NOVEL OF THE FUTURE COMPLETE IN THIS IS.

# STARTLING STORIES

NOV.

15¢

THE ANCIENT BRAIN
A Hall of Fame Classic
By A. G. STANGLAND

BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS FOR VICTORY!

FEATURING

## THE DAY OF THE CLOUD

An Astounding Complete Book-Length Novel

LOSS ROCKLYNNE

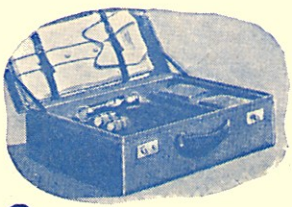
A THRILLING PUBLICATION

How to make your

# FLASHLIGHTS and BATTERIES LAST LONGER

**These Wartime Suggestions have been Reviewed and Passed by the Office of Price Administration and the Office of Civilian Defense**

**1 DON'T USE FLASHLIGHT CONTINUOUSLY.** Snap it on when you *need* to see—then snap it off. *Needless* use of flashlight merely wastes "juice."



**2 WHEN STARTING A TRIP,** don't toss your flashlight *loaded* into your suitcase, haversack or toolbox. Unscrew, or remove batteries—then switch can't "catch" and waste batteries.

**3 KEEP FLASHLIGHT OUT OF CHILDREN'S REACH.** It is not a toy—but a tool for your convenience and safety. *Know* where it is at all times—so you can put your hand on it quickly when you *need* it.

**4 DON'T THROW AWAY A BROKEN FLASHLIGHT** until you're sure it can't be fixed. Minor repairs can quickly be made, lens or bulb may be replaced.

**5 DON'T "HOARD" BATTERIES**—keep one extra set for each flashlight in case of long-continued use. Others want and need batteries too. *Do your share* in conserving the nation's battery supply.

## BUY FRESH DATED BATTERIES

Fresh batteries last longer. Dependable "Eveready" *fresh* DATED batteries will give long life and reliable service.

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**30 East 42nd Street, New York**
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**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE**

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**FLASHLIGHTS AND BATTERIES**

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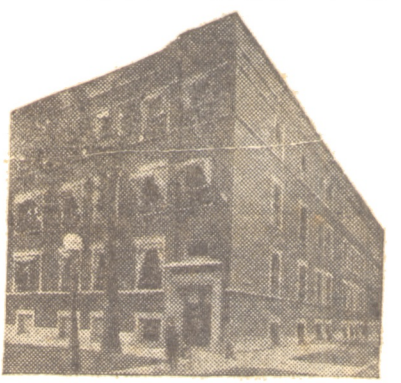

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The Course includes thorough training in the very latest and most modern methods in Finger Prints, Police Photography, Secret Service Intelligence, Firearms Identification (Forensic Ballistics), Bertillon, Modus Operandi, Identification of Handwriting, and Identification of Typewriting. Fully equipped laboratories are maintained where advanced students and graduates may come for personal instructions on all sorts of Scientific Crime Detection apparatus *without* additional charge. A Diploma is granted upon completion of the Course. You do not need to come to Chicago to complete the Course and get a Diploma.

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# STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 8, No. 3 CONTENTS November, 1942

**A Complete Book-Length Scientifiction Novel**

## THE DAY OF THE CLOUD

By

**ROSS ROCKLYNNE**

*Harry Porter, Playboy Engineer, Is Catapulted into the Far Future on an Earth-Shaking Mission and Battles to Save the World from Grim Chaos and Destruction!* ..... 15

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**$200 a Month In Own Business**

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field."—ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

**Lieutenant In Signal Corps**

"I was a Sergeant in the U.S. Army, Signal Corps. My duties covered Radio operating, maintenance of Army Transmitters and Receivers. I am now a 2nd Lieutenant. N. R. I. training is certainly coming in mighty handy these days." (Name and address omitted for military reasons.)

**$5 to $10 a Week in Spare Time**

"I am engaged in spare Time Radio work. I average from $5 to $10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy." — THEODORE R. DuBREE, Horsham, Pa.

MAIL the Coupon for a FREE lesson from my Radio Course. It gives you, at first hand, evidence of how N. R. I. will train you for Radio at home in spare time. And with this sample lesson I'll send my 64-page illustrated book, RICH REWARDS IN RADIO. It describes the many fascinating jobs Radio offers. Explains how N. R. I. teaches you with interesting, illustrated lessons and SIX BIG KITS OF RADIO PARTS!

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Right now, in nearly every neighborhood, there's room for more spare and full time Radio Technicians. Many spare time Technicians are stepping into FULL time Radio jobs, or starting their own shops, and making $30, $40, $50 a week!

Others take good-pay jobs with Broadcasting Stations. Hundreds more are needed for Government jobs as Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Radio Manufacturers, rushing to fill Government orders, need trained men. Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio and Loudspeaker Systems are live, growing fields. And think of the NEW jobs Television and other Radio developments will open after the war! I give you the Radio knowledge required for these fields.

### My "50-50 Method" Helps Many Make $5, $10 a Week *Extra* While Learning

Many N. R. I. Students make $5, $10 a week extra money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. I send EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that tell how to do it!

My "50 - 50 Method" — half building and testing Radio circuits with the six kits of Radio parts I send, half learning from illustrated lessons — makes you "old friends" with Radio before you know it. Run your own spare time shop, get practice fixing friends' Radios, get *paid* while training!

### Find Out What N. R. I. Can Do For You

MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE sample lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how you can train at home. If you want to *jump your pay* — Mail Coupon AT ONCE!

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BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week extra, fixing Radios in spare time.

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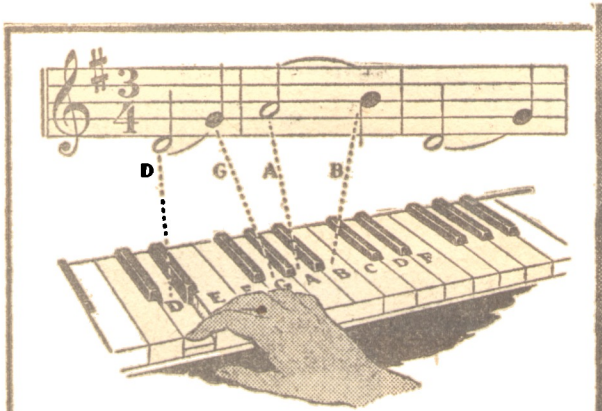
# LOOKS EASY..DOESN'T IT?

## AND IT IS! Yet it's from the famous "Merry Widow" Waltz!




Look at the diagram. The first note on the music is "D." Following the dotted line to the keyboard you'll find "D" is the white key between the two black keys near the middle of the keyboard. From that you can locate the other notes. As you strike them on the piano you'll be playing the melody of the ever-popular "Merry Widow" Waltz. Simple, isn't it? Now read below how you can take lessons on any instrument and learn to play quickly and easily . . . at a surprisingly low cost.

# HERE'S PROOF that you, too, can learn to play the piano or any other instrument!

Don't let the mistaken idea that it's difficult to learn music deprive you of the pleasure of playing any longer. Learning to play is now actually easy as A–B–C . . . thanks to the amazing new "Note-Finder."

This invention of the U. S. School of Music takes the mystery out of the piano keyboard, ends tedious scales and exercises, enables anyone to play a real tune almost from the start. You learn to play by playing. Soon you will be thrilled to find that you can pick up almost any piece and play it at sight. That applies to the piano, violin, guitar . . . any instrument you choose!

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With this modern method you don't need any previous knowledge of music; you don't need to spend months on monotonous exercises. It's real fun to learn music this short-cut way, and it takes only a few minutes of your spare time. What's more, it costs less than 7c a day . . . and that includes everything.

But see for yourself! Simply send today for our Print and Picture Sample. It will show you how you can quickly learn your favorite instrument. You will also receive a handsome booklet and details of the money-saving offer that enables you to learn music for but a few cents a day. Mail coupon today. Mention instrument that interests you. Note: Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 29411 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C., N. Y. (Est. 1898.)

## HERE'S FURTHER PROOF!

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Before I took your course, I did not know one note of music. Then 3 months later I started to play for dances. I've been invited to many parties.
*R. M., Vancouver, B. C.

***Plays from Start***

Your advertisements are true to the letter. I can actually play my favorite instrument even though I'm only at the beginning. How can I ever express my joyful gratitude.
*F. R. O., Illinois

** Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.*

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I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and your illustrated Print and Picture Sample. (Do you have instrument?.....)

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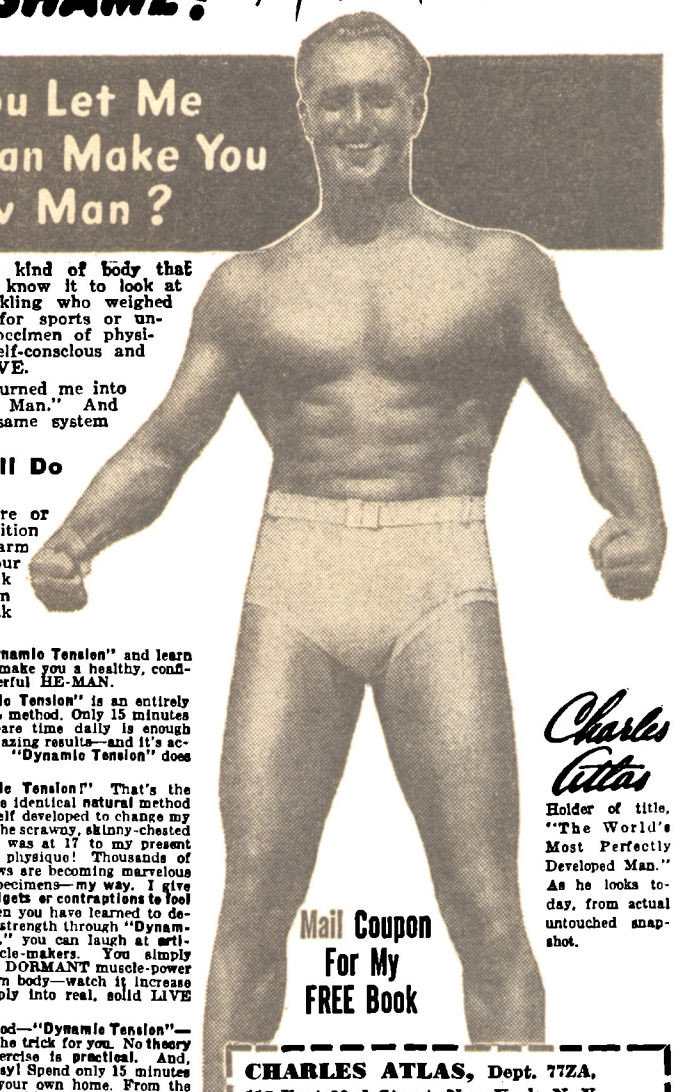
## ... Instead of SHAME!

ARE YOU Skinny? Weak? Flabby?

## Will You Let Me Prove I Can Make You a New Man?



I KNOW what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn't know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed only 97 lbs.! I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I'd like to prove to you that the same system can make a NEW MAN of YOU!

### What Dynamic Tension Will Do For You

I don't care how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps — yes, on each arm — in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day — right in your own home — is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice new, beautiful suit of muscle!

### Only 15 Minutes A Day

No "ifs," "ands" or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about "Dynamic Tension" and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

"Dynamic Tension" is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results—and it's actually fun. "Dynamic Tension" does the work.

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc. — to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

Charles Atlas

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In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77ZA, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

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I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

*A Department Where Readers, Writers and the Editors Get Together*

OF COURSE, you space yard-birds will want to know right off what's cooking for next issue, so the old Sarge might just as well tell you and get that much of the astrogation charted and set up in the map rack. I want to tell you that we've got a peach of a surprise in store for you.

From the heart of the Ozarks—which is the old Sarge's personal stamping grounds—Robert Moore Williams has dug out a sparkling gem of a science-fiction yarn, polished it up and sent it in to ring the bell as the lead novel for STARTLING STORIES for January, 1943. And I'm not going to dissect the plot for you monkeys to chatter over here.

Just relax and take it easy. You can chew the fat over WORLD BEYOND THE SKY after you read the story in the next issue. Let it suffice that Astrogator Williams has tossed a big handful of story ingredients into his typewriter, stirred them all up nicely with a rocket wrench and a space chart, and dished out as dramatic and rapid-moving a yarn of a land beyond space as you birds ever champed your teeth over.

Pick it up from here and write the old Sarge after you've digested the story.

Yes, Junior, put down that chunk of meteorite. There'll be a Hall of Fame Classic stowed away in the starboard locker. THE GREEN TORTURE, by A. Rowley Hilliard, and it's a humdinger of a yarn that is strangely prophetic of the present world-wide trend in warfare, although it was written years ago.

Sure, sure, there'll be two or three brand new shorts in the cargo so you harpies can compare or contrast things. Now, if you're temporarily satisfied, how about starting the blower fan so we can open this month's bouquet of mail?

## ETHERGRAMS

WELL, bless my soul, the first billet doux to be exposed to the light—like a Plutonian slug clinging to an overturned rock—is a short note to the effect that the good ship STARTLING STORIES has gone to the Dog Star in quality and consequentially is off this kiwi's reading list.

Consequently, there's no use printing his letter, because he wouldn't see it, and there's no use making the rest of us feel bad. Instead, we'll head this month's department with a comment of some worth about fanzines.

### PRICE THE SHEETS
**By Edward Murphy**

Your idea about an indexed list of fanzines is terrific, but **please** mention this quick! Have the editors include the price of their mags. It breaks my one-fourth Scottish heart to think of all the letters I've sent to fan mags asking for a sample copy because the editor had not told the fan mag reviewer the price—and never received an answer.—**New York City.**

I know just how you feel, Pee-lot Murphy, and I hope the fanzine publishers will take heed. I guess the reason they never answer your letters is that you probably failed to send reply postage, and postage is no small item if there is a lot of mail. Anyway, here's hoping for the best. The old Sarge always lists the price in the review column—whenever a price is given.

Comes now just a snort of a letter. A sort of triumphant fillip in a few short words. Slap your goggle-eyes on this.

### BEST YET
**By W. J. Mason**

Set down the old Xeno jug and listen to this. "Two Worlds to Save" was one of the best stories I have ever read in STARTLING STORIES. All the other yarns were good. The cover was fair.—**Franklin, N. C.**

Now, if I had only printed that first letter! But what's the use? That space-sick kiwi won't be seeing this puff from Pee-lot Mason, and he wouldn't agree if he did. Thanks, W. J., but I don't have to set down the Xeno jug to listen to that. I can hear every word you say between swallows and not miss a syllable—or a gulp.

### TALKING OF ASTRONOMY
**By W. R. Clark**

Because of a letter in your March issue I thought I should write, but I hesitated, waiting to see if anyone else would answer it. They haven't thus far, so I shall.

First, let me state that my father teaches astronomy and math at the college here, and I have conducted a private study of astrology only to find it wanting.

I don't know what kind of a gullible person Miss Leeds is, or what kind of suckers she may think most people are, but I hereby state that astrology just doesn't appeal to me.

*(Continued on page 10)*

# SURPRISE!

THIS young man has just got a big surprise!

He telephoned to congratulate a friend on getting a big promotion — and learned how little it costs to acquire modern *training-for-success* through the International Correspondence Schools!

You, too, will probably be surprised to discover that only a few dollars a month will pay for the sound, essential I. C. S. training you need to "get the jump" on job-competition. Compared to the cost of comparable training-courses (I. C. S. texts are being used in 24 State universities), I. C. S. courses in 400 business and technical subjects are amazingly inexpensive.

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HELPING TO TRAIN AMERICANS FOR VICTORY

LET'S GO! U.S.A. KEEP 'EM FLYING!

**BOX 3970-V, SCRANTON, PENNA.**

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

**TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES**

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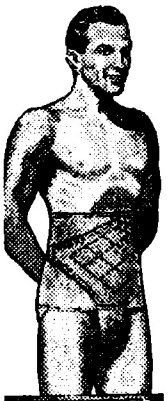

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Look YOUNGER
Feel BETTER
Instantly!

Don't let them talk about your "Bay Window"—stay slenderized with this amazing free-action, ever comfortable, elastic woven garment!

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Sensational NEW PRINCIPLE
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# THE ETHER VIBRATES

*(Continued from page 8)*

I'm afraid astronomy will have to be rude and tell astrology to go jump into the lake.

I have before me all the issues of this year to the September number. I find to a large extent that the covers are well-drawn, although the September issue is the only completely accurate issue. I find the subject matter with one exception is putrid. That exception is the July issue.

Mr. Morrison has a very good ability in describing Mercurian life. His plot was fair and the reason for the story, lack of fuels, is very suitable and plausible. Altogether, an excellent novel.

"The Cubic City" is an excellent story.

How about printing "The Light Bender," "The Man Who Changed the Future," "In 20,000 A.D.," "Tetrahedra of Space," and many other favorites?

No apologies are needed for the Misty Isle yarn. I completely agree with the fellow who said he was glad to see America wasn't painted lily white all the time.—**209 W. Doroml, Alma, Mich.**

**You'll have to repeat certain parts of this one, Kiwi Clark; I can't figure out whether you are panning the covers or the contents of the magazine. And William Morrison's story about Mercury is in the September issue, not the July number—or am I misinterpreting your astrogation chart?**

**Let it lay. We'll see what we can do about the Hall of Fame reprints for you, and we'll let Miss Leeds do her own arguing with you. The old Sarge has all he can do to keep the astrogation charts on this voyage.**

# TRIMMED EDGES

## By Thomas Regan, Jr.

Here's another guy who would like trimmed edges. Even with your sloppy covers they would make your mag look much neater. I second Gene Hunter's plea for **trimmed edges.**

My gosh, what a dream I had after seeing the September cover. How about getting Paul, Finlay or Wesso to do a cover for you? But what's the use of talking? You let no one but Bergey and Belarski do your covers, anyway.

The illustrations were not so good. Orban could do much better work, and so could Morey.

"Two Worlds to Save" was okay—not good, not bad. I beg for a novel by Binder, Hamilton, or even Bond would do. The coming ish looks promising. Rocklynne can hit it when he tries.

The shorts were over par this ish. "The Cubic City" was as good as the novel. "Kids Don't Know Everything" was darn good, too. "Meteorite Enigma" was fair and warmer—oh! Military secret! Must not tell weather report.

Don't forget, you old space rat—**trimmed edges!—138 Townsend St., New Brunswick, N. J.**

*Continued on page 12)*

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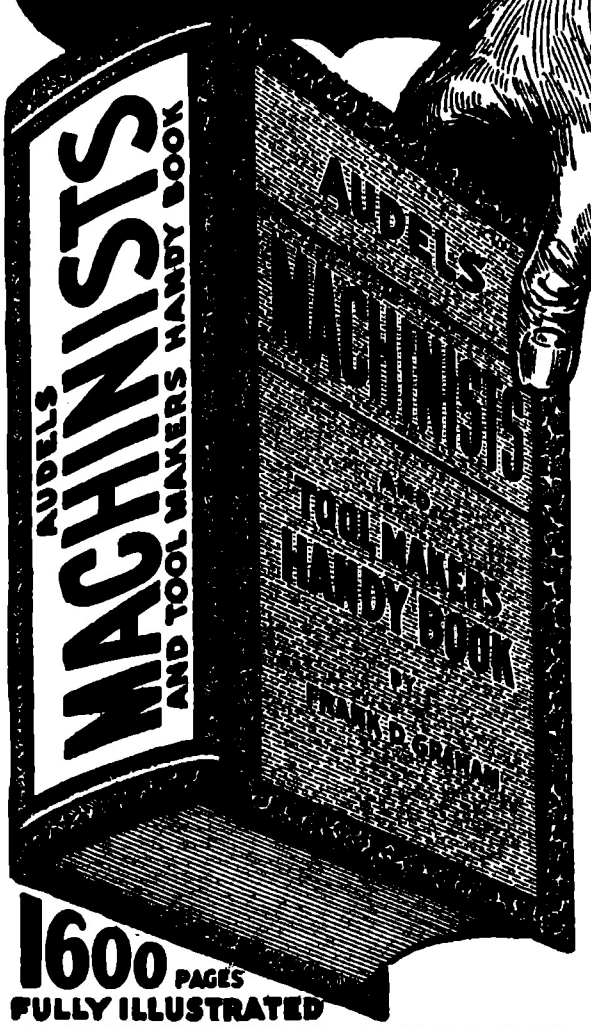


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## THE ETHER VIBRATES

*(Continued from page 10)*

I see, kiwi, that I'm going to have to trim the edges off of something, all right. Old space rat, indeed! I ought to pin your ears back with a beryllium riveting machine. On second thought—no. Go ahead and use 'em to polish the brass work.

Oh-oh, look at this erudite taking-the-Sarge-to-task letter coming up.

## LOOMIS VERSUS EINSTEIN

By Gilbert H. Jacobs

Take a good slug of your parody on liquor, Xeno, and sit tight. This is my first letter to this magazine, (as you know I write to TWS now and then) and it's going to warm up the old Sarge a bit. So hang on tightly and we're off.

As a whole, one must concede that the July issue of alleged STARTLING STORIES was fairly decent. How in heck did Hansen's ghost tale get in SS??

"The City of Glass" is a great story, and surely a sequel is to be had. However, there are a few mistakes in this otherwise interesting story, so:

1. Hey, Author Loomis, who said that an increase in mass does not call for an increase in energy? Energy, Einstein said, equals mvv, or briefly: $E = mv^2$, $v^2$ being v times v itself. So an increase in mass, with a constant V, should increase energy. Especially so as v represents the speed of light (c).

2. How can the speed of light ((3) ($10^{10}$ cms./sec.)) be infinite if we know its finite measurement? Carramba!

3. Since when do electrons constitute the mass of something? Electrons and protons with neutrons and positrons constitute an atom. Do electrons constitute mass? **I doubt it!** The MASS of an electron is merely $(9.1)(10^{-28})$; or .0000000000000000000000000091 grammes, while the rest of the particles also have mass, i.e.—the nucleus of hydrogen being $(1.662(10^{-24})$. Tell your linotype man to watch those zeros or the readers will mob me!

By the way, Sarge, please excuse this II Duce paper, can't find the &!%$‡#":¾))' regular paper!

Now for comments on the magazine itself: Again—how did that tale of a ghost ship get into SS? (reply requested, Sarge); Marble Virgin?—Phoo!; Special Features?—Swell, all except Meet the Author Department; Question-of-the-second—why do cover paintings not represent scenes from stories??

Some readers annote that they do not like the comments of the alleged Sarge in the readers' column. I lend them no support, inasmuch as I find that this idiotic space prattle livens up the column, and makes interesting reading. Far too many magazines are good, but have poor readers' sections due to the boring way in which the column is conducted. Hail the Sarge! However, the omission of your spatial (allegedly so) lingo would be better than wasting space with aforementioned lingo (at least omit some of these stupid words).

Well, sargey-wargey, this has been going on long enough, which brings us to the long awaited conclusion of the epistle:

Is Xeno REALLY Waterman's blue-black washable ink?—**984 East 15 Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.**

Don't blame the old Sarge if the printer fails to set up your equations properly, Kiwi Jacobs. All I could do was to clean up the grammar and the profanity of your ethergram. As for your technical discussion—I'm a stranger in these parts myself and am riding a bicycle for the duration. If Author Loomis wants to lock horns with you, okay. The old Sarge will furnish the

arena and spread the sand, but you principals will have to furnish your own grit, Professor Einstein and I are going fishing.

And never mind that funny talk about Xeno! It does not correspond chromatically to the third color of the spectrum, and I refuse to go deeper into the intricacies of the potent elixir's atomic structure for the benefit of the laity. I got troubles now in Flushing, N. Y.

## RED MAN PALAVER

### By A. R. Brown

Engarde:

After having stood more than 3 years, 22 issues to be exact, of S.S. I gurgle and gasp in helplessness. Now, I am a fan (a true fan being one who reads the depts. first) and quite naturally I read the blatt column first. I wade through a bunch of addle-pated, moronic imbeciles (there are a few sane ones) who drool and drip with gushing comments on how wondahful deah, deah SS is. And with a war going on! What a morale breaker! Your remarks are just as bad if not worse.

Oh for the days of Anderson, Hidley, Bridges, Saun and D. B. Thompson.

Your stories—well, if you want to know, compare them with those of 1939-40. You'll get the idea. As for art—???!!! For Finlay fans he is suited for weirds, but is he stf?

I have spoken.—**139-09 34th Rd., Flushing, N. Y.**

**Yeah, kiwi, you have spoken. But have you said anything? You open with a French word, carry on a pointless ramble, end with an American Indian phrase—and wind up behind Neptune. But if you're happy about the whole thing, why, so am I. Maybe you can get a rise out of one of the junior pilots; not the old Sarge.**

**Why Neptune? Because that's the eight ball in our little game of solar billiards—pool, to the engine-room crew.**

**Next bellyache. Hey, what's happening here?**

## MORE EXPLICIT

### By A. R. Brown

Dear Private Asteroid:

So you don't like generallties, eh? For my part, you can go plumb to Hades.

*(Continued on page 117)*

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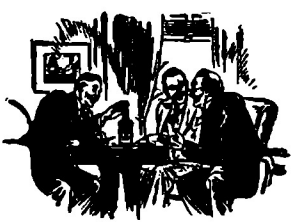

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Harry and S'ee knelt humbly before Ax'r-o-Ax'r, Ruler of the World (Chap. VII)

# THE DAY OF THE CLOUD

## By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

### CHAPTER I

*"Humanity Is Doomed!"*

HARRY PORTER got to the party by twelve, cold sober. By one, he was tipsy. By one-thirty, he was the life of the aforementioned affair, and a bevy of laughing friends, scarcely more sober than himself, was besieging him with questions as to where he'd been.

"Oh, Harry! Don't tell me the old man actually made you go with him to that dusty old scientific banquet!"

"'S'truth," avowed Harry, seeking out the dazzling blonde who had put the question to him. "'Tis honest truth! Says I was a no-good and a wastrel, he did. Says I was going to the dogs. Says he was ashamed of me.

"Says he wanted to take me to this banquet to show me the glories of science. Says I should wake up and stop dragging the human race into the ground. Nuts!"

The girls laughed and screamed. The men bellowed. Finally, they insisted on lifting Harry's trimly tuxedoed self to the polished surface of the baby grand piano.

"Gonna fall," Harry muttered.

But his protest was drowned as the blonde clambered onto a table and made a theatrical gesture with her milk-white arm.

"Ladies! Gentlemen! I give you that sterling apostle of science, that white-haired man of the telescope, that savant whose theories have got the scientific world ga-ga!"

"Ha-ha!" somebody said, and everybody laughed.

"I give him to you—you can have him!" the blonde continued shrilly. "Dr. John Porter, who is here with us tonight to speak on a matter of supreme importance to the human race! The great, the glorious human race! Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. John Porter! Applause!"

The crowd clapped and roared and cat-called at the weaving man on the piano, who had to stoop a little to avoid bumping his black-haired head into the ceiling. Then everybody quieted down and waited expectantly for the antics.

Harry Porter looked around, essayed to stand erect without outward assistance and grinned foolishly. Then he cleared his throat and ran his tongue around his lips.

"The human race," he mumbled with great effort, "is doomed!"

"Hear, hear!" the blonde wailed, wringing her hands. "The human race is doomed!"

"In one thousand years," Harry added.

"Oh!" cried the blonde, horror-stricken. "We must flee! In only one thousand years!"

YOUNG Porter eyed her sadly.

"You said it, kid," he said, and then added more sadly still, "And all because of a gravity cloud. A dumb, stupid gravity cloud."

One of the men spoke up.

"Come on, pal, come on! Talk. What else did your old man say that was funny?"

Harry looked down at the man. Tall, heavily built, he was the son of a Wall Street pirate. Harry looked as if he were going to kick the fellow in the face. Then he sighed and thought better of it.

"Didn't say anything funny," he decided. "My old man just told the truth."

The crowd smirked and surged closer to the piano.

"What about the gravity cloud?" the blonde pleaded excitedly. "Is it going to rain gravy-drops? Is it an affair of the utmost gravity? Is it a weighty matter?"

Harry looked at her in some surprise.

"You hit the nail square between the eyes," he avowed admiringly.

He paused dramatically and eyed the crowd with an effective pause.

"It's a weighty matter," he declared. "Yes, sir. Everybody's going to gain weight—even you," he said owlishly to the immediately horrified blonde.

"We're all gonna gain four times our weight," he went on. "We aren't going to be able to hold ourselves up. All the buildings will come crashing down around our noses—and our ears. Good old Earth will somersault toward the sun. The sun will somersault toward the Earth.

"All the planets will bunch up closer. Alpha will snuggle up closer to Proxima. And we'll die because we can't hold ourselves up. Or we'll

roast because we're too near the sun!"

Somehow the laughter and cat-calls weren't forthcoming this time. There was a strained silence, a self-conscious silence. The blonde tried to break it.

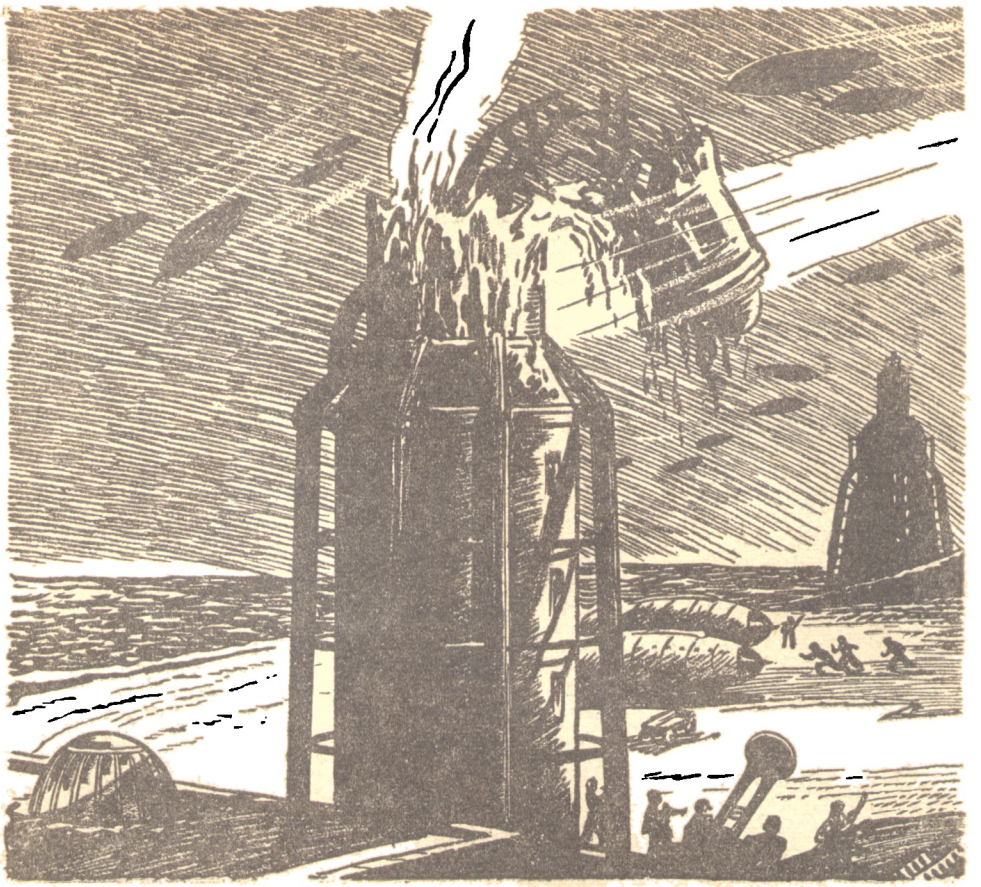
"In one thousand years," she repeated. But it took the son of the

"Now I know old man Porter is nuts," the tall fellow bellowed, breaking the silence with a high-pitched laugh. He swung around on the crowd. "That's what *my* old man said. Dr. John Porter is crazy! My old man was on the committee to decide whether Porter's department at the

Wall Street wolf to break the spell of the solemnly intoned words; solemnly intoned, in spite of the circumstances under which they were uttered.

university should receive an extra allotment, in order to allow him to work out a theory of temporal transmission.

"Time-traveling, it's called. Why, the governor came right out and gave



A full forty feet of the tower was sliced

the committee his opinion. He said Porter was out of his head. And I say so too."

A great sigh of relief ran through the room.

"So we aren't doomed!" they cried.

Harry Porter raised his glass above his head and smashed it down on the piano. There was a dangerous flicker in his gray eyes, as silence was turned on again.

"So your old man says my old man is crazy?" Harry demanded.

"You heard me, didn't you?" snapped the son of the Wall Street wolf.

Harry Porter dropped unsteadily to his feet. His fist swept up from his hip and smashed into the outthrust chin.

"Oomph!" the tall man said.

A blank look came into his eyes. Quietly he slid to the floor. He twitched once and was still; as still as the rest of the amazed party.

Harry Porter pursed his lips in satisfaction, dusted his hands, buttoned his coat, tightened his askew bow tie and threw back his shoulders.

He started for the door.

"Nobody can insult *my* old man," he said grandly.

The door closed behind him.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Drugged Wine*

HARRY was grinning to himself all the way home. He was amused about quite a number of things. First of all, it gave him a great lift to feel his still tingling fist. Well, he never had liked that guy. Even if the governor did have some screwy ideas, nobody had a right to say so.

Secondly, Harry was amused be-

neatly off by the attacking ship (Chap. XV)

cause that traffic cop had lost his coupé two miles behind. Probably got his license number, but what of it? It had happened before, and Old Man Porter was pretty influential with the judges. Old Man Porter was big stuff in this man's town. Everybody respected him.

There was some talk that he was going to get the Adams Prize for scientific achievement, too. Well, there was no getting around it. The old man was a *brain!* Some people said he was a thousand years ahead of his time, even.

Harry Porter weaved the coupé through another lonely red light, and tried to imagine how it would be if gravity were increased four times. The car would be four times heavier, obviously. He himself would weigh four times as much. It would take all his strength to keep his hands on the wheel.

He'd have to drop his right hand down toward the gear shift, to change speeds. Then up to the wheel again. Why, likely he'd crash into a telephone pole.

The car obediently went wheeling off toward a telephone pole, as Harry used his imagination.

"Oops!" he said, aghast, his eyes bulging. He managed to retrieve safety in the nick of time.

"Won't be any fun with four gravities," Harry decided unhappily. "Sure glad it's a thousand years away!"

He grinned again and jauntily sped through the intersections. After all, his father was a little bit screwy, principally for taking the whole thing seriously. A thousand years away, and he was worrying!

But then those other scientists at the banquet had listened gravely, seriously too. They respected Dr. John Porter, and they actually considered his discovery of the doom of the human race a real problem.

It was really a pity the old man had to take the troubles of the human race so seriously, Harry thought. Particularly when they were so far away in time, and absolutely could not affect those who lived now. As the car made a wide, unbalanced curve onto the street where Harry lived, he thought regretfully that it'd be nice if the old man would unlimber. He still had plenty of life in him.

There was a truck coming down the street. Harry shook his head. His eyes were blurring. His hands tightened on the wheel, and he leaned forward, squinting. Then, too late, he sought to turn the wheel. There was a sodden, crushing sound and a jolt that jarred his spine. The next thing he knew, his head was down where his feet should be. "Again!" he thought to himself gruesomely.

Then he worked his way out the door, ducked across the street and into a lawnful of trees.

He saw the truck driver peer into the shattered coupé.

"Hey, buddy! You hurt?" the man muttered, scared. "The dumb, drunken boob!"

Harry decided to go. He made his way down the shadows of the street, and sighed with relief as his key turned the lock. Once before he'd pulled a trick like that. The old man had let him stay in jail two days before he pulled the necessary strings. It wouldn't do for the police to find him with liquor on his breath again.

Jauntily he pushed open the door. Then his grin faded. Hastily he attempted to straighten his hair. He squirmed and wished to heaven he'd have had the good sense to stay in the wreck. Anything was better than facing the old man with that look in his eye. Harry stepped in slowly and closed the door behind him.

DR. JOHN PORTER rose from the hall chair in which he was seated. He stood there silently, the single lamp casting a weird light through his hair, seeking out little high-lights in his sharp, sensitive face, forming little pools of shadows. He was tall, sparingly built, and little wrinkles about his eyes showed a mature philosophy and wisdom.

"Hello, son," he said quietly. "Come along down to the laboratory. We've some things to talk over."

He turned, his hands sunk into the pockets of his dressing robe, and went toward the basement stairs.

Harry mutely followed, heavily expecting the worst. The old man had been waiting up for him, and when he did that—look out! And on top of that, there was the matter of a little wreck outside. Ye gods, that was more serious than he'd thought! He'd left the scene of a wreck. What would they do to him for that?

Nerves twanging, uneasy and scared, Harry followed his father into the laboratory. He watched his father moving around the rim of the cement floor, snapping switches here and there. Lights burst through the room. A bank of tubes glowed prismatically in the northwest corner, and in the opposite corner a bank of power-leads emitted a low, humming growl. A generator crescendoed.

Harry watched the eerie display with growing unease. What was all this for? The old man wasn't saying a word, simply getting his machinery into action. His face was quiet, grave. Good grief, this wasn't like his father at all. He'd made up his mind to something. And it was something that had to do with Harry Porter!

Finally Harry couldn't control himself any longer.

"What's up, Dad?" he demanded, but his voice broke nervously. "Why all the spitting lights?"

"You'll see, son," said Dr. Porter, busily engaged over a cubical cabinet that Harry suspected was something he hadn't seen before. "I'm getting ready for a little experiment."

"Experiment? Experiment? At this time of the night?"

Dr. Porter was silent a minute. Then he stepped back, shrewdly casting his glance over a bank of meters.

"There." He turned. "That does it. Now, son, sit down a minute. We'll let that warm up."

When Harry didn't sit down, Dr. Porter brought a chair over for him, gently pushed him into it. Then he scraped a chair up for himself and sat

down, his knees almost touching his son's. "Did you have a good time at the party?" he said, appraising Harry with steady gray eyes. He drew out a cigar, lit it casually.

"Why—I suppose I did. I had a good time. I had an excellent time. Why?"

"Are you very drunk?"

Harry jerked, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously.

"Drunk? Drunk? Of course I'm not drunk!" he stated angrily.

His temper was beginning to rise. Nobody, not even his father, could make a fool of him this way. He started to get to his feet. But Dr. Porter held out a single restraining hand that made him drop back into his chair as surely as if he had forced him down.

HARRY shook his head helplessly. There was something *frightening* about the old boy tonight!

Dr. Porter leaned forward, gravely.

"I want you to tell me the truth, son. It's important. It want to be sure you can think clearly."

"Certainly I can!"

"Very well," the scientist said smoothly. He began to talk. "I want to tell you a few things, Harry. Maybe you know them already. Soon you're going to have to realize them strongly. You're an anarchist, Harry. You live for yourself. You don't consider anybody's future but your own.

"That's fallacious, Harry. It can't be done. You consider that generations yet unborn are none of your concern. That's exactly the same type of outlook of a person who can't feel or understand or wish to prevent the misery of the millions of Asiatics, on the other side of the world.

"Those Asiatics are part of the human race. I *know* you feel for them, Harry. You're my son. But those Asiatics are separated as far in space as the people of a thousand years from now are separated in time. They live —*now*."

Harry's face was burning.

"I don't think that's quite fair, Dad," he said heatedly. "You know perfectly well my application as a flying cadet has been in for the past month. Once I'm a flyer, they can send me to any part of the world—maybe even China. Sure, I'd fight for China! They never hurt anybody. But—"

Dr. Porter somberly shook his head.

"That's something else again," he said. "But if we weren't in the war, I don't think that you would bother your young head much about the woes of mankind. No, Harry—my proposition is different. I rather wonder if you can imagine what I'm getting at."

Harry was sullen, restless.

"Oh, it's another of your theories, I suppose," he said.

"Not a theory. A proved fact. The oneness, the eternal *nowness*, of time is an inescapable fact. Looked at sanely, time becomes a roll of camera film, with both beginning and end already pictured. That follows, from the immutable law of cause and effect. Therefore, all is laid out beforehand."

"Fatalism," Harry snapped.

He tossed his head irritably. There was no sense in this. The old man wanted to give him a good bawling out. Why was he choosing this roundabout method? Again Harry's eyes turned on the banked, glowing tubes, on the spitting power-leads.

Dr. Porter shook his head, stretched his long, still athletic legs.

"Not fatalism," he denied, studying the glowing ash of his cigar. "Fatalism is a senseless bowing to the inevitable. I don't bow, son. I glory in the fact that I am a cause, an active agent which *affects* the future. It is my part in the great film, and I will act my part as I should. It is not in me to lie down on the job, nor will I.

"Yes, Harry, already the people of unborn generations live. Already—they fight the gravity cloud."

Then, before Harry could make head of tail of what all this was about, his father rose to his feet and crossed to a cabinet. He opened it and extracted a bottle. "Wine," he declared, smiling peculiarly at his son, "to suit the occasion!"

He broke the bottle top off.

Harry drank with no little trepidation. Trepidation! Where had he heard that word before? Oh, yes, at the banquet, from his father's own lips. "Trepidation"—some strange quantity

or force operating in the universe which causes certain celestial bodies to be out of step.

For instance, astronomers never seemed able to find the Moon at a certain time where they predict it will be. As if some celestial force had interfered. It was nothing new. Scientists since 1920 had come to the conclusion that some powerful and unknown agency was at work in the Solar System which acts suddenly to create abrupt changes in the motions of the planets. As if a mighty surge or wave were spreading throughout space—

Harry broke from his half-formed thoughts to feel his father's eyes on him. Funny, his father seemed to be floating in a kind of mist. But then, so did the room. His own feet didn't seem to have a firm purchase on the floor at all. From somewhere far in the distance, he seemed to hear a musical, crashing tinkle. His wineglass, slipping from his nerveless fingers onto the floor!

"Steady, son." His father's voice was hard, grating in his ears. "Your arm around my shoulder — there! We'll have this thing over with in a jiffy. Oh, it'll be a surprise, when you wake up, but I fancy you'll change your mind about not caring what happens to the human race a thousand years from now."

Young Porter's weight was a dead load on his feet. His father practically carried him across the room. And all the while he was trying to shout out, to scream out accusingly.

"You tricked me! You drugged me! My own father—trying to get rid of me! Ashamed of me!"

"Trying to make a man of you," an answer floated into his mind. Or had he said that to himself?

Then Harry was sitting down, his head leaning helplessly back against a hard surface. Something closed on him, shutting him in. He tried to move, summoning all his trapped energies to the task. But he couldn't do it. Then he tried to scream. He couldn't do that, either.

The only one of his senses that seemed to be working was that of sight. For one last blinding instant, he saw his father's tense, haggard face, framed through a window, saw his lips moving, saw the lips frame grief-stricken words.

"Good-by, son!"

Then the universe whirled, seeming to spiral out from his stomach, ripping him apart, scattering the pieces of his body and his mind through an unnameable, unthinkable dimension. Harry cried out in pain against the thing that was happening.

He caught one kaleidoscopic view of the past few hours.

"The human race ish doomed!" he had cried.

In his mind's eye, he saw his fist flailing into the face of the man who had insulted his father. The traffic cop. The wreck. The quiet, unalloyed pain that had been set deep in his father's face.

Then—something entirely unorthodox for his father to suggest—the wine. The drugged wine—

Blankness settled across and around him then, and he went plunging into depths beyond belief.

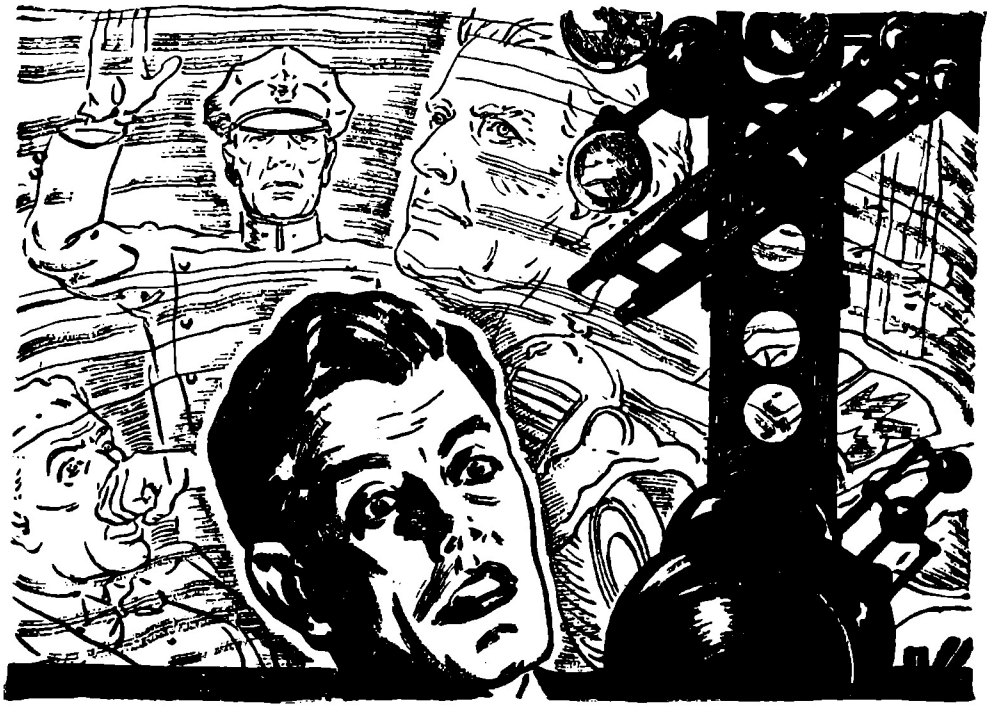
## CHAPTER III

### *One Thousand Years*

HARRY PORTER'S thoughts and remembrances linked together one by one until they formed the chain that spelled complete consciousness. He didn't want to wake up, though. It was infinitely restful to lie here and not think about what had happened to him. Something had happened, something terrible; he had seen it in his father's expression.

He kept his eyes closed. Wind was gusting against his body and rain was freckling his face. Then the rain came down in sudden, sodden downpour. In ten seconds he was wet through to the bone.

He placed his hands against soggy grass and leaped to his feet, chattering. He wrapped his arms around his tuxedoed figure and turned a swift semi-circle. The alien surroundings struck at him. What had his father done?



In swift kaleidoscope, the night's events passed before Harry's tortured mind (Chap. II)

There was nothing different about the sky. It lowered down on him, barely visible through the steady, roaring downpour, a sea of churning gray clouds. But to either side of him was where the strangeness lay. There was a road, stretching straight away into the distance as far as he could see. But bordering it, one on either side and parallel with the road, were two waterfalls!

It was as if there were two long buildings, curving up from the sides of the road to a height of a hundred feet, following the road into the distance. Each of the buildings was set about twenty-five feet back from the road, and shedding rain-water into channels that carried the water away.

But the odd thing was that they couldn't be buildings! For the arched falls were unbroken by projections such as windows.

Shaking his head and darkly blaspheming his nearest ancestor on the paternal side, Harry essayed a few steps onto the road, which had a solid, unsectional surface. He dropped to one knee with a quickening of interest and vitality. Harry had come away from college with an engineering degree. Any new road-building material was subject for speculation.

This was something new too. The road gave slightly when he pressed his finger to the surface. Elastic cement! Well, that was something to write home about. No wonder they could put it down in solid sheets, without breaks to allow for contraction and expansion. This material contracted and expanded like a sponge.

Who had laid this road? Sudden fright thrummed through Harry's brain. Where *was* he?

A light speared through the downpour. Simultaneously a low hum, powerfully suggestive of leashed energies, grew frighteningly loud in his ears. Out of the murky rain, a bullet-like shape came hurtling down the road, straight at him. For a moment he was held in fascination by the sleek, oncoming metal monster.

Then he let out a strangled squawk and threw himself bodily from the road. He landed face down in the mushy grass, turning over on his back to see the streamlined vehicle swish past at outrageous velocity.

Harry scrambled to his knees.

"Whew!" he gasped. "Watch where you're going, buddy!"

Shaking, unnerved, a hammering doubt of his own sanity adding to his fear, he crawled to the road and sat down on the cement, burying his face in his hands. He was cold. He was miserable. And he was scared.

He shook his head doggedly and flung himself to his feet. Hardly aware of what he was doing, he started out onto the road and broke into a stumbling, half-running trot. He kept that up for a quarter of an hour, glancing from side to side, searching for sign of a house. But there weren't any houses. There were just those two alien, parallel, unending waterfalls!

TWICE Harry was forced to leave the road because automobiles bore down on him through the rain. Good grief, weren't they trained to look out for pedestrians? But maybe there weren't any pedestrians in this age. In this age . . . Now he must be crazy, to think for a minute that his father actually had sent him into the future.

When the next automobile came along, he neatly sidestepped, and was ready to blaspheme it with appropriately chosen words when another vehicle swept past, on the heels of the first. Harry stared. Something funny was going on!

The second car was a heavily built monster of the road. It caught up with the first car. It swerved sharply and there was the scream of metal scraping violently against metal. Then the first car careened, stood balanced on two wheels for a split second, and then rolled soggily off the road.

Harry started forward a few steps, in instant alarm. He halted again. The undamaged car came to an abrupt halt, a door was thrust open and three heavily built men stepped out. Their attitude somehow didn't convey an impression of mercy as they ran around to the wrecked machine.

The occupant was already extricating himself. He took one look at the three men and broke into a stumbling run. He slipped in the rain; the three men jumped him. The human mass surged for a moment; then Harry momentarily saw the fallen man, flat on his back, kicking up at his three attackers. A shout of anguished desperation cut through the air.

Harry started ahead hesitantly. Then, as what was happening crystallized in his mind, he impelled himself forward at full speed, his stubbled jaw projecting, the light of battle showing in his eyes.

He reached the battle, grabbed one of the men around the neck, used his hip and his opponent's for leverage, and threw the man cleanly over his shoulder and out of the picture. The other two men cast the newcomer a startled glance. One reached toward his hip, but Harry shouted full in his face, jumped through the air and knocked the weapon from his hand before he could use it.

The third man, however, lashed out viciously with a gauntleted, savage fist. Harry reeled backward, fell to a sitting position. His adversaries converged down on him. Harry got his senses together, waited, kicked upward with both legs. There was an *oof* and a scream of pain.

Harry got to his feet, shoved one man against the other and, as they fell, pounced on them. Two heads smashed thuddingly together. The bodies went limp.

Harry looked down on them, panting. But he was grinning too. He turned around just as the attacked man weaved to his feet. Harry grabbed his arm, held him steady.

"You all right?" he demanded.

The fellow shook his head. Without a word, he jerked his arm free, made a curt, commanding movement with his hand and trotted toward the car that had knocked his machine from the road. Harry followed and, obediently and thankfully, edged in beside the man. The barely audible motor now took on new life as the car moved forward with a quick burst of speed.

The man kept to his driving for a full minute before he said anything. His primary object seemed to be to get away from the immediate vicinity of the short battle as quickly as possible.

HARRY sat stock-still, relaxing, running his hands through his straggling hair to get rid of the water. His teeth chattered. The other man cast him a quick glance, one of wary puzzlement, and reached to the simple dashboard to turn a knob. A grateful warmth bathed Harry's skin at once—so swiftly, in fact, that he decided it certainly couldn't be an ordinary heater.

He took time out now to study the driver. Gray coat of military cut. Trousers laced with gaudy leather thongs about the ankles. Metal braid sandals; and a curl-brim hat rimmed with almost microscopic little bells that jingled faintly.

The fellow himself was striking. He was approaching middle age, but there was the set of power in the breath of his shoulders, in the clear, unblinking gray eyes, in the clean-shaved, square jaw and the full, compressed lips.

As if he were conscious of Harry's scrutiny, the man spoke up, without taking his eyes from the road.

"Air goan?" The voice was harsh, abrupt, unconciliatory.

"What?" Harry said.

The man darted one look at him.

"Air goan? Air goan?" he snapped. "Cincinnati? Washington?"

"Oh!" Harry thought he understood now. But the fellow certainly did slur his words.

"I'm not going any place in particular," he said uneasily. "I'm—" He didn't know how to proceed with an explanation.

The man behind the wheel again shot him a glance, an impatient one.

"Doan ustan!" he said sharply. "Tah Ingis?" Then, as he saw Harry's perplexed look, "Oh, ne'er mi'! 'Ere!"

He reached into a pocket that was halfway down the satiny length of his satiny trousers, and drew out a card. Harry took it. He read:

| | |
|---|---|
| Miami | Televise: |
| Eastern Quadrant Bldg. | 9999.9 kc. |
| An'ru Ch'on | |
| Governor Eastern Quadrant | |
| Life License: | |
| No. 1000 | Quarterly O.K. |

An identification card, Harry thought helplessly. But the information, save for the peculiar name and address, was very much on the puzzling side. What was life license? A quarterly okay? Somehow, he managed to keep his mind away from the reference to television—where a telephone number would have been ordinarily.

But it was making him feel a little sick in the stomach, this whole thing. Beside him was a hard-eyed man who kept his eyes straining ahead through the now-lessening downpour—Governor An'ru Ch'on, of the Eastern Quadrant. A man, apparently, of no little importance, who spoke an extremely slurred version of the English—"Ingis?"—language.

Since he was important, for some reason assassins had been set on his trail. But why? And why the outlandish name? Why the peculiar dress? In horror, Harry knew that a thought he was trying to down was rising to his conscious mind.

Face paling, he made a convulsive motion to hand the card back to Governor An'ru Ch'on. Ch'on's glance became more penetratingly curious. If he felt any gratitude toward Harry for saving his life, he did not show it.

"Kee't!" he said peremptorily, waving the card inside.

His eyes swept up and down Harry Porter's bedraggled, tuxedoed figure. His thin brows drew down in a frown. With an impatient motion, he held out his hand.

"See oor denfation 'ard, man! Quar-'r'y ohay? Or 'unner?"

YOUNG PORTER made an uneasy motion and spread his hands wide.

"I don't have a card."

His nerves were twanging, and he was trembling. He felt as if he was going to be really sick.

"No card? Iposs!"

The man's gloved hand reached toward the transparent dashboard with sudden purpose. His finger inscribed a small circle. The car rolled to a twenty-foot stop from what had been at least a hundred-mile-an-hour velocity.

An'ru Ch'on twisted around in the seat, his straightforward gray eyes seeming to bore deep into Harry's scared brain. Outside there was the rumble of thunder, a dying splatter of rain against windows so transparent they might have been invisible. New light was spreading across the world, like a second dawn, as clouds were swept away from the face of the sun.

From the corners of his eyes, Harry saw the twin waterfalls thinning out to mere isolated arched streams, running down curved channels that were invisible! As the waterfalls died, so did they give birth to new vistas.

This was corn country. There were fields packed solid with yellow tassels, with row upon row of identical cornstalks. From top to bottom—more than three times a man's height—monster ears were packed in. Briefly, Harry caught sight of machines emitting a barely audible hum, moving swiftly, methodically through the rows.

An'ru Ch'on spoke, his voice harsh. "Air fum?"

When Harry did not answer, he snorted with plain impatience.

"Doan tah Inglis?" he demanded.

The official made a muttered exclamation, jabbed toward the dashboard with one gloved finger. The car built up speed again, finally was roaring down the sunlit highway at blurring speed.

Ch'on seemed to have a purpose now, for he twisted the wheel and, without a break in speed, made a curve and went roaring down another road.

Even through his daze, Harry noticed that on rounding the curve there had been no centrifugal effect. Nor was there any sensation of motion whatsoever; although, as suggested by the gently undulating terrain, the car rocked gently back and forth as it roared along.

Harry drew his mind away from this frightening and alien suggestion too. But he received the final, culminating shock when his eyes rested on a tiny grouping of English letters, etched in the form of a circle into the lower right-hand corner of the windshield.

Plastiglass. Form 2A. Manufactured at Birmingham and okayed by Vehicle Committee, January 1, 2940 A.D.

Harry Porter's muscles went rigid through his body. He had one chaotic glimpse into a past that he knew was now dead for him. Stiff and formal and bored, he had sat near the head of the table. Beside him, addressing an intensely attentive audience, his father had stood. Trim, immaculate, Dr. John Porter's deep, effortlessly carrying voice had held every ear.

"How long, gentlemen? Generally speaking, in one thousand years. Specifically, my calculations point out a month or so over that—twenty-nine forty-four A.D., to be exact. Yes, in that year, somewhere near the middle of July, the gravity cloud will strike!"

Harry Porter again heard that voice, and everything seemed to fall apart inside him. He slumped in the seat and his hands fell nervelessly to his sides. A bitter, cynical smile curled his lips. For now he knew where he was. Where he was? *When!*

In the era of the gravity cloud.

The inescapable fact was brought home to him. Dr. John Porter, now less than the dust from which he had sprung, had deliberately and with malice aforethought sent his own son one thousand years into the future!

## CHAPTER IV

### *The License Inspectors*

WHEN Governor Ch'on's car finally drew to an abrupt stop before a group of softly prismatic, single-storied edifices, Harry got out like an automaton.

Cornfields stretched away from this little cluster of buildings. Above, barely visible to the human eye, a sheet of peculiar, luminescent force played, stretching away into the distance, where it curved down at a road edge.

Harry Porter did not notice. He was shaken with grief and bitter rage and dazed incredulity.

He followed An'ru Ch'on across a lawn gaily patterned with flowers, and thence to a honeysuckled porch. Suddenly a door swung open, and a man with a full head of glossy gray hair falling down to his shoulders made his appearance. The fellow burst into a flood of speech, a wide grin splitting his deeply tanned, wrinkled face. He extended a hand and shook An'ru Ch'on's.

Ch'on spoke in delighted tones himself, then turned abruptly serious. He swung around to face Harry and spoke rapidly again. The other man's canny eyes sharpened. He nodded briefly.

The next thing Harry knew, An'ru Ch'on took his hand, shook it briefly and then bounded down the steps. In the space of a minute, the car disappeared down the road, taking Governor An'ru Ch'on with it.

Harry turned dazedly around, to surprise this new friend—or enemy? —as the man appraised him with a curious glitter in his eyes. Then he beckoned Harry, led him into the house and into a room adjoining the cool, simply furnished hall. The door closed and Harry was alone.

It was a softly sunlit room in which he found himself. He moved about, touching cool, milk-white chairs, gathering from them a measure of the peace and quiet calmness he so desperately needed. He stopped near the bed and with a sigh threw himself across it. Within a minute his shoulders were rising and falling under the impulse of sound sleep.

He awakened with a start. A door had closed softly. The sun was streaming on a low slant through the window. Morning! Harry lay motionless, collecting his thoughts, conscious of his raging thirst, of his splitting head. Then he heard the slow step of lightly moving feet. He turned his head—and gasped.

The girl moved quietly toward him, carrying a tray in her hands. Harry watched her, open-mouthed. Good heavens, that he should wake to find this vision in the same room with him! He grinned and drew himself to a sitting position, trying to smooth

A pale triangular beam of light stabbed toward the fugitives (Chap. IX)

out some of the wrinkles in his coat.

"Hello, wonderful!"

She looked at him curiously from level, hazel eyes as she set the tray on a table by the side of the bed. Then she took time out to frown at him.

"Doan ustan'," she said.

Her voice was as clear and attractive as the russet hair that fell far below her white-clad shoulders and dropped over her forehead in bangs.

Harry got to his feet and took a step toward her. He had to restrain a groan. His head was splitting. But he grinned anyway.

"You sure do 'ustan', sister! At least, if not my language, then this one!"

He wrapped his unsteady hands around her bare arms and crushed her to him and kissed her. Boy, this was like home again! Now, if he could only find a drink somewhere to clear the cobwebs from his brain—

He suddenly went reeling back as the girl cried out, wrenched away and smashed her hand full force to his face. He fell half across the bed, one hand to the red handprint on his cheek, his eyes wide with unbelief.

"Well!" he gasped. "All I did was try to kiss you!"

She glared at him, her lips pursed murderously. Then she swished around and half ran from the room, her metal braid sandals pattering on the floor.

HARRY stared after her. He came back to a sitting position, rubbing his cheek rebelliously.

"Okay, sister! I won't try that again." Then he added as an afterthought, "Maybe."

He turned around to the tray. Eggs. Bacon. Milk. His stomach curled at the mere thought of food, and he shoved the tray away in disgust. What he needed was a drink! His eyes turned longingly toward the corner and there he saw—

Five minutes later, Harry heard a step on the basement stairs. He turned around in a flurry, good red wine flowing from the spigot onto the floor before he fumblingly turned it off.

The gray-haired man stood looking at him, his eyes narrowed slightly. He came forward. Harry grinned weakly, looked abashedly at the cup of wine in his hand. Color was flooding up from his neck.

The gray-haired man spoke simply with a wave of his hand.

"Zhring, oo ish."

But his eyes retained their steely hardness.

Harry decided to drink. He did so, long and satisfyingly. Then he set the cup down, still self-conscious. He muttered something inane, but the other man wasn't paying any attention. He had drawn a notebook from his pocket and was writing. He tore the page off, handed it to Harry. Harry took it, puzzled.

The note was unmistakably in the English language, save for what appeared to be a few misspellings.

"Ch'on says you no a little English," it read.

Shaking his head in bewilderment, Harry borrowed the pencil and wrote on the same sheet.

"Yes, I no a little English. I can rite it better than I can speek it."

"My name is Jums Var'r," the other man wrote back. "My dawder wil teech you to speek English."

Harry scribbled a reply, his verbal tongue in his cheek.

"My name is Harry Porter. Pleased to meet you."

The gray-haired man composed another note and handed it to his guest. Without any more ado, he ascended the stairs and was gone. Harry dropped his eyes to the note, felt the red creeping up his neck again.

"Hav another drink," the note said.

Harry did.

Then began a period that lengthened into weeks. S'ee Var'r—for such was the name of Jums Var'r's "dawder"—came the next day. Without any sort of preliminaries, she commenced to teach Harry "Ingis." She went at it methodically, impersonally and with utter detachment.

English had deteriorated in that thousand years, Harry quickly perceived. The one rule that was most strongly accented was that all sounds involving more than a minimum

amount of effort had been dropped. Harry decided that this implied either laziness or efficiency.

Yet there were rules and irregularities that totally defied this law. One could not simply slur his speech; he had to slur it in particular ways.

"Peculiar" degenerated into "bulyer," but "particular" became "ticlar." The names of cities had the honor of being fully pronounced, except in isolated instances. Washington might have become "Wash'n'n." But it didn't.

Written English seemed vastly different from the spoken language. It had retained its individuality of a thousand years before, with the exception that unnecessary and some of the silent letters had disappeared.

"Our written language," said S'ee, her face impassive, her hazel eyes impersonal, "is archaic. But then the credo of our civilization—as well as that of the rest of the world—is changelessness. It would be quite dangerous even to think of changing anything, now that the world has got along so splendidly for these past five hundred years. Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right, and all his predecessors were right."

"Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right, and all his predecessors were right," Harry said, sighing with the slightest bit of impatience. "S'ee, you say that at least once during every lesson. Why?"

SHE countered with another question, her softly rounded, delicately tinted face still impassive.

"You should know," she said. "What country were you born in, and when?"

"United States," Harry said hopelessly. "Nineteen sixteen."

Her scarlet lips pursed.

"One would think you were born a thousand years ago. I don't appreciate your poor joke, if that's what it's supposed to be."

"I was born," said Harry feebly, "in a remote territory, and my education was neglected."

"There are no remote territories."

"Please, lady!" Harry desperately poured himself another glass of wine and gulped it. Emotionally upset, he hadn't stopped drinking since his arrival in the future. He leaned forward then and made a grab for the girl's hand. She withdrew it hastily.

"No sense of humor!" Harry said acidly.

S'ee regarded him as she would an insect.

"I don't like you, Harry Porter. I never saw anybody drink so much as you. I don't like the circles under your eyes. I don't like your easy morals—and keep our hands off me, please.

"The only reason I come here is to teach you to speak the English language. An'ru Ch'on is our friend, and he said you appeared helpless when he picked you on the road—"

"Ye gods! *Picked* me up? Why, I saved his life!"

"And you know so little about the world that he apparently saved yours by bringing you here."

She gathered up her books and swished toward the door. She paused then and looked back thoughtfully.

"But I am curious about you, Harry Porter—even if I don't like you. Tomorrow we will take a ride on the corn-pickers and I'll answer all the questions you ask me. If you promise to give me sensible answers to the questions I ask you."

Harry propped his head on his right fist and gave up.

"Okay, S'ee," he said in disgust. "But you won't believe me."

He ate his supper mechanically that evening and went to bed.

In the middle of the night he got up. The door smashed open and the next thing Harry knew, somebody was shaking his leg. He spluttered and woke up.

"Get up," Jums Var'r, S'ee's father, said urgently. "Go down to the basement. The license inspectors are here."

"The license inspectors?"

"Don't ask questions!"

Jums dragged him out of bed, guided him to the stairs and went down into the basement with him. He selected a large, nicked, dusty plastic chest, hauled the lid open and shoved Harry in. The lid banged on his ears.

Harry squatted in there for fifteen minutes, sweating, wondering. Then Jums came down the stairs and opened

the lid and let Harry get out.

"It's all right," he said, grabbing Harry's arm. "Get up to your room. In the morning, whatever happens, just remember to keep your mouth shut. I'll do the talking."

In answer to Harry's single question as he entered his room, Jums Var'r made a motion with his head over his left shoulder.

"It's all right, Porter. Jack Ulls'n, S'ee's fiancée, is a member of the life license inspectors, and he's staying here for the next week or so. Good night."

The door closed, and it was like the sound of a gong on the wrong answer in a quiz program.

Jack Ulls'n. S'ee's fiancée . . .

FOR the rest of the night Harry couldn't get to sleep. He got up twice and sat in the half gloom, sipping from the wine bottle, a scowl darkening his face.

He came into the breakfast room the next morning, dressed in the clothing they had given him some two weeks ago—fluffed silk shirt, satin, subtly striped trousers, metal braid sandals. They made him feel like a prince of Bagdad, and just as ridiculous.

There was a stranger sitting next to S'ee. The second he saw Harry, his thin eyebrows went up, and his thinner lips opened in a round "oh" of confused astonishment. His uniformed body swung halfway around to Jums Var'r.

"Who's this, Jums? Last night—"

Then an expression of anger crossed his face, and his chair clattered back as he came to his feet.

"Was he here last night?" Jack Ulls'n snapped.

Jums Var'r did not let a muscle of his face twitch.

"That question will not have to be answered," he said coolly.

Jack Ulls'n glared at him.

"This man was here last night!" he shouted. He turned his attention to the girl. "S'ee! He was here, wasn't he?"

She said nothing, merely shrugged her shoulders.

Ulls'n whirled on Harry as a last resort. Harry regarded him with sullen disfavor.

"None of your business, Ulls'n," he interposed coldly.

Ulls'n's close-set eyes blazed.

"See here!" he shouted. "I'm a life license captain. I was here with my men last night to inspect life licenses. I didn't find *you!* I won't ask you any impertinent questions now. But I will ask you the question my rank entitles me to. Have you received a quarterly okay?"

Harry opened his mouth to speak. But S'ee was quicker. She flew to her feet and clapped one hand over Harry's astonished mouth. She turned on Ulls'n stormily.

"You've no right to ask any questions, Jack Ulls'n," she snapped heatedly. "Yesterday is gone. You have to wait until the first of the month before you can inspect again. Until that time, whether or not Harry Porter has a quarterly okay or even a life license is none of your concern and you know it."

Then she took her hand away from Harry's mouth. She drew herself up imperiously and stamped her foot.

"You're a guest here, Jack Ulls'n. Please act like one!"

Ulls'n opened his lips twice to speak, his face acquiring a dull red. Then he choked. Suddenly he drew his chair up under him and attacked his meal savagely.

In the quiet that resulted, S'ee sat down and Harry followed suit.

"Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right," Jums Var'r said sententiously, "and all his predecessors were right."

Jack Ulls'n's head snapped up, and his rage seemed to die away with mention of that name. His face lighted.

"Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right, and all his predecessors were right." That seemed to relieve him.

S'ee repeated it.

"Okay, okay!" Harry grumbled inwardly.

But everybody seemed to be waiting for him expectantly.

"Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right, and all his predecessors were right!" he said helplessly.

Who the blazes is Ax'r-o-Ax'r? Harry wondered.

Harry stared, aghast, as the escaping ship plummeted through the force dome (Chap. XVI)

## CHAPTER V

### *To Washington*

THAT was Harry's first question when he and S'ee rode off on the corn-picker. Harry had seen these corn-pickers before. They were as near to being robots as any machinery on the face of the world. They moved on single flanged rails laid between the rows of corn.

Cupped tentacles weaved out from their complex insides, for all the world like human fingers, to pluck ears neatly from their stalks and deposit them in a compartment in the rear of the machine. The plants, however, were admirably fitted to cooperate.

It had been discovered, S'ee explained, that all plants gave off a characteristic radiation. Harry himself remembered reading something about it before his arrival in this alien world. The ripe fruit—the ears—gave off a certain quantity of these radiations which drew the tentacles of the machines like a magnet draws iron filings.

Other things he had learned from S'ee. This rich land was what he had known as Indiana. Farm country stretched almost unbroken throughout the state, corn predominating.

When Harry had evinced curiosity about the faintly luminous sheet of force that hung a hundred feet above the ground, S'ee had seemed astonished.

"But why shouldn't it be there? Edible corn couldn't very well grow without the force dome. Our force dome extends for a hundred miles in either direction, and comes down only when it crosses a road."

"The waterfalls!" Harry exclaimed.

It was puzzling to S'ee that he shouldn't have understood that.

"Naturally," she explained, "we don't actually let rain *fall* on the crops. They might get too much or too little. The force domes simply drain the water off into channels which take the water to the irrigation tanks. Naturally, from the road, I suppose the water draining off would look like waterfalls.

"You should know that," she added, shaking her head. "It would be sheer idiocy to try to grow anything without the force dome. Why, insects and weeds might actually make the stalks of uneven height; the ears might actually be of all sizes instead of just one!"

Now, as they rode out of sight of the group of prismatically sparkling, fairyland farmhouses, Harry asked the girl about Ax'r-o-Ax'r.

She answered his questions from now on without any reference to his ignorance. Ax'r-o-Ax'r was the Ruler of Rulers, the Mighty of the World, the Mentor of All. He was the present sovereign of an unbroken line of rulers who extended back five hundred years. Under the reign of this dynasty, civilization had endured unchanged, and such indeed was the credo: changelessness.

"And it will exist unchanged for the rest of eternity," said S'ee with equanimity.

She plucked at a long leaf that brushed her oval face and let it flutter away on the slight breeze.

Harry tensed a little, and something started thrumming at the back of his mind. And try though he would, the thought insisted on coming out.

"Forever?" he demanded.

His voice was strained. He knew there was a haunted look in his eyes.

"And what," he said slowly, "about the gravity cloud?"

"The gravity cloud?"

Harry's hands tensed around his crossed legs.

"So you never heard of the gravity cloud!" he said through his teeth.

She shook her russet head. Sunlight played through it.

"I never heard of anything like that. What is it, Harry?"

SOMETHING hopeful and peaceful turned to ashes in Harry's mouth. He felt like grinding his teeth and groaning. What in heaven's name had he stumbled into? Was he the only man in all the world who knew

anything about the gravity cloud?

"S'ee," he said hoarsely, "tell me how it was that civilization stopped progressing."

The girl was taken slightly aback. But she seemed to agree that progress had halted. The general tenor of her words, however, convinced Harry that she considered this best.

She told him the story.

Many hundreds of years ago, man conquered the Solar System. He had expected to find life. He did not. He went farther, and farther still. All the dreams man had dreamed had come to nothing. Not only was there no life on the planets, these alien worlds were not even livable.

Finally man landed on Pluto, and looked toward the stars. But man was disillusioned. Struggle toward the stars, only to find the same futility and death he had found on all the planets of the Solar System save Earth?

The widening circle stopped. Then it contracted back to Earth. Man was no longer interested in the planets. Thus the age of retrogression from science had set in.

Civilization itself almost degenerated.

Then a great ruler had risen, and humanity was stabilized at one level. There no longer seemed a need for progress. Neither were there any grounds for decadence. The happy medium had been reached, and mankind was at the millenium, balanced forever.

Harry reached forward and caught the girl's hand. She strained away from him, until he held her eyes with his desperate look.

"Don't," he said tensely. "I'm shaking like a tuning fork. I feel as if I need something to hold on to. This civilization of yours scares me to death. It's in for a jolt—but I don't know who's going to jolt it! S'ee, I'm going to tell you my story, and I swear that every word I speak is going to be the truth!"

Her hand tensed in his. Then she moved about on the hot metal surface of the rumbling, steadily rolling corn-picker. S'ee faced him squarely.

"I get no pleasure from your holding my hand," she said. "But if it gives you strength, I will not mind. Please tell me all about yourself, and what the gravity cloud is. And keep looking at me, because then I'll be able to tell whether you are lying or not."

He started at the beginning, his voice ringing with emotion, and ended up with a breathless rush of words.

"In a little more than two years, S'ee! That's how long the human race has got! Then the gravity cloud—it will kill us all, drag down everything that humanity has done. You believe me, don't you?"

In spite of himself, Harry was shaking, because an enormous fear was welling up within him. If S'ee, alert and intelligent girl that she was, didn't believe, then who would? There were ten billion persons in the world now. Science had been forgotten, except as it existed. *What if no one believed him?*

"Harry, we will have to tell my father," S'ee decided. "And then, you will have to go before Ax'r-o-Ax'r!"

"Me?" He drew back. His voice cracked. "It isn't my place to do that, S'ee! What about this life license business? The quarterly okay? What do they mean?"

THE girl drew her hand from his with a sudden motion. Her hazel eyes were cold, her voice frigid.

"Everybody must have a life license. It is simply a license showing that he has the right to live—that is, that he will fit into our civilization as a useful citizen. Those who do not fit into the pattern have their licenses revoked.

"It means death, of course. The quarterly okay is given when one reaches twenty-five years of age. It simply means that his license is renewed for another twenty-five years."

"But you know I haven't got a life license!"

"Yes," she said, unperturbed.

"Then if I go before Ax'r-o-Ax'r, it means my death!"

She studied him hard and long. Then she got up and started climbing down the metal ladder on the side of the corn-picker.

"The human race means more than

you do," she said coldly, as her face disappeared over the side. "You will have to risk your life for it!"

Stunned, his head whirling, Harry followed her over the side and dropped to the moist earth. He followed S'ee to another corn-picker going in the opposite direction.

Jack Ulls'n met them as they came toward the house. Ostentatiously, his jaw thrust out, his glance at Harry poisonous, he took S'ee's arm and led her into the house. Harry grinned twistedly, in spite of the throbbing feeling of disaster gnawing in his mind.

Ulls'n didn't like to have S'ee go off with someone else. Especially somebody who Ulls'n was certain didn't have a quarterly okay.

Five minutes later, Se'ee had found her father. With Jack Ulls'n, she entered Harry's room.

He looked up, set down the wine bottle and shakily gulped his drink. He looked from face to face. For the first time, the hostility in which Jums Var'r held him was made clear. The man disliked him, didn't even trust him. Why?

Defiantly he finished off his drink and slammed the glass down. Three people, every one of them showing their own brand of animosity!

"Well?" he snapped.

Jums Var'r's level blue eyes held his.

"My daughter," he said quietly, "says you have something to tell me."

Before Harry could speak, S'ee raised her hand.

"Please tell him, Harry."

He glared at her.

"And go before Ax'r-o-Ax'r and have my head lopped off for not having a life license? No, thank you!"

"No license!" Jack Ulls'n burst out explosively. "I thought so!" His close-set eyes were malicious.

"You shouldn't have said that, Harry," S'ee said iritably. "Now you have to go ahead and explain why you haven't got one."

She moved forward and placed a cool, pleading hand on his arm. Harry gave up. Sullenly he told his story.

Silence lay heavily on the air after he finished. Jums spoke presently, fingering his graying mustache, his old eyes dwelling on secret speculations.

"I won't say I believe you, Porter. Nor will I insist on disbelieving you. But the fact is that I *have* heard of this theory!"

"You have?" In spite of himself, Harry surged forward, face lighting with relief. "Then they're working on it? The information was handed down? They know of the book my father wrote?"

His nerves suddenly stopped their thrumming, and a wild thankfulness took possession of him. If they did know of it, then the whole responsibility was taken off his shoulders!

BEFORE Jums could speak again, Jack Ulls'n broke in.

"I don't believe it!" he said cuttingly. "It's a neat trick of his to get out of the fact that he hasn't a license. It won't do any good."

Ulls'n took the floor, and his voice rose excitedly.

"This amounts to heresy! Is there anything about this gravity cloud in our books? Do the instructors teach it? More important"—and his voice turned triumphant—"if Ax'r-o-Ax'r had known anything about it, he wouldn't have kept it secret! And if Ax'r-o-Ax'r never heard of it, how could it possibly be true?"

For the first time, S'ee showed some doubt.

"That's true," she muttered, glancing uneasily at Harry. "All necessary knowledge is now in the books. Additional knowledge has always come from Ax'r-o-Ax'r."

"And it's heresy for this upstart to even suggest that there is knowledge that is not in the books!" Ulls'n finished up.

Jums Var'r stiffened a little. To Harry's astonishment, he appeared to backtrack entirely.

"You're right, Jack, of course," he conceded. "I was merely about to mention that there was another man some ten years ago, who approached Ax'r-o-Ax'r with the same theory. But Ax'r-o-Ax'r rightly concluded that the man was a menace to true thought, and jailed him in the dungeons below

the Administration Building. He's still there, I understand."

"And the right place for him too," Ulls'n snapped. "Why should crackpots disrupt our civilization by going beyond the discoveries already laid down in the books?"

Then he faced Harry.

"So it appears that I'll be taking you before the Death Committee, my fine liar!" he intoned smoothly.

Something in Harry snapped. He roared a curse and threw himself forward at Ulls'n. But Jums caught his arms in a grip of steel.

"Stop it, you young fool!" he bit out.

Harry struggled furiously and then stopped. Distinctly, with no room for doubt, Jums' left eyelid came down in a slow wink!

"Stay here for tonight in this room," Jums said abruptly. He stepped back. "Tomorrow we'll give this thing a little more thought. Come on, S'ee and Jack."

Again Ulls'n took S'ees bare arm. As the door closed, he threw a smirk of mingled triumph and dislike back into Harry's face.

"There'll come a day, my fine-feathered friend!" Harry muttered savagely under his breath.

It was early the next morning when Jums woke him up.

"Get up, Porter. Get dressed," the old man said in a bare whisper.

Like an automaton, Harry dressed, his heart thudding painfully, his eyes on Jums' indistinct form.

Jums handed him his billfold, which had been in his tuxedo.

"If you are truly what and who you say you are, Harry Porter," S'ee's father said hurriedly, "remember that Governor An'ru Ch'on, although he suspects you of something I dare not mention, can also be your benefactor. Now follow me!"

Bewildered, Harry followed him into the yard. The Moon was riding high in the heavens, shimmering with a certain amount of distortion through the force dome. At the side of the roadway, the motor of a long, sleek, bulletlike car sounded. Jums opened the door and shoved Harry in.

"Good luck!" he said and closed the door softly.

In the next second, the car began to move, then shot down the road with blinding velocity. Harry darted a panic-stricken glance toward the wheel.

S'ee Var'r's lips smiled at him through the gloom. It was the first smile she had given him. Her hands were gloved, clasped around the wheel.

"It's very simple, Harry Porter," she whispered. "We're off to Washington! I believe you, and my father believes you, but it might be suicide to admit it with a staunch patriot like Jack Ulls'n around!"

## CHAPTER VI

*Prisoners*

EIGHT hours later, S'ee's competent, gloved hands on the wheel, the automobile was making its final, hundred-mile-an-hour descent

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on Washington. During those hours, a mighty civilization had unrolled before Harry Porter's eyes.

Much of it he did not understand. But he had a remaining picture of people, people everywhere. Vast plazas paraded at the heart of cities that had swollen until they were unimaginable to his twentieth-century mind.

Louisville he saw as a metropolis seen across the muddy, eternally flowing waters of the Ohio, its unending spires and turrets as airy and fantastic as the cities of Arabian legend.

Cincinnati was a sprawling giant of colorful, rearing skyscrapers that occupied a quarter of Ohio and part of Kentucky.

Roads, built tier upon tier, became enduring monuments in themselves. Down the top level of these roads the car had plummeted, other machines passing at blurring velocity.

Once they had been headed for certain head-on collision. S'ee coolly jabbed her finger against the instrumentless dashboard. In the space of a single second, the car's speed had dropped from more than a hundred miles per hour to exactly nothing—with no disconcerting effects whatever.

S'ee smiled as she pointed upward at a bullet-shaped airship, which faded into the distance as they watched. It had neither propellers, wings nor rocket jets.

"They call it the reversed Fitzgerald Contraction drive, Harry," she explained. "I don't know the exact theory, except that all objects in motion contract in a direction parallel to that motion.

"It's a natural law that has been turned around. All our vehicles use the principle. The machinery contracts the atoms of the vehicle, and everything in the vehicle, in the direction desired.

"The contraction takes away the motion. That's the reason we can go around corners—or come to a dead stop—and feel no acceleration effects."

Harry shook his head in wonderment. They drove on.

Of the people Harry saw—they had stopped once in a cool restaurant palace of glass and tinted marble—mostly he remembered the look of softness, of laxness, of physical and mental incompetence. If that was a picture of the human race—

Yet the destruction of billions upon billions of humans, however, soft, made him wince. He could not condemn them. But staring through the windshield at the broad road as it fed under the car, the cold finger of apprehension touched at his spine. Would Ax'r-o-Ax'r condemn them instead, unknowingly?

But S'ee drove serenely on, her classic profile untouched with fear. Some of Harry's own apprehension receded. Surely the girl knew what she was doing.

As the afternoon sun touched at his neck, they were flashing through the residential suburbs of Washington. Then the main mass of the world's capital leaped into view. It was such a ponderous, awesome sight that it was painful to watch.

Rank upon rank, tier upon tier, the mighty structures loomed against the skyline, cut here and there by web-like road structures. And so far stretched this gargantuan latter-day city that mists overhung its farthest ramparts.

One capable gloved hand on the wheel, S'ee pointed out a single flaming red spire that rose from a circular grouping of edifices.

"The king-building," she said. Her face was relaxed, radiant with an inner awe. "It is the home of Ax'r-o-Ax'r, our Mentor. From there he rules the world, and disperses his beneficence down upon us."

Harry watched her profile, the classic curve of her nose and lips and cheeks. His lips curled.

"Beneficence!" he said.

S'EE turned around as though something vulgar had been said.

"Do you doubt it?" she demanded, and her eyes flashed angrily. "There has been no greater personage than Ax'r-o-Ax'r in all the centuries of human history. His personality reaches into the innermost sanctum of our lives. He leads us around and

past all discontentments. He is the ultimate—"

"They taught you all that bunk from the books, didn't they?" Harry snapped.

S'ee's eyes narrowed.

"Harry Porter, it is not wise to talk that way. You are throwing yourself on his mercy."

"That's what I thought," Harry said grimly. "What makes you think he will be more merciful to me than to the old man he threw in jail ten years ago—and all for the same general story I'm going to tell him?"

"That old man," she retorted, "was probably caught without a life license. If he had gone to Ax'r-o-Ax'r and admitted that he had none, and then told his story—"

"But what if they catch *me* before I get to Ax'r? What if Jack Ulls'n sends word ahead that I'm coming, and tips them off?"

Her scarlet lips pursed.

"It would get me in trouble too," she admitted.

"So?" said Harry.

Her eyes flashed.

"You have no right to talk about Jack like that, Harry Porter. You insult me when you do, since he's my mental and physical counterpart as decided by the Eugenics Committee."

Harry swung halfway around in his seat, his mouth falling open.

"Good grief! You mean they decide *that* for you in this god-forsaken monotony of a world? Aren't you in love with him?"

"I am in love with him. He is in love with me. How else could it be, since Ax'r-o-Ax'r, acting through the Eugenics Committee, has decided we are natural mates?"

Then, abruptly, she brought the car to a stop.

Something stopped inside Harry at the same time. All his carefully built up hopes, his decision to trust in the girl's belief in what she was doing, came to exactly nothing.

The car was now beneath the arching entrance to subterranean road levels which cut through the city. Standing on a red, glowing, plastic dais were three road guards. They were looking at the car. It was nothing new, Harry thought. This was a ritual that had been followed at the entrances to other cities.

One road guard would step up and casually ask to see S'ee's life license, and request her business. Then she would be directed off into the proper road level.

Now it was the same thing—or so Harry tried to convince himself.

S'ee cast him a serene, untroubled glance.

"They will pass us through," she said confidently.

Harry's nerves had been vibrating like so many plucked harp strings. Now he relaxed, his breath coming out in a long drawn sigh. There really wasn't anything to worry about. S'ee knew her business. Jack Ulls'n simply wouldn't—

But as the seconds lengthened into a whole minute, a muscle in S'ee's face jumped. Thereafter things happened quickly. One of the road guards came down from the dais, strode quickly toward the car. His eyes were visibly ironic.

He stuck his head in the car, glanced once at S'ee, then fastened his ironically mirthful eyes on Harry.

S'ee made a pathetic, jerking motion.

"My life license," she faltered.

The guard kept his eyes on Harry.

"Never mind, Miss Var'r," he smirked. "I know *you've* got one. Move over—please!"

HARRY went cold, rigid. He was conscious of panic, of acid fear welling up inside him. S'ee turned her head slowly toward him, sudden tears blurring her eyes.

"What do you think of your precious Jack Ulls'n now!" Harry blurted out.

Abruptly all her soft despair was gone. Shock crossed her face. She turned her head away.

"It's too bad," she said evenly, "you haven't got a drink now. It's where all your courage comes from!"

She moved over just far enough to allow the road guard to slip behind the wheel. The door closed softly and the car dipped into a subterranean avenue.

They were on their way to an audience with Ax'r-o-Ax'r. Not of their own free will, as they had planned, but as prisoners. And the difference was, Harry knew, all the difference between life and death!

## CHAPTER VII

### *Ax'r-o-Ax'r*

THREE hours later—they had been held incommunicado in separate rooms during that time—Harry and S'ee were marching down a rose-marble corridor that was set with exotic plants and washed through with fresh, spiced air. Behind the two prisoners strode two guards, each with a three-barreled weapon in his hand.

Here on the thirteenth level in the heart of the king-building—the World Administration Building was its proper title — the prisoners were halted before a double door set with gold leaf and glinting, semi-precious stones.

They stood before this door now, S'ee's bare arm almost touching Harry Porter's. The girl stood straight, tall, her chin up. Harry sent a glance toward her which he tried not to make too desperate.

Without turning her head, S'ee spoke to him for the first time.

"You need your courage now, Harry," she breathed. "You must say the right things. Please."

But it didn't help. And he had no further opportunity to bolster himself, for the double doors swung slowly, majestically open.

Harry found himself scanning the width of a room that was shadowed with flickering, mystically burning tapers. And suddenly his tenseness seemed to be gone! He didn't know why, yet he felt as if there had been a great outpouring of sympathy, of understanding welling into him.

His eyes glued themselves in fascination to an ornately wrought chair of ivory and gold rearing from a depression set into the floor. And in this chair, this throne, most of his body beneath the level of the floor, sat a man. Harry strained to see him.

A voice filled the room with soft, muted boomings.

"Guards, bring the pawns in."

"Advance," said a guard.

Harry moved forward, almost unconscious of S'ee's presence beside him. The Ruler of the World was shocking in contrast to what Harry had expected. Something of relief sang in him. The beneficence of which S'ee had talked was—reality!

For here were the eyes of a ruler, with nothing of the despot in them. Black eyes, tufted over with beetling black brows, but eyes that were straightforward, guileless, vital with life and understanding!

They stood now upon the edge of the throne-pit. And Harry was looking *down* on the man! He forced himself from the fascination of the ruler's eyes. Briefly he took in a picture of abnormally broad shoulders, of a heavy beard on a square-cut face, of rich robes colored clashingly and startlingly.

S'ee dropped on one knee.

"My Master!" she murmured reverently.

Harry felt no shame in following suit.

Then the lips of Ax'r-o-Ax'r, bearded as heavily as those of an oriental potentate, moved in booming speech.

"It is good, pawns. The stars look upon us all with great favor in their unchanging glory. Now I will hear for what sins the man and woman have been brought before me." And he smiled, gently, benevolently.

He dropped his bearded chin into the palm of his hairy hand. His eyes bored into Harry hypnotically.

"Speak," the guard behind Harry said softly. "The ruler will listen."

Harry wet his lips. Finally he trusted his voice.

"We have committed no sin, Master," he whispered.

He felt the full power of the great and ominous tidings that he bore taking hold of him, erasing fear and doubt. His arms raised in unconscious dramatization. Words, vibrant, compelling, began to flow from him.

He told of his being thrown into

the future, fictionalizing some details so that confusion should be at a minimum. He told of his adventures, stressing always his natural lack of a life license. And finally, he told of the doom certain to visit this Solar System.

HE KNEW now that there was genuine understanding in this great man's eyes. And kindliness! What had his fears been for? For nothing!

He spoke as in a dream, thrilling to the rise and fall of his own voice. He spoke of the unequal distribution of gravitational substance in the universe. Of its effects on nebulae and stars. Of ice ages and dinosaurs. Of asteroids and Saturnian rings.

Finally he finished with a graphic description of Earth's falling nearer the sun, of the consequent incineration of the human race.

The silence of the room was broken only by the faraway sounds of a great metropolis. Tapers flickered under the impulse of an artificial breeze. Ax'r sat motionless, bearded chin still supported in one palm.

S'ee broke the silence, eyes shining.

"It is true, Master, true!" she breathed.

And then Ax'r spoke.

"The latter half of this tale I have heard before. It was told me by a man who now lies moldering in the dungeons. Perhaps I did wrong to imprison him, after all."

While Harry stared hopefully, all the weight of fear lifting from his shoulders, Ax'r rose to his full height —which could not have been more than five and a half feet. His fanciful, mystic costume draped around him, he raised one hand to the heavens. He stood in that position a full moment. Then abruptly he sank backward to his seat.

And now his voice changed, subtly. Harry felt that change. He frowned a little.

"The unchanging stars have told me the truth," said Ax'r-o-Ax'r. "I should not have imprisoned the man. I should have executed him at once!"

Something icy cold touched Harry's spine.

"Executed him, Master?" he gasped.

"He was a menace to true thought. His mind broadcast telepathically a lie which was received and enlarged upon by you, pawn!"

"A lie?" Harry cried in unbelief. "But—but—"

Suddenly he was struggling to his feet, face contorted, as the full force of what had happened struck him.

"A lie!" he cried. "But it *isn't* a lie! It's the truth. You can't do this—"

Suddenly he had been precipitated from thankfulness to horror to rage. He was about to throw himself at Ax'r when guards grabbed at his arms and clapped hard hands across his mouth, cutting off his furious invective. He struggled, to no avail.

He caught sight of S'ee, still kneeling, her eyes turned up to his, full of pity and fear. S'ee was afraid, too! Abruptly he quieted, fastened his burning eyes on Ax'r.

The ruler went on speaking, staring fixedly at him.

"The stars, unchanging, tell me the truth. You have been in mental communion with a man who chose a similar means of excusing himself for his lack of a life license. You have added to his story some lies of your own.

"Time travel? Nonsense! I, Ax'r-o-Ax'r say it is quite fanciful. It would disrupt our civilization. A gravity cloud would also disrupt our civilization. Since our civilization can never change its pattern, your story is entirely a lie."

Harry choked helplessly.

Ax'r's arm raised. He pointed at S'ee.

"She is an accomplice of this pawn. She will stay in my court and dance for a decade." The alliteration seemed to please him. "Dance for a decade. As for the man, he is non-existent. Therefore he must die."

S'ee knelt with bowed head, saying no word. It was worse seeing her that way than to hear Ax'r's sentence. There was no appeal, for this was the highest court! Harry's muscles gave way, and all his sternly repressed fear returned to him. Tears, hot, stinging, smarted at his eyes. The

guard took his hand from Harry's mouth.

Then there were slow footsteps, approaching from behind him, and Harry slowly turned his head. He stared with smoldering, bitter eyes at the trim figure of the life license captain, standing now on the edge of the sunken pit.

Jack Ulls'n did not look at the prisoners, though both S'ee and Harry were watching him. An almost worshipful expression crossed Ulls'n's face as he dropped to one knee.

"My Master!" he whispered.

Ax'r's hand raised in a gesture of benediction.

"Welcome, pawn. I have summoned you to request you to state your desire. In making known to me the existence of this non-existent being, our civilization pursues its patterned way. You have our gratitude."

"No service can be too large for my Mentor," Ulls'n whispered, apparently overcome. "If there must be a reward, I beg only the small privilege of a stay-order."

"It is granted, pawn."

Ax'r made another motion. Two guards grabbed Harry, whirled him toward the door. But with a low, blasphemous curse, he broke free, sent the guards staggering back.

"You'll get your reward for this, Ulls'n, and it won't be a stay-order—whatever that is!" he shouted, before they caught him again.

Ulls'n's teeth flashed. As if he knew what would infuriate Harry the most, he moved closer to S'ee. But Harry transferred his eyes to hers.

"Good-bye, S'ee," he said, chokingly. "It—it was nice knowing you."

The guards hurried him away.

## CHAPTER VIII

*The Library*

FOR two days Harry sat in his cell in the upper dungeon level beneath the World Administration Building, sullenly brooding, paying small attention to a peculiarly loquacious guard who came on eight hours out of every twenty-four.

This guard was evidently a rather low-caste specimen. His hair straggled over one side of his head, uncombed, and a reddish stubble of beard, just short enough to escape condemnation from the captain of the guards, graced his angular, lazy face. On top of that he murdered his English. Which, Harry thought bitterly, was compounding a felony, considering the present state of the language.

"Ye're a funny chap. Won't talk at all, will ye?"

The guard plastered himself against the cells, peering into the semi-darkness, his eyes as friendly and beseeching as those of a dog.

"Seems you'd *like* to talk, since you ain't goin' to do much of that after next week. You ain't like the old non-existent on the next floor below. Now there's an old fellow what likes to talk! He jabbers so much, in fact, you wish he'd shut up."

Harry looked up.

"What's non-existent?" he demanded.

"Oh, showin' some interest, eh? Say, you loosen up, and me and you'll get along fine."

Harry repeated his question.

The guard looked puzzled.

"Why, you're a non-existent, ain't you? Ain't got no life license, have you? You're as non-existent as they come. Shoulda been dead a long while ago."

Harry got to his feet and went to the celldoor.

"I'm beginning to get the keynote to this civilization," he said grimly. "Anything is non-existent that nobody wants around."

"Logical, ain't it?"

"A non-existent gravity cloud," Harry muttered savagely. "What nonsense!"

The guard's face lighted and he pointed an emphatic finger.

"Say! That's just what the old non-existent jabbers about. Something about gravity. Only it don't make no sense. Now *you're* sensible. What about this here gravity cloud?" He seemed genuinely interested.

Harry regarded the man with disfavor. But his sullen, indifferent

mood was falling away. Someone else in this civilization knew about the gravity cloud. But because the minions of the law had discovered that his life license had been revoked, he had been taken before Ax'r-ô-Ax'r, and thrown into prison.

Harry's pulses started to thrum. Somehow, some way, he had to fight, to get out of this mess. Fight to the last ditch, anyway. His fingers tightened on the bars.

"Who is this old fellow?" he demanded.

The guard shook his head sadly.

"Non-existents don't have no name. They just put 'em in the cells. Half the times they forget 'em."

Harry desperately looked up and down the cell block. A thought was simmering in his head, a plan which could hardly result in freedom. But it was worth trying, at least.

He sought the guard's eyes and held them.

"Listen," he said tensely. "There isn't any harm in this, but—I have to write a letter!"

The guard seemed surprised.

"Why, you go right ahead and write it."

He fumbled in his mussed uniform, going from pocket to pocket. He extracted what looked like a pencil. He found an old, dirty envelope. He gave both to Harry.

"Ain't nothing wrong with writin' a letter, is there? Here. You go ahead and write."

HARRY took the writing materials doubtfully. The guard's eyes met his, seemed to flicker briefly. The man turned back up the corridor.

"But I ain't goin' to mail it, no sir! Not even if you dropped it outside the cell here for me to pick up."

He was gone.

Harry stared after him, then dropped his eyes to the dirty envelope. Unconsciously he rubbed a finger over it. The dirt felt away like magic, showing up on his finger. Well, that was good! They made paper you could erase with your finger.

In the dim light of the cell he composed his note. The pencil made thin marks which had the same appearance and quality as pen and ink. He wrote:

To:
Governor An'ru Ch'on,
Eastern Quadrant Building,
Miami, Florida.
Sir:

You remember me. I saved your life on an Indiana road. I am prisoner in a cell in the World Administration Building. Would you like to come and watch my execution next week?

He signed his name feverishly, and then slipped the oblong of paper between two bars. Then he went back to his bed, turned his face to the wall and lay there tensely. He heard the guard pass by once, twice. Then there was a rustling sound.

Harry didn't look around. The guard didn't want to incriminate himself.

He fell into a restless doze. He dreamed of S'ee. She was running, running, growing smaller in actual size, as gravity took hold of her. The gravity was shrinking her. Suddenly Jack Ulls'n caught up with her, took her in his arms—

In a cold sweat he awoke, gasping her name, his heart filled with panic. Then came reality. He raised his eyes. The little white oblong of paper was gone.

* * * * *

The days passed. Guards walked their beats, were replaced regularly. Rough tasteless food was brought on large metal plates. The red-headed guard lost none of his loquacity, but did not refer to the letter.

He stopped once to mention that a diplomatic function was going on in the building upstairs. And An'ru Ch'on was there! Harry gripped the bars. So Ch'on by this time had received the letter!

"Seems they call it the five hundred sixty-seventh meeting of the sectional governors of the World Unity. Everybody's there. Know An'ru Ch'on? Know him, huh?"

"I met him once," Harry said cautiously.

The guard admired Harry.

"Oh, you did! Say, he's quite a fella. A big man and good looking.

You know the ladies go for him? But he's always got something on his mind, so he don't pay any attention."

The guard shook his tousled head.

"Poor fella! I hear rumors they're trying to convict him of some kind of treason."

Harry gripped the bars. Treason! His mind fled back to that day he had rescued Ch'on from assassins on an Indiana road. Was it possible that those men had been in the employ of Ax'r-o-Ax'r? His lips set grimly. If Ch'on was involved in treason against the tyrant with the benevolent smile, then he, Harry Porter, was all for it.

"Treason for what?" He tried to appear casual.

"Claim it's against civilization. Claim he don't like the way things are run." The guard's face showed unbelief. "Can you imagine it? Here we got a perfect civilization, running along smooth as oil, and Ch'on running his end of it as good as could be expected, and they try to accuse him of that."

Then the guard's face twisted into a malevolent scowl.

"But if they ever get the goods on him, I hope he gets it good, the dirty—! Ax'r-o-Ax'r is right, and all his predecessors were right."

THE guard stalked away on his round of the cells, his hand on his three-lensed weapon. Harry stared after him with sinking hopes. An'ru Ch'on—in danger of impeachment or worse. The one man who could help him, and in so doing help the world.

All of his old bitterness returned. It was hopeless, after all.

But Harry was wrong. The next morning his cell door opened, and the red-haired guard beckoned to him sharply. Harry stepped out, holding his breath. The cell door clanged shut.

The guard pulled his weapon, his eyes flecks of brittle hardness.

"Get moving," he said. Gone was the easy-going nature, the soft voice, the loquacity. He prodded the weapon into Harry's side. "Any funny moves, non-existent, and you'll die *first!*"

They moved down the corridor, past cells, down a flight of stairs. Harry heard a burst of voices that quickly faded away as a ponderous, almost invisible door closed behind them. He guessed they had just passed the guardroom.

They moved now through absolute dark, but the guard's step was sure. He forced Harry along at the point of his weapon, down, always down. Then they stopped.

There was a dim burst of light that grew as Harry's eyes accustomed themselves. He was looking down an aisle bordered on both sides by towering steel shelves. The moldiness of an underground section smote his nostrils. He turned slowly.

Now the red-haired guard was standing at ease, one hip seemingly thrown out of joint. His lips were set in a crooked smile.

"I've been looking you over for quite a spell, pardner," he said, "But I don't know. Still, I got my orders. I have to trust you, whether or not it means my neck!"

Harry shrugged cynically.

"I'm not in a position where I can distrust anybody."

He looked at the weapon. But the other man did not holster it.

"Know where you are?" the guard said abruptly. "Oh, never mind. It's the library. *The* library, understand? There's more than a million books here, in steel cabinets and shelves. The outlawed books. That is, the books that don't have any sense to them. The ones that don't agree with what goes on in the world are all right here in this place."

"But—"

The guard squinted at him, a challenge growing in his eyes.

"Listen," he said. "You're looking for a book, ain't you? The book your father wrote! Now go to it!"

Without another word, he turned and was lost in the gloom.

Harry started forward after him, as the shadows and sounds of this strange underground library seemed to close around.

"Hey!"

But his only answer was the sound of a closing door as the guard went out leaving him alone.

## CHAPTER IX

*Jums Var'r*

SOME of the eerie ancientness of this vast, underground library seemed to seep into Harry's bones as he stood there. When he finally moved, it was with sluggish, uncertain step. Vaguely he knew that the succession of events had had a numbing reaction on him.

He gritted his teeth and broke into a stumbling half-trot. Dust rose in choking clouds. But the pound of his feet, the vibration and the sound, seemed to have the effect he wanted. Inaction, fear, the feeling of helplessness dropped from him.

He had a job to do.

Deliberately he stopped, and with a sudden vicious jerk pulled down a hinged panel from the towering, cobwebbed structure to his left. Dust mushroomed out. But stacked vertically in the space revealed, Harry saw a dozen thick tomes, bound so similarly that he guessed they must compose a set of books.

With shaking fingers he drew one out. But it was written in a foreign language; Italian, probably. He put it back, closed the panel over the set. His eyes traveled up and down the corridor. Unending steel shelves, stretching into the gloom.

Where was his father's book? How would he find it?

He uttered an expressive curse. This could easily turn into a lifetime job. Unless—unless—

"Of course!" he breathed.

In the next two hours, he made a complete survey of the library. Its vastness was staggering, for in length it ran for three city blocks, and in width little less than that. Between the towering shelves there were narrow aisles. The books were protected behind hinged steel panels.

Harry began to feel a vast admiration for the despotic ruler who must have stored these books here originally. The man had taken pains to see that they would stay intact for hundreds of years.

But why? If the books were banned as being untrue, why hadn't they been destroyed? Some lingering doubt in that long-dead ruler's mind that some day these books would come in handy?

Harry grinned crookedly. Just one of those books would come in handy now—but where would he find it? If there wasn't some sort of filing system—

Weary, hungry, footsore, tired of the soundlessness, the eerie tread of his feet on the dusty, cracked cement floor, he made his way back to the point where the red-haired guard had left him.

He found what he had half expected: a tray of food. He seized on it eagerly. The milk disappointed him, but he drank it down. A good stiff Scotch and soda would have been much better.

He renewed his search, going at it with a dogged patience. It was more hours before he found the file; but he felt a new surge of energy when he did. At one time, these had been ordinary green filing cases, such as might have been found in any metropolitan library of his own time.

But dust and the oppressive weight of the centuries had turned them soot black. Row upon row these cases stretched away, forming an exact square at the geometrical center of the library.

Experimentally, Harry flicked open a case. Dust rolled. He blew more dust away from brittle yellow cards. The printing was intact, but faded. Excitement showed in his eyes, for by some chance these index cards noted books dealing with the technique of space flight.

One title read:

**The Relation of Gravitons to Electrons, Neutrons, Photons, Positrons and Other Sub-Particles.**

The author had lived from 2472 to 2530. Other cards made mystic references to Mars, to Venus, to the other planets. But it wasn't what he wanted. He shoved the case back. The name index—

An hour later, Harry was riffling with trembling fingers through a case

labeled "Porter." It was the third such case he had tried. He was coughing and red-eyed from dust, his face was running with sweat, and his clothing and arms were smudged black.

JOHN G. PORTER. John G. Porter. The G.'s ran on unendingly. He shoved the case back, savagely pulled another. Five minutes later, he was staring with hypnotic gaze at a single faded card which bore his father's name.

John Quincy Porter. 1892-1949.

"A New Conception of the Universe," Harry read aloud.

His eyes grew strained and blurred with half-formed tears as he stared at the telling numerals. 1892-1949. The first emotions of repentance, of genuine sorrow closed in, and an unbearable nostalgia overtook him. It was too much like a voice from the grave, like his father's own hand, reaching across the centuries, touching him.

Until this moment, he had not quite realized that his father was dead. Until this moment, John Quincy Porter had still been alive, but in another distant land. The air seemed suddenly full of ghosts, the ghosts of his father, friends and of—himself. He himself shouldn't be alive now.

He made a sudden angry gesture and focused his eyes on the card.

"A New Conception of the Universe," he repeated.

Under that prosaic title lay a prediction of doom. Spiritlessly Harry memorized the numerals and letters to the left of his father's name, and then slowly shoved the file back.

As slowly he returned to his starting point, and again found his meal awaiting him. He ate, and stretched himself listlessly on the paved, dusty floor. Presently he slept. He felt that the hardest part of his work was done.

When he awoke, he felt refreshed for the task at hand.

But as the hours wore away into what Harry judged to be days, his opinion changed. Finding the filing number of the book had been the easiest part. He went through the aisles, hunting, hunting for number 87G, with sub-numerals of 110c and 900-08r. Gradually he became sick with loneliness, with frequent nostalgic journeys into the past.

The present, with very real doom about to confront an unsuspecting world, became nebulous, without being. Harry Porter became the only creature alive, a worm burrowing through books, blinding himself, choking himself with dirt.

But on the third day, or what he judged to be the third, he returned to his meal. Who had brought it, how it was smuggled into him, he had ceased to care. He was a trapped animal, returning by instinct to his food. And like an animal, he proceeded to eat.

He heard the sound of a scuffling foot behind him. He whirled, flattening himself against a bookshelf, his eyes narrowed. Lovely, unbearably beautiful and desirable when contrasted to the grime in which he had lived, S'ee Var'r stood there, her scarlet lips curved in an eager half smile.

"Harry," she said softly.

"S'ee!"

Suddenly he was stumbling toward her, realizing for the first time how starved he had been to see her, to know that she was safe. He ached to take her in his arms. But he stopped just short of that, and fell back a step.

His eyes dropped slowly to the sweat-sodden dirt of his clothing, then lifted to the girl again. She seemed a dazzling white, possessed of a freshness that he couldn't make himself destroy. Harry saw that she was dressed in the abbreviated costume of a dancing girl.

HER parted lips closed and her eyes fell to his grimed body. She moved impulsively forward and took his hands in hers.

"Then you've really been looking, Harry?"

There was vast relief in her voice. Before he could fathom the statement, her words hurried on, while he hungrily drank in the sweet curve of her lips, her expressive eyes. She told briefly, shudderingly of her experiences.

"And then An'ru Ch'on saw me at

last evening's banquet. He sent one of his sp—" She bit her lip.

"One of his spies?"

"Oh, Harry I shouldn't tell you. Ch'on is in danger of his life. If anybody got any definite information on him—" Her eyes were tragic.

"So you think I'm going to snitch on him?"

She dropped her eyes.

"You'd better not ask me any questions. Please, Harry. I shouldn't even tell you it was Ch'on who smuggled me down here. He felt that—that I could help."

Harry shook his head bewilderedly. But he humbly held her soft hands.

"What's a stay-order, S'ee?" he said slowly, as a new thought came to him.

Something of defiance crossed her face.

"It gives Jack Ulls'n the right to live in the king-building for six months."

"A court favorite!" Harry muttered some unprintable words under his breath.

S'ee seemed to wilt under his anger. Then her eyes flared with spirit.

"It wasn't that that made him betray us. Jack worships the Mentor. He loves our civilization. If anything tends to disrupt civilization, he fights it in any way he can. At least he has his principles and he sticks up for them!"

Harry dropped her hands with a savage motion.

"Meaning that I don't!"

She did not deny it.

"And besides," she said defiantly, "Jack is planning to get me out of the building. It was his idea from the first. He told me so when he knocked the dancing master down."

"Oh," said Harry, nodding his head grimly. "So that's how he proved his love!"

Then he all but exploded.

"You beat all, S'ee! One minute you're on my side, the next you're sticking up for *him*. Oh, never mind! You're just like all women. What about Ch'on?"

He was bitter now with the belief that, after all that had happened, S'ee was still in love with the conniving Ulls'n.

"An'ru Ch'on," S'ee said shortly, "moved in the toils of an intrigue from which he realized he could not escape. Every servant in this huge building was being put to a rigid grueling. It was suspected the World Administration Building was infested with Ch'on's spies."

Harry poignantly recalled the red-haired guard. What if they should start questioning him, torturing him? And suddenly he knew it was imperative that he find the book quickly. A sort of sixth sense was nagging at the back of his mind, an insistent premonition of doom.

Desperate, he put the problem up to S'ee. Her answer was immediate. Imperatively she demanded the file number from him.

Twenty minutes later they found the book.

Harry led the girl to the shelves bearing the main classification 87G. With a sort of bitter triumph, he showed where the 87G's stopped at the sub-classification 110c.

S'ee frowned. Then she suddenly pointed to the small "r" of the third sub-numeral.

"It means rear," she said simply.

She proceeded to the small numbers under 87G, pulled out the hinged panel. Harry's stomach did a cave-in as he saw what she meant. With mounting excitement, he lifted out a whole row of books.

Behind them was another panel!

S'EE stood breathless while Harry pulled the panel down. The dust of centuries swirled up, but he didn't care. This particular search was over, he knew. With sure instinct his fingers drew forth the book. The title, barely discernible, stared up at them.

"A New Conception of the Universe," Harry read.

While he held the volume, hardly knowing how to act, S'ee moved closer to him.

"I'm glad," she whispered. "Glad!"

They started back to the entrance, Harry moving in a daze, holding the book in two hands straight out in front of him. It was a heavy book, bound in vellum, and thin-paged. But

he didn't dare to examine it, to open it, for fear it might fall apart.

He was trying to think what he would do with it now. Give it to Ch'on? But Ch'on was in danger of death.

A voice went blasting suddenly through the dusty corridors.

"Porter!"

Harry tensed. Then, with S'ee flying after him, he was off toward the voice, only to stop short as the man he knew only as the red-haired guard came stumbling toward him, gasping. There was a red flow of blood from his eye. He reached Porter, caught at him for support.

His scraggly hair was plastered down over his face with blood.

"They've—got Ch'on!" he gasped. "It's all over. And the old man—that brought you the eats—he blabbed—they're coming—*guards!*"

He staggered erect, pointed in the direction he had come. At the same time, Harry heard the pound of feet. Suddenly several indistinct forms took shape in the gloom.

"There they are!" a voice bellowed.

A pale triangular beam of light stabbed toward them. The red-haired man's eyes bulged. There was the smell of roasted flesh and the man fell soggily to the cement floor.

Harry wasted no time in thought or useless regret. He grabbed S'ee. They fled, deep into the recesses of this vast library. Footsteps pounded after them. But still they continued the senseless flight, knowing there was no way of escape, seeking only a momentary release from the doom that was foreshadowed.

Suddenly Harry set foot into one of the empty rooms bordering the library. He realized this was a sure trap and started to turn.

Too late, he heard a sound behind him. He tried to whirl. Something descended on his head with quiet, effective force, and all knowledge of being fled from him.

And when, after what seemed hours and hours had passed, he finally opened his eyes in full wakefulness, he was staring up into the square, honest face of old Jums Var'r bending over him.

## CHAPTER X

### *Death for An'ru Ch'on*

AMAZING as this was, Harry felt no impulse to ask questions then. It was indescribably good to feel that after all the horrors he had gone through, he was in the hands of friends. He met Jums' gaze for a long moment, then allowed his eyes to wander slowly about the room.

This was a hospital room, to judge by the instrument cabinet against the wall. Then too, a nurse, white-uniformed, hovered in the door. The room was windowless, however, although the air was fresh. The restfulness of the green glowing walls was soothing to Harry's nerves.

Had he been this sick? Well, of course, there had been that sock on the head, and the utter exhaustion of constantly searching for his father's—

He started.

"The book!" he cried out tensely.

Jums stooped over, placed a quiet hand on his shoulder. With the other hand he held "A New Conception of the Universe."

"Don't worry about that, son," he said, grinning.

"So I see," Harry said uncertainly. "How long have I been out?"

"Two days," came another voice.

Harry jerked his head around, his eyes lighting.

"S'ee!" he said gratefully.

He sat upright in bed and forcefully captured her hand. She smiled at him. He smiled back. There was a white flower in her russet hair.

She sat down on the bed and glanced at her father interrogatively. Jums nodded his graying head emphatically.

"Go ahead. You can tell him everything now. I believe we'll all agree he's cleared himself of Ch'on's suspicions."

Harry looked from one to another, his head whirling.

"Cleared myself of *what?*"

"Just what I said," Jums repeated, still grinning. "You see, we all thought you *might* be a spy in Ax'r's employ."

"But I rescued Ch'on from assassins!" Harry began blankly.

Jums nodded understandingly.

"Ch'on still thought you were one cog in a fantastically involved plot to find proof of his plotting against civilization," he insisted. "And since he *is* plotting against civilization, as head of an organization whose members number in the hundred millions—well—" His shoulder lifted expressively.

Various puzzling factors at once clicked into place in Harry's mind. That was the reason An'ru Ch'on hadn't showed him any gratitude when his life was saved. That was the reason Jums Var'r had been plainly suspicious of him. And the reason the red-haired guard—now dead—had pulled a weapon on him when he took him to the library!

"And you say there's actually an organization plotting against civilization, right under Ax'r's nose?" he demanded breathlessly. "I mean, this stagnant joke of a civilization?"

"Has been, for a hundred years."

"Wow!" Harry said softly. He gripped Jums' arm. "Why, this is just what we need, sir." His excitement mounted, his eyes sparkling. "Somehow, this organization has got to save humanity. It's up to them. And since Ax'r won't cooperate—"

He stopped, reddening as he realized he was saying the obvious thing. Of course, that was what was in Jums' mind. And Ch'on's, too. It was all clear to him now.

Jums nodded as he rose. The lines around his eyes crinkled.

"You get the idea, son. It's going to take some doing, though. But—well—"

He tapped the book and started for the door.

"There's a half dozen of Ch'on's pet scientists downstairs in the lounging room," Jums said. "You get dressed and come on down. There are some things to be talked over, things we should discuss together."

"But how—" Harry began, one foot on the floor.

"S'ee'll clear up anything else you want to know."

The door closed.

HARRY turned back to the girl, grinning ruefully.

"Talk about having your head jerked out of the lion's mouth! How did that happen, S'ee? And say—were you in on this plot all the time too?"

She made a wry face.

"It's news to me, Harry," she said solemnly. "I only knew Ch'on was our friend. I didn't have any idea that anybody could be plotting against civilization." She made a confused gesture. "I still don't see why—"

Harry gazed at her oddly.

"Why anybody should think this civilization wasn't doing humanity any good?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "But my father—he's Ch'on's direct subordinate—my father tried to show me how it could be bad. But could a static civilization be bad? We are all happy. Ax'r is good to us."

"He is a ram, leading ten billion sheep," Harry said gently. "And I do mean sheep. And some day he or one of his successors would have led the whole drove over a cliffside."

S'ee shrugged her slim shoulders.

"Perhaps, Harry. At any rate, if your father's book is right, our present civilization must fall anyway."

"Right!" Harry grinned. He patted her hand sympathetically. "Now, how did we—"

"Oh! Why, they had just broken the tunnel through into the library, and they were watching you, to make certain you were the man you claimed to be."

She smiled impishly at his puzzlement. She told of the ten-mile underground tunnel which the Organization of Free Thought had been burrowing into the library, with the idea of securing the vast knowledge of the ancients that was withheld from the public.

This tunnel extended from a hill outside Washington, where the Citadel of Free Thought was buried. From this place, the very underground building where they now were, the vast organization had been controlled during the entire century of its existence.

It was a vast organization, inter-

locked with every phase of industry, of government and society. Continually it built toward the time when it would be powerful enough to overthrow a changeless, decadent civilization.

"They brought us back through the tunnel. And when my father saw the book, he was certain at last that you had been telling the truth."

"The truth," said Harry sententiously, "will out, won't it?"

When he entered the lounging room with S'ee fifteen minutes later, he was conscious of a sudden halt in the buzz of conversation. Harry saw a half-dozen men turn around and gaze at him. He could almost hear their thoughts.

"So this is Dr. John Porter's son! Naturally, he must know a great deal about the subject his father studied."

Harry felt the quick resentment that flamed in him. It was no fault of his, he felt, if his interests had never included science. He managed to hide his feelings as he was introduced, though he saw that S'ee was looking at him curiously. After introductions, the scientists began plying him with questions, making reference to technical things which he knew nothing about. He decided to stop this once and for all.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said shortly. "All I know is the general theory—and not much of that. Go ahead and talk—but please leave me out of it."

A very large man with a florid countenance looked at him curiously.

"But we thought it would be best to get your ideas on the shift-field, the construction of the towers."

JUMS, a half head taller than any of these men, grinned with one side of his mouth as he saw the difficulties Harry was in. He interceded.

"I'm afraid that—ah—certain circumstances forbade Harry Porter's knowing the intricate factors in his father's theories," he said dryly. "Suppose we go ahead and acquaint him with the simplified facts. In the first place, son, we've read your father's book through, word for word. And word for word, he's been entirely vindicated.

"We haven't much scientific apparatus here, but we have a thirty-three-inch telescope. Using your father's special emulsion process, we discovered exact proof of the gravity cloud. Furthermore, by looking through some old astronomical books that were brought back from the library, we find that Alpha and Proxima Centauri, the double stars nearest to our Solar System have, in the last three years, actually decreased their distance from each other by half.

"So to us, it is quite evident that a gravity region or cloud, four times as dense as the one we now occupy, is a little more than two years' distant from our Solar System."

The large florid man, who in his better-known life was a professor of atomic physics at Milan, in what was once Italy, spoke up. He had been eying Harry Porter curiously; feeling, no doubt, rebuffed. His voice was diffident.

"Your father proposed a remarkable solution. But his assumptions were more remarkable. However, there were some things he couldn't have guessed back in his own time. The gravity cloud has no attractive powers in itself. It acts on gravitons—"

"Gravitons?"

Harry felt interested in spite of his former resolve to keep quiet.

"Gravitons are the real particles of weight. There are eighteen hundred and forty-six in a proton and one in an electron, which is why the proton weighs that many times as much as the electron. The gravity substance thus becomes a catalyst which acts on gravitons, which in turn cause that phenomenon known as gravity.

"It is a new concept of gravity, but it doesn't violate the Einsteinian laws of gravity, which sprang of course from those of Newton, who I believe was your contemporary."

Harry grinned at him.

"Newton lived about three centuries before I was born," he chuckled.

Professor H'mer—such was the Milan professor's name—rushed on to his point, coloring slightly.

"As I say, your father made a good many assumptions. They were daring assumptions, and most of them are

correct. But—well, it's possible he expected too much of our civilization. If we had developed normally upward from your civilization to ours, instead of being forced to go through this incredible period of stagnation, we could have followed your father's instructions to the letter."

"Can't you now?" said Harry.

He suddenly saw the expressions of uneasiness on these men's faces. His own face fell.

"Oh, it's not that bad!" Jums said quickly. "We have our force fields, our pulverizing rays and tractor beams and all the rest of the lot. But it's the magnitude of the scale we have to raise them to that worries us. For instance, we have to power a shift-field that will spin the Earth—"

HARRY'S eyes bulged.

*"What?"* he exclaimed.

Jums appreciated his astonishment. He drew forth pencil and paper, stood over a table. Harry moved beside him, S'ee close by, silent but alive with interest. The other scientists crowded around. Jums drew a rough sphere, with another sphere hanging outside it.

"Earth and Moon, understand?" said Jums vibrantly. "Now look here! What's our main problem? The weight and the heat. The latter can be taken care of; so can the former. First of all, we literally pulverize the Moon!"

"Good Lord!" Harry exclaimed, aghast. "What for?"

Jums grinned at him.

"Use it as a shield to keep out the sun's heat, you young fool! It's possible, fully possible. Next, we spin the Earth—*at the equator!*"

Harry shook his head, let out a long low whistle. His jaw fell slack.

"Is *that* what my father suggested?"

"What else?" said Jums, spreading his hands. "Hereafter, the human race will have to live at the equator. There's nothing else for it. The increased centrifugal force resulting from the increased Earth-spin will cancel out the increased gravity.

"We can do that—theoretically. It's no problem. We'll erect a series of towers around the equator which generate overlapping shift-fields—"

Harry understood that.

"A reversal of the squirrel-cage motor idea," he ventured.

But Jums didn't know exactly what that was, and asked for no explanation. S'ee's father let the pencil hover over the paper. Then with a bitter curse he slammed the pencil down and raised his eyes.

"Your father was a genius, young man. If we had him here now—Well, what's the use of wishing! It's power we need. A new source of power. And we haven't got it!"

There was a knock on the door. It swung open. A gray-tunicked youth hurried in, flushing from so many eyes on him.

"Coded message from Washington, sir," he said and backed out.

Jums quickly unfolded the gray slip of paper. A swift pallor erased all the lines of gentle humor from his face. He looked up, glanced with bitter eyes from face to face.

"The date of Governor An'ru Ch'on's execution is set for nineteen o'clock tomorrow evening!"

## CHAPTER XI

### *A Desperate Gamble*

QUICKLY upon the heels of that shocking announcement, Jums Var'r broke up the meeting. He spent the next two hours up in the telescope observatory with the Citadel's radio operator.

Harry wandered about the Citadel, surprised at its vastness. It was a system of rambling underground corridors, burrowing for an amazing depth into the earth. The population was somewhat over a hundred. Here there were laboratories, a completely equipped hospital, a huge mess hall, a kitchen large enough for a metropolitan restaurant.

S'ee went with him, into the lower depths. And when Harry ran across the wine cellar, he battled with his desire for S'ee's company and his need for something beside water in his stomach. He gave up the battle, ex-

cusing himself on the grounds that he wanted to rest.

But as S'ee trotted alongside him up the broad flights of stairs, he suspected, from the set of her lips, that she knew what he had discovered. Nonetheless, when she left, Harry pounded down the stairs again.

It wasn't simply that he was irresponsible. There was more to it than that. Outwardly a hale and hearty young man, Harry Porter was actually a rather complex personality.

In the first place, he'd never wanted to be a scientist. He hadn't wanted to be a professional man at all, in the accepted sense. He'd wanted to be a newspaperman.

"No," the stern Dr. John Porter had said. "You must carry on the family tradition."

So Harry had gone off dutifully to college and gotten himself a degree as a civil engineer. Ever since he'd worked for a firm of architects. And they had found his work exceptionally competent.

But frustration had ridden Harry Porter's career. He'd wanted to cover football games, cover political conventions, help the police solve murder mysteries.

Instead he found himself cooped up in an office, constantly berated by his father to join him in his researches. So Harry had gotten into the habit of drinking a bit more than he should.

Not that it really hurt his rugged frame. But it did displease his father, and that in itself was a certain compensation . . .

"Calling Harry Porter! Meeting in the lounge at once."

Harry spilled half a mouthful of what must have been hundred-year-old champagne. He looked with wounded eyes at the audio-call in his direct line of vision. He sighed bleakly, corked the bottle and placed it tenderly back on its shelf.

With a certain swagger, he returned to the lounge. S'ee was already there. Harry found a seat, self-consciously aware of her eyes.

Jums spoke slowly, yet urgently.

"There are certain facts we have to face. Our fight against the gravity cloud becomes of first importance. We have to prepare. In order to do that, we have to act against Ax'r now. Namely, we can't wait until next year to strike."

One of the scientists spoke up gravely, shaking his head.

"It would be only half a revolution, Jums, and you know it. Most of the northern cities and some in the south aren't ready."

"What else is there to do?" Jums demanded heatedly.

There was an uncomfortable silence.

Jums went on, more quietly.

"The revolution must come, and quickly. But without An'ru Ch'on—well, you know and I know that I'm not much of a substitute for Ch'on. We need him, and need him badly.

"Therefore, I have made some precise plans for his rescue—precise down to the minute."

Then his eyes strayed to Harry. Harry felt the quick thrill of alarm. What the—

"You're in on this," Jums was saying. He smiled tensely. "I know enough of your past to know about your engineering degree, young man. You know explosives, and you'll be handling that detail."

HARRY was suddenly on his feet. "Wait a minute!" he blurted excitedly. "I can't—"

Jums looked at him oddly.

"Can't what? You're a member of this organization, and in Ch'on's absence I give orders." He was suddenly nettled. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Harry said wildly. "Good grief, man, I'm no professional saboteur! I've never been involved in any intrigue in my life. I know something about explosives, sure, but I've never gone around blowing people up!"

Jums decided to play it another way.

"Look here, Porter," he said. "You hate to get yourself in trouble—yet you're not afraid to fight your way out in a crisis. I think that some day when I have a little time, I'm going to sit down and have a heart-to-heart talk with you.

"Maybe we'll be able to straighten out a certain kink in your psychology.

Meanwhile, son, we've all got a job to do."

Harry reddened slowly. It was all true enough. A fight he was never afraid of. But since losing the battle for his career with his father, he'd always been gunshy. Trouble came to him—he didn't come to it.

But now, Harry realized, was the time for action.

"All right, sir," he told Jums. "You're the boss."

Jums, not a young man any more, had been through a trying period. The necessity for assuming so much responsibility on such short notice was weighing heavily on him.

"Good," he said a bit shortly. "Now, then—"

But Harry was still young and still impulsive.

"Listen, sir," he said, taking an eager step forward. "How about the old man Ax'r jailed ten years ago? Why don't you rescue him? He knows something about the gravity cloud. Maybe he could help you—"

"I considered that," Jums said impatiently. "It duplicates the risk of failure if we try to rescue both men. Besides that, the man is patently mad. Sit down, please."

"But he may be more important than you think he is! Some sort of surgical operation to bring his mentality back—"

Dr. P'man, a nervous sort of man with a recessive chin, spoke hesitantly.

"That may be possible, Jums. Electroencephalography—"

Jums exploded, thrusting his chin out.

"The plan is *out!*" he roared. "Porter, if you don't—"

"Well, if you don't want to take the risk, why couldn't I?" Harry cried desperately.

Jums just looked at him, his eyes snapping with anger. Harry hastily sat down. But as he sat there, hot and flushed, the plan that he would follow was forged in his mind. He could and *would* rescue the dungeon prisoner!

The following day, when he was given his written, timed instructions, he was grimly determined to carry his own private plans out to the letter.


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THE narrow flat-car, thirty feet long, ran soundlessly along the rail that speared through the tunnel, its pale headlight eating up the darkness ahead and disgorging it behind.

Stacked at the center was a full ton of duodecaplylatomate, the most powerful, sheerly frightful explosive known to man; also there were fuse caps and lines. Near this material a loosely jointed man sat, carelessly keeping the cases from jarring. Four other men were at the front of the car, as carelessly dangling their legs over the edge.

Harry sat behind them, hugging his knees to his chest.

"You men have made this trip before?" he said.

One of them spoke up.

"We've been working on this tunnel since we were twelve years old," he replied. "I was the one that bopped you on the head and closed up the tunnel door some days ago. Since then we've been carting books—mostly scientific—by the thousands.

"Those scientists got all excited when they got hold of them. You reckon that when the Administration Building comes tumbling down around Ax'r's head, the books will be ruined?"

Harry shook his head. He jauntily gave his opinion that the steel cases would protect a majority of the books, provided the explosives were inserted correctly. At some future date, the precious volumes could be excavated.

Abruptly they came to the tunnel's end. There a hinged door swung out. A man crept into the empty room beyond, using an infra-ray detector. The results were negative, which indicated there was no one in the library giving off rays of heat.

Determinedly Harry went into the library, pale glow-lamps coming into being as he turned buttons. In the next half hour, he pointed out master pillars which supported thousands of tons of masonry and heavy I-beams. He drew diagrams which the drills were to follow.

Then he called the most mature man of the group aside. He spoke intently, pointedly.

The man was startled.

"But you can't do that! In another half hour we're supposed to meet the rescue gang barging their way down here with Ch'on!"

He cast a flurried glance at his single-handed wrist-watch.

"We'll meet them," Harry growled. "I know what I'm doing. Inserting the duodec and trailing the fuse lines back to the tunnel is the least part of this job. Take care of it, fellow, and don't worry."

With a single stormy look he turned on his heel and lost himself to the astounded man's eyes. In five minutes, running as softly and steadily as his unsure feet would allow, Harry reached the library exit to the lower dungeon level.

He put an excited, trembling hand to the rusted cross-bar. Would it give? Or had it been locked from the other side?

His answer came as the door swung slowly, ponderously open. In another second, he had closed it behind him. With pounding heart he stared along the length of the cell block.

In one of those cells, mad, babbling insensibly about a gravitational doom, lay the old man Ax'r had condemned to lifetime imprisonment. Harry's hand fell to the triple-ray gun swinging from his hip. He started forward, hugging the wall, peering into cells that seemed pitchblack to his unaccustomed eyes.

Twice he saw haggard, bearded men hanging on the bars, staring at him. But they made no comment. At each cell, Harry stopped momentarily.

"Gravity!" he whispered.

If there was one word that would bring out the old scientist that was it.

He had proceeded halfway down the L-shaped corridor, unimpeded so far by any suggestion of a guard, when he heard the tread of a half-dozen marching feet from around the corner. His breath froze, and in one second he felt his blood turn cold.

Trapped! Harry looked wildly around, then made a break toward a niche in the wall. He reached it. A flight of stairs! He went up a half-dozen steps, realized too late he was going from bad to worse. The march-

ing feet neared, stopped, started up again.

In panic, his heart in his mouth, Harry dashed full speed up the stairs, and thus came to the second dungeon level. He found himself in the open corridor, tried to draw back. But the guard pacing the length of the corridor saw him.

He rapped out a sharp question, advanced a step. The man's breath whistled between his teeth. A triple-ray gun came out and a triangular beam of pale light took form.

The pain of a thousand agonies burned at Harry's arm. Cursing he drew his own weapon and in pure instinct pressed the trigger. The guard gurgled in his throat and pitched forward to sprawl full length.

Harry stooped over him. The man was dead, a hole burned neatly through his face.

A new plan gripped Harry. He started disrobing the man. Five minutes later, working with frantic haste, he was dressed in the guard's clothing. He picked up his own garments and the body of the dead man, strode to the first of the cells. Awkwardly he inserted the key in the lock—then stopped stock-still.

GOVERNOR AN'RU CH'ON's hands gripped the bars of the cell. He was watching Harry through slitted eyes. Harry gulped.

"Are you part of the rescue plan?" Ch'on said evenly.

Words stuck in Harry's throat. But one look at Ch'on's square jaw convinced him of the uselessness of deception.

"No," he whispered. "But I—"

"The impatience of youth!" snapped Ch'on.

His teeth came together with a click. But he wasted no more time in condemnation.

"Quick, then. The lock! We'll have to make the best of it."

"But—" Harry began bewilderedly.

But even as he protested, the sickening revelation of his own impulsive act struck him. He inserted the key. The door swung open. Ch'on took the dead guard from him in his powerful arms, strode to the rear of the cell. He came back empty-handed.

He ripped the keys from Harry's hand and locked the door. Then he turned, his eyes slits of fury.

"You've ruined everything! That guard you killed was due to be relieved in mere minutes by the guard squad. They're on their way up here now, so escape downward is impossible."

His hand shot out, grasped Harry's arm.

"Keep your courage about you, man. You've bungled my escape, but I have a notion we'll both sell our lives dearly. Follow me—but I am your prisoner. Remember that!"

Not understanding very clearly, but aware that somewhere along the line he'd made a grievous error, Harry followed Governor Ch'on. The man moved purposefully, swiftly. They turned abruptly up a chill, stone flight of stairs so narrow Ch'on's shoulders scraped the walls.

"There'll be a guard at the next level," he whispered back grimly. "Blast him. After that, we'll be able to go up thirteen levels without encountering a soul."

Satisfaction, grim and relentless, etched his voice with acid.

When the moment arrived, Harry pressed the trigger of his ray-gun. Death struck the guard squarely in the back. Ch'on stepped without a word over the dead body and started agilely up the next flight.

Harry was panting, his lungs burning with white fire, his muscles hot frayed ropes, after the first few levels. Ch'on kept up the same relentless pace, his powerful body more than equal to the occasion.

Harry remembered years of comparatively soft living back in the twentieth century. He forced himself along, feeling a peculiar anger at himself for not having kept in condition after his college football days.

At the thirteenth level, his weapon again spat death. Another guard fell forward on his face. They were now far up in the World Administration Building, but far off the beaten track of the main passageways. Harry's breath came rackingly as he leaned against the wall.

Ch'on still seemed tireless. He was at the wall now, fumbling at something. There was a creaking sound. A section of the wall swung out to reveal a black, narrow tunnel.

Ch'on turned, grinning crookedly.

"I wasn't Ax'r's chief adviser ten years for nothing. But that was before he began to suspect me of not caring much about his pat, smooth-working civilization. All right, Porter—in!"

The section of wall closed soundlessly behind them. Harry found himself following the stealthy patter of Ch'on's footsteps. They groped their way for some five minutes. Then Ch'on's hand came back, grasped Harry's arm. He spoke, his voice heavy with portent.

"I haven't done much explaining. But the fact is, you messed up the vital plans for my escape. So I find it necessary for us both to make ourselves useful, even to the point of death. I had considered Ax'r's assassination, but a better plan now occurs to me. It will involve your holding your ray on Ax'r while I make my escape."

FOR the first time, Harry answered him.

"Escape?" he said hoarsely. "But what about me? Don't I get any break at all?"

"Yes, what about you?" Ch'on's voice was cold. "I plainly consider my life above yours in value, Porter. You furnished the warning, you supplied the book that may save humanity. There your usefulness ends—except for this last opportunity. Don't look for more than your death from this, Porter. In any case, follow my lead."

Abruptly a tiny square of light formed in the wall, as Ch'on turned a small eyepiece. His head blotted it out. Harry stood there rigid, deeply and tremendously aware that the course Ch'on had pointed out was one he would have to take.

A second later, Ch'on had stepped away from the eyepiece, made a commanding movement. Harry put his eye to the hole. He gasped.

He saw a comparatively small room, its walls polished to mirror-like smoothness. At the far half of the room was a square, sunken pool of water. On the tiled edge of the bath, dangling hairy legs into the water, sat a man.

It was Ax'r-o-Ax'r.

## CHAPTER XII

*Explosion!*

AN'RU CH'ON'S chuckle sounded dryly in Harry's ear.

"If anyone ever overawes you, Porter," he said, "just try to visualize him as he is without clothes. One side now, and we'll give Ax'r a little surprise."

He put his shoulder to the wall. A section moved on a pivot, and Ch'on slipped through into the room. Hurriedly Harry followed, his ray-gun drawn but held in nerveless fingers.

Although they were plainly visible to Ax'r, the ruler did not see them. He was lazily contemplating the placid surface of his bath water. A broad-shouldered, short, fat man, Ax'r-o-Ax'r, but powerful of build nonetheless. Harry watched the ruler with hypnotic gaze until Ch'on gently disengaged his fingers from the ray-gun.

His lips curved with a peculiar, tight smile.

"Ax'r!" he whispered.

Ax'r-o-Ax'r's whole heavily built body stiffened. He remained in that state for a full ten seconds. Then his massive head turned. In one lightning-quick movement, his eyes flicked over the two men who stood there, over the open passageway behind them, over the gun Ch'on's steady, purposeful hand held.

A bleak, cold expression settled into his ebon eyes. Outside of that, he showed no consternation.

"You, Ch'on," his voice uttered slowly.

Ch'on advanced, Harry following, until they stood at the edge of the pool, looking down at Ax'r's nakedness. Ch'on's hard face was grinning vengefully.

"I," he said softly. "I hardly think you expected me, Ax'r. But you made the wrong move when you jailed me."

Ax'r did not flinch. He came slowly to his feet.

"Allow me the dignity of a dressing robe, pawns."

With his free hand, Ch'on took the luxuriant silk robe from a hook, tossed it across the pool. Calmly, the Ruler of the World draped it about himself. Then he stood with his hands in the pockets. His eyes, hard, cruel with a bitter anger that did not show elsewhere on his emotionless face, passed over Harry Porter.

"Ah, yes," said Ax'r. "I remember this one. So there is treason all around me!"

Ch'on, with no regard for the niceties of politeness, smirked openly.

"All around you, and through and through your rotten empire, Ax'r! Now which shall it be—my life or yours? I give you your choice. Speak quickly!"

He made a deadly motion with the ray-gun.

Ax'r's eyes were hooded.

"If I die, there will be no hand to guide my people. Therefore, you shall have your freedom, though I promise you it will be a short-lived one."

Ch'on laughed shortly, harshly.

"I'll be the one to decide that!"

With one motion, he thrust the triply lensed weapon into Harry's hands, turned. He went from Harry's line of sight. He came back, passed what looked like a pencil and small paper pad to the stiffly standing ruler.

"Now," said Ch'on, "write!"

Ax'r looked at him steadily, then wrote swiftly on the pad. He tore the paper off. Ch'on took it, scanned it quickly, and nodded in grim satisfaction.

"Now you can call your orderly. If I remember correctly, he waits in the room outside. Speak in a normal tone of voice. Command him to escort me to the roof and to my airship, then return to his own quarters."

Ax'r's voice boomed out.

"Yes, my Master," a voice answered, barely audible at first, then neared the door.

THE ruler spoke distinctly, commandingly, directly. The orderly hesitated. Ax'r spoke peremptorily. The orderly was humbly acquiescent.

Ax'r turned back, lowering his head in a mock bow.

"Your escape lies before you, Governor. I have fulfilled my half of the bargain."

"And I will fulfill mine!"

Ch'on turned to the door, his hand on the knob, vitality surging through his stocky, compact body. His eyes sparkled.

"There will be a signal, Porter," he said, smiling peculiarly. "When that signal comes, you will cease to menace our Mentor with your weapon. It will be pointless for you to refuse, even though your own death is a certainty!"

Harry turned cold.

"Wait!" he gasped hoarsely. "The signal—the signal! What is it?" Then he caught himself, in a burst of passion. "And what makes you think I'm—"

Ch'on's interrupting voice was cutting.

"Because I say so! The former plans for my escape were precise down to the last second. You ruined them, didn't you? Be man enough to rectify them in the only way you can!"

Then the door closed behind him, and Harry was alone with the man who ruled the world.

Harry's eyes turned back. The few seconds of silence that passed were nerve-racking. The gun was shaking in his hand. This was a terrible spot for a young man to be in. Especially for a young fellow who had not spent half his life in the murky ways of conspiracy.

It was uncanny the way Ax'r-o-Ax'r stood there, clad in his violently colored dressing robe, powerful hands sunk deep in the pockets, head lowered slightly, so that his eyes seemed to gleam at his young captor through bushy black brows.

Ax'r's lips moved in slow, insidious speech.

"If you drop your weapon now," he whispered, "I will reestablish your life license, and add to it my unquali-

fied quarterly okay. You'll be free."

The offer came as a shock to Harry. He renewed his grip on the weapon.

"Why?" he challenged.

"So that I may apprehend An'ru Ch'on before he gains his freedom and works irreparable damage to our civilization."

"Our 'civilization'? It never was *my* civilization! I never had a life license in the first place."

"Don't be a fool," Ax'r said sharply. "You were born, and at the moment of your birth, your parents received your life license. Later on, some serious misdemeanor on your part caused the rescinding of that license. I propose to return your name to the lists of those who exist."

"Listen, Ax'r-o-Ax'r," Harry said in a low, deadly tone. "Of all the pawns in all the world, whom you move blindly as suits your will, *you* are the blindest! Your civilization—indeed, all humanity—stands on the brink of extinction. I myself brought you the warning, as another brought you the warning ten years ago.

"I told you I came from another time, another era which had evidence of a gravity cloud that would insure humanity's doom. Why is it you don't believe me?"

For the first time, Ax'r laughed, deeply, unpleasantly.

"I repeat my conviction," he snorted. "This tale of yours was stolen from the mind of a man who lies in the dungeons below. I repeat that it cannot be true, for it would disrupt our perfect civilization. That is the impossibility." He added coldly, "How can perfection be marred?"

SUCH smugness enraged Harry.

"Naturally, it can't," he snapped. "Your 'unchanging stars,' however, are as fallacious as your 'perfect, unchanging civilization'."

"The stars hang motionless in the vault of the sky," said Ax'r with equanimity.

"They move!" Harry cried. "The very gravity substance whose existence you deny affects them. If you opened your mind, I could prove the effects."

Without waiting for an answer, caught up in the belief that perhaps there was some way he could communicate with a mind that was, at its base, fundamentally different in structure from his own, Harry rushed on.

"Gravity increases and decreases. As nebulae of gas whirl, increased gravity deflates them, draws their parts together, condenses them into matter. Suns are born.

"A decrease of gravity causes a decrease in velocity of escape, and the star breaks up into a binary or triple star—or a solar system such as our own!"

"I do not know of such things," Ax'r said coldly.

Harry desperately abandoned the stars, and brought the matter closer to things this man could understand.

"The ice ages," he said, leaning forward tensely. "What causes them? If our Solar System passed through a decreasing gravity cloud, the Earth would recede from the sun, thus receiving less heat. An ice age would overspread the Earth. An increase in gravity, and our planet would drop nearer the sun. The ice age would disappear!"

"There have never been such things as ice ages," Ax'r declared.

Harry felt a flurry of unbelief.

"And there have never been such things as dinosaurs?" he said in dismay. "The great reptiles who were so heavy they were unable to stand erect, and thus died when Earth's gravity increased?

"There are no such things as satellites, which were thrown from young, molten planets when gravity decreased? Or as the rings of Saturn, when satellites dropped within Roche's Limit and were shattered? Or as the asteroids, caused by a gravity decrease?"

Ax'r stepped forward. Blazing impatience entered his eyes.

"You seek to disrupt my civilization with words, words of which I have never heard. Therefore, how can they be truth? I give you your chance, pawn! Lower your weapon, and I give you life! Continue to fix it upon me, and when your signal comes, you will be subjected to a

death you will not like."

"I don't know what the signal is," Harry whispered shortly, taking an equal, threatening forward step. "Therefore, I shall be forced to ignore it. Probably, in the end, I'll use you as a hostage to make my escape from the building!"

Ax'r laughed harshly.

"Use me as hostage or not, you would find it impossible to leave this level."

Something in the way he spoke convinced Harry of that. The certainty of his own death rankled in his mind now. Never to touch S'ee's hand again, never to see Jums Var'r, never to be allowed to engage in that greatest of all undertakings, the salvation of the human race!

He felt the freezing calm of hopelessness, but he knew what he would do. When the signal came—whatever it was—he would lower his weapon, would complete the pact Governor An'ru Ch'on had made.

He had made a blunder? Very well, he would rectify it! He stood straighter and taller, unflinching before the growing rage of the world's ruler.

Harry did not know how much time had passed when he felt the signal, perfectly recognizable as such but dismaying in its implications. It was perhaps more than two hours. He was stiff and sore from standing in one spot for so long, from holding at bay this man whose powerful arms could crush even him with one constriction.

THE floor beneath them shook suddenly, canted at an abrupt angle and flung Harry against the wall. His eyes bulged. He saw Ax'r, momentarily pinned against the wall opposite. Then a great roar leaped from Ax'r's throat and he threw himself forward.

A thunderous rumble pounded at Harry's ears, one great outpouring of violence which sounded like the crashing of universes. Around him, pieces of the ceiling rained down. The whole room bunched up like an accordion.

A wave of water ejected itself from the pool, caught Harry, deluged him. A body flung itself at him. It went past. There was a shrill scream.

The floor buckled. Harry lost his weapon. A wall fell. Dust suddenly obscured his vision. Choking, Harry flung himself toward the gaping cavity of the doorway, heard the crash of masonry behind him. He ran blindly through dust, through a turmoil of topping walls and pillars, of dust and unimaginable grindings and rumblings.

A whole floor caved in under him. He was hanging madly to a twisted girder. He let go and fell a half-dozen feet.

He tore away a door, found himself in a corridor that was like a huge snake, twisting and writhing in some unendurable agony. He ran down the corridor, balancing himself with all the instinctive finesse of a tight-rope walker. He found a stairway, hanging by a thread but intact. Halfway down, he met another figure coming up. Both halted briefly, their faces bare inches apart.

"Ulls'n!" Harry gasped.

It was true. The life license captain stared at him dazedly, a trickle of blood running down his face. Then he gave a moan of agony, thrust Harry aside and went pounding upward.

And Harry went down, as uncaring of Ulls'n's purpose as Ulls'n was of his. A single thought was burning in his mind now. An'ru Ch'on had escaped back to the Citadel, had given the signal. That signal had been the destruction by explosives of the World Administration Building.

It did not matter that one Harry Porter was caught in that holocaust. He had already sacrificed his life, and Ch'on knew it. The first explosive blast had come; soon would come the next, and the next.

Harry flung himself down level after level, stumbling over dead, bleeding bodies, evading death by a hairbreadth. But there was a bloody gash in his forehead, a red welter of blood on his chest where a falling I-beam had literally scraped most of his clothing from his body.

At ground level, he found himself caught in a rush of bodies forcing it-

self to the street. He fought madly in his own chosen direction, indiscriminately knocking out at men and women, sweeping them aside savagely. He had a mission to perform now. Nothing must stop him.

He reached a cleared space and leaped ahead, took another flight of stairs downward for three levels. The dungeons were havoc, clogged with debris and twisted iron bars. The ceiling opened up to the ground level. Light cascaded down.

Could he make the lower dungeon? He dropped through a cavity, found himself in pale gloom. Harry's eyes accustomed themselves. He was in a cell. He grasped his keys, that he had taken from the upper dungeon guard. Would they work down here?

He tried a half-dozen keys on the cell door before it swung open and admitted him into the passageway. A screaming animal of a man brushed past him. Cell doors were hanging on their hinges.

Harry impelled himself forward, looking vainly. But suddenly he heard a creaking, cackling voice that sent chills down his spine.

"It has come! It has come! The doom is here!"

SWEATING, Harry flung himself toward the source of that voice. A specter tottered toward him out of the gloom, a veritable husk of a man, faced pitted with the scars of some prison disease, dirty, fouled gray hair spilling from his head and face. He grasped Harry's arms, staring up with bleary eyes, mouthing unintelligible words.

"Silence, old man!" Harry admonished.

He brought his fist lightly upward against the old creature's chin. The man sagged. Harry picked him up in his arms. Feeling more dead than alive, blood running from his forehead into his eyes, he stumbled along until he found the stairs.

At ground level, the second series of blasts came. But the churned plaza was empty of human beings now. Harry fought his way over the rubbish, made his way toward the exit and darted out into the open just as the roof he had been under collapsed.

He staggered down the stairs onto a street littered with masonry and human bodies. Behind him there sounded an immense thudding concussion. Harry looked wildly over his shoulder, saw that the entire top of the Administration Building must have toppled over on the other side. For it was gone.

Now, as he stared, the whole vast structure seemed to shudder, to sway, to sink in on itself.

Across the street was an abandoned automobile, its wheels half buried in debris. Harry opened the doors, threw the unconscious old man in and scrambled behind the wheel. Momentary uncertainty tugged at him as he stared at the instrumentless dashboard.

He had watched S'ee drive one of these machines. Could he duplicate it? Experimentally he jabbed a finger out. That would create an eddy current of a certain frequency—

Before he knew it, the car had leaped ahead, shaking the rubble from its wheels. Harry twisted the wheel savagely and went roaring around the bend. All he had to do now was keep from hitting anything, and he could take this car in all directions as long as he wanted to.

The sense of power grew within him as he drove. Once he felt the terrific concussion as the mass of the World Administration Building fell in. He tensed but did not glance back. He could afford to worry only about the road guards. How would he get out of Washington?

His question was answered for him. Twice he saw armed bodies of men in close combat. He saw other isolated fights, heard the cries of victory ringing about him. He got through to the road exit. He stopped the car as a road guard came running toward him.

The man spoke briefly, challengingly. Harry was ready to run him down, when the import of what the guard was saying struck him. He put his head out the window.

"You say you don't want to see my life license?"

"That's all done with!" the guard

said impatiently. "Don't you know that revolution has struck the city, man? Where've you—"

"I'm one of Ch'on's men," Harry almost shouted in his face. "Harry Porter. I just escaped from the Administration Building from a secret mission. I can show you—"

"Never mind." The guard came up, face glowing. "Go on, wherever you're going. I believe you."

"But what about the rev—"

"We've won!" the guard said proudly. "We've taken over the city! Washington is ours!"

## CHAPTER XIII

*Lapse of Memory*

OF THAT harrowing ride toward the Citadel, Harry retained little memory. Now that freedom was his, a thousand little agonies began to pluck at him. For the first time, he became aware of the pain in his left arm, where the triple ray had seared it.

It was stiffening at the elbow, and he could use only one hand on the wheel of the car as the machine plummeted down jam-packed highways. Too, he had suffered a loss of blood which just now was making itself known to him. He was dizzy, nauseated, desperately hanging onto the thread of consciousness.

In the back of the car, lying limply, without sign of life, lay the old creature he had rescued from the collapsed hulk of the king-building. It was the thought of this that kept Harry going. He had come away from his desperate adventures with a prize —a prize taken from a grab-box, true enough. But who knew how valuable it would be?

This creature knew of the gravity cloud. By some long chance, he might be the real key to the final salvation of the human race.

The location of the Citadel was known to Harry. Now that he had been inducted as a fellow-conspirator in the downfall of Ax'r-o-Ax'r's world empire, Jums Var'r had led him from the buried complexity of tunnels and chambers to the camouflaged telescope observatory.

From this vantage point, Harry had looked down on a road passing through the scattered west-side suburbs of Washington. It was not a heavily traveled road, for less than a mile to the east ran a tiered, mighty highway, which carried the bulk of land traffic east and west.

The Citadel was buried deep in the heart of a sharply rising hill, in a section of wasteland that was thoroughly unpopulated.

Harry drove the automobile straight west. An hour after leaving the havoc of the king-building, he was traveling the road that led past the Citadel. Opposite the blunt-browed hill, he brought the car to a dead stop and got out.

He would leave the car here. It did not matter any more even if the location of the Citadel were known. He had seen enough and heard enough to know that a mighty revolution had taken place, that the regime which Ax'r-o-Ax'r had headed was no more.

There was a new master of the world. His name was An'ru Ch'on.

Harry stagged through grass and weeds, carrying his lifeless human burden, calling on every ounce of his strength. He came to the base of the hill. For the first time he felt the thrill of fright, the fear that he had blundered, that this was not the Citadel at all.

He fell to his knees, staring hopelessly upward.

"Jums Var'r!" he shouted. "Jums Var'r!"

There would be a man on watch, in the telescope observatory. Would he hear that desperate cry?

It did not seem to matter any more. Harry sank with a muffled groan over the body of the bedraggled, bearded man in his arms, and the sweetness of sleep claimed his weakened body.

WHEN he again opened his eyes, the mere fact of wakefulness convinced him of his safety within the Citadel of Free Thought. Again white sheets were enclosing him. But he was alone in this room. The softly

glowing, green-tinted walls were as restful to his eyes as the mattress to his body.

His left arm around the elbow, he discovered, was bandaged with a translucent material which seemed to merge into his very skin. He could move the arm without pain. Moreover, the gashes on his chest, as well as those on his forehead, seemed to be gone.

He sank back with a great sigh, his eyes closing. But almost immediately, there was a light patter of footsteps approaching him from behind.

His eyes snapped open again. A thrill of emotion shot through him. He looked up at S'ee Var'r.

She dropped to her knees beside the bed, her face shining. But he stared at her so directly, and with such obvious emotion, that a retreating expression entered her eyes. Her smile faded a little.

"You're well now," she said guardedly. "You can get up."

Harry concealed his disappointment.

"How long was I out?"

"Three days."

"What's happened, S'ee? To the world, I mean."

Her face fell.

"The old order is gone," she said spiritlessly. "I never really thought it would." Then she shook her head. She added, slowly, "It was a perfect world, Harry. I was born the year Ax'r-o-Ax'r came into power. He was passionate about his world. What he did *was* right. I was taught that in the schools."

"All right," Harry said roughly. "Everything he did was right. Until he decided that he was so omnipotent that the stars stopped in cold fright in the skies—just because he wanted them to. He made allowances for everything except outside influences, and I'm glad he's dead."

"Dead? Dead?" Her eyes were round. "But he isn't dead, Harry! His armies are fighting Ch'on's in the north, and he himself is directing them. Ch'on himself talked to him by television!"

Harry looked at her as if she'd lost her senses. He came abruptly to a sitting position in his astonishment.

"But—but," he stammered, "I was there when he died! The place was falling down around our ears. I—"

"You escaped, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—" Suddenly, he was remembering Jack Ulls'n.

"Ulls'n," he gasped. "He was running up the stairs as I came down. He could have—"

S'ee leaned forward tensely.

"Then Jack saved Ax'r! Harry, whatever you may have against Jack—"

Then she stopped. Her eyes fell, and then came up again straightforwardly.

"I admire Jack for his principles, if not exactly for his ideals," she said pointedly. "At least, he risked his life to save the man whom he thought to be the rightful Master of the World."

Harry sank back, eyes slitted.

"Chalk one up for Ulls'n!" he said angrily. "And I suppose I was just having fun, chasing around in dungeons and what-not!"

Her shoulders stiffened.

"Well, you don't have to be so sarcastic about it!" she flared.

Harry broke into a slow grin.

"I do get you all het up, don't I?" he said.

S'ee couldn't answer that one. But —she blushed.

THEN she was serious again. Briefly she told of the revolution that had spread like quicksilver around the world. She spoke of deposed sectional governors, of armed fighting that in a hundred or more important cities had ended in victory for An'ru Ch'on's undercover forces.

Indeed, so quickly had the revolution been accomplished, so insidiously had the balance of power toppled, that the populace was only now becoming aware of the change.

Roughly, the only part of the world which remained under Ax'r's control lay in northern and southern latitudes, beyond the forty-fifth latitude. Fighting on a full wartime scale was being waged on those fronts.

Jums Var'r was now in provisional control of Washington. And S'ee

added, Governor An'ru Ch'on had flown around the world three times since Harry had been in his sick bed. Riots had been quelled, propaganda leaflets distributed, positions consolidated.

"Then we've got the equator, and most of the principal industrial centers?"

"Enough to wage a war and build the machinery and space-ships that we'll need to offset the gravity cloud," S'ee agreed.

A shadow darkened her face.

"But there are the people, Harry," she said slowly. "They were brought up under the rule of Ax'r-o-Ax'r. They believe in him, no matter how submissive they may seem in the face of a conqueror. Ax'r can send spies among them, organize them. A concerted rebellion could so easily lose us all we have gained!"

Harry suddenly remembered something. S'ee answered his question with a quickening of interest.

"He is so old, so pitiful!" she exclaimed. She was referring to the old man Harry had brought to the Citadel. "The dungeons were not kind to him. He must be ten or twenty years younger than he looks.

"But"—her face softened—"he's insane. Whoever he was, where he obtained his knowledge—well, I think his memory must be entirely gone."

Harry lay, thinking that over, twin lines of concentration between his wide-spaced eyes. So strong had been his hunch as to the old man's supreme importance that he could not get the idea out of his head.

"They operated on him yesterday," S'ee added.

"It wasn't a success?"

She rose. She smoothed out the uneven places in her colorful, flaring skirt.

"I think you could see him, if you asked," she said hopefully. "We can go see Dr. P'man. He performed the operation."

Harry dressed in clothing that had been laid out for him. Fifteen minutes later, the tiny bells on the hem of his shirt jingling to the rhythm of his step, he and S'ee were striding down a corridor. They entered a little room to the left of the operating pavilion.

Doctor P'man rose from a chart showing a pattern of jagged lines. He shook hands. At Harry's question, his hand nervously stroked at his pointed chin.

"You can see him, yes," he admitted guardedly. "But I warn you, you'll be disappointed. The man's memory is gone, blanked out. We tried a minor operation on the frontal lobes, but—" He shook his head darkly. "His words are clear-cut, but his total conversational range includes only 'doom,' 'gravity,' and 'July, twenty-nine forty-four'."

"The date of the coming of the cloud," Harry said tightly.

"I know. Well, look here—I'll show you what we're up against."

HE indicated the chart.

"The brain—you probably understand this, since it was common knowledge in your own time—gives off definite electrical vibrations. Call them brain waves, if you prefer. When at rest, or asleep, there is a steady pulsation—the gamma waves. Beta waves are more unsteady, an indication that the brain is at work.

"There are other classifications, such as the delta, omega, and phi—rather complex manifestations. These are all normal, though, and simple to translate from electroencephalograms.

"Here's our patient's encephalogram. A jagged affair, don't you think so?"

Without waiting for an answer, the doctor rushed on, his finger jabbing at crests and troughs.

"Epilepsy, you see? Unmistakably the brain wave of epilepsy, which has as definite a vibration as the normal waves. But, although electroencephalography is a whole branch of medical science in our present civilization—I myself was chief of staff in such a hospital before I chose to enlist under An'ru Ch'on—there have been so many things that have been forgotten!

"Brain diseases were infrequent in Ax'r's civilization—the people didn't have to use their heads, either for thinking or worrying."

"Check!" Harry grinned wryly.

"To that extent," said Dr. P'man, "Ax'r was beneficial. Which is beside the point, of course. What I am pointing out, is that having no need to treat certain diseases, our knowledge of them died out. Epilepsy can be cured, unless there is another complication. The patient under discussion has such a complication, but one we know nothing of.

"Oh," Dr. P'man added hastily, "we aren't quitters. We've got a few thousand ancient medical books, brought back from the library, and we hope to run across something soon—"

"Could I see the patient?" Harry quietly interrupted.

Dr. P'man was immediately acquiescent, and turned toward the door. They went down two flights of stairs, and the doctor led the way along a clean, softly lighted corridor.

S'ee pattered along at Harry's side. But he hardly noticed her presence. He walked with wooden step; and for a reason he couldn't fathom, the blood was rushing away from his face. There was something, he knew; some knowledge that his subconscious mind refused to disgorge into his conscious.

Every step he took was with a reluctance that made him want to turn, to flee, to vanish from sight of a revelation that might threaten to unhinge his sanity, even as ten years in an underground prison had unhinged the sanity of the pathetic old creature he wanted to see.

Dr. P'man opened a door wide. He was looking at Harry strangely.

"Something wrong?" The doctor said quickly. His voice took on an alarmed note. He started forward. "Good heavens, son, you're white as a sheet!"

Harry shook him off.

"It's nothing," he said hoarsely. "Let me go. I'll go in."

He felt S'ee's suddenly anxious eyes on him. With a determined burst of will-power, he brushed by them both and took one step into the room.

He froze there, in mid-step, his blood congealing in his veins, a million yammering, screaming devils taking possession of his brain, to dance tauntingly before his eyes. His glance was fastened to the man lying full length in the bed.

Gone was the foul, matted hair, the dirt and grime of the prisoner Harry had rescued from the cells. But the pock-marked face, the cadaverous cheeks, the unnaturally bright eyes remained. They could not very well camouflage the features that Harry knew so well.

He took another half-dozen steps into the room, a single word bursting hoarsely, unbelievingly from his tortured throat.

*"Dad!"*

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Preparations*

IN THE tremendous, thudding seconds that elapsed while Harry Porter stood there, arms half outflung toward the vacuously staring man who was his father, one remembrance unfurled and enshrouded his whole toppling universe like a banner.

John Quincy Porter. 1892-1949. "A New Conception of the Universe."

Nineteen forty-nine—his father, the man who short weeks before had sent his own son a thousand years into the future, was *dead!* That card in the library beneath the now-shattered king-building had said so.

And yet—and yet—

A soft cry escaped Harry's lips. He staggered to the foot of the bed, dropped to his knees and grasped the shriveled hand in his own. Eagerly he scanned the cadaverous features, the tufted brows, the straight aristocratic nose.

His father! Behind that vacuous, uncomprehending stare lay the same mind that had earned the plaudits of scientists a thousand years dead. Emotion choked his throat, but his shocked mind cleared in time to let him get to his feet.

He forced himself to smile at Dr. P'man and S'ee Var'r, as they came across the room toward him.

"Good heavens!" the doctor gasped.

"Your father! It can't be true!" The blood had receded entirely from his face.

The figure on the bed suddenly burst into a cackle, revealing his toothless gums. One arm raised and he pointed with trembling finger at the sky, his burning eyes fixed on Dr. P'man.

"Gravity!" he whispered. "July, twenty-nine forty-four!"

The vacuous expression returned to his eyes, and he slumped backward.

Harry broke the tense silence, aware that S'ee's hand had crept into his.

"That's my father," he whispered hollowly. "The man who discovered the gravity cloud!"

* * * * *

The hurrying days fled unheedingly past, renewed each morning by a blazing star that had survived at least as many changes in gravitation as there were ice ages. The tidings of immense events broke through to the ears of the little group of human beings who inhabited the Citadel.

An'ru Ch'on, tireless, forceful, a mighty figure strutting across the stage of the world, was rehabilitating defunct governments with men of his own choosing. He was setting into motion the vast, geared machine that was human society, while at the same time directing a war that raged on the boundaries of his suddenly acquired empire.

When Ch'on suddenly showed up at the Citadel, it seemed to Harry that he was an engine that was painfully running on its last ounce of fuel. There was the same powerful stride, the characteristic impatient jerk of the leonine head, the solution of problems with lightning quickness.

But in the tired, too-bright eyes, the deepening lines of the face, was to be found the true story. The tremendous responsibilities that were An'ru Ch'on's were taking their toll.

Jums Var'r came from Washington, conferred with An'ru Ch'on at length. Scientists from all over the world, members of the vast organization, came flocking into the Citadel.

Twice Harry Porter was invited to sit in at the meetings. The things that were discussed amazed him. These were men who had been blocked in their passion for truth by the senseless edicts of Ax'r-o-Ax'r. Those few thousands of scientific books that had been brought back from the underground library sent them into ecstasies.

The new things they learned from these books, they applied to the problems that confronted them. They talked of the Earth and Moon as if they were toys, to be played with as one would play games. They drew diagrams of machinery which, as far as Harry could see, had no moving parts except complex, frictionless magnetic fields.

At the end of a week-long session, the savants dispersed as quickly as they had come, sheafs of blueprints under their arms.

Then An'ru Ch'on called Harry Porter in to see him.

JUMS VAR'R gave him the news about it. Jums was tired too. Working hand in glove with An'ru Ch'on, he had stabilized the central government in Washington, prepared the way for a new, strengthening order.

Harry plainly dreaded that interview.

Jums frowned.

"It's your little escapade you're worrying about," he decided. He gripped Harry's shoulders with friendly hands. "I can't say that I blame you for that. But I suspect that Ch'on's responsibilities are too great for him to remember with malice something that's done and gone."

Some of Harry's uneasiness evaporated, but what Ch'on did have to say on the subject astounded him. The new ruler broke off a discussion with Dr. P'man, dismissing him as Harry came hesitantly into the meagerly furnished office.

Ch'on gestured him into a chair. He remained standing as Harry hovered nervously on the edge of the seat. A faint smile broke the weary hardness of Ch'on's face.

"I've a number of things to talk over with you, Porter," he said tiredly. "But let's make it brief and to the

point. Heaven knows that we'll have to move with dispatch from this point on, if we expect to get everything done that has to be done.

"First, my compliments and appreciation for your steady nerve and ability to think in a crisis. I'm referring to the little adventure you experienced after I so unceremoniously left you alone with Ax'r in his bath."

"Steady nerves?" Harry stared. "Ability to think in a crisis? Why—I was scared stiff, sir, from the second I saw you looking at me from behind those bars!"

He broke into an unbelieving laugh.

"My father used to think I was the world's worst no-good. Perhaps he was right—from his viewpoint. I don't consider it necessary for you to pat me on the back for something that isn't true."

Ch'on looked at him oddly.

"You're the young man with the inferiority complex, aren't you?" he said.

Deep red stole into Harry's face.

"Well, sir—I—that is—"

"Think nothing of it," Ch'on said.

Suddenly he smiled, and his smile revealed a capacity for charm Harry had never suspected.

"Of course you were scared," Ch'on chuckled. "After all, how old are you? Twenty-six? That isn't very seasoned, when you have to rub elbows with old-time conspirators like us. Come out of your shell, young man. Yes, naturally it was a mistake to upset my carefully laid rescue plans.

"But that's all over the dam now. The point is, a crisis arose and you proved equal to it. Don't ever doubt your personal courage or ability, Porter. We don't."

Harry blushed more furiously than ever.

"That's awfully kind of you, sir, but—"

Ch'on made a noise in his throat, pointedly ignoring the other's embarrassment.

"Now to business," he said briskly. "That rescue of your father was a very important thing. I'm glad you were able to accomplish it. Because—"

He must have noticed the sudden pain that showed in Harry's eyes. Quickly he drew up a chair and dropped a friendly hand on Harry's knee.

"I think that in the end it will be your father's direct assistance that will save humanity, Porter. We plumbed his book to its depths, found the clues that enabled us to perfect machinery which would produce such a field as he described.

"In your father's own day, his ideas must have been fantastic, for they took into account a control of electromagnetic phenomena which scientists did not then possess. He guessed correctly that we would have progressed that far by the time the gravity cloud put in its appearance.

"We have the machinery, the means, the ships—everything we need. Except—except the power," he concluded grimly.

A HAUNTED, frightened look flashed momentarily across his face, a face that Harry thought could never exhibit such an emotion. But he caught the implication.

"You think," he said slowly, "that my father could supply that missing link in the plans."

"Yes! My own men are at a dead end. Your father suggested solar power, via tight-beam. Clearly, he had something definite in mind at the time, but the solution appears nowhere in the book."

Ch'on rose impatiently to his feet, took a worried turn about the room. He faced Harry again.

"What I want to know is, what's wrong with him? Why doesn't his memory, his sanity, return?"

Ch'on was a man suddenly off balance, a warrior on the wrong battlefield. Uncertain what to fight, but desperately in need of fighting something. It was a frightening indication of a mind that had been worked to the limit, and Harry sensed it.

He got hurriedly to his feet and, feeling somewhat out of his own province, strove to soothe the agitated leader.

He laid the facts at Ch'on's feet.

"We're in no danger now, sir," he insisted. "This is the first of July.

We've got a little more than two years to prepare. We can go ahead, build spaceships, installing Fitzgerald Contraction drive motors.

"We can put the necessary towers up, equip them with the machinery that's needed to create the Earth-spinning field. We can get everything in readiness, and I'm certain the rest will come."

Ch'on stopped his agitated pacing.

"But will it?" he charged. "Dr. P'man's electroencephalography and psychosurgery have resulted in exactly nothing. How do we know he hasn't ruined the brain altogether?"

Harry's heart sank, but he strove to bolster his own hopes by keeping a confident air.

"That was less than a week, ago, sir," he recalled. "Even the brain needs time to recuperate. And even then, another operation may be necessary."

Ch'on looked at him with sudden shrewdness. Then a broad unaccountable grin that revealed the white, even rows of his teeth spread across the flat planes of his face.

"Now you're bolstering me up!" he chuckled. "You're all right."

Abruptly this man of dynamic moods became serious. He flung himself into a chair, sighed, stretched out his stocky legs.

"Porter," he said weightily, "you haven't given me any new advice, but I admire you for trying to bolster me up with it, anyway. In addition, I'm going to give you the job of engineering the construction of those towers—effective tomorrow!"

Harry's eyes bulged.

"But, sir—" he stammered.

"But nothing! Look here, Porter. I've known you from the minute you arrived in this world. I've heard other things, from S'ee, from Jums Var'r. We've noticed that in a pinch, you stick to your assignment and what you believe in. You get things done.

"You're an engineer, Porter, and you can swing this job. Tomorrow we're shipping you off to Africa with some blueprints."

The next thing Harry knew, he had been shoved out the door. He leaned weakly against the door jamb, nervous and excited. An'ru Ch'on had just conferred upon him the most important job in his life! But this tremendous new responsibility was so heavy in his mind that it had intoxicating qualities, too.

With a certain jauntiness Harry looked up to see Dr. P'man. Dr. P'man seemed worried.

"Your father had an immense problem on his hands, a responsibility which he knew would be impossible to discharge," the doctor said, speaking with his characteristic nervousness. "He was helplessly confined in a dungeon; and, on top of that, in filth and darkness and loneliness. Ten years of that would certainly drive a man insane. Continual worry will."

HE FUMBLED in his pocket, drew forth pad and pencil. He made a picture of a skull, drew a straight line from one ear cavity to the other.

"The thalamus is the key in cases like this," Dr. P'man went on. "It's

[*Turn page*]

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the seat of raw emotion which we inherited from our animal ancestors. The thalamus lies right above the center of that line, two little masses about the size of the forepart of a man's thumb.

"It can't think, but it colors thinking, which comes directly from the prefrontal lobes by way of association fibers. You understand that?"

Harry was confused.

"If the thalamus is overworked with worry or fear, it colors rational thought so strongly that nervous or mental disorders result. So it has been with your father, young man. Prefrontal lobotomy, a severance of the thalamus from the prefrontal lobes, was the answer."

"In other words, my father will turn out to be an unemotional supermind?" Harry said in dismay.

Dr. P'man laughed.

"Hardly. There are really twelve separate brains in the skull, and they can adjust themselves naturally to any slight damage. If prefrontal lobotomy makes certain nerves useless, other nerves will eventually take over the duty."

"But you indicated my father's operation wasn't a success."

Dr. P'man was cautious.

"True. It merely means that another, more complex operation of a similar nature will have to take place."

He shrugged his thin shoulders.

"In any case," he added dismally, "successful or not, a year or more will be required for complete recovery."

A year or more . . .

Harry received his written orders from An'ru Ch'on that evening. In the morning, an airliner would carry him and several staff assistants to the west coast of Africa. Depressed both by this and the unencouraging news about his father, he found himself unable to ask the question he wanted to when he saw S'ee.

She ran into him in the corridor, her face flushed her eyes sparkling.

"My father told me the good news," she said excitedly. "Harry, it's wonderful!"

"I don't think it's so wonderful," he said glumly.

The nearness of her, the flushed vitality of her sweet face, a breath of some subtle perfume, filled him with a terrible longing to take her in his arms, to pour out his heart to her. But a miserable humbleness, a sense of inadequacy held him back.

S'ee rushed on, telling him of the duties which Ch'on had decided on for her. She and her father would be the controlling heads of a world-wide propaganda bureau.

"It's one of the most important jobs there is," she said seriously. "Above all, the people must be controlled. And we have to get them used to the idea that they are going to have to leave their beautiful civilization, live on the equator hereafter."

Harry's heart sank.

"Then I won't see you?"

"Not for a long time, Harry," she said gravely.

To Harry, S'ee seemed unconcerned about the separation. His voice was bitter.

"You're still thinking of Jack Ulls'n," he muttered.

She flushed at his tone, and unaccountable tears came to her eyes.

"Jack Ulls'n must be dead. No one has heard of him. Besides—" She stopped. She said suddenly, "We might as well say good-by now, Harry!"

Her arms crept around his neck and she kissed him quickly. Then she released him and fled down the corridor.

Harry stared after her, his heart pounding. He started giddily after her, but the thought that maybe she really was saying good-by for good halted him.

Head down in troubled thought, he went back to his room and slowly prepared himself for his morning departure.

## CHAPTER XV

### *After Two Years*

ON THIS night of May, 2944, the sea breezes were blowing into the humid jungle of the rainy low latitude which in ancient times com-

monly had been known as French Equatorial Africa.

Those breezes did not touch Harry Porter, as he lay asleep, muttering, restlessly tossing as the sense of something wrong grew in him.

A protecting force dome cut out the breeze and all possible outside disturbances. The apex of the dome barely missed the top of the five-hundred-foot vibro-steel tower, which rose like a proud black god from the midst of a cluster of storage depots, shacks and forging furnaces.

Harry's eyes opened. He lay tense, every nerve in his body bringing faint alarm to his brain. Was it a sound he heard, a distant mutter approaching from the heaving salt wastes of the Atlantic?

Then, abruptly, the tangy odor of salt water entered his nostrils. The sea breeze! In a flurry of unbelief, Harry leaped from the bed, ran to the window. Desperately he looked upward at the high-riding tropic Moon. His breath caught in his throat. That was not the Moon as it should be if it were seen through the force dome!

The force dome was down!

Barefooted, Harry thrust open the door, impelled himself from the bungalow directly onto the smooth, pliant, thousand-foot circle of the compound. His glance swept up and down the line of one-story bungalows where his workers slept. His eyes moved to the trim row of fighting vehicles standing halfway between the gauntly rising tower and the edge of the steaming jungle.

He started to turn his head away, but at the last second caught sight of a moving figure, vanishing behind the row of bungalows. For a moment Harry thought he had recognized the shape, but he couldn't be sure.

The man named Rv'y Gre'el? His teeth clamped savagely. His growing apprehension kept him from following that lead when following it might lead to havoc.

Instead, he ran swiftly toward the powerhouse. With a bitter cry, he knelt momentarily over the lifeless body of the lookout man. He darted into the powerhouse, took one look at the demolished machinery which maintained the force dome and came stumbling out, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Ray-gun squad! Up! Out, everybody!"

The mutter of ominous sound that had been approaching from the Atlantic had suddenly increased to a full-throated, blood-freezing roar. And now Harry saw moonlight glinting from the long line of sharp-nosed ships that came hurtling out of the night toward the tower!

Everything was at once confusion. Men came half dressed from their rooms, bewildered, dazed until they saw what was so obvious—the force dome gone, the tower easy prey for the proton-shower guns projecting from the enemy ships that now were over the compound with a deadly rush and roar.

Harry was galvanized into action, shouting above the tumult. Men swirled in knots until he singled out the ray-gun squad, sent them stumbling to their places with violent profanity.

It was a full minute before they were in their niches behind the gun emplacements, another ten seconds before the first of the cannon rays went into action with a racking hiss and roar.

BY THAT time, the line of attacking ships had maneuvered itself into position and was streaking down. The first coruscating, fountainlike proton-shower guns lighted the night hideously with their orange beauty. Heart racing in panic, Harry saw a full forty feet of the tower sliced neatly off at the top. It came spinning down to create havoc in the storage depots.

Harry stood rigid, mind racing back to remembrance of other such scenes. Once sabotage had been worked on the just-completed base of the tower. The explosion had torn up the whole compound, killed off half his staff.

Nor had sabotage been confined to just this one tower. Stretching around the world, on the equatorial line, were sixteen other such towers.

Inland, coastal and ocean towers similarly had been sought out, had been worked on by a system of spies.

Who were the vicious saboteurs that had killed his watchman, smashed the field maintenance machinery, worked hand in glove with Ax'r's secret forces?

And as he watched that tremendous battle, Harry reflected that though the men of An'ru Ch'on should win here, in the long run Ax'r must succeed. In the two years since the fall of the World Administration Building, there had been steady, unbelievably ferocious war. And slowly, relentlessly, Ax'r had gained ground, until his armies knocked at the back door of Washington itself.

In other latitudes, the constriction was growing fiercer. Much of Ch'on's empire had been lost to him.

The light of a serene Moon reflected itself a thousand times from the sweat globules on Harry's tense, haggard face. But he saw with mounting thankfulness that the hard-working, cursing ray-gun squad was paying off in big dividends the grueling period of training he had put them through.

Three ships were caught in that powerful barrage. In mid-air, their noses turned molten. The momentum of their flight carried them clear over the compound, to crash with tremendous explosion in the seething jungles beyond.

Harry's staff gathered around, silently sharing his exuberance as the ships were beaten back. Finally, the last four turned tail and snarled back toward the Atlantic and their secret base off the coast.

Harry drew a deep breath and dared to look upward at the damage. The entire top of the tower was gone. Farther down, the vibro-steel skeleton dripped in molten, stalactite formation. Repair would require weeks, at the very least.

"All right," he said heavily. "You, An's'n. Get a crew to work taking the specifications for the damaged sections. Aarn, see about the storage depots—and set the men to cleaning up the mess. V'ner, see about the field maintenance machinery. You, Gre'el, come along with me."

Harry wheeled and hurried toward the radio shack, his radio operator, Rv'y Gre'el, following him. Once they got in the shack, Gre'el turned his broad, expressionless face interrogatively. Harry held the man's eyes quietly for a full ten seconds.

Gre'el flushed darkly.

"Well?" he charged. His voice was a foggy bass. "You want me to call somebody?"

"Where were you when the dome went down?" Harry said expressionlessly.

GRE'EL straightened, anger in his eyes.

"I was in bed, I was sound asleep. I heard you yelling. I woke up. Why?"

His voice rose challengingly. He was obviously hurt, resentful, angry at the same time.

"Oh, nothing," Harry muttered irritably. "Forget it. Call Jums Var'r. Audio-visible."

The man gave him a final, bitter glance and turned to his set. Harry looked at him, his helplessness rankling his brain. He had been watching this man ever since Jums had sent him from Washington. Something intangible, something that he felt subconsciously made him distrust Rv'y Gre'el.

Jums' image finally built up on the audio-screen. The gray, shoulder-length locks looked good to Harry. Jums nodded in greeting. His tired eyes immediately saw that something had gone wrong. Harry told him what had happened.

"What about the other towers?"

"They haven't reported. They're getting along."

He spoke briefly of his new need for tower sections. Jums laughed with singular bitterness.

"Then you'll have to send the specifications to the auxiliary factories at Para. Central Europe went yesterday, and the Birmingham district is too busy turning out munitions."

Harry was chilled.

"So they swamped Central Europe. What next?"

"And," said Jums, with forced cas-

ualness, "South America, up to twenty degrees, went about the same time."

A convulsion of hate crossed his face.

"Confound that man Ax'r!" Jums said feelingly. "I've fought like a dog to force the truth down the people's throats. It's no good. One word from Ax'r can cancel ten thousand from my propaganda department. They don't believe us. They think *we're* the ones who are trying to destroy the Earth!"

"Rebellion?"

"Rebellion?" Jums was scornful. "They welcome Ax'r with open arms. Well, it was a rotten base we had to build on, a temporary structure at best. They've been under the shadow of Ax'r too long. I don't care if we lose the whole world, as long as we hold the towers, get the Moon pulverized and the Earth to spinning.

"We've got a mere two months to do that, Harry. But Ax'r gathers power with every victory, and if his fleets can take our island tower bases—"

His lips clamped.

"Then there's your father, Harry. It's funny how we've all subconsciously been waiting for him to regain his memory and his sanity, so he can pull his rabbit out of the hat. But now it looks hopeless."

"How is he?" Harry asked painfully.

"The same as always. Not insane, just quiet. He doesn't think. Probably he can't. And his memory—well, he still doesn't react to your name. Dr. P'man put him through another one of his confounded operations, though."

They spoke for awhile of supplies and supply ships.

"I'll send the okay for the specifications direct to Para," Jums said as they signed off. "Good luck."

Harry's contacts with the outside world were infrequent, but they did much to assuage his sense of aloneness. These two years had driven him hard. He had been around the world countless times, selecting tower sites, instructing subordinates, on several occasions ferreting out spies.

Of prime importance had been the necessity of receiving supplies. And sabotage had entered here too. But through it all, by profanity and sheer man-killing labor, the vibro-steel structures, of such importance to humanity, had gone up.

In the morning, reports from the other towers filtered in, as was the custom. The news was shocking. Five tower bases had been attacked, at the Amazon River Valley, Baker Island, Borneo, Maldive Island and the one on the high Kenya Plateau.

Damage had not been irreparable. But how had Ax'r known the location of those towers? Who had had the means of revealing such information to the enemy?

Worse news came in the afternoon. Washington would fall to Ax'r in a matter of hours. And the new seat of An'ru Ch'on's diminished world empire was to be here at the main tower base on the west coast of Africa.

Roughly speaking, Ch'on's empire now consisted of a five-hundred mile strip of land girdling the equator. All else was Ax'r's—and his armies were now fighting on thousand-mile fronts to take the rest.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Recognition*

IT WAS only after the vast fleet of Moon-destroyers and power-ships had landed on the compound, and Jums Var'r and An'ru Ch'on had been shown to their quarters, that Harry Porter took the time out to satisfy his overwhelming burning desire to look up S'ee.

Eagerly he pushed his way through crowds of soldiers, pilots, crews and other loyalists who had come with Ch'on in the exodus from Washington. Shortly he was walking down the corridor of Ch'on's ship. There was an open door. He stood tensely on the threshold.

S'ee was bending over Dr. John Porter. Suddenly she looked up. Her expressive eyes lighted, and a soft cry escaped her lips.

"Harry!"

She came toward him, looking at him in wonder. They stood a few inches apart. She was looking up at him.

"You've changed," she murmured incredulously. "Harry, you're—different!"

"I'm the same guy," Harry said huskily. "Maybe a little bit harder and tougher and blacker. But this job and this climate would do that to anybody. I haven't been ten degrees away from the equator in two years. But outside of that, I'm no different—especially in a certain way."

She saw the longing in his eyes. With a little sigh she moved closer to him, letting her head fall on his chest. His bare, tanned arms held her to him. Her voice when she spoke was as soft as the waves on the near Atlantic beach.

"Ch'on and my father are so proud of you, Harry. Did you know that? Nobody else could have handled this as well as you did. And it's so funny to remember that you thought you weren't fitted for it!"

Her shoulders moved in girlish laughter. Then it seemed to be more than laughter. Her shoulders shook under a tempest of sobs.

Harry was aghast. She was half laughing, half crying. He grabbed her shoulders, shook her savagely, but it wouldn't stop. He realized suddenly that she was unstrung. But for what reason?

Something of the truth came to him as he swept her into his arms, ran across to another cabin and placed her gently on the bed. She gasped and he rubbed her hands worriedly. Finally she quieted and buried her face in the pillow.

When she came out of it, she lay stiffly, her face white and pinched. And Harry guessed what she had been through. She opened her eyes and spoke in a low, tense voice.

"I didn't mean to, Harry. But seeing you after two years—in the flesh and not by television— And anyway, television is no good for really letting people see each other, is it? And having to *run* away from Ax'r—"

Her voice choked up.

"And talking and talking to the stupid people, and then having them not believe a word you say—and then they welcome Ax'r by rebelling and making it easier for him!

"It's too utterly senseless. And now we've lost everything anyway, particularly if your father doesn't wake up. Harry, what will happen then?"

A lump rose in Harry's throat. He didn't answer the question. There was no answer. He leaned closer to S'ee, and felt a great outpouring of tenderness. He was in love with S'ee, and he always would be. Softly he stroked her hand until her eyes closed and she fell asleep.

BUT long after she slept, he knelt there, scowling blackly to himself. In the cabin across the hall lay his father—humanity's last hope. And maybe a lost hope. Queer that it should happen this way.

There lay the man who had discovered the gravity cloud, a thousand years ago. He could not have dreamed, ever, that some day he would lie in that bed, mentally incompetent to think or remember or be aware.

He could not have dreamed that, moving in a world exterior to his mind, others waited desperately for that trapped mind to release itself. He could not know, and perhaps never would . . .

Harry rose finally and walked thoughtfully into his father's room, studying the gaunt face, the white bandage around the head.

There were footsteps in the corridor, and Dr. P'man entered the room. He stopped short as he saw Harry, surveying him with his quick, nervous eyes. He glanced at the figure on the bed, then drew Harry aside. Harry sensed triumph in his expression. His breath came through his teeth.

"You mean—" Harry began.

"I don't mean anything. Don't get your hopes up. But—well, two weeks ago I performed a delicate operation on your father, expecting it to kill him —a realignment of the association fibers of the prefrontal lobes with the

deeply buried memory tracts. It didn't kill him. He's very much alive. What does that mean?"

He looked sharply at the figure on the bed, nodding his head in jerky up and down movements.

"The mere success of the operation points to complete recovery eventually. I failed before. Darned if I'll fail this time! I mean it."

His recessive chin was thrust out. He was elated, determined, proud of himself at the same time.

"But—but how soon will that be?"

"Oh, Lord!" Dr. P'man's nerves were getting the best of him. He was suddenly angry—and at himself.

"How can I tell?" he snapped. "They all want him well in the next couple of weeks. He *has* to get well, they say. But it depends on the strength of the emotional shock—"

Harry heard the scuff of a shoe in the corridor. Nerves attuned to all small sounds, he was not inclined to ignore surreptitious noises. He took three steps, emerged into the hall and almost ran into Rv'y Gre'el.

Gre'el stumbled back.

"Watch where you're going!" he bit out.

Harry grabbed his arm savagely.

"What were you doing here?" he demanded.

A pallor came over Gre'el's broad face. With a thick, angry curse he tore his arm away.

"Nothing except minding my own business!" Then his jaw thrust out.

"Listen," he said with rising fury, "you may be my boss, but you're not going to question every move I make and expect to get away with it!"

"When I find you eavesdropping, I expect to get away with it. Look here, Gre'el!"

Harry was suddenly nettled, his nerves on edge. He was determined to have done with this thing for good.

"Plainly speaking, I don't trust you. In the morning, you'll go on another detail. In the meantime, I'll look up your recommendations. Now clear out!"

Gre'el held his ground, eyes blazing. Then he turned on his heel.

Dr. P'man was distressed.

"The man was just walking through and may be perfectly—" he began.

"Walking through, nothing! If he's a spy or not, though, I'll feel better if I get rid of him. Things are too crucial now to take any chances, particularly with my father hovering on the brink of recovery."

HARRY went out to the compound to wait for the scheduled airliner bringing the needed equipment from the emergency factories at Para, Brazil, almost three thousand miles away.

Under his breath, Harry swore fervently. The way things were working out, he was being all but smothered with responsibility. The life of a rebel, he realized now, was blood and sweat and tears.

That night Harry slept restlessly. Something must have told him that as a result of that set-to with Gre'el, portentous, ominous events were about to take place. The sudden scream that went blasting through the night—S'ee's scream—was the trigger that touched off his tense nerves.

Before he was half awake he was on the compound, impelling himself toward the hospital. But he stopped going in that direction as he heard the howl of a Fitzgerald Contraction motor. He whirled, briefly saw one of his slim, torpedolike flyers erupt into the air and at a low angle head for the force-dome wall.

Harry stood turned to stone, staring at the open cockpit. Another scream sounded. S'ee's head came into view. The pilot vengefully shoved her down, just as the force-field nullifier in the nose of the ship opened a slit in the dome.

The ship plummeted through, and the shimmering force dome closed up again.

With a panted curse, Harry turned in his tracks, ran for the line of fighting craft. He threw himself into the cockpit. He was aware of men running toward him. He heard Jums' startled voice. But he was filled with anxiety. Desperately he jabbed his finger against the dashboard.

The ship leaped into full speed. In another second it was hurtling over an ocean whose white caps already were

tinged with the ominous, reddish light of early dawn.

The fleeing ship was a speck ahead of him. Now it swerved, to take a new, northward course. Savagely Harry sent his own vehicle along the hypotenuse of that right triangle, and in the space of a minute had cut his distance from the other ship down to a fraction.

He saw the pilot look hurriedly back. Cold fingers touched at his spine. Rv'y Gre'el! And he could now see that there were two other figures in the ship beside him. Who the other one was, Harry couldn't know, unless—

A burst of panic shot through him, as he realized who it must be. His father, torn from his sick bed, the incisions in his skull barely healed!

Harry's fingers were suddenly shaking from the intensity of the resolve that gripped him. Gre'el was no fool. He'd blast Harry's ship outright—unless Harry got in the first lick.

Harry's fingers fumbled at the cannon-ray controls. He set the deadly weapon at minimum aperture. At the full, ghastly risk of obliterating both S'ee and his father, he pressed the trigger.

His aim was good!

The rounded, tapering beam leaped into being, like a hot glowing cable athwart the two ships. Harry kept it on vengefully for a full five seconds. He saw the entire rear half of the ship dissolve into molten, fiery drops that streamed downward into the great surface of the sea.

Rv'y Gre'el's ship faltered. Its nose turned up. Harry had a glimpse of a face contorted with rage as Gre'el madly strove to regain control. It was futile. Twisting slowly, gracefully like a feather, the renegade ship sank downward onto the gently heaving waters.

Harry brought his fighter down between two waves to bob on the crest. He stood up in the cockpit. Scarcely twenty feet away foundered the disabled ship. Even as Harry watched, a wave gently washed over it and it sank from sight.

"S'ee!" Harry cried hoarsely. "Dad!"

THE girl's answering cry came like a wail. Then it was cut off abruptly. Harry was about to turn toward the sound of the voice when his blood froze. Near the spot where the ship had sunk, he saw a patch of gray that might have been seaweed.

A veined hand rising feebly from the water to clutch at empty air told him the truth.

Harry made his choice. He cast the torturing thought of S'ee's suddenly quenched appeal from his mind, scrambled to the edge of the cockpit and threw himself in a clean surface dive into the water. He struck out, shocked by the cold.

*"Dad!"*

He jackknifed in the water, saw the frail, sinking form. He grabbed at the struggling hand, drew his father to the surface. John Porter's eyes were wide, filled with shocked fright. He clawed at Harry.

Desperately Harry fought himself free, but it was as if he were fighting with a maniac. Hair was falling in his eyes. He brushed it back with one motion, with another lashed out with his balled fist. It smashed the old man on the point of the jaw. He slumped as the hit came home.

One arm looped around his father's neck, Harry turned and struck out.

He stopped stock-still and almost went under. His eyes were frozen on the cockpit of his ship. A hoarse, unbelieving gasp was wrenched from his lips. For standing in the plane, grinning vengefully, S'ee's lifeless body draped limply over one arm, was —Jack Ulls'n!

True, it was not the Jack Ulls'n that Harry Porter had known two years before. Ulls'n had not been as heavily built as this broad-shouldered man. But seawater had loosened the false, coarse strands of hair, had splotched the artificial coloring matter of his skin.

Revealed stood an obviously padded figure, nose and lips patently distended with wax, the loss of the artificial hair showing the high forehead, the well-shaped head of the life license captain!

How long Harry tread water, staring at this apparition from out of

the past, this man who had posed with such diabolical success as "Rv'y Gre'el," he didn't know.

Then both men turned their heads as a murmuring roar sounded from out of the sky. Barely skimming the water came an airship, motor howling mutedly.

Ulls'n's teeth gleamed. He laughed softly. He dropped S'ee onto the floor of the cockpit, hurriedly seated himself at the controls.

He threw one taunting glance at Harry Porter.

"Take your father, then!" he shouted triumphantly. "I should have killed him outright, but I suspect he'll be doing you little good, anyway. In the meantime, I've got S'ee.

"Many thanks for a pleasant, profitable visit. And remember—your criminal plan to disrupt our civilization is doomed to failure. Ax'r isn't through with you!"

His motors howled. The trim craft leaped up and away, just as Jums Var'r's own ship dropped with a savage splash in the spot the escaping ship had left.

Harry watched the dwindling ship haggardly, the slow, torturing fire of a great loss burning in him. S'ee was gone!

The man in his arms wriggled, gasped.

*"Ah-h-h!"* he moaned heart-rendingly, twisting around in Harry's arms, sunken eyes distended.

"Steady, Dad, steady." Harry muttered compassionately.

But an electric flash of intuition thrummed along his nerves. There was something in his father's expression that was like a light, growing in brilliance. Harry stared with pounding heart as the transformation took place. Gone was the look of soullessness, the vacant unawareness. It couldn't be! And yet—

Dr. John Porter's pale lips opened in a half scream. He struggled.

"Son!" he gasped. "Harry! Where are we—I don't understand—this water—"

He moaned again. Harry shouted then across twenty feet of water, toward Jums' approaching ship, with the full power of his lungs.

"Jums! My father! He remembers!"

Seconds later, Jums was reaching over the side of the cockpit to draw Dr. Porter into his own ship. And though he himself had witnessed his own daughter's abduction, on his face was the savage fighting look of a man who has been given new hope and new life.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *To the Moon*

LONG after the enthusiastic, unrestrained cheers greeting his formal introduction to these scientists died away, Dr. John Porter stood on the rostrum of the assembly hall, unable to speak, tears choking his throat.

A round of good-natured, friendly laughter rippled through the waiting group. Harry, standing tensely at the back of the hall, laughed too, but his was a nervous laugh, as tear-choked as his father's voice.

A month had passed since Dr. John Porter's complete recovery. He had been told the story in detail. His own importance had been explained, the necessity of his discovering, if humanly possible, a means of supplying the towers and the Moon-destroyers with the power they so desperately needed.

Harry watched eagerly as his father regained control of himself. Almost humbly, the son traced again the familiar cut of his parent's chin, the straight, patrician nose, the deeply placed eyes that glowed with an inner kindliness and a new tolerance.

Pride grew in Harry's eyes. Even the dull, throbbing ache that he felt for S'ee Var'r could not erase that pride.

"I should not be here," Dr. Porter began, a tremulous smile tugging at his wan lips. "According to the card my son found in the library, I died in nineteen forty-nine." Another ripple of laughter. Porter smiled. "But I *am* here, and that's what counts. As for my reported death—well, I'll

never know the truth of the matter. It is too far lost in time.

"But most of you know now that it was after I wrote my book"—an unrestrained burst of applause—"after I wrote my book, that I was again able to secure the necessary amount of *temporum,* the peculiar metal whose disintegration alone makes time-traveling to the future possible.

"I was determined to throw myself forward to the future, there to find my son. It was my intention all along, as I have told him. But first I had to write the book, in case something went wrong and I should not survive."

He laughed softly, with gentle irony.

"Apparently something did go wrong. At least, it is evident that the time machine exploded behind me, wrecked my home and brought it down in flames. I was dead—certainly that must have been the explanation.

"But I was very much alive in the future." He paused, and added quietly, "Very much alive in the future—eleven years before my son arrived! I miscalculated, or else the quality of the *temporum* was not what it should have been.

"But the paradox exists. That it was a paradox is ample excuse for my son's not suspecting that it was his own father imprisoned in the dungeons below the World Administration Building. How I got there—well, that is too long a story to go into here.

"I wasn't fortunate enough to run into a member of An'ru Ch'on's Organization of Free Thought, but only had the bad luck to be questioned about my life license. Ax'r didn't listen to me long. He described my story of a gravity cloud as blasphemy. And so—I was hauled away."

He bit at his lip as what he remembered of the horrible ten years came back to him.

Everybody waited respectfully. Hope was running high that Dr. Porter had solved the problem. Nor were his listeners wrong. In the next half hour, the scientist held them spellbound with a highly technical description of a tight-beam whose energy loss and dispersion was a fraction of a watt for each million miles, up to a billion miles. Each equation was explained.

"It is a simple tube of energy," said Porter softly, "wrapped around with a spiraling system of high-frequency oscillations, projected with almost any diameter from the machine I have described. It pierces the heart of our Sun, but heat will not affect it, though the titanic energies raging there will.

"Those energies, easily transformable into electric power, are under a pressure which makes them follow the line of least resistance—down the length of the tight-beam. A simple, workable plan, gentlemen, the blueprints for which we can have ready within the next day."

THE meeting was disbanded, and Dr. John Porter became the center of a thankful wildly enthusiastic group of scientists. Harry waited outside the door. When his father was alone at last, he grabbed the old man's hand in unashamed affection and pride.

"You've fitted yourself into the film, Dad," he said in a rush. "The film of the future!"

Dr. John Porter looked his son up and down, an odd expression in his eyes. He saw a broad-shouldered, muscular figure, lines of dissipation smoothed away from the tanned, strong-jawed face, a new vitality and character showing in the eyes.

A slow, secret smile curved the father's lips.

"Yes," he said softly, "I think I have."

* * * * *

The four men high up in the control room of Number One tower were in a high state of tension. Enclosed by the horseshoe-shaped console board sat Harry Porter, with An'ru Ch'on, Jums Var'r and his father behind him.

It was but a week before the coming of the gravity cloud to this solar system. Dr. John Porter's vital solar-power machinery had been installed in the control rooms of sixteen equator-girdling towers.

"The beam should have returned by now," Jums said in a strained voice.

His eyes were on the television screen which showed the interior of the small power-ship now hovering

three thousand miles out in space on Earth's sunward side.

Ch'on great hands clasped behind his back, stood motionless, making no comment, watching with eagle eyes this test experiment.

"Thirty seconds to go," Dr. Porter said confidently. "The beam hit the Sun fifteen minutes ago. Shortly, the transmission beam from the ship will strike our receivers. There!" He pointed at the ship's meters as shown by television. "And there!"

His voice rose in excitement, and Ch'on lost his poise. All three men surged closer to look at Harry's meters. The voltage crept up and up, the amperometer keeping pace with it.

"Release it! Release it!" Dr. Porter shouted. "You'll blow out your tubes!"

Indeed, the meter hands were moving around the dials so fast that it seemed they would go past the checks, the danger point. Frantically Harry's hand darted out, depressed the finger-sized switch.

The meter hands hovered. And leaping out from tower base Number One, an invisible, tremendously elongated oval of force spread halfway across the Atlantic Ocean and almost halfway across Africa, deep into the core of the Earth, grasping matter and all its small particles in a semi-rigid grip.

The mere fact that there was an outflowing of a tremendous power was proof enough of that single gear in the massive, energy-wheel that in less than a week would be called upon to spin the Earth.

Voice shaking from relief, Harry told the testing pilot to bring his ship back to base. Then he turned to the three older men, eyes shining. But neither he nor the others could speak.

Ch'on's hard eyes were suspiciously misted. Yet he did not seem ashamed. He dropped his massive, powerful hands to Dr. John Porter's stooped shoulders.

"The human race owes you more than it can ever repay," he said plainly.

He said no more on the subject. A flow of praise would have cheapened itself, and Dr. Porter understood.

But the scientist allowed a wry smile to cross his face as the elevator dropped downward.

"Maybe," he suggested, "we'd better wait till our plans are hatched to count our successes."

Ch'on agreed with him, but it was evident that his confidence had returned. Despite Ax'r-o-Ax'r, he and Jums Var'r were both sure of success now.

AND so it was a shock when the alarm bell started its monstrous clanging. The four men stared at each for a single second, and then Ch'on ground out a single, bitterly expressive groan.

*"Ax'r!"*

The rebel leader turned pale, but the mantle of authority dropped over him instantly.

They left the elevator in a rush. The compound was in a furor. Harry took one look into the sky, heard the approaching mutter that had signaled such cold terror to him before.

The wickedly gleaming teardrops came rushing from the north, an ominous, roaring cloud that literally blanked out a large portion of the sky.

"They're playing for keeps," Ch'on said thinly. "Our force dome is up, which means they've got only one intention—to weaken it by sheer force of explosives and energy impact until our generators can't throw off the energy."

Jums' face was hard and pale as cold marble.

"There's only one thing to do," he gritted. "This base must be protected at all costs. Its shift-field connects with the tower three thousand miles away in Para.

"Whatever else happens, we have to get the Moon-destroyers and power-ships into space at once. They'll do us no good protecting the tower."

Harry grabbed Ch'on's arm.

"I've got a plan!"

Ch'on took his attention away from the oncoming horde, his anxious eyes questioning.

Harry rushed on, speaking to Jums as well.

"We *can* use the power-ships against

the enemy! Just this once, it will work. We'll *throw* them out of control!"

Interest showed in Ch'on's eyes.

"How?" he demanded.

"It's the force-field, the Earth-spinning field," Harry said with mounting excitement. "Each tower throws out an elongated ovular field which links up with the tower next to it. Each of those fields grabs hold of molecules clear down to the Earth's core—not rigidly, but enough to affect their motion in a given direction.

"In order to spin the Earth, the fields are swung over from one tower to the next. It's like a vast wheel which, in turning, causes another wheel to turn in another direction, but at a much lower speed—as if the *wind* caused by the first moving wheel had caused the second to turn a little on its axis. That's the way our Earth-spinning field acts!"

"But what—"

"We can control the depth of the shift-fields. We'll take our ships into space, broadcast the power back here to this tower, and then switch the whole field over to the Congo tower! Won't that work, Dad?"

Dr. Porter stared at his son in dawning startlement.

"I think," he breathed, "it will!"

And then Ch'on got it. His breath erupted.

"Good enough! We'll do it!"

He sent Harry with one shove toward the flagship of the Moon-destroyers.

"Up with the whole fleet! It's your job!"

And at that very instant, the manifold, deadly ships of Ax'r-o-Ax'r swooped over the compound. The first tremendous, lividly bursting bombs struck the force dome!

But while the force dome was up, the wicked brace of cannon-ray guns, embrasured solidly into the floor of the compound, could do small damage, if any. Their heavily driven protons, hungrily thirsting for electrons, could not smash outside through the force dome to wreak their havoc.

But Ch'on kept the gunners at their posts. Harry, shouting above the racking hiss and voluminous roar of the enemy's proton-shower guns and bombs, sent crews scrambling pell-mell into their ships.

THEN, with one last glance upward at the circling ships, which he knew would hang on like bulldogs until the very ferocity of their attack brought the force dome down, Harry entered the flagship of the Moon-destroyers and threw himself into the pilot seat.

He grabbed the mouth-tube.

"Follow my lead!" he shouted. "One, two, three, four—in that order. At two-second intervals, straight up through the dome, straight up into space, without stopping for *anything!*"

He meant that quite literally. They would lose a few ships, but the main thing was to get the bulk of them into space, where all of Ax'r's armies and weapons and ships could never hope to follow.

He threw in his force-dome neutralizer, as other pilots were doing. His finger swept through the eddy currents that hovered skin-deep on the instrument board. It was the full, large circle that he described. It meant maximum air speed from the very first second of motion. And that speed, for these ships, was close to a thousand miles a second.

Maximum space speed was another matter, with a theoretical limit of something less than the speed of light.

Harry felt no sensation of motion. In his view-screen, he did not even see his ship split through the force dome, to miss one of the attacking ships by a hairbreadth and plummet up into the blue vault of a sky that swiftly turned purplish black.

Nor did he see the long line of power-ships and Moon-destroyers, as they were ejected like flicked watermelon seeds from the interior of the bubblelike dome, to follow in his wake.

But three of those ships met catastrophe, yet in meeting it they also dealt it out. Three of Ax'r's fighters, coming into violent contact with three escaping ships, erupted into meteor-like brilliance and burst with one solid detonation.

Their crews never were aware of that infinitesimal second of time which separates life and death.

Out in space, Harry exultantly gathered his ships together. He noted the loss of the three ships. But time was wasting, and he refused to cloud his brow with the bitterness the loss of those ships could bring.

Instead, he barked orders to the pilots of the power-ships. Immediately three tight-beams leaped out, spearing through deep, cold space toward the sun.

In eight minutes, those beams touched, and Harry knew that power inconceivable was surging back up those energy cables. That power would return to the ships, would automatically be transmitted back to the force-field machinery at the main and the Congo towers.

With much difficulty, operating under spatial conditions with which he was unfamiliar, Harry contacted Jums Var'r by television.

Jums was haggard, his shoulder-length hair in disarray.

"They're straining the force dome beyond the limit," Jums gritted through his teeth. "The force-dome machinery has not only to maintain the dome but to counteract the energy, both kinetic and electromagnetic, that's being thrown against it.

"Curse that man Ax'r! He knows that if this tower falls—just this one! —the whole plan is shot to pieces."

"Hang on!" Harry said imperatively. "In five minutes, your receivers can pick up the power to create an Earth-spinning field. And be sure the operator at the Congo tower is ready for your signals, is ready to hold the force-field as it spins toward him!"

Harry never saw what happened to those hundred or so odd ships that were attacking the main power base. But he was so certain of his theory that scarcely eight minutes later, when An'ru Ch'on's face built up in the television plate, he was able to shout his triumph.

"It worked!" Harry exclaimed breathlessly.

A huge grin overspread Ch'on's broad face.

"Worked? Porter, thank heaven you thought of that! We threw the spinner field over to the Congo tower. The attacking ships were like leaves in a whirlwind! They never knew what happened. They lost control, crashed against each other and smashed into the jungle. Those that came out of it, a mere half dozen, are even now limping back home toward that fiendishly hidden coastal base of theirs, on some offshore island."

Harry's tense nerves relaxed. He matched Ch'on's elated smile.

"But we have to remember that won't work again. They'll be prepared."

The shadow of heavy foreboding darkened Ch'on's bronzed, angular face. He nodded slowly. Then he made a gesture.

"Keep your ships in space, Porter. You're in command of the fleet. Scatter the power-ships around the equator, ready to supply the towers with power the minute the moons of Jupiter begin to fall closer to their primary. And that's only a week away.

"As for the Moon-destroyers, they've got their own power pick-up system. Go ahead."

He cut connections.

And so it was that Harry Porter, late of 1942 A.D., once an irresponsible man-about-town, sat in space at the head of a mighty fleet, assigned to the destruction of the dazzling planet which had witnessed so many of his night-time escapades when he was a part-time playboy.

The Moon was about to be destroyed—so that humanity might survive.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *The Maldive Tower*

WOODENLY, ruling out his nostalgia, Harry bunched his ships on the Moon's Earthward side. The comparative nearness of Earth's gravity would render his task easier.

A hundred miles above the gleaming white circle, hovering relatively motionless by means of their reversed Fitzgerald Contraction drives, the

ships looked down on a tumbled, scarred landscape that was foreign to all Earthly experience.

Harry effortlessly picked out such distinctive features as Mare Imbrium, at the northeast portion, Tycho on the southeast, and Copernicus at the central portion, radiating, though in lesser degree than Tycho, its mysterious white streaks.

Then Harry's meters leaped, indicating the arrival of titanic energies from the heart of the Sun. He threw the unimaginable voltages into the ready generating equipment of the pressure beam.

The invisible beam leaped from the ship. Harry had deliberately chosen Copernicus, one of the most impressive craters on the Moon. Once the destruction of that 14,000-foot crater was accomplished, the unpleasant task of demolishing other features, less beautiful, would be made easier.

The beam struck. And on the Moon, without a warning prelude, the south wall of Copernicus toppled into its own crater. Dust swirled up, obliterating final sight of the destruction.

Harry was aware of the pilot he had replaced standing behind him, watching with unhappy eyes. Harry grinned at him lopsidedly.

"It tears me to pieces to have to do this," he said sorrowfully.

"Of course." The man nodded gravely. "When you get sick of it, though, turn it over to me. My stomach's strong."

The pilots of the other ships followed Harry's orders with smart salutes as their uneasy faces formed on the vision screens. With a minute to go before they would have to start discarding power, they ringed their ships, a hundred strong, around the flagship in a ten-mile circle.

As Harry gave the word, their pressor beams leaped out to encircle the territory surrounding defunct Copernicus, so that all that vast power was focused down to a single area.

These pressures were now forcing untold thousands of tons of solid rock and lava to a central point. Whole mountains pressed toward each other, were toppled from their bases.

Underground, immense convulsions took place as tortured gneiss—crystallized granite—strove to equalize pressures by escaping from them. Dust, whole tons of rock burst upward from the disturbance, rose thousands of feet and arced back.

Harry tensely dealt the finishing blow. His tractor ray went on, shot downward to strike at the very center of that disturbance. Twisting, pressure-torn rock sought the legitimate method of escape. Tons upon tons of Moon-stuff were sucked upward with tremendous, building velocity, through the cone of the tractor ray—and straight at Harry's ship!

Harry felt a convulsion of alarm. He flicked the tractor ray through an arc a hundred miles long. The Moon-fragments were snapped away, struck the Moon in free fall more than a thousand miles distant.

Harry's co-pilot grinned weakly.

"That was something!" he admitted. "Another second, and this ship would have been pulp."

HARRY went back for another "load." This time he was more experienced. No sooner had the tractor ray struck than he flicked it through a vast arc, released the material. It soared away into space, rapily grew invisible as it pursued a haphazard orbit about the Earth.

So far, it seemed they had barely made a dent in the gleaming sphere. Harry felt dismayed. But as his operations became more routine, mechanical, he exulted. At the end of five man-killing hours, a vast pit in the surface of the Moon had been gouged out.

The ship's mathematician reported that the cavity was but little less than a hundred miles deep. Furthermore, the ejected masses were circling the Earth, at about the same distance as the Moon, but on different planes!

That was what Harry wanted to hear. He gave his task over to the eager pilot, and dropped down to the television cubby. Soon Jums' glowing face appeared.

"Fine job," he said warmly. "How long do you suppose it will take?"

"This is the hardest part. When

we get a big hole, the sides will break up automatically. Then we'll put a dozen tractor rays on and scoop the material out as fast as it forms. We'll have two halves of the Moon leaning dangerously toward each other.

"Then it'll be a simple matter of picking up the pieces, hurling them around the Earth in orbits. Then—pulverization! A week from now, the job should be complete—just about the time the gravity cloud shows up."

Jums bit at his lip.

"I hope we can hold out that long. We've sent out scouts to size up the lay of the land. Ax'r's ships are massing for a big drive. Unfortunately, thanks to Jack Ulls'n, that tyrant knows a good deal of our plans."

"And we can thank him for a lot of other things too," Harry said morosely.

Jums showed quick sympathy.

"S'ee can take care of herself, son."

"Not in the hands of a fanatic like Ulls'n. He'll never believe there is such a thing as a gravity cloud. Then it'll be too late, and S'ee will die with him."

He cut connections with Jums, and sought an officer's cabin for some much-needed sleep.

For two days, Harry deliberately transferred his hate for Jack Ulls'n to the Moon. He liked to imagine it was Ulls'n's smirking face. . . .

The towers were now perfectly fitted to do their work. Astronomers at the African tower base were keeping track of the approach of the cloud with Dr. Porter's special emulsion process. In five days, the outermost fringe of the gravity cloud would touch the Jovian system. It would be the signal starting into motion the complex machinery which would spin the Earth at gradually increasing velocity.

At the end of two days, the Moon looked as if a cosmic ax had smashed into it. The gash was a full thousand miles in length, four hundred miles in breadth and five hundred miles deep. Into this cavity, the pressor rays poured their full fury, gouging the bottom of the cavity until landslides chipped billions of tons off the sides. They worked on steadily.

The tractor rays, more than a dozen now in operation, scooped up the debris, flung it away from the Moon in thousands of whirling orbits about the Earth.

Ax'r must finally have been aware that his heavens were far from unchanging. For with one shocking blow, into which he must have poured every fighting ship at his command, he struck simultaneously at the Christmas Island and Congo towers, demolishing them utterly.

Harry took the news silently, but icy fingers of anxiety touched his spine. It had been so sudden that even yet he couldn't credit it for the truth.

JUMS' hands were shaking. He was thrown completely off balance. In Ch'on's absence at Para, he couldn't think constructively.

"If Ax'r can get through the domes that easily, he won't have much more trouble. We can't hold out for three days!"

Muscles bunched in white knots along Harry's jawline.

"Remember," he said tightly, "if the main tower or the Galapagos or the Maldive towers fall, then we are done for. They take care of empty stretches of sea where we couldn't find land to put up towers. All in all, there are eight towers which are vital.

"Why doesn't Ch'on withdraw his forces from the towers we can do without in a pinch, and protect the important ones?"

"It's a drastic step."

But the suggestion seemed to pull Jums together. He ground his hands together nervously and nodded.

"I'll suggest it to Ch'on," he said.

And in the next twenty-four hours, the sides of the Moon-cavity fell together with a shock that seemed to shake space. Hours later, when the debris was cleared away, the awe-struck billions of Earth's population saw a gaping black depression in the Moon, which penetrated clear to its center and sloped up to a width of some twelve hundred miles!

The Moon-destroyers had literally

eaten through to the central core of the giant satellite, were deliberately lengthening that gap until it seemed liked a death-defying grin. Death-defying though it might be, the two halves were again leaning dangerously toward each other.

And in the meantime, there came news from Earth that An'ru Ch'on had abondoned six of the remaining fourteen towers. Ax'r had fallen on them to find no resistance. On the eight towers left would fall the burden of spinning Earth. If but one of them should fall—

Harry refused to consider the possibility. The hours fled by, and he was suddenly aware that the outer fringes of the gravity cloud were only a half-dozen hours distant!

As if Ax'r were craftily aware of the crisis in Ch'on's plans, his vast fleets went into action. News came that the Maldive Island and Borneo towers were being defended to the death.

And at the same time, Ch'on made an important change in plans.

Jums called Harry, quietly told him that the shift-fields were already in action. Earth was slowly gaining rotary speed!

Harry was shocked.

"But why?" he cried. "The fringe of the cloud hasn't even touched Jupiter yet. And it won't touch Earth for six more hours!"

"Ch'on knows that. But we've got those six hours to work with now, whereas we may not have them later on when we really need them. So Ch'on is deliberately working the Earth's speed upward.

"We figure that in those six hours, Earth's day can be worked down to twenty-one hours. When the cloud strikes, we'll have gained on ourselves —and if a tower should go down, maybe we'd have reached the necessary speed already."

"But—but how about volcanoes? The whole Earth might split wide open!"

Jums shook his head.

"Your father assures us it won't," he declared. And in his voice was complete confidence of the scientist's knowledge.

HARRY nodded. Then he was abruptly called away to the control room. The Moon had chosen this moment to complete its own disruption. It literally fell in on itself! Craters, seabeds, mountain ranges went sliding in one frightful motion into the gorge. The whole satellite buckled. The halves smashed together, broke open like a rotten apple.

Against the background of deep, eternal space the Moon went through its dying convulsions. Every distinguishing feature was gone, its girth, identity and existence lost.

Tractor beams dipped in, flung whole mountains in vicious orbits about Earth. The Moon was nothing but a memory. Its fragments moved in orbits that sped in every conceivable plane about Earth, ready for the ships that would now follow up. With a modification of the pressor ray, the ships would pulverize those fragments into clouds of dust.

Harry himself saw the down-spiraling motion of the Jovian moons as the fringe of the long-awaited gravity cloud touched the System. It was barely detectable, but detectable enough. Eventually, some of those satellites would fall within Roche's Limit, and Jupiter would become another ringed planet like Saturn!

But most important was that in mere minutes, the cloud would touch Earth, an Earth whose rotary speed was now only twenty-one hours to the day. And during those six hours, although earth tremors and full-sized earthquakes had occurred, Harry saw no sign of volcanic eruptions.

He began to feel a giddy lightheadness. Success was within grasp. But Jums' jubilance served to draw him back to the realm of common sense.

"We have to keep the towers operating three whole days, until the densest, four-gravity part of the cloud is reached," Harry reminded him. "For three days we'll be passing through the outer fringes, and the increase in gravity will be gradual.

"If one of the towers—just one—comes down before the three days are up—"

But Jums grinned confidently.

"We'll hold Ax'r off! You tend to

your dust cloud!" he ordered.

His relieved, care-worn face faded on the visiscreen.

It was less than a minute later that Harry was called to the communication cubby again. The moment Ch'on's face, together with Jums' and his father's, flashed into full clarity, Harry knew what had happened.

Bleak agony had replaced Jums' elation. And Dr. John Porter stood behind him, deep lines etched into his pale, distraught countenance.

Ch'on himself had wilted. The dull, dead expression of utter defeat mummified his skin to grayness. He spoke simply, in a voice that appropriately seemed to emanate from the grave.

"The Maldive tower has fallen."

## CHAPTER XIX

### *The Spinning Earth*

THE heart-rending implications of that single statement were so great that Harry Porter stood stone cold, unable to feel emotion. His thoughts took a curious turn.

The vital tower had fallen. Good. The Earth could not be whirled to the speed necessary to counteract the increased gravitation at the equator. Good. Everybody would die under unsupportable, quadrupled gravitation pull, and there was simply nothing to be done about it. Good. It was good to have to worry about nothing anymore, nothing at all.

But the cold, bitterly frightening thought of S'ee Var'r entered his mind to taunt him. Something inside him cried out against the fate that he must share without her. That seemed the worst thing.

His bloodless lips moved.

"There's no hope?" he muttered.

Ch'on's cold face was as hard as granite.

"None," he said. "You can stop pulverization of the Moon, if you like. Or you can go on and finish it up. It doesn't matter. Good-by, Porter. We'll probably never see each other again,"

He turned away from the screen, and Jums went woodenly with him.

Dr. John Porter smiled bitterly.

"What are you going to do now, son?"

"I'm going to find S'ee Var'r," Harry whispered. "Good-by, Dad."

He cut connections and leaned weakly against the console. But only for a moment. He turned to the television operator.

"You heard," he said huskily. "You know what it means. Go to the control room and tell the men. I'm going to Earth, and they can do what they like. The whole blasted job was a fizzle."

Ten minutes later, the small subship slipped from the airlock. Harry was looking with hard eyes at the great mass of Earth showing against black emptiness, its rounded bulk laced with clouds, great splotches of green and hazy brown indicating water and land.

What was taking place down there? Did the people realize, did they believe now? Or had the first small effects not yet been noted? He did not care. It did not matter any more.

The ship sped down toward the turning planet. The ache came back to his mind and stayed there. Where would he find S'ee, so he could at least manage to die with her?

He knew that a new, smaller addition of the World Administration Building had been thrown up on the ruins of the old. He knew that Ax'r would be there. And Jack Ulls'n was close in the confidence of Ax'r. That was because Ulls'n had saved Ax'r's life. Ulls'n would want to be near his Master. And S'ee would most certainly be with Ulls'n.

Perhaps because she was his captive, Harry thought. Or perhaps because she was really in love with the man, even after everything that had happened. But Harry knew that he would go to the new World Administration Building. If he couldn't find S'ee there, then he would watch Ax'r die as four full gravities flattened the tyrant's fat bulk to the floor.

It was only after Harry had dropped into Earth's atmosphere that he could appreciate the real size of the sun. It hovered in the west, a fiery, diseased orange. Its photosphere and corona

probably shrinking. Such, Dr. John Porter had said, would be the sole effect of the gravity cloud on the sun's immense bulk. That and continual sunspot eruptions.

BELOW Harry was the Pacific Ocean, the huge spread of China, with Japan snuggled up close, separated by a metallic hairline of water. He dropped lower and reduced his speed accordingly, as thick air closed around the ship. He had been gone from the Moon-destroying fleet some two hours now. By this time, certainly, people would have noticed an increase in their own weights.

It was not much. Perhaps a quarter of a gravity. In two more hours, it would be half a gravity. Then the Earth's population would be bound to believe what had been pounded into them for two years. But they would believe it too late!

Harry beat up from the land again, went zooming eastward. And it was as he dropped downward to the coast of California, a slow hour later, that he saw his prediction come true.

He looked down with startled eyes. Hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of aircraft were streaming south in great clouds, their contraction motors howling like demons in their mad efforts at escape. Those ships were headed toward the equator!

Bitter curses erupted from Harry's lips. Fools! Utter fools! By their utter stupidity, they had murdered themselves as well as those who had tried to save them.

The howling horde came on unendingly, like a vast, visibly moving Milky Way. And like the Milky Way, there were flashes of supernal brilliance as madly driven ships burst against each other. In that senseless exodus to a promised land that would now give them nothing, millions, billions would die.

Behind them lay the civilization they had believed immune to change. Ahead of them lay certain death by violence, heat and weight.

As Harry passed over Cincinnati, nostalgia gripped him. Below was the road he and S'ee had followed that long-gone day on their ride to Washington. S'ee had sat beside him, cool, competent, lovable, though she had treatened him worse than impersonally.

He saw again the scarlet, curved lips, the russet hair hanging in bangs over the smooth forehead, the long-lashed, straightforward eyes—and he thrust the torturing vision away.

It was at that moment that disaster came. Harry's ship twirled head over heels. The next second, he found himself plunging down through a cloud of ships that shied from the path of his fall. Above him he saw disappearing the ship that had glancingly struck him.

Harry cursed soundly. A deserted meadow came rearing up at him. He got the ship partially under control, but accomplished no more than a landing which jarred him to the bone. The ship came to rest.

He clambered lurchingly from the ship, stood on grass that was moving under an oppressive wind. He cast one frightened glance into the sky. The sun was on the horizon now. It was red, as red as if it were actually shining through Moon-dust—which, of course, could not be.

His body now felt like lead, so abnormally heavy was it. Beneath him, Earth pulled with a gravity that was one and a half times normal!

But Harry thrust the puzzling matter of the sun from his mind and turned desperately to his engines. After a few minutes he located the trouble, a series of loosened grid plates on the anatherm tubes. It would take hours to repair. Hours! And by that time, there would be more than two full gravities. What would happen to S'ee?

THE world was plunged into sudden blackness. Harry's head raised, his jaw falling slack. The sun had gone down quickly, too quickly! He stared a moment, then thrust that matter from his mind too. He went to work on the motors, using his auxiliary cells for light . . .

So it was that ten hours later, panting, weary to the bone, his ship lifted heavily upward into a morning sky that held only occasional equator-

bound ships. There were two and a fraction gravities now.

Before he reached Washington, the sun had passed zenith! Harry watched with startled eyes. Had almost a whole day passed since he had been forced down? It did not seem possible. And yet—

As he thrummed over the deserted, crimson-bathed city at diminishing pace, his heart was beating a tattoo against his ribs. An incredible thought was growing in him as the new Administration Building, dwarfed by its brothers, thrust out like a shrouded figure of doom.

The sun was not hot. It was big, yes, and the Earth had fallen steadily nearer. But somehow that nearness was not bringing an increase in heat.

Therefore, the Moon-destroyers had gone ahead with their work. The dust-shield surrounded the Earth, protecting it from the heat. But *why?* Why had Ch'on's men gone ahead with the project, when they knew that gravity would kill all mankind, anyway?

Harry felt chilled by a thought that was forcing its way into his mind.

Then the roof of the Administration Building came up. The ship landed, her motors went off. The roof was empty. Weird silence of a deserted world rushed in at Harry. He sat petrified, afraid to move, afraid to disturb the brooding loneliness that overlay the city.

But soon he moved, thrust open the hermetically sealed door. He was like a creaking old man, barely able to work his muscles. With tremendous effort, he managed to get over the side and to the roof. He stood there swaying, bathed in the sun's crimson glare.

He watched the sun. It was zooming across the ominous, redly tinged sky, even more swiftly and unexpectedly than it had set last night. It was moving with visible velocity!

Harry stood like a blood-reddened statue, a mighty, all-pervading emotion taking hold of him, surging like a paean of victory that engulfed the whole universe in its rhythm. His fingertips were tingling, his lips moving senselessly, sudden tears smarting at his eyes.

He wanted to shout and scream this news to the world. He wanted to dance and sing and shout and let loose his emotions.

He did nothing but give away to the pull of an outlandish gravity. He dropped to his knees and raised his arms like a sun-worshipper and moved his parched lips.

"Saved!" he whispered.

For the sun told the story. Beneath him, Earth was increasing its rate of spin—by itself!

## CHAPTER XX

*Empire of Ax'r-o-Ax'r*

HE FOUND the roof entrance to the Administration Building. Panting from the strain of moving his body under more than two gravities, Harry came down a ramp to enter a lonely, fully lighted corridor. But there was a new warmth in his blood, a fire behind his eyes that made his travail seem as nothing.

He thrust doors open, glanced into dark interiors, dropped down the stairs to the next level. A conviction was growing in him, and it had to do with S'ee Var'r.

Thus he passed through seven levels of this low structure and halted, his heart racing. He heard a sound, a human voice! Harry forced himself toward the source of that voice, panting.

It had been a feminine voice! And great as was his thankfulness for a mysterious event, that triumph would be nothing if S'ee could not share it with him.

Cold marble slipped underfoot, empty rooms receded, and then came another voice. *Ax'r-o-Ax'r!*

Harry stopped stock-still against a metal door, trembling as the doom-laden insidious voice sounded clearly.

"You are the remains of my empire. All the people have fled me. They have listened to what they have seen in the sky, and not to my word, which is the true law. Did I not say there would be no doom?"

The voice was plaintively aggressive.

"Very well, pawns, there is none," Ax'r declared.

There came the echoing voice of Jack Ulls'n, the life license captain, a voice that was heavy with fatigue.

"There is none, master. We do your bidding. And when the people come back to their homes, they shall find us merciful. May we sit at your feet, Master?"

"It is not meant that my subjects should sit in my presence," Ax'r said dignifiedly.

From the distance, rocking the crimson-bathed city with concussion after concussion, came the sound of a crashing skyscraper.

"What was that?"

It was S'ee Var'r who asked the question, her voice trembling, nerve-racked. Harry's muscles bunched, his eyes flaming with his wild relief. He closed one hand around the door knob, but waited for Ax'r's reply.

"It was nothing. The howl of a motor. The last of my faithless subjects leaving the city."

"You lie!" cried the distraught girl. "It was a building falling under the increased gravity. You know it was. You sit there, and you will not allow us to sit, though we beg you. You know you are going to die. You refuse me life because you know your own is forfeit!"

There was the sound of a scuffle. Jack Ulls'n's voice raised in anger.

"You stand in the presence of the Master!"

But S'ee must have broken away.

"The master of what?" she cried. "He is nothing but a stupid old man, emperor of a world that will topple around his ears in mere hours. Oh, Jack, Jack, why are you such a fool?

"The sun is huge, red. It is only the Moon-dust with which Harry Porter has shielded the Earth that is saving us now from the unbearable heat. Isn't that proof enough?"

"You love Harry Porter!" Ulls'n snarled.

And Harry's pulses leaped when he heard the gril's low, controlled reply.

"Yes, I do, Jack. But that isn't the reason I believe in the gravity cloud. I believed in it from the first, though my—my *Master* almost had me believing that he had some accult means of saving us from it. But now—now I know him for what he—"

HARRY chose that moment to throw open the door. He stood on the threshold, legs braced wide, a grim smile etched on his sweating face, a triple-ray gun in his hand.

Ax'r sat on his sunken throne. Beads of sweat tufted his beetling black brows, dripped from his face and onto the gorgeously hued robes in which he had draped himself. He saw Harry instantly, but it was only the coal-black eyes taking flame that showed his recognition.

A convulsion of swift hate swept over Ulls'n's handsome face. He dropped back a step, eyes bulging.

The light of utter gladness leaped like a beacon into S'ee's tearful eyes.

"Harry!" she cried softly.

"S'ee!"

He made a motion for her to stay where she was. He turned to Ax'r, took three long steps toward him.

"Ax'r," he said grimly, "stand up—if you can!"

He saw now that a pair of double doors was thrown open to a low-railed balcony which overlooked the brooding, crimson-bathed world. Air, hot, oppressive surged through the gorgeously draped room.

Sweat grew visibly on Ax'r's brow.

"I do not take orders from my pawns," he snapped, hissing the words through his teeth.

"You *can't* stand up," Harry retorted. "Your fat carcass is as decadent and unwieldy as your changeless empire."

A spasm rippled over Ax'r's bearded face. His shoulders bunched, his arms grew big with effort. It was a ghastly attempt to meet the challenge. And it ended in failure.

He slumped back, breathing heavily, and his head dropped to his chest, his shoulders heaving in little jerks of emotion. His head stayed down and he would not raise his eyes.

Ulls'n saw that spectacle. Something went from his eyes. Terror appeared. He threw himself to his knees, looking down on Ax'r's bowed head.

"Master!" he whispered. "Allow me to leave you!"

And Ax'r's muffled, dead voice replied.

"Go, go! Leave me! And there will be an accounting for the treachery done me!"

Ulls'n scrambled to his knees.

"I'll go with you, Porter," he whispered. "You've got the only ship in the city. All three of us will go!"

"My ship," said Harry coldly, "will carry two."

Shock was in Ulls'n's trapped eyes. He glanced at S'ee and back to Harry, saw written there his doom. He shouted hoarsely, threw himself through the air. And the next thing Harry knew, he himself had struck the floor with sickening force.

The gun had slipped from his hand. It spun in a low, heavy arc to land on the sun-reddened balcony. Ulls'n pounced on the weapon, his slim figure silhouetted against the descending sun. Harry was suddenly staring upward into the triple lenses.

Jack Ulls'n's fingers tightened on the stock. Harsh purpose was strong on his face.

"Don't move," he warned, crouching slightly. "S'ee, come here, out of the way!"

S'ee stared. Then, like an automaton, she moved past Harry, out onto the balcony beside Ulls'n.

ULLS'N did not have eyes for her. He was gloating in his moment of triumph, his legs braced wide, supported a little against the low balcony railing.

"I've wanted to do this, Porter," he said viciously. "Ever since I saw you with S'ee. Well, I've got her now—"

"Have you?" S'ee said woodenly.

She brought both hands up, placed them against Ulls'n's shoulder and pushed back. Too late, the life license captain turned his attention to her. His face underwent a convulsion of horror. His hands went up as he strove to regain balance. His feet slipped from under him, as his calves struck against the railing.

A hoarse animal scream erupted from Ulls'n's twisted lips. He turned a full half somersault and tumbled over the side of the balcony. His dying shriek burst upward, to diminish rapidly as twice normal gravity pulled him down to his certain, smashing doom.

Harry Porter had hardly had time to think. Now he stared up at a shaken, ashen-faced girl. He caught her just as she gave a little gasp and fainted.

Less than thirty seconds later, S'ee's tremendously heavy body limp in his arms, Harry stood in the doorway, looking back at Ax'r-o-Ax'r. The world's potentate had never raised his head. He sat there quite still, a shaft of crimson touching at his sweat-sodden beard.

Ax'ro-Ax'r, alone amid the ashes of his empire.

Harry began his long trek up seven flights of stairs, fighting every step of the way. Gravitation was subtly, steadily increasing. His heart pounded with effort, and S'ee was a limp rag in his arms. He made the ramp, dragged himself across the roof and into the ship. When he raised his hands, they were like lead. But he jabbed at the dashboard. Like a thing still alive, the powerful ship darted up from the Administration Building, over the city and southward, ever southward.

And as the sun sank with outlandish speed behind its inflamed horizon, a voice jabbered from the waiting television receiver.

"Harry Porter, Harry Porter, Harry—"

With sudden wildness, Harry threw the switch. His father's face built up to clarity.

"Son!" Dr. John Porter choked. "Thank God!"

* * * * *

During the hour of that flight across the ruins of a civilization that was literally toppling, Dr. John Porter told of the startling events since Harry had left the Moon-destroying fleet. Scarcely an hour passed when it was discovered that Earth was increasing its rate of spin without man-made forces, would increase it until centrifugal force offset gravity at the equator.

Ch'on had thereupon abandoned all towers save the one on the high Kenya Plateau. His forces had landed there, had entirely taken over the country. There the new civilization would flower.

"And as for the Earth increasing its own rate of spin," Dr. Porter went on, "it wasn't the Earth entirely. The gravity cloud supplied the power. That was a miracle I would have foreseen had I gone into the matter."

His face lighted with a soft radiance.

"Perhaps it really was a miracle. But the miracle has an explannation. The wave-front of the cloud was parallel with the Earth-Sun line. The fringes of the cloud will grow progressively stronger until they merge with the four-gravity part of the cloud. This gravity, incidentally, will last for millions of years.

"Under those conditions, there was a differential, an unequal balance of forces. On the average, the side of Earth facing the cloud was heavier than the side which faced away. And similarly with the Sun."

DR. PORTER paused a moment. "Those two heavier sides had a continual tendency to fall toward each other, faster and faster. But as Earth's heavy half *fell* toward the sun, Earth was turning on its axis, and the heavier half continually became part of the lighter half. A process which speeded up and grew on itself as Earth and Sun neared each other."

Harry's hand tightened tenderly around S'ee's shoulder. Her head lay against his arm, and she smiled faintly in her troubled sleep.

"Then," he said, speaking slowly, "the unbalanced weight of the Earth caused the Sun to rotate faster, too, in proportion."

"Give and take."

"And," added Harry, smiling ironically, "the towers were unnecessary from the start."

Dr. Porter chuckled.

"Not at all! If it hadn't been for the six hours' use we obtained out of the shift-field, this old planet of Earth would have cracked wide open! Ch'on quite accidentally saved us when we started the process with the cloud still six hours away.

"Because we did in six hours what the cloud would have done in six *seconds!* Namely, increasing the rate of spin to twenty-one hours. The greatest differential was at the forepart of the cloud's fringe. The difference in weight between the two halves was greater right then.

"This meant that Earth would *at once* have sped up to a twenty-one-hour rotation. We got under the dead line—and I leave it to your imagination, son, to guess what would have happened if we hadn't!"

Harry could well imagine it—terrific convulsions at the core of the planet; volcanoes, whole continents sliding from their moorings, churning, grinding. Oceans overrunning in one tremendous wave every square foot of land that was left. And what would have been left of humanity under that miraculously escaped breakup? Nothing!

Dr. Porter signed off just as the ship was leaving the North American continent to thrum out through a night sky over the heavily rolling waves of the Atlantic, on a reversed course this time. Harry looked back once at the dark mass of land he had left, the never-never land of weight.

All that, and all the world save a fourteen-hundred-mile strip of livable land girdling the equator, was Ax'r's. Ax'r-o-Ax'r sat on his throne, *three gravities* pulling on him and on all the far-flung, toppling cities of his deserted empire!

## CHAPTER XXI

### *All's Well*

AS THEY drove on, ships of all sizes and makes swarmed below, their occupants sending them in purposeless directions. There must have been millions of them, as far as the eye could see.

Harry stayed above them, frowning. Some ships crashed, fell into the waves. And as Harry's ship slanted in to the equator, land showing up

below, he knew the reason for that helter-skelter panic.

The very jungle was literally alive with ships and men, stretching for miles and miles.

S'ee's lovely eyes shadowed.

"A battle!" she whispered.

It was true. There were bodies of men in close conflict. Ships attempted to land. In some cases, armed craft beat them off. There was the dull, grinding roar and hiss of cannon rays and proton showers. Everybody was trying to get as close to the equator as possible.

They were killing senselessly, without discrimination. And such must be the picture over the whole world. Bitter, wholesale slaughter of mankind's billions.

"And they could have been saved!" Harry exclaimed heatedly. "Down to the last man, woman and child. There's room in that fourteen-hundred-mile strip. In two years, we could have cleared away jungle, reclaimed all the equatorial lands, built temporary cities. Instead, we had to put all that energy into a war."

Harry kept high above the land, staying away from the wild tumult, not taking chances. He didn't want to give anybody the impression that he was going to land. And what about Kenya? Would there be fighting there too?

They raised Kenya in the next fifteen minutes. Snow-capped mountains rose like calm sentinels watching over the world. This range had experienced no upheaval. Indeed, it was a shock to discover the peaks still snow-capped. In this rocky region but few ships had dared to land.

Harry swooped down. Great sheep scattered in timid panic. Grazing cattle shied away. Wild mountain goats stared upward belligerently. Here too were coffee plantations, wheat and cotton and sisal lands. An agricultural and farming paradise!

As the mountainous land dropped away, ships swarmed again. But it was a losing battle for them. For here, ringing the level land, were great braces of cannon rays, pointed threateningly upward.

Many ships had already landed. The saturation point had been reached. Harry grinned. He suspected that Ch'on had this situation well in hand.

There was no selfishness here, merely the fight for survival, the beating back of invaders. Harry kept out of range and drove swiftly toward the high-rising vibro-steel tower. Men swarmed below. Some were looking upward.

Harry opened his receivers. "Move on!" a voice barked savagely. "Kenya is occupied! Move on! Kenya is occupied!"

The words were uttered over and over again, imperatively, without


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mercy, directed at any ship which might want to land.

But Harry started calling as imperatively for Dr. John Porter. His father's face flashed on the screen, a radiant, contented face.

"I'll send a couple ships up for you," he said warmly.

Two ships did rise, circled Harry's craft. He waved to them through the transparent cowling. The pilots waved back. They escorted him to the ground.

After the ship had come to rest, Harry sat quite still, S'ee's soft hand enclosed by his. He waited breathlessly. A slow smile curved his lips.

"No difference," he breathed. "Our weight's—normal!"

HE OPENED the cowling. They jumped from the ship without difficulty. Men, women, children came running toward them, shouting, laughing. The ship was ringed in an instant. And shouldering through the crowd, the flat, hard planes of his bronzed face softened by a wide smile, came An'ru Ch'on!

It was a great reception.

When the four of them—An'ru Ch'on, S'ee, Jums Var'r and his father—were facing Harry finally in the privacy of Ch'on's quarters, the young engineer could hardly bring himself to speak. These were faces he had thought never to see again!

Greetings ended in questions, questions in a discussion of the future.

Ch'on's strong face darkened a trifle.

"We're a people, a nation now. Kenya is our land. Our children will live here, and their children. We'll hold it against invasion—an easy task, at present, since we were armed well from the first. And I chose Kenya deliberately. It's high mountain country, an invigorating climate."

"The mountain regions will develop the most intelligent and progressive race," Dr. John Porter declared. "Planetary winds, circling the Earth many times faster now, will bring cool winds from the poles to strike at the mountain regions.

"Together with the Moon-dust cloud the increased rotation of Earth makes the planet a gigantic icebox. But the humid lower regions will produce the barbarians of our new world."

Outside the bungalow, in the shadow of the Kenya tower, there was singing and shouting. But among these five who had seen so much of the great change, quiet descended.

Harry knew what they were thinking. Kenya would flower. In a day, the gravity cloud would completely enclose the Solar System. Earth's steady increase of rotation would cease. It would settle to a stable orbit some forty-seven million miles from the sun, and would stay there until the next great change.

Man would gradually accustom himself to the difference in gravity between the equatorial lands and the rest of the planet. The Moon-dust, brought into being while Harry had drifted broodingly across a world gone mad, was a great heat-shield, contracting even closer to Earth as gravitation increased.

Some day, when the Moon-dust dispersed, man would bring asteroids or other satellites to shatter as he had the Moon.

Outside, the sounds of festivity arose. The songs seemed an echo from that future day when civilization would be rebuilt. And they were calling for An'ru Ch'on.

Ch'on left, his mighty, upright shoulders scraping the sides of the doorway. In the act of following, Jums paused, bent his wise old eyes on his daughter. There was an unvoiced question in his expression. S'ee answered it by moving a step closer to Harry. And Jums grinned in satisfaction and was gone.

Harry faced her.

"You mean—" he said huskily, not daring to put the thought into words.

The thought was dizzying. And as Harry remembered some of his actions, it seemed entirely too much to expect.

Dr. John Porter chuckled.

"Don't forget I'm in the room. Of course she means it, Harry! But—I'm wondering if S'ee knows what she's doing."

His voice was abruptly serious, his

white-browed eyes a little stern. He stroked thoughtfully at his chin.

"Remember, S'ee," he said kindly, "this son of mine was a flop in the world he came from. An unmitigated flop."

S'ee Var'r's slow smile was enigmatic and a bit taunting.

"According to your lights, yes, Dr. Porter," she said softly. "But I think there are two sides to that. I was with him from the first in this world, you see. He simply had to develop by himself."

Harry began to redden, and his father's eyes snapped.

"Now see here, young lady!" Dr. Porter said. "After all—"

"After all," Harry interrupted quickly, with more courage than he felt, "you really shouldn't pick bones with your future daughter-in-law—should you, Dad?"

Dr. Porter turned irritably to face his son. He saw a strong, bronzed young man, a son quite capable of knowing what he wanted and how to go about getting it.

"Well," the old scientist said with a quick, tremulous smile, "I guess there's no fool like an old fool."

He clasped Harry's hand in a grip of deep affection and pride. He smiled then at S'ee, and she smiled back. Then he was gone. The door closed behind him, and they heard his steady, diminishing footsteps, the forerunners of a new civilization on the march.

Short moments later, S'ee Var'r moved into the encirclement of Harry Porter's arms and offered him her lips.

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"You wanna start a fight, huh?" demanded Mr. Parmadunk belligerently

# The Earth-Saver

## By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

*When Mr. Parmadunk's Wife Goes to the Country for a Vacation, Unexpected Guests Drop in from Outer Space!*

AT four o'clock in the morning, Mr. Parmadunk tacked toward Central Park through a roseate haze of happiness. His spirits were ebullient, his emotions alcoholically mellow. From time to time, as the irrepressible urge fell upon his soul, he lifted voice in what might charitably be identified as song.

Oh-h-h-h, my wife'sh gone to-o-o the country,
Hoo-RAY! Hoooooo-RAAAAAY!

The first "Ray" appearing to lack umph, Mr. Parmadunk cast about and located proper embellishment for the second one. This consisted in drawing out the "Hoo" and then jumping vocally upon the "Ray," simultane-

ously throwing both arms upward and outward with abandon. The result of this happily conceived maneuver left nothing to be desired, as far as vocal emphasis was concerned, but it proved definitely destructive to a carefully cultivated equilibrium.

To state it crudely, Mr. Parmadunk fell down on the path just inside Central Park.

Far from being annoyed, Mr. Parmadunk hiccupped behind a polite palm and remained upon his back on the cinders, while he weighed the situation. He could, of course, get up again and continue homeward with some effort. On the other hand, why should he? Mrs. Parmadunk had gone away that very evening on what she fondly believed was her vacation. There was no one else at home to mind his absence.

Here, by contrast, he could forego all physical effort and steep his soul in psychic wanderings. In time he could even drift into slumber with only mildly uncomfortable cinders for his pillow, a faintly overcast sky for a ceiling and the aroma of a nearby bridle path to surround him like a blanket.

The idea had merit. It had also a certain touch of mild daring. All in all, the adventure was intriguing. Mr. Parmadunk composed his hands, closed his eyes and gave himself wholeheartedly to the call of the wild.

He opened his eyes again almost immediately and waved an annoyed hand.

"Go 'way," he said firmly. "Go buzzh in shomebody elshe'sh ear. Biz-bizzhy li'l beesh aren't shupposhed to buzzh around at night, anyhow."

The irritating bumble of faint sound continued, however, with defiant disregard for the command. It was not actually a buzz. Rather it seemed to be a sort of burbling purr, with a faintly metallic undercurrent.

ANNOYANCE forsook Mr. Parmadunk's expression, to be replaced by vague alarm. Since, from Mr. Parmadunk's reclining position, the only direction he could look with ease was up, he looked up and saw the object.

At first it was no more than a round blackness, darker than the black sky. It seemed to be hovering like the Sword of Damocles, directly over his head but a long way up. Then he saw that the object was not hovering at all but was, in fact, rushing down toward him with disturbing speed.

Fortunately Mr. Parmadunk knew how to handle a situation of that nature. He sat up and made firm pushing gestures at the globe, still several hundred feet overhead.

"Go 'way, you bloody Nash—Natsh—Nazish!" he ordered. "Go bomb good ol' Lon'on and lemme shleep. G'way!"

The invader obeyed by whirring down and coming to rest on the soft green grass a hundred feet from Mr. Parmadunk's pallet. The droning sound immediately ceased. From a perfectly smooth and ventless point on the glistening surface of the globe, two thin plumes of grayish mist spurted out.

The twin clouds of vapor swelled and thickened. Then, with no preliminary swirling or stirring, they suddenly became the figures of two men.

That is, Mr. Parmadunk gave them the benefit of the doubt and courteously accepted them as men.

There were such minor discrepancies as a height of nine feet, vastly cupped ears and eyes with a bewildering tendency to pop out on the ends of long stalks in order to look behind them. These he considered a result of the last three Sidecars he had consumed.

He applauded vigorously, while contentment stole over him like the warmth of summer sunlight. Heaven was kind to him. At last he would be able to face Oswald Quipler, whose tale of pink elephants and purple alligators was growing steadily more boring, and put him to utter shame.

Mr. Parmadunk got to his feet with some difficulty and weaved closer to the apparition. The supplying of a wealth of intimate detail would be essential to his triumph over the poor visionary banalities of Quipler.

He achieved a proximity of some ten feet before falling down again.

The two creatures—Mr. Parmadunk doggedly clung to his original appellation "Men"—regarded his gyrations with solemn gravity.

For clothing, each wore a sort of tunic of wispy gray material, girded at the waist by a broad belt studded with knobs and dials. The taller had a small, bulbous pair of lips, like a telephone operator's transmitter. He pursed flaccid lips and uttered a conglomerate assortment of chirps, whistles, burps and whines.

Mr. Parmadunk was transported to fresh pinnacles of delight. Never, in its most fervid tellings, had one of Oswald Quipler's hallucinations ever dared equip itself with sound effects. Mr. Parmadunk retired to his original sitting position to free both hands for more vigorous applause.

THE creature with the phone device lips turned sharply to his companion and said in perfect, if slightly metallic, English:

"Your speech equalizer, Xental. The primitives of these rough planets are less likely to take alarm if they are addressed by us in their own tongue."

The other hastily twisted his mouth. The incoherent sounds broke into:

"Sorry, Av Dass. I was so absorbed in watching the antics of this weird creature that I forgot my unit. From his position of abasement and the way he repeats that odd slapping of the paws, I would almost guess he is rendering homage. He probably thinks we are gods dropped down from the sky to visit him."

"Thash very good," Mr. Parmadunk approved solemnly. "Very, very good. I know a—*hic*—man who knowsh a man who knowsh Orshon Wellesh. You know, you look like shomebody who made a shpeesh at lunsh—lush—dinner club lash month. Are you Rotariansh, too?"

The two creatures nodded gravely to each other. One of them ducked his head and spoke rapidly in a low voice, as if communicating with others at a distance.

"Av Dass, contacting Gnillrth. We are outside the ship now, interviewing one of their higher mammalian forms. Despite a guttural slurring of speech, characteristic of primitive races, we have been able to ascertain that it calls its tribe Rotarian. We shall inform you shortly whether this world is suitable for conquest and colonization. We shall attempt to ascertain whether the primitives should be spared and trained for service, or whether their complete annihilation should precede the landing of our colonies."

Mr. Parmadunk listened in beaming fascination, nodding vigorously at intervals.

Experimentally he pointed with his right hand at the silent member of the pair and waggled his fingers. That creature looked startled, but tentatively poked out a massive webbed appendage and returned the gesture with awkward solemnity.

Mr. Parmadunk slapped the ground beside him and burbled with delight. He was considering a variation of the experiment, wherein his right thumb remained affixed to the tip of his nose, when suddenly his merriment vanished.

He clutched at his ailing middle and groaned.

"Is something wrong?" Av Dass questioned intently.

"I don't think I feel sho good," Mr. Parmadunk confided, blinking. "I think I mushta got hol' of a shpoiled pretshel."

"Pretshel?" Av Dass questioned, frowning. "Is that the food on which you beings subsist?" He saw Mr. Parmadunk's wan-faced bewilderment. "I mean to say, do you Rotarians eat these pretshels, hunt them in their native haunts, perhaps?"

"Do we eat 'em?" Mr. Parmadunk repeated enthusiastically, beginning to feel better. "I'll shay we do. Why, tonight I besha I ate preshtels—*pret*shels—in a hunnerd bars. An' at the Convensh—venshun in Havana, eight of ush hunted pretshels in their native hauntsh all night." He sighed reminiscently. "An' boy-oh-boy wash *I* shick!"

"You mean," Av Dass pursued, "that you Rotarians deliberately consume these pretshel creatures, even though the indulgence results in ar-

riving at a condition like yours?"

MR. PARMADUNK was, at the moment, engaged in a most unusual activity. This seemed to consist in clasping his lips tightly shut, while alternately puffing out and deflating his cheeks. Meanwhile his complexion, chameleon-like, was beginning to assume the tint of the surrounding grass.

The stranger's concluding words penetrated his agonized preoccupation and served to allay the spasm. Mr. Parmadunk scrambled to his feet and dropped into what resembled a scowling crouch.

"Wha'sh wrong wizh my condish—dishion?" he demanded belligerently. "You wanna make shump'n of it, huh?"

The two creatures recoiled, dropping hands to the complex belts at their waists. Alarm showed on their faces.

"Be careful," Av Dass warned sharply. "We have weapons here, the product of a science you could not possibly comprehend. They would annihilate you instantly, should you move to attack."

Mr. Parmadunk was enormously unimpressed.

"Ish shat sho?" he sneered. "You know what I shink, huh?" He made a gesture of scornful contempt. "I shink nutsh to you. You got a weapon, huh? *Double* nutsh to both of you!"

He weaved a step closer, held both clenched fists before his ferociously contorted face and waved them with cautious vigor.

"You shee thoshe fish — fitsh — handsh? You shee 'em, huh? Lishen, *there'sh* a weapon. You wanna fight, huh?"

Av Dass and his companion retreated another step, eying the wavering fists with uneasy doubt. Mr. Parmadunk offered a demonstration in the form of an all-embracing uppercut that terminated in the region of his own left shoulder-blade. He recovered his balance only by a miracle of contortion.

"Shomebody'sh too fresh," he muttered darkly. "Got no bushinesh pushin' people around."

"A weapon?" Av Dass finally ventured with cautious skepticism. "But I see nothing. As near as I am able to determine, both appendages are totally empty."

Mr. Parmadunk's anger evaporated. He grew confidential. He shushed conspiratorially, making a vain attempt to bring lips and forefinger into proper juxtaposition.

"Thash jush it," he whispered. "They *look* empty. A lotta guysh *think* they're empty. But are they? Uh-uh! They're fulla dyma-dymanan—fulla shudden death, shee? Zowie! Fifty guysh fall dead all over the plashe. Jush like that."

"Fifty Guysh?" It was Xental who let his anthropological curiosity overcome his wariness. "Creatures of an enemy tribe, no doubt."

Their tense regard was exhilarating. Under its spell, Mr. Parmadunk's ego expanded pleasantly. So did his imagination.

"Fifty?" He fanned the night air disdainfully. "'Shnothing. A hunnerd—*five* hunnerd guysh. Bigger'n you. *Zowie,* an' ish all over."

THE visitors exchanged uneasy glances, after which their eyes followed every movement of the avowedly lethal fists with flattering fascination.

"Apparently," Av Dass whispered in a swift aside, "we were mistaken in our first judgment of these primitives. For all their apparent crudity, they do appear to have at least the rudiments of an advanced science. This weapon called Zowie in their tongue evidently is a form of controlled energization. . . ."

"Rudiments of science?" Xental interrupted in a tone of faint reproach. "My dear Av Dass, our science is still fumbling for the secret of effective invisibility. Our finest of wave-bending refraction screens betray themselves by a faint shimmer. You can see for yourself how completely undetectable this Zowie is. I suspect they may have abandoned screening altogether and instead divert the entire object into another spatial dimension."

"In either event," Av Dass said grimly, "I shall recommend that we make no attempt to subjugate this deceptive race. I believe the only safe method is for Gnillrth to bring on his fleet and wipe out all life before any attempt is made to land. The race seems not only inherently warlike, but infinitely better armed than we suspected. They must be destroyed."

"You are right," Xental agreed reluctantly, "though I do wish we could have had an opportunity to study these primitives more fully." He sighed. "Still, your plan is safest. We had best destroy this creature before he can warn his fellow-Rotarians. Our entire hope of success in finding a new world to occupy may rest on a surprise attack. Frankly, I'd rather not see our fleet artillery hurled blindly against the unknown weapons of an alert enemy."

Mr. Parmadunk had, during this interchange of mutterings, occupied himself with another attack of vertigo and some rather uncertain ponderings. Now Xental's repetition of the word "enemy" reminded him of an earlier statement as yet unanswered.

"Enemiesh," Mr. Parmadunk muttered savagely, encompassing the night sky in a sweeping and almost catastrophic gesture. "Ever'body'sh ene — emeniesh. You're emeniesh, too."

Xental and Av Dass started violently at the accusation. Av Dass touched his belt in a menacing gesture, but Xental's hand restrained him.

"Wait," he cautioned. "We must learn more." He addressed the glowering Mr. Parmadunk, whose inner disturbances were beginning to destroy the first roseate tinge that had bathed all nature. "You say we are enemies. How do you know? What manner of—"

"Emeniesh!" Mr. Parmadunk interrupted flatly. "*I* know. Orshon Wellesh tol' the whole worl' about it. Lotta shpashe shipsh coming down. Gonna con—conqu—lick the worl'."

"Orshon Wellesh," Av Dass repeated, aghast. "That must be some sensitive instrument employed to detect the approach of enemies. This upsets all our calculations. If the device is sensitive enough to detect one lone ship and analyze the carefully hidden motives of its occupants, what chance has Gnillrth to surprise them with the entire fleet? Already they know that we are invaders from space, whose aim is the conquest of their world."

"At least," Xental comforted, "we come from so far beyond their galaxy that they can't know very much about us or our armaments. In that respect we have the element of surprise on our side. No, Av Dass, I still can't believe this creature's race is as dangerous as it first appears."

AT this point Mr. Parmadunk, who was growing more distressed with every passing moment, interposed a sound that is not met with in the better drawing rooms. To be baldly explicit, Mr. Parmadunk burped with explosive verve and enthusiasm.

With the echoes still ringing cheerfully about the welkin, the visitors stiffened in shocked incredulity. Their cupped ears fanned out amazingly. Their disturbing eyes popped to the extremity of their stalks. Each separate hair of their heads rose and quivered with serpentine alarm.

Things were, by this time, getting pretty hazy for Mr. Parmadunk, but not too hazy for him to realize that he had committed a grave breach of etiquette. The situation called for an immediate and delicate apology. He opened his mouth to comply with the dictates of courtesy. Instead of the intended words, he emitted a second and even more titanic burp.

Mr. Parmadunk was appalled. He was also devastated. No mere verbal plea for pardon could ever condone a second offense. Something more was needed, something indicative of the most profound regret. His mind groped painfully through the gathering clouds and found the needed gesture.

Mr. Parmadunk swept off his hat and bowed deeply. The fact that he had lost his hat several hours before did little to detract from the earnestness of his intent. The fact that he made a slight miscalculation in the

exact location of his own center of gravity, however, was an equine of different tint.

Mr. Parmadunk collapsed on the grass, considered the problem of regaining his feet from a calmly fatalistic point of view and arrived at a decision. He quietly laid his cheek against the cool sward and went to sleep.

The effect of all this upon Av Dass and Xental was incredible. At the first burp they had been too shocked to move. When the second explosion came, it rocked them right back on their heels. Amazement fought a losing battle, was driven from their alien countenances by a mingling of fear and anger.

"Did you hear what he said?" Xental gasped incredulously.

"How could I help it?" Av Dass cried, his automatically interpreted words trembling with anger. "The two most insulting phrases in our whole rich language, yet he fairly shouted them at us. I have disintegrated companions who called me milder names in jest."

His hand moved ominously toward his belt.

"Wait!" Xental cried. "Don't you see, Av Dass? *He spoke our language!* There was not a trace of accent in his pronunciation. Neither you nor I could have rendered the epithets more fluently, or with greater depth and richness. Don't you see what that means?"

"Of course, I see," Av Dass panted furiously. "It means the creature was toying with us, pretending to be stupid in order to make us appear ridiculous. Not only did his fellow-Rotarians detect our approach and read our purpose, they have even studied our race from afar so carefully that they speak our language!"

"A trap!" Xental jittered. "See? After first tricking and then insulting us to the point of combat, the creature lies down and closes his eyes to show his disdain for our feeble weapons. If we attempt to harm him, we will know the full fury of his Zowie."

Mr. Parmadunk's lips parted and a gentle snore issued forth. The sound began in low gear, so to speak. After grinding along for a moment, it shifted clashingly into second and then into high, rising to a fulsome crescendo.

AV DASS clutched his companion's arm in trembling fury.

"Back into the ship, quickly!" he yelled. "If I listen to any more such insulting descriptions of my ancestry, I may lose my self-control and bring destruction to us both. I shall advise Gnillrth to give this planet a wide berth and seek some vastly distant world for conquest and colonization."

"And I shall concur," Xental choked. "I shudder to vision the result, had our cleverness not penetrated their ruse. These Rotarians are by far the most dangerous life-form on any planet we have yet visited."

The twin forms shimmered, faded and became twin clouds of mist. Then, like cigarette smoke blown toward a vacuum cleaner, the tenuous clouds whipped from sight. There was almost a suggestion of panic in the way the great globe whined and spurted up from its resting place. It shot skyward and the drone dwindled to silence.

Across the park, a grayness vaguely outlined tall buildings against the morning sky. Nearby, a bird chirped sleepily.

On the soft grass, Mr. Parmadunk's right hand fluttered and moved toward his lips. He burped politely behind it.

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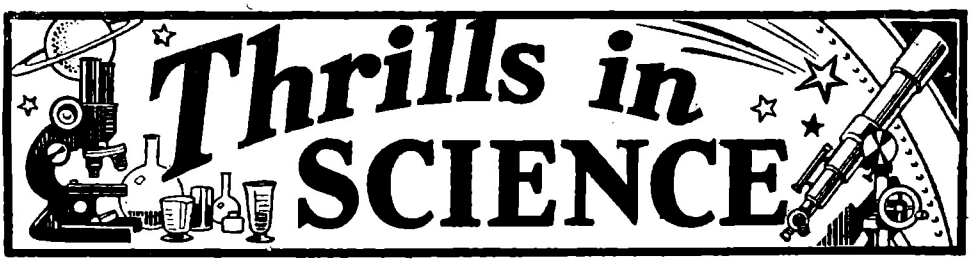
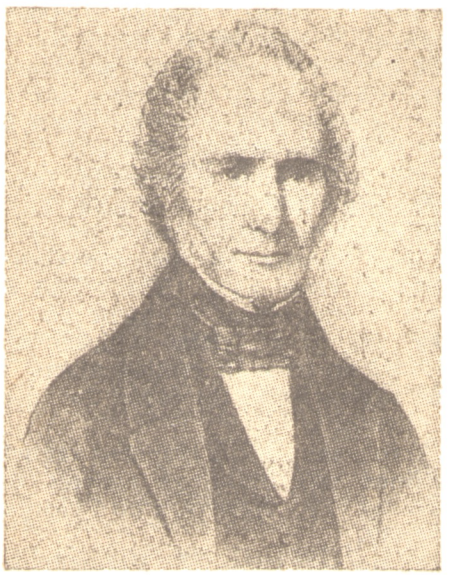



# THE STRENGTH TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

## *William Sturgeon Learned to Make Electricity Work for Him*

IN Master Tyndale's shoe shop at Whittington, in Lancashire, was one magnificent possession. It was a small cobbler's anvil, mounted on a wooden block base and surrounded by metal cups to hold cobbling nails and pegs, and loops to hold various shoemaker's tools. There were several metal forms for different lasts. A prized possession, indeed, that weighed all of a hundred pounds.

But what did the weight matter? Whenever it became expedient to move the com-



WILLIAM STURGEON

pact paraphernalia around there was the strongly muscled, shiftless young apprentice, William Sturgeon, to do the heavy work.

William, however, didn't take the same careless view of things that his harsh master did. And he really wasn't shiftless, even though his own father, another cobbler, had been. The trouble with young Sturgeon was that, while he was fast becoming an excellent cobbler, his heart was not in that sort of work. In fact, he didn't know just what sort of trade he wanted to follow.

Today, for instance, he was pretty well fed up with hard labor and abuse. It was a sunny day in 1802 and he was nineteen years old and filled with the dreams of adventure—of striking out for new horizons—that is the priceless heritage of youth. Yet, here he was, moving the heavy anvil to a spot better lighted to suit Master Tyndale's failing eyes.

"If only," he panted, "there were some easier method of moving heavy pieces of cast-iron around, think of all the effort it would save."

But this was idle fancy. He had nothing beyond the wish to work with. His education was practically nil; he had been apprenticed to Master Tyndale when he had been but thirteen years old. All he knew was the shoemaker's trade.

But his term of apprenticeship was expiring today. At least, he would now be his own master.

"I suppose," said Master Tyndale acidly, "now that your term is up, you expect me to take you in as a partner, or set you up in competitive business and give you that cobbler's bench as a bonus."

"No, sir," replied William. "From you I expect nothing, sir. And I am not going to set up in the cobbling trade."

"No? And what, then, will you do?"

"I shall—I shall—enlist in the king's army!" declared young Sturgeon at random.

Which he did while his enthusiasm ran high. He joined the royal artillery and soon found himself stationed in Newfoundland, where he found his cobbler trade standing him in good stead. But he became profoundly interested in the electrical storms of that country.

"Such a waste of electric energy," he mused many times. "But how can it be employed?"

This time the idle thought was given something to feed on. The sergeant of his company lent him books to read, and William Sturgeon's education began in real earnest. He became interested in the early experiments of Benjamin Franklin.

With the ever-recurrent electrical displays of nature at hand to spur him on, he

followed closely the experiments of the early masters, making many of the simple devices for himself.

He attained a reputation as an electrical wizard among his comrades, but he had still produced nothing original until the day he wrapped some copper wire around a spike from an artillery wagon tongue and connected the ends to one of his home-made batteries. To his amazement he found that the ends of the spike attracted steel and iron.

Highly excited, he pursued his experiments. He used paper-insulated wire, silk-covered wire, lacquered wire. He tried different kinds of soft iron for his magnet core. Once he used a horse-shoe, which worked even better.

Now he plunged into the uncharted field of electrical research with all the fervor of his ardent nature. At last he had found out what sort of trade he really wanted to follow.

He left the artillery and the army at the age of 37 in 1820 and returned home. But it was no longer the simple cobbler's apprentice who returned to Whittington; it was a man who had already gained the respect of the scientific world because of his patient studies of the mysterious properties of electricity.

His first original contribution to science that the world recognized was the production of a modified form of Ampere's rotating cylinders. But that was not his greatest feat, nor did he think so himself.

The first thing he did was to buy that heavy cobbler's anvil from Master Tyndale, who had long since retired from active business. In the privacy of his own shoe shop, where he spent more time on electrical paraphernalia than he did on the cobbling business, he proceeded to build a large horse-shoe magnet along the principles he had discovered.

This he suspended from a beam overhead and connected with a set of batteries. The magnet didn't weigh more than a couple of pounds all told. But when he moved it close above the heavy anvil and switched on the current, with a snap like the closing of a gun breech, the electro-magnet fastened against the anvil and lifted it clear of the floor.

For the first time in history a man had used the power of electricity to do manual labor through the use of the magnet. Fashioning his electro-magnet on a sort of traveling dolly was the obvious and easy next step. Now, remembering those sweating hours of toil in his youth, he trundled the anvil here and there about his workshop by the simple means of transmitted electric power.

"Why, there is no limit to the work my electro-magnet can do," he said in something akin to awe.

And William Sturgeon was more correct than even he dreamed. The father of the magneto-electrical engine, he was the first to devise an apparatus for throwing opposing currents into one direction, thus doing with electricity what James Watt did for the steam engine.

In 1825 he presented to the Society of Arts the entire set of improved electro-magnet experiments, including his first soft-iron electro-magnet—for which he was awarded the silver medal of the society.

And because of William Sturgeon's boyish wish to move heavy metal pieces easily, the whole science of electro-magnetics—from tiny induction motors to huge magnets which lift thousands of pounds and do the work that hundreds of men could not—owes its origin.

# THE POWER OF MOTION

## *How Coleman Sellers Paved the Way for Hollywood*

HE was one of America's greatest mechanical engineers and inventors. His work dealt with locomotives, great turbines, giant mechanisms of power. No one would have considered the works and achievements of Coleman Sellers and thought of him as fathering the greatest modern art that the twentieth century has yet seen. What did an engineer have to do with works of art?

But it was while studying the thundering cataracts of Niagara Falls, where he was the head engineer of the great power plant installed there, that Coleman Sellers dreamed of the beauty of power in fluid motion.

What had this to do with modern art? With what modern art? Coleman Sellers' hobby was photography. The art of photography was pretty primitive in his day, too—1860. It was advancing slowly from the early experiments of Leonardo da Vinci. Peter Mark Roget had captured the glimmering of an idea in 1824 when he

COLEMAN SELLERS

wrote a paper on "The Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects."

Then, in 1853, Baron Franz von Uchatius, an Austrian artillery officer, conceived the idea of mounting a series of drawings in chronological order upon a disc rim and viewing the spinning disc through a slot.

This gave rise to the invention of the zoetrope, or "wheel of life," which is still a familiar toy.

But it remained for Coleman Sellers to make the first known endeavor of combining photography with the principle of zoetrope.

Sellers, ever a thoughtful man who searched for answers which lay buried beneath the surface of the obvious, his head still filled with the visions of spinning turbines and the majesty of water power, came upon his two sons one day as they riffled the pages of their history book, staring intently at the margin of the blurring pages and laughing in glee.

"Boys," said the father in slight surprise, "what are you doing?"

The two lads became alarmed and looked on apprehensively as their father took their book and examined it. To Sellers' disapproval, he found that his sons had drawn skeleton figures of a pair of tiny boxers in the upper corner of each page, depicting them in progressive action from page to page.

"What have you boys done?" he said, frowning. "Why have you mutilated your textbook thus?"

"We were just making pictures come to life, Father," said one of the lads anxiously. "Here, let me show you."

He took the book and riffled the pages for his father. Instantly the blurred little figures took on the liveliest animation, seeming by optical illusion to dance around and spar with each other briskly. Both boys watched their father's face in trepidation. Then to their relief, his features became wreathed in a smile of interest.

"We made another of a pair of dancers in our arithmetic book," said the other boy, anxious to please. "It is great fun to watch them whirl about."

"Let me see this," said the elder Sellers quickly. "It gives me an idea. Where did you get the idea for this?"

"From the zoetrope we got for Christmas," replied his sons. "Have we made you very angry, Father?"

"On the contrary, my lads," said the fascinated father, turning the pages of the book for himself.

Then, putting down the book abruptly: "Come out into the garden with me, boys. We are going to try another experiment."

The two boys, mystified but obedient, went with their father out into the sunshiny afternoon. They watched with large eyes as the man set up his photographical equipment. Obediently they posed at the progressive business of driving a nail into a wooden box.

Fully two dozen exposures Coleman Sellers took of his sons that afternoon, for he had the happy facility of being able to work and play at the same time. It was a game with them.

Then, while the boys waited breathlessly, the father developed his plates, made prints, and selected with care some fifteen prints which showed the advancing stages of the sequence of carpentry work.

These prints he mounted on the blades of a paddle wheel he constructed. This he set up to revolve so that from a given point of view the pictures of the two boys presented a zoetropic effect.

"Why, Father!" cried one of the lads as he viewed the result. "It's us come alive! We are moving! We are driving that nail into the box."

It was true. Coleman Sellers had, in this little game with his sons, applied photography to the wheel of life, bringing the camera to the realm of moving pictures for the first time, siring thereby that modern young giant of art and industry known as the motion picture business. There remained many improvements to be added, in photography as well as in the invention of film and of motion picture projection.

But Coleman Sellers actually made the first motion pictures. His machine was patented as the kinematoscope on February 5, 1861.

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# A LAYER OF OLD PAINT

## *Carleton Ellis Held 810 Patents—and Here's Why!*

IN spite of the many instances presented in this series of true stories about famous and world-changing scientific discoveries, all such thrilling wonders are not stumbled across by accident. Take, for example, the case of Carleton Ellis, who has more than once been compared with Edison.

Finishing a very fine education as a bachelor of science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1900, he became an instructor there at the school while he sort of paused to look around and get his breath.

A fine-looking and vigorous, but rather an impatient, sort of man was young Carleton Ellis. Not yet sure just what he would choose as his life's work, Ellis was impatient mostly at the apathetic way people had of accepting things as perfect because they were familiar. If such and such a custom or product or way of doing things was good enough for Dad and Grandpa, it was good enough for us, did not suit young Mr. Ellis.

He was painfully aware of imperfections and strove all his life to correct them. It began that day he watched a painter removing paint from some furniture preparatory to refinishing the piece. First the

man softened the paint with wood alcohol. Then he laboriously scraped off the film, revealing the wood beneath as an ugly and stained brown. This the man corrected by bleaching it with oxalic acid.

Ellis could stand no more of this. "Isn't there a quicker method than that?" he asked impatiently.

The painter stared at him in surprise. "Sure," he told this crisp-looking professor. "You can use a blow torch to blister the paint and then scrape it off easy. But you can't do that to fine furniture. This is the only way."

Just why this waste of time to remove a thin layer of paint should worry him who was not personally concerned, Ellis did not know. But it did. Already familiar with chemicals by virtue of his education and photography hobby, he couldn't get that tedious paint-removing job out of his mind. There should be a solvent to do such a job in one operation, quickly and efficiently. But inquiry into the matter revealed a paucity of inventiveness on the part of the paint industry.

So Carleton Ellis began spending all his spare time in a chemistry lab as he mixed would-be solvents with the indefatigability of a medieval alchemist seeking the philosopher's stone. He created evil-smelling concoctions and decoctions ad nauseum which he tried on boards coated with ancient and hardened paint.

It was a trial and error method, and a renewed plunge into his chemistry books. Sometimes his solvents ate up the wood. Other times they bubbled up like acid in gelatinous masses. But Ellis was a persistent sort, and finally he came upon a mixture of benzol, alcohol and paraffin which did the complete job in one simple operation.

Just one simple idea which it seemed that anybody should have figured out from sheer necessity years before. But they hadn't. And Ellis started marketing his patented paint remover by a door-to-door system.

Patent number one for Carleton Ellis! And still he wasn't sure just what he wanted to do. And then the Pennsylvania Railroad placed an order for $5,000 worth of the paint remover . . . an entire carload!

On the strength of this amazing development Carleton Ellis resigned from the institute and went into business. There was gratifying reward for diligent work in the field of chemistry. All a man needed besides a fundamental education was three things—business ability, capacity for work and a good imagination.

Young Ellis was highly gifted with all three. He had genius' capacity for taking pains, and he had found the kind of work he loved. He turned his talent and research into many paths, always digging up

CARLETON ELLIS

an answer to a problem that other people did not consider as a problem.

In 1909 he launched a campaign against the petroleum molecule. At this time the yield of gasoline from crude oil was only forty percent. So Ellis laboriously worked out a method for cracking petroleum which eventually brought the yield of gasoline up to ninety percent from crude oil.

He went from product to product, working in resins, plastics, edible oils, waxes, varnishes, etc. The very trend of modern civilization has been changed because this one man was not satisfied with things as he found them.

At the time of his death in 1940 Carleton Ellis had come a long way from that original patent on paint remover. He held more patents—all useful and in active service—than any living man. The astonishing total was—810. And it all began because it took a painter too long to remove a thin layer of old paint.

ASTOUNDING THRILLS OF THE FUTURE
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WORLD BEYOND THE SKY

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

# The Ancient Brain

**By A. G. STANGLAND**

***Preserved for One Hundred Centuries, the Mentality of William Golend Reawakens to a World Wondrous in the Extreme!***

THE first glimmer of consciousness came to me; I opened my eyes. They looked squarely into those of a white-robed man bending over me: kindly eyes of light blue that twinkled. He turned to another man.

"Doctor, you can consider this one of the greatest moments of modern medical science. Together we have labored incessantly, and now, the triumphant hour has come!"

"Yes," was the solemn answer of the other. His face was grave, and showed the lines of worry and fatigue.

Where was I? That horrible, blinding flash—! Ah, thank God, I was not dead after all. Nurses, doctors, medicinal odors—all told me I was in a hospital. Vivid memories came into my mind. I was back again in the college electrical engineering testing laboratory.

Quite distinctly I recalled going over to the control board to step up the voltage for a new experiment. As in a dream, I saw myself put my hand out to the great resistor, saw with horror a connecting cable from a high-tension jack dropping from the top of the control board. Too late—it touched my forearm. Stabbing blue flames leapt before my eyes, and then —the soft velvet of oblivion.

"How long have I been here, Doctor?" I asked weakly.

The other studied me a moment, and then intoned very solemnly:

"Ten thousand years."

Great God in heaven, was the man mad! Ten thousand! Rot.

"Great Scott, Doctor, my question was perfectly civil. Need you cavil now?"

He turned to the other, his evident colleague.

"You see, there has been no impairment of the sulci and fissures. His psychological reaction is quite normal. Indeed, we are fortunate."

He then surveyed me with a kindly and friendly mien.

"Young man, you have verily been dead for ten thousand years. We are just a little uncertain as to the very early history of your brain, but this we do know: you were electrocuted in a college of Western America. Oregon State College, I believe.

"Your brain, for some reason or other, was not injured by the electronic flow through your body. Pioneer doctors in the field of brain sur-

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Some stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Ancient Brain," by A. G. Stangland, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time, as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!

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I felt that I was surveying a stranger, instead of myself

gery undertook an experiment to keep your brain alive for as long as it would survive. It was studied and weighed and photographed for one hundred centuries, until it became known as 'The Ancient Brain' to all the scientific world.

"Most of our latest knowledge of the field of biochemistry and its relation to psychology has come from a scientific study of your brain. And now, the last most important experiment with your brain is its transferrence from its platinum 'cranium' to the body of a young man.

"For thirty-six hours Dr. Volor 146M22X18 and myself, Dr. Sine 8802W75MN63, have worked unceasingly, preparing your bundle of nerves for its new abode. Your capacity for brain development has been increased ten-fold. Whereas, before, your capacity was three hundred cells, it is now about three thousand.

"All the most modern means of medical science have been employed to prepare your brain for its development in this far more advanced world of today."

I LAY thinking and pondering upon this staggering information. Dead for ten thousand years! And now, in this vastly altered world I should have to find my own way, all my friends gone, with a new body to exist in. The last thought startled me into movement. What kind of body did I have?

"Dr. Sine, may I get up to walk around? I should like to see the new home you have given my brain."

"You can move about, but be very

careful in your movements, as you will have to become familiar with your new anatomy. With all of our advances in science, we have been unable to create coordination between your brain and the new nervous system. That will have to develop naturally as your brain controls the new nerve fibres."

Assistants helped me from the bed in which I lay, and stayed beside me as I began to walk. My movements were a little slow, I thought, for in my other body I got about rapidly; it was characteristic of me. I looked at my hands. They were somewhat smaller than the memory of my former limbs, and were of a finer texture. I came to a mirror. Wondering what I should see, I stood before it.

I had the anomalous sensation of feeling that I was merely an entity of intelligence in the ether, and that I was surveying a stranger upon whom I had come. I saw a comely-looking young man about twenty years old, of slight build—by my memory of former standards—with very intelligent-looking eyes.

The head was a little large for the body, but as I looked at the people about me, I saw that theirs were of similar proportions. No one spoke; all were quietly observing me and watching my face to see my reaction to my new environment.

Doctors Sine and Volor came toward me. Both were dressed in white garments consisting of a loose-fitting blouse and what looked like riding breeches, which I found later to be about the standard dress of the people; the color alone differentiating the profession of the wearer. Comfort was paramount in the styles.

"And now that you have seen yourself, what do you think of your new body? The young man who was the former possessor of your body was a laboratory worker in the government chemical research laboratories. He was engaged in obtaining a new element from the sun by means of the new electrothermic oscillator. When found, the delicate cells of his brain were discovered to have become a gelid gelose from exposure to the rare element."

I must have turned a ghastly white, for both doctors pressed forward anxiously.

"Surely there can't be a failure of one of the cells of the corpus callosum, Volor!" exclaimed Dr. Sine. "We checked all the nerves going into the prosencephalon."

"I'm all right, Doctor," I reassured him.

"Come into this room and rest for a while. There is something here that may interest you besides," and both led the way into a dimly lighted circular room.

I was motioned to a seat near Dr. Sine, while Dr. Volor took a position near a control panel covered with small buttons.

"We are now going to show you some very excellent stereoscopic photo-cell pictures of your brain," began Dr. Sine. "You will notice over there in the gloom a huge krypton tube and exactly opposite it, on the other side of the room, another one. Using the old, simple television system of the projectoscope, these tubes change the photographic waves on the wire spools into light again and throw it on an electronic screen in the center of the room."

The room was totally darkened. In the center of the room something was beginning to glow and take three-dimensional extension. Finally, it was resolved into the forms of two men whom I recognized as the two doctors. The effect was startling, for it appeared as if the two were actually in the middle of the room.

But what was more startling and electrifying was the object they were bent over. It was the brain of a man. The two scientists seemed deeply engrossed in a pencil of orange light they were focusing on a part of the brain.

"There you see us beginning to culture the cells of your brain so that they can develop to a greater degree. We found that only a small fraction of the total capacity was developed naturally. The tube you see me looking through, while Dr. Volor trains the electro-culturer on the cells, is an electric microscope with which I am watching the cells expand."

Fascinated, I continued to stare at

the stereoscopic effect. To think that that very brain on the screen was now seeing itself! It was amazing. The scenes changed and I saw a body in a circular room.

Around it were the two doctors and several assistants, who appeared very busy about a silver sphere which had tubes and wires emanating from it, going toward a glass cage that contained intricate and complex apparatus of an electrical nature beyond my comprehension.

The assistants stood aside, and the two doctors, finished with their work on the body, very carefully, yet easily, opened the silver sphere. Inside it reposed my brain. With the skill of highly trained surgeons they placed it within the cranium of the body.

When the top of the skull was replaced, the wound where the knife had cut was bathed with a chemical solution, and then treated with yellow rays from a huge tube. In a very short while the cut healed, and all signs of the surgical operation vanished.

FOLLOWING the showing of the picture, Dr. Sine took me into a large, palatial room. My eyes were ever meeting new objects of interest. Huge glass mirrors surrounded by complex apparatus stood in the walls, and in the mirrors individuals seemed to be holding conversation with people in the room. Others appeared to be writing, their motions being duplicated by an automatic pencil operating on a slanting desk before the mirrors.

We approached a young man just turning away from one of the glass screens, evidently a television instrument. He had a large forehead, and keen, piercing eyes.

"How do you do, Dr. Sine?" he exclaimed in a firm masculine voice, glancing at me eagerly in turn, and bowing slightly.

"Jak, I wish to acquaint you with—er—ah—hysteresis. I've been so interested, in a scientific sense, in this gentleman that I've failed to learn his numerical name!" and the doctor, reddening a bit, asked my name.

"Doctor, I don't quite understand what you mean by 'numerical name'. However, I was at one time in the dim past known as William Allen Golend."

"Ah, then our ancestors did not have the system of registering numerical surnames as early as some historians would have it. Jak, I take great pleasure and pride in presenting my friend, William Allen Golend; William, my esteemed young friend, Jak 158MNC-802."

Instinctively, I was drawn toward the intelligent-looking Jak. I put my hand forward to shake his. He gazed at me and at my outstretched hand, quite at a loss as to what to do. Suddenly, a dazzling smile spread over his handsome face.

"By the sacred constant Pi, forgive me, William. My usually perfect memory slipped for once. I forgot my ancient customs," and he grasped my hand in hearty handshake.

"I might tell you that Jak is one of the best mathematicians the Interplanetary Coordinated has on its interstellar navigation staff. He has been a deeply interested follower of my experiment on your brain, and has taken it upon himself to help you orient yourself in this new world. You may now consider yourself a free citizen of Aerial America.

"All I ask of you is that periodically you come to my laboratories here for psychological examination, to aid me to consummate my greatest experiment. Any time that you are bewildered by this world and want counsel, you are cordially asked to consider Dr. Volor or myself as your intimate friend. And in the meantime—take good care of him, Jak."

With that he hurried away to his work.

"There goes one of the outstanding medical scientists of our present age," said Jak, watching the retreating figure of the doctor. And then he turned to me. "William, I consider this one of the most profound moments of my life. Here you stand before me like a memory out of the past, your intelligence over ten thousand years old—what a staggering thought to me!

"Most people's appreciation of science is dulled in this age, but I appreciate the greatness of the doctor's

accomplishment. But come—I mustn't cogitate foolishly over such a scientific triumph. It is my duty now to introduce you to the governmental registrar of numerical names, and to the psychoanalytical examiner."

Jak led the way to a tube extending from the floor of the room to the ceiling. He pressed a button and an elliptical door slid back, revealing a small elevator. When we had entered, my new friend pressed a button and I suddenly felt as if I had taken on a great weight.

Following what seemed like a half second, we emerged into what appeared to be a square or parklike area, in which gorgeous palms and mangroves spread waving fronds in the light breeze. But what instantly impressed me was the beautiful architecture of the buildings.

Out of respect for my natural wonderment, Jak pointed out to me and explained the ultra-modern objects of my interest. The buildings were constructed of an alloy metal which was extremely strong and light in mass. It had made possible the graceful sweeping finish of the skyscrapers, which seemed to have an average height of twenty stories.

Between the towering masses of metal stretched spidery suspension pathways, the sidewalks of which were moving, thus transporting pedestrians. Aerocars floated about in the air above the thoroughfares. Jak explained that invisible repulsion rays suspended them in space.

All this time we had been transported along on a moving sidewalk, until finally Jak indicated that we should enter a long, tall building. Again we were whisked up many stories by the tube elevators, to emerge into a spacious office.

WE APPROACHED a tall, angular man busy at what appeared to be a great typewriter; at least that was my impression of it.

"Hello, Alleron. I have a new person for you to record. He's been here for ten thousand years, but you have never got his name," said Jak, smiling.

"Oh, yes, this is the famous gentleman whose brain was kept alive for ten thousand years. Now, if you will sit in this chair for awhile, we shall be through very quickly."

The thought came into my mind that he was not much impressed by the startling statement of my age. However, this thought was followed by a theory that the people of this ultra-modern age were highly developed in science, and hence, not to be surprised by advances in the science of the day.

I sat down in the chair, surrounded by delicate-looking apparatus that was meaningless to me. The recorder adjusted a long tube that arched over my head. Suddenly, it glowed dully and crackled with a high-pitched note, continuing so for five minutes, during which the recorder tabulated the readings of various instruments arranged in a bank.

He took the data and typed on the typing machine, which in reality was a machine for photoelectrically recording the data on wire. When referred to, it was to be run through a revisualizing instrument which permitted one to see the particular datum desired. Jak explained that this method of filing took up very little room.

Next, my examiner placed rings on my wrists and took accurate data on the state of the health of my body, as Jak afterward told me. Finally, he handed me a stamped metallic disc.

"That is all, sir. Your name has been registered as William 55203NL484—it is on your stamp here. I found that you possess a large potential intelligence, and that your health is excellent. I sincerly hope that you adjust yourself successfully to this world. And it will not be difficult, with such wonderful assets."

Jak and I started for the tubes.

"Now, William, is it your desire to educate yourself further in knowledge? Don't be submerged by the natural contrast that you notice between your own memory of scientific development in your ancient day and of the present. Remember that your intelligence capacity has been increased ten-fold.

"Although you are lost at present, yet it will not be long until you find that you have the ability to develop your brain up to the average of today

and maybe further, much further."

Great Scott! I try to learn the common knowledge of the day? The self within me did the natural thing of giving in to the inferiority complex that enveloped it. Yet reason took precedence, and I began to think logically. Why feel inferior? Intelligence is merely a matter of developing the brain, and if my capacity for development had been increased, why couldn't I at least try to improve my knowledge?

A new mental attitude began to assert itself within me. I began to feel the desire, the thirst for knowledge. In the days of my studying in that dear old college in the West, I had been conscious of an enthusiasm in gaining knowledge, and of a proud feeling when I had mastered something difficult.

"Yes, Jak, I do feel that I should continue to improve myself. Ten thousand years ago I used to go out on a starry night and gaze at the gleaming, scintillating suns far away. An unfathomable longing would grip my consciousness as I looked out across space, a feeling that engendered a deep and profound desire to delve into the secrets of Nature and understand them. That feeling still survives, and will be extant as long as I live."

"Ah, already he shows the ineffaceable spirit of the scientist!" exclaimed my friend with fervor. "William, with such an attitude toward the world, I know that you are going to be a success, and I feel sure that in the hundreds of years of life ahead of us, that we shall be bosom friends."

"Hundreds of years of life ahead of us! Do you mean that the average expectancy of life in this day is counted in hundreds of years, Jak?"

"Why, yes," he replied, as though asserting a perfectly consonant statement, and he continued to explain, "you see, we have means of controlling our health almost perfectly. From history, I know that in the ancient days of medicine, the scientists continually battled disease germs that are now extinct, and have been for ages.

"We know our bodies perfectly in regard to the food that is required and the effects of it. They are like any other mechanism that runs down eventually when not repaired."

Jak stopped the elevator at a floor of the same building we had first entered.

"Now, you will go through a psychoanalytical examination to determine what profession you are best suited for," said Jak, opening the door and stepping through it. "You were studying electricity in the ages that have gone by. I wonder if the examiner will find you suited to it."

We passed on into a circular room, where we were met by a small man who proved to be the government psychoanalyst. My name and age were recorded. He raised his eyebrows slightly at the mention of my great age, but did not inquire further. For an hour I was put through various tests pertaining to my hearing, to my bodily resistivity, the number of cells in my brain and my intelligence quotient.

FINALLY, the spectacular test came when the room was darkened and a gleaming sphere above me began to expand and contract. Slowly, I became conscious of a low hum in my head that I tried to locate but failed. In the gloom I saw two smoldering eyes that drew my own so that they hurt.

I blinked my eyes and looked again, and then noticed that the points of light had increased, so that they revealed themselves as glowing tubes. By this time, I was getting exhausted from the tiring tests, and my senses seemed to be tricking me at times.

The lights were switched on and I relaxed. To my tired brain came intermittent scraps of conversation of the government scientist and his assistant.

"By the clouds of Venus, he has enough resistance! I burned out two phylons before I found the constant of five micrads per leucocyte."

"His memory curve surely turned out beautifully — almost a perfect hyperbola, just one per cent in error."

"Yes, but from the way this integraph is functioning, he will never make a surgeon; he hasn't very good

bodily coordination or reactions."

At last, the psychoanalyst approached me and laid various sheets with curves on them, and also data sheets covered with rows of figures.

"We have found that you should study electricity. Your mind is of an analytical nature, as shown here on this curve of successive crossplates of your brain in the area of the thalamencephalon. You have a mathematical tendency that should be cultivated further."

He went on similarly for several minutes, while I trailed along behind him and his erudite discussion of my mental powers and their relation to the study of electricity.

Before Jak and I left, the official told me that I was qualified to enter the University on the Disk.

"Jak, what did he mean by 'Disk'?"

He looked at me quizzically a moment and then smiled.

"Ah, yes, it is quite natural for you to ask. It is possible that you have not learned this fact since your 'return' to the world: at this moment, you and I are on a suspended disk-city eight thousand feet above the earth. A long way back, it was found that people who flew constantly were as a general rule much healthier than those who were at the surface of the earth continuously.

"Purer air and absence of bacteria in the upper currents of atmosphere were conducive to the better health of the human race. Consequently, in time, huge disks were built miles in diameter with cities on them, so that the entire population could derive the benefits of cleaner air. From then on, science made great strides in eliminating disease."

"But what keeps us up?" I asked, astounded.

"It was discovered that a repulsion ray was given out, when electrons of an atom were slightly pulled away from the nucleus and allowed to resume their normal position. This caused a very strong repulsion ray when carried on with a quantity of matter high in the Periodic Table."

We reached the level of the streets, and went out to a conveyor sidewalk or "escalon," as Jak called it. I marveled at the surprising information of the disk-cities.

"I am taking you to the edge of this, our disk, so that you can see for yourself how it appears to be on a city in the air. You know, William, I am getting a lot of interest out of seeing your reaction to the comparatively commonplace things of today. It is rather refreshing."

"Do you know, Jak, there was a gentleman in my day by the name of Einstein, who at the age of eighteen years propounded a theory that all things were relative. He was a wise man, Jak, and his theory applies to something I have to say now. You are amused at me for my amazement at what are to you commonplace matters.

"I can remember reading of people, having been away from the advances of society, coming into what was a new world for them. One old fellow, seeing moving pictures for the first time, could not be convinced that there were no people behind the screen."

"Yes, I have come upon the name Einstein somewhere in my reading of old manuscripts. He was a— there you are! What a beautiful, clear view today!" and he pointed to some sparkling lakes that lay below like diamonds in the glow of the sun.

I gazed at the gorgeous mid-morning landscape that lay stretched out before me. Hills, valleys, streams and meadows stood out very distinct in the freshness of the morning. I am a lover of Nature in all of her moods. The cool, crisp breeze of early day invigorated me, and toned up my skin. Birds on the wing swung up and down out in front of us, careening with the air currents to take advantage of them.

"I have been on disk-cities for all of my life, William, and yet I am always fascinated by the view from them. I am conscious of an unnameable longing when I look at the horizon, the rim of the earth; I feel as if something within me, ancient, is crying out to go just beyond to explore and seek adventure."

I GLANCED at my friend to see if he were the same person I had judged him to be. It surprised me to hear him talking in such a vein, for he

had always impressed me as being a type that took Nature for granted, and who worshiped science.

He turned to me, a look of great distance dying out of his eyes.

"It is ten o'clock, William. I should like to have you come to my club today, for we have some interesting exhibits to present."

On the escalon we headed for the other edge of the disk. I watched the aerocars gliding about in the air above the city, and noted one in particular that was being piloted by a very charming young woman.

"We get off here," I heard Jak say.

Still gazing up at the aerocar, I started to leave the escalon. Of a sudden I came into contact with someone. Feeling somewhat guilty, and very apologetic, I lowered my eyes to look into beautiful pools of blue. The young girl in scarlet made my heart skip several beats.

"Why, ah—er—I beg your pardon," I stammered.

"Young man, you should be chastised; and looking at another woman, too! Oh, yes, I pardon you," and she gave me a radiant smile.

I came up to Jak, who was grinning.

"Jak, er—ten thousand years seem not to have changed woman in any way. She is just as much a mystery to me now as she was in my early days."

"Well, they've kept pace with us men these thousands of years," he remarked dryly.

We entered a tall building and went up twelve levels. Jak conducted me into a hall filled with many men, talking in groups, standing about a silver screen. He came upon a friend of his whom he introduced as Julian 11145-MWM986.

"The topic of interest for today is on ancient warfare," proclaimed a gentleman standing on a dais.

"We have here some old moving celluloid films that were sealed ten thousand years ago and kept in vaults. The pictures deal with a world holocaust of the year 1917. Please be seated and the pictures will begin."

The members stood in rows, and behind them came up chairs out of the floor. I sat down, my heart pounding; I was soon to see the world of my natural days on Earth. Soon the moving pictures started, with a scene of troops in column marching toward a dilapidated village. The men were tired and haggard-looking from long hours of fighting.

AS THE picture progressed, I was conscious of having seen it some place else.

"Of course, you all know that this was one of the last great wars the world experienced. In the centuries that followed, the human mind gradually caught up with science, and warfare was finally abolished as being a disease. This picture illustrates clearly that man in that day was not so very far from his primeval ancestor in controlling his instincts.

"Throughout all the ages, from that time on the greatest accomplishment of man has been the subduing of his inferior self, and the elevation of his social inclinations for the betterment of the race. Notice this scene where the men are advancing with what they called bayonets — really knives — on the ends of their guns.

"It shocks the social instincts of the age to see those men of the Dark Era of science plunging knives into the bodies of each other."

Now I recognized the picture. It was one of the greatest actual moving pictures of the World War, and had been shown to my military class at college. Instead of the thrill of seeing my old world, I experienced a revulsion. My mind was in a turmoil. What had Dr. Sine and Dr. Volor done to my brain, besides developing the cells for expansion?

I began to see my world of the past from the viewpoint of the modern man. Yes, environment is a great factor in a man's life; I found it influencing myself.

Beside me, Jak took out a small case from an inside pocket. On the surface of the mirror seemed to be written:

"No. 43 arriving in atmosphere. Stand by."

Jak told me in a low voice that a limited from Venus was arriving in a few minutes and that he had to be

there to meet it on its arrival.

In the tubular elevators we dropped to the street level, and, getting on a swift escalon, passed through the heart of the disk-city to a wide area, in the center of which was a huge cradle that Jak told me held the body of the limited when it landed. My friend took me into a long, low building that I found to be the offices of the Interstellar Coordinated.

I was impressed by the richness of the interior decorations. Pleasing color combinations met the eye at every glance. The people of this day knew well the psychological significance of the effect of color on the retina of the eye.

AS I walked along, Jak was holding conversation with the chief of the landing crew through the pocket televisor, giving orders for the berthing of the interstellar flyer. I looked at him, and reflected upon his personality and those of all his colleagues, and its significance as a result of a harmonious atmosphere.

Nowhere had I seen undue loss of temper. Every individual seemed serenely happy, as if in command of a mentality free from the toxic effects of suspicion, anger or covetousness. No wonder there was such efficiency in the social order.

Evidently, in the past educators had finally made the people realize the value of self-control, and by an efficacious marriage code had produced a super-race of human beings.

We entered Jak's computing rooms.

"William, my chief instrument man, Litnus."

I met a man slightly taller than myself, of high forehead, and sparkling eyes, and pleasing personality.

"She's ninety miles now, but dropping rapidly on a parameter of a squared variable and a cubic function," he said to Jak, after acknowledging the introduction with a courteous bow of the head.

"Let us have a look at her," and Jak went to a mirror and twisted a knob.

Instantly, there flashed on the ground-glass screen the image of a beautiful white cigar-shaped flyer on which was painted the number "43". Except for the glowing tubes at the end of the ship and rows of ports on the sides, it reminded me of the Zeppelins of my day.

"How long has it been on the way, Jak?" I ventured.

"Well, ordinarily, it would have been twenty-six days on the run. But since the recent unaccountable change in the orbit of the Leonids, it has been ten days overtime dodging the swarm."

He went over to another instrument, and got into communication with the commanding officer of the ship, assuring him that everything was in readiness to receive the big hulk of the space traveler.

Fifteen minutes later, we ascended the landing platform to watch the hovering bird from out of space settle gently into the cradle. After a few minutes' wait, several massive doors opened in the side of the vessel, and passengers began to descend. Long conveyors were put into the ship through some of the larger hatches, and baggage began to flow from the huge monster down into freight rooms below the deck.

Jak approached a tired, somber-looking group of men.

"Greetings, gentlemen. Chief of Staff Georges couldn't be here to meet you today, so I was sent in his place. Everything is taken care of. You had better go immediately to the Violet Room and refresh your systems. I can see the worries of this last trip have taken a great deal of your vitality."

They turned grateful faces to Jak, and thanked him many times over.

"That's the navigation staff of the ship, William. What a difficult task theirs is! You can't imagine the reaction you undergo when you leave the earth and venture into vast space. It is said that early experimenters went insane from the loneliness and terrible mystery of outer space. Things have happened out there that have puzzled scientists for years."

I looked at the bulging sides of the compact structure looming up beside us. What mysteries could it not reveal!

Down in Jak's private office, off

from the computing rooms, we sat and talked for a long time, discussing my future, philosophy, psychology and cultural subjects. I say "We discussed," but I might have said "I listened," for everything was so beyond me that I was lost. A steward brought in food and liquids.

"I know this will be quite new to you, William. These tablets are condensed food, in which is contained the essential values of vegetables, fruits and nuts. However, the human stomach needs some bulk. This is a leaf from Venerian soil that has ferrous properties vital to the bloodstream."

I surveyed the tray. No wonder I hadn't seen any rotund, obese people in this age! However, after consuming my part of the meal, I felt as if I had just eaten a wholesome old-fashioned dinner.

In the late afternoon Jak took me to his suite of rooms in one of the beautiful skyscrapers. He offered himself as my roommate for as long as I wished. I was captivated by his taste in selecting little oddities. Queer little models of animals reposed in various parts of the apartments. I was informed that they were replicas of the fauna of Mars and Venus.

Jak's love of the science of mathematics was reflected in his rooms. Here and there were lights in the form of a truncated pyramid, rich carpets woven in startling angles and colors, miniature models of various atoms, the electrons of which actually moved very slowly, depicting the Eternity of Matter.

"Well, William, let's have a peep at the day's events," and he sat down in a massive chair, alongside which was a right prism whose top was covered with many pearly buttons.

He pressed one, and a screen built in the wall opposite us glowed, resolving the light into the picture of the interior of a giant observatory on the surface of the earth. An announcer explained the objects of interest to us, pointing out highly complicated apparatus.

Briefly, the fifty-foot reflector focused the starlight on a battery of "electric eyes" that magnified it to greater detail and intensity. Next, we were given a view through the electric telescope.

"And here is Betelgeuse itself."

THE announcer stopped talking to let the unseen radio public appreciate the profound and spectacular sight of the flaming young giant star. The picture blurred for a moment and then it cleared suddenly, the ball of raging, gigantic flames standing out in perspective in the room, so that I imagined that I could grasp it.

The view changed to the planets of the star of which, the announcer said, there were ten known. We saw two brilliant, scintillating oblate spheroids which were still in a molten state. For a great part of the evening we sat and looked out into the evening sky through the space televisor.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen of the invisible audience, Professor Cobb will present the most spectacular event of the celestial stage. In about one minute, two dark bodies rushing toward each other in the region of the 'Coal Sack' will collide. Color screens will tone down the brilliancy of the flaming gases."

Hardly had he finished when the black mirror was lit up with a soundless flash, great curving arms of the flames reaching out beyond the limit of the screen. I went to the window and looked up into the sky. There, out on the ecliptic, was a brilliant spot of light that apparently grew brighter as the moments passed.

I turned to call Jak. He was staring at the screen, a tragic expression on his countenance. Sensing something in the atmosphere, I approached him.

"Jak, old fellow, what's amiss?"

He motioned to the screen.

"You see there what happened to my father when a meteor struck his ship, and to think that all I could do was to sit at a screen like this and watch it happen!"

In the days that followed I started my attempt to get a University education at the government institution. I was given more work at first than I thought I could handle, but somehow I got it done. Psychology played a

very great part in the methods of instruction.

In the big classrooms, each student would recline in a chair and go to sleep through the effect of a certain vibrating energy, during which the process of instruction would take place. At other times we would see and listen to a professor who was probably several thousand miles away.

Since I was studying electrical engineering, I received a great deal of practical instruction down in the engine rooms of the "Disk", where was situated the huge apparatus for sustaining the weight of the city off the earth.

I was surprised to learn that the real, heavy, mechanical labor was performed by highly proficient automatons, that could answer any technical questions about the instruments and their readings, lift machinery, or do anything else of a dozen duties assigned them. I was fascinated by the mechanical men moving about doing their tasks, for they were the personification of man's genius.

As I found in my lectures, the source of energy for the electrical apparatus in the engine rooms was the electrical field about the sun. A long, slender pointer through the bottom of the disk collected the vibrations in the air, and conducted them through a maze of tubes and rectifiers to four great tubes on the circumference of the disk.

Here the electricity was stepped up billions of volts and let loose in a continual gigantic discharge through the long bulging tubes. At the ends of the latter the discharges caused the metal to emit a repulsion ray. My professors thought me rather dull, but it took me a very long time to understand the process.

Although the students worked hard, and with serious intent, still they found time—and they were encouraged by the teaching staff—to have recreation in dances and various social functions.

One evening when I came in, Jak was busy in conversation with his assistant back in the company offices. Soon, he ended and shut off the televisor.

"Hello, there, William, how's the engineer?"

"Not so bad. What are you doing tonight, Jak?"

"Why, I've heard about the university dance to be given this evening. So, that's where I'm going, and I presume you are, too?"

"Yes, I was going to ask you, too."

The dance was given in the ballroom atop one of the skyscrapers, the roof of which was covered in glass. We had taken two very charming girls from the University as companions for the evening. I had been to several dances before, and had learned the new graceful steps of the "Martian Ballet". During the evening I happened to see a friend from one of my classes.

"Good evening, William. How about a dance?"

"Oh, hello, Kant. A dance? Yes. Where shall you be?"

"Down near the orchestra. Thanks."

WHEN my companion and I reached Kant at the beginning of the next dance, I found to my surprise that his feminine friend was the girl of the deep blue eyes. Introductions were made, and we moved off.

"William, I'm tired. Let's go out to the garden," said Shirley of the blue eyes.

I acquiesced, and we went to a secluded roof garden to sit under a brilliant-colored canopy, and enjoy the beautiful night. Just above the earth's rim floated the full, golden disk of the age-old moon.

An exotic, cool breeze disturbed the palms. Romance was in the very atmosphere. My mind ran back over the centuries to the moonlight nights that I had seen on that dear old Western college campus — strolling couples passing through the shadows of the college gardens—

"Oh, isn't it a wonderful evening, William?"

"Why—er—yes," and I came out of the past ten thousand years to be quite conscious of the young, vivacious woman near me.

"Will you tell me something of your past life of thousands of years ago?" she asked, settling herself com-

fortably in the corner of the divan.

"How did you know I was alive ten thousand years ago?" I requested, being rather surprised.

"Why, you are a well-known character around the University. Everyone is interested in you." She colored slightly.

"Well, Shirley, I don't know where to begin. Perhaps if you ask me some questions, I'll know better how to tell you of my past life."

"Well, then, were young girls interested in science and art, as they are now?"

"There were a few in science, but more in art; however, not as many as today."

While answering her question, I noticed a new expression in her eyes.

"Did you ever experience love?" she asked, quite serene, gazing up at a twinkling star. Sirius, I believe it was.

"Yes, Shirley. She was a girl like you. Resourceful, clever and—beautiful!"

The word was out. Confound my tongue!

She turned languid eyes on me, her lips parted, smiling. I never was a master of women; they always sensed their superiority over me. The turn of conversation left me helpless. To augment my confusion, Shirley was silent.

"Er—don't you think the dance is about over now?" I ventured.

"Oh, no, not for ten minutes yet; and anyway, I'm not quite cool. Let's go over to the edge here and look at the street below."

We walked to the edge, and looked down upon a beautiful flood of colored lights that outlined the busy thoroughfares in striking hues.

"Oh, it looks as if there has been an accident over there on Escalon Twelve!" exclaimed Shirley.

I looked but failed to see it.

"Where?"

"Come here, and I'll point it out for you," she said in a tone one uses when speaking to a hopeless child.

She took my head in her hands playfully and pointed it in the right direction. I felt a tingling sensation where her hands touched me.

"Oh, yes, I see it now."

An escalon had snapped. I turned to smile at her. She was looking at me with shining eyes that reflected the blended colors from below. Her hands had taken hold of a lock of hair and were pressing it back.

"Shirley—" I began, my heart pounding; but I changed my amorous intentions.

"Yes." Her voice was soft.

"I believe we had better go back. Kant will think we've lost ourselves."

"Oh, he won't mind," she came back, a little peevishly, I thought.

Shirley was quiet all the way back to the ballroom. What had I done? Many times I had pondered upon remarks made by my friends, that led me to think that I had violated some unwritten code of this far-advanced age, where my twentieth century ideas of ethics were incompatible. In the past I had been blest with the ability of blithely talking myself into tight corners, and it seemed now that Dr. Sine and Dr. Volor had not helped me to remedy this detriment.

ONE day I was running a test on the polonium that flowed into the repulsion tubes to determine its quality.

Ron, a classmate, approached me.

"William, will you take my place for a while at the 'auto' controls? I have to see Professor Luch personally for a few moments."

"All right, Ron."

"Thanks a lot."

I went to the control room where the three other men were manipulating their mechanical men, doing various duties that could not be done very efficiently by automatic levers and relays. I sat before the mirror that represented the electric eye of the robot, and by various levers moved No. 7 to take a look at the temperature of the electric furnace for repulsion tube No. 3. Everything was functioning perfectly. I continued to do routine work relative to the operation of the repulsion tube.

"Say, Havloe, did you hear about the great explorer, Ziffin, who just returned last night from a trip to Uranus?"

The others carried on a conversation about the space adventurer who found evidences of a huge ship on Uranus, that led him to believe that it came from some other Solar System.

As my robot straightened up from depositing some huge balance weights on the floor, I saw with horror that a polonium tube leading to the great discharger had snapped, pouring the precious Martian metal on the floor. Immediately, the dial on the wall above me showed that the great disk had already taken on a list, and was beginning to descend slightly.

"Increase your voltage and polonium flow, men! I'm shutting my discharger off. Polonium tube snapped!"

Knowing full well that the other repulsors could not stand the added strain indefinitely, I set No. 7 to work swiftly to close off the voltage and metal flow, and replace the broken tube. Conversation ceased; the others turning grim faces to their work, and working rapidly and surely. The list was corrected, but still the disk continued to descend.

With my heart pounding in my ears, it seemed an eternity to cut out the tube. Yes, it was delicate work and had to be done with extreme care. Even in this crucial moment I marveled at the delicacy with which the automaton handled the tube under my control.

As soon as it was safe, the polonium began to flow again, and the discharger was turned on. Slowly, the instruments indicated that the descent of the disk was checked, and that it began to assume a normal elevation again after having fallen a thousand feet.

Ron came in with drawn face.

"By the rings of Saturn, what's happened, men!"

Havloe turned from his instrument, his face relaxed into a wan smile.

"Ron, you've never seen such cool, deliberate headwork as William has just displayed. I've heard the professors doubting whether he would ever be able to equal the man of today, but surely he will stand high in their estimation now."

I was commended highly by my faculty for my good work. But the ones who were the most laudatory were the Doctors Sine and Volor. I sat in their laboratory.

"William, we are both proud of the great effort you have made to adjust yourself to this new world. You have succeeded very well. In our tests we have found that your mental capacity has increased even somewhat beyond what we hoped for. Your glory has come from the right use of your abilities, while our triumph has come from the successful experiment we performed on your brain. Your future in this world is assured."

WHEN I got up to Jak's room he congratulated me profusely.

"But say, William, a young woman was just speaking to me over the televisor. She wants to see you."

"Who was she?"

"Do you remember a certain day that you 'needed to be chastised'?" he asked, a twinkle in his eye.

"Shirley!" I exclaimed. "When does she want to see me?"

"Gosh, you're clever!" he mimicked me, using the twentieth century expletive. "Oh, she'd like to see you any time you will call on her."

That evening found me as Shirley's guest. She praised me for my quick work of the day, and told me how much I was lauded as well as the other men over the public mirrors of the news companies. We talked of various subjects of the moment.

"Look at the full moon, William."

As I looked, a slowly moving aerocar passed across its disk. Shirley put a hand to my hair, smoothing down a misplaced lock. I took her hand and drew her closer to me.

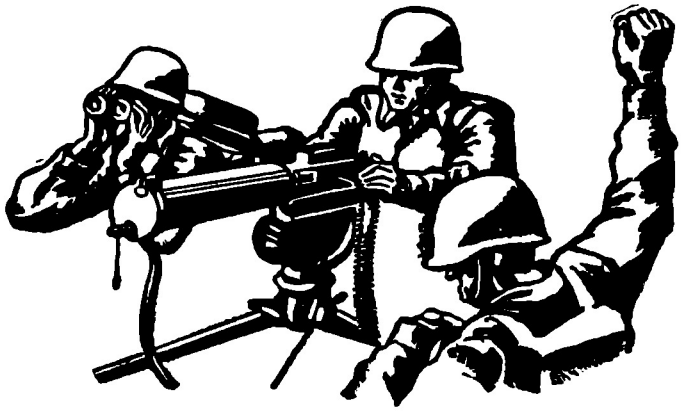
"Shirley, I—I love you!"

She smiled alluringly.

"Well, my dear boy, you may be ten thousand years old, but I have loved you very much since the last University dance!"

I looked down at her comfortably settled in my arms, a great light dawning upon me.

"Shirley, dear, this old world hasn't changed much, after all. People act very nearly the same—only they are in a different environment."



# *"ATTACK AT 0600!"*

In the Army, that simple order means action! Excitement! It means American troops are going ahead against the enemy!

Before that order can be transmitted by the Signal Corps, it means that plans must have been made for months in advance, troops must have been moved into position, hundreds of reconnaissance flights must have been made, thousands of tons of supplies and munitions prepared.

It means that in America millions of men and women in factories and mills, on farms and in the homes, in shipyards and steel mills, in logging camps and mines, have been working day and night for weeks and months.

You, no matter who you are nor what you do, have your part in making that order possible so that we may smash our enemies!

"Attack at 0600!"

Dawson Olmstead

DAWSON OLMSTEAD
MAJOR GENERAL
CHIEF SIGNAL OFFICER
U. S. ARMY

# DEATH RAY

By HENRY S. LEWIS

OF COURSE there wasn't much that could be done with Dr. Furman. He was such a fussy little man, to begin with, that there was no point in trying to get him to do any one particular thing at any one particular time.

So the War Department had simply sent a representative around to sign up the famed biochemist.

"We have an idea," said the young Army major, "that the enemy has got some pretty nasty things up his sleeve. Nerve gas, to poison our troops. Perhaps some version of a death ray. In fact, they may be working at this very moment on some such frightful explosive as U-two-thirty-five."

"Indeed?" murmured Dr. Furman absently. "What a dreadful waste of scientific talent, to be sure. A perfectly dreadful waste. I don't believe in killing people, you know."

Grimly the little scientist awaited his total death

"Of course not," the Army man said hastily. "Of course not. Those hand grenades you invented for the last war were really quite humane. They blew a man to bits, and he felt no pain at all."

"To be sure," agreed the biochemist. "I was a physicist specializing in explosives in those days. Perhaps tomorrow I may start experiments in electronics . . . Oh, I'm sorry. You want me to do a bit of research for the government, young man? But I'll have to take all my equipment with me."

The Army major mopped his brow, thinking of the tons of gadgets Dr. Furman had accumulated in twenty-five years of brilliant but not wholly consistent experimentation. Still, the job had to be done. Thus it was that a week later, an Army bomber came for the famed scientist and landed him at an obscure little village high in Virginia's Blue Ridge mountains.

By air, the village was only a short trip to Washington. And in Washington is housed the central nervous system of America's armed forces. The War Department built an air-conditioned laboratory for Dr. Furman, crossed its fingers and sat back with an anxious prayer.

The first month went by, and nothing happened.

Indeed, except for the fact that a few Military Intelligence operatives took rooms in the village and spent their time ostensibly in fishing, things went along pretty much as the War Department had feared.

Dr. Furman didn't want anybody poking around his brand-new labora-

*The Left Hand of Dr. Furman, America's Foremost Killer, Never Quite Knew What the Right Hand Was Doing!*

tory. Nobody saw him for days on end. In fact, it was a wonder that he even went to the rear door one morning, when a stubble-bearded, apologetic tramp showed up.

"Got any work, friend? Glad to do anything for a bite."

"Come in, come in!" Dr. Furman exclaimed. "That fool rabbit won't hold still, and I've got to have somebody to hold him down."

Somewhat bewildered, the tramp followed the scientist inside. The sight that greeted his small blue eyes made his heart pound faster. The laboratory, he knew at once, was something no ordinary man would see in a lifetime.

In fact, at first glance it resembled a modern version of a medieval torture chamber. Sunlight agreeably diffused through the special glass roof shone somewhat weirdly on all manner and form of metal and plastic apparatus.

Row after row of peculiarly mixed chemicals stared from their wall niches. There were carbon-arc lamps, ultra-violet lamps and, over the scientist's desk in the corner, a new type of fluorescent light which blotted out all shadows for a foot around.

"My inventions," Dr. Furman said impatiently to the awed tramp. "Never have time to finish them all, I guess. Keep 'em around for inspiration. No doubt there's a fortune in ideas here, but I cannot be bothered with such details as money."

Clutching the man by his ragged sleeve, the professor led the amazed tramp to an involved, chromaloy gadget. It stood on a platform about five feet high, and resembled an X-ray machine. With this difference: Instead of the regular plastic cone over the anode and cathode terminals, here instead was a small steel snout which looked exactly like a submachine-gun barrel.

"Take these tongs and these asbestos gloves," the scientist directed, "and hold this rabbit. Right there, on the little pedestal."

Dr. Furman thrust the supplies into the tramp's hands, then removed a small white rabbit from a bank of cages near the machine.

Uncertain and a little shaky, the tramp did as he was told. He did more; at Dr. Furman's explicit orders, he crouched down on his knees, holding the rabbit on the pedestal over his shoulder.

The small steel barrel now pointed directly at the nervous little animal.

"Hold still!" commanded the physicist.

He pressed a button on the chromaloy machine. There was a short, sharp hiss.

The rabbit vanished—without so much as a squeal.

"It works!" Dr. Furman exclaimed. "At last, the secret of disintegration! And so beautifully painless."

But the tramp didn't know anything about that. He simply glanced at the rabbit, saw that nothing at all was held between the two tongs, and promptly fainted dead away.

He came to with Dr. Furman sloshing water over his head.

The scientist was in considerable impatience.

"Get some food from the ice-box," he said. "And please be quick about it. I'll need you for further experiments. You can sleep on that cot over there."

BUT during the ensuing week, the tramp found little time for food or rest. Dr. Furman had him on the go constantly, as the two labored to make a smaller machine more compact and maneuverable than the first. During odd moments, the scientist wrote out lengthy notes, describing in minute detail the construction and operation of the lethal apparatus.

Yet during the week a subtle change occurred in the tramp's attitude. For one thing, he was no ordinary dolt. He learned all too quickly how the machine worked. And for another, he didn't seem particularly concerned as to his exact status. If he was to be paid for his labors, he didn't appear at all worried.

There came a hot, sultry night when summer lightning chanted murmurously over the dark blue mountains. Dr. Furman had just finished his supper, and was browsing over a volume by Plato in the original Greek for

after-dinner relaxation, when he glanced up to see a tramp standing over him, a sharp knife in his hand.

"Come," the man growled, jerking the scientist to his feet. *"Das Spiel ist aus.* The game is up, you see. I have the death ray, I have all your brilliantly written notes. The *Fuehrer* will make me his second successor, after Goering, for this!"

Little Dr. Furman glanced at the ex-tramp nervously. The professor's straggly mustache curled pathetically above his trembling lips, and sweat came to his forehead.

"Of course," he said weakly. "But of course. You were far too intelligent a man for an ordinary tramp."

The spy dragged him over to the little pedestal, thrust it aside and found a chair instead. Into it he pushed the anxious professor.

"Sit still!" he snapped. "Otherwise I am not so merciful."

The spy strode over to the death ray, and adjusted the barrel so that it pointed directly at Dr. Furman's heart. The man took a stance to the professor's right. His thick finger felt for the trigger release.

"Just a moment, please," begged Dr. Furman. "I think that my face shows fear. I do not want to die as a coward. . . . Ah — thank you very much."

He removed a small pocket mirror from his jacket and scrutinized himself closely. With an audible sigh of relief, he folded his hands in front of him, as though in calm prayer.

*"Das Spiel ist aus,"* the scientist said composedly. "A most aggressive race, the Germans. Even in Heidelberg, when I was a student. Go ahead, please."

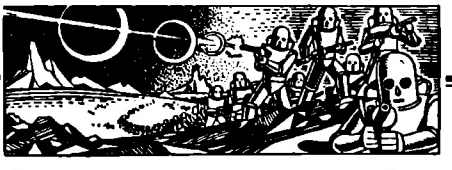
Snorting with disgust, the spy took one last intent look at the lethal little machine. Then, with an impulsive oath, he pressed the trigger button.

Even as he did so, the professor's prayerful hands opened. The invisible bolt from the death ray struck directly at him—at the mirror in his hands. And as swiftly it was deflected back to the right, to stab the spy squarely in the face.

But there was no cry of pain. Not even a shocked cry of horrified amazement. There was—nothing.

Drenched with perspiration, Dr. Furman got up from the chair, walked over to a sink and doused his face with cold water.

"Very awkward," he muttered to himself. "Very awkward, indeed. I didn't even get the poor fellow's name."

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## THE ETHER VIBRATES

*(Continued from page 13)*

Having voiced my sentiments on this nauseating subject, I delve deeper into Volume 8, Number 2 of STARTLING STORIES.

Now, dear screwball, I like science-fiction, but, brother, how I am changing. Not that you're the only reason, but you help.

"Two Worlds to Save"—now where've I read this before? Only Morrison's expert writing makes this, from a rotten story, a mediocre story. (Rocklynne's yarn shows promise. He's one swell writer. My fingers are crossed.)

Hall of Fame—!

Short stories—!!

Art? Well, here it is again. Cover, as usual, is inaccurate. And the BEM! Shades of the SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP. And Belarski??? Interiors—a glub and a gurgle. Bring back Wesso and Binder (some Schomberg). Finlay is for weirds, not for stf. Give me Paul on the covers. Enough of art!

Blatt column—kill the Sarge and throw that blankety-blank Xeno jug after him and close and bar the door. But kill him dead.

As I told you previously, your column is one of the most juvenile on the market. If your comments were like those of the old "Wonder," what a column! What stf reader columns need are longer letters and a couple of good feuds—stf, of course. Your column reeks of gushing and gooey comments on how wonderful SS is. Not a shred of individuality. I get down on my sadly weakened knees and wail out to the great god Klono: "Let me see one solitary shred of individuality in The Ether Vibrates." Exhaustedly yours.—**139-09 34th Road, Flushing, N. Y.**

**Well, well—and well! Pee-lot Brown certainly can get down to specific "honorable mentions" when you conk him over the dome with a space spanner. Why didn't you write this letter the first time and save us all this space!**

**And let's not hear any more griping on the subject of originality in this department, either, bub. This double-header we just played is not of the garden variety of chit-chat. As for the broadside you loosed, Pee-lot Brown, the old Sarge will just turn you over to the squad of junior astrogators for getting fresh with your superior officer.**

**Anyway, you crawled out from behind the eight ball. Nice going.**

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

### By Edward C. Connor

Greetings, Saturn:

Jumping Beezelbub! Shades of Hades! When better (and bigger) bug-eyed boogeymen are shoved off on us poor (but not unsuspecting) scientifiction fans, STARTLING STORIES will shove them. On the September cover one sees a combination dinosaur and devil, with the claws of a bird and the teeth of a whole pack of Were-wolves. Orban's interiors were super, but why so few of them?

Glad to see our **Friend,** Owen Fox Jerome, continuing the excellent work with **Thrills In Science.** This feature has always been the backbone of the magazine, and I dare you or anyone else to deny it.

When are you going to give out with that Annual—or such—you Xeno-logged Space Spook? Also knock those bolts loose from the original files and spring a contest of some kind. I demand action! (Except on that "trimmed edges" idea.)—**929 Butler Street, Peoria, Ill.**

**Smarty-pants, aren't you, Kiwi Connor? No, the old Sarge isn't going to fumble**

*[Turn page]*


# To People who want to write *but can't get started*

**Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the editor of Liberty said on this subject:**

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around and correct you. It's an open secret that Friend and Jerome are one and the same man. He's a chap who publishes western novels under one name and detective novels under the other while he writes science-fiction in between, and has been doing so for a number of years. But he isn't the backbone of the good ship STARTLING STORIES, not while Sergeant Saturn can still ride herd on you junior space monkeys and chart the astrogation of this craft.

Maybe you have something in the contest idea. The old Sarge will see what he can dig up.

Comes now a brief note from out Idaho way.

## THE XENO RATING SYSTEM

### By Paul Carter

What is that brilliant object flaring up from the front of the latest issue of your (excuse it—"our," of course) mag? Can it be the COVER?

Your space-mad correspondent concludes—regretfully—that it is.

Seriously, however, I didn't know Belarski had it in him. Why, that B. E. M. was the best on S.S. since the cover illustrating Oscar Friend's "green twins" in "Mind Over Matter" and "The Worms Turn." The human beings, I am sorry to announce, while drawn in genuine action instead of a pose (as many are), possess faces that are unbelievably horrid. Your correspondent has no objection to dames on the cover, but they ought to at least be good-looking. The face on the heroine is enough to make Superman shudder and turn away. That hair looks like a bonfire—which is **no** compliment, Sarge. As for the guy under the Thing's right claw, the color of his face and arm are not only in poor taste but hideous. Not only hideous, but sloppy. Not only sloppy, but amateurish. Not only—well, you get the idea. The conflicting good and bad points make this cover hard to rate: let's say 3½ Xeno jugs (this time the ½ isn't for you, Sarge).

Orban is a careful, conscientious artist who gets a tremendous **feeling** into his pictures. Give him 3.7 Xeno jugs (use a graduated chemical beaker to measure out the .7); the only reason he doesn't get 4 is that his character-sketches are quite crumby compared to Wesso or Schomburg. Morey's first illustration proves that when he wants to he can really draw. The one for Johnson's tale is a let-down, but not such a let-down as Morey **has** given us at times. Give him 4 for the one and 3 for the other. As for the decoration for "Meteorite Enigma": the B. E. M. loses most of its glamour inside the magazine. 2 Xeno jugs.

And now, "Two Worlds to Save." I don't see how you do it so consistently. Maybe your novels can't all be called "classic," but I haven't yet seen a dud in the bunch—or even an "Average Yarn." I will not attempt to comment on this tale, save to say that the road for a sequel has been left wide open. What's the lowdown on this "Orlando Company" with its "attempt to harness volcanic steam"? And is further sabotage to be expected in our hero's project? It seems to me that the problems on Mercury were pretty well wound up; but those on Earth were still waiting for solution. Besides—you could tie in that obscure little reference to the Mercurian spaceship which encountered trouble on attempting to leave the ground . . . on returning from Mars. . . .

"The Cubic City." Vigorous and violent applause, except for one thing. **I do not like blurbs which give away the plot!** If it were not for the fact that the "important" fans are ag'in the formation of new Societies, I would do something along that line. As it is, though . . . Sarge, would you be so kind as to mail a bomb to the gentleman responsible for your blurbs? And while we're on the subject, your three magazines have the worst blurbs in the field. They are not only hackneyed and stereotyped, but they smell of pulp to high heaven. Furthermore, they are not only copies of their ancestors but even of each other! For example, how many times have you used the term "Citadel of Science" in a blurb???

"Kids Don't Know Everything," by Frank Johnson. Nice space-pirate story, nice characterization—but there is a deep gap between this and "The Cubic City."

"Meteorite Enigma," by "Owen Fox Jerome." Tch-tch, Oscar, I don't blame you for masquerading under a pen-name. You've done 100% better than this, or more. Come, now: is this the Oscar J. Friend of "The Kid From Mars," "The Water World,"—or even "Blind Victory" This tale is, very definitely, last and least.

And now, to wind up the review, we have "The Ether Vibrates." First, to Comrade Ewald: I should like to thank you for using my rating "system." You are quite welcome, and the method is not copyrighted. To "Thornin Yorsyd": what's the matter with Xeno? For that matter, what's wrong with Sergeant Saturn? (Go ahead, Sarge, tell him; I leave that for your big Irish paw to manage.) To Clifford Coleman: as regards B. E. M.s, bravo! As regards "handsome men with wacky guns," etc., I agree, nuts to them! As regards your letter, viva! As regards the Dodgers—ummm, hem, meet me back of Ed's Saloon in Crooked Gulch with pistols. You bring the pistols — **156 S. University St., Blackfoot, Idaho.**

**Before the old Sarge can get his breath to thank one of you space harpies for a nice compliment, the next kiwi takes a slap at the very point of praise. And vice versa. So what's a poor chief astrogator to do? What Columbus did, I guess. "Sail on! Sail on!"**

**I'll pass your comments about blurbs on to the black gang around the engine room, pee-lot. Perhaps it will do some good. As for the Xeno rating—instead of toying around and being wishy-washy (pronounced Vichy-vashy today) the old Sarge agrees heartily and accepts the ratings. Henceforth, pee-lots, one Xeno jug means poor story, two jugs mean mediocre, three jugs mean fair, four jugs mean good or excellent or splendid, while five jugs mean exceptional and superb.**

**And if you little monsters would like to see a boxed score of the ratings of stories in the preceding issues, list the stories at the foot of your letters each time and put your Xeno appraisal on them. If I get enough correlated responses, I'll make room for a scoreboard which you can read at a glance. But there will have to be enough votes according to the Xeno ratings to make such a scoreboard a fair enough estimate. So, if you like to play, come on. I'll wrestle you for one more fall.**

## YOU KNOW ME, AL

### By Victor King

There! Y'see? I'm not the only one who thinks I'm good. Cheeeee . . . tanks, Al.

He's right, of course; The Ether Vibrates **could** be pepped up a lot, either with controversial or comprehensive material. Why not take his suggestion and give awards to the best letter writers? Make the awards original interiors and feature Finlay in every issue. Guaranteed to bring better and longer letters. Oh, you're welcome! No trouble at all!

The novel in this issue struck me as being pretty sloppily written. Poor characterization was only one of many things which

contributed to its poor quality. It wasn't as bad as "Devil's Planet" or "Tarnished Utopia," but it was certainly not as acceptable as "City of Glass." Comparison with "Blood on the Sun" is out of the question.

"The Cubic City" was good—but screwy. I don't consider myself exceptionally dense, but I don't get it.

"Meteorite Enigma" was one of the best shorts you've published. A very enjoyable little fantasy.

Before I go on, I'd better digress a bit. I like fantasy. But I like fantasy in its place. When a magazine advertises "The Best in Scientifiction" you expect nothing but stf. Then, when you run across a fantasy bit in the magazine, you cannot enjoy it fully. You have to be in different moods when you are reading stf and fantasy. Watch it, please, or else drop that blurb from the table of contents.

"Kids Don't Know Everything": Bra-a-a-a-ack. . . .

It's amazing how you can assemble so many poor pics in one issue. The only ones even remotely approaching quality are the close-ups of Haines, Carson, and Nora Sayres. The cover? I wouldn't be so base as to let my views on it be opened to public inspection.

In closing, I say, take Al's little gems of wisdom to heart. They are that, you know—
**711 So. Arch St., Aberdeen, So. Dakota.**

**Hold up a minute, Kiwi King. You're taking off at the wrong tangent about science-fiction and fantasy. Science fiction always seems fantastic to the staid and conservative reader. As for our three science magazines, we don't want you kiwis to get the idea that our stories must always fit into the same rigid and stereotyped grooves. As long as there is a scientific angle, we do not bar any story because of its unusual slant or promise.**

**So you are likely to run into all sorts of yarns in our group, barring straight-out ghost stories, dreams and pure supernatural thrillers.**

**Otherwise, you and this guy Al can go ahead with your double talk.**

## XENO JUGS AND LEMON

### By Charles Nutt

Dear Mr. Saturn:

For the love of dear old aphroditee! After waiting two long months for Startling to come out I am rewarded with the best issue you have ever put out bound in the rottenest piece of cover tripe ever concocted.

Belarski doesn't know how to paint worth a d--n and I have seen all his poor stuff. Yeah, I know that he makes his livin' drawing, but tell him that I know where a nice, cozy ditch digging job is.

How dat guy can think up so many BEM's is beyond me. Now take a slug that really knows his art, E. K. Bergey to be exact, and have him do the same scene an' you'll have a masterpiece. To sum da whole affair up in a bag; I want Belarski out, and Bergey in.

Whew! And now to the beeootiful inside.

The Novel: I consider it better than any you have yet put out, and you sure have put out enough. Morrison knows how to write . . . huh? Oh yeh, write good. Hall of Fame: Suuwell, to say the least, but that pic spoiled it. The illustration was by Morey, I presume. Only he could ruin paper so nicely.

In fact there wasn't an illustration in the book that could be looked at without flinching. (An' dat's de truth.)

**Kids Don't Know Everything:** The best story in the issue, and once more it is spoiled

*[Turn page]*


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by a thoroughly rotten piece of ART work.

Best of the stories: All of 'em were pretty snifty.

Readers Page: The readers page in a mag is always the most entertaining feature.

On a whole I would like to see more issues like the Sept. one only without the terrible drawing.

Now if you don't mind I would like to announce the newest fan mag in history: Starlit Fantasy. It will have a cover by Clyne and inside work by Hamling, Yerke, Lesser, Warner, 4sj, and others. All the readers of this letter, how about sending 15c for this new litho'ed fan mag in which the editors are Nutt, Schmarje, and Handler. And thanks, Sarge, for the splendid issue and a lemon for the art work—**8025 Ainslie St., Chicago, Ill.**

**I take it from your ethergram, Pee-lot Nutt, that you award at least four Xeno jugs to the September issue as a whole and one lemon to the art work as a hole. And as I have some other eggs to fry, and the sun is going down, I'll leave you here to kick your own ball around until dark while I take a glance the next communique.**

## DOUBLE-HEADER

### By Robert Zarich

Being a regular reader of Startling Stories and listening to the other readers send in their opinions, makes a fellow want to do the same. As this is the first time I've written to you I want to sum up two issues at once. I sincerely hope you print my letter.

But enough of this baloney; let's get down to facts. First I agree with Victor King's letter in the September Issue. The only story in the July issue which was good was "City of Glass" by Noel Loomis. This was very good and rates a top 4 Stars. As for the others they were 100% punk with a capital P. As a Hall of Fame Story, "The Marble Virgin" was a complete flop. The other two were even more degrading. Please no more stories like them.

As for the illustrations—Phew! How about getting some decent illustrators? The cover was fair although it should have illustrated something in the contents. The Special Features are always good. The issue on the whole was good and this is due to the one 4-Star Story.

Now for the September issue. First the cover, Belarski did all right and I see that he is finally improving, which is swell. But turning to the story it illustrated, "Meteorite Enigma," we find that the cover appears as an illustration in the story. This is perfectly all right in a novel where there is more than one illustration, but why in heaven's name does it have to appear in a short story where there is only one illustration? Don't tell me that so many illustrators have been drafted. By the way that fellow Orban who illustrated "Two Worlds to Save" is swell. Let's have more from him. The remaining art work was pretty bad, and looked like a bunch of scribbling by Mercurian Crawlers.

Finally the stories and their ratings:

1—"Two Worlds to Save." Morrison redeemed himself from that horrible thing he wrote in the July issue, "The Man in the Moon." For his work in "Two Worlds to Save," a 3-Star Rating.

2—"Meteorite Enigma." Another good story which rates 3 Stars. Let's have more from Jerome.

3—"Kids Don't Know Everything." Could have been developed into something better, but it is just fair and so 2½ Stars.

4—"The Cubic City." Not so hot for a Hall of Fame Story, but a fair one just the same and so another 2½ Stars.

As for the issue altogether it received 3 Stars. But please let's have some improvements especially in the art department. Some could also be used in the stories, especially the short stories.

Well, I've come to the end of the line and I sincerely hope to see better stories and art work in future issues—**463 85 Street, Brooklyn, New York.**

**What you've just done, Kiwi Bob, in your "star" rating is exactly what the old Sarge means for you junior astrogators to do with the Xeno jug ratings. Those of you pee-lots who have been on the night shift and don't feel up to elaboration or explanation, simply list the stories and put the proper number of Xeno jugs after them as a sort of footnote, and the old space dog will tally the votes. It goes without saying that these votes must not appear in the body of your letters, as they will register only on the scoreboard and will not clutter up the reading space of this part of the ether. Catch wise, all you little beasts?**

**Okay, take off your muzzles, sharpen your pencils, wits and tongues—and bare down.**

## DRAFT TWS CHARACTERS

### By George Ebey

Though the gentleman from Opelousas doesn't sign his name, the address looks familiar. However, his identity is not as important as what he has to say.

I agree with him as regards the downward track of STARTLING STORIES. Remember such tinglers as Weinbaum's classic "Black Flame," Williamson's "Fortress of Utopia," "Twice in Time," by Wellman, "The Impossible World," "The Kid from Mars," and several other STARTLING novels? Most of them came during the earlier part of the mag's existence. Later the quality faltered and took a downward trend: Wellman's Martian droolings, Joe Millard's meteorite flubdubbery, and final low point, "The Bottom of the World," with what I pray may be the last of the Burroughs lads in science fiction.

Now appears the same old hash glazed over with smooth writing. So much love interest, so much adventure, so much science, all designed to produce stories as easily digested as a cup of Postum—and as long remembered.

This, I think, is the fault of the editor. Most authors will write pretty much to editorial requirements, STARTLING may be no exception. If this situation is as the editor wants it, merely chuck my letter into the omnipresent wastebasket and return to the ramblings of other writers. Perhaps the editor's goal has been reached in the "City of Glass," and Morrison's latest. If so, this criticism is superfluous. If not—well, read on, Sarge, read on.

Assuming the editor wants a different type of story, why can't he try a different type of author. Weinbaum may be unavailable, but Williamson & Wellman are as active as ever. Why not try Arthur K. Barnes, Henry Kuttner, Nelson S. Bond, or get hold of one of John Taine's novels? All of these writers are competent men. I can't recall a bad story by any of them.

As for illustrators, there are always the peerless Schomburg, Wesso (at his usual level), and Orban (at his best).

What's wrong with importing some TWS

characters from that magazine? I should think that a Carlyle-Quade yarn would be most entertaining. Has anybody thought of a booklength "Vla" novel? Who knows what Long might accomplish with his botanical hero in eighty-odd pages?

Frankly, I have no suggestions to offer as regards STARTLING'S covers. Artists Bergey and Belarski seem to glory in the same old rut of gal, monster, and ray gun. The September retina-renter is a fair example of what I mean.

Bergey can do good work, but his latest attempts are boringly mediocre. And while I'm on the subject of artists, please keep Morey and Marchioni—the two most dated scratchers in stfiction—at a healthy distance from S.S.

Ah yes, The Ether Vibrates.

It seems to me that the important question is whether Sarge Saturn likes his letters long or short. You haven't expressed any opinions on the subject, dear Super-Peelot, why not do so in this issue? Prizes for letters should take the form of originals. Another mag in the field does just that, and as a consequence has one of the snappiest columns in stf. The letters hacks will flock just as swiftly to STARTLING under the same persuasion.

Regarding "Yorsyd's" remarks anent Carter and Benham: heck, Carter always made pleasant reading when he wasn't too syrupy, but Benham—arrghhh—he was the guy who wanted to bring back **Zarnak!**

Hmmm, there's some space left. Time out for a few words on the Sept. ish. I've already voiced my opinion on the novel. The reprint is excellent, "Kids Don't Know Everything" sounded like Morrison, and the illustration for "Meteorite Enigma" scared me away. The framed pic is a good idea, though, and should be retained. Orban is strangely good, and Morey is—not so strangely—bad.

How about some news on the TWS annual, Sarge?—**4766 Reinhardt Dr., Oakland, Calif.**

Now, boys, now, boys—don't hit him. He knows he's safe in talking about THRILLING WONDER STORIES and

[*Turn page*]


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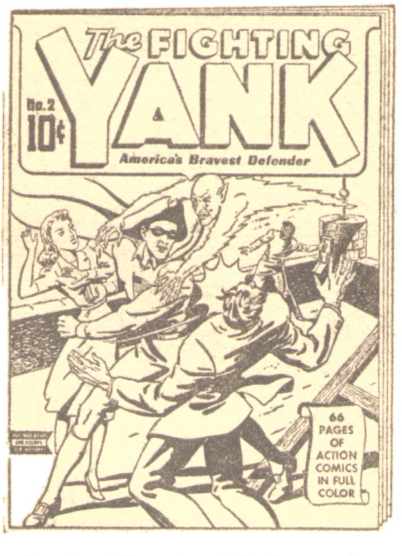


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CAPTAIN FUTURE to the old Sarge. But I must have left Kiwi Ebey out in the sun too long on that last voyage to Mercury. Draft TWS characters into STARTLING? Of all the sainted space monkeys of the seven spiral whorls! Not on your life! The good ship STARTLING STORIES voyages on the impetus of her own rockets. She doesn't want any carry-overs from another ship of the line. And how would ardent TWS readers feel when they found out they had missed an adventure of one of their favorite TWS characters because it appeared in STARTLING STORIES?

Yeah, I know, I know—lots of you space monkeys read both magazines, but everybody doesn't (unfortunately) and the old Sarge can't start to do any cargo shifting out here in space. However, if you frog-eyes want a series character or two to start appearing in STARTLING STORIES more or less regularly, just start writing us to that effect, and we'll see what we can pull out of the rabbit.

As far as our goal is concerned, Pee-lot Ebey, we have no goal beyond printing the kind of stories you junior astrogators want. Everybody doesn't like the same stories in the same degree. And the same fellow might feel different by next isue. But cheer up. Robert Moore Williams, Ross Rocklynne, Ray Cummings, Malcolm Jame-


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son—and others are coming to you through the pages of STARTLING between now and this time next year.

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## THE ANSWER MAN

### By Pahjois Tuuli

I have never yapped about preference in stories, covers, et cetera, because individual preference in these matters is a matter of individual idea-association.

However, I note in Sept. issue "The Ether Vibrates," that you give Alfred Hansen of Wilmington, Calif., the plain old casual brush-off on his question of what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable body. Is that nice, Sarge? If you are going to treat every wide-eyed wind-pony who asks questions in that brusk and indifferent fashion how do ya expect them to learn anything?

(Never mind the Sarge, Alf! He is like that lately. He has been trying to reduce by dieting so he can get into a size 18 without bulging in the wrong places. Result is he gets sort of irritable and short on patience.)

Now this matter of an irresistible force meeting an immovable body. It does not happen in our space-time continuum, Alf. It only happens in hyperbole. (Hyperbole is located north by northeast of hyper-space. Sarge spends so much time in hyperbole that he is sensitive about it. Perhaps that is why he ignored your question instead of answering it, Alf!)

Anyhow, Alf, in hyperbole . . . where it can happen . . . an irresistible force meets an immovable body and the result is INFINITE STRESS.

Now all ya gotta do, Alf, is reduce that to a mathematical equation and ya will floor Einstein himself.—**P. O. Box 188, Stoughton, Mass.**

I was under the impression that I answered Kiwi Hansen's immovable force and irresistible object question logically, Pee-lot Tuuli, but perhaps I didn't. Anyway, thanks for assuming the job. Now, if you will only figure out (for me) how I can get rubber tires put on my sugar ration card, I'll ask you the sixty-four-cent question.

And that will be enough out of you pests until next voyage. Not one swig of Xeno have I had time to guzzle during this session. So I'm going to remedy that calamity now. All you birds climb back into the box and pull the lid down tight. Frog-face, hunt the aspirin while I knock the neck off a fresh Xeno jug. Yeah, five Xeno jugs to the old senior astrogator!

—SERGEANT SATURN


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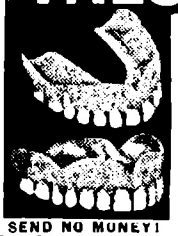

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# REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

## By

## SERGEANT SATURN

•

WHAT, time again to mount the reviewing stand to inspect a new fleet of fanzine rockets? How my life is slipping away from me! Okay, okay, let 'er slip. That's one thing that every living creature in the Universe is doing at the same time. What? Growing older, you dope! Yeah, the old Sarge knows that's an old gag, but it's a good one to spring on your gal friend to pass some time during a black-out.

Sure, I know better games myself, but skip it, and pass over the first fan mag, Frog-face. And better get me a fresh jug of Xeno from the spring-house. What the space devil is this? A postal asking for a review of STARLIT FANTASY. Swell, Editor Schmarje, but where is a copy of STARLIT FANTASY to review? When you send one, the old Sarge will rip into it for you.

And while we're on this subject, fan mag editors, remember to send copies of your contortions to me if you want reviews. The old Sarge is a pretty busy merchant, but he guarantees to review every fan mag that hoves into sight between each publication date of STARTLING STORIES.

Let's look at number one.

**CENSORED** (quarterly), St. Andrew's College, Aurora, (Ontario?). Editor, Fred Hurter, Jr. Price 10c per copy; 3 for 25c.

Well, I wish you'd take a jaundiced glance at the yellow and black and pale blue silk-screened cover depicting a streamlined robot sniping at a space shell while Christmas stars make twinkling crosses overhead. No foolin', a swell cover. Twenty-four pages of two-column, neatly typed subject matter, black ink on white, and with a number of neat line-drawing illustrations. And what a slap in the face for the old Sarge on page 9—a department of UNSCIENTIFACTS and appropriate panel drawings. You gave the old Sarge a good laugh. Carry on.

**FANTASY** (irregularly), Idlewild, Fountainhall Road, Aberdeen, Scotland. 6d. per copy; 1/6 for 3 copies. Douglas Webster, editor.

Nice blue-gray cover with cubist (or triangularist) illustration of the head of Friar Tuck in a hood or a mound of crystals. Black ink on white, thirty-four pages of one-column

stuff with suitable illustrations and doodads scattered throughout. Neat headings in Gothic style. These British fans certainly get out some snazzy numbers.

**FANTASY FICTION FIELD (weekly), 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y. Julius Unger, editor. Price 5c per copy; 6 for 25c.**

This little number has been reviewed several times before. It has three yellow sheets, black ink, includes a photo, illustration, mag and book information, etc. Photo seems to be of a young man doubling for the White Rabbit. Don't ask the old Sarge for more details—I'm busy looking for Alice. No kiddin', this is a newsy news sheet.

**NEBULA (weekly?), 333 Belgrade, Philadelphia, Pa. Publishers, Rusty Barron, James Hevelin and Robert A. Madle. Price 5c per copy; 24 for $1.**

Two sheets, four pages, black ink on white. News and information. Don't ask the old Sarge any more about it; this was all he could glean from a careful examination.

**NOVA (sesqui-occasionally), 86 Upton Ave., Battle Creek, Mich. Al Ashley, editor. Price 10c per copy; 60c per year, or six consecutive issues.**

Whoops! For sobbing out loud into the Big Dipper! Airbrush work in green on the front, semi-stiff white cover—a rocket ship doing pantographic parabolas into space from a planet. And the Northern Lights in color on the back cover while the sun peeks over the icebergy horizon at a *kaffee-klotsch* of penguins. No end pretty and effective. Forty-four pages of black ink on white. A couple of nice headings and a cartoon strip. Articles, fiction, features and departments. Uptown stuff. Excellent going. Pee-lot Ashley.

**PARADOX (quarterly), 3 Lewis St., Westfield, Mass. Frank Wilimczyk, Jr., editor. Price 10c per copy; 3 for 25c.**

Ah, a purple Easter egg space ship on the cover. A flash-boiler underneath, and zip!

[*Turn page*]


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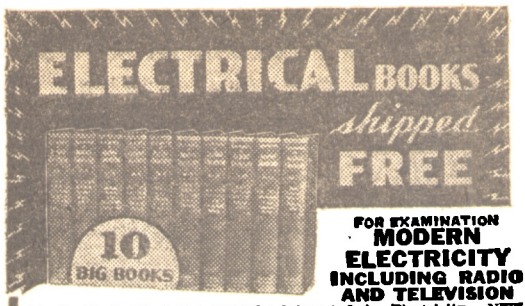


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Off for the open spaces. Father Time scratching himself in the end on the back inside cover. Twelve pages of purple ink on white. Headings and illustrations in wine and green. A real nice job, but where's your contents page, kiwi? The old Sarge can't plot an astrogation without a map.

**STENCH (occasionally), 1655 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. Editors, Street and Finn. Price 10c per issue.**

This is also a new kiwi to our ranks—volume 1, number 1—a fan mag to end fan mags. Oh, yeah? Salmon pink covers with front drawing in black ink showing Death in monkish robes. Hello! A yellow sheet buried inside amid the fire and fury of eighteen pages of black ink on white paper. A cartoon contest, eh? Neat stuff. This issue depicts Aladdin visiting his favorite jinn via the rug route. Format good, nice line drawings, and single-spaced typing easy to read. The Pacificon is buried on the last page—but that's nothing to what we're going to do to the Japs.

**SUN SPOTS (bi-monthly), 31 Bogert Pl., Westwood, N. J. Editors, Gerry de la Ree, Jr., and Roderick Gaetz. Price 10c per copy; 3 for 25c.**

Well, give me a doll-size hat and call me John L. Lewis, if here isn't that pocket-size fanzine set to regular type again. Excellent for subway reading. This little space craft has been reviewed before in these columns. It is still a nifty little number. Question: What made the artist put that Tyrolean Alp climber's hat on the nose of the rocket in the illustration on the cover?

**ULTRA (bi-monthly), 274 Edgecliff Road, Woollahra, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia. Editor, Eric F. Russell. Price 6d. per copy; 3 for 1/6 (to Aussies only).**

Nice lavender-pink covers with brown ink drawing of a nicely muscled gent reclining on rugged terrain with one hand on a rifle while a Japanese sun seems to be rising in


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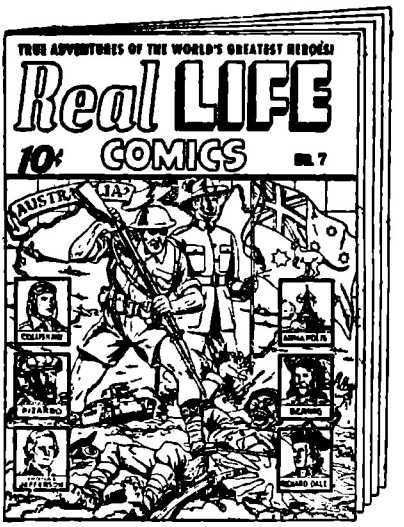


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the distance. But a finned jug of Xeno is dropping down to give the chap a sort of St. Bernard lift—and the yellow monkeys had better watch out! Forty-eight pages of nicely typed articles, features, fiction and stuff, with Gothic style lettering for the subheads, and several drawings and illustrations. This is a second anniversary number, too, and it's okay.

**VOICE OF THE IMAGI-NATION (monthly?), Box 6475 Met. Stn., Los Angeles, Calif. Price 10c.**

No publisher's statement or mast head box that I could find in this June issue, but I've reviewed this fanzine before, and if you don't know where and how to order your copies by now you don't deserve to get 'em. Front cover of this legal size fanzine looks like a section from the rotogravure. A veritable montage or camouflage—or something, of excellent snapshots of various fans, etc., of interest. VOM always does a nice job of this. Fourteen pages of solidly packed news and information. Good, but *phew!* Single-spaced and solid. You fans take the time out to read all this stuff. Frog-face, pass me the aspirin and I'll—whoa! What's this two-third-page drawing of the VOM-MAIDEN by Turner on page 14? All else is forgiven. So that's what the Chinese gals look like in their native habitat, eh? Okay, the old Sarge is resigning from spatial astrogation for the duration. I'm going to start a new AVG outfit.

**ZENITH (six-weekly), 41 Longford Pl., Victoria Park, Manchester, 14, Eng. Harry E. Turner, editor. Price 4½d. per copy; 3 for 1/-.**

Well, well, and again, well. The old Sarge has two issues of this snappy fanzine before him—October and December, 1941. Pale green covers and approximately twenty-seven pages of text in each issue. The art work is by Turner, who is the nearest fanzine illustrator approach to Virgil Finlay the old space dog has yet seen. Nice headings, nice illustrations, nice contents page—just nice, that's all. Black ink on white paper, brown ink for illustrations. Gothic style lettering for headings. This fanzine ranks right up there. Note to Harry E. Turner: On page 33, Diana is just a wee bit on the "Brookay" side.

**And there you have the lot of them, kiwis, and as neat a packet of fanzine space craft as the old Sarge has ever reviewed in one wad. No foolin', the old space dog is proud of the whole group of fanzines in spite of what he says sometimes.**

**Now, you junior astrogators pick it up from here and kick it around until dark. Pass me that cooled Xeno jug, Wart-ears. I can dream, can't I? Well, anyway, I can still sleep.**

**—SERGEANT SATURN.**


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## *Six-footer Ross Rocklynne Tells the Tall Story of His Life*

THIS issue you meet an author who is rapidly coming to the front with his imaginative yarns in the realm of science-fiction. THE DAY OF THE CLOUD is the latest book-length novel from the pen of Ross Rocklynne, a product of Ohio himself who now lives in the extreme Southwest.

Take a glance at the passport sketch herewith included and then read what our

ROSS ROCKLYNNE

staff reporter dug up on the original of the picture.

Ross has not much to say about himself. His parents convinced him they found him in a basket of tomatoes, eating his way out. He discovered later that he was born in a normal manner, February 21, 1913; and then he had a story published. Between those two events nothing of importance occurs. Still, he adds, the readers might like to know that once he fell in the canal that ran a short distance from his home, and that he waited for his emergence with bated breath, not knowing about Corporal Adolph Schickelgruber, then in "reaction" on the western front.

Behind his house was a dairy. His brother was scalded with hot mash, and Ross was bitten by a horse. Behind the dairy was a cow pasture. Ross used to play ball there.

Beyond the dairy was the canal, and mules, using the old cowpath, drew canal boats along. Beyond the canal was an old ice-house, where tramps congregated, and cooked their mulligan stews, and stole bar-

rels of whisky from the canal boats. They have drained the canal and made from it Cincinnati's Central Parkway.

Ross is six feet two, 170 lbs., blue-eyed, blond, freckled. The urge to write came early, fostered on fantastic subjects from the first. He discovered Edgar Rice Burroughs at just that age when he was impressed by the written word, fiction or otherwise. After some unsuccessful tree climbing, he decided that perhaps Tarzan was not true to life. He had a baptism of science-fiction magazines, which inspired him one day to write a story which sold. In the interim, and in this order: handyman; nurse to a flock of experimental guinea pigs; furnace caretaker; flunky in a department store; then purchasing agent in a department store; and finally full-time writer, doing mostly stf, but now selling westerns also.

Of his further adventures, Ross says:

"My fortunes reached an all time high, when I recently married a most wonderful girl, who, being a writer herself, has helped me immeasurably. We are now 'somewhere in the Southwest,' but I am constrained by a responsibility for my welfare from letting my address out until I receive the readers' reports on THE DAY OF THE CLOUD.

"I hope you like this novel. In it I have incorporated a hypothesis, which, although I bolstered it on all sides with 'proof,' does not have the status of a theory. What is gravity? What caused the ice ages? Why did the giant reptiles die? How did the solar system evolve? What caused novae; binaries; the rings of Saturn; the asteroids?

"Does my hypothesis truly answer these puzzlers?

"I wonder. Being only a professional writer, and not a scientist, I wove the hypothesis into fiction, hoping it might start someone to thinking, with the consequent elevation of Mr. Einstein's eyebrows—and another bouquet for our favorite fiction!"

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From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book." Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

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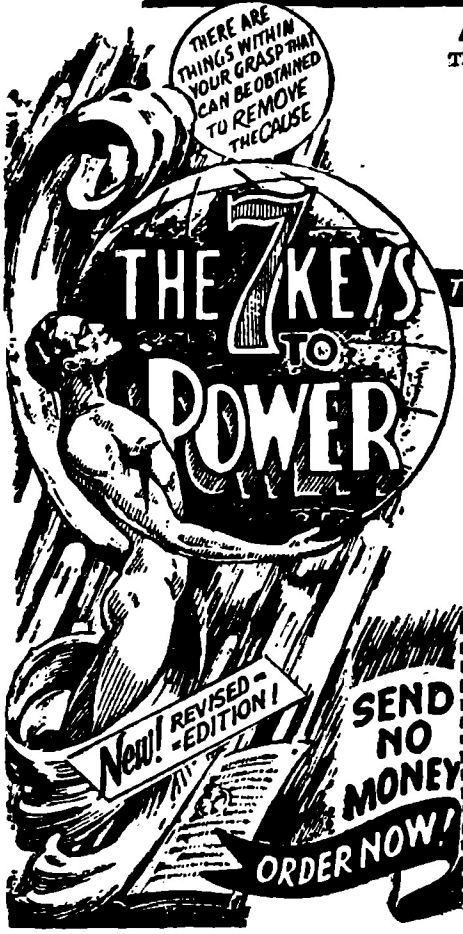


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