. Carver was gone. Had the Indians returned again after that?

It was an enigma with no solution.

Ants had got into the food and eaten every particle of it, save some in two sealed tins. That had to see me all the way back to Pocado!

I sat down to have one real meal before I started back, and to ponder upon the most amazing and tragic adventure of my life.

There was nothing else I could have done but retreat from that accursed glade, and leave poor Farne's body there for ever. It would be insanity to venture into that snare again.

Although I knew that the Boomala's sphere of influence extended well past this spot, I hoped it would not attack me again, but be satisfied with having frightened me off, which was its primary task. Certainly I would never recommend anyone to go within miles of that place.

Masticating the precious food slowly and carefully, I dwelt upon the strange phenomenon I had witnessed, and sought for explanations of it.

I remembered the peculiar flickering effect of the trees and images in the glade, and tried hard to place the experience of which it reminded me. Then I got it: my own home movie projector!

IT WAS a fad of mine to take moving pictures with a camera on my travels, and show them at leisure in the parlor at home. Sometimes when I ran the projector slowly, the projection speed fell below the normal sixteen frames per second for silent films, and then the view on the screen assumed that same flickering and slightly jerky aspect.

On that fact, I built up a theory.

As some Time theorists have it, Time is not the smooth, unbroken line it appears to be: actually, it is made up of a series of points, or instants. Time is not gradual, but progresses in continual, even jerks. But these jerks are so frequent that they seem to the mind to be one continuous smooth action, just as the jerking movie film on the screen appears as a continuous smooth action to the eye.

That long vista of images of myself which I had seen stretching back along the glade was like a long reel of movie film, containing hundreds of consecutive still photographs from my immediate past. The flicker was caused by every image starting back a trifle as every new instant jerked into the past, or as I jerked into the future—that was a matter of relativity.

And then I got into a rare confusion trying to think out *how* I could have detected the intervals in Time, because naturally I ought not to have existed at all during those intervals. How, then, could I have observed them?

The only solution was the rather unsatisfactory one that in that misty No-Man's-Land Time existed in some completely different condition or state. Certainly I had seemed to spend hours there, but the actual terrestrial time could not have been more than a few seconds. But what this property was which enabled one to observe Time lines quite detachedly I had neither the knowledge nor the imagination to visualize.

Nor did I waste any more time in thinking, but prepared myself for the long and lone trip back to Pocado.

CHAPTER SIX

Back to Civilization

I DON'T intend to go now into the details of that terrible journey. It is just a jumbled phantasmagoria in my

memory now; the endless undergrowth, millions of impeding tree branches, snakes that spat and wriggled slimily, howling, chattering monkeys, the maddening clouds of flies and mosquitoes, steaming, smelling swamps, the wide, bare, and strangely silent clearings, the long hot nights when the fear of the Boomala revived, and the ever-present but irrational hope that somewhere in the forest I might stumble upon Mrs. Carver again, alive. . . .

They found me on the outskirts of Pocoda nearly gone with starvation and exhaustion.

I spent a week in bed and in restless delirium, under the care of the trader, Andrews, whom Farne and I had befriended before we set out.

And then one sunny morning I awoke, weak and tired as the devil, but sane again.

Andrews gave me a drink of tepid water, and asked me how I felt. I told him, with some profanity, I'm afraid.

"I suppose you'd like to know what I've been through, and where Farne is," I said, in a voice which wouldn't come above a hoarse whisper.

He shook his head, and smiled slightly.

"No," he replied, grave again. "I already know all about it. You probably won't believe it, but you've hardly stopped talking since we found you. That's why your voice is almost gone. You've repeated every detail of your adventures since you left here. Quite lucidly, too, along with your theories and all. I've listened to it right through at least six times."

I lay and stared at him.

"Do you think that was delirium?" I croaked at last. "Because I can assure you that it wasn't."

"No, I believe in the Boomala, as you know, and I believe you've met the creature just as you say. But one part of your story is pure raving."

I looked at him interrogatively. He squatted on the edge of the bed.

"Hugh Carver was an intimate friend of mine," he went on. "I know for a fact that he was a bachelor! There never was a Mrs. Carver, or any lady friend at all. I also know that he set out from here alone, apart from a couple of near-Indian carriers, who might have deserted him later. And no white woman has set foot in this district for years!"

He sat and pondered, and when he was not having a whiskey bout, Andrews had a remarkably agile brain.

"I've got it!" he said presently. "You remember what those other-world beings said about the Boomala—'it carries out its duty with a certain subtlety. . . . It can adjust three of its dimensions to any conceivable shape in a three-dimensional world, having surprising flexibility in this respect. . . .' Well, I think that your sweet lady friend was nothing more than a three-dimensional projection of the Boomala, adjusted at its subtlest! Some adjustment, eh?"

To think that I had had tender feelings toward the thing which had murdered my friend! Unbelievable irony!

Against my will, I began to accept Andrews' fantastic explanation.

The trader noticed my growing conviction, and smiled his wry and somewhat cynical smile. And he had the last word.

"Anyway, you can't say you weren't warned. The Boomala had no wish to harm you unless you actually went into the forbidden glade. And you must thank the fake Mrs. Carver for your life! For it was only by remembering the Boomala in that role that you were able to escape from it in its real and nastier role—if that was its real role. You know, despite the fate of poor Farne, I'm almost beginning to think that somewhere the Boomala has a heart of gold!"

THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER

Official Organ of
The Science Fictioneers

MEMBER William Ramell, of N.S. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, sends in the following poem, which seems to exemplify the spirit of *The Science Fictioneers*:

We blaze a pathway through the stars,
And along the long light-years;
We'll take a dare to go anywhere—
We're *The Science Fictioneers*!

We fall asleep to the rocket's roar
And nothing can raise our fears;
We blast through space at a dizzy pace—
We're *The Science Fictioneers*!

Thanks a lot, Member Ramell, and let's hope the club can live up to that description!

Note the expansion of *The Science Fictioneer* this issue. We hope to make it even larger in the future, providing we can find worthwhile material to fill the space. So, if any member has a suggestion for a new feature to incorporate here, please ship it right along!

News From Our Branches

Three new branches of *The Science Fictioneers* have been chartered since the last issue appeared, bringing our total up to twelve. They are:

ADVISORY BOARD

Forrest J Ackerman
Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.
Robert W. Lowndes
Robert A. Madle
Milton A. Rothman
Bob Tucker
Harry Warner, Jr.
Olon F. Wiggins
Donald A. Wollheim

The Denver Science Fictioneers, Branch No. Ten, Director, Olon F. Wiggins, 3214 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado. Starting with seven members, this club "hopes to expand rapidly now that we have finally got things lined up," according to its Director. Director Wiggins is a member of the International Advisory Board of *The Science Fictioneers*, and is also well-known in science fiction fandom as the publisher of the leading fan magazine, *Science Fiction Fan*.

The Lunarites, Branch No. Eleven of *The Science Fictioneers*, Secretary, Art R. Sehnert, 791 Maury, Apt. 1, Memphis, Tennessee. This is the first "deep South" branch of the association, though several more are expected in the near future. Bill DuBrucq is the Director of this branch.

The Chelan Science Fictioneers, Branch

No. Twelve, Secretary-Director, Norman Willmorth, Chelan, Washington. Member Willmorth writes that his group decided to affiliate with *The Science Fictioneers* because, "this new club, endowed with enthusiasm and run by active fans, should go farther in the right direction than the other clubs. As yet, fan magazines hold no attraction for the group, so organizations run through that medium seem to be out. The club ought to go a long way." The Chelan group starts out with a membership of eight, which seems to indicate that it *will* go a long way.

The Toronto Science Fictioneers, Branch No. Seven, reports that it has adopted a program of aims and ambitions for the club. They are, according to Director Ted White, "To further science fiction in Canada; to make the club equal to the best in the U.S.A.; and to aid Canadian fans in occupying a prominent position in the science fiction world." He continues, "The present members are unanimously agreed that the club has been formed on good grounds, and everyone is more than willing to help make them a reality. We are having our troubles, principally in regard to finance, but where there is a will there's a way! We have succeeded in forming a library which is growing every day." Director White's address is 73 Taunton Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The Solaroid Club, Branch No. Four of *The Science Fictioneers*, has reorganized its meeting schedule, reducing the number of meetings to one each week. They are also attempting a program of getting speakers to their meetings. Manly Wade Wellman, prominent author, is the latest who has consented to attend. *The Solaroid Club* is located in Westwood, New Jersey.

That's all the news on the branches received this month. We will continue to publish information about our local groups as it is received.

Other chartered branches of *The Science Fictioneers* exist in Los Angeles, California; Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; and Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Proposed Branches

The following persons would like to form clubs or branches of *The Science Fictioneers* in their areas. Interested persons will please contact them.

Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Road, Muscatine, Iowa; Phil Bronson, 224 West Sixth Street, Hastings, Minnesota; Glen E. Grosbach, 5155 North New Jersey, Indianapolis, Indiana; David G. Miller, Box 324, Lake City, Florida; Jesse Levy, 119 Griffith Street, Jersey City, New Jersey; John Patch, New Concord, Ohio; D. L. Hetrick, 154½ Robinson Street, Binghamton, New York; Ned Will, 98 East Tulane Road, Columbus, Ohio; Paul H. Spencer, 88 Ardmore Road, West Hartford, Connecticut; John W. Olsen, 2525 Court Street, Baker, Oregon; Milton A. Rothman, 2020 F NW, Washington, D. C.; Roy Cameron, Jr., 1021 Chestnut Street, Hamilton, Ohio; J. F. Gaillard, 731 Keith Avenue, Anniston, Alabama; Harry Warner, Jr., 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Maryland; and J. J. Fortier, 1836 39th Avenue, Oakland, California.

With the Science Fictioneers

Arthur Widner, Jr., mentioned last issue in connection with his Ten Favorite Authors poll, is now conducting another nation-wide scientificfictional poll in an effort to determine who the ten leading science fiction fans are. He is also tabulating votes of fans concerning science fiction artists. Anyone interested is advised to contact Art at Box 122, Bryantville, Mass. . . . John V. Baltadonis (Philadelphia), prominent fan magazine illustrator, is attempting to sell his work to the profes-

sional magazines. Several artistically inclined members of *The Science Fictioneers* have made good in this direction recently, namely Leslie Perri (Brooklyn) and Walter E. Marconette (Dayton).

Dick Crain (Weehawken, N. J.) recently paid a surprise visit to your correspondent. Dick has just finished the first issue of his fan effort, *Cosmic Tales*. . . . Despite the fact that Milton A. Rothman resides in Washington, D. C., well over one hundred miles from Philadelphia, Milt attends most of the meetings of *The Philadelphia Science Fiction Society*, affiliated Branch No. 5 of *The Science Fictioneers*. . . . Question: Is Henry Andrew Ackerman, author of a short story in the last issue of *Super Science Stories*, the same Henry Ackerman who was President of *The Boys' Science Fiction Club* of some years back?

C. E. Forst, California member, has a job in keeping with his avocation of science fiction. He's a television engineer, and a "Telescript", or television-script, writer. . . . W. C. Liebscher (Chicago) postcards in answer to our question in the last issue, "You ask how many *Science Fictioneers* play musical instruments. Well, sir, I tickle the ivories. Ages ago I

could rattle out 'Liebestraum' with all its difficult runs and arpeggios without batting one eyelash, but, alas for me now, my taste ran to the baser things in music at the time I should have continued taking music lessons. Here's to a *Science Fictioneer* jam session at the Chicago Convention." . . . Mrs. Ginger Zwick (Orchard Park, N. Y.) is sponsoring a Science Fiction Address Bureau. Those who want correspondents should contact her "P.O. Box 284, Orchard Park, New York" for information. . . . Joseph M. Lewandowski, Jr., is attempting to organize a state-wide science fiction group tentatively called *The Ohio Fantasy Association*. Interested persons can reach him at 17 Riverview Road, Brecksville, Ohio. . . . Any items of interest for publication in this column should be sent to 333 East Belgrade Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

—Robert A. Madle

Fan Magazines

PLUTO, published by Marvis and Vincent Manning, Decker, Indiana. Bi-monthly; 10c. A beautifully mimeographed, varicolored all-purpose fan magazine, it has a fresh touch which is very welcome. One of the youngest fan mags, but a "best buy."

VOICE OF THE IMAGINATION, published by Morojo and Forrest J. Ackerman, P.O. Box 6475, Met Station, Los Angeles, California. Bi-monthly; 10c. Letters of all descriptions, with a couple of pictorial oddities to set them off, are all this magazine contains; nevertheless, it ranks as one of the half-dozen tip-top fan mags for entertainment and reader appeal.

SPACEWAYS, published by Harry Warner, Jr., 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Maryland. Occasional; 10c. One of the best things about this publication

THE SCIENCE FICTIONEERS APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Science Fictioneers
210 East 43rd Street
New York City.

Sirs:

I am a regular reader of science fiction and would like to join *The Science Fictioneers*. I enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for my membership card.

Name

Address

City & State

Occupation..... When Born.....

is that it is written more for the ordinary reader than for the fan. This doesn't make it any the less appetizing to the long-time fan, but it certainly makes things easier for the newcomer.

STARDUST, published by W. L. Hamling, 2609 Argyle Street, Chicago, Illinois. Bi-monthly; 15c. The aristocrat of fan magazines appears this month in a new format, somewhat smaller, but with more pages. And the quality of the contents seems to be catching up with the beautifully printed appearance.

SUN SPOTS, published by Roderick Gaetz, 31 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey. Tri-weekly; 5c. This lively little newsmagazine has recently changed publishers, being given up by *The Solaroid Club* and taken over by its three editors. The magazine itself has changed very little, however, being still a very commendable effort.

MIDWEST NEWS & VIEWS, published by Erle Korshak, 3156 Cambridge Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Bi-weekly; 5c. Continues to give all the news that turns up about science fiction fan and professional activity in the Midwest area.

LE ZOMBIE, published by Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. Bi-monthly; 5c. Tucker's magazine, recently renovated, continues to bear the same relation to other fan magazines that Ogden Nash bears to Shakespeare. If you like to laugh, you'll like this.

FRONTIER, published by Donn Brazier, 3031 North 36th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bi-monthly; 10c. A brand-new magazine devoted, not to science fiction, but to "a search for material in science and philosophy which extends across the border of the known." Principal content of the first issue is a long article on Extra-Sensory Perception, very ably written by the editor.

SCIENCE-FICTION FORWARD, published by Peter Duncan, 114 16th Avenue, Paterson, New Jersey. Monthly; 10c. Another new magazine, and, like the above, also a bit off the beaten track. This magazine is devoting itself entirely to a campaign for the increase of science in science fiction magazines. Entertaining, though a bit weighty.

Helpful Hints for Fan Clubs

The credit for the inspiration for this section of *The Science Fictioneer* goes to Paul H. Spencer, of West Hartford, Connecticut, who wrote us, "Suggestion for *The Science Fictioneer*: Each issue feature a column of 'Helpful Hints' for science fiction clubs proposing various activities likely to be of interest. The local club nearly goes nuts trying to think up something different for each meeting." Those words, as every fan knows, are very true; it is only surprising that no one has thought of this before.

This first time, suppose we take up the problems of the meetings themselves. Later columns can deal with field trips, projects, etc., but they are less important.

A well-planned meeting of, say, two hours, might have the following on its program: Reading of the minutes, business of the club (passage of motions, etc.), a short talk, entertainment, discussion of the latest issues of science fiction magazines or other similar topics, and adjournment. That is a rather elementary program, well within the capabilities of even the smallest club; yet, properly handled, it can be very entertaining. There are two important factors which can make it so.

First, someone in the club must be directly in charge of the program, *with full authority*. He must be responsible to see that everything is planned, and that all the planned features can be put on.

Second, the talks or entertainments must be of a type that will interest all the members. If your membership is predom-

inantly male, a talk on the fashions of the future, however well prepared, will scarcely interest it. And if most of the members are science students or work in scientific lines, don't have the local high school teacher speak on science.

That's a bare scratching-of-the-surface, but it's all we have space for this time. More next time. Need we mention that any experiences of your own which might be helpful to other clubs will be appreciated if sent in?

New Members

Charles M. Aker, 74 Whitney Road, Medford, Massachusetts; Bill DuBrucq, 900 Avalon, Memphis, Tennessee; Glen Taylor, 503 South Jackson, Kansas City, Missouri; Garfield McConnell, 38 Woodington Boulevard, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Charlie Vaughan, 154 Dundas Street East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Stanley Price, 911 St. Clarens Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; and Laurie Woodruff, 42 Beulah Avenue, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Raymond J. Kulas, R.F.D. 1, Stephen, Minnesota; Harold Newton, 6641 Angus Drive, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; Rod Ball, 148 N.E. 6th Street, Miami, Florida; Gertrude Kuslan, 170 Washington Avenue, West Haven, Connecticut; Asa J. Pickett, Sr., Kennett Square, Pennsylvania; William Stoy, Jr., 140-92 Burden Crescent, Jamaica, New York; Samuel A. Peoples, 3401 Hueco Street, El Paso, Texas; Jerry White, 924 North Willett, Memphis, Tennessee; Monroe Hanish, 615 Wheeler Avenue, Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Fred M. Holobow, General Delivery, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

W. Y. Keane, 521 North Fulton Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland; Arthur Saha, Route 1, Box 68, Hibbing, Minnesota; Richard J. Kewin, 4420 Fairfax, Dallas, Texas; David Henry Blair, P.O. Box 91, Corner Brook, Newfoundland; Floyd E. Counts, 298 North Washington Avenue, Battle Creek, Michigan; E. Everett Evans, 191 Capital Avenue SW, Battle Creek, Michigan; Arthur L. Widner, Jr., Box 122, Bryantville, Massachusetts; Claude Fredericks, 1005 Elm Street, Reading, Pennsylvania; Harry Harrison, 147-20 84th Avenue, Jamaica, New York; and W. S. Fiedler, 29 School Road, Kenmore, New York.

David Miller, Box 324, Lake City, Florida; Joe Hudson, Jr., 223 South 1st Street, Jacksonville Beach, Florida; C. P. Sweeney, 300 Rhode

Island Avenue NW, Washington, D.C.; Richard Mallett, 1200 Lexington Avenue, New York City; Joseph Gilbert, 3911 Park Street, Columbia, South Carolina; George Trimbach, 175 North Stonewall, Memphis, Tennessee; Mary T. Leary, 132 2nd Avenue, Westwood, New Jersey; James Breckenridge, 114 Mill Street, Westwood, New Jersey; Charles Beling, La Roche Avenue, Harrington Park, New Jersey; and Phillip Franco, Clinton Avenue, Box 431, Emerson, New Jersey.

Jack McIntyre, Chelan, Washington; Jimmy McIntyre, Chelan, Washington; (Mrs.) James Monroe, Chelan, Washington; Stanton Whitman, Chelan, Washington; Mrs. Staton Whitman, Chelan, Washington; Iris Willmorth, Chelan, Washington; Faye Willmorth, Chelan, Washington; and Norman Willmorth, Chelan, Washington.

Basil Wells, Box 12, Springboro, Pennsylvania; Edward Wescott, Route 2, Box 14, Marysville, California; Ken Mongold, Fayette, Iowa; Gerald Gentry, Gracemont, Oklahoma; Joe Kahn, 718 St. Mark's Avenue, Brooklyn, New York; J. Corliss, 5027 Reiserstown Road, Baltimore, Maryland; Jack Cohen, 10 Wilmore Street, Mattapan, Massachusetts; Ned Will, 98 East Tulane Street, Columbus, Ohio; Jesse Levy, 119 Griffith Street, Jersey City, New Jersey; J. S. McGlashan, 1425 4A Street East, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Mary Woods, R.R. 3, Box 208, Princeton, Indiana; and C. M. Chatterton, Box 412, Milaca, Minnesota.

Bert F. Castellari, 10a Sully Street, Randwick, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Ronald B. Levy, "Domremy," 18 Dudley Street, Randwick, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Ralph A. Smith, Flat 3, "Monray," 5 Copper Street, Randwick, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Keith Hooper, Flat 3, 5 Mears Avenue, Randwick, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Edward H. and Eric F. Russell, 274 Edgecliffe Road, Woolahra, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Kenneth N. Dwyer, 10 Manning Street, Waverly, Sydney, NSW, Australia; Charles La Costez, 18 May Street, St. Peter's, Sydney, NSW, Australia; and Neville Friedlander, 30 Oxford Street, Bondi Junction, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

Samuel D. Russell, 507 15th Avenue, S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota; Christian A. Jensen, Box 1411, Juneau, Alaska; Alderson Fry, 2115 Garland, Nashville, Tennessee; Herschel M. Jenkinson, Jr., 214 East Willard Street, Muncie, Indiana; Edward J. Walz, 61 Edwin Plane, Asheville, North Carolina; and Melecio R. Magaino, Provincial Treasurer's Office, Lucena, Tayabas, Philippines.

Secret of the Crypt



Zarth-I had waited five thousand years to give the signal for which his planet waited—and no two puny men could stop him!

By Oliver E. Saari

BITING SNOW eddied down the white valley, beating against the two struggling human figures. They leaned hard against the wind, tugging at a loaded sled.

Vic Howard peeled back his sleeve and cast an anxious glance at his watch.

"Won't make Circle—tonight—at this

rate," he panted into the wind.

"We gotta dig in till it blows over," growled his companion past a well-chewed quid. "If you wouldn't hev been so set on diggin' out them worthless rocks we'd—"

Vic shook his head. Sam just didn't understand the scientific importance of

those last samples. Sam was no geologist. Vic had hired the grizzled old trapper for a guide and companion, while he probed the rocky soil of Alaska for priceless geological data. He'd spent some profitable weeks in the wilds. Then the wind had wrecked their plane, and now they had to reach civilization on foot.

Sam went on muttering his grievances till something made him stop in sheer amazement. His stubbled jaw fell agape. Vic turned and saw ahead of them—the light.

It lanced up from the drifting snows, first a faint cerise and changing to a blood red beam. Straight up, high into the blizzard it bored, and the snowflakes in its path changed to droplets of water and hissing vapor. Like a giant fountain of ruddy flame it shot up into the falling snow.

The light was strangely warm on their faces, but it was not blinding. Vic's eye followed the amazing beam to its base. It was hidden in a swirling vapor.

From this mist something solid was emerging. Instantly the light flickered aside. A twelve-foot egg of red metal ballooned upward trailing a high pitched whine. It went up and up till the blizzard hid it from view.

Vic's attention was brought back to Earth by a railing curse from Sam. The old trapper was rubbing mitten fur into his eyes.

"I've gone snow-daft," he wailed, "plumb loco!"

"Shut up. *I saw it too.*"

"Huh? You mean it was—"

"A meteor, maybe," Vic said, but his mind rejected the thought.

Certainly it hadn't been a meteor. Vic knew that something very unusual had happened here before their eyes. That thing that had come up, seemingly from the very earth, had been a machine of some sort—but a machine that knew no Earthly counterpart.

The wind had swept the mist from the place where the light had come. The blizzard was closing in, but before the falling snowflakes hid it, Vic thought he could see a glass-walled shaft sunk into the hillside. A smooth, round hole at whose bottom was a red-tinted darkness. . . .

ZARTH-I had been a First Thinker of Theor when he had conceived his plan, thousands of years ago. His confidence in his ideas hadn't been misplaced, for now, as he lifted his spheroid flyer from its hiding place, he knew that the time was at hand.

He had emerged into a strange world. A world that was oddly cold where tree-ferns had swayed when last he'd seen it. White crystals danced in the air, over a frozen ground.

Zarth had seen snow before but never like this. On his own world the extremes in temperature were so severe that even the air froze.

He moved the control bar with a green, boneless finger, sending the flyer high into the thin, cold air. All around him swirled the white flakes. He could not even see the ground from which he had come.

But he was not blinded long. He simply willed his deep-hued eyes to see lower in the infra-red vibrations and the blizzard seemed to vanish. A plate before him showed a view of the ground below. The hills showed up in sharp relief. Far below him was the door to the Crypt. He had blasted his way out with the heat-disruptor as planned.

Suddenly Zarth saw the two tiny figures near the opening. Magnification brought them nearer. Quickly Zarth trained his weapon's sights on them. The red beam flashed again from the front of his ship. . . .

Vic and Sam didn't know they were being watched.

Suddenly the air was hot, unbearably hot. Snowflakes boiled in midair.

Vic yelled a hoarse warning, "Down! In the snow!"

He saw the top of Sam's fur cap burst into flame, before he dove headfirst into the cool whiteness. Burning agony played on his back.

The heat vanished as suddenly as it had come. Vic lay in half-melted slush, breathing hard. His back seemed to be burning so he rolled over once. Sam lay beside him, a smoking, groaning heap.

"Don't move," Vic whispered. "It—something tried to kill us. Play 'possum.' "

They lay still and waited while Zarth's flyer droned above.

Up in his spheroid Zarth peered once more at the two still figures on the snow. Then he moved his controls and sent the ship swiftly toward the south. He didn't know that the snowflakes had blunted the energy of his weapon and the two squat bipeds who lay near the Crypt were—alive!

THE SOUND of the strange flyer had faded far into the distance when Vic finally sat up.

The wind was cold again. Sam still lay with his face in the snow, his charred furs smouldering. However, at Vic's anxious touch the old trapper raised a mournful countenance. His whiskers had burned to a thin stubble.

"Never took stock in Hell or Heaven," Sam moaned. "Maybe that's why—"

"You're not in Hell yet," Vic said. "Not yet, but close. I wonder why it turned the heat on us? Maybe there was something it didn't want us to see."

What it was that had tried to kill them Vic couldn't start to guess. But ahead of them was the place from where it had come. He'd seen some kind of an opening in the hillside. Where did it lead?

"Whatever it is, we'll see it," Vic decided, giving the sled a tug.

They came to a spot on the hillside that was still warm, and where the snowflakes melted as they struck. In the center of a snowless area was a ten-foot hole. They peered over the edge.

The sides had a glossy grey finish that looked like glass-coated granite. The walls curved in near the bottom and the floor—thirty feet down—was smaller than the mouth of the pit. The sand around the hole was hot but the strange lining of the walls wasn't even warm to the touch.

"What d'you reckon that is?" Sam wondered.

"I'm going to find out," Vic said. "Get me the rope."

He tossed off his big fur cap and mittens while Sam fumbled in the packs for the rope.

"Hang on to this or sit on the sled," said Vic, handing one end of the rope to Sam, "I'm going down."

"We better brace it somehow," Sam said.

They tied the rope to the runners of the sled, which they wedged behind a big rock. Vic sent the free end snaking into the pit.

He stepped over the edge and went hand-under-hand down the rope till his feet touched bottom.

Stones and miscellaneous rubbish covered the smooth hard floor. In the center was a low, round dais, some two feet wide.

Vic passed his hand over the smooth roundness of the wall. The red spheroid he had glimpsed must have fitted snugly into the bottom of this hole.

Sam's face was peering down at him. "Anything thar?"

"Nothing." Vic shook his head.

Sam was fumbling at the rope. He swung over the edge to come sliding down.

"Hey, stay up there," Vic yelled. "The rope might—"

But Sam was already down. His boots clumped to the center of the dais.

"You old fool—" Vic started to say.

A hidden mechanism jarred. Metal grated. Sam jumped and let out a yelp of surprise as the dais swung downward under him, revealing a round opening. A thick-runged ladder led down into a deep and mysterious darkness.

Vic whistled his surprise.

"We've found the buried treasure," he said, "without so much as an 'open sesame'!"

FROM his pocket Sam jerked out a huge Colt revolver. The trigger had been filed off the ancient thing, but the hammer could be fanned. Vic had seen it blow the head off a rabbit at eighty feet.

"Now let them Devils come!" cried Sam.

Vic kneeled and peered down. The faint light from the opening shone on a metal floor twenty feet below. It also revealed the shadowy outlines of machinery.

"Looks deserted enough," Vic said. "I'm going down."

Carefully he tested the rungs of the ladder with his foot. They seemed solid enough, though they were set strangely close together. Vic went down slowly, Sam following.

Suddenly a greenish light came into being and the trapdoor above them whirled shut.

"An automatic control," Vic explained quickly. "One of the rungs of the ladder must have started it."

The light came from nowhere and everywhere, springing into being in the very air. It revealed a square vault a hundred feet on a side and furnished with the creations of an alien science!

The floor and walls were smooth, of the same material as the pit. On the floor were massive machines, glinting tubes, racks lined with varicolored chemicals in odd spherical bottles.

Vic saw near the bottom of the ladder a crystal cube between banks of coils, with a door in one side big enough to admit a man. Beside it rose a massive pillar of dead black, as high as the ceiling. All around its base were inset switches and dials.

A film of dust lay over everything.

"Whoever lives here isn't a very good housekeeper," Vic observed, his voice suddenly hard and rasping in the ancient silence.

"I hope he ain't around," Sam said, gripping his Colt tightly.

Vic climbed the rest of the way down and walked over to the glass cube. It was about eight feet on an edge and in the center was a round table covered with a soft-looking fabric. A small switchboard and a few wires leading out through holes in the walls. A round door plug was open.

Power hummed somewhere. Vic glanced around.

Sam was standing before the black column, looking at the banked switches and dials.

"Don't—!" Vic cried.

The trapper had hooked a gnarled finger in a ringed projection and pulled experimentally. Sam jerked back his hand sheepishly at Vic's warning, but the ring had moved.

A harsh, drawn-out "Skr-r-raw-w-wk" issued from behind the switches, from the pillar itself. Sam jumped as if stung and trained his Colt on the source of the noise.

A low, throbbing roar assailed their ears. It sounded like the beat of muffled tom-toms, playing a staccato, mathematical rhythm. For a minute it went on; then silence closed in again.

"Sounds like a message," Vic breathed. "Maybe a radio of some sort. You must have turned it on."

"But what's it fer?" Sam demanded. "That noise ain't no music, unless it's some new jazz number. What's the sense?"

Again the tom-toms came. They drummed through their cadence and died once more.

"That isn't any known code," Vic mused. "I'd like to try—"

Sam was struck by a sudden idea. "A radio, huh?" he interrupted. "Mebbe you can tune in on ABS in Juneau!"

Vic nodded absently. He was eyeing the black pillar curiously. The switch that Sam had pulled was a big one near the bottom of the board. Above it was a dial whose heart-shaped indicator quivered half way around its arc.

At Sam's suggestion Vic reached out and gave the ring a twist. The dial swung toward one extremity and sundry noises issued from the pillar.

"Sounds like it's tuned on ultra-short waves," Vic said.

He twisted more. The indicator went down in little jumps. The sweet strains of music floated through, distorted a little by an amplifier not built for them.

"That's broadcast all right."

Vic left it on for awhile, for Earthly music was comforting in this alien vault.

Then he turned the ring again. When the indicator reached the limit of its swing faint words were coming through from some other station. Vic listened; then suddenly he tensed and grabbed Sam's arm.

The excited tones of the announcer were weak and fading but a little of it could be understood.

"... hysteria," they heard. "The whole north side of Vancouver is in flames ... by a ... machine that flies without wings. Martial law has ... toward Seattle. Reports are coming in fast. No one knows what reason the pilot of the strange ship may have for ..."

VIC stared at Sam in mute silence.

With tense fingers he turned the control back to the first station they had heard. The music had stopped. The an-

nouncer was screaming, "The city has been attacked by a mysterious menace from the sky! Red rays sweep the streets and leave in their wake flame and destruction! A strange egg-shaped flyer has—"

Vic said grimly, "Our murderous host is raising hell out there!"

"What—the—" Sam faltered.

"The same thing he tried on us—he's using it on the cities!"

They listened again to the tale of destruction that was coming through. The red flyer had appeared in the sky over Vancouver at 4:03 P. M. Without hesitation it had trained a red beam of light on the city below—a light that turned into flame every flammable thing it touched. It had destroyed four planes that tried to attack it. Machine gun and anti-aircraft fire it shed like water. . . .

"Looks like we've stumbled onto something big," Vic whispered. "Do you realize we're probably the only ones in the world who know where the red ship came from—or have a chance of finding out?"

Slowly he turned the ring control back to its original position. Abruptly the message of the tom-toms started beating again.

"We've got to find out what that means. It's the only way of shedding some light on this thing!"

Vic stretched his lean, sinewy form on the hard floor and took out his pencil and notebook. He started drawing dots and dashes between beats of the signal when it came again.

After awhile he forgot all about his strange surroundings, the arctic cold outside, and the incredible situation into which they had been plunged—all save the problem at hand. That code had to be solved!

Meanwhile Sam was left without a thing to occupy his mind. He looked sheepishly at the big revolver in his hand—finally put it in his pocket. It was

warm in the vault and he peeled off his heavy furs. He looked over the other controls on the black pillar. What would happen if he pulled—but no, he didn't want to touch anything else in this strange vault. Next time it might not be a radio! Finally he settled down to watching Vic.

They tuned the radio on the broadcast waves now and then. The ether was full of terror and destruction. Seattle had tasted gas—murky purple vapor that ate the flesh from the bones. 'Frisco withered under an electric blast more fierce than lightning. On the streets of Portland people simply died and none knew why.

And still the hours ticked slowly by, and Vic was no farther toward solving the problem. The green light of the vault shone unwinkingly upon them, though night had wrapped the outside world.

Vic's notebook was crammed with mathematical formulae. Somehow he was certain the message was in a code or language that was based on mathematics. If so, it was a universal language of sorts, and, given time, it could be puzzled out.

Given time! That was the trouble—for there was not much time. At any time the owner of this strange laboratory might return from his mission of destruction, and then—

After a long and remarkably patient wait, Sam climbed up to the sled and brought them a lunch.

"It's gettin' plenty cold out thar," he told Vic. "Glad this place is warm, but what heats it?"

Vic shook his head absently without answering. His mind was on the problem. The message was coming through again—the same beat, so monotonous by now.

Suddenly a flash of understanding leaped through his brain. It was so simple. Mathematical rhythm: this language was based on universal mathematical truth. When he followed it to the end, somehow his mind made words for the thoughts expressed.

"I've got it!"

"Got what?" Sam garbled, his mouth full of ham and chocolate.

"The code! Listen, it says:

"'First Thinker on Planet 3. Report quickly. The time draws near. Report. The Thinkers await your signal.'"

"What's it mean?" asked Sam.

"'Investigating Planet 3,'" Vic mused. "It means that the thing in the red flyer is a creature from some other planet. And—the time draws near—for what?"

ONCE more the pillar shook with the beat of the strange message.

"Same thing again," Vic said. "If we could only answer them somehow—"

He looked around. The green light of the crypt shone on many machines, none of them familiar. He couldn't see one that resembled any recognizable sort of radio transmitter.

"The transmitter too must be in the black pillar," he said. "If we can get it going, somehow, the things might change their tune and tell us a little more."

Sam looked uneasy.

"You were lucky the first time," Vic told him. "Try it again."

Sam's stubbled face broke into a grin. He looked at his hands, the backs of which were still raw and blistered from the effects of the ray. Then he reached out and grasped a thing that looked like a typewriter key. "This one?"

Vic nodded. Sam pulled.

The hum of power in the pillar rose to a higher pitch. The whole column shook and the green light of the cavern dimmed to an eerie glimmer.

"Let up on it!" Vic cried quickly.

They kept trying. Sometime, somewhere they'd strike something that would break the even monotony of that rumbling message.

Once when Sam moved a switch the light turned a deep violet that was strangely prickly on the skin. A tube burst,

showering them with glass. Vic managed to get the place in complete darkness, and also evicted strange rumblings from a squat machine in the corner, but the tom-toms went on in their staccato repetition. Vic went on grimly and purposefully pulling switches.

Then abruptly the message stopped in the middle of its course. It began again in a newer, swifter note. Vic fumbled for his pencil and notebook. The sweat beaded on his forehead as he wrote. The tom-toms beat too fast—he didn't get it all—but. . . .

Finally he looked up at Sam.

"It's even bigger than I thought," he said in an awed tone. "That message tells enough between the lines to answer all the questions!

"This place was built a long time ago by creatures from another world. They came from a planet we've never seen, a world that completes its revolution around the sun only once in thousands of years. Its path is in a great ellipse that's almost a parabola. On the outer end it slows almost to a standstill, spending thousands of years in the darkness, many billions of miles from the light and warmth of the sun. . . ."

Sam scratched his thinning hair. "Something like a comet, huh?" he interjected, and Vic's eyebrows rose in surprise.

"Why, yes. That's right, like a comet. Only this is a real, solid planet. How it got into an orbit like that I couldn't gather. Probably it wasn't, always so, for somehow intelligent life managed to evolve on it. Alive for only a few years at a time, hibernating during the cold, they don't lead an ideal existence.

"On the last sunward swing of their planet they tried to move en masse to Planet 3—Earth. But they went about it wrong. A mighty civilization reigned here at the time and they tried to subdue it, to their sorrow. In the war that ensued,

half the colonists were destroyed and the others beat a hasty retreat back to their own planet. Earth was the only world suited to their needs, and they could not have it.

"Then some of their scientists got the idea that led to all this. The Earthly civilization was fast-living and unstable, they said. It fought within itself with weapons that were far out of proportion to its judgment. Presently it would lose its science, sink back along the ladder—perhaps even before the wayward planet had completed its next swing. Then the invaders could try again.

"Their planet would pass near the Earth in its next sunward dip, but it would not stay there long. The exodus had to be done all at once. No chance for warships to conquer and colonists to follow. The Thinkers of Theor did not want to risk it again, unless they knew what they had to face.

"That's how they happened to build this vault, before the last of them left Earth. Why not leave a spy behind, they said—someone who could determine Earth's capacity to repel invasion when the time came, find out what weapons would have to be faced? Then the Thinkers could decide whether or not another exodus was feasible."

Vic paused to let the import of his words settle on the unperturbed Sam.

"Don't you see?" he cried. "Somehow their spy has slept five thousand years in this vault. Now he's out to test our power.

"Whether it was Atlantis or Mu or something we never dreamed of—the civilization that drove off the invaders is gone. With it went all its weapons, its science. Against a power like this we're—defenseless.

"When that spy reports to the Thinkers, they'll send their colonists across. And we'll have a hell of a time stopping them!"

BATTLESHIPS, cruisers, destroyers belched smoke over choppy water. All engines were on at full speed, prows pointed northward. An armada of planes roared overhead. From San Diego, from maneuvers, from all points the swiftest might of the nation was converging on one point: Los Angeles.

The ether crackled with signals. The Red Terror was still progressing toward the south, resisting every effort of the defenders to destroy it. San Francisco was already a blazing ruin. Every movable unit of defense was being moved toward the city next in line.

A message came with a quicker note. The red spheroid had been sighted above the heart of Los Angeles.

Even then the first squadron of planes was roaring up from the south, and the sky behind was black with them. But the battleships were still rounding the horizon, too far.

However, the Invader made no move. It hung lifeless, motionless above the city, while the planes chattered madly at it with their guns. No rays shot forth, no bombs rained down—it simply waited.

Then it lunged upward, suddenly—moved swiftly toward the far-off smoke-plumes of the ships on the curving breast of the sea. The planes fluttered wildly in its wake, left far behind.

A carrier disgorged its brood of hornets before the hurtling flyer. With the swarm of planes in the rear, the Invader was surrounded on sea and sky. It could not escape!

On the ships, orders crackled. Every gun that could be elevated was trained skyward. Smoke spurted as anti-aircraft units rattled. The air became a thick inferno of rending steel and acrid smoke.

The tiny flyer was hurled aside but—not destroyed!

Up in his spheroid Zarth was tense. This was the thing he was seeking. These were the weapons he had come to test.

The cities had shown him nothing. Unprotected, open to any attack, they had not been a sufficient test for his powers.

An instrument before him showed a quick succession of flashes. Those crude flying machines were tickling his magnetic shield again. Zarth swept them with his heat-disruptor, sent two of them flaming to the sea. The rest he ignored.

Suddenly the planes drew back. Watching the warships below, Zarth saw a quick puff of smoke. The detonation he couldn't hear through the wall of force that surrounded his ship, but he felt the shock when a twelve-inch shell exploded on his shield. Greenish blood welled from a burst vessel on his bulbous temple, but he was not mortally harmed. Luck had aimed the projectile to its tiny mark—luck and magnificent marksmanship—but even that had not been enough. Zarth's science was impervious to man's weapons.

Projectiles! That was all these men had—explosives and projectiles. Zarth clenched his fingers in satisfaction, for he knew his mission was a success. When the wandering world passed by, the ships could come from Theor, and this planet would be theirs.

For awhile yet Zarth waited. Then, calmly, his supple fingers played over the keys.

A fan of red light swept down, enveloping two speeding destroyers. On the deck men screamed and tumbled wildly. Into the sea they jumped, clothes aflame. Others died in their gun turrets.

Zarth moved more controls, and a mighty armored battleship below was cleaved in two by a paper-thin sword of force. The two halves soughed heavily under the waves. Dark dots of men swirled in the grip of the tortured whirlpool.

Weapon after weapon he unleashed. In the swarming planes spontaneous bursts of flame appeared, went whirling to the sea. Others careened downward, dead

pilots at the controls. A huge battleship plowed the water aimlessly, her crew dead from Zarth's catalyst beam.

The human defenders went mad. They poured everything they had on the twelve-foot spheroid. Mad pilots flattened their ships against the invisible shell of force. Guns threw shell after shell into the sky, and still the red flyer was undestroyed, immovable, locked in its position by engines of tremendous power.

When an indicator showed that the atomic fuel was two-thirds gone, Zarth shot his flyer up, up, till the world grew hazy below and the stars shone in the morning sky. His job was done; he would return to the Crypt and report.

Behind the northward speeding spheroid, the Pacific Fleet lay under a purple poison vapor that hugged the waves. A sea covered with dead fish and tangled wreckage drifted toward the shore.

IN ZARTH'S time crypt Vic and Sam huddled by the black pillar, listening to a tired-voiced announcer's account of the battle off the California coast.

"One ship," Vic marveled, "licks our fleet and doesn't even get scratched!"

"Looks bad all right, Son," said Sam gravely. "But maybe we could do something about—"

"Yes, we've got to do something," Vic said, but his mind doubted.

What could they do? Somehow they had to prevent the thing in the spheroid from sending its message. How? The black substance of the pillar was impervious to any tools they had—they couldn't destroy the radio. Even if they destroyed the vault, somehow, the spy would find another way to send his message. How could they alone combat a thing which all of man's weapons couldn't destroy?

"What about the noise?" Sam was saying.

Vic turned the radio again to the tomtom message. It was drumming a monot-

onous note of question. Ever since that one outburst which their tampering had precipitated, it had been like that. Vic didn't know how to send a coherent answer.

Sam was pulling at his arm.

"Mebbe the thing'll be coming back here after that ruckus in California."

"You're right," Vic said. "We'd better be ready—some sort of a trap. It's our only hope. We've got to stop this thing!"

Hastily they donned their furs. Suddenly Vic held up his hand for silence.

A muffled drone came from above, rising in intensity.

"It's back!" Vic whispered. "Lord, it must have traveled fast!"

Sam's stubbled countenance was raised fearfully.

"We should have hid the sled," he said. "It saw—it knows we're—"

Something grated in the pit above. The drone rose to a crescendo and died as Zarth's spheroid came to rest in its old niche. Zarth had seen the sled at the rim of the pit, and had guessed the truth. The two bestial things he'd rayed on his emergence hadn't died. They were in the Crypt!

But in the hour of triumph for his race, this was a small matter. Zarth disposed of the two trapped humans in his mind, even as he had disposed of the Pacific Fleet. Soon he would send the message, and then the Exodus

Sam let out his breath with a tremulous sigh.

"Hide!" Vic was whispering fiercely. "Hide! It's our only chance."

They squatted behind the black pillar. Vic's wrist watch ticked loudly, and still the thing above made no move. It was preparing some hellish weapon. Vic weighed a metal bar he'd found, grimly waiting. Useless—but he'd go down fighting!

Then the trapdoor dropped down, re-

vealing a smooth, red surface beyond. Gas hissed and an opening appeared. Vic could see inside the spheroid—a mass of curved pipes and dials but nothing else.

Madly he lunged. This was more chance than he'd expected. If he could make it up the ladder, get in close—

He started up the ladder, when a face suddenly peered down at him. Hideous spawn from an abnormal world! The head was huge, like a ripe green melon. The mouth was round, toothless—a suction cup beneath a boneless nose. For an instant Vic stared straight into the huge dilating pupils of its eyes, and something ancient and instinctive in him wanted him to rend and tear

Then Vic saw the gleam of a lens. He was halfway up the ladder, and the thing had some weapon trained on him. His feet seemed to drag. A rung at a time, up, up—but the thing was faster. The weapon in its hand flashed and Vic reeled under a wave of nausea. The bar dropped from his free hand. He started to fall.

An explosion shook the vault. Again and again. Vic still hung on. Something dropped past him, shattered on the floor

with a tinkling noise. His head was reeling but he fought to clear it.

Something cold was dripping on his neck. The feel of it was somehow repellent, and Vic squirmed away from the rain. As his vision cleared, he could see the green, viscous drops splattering on the metal floor of the vault. Then he looked up.

The bulbous head of the monster hung limply from the trapdoor. It was punctured in one—two—three places, and the green liquid dripped from the holes.

With a wave of relief that send him reeling, Vic knew the answer.

The spy from Theor would never send his report. The two planets would swing past their conjunction, and the invaders would not come. The Thinkers of Theor would believe their scout destroyed by weapons of Earth greater than his own, and they would never start their exodus.

Down below, Sam was looking fondly at the smoking Colt in his gnarled palm, his thumb still ready on the worn hammer.

"I allus said," he drawled, "that a shootin' iron is still mighty useful!"

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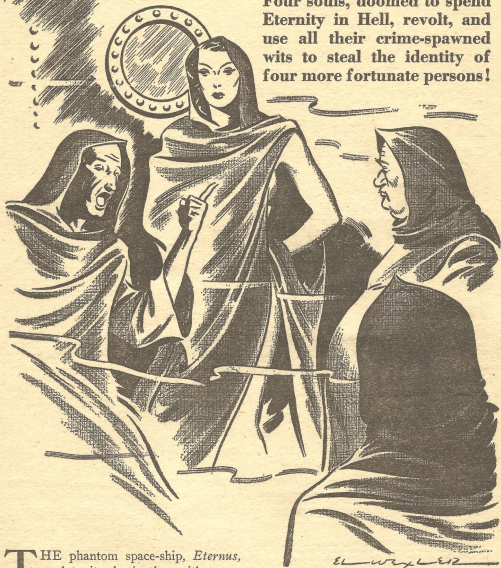
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MUTINY IN HELL

By William A. Rossi

Four souls, doomed to spend Eternity in Hell, revolt, and use all their crime-spawned wits to steal the identity of four more fortunate persons!



THE phantom space-ship, *Eternus*, sped to its destination with a velocity that made that of light seem comparatively stationary. It was bound for the last outposts of space that the most futuristically imaginative of mortal men on Earth could not hope to conceive of, even with the ultra-modern astronomical

instruments of a million years hence. The distance in time and space was that far removed from Earth and mortal man.

In the control room of the spacious ship two men, their strange faces expressed with anxiety, talked in slightly tensed

tones as they solemnly paced their nebulous, ectoplastic bodies up and down the chamber floor. The taller of the two was speaking.

"Mate," he said, shaking his head with slow gravity, "I don't like the looks of it all. I've been skipper of this ship for nigh on to four hundred thousand years, carrying the souls of the mortal dead from Earth to their respective ports. But in all the thousands of trips I've made I've never been as worried about my cargo as the one I've got aboard this time. Matey, I smell mutiny in the air."

"And I can't say that I disagree with you, Skipper," the other said. "Of course my service with this ship hasn't been near as long as yours—only a little more'n a hundred thousand years, Earth-time reckoning. But that Hadeus-bound lot is the worst I've ever seen. Rebellious bunch from the start. And that Purgatorus group look weak enough to spell danger for all of us. Naturally we haven't anything to worry about with that Utopus bunch. That is, unless. . . ." He dropped it on an apprehensive note, slowly stroking his beard.

"Well," the Skipper said, "as long as the Purgatorus and Utopus groups keep their secret code-phrases to themselves they'll be safe. But if one of those hellions in the Hadeus section gets hold of those codes, good-bye. The Purgatorus and Utopus groups were duly warned at the start that to give out their code-words to a Hadeus member meant their finish. They would instantly lose their identity and become hopelessly absorbed by the Hadeus soul, and consequently doomed to eternal suffering."

"I'll keep a close watch on the cosmos screen," the Mate said. "In case of mutiny it's our only protective weapon. I don't remember ever having had to use it in all my service aboard this ship, so I'd better give it a once-over to see if it's in working order."

OVER in an inconspicuous corner of the music chamber on Deck A sat two young people, a boy and a girl. They were seated close together, their hands clasped tightly, her head resting blissfully content upon his shoulder. Their eyes were closed as the indescribably sweet music of the string ensemble wafted to their ears. The final cadence of the selection was taken by the soft notes of the harp, and the music gently faded to its close.

The boy opened his eyes and tenderly looked down at the girl. "Ruth, darling," he whispered, "on Utopus there will be music like that for us every day, and it will last into all eternity."

The girl looked up at her beloved. "Oh, Dennie," she said, a little tensely, "I'm almost afraid to believe that all this is true. It seems like a wonderful dream—that we're really dead and bound for the planet of eternal paradise."

Dennie smiled into her lovely face. "It's all very true, sweet. Look at these other souls here with us. See the ecstasy and joy in their faces. They know that like us they are bound for the planet of everlasting happiness, with beauty and peace forever theirs."

She nestled closer to him. "And when we were dying in that automobile accident back on Earth, remember how we thought that those last seconds were the end of everything?"

She smiled to herself, then muttered purringly,

"And now all this wonderful happiness ahead for us."

The ensemble started another of its soft lilting selections. Dennie and Ruth again nestled close together as their eyelids slowly fell with the soothing touch of melodious sound.

ALISTLESS pall hung over Deck B. Men and women strolled phlegmatically, gloomily passing each other with-

out a nod or smile; but then, they had little to smile about. Their features, despite their ectoplasmic composition, were clear. Dismal repentance was in their eyes as their lips moved in inaudible mutterings to themselves.

A sallow, sunken-eyed passenger of this section restlessly seated himself in a corner beside another man. The first was thin of build, his lips and fingers twitching with constant nervous torment. There was a distinct weakness about his thin mouth, a shiftiness about his person.

He finally turned to his fellow passenger. "I didn't deserve this!" he cried. "I'll die if I have to spend my life on Purgatorus!"

"You're already dead," the other said calmly. "No need of whining now. If you follow the rules on Purgatorus you might have a chance to get to Utopus—some time."

"Sometime!" the first one wailed. "That might be never! Meanwhile I must suffer on a bleak lonely planet. What did I do on Earth to deserve this fate? Nothing, I tell you. I've been misjudged. I belong in Utopus!"

The second Purgatorian glanced sharply at the first. "You've no right to question the judgment of the Master of the Rolls, for he has kept accurate records. Careful of your tongue and thoughts or else you'll lose all chance of redemption. And by the way, what was your mortal error?"

"Embezzlement," the first grumped. "A mere few thousand dollars. But I, Hugh Wissom, paid for that on Earth when I served my penitentiary term. And anyway, I was taking only what was rightfully mine. Fifteen years I worked for my firm at a pitifully small salary."

"Hmmm," the second commented. "I think you got off easy, Mr. Wissom. And after all, Purgatorus isn't too bad. It could be worse, you know," he added significantly.

The first rose angrily to his feet. "None of your lush consolation!" he snapped. "I still think I was misjudged. And no doubt there are plenty more souls aboard who've been terribly misjudged!" He stomped off.

DOWN in Deck C an unholy foursome was huddled together in the dank semi-darkness. Revolt was harshly imprinted on their deceptive faces as they exchanged confidences. "Sluggo" McGraw, squat and pugnacious, was speaking.

"I'm tellin' ya, gang, it ain't right! I ain't gonna take it layin' down, nohow. Us suckers goin' to da hot spot on Hadeus to rot while dem lush upstairs gets da gravy. Why, if da mob back on Oith knew dat Sluggo was lettin' hisself be takin' for a ride to Hadeus wit'out puttin' up a squawk I'd never live it down."

A distinguished looking nebulous form beside Sluggo coughed artificially. "Er—Mister McGraw, you fail to remember that you can no longer live anything down, or up. You are already dead and destined to Hadeus for eternity. However, I admire your spirit of resistance to your fate. I, likewise, find this Hadeus planet distasteful to me. My esteemed rank of Senator on Earth is in itself sufficient to warrant the best that the Infinite has to offer."

An exotic feminine creature spoke up. "We haven't any time to play innocent, boys. You, Sluggo, you've got enough chalked up against you to send ten souls to Hadeus. You could celebrate at least eight murder anniversaries, to say nothing of the rackets you controlled. And you, Senator Parkinson. You're not exactly a cherub." She ignored the Senator's indignant glare. "How about that oil scandal, that big utilities swindle and that white slavery tie-up? You've had your fingers in plenty of illegitimate pies."

"You are hardly the one to be preach-

ing of virtue!" the Senator retorted. "An adventuress of questionable morals. . ."

She curled her voluptuous lips in a smile. "There's no question about it, Senator. Nariise has been around plenty in her day. Seen the whole world and topped over men of all kinds, from nobility to honky-tonk business men. Men are suckers for charm and vague promises. If it hadn't been for that love-crazed playboy who put a slug in me when I gave him the air I'd still be on Earth. See where he put the slug?" She started to lift her shroud when she saw McGraw's eyes bulge wide in anticipation, while the Senator coughed. She dropped the shroud. "Never mind," she muttered.

THE fourth of the quartet, his eyes like two white bulbs against his swarthy ascetic face, spoke in his droning voice.

"I believe we are diverging from our original plan," he said with sinuous softness. "If we are determined to escape the horrible fate that awaits us we must act. As Zanil Mahabu, the witch doctor, when I was a mortal, no matter what the problem I could solve it. If I was encountered by opposition I merely applied one of my famous methods of mental torture and the hazard was removed. Ah, but this is different. The only access to Purgatorus or Utopus is by learning the code-phrase of those souls, which would thereby permit us to lose our identity in theirs, and thus save us from our horrid fate."

"Let's put da slug on dem softies upstairs!" Sluggo suggested. "Dey'll talk and fast!"

"You can't seem to remember that you or they are no longer physical beings!" Senator Parkinson reprimanded. "You cannot—er—sock them into submission. The physical is worthless here."

Nariise said: "Well, supposing we find a plan—are we going to pass it along to all the others down here with us?"

"Nuttin' doin'!" Sluggo spouted. "We

got a nice little crew right here—jus' da four of us. We ain't sharin' our brains wit' dese other punks down here."

"Yes, quite," the Senator said. "At last Mister McGraw and I are agreed on an issue. Those who help themselves—"

"You said it, Parkey, ol' boy!" Sluggo ejaculated, sending a chummy but hefty slap at the Senator's back. Sluggo looked foolish when his hand swept through nothingness.

"Come," admonished Zanil, growing irritable with the delay, "we are fast approaching Hadeus. Once we are off this ship we are doomed. If only we knew the code. . . ."

"Wait!" Nariise injected, a little hoarse with sudden revelation, "I have a plan."

Four heads came together. Nariise the cunning, Senator Parkinson the eloquent, Sluggo the ruthless bully, and Zanil the master of mental torture.

HUGH WISSOM, the Purgatorian, gazed wistfully out into space as he stood before the porthole on Deck B. But gradually his eyes began to gather bitterness, his lips pursing tightly. There was so much to hate, so little to love.

Presently he saw her come up the stairway from the deck below. A profound sadness played about her beautiful face, and her shoulders seemed slightly stooped with the burden of her sorrows. She saw him, and her lashes drooped as with shame. She hesitated, averting his magnetized gaze of admiration for her enchanting beauty.

He quickly approached her. "You came up from down there?" he asked incredulously, pointing a finger to the deck below. "Impossible!"

Her bowed head slowly lifted and a helpless plea poured from her hypnotic eyes. "I—I wanted to steal a few moments with your purer souls," she said with soft apology. "It's so—so dark and cold and—and bad down there."

She shuddered, turning her eyes from the stairway leading below. Wissom enveloped her protectingly in his arms. "Of course," he consoled. "You don't look as though you belong down there with those terrible Hadeus souls. Surely there must be some mistake."

She pressed back a lump in her throat. "I—I tried to make the Master see that. B-but he was adamant and said that I must pay for my mortal mistake, helpless as I was against it." She unobtrusively laid her head on his shoulder.

He gently stroked her soft tresses. "I can well sympathize with you, my child. And what, may I ask, was your mortal error?"

"A—a man," she said humbly. "I loved him with all my young innocence, and—and—"

"And for that," Wissom said quickly, "you are to go to Hadeus. Misjudgment again, just as I thought. Oh, my child, I wish I could help you."

"Yes," she said with soft wistfulness, "it would be wonderful. You and I together forever on Purga—" She quickly put her hand to her mouth, bowing her head in humiliation. "I—I—shouldn't have said that. You must think me b-bold, suggesting that we could. . . ."

He stepped close to her, a fierce new spark in his eyes. "Why yes," he husked, "we could! You and I together on Purgatorus. I—I've always longed for someone like you. Young, beautiful and sweet. I—I could give you the Purgatorus code-phrase, and you could unite as one with some other soul on this deck. Then you'd be with me forever."

She looked up at him, her eyes misted with overflowing gratitude. A muffled sob escaped her as she cradled softly in his arms. He quivered with strange new excitement.

"Here is the code-phrase!" he whispered hoarsely. "'Let not your weakness destroy you!'"

HER shoulders suddenly straightened and a hard line drew across her mouth. She glared triumphantly at him. "Let not your weakness destroy you!" she repeated gloatingly. "Fool! Now you are lost!"

"No!" he cried, cringing. "Not me! Don't touch me!"

She laughed harshly. Then she stepped forward and into the soul of the weak Hugh Wissom. The latter immediately lost his identity and the superior cunning of Narris won its victory. She was now a Purgatorian, saved from the fate of Hadeus.

"Now there is work to do!" she gritted, quickly moving back down the stairway.

The Senator, Sluggo and Zani! leaped forward at the sight of the enchantress. By her flaunting sway they knew that she had succeeded. She nodded, smiling, to assure them.

"Ya done it, babe!" Sluggo exulted. "Ya said ya could make a sucker out o' any guy an' damn if ya didn't!"

"Splendid!" the senator boomed. "If I were in possession of a floral wreath I would humbly lay it at your feet as a glowing tribute to your charm that is surpassed only by your beauty." He made a sweeping bow.

"Jeez, Senator," Sluggo said, "how you can spill the goo!"

"But the code-phrase," Zani! said impatiently. "We must work quickly before we are discovered."

Narris repeated the Purgatorian code-phrase. "Let's go, boys. Better make your pick a good one." She led the way up the stairway.

"I ain't fussy so long as I get da hell out o' here!" Sluggo said. Then he laughed. "Pretty clever, eh Parkey?" The Senator pressed his fingers over his nose.

The unholy four slunk along the edge of Deck B. They concealed themselves by

huddling in a corner of the promenade deck. The Senator was first.

"I know this chap coming along," he whispered. "Tried to impeach me once. This will be the perfect revenge." He leaped out before the astonished gentleman, sputtered the code-phrase, and in the next second enveloped his victim.

Sluggo pounced on a wizened old gent who gave him no trouble, and Zanil won his spurs by grabbing a dark-skinned damsel.

"Now on to the Utopus deck and the final victory!" the Senator cried, shoving his fist into the air.

The foursome hurried up the stairway to the Utopus aft deck. A girl, young and lovely, stood alone peering contentedly out the porthole, her mind pensive.

"There, that girl!" Zanil whispered to the others.

"Cautiously!" the Senator hissed. "We must make a disarming approach."

They started forward. The girl turned and saw them. She looked at them, puzzled, then slowly smiled in greeting. The foursome surrounded her. The Senator bowed low, then started to speak with an elegant flare when suddenly a shouting voice interrupted.

"Ruth—run for your life! They're Hadeus passengers! Run this way!"

THEY turned and saw a young man running frantically toward them, waving his arms. The girl at once looked frightened and bewildered.

"They've discovered us!" Zanil growled.

The girl turned to flee toward the young man when suddenly a gaseous blue veil sprung up from the floor a few yards in front of her, instantly cutting the young man from view. Bewildered, she attempted to run through the veil, but was thrown back as though she had hit a stone wall. She fell to the floor with a sob.

"Dennie!" she cried out. "Dennie—help me!"

But there was neither sound nor sight of Dennie, for the impenetrable cosmos screen had come between the pair of young Utopus-bound lovers.

The foursome exchanged glances as they took their eyes from the girl. Smiles of satisfaction crawled across their mouths.

"More than we dared hope for," Zanil said, rubbing his hands. "She will be our salvation, for between the four of us it will be an easy matter to break down her resistance and extract the Utopus code-phrase from her."

ON THE other side of the cosmos screen much excitement prevailed to upset the tranquillity of Deck A. The Utopus souls anxiously hovered around the Skipper. Dennie frenziedly shook the Skipper's arm.

"We've got to get her out of there!" he pleaded. "If those Hadeus souls torture her she'll break down with the code. I'll lose her forever. You must lift the screen!"

The Skipper sadly shook his head. "Sorry," he said, sympathetically, "but the screen must stay as it is. It is the only protection all of you Utopus souls have against those Hadeus fiends. If I lift the cosmos screen they'll swarm in here, and before we reach our destination they will have found the Utopus code-phrase by some clever ruse which only such treacherous souls are capable of inventing. Then at least four of you will be doomed."

"But you can't let her stay there!" Dennie frantically persisted. "Why didn't you keep the cosmos screen over the C Deck from the start?"

"No, the cosmos screen has a disintegrating action on souls if the latter are exposed to its rays too long. As it is we shall just about make our destinations before it begins to take serious effect."

Dennie was desperate now. "Then you mean that Ruth is doomed eternally behind that screen?"

The Skipper nodded. "If she can hold out without giving the code phrase before we reach the eternal planets she'll be able to enter Utopus as a pure soul. But if they manage to break down her resistance she is lost."

Dennie looked into the eyes of the surrounding Utopans. Compassion was evident everywhere, but other than that they could offer nothing. Dennie once more turned to the Skipper.

"Isn't there some way I can talk to her—to give her courage?"

"Yes. I can project a televisior through the screen, and you can see and speak with her."

"Please hurry, then!"

A few minutes later Dennie peered through the televisior. He saw her cringing in the corner, surrounded by the four hellions who were applying the fiendish torment relentlessly.

"Ruth!" he shouted. "It's Dennie!"

The Hadeus group whirled at the sound. They saw Dennie's face on the televisior screen. Ruth also saw it, and at once her hopes leaped. She rushed toward it.

"Dennie—get me out of here! Please! I can't stand this torment!"

"Darling," Dennie said, his head ringing with mental anguish, "you must be brave. We—we can't help you. But you must do everything in your power to resist them. If you give out the code-phrase it means your end."

She flung back her shoulders. "I'll do it!" she gritted.

Sluggo jeered. "Yeh, sez her! Why, we ain't started to put on da pressure yet! She'll crack—an' soon!"

Ruth whirled. "We'll see!" she snapped, defiantly.

"Good girl!" Dennie encouraged, though inwardly he knew that her chances against the ruthless foursome were small indeed. If only there was something he could do!

AND then he was forced to watch her undergo a session that made an Earthly third degree seem childish. The combined savage powers of Nariisse, Sluggo, Zani! and the Senator were gradually taking effect, although her strong Utopus will and valor were fighting valiantly. Agony and suffering were beginning to show on her lovely face, and her resistance was waning. Dennie's words of encouragement were going for naught.

At last, when he heard her anguished sobs he could endure it no longer. He ran to find the Skipper. Finally he contacted him in the control room. He pleaded hoarsely:

"I've got a plan, Skipper! You *must* let me try it!" He quickly unfolded it.

The Skipper stroked his aged chin. "Well—I don't know," he said hesitantly. "It all depends on whether those Hadeus fiends will agree to it. It's all right with me."

"Thanks! You've got to come with me while I try. I'm positive they'll accept my proposition!"

With the Skipper by his side Dennie spoke before the televisior screen. "You Hadeans!" he called. "I'll make a bargain with you!"

They turned. Sluggo juttied out his prognathous jaw. "What's yer proposition, buddy?"

"Just this. Let the girl out and let me in there, and I'll promise to give the Utopus code-phrase to one of you. You've nothing to lose and everything to gain. Soon we'll reach the planets. If the girl succeeds in holding out against you until we arrive there you've lost your chance. But if you let me in there at least there will be one of you who is certain to get a free ticket to Utopus. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know."

They were quiet for a moment as they pondered the proposition. The Senator spoke. "How do we know you'll keep your word?"

"You have the Skipper's guarantee," Dennie replied. The Skipper stepped before the televisor and corroborated Dennie's statement.

"Dere's sumtin' screwy about dis," Sluggo said cautiously. "An' anyway, which one of us four is gonna cash in on da jack-pot?"

"That is for you four to decide between yourselves. Each of you has some remarkable quality of persuasion, shall we say? I have watched you use those qualities on the girl, and each of them is equally potent. I might suggest that you have a contest among you—a process of elimination, and may the best man win. I shall lose my Utopus-bound soul to that person. Remember, you're sure of me, and you're only gambling on the girl. Well?"

The four Hadeans exchanged doubtful glances that grew less skeptical as each of their self-confidences swelled. They nodded acceptance to one another. Narris addressed Dennie.

"It's a bargain. The girl goes free and you come in. But if you go back on your promise the Skipper will be dumping off a sorry lot of Purgatorus souls. We'll do an awful job on that bunch, and you'll be the cause of it."

"Don't worry," Dennie answered.

Ruth was permitted to re-enter the Utopus section when a corner of the cosmos screen was cautiously lifted. She immediately rushed into Dennie's arms.

"Dennie, darling!" she choked. "You can't go in there! It means that I'll lose you forever!"

"I gave my promise, sweet. If I went back on that, even to those Hadeans, I would be unfit to enter Utopus. As it is I will enter Utopus with a smirched soul—maybe."

"I can't bear to see you go!" A sob broke from her.

"Don't worry, darling," he soothed. "I have a hunch that I'll come out as well as I'm going in." He held her tenderly as

the misty-eyed Utopans watched. He quickly stepped away and entered the section aft where the unholy four awaited him.

DENNIE calmly sat off in a corner as the four, each smiling smugly with their own self-assurance of victory, drew lots to decide the pairing. Sluggo was pitted against Narris, and the Senator against Zani. Dennie, acting as referee, gave the word to start.

Narris the cunning and Sluggo the bully squared off. Sluggo wasted no time. He sent a vicious haymaker to Narris's head. The blow passed harmlessly through her, and Sluggo, dazed and surprised, landed on his ear.

Narris was at once beside him. "Come, my darling," she said softly, "let me help you up. You must be hurt." She stroked his hair as he rose to his feet.

"I—I took a poke at ya, an' ya ain't mad?" he said, incredulously. "Jeez, babe, I'm sorry—hones' I am."

She undulated gracefully beside him, sliding her cheek against his. "Of course you're sorry, darling," she purred. "And I forgive you."

The subtle gyrations of her willowy body, her fragrant nearness, were beginning to take effect on dull-brained Sluggo. A puerile expression of apology crept into his face.

His arm went around her slender waist. "Babe," he husked, "there ain't no sense in you an' me squabblin' over dis Utopus soul. Jeez, you an' me on Hadeus, Purgatorus—anywhere—an' dat's all I'm askin'!"

She pressed close to him, her lips half parted, her eyelids languorously half closed. "Oh, Sluggo, my sweet!" she whispered. "Take me in your arms—kiss me. All my life I've waited for someone like you, strong and protective. Someone who could love with equal passion. Take me, Sluggo. Love me! Crush your lips

to mine and never cease loving me! Kiss me—kiss me!”

Impassioned with eruptive fire Sluggo went wild with uncontrollable lust. “Baby!” he choked. “Wonderful baby!” He sent fierce hungry kisses at her throat and lips and hair—but they met only with emptiness! He fervently pressed her close to him but his arms gripped nothingness! And yet she was there, her bosom rapidly rising and falling with furious ardor; her fragrance hypnotic, her lips waiting.

“Your lips, Sluggo,” she panted, “I don’t feel them! Love me with all your passion! Pain me with your kisses!”

“I—I can’t!” he sobbed. And again he made an infuriated attempt to satiate the lustful fire that was searing him to the core. She urged him on with insistent demand. Every fibre of his soul was striving desperately to respond, But failure mocked his every endeavor.

His knees buckled as he gave out a long wail of frustration and futility. He slumped in a heap on the floor, clawing madly at the air, sobbing her name. And then suddenly he was still, hopelessly spent with exhaustion.

Narisse looked down, then threw back her beautiful head and laughed.

THE Senator was hardly any more of a match for the wily Zanil than Sluggo had been for Narisse. The oratorical eloquence which on Earth had easily enthralled Congress and voters alike, was now a fanatical rage in the face of Zanil’s calm torment.

“You savage!” the Senator howled. “Don’t think that you can bulldoze me with your ridiculous witchery. You’re not dealing with some ignorant native. I am Senator Parkinson, and I rightfully deserve entrance into Utopus. My rank and position demands it.”

Zanil’s fierce white eyes bored into the Senator’s. “Of course, Senator,” he droned, “of course. By all means you

must have first choice. But first you must sleep—sleep. You must be rested to enter Utopus. Sleep—sleep is what you need.” The Senator’s eyes blinked drowsily. “Yes,” Zanil continued in that soft monotonous tone, “that is it. Sleep—sleep.”

“B—but I don’t want . . . to . . . sleep,” the Senator muttered. He shook his head violently. “No!” he said hoarsely. “You can’t make me. Stop that damned staring!”

“No excitement, Senator,” Zanil droned. “You need rest. Rest and sleep—Sleep. Utopus wants restful souls, so sleep—sleep—sleep.”

The Senator’s head hung limp, his lids heavy. His shoulders rounded and his trunk became increasingly flaccid. Zanil continued with his merciless drone. The Senator sagged to the floor, gave out a heavy sigh, then stretched out in heavy slumber.

“And may you be as helpless through all eternity,” Zanil said softly, his lip twisted in a triumphant smile.

NARISSE and Zanil cast covetous glances at Dennie, and then they faced each other, self-confident. Zanil bowed low before the swan-poised Narisse, his eyes hungrily absorbing the beauty confronting him. Dennie sat back, tensed. His eternal existence depended upon his hunch being right.

Zanil started to speak in the same droning tone he had used with the Senator, his eyes fixed on Narisse’s. “Gracious and charming one, it is without question that you are to be the one to find haven on Utopus. But it is well that you arrive there well rested after the strenuous effort you have made. Thus, I implore you to sleep—sleep while you prepare for eternal peace.”

Narisse avoided the terrible white glare of his eyes. She slithered close to Zanil, brushing and nestling close to him. He seemed disconcerted for a moment.

"Let's not talk, Zanil," she whispered amorously. "This moment can be so ecstatic—if only we make it so!" She tempted him with her voluptuous, half-parted lips. For a moment he seemed ready to partake, but blinked his eyes and drew back his head.

"It is more necessary to sleep, beautiful one," he monotoned. "Slumber is peace—sleep." He caught her vision in the web of his own, and held it, droning on.

"Zanil," she said with rising fervor, "we pulse the same in passion. We are for each other. Let us take Purgatorus together, for there we shall be paired forever. Your arms, Zanil—embrace me!"

For minutes they gave no quarter, but the resistance of each was slowly cracking. Zanil was withering under the amorous subtleties of Narris, and she in turn was weakening under his hypnotic commands. He struggled vainly to satiate the burning lustful desire that fired his swarthy being. The more unavailing his impassioned endeavors to physically possess the seductive charmer the more infuriated he became. And Narris was already feeling the heavy veil of induced slumber stealing over her.

Narris finally slumped to her knees, her powers fast failing. Zanil's waning powers of witchery were suddenly discard-

ed, replaced by a fierce ardor and vehement desire. He blindly struggled to embrace her, to send burning kisses to her lips and throat with ravishing fervor—all in vain! Madness, stark frothing insanity, twisted his soul as he slumped and teetered to the floor, a writhing mass beside Narris who now fell into a heavy hypnotic slumber. Then suddenly both quivered with a convulsion, then were still.

Dennie slowly walked over and looked down at each of the unholy four. All were still, as in a strange ethereal death that could well be infinite in time.

"HADEUS!" the voice of the Mate announced through the televisor. "All Hadeans disembark!"

"Oh Dennie, darling!" Ruth said with a soft fright. "Suppose one of those dreadful Hadeans had won."

He smiled tenderly at her. "I had full confidence in my hunch, sweet. Like all persons who are evil that foursome was imbued with greed and selfishness. I simply believed that evil will always destroy evil—that it is its own worst enemy. I was right." He shuddered. "But if they had decided to draw lots. . . ."

"But they didn't, Dennie darling," she whispered happily. And the pair walked back into the music chamber of Deck A.

THE END

When the tiny space-explorer *Thuban* ruptured its motors in breaking away from the fierce drag of mighty Sirius, its hard-bitten crew reconciled themselves to a long period of drifting through

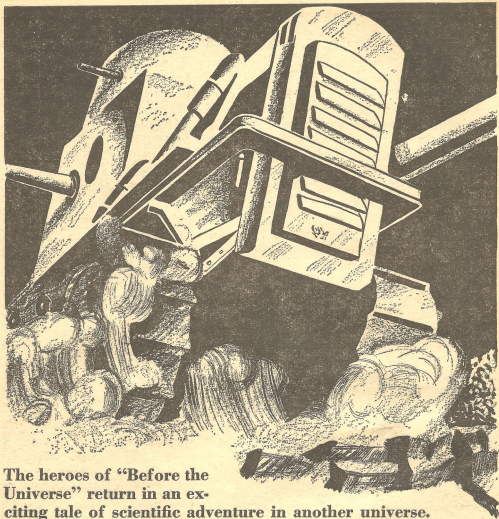


space, waiting to be picked up. But they didn't count on drifting into the strange system where Time ran backward, and it meant death to be too young! Don't miss Malcolm Jameson's brilliant long novel of the strangest world known to fiction, *Quicksands of Youthfulness*, beginning in the October issue.

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NOVA MIDPLANE

By S. D. Gottesman

CHAPTER ONE

The Gaylens

EXCEPT for Gaynor's snores, and the rustle of Clair twitching around in the bed, the room was very quiet. It was warm, and dusky, and altogether a pleasant room to sleep in . . .

Until, coming through the glass walls,

light began streaming in, from a rapidly rising sun. Quickly the room got brighter and brighter: then, suddenly, there was a faint click from Gaynor's bed, a buzz, and violently the bed turned over, catapulting Gaynor to the floor, where he landed with an awakening yell and a thud. A second later, Clair's bed ejected its occupant as well.



Clair groaned and shoved himself to his feet. "I must be getting used to this, Paul," he said. "It didn't bother me much today."

"You may be getting used to it. There

are some things that I'll *never* get used to," murmured Gaynor drowsily, holding his head in his arms. "The gas they use to put us to sleep every night, for instance. It makes me itch like the devil."

"Me too," said Clair, busily inspecting his teeth in a mirror. "I must be allergic to the stuff to some extent. We'll have to tell Gooper. Otherwise I might begin to break out with big rashes."

"And you wouldn't like that to happen to your screen-idol pan, would you?" sneered Gaynor viciously.

"Why not, bud?" snapped Clair, putting on a pair of socks weft of every color of the rainbow.

"Jocelyn might not like it—that's why not," said his friend, peering at Clair's socks, and then selecting a somewhat gaudier pair for himself.

"And what if it isn't Jocelyn?"

With a start Gaynor straightened up and stared at his companion. "If it isn't Jocelyn," he said wonderingly, "who—or what—is it?"

"My business alone."

They weren't about to slug each other as a casual observer might have supposed. Fighting words before breakfast were only one of the inexplicable habits that had kept these two together for most of their young lives.

They made a strange pair—physicists both, and in perfect symbiosis. One was a practical engineer, fully qualified to toss around murderous voltages or pack them in little glass tubes of the other's design and inspiration. Perhaps they were drawn together by a mutual love for practical jokes of the lowest sort—like rigging up chairs with high-voltage, low-wattage electrical contacts, or cooking up delicious formal dinners which crumbled into grey powder before the eyes of the horrified guest.

Be that as it may—they were *here*. Where *here* was they did not know, nor could they have any way of knowing, so, as was their way, they made the best of whatever happened to them, though their present weird fix was probably the most unexpected incident in two unpredictable careers that moved as one.

"ART," said Gaynor warningly, "Jocelyn wouldn't like for us to be late."

"Jeepers!" cried Clair resonantly. "Is she waiting for us?"

"Sure she is. We were supposed to have breakfast with her. Don't you remember?"

"I thought this was screen-test day," said Clair hopelessly. "These Gaylens have the most confused notion of the number of appointments a man can keep at one time."

"We have the screen-tests after breakfast," said Gaynor. "Or that seemed to be the idea." He draped an exceptionally fancy shawl about his shoulders.

"Like it?" he said, curvetting before his friend.

"All right for here," said Clair grudgingly. "But don't try to get away with that on Broadway. You'd be picked up in a second."

"This isn't Broadway. Come on."

Arm in arm they strolled down a short stretch of corridor and stepped onto an undulating platform. Gaynor kicked at a protruding stud at his feet, and the thing went into motion, carrying them to the very door of a vaulted concourse of glass. There they dismounted and looked around the immense place.

A tall girl with the pale face of a perfect cameo, save that her eyes and the corners of her mouth were touched with something that the Italian carvers of the middle ages had never dreamed could be in the face of a woman—vivacity and wit—approached them.

"Ah, friends," she said bitterly.

"Sorry we're late," said Gaynor with a soft, foolish look on his face.

"Where do we eat, Jocelyn?" asked Clair practically.

"Right over here," she said as she piloted them to a long table with curiously slung hammocks for seats. "I've ordered."

"I don't see how you pick these things up," sighed Gaynor unhappily. "I've been trying to master their menus for weeks, and still every time I want food I get glue or a keg of nails."

"They must think you're mechanically inclined. Here are the eats." Jocelyn spoke as she saw a little disk set into the table begin slowly to revolve, a signal to take off elbows and hands under pain of being scalded. The top of the table neatly flipped over, and there before them was a breakfast according to the best Gaylen tradition.

Gaynor swore under his breath as he stared with a pale face at the wormy mass before him.

"Highly nutritious, I'm told," commented Jocelyn, plunging into her dish of the same with a utensil that looked like the spawn of a gyroscope and one of the more elaborate surgical instruments.

Gaynor dug in determinedly, thinking of bacon and eggs and toast and orange juice and strong coffee—in fact, of every delicious breakfast he had ever eaten on Earth before setting off on this screwiest of all journeys ever undertaken by man.

He was staring at the empty plate with a sort of morbid fascination when a Gaylen came up to their table.

"**Q**UITE finished?" asked the Gaylen. "Quite," said Gaynor and Clair simultaneously. "Oh, quite."

"Then we shall now go to the recording studio," said the Gaylen. "Our duty to posterity must not be delayed."

"Okay, Gooper," said Clair. "But who does the talking?"

"All of you. Or whichever you want."

They mounted the moving ramp again, this time riding far into the recesses of the building before getting off into a glass-walled room obviously very thoroughly insulated against sound and vibration.

"Address that wall," said Gooper,

pointing to a blank, plastered partition. He was outside the glass.

"When does it go on?" asked Jocelyn.

"It went on the moment you entered," said the Gaylen with a smile. "Now begin at the beginning."

Clair took a deep breath. Since neither of the others seemed anxious to speak, he began. "Well, my partners and I," he said, "are from a planet known as Earth,—the third major satellite of a yellow dwarf star which may or may not be in this present universe. We don't know where it is—or where we are."

He stopped, waiting for one of the others to take up the tale.

"Go ahead, Art," said Gaynor. "You're doing fine."

Reluctantly, Clair continued. "Uh—well, we freely acknowledge that we never expected to get here. In fact, we weren't exactly sure that we'd ever get anywhere alive, since we were the first to experiment with a hitherto unknown—or unutilized, at least—force which we called protomagnetism.

"This force, protomagnetism, had quite a resemblance to the common phenomenon of ferro-magnetism. The big difference was that it didn't act on the same substances, and that the force appeared to come from somewhere pretty strange. Where that somewhere was, we didn't know—don't know yet.

"But we built a ship—we called it the *Prototype*—which had, as its motive power, a piece of the element most favored by protomagnetism. We figured that, soon as we let it, the proto would drag on the element and pull it, together with the attached ship, to whatever place in space it came from. We also have artificial gravity for directing the ship in normal space, and plenty of food and oxygen regenerators—everything we could think of.

"That's the way we'd planned it, and that's the way it worked. I forgot to

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mention, though, that at the last moment we found we had to ship an extra passenger, a Miss Jocelyn Earl—the female among us—who was a newspaperwoman of sorts.

"Well—we got to the source of proto, and found ourselves in a universe of perfect balance—a one-hundred-per-cent equipoise of particles distributed evenly through infinite space, each acting equally on every other. But, naturally, we upset all that. Our ship coming into that closed system was plenty sufficient to joggle a few of the particles out of position. Those particles joggled more, and more, and then the whole thing seemed to blow up in our face.

"Anyway, after a couple of false starts into some pretty weird planes and dimensions, we managed to get into this present space-time frame. This wasn't too good either, because we couldn't seem to find a planet by the hit-or-miss method. Planets were too scarce, especially the oxygen-bearing atmosphere-cum-oxidized-hydrogen hydrosphere type—unfortunately, the only type that could do us any good.

"Well—we couldn't find a planet—and we *didn't* find a planet. This planet reached out and found us. The first thing we knew, there was a tractor beam of sorts on us and we were snatched down out of the sky onto your very lovely world. Then you Gaylens crept up on us and slapped mechanical educators on us, and taught us your language at the cost of a couple of bad headaches.

"It was a sort of a fantastic coincidence, we thought, until we found out that Gooper over there had been scanning the heavens for quite a while, looking for a new planet, or a wandering star, or anything that might be important enough to win him recognition. We would be ungrateful to say anything against our savior, but I admit we had some rather generally bitter reactions when he found

that practically Gooper's sole reason for dragging us down out of the sky—his sole reason for having been looking at the sky, that is—was the hope of earning himself a name. One of the principalest things I would like to do here is to establish our terrestrial system of nomenclature. Your way of giving every babe a serial number for identification, and making each person *earn* a name by doing something or discovering something of importance to the world may be right enough on a merit basis, but it seems to lead to complications.

"So Gooper—the one who found us—is now known as Gaynor-Clair. To avoid confusion he is known among us as Gooper."

CHAPTER TWO

Jocelyn Plays With Fire

"**T**HANK you," said Gooper. "It's turned off now. You have made a valuable contribution to our knowledge, friends. But may I impose on your generosity with your time a little further?"

"Might as well," said Clair bitterly.

"A committee of our scientists wish to examine your ship, the *Prototype*. Will you explain to them its various functions?"

"Sure," said Gaynor. "Let's go."

They mounted the ramp and traveled a short distance.

Waiting for them was a group of about eight of their hosts, and Gooper introduced them hastily. Practically all of them had names—an accurate index of the scientific prowess of the group. One, a short, sweet-faced female, had been honored with the name of Ionic Intersection for an outstanding discovery she had made in that field. As Gooper presented her to Clair they both smiled.

"We've met already," said Clair.

"To put it mildly," laughed the girl.

The Earthman shot her a warning look and muttered a word which Gaynor couldn't quite hear—though he tried. So Gaynor began the lecture by conducting his hosts through the ship.

"It's a bit crowded here," he said, "but, after all, we hadn't planned that it should be big enough to hold more than two. Most of these gadgets—air regenerators, lighting system, and so forth—are undoubtedly familiar enough to you. And Gooper has told me that you know all about artificial gravity—though I'm still waiting for an explanation of why you don't apply it, to commercial uses or to space-travel. But over here—come back into this room, please—is something that I'm pretty sure you *don't* know anything about." He beamed at Clair—this was the crowning achievement of their joint career.

"Right there. What we call the 'protolens.' That's the thing that focusses the force of protomagnetism on the tiny filament of—an artificial element, atomic number 99. This element, like all the heavier ones, is—is like—" The word he had sought was 'radioactive,' but he fumbled in vain for the Gaylen equivalent. "Say, Art," he said in English, "what's Gaylen for radium?"

Clair was also stymied. "I don't know that I've ever heard it. Will you" (to the Gaylens) "supply us with your word meaning an element of such nature that its atoms break down, forming other elements of lesser atomic weight and giving off—giving off an emanation in the process?"

His hosts only looked blank. Ionic Intersection said, "On our world we have nothing of that nature."

Gaynor turned back to Clair. "How's that, Art? I thought radio-activity was an essential of every element."

"Well, in a way, yes," said his partner thoughtfully. "But only detectably in the very heavy ones. And—Art—now that

you think of it, have you seen, or heard any of our pals mention, any of the really heavy elements? I haven't—they don't even use mercury in their lab thermometers. Although it would be a lot more efficient and accurate than the thermocouples they do have."

"I see what you mean," Gaynor said excitedly. "All their heavy metals, *being* heavy and therefore radioactive, have broken down to the lighter ones. Why, Art, we're in an *old* universe!"

"Probably. Maybe just an old sun, though—after all, the development of an entire universe probably wouldn't be uniform So anyway, that might explain a lot of things about these Gaylens—why, with all their knowledge of science, they die like flies to carcinoma and other cancers, for instance. Maybe we've got something we can give them for a present, as a sort of a payment for their saving our lives." He smiled amiably at Ionic Intersection as he spoke, and the girl, though not understanding a word of their jabber in a 'foreign tongue,' smiled back.

Gaynor scratched his head. To the Gaylens he said, "This is going to take time to explain. More time than I'd figured, because this is *the* key-point of the structure of the *Prototype*. Let's step outside."

"I'll stay here," said Ionic Intersection. "Provided one of you will be so good as to show me the mechanical features of the ship. I'm not covering electronics any more—I decided to let someone else make a name for himself there."

"Very commendable," said Gaynor busily. "Jocelyn, point things out to the lady and see that nothing happens."

He, Clair, and the others filed out of the ship, and he leaned against the main door, swinging it shut, to continue his lecture.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I cannot

demonstrate with a chunk of—of one of the elements I mean since we forgot to bring any along. But perhaps you have observed the phenomenon occasioned by the passing of an electric current through such inert gaseous elements as neon, argon, nitrogen, and so forth?"

"It is one of the most vexing riddles of our science," said one Gaylen.

"Well, that is a phenomenon closely allied with the force of which we spoke. The particles of the gases—" and he droned on, trying to explain the incomprehensible to the Gaylens. Gaynor could not stand still while speaking—a habit acquired in the lecture rooms of half-a-dozen universities, he had to walk back and forth. He did so now, but completed just one lap. For, as he, still talking, turned—

He saw the *Prototype* quietly, and as if by magic, vanish!

Somehow, surely inadvertently, possibly in trying to produce a sample of radioactive matter in the condensers, Jocelyn had allowed the ship to be dragged out of this good universe once more by the awful force of protomagnetism.

CHAPTER THREE

Nova!

THE Gaylens looked about blankly. "What happened?" asked one of them dumbly.

"She started the ship!" choked Gaynor. "She's gone—God knows where or how!"

"Surely she can be traced," said Goo-per sympathetically.

"How? There's no such thing as a tracer for the *Prototype*—it might be anywhere and anytime, in any dimension or frame of the cosmos."

Clair nodded numb affirmation.

One of the Gaylens coughed. "Then

(Continued on page 110)

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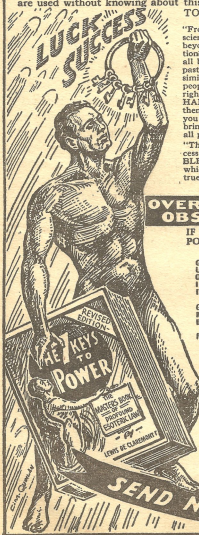
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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

(Continued from page 108)

this is probably the best time to tell you . . .” he paused.

“Tell us what?” snapped Gaynor eagerly.

“Well—that you would be just as well off, in a way, if you were with your companion.”

“I don't understand,” said Gaynor, losing attention once more to the question of the whereabouts of Jocelyn and the Prototype.

“This planet will soon be unsuited to your temperament and physique,” explained the Gaylen carefully.

“Stop beating around the bush,” interjected Clair fiercely. “What's the secret?”

Gooper took over. “What he means,” he said, “is that now we should tell you what we have successfully concealed from you for the duration of your stay—not wishing to inhibit your pleasure at again attaining security. In short . . . our sun is about to become a nova. Within a matter of days, as we calculate it, and this planet will be well within the orbit of the expanding photosphere.”

GAYNOR actually reeled with the shocking impact that the words carried.

“But you—” he said inarticulately. “What will happen to you?”

Gooper smiled. “Our bodies will perish.”

“But what will happen to your civilization? Why—” he was struck by a sudden thought—“why did you have us make a record for you—who is going to use it after the nova comes?”

“We are not unprepared,” said Gooper. “Don't ask questions for a few seconds—come downstairs with me.”

En masse they descended, walking into a large, bare room. Gooper proudly indicated a sort of pen in the center.



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"Behold!"

Gaynor looked over the little fence, and recoiled at the horrors within. "What are they?" he gasped. For he was looking at a dozen or more small things that were at once slimy and calcined—like lizards, save that lizards were at least symmetrical. That was little to say of any animal, but certainly no more could be said of lizards, and not even that of these creatures. Blankly he wondered how they could have evolved to their present fantastic condition.

One of the Gaylens pressed a floor-stud, and transparent shields slowly rose to curve about and cover the pen completely.

"That area," said Gooper, "is now a refractory furnace of the highest type, able to reproduce the conditions that will obtain on this planet when the nova occurs. Watch carefully."

Gaynor, in spite of himself, bent over the furnace as it slowly heated up. He shielded his eyes as electric currents went into play and made the floor within the pen white hot—and more. And still the lizard-like creatures crawled sluggishly around the sizzling floor, seemingly completely unaffected by the heat!

Tongues of burning gas leaped out from the shield, and the air became a blazing inferno within the little confine of the pen. Obviously the shield was an insulator of the highest type, and yet it slowly reddened, and Gaynor backed cautiously away from it, still observing the creatures.

"Watch!" cried Gooper tensely, pointing to one of the creatures. It, completely oblivious to the heat, was fumbling with a small pellet of something on the floor—possibly food, Gaynor thought as he tried to make out, through the glare and burning gases, just what Gooper wanted him to observe. Then Gaynor noticed, and thought he was going mad. The thing picked up the pellet—it was food, of a

sort, apparently—and put it in its mouth. And the organs with which it picked the pellet up were hands—tiny, glassy-scaled, perfectly formed human hands.

"Enough," said Gooper. And slowly the gas flame died down and the floor cooled. They retreated into the next room, and Gaynor faced his hosts in baffled wonder.

"Now will you tell me what was the purpose of that demonstration?" he demanded.

"No doubt you wondered about the evolution of those creatures," said a Gaylen obliquely. "It should soothe you to know that they're not natural—what with surgical manipulation of the embryos and even the ova of a species of lizard, we produced them artificially. You noted two great features—complete resistance to heat, and a perfect pair of hands—more than perfect, in fact, because they have two thumbs apiece, which your hands ours don't."

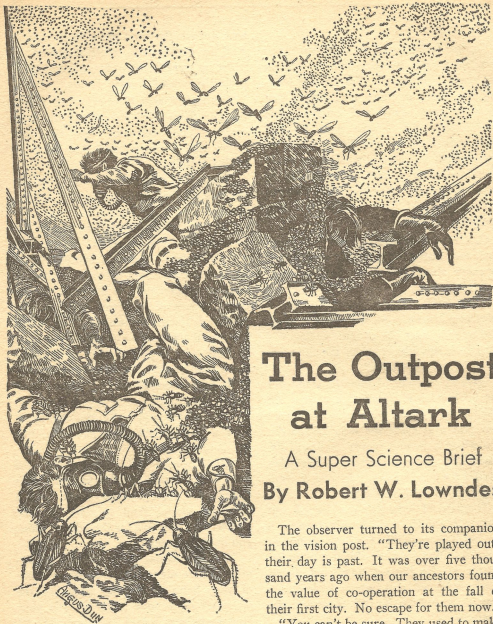
"Yes," said Clair, "I noticed them. And a nasty shock they gave me, too. What are they for?"

"Well, you should have guessed—the nova is the reason. We've known it was coming for quite a while—more than a thousand years. And so long ago the cornerstone was laid for the edifice which you have just seen."

"If there is one thing more than another I hate about you Gaylens—outside of your habit of keeping facts like the approach of a nova from us—it's your longwindedness," said Clair angrily. "I want to know just what those hellish horned toads have to do with the nova."

The Gaylen coughed delicately. "A third feature of the creatures which could not be displayed to you is that their brains—note that I say nothing about their *minds*—their brains are fully as large, proportionately, and as well-developed, as ours and yours."

(Continued on page 117)



The Outpost at Altark

A Super Science Brief
By Robert W. Lowndes

THE city walls could be seen plainly in the tele-mirror's disc; the great inch-long cockroach haunched itself up slightly, peering again at the scene.

"Activity again among the Big Ones," it vibrated.

"Something new, perhaps."

"After all these years? How could they have anything new?"

The observer turned to its companion in the vision post. "They're played out; their day is past. It was over five thousand years ago when our ancestors found the value of co-operation at the fall of their first city. No escape for them now."

"You can't be sure. They used to make it hot for us when the termite posts above the surface were still being made of the original cement. We forced the grub-slaves to use our new variations in the materials; if it hadn't been for that, those posts wouldn't be there now."

"Exactly. The Big Ones haven't found any explosive powerful enough to smash our above-surface posts for the past cen-

tury. A hundred years without a single new discovery by them. They're finished!"

Through the tiny mirror of their instrument, the two watched in silence, tirelessly watched the tremendous (to them) walls of the enemy's last fortress. As new impressions came to them they flicked their antennae against those of a waiting termite, a curious half-cousin to the guiding roaches trained to retain messages. Its physical body was minimized by breeding and culture while the memory cells were overdeveloped to the amazing degree of which termites are capable.

Throughout the great entrenchments the activity went on ceaselessly. Millions of roaches rushed through countless tunnels beneath the earth or up into the impregnable bomb-proof fortresses raised by the termites on the surface. Yet no insect showed itself to the enemy. The colossal bipeds, which had once claimed leadership of all the earth, never saw the physical forms of the New Intelligences save at the instant of attack. Their fighting men could find nothing to combat; their mighty armies were useless. Only the scientists could oppose so insidious a foe.

EVEN now, carefully hidden in a tunnel newly built into the stellite walls of Altark's central command, lay the chitinous form of a high officer of the New Intelligences. The Thirtieth One listened intently to the conversations of the biped leaders; a linguistic-brain-termite, ensconced next to him, translated what an ear-termite, with its tremendously overdeveloped stethoscopic organs, heard.

"Are you sure thus will work, Varl Burd? Remember, it's our last hope."

The voice came from one of the younger heads of Altark, a youth with much enthusiasm but little experience. A fault of these stupid creatures, thought the Thirtieth One, who permitted birth to hold more importance than ability.

"I'm not sure of anything. We've

fought them for several thousand years and we've been losing steadily. All our other cities, kingdoms, empires, commonwealths, and colonies are gone. The land is under control of these insect beings.

"Sometimes I think it is destiny. The mammals, our ancestors, wrested the land from the reptiles, who took it from the amphibians. The process goes on relentlessly. Now, from what we once considered the lowliest of insects, has come a type of individual intelligence that towered over the others even as that of the first primate towered over the other mammals. And they have learned. . . ."

"Speculations! We haven't time for them. What's our chances of defeating them?"

"We have a fair chance," replied the other, smiling wanly at the young man. "Only a fair chance! I've seen so many fine schemes go astray in my life. Numbers lost mean nothing to the enemy; even when the tunnels collapse, and they are forced to retreat, they will come back. When they attack again, it will be with improved forms."

"Then we'll beat them again. We'll start winning now and keep it up. With our vibrators, they can do nothing in tunnel work. The termites, on whom they depend for their labor and special activities, can't endure sunlight; the roaches will have to come out into the open. Then—"

"Speculation, my lad! These vibrations are something new in our warfare. We had previously carried it on by means of rays, explosives, and gasses that seeped into the soil. But we've had no experience with vibrators.

"We only *believe* that when the rods, now being sunk into the ground, are set to vibrating in sympathy with our broadcast sound-vibrations, to which they're attuned, they'll transmit these vibrations through the earth for miles around; the intensity should bring the insect tunnels

crashing about the roaches' heads. Then when the rest succeed in getting to the surface, it will be easy enough to finish them off there."

The Thirtieth One quivered excitedly in its scooped-out burrow. Hastily it ordered an assistant to take its place at the listening post, while it attended to the matter just overheard.

With the amazing rapidity of a roach, the Thirtieth One sped through the single tunnel that had been worn in the center of the wall by corrosion-secreting termites, down into the foundations of the building. There it came to a crossways of the spy tunnels undermining the entire city. Rapidly it scuttled to the nearest communication post. While a runner set out to carry the report to the Foremost One, the other set out toward the earth-knowledge laboratories in the outer borings. Through tunnel after tunnel it scuttled on its six legs with the terrific speed of its species.

Arriving at that curious chamber, it went directly to the Master of Earth-Tremors, reported its findings, requested instruction on counteracting the bipeds' plans.

The Master was not a roach. It was merely an obedient termite trained for that type of knowledge, nothing more. It fell into deep thought, then called upon the Master of Etheric Tremors. The two conferred. Both creatures were termite-beings newly developed after the cockroaches had seized intellectual control of the termites. The Etheric Tremors Master, whose knowledge was far superior to humans, due to the natural advantage of an antenna and a sixth sense of etheric sound, had little difficulty in finding an answer.

Then commenced terrific action. The Thirtieth One appropriated the chamber for orders. An order came through from the Foremost One delegating the Fifth One, normally in command, to subordinate itself to the other.

FOR several hours small armies of termites and roaches scuttled in and out of the chamber. Pieces of metal apparatus, newly molded by the select action of corrosion secretions, were brought out, sent forward through the now enlarged spy catacombs beneath Altark. A large chamber had been scooped out under the laboratory of the grey-haired biped. The human's apparatus had been examined minutely by spy-roaches which rushed out of their cleverly hidden spy-holes and clambered over the various pieces of apparatus when the laboratory was empty. By now, all was known.

The humans sank their metal rods along the outskirts of the city. The size of these rods had been checked, carefully, vibratory indices checked and rechecked. The sound-wave broadcaster had been set at the precise pitch; it seemed foolproof. The rods could not be corroded away, thus changing their index; they had been made of one of the few alloys so far immune from the various acids secreted by the enemy. A fair chance for success.

Beneath the city, matters were different. As each rod was sunk, squads of the New Intelligences set to work immediately. To the end of each they attached more metal masses, each long enough to change the vibratory indices considerably. In addition, wires were affixed to run down to bed rock, thus losing the vibrations. All this work was carried on unseen by the unsuspecting bipeds above.

In the chamber that had been hollowed beneath the laboratory, other apparatus was being assembled. Radio-wave disseminators set to wave-lengths of their own finding. As each set was assembled, messengers would arrive and give whispered figures. The sets were fixed according to these findings, then each dismantled and returned to the various posts for re-assembling. Wires from each ran back to the central chamber.

From the central chamber, a master

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wire was run upward, through the interior wall of Varl Burd's laboratory. There it was carried under the floor, up through the leg of the table, up under the sound machine, and spliced into the feed wires running to the dynamos of Altark. All this was done by the termites at the command of their roach overlords, accomplished entirely out of sight of the humans; not once had they come into the light.

THE human defenders gathered by the walls; all type of weapons they had been using were ready. When the insect tunnels collapsed, those that escaped to burrow to the surface would find death there in the form of burning oil, stifling gas, and searing rays.

"They haven't a chance," murmured the youth. Attired in gas mask and ray-proof garments, he stood on the walls, the commander.

"The insects are clever, but they'll find that they've finally met their superiors this time."

But the insects were not idle.

From each of the many spy tunnels, all observers were withdrawn. At last, in all the city not one of the New Intelligences could be found above ground level. Through the surrounding catacombs, terrific activity went on.

Myriads of fighting roaches and termites came forward. Great monsters with long, vicious mandibles and barbed legs. Battalions with long, metallic needles with which to inject minute amounts of deadly poison into the exposed flesh of whatever animal they might find and cling to. Literally millions were brought to the fore in all parts of the tunnels under the city and around it.

Varl Burd placed his hand on the starting switch. He breathed deeply for a moment, wondering the outcome, then pulled

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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

it down, closing the current. The machine hummed, its pitch growing higher until it stopped at a shrill tone that vibrated all over the city. The rods felt it, vibrated for an instant. But not more than an instant.

As the current flowed into the sound machine, so it flowed along the spy wires, into the apparatus set at the base of every structure in Altark. At the base of the walls. And each of the small sound machines, for they were simply duplicates of the greater device in Varl Burd's chamber, set up their own pitch; each was attuned to the vibratory index of the structure at whose foundation it lay.

The watchers on the walls waited nervously for signs of the tunnels' collapse. Then they seemed to feel a vibration beneath their feet; they smiled, thinking it other than the harbinger of their own death.

With a startled shriek, and a thousand sudden screams of terror, the ground beneath their feet gave way. The metal walls vibrated violently, then collapsed in a mass of powder. The metal runways on which the defenders were perched likewise crumbled.

As the luckless humans went sprawling, they saw with terrified eyes the complete destruction of their city.

Building after building collapsed in a heap of dust; the entire city had lost shape, had dissolved into amorphous fine white powder.

And from every quarter the earth erupted roaches and termites. It became alive with them, ravaging for blood. They swarmed over the struggling defenders, millions strong; before the day was out, there was no human alive in Altark, no human anywhere was left alive on the entire planet.

Altark had been the last outpost, and it was taken.

THE END

(Continued from page 111)

"And," Gooper interjected, "we have a gadget invented by my great grandfather, Parapsychic Transposition, which allows us to transfer mentalities between any two living things with brain-indices of higher rating than plus six Do you begin to follow?"

"I think so," said Gaynor slowly. "But get on!"

"So, when the nova bursts, we shall—all the Gaylens shall—each have his mind and memories and—I think your word for it is *psyche*—transferred into the body of one of those little animals. And—our civilization, though no longer human, perhaps, will go on."

Clair gasped. "What an idea!"

"Our only chance of survival."

Clair collapsed onto a seat. "Ye gods!" he cried accusingly. "And you didn't tell us before!"

"We thought you could leave at any moment—and, if not, there are more of the lizard-hosts than are necessary."

Clair thought of the things he had seen in the pen, reviewing their better points, trying to shut out the memory of their utter, blasphemous hideousness. He looked at Gaynor, obviously thinking the same thoughts. The look was enough. "Speaking for my partner and myself," he said to the Gaylens, "the answer is *no*. The flattest and most determined no you ever heard in your born days."

"Very well," said Gooper quietly. "Whatever you wish. But—the nova will be on us in a week."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Archetype

"**H**OW'S chances, Pavel?" asked Clair grimly, looking about their borrowed lab.

"Well, small. Small, if you're referring to the chances of the late John L.

Sullivan appearing before us in a cloud of glory. But if you mean of our finding Jocelyn, or Jocelyn finding us—the chances are *real* small."

"That's about how I figured it," said his companion wearily. "Why even bother?"

"Earthman's burden, maybe. Anyway, the program is: first we manufacture some 99, then we make a protolens, then we build a ship around them How long did they say we had before this planet starts frying like henfruit on a griddle?"

"About a week. Is that plenty?"

"Well," said Gaynor soberly, "considering that it took us upwards of two years to finish the *Prototype*, when we had all the resources we needed, and enough radioactive substances to fill a pickle barrel, it isn't exactly too *much* time. Of course, we have the experience now."

"Right again," said Clair sullenly. "Doesn't it irritate you—this business of never being wrong?"

"Sorry, bud,—it's the way I'm built. Like clockwork—you give me the data and I click out the answers, right every time Well, we seem to be missing just about everything. It will be sort of hard getting away from here without *any* sort of a ship. But does that stop the Rover Boys of space?"

"Yes," said Clair flatly. "Let's stop kidding ourselves. I'd sooner drink slow poison than have one of their psychotaxidermists put this nice brain of mine into one of those asbestos lizards. And I know like I know my own name that you would, too."

There was no answer to that. But Gaynor was spared the necessity of inventing one when the doorbell rang—just like on Earth. Eager for any distraction, he answered it.

Gooper stepped in, a rare smile on his face.

"Greetings, friends," he said cheerily.

"Yeah?" growled Clair. What are you happy about?"

"It's a fine day outside," said the Gaylen, "the air is bracing, all machinery's working beautifully,—and we've worked out a solution to your particular problem."

"That so?" asked Gaynor. "What is it?"

"Wait a couple days and you'll see," said the Gaylen confidently. "We boys down at the Heavy Industries Trust want to surprise you."

"You might yell 'boo!' as us when we're not looking," said Gaynor sourly. "Nothing else could surprise us about you."

"I agree with my collaborator," confirmed Clair. "Go away, Gooper. And stay away until we send for you, please. We have a lot of heavy thinking to do."

"Oh, all right—if you want it that way," snapped Gooper, petulantly. He huffed out of the door, leaving the two Earthmen slumped despondently over a bench, thinking with such intensity that you could smell their short hairs frizzled with the heat.

TWO days later they were still sitting, though they had stopped the flow of thought a few times for food, sleep, and the other necessities of the body.

"Art," said Clair.

"Yes?"

"Do you suppose that Gooper had the McCoy when he said that they'd solved our problem?"

"I doubt it. No good can come from a Gaylen—take that for an axiom."

"I know they've got bad habits. But where would we be if it weren't for them?"

"Are you *glad* you're here?" cried Gaynor savagely.

"Not very. But it's better than lying poisoned in the *Prototype*. And their pro-

jector—the one they used to drag us in is a marvelous gadget—even you should admit that."

"Why?" asked Gaynor glumly.

"Because," said Clair complacently, "I just figured out an answer to our difficulties, and the projector forms a large part of it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah! Because all we have to do is to coax the Gaylens into letting us have some sort of a shell—a boiler or a water-tank will do, if it's gas-tight—and then fix it up for living-in purposes." Clair sat back triumphantly.

"And what good does that do us? We can't stay in it forever, if that's what you're driving at—even if we could get one that was a good enough insulator to keep out the heat."

"Far from it. I examined their traction-projectors, and learned how to work them. They're a good deal like our own artificial-gravity units, which, you may remember, are no floating around in the *Prototype* somewhere. Only these things are powered by *electricity*, and they don't require a great deal of that, either. I've been trying to dope out just how they work, but I haven't got very far, and Gooper keeps referring me to the experts in the field whenever I ask him. But I can handle them all right, so if we stick a quartz window in the shell, and install the projector, and seal it up nice and tidy,—"

"We can take off!" yelled Gaynor.

"Art, you have it!" He whooped with joy. "We can tack out into space—"

"Head for the nearest star—"

"Raise our own garden truck with hydroponics—"

"Maybe locate some radium—"

"Live long and useful lives until we do—"

"And if not, what the hell!" finished Gaynor.

"So we'll call up Gooper and have it done." Clair began punching the combi-

nation of wall-studs that customarily sent their host and name-sake dashing into the room, but for once he actually preceded the summons.

"Something I want to show you," he said as he entered.

"Lead on," said Clair exuberantly, and all together they mounted the moving ramp. Clair began to describe his brain-child.

But half-way through Gooper stamped his foot and uttered an impatient exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Clair, surprised. "'Won't it work?'"

"We wanted to surprise you," said Gooper mournfully. "Remember?"

"Distinctly. But where is this surprise?"

"Here," said Gooper as they dismounted, leading the way into a room of colossal proportions. And there on the floor, looking small amidst its surroundings, but bulking very large beside the hundred-odd men who were tinkering with it, was the very image of Clair's machine—a mammoth ex-steam boiler, fitted with quartz ports and a gastight door, containing full living quarters, supplies, and a gravity projector.

CLAIR and Gaynor staggered back in mock astonishment. "Pavlik," said Clair gravely. "I like their system of production here. No sooner does one dream up a ship than its on the ways and ready to be launched."

"Let's look the blighter over," said Gaynor. "What shall we call it?"

"Archetype," said Clair instantly. "The primitive progenitor of all space ships. Archie for short."

"Not Archie," said Gaynor, making a mouth of distaste. "No dignity there. How about calling it the Ark?"

"Twill do. Archetype she is, now and for ever more." They entered the ca-

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pacious port and looked cautiously around.
"Big, isn't it?" Gaynor commented superfluously.

"Very big. Hydroponics tanks and everything. Stores and spare parts too."

"We left little to chance," said Gooper proudly. "This may be the last job of engineering of any complexity that our people will do for some time, so we made it good and impressive, both. I don't see how, outside of diving into the sun, you can manage to get hurt in this thing."

"What are those?" suddenly asked Clair, pointing to a brace of what looked like diving suits.

"In case you want to explore our unaffected planet," said Gooper.

"Are there any?" cried Gaynor, his eyes popping.

"Only one. It will be well out of the danger zone. You can even settle the Ark there if you like, instead of living in space. Its gravity is a bit high, but not too much so."

"Look, Gooper," broke in Clair. "I just had a simply marvelous idea."

"What is it?" asked the Gaylen with suspicious formality.

"You have a bit of time left. If you work hard, enough time to fabricate more of these ships, to transport a lot of your people to that planet. Why not do it? You probably couldn't get all of them there in time, but a good nucleus, say, for development."

Gooper scratched his head thoughtfully. "Psychologies differ," he said finally.

"And we stand in utter terror of space travel. We would sooner go through the fantastic hells of our ancient religious ancestors than venture outside the atmosphere. Without a doubt this has cost us much in knowledge we might have gained—but some things are unaccountable, and this is one of them, I suppose. Do you understand?"

"No," said Gaynor bluntly. "But I

don't suppose there's much need to understand. It's a fact, and it's there. Well, there's an end. When can we take off?"

"Right now, if you wish," said the Gaylen. He gestured at a control man high in a little box stuck to one of the transparent walls, and slowly the mighty vaulted roof of the place split and began to roll back. "Just turn on the power and you'll flit away from the planet," he said. "After that, you're on your own."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Proteans

"**I**T IS bigger than I thought," said Clair absently, staring through the port of the *Ark*.

"Mean the planet?" asked Gaynor.

"What else, ape? Do we land?"

"I suppose so." Gaynor peered down at the mighty world spinning slowly beneath them.

"Then the question is—how?"

"Find a nice soft spot and let go," suggested Gaynor. "Anyway, you're the navigator. You dope it out."

In answer, his companion sent the ship into a vicious lurch that spilled Gaynor out of the hammock into which he had just crawled. "Necessary maneuver," he explained genially.

"Necessary like a boil behind the ear," grunted Gaynor. "Let me take over."

Lazily they drifted down for a short period, then came to a near halt, perhaps five thousand feet above the ground, settled, fell again, halted; settled again, fell, and landed with a shattering jolt.

"**V**ERY neat, chum," said Clair with disgust oozing from his tones. "Very neat."

"I could do better with the practice," said Gaynor diffidently. "Do you want I should go up again and come down again maybe?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Clair hastily. "Let's get out and case the joint."

They donned fur garments thoughtfully laid out by one of the nameless builders of the *Ark* and stepped through the port. Clair took one deep breath and choked inelegantly. "Smells like the back room of McGuire's Bar and Grill," he said, burying his nostrils in his furs.

"How does the gravity strike you, Art?" asked Gaynor.

"Easy, Pavlik, easy. A little heavier than is conducive to comfort, but agreeable in many ways. It seems to be dragging yesterday's dinner right out of my stomach, but it's not too bad. How's for you?"

"I feel sort of light in the head and heavy everywhere else. But I can thrive on anything that doesn't knock you for a loop."

"See any animal life?"

"Not yet. The Gaylens didn't mention any, did they?"

"No. But they couldn't—all they know about any of their planetary brethren is what they can see at long range," said Clair.

"True for you, Art. Now, what would you call *this*?" As he spoke Gaynor pulled from the flint-hard soil a thing that seemed a cross between plant and animal. It looked at him glumly, squeaked once, and died.

"Possibly you've slain a member of the leading civilization of this globe," said Clair worriedly.

"I doubt that. You don't find advancement couple with soil-feeding."

"There's another reason why this thing isn't the leading representative of the life of this planet," said Clair, staring weakly over Gaynor's shoulder. "Unless they built it, which I don't believe."

Gaynor spun around and stared wildly. It was a city, a full-fledged metropolis which had sprung up behind his back. It was—point for point and line for line—the skyline of New York.

Then the city got up and began to walk toward them with world-shaking strides.

"You mean the city with *legs*?" Gaynor cried, beginning to laugh hysterically.

"My error," said Clair elaborately, passing a hand before his eyes. "I mean the giraffe."

Gaynor looked again, and where the city had been was now a giraffe. It looked weird and a trifle pathetic ambling across the flinty plain. It seemed to be having more than a little trouble in coördinating its legs.

"Must be an inexperienced giraffe," muttered Gaynor. "No animal that knew what it was doing would walk like that."

"You're right," said Clair vaguely. "But you can't blame it. It hasn't been a giraffe very long, and it wants practice. What next, do you suppose?"

"Possibly a seventy-ton tank." And the moment the words left Gaynor's mouth he regretted them. For the giraffe dwindled into a tiny lump, and then the lump swelled strangely and took shape, becoming just that—a seventy-ton tank, half a mile away, bearing down on them with murder and sudden death in its every line and curve.

WITHIN a couple of yards of the humans the tank dwindled again to a thing more like a whale than anything else in the travelers' pretty wide experience—but with some features all of its own.

"Hello," said Gaynor diffidently, for lack of something more promising to say or do.

And a mouth formed in the prow of the creature. "Hello," responded the mouth.

"I presume you're friendly," said Gaynor, drawn and mad. "At least, I hope so."

Quite friendly," said the mouth. "Are you?"

"Oh, quite," cried Gaynor enthusiastically, sweat breaking forth on his brow.

"Is there anything I can do for you to prove it?"

"Yes," said the mouth. "Go away."

"Gladly," said Gaynor. "But there are reasons for us being here—"

"Do they *really* matter?" asked the mouth. "To a Protean, I mean."

"To a what?"

"To a Protean. That, I deduce from your rather disgusting language, is what you would eventually come to call me, from my protean powers of changing shape. That's what I am—a Protean, probably the highest form of life in this or any universe."

"You're a little flip for a very high form of life," muttered Clair sullenly.

"I learned it from you, after all, the whole language. And naturally I learned your little 'flip' tricks of talking. Would you like a demonstration of my practically infinite powers—something to convince you?"

"Not at all necessary," interrupted Gaynor hastily. "I—we believe you. We'll leave right away."

"No," said the Protean. "You can't, and you know you can't. Moreover, while it is certain that your presence here disturbs me and my people with your very sub-grade type of thought, we have so constituted ourselves that we are merciful to a fault. If we weren't we'd blast the planet to ashes first time we got angry. I want to do you both a favor. What shall it be?"

"Well," brooded Gaynor, "there's a woman at the bottom of it all."

"Females again!" groaned the Protean. "Thank God we reproduce by binary fission! But go on—sorry I interrupted."

"Her name is Jocelyn, and she's lost."

"Well?" demanded the mouth.

"Well what?"

"Shall I see that she stays lost or do you want her to be found?"

"Found, by all means found!" cried Gaynor.

"Thanks. Wait for me." Then the Protean vanished for a moment and became a perfect duplicate in size and scale of the *Ark*. Then it flashed up and out of sight.

CHAPTER SIX

New Sun—and Old

GAYNOR stared at Clair—stared at him hard. Then he coughed. With a start his partner came to. "Anything wrong, Paul?" he asked soberly.

"Anything wrong. Anything *wrong*," murmured Gaynor quietly, almost to himself. Then he exploded, "Art, you bloody idiot, don't you realize that we were in the presence of a Protean,—the mightiest organism of any time or space? It even admits it—it must be so!"

"I'm sorry, Paul," said Clair gently. "But I was busy with a theory. I noticed something, yes, but it didn't seem terribly important at the time. What happened to the giraffe we were talking to?"

Gaynor choked. It was rarely that this happened—but when it did something usually came of it. The first of these near-trances he had witnessed had come when Clair, in the middle of the Nobel Prize award, had glazed his eyes and stood like a log, leaving Gaynor to make a double speech of acceptance. And all the way back to America he had been in a trance, mumbling vaguely when spoken to, or not answering at all.

A dot appeared in the sky—two dots. As they swooped down Gaynor recognized, with a jumping heart, the *Prototype* being towed by what looked like the *Archetype*, but really was, of course, the Protean who had forced the favor on him.

Gently they landed, almost at his feet. And then the *Ark* turned into the whaley creature again, and the mouth remarked, "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

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"Yes. How do we get back to Earth?"

"Ha!" laughed the creature. "You can think up some funny ones. Please visualize the planet for my benefit. I'll have to explore your mind a little for this. Have I your permission to do so?"

"Certainly!" cried Gaynor.

"Thank you," said the Protean, as the man began to concentrate on the more salient features of his native planet.

"I said thank you," repeated the creature to the expectantly waiting Gaynor. "It's all over. You didn't have too much of a mind to explore."

Gaynor was disappointed—the Gaylen mind-teachers had been a lot more spectacular, and a lot less insulting. "Well," he asked, "funny as it may seem to you, how do we get back to the place?"

"You know already," said the Protean. "At least, your colleague does. Why don't you ask him? Now will you leave?"

"Certainly," said Gaynor, puzzled but eager. "And all our thanks to you for your kindness."

"Just being neighborly," said the Protean. Whereat it dwindled into a tiny wormy thing which slipped down an almost imperceptible hole in the ground.

Gaynor looked blankly at Clair, wondering how best to broach the subject of getting back, but, before he could inaugurate a campaign to return the mental marvel to the world of cold realities, the door of the *Prototype* swung open wide, and Jocelyn Earle stepped out.

"THE trip didn't do you any good," said Gaynor, inspecting her face. "Whose idea was it?"

"Are you being stern, Pavlik?" she asked, flinging herself into his arms. When they had disentangled she explained, indicating Ionic Intersection who stood smiling in the doorway, "Her idea, really—she couldn't stomach the idea of turning into a lizard to avoid the nova.

She even preferred floating around in space—have you heard about the creeping quivers that space travel gives these sissified Gaylens?—well, she was even willing to face that instead.”

“I felt,” explained Ionic Intersection, “that I have something to live for now, since—well, something to live for. And I find that space travel isn’t fractionally as bad as I’d expected—I almost like it now, in a way.”

As if to punctuate her sentence, Jocelyn emitted a yelp. “Ye gods and little fishes!” she screamed. “*Look at the sun!*”

The others looked—it was worth looking at. Probably no human had ever seen a sun like that before at closer range than half a thousand parsecs—and lived. Great gouts of flame, and relatively miniature new suns composed of pure, raw, naked energy were spouting from it; rapidly and violently the heat and light from it were increasing, becoming uncomfortable even on this distant planet. It was becoming a nova by cosmic leaps and vast bounds.

“This is *no* place for us, friends—not while we’ve got what it takes to get away. So let’s go—fast. I wouldn’t put it past our Gaylen pals—with all due respect to you, Ionic Intersection—to have forgotten a decimal point or neglected a surd in their calculations. This planet may be as safe as they claimed—or it may not. I don’t choose to take chances.”

Shooing the ladies along ahead of him, Gaynor gently took Clair’s elbow and walked him into the *Prototype*. “He’s got a theory,” he explained to the girls, neither of whom had ever seen him that way before. “It gets him at times like these, always. You’ll have to bear with him; it’s just another reason why he shouldn’t marry.”

Once they were all arranged in the *Prototype* and sufficient stores had been transferred from the *Archetype*, left to

rust or melt on the planet of the Proteans, they took off and hovered in space far away from the wild sun.

“Now,” said Gaynor, “we’ll go home.” So speaking, he took Clair by the arm once more, shaking him gently. “Theory-Protean-idea-home-theory-HOME!” he whispered in the entranced one’s ear, in a sharp crescendo.

Clair came out of it with a start. “Do you know,” he said quickly, “I’ve found the governing principle of our little mis-haps and adventures?”

“Yes,” said Gaynor, “I know. The Protean told me. He also told me that you knew how to apply that principle so as to get us home.”

“Oh, yes. *Home*. Well, in order to get us home, I’ll need your coöperation—all of your coöperation. I’ll have to explain.

“I said a while ago that nothing was liable to hurt us in this universe. Well, nothing is. And the reason is that every stick, stone, proton, and mesotron in this universe is so placed and constructed that we *can’t* get hurt. Don’t interrupt—it’s true. Listen.

“Let me ask a rhetorical question: How many possible universes are there? Echo answers: Plenty. An infinity of them, in fact. And the funny thing about it is that they all exist.—You aren’t going to argue that, are you, Paul? Because everybody knows that, in eternity, everything that is possible happens at least once, and the cosmos is eternal I thought you’d see that.

“There being so many universes, and there being no directive influence in the *Prototype*, there is absolutely no way of knowing, mathematically a provable point, just which universe we’ll land in. But there has to be *some* determining factor, unless the law of cause-and-effect is meaningless, and all of organized science is phoney from the ground up.

“Well, there *is* a determining factor. It’s—thought.

"Thought isn't very powerful, except when applied through such an instrument as the human mind, or rather through such a series of step-up transformers as the mind, the brain, the body, and the machines of humanity. But there are so many possible continua that even the tiny, tiny pressure of our thought-waves is plenty to decide *which*.

"What did we want before we hit the universe of the Gaylens? I don't know exactly what was in your minds, but I'll bet it was: food, human companionship, supplies, and SAFETY. And we got all of them.

"So—the rest becomes obvious. To get home, recipe: Think of home, all of us, each preferably picking a different and somewhat unusual object to concentrate upon, so as to limit the number of possible universes that fit the description—you, Ionic, will try not to think of anything, because you come from a different universe; then throw in the switch to the protolens—and you're home."

THEY had made five false starts, and had spent a full week in one deceptive home-like universe before they'd got the correct combination of factors to insure a happy landing, but this one indubitably was it.

Clair was at the controls—had been for days of searching, and now that they had identified their solar system was driving every fragment of power from the artificial-gravity units.

Jocelyn and Gaynor approached him with long, sad faces. "Well, kiddies?" "I love Jocelyn," said Gaynor unhappily.

"So," he said, not taking his eyes from the plate which mirrored stars and sun.

"And that's not the worst of it," said the girl direly. "I love Pavlik too. Do you mind?"

"Bless you, my children," said Clair agreeably.

"But don't you *mind*?" cried Jocelyn indignantly. "We want to get married."

"A splendid idea. I'm all for marriage, personally."

"Good!" said Jocelyn, heartily though a bit puzzled and annoyed. "What you ought to do is to find some nice girl who can cook and sew and marry her."

"Impossible," said Clair.

"Why?"

"My wife wouldn't let me. Ionic Inter-section. We were married three days ago."

"What!" shrieked Jocelyn, and Gaynor cried,

"You can't have been. We've been in space!"

"Sure. That's what made it so easy. You know the old law—the captain of a ship at sea can perform marriages."

"But—"

"But nothing. I'm the captain, and I performed the marriage—to me."

Gaynor reeled and clutched at a railing. "But—but since when are you captain—who appointed you?"

"Ha!" crowed Clair. "Shows how little you know about sea law. It's just like the case of a derelict—when the regular officers and crew of a ship are unable to bring her to port—and you were definitely unable so to do—anyone who can takes command. That's the law, and I'm sticking to it. And you'd better not question it—because if you do, I'll dissolve *your* marriage."

"Our marriage! *What* marriage?" cried Jocelyn, incredulity and delight mingling in her voice.

"The one I performed over you two not five minutes ago. Probably you thought I was whistling through my teeth," Clair very patiently explained. "Now are there any objections?"

No, there were no objections . . .

THE END

THE PREVIEW

HE'D been at the plane's controls, should have kept her nose up. All he knew was that something had yanked it down. He could remember the nauseous whirling of the plane—the up-rushing table of sand—and then darkness. They'd cracked up in the great Sand Ocean of Mars, the vast desert that covered nearly half the planet's surface. Sand. Sand that was like no other sand known to man. It was light and slippery and flowed like water. A man could sink into it of his own weight and never leave a trace.

Perhaps they *would* sink into it, and never be found. Yes, he should have been more careful and alert. . . .

But that was the past. Now, more interesting, Fred had the nature of this odd dome to consider. It was about four feet above sand at its highest point, and about fifteen feet in diameter. It was made of copper-colored metal with a suggestion of yellow flecks in its grain, but it wasn't copper. At least, not pure copper. Fred found that out when he tried to scratch it experimentally with one of his sand-ski buckles.

"Fred!" called the professor suddenly. "I've found the door to it! If you can think of a way of opening it we can walk right in."

Fred remembered a passage from his Arabian nights.

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"Why not say, 'Open Sesame?'" he said.

The Professor laughed, delighted at the little joke. "Open Sesame!" he quoted. "Open—" He swallowed the words. Suddenly he wished he could have plucked them back out of the air. For the crack in the dome was widening, a circular section of metal spinning round. With a faint grinding noise the tapered metal plug rose slowly from its socket, rose and left a dark opening leading into the mysteriously obscure interior. . . .

Oliver E. Saari's novelette, "Under the Sand-Seas," in the January issue, completes the story of the mysterious metal dome lost in the great Martian desert. In the same issue will appear stories by Arthur G. Stangland, Leigh Brackett, Ross Rocklynne, E. A. Grosser and Ray Cummings.

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