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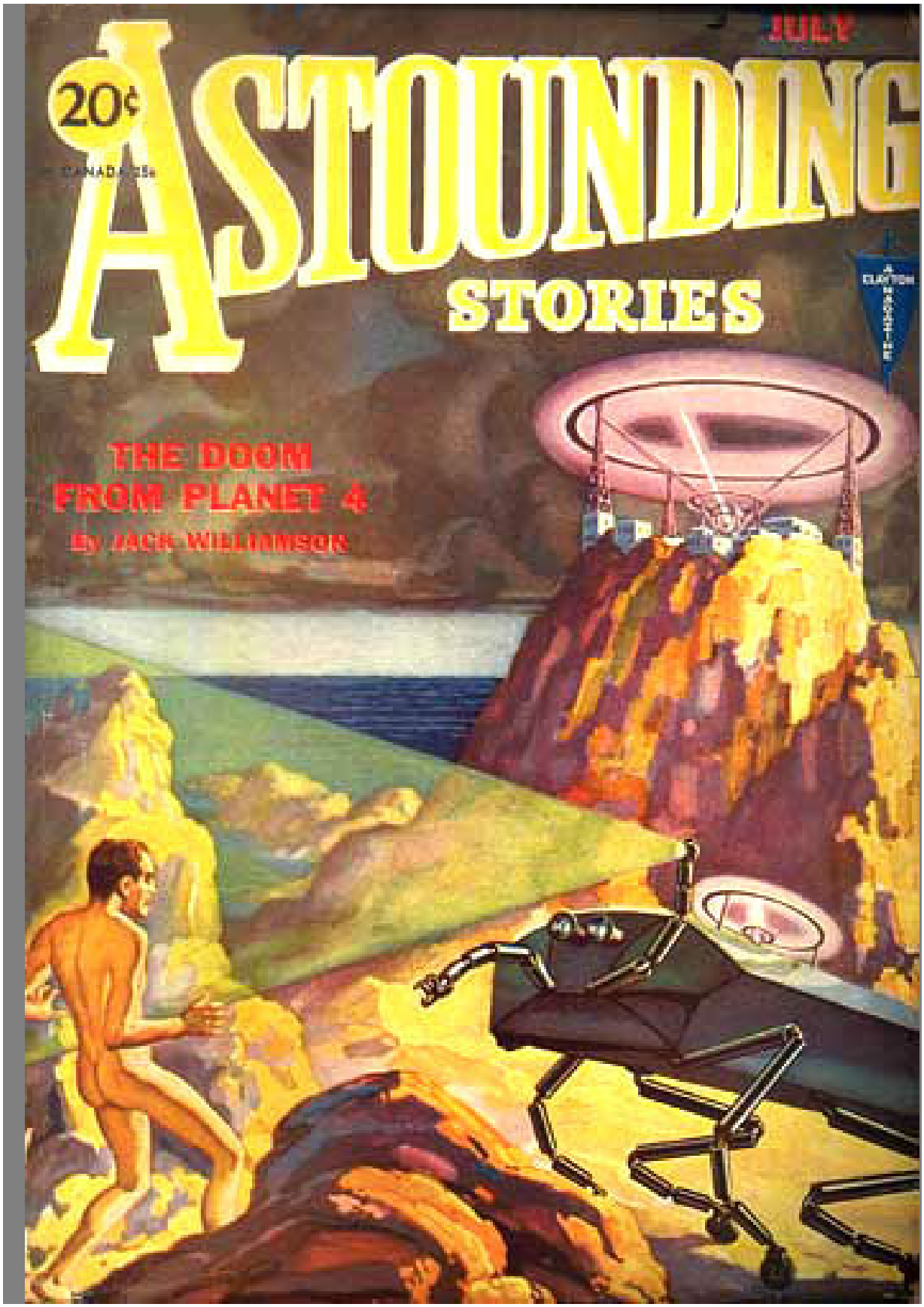
By JACK WILLIAMSON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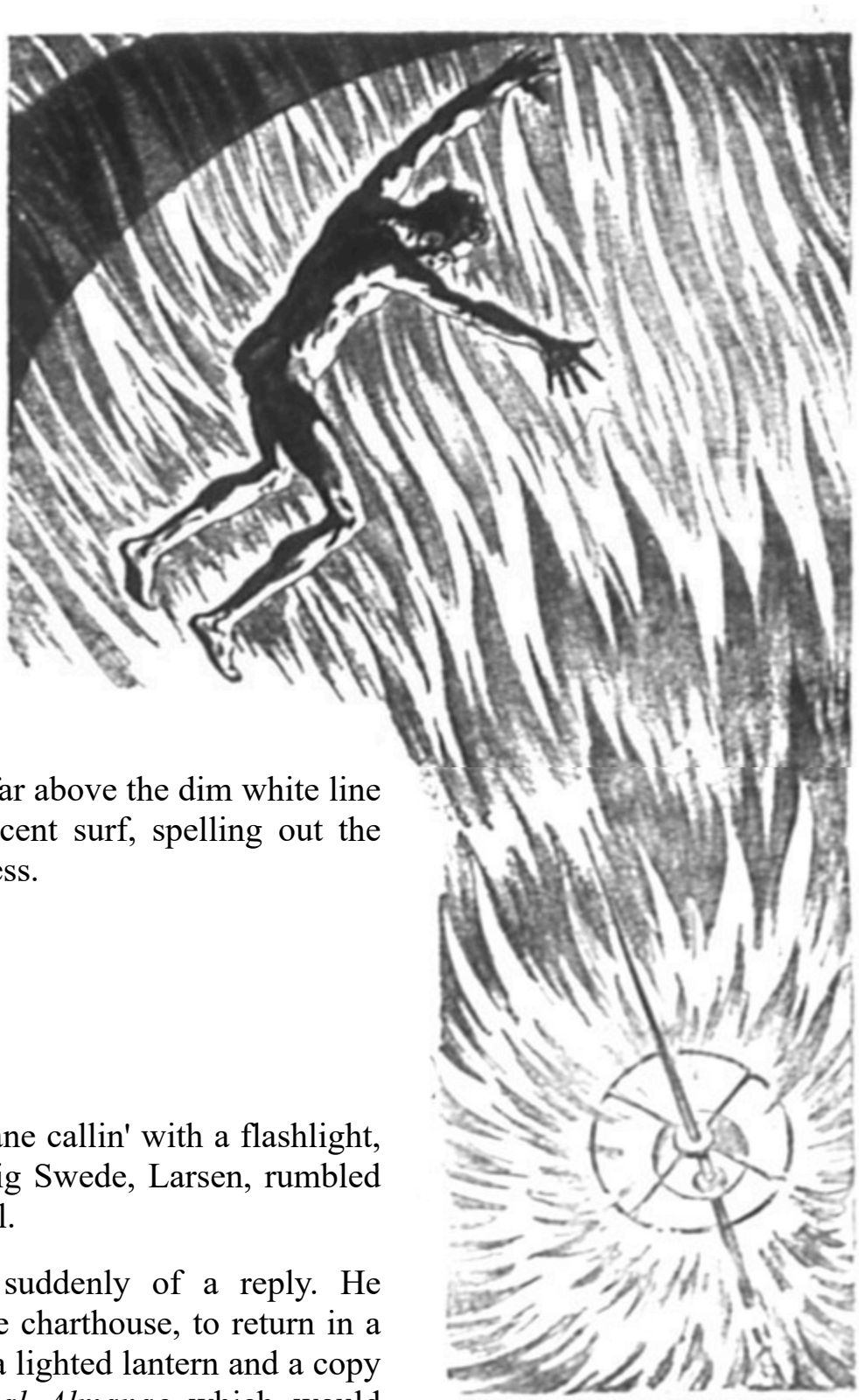
The Doom from Planet 4

By Jack Williamson

"S O S. S O S. S O S." Three short, three long, three short, the flashes winked from the dark headland. Dan McNally, master and owner of the small and ancient trading schooner, *Virginia*, caught the feeble flickering

light from the island as he strode across the fore-deck. He stopped, stared at the looming black line of land beneath the tropical stars. Again light flashed from a point of rock far above the dim white line of phosphorescent surf, spelling out the signal of distress.



For long seconds he was plunging down through space.

"Somebody bane callin' with a flashlight, I t'ank," the big Swede, Larsen, rumbled from the wheel.

Dan thought suddenly of a reply. He rushed into the charthouse, to return in a moment with a lighted lantern and a copy of the *Nautical Almanac* which would serve to hide the flame between flashes. He flashed an answer.

A ray of fire, green, mysterious, stabs through the night to Dan on his ship. It leads him to an island of unearthly peril.

Again the pale light flickered from the dark mass of land, spelling words out rather slowly, as if the sender were uncertain in his knowledge of Morse. Surprised as Dan had been by the signal from an island marked on the charts as uninhabited, he was astonished at the message that now came to him.

"You are in terrible danger," he read in the flashes. "Dreadful thing here. Hurry away. Radio for warships. I am—"

The winking light suddenly went out. Dan strained his eyes to watch the point where it had been, and a few seconds later he saw a curious thing. A darting, stabbing lance of green fire flashed out across the barren, rocky cliff, lighting it fleetingly with pale green radiance. It leapt out and was gone in an instant, leaving the shoulder of the island dark as before.

Dan watched for long minutes, but he saw nothing more brilliant than the pale gleam of phosphorescence where the waves dashed against the sheer granite wall of the island.

"What you t'ank?" Larsen broke in upon him.

Dan started, then answered slowly. "I don't know. First I thought there must be a lunatic at large. But that green light! I didn't like it."

He stared again at the looming mass of the island. Davis Island is one of the innumerable tiny islets that dot the South Pacific; merely the summit of a dead volcano, projecting above the sea. Nominally claimed by Great Britain, it is marked on the charts as uninhabited.

"Radio for warships, eh?" he muttered. A wireless transmitter was one of many modern innovations that the *Virginia* did not boast. She had been gathering copra and shell among the islands long before such things came into common use, though Dan had invested his modest savings in her only a year before.

"What would anyone want with warships on Davis Island?" The name roused a vague memory. "Davis Island?" he repeated, staring in concentration at the black sea. "Of course!" It came to him suddenly. A newspaper article that he had read five years before, at about the time he had abandoned college in the middle of his junior year, to follow the call of adventure.

The account had dealt with an eclipse of the sun, visible only from certain points on the Pacific. One Dr. Hunter, under the auspices of a Western university, had sailed with his instruments and assistants to Davis Island, to study the solar corona during the few precious moments when the shadow covered the sun, and to observe the displacement of certain stars as a test of Einstein's theory of relativity.

The reporter had interviewed the party at San Francisco, on the eve of sailing. There had been photographs of the chartered vessel, of Dr. Hunter and his instruments, and of his daughter, Helen, who acted as his secretary. She looked not at all like a scientist, Dan recalled. In fact, her face had seemed rather pretty, even in the blurred newspaper half-tone.

But the memory cast no light upon the present puzzle. In the rambling years that had led him to this spot upon the old *Virginia*, he had lost touch with the science that had interested him during his college days. He had heard nothing of the results of the Hunter expedition. But this island had been its destination.

He turned decisively to the man at the wheel. "Larsen, we'll stand well offshore till daylight," he said. "Then, unless we see something unusual, we can sail in and land a boat to—"

The sentence was never finished. Through the corner of his eye, Dan saw a ray of green light darting toward them from the island. A line of green fire seemed to reach out and strike him a physical blow. Green flame flared around him; and somehow he was hurled from the bridge, clear of the rail and into the sea.

His impression of the incident was very confused. He seemed to have struck the water with such force that his breath was knocked out. He struggled back to the surface, strangling, and coughing the bitter brine from his lungs. It was several minutes before he was comfortably treading water, and able to see what had happened.

The old schooner was then a hundred yards away, careening crazily, and drifting aimlessly before the light breeze. The strange green fire had vanished. Parts of the ship apparently had been carried away or disintegrated by the ray or the force of which it was a visible effect. The mainmast was down, and was hanging over the side in a tangle of rigging.

Bright yellow flames were dancing at a dozen points about the wreckage on the listing deck. A grotesque broken thing, queerly illuminated by the growing fires, was hanging over the wheel—the body of Larsen. No living thing was visible; and Dan, after a second look at the wreck of the bow, knew that he must be the sole survivor of the catastrophe.

"Too bad about the boys," he muttered through teeth that chattered, for the cold water had already chilled him. "And poor old Larsen."

He thought again of the warning flashed from the shore. "Guess there must be something hellish afoot after all," he muttered again. "The flicker of green that stopped the signals, and the green fire that got us—what can they mean?" He looked toward the looming black shadow of the island, and began divesting himself of his clinging, sodden garments. "I don't wonder somebody wanted battleships. But even a battleship, if that green ray hit it —"

He drew a deep breath and ducked his head while he unlaced his shoes and kicked out of them. Then, with a final look at the burning wreck of the *Virginia*, he tore off the last bit of his underclothing and swam for the shore in an easy crawl.

The rocky ramparts of Davis Island were three or four miles away. But there was no wind; the black sea was calm save for a long,

hardly perceptible swell. A strong swimmer and in superb condition, Dan felt no anxiety about being able to make the distance. There was danger, however, that a shark would run across him, or that he could not find a landing place upon the rocky shore.

Four bells had rung when he had seen the first flash; it had been just ten o'clock. And it was some four hours later that Dan touched bottom and waded wearily up a bit of smooth hard beach, through palely glittering phosphorescent foam.

He rubbed the brine from his tired limbs, and sat down for a time, in a spot where a fallen boulder sheltered his naked body from the cool morning wind. In a few moments he rose, flexed his muscles and peered through the starlit darkness for a way up the cliff behind the beach. He found it impossible to distinguish anything.

"Got to keep moving, or find some clothes," he muttered. "And I may stumble onto what made the green light. Darn lucky I've been so far, anyhow. Larsen and the others—but I shan't think of them. Wonder who was flashing the signals from the island. And did the green fire get him?"

He turned to look out over the black plain of the sea. Far out, the *Virginia* lay low in the water, a pillar of yellow flame rising from her hull. As he watched, the flame flickered and vanished: the old schooner, he supposed, had sunk. Then he noticed a pale glow come into being among the stars on the eastern horizon.

"Hello," he muttered again. "So we're going to have a moon? In the last quarter, but still it ought to light me up from this beach."

A moment later the horns of the crescent had come above the black rim of the sea. Dan waited, swinging his arms and tramping up and down on the sand, until the silvery moon had cleared the horizon and illuminated the rugged face of the cliff with pale white radiance.

He chose a path to the top of the cliff and clambered up, emerging in a jungle-like thicket of brush. Picking his way with the greatest caution, yet scratching his naked skin most painfully, he made his way for a few yards through the brush to a point of vantage from which he could look about.

He was, he perceived, in a narrow valley or ravine, with rugged black walls rising sheer on either side. The silvery light of the crescent moon fell upon the rank jungle that covered the narrow floor of the canyon, which rose and dwindled as it penetrated inland.

Gazing up the canyon, Dan gasped in amazement at what he saw.

Mars, the red planet, hung bright and motionless, low in the western sky, gleaming with deep bloody radiance. Directly beneath it, bathed in the white light of the moon, was a bare, rocky peak that seemed the highest point of the island. And upon that highest pinnacle, that chanced to be just below the ruddy star, was an astounding machine.

Three slender towers, of a white metal that gleamed in the moonlight with the silvery luster of aluminum, rose from the rocky peak. They supported, in a horizontal position, an enormous metal ring. It must be, Dan reckoned swiftly, at least a hundred feet in diameter, and held a hundred feet above the summit of the mountain.

The huge ring gleamed with a strange purple radiance. A shimmering mist of red-violet light surrounded it. An unknown force seemed to throb within the mighty ring, drawing the mantle of purple haze about it.

And suspended inside the ring and below it was a long, slender needle of dazzling white light. To Dan, from where he stood in the canyon, it seemed a fine, sharp line, though he knew it must be some kind of pointer, luminous with the strange force pulsing through it.

The strange needle wavered a little, with quick, uncertain motions. The brilliance of its light varied oddly; it seemed to throb with a queer, irregular rhythm.

And the gleaming needle pointed straight at the planet Mars!

Dan stood a long time, watching the purple ring upon the silver towers, with the shining white needle hanging below it. He stared at Mars, glowing like a red and sinister eye above the incredible mechanism.

His mind was in a wild storm of wonder shot with fear. What was the meaning of the gleaming ring and needle? What connection did this great device have with the signal of distress from the cliff, and the green fire that had destroyed the *Virginia*? And why did the glowing needle point at Mars?

He did not know when he first began to hear the sound. For a time it was merely part of the strange mystery of the island, only another element in the atmosphere of fear and wonder that surrounded him. Then it rose a little, and he became suddenly sharply conscious of it as an additional menace. The sound was not loud, but deep and vibrant. A whir or hum, like that of a powerful, muffled motor, but deeper than the sound of any motor man has ever made. It came down the gorge, from the direction of the machine on the mountain.

That deep, throbbing noise frightened Dan as none of his previous experiences had done. Shivering from fear as much as from cold, he crouched down beside a huge boulder in the edge of the tangle of brush that covered the bottom of the ravine. His heart pounded wildly. He was in the clutches of an unreasoning fear that some terrible Thing had seen him, and was about to seek him out. For a moment he had to use all his will to keep himself from panic flight through the brush. The unknown is always terrible, and he had invaded the domain of a force he could not understand.

In a moment, however, he recovered himself. He would be as safe there in the jungle, he thought, as anywhere on the island. He thought of starting a fire, then realized that he had no matches, and that he would not dare to make a light if he were able. He pulled a few handfuls of dry grass to make a sort of bed, upon which he huddled up, thanking his lucky stars that the island was in semi-tropical latitudes.

His mind returned again to the riddles that confronted him: the green flash and the strange mechanism on the peak. He recalled fantastic stories he had read, of hermit scientists conducting amazing experiments in isolated parts of the world. Presently he decided that something of the kind must be on foot here.

"The green flash is a sort of a death ray," he summed up, aloud. "And they shoot it from that bright needle. No wonder they don't want to be bothered! Somebody may be fixing to upset civilization!

"But it's queer that the needle points at Mars...."

Of this last fact, which might have been a clue to the most reasonable solution of the mystery, if a rather astounding one, he was able to make nothing. In fact, huddled up on his pile of grass in some degree of comfort, he presently went to sleep, still pondering in vain upon this last clue.

He was awakened by a soft, insistent purring sound, rather like that of a small electric motor run without load at very high speed. Recollection of the night's events came abruptly to him, and he sprang to his feet in alarm, finding his muscles sore and stiff from his cramped position.

From one side Dan heard the rumble of thunder, and, glancing up, saw that the sky above the sea was overcast with a rolling mass of dark, menacing clouds. There was a strange portentous blackness about these storm clouds that filled him with a nameless fear.

Suddenly he was struck with the thought that it was not thunder that had wakened him. The noise he had heard had not the rumbling or booming quality of thunder. As he stood there he again became conscious of the low, whirring sound, behind him. He whirled around to face it. The shock of what he saw left him momentarily dizzy and trembling—though undoubtedly his surroundings had much to do with its effect upon him.

The sound came from a glistening metal machine which stood half-hidden in the brush a dozen yards away *looking at him*!

The thing was made of a lustrous, silvery metal, which Dan afterwards supposed to be aluminum, or some alloy of that metal. Its gleaming case was shaped more like a coffin, or an Egyptian mummy-case, than any other object with which he was familiar, though rather larger than either.

That is, it was an oblong metal box, tapering toward the ends, with the greatest width forward of the middle. Twin tubes projected from the end of it, lenses in them glistening like eyes. Just below them sprang out steely, glistening tentacles several feet long, writhing and twitching as if they were alive. The tangle of green brush hid the thing's legs, so that Dan could not see them.

Suddenly it sprang toward him, rising ten feet high and covering half the distance between them. It alighted easily upon the two long, jointed metal limbs upon which it had leapt, and continued to keep the lens-tubes turned toward Dan, so he knew that the grotesque metal thing was *watching him*.

The limbs, he observed, were similar to the hind legs of a grasshopper, both in shape and position. And evidently the thing leapt upon them in about the same way. Then he noticed another curious thing about it.

Three little bars of metal projected above the thickest part of its case, on the upper side. Their ends were joined by a little ring, three inches across. The tiny metal ring glowed with purple luminosity. A purple haze seemed to cling about it, as to the huge ring Dan had seen on the towers above the peak. And suspended inside this ring was a tiny metal needle, shimmering with pulsating white fire.

On the back of this metal monster was a miniature replica of the strange mechanism upon the pinnacle. The little needle pointed up the canyon. A glance that way showed Dan that it pointed at the great device upon the mountain, which looked even more brilliant on this gloomy morning than in the uncertain radiance of the moon. The colossal ring was shrouded in a splendid mantle of purple flame; and the long, slender needle, which seemed to have swung on down to follow Mars below the horizon, still throbbed with scintillating white fire.

For several minutes the two stood there, studying each other. A naked man, tense and bewildered in the presence of mysterious forces—and a grotesque

machine, cased in gleaming white metal, whose parts seemed to duplicate most of the functions of a living creature.

Then one of the writhing tentacles that shot from the "head" of the machine reached back under the metal case, and reappeared grasping what appeared to be a flat disk of emerald, two inches across and half an inch thick.

This green disk it held up, with a flat side toward Dan. There was no sound, but a flash of green light came from it, cutting a wide swath into the jungle, and littering its path with smoking and flaming debris.

But Dan, expecting something of the kind, had flung himself sidewise into the shelter of the boulder beside which he had slept. Behind it, he gathered his feet under him, picked up a rock of convenient size for throwing, and waited, ready and alert.

He heard the soft humming sound on the other side of the boulder. A glittering object flashed above him. Crashing through the brush the metal monster came to earth on the same side of the boulder with him.

But the metal thing had not turned in its flight: consequently its rear end was toward Dan. As it began cumberously to turn about, he hurled his rock with an accuracy that came of a boyhood on the farm. Instinct had made him try for the little ring and needle on the back of the monster, apparently its most vulnerable part.

Whether by luck or skill, the rock struck the gleaming ring, crushing it against the needle—and instant paralysis overtook the metal thing. Its tentacles and limbs became fixed and rigid, and it toppled over in the brush.

Dan walked over to it, and examined it briefly. The green disk had fallen on the ground, and he picked it up. It was made of emerald crystal, it had a little knob of glistening metal set in one side. Rather afraid of it, Dan forebore to twist the knob. But he still clutched it in his hand a few moments later, when, partly for fear that others of its kind would come to succor the fallen monster, and partly to secure shelter from the threatening rain, he retired into the shadows of the tangled jungle.

He spent perhaps half an hour in creeping back to what he supposed a place of comparative safety. For some time he lay there in the cool gloom, brushing occasional insects off his bare skin, wishing by turns that he had a cup of coffee and a good beefsteak, and that he could puzzle out a logical solution of all the astounding things he had met in the island. After the encounter with the metal monster, he felt his theory of the hermit scientists a bit inadequate.

Presently his attention was attracted by the unmistakable mew of a kitten. Then he heard the padding sound of cautious human footsteps, and a clear feminine voice calling "Kitty, kitty," in low tones. The steps and the voice seemed coming toward him; since there was no sound of crackling brush, he supposed there was a trail which he had not found.

"Hello," he ventured, when the voice seemed only a few yards away through the green tangle.

At the same instant a gray kitten appeared out of the underbrush, and frisked trustfully across to him. He put out a hand, caressed it, picked it up. In a moment the feminine voice replied, "Hello yourself. Who are you?"

A crackling sound came from the brush, as if the speaker were starting toward him. Dan, abruptly conscious of his lack of attire, said quickly, "Wait a minute! I haven't anything on, you see. I'm Dan McNally. I owned the schooner that something happened to off the island last night."

A delicious, trilling laugh greeted the panic of his first words. Then the clear, sweet voice, serious again, replied, "So you swam ashore from the boat I signaled?"

"Yes."

"Gee, but I'm glad to find you! And you say you haven't any clothes? I wonder what...." The voice paused reflectively, then resumed, "Here's a sheet that I got to signal with in the daytime, if I had a chance. You might wrap it around you until we find something better."

The low, liquid laugh rang out again; again there was a rustling in the brush, and presently an arm appeared, holding a rolled-up sheet.

"All right," he called. "Throw it this way."

In a moment, with the sheet draped around him like a Roman toga, and the kitten on his arm, he advanced to meet the owner of the beautiful voice.

At the trail he met a trim, active-looking young woman, clad in out-of-door attire and with a canvas knapsack on her back. Bareheaded, she wore her brown hair closely shingled. Her face, Dan recognized from the photograph he had seen five years before, though it was more lovely than the splotched newspaper picture had hinted. Her brown eyes were filled with laughter at his predicament and his present unusual garb.

He bowed with mock gravity and said, "How do you do, Miss Helen Hunter?"

Brown eyes widened in surprise. "You know me?" she asked.

"Not half so well as I hope to," he grinned.

Then, handing her the kitten, he spoke seriously. "What about this island? The green flashes? The big machine on the mountain? The metal thing that jumps about like a grasshopper? What's it all about? You know anything about it?"

"Yes, I know a good deal about it," she told him soberly. "It's rather a terrible story. And one you may not believe—no, you've seen them! But the kitten is hungry, and you must be, too, if you swam ashore."

"Well, yes, I am." Dan admitted.

The storm clouds were drifting out to sea; the sun was beginning to assert itself, and it now lighted up the scene with a cheerful brightness. She slung off her pack and sat down cross-legged at the side of the trail. Dan sat down

opposite her as she opened the knapsack and produced a can of condensed milk, one of sardines, a can-opener, and half a loaf of bread.

"I had to select my supplies rather at random," she said, "and you'll have to make the best of them."

She started to open the sardines. "You'd better give it to me," Dan advised. "You might cut your hand."

"You think so?" she asked, deftly lifting the lid, fishing out a fish for the kitten, and presenting the can to Dan. Then with capable hands she broke off a large chunk of bread, which she handed him.

"Go ahead and finish this up," she said. "I've already had breakfast." She punched two holes in the end of the milk can, and poured some of the thick yellow fluid into the palm of her left hand, from which she let the kitten lap it.

"And now for the mystery of the island," Dan demanded, forgetting bread and sardines in his eagerness.

The girl turned her face to him. "I'm Helen Hunter, as you seem to know," she began. "I came here with my father five years ago to observe an eclipse of the sun. When it was all over, and the ship called to take us off, he decided to send the results of our observations by one of the other men. He wanted to stay here to carry on another experiment —the one that led to that machine on the hill. Part of the other men were willing to stay. The yacht left us here, and has been back from San Francisco every six months since, with mail and supplies."

"And what was the experiment?" Dan demanded eagerly.

"Have you ever looked at Mars through a good telescope?" she countered. "Then you must have seen the canals—straight dark lines running from the white polar caps to the equatorial zone. All scientists did not agree as to what they were, but nobody could suggest a natural origin for them.

"My father was one of those who thought that the canals were fertile, cultivated strips, irrigated with water brought down from the melting ice-caps. Irrigation systems meant intelligent life upon the planet, and his experiment was an attempt to communicate with that intelligence."

"And he succeeded?" Dan was astounded.

"Yes. The means was simple enough: other men had suggested it years before, in fact. Any fairly bright light on Mars—such as the beam of a searchlight directed toward earth—would be visible in a good telescope, when the planet is favorably situated: it follows that such a light on earth should be visible to an observer with a similar instrument on Mars.

"It was possible, of course, but unlikely, that Mars would have intelligent inhabitants still ignorant of the telescope. It was also possible that their senses would be different from ours—that, if they saw at all, it would be with a different part of the spectrum. Father took the chance. And he succeeded.

"The call was simple: merely three flashes of light, repeated again and again. We used a portable searchlight, mounted on a motor-truck, such as is used in the army. The three flashes meant that we were on the third planet of the solar system. The answering call, from the fourth planet, should be four flashes, of course.

"For three nights we kept signaling. One of the men watched the motor-generator, and I operated the searchlight, swinging it on Mars and off again, to make the flashes. Dad kept his eye screwed to the telescope. Nothing happened and he got discouraged. I persuaded him to keep on for another night, in case they hadn't seen us at first; or needed more time to get their searchlight ready.

"And on the fourth night poor Dad came out of the observatory, shouting that he had seen four flashes."

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an gasped, speechless with astonishment. "Then that machine, with the needle pointing at Mars, and the green flashes, and the thing that jumped at

Dme—"

Helen waved a white hand for silence. "Just keep cool a minute! I'm coming to them.

"The four flashes just began it. In a few days Dad and the Martians were communicating by a sort of television process. He would mark off a sheet of paper into squares, blacken some of the squares to make a picture or design, then have me send a flash for each black square, and miss an interval for each white one, taking them in regular order. The Martians seemed to catch on pretty soon; in a few days Dad was receiving pictures of the same sort.

"Rather a slow way of communication, perhaps. But it worked better than one might think at first. In a month Dad had received instructions for building a small machine like that big one on the hill. It is something like radio—at least it operates with vibrations in the ether—but it's as much ahead of our radio as an airplane is in advance of a fire-balloon. I understand a good bit about it, but I won't try to explain it now.

"And in the next three years Dad learned no end of things from the people on Mars. One queer thing about it was, that they never let us see them on the television apparatus, no matter how many of their scientific secrets they gave us. Dad and I exhibited ourselves, but I don't know yet what the Martians look like—though I have made a guess.

"By the end of the third year they had showed Dad how to make one of those metal things—"

"Like that one that jumped at me?" Dan broke in with a shudder.

"Yes. They seem almost alive; but they are machines, like our robots, and controlled by the radio apparatus. The eyes use photo-electric cells, and relay what is before them to the Master Intelligence." The girl spoke these last words in a low tone, shrinking involuntarily. She paused a moment, then shrugged and continued.

"The first machine did not obey my father. It was controlled by signals that came from Mars, over the big station on the hill. And it went to work,

making more apparatus, building more machines, enlarging the receiving station. It worked in obedience to the Master Intelligence on Mars!

"That was a year ago. The last time the yacht called, my father and the other men still hoped to control the machines. They let her go back without us. The machines tolerated us a while; paid no attention to us; they were busy working mines and building huge, strange things that must be flying machines; the plateau on the other side of the peak is crowded with them.

"For the machines are preparing to leave the island! They are going to conquer the world for the Master Intelligence on Mars!

"Months ago my father discovered this, and realized that he had loosed doom upon the earth. He and the three other men planned to destroy that big station on the peak. All the signals to the machines are relayed through that, from Mars. The machines seemed to pay no heed as they made their preparations.

"Then one night, about three weeks ago, they tried to dynamite the station." The girl's shoulder trembled; she paused to brush a tear from her eye, then went on hastily, in a voice grown husky with emotion. Dan felt an odd desire to take her slight form in his arms and comfort her in her grief.

"The machines had seemed heedless, but they were ready. They had those disks that throw the green fire: we had not seen them before. And—well, all four of them were killed."

Dan handed her the disk of green crystal he had taken from the thing that had attacked him. She examined it silently, then went on.

"Dad had left me in bed, but I heard an explosion. I think the bombs went off when the green fire struck them. I knew what had happened, and got out of the house just before the machines arrived. They wrecked the place with their green flashes.

"And for the last three weeks I've been hiding in the jungle, or watching for ships. Three times I've raided the ruins of the house for something to eat: fortunately it didn't burn, like your ship. And that's all, I suppose—except I'm awfully glad that you got ashore."

"Thanks," Dan said, earnestly. "And what are we going to do now?"

"I don't know," Helen answered in a troubled tone. "I'm afraid. Afraid for all humanity. On the television, I've seen enough of Mars to be sure that it is a world of machines, controlled by one Master Intelligence. And even that may be a machine. We make machines that compute the tides and carry out other computations that are almost beyond the power of the human mind: why couldn't a machine think?

"The Master Intelligence of Mars plans to add the Earth to his domain. Unless we can do something to stop it, in a few years the world will be overrun with gigantic robot-machines, controlled by force from across the gulf of space. Humanity cannot resist them. Imagine a battleship pitted against that green annihilating ray, and all the other science of an elder planet!

"Life is to be blotted out! The Master Intelligence of Mars will rule two worlds of mechanical monsters!"

Dan sat in a dazed vision of horror to come, until Helen straightened up as if shaking off a mantle of fear, and smiled heroically, if a bit wanly.

"Now you must eat your bread and sardines, to give you strength to fight for humanity!" she cried, with a laugh that she strived, not too successfully, to make cheerful and gay.

Obediently, he began to eat, finding an excellent appetite....

It was several minutes later that he fancied he heard a whirring and crackling in the brush behind them. He sprang to his feet in alarm.

"It can't be far back to where I left the machine," he cried. "Do you suppose there's danger that—"

The mechanical ears of the metal things may have picked up the sound of his voice: but in any event, green flame flashed about them on the instant. Feeling a sudden protective impulse, Dan started toward Helen. That was

his last recollection, before what seemed a terrific concussion swept him into the abyss of unconsciousness....

His first thought, when he awakened, was of the girl. But he was alone in the silence of the canyon. He sat up, realizing that many hours had passed, for the air was growing cool again, and the sun was low behind the peak at the head of the ravine. The huge, mysterious machine of the purple ring and the vibrating white needle were blazing splendidly.

He took more detailed stock of his immediate surroundings. The tangle of brush that had sheltered them had been cut away by the green annihilating ray. Charred stumps remained to show where it had fired bushes beyond the trail. His own shoulder was blistered, a hole was burned in the sheet wound about him, and the hair was singed from the back of his head.

Suddenly trembling with horror, he looked about for anything to show that Helen had perished by the ray. Discovering nothing, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"She must be still alive, anyhow," he muttered. "And I've had another lucky break! The ray was too high to get me. They must have left me for dead."

Presently he became conscious of torturing thirst. He retired through the brush, along the rocky wall of the canyon. By sunset he came upon a little natural basin in a rock, half full of rain water. It was none too clean, but he drank his fill of it, and felt relief.

Looking up the canyon, he could see the great mechanism on the peak, gleaming in the dusk. Intensely-glowing purple mist clung about the great metal ring, and the slender, delicate needle swung below it, still vibrating, still throbbing with brilliant, white radiance. It pointed at the red eye of Mars, which had just winked into view.

Dan stared at it a long time.

"It all sounds crazy," he muttered, "but it isn't! The Master Intelligence of Mars, she said, is controlling the mechanical things through that! The doom

of the Earth is coming through that white needle! If only I could smash it, somehow!"

He looked down at the white folds of the sheet that draped him, and clenched his hands impotently. "No gun! Not even a pocket-knife. Nothing but my bare hands!" He bit his lip.

Still he stared challengingly at the gleaming mechanism on the peak. An idea slowly took form in his mind; an exclamation abruptly escaped him. Narrowly he eyed the trussed girders of the silver towers which supported the great ring, muttering to himself.

"Yes, I can do it! If I don't get caught! I can climb it, well enough. The needle looks a bit frail. I should be able to smash it! I'd like to see Helen again, though."

He gathered the sheet around him, and began picking a cautious way up the canyon, staying always in the cover of boulders or brush. A few times he disturbed a rock, or snapped a twig beneath his foot. Then he waited out of sight for long minutes, though he had no reason to believe that the metal monsters were on the alert for him.

"I've got to do it! The world depends on it!" he kept saying again and again in his mind.

The quick darkness of the tropics had fallen almost before he started. But he welcomed the night, for, if it made his own silent progress more difficult, it reduced the hazard that he would be discovered.

Gauging the time by the slow wheeling of the diamond-like stars across the velvet sky, he thought that two hours had passed when he reached the head of the canyon. He stood up cautiously to survey the little plateau at the summit of the hill.

It was several acres in extent, quite level, and almost clear of vegetation. At the farther side was a pile of wreckage, which, he supposed, had been the quarters of Dr. Hunter's party, before they had been destroyed.

Many huge machines stood about the plateau, vast, dark masses looming in the starlight. Mostly they were either not running or very silent in operation; but a very deep, vibrant humming sound came from one near him. Smaller shapes were moving about them, with long easy leaps. These, he knew, were the mechanical monsters, though it was too dark to distinguish them.

But by far the most prominent object upon the plateau was the enormous gleaming thing that Helen had said was the station over which came the signals from the Master Intelligence on Mars. One of its three towers sprang up not far from where he stood. The huge, refulgent ring, swathed in its mist of purple fire, was a full hundred feet above him; and the slender needle, pulsing with white flame, swinging within and below the colossal ring, was itself a hundred feet in length.

The white needle, for all its length, seemed hardly thicker than a man's finger. It was mounted at the top of a curiously complex and delicate-looking device that spread broadly out between the three towers, below the center of the huge purple ring.

Dan looked at it and decided that his plan had at least a chance of success—though he had no hope that it would not be fatal to him.

Quickly and silently he ran to the base of the mighty silver towers nearest him and began to climb the side toward the ravine, where the maze of girders would hide him, at least partially, from any watchers back on the plateau. The starlight and the faint weird radiance of the purple ring above sufficed to guide him.

The cross-braces on the girder he had chosen were spaced closely enough to serve as the rungs of a ladder. Dan climbed easily, pausing twice for breath, and to look down at the dark plateau. The vast, humming machines loomed up strangely in the pale purple light that fell from the gleaming ring.

Once he looked across toward the other side of the island. The surface there was more level. He glimpsed tiny moving lights, and huge stationary masses, apparently as large as ocean liners. He had an impression of a vast

amount of mechanical activity, proceeding in the darkness very rapidly, and in a silent and orderly fashion.

"The expeditionary force of the Master Intelligence of Mars," he thought, "preparing to set out against humanity! And what I can do is the only chance to stop it!"

He climbed again with renewed energy. A few yards more brought him to the colossal metal ring. Resting upon the three towers, it was a circular band of shining metal a foot thick and as wide as a road. The intense purple glow extended several feet from its surface.

Dan touched it tentatively. He felt a tingling electric shock. And he thought he could feel a radiation coming from it, giving him a curious sensation of cold. As he reached his hands up and grasped the upper edge of the great ring, he felt what seemed a physical current of cold.

Controlling his tendency to shiver, he climbed upon the last brace, and, lifting his weight with his hands, threw himself face down upon the flat upper surface of the vast ring. He lay bathed in cold purple fire. He tingled with the chill of it. A frozen current seemed to penetrate his body. Involuntarily he trembled, lost his grip and dangled precariously from the rim.

Only a frantic scrambling restored his hold. Then, fighting the sensation of freezing cold that came from the mist of purple flame, he drew himself forward and got to his feet upon the broad surface of the metal ring. On both sides it curved away like a circular track. Red-violet fire shimmered about it, bathing him to the waist in a chilling torrent.

Through coruscating frozen flame he waded to the inner rim of the colossal ring. Below him hung the needle, a mere straight line of white fire, a hundred feet in length. Eye-dazzling radiance scintillated along it, waxing and waning with a curious throbbing rhythm. The needle vibrated a little, but it pointed directly at the red point of Mars, now almost directly overhead.

Repressing a shudder, Dan looked down at the complex and delicate apparatus upon which the slender needle was mounted. It was a light frame of white metal bars, with spidery coils and huge glowing tubes and flimsy spinning disks mounted in it. The gleaming needle was mounted much like a telescope at the top of the device, fully fifty feet below him.

"Looks flimsy enough," Dan muttered. "I'll go through it like a sixteen-inch shell! Who would have thought I'd end this way!"

He stepped back for a moment, and stood on the polished metal, hidden to the waist in cold purple flame. Lest it impede his movements, he tore the sheet from him and threw it aside. He let his eyes sweep for a last time over the familiar constellations blazing so splendidly in the black sky above. He had a pang of heartache, as if the stars were old friends. His glance roved fondly over the dark, indistinct masses of the island, and across the black plain of the sea.

"Well, no good in waiting," he muttered again. "Sorry I can't see Helen. Hope she gets off all right."

He backed to the outer rim and drew a deep breath, like one about to dive. Then, with set face, he sprinted forward. As he did so a blinding flash of green light flickered up before him. He ducked his head and leapt from the inner edge of the vast glowing ring.

For long seconds, it seemed, he was plunging down through space, feet first. Air rushed screaming about his ears. But his mind was quite calm, and registered an astonishingly large series of impressions.

He saw the delicate, gleaming machine rushing up to meet him, the shimmering white needle swung on its top.

He took in the silent, dark plateau, with the masses of the great machines rising like ominous shadows here and there, and the mechanical monsters leaping busily about it, almost invisible in the dim, ghostly radiance that fell from the purple ring.

He saw a vivid flame of green reach up past him from somewhere below. He knew, without emotion or alarm, that he had been discovered, and that it was too late for his discoverers to stop him.

He found time, even, for a fleeting thought of death. His mind framed the question, "What will I be in a moment from now?"

Then he had struck the great white needle, and was crashing into the delicate apparatus below it. Waves of pain beat upon his mind like flashes of blinding light. But his last mental image, as he passed into oblivion, was a picture of Helen's face. Oddly, it was not her face as he had last seen it, but a reproduction of the old newspaper half-tone, curiously retouched with life and color.

There is little more to tell. It was some weeks later when Dan came back out of a world of delirium and dreams, to find himself lying on his back in a tent, very much bandaged. He was alone at the moment, and at first could not recall that tremendous last day of his conscious life.

Then he heard a thrillingly familiar feminine voice calling "Kitty, kitty, kitty." He tried to move, a dull pain throbbed in his breast, and a groan escaped him. In a moment Helen appeared; the gray kitten was forgotten. She looked very anxious and solicitous—and also, Dan thought, very beautiful.

"No, no!" she cried. "You are going to be all right! Dad made me learn a little elementary medicine before we came here, and I know. But you mustn't speak! Not for days yet! I'll have to guess what you want. And you can wink when I guess the right thing.

"Gee, but I'm glad you've come to! You'll be as well as ever, pretty soon. The kitten was lots of comfort. Still—"

Dan attempted to move. She leaned over him, shifted his weight and smoothed the sheet with strong, capable hinds. "You want to know about what happened to the machine monsters?"

He winked.

"Well, you remember when they found us, and shot the green ray at us. They left you there—I thought you were dead—and carried me up here on the hill. Perhaps they wanted me for a laboratory subject to test the green ray on, or something of the kind. Anyhow, they carried me into a big shed filled with strange machines.

"They kept me there until that night. Then, all of a sudden, they all—stopped! They froze! They were dead!

"The tentacles of the one that was holding me were set about me. But I worked free, and got out of the shed. It took all night. And when I came out, just at sunrise, I saw that the purple fire was gone from the great ring. The needle was knocked down, and the apparatus smashed.

"I found you there in the wreckage. You made a human bullet of yourself to smash it! The greatest thing a man ever did!"

Though normally rather modest, Dan felt a glow of pride at the honest admiration ringing in her clear voice, and shining from her warm brown eyes.

"So I gathered up what was left of you," she went on, "and tried to put you back together again. A good many bones were broken, and you had more cuts and bruises than I could mention; but the apparatus had broken the force of the fall, and you were still alive. You are remarkably well put together, I should say; and unusually lucky, as well!

"And, well, the machines and apparatus are scattered about all over the island. Every one of them stopped the instant you smashed the connection with the directing intelligence on Mars. There'll be quite a stir in the scientific world, I imagine, in about three weeks, when the yacht comes and carries us back with a lot of plans and specimens. We must send about a thousand engineers back here to study what we leave behind us.

"And do you want anything else?" She bent over and watched his bandaged face. Looking up into her bright eyes, thrilling to the cool, comforting pressure of her hand on his forehead, Dan reflected. Then he winked.

"Something you want me to do?"

He winked.

"When? Right now?"

No response.

"After the yacht comes."

He winked.

"What is it?" She looked him in the eye, blushed a little, and laughed.

"You mean—"

Dan winked.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

BROOD OF THE DARK MOON

Beginning an Outstanding New Novel—a Sequel to "Dark Moon"—

By Charles Willard Diffin

THE MIDGET FROM THE ISLAND

The Story of a Machine-Made Midget and His Fight Upward to Normal Size

By H. G. Winter

THE MOON WEED

A Story of a Strange New Earth Menace, Terrifying in the Speed with which It Gathers Momentum

By Harl Vincent

—And Others!

The sharp roar of an explosion thundered through the Temple.

The Hands of Aten

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By H. G. Winter

The sleek black monoplane came scudding out of the south, flying low over fields of ice and snow that were thawing slowly under the heat of the arctic sun. After a long time it wheeled, circled gradually, and then, as if it had found what it had been looking for, came lightly down and skidded to a graceful halt in a low flat area between some round-topped hillocks. A fur-clad figure emerged from the enclosed cockpit and climbed a low ridge into the wan sunlight above.

Out of solid ice Craig hews three long-frozen Egyptians—and is at once caught up into amazing adventure.

For a while the man looked around, getting his bearings. Miles on every side stretched the great rough plains of ice—ice that became a broad path of glittering diamonds where it led toward the low-hung sun, far in the south. Perhaps a quarter mile in that direction lay the white rise of a hill much larger than its fellows, probably, the man thought, a volcano. Towards it he laboriously made his way. His tiny figure was only a speck on the far-flung, deserted landscape—a human mite, puny and futile against the giant, hostile white waste.

The sky was clear and cloudless, the sun unusually warm. So warm, indeed, that long clefts, caused by the unequal expansion of the ice, appeared here and there. The man from the plane had not gone more than fifty yards when he halted sharply. With a crack like thunder, a cleft had opened at his very feet—a rift ten feet deep in places, apparently bottomless in others, and very long. Not wanting to go around it, he slid down one side and, with an ice pick, started to hack a foothold in the opposite bank.

It was then that the man saw the thing—something sticking from the ice just above his head. As he stared at it, amazement appeared on his bronzed face. He looked around bewilderedly, then peered still more closely into the bluish depths of the crystal wall.

The head of a spear was jutting from the ice. And the spear was held by a man entrapped within the wall.

The details of the ice-held figure were but slightly blurred, for it was only a few feet from the surface. It was that of a man, and it was plain that he was not an Eskimo. He was locked in a distorted position, as if caught unawares by a terrific weight of sliding snow. And he had been caught, seemingly, when in the act of hurling his weapon.

For a long time the man from the plane peered at his discovery. Then his blue eyes followed slowly the direction in which the spear was pointing, and he gasped, and took a few quick steps further down the cleft. There, in the opposite wall, were two more bodies.

These, though, were of man and woman. They were even closer to the surface of the ice. Crouched over, the man's left hand was craned as if to protect his companion from some peril—from the cataclysm that had trapped them, it might have been. Or perhaps from the spear of the other.

The fur-muffled figure stood motionless, gazing at them. His ice pick was held limply, his eyes were wide. Then, suddenly, the pick was grasped firmly, and flakes of ice flew under its level blows as he started to carve his find from their frozen tomb.

The man was trembling with wild excitement when at last the stiff form of the woman was extricated. She was not so much a woman as a girl, really—and she was beautiful. But the man from the plane evidently didn't care so much about that; nor even her almost miraculous state of preservation. He rubbed away some of the coating of ice from her face, and stared most intently at her forehead. Then he stood upright, and said, simply:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

If Wesley Craig had been merely what he was listed as on the roster of the Somers Arctic Expedition of 1933—that is, a geologist—he would not have been so astounded. But his life work, really, was archaeology. He had spent years delving in the ruins of ancient temples, especially, those of old Egypt. He knew the ancient language as well as anyone knew it, and was familiar with every known detail of the civilization of the Pharaohs. And, being so, he was now properly confused. For every bit of his knowledge told him that this girl, whom he had found in the wastes of the arctic, was of Egyptian stock.

A certain tiny hieroglyph traced on her smooth forehead—the intricate band around her fine hair—the very cut of the frozen robe she wore—Egyptian—every one of them!

Yet, stubbornly, Wesley Craig wouldn't admit it. Not until he had cut the two men from the ice and hauled all three laboriously up the side of the cleft and stretched them out on the level ice, did he have to. He couldn't

deny it, then. In some mysterious way, Egypt was connected with the three rigid bodies.

For the two men were garbed as warriors, and their helmets and harness and sword-sheaths were indisputably of Egyptian design.

There, however, the similarity between the two ended. The one with the spear was big-muscled and burly; the other much slighter of build. This latter, Craig guessed, had been fleeing with the girl when icy death had overwhelmed them.

But he did not then try to go into that, the story that some sudden cataclysm had cut short. His fervor, as an Egyptologist, was afire. He was burning with eagerness to get these bodies back to the main base of the Somers Expedition, some three hundred miles south. Into the learned circles of Egyptology, of archaeology, they'd throw a bomb-shell that would make nitroglycerine seem like weak tea.

Craig couldn't taxi his plane closer; he would have to carry them to it; and to do this he began to carefully massage all the larger pieces of ice from the girl's limbs and clothing, to make her lighter. At the Somers base they could all be re-frozen, to maintain their perfect preservation.

It was while he was diligently rubbing that he fully realized the girl's beauty. Delicate, cleanly cut features; fine, large eyelids; tiny, slender hands. Save for her icy pallor, she might almost have been merely asleep as she lay on the snow.

Wes Craig finished massaging the girl and then went on and did the same for the two warriors. For an hour he carefully and reverently released them from the reluctant fingers of their icy death, and he was a little tired from his exertions and his great excitement when at last he finished and stood erect, resting. But he did not stand quiet for long. A sudden gleam lit his eyes: a mad idea had come to him.

"Won't hurt to try!" he muttered excitedly, and the next moment his lithe figure was running over the slippery ice bank to his airplane, out of sight

behind the nearby hillocks.

Wes Craig worked from a sub-base on his sole expeditions to chart the various mountains and ranges in the islands off north-east King Charles Land, within the Arctic Circle. He had only one partner, a mechanic, who stayed behind on his shorter trips. And therefore all manner of emergency devices were stowed in the cockpit of his plane: a tiny folding tent, an amazingly light sled, a large store of compressed food—and a large vial of Kundrenaline and a hypodermic needle.

Kundrenaline was still somewhat of an unknown quantity in 1933. Kund, the German, had developed it but a year before. The fluid was already standard beside the operating tables of the world's most modern hospitals, so valuable had its qualities proven to be. It had actually restored life after hours of death. A complex mixture of concentrated adrenaline and highly compressed liquid food, it gave a tremendous stimulation to the heart, at the same time providing the body with energy food to withstand the shock.

It was meant for emergency use on the Somers Expedition. But Wes Craig wasn't going to use it for that. He was going to use it for an experiment—a crazy experiment, he told himself. Fish—many forms of life—withstand freezing in solid ice without hurt. Human beings—? It wouldn't hurt to try, anyway, his mind kept repeating.

Fifteen minutes saw him back beside the rigid bodies, and kneeling over the girl. The sun had warmed her body somewhat, and the glistening rheum of frost had melted from all three. Hardly breathing from his suspense, Wes filled the needle's chamber full and plunged it into the firm white flesh just above the girl's silent heart.

A short laugh came from him—an ironic laugh. It seemed idiotic to even think of restoring her to life, even if she *had* been dead only a week or so. It was quite—

And then his thoughts stopped.

"My God!" he said suddenly.

For a tide of faintest color had surged through the girl's wan cheeks. And her slim figure had stirred perceptibly on the sheet of ice!

"By heaven, she's coming to!" Craig muttered unbelievingly.

Pressing his ear to her chest, he detected a faint and labored beating of her heart, stirring from its cold sleep as the terrific stimulation jolted it back to life. The girl's eyelids flickered; a tiny sigh escaped her full lips. Craig took off his heavy parka and laid it over her. Trembling with tremendous excitement, he tore himself away from the miracle of re-created life, and strode to the body of the young man who was apparently her partner.

Again he administered the Kundrenaline. Then he went to his first discovery—the heavily built, powerful warrior whose spear had stuck out of the ice. The hypodermic was once more filled, and the fluid plunged into his body. Even as a faint moan came from the younger man, the warrior's heart started to beat.

Perspiring, breathing quickly, vial and needle still in his hands, Wes stood off and surveyed the three.

The girl's hands were moving fitfully; strange, racking gasps came from her throat. The other two were similarly affected. Almost frightened, held motionless by the weirdness of it, the American watched.

The heavily built warrior was tossing in a series of convulsions. His legs kicked out spasmodically, arms jerked and clenched, and the helmeted head rolled from side to side. Then the man lay still for as long as a minute; but, just as Craig was about to go to him, his legs tensed once again, and, staggering drunkenly, he got to his feet.

He looked around wildly, but did not see the dumbfounded Craig, for his eyes fell on the figure of the younger man. He too had risen, swaying on weak legs. And the girl was sitting up and staring at the two of them.

And then, grotesquely, preluded by a cry from the woman, the tragedy which death had once cut short was enacted out, there on the rough sheet of ice and snow.

The man with the spear fixed his eyes on the girl's young partner, raised his weapon, leveled it unsteadily, and tossed it weakly forward. The pointed end clipped its target and sent him reeling, with a thin trickle of slow blood running from his right shoulder. The girl staggered to her feet and ran between the two. But the big warrior's hand swept her aside, and a short sword leaped from its sheath at his waist.

Wes was stupidly staring, unable to move. The combatants were utterly unconscious of him. The younger one, painfully wounded, drew his own sword and swayed forward to meet his enemy.

The fight was grotesque. Both were weak, unsteady. The short swords stabbed slowly, missing by yards in their drunken course. Hatred was on the big man's dark face, and a fierce lust for blood. It was only when the weapons clashed loudly together that Craig came out of his daze.

"Stop!" he yelled, jumping forward. "Wait! Stop!"

All three turned and looked full at him. And then death, which had been banished for but a few minutes, swooped swiftly once more on the young man. While he stood peering, bewildered, at Craig, the huge warrior steadied his blade and drove it home through his unguarded chest. The man slid over the edge of the ice into the cleft below.

The girl shrieked again and went down to his fallen figure, while the victor waved his bloody sword aloft with a shout of triumph. Then, without hesitation, he leaped at the American.

Wes was taken wholly by surprise. He dropped the vial of Kundrenaline and the hypodermic, and he heard them crash and break at his feet as he fumbled for his automatic, in a holster at his belt. But the warrior was upon him. His crimsoned blade swung high, gleamed downward, and smote Wesley Craig square on the side of the head.

Lucky for him, the flat of the sword had been used—but it was enough. The American reeled under the terrific swipe. He had a last glimpse of two

inflamed eyes, of a savage, contorted face; then the universal whiteness went black, and he fell, and the whole incredible scene passed from his consciousness....

Just how long he had remained unconscious, Wesley Craig had no means of determining. His head was hurting devilishly; for a moment he thought that his plane had crashed, and that he was lying in the wreckage. Then he tried to move his hands, and found that he couldn't. They were bound. His eyes opened.

He discovered that he was lying flat on the ice, hands tied behind his back. Somebody was moaning softly. It was the girl. She too was tied. Wes tried to sit up; and a hand grasped his shoulder tightly and yanked him to his feet.

The big warrior who had felled him, his bloody sword still in hand, stared closely at the American, and fingered his fur jacket curiously. Presently he muttered a few words in some strange tongue. When Craig did not reply, he again spat out the words, his dark brows bunching malevolently. And this time Wes understood part of what he said.

He was speaking ancient Egyptian!

That proved it. These three, who but half an hour before were dead and entombed in the ice, *were* Egyptians. Trying to cope with his returning bewilderment, Craig racked his brains for remnants of the difficult language. And finally said laboriously:

"Who—who art thou?"

A torrent of words broke from the warrior. Only a few were understandable.

"Shabako—Pharaoh Shabako!" And he repeated Craig's question: "Who art thou?"

The girl was sitting up now, and peering at the American. Her eyes were still tear-filled, for the dead body of the young man was at her side. She cried out a warning, and Craig caught most of it.

"Be careful, Stranger! He will slay thee as he slew Inaros!"

"Answer me! Who art thou?" repeated the warrior angrily. His patience was short; he played with the hilt of his sword.

"I come," said Wesley Craig slowly, groping for words, "from a far country. I found the three of you in this ice—dead. I brought thee back to life."

There was an astounded silence. Then the man who called himself Shabako deliberately cuffed his prisoner on the cheek. "Blasphemer!" he roared. "To claim the powers of the gods! Thou shall die for that! Yea, the ice entrapped me when I was about to slay the guilty Inaros—but our mighty god Aten restored me to life! Enough! The priests shall deal with thee!"

He jerked the trembling girl to Craig's side, and with a prick of his sword in their backs made them go forward. The American was too bewildered to think evenly. Why, the god Aten was the Sun God!—the divinity Egypt worshipped in five hundred B.C.? How had these warm-blooded people come to the far north? Where did they live? And what fate lay in store for him?

He felt none too optimistic about his position. He knew that it would be two weeks before Somers, at the main base, would become alarmed at his absence. Unless, of course, the mechanic at the sub-base tried to beat his way back on foot, which was only barely possible.... Then he discovered that his automatic was still in its holster; it was slapping against his thighs; and he felt more hopeful.

The girl trudged tiredly at his side. Shabako was a few feet behind, grumbling and urging his captives along.

"Where does he drive us?" Craig asked softly. "What is thy name—and why did he slay thy companion?"

Her frightened eyes slanted towards his face. "To the Temple of the Sun God, Stranger," she whispered. "And there—" She broke off, to get control

of the emotion she was feeling.

"There—what?"

"The God's awful hands!... Taia is my name. I do not know how I am once again alive, when a short while ago I was dead—but it matters not. I am a priestess of Aten, a virgin of the Temple. Inaros, he—he who lies behind—dared to love me. But a few hours gone he committed sacrilege, hiding in the Temple, so he could watch me. Pharaoh Shabako chanced on him, threatened death to us and pursued us out here. And then of a sudden, when Shabako was hurling his spear, we were entrapped ... and died...."

It was a strange story of forbidden love, one that might have been enacted in age-old times beneath the shadows of the pyramids. Craig began, "How did—" but a harsh voice cut his question short.

"Silence, infidel! Stir thy feet! This ice cools my blood!"

The American's plane, hidden from view behind the hillock, was left farther and farther in the rear, and Wes was surprised to find that he was being driven up the very slopes of the ice-covered hill he had come to investigate.

At the top, he saw that the hill was a volcano, as he had guessed. There, in the center, was a wide gaping hole from which, in past ages, fiery streams of lava and ashes had belched forth. He was amazed to see that rude steps had been hacked in one side of the great cleft, and that they led sharply downwards. A faint warmth reached him, and he observed that there was but little ice in the crater cup, and none on the rocky walls where the hewn steps led down. It was here that these warm-blooded people lived!

As soon as Taia reached the steps she began to descend them, but Craig wasn't so docile. He told himself that this was his last chance; once below, surrounded by numbers, there might be no opportunity to strike for freedom. His eyes narrowed as he groped for a plan. If he could butt his brawny captor, strike him fairly in the solar plexus, and, while he lay helpless, cut his bonds with the sword....

He whirled around. Reverting to football tactics, he tensed his lean, hard body and plunged squarely at Shabako.

The Pharaoh was taken completely by surprise, and went sprawling; but the sword did not pitch from his hand. He had received a stiff, shrewd blow, but only a glancing one, for he had twisted his body at the last second. Now, sputtering with wrath, he scrambled to his feet and whipped back his blade for a killing slice at the American.

It was Taia who saved him, then. In a flash she threw herself against the sword arm and deflected the sweep.

"Wait, O Pharaoh!" she cried breathlessly. "The priests will claim this stranger; 'tis they who must decide his fate! Do not kill him here!"

Shabako's face was livid with wrath; rage choked him; but he paused. The girl's aptly timed words had told. He was obviously not decided as to what to do. There was a pause, while the sword pointed straight at Craig's chest; then, grumbling, the Egyptian let down his weapon.

"But try no more of thy tricks, dog!" he said harshly. "Else thy death come before its time!"

Taia glanced appealingly at Wes. Her eyes were half-frightened. Craig smiled wryly. "Lead on!" he said.

Years of time fell away with each of their descending steps. Egypt stirred under the dust of the centuries; Egypt lived again, though in a sad mockery of her former glory. It was like a descent into a new world, yet a world that was, at the same time, as old as man's civilization....

Fifty or more steps they trudged down, then came suddenly to two dark corridors, both of which slanted steeply into the bowels of the earth. The one they took was mystic with deep shadows thrown by flaring oil lamps, cunningly imbedded in the walls of rock; and immediately into Wes's mind came the memory of a corridor he had once walked through in old Egypt, a corridor that pierced to the heart of a pyramid and the somber vault of a

mummy who had once been revered as the Pharaoh Aknahton. In his nostrils now there seemed to be that same, musty, age-old smell; the same hushed gloom was about him; his eyes saw dimly on the walls the same rows of hieroglyphs telling of long-past deeds of warriors and priests.

But there the similarity ended. In Egypt it had been a dead Pharaoh; here, though even yet he could hardly believe it, a living one—living by grace of modern science—walked warily behind him, and a living virgin of the temple at his side. The sword of the Pharaoh was pricking his back.

The passageway they trudged down became one of many. Others angled from it frequently, all dark, all hushed, all seemingly devoid of people. The volcano—extinct, almost surely, for the warmth was only that of the earth—was honey-combed with corridors. The marvelous ingenuity of the Egyptian race had come into play in fashioning this warm home in the barren arctic wastes. But Craig's ever-alert eyes warned him of what was to come. The characters, the hieroglyphs, the rude forms of Egyptian gods on the jagged walls were of degenerate character—and always, when degeneration sets in, the cruellest form of worship has been chosen. The worship of Aten, the Sun God, Wes recalled, was one that demanded human sacrifice....

Still they went down. Savage crevices, split in the days when the volcano roared with fire and gushing lava, were skirted; crude ladders reached down ever-recurring pits, beneath which there was always another corridor, and always leading down. Craig could not reckon the depth they must be at; he knew that the heat was growing, though, and that his skin was wet with perspiration beneath his furs. He started to ask Taia the question that ceaselessly tormented him—how her race had come to the arctic; but a prick from Shabako's sword silenced him.

Then the passageway they were in widened. There was a bend just ahead. Through the gloom came the sonorous chant of many voices.

"The Temple!" whispered Taia.

They turned the bend, and saw, ahead, lit by a thick cluster of oil lamps which threw a broad swathe of yellowish light, two tall columns of corrupt Egyptian design. They framed the entrance to the Sun God's Temple. The full volume of a chant of worship from inside poured through them.

Shabako's sword brooked no pause. He drove his prisoners straight through.

A host of impressions thronged Wes's bewildered eyes: a huge, misty-dark room, columns lining it—the vague form of a great idol squatting at the far end, massed people bowed before it—a weird chant rising into murmuring echoes along the high, dim ceiling. There were priests standing rigidly in front of the idol, their hands stretched high; and every eye was upon them. None saw the three in the doorway until a roar split the drone of worship.

"Way! Way for thy Pharaoh, Shabako the Fourth!"

Shabako had stepped for the moment in front of his prisoners. His sword blade was waved aloft; his bawl rudely interrupted the ceremony. The chant stopped, and silence fell as the priests whirled around. The worshippers, too, turned and stared at the man who had broken the service with his imperious command.

"Way!" the vibrant voice cried again. "Aside for thy Pharaoh, who returns to the shrine of Aten, Father of Life!"

Some sixty bewildered faces peered at the man. The silence of the buried Temple was solid, awesome. Through the mist of wreathing incense-smoke and heavy shadows the giant head of the idol stared down, cruel in the coldness of the rock it had been chiselled from.

But a pathway cleared in the thick of the crowd, and, without a glance to either side, Shabako's proud figure strode down it, driving his prisoners before him.

Craig heard low gasps of astonishment, glimpsed the people fall back as he walked forward, saw the amazement in their eyes. The statue of the god seemed to grow as he neared the altar; it was in squatting posture, with

hands outstretched, one above the other. The American was to learn the reason for that position later. Now he had only a fleeting impression of it, for a man stepped from his ceremonial position beside the god's feet and met Shabako halfway.

His face was thin and cunning, with slanted rat's eyes. Ornate head-dress and stiffly inlaid robes denoted him to be the High Priest. He held a claw-like hand high.

"Hold!" he bade shrilly. "Who art thou to come thus into the Temple, calling thyself Shabako—Shabako, who has been dead these twenty years?"

The words were a thunderbolt of surprise, both to the Pharaoh and Taia, and to Wes Craig. He could not see Shabako's face, but he saw his tall form pause, and his tensed muscles relax.

"Dead ... these twenty years?" the Egyptian at last repeated slowly, struggling to overcome the shock. "Why, 'twas but a few hours ago that I left this Temple, in pursuit of—" He peered at the priest's sly face. "Who art thou?" he demanded suddenly.

"Hrihor, High Priest of Aten."

Craig heard the girl whisper something, inaudible because of her surprise, but Shabako's bewildered voice cut in:

"Hrihor! It cannot be! Thou art not Hrihor! When last I saw Hrihor, he was an under-priest of twenty. Ay was High Priest of the Temple! Call him! Where is Ay?"

"Dust," said the priest. "Dust these ten years and more."

Wes's senses were reeling. The bodies in the ice—he had taken it for granted they had only lain there for days; a week at most. That they had been entrapped for twenty years was incredible. Had he known that, he would not even have thought of using the Kundrenaline. Twenty years ago he had been a boy of eight; it meant—Lord!—it meant the youthful girl

beside him was twice her age; and Shabako an old man! Old—yet young! Fantastic, unimaginable—yet true!

He saw Shabako pass a hand over his face, as if his body were suddenly tired; but the next moment it tautened again and he swung around. His face was unreadable. A multitude of conflicting emotions struggled there. He strode to a group of several of the older men.

"Look at me!" he cried, facing them squarely. "Look well at my features! Am I not he who twenty years ago—as the High Priest says—pursued the priestess and her lover into the land of ice? Am I not the man who ruled thee? Am I not Shabako? Is this not the priestess, Taia?"

They stared at him. Remembrance suddenly gleamed on their faces. A thin, cracked voice shrilled:

"Yea! Thou art Shabako! Thou art Shabako as he was twenty years ago—old, yet without the lines of age on thy brow! And the priestess—well do I remember her. That is she!"

A hand pointed at the trembling girl; all eyes centered on her. The High Priest's mouth dropped open, and he believed.

Then Shabako breathed deeply, drew himself up and with kingly dignity faced the ranks of his people, sword again held imperiously aloft.

"Thou hast seen!" he cried. "Thou hast heard! Here is the guilty Taia—and here am I, returned to thee, still with the strength of my prime! As I was about to slay the rash Inaros, the ice entrapped us, and for twenty years we lay thus, while my spirit pursued those two guilty ones across the River of Death. Then Aten aided me, filled my veins with His holy fire and melted the ice from our bodies. We lived and breathed again. With His divine help I slew Inaros and brought the transgressing virgin back to the Temple. Twenty years have passed—but of years Aten thinks nothing. Give praise to our God!"

A breathless silence swallowed his shout. Then a mighty roar burst out, an exultant roar that soared up past the impassive image of the god and rolled in thunderous echoes along the roof. "Praise to Aten! Praise to Aten!"

Wesley Craig smiled wryly. He could hardly credit the Kundrenaline's power in wiping twenty years away; but it was evidently true. Shabako, he saw, really believed the superstition-conceived story he had just spun, so—now what?

The High Priest was staring at him malevolently, his slanted eyes fastened on his garb of furs. His weedy voice pierced through the echoes.

"O divine Shabako," he questioned shrilly, "who is this stranger?"

The Pharaoh's glance was contemptuous. "A blasphemer," he said harshly. "One who dares claim—"

But Wes had understood the question. He stepped forward. Frankly and simply, he told his story.

"I found thy ruler and the maid and her lover in the ice, entrapped," he concluded. "I cut them out and, with a fluid which is of common knowledge in my country, restored them to life. I told this to Shabako, but he overpowered me and—"

"Hear thou!" bawled the Pharaoh, furiously breaking in. "Blasphemy! He claims the might of the God! Back, dog, lest I kill thee here myself!"

Wes saw how hopeless it was; he shrugged and stepped back. He read all too plainly the hatred in Shabako's eyes; his frank story had also apparently inflamed the High Priest against him. There was not a friend in the whole Temple, save the girl—and the next moment Hrihor walked to her.

His slanted eyes ran over her figure. A sneering smile appeared. "So!" he observed mockingly. "Taia is returned to the Temple! Yes, well do I remember thee now—the scornful cast of thy mouth, the proud bearing of thy head. Even Aten thou were scornful of, I remember. Aten remembers too!" He turned slightly. "Listen, O Shabako. Three days ago thy elected successor, Siptah, died. We had met to choose a new ruler. But, by the will of the God, thou art returned and art again Pharaoh. Thy people are grateful

to Aten. In twelve hours a sacrifice shall proclaim our gratitude." His crafty eyes again swung to the girl. "There!" he shrilled, "—she pays for her sin. She is the sacrifice!"

There was a great shout from the crowd, but the words that Shabako then cried savagely were plainly audible to Wes Craig.

"Aye. Taia. O High Priest—and the blasphemous stranger, too! Both shall die in the hands of Aten!"

The priest nodded, smiling cruelly. "'Tis well, Shabako. Both shall die!"

Taia's frightened eyes met Craig's, then lifted to the form of the idol. He too peered up at it, and for the first time its hideousness and the cold-blooded cruelty of its design struck him.

The rudely carved figure was a full forty feet high. The impassive face, horrible in the lifelessness of rock, stared unseeingly down on its worshippers. One gross black hand was held some ten feet above the palm of the other, and, inserted in its palm, was a long, keen-pointed blade. The living sacrifice would be tied to the lower palm; the upper, by some trickery, would be made to slowly descend....

A surge of panic swept over Craig. In his mind he saw the slight, helpless form of the girl strapped to that grim paw, saw the knife inch down, saw it touch and prick and finally drive through her heart. And it would be the same for him! A flame of blind fury burst in him, making him reckless; mad.

"The hell we die!" he yelled, in English, and with a great bound he was at Taia's side. A priest leaped for him, but Craig shot a foot out and sent him sprawling. Then, with eyes flaming and legs outthrust, he stood in front of the girl, facing the worshippers.

"Fools!" he roared. "Listen to me! My words are truthful! I do not lie, as does thy Pharaoh! I can prove that which I say! I can—"

"Take him!" the High Priest shrieked. "Forward! Take him!"

Craig could handle one or two, but not a dozen. A mass of men, women, soldiers, priests, swept at him. There was a brief moment of struggle, of oaths and shouts and excited yells from the crowd in the Temple, till something thudded into the American's head and he went down. Feet trampled him; men surged over him; then blessed unconsciousness enwrapped him, and he knew no more.

He did not hear, as did Taia, Shabako's command:

"To a chamber with them! Guard them well, till the time of sacrifice!"

A small party, led by the stocky figure of the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, wound its way through a network of corridors, past jagged walls down which water slowly dripped, across a swaying bridge of hides that spanned an awful chasm in the volcano's very heart, and came at last to a large dark hole in the rock.

The captain turned. "In there!" he commanded harshly. The two figures, man and girl, were dumped like sacks of flour into the gloomy chamber. The men who had carried them turned and tramped away; the captain faced one who had stayed.

"Guard them with thy life, Sitah. Thou knowest the payment for carelessness."

Sitah nodded grimly. He was fully armed, with spear and sword. He sat down outside the dark hole, and the captain retraced his steps. The pad of his feet on the floor died away, and then, for a long time, there was silence.

Perhaps every five minutes Sitah turned and stared down into the hole behind, ears craned for the slightest sound. But none came. The two inside, no doubt, were asleep.

It was very hot, down in the deep-buried corridor, and though Sitah was accustomed to the heat, he soon found his eyelids drooping and his whole

body crying out for sleep. But he did not go to sleep. He knew too well what would befall him in Aten's hands if he did. He had seen many old men and women die in those hands, on ceremony days—old people who croaked in helpless agony as the keen knife blade dropped slowly down toward them, paused a second, inches from their hearts, and then plunged in with a rush. Old men and women, useless, their years of service gone. Yes, and many unwanted girl children....

That was what the Sun God demanded. His hands reached ever for human bodies. It was cruel, but he was a god; and who was to question the will of a god?

Sitah was very glad when, after six hours of lonely vigil, another guard relieved him and took his place outside the dark hole. Sitah spoke humorously to him, a grim kind of humor, as befitting one who has seen much death.

"They sleep, Hapu," he said, nodding into the prison. "But soon a longer sleep will come for them—the sleep of the knife!" He chuckled as he made his way far below, to his bed. A few hours of rest and he would be in fine fettle for the ceremony.

The relieving guard grunted and peered into the cell. He saw two dark figures outstretched, mere blobs of black, a little blacker than the shadows. Yes, they slept....

He sat down on the bench Sitah had just vacated. He had four hours to wait. Then the priests, led by Hrihor, would come, and the ceremony would begin, and the god's hands would move together. It would be a fine show! He looked forward to it keenly. It would be delicious to see that girl Taia bared to the knife. It would please the god: seldom did his hands hold such a beautiful sacrifice. And the queer stranger, too—he would probably die very noisily. When he saw the knife sliding down, he would regret his blasphemy and shriek for forgiveness!

For along time Hapu sat quite motionless. He was a good watchdog. Hours passed; his vigil was nearing its end; the priests would soon come. Soon—

A slight noise came from the cell behind him.

He whirled around. The noise came again, louder. A voice cried out.

"Water! Water! I am dying!"

Hapu grunted. It was the stranger's voice. The stranger must not die; it would spoil the ceremony; Aten would be wroth. He stared into the hole.

One of the figures was tossing, writhing painfully. The agonized cry echoed again. "Water! Please! I am dying!"

Hapu strode into the cell.

For a moment he stood still, peering down at the tossing figure. His brain suddenly shouted alarm. This was no human body! "What—" he began.

But the question was never finished. Something hard crashed into the back of his skull; his spear dropped with a clank, and he slumped to the floor.

Out of the shadows, behind, a man emerged and bent down over the outstretched figure of the guard. A smile appeared on the man's lean face: the guard was out—cold. It took Wes Craig just a moment to ascertain this; then he tiptoed over to a dark form that lay on the floor—the girl, whose pale, anxious face peered up out of the shadows. Craig cut her bonds with the guard's sword and raised her to her feet. She stood close to him, clinging to him, trembling, almost not believing she was free.

Her eyes were filled with awe as she looked up into the American's eyes. "First thou didst restore me to life," she whispered, "and now thou hast broken thy bonds. Surely, thou must be a god!"

Wes smiled. "It was simple, Taia. Look! This buckle on my belt—'tis sharp. I edged it round and cut the rope. It was slow work, else we would have been free long before."

"But I saw thee toss and writhe on the floor, and cry out for water!"

Craig kicked a pile of furs that had been heaped one on top of the other, and tied together with thread from an unraveled woolen mitten. "This was my body," he said coolly. "Furs. The cell must be a storeroom for them—lucky for us. I was standing with a rock in my hand near the door, when I cried out for water.... We shall not die in Aten's hands, Taia! See—I have a sword. With luck—"

There was a warmer quality than reverence in Taia's eyes when she spoke—though she did not realize it. "Then come quickly, O Stranger!" she said. "The guard has been changed once; the time for sacrifice nears!"

Craig nodded. Only a sword was in his hand; his automatic, he found, had been taken from him while he lay unconscious in the Temple, probably desired as a curious heathen object. The discovery, made when he had cut his bonds, had been a serious blow to his hopes: with a sword, he was only a human being, but with a gun he might have passed as supernatural to this primitive race.

But it could not be helped. He peered to each side, gestured to the girl, and together they started up the sloping incline of the corridor.

The heat of the earth was great, down where they were, and it made the passageway muggy and odorous. Fitful shadows were flung by widely separated oil lamps as they pressed forward—grotesque splotches of black that half a dozen times tightened the American's grasp on his sword, sure that a guard had come upon them. He knew that their margin of time in which to effect escape was small, and he gradually quickened their pace, sacrificing caution for speed. Taia's hand was in his left; and he had just turned to her to ask if they were taking the best course up to the surface, when suddenly she stopped short.

"Hearken!" she whispered, frightened.

Wes craned his ears. For a moment there was nothing but silence. Then a faint sound trembled through the shadows. It could only have been that of

many approaching footsteps.

"The priests!" Taia murmured, tightening her grip on his hand. "They come!"

There was a sharp bend in the corridor fifty feet ahead; from behind it a growing clatter of sandals echoed through the rock-walled passageway. Craig paused, irresolute. "Are we blocked, ahead?" he asked.

"Yes," her low voice hurriedly told him. "But we can go back, cross the bridge of the chasm and go up the other side. But others may be there, and —"

A shout cut her words short. Dim figures appeared around the bend in the passage. They were discovered!

Wes Craig's face set grimly; he worked his hand into a good grip on the sword handle, looked levelly at the gathering crowd ahead and said:

"I think it best to face them now, Taia. I can hold them for minutes at least; thou canst perhaps escape. Rest assured I shall take that High Priest with me, when I cross thy River of Death!"

"But where can I go?" cried the girl. "Nay, Divine One—I shall stay at thy side!"

The excited yells of Hrihor, urging the others forward, came plainly to their ears. Swords glittered in the gloom of the corridor, and like a foam-tipped wave that slowly gathers speed the group of priests and soldiers charged down on the man and girl. Craig saw that she would not run.

"Then come!" he shouted, and swung her around. With desperate speed they retraced their steps. They soon passed their cell, and recklessly leaped through the deceptive shadows on the far side, on down the corridor.

The High Priest and the others followed close behind. His crafty face was distorted with rage, and he kept screaming to his men: "The wrath of the

God on thee if they escape!" Craig's ears caught that, and he found time for a bitter smile. *If!* If only they had left him his automatic! A few bullets flung into them would even matters a trifle.

The corridor twisted and slanted ever downward. They panted around a corner and came to the brink of a dark pit. "Down!" cried the girl. She led the way, nimbly dropping down the fifteen-foot rawhide ladder that was there. Halfway down the ladder Wes reached up with his sword and cut it from where it was fastened. He fell to the bottom of the hole with a grunt. As he extricated himself from the ladder's entangling meshes be yelled up, "Come and get us, you cutthroats—if you can!" and was off after the lithe form of the girl.

But the action helped them but little, and added only a few feet to the distance between them and their pursuers, for they boldly made the deep drop without sending for another ladder. Taia was sobbing for air, and Wes himself beginning to feel the bitter pang of hopelessness when they rounded a corner and came to a great chasm—a wide cleft in the very heart of the volcano. A terrific heat came from its maw of unbroken black, and a peculiar, choking odor, sulphurous. Across it was a slender framework of hides and thongs—a mere catwalk over the terrible depths below.

"You first!" Craig snapped, and as Taia started across a spear came hurtling from the mob behind, and clanked against the rocky wall on the far side. Nimbly Taia sped over the bridge, and Wes, the yells of Hrihor and his men loud in his ears, followed.

Midway a long spear snaked after him. It missed by inches, and went pitching into the gulf. In his haste he caught his foot on the interlaced thongs, stumbled and almost fell—which saved his life, for another spear streaked through the very spot he had been a second before. Then he was across, and his sword was flashing in vicious hacks at one of the two main supporting thongs of the bridge.

The hide was tough, but Craig's strength was that of a desperate man, and in several mighty strokes he severed it. The framework slumped to one side,

held only by one thong. Hrihor, half across, croaked in sudden horror and sprang back as he saw the stranger raise his blade to carve through the other support. But even as the sword swept down a spear streamed from a warrior's hand and thudded against Wes's right shoulder.

His sword jarred loose. It fell into the chasm.

"Thou art hurt!" cried the girl. Wes grinned wryly.

"Nay," he said, "but weaponless. Lead on!"

They were now on the other side of the chasm in the tunneled volcano. The priests had hesitated a moment when the bridge had slackened; but now, seeing the weaponless man and girl disappear in a tortuous corridor ahead, they sidled across the damaged catwalk after their fierce leader.

"They will go past the Temple!" Hrihor shrilled. "It is Taia who leads him: again she tries to escape to the land of ice! Follow—up here!"

His words were true. The corridor that led by the Temple was the one which led to the only other passage up to the crater of the volcano.

But Taia had guided Craig only a few steps past the place of worship, now a silent vault of impenetrable blackness when, turning a corner, the American felt her shrink back.

"Shabako comes!" she told him faintly.

Quickly he verified it. Led by the Pharaoh himself, a party of soldiers was coming down the corridor some thirty yards away. Even as Wes saw them, they saw him—and Shabako's roar of sudden alarm tingled his ears.

Priests behind, soldiers and the blood-lustful Pharaoh ahead. They were cut off, blocked, trapped. There was no nearby branch passage to run down; there was no way to turn. It was the end of the game.... But no, not quite, Craig told himself grimly. His sword was gone, but his fists would tell on

them before he went down, before the paws of the idol finally claimed him....

He stepped before Taia, clenched his fists, and waited the shock of the charge.

He could see the fury in Shabako's narrowed eyes, so close were they, when a soft hand pulled him back. It was Taia's.

"Come!" she whispered, and darted swiftly back to the gloomy, shadow-filled entrance of the Temple. And wondering, Wes Craig followed.

She glided through the pillared portal and was immediately swallowed up by a shroud of silent, velvety darkness. Wes could not see her, but her soft hand touched his arm lightly to guide him forward, and he sensed the girl's warm body close to his. Where was she going? Inevitably they would be trapped in the far end of the Temple, beneath the very hands of the idol—or so he thought. But he trusted her, and went on.

A shout came from the entrance. "They went in here!" someone cried, and the two heard Shabako detailing swift instructions to his men—instructions which were cut short by another clatter of feet and the approaching voice of Hrihor. Priests and soldiers had joined, a confusion of men, most of them hanging back, half afraid to venture into the well of blackness that was Aten's abode on earth.

But the Pharaoh whipped them into discipline with the harsh tones of his voice, and strung them into a close line, to advance slowly through the Temple. "Have thy blades ready!" he added. "They cannot escape us now: they are trapped. Forward!"

Nothing could get through that line. It was like a fine-toothed comb, with every tooth a man. Craig saw it coming, and knew that he and the girl could not go much farther back, for already he sensed

himself directly beneath the looming figure of Aten. Yet the gentle touch led him on—around and past the idol into the furthermost corner of the Temple. It was then that Taia paused, felt around, and placed Craig's right hand upon some unseen knob in the wall. Her faint whisper hurriedly explained the purpose of the knob as Wes drank in her words eagerly.

"There is a secret room behind the idol, from whence the priests ape the God's voice and move his hands at sacrifice. A priest should be there e'en now, ready for the ceremony. Thou must overcome him, Divine One, and we too can hide therein. Hrihor dare not search for us there while others are present, for e'en Shabako knows not of the room. Quick, then—they come! Thy hand is on the latch of the secret panel. I follow thee!"

Wes pressed the girl's hand tightly and his body tensed. Then, without hesitation, he jerked the secret panel back. A faint glow of light lay ahead, and he plunged into the tiny room that lay revealed.

An alarmed face stared up—the priest! Wes leaped at him, his steely fingers thumbing into the man's throat and throttling its scream to a gasping choke. All the American's pent-up fury went into a lunge that the priest could not begin to stand against. He was bowled sharply over and went down. Craig on top, and there the fight ended as suddenly as it had begun. The priest's head thudded into the smooth rock floor; a convulsion quivered his body; he moaned and lay still.

A grim flicker in his eyes, Craig got up and looked around for Taia. Then astonishment and cold fear swept through him.

The secret door was closed—but she was not inside!

"Now what—" Wesley Craig gasped.

He did not dare finish the thought. He glared around, much as a trapped tiger does, his brain a turmoil. His eyes fell on a ladder that led up from the floor to a niche in the left wall—a slit about forty feet high, a pool of darkness, shadowed from the thin tongue of flame that lit the room. Only half realizing what the slit was, Wes sprang forward and leaped

up the ladder. A platform was built high up inside the niche, a place for a man to stand on. The American reached it, pressed himself forward, and peered through a tiny hole that was in the rock ahead. He knew it ought to command a view of the Temple.

But if it did, Craig could see nothing, for there was no light in the huge vault outside. For minutes the brooding silence was not broken, save by an occasional scraping sound made by one of the searching line of men. There was no hint of the girl who waited beside the hideous figure of the god, nor of the network that gradually closed in on her.

But suddenly the silence was shattered by a shout.

"I have her!" someone yelled. Then came a multitude of sounds. The piercing voice of Hrihor was audible above them all.

"Light the lamps! Hast thou the other, too?"

"Nay—he is not here."

"Not here? What—"

A spark of light made an erratic course from the Temple door: someone was bringing a flame to light the lamps. A moment later there was a flare of yellow light as the oil in a large wall lamp caught fire, and then the darkness melted further before a wave of light from the opposite wall. Now could be seen the warriors who, with gleaming outdrawn swords, were clustered around the girl. Shabako was gripping her arm and shaking her roughly: the High Priest was drawing to a stop before her, to stand glaring at her with hate-inflamed eyes.

"Tell us!" roared the Pharaoh. "Where is the man?"

She looked at him levelly. Her eyes were quite calm, and she breathed evenly. There was a glorious light in her eyes as she replied.

"I will tell thee," she said; "though thou wilt not comprehend. He vanished. Vanished, even as a god. He was here beside me, in the darkness and then

suddenly he was gone. But why not? For he was a god...."

The soldiers gaped at her. Silence came down in the Temple. The High Priest did not break it, but only stared closely at the girl with eyes that suddenly had something more than hate in them—comprehension, and a trace of fear....

But the Pharaoh Shabako's eyes were only wrathful, and he shouted:

"A god? Vanished, sayest thou? Lies! Lies! But thou canst not lie to Aten! The God knows of a way to loosen thy tongue!"

Despite herself, Taia shuddered. She knew that way.

Gradually the Temple was filling with other worshippers come to see the sacrifice, and soon there were sixty or seventy of them. The men outnumbered the women two to one, and none of them was very old. Fifty was about their age limit—and those who were near this age were reluctant to let their eyes rest on the hands of the idol. When they did glance at them, and at the cruel knife blade in the upper one, fear showed on their faces. There were also very few children....

Hrihor's thin features grew unreadable in the coldness that settled upon them. He was now in the role of High Priest: apart, separate from the common mob before him; interpreter of Aten's divine mysteries: playing his part of one who listened to a god's awful whisperings. Impassively he superintended the binding of Taia by a priestess, who tightened the cords around the girl's slim body with claw-like hands, a gleam of unholy anticipation on her fleshless, soured face. Then the High Priest turned from the altar and faced the crowd of people.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Silence, before thy God Aten!"

A hush fell instantly. Their eyes centered on the bound figure of the girl, standing just beside the lowermost hand of the idol that would presently claim her. Her face was very pale, but none could detect fear in it. There was an uneasy stir, a shifting of feet, a mumbling, as her fresh young beauty

struck the watchers. Somewhere a man muttered that she was very young to die. Aten had returned her once: perhaps the God did not wish her to perish.... His neighbor demurred. And the ceremony went on.

Ornate but crude censers were in the hands of two priests; the incense was lit by long tapers, and its acrid odor wound up in wavering purple spirals of smoke. On each side of Hrihor were five under-priests, eyes stiffly on their superior's impassive face. The soldiers had retreated from the altar and now were massed in the rear of the Temple, their spear blades glittering dully above their heads.

The High Priest raised his hands slowly, and stared with glazed eyes into the gloom of the ceiling, high above. "Praise!" he shrilled. "Praise to Aten!"

The assembled worshippers joined him in the chant of sacrifice. It was low and soft, and, at first, almost drowsy, like the slow stir of a tropical wind through palm leaves. But soon it quickened with rising tones from perfectly concerted voices; it soared up; its tenor changed; it became fierce, lustful, eager for blood, eager for the sacrifice, a heathen chant shrilling for sight of a girl's body in the god's, awful hands.

And it died in a sad, discordant moan on an expectant note....

Hrihor's body, stiff and rigid in its ceremonial robes, did not seem human as he stretched his arms straight forward and wheeled silently to the huge idol of stone. A full two minutes he stood without so much as flicking an eyelash; then, not shifting his glazed stare, he harshly intoned:

"Ages ago our ancestors set out from the homeland of Egypt in a great galley, bound for the barbarian countries of the north in quest of metal. But storms seized upon them, drove them far from their course, till at last, weak from hunger, they came to this land of ice, where their galley was wrecked and they were cast ashore. At first all was dark; then came the Sun God Aten's life giving rays, leading them to this mountain, which they inhabited and in which they carved this Temple wherein to worship the God who had saved them. The lord of the galley was the first Pharaoh; the priest of the

galley was called High Priest; the Pharaoh took a concubine to wife—and thus was our civilization begun.

"There were virgins of the Temple, holy, set apart from man, sacred to Aten. Never did one betray her sacred trust—never, until Taia fled to the land of ice with the sacrilegious Inaros. Our mighty Pharaoh pursued them, and after twenty years, by Aten's special grace, slew the man and brought the maid back to pay for her transgression. Never before has this happened."

He paused, waiting. An under-priest spoke; evidently following some ritual.

"Here is the priestess, O High Priest of Aten! What penalty must she pay?"

"Death in Aten's hands!" the cold voice shrilled instantly. "The God wills it!"

But now came an interruption, unexpected and disconcerting to the well-laid plans of Hrihor. The voice of Pharaoh Shabako cried out:

"Another came with this priestess—a blasphemous stranger! He lies concealed; the maid will not tell where! High Priest, let her be tortured in Aten's hands until she reveals where he is!"

For a moment Hrihor lost his mask-like rigidity, of expression. His eyes shifted nervously. But Shabako was not to be denied. Again be repeated his demand.

"We must pray to Aten to make his hand descend on her, prick and gash her, till she divulges!"

A murmur arose from the people in the Temple: they approved the torture. Hrihor, obviously reluctant, was forced to comply.

"O mighty Aten," he cried, turning to the idol, "thou hast heard our Pharaoh. We pray to thee to lay thy hand on the priestess Taia, till she tells where the stranger lies concealed!"

Shabako nodded in approval. While a mumbled prayer rose, four priests strode to the girl, lifted her slight form and flung it on the upturned lower band of the idol. They strapped her there securely, her breast but ten feet below the waiting knife. Even then she did not struggle or cry out.

She did not know who had won the fight inside the secret room, but her heart told her it was the mysterious stranger, for was he not a god?—She would not be afraid, for he would surely reveal his divinity, and save her, even as he had from her twenty-year death, and from her bonds in the cell where they had been imprisoned....

The softly chanted prayer surged through the Temple. Hrihor's slitted eyes were on the knife in the upper palm of the idol. Suddenly he flung up his arms, and cried:

"Now, O Aten!"

The prayer stopped. With fearful interest the people stared at the dagger, at the inert figure of the girl—the more elderly seeing in her a hint of what was to come to them when their days of service were ended.

The knife started downward.

Taia's eyes were closed. Her breathing was even and regular. She did not seem at all aware of the shaft of steel that slowly, in the hushed gasp from the audience, stirred with the stone hand that held it and moved deliberately downward.

To the silent crowd of worshippers it was a religious phenomenon, and well calculated to strike fear and awe into their hearts. The moving idol seemed to be a living thing, motivated by the unseen spirit of the god it represented, who caused the massive upper hand to execute his will. Its movement was slow and clumsy, and close listeners would have heard a slight creaking noise from somewhere behind it—but the ears of the worshippers were deaf from the fear and the horror in which they were vicariously participating.

Slowly the hands came together, until the long, wicked shear was but a foot above the bound girl.... It dropped to within inches of her flesh....

And there it stopped.

Then, before the amazed crowd could realize what was happening, before even Hrihor could control the surprise that raised his brows incredulously, the palm in which the blade was implanted slowly retraced its course and returned to its original position.

A breathless silence reigned in the Temple. The hand was motionless. It did not stir again.

"The God will not touch his priestess!"

It was a faint, awed whisper that came from someone amongst the worshippers. But Hrihor heard it, and so did the other priests. While they stared at each other, utterly at a loss, the whisper was taken up and repeated on all sides.

"The God will not touch his priestess!"

The High Priest sensed the crowd's conviction, and sensed them turning against him. His beady eyes glanced around nervously. His lips a thin line, he called to his second ranking priest in a tense whisper, and, when the other came to him, muttered in his ear:

"'Tis the stranger, hiding in the secret chamber, who does this! He has overcome our brother there, and now controls the levers! And Taia knows it; and if she reveals it to the people our hold will be broken! She must be killed!"

"Yes! But how? We must be quick!"

Hrihor's crafty face set cruelly. "I know a way. Watch thou...."

He strode to the fore of the altar and flung his hands high. A shrill shout from his thin lips cut the uneasy murmuring short.

"Hearken! Aten will not torture His own priestess! He will not maim those who have sworn their lives to Him!"

The silent crowd waited for his next words. He screamed savagely.

"His High Priest must perform the rite! Aten has appointed me to be His instrument of vengeance!"

A gleam of unholy exultation was in his narrowed eyes. His face worked: he thrust a hand inside his ornate ceremonial vestment.

"By Divine Will," he cried, "this knife in my hand is the knife in the God's hand!"

And he whipped a long blade from the robe.

Never before had such a ceremony been held in the Temple of Aten, the Sun God. Never before had the hand of the god paused above the living sacrifice and deliberately risen again without tasting blood. It was miracle upon miracle; half-bewildered, Pharaoh Shabako and the herd of common people alike waited for what would come next, their High Priest's savage words somewhat reassuring them that all was correct.

They saw him clench his dagger tightly and with slow steps advance to the side of the helpless girl. Glaring down at her, he swung the blade high. It poised directly over her heart. It would not torture her, Taia knew: it was death that she read in the High Priest's eyes. She closed her own, and thought of the stranger; she breathed a silent prayer to him. She waited.

"In Aten's name!" screamed Hrihor, and brought the dagger down.

At that second the sharp roar of a sudden explosion thundered through the Temple, and the startled worshippers saw, slowly trickling from the right eye of Aten, a curling streamer of gray smoke. They did not know what had happened. And not until, after a moment of fearful silence, they saw the expression on Hrihor's face change to great surprise, and saw

his right hand relax and drop the dagger to the floor, did they comprehend that he had been struck down.

He clutched at his side, staggered, twisted round, and fell full length before the feet of the god whose representative he was.

A frightened woman close to the altar saw a dark red stain on his robe, and a scream from her lips pierced out:

"He is dead! Killed by Aten—whose eyes have looked death! Oh!"

She flung herself flat on the floor, and the others, back to the soldiers in the rear, did likewise. The priests clustered together in a scared group, staring fearfully at the right eye of the idol, from which a wisp of smoke was still trailing. None dared approach the outstretched figure of the High Priest. Only Shabako dared look at him.

The Pharaoh clutched his sword tightly, muttering uneasily to himself. Not a sound came from the prostrate multitude. The slow echoes of the explosion died away; again the heavy silence fell. Then Shabako suddenly stared around, and peered up at the stone image of the god.

His ears had caught a sound. It was a panting and scuffling noise, as if men were fighting. It grew, even though muffled by apparently intervening rock. The beginning of a scream, cut short into a choke, added to its volume. The worshippers far back in the Temple heard it, and looked up. There was a muffled crash—then another crash of thundering noise, similar to the one that had come from the god's eye.

But this time no smoke eddied from the eye. The explosion echoed through the Temple and died away, while all the time Pharaoh Shabako stared at the idol. Slow comprehension broke through the bewilderment on his face. Suddenly he swung around and gripped the cowering form of the second ranking priest, who stood near him.

"From whence came those sounds, Priest?" he hissed. "Tell me!"

The frightened priest gibbered unintelligibly, but there was a guilty look on his face which spurred Shabako on. He shook the man and roared the question again. Then the priest spoke.

"They came—from—the secret chamber," he stammered.

A gasp rose from the crowd behind. But before they could master their astonishment, Shabako had whipped his sword from its sheath and sprung up the altar.

"Show me this chamber!" he cried.

Up on the platform in the secret room, his eye glued to the hole that was the eye of Aten, Wes Craig had seen and heard everything that had transpired. He had been shocked to see the brave thing Taia had submitted to, rather than divulge where he was hidden. Sacrificing herself, so that he, a stranger, might have a few more minutes of life! It hurt.

He had climbed down from the platform and glared around the lower floor of the secret room again, scanning shelves that were crowded with scores of curious objects, sacred relics, properties to aid in the manipulation of the

idol and other unidentifiable things—looking for a potential weapon. If the girl had to die—and he—it would be better to go out and meet his enemies, taking some of them with him in full fight.

And then his heart leaped madly at the sight of something lying on one of the shelves.

A stumpy black shape, it was, with a short barrel of cold blue steel, and it looked as much out of place in that chamber as did the fur-clad man who stared half-unbelievingly at it. It was a foreigner, as he was, in the gloomy corridors and chambers of the race that worshipped Aten. It too was American. It was a friend—his automatic!

To Wes Craig, bewildered and tired and sadly without hope, it almost seemed to be alive, smiling at him with its wicked round mouth. He picked it up, and it bolstered his courage, his hope and his energy enormously. At once he leaped to the closed entrance-door and felt for the lever that opened it. But there he paused a moment to think.

There was only the faintest chance of fighting free with Taia now. There were at least thirty men outside, and he had only seven bullets. And then he remembered where he was, and what the purpose of the secret room was. He remembered, also, a certain nervous expression on the High Priest's face that he had just seen....

He swung around and inspected the levers and crude wheels of wood that led to a handle up in the niche, shoulder-high to whoever might stand on the platform there. He had had experience with certain idols in Egypt. He remembered particularly one that had been worshipped in a degenerate age —its hands, its eyes. And then he stepped over the sprawling body of the still unconscious priest and climbed to the platform and his peep-hole again.

As he pressed himself forward in the niche, and applied his eye to the slit, he gently fingered the handle of the large lever right beside him. And he also measured the size of the slit in the right eye of the god....

Craig had not minded shooting the murderous High Priest Hrihor, but he did not want to kill the under-priest in the secret room. He had had no choice in the matter. At the tensest moment in the dramatic scene in the Temple, just when he had been hoping that the mysterious death he had sent to Hrihor would frighten the worshippers away, he had heard a slight rustling sound behind him, and had turned just in time to see a hate-distorted face within feet of him, and a short curved-knife upraised to strike him in the back. It was the priest, whom he had left unconscious below, now revived and coming to kill him.

Wes could have shot the man then and there, but he knew the thunder of his gun would betray his presence; so, using the weapon as a club he had struck out at his attacker and tried to block the thrust of the knife. For a moment he was successful; but the knife proved the better weapon in the close rough and tumble scuffle that ensued and, with its point at his very throat, Wes had been forced to shoot.

He had killed the man instantly, but he felt no slightest relief. Like a tiger—even before the crashing echoes had died away in the little room—he sprang back to his peep-hole to see what the effect was outside. And just what he feared most was happening. The frightened priest in the Temple was telling the suspicious Shabako about the hidden chamber—and even then was leading him to the secret entrance!

The two passed the American's line of vision, and after a moment he heard them fumbling at the catch of the panel. He could shoot them both down, easily, but there would still be a whole Temple full of warriors and priests to be faced with only three bullets!

Then, in a flash, came an inspiration.

Wes swung around, leveled the automatic's muzzle at the hole in the idol's eye, sighted carefully, and squeezed the trigger. And as the explosion boomed through the vast chamber outside, he veered the gun in a different aim and fired again and again.

The two huge oil lamps, imbedded one in each side wall, splintered and crashed.

"Now for it!" Wes Craig muttered. He sprang for the ladder, snatching the dagger of the dead priest as he passed, and half-slid, half-tumbled to the floor below. At once he was at the secret door and grasping the lever that worked it; and, pausing only to take a deep breath, he plunged out.

He came into a scene of wildest confusion. Panic-stricken screams rang in his ears; the oil from the cracked lamps, transformed into splatters of flame, had splashed down from the walls and scattered fire over much of the floor. A tumult of shadows moiled through the flames as the crowd fought to get free. Shrieks and gasps and curses cut through the air: the worshippers were caught up in a mob panic caused more by their superstitious frenzy than by the understandable fire. The flames pierced fantastically into the blackness, throwing a vivid glow on the frantic faces of the people who struggled to get out of their reach. The altar was deserted, save for the girl who still lay on the hand of the idol....

Wes Craig, a blur in the wavering shadows, darted to her side. His dagger sped through the cords that bound her, and he lifted her slight form down. For a moment she clung to him.

"I knew thou wouldst come, Divine One!" she whispered. "I knew!"

He smiled for answer, gripped her hand, and then swiftly led her along the least crowded wall of the Temple towards the door, packed with a frantic, struggling crowd of soldiers, people and priests.

The deceptive shadows thrown by the flames were kind to them; for some time no one in the whole crowd recognized the two. Everyone was reacting in a blind panic of fear from the mysterious thunders that had killed their High Priest, splintered the lamps, and caused the resultant inferno of leaping fire. But discovery was inevitable, and at last one did see the fleeing pair—one who had kept his head and was looking for them. It was Shabako. He roared:

"The stranger escapes—and the girl! There, there! Hold them!"

His imperative shout brought a measure of control to the soldiers, who were fighting to get through the doorway. They grouped uncertainly together, gripping their swords and staring wildly around. They saw, in the ruddy light of the flames, a grim-faced man pressing into them, holding in one hand a stubby black object, and in the other the arm of the sacrifice, Taia.

Wes cursed, and, forgetting that the warriors understood no English, ordered them in that tongue to make way for him. For answer, one of them leaped out at him, his sword swinging up. Craig's face set; he levelled the automatic and fired. The bullet caught the man in the midst of his leap; he spun round, his sword clanked to the floor, and he fell.

Wes fired again at the staring mob; then again; but the last time only a sharp click answered his trigger finger. He flung the gun into the thick of the hesitating warriors, swept the dead soldier's sword off the floor and pressed forward, intending to hack his way through.

But he did not have to. The other warriors were only human. They had just seen uncanny, instant death. They shrank back from the door; some even ran back from the stranger, preferring the flames to the thunder-death that he meted out. The doorway was cleared, and Craig pulled the girl through.

"Back to the left!" she gasped. "Across the bridge! Quick—Shabako comes!"

Even as they ran, they heard the Pharaoh's furious bawling as he struggled up to the door of the Temple, which he had not been able to reach for the rolling tide of fear-stricken people around him. He was shouting:

"After them—after them! They cross the bridge! Follow them, everyone! I will take the other way up and trap them! Hurry!"

He turned to the right, panting up the corridor in the direction from which he had first approached the Temple. And slowly, as they collected their

dazed wits, the swarm of warriors and priests and common people followed the fleeing pair toward the bridge.

Wes Craig was tired, but the shouting pursuit lent strength to his near-exhausted limbs. Spears snaked after Taia and him from the warriors close behind; but, once across the dangerous bridge, he disregarded them long enough to hack its supports through and see it fade into the blackness beneath. "Get across now, damn you!" he yelled, and ran again after the girl's leading figure.

All now depended on their speed in reaching the top of the extinct volcano, and of that speed he was none too confident. He had gone through two strength-sapping fights in the last hour; his nerves were ragged from the constant strain, and his breath came in racking sobs. He wished passionately he had a loaded gun—even his smashed vial of Kundrenaline. The fluid would have put marvelous new life in his weary limbs.

"Hurry, Taia!" he gasped: "we must beat them! Shabako goes some other way to head us off! If only we can get to my bird-that-flies-in-the-air!"

Once again they stumbled up the difficult passage, fighting for speed with tired bodies, bodies which every twist and obstacle tried sorely. Without the girl, Wes could never have made it: she led him unerringly through the branching, gloomily-lit corridors, up flights of rickety steps, her knowledge of several short-cuts aiding measurably the speed of their progress. Tired as he was, admiration for the mighty fire of courage that burned in Taia's frail figure, and drove it forward when all physical strength was gone, never left him. For she had been through as much as he—and even more!...

They did not know it then, but the Pharaoh had made good time on the other side. As they at last neared the cup of the crater, and passed the place where the two diverging main corridors, each slanting

downwards, met, they heard Shabako's shouts and the rapid clatter of his feet on the rock floor.

In a desperate sprint, they gained the flight of steps, stumbled up them, and came again into the glorious fresh cold air, and the slanting rays of the setting sun....

New life surged through Craig's body; but, whereas he ran across the uneven cup of the crater with fresh speed, the girl seamed suddenly to tire. He had taken the lead; now he went back, took her hand and pulled her forward, puzzled by her sudden exhaustion. He did not have time to question her, however, for the rapid beat of footsteps grew quickly very loud, and with a shout Shabako burst up into the open and caught sight of them.

The two went across the lip and slid down the slope of the volcano with all the haste they could. Shabako only twenty yards behind, his sword waving aloft and his dark face lit with a savage hate. And he was gaining—gaining steadily; and Taia was tiring more and more, and was becoming almost a dead weight on Wes Craig's supporting arm....

This was the last stretch, over almost the same ground the girl and her dead lover, Inaros, had covered twenty years before—and with the same pursuer behind. Again, by grace of the potent Kundrenaline, Shabako and the girl were enacting the desperate chase of years before, the chase that had ended in death for Inaros....

But there was a stricken look in Taia's eyes now.

"I am suddenly so tired, Divine One!" she gasped. She seemed hardly able to walk. Craig could not understand. Snatching a glance backwards, he saw that the Pharaoh, too, seemed to be strangely tiring—but gaining nevertheless....

He was practically carrying the suddenly exhausted girl when they came to the cleft in the ice from which he had dug her the day before. There was no time to get across, for before they could climb

the other side Shabako would be on them. Wes gripped the handle of his blade. Here the last fight would have to be made.

"Go down the cleft, out of the way!" he told the girl rapidly. He did not have time to help her; he swung round just in time to parry a slash of Shabako's sword with his own.

Then Wes Craig stepped back and stared at his opponent, a peculiar look in his eyes.

It might have been merely from the force of his first swipe, or he might have slipped—but Shabako staggered drunkenly and barely avoided falling. With an oath, he came erect and once more charged at the American. It was easy for Wes to avoid his thrust; it would have been childishly easy to drive his blade through the Pharaoh's unguarded chest. But somehow Craig withheld his attack, and only peered more closely at the other. He rubbed his hand across his eyes. What he was seeing was incredible.

For Shabako's face was going a ghastly white; and, as Wes watched, he groaned, tried to raise his sword arm for another blow—and could not. He staggered, legs askew, lurched crazily forward, stumbled, and at last pitched down on the ice near the cleft.

Then his great body rolled over, arms flung wide, and lay still. And the face of Pharaoh Shabako stared unseeingly up at the darkening sky....

Then, in a flash, understanding came to Wes Craig.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "The Kundrenaline!"

He had forgotten completely about the liquid he had infused into Shabako's veins. Its potency, adequate to the tremendous task of revitalizing a long-dead heart, had given out—hastened, no doubt, by the great physical exertions of the man, and made sudden by the return to the biting air of the ice fields. The liquid was only for emergency use, anyway, and supposed to serve for a period of but hours, after which the heart was intended to carry on alone.

Shabako's heart had not been able to carry on any longer....

Wes Craig was afraid to think, afraid almost to look, to see how Taia had stood the shock. Her sudden weariness became at once all too clear to him....

Slowly he turned and looked down into the cleft. He saw her—a slender, quiet little figure, flat on the ice by the body of her slain lover.

He leaped down the slippery bank and ran to her side; knelt there, and grasped her cold white hand.

The girl's eyelids were closed, but when he touched her, they flickered, and a little sigh came from her pallid lips. Then her large black eyes, opened and looked up straight into his—and when she saw him there, she smiled.

It wrenched the man's heart. "Taia!" he cried. "Taia!"

She nodded feebly, still smiling, and her lips moved. He bent close. She was whispering something. The words came to him through a great fear.

"Take me—take me, O Divine One. Take me with thee to—to thy—heaven.... Canst thou not—take—Taia?"

With her last bit of quickly ebbing strength, she pressed his hand. Then the fingers went limp in his, and her arm dropped. And her eyelids gently closed....

Wes's jaws were clenched tightly as he folded her hands across her slim body. "If thy Pharaoh had not made me drop the vial," he murmured softly, "I would again bring thee to life, Taia, and take thee to my heaven.... Though"—with a sad smile, and relapsing into English—"Times Square would not be quite the heaven you had pictured...."

He stood up. The irony of the thing gripped him, and brought a wry smile to his tight lips. The body of Inaros, her dead lover, lay at her side; and Shabako's still figure was but feet away. Once again they

were all together in death. The Kundrenaline had pierced the black veil of their silent tryst and brought them back for a few fleeting hours; but even modern science could not stand long against the weight of twenty years.

And science would not have another chance with their still bodies. They would quickly be found there by the pursuing Egyptians, and would be gone, already decaying, when he could get back with another vial....

A growing murmur of nearby voices brought the silent man back to the present. Over the cleft in the ice he saw a string of priests and warriors speeding towards him. He sighed. It was time to go. There was much he wanted to learn about these people and their strange civilization, but there was no chance for it now. Perhaps on another trip, later.

He looked a last time on Taia, lying by her lover.

Then he scrambled up the other bank and ran towards the hillock behind which a sleek black monoplane with an eight hundred horse-power motor awaited him....

The thing that followed next was never forgotten by the people who worshipped Aten, the Sun God. It went down in legends; it was repeated and repeated, and it grew in the telling. It was awful; it was magical; it was godlike.

A great thunder sounded from behind the hillock of ice, a thunder that pulsed louder and louder, until the people fell down in awe, hardly daring to look. When they did, they saw a gleaming black form that stood on queer shafts of wood come gliding with the speed of the wind from behind the hillock. It straightened out on a stretch of snow, bellowing with a loudness that hammered their eardrums into numbness, and sped lightly along till the queer shafts of wood left the surface and the sleek black object soared up into the air.

Into the air! With frightened eyes they watched it wheel around, and then come roaring towards them. They fell flat again, and did not dare to look.

The thunderous blast passed close over them, then dwindled and dwindled, until they ventured timidly to look up again.

They saw the shape ringed with sunset fire hurtling through the air, soaring up and up and up ... till it died to a speck ... till it disappeared into the face of the sun they worshipped as Aten....

A warrior spoke. His tones were low and awed but they all heard him.

"Truly," he whispered, "he was a god!..."

A ONE-BILLIONTH-OF-A-SECOND CAMERA

Through use of a spectroscopic camera with a shutter which operates in about one-billionth of a second, physicists at the University of California have been able to take pictures of the action of light at various periods during the course of an electrical spark which lasts only one one-hundred-thousandth of a second.

They have been able to show by photographic evidence that the magnetic field developed by the passage of an electric current across the spark gap gives the first light emitted a different appearance from that emitted a few millionths of a second later.

At the moment that the spark jumps, electricity is released in enormous quantities much as water is released by the breaking of a dam. It is this sudden release of the dammed-up current across the spark gap that causes the temporary magnetic field and the difference in the appearance of the light from the spark.

In answer to those who scoff at the possibility of a camera shutter operating in a billionth of a second, it was explained that the shutter is not a mechanical device, but operates automatically through the application of a physical law of light. In a general way, it might be said that the spark takes its own picture.

The spectroscope camera is set up at one end of a long corridor. When the electrical current jumps across the spark gap it sets up a momentary current

in a set of wires running the length of the corridor and connected with the camera. This current travels toward the camera at the rate of about 186,000 miles a second.

At about the same instant that the current jumps, or an infinitesimal fraction of a second later, the light of the resulting spark starts toward the camera at a trifle more than 186,000 miles a second. It is a race between the spark current and the spark light as to which arrives first. The current jumps just before the spark appears; so it is possible for the current to reach the camera and close the shutter even before the light which is to be pictured arrives.

By lengthening the wires between the spark gap and the camera the light is allowed to arrive first. By suitable adjustment of the wiring, the shutter can be made to close during any one-billionth of a second interval during the first four ten-millionths of a second of the spark's short life.

The camera shutter consists of two Nicol prisms of Iceland spar and balsam, arranged in such a way that under ordinary conditions the light coming from the spark is stopped by polarization and prevented from reaching the camera. Between these two prisms, however, is a solution of chemicals which will depolarize the light and allow it to continue.

The wires leading from the spark gap connect with this solution. When the current jumps across the gap it races down the corridor and electrifies the solution for about one-billionth of a second. This electrification removes the depolarizing effects of the solution and light passage stops; in other words, the shutter is closed.

"Good Lord! What's this?"

The Diamond Thunderbolt

By H. Thompson Rich

Locked in a rocket and fired into space!—such was the fate which awaited young Stoddard at the end of the diamond trail!

Prof. Norman Prescott, leader of the American Kinchinjunga expedition, crept from his dog-tent perched eerily at the 26,000-foot level of this unscaled Himalayan peak, the third highest in the world. With anxious eyes he searched the appalling slopes that lifted another 2,000 feet to its majestic summit, now glistening in the radiance of sunset.

Where was young Jack Stoddard, official geologist and crack mountaineer of the party?

That morning Professor Prescott and Stoddard had set off together, from Camp No. 4, at the 22,000-foot level. Mounting laboriously but swiftly, they had reached the present eyrie by noon. There Stoddard had left the leader of the expedition and pushed on alone, to reconnoiter a razor-back ridge that looked as though it might prove the key to the summit.

But the afternoon had passed; the daring young geologist had promised to return in an hour; and now it was sunset, with still no sign of him.

Professor Prescott sighed, and a bitter expression crossed his bronzed, lined face. Just one more evidence of the cursed luck that had marked the expedition from the start!

Well he knew that he must head down at once for Camp No. 4 or risk death on this barren, wind-swept slope, and equally well he knew that to go would be to leave his brave companion to his fate, providing he had not already met it on those desolate ridges above.

Yes, and another thing he knew. The report of this latest disaster would mean the doom of the expedition. The terrified, superstitious natives would bolt, claiming the "snow people" had struck again.

"Gods of the Mountain" they called them, those mysterious beings they alone seemed to see—evil spirits who kept guard over this towering realm, determined none should gain its ultimate heights.

Tensely Professor Prescott stood there on that narrow shelf of glacial ice, peering off into the sunset.

A hundred miles to the west, bathed in the refulgence of a thousand rainbows, rose the incredible peak of Everest, mightiest of all mountains, yet less than 1,000 feet higher than Kinchinjunga. And down, straight down those almost vertical slopes up which the expedition had toiled all summer, lay gorges choked with tropical growth. Off to the south, a scant fifty miles away, the British health station of Darjeeling flashed its white villas in the coppery glow.

An awesome spectacle!—one that human eyes had seldom if ever seen. Yet from the summit, so invitingly near!...

Perhaps, even now, Stoddard was witnessing this incomparable sight. To push on, to join him, meant triumph. To head down, defeat. While to stay, to wait....

Grimly, Professor Prescott left his insecure perch and headed up over that razor-back ridge whence the young geologist had vanished.

As he proceeded cautiously along, drawing sharp, quick breaths in the rarefied upper atmosphere, he told himself it was ambition that was leading him on, but in his heart he knew it was not so. In his heart, he knew he was going to the rescue of his gallant companion, though the way meant death.

A hundred yards had been gained, perhaps two—each desperate foothold fraught with peril of a plunge into the yawning abysms to left and right—when suddenly he spied a figure on a twilit spur ahead.

Panting, he paused. It must be Stoddard! Yet it seemed too small, too ghostly.

Professor Prescott waved, but even as he looked for an answering signal, the figure vanished.

"My eyes!" he muttered to himself. "I'm getting snow-blind."

Then he called aloud:

"Jack! Oh, Jack! Hello!"

Only an echo greeted the call, and he did not repeat it but pushed on silently, conserving his energy.

Was there truth after all in those persistent rumors of the natives about the snow people who inhabited the upper slopes of the Himalayas? His tired brain toyed with the idea, to be cut off sharply by the cheery call:

"Hi there, Professor! Hi-ho!"

And gazing upwards toward a jutting crag not ten rods beyond, he saw young Stoddard etched against the darkening sky.

In a few joyous steps, Professor Prescott had reached his audacious companion.

"Thank God!" he gasped. "I'd given you up for lost."

"Why give me up for anything so unpleasant?" was the genial reply. "I've just been enjoying the view."

"Then—then you reached the top?" with a quick intake of breath.

"Well, not exactly, but I feel on top of the world, just the same."

The professor's spirits fell.

"Then I can't see—"

"Of course you can't see!" interrupted Stoddard. "But look at this!"

As he spoke, he drew from a pocket of his leather jacket something that caught the last light of the dying day and refracted it with weird brilliance.

Professor Prescott blinked.

"Well?"

"A diamond. As big as your fist! And here's another!"

His left hand reached into his jacket and produced a second sparkling gem.

"But—but I don't understand—"

"Granted. But you will, when I tell you I've found the Diamond Thunderbolt!"

The professor gave a shrug of scorn.

"And no doubt you've seen the snow people and have had a perfect afternoon, while—"

"No, I haven't seen any snow people, but I've had a perfect afternoon, all right! As I said, I've found the Diamond Thunderbolt; and here are a couple of chips, picked up from around the edge."

So saying, Stoddard extended his two specimens toward Professor Prescott, who disdained at first to touch them.

"Nothing but quartz!" was the deprecating comment. "The snow has affected your eyesight, as it has my own."

"I'll say it's affected *yours*, if you don't recognize diamonds when you see them. But wait till I show you the old Thunderbolt itself! It's—"

"More quartz!" brusquely. "Be sensible, Jack. This Diamond Thunderbolt thing is a pure myth, like the snow people business. Just because this section of India is known as The Land of the Diamond Thunderbolt you

think you're going to find some precious meteor or other, whereas the term applies merely to the Lama's scepter."

"Granted it does,"—a little impatiently—"but did it ever occur to you that where there's smoke, there's fire? Meteor is the word! One struck here once—a diamond meteor!—and I've found it. Take a look at these two specimens and see what you think."

Whereupon Professor Prescott accepted the glinting gems from his young friend—to gasp a moment later, as he held them tremblingly:

"Good Lord—they're diamonds, to be sure! Where did you find them?"

Stoddard hesitated before replying.

"Not far from here," he said at length, moving off. "Come, I'll show you."

But the professor stood firm on their narrow ledge.

"You must be crazy!" he exclaimed. "We'll have trouble enough now, getting back. It's practically dark already."

"Then what's the odds?" retorted the young geologist. "We've got all night."

"But our friends at Camp No. 4. Even now, they must think we are lost."

"Then further thought won't kill them. Besides, we'll be back before morning—and they can't send out a relief party sooner."

"But any moment a storm may come up. You know what that would mean."

"Does it look likely?" scoffed Stoddard, waving his hand aloft. "See—there's the moon! She'll be our guide."

Professor Prescott looked, saw a slender shallop charting her course among the stars, and for a moment was tempted. But speedily his responsibilities reasserted themselves.

"No, I can't do it," he said with finality. "I owe it to the expedition to return as soon as possible. Furthermore, there's the matter of the authorities. We assured the British we would adhere strictly to our one purpose—to scale Kinchinjunga."

"A mere formality."

"No—a definite order from the Lamas. They closed Mt. Everest, after the last expedition, you will recall. The Lama's scepter is veritably a diamond thunderbolt of power in this region."

Whereupon Stoddard's patience snapped.

"Listen!" he said. "I hurried away because I knew you'd be anxious, but I'm going back, if I have to—"

"And I say you're not!" The professor's patience, too, had snapped. "I'm not going with you, and you're not going back alone! As the leader of this expedition, I forbid it!"

The younger man laughed raspingly, as he shook off the hand that clasped his arm, and for a moment it looked as though the two would fight, there on that dizzy ledge above the world.

Then Stoddard got control of himself.

"Sorry!" he said. "I see I've got to tell you something, Professor. You think I'm merely the geologist of this expedition, but in fact I'm a secret service man from Washington, on the trail of the biggest diamond-smuggling plot in history—and here is where the trail ends!"

Professor Prescott's astonishment at these words was profound. He stood there blinking up at Stoddard, scarcely believing he had heard aright.

"You—you say you are—?"

"A detective, if you want. Anyway, if you've read the papers, you must know that for the past year or more the diamond markets of the world have been flooded with singularly perfect stones."

"Yes, I recall reading about that. They were thought to be synthetic, were they not?"

"By certain imaginative newspaper reporters, not by the experts, for under the microscope they revealed the invariable characteristics of diamonds formed by nature—the tiny flaws and imperfections no artificial means could duplicate."

"But didn't I read something, too, about some anonymous Indian rajah who was thought to be raising money by disposing of his jewels?"

"More newspaper rubbish! For one thing, British secret service men traced the rumor down and satisfied themselves there wasn't a rajah in India unloading any diamonds. For another; no rajah could possibly have the wealth involved. Why, do you know that since this plot unfolded, over five million carats' worth have made their appearance—and that means something like a billion dollars."

"Whew!" whistled the professor.

"Whew is right!" his companion agreed. "And not only have the diamond markets of the world been disorganized by this mysterious influx, but the countries involved have lost millions of dollars in revenue, due to the fact that the gems have been smuggled in without payment of duty."

"But surely, my dear fellow, you don't connect this gigantic plot with your discovery of—whatever it is you have discovered?"

"A diamond as big as a house! That's what I've discovered! And I most surely *do* connect the plot with it. Did you ever have a hunch, Professor? Well, I had one—and it's worked out!"

"You leave me more in the dark momentarily!" declared the older man, glancing around as though to give his words a double meaning. "What was your hunch, and how did it come to lead you here?"

Whereupon Stoddard told him, swiftly, for there was no time to lose.

When first assigned to the case, he said, he had been as baffled as anyone. But as he had studied the problem, one outstanding fact had given him the clue. All the gem experts agreed that the mysterious flood of smuggled stones was of Indian origin, being of the first water and of remarkable fire—in other words, of the finest transparency and brilliance.

Therefore, since they were genuine and were seemingly coming from India, Stoddard had concentrated his attention on this country, seeking their exact source. Investigation showed that there were no mines within its borders capable of producing anything like the quantity that was inundating the market.

But—and here was where the hunch came in—there was a district in the Sikkim Himalayas of Bengal whose capital was Darjeeling—Land of the Diamond Thunderbolt. Why had it been called that? Was there some legend back of it?

There was, he had learned. For though in modern times the phrase had come to apply merely to the Lama's scepter, as Professor Prescott had pointed out, originally it had carried another meaning—for legend said that once a diamond meteor had fallen on the mighty slopes of Kinchinjunga.

That had been enough for Stoddard. He had followed his hunch, had got himself attached to the American Kinchinjunga expedition—

"And that's why I'm here, and all about it," he finished. "Now, then, are you coming back with me and have a look at my Diamond Thunderbolt, or am I going back alone?"

A long moment the professor debated, before replying.

"Yes, I'll come with you," he said at length, extending his hand. "Forgive me, Jack. I didn't know, or—"

"Forget it," said Stoddard shaking. "How the devil could you, till I told you? But just one thing. Mum's the word—right?"

"Right!"

"And one thing more. It may be—well, a one-way trip."

"Forget it."

"O. K., Professor."

With a last warm handclasp, leaving them joined in a new bond of friendship, the two men moved on over that narrow, moonlit ridge across the top of the world.

It was a desperate trail, Professor Prescott realized after scarcely a dozen steps. The ridge grew narrower, sheerer, and in places they had to straddle it, legs dangling precariously to left and right.

Admiration for his gallant companion mounted in the professor's pounding heart, as they struggled on. Only to picture anyone eager to return such a perilous way, after once getting safely back!

Other thoughts occupied his mind, too, during the next half-hour. More than once he could have sworn he saw small, ghostly figures on the ridge ahead. But he made no mention of it, for Stoddard didn't seem to see them.

Now they gained the far end of that hazardous ridge, where a sloping shelf of jagged rock offered a somewhat more secure footing. Along this they proceeded laterally for some distance.

Suddenly Stoddard paused and called out:

"Ah—there we are!" He indicated a steep pocket to the left. "Have a look down there, Professor, and tell me what you see."

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rescott lowered his eyes to the depths below, to draw back with a gasp—for what he saw was a vast phosphorescent glow, like a fallen star.

"What—what is it?" he cried, in an awed voice.

And back came the ringing reply:

"The Diamond Thunderbolt!"

"But the radiance of the thing! It couldn't reflect that much light from the moon!"

"No, and it doesn't. But there's nothing uncanny about it. Just what I expected the thing would look like at night. But come on, Professor. You haven't seen the half of it!"

The way led down the jagged, shelving slope, now, and the descent was too precarious for further comment.

Ten minutes passed—fifteen, possibly—when they reached a sheltered, snowless arena where titanic forces had clashed at some remote age. Fragments of splintered rock lay strewn in wild confusion—and among them, glinting in the moonlight, were bright crystals.

Picking up one, Stoddard said laughingly:

"One of Mother Nature's trinkets worth half a million or so!"

Professor Prescott blinked at it a moment, almost in disbelief, then stooped and picked up one for himself—a diamond that would have made the Kohinoor look like a pebble.

There was no doubting its genuineness. Even in the moonlight, it flashed and burned like a thing afire.

But as the professor turned his eyes at last from its dazzling facets, they failed him again—or so he thought—for half hidden behind a jutting crag loomed a huge cylindrical object, seemingly of metal.

For the space of two breaths, he stared speechless, then gasped:

"Good Lord! What's that?"

Following his gaze, Stoddard saw it too.

"God knows!" he muttered, in a tense voice. "It wasn't there this afternoon. Let's have a look at it."

Cautiously, not knowing what to expect, they advanced toward the singular phenomenon.

Nearing, they saw that it was a mechanism some twenty feet at the base and sixty or more feet high, pointed at the top.

"A rocket!" declared Professor Prescott. "Though I've never seen anything larger than a laboratory model, I'll gamble that's what it is."

"And I'll gamble you're right!" exclaimed Stoddard. "And one capable of carrying passengers, would you say?"

"Fully."

"Then I think we have solved the mystery of how these diamonds reach the market. The question now is, who's back of this thing? And since our position here probably isn't any too healthy—"

He broke off and drew his automatic, as a small, ghostly figure appeared—seemingly from nowhere.

The professor saw it, too—saw it followed by another, and another—and now he knew his eyesight had not failed him back on that wind-swept slope above, either, for these were actual creatures, incredible as they seemed.

The snow people?

He did not know—had no time to find out—for with a rush, the strange beings were all around them.

Stoddard levelled his pistol and called on them to halt, but they came on—scores, hundreds now, seeming to pour out of some unseen aperture of the earth.

Once or twice he fired, over their heads, but it failed to halt them. They closed in, jabbering shrilly.

But though their words were a babel, their actions were plain enough. Swarming up, they overpowered the explorers by sheer numbers, and herded them with jabs of sharp, tiny knives toward a cavern mouth that opened presently amid those eery crags.

Led underground, they found themselves proceeding along a frosty passage lit every few yards by a great chunk of diamond. Their dim glow seemed to be refracted from some central point beyond.

This point they soon reached—a great, vaulted chamber whose brilliance was at first dazzling.

Its source, after the first moment or so, was obvious. It was coming from the roof, which was one vast diamond.

"You see where we are?" whispered Stoddard. "Under the Diamond Thunderbolt! These people have tunneled beneath the meteor. Or else—"

"Their tunnel was already there, when the meteor fell," finished Professor Prescott. "But can it be possible such creatures could have produced that rocket?"

"I'm inclined to think anything is possible, now! But I'm sorry I dragged you into this, Professor. I—"

"Forget it! We're here and we'll face it together, whatever it is."

"You're a game sport!" Stoddard gripped the older man's hand. "We'll face it —and lick it!"

Further talk was interrupted by a stir among their captors. The ranks parted —and into that dazzling chamber stepped a tall, bearded personage whose aristocratic features and haughty bearing suggested a Russian of the old regime.

He strode toward them, smiling sardonically.

"Greetings, my friends! Nice of you to drop in on me while in the neighborhood." His English was suave, precise. "Professor Norman Prescott, leader of the American Kinchinjunga expedition, I believe." He paused and lifted inquiring eyebrows to his other guest. "And—?"

"Dr. John Stoddard, our geologist," came the answer stiffly. "And you, sir?"

"A fellow professor, you might say. Prince Ivan Krassnov. You have heard of me, perhaps?"

Prescott had indeed. One of Russia's most brilliant and erratic scientists under the czar, the man had been permitted to continue his work for the Soviets, developing among other inventions, a rocket reported to be capable of carrying passengers. But some two years ago he and his rocket had vanished in the course of a test flight from Moscow, and the natural conclusion was that he had either perished in the sea or shot off the earth altogether, since no trace of the unique mechanism was ever found.

"Yes, I have heard of you," said the professor, recalling this sensational story that had occupied the front pages of the world's press for days. "And so it turns out that your rocket didn't come to grief."

"Not exactly—though as you can see, it landed me in rather an inaccessible spot," was the reply. "But quite an interesting one! I was well satisfied to let the papers report me missing. You can understand, yes?"

"I think I can, that part of it." While as for Stoddard, he was beginning to understand a great deal. "But these curious creatures?" he said, indicating the whispering, pigmy host that filled the cavern. "You found them here?"

"They found me, rather!" corrected the prince. "But we get on quite well together. They consider me a god, you see, since I, too, came out of the sky in a thunderbolt, as their great diamond once did, according to their legends."

"But who are they? What is their origin? Why are they so small, so pale?"

"Natural questions, Professor, but not so easy to answer. Who they are I cannot say, save that they are the snow people of native superstition. Their origin? It is lost in antiquity. Perhaps they are the remnants of some Tibetan tribe driven into the mountains by enemies, thousands of years ago. While as for their stature, their pallor—these no doubt are the result of the furtive underground life they lead."

He paused, waited politely, as though for further questions, but neither spoke. Now that the main mystery was solved, the one question uppermost in both their minds was what this suave, inscrutable nobleman was going to do with them—and that question neither cared to ask, fearful of what the answer might be.

Finally Prince Krassnov spoke again.

"What, gentlemen—you have no further curiosity about me? How unflattering! I thought perhaps you might want to know why I have chosen to maintain my headquarters here on Kinchinjunga, the past two years, and how I have been occupying my time. But I hold no resentment. I shall tell you, so that you will be prepared for what I am going to propose."

He turned and addressed the pigmy host in what must have been their own tongue. Then, facing his guests again, he said:

"Now, come. Let us retire to my private study, where we shall have more leisure."

They followed him from that dazzling chamber and proceeded on down the cavern to a fork that ended about twenty paces further in a massive steel-bound door.

There he paused and twirled a knob like the dial of a safe. After a moment there came a click, as of tumblers meshing, and a tug on the knob swung the door open.

The prince bowed.

"Step into my little apartment," he said.

They entered, to find themselves in a large oblong room furnished in Slavic luxury.

As they crossed a rich Oriental rug spread over the threshold, a musical gong sounded somewhere, and almost instantly two enormous Cossacks sprang into view, to bar their way with rifles.

"My bodyguard," apologized Krassnov, shutting the door. "They are quite harmless, except to intruders. Just one of the little precautions that make life safer."

He spoke to the men in Russian and they withdrew.

Then he advanced to a divan beside a teakwood table on which stood a large copper samovar. Dropping down, he motioned for them to take seats beside him.

"You will have tea, my friends? Or perhaps you would prefer whiskey and soda?"

They chose the latter, since their recent exertions seemed to have warranted it, and their host tinkled a silver bell, bringing a Chinese boy beaming and salaaming.

A few words to him and the samovar was lit; then he hurried off on padding feet, to return with miraculous speed, bearing not only the whiskey and soda but a platter heaped with exotic cakes, cubed sandwiches of caviar and spiced fish, together with a profusion of other delicacies—doubly welcome to men who had toiled all day on a mountain peak, with nothing but chocolate to sustain them.

And while they drank and ate, Prince Krassnov told his story—a story whose very first words were an admission that he was the head of the great diamond-smuggling plot Stoddard had set out to trace down.

It was a story as dramatic and romantic as it was unscrupulous.

Finding himself and the crew of the rocket marooned on the upper slopes of this mighty mountain, in the midst of an incalculable wealth, he had set about at once to capitalize their astounding discovery.

First he had made certain adjustments in the mechanism of his apparatus—which fortunately had not been injured by its forced landing—and then he had taken off with specimens of the treasure, bringing the craft down this time with precision in the midst of his ancestral estates near Baku, in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains.

This vast property the Bolsheviks had not confiscated, partly because of its remoteness, no doubt, and partly because of the prince's services to the Soviet Republic. At any rate, it was here he had developed in secret the details of his amazing plot—a plot that had as its aim not only his own enrichment but the rehabilitation of all the Russian nobles.

Once they had heard his story of the Diamond Thunderbolt and seen the specimens he showed them, many had eagerly joined the plot, with the result that an international ring had been formed for disposal of the gems.

His plans perfected, Prince Krassnov had then returned to Kinchinjunga with his rocket, since when the mysterious flood of those perfect diamonds into the jewel markets of the world had begun.

"So you see, my friends," he smiled, "that is what you Americans would call my 'little game'—a game your chance discovery has rather jeopardized, you must admit."

Professor Prescott could well realize this, but at a glance from Stoddard he declined to admit it.

"A very ingenious game!" he said. "But where do the Lamas figure in this? Surely they must know of the presence of this meteor within their kingdom."

"No doubt they do," the prince conceded. "This is why they are so reluctant to have foreigners enter their domain. At one time, I am satisfied, they knew its exact location and drew many of their own gems from that source. But in recent times the snow people have guarded their secret well. The Lamas are as terrified of them as the natives—and with better reason!"

He did not mention what the reason was, but there was something ominous in his tone.

"But to get on with my story, friends. I am not telling you all this merely to satisfy your curiosity. I have what you call a motive in my madness!"

Madness was right, thought Stoddard. The man was dangerously, criminally mad.

"My motive is simply this," he went on. "You have chanced upon my little nest-egg, and consequently I have either to let you in on the deal or—"

Krassnov paused; shrugged.

"But why talk of anything unpleasant, when there is wealth enough here for all? What I propose, briefly, is that you join me."

They knew it was coming, but they winced, nevertheless.

"Oh, don't be premature!" he exclaimed, a little nettled. "Hear me out. What is good enough for me and my fellow nobles of Imperial Russia is surely good enough for poor, under-paid professors of democratic America. Listen, friends—I am generous. Join me and we will make millionaires out of all of you. Every professor in your country shall be a little czar. It will be, to use the old phrase, a triumph of the intellect."

Beyond a doubt, the man was mad; yet his madness was vast, dizzying. Though neither was tempted, they were both rendered speechless for a moment. It was like standing on a mountain top and being shown the

countries and the glories of the world—like standing on the top of Kinchinjunga, thought Prescott.

"But you assume we are all Bolsheviks, like yourself, we professors," he said, struggling for calm words.

"Bolsheviks!" snorted the prince. "I spit on them! You think I, a nobleman, am interested in the masses? Cattle—swine! I plan only for the day when we who are worthy rule again, and this that I have told you is my plan. You can, as you Americans so coarsely say, either take it or leave it."

A tension hung in the air, as his words echoed into silence. The man had revealed himself.

"And suppose we leave it?" asked the professor, restraining his irritation as best he could. "What then?"

"Then I am afraid—ah—unpleasant consequences would result," was the bland answer. "Surely you realize that I could not let you and young Dr. Stoddard rejoin your expedition with this story to report."

They realized it quite well.

"But suppose we agree not to report it?" said Professor Prescott.

"Not to doubt your honesty of intention," replied Krassnov sharply. "I would refuse to accept such an agreement."

"Then I see nothing else but to decline your kind proposal," said Stoddard, before the professor could formulate further words. "What do you propose to do—murder us?"

"Nothing so personal," said the prince, with his sardonic smile. "I shall merely turn you over to my little subjects. They no doubt will deal with you as your merits warrant."

Whereupon he pressed a button under that elaborate teakwood table. The musical gong they had heard before sounded again, and the prince's two

Cossack retainers reappeared.

He addressed them briefly in Russian, adding to his guests:

"Adieu, friends! If you change your minds, you have only to speak. You will be understood, and I shall be gratified."

And without further words, they were led from that ornate apartment.

Taken back to the dazzling chamber under the meteor, they were turned over to the pigmies.

A powwow resulted, but it was brief. The two captives were bound fast in a curious ceremonial pit near the center of the room. Then the midget horde withdrew, leaving them alone there under that eery glow.

"Now what the devil will be the next step?" queried Stoddard, when the last of the pigmies had gone.

Professor Prescott considered for a moment, before replying.

"I don't think there will be any next step, except our cremation," he said at length.

"Cremation?" gasped his young friend. "What do you mean, cremation?"

Another pause, then:

"Just this. Don't you see where we are? Right under the Thunderbolt! Well?"

"Well what?"

"Simple enough, Jack." The professor's tone was grave. "When dawn comes, and the rising sun strikes that—"

"Good God!" Stoddard suddenly understood. "Why, we'll be cooked alive—frizzled!"

It was only too true. Even now, the pale rays of the moon, concentrated by the myriad facets of that monumental diamond, were beginning to focus on them a warmth that was uncomfortable. And by morning—!

The two men crouched there silent, realizing their desperate plight. They *must* escape, before the sun rose. But how?

Studying their bonds, they discovered that they were of rawhide of some sort, obviously from the hides of animals these strange people caught on the lower slopes somewhere. But though they strained and twisted, they could not stretch them, the leather evidently having been cured to a marvelous toughness in these high altitudes.

Precious minutes ticked by as they struggled there, but they were unable to extricate themselves.

But before the end of a half-hour, Stoddard managed to free one arm, and reaching into his jacket he drew forth a small, compact metal object—his cigarette lighter.

Twirling the wheel, while Professor Prescott held his breath, he succeeded in kindling a flame on its tiny wick.

If only he could reach the thongs with it! If only he could burn them through and free himself and the professor before any of the pigmies re-entered that lethal chamber!

Wrenching around now, he applied the flame to his left wrist, which was still bound. As the living fire touched his flesh, he winced with pain, but almost anything was better than the grisly fate that threatened.

Slowly, a little at a time, he endured the torture, straining at each application to see if the thongs would yield.

"Here, let me try it once!" called out Professor Prescott, as he cried aloud with the agony of the ordeal.

"No. I'll get it!" Stoddard gritted his teeth, continued. "There! I think my hand is free!" He struggled. "Yes. Now wait!"

Replacing his cigarette lighter in his pocket, he drew his blistered wrist from its smouldering bonds and struggled feverishly now to undo the lashes about his feet.

Five minutes of that and suddenly he flung them off and stood up.

"Now! Now then, Professor. I'll have you loose in a jiffy!"

Bending over his fettered companion, he worked with frantic haste to untie the rawhide bonds.

Another five minutes and they were both free.

Professor Prescott stood up and stretched.

"Thank God for small favors!" he exclaimed. "But you, Jack? You must be burned cruelly.

"Forget it!" Stoddard was already wrapping a handkerchief around his wrist. "Now let's see about getting out of here. These little rats all seem to be asleep, and Lord knows where that maniac Krassnov is. Perhaps we can make it. At any rate, we'll give them a run for their money!"

As he spoke, he drew his automatic.

Silently, stealthily, they left that glittering chamber and proceeded down the cavern toward what seemed to be the entrance, guided by their remembrance of the way they had come.

A hundred yards or more they made, seeing no sign of their captors, when suddenly a musical gong rang out.

"We've stepped on one of Krassnov's infernal signals!" cried Stoddard, above the din. "Now there'll be hell to pay!"

And "hell to pay" there was, almost instantly—for before they had taken ten more steps, the cavern ahead was full of small, ghostly figures, jabbering in their shrill voices.

Indifferent now of what he did, their lives at stake, Stoddard blazed away with his automatic, sweeping it from side to side of the stony walls as he fired.

As the shots crashed out, the jabbers turned to shrieks of terror. Several of the pigmies fell. The rest broke their ranks and shrank into the shadows.

"Run!" yelled Stoddard, slipping a new clip into his pistol.

The professor needed no invitation. Gathering his long legs he sped after the younger man, and together they burst from the mouth of the cavern.

Outside, in the dazzle of moonlight, they paused for an instant.

"This way!" called Stoddard, racing toward that splintered arena.

They gained it and lunged across it to the shelving slope that reached upward to the narrow, perilous ridge whence they had come.

As they proceeded, the pigmy horde following with incredible swiftness, Stoddard wheeled and fired time and again—and now his shots were answered by the reports of rifles.

"Krassnov and his Cossacks!" he muttered. "Well, we'll give them our heels, unless they hit us."

"And Russians are notoriously bad shots, I understand," panted the professor.

At any rate, they reached the slope and struggled upward toward the ridge, putting themselves presently out of range behind the jagged rocks that loomed on every side.

But just as they were congratulating themselves on their escape, came a dull, reverberating explosion—and as they clung to their insecure footholds, a volcano of snow and ice rose ahead. Thousands of tons of debris avalanched into the chasm below.

Stunned, deafened, they looked around.

Down in that pocket where the Thunderbolt had so recently gleamed was one vast chaos, and above, where that razor-back ridge had led across the intervening chasms to safety, was a dazzling void.

To both came the same thought, but Stoddard expressed it first.

"Krassnov—he's dynamited the ridge!" he gasped.

"Then we—we'll never get back now!" echoed Professor Prescott.

"No, but they'll never get us here!"

"Scant comfort, though, when we're pinioned here like a couple of birds with their wings clipped."

"Right; but let's see. Let's figure. We're better off than we were. And what was it Napoleon once said: 'When you can't retreat, advance.' So suppose we—"

"But listen!"

Stoddard heard. It was the sound of rifle shots. And looking down, he saw a feverish activity surrounding the rocket. Myriads of the pigmies were swarming upon it, while a handful of Cossacks were holding them off.

"Something doing down there, all right!" he muttered. "Looks to me like—why, sure I've got it! That madman has overshot himself, for once! He's

buried their precious meteor, in blowing up our ridge, and they've turned on him!"

"I think you're right," agreed Professor Prescott. "Suppose we advance as you say. It looks like a chance."

"Right," said Stoddard.

Slowly, cautiously, they returned down the slope.

When within a hundred yards, they knew they had sized up the situation correctly. With frantic speed, Krassnov was supervising the shoveling out of his rocket from amid the debris; was directing its loading, while the free members of his crew held off the enraged natives who were obstructing them.

Descending even more cautiously now, they neared the scene of activity.

"My plan is this—to get aboard and find out where they're going!" said Stoddard, through shut teeth. "What do you say?"

"Lead on!" said the professor.

So they continued down, neared the resting-place of that strange craft, and, under shelter of the moonlight shadows, stole through the confused ranks surrounding it and crept aboard.

Stowing themselves into the first likely niche that offered—a narrow cubicle behind a flight of metal stairs—they waited, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of being discovered.

Fifteen minutes passed, a half-hour, when suddenly sounded a rasping of doors that told them the rocket was being sealed.

Then came a roar, as of some mighty blast beating down upon the frozen earth, followed by a lifting, rushing sensation—and they were flung violently to the flooring.

The pressure ceased in a moment, however, to be supplanted by a buoyant, exhilarating sense of flight. It increased, and they judged they must be traveling at great speed.

Glancing at the luminous dial of his watch, Professor Prescott saw that it was a quarter to ten.

"Well, we're off!" he whispered. "And where, would you guess, are we headed?"

"I wouldn't guess," Stoddard whispered back. "From the way we're riding, it might be Mars! We must be making hundreds of miles an hour."

"Or thousands! Who knows?"

They crouched there in their cramped niche, scarcely even whispering now, as the tense minutes passed.

Suddenly the motion changed. They seemed to be dropping.

Another moment or two, and with a slight jar the rocket came to rest.

"Well, we're here, wherever it is," said Stoddard, stirring.

"Yes, undoubtedly," the professor agreed. "And the next move?"

"I think we'll let them make that."

They were not long in doing so. There came the sound of doors rasping open, of footsteps echoing on metal stairs and corridors. Once a giant Cossack passed within four feet of them. But at length, all was silent within the rocket.

"Now, then, suppose we have a look around," said Stoddard, stepping out.

"Right," agreed his companion, following. "I'll admit I am mildly curious to know what corner of the earth we've been transported to."

They proceeded down the dim-lit corridor the way they had come, descended a flight of stairs and headed along another corridor—to pause suddenly and gasp with astonishment. For through the door whence they had entered the rocket poured a flood of sunshine.

Stoddard stared at it a moment incredulously, and then glanced at his watch.

"Ten o'clock, I make it!" he muttered. "Am I crazy, or what?"

"No, I hardly think so," smiled Professor Prescott, recovering from his own surprise. "It is merely that we are in some part of the world quite a few thousand miles removed from India. Back on Kinchinjunga, it is still ten o'clock at night, but here, it is quite obviously daytime."

"That must be the explanation," Stoddard agreed. "But it certainly gave me a start at first!"

Approaching the door, followed by the professor, he peered cautiously out, to confront a desolate stretch of scrubby growth, hemmed in by a background of rugged mountains.

"Now where the devil would you say we are?" he demanded, gazing around perplexedly.

"Either in the United States or in Mexico," was the astonishing reply.

"But how can you say that?"

"Because it must be some place approximately twelve hours distant from India in time, to judge from the sun, which is not far past the meridian."

"But why not Australia, for instance?"

"Because Australia is too far. It would be three o'clock tomorrow morning there, since it is ten o'clock last night now in India."

Stoddard pondered this a minute, then admitted its correctness.

"All right, then. Assuming that we are somewhere on the North American continent, the next thing is to give Krassnov the slip; otherwise it won't be big enough for all of us!"

And that Professor Prescott conceded readily enough.

But before making any further move, they looked over their surroundings carefully, to satisfy themselves none of their late captors were in view.

"They're evidently somewhere on the other side of the rocket," Stoddard concluded at length. "So let's make a break for it while we've got the chance."

"Lead the way!" said the professor.

"O. K., here we go!"

And, stepping through the door, they dropped to the ground and raced off under the glare of the burning sun toward the rugged mountains that loomed ahead.

For a hundred yards or so they were able to keep the rocket between themselves and the Russians but soon the ground sloped up to such an extent that they realized they must be in full view.

Dropping behind the scant shelter of a scraggly tree, they turned and glanced down—and there, beyond the rocket, they could now see a group of men standing around outside a small wooden shack, shouting and gesticulating in their direction.

"Damn it, they've seen us!" muttered Stoddard.

"But why don't they come after us?" queried Professor Prescott.

The answer came even as he spoke, for out of the shack rushed the tall figure of the prince, in his hand a pair of binoculars which he raised to his

eyes.

Whether or not be spotted them, an instant later he turned and uttered a command, and two huge Cossacks sprang to the pursuit.

"There's nothing to do now but run for it!" cried Stoddard, leaping to his feet.

The professor followed and they plunged on up the slope, bullets from their pursuers' pistols and the rifles of those below kicking up the dust around them. But either because the aim was bad or the targets difficult, they escaped unscathed.

As for Stoddard, he wasted no time in firing back.

"Once we get in those mountains, we're safe!" he gasped, as they struggled on. "How are you, Professor—all right?"

"No holes in my skin so far!" came the panting answer.

Five desperate, dodging minutes passed.

Glancing over their shoulders, they saw that the heavy, stolid Cossacks were losing ground. And ahead, tauntingly near now, loomed a thickly-wooded slope that meant the beginning of big timber—and safety.

Another five minutes—each second an hour—and they had gained it.

But there was no pausing yet, they could hear the Cossacks crashing on like determined blood-hounds behind.

"No need to climb any more!" exclaimed Stoddard, half breathless. "We'll edge along, keep in the trees, and try to throw them off."

The older man said nothing; merely gritted his teeth. This climb had told on him more than anything he had experienced on the cruel slopes of Kinchinjunga.

As they struggled along now, sometimes it seemed that they had thrown their pursuers off the trail, or completely outdistanced them, but always a moment later they would hear again the crunch of the Cossacks' boots on the dry undergrowth.

So the grim flight continued, mile after heart-tearing mile, and Stoddard was beginning to realize that the professor couldn't keep on much longer—had just about decided to stop and shoot it out with their pursuers—when suddenly there came a sound that brought new hope to him.

"Did you hear that?" he gasped, pausing.

"It—sounded like—a car!" panted his companion.

"Right. And that means there must be a road through here somewhere! But where?"

"Listen." Professor Prescott pointed to the left. "The sound seems to be coming from over there."

And sure enough, from the left came a wheezing grind of a car making a heavy grade.

"Near, too," decided Stoddard. "Come on—let's go! We've got to head it off. It's our only hope, except—"

With relief, he shoved his automatic back into its holster and led the way in the direction of the now rapidly nearing car.

A hundred yards they had made, up a slight rise, when there spread before them a rutted mountain road, and on it, in full view, was a laboring Ford of ancient vintage.

Over the wheel hovered a lanky, leathery native, and beside him sat a small, plump woman who looked as though she might be his wife.

They were almost to the top of the hill when Stoddard hailed them.

"Say!" he said. "Give us a ride, will you? We're lost."

"Keep on, Henry!" he heard the woman urge. "I don't like the looks of 'em."

Americans! Well, thought Stoddard, they were in the United States, anyway. That was something. And he didn't exactly blame the good woman for her suspicions. They must look pretty wild, at that, with their two-day beards and tattered clothes.

"Sorry," spoke up Henry. "Missus says no. She knows best. 'Sides, it ain't fur to Martin's Bluff. You kin make it in an hour."

"But say, wait a minute!" They were running along beside the wheezing car now. "We've got to get there in a hurry. We'll pay you."

Henry pricked up his ears at this, but his wife shook her head.

"Keep on!" she urged. "They may be bandits!"

Whereupon Stoddard drew his automatic, for there was no more time to argue.

"Stop!" he commanded. "You'll take us, understand? I'll pay you well!"

"See, I was right!" screamed the woman. "Bandits! Bandits! Oh, Henry—save me!"

Wildly she clung to him, as Stoddard mounted the running-board, but before he could make another move, Professor Prescott gasped out:

"The Cossacks! Quick!"

And jumping down, he wheeled to face the two leering Russians, not forty feet down the road. Pistols levelled, they were advancing stolidly.

Stoddard half-raised his own weapon, then turned to see if the car was within range of the return fire it would bring. It was—but not for long.

With a furious chattering of bands, as Henry gave it the gas, the decrepit vehicle gained the top of the hill and disappeared from view down the far slope, and the last thing he saw of it was a dusty plate flapping under its tail-light.

It was a Texas license!

Then, turning back, he lifted his automatic; but it was too late. The Cossacks were on them.

In answer to a guttural command, he dropped the weapon and raised his hands, as the professor had already done.

Two hours later, they were back at the rocket.

Led into the shack—which was furnished inside like an Oriental hunting-lodge—they were confronted at once by Prince Krassnov.

Though his aristocratic features were immobile, it was obvious that he was in no amiable frame of mind.

"So, my friends!" he exclaimed. "I leave you in India, and meet you again in America, all within a matter of hours. It is but an example of our modern progress, is it not?"

They made no reply.

"Ha! You are not sociable, after enjoying my hospitality, my transportation? Then suppose we—as you Americans so quaintly say—call a spade a spade! I gave you your chance. You declined it. And what is the result? My beautiful Diamond Thunderbolt, my immeasurable treasure, is buried forever."

"Through no fault of ours!" put in Stoddard.

"But buried nevertheless, and my adopted kingdom in revolt. Yet do not think I mourn too much, my friends. Though the game is what you call up, my plans shall go on. Here and elsewhere in the world, where we have sub-

headquarters, are billions of dollars' worth of diamonds—supplies for years ahead. We shall not suffer. But you—Professor Prescott and Doctor Stoddard—I have a very interesting fate in store for you. How would you care to make a little scientific expedition to Mars, say?"

"Mars?" gasped the professor.

"Yes, or Venus, or even Jupiter, not to mention the moon! Or how about the sun? That would be an interesting sphere for exploration."

"We don't know what you're talking about," said Stoddard growing nettled. "Why mince matters? Call a spade a spade, if you're going to! What do you propose to do with us, now that you have us in your power?"

The prince paused, drew forth a long Russian cigarette from an exquisite platinum case.

"I propose," he smiled, when he had lit it, "to turn over my rocket to you, my fellow scientists, since I shall have no further use for it and it might be embarrassing to be found with it in my possession."

And the way he proposed to turn it over to them, as they had already suspected, was to lock them in it and fire it off into space.

Within the hour, the man's diabolical plan had been put into operation.

Led to the rocket, the luckless pair were locked within a small metal room somewhere within its recesses. There sounded again the peculiar rasping that told them its doors were being sealed. And then came the roar of that mighty exhaust beating down.

There followed the lifting, rushing sensation they had experienced before, and again they were flung violently to the flooring by the force of the upward impulse.

When the pressure slacked, they staggered to their feet and groped around the dark, stuffy little room.

"Well, this is the end, I guess," sighed Professor Prescott. "I had never thought," with a grim attempt at humor, "that I would meet quite such a scientific fate as this!"

"Nor had I!" Stoddard agreed. "But I'm not quite ready to cash in my checks yet. The game isn't over!" He was pacing around the room, knocking on the metal walls with something that gave back a strident ring. "Have you any idea what composition this stuff is?"

The professor rapped on one of the panels; felt of it.

"Aluminum, I would say."

"Nothing so lucky! If it were, I could cut it like cheese. But duralumin, probably, a very light, strong alloy; and what I have here is a hunting knife with a can-opener on one end! If I'm not mistaken, we'll be out of this sardine box before long."

Whereupon he applied himself to the thin metal wall of their cell, working determinedly, while Professor Prescott held his cigarette lighter for a torch.

"You see, duralumin yields to heat, like aluminum," he exclaimed, as finally his knife thrust through. "Now then, let's get the can opener working."

The progress was slow but sure. Within an hour, he had cut out a jagged section some two feet square, through which they squeezed into an equally dark corridor.

"Now then!" Stoddard's mood was exultant. "There must be switches around here somewhere. There were lights, I remember, so let's find them. Once we get a little light on the subject—"

"Here!" called the professor, who had groped down the corridor with the cigarette lighter. "How's that?"

As he pressed a switch, a row of small bulbs glowed overhead.

"Fine!" was the answer. "Now let's see if we can find the engine-room, or whatever they call it."

Jubilant now, they continued on down the corridor, which ended in a flight of stairs.

"I fancy it must be below," said Professor Prescott. "From what I have seen of experimental models, the propulsion impulse must originate from the base."

So they descended the stairs, entered another dark corridor, found another switch and pressed it, and thus they proceeded, lighting the interior of the rocket as they went. And as they descended, the roar of the exhaust increased in volume, indicating that they were nearing its source.

Presently they entered a large, circular room with an illuminated dial at the far end. Drawing near, they saw a confusion of instruments that for a moment left them dazed.

While Stoddard studied them in bewilderment, Prescott circled the room till he found a switch. Pressing it, he produced a brilliant flood of illumination.

"Now then, let me have a look at this," he said, returning to the dial. "Professor Goddard once explained to me the workings of one of his experimental models. The motive force must be some liquefied mixture, possibly oxygen and hydrogen. Some of these instruments—most of them, in fact—must be valves."

He touched one, turned it, and the rocket responded with a sickening burst of speed.

"No, that won't do! We're going plenty fast enough now!"

He touched another, and they slacked off dizzyingly.

"Well, there are two controls, anyway. Now then, how do they steer this thing? That is the next problem we must solve."

But though he touched this instrument and that, producing weird effects, their course continued in the direction set. And meanwhile, they were hurtling outward through space at a rate of speed he knew would presently carry them beyond the gravitational pull of the earth.

Then, as he grasped and swung down a curious lever that worked in a quadrant, they felt a violent lunge to the left, and for a moment it seemed they would shoot to the ceiling.

"Good God!" gasped Stoddard. "What's happened?"

"Nothing—only that I've found how to steer this wild steed!" cried the professor, exultantly.

It was really quite simple, he explained, as he eased up on the lever. In application, it was a development of the gyroscope principle, that a wheel revolving freely within a freely suspended frame tends to make the frame revolve in the other direction.

"You see, the rocket is the freely suspended frame," he went on, "while this lever controls a gyroscopic wheel somewhere. To set it spinning to the right causes us to turn to the left, and vice versa."

"But you almost stood us on our heads, a moment ago! How did that happen?"

"Simply because I threw the lever too far to the right. We are in interstellar space, obviously, where every change of direction involves an adjustment of equilibrium."

And if Stoddard didn't exactly understand, being first a secret service man and only secondarily a scientist, at least he showed his ignorance no further. If the professor could bring this astounding machine back to Earth, that was all he wanted.

Prescott said he could, he thought, providing they had fuel enough left. So for the next few minutes, while the younger man held his breath, the

professor labored with the various instruments on that complicated dial.

"Now then, I think we're headed back," he said at length, relaxing. "But we've got to have visibility, otherwise we will land with a velocity of about twenty thousand miles an hour, which is what I figure we're making at the present time."

"Good Lord!" gasped Stoddard. "I'll say we've got to have visibility! Wait a minute! Let me look around!"

He searched the room for further instruments—to find nothing that in any way met the purpose.

But even as he returned dejected, the professor cried out:

"Here—I've got it! Take a look at this!"

Bending over a small table beside the dial, Stoddard saw mirrored, in its ground-glass surface a hazy circular panorama that at first had no significance. But as he continued to peer down upon the scene, certain familiar aspects loomed out. It was the Earth—and what he was looking at was a view of the North and South American continents!

For some moments Stoddard stared at this amazing panorama in silence; saw it grow rapidly clearer, as the careening rocket plunged like a giant shell toward the earth.

"My God!" he whispered at length in awe. "Do you think you can ever check our speed?"

"I think so," the professor replied, busy over his instruments. "But where do we want to land? How do we know what state we were in?"

Whereupon Stoddard told him of that Texas license plate.

"But we don't want to land anywhere near that fiend Krassnov," he added, with a shudder. "I suggest, if it's possible, that you pick out some

aerodrome, preferably in the western part of the state—for if I remember my geography, Texas isn't mountainous in the east."

"I will do the best I can," said Prescott, grimly.

There followed tense minutes as the panorama in that ground-glass narrowed and grew more intense. Now they could see only North America, now only the United States and a portion of Mexico, and now only Texas.

"Back—*back!*" cried Stoddard, as the rugged land loomed up, spread into a panorama of towns and ranches. "We're descending too fast! We're bound to crash, unless—"

But already the professor had touched the ascending valve and swung the steering lever.

Up they zoomed again. Once more a portion of Mexico was visible on the glass, and along the international border now they could see a winding thread of silver.

"The Rio Grande!" exclaimed the young geologist. "Just follow it up toward its source till we come to El Paso. There'll be a landing-field there."

"Yes, undoubtedly." The professor was working in abstraction over the unfamiliar controls. "Now if I can just hold us on our course...."

He succeeded, and presently a white city gleamed over the curving rim of the horizon to the northwest, the tall chimneys of its smelters throwing long shadows from the lowering sun beyond.

In a minute or two they were over it, at a height of perhaps twelve miles—and now, as they began descending, its patchwork of buildings and plazas unfolded like some great quilt below.

"There's the field!" cried Stoddard, pointing in the glass to a wide clear space on the outskirts. "Can you make it, do you think?"

"We'll know soon!" was the grim answer, as Prescott worked frantically now with his valves and levers. "It's a matter of balancing off our flow of gases, of holding up buoyancy to the very last. A little too much, or not enough, and—"

Breathlessly, as they descended, Stoddard peered into the glass. Now a scene of excitement was visible below. Figures could be seen gazing up, waving their arms, running about this way and that.

"They must think they're getting a visit from another planet," said Stoddard. "Or that the end of the world has come!"

"Maybe it has, for us!" agreed the professor, gravely. "I'm afraid we're going to crash. I can't seem to—"

Whatever he was going to add was lost in a sudden, rending concussion that flung them violently down, and plunged the room into darkness.

Staggering to his feet a moment later, bruised and shaken, Stoddard gasped out:

"Professor are you there? Are you all right?"

A groan answered him, and for a moment his heart sank, but then came the reassuring call:

"Yes—all right, I guess. And you?"

"O.K. Let's get out of here, quick!"

An ominous hissing sound beat on their ears, as they groped their way toward the door. Evidently escaping gases from the deranged mechanism, thought Stoddard. The floor rose at an angle, indicating that the rocket was half over on its side.

They found the door, and struggled along the twisted corridor toward a flight of stairs that would lead below; found it, descended, and groped along another dark corridor, seeking an exit; when suddenly, around a bend,

daylight confronted them, and to their joy they saw that one of the main doors had been burst open by the impact.

Approaching it, they peered out—to be greeted by an awed group of officials and mechanics from the field.

As they climbed through, dropped to the ground, the group retreated, taking no chances.

"Back!" called Professor Prescott, warning and reassuring them with a word. Then, turning to his companion: "Come on, Jack—run! This thing is likely to explode at any moment."

Following this advice, Stoddard raced from the rocket with the rest.

At a safe distance, he turned and peered back—to see it standing there at a crazy angle, dust and fumes issuing from under it in a blast that was hollowing a deep crater to the far side.

Even as they looked, the strange craft quivered, tottered, and fell over on its side, and the next instant was enveloped in a blinding sheet of flame that brought with it a dull detonation and a blast of dazing heat.

The party backed still farther away.

"A nasty mixture, oxygen and hydrogen," muttered the professor, feeling of his singed eyebrows. "We got out of there just in time, Jack."

"I'll say we did!" Stoddard agreed, with a shudder.

By now the higher officials of the field were on the scene, among them a number of Army men.

Curiosity ran high, not unmingled with indignation. Who were these strange visitors? Where had they come from? What did they mean by endangering the lives of everyone, with their damned contraption?

Inquiring for the commandant, they were taken to him—Major Clark Hendricks, U.S.A.—and Stoddard briefly outlined their astounding story, producing credentials, whereupon a squadron of fast military planes was assembled.

From the way they described the mountainous region where the rocket had first landed, mentioning the town Martin's Bluff, that Henry of the ancient Ford had named, the major declared that it must have been the Guadalupe Mountains a hundred miles to the east—and sure enough, a government map showed such a town there.

So it was that presently the squadron lifted into the late afternoon skies, with Major Hendricks in the leading plane, accompanied by the two weary adventurers.

Swiftly the squadron winged eastward. They reached the mountains in less than an hour, and circled them in search of that little wooden shack which Prince Krassnov and his Cossacks had made their rendezvous....

It was like finding a needle in a haystack, and for a time Stoddard despaired of success. But those rugged mountains were an open book to the planes circling high overhead, and with Martin's Bluff once located, the rest was not so hard.

At last, as twilight was falling, they found the shack and brought their planes to rest near it.

But as the party approached the shack, after posting a heavy guard over their planes, they saw that it was deserted.

This, after all, was only what Stoddard had feared, but nevertheless they forced their way inside—and there, had Major Hendricks had any doubt of their story, it was dispelled.

As Stoddard had told them, it was furnished like an Oriental hunting-lodge, with evidences of the recent occupation of the Russians on all sides.

But where were they? Had they got away or were they hiding somewhere?

Proceeding from room to room until they had searched it thoroughly, the party paused baffled.

But not for long, for suddenly Stoddard discovered something that gave him a clue. It was a barred door, within a closet, covered over with clothes and uniforms so as to be fairly well concealed. On battering it in, they found that it led into a passage below.

As the party entered the passage, leaving further guards above, it became obvious that what they had found was the shaft of an old mine.

It led down abruptly, for a while, then more gradually, with many windings and twistings, and ending presently in another barred door.

This they in turn battered in—to be greeted suddenly by a volley of rifle-fire that dropped three of them in their tracks.

Stoddard was one of those who fell.

Bending over him, Professor Prescott lifted up his head.

"Jack!" he called. "Where are you hit? Answer me!"

"I—it seems to be in the shoulder," came the weak reply. "If you've got a handkerchief—"

The professor produced one and staunched the flow of blood as best he could, working with the aid of his flashlight.

Meanwhile, ahead, the crash of pistols and rifles continued to split the stillness of the passage, as the attacking party pressed forward.

"There—that does it!" gasped Stoddard, at length. "Help me up. I'll be all right."

Prescott steadied him to his feet. They continued on.

Now the firing ceased, and in a moment Major Hendricks appeared, at the head of his party.

"Well, we've got them," he said, saluting Stoddard. "How are you, old man?"

"All right," was the gritted reply. "Let's have a look at them."

A flashlight was swept across the stolid group of Cossack prisoners, but as Stoddard peered into one face after another, he realized that Krassnov was not among them.

"You haven't got the leader," he said. "See here, you birds," he addressed the Cossacks, "where is he, eh?"

If they understood, they gave no indication of it, but shook their heads sullenly.

"Well, damn it, we'll find him!" Stoddard wheeled and strode past them. "Give me three or four men, Major. I'll smoke out that Russian bear. He must be here somewhere."

Hendricks sent the main body above, with their prisoners, and gave him the men he wanted, putting himself at their head.

"You'd better go on up, too, Professor," said Stoddard, addressing Prescott. "You've risked enough, in my behalf."

But the older man shook his head.

"No, I'll come along, if you don't mind," he insisted. "I want to see the end of this thing."

It was an end that came with dramatic suddenness.

Pausing before a barred door some fifty paces down the passage, they were debating what their next move would be—when suddenly it was flung open.

"Come in, gentlemen," came a suave, ironical voice. "Sorry my servants were so uncivil."

In the glare of light from beyond, Stoddard and the professor saw that it was Prince Krassnov.

He stood there unarmed, smiling.

"Is this the fellow?" rasped Major Hendricks, his automatic levelled.

"It is," said Stoddard.

Slowly, cautiously, they followed the man into the room, which in reality was merely the end of the passage sealed off, though its walls were richly panelled and it was luxuriously furnished.

Pausing beside a small, heavy table, he swept his hand over it, indicating a heap of rough diamonds that must have represented millions.

"Merely a fraction of my treasure, gentlemen," he told them, with a deprecating shrug. "I hadn't quite finished storing away the last shipment, when you interrupted me."

He strode to one of the walls, drew out a small drawer from a built-in cabinet and dumped its glittering contents on the table with the rest.

All around the room, Stoddard noted as he stood there swaying, were other cabinets dotted with the knobs of similar drawers.

"And this, gentlemen, is but my American sub-headquarters," the Prince went on. "In Siberia, in Brazil—but why bore you with the multiplication of my now useless wealth? Tell me, instead, my good friends—Professor Prescott, Doctor Stoddard—how come you back here, after I saw you safely on your way earlier in the afternoon?"

"Because I happen to have a knack with can-openers, and my colleague is rather adept with machinery," Stoddard told him, "while Major Hendricks

here is quite a hand with geography, not to mention aviation."

A question or two, which they answered briefly, and Krassnov had the story.

"Ah, my poor rocket!" he sighed. "But it is fate, I suppose; Kismet, as the Turkish say. Still, I deserved a better fate than to be captured by a pair of American professors, when the secret service of the world was on my trail."

"Then cheer up!" said Stoddard, gritting his teeth to keep back the pain of his throbbing shoulder. "For I have the honor to represent Washington in this case."

At that, the prince scowled darkly for a moment. Then he brightened.

"Kismet again! I might have acted differently, had I known that, but—well, I drink to your success, Doctor Stoddard!"

Whereupon, before they could restrain him, he lifted a vial from a shelf over one of the cabinets and downed its contents.

"A diamond-dust cocktail!" he smiled, replacing the vial. "The most expensive, even in your country of costly drinks—and the most deadly!"

But Stoddard knew, as the doomed nobleman stood there facing them in stoic triumph, that diamond dust in the human system was as slow as it was deadly, and that the desperate gesture had been futile, so far as justice was concerned.

There would be ample time, in the weeks Prince Krassnov of Imperial Russia still lived, to round up his international allies and stamp out the remnants of their amazing ring of diamond smugglers.

While as for Professor Prescott, he was thinking with what amazement the members of his expedition back on Kinchinjunga would receive the cablegram he would dispatch that night, informing them that Stoddard and himself were safe in El Paso, Texas.

"The slaves!" gasped Jim, and involuntarily backed into the room.

The Slave Ship From Space

By A. R. Holmes

Three kidnapped Earthlings show Xantra of the Tillas how "docile" Earth slaves can be.

Twice that night the two young men had seen the thing, and their hour for turning in had long since passed as they lay half reclining on the ground by their campfire waiting, hoping that it would return once more. Their interest in the strange visitant had completely banished all sensations of fatigue from a full day of vacation fishing in the cold Adirondack streams among which they were camping for that month.

They had discussed the appearance until there was nothing more they could say; and now as for the last hour, they watched in silence, only moving to knock the dottle from their pipes and to get fresh lights off the splinters they stuck into their slumbering fire. The velvet night was now at full reign, and the myriad stars in their familiar patterns leaned close—brilliant jewels for man to share but never pluck.

Jim Wilson had seen the thing first—a pinpoint of cherry red that moved upward in a perfect arc against the brilliant white constellations of the east. As it rose, it grew perceptibly larger, to dwindle again as it arced over the western horizon.

Nearly an hour later it had appeared again; but this time, when halfway up the skies, it had changed its direction until it was heading directly over the spot where the two thrilled campers were watching; and as it approached they saw its color fade slowly until it had disappeared completely from sight among the inky patches between the stars overhead. For minutes the two were not able to locate it—until Jim, once again, had pointed to a faint red spot that grew in color and intensity as it drew away from the zenith. Once again it had disappeared over the rim of the western world—and from then on there was no thought of sleep in the minds of Jim Wilson and Clee Partridge. They were watching the skies, hoping it would return.

"What was the thing?" Jim Wilson exclaimed suddenly with exasperation. "I've been racking my brain, Clee, but nothing I can think of makes sense. It

couldn't have been a plane, and it couldn't have been a meteor. And if it was a fire-fly—well, then I'm one too." He paused, and looked at the other. "Any new suggestions?" he asked.

"Me—I still think it was a space ship from Mars or Venus," Clee Partridge answered drily; "searching for a couple of good Earth-men to help 'em out of some jam. You noticed the way it disappeared for a moment when it was overhead: it was looking us over."

"Then it'll be back," answered Jim, not to be outdone, "for it's not apt to find anyone better qualified. I, myself, would kinda like to take a joy-ride out through the Great Dipper."

Clee smiled and looked down at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. The two resumed their vigil, and there was quietness between them. For some time they lost themselves in the sparkling glory of the firmament, hardly moving, except to pull closer the collars of their flannel shirts against the increasing coldness of the mountain air.

And then for the third time that night the mysterious sky traveler sprang over the trees on the eastern horizon. Suddenly it appeared; both men saw it at once; and this time it made a clear, beautiful arc straight for the zenith. As it raised, it grew in size, a beautiful, delicate cherry star spanning the whole welkin. The two men got to their knees and watched it, breathless with fascination.

"Look!" cried Jim suddenly.

As had happened on its second appearance, the thing began to slow up and its color gradually faded as it drew directly overhead. By the time it should have reached the zenith it could no longer be seen. It had dissolved against the inky spaces above.

"It should come into view again in a moment," Clee said; "a little farther on, like the other time."

They watched, thrilled by the mystery of the midnight phenomenon. Minutes passed, but still it did not appear. Clee grew restive, and as his eyes chanced on his wrist watch he started violently and held out his arm for Jim to see. The radium-painted hands and dial were glowing with unusual brilliance.

Looking quickly into the skies again, Clee sensed something wrong; something different. For a moment he could not figure out what—and then it came to him. One of the great stars, one that he had been watching in its climb up the sky through the night, had disappeared!

He got excitedly to his feet, grabbed his companion's arm and pointed out this strange thing—and as he pointed another star blinked out and did not reappear.

"Something's happening up there," Jim said soberly. "I don't know what; but I, for one, don't feel quite comfortable."

He kept peering at the place pointed out, at a spot of black even darker than the inky sky; or did he only imagine it was darker? he asked himself. Soon the spot enlarged; became a distinct patch; then, growing still, obliterated one star after another around its borders. It made a pure circle; and before long the starlight glinting off its sides showed it to be a great, tinted sphere.

Swiftly it dropped down on the two men, and they watched it hypnotized, incapable of moving. It was only a hundred yards overhead when some presence of mind returned to Clee.

"Run, Jim!" he yelled, moving away. "It's coming straight down!"

Wilson came out of his daze and the two sprinted wildly for the path that led down the spur on which their camp was located. They had not made more than fifty yards when they heard a dull thud, and, turning, saw the great sphere resting on the ground with a slight rocking motion that quickly ceased.

A gully cut into the trail ahead, and when they reached it Clee grabbed his partner's arm and pulled him off to one side, where, panting with their sudden exertion, they wormed up to the brow and peeped over at their strange visitor.

The sphere stood in the starlight on the very spot they had been occupying when they first saw it. Right in their campfire it lay—a great, dark-red crystal shape perhaps fifty feet in diameter, whose surface sparkled with innumerable facets. It rested quietly on the ground, as if oblivious of the two routed men breathlessly watching it from a short distance. No ports or variations of any kind were visible to mar its star-reflecting sides.

"It must be some new kind of dirigible!" murmured Jim; "but why did it go and pick on us for its midnight call!"

"It's a space ship from Mars," answered Clee with a serious face. "They heard you, and're coming to take you for your ride. See?" he added quickly, pointing.

A large door was opening in the side of the sphere, and the illumination within threw a bright beam of amber-colored light in their direction. A metallic ramp slid out and angled down to the ground.

Breathlessly the two men waited to see who would emerge, but a long time went by without their catching the slightest sign of life within. The face of Clee's wrist watch was fluorescing brilliantly now, and moment by moment the weird glow was increasing. Jim stirred nervously.

"I don't mind telling you, I'm scared," he said.

"Aw, they won't make you walk back," consoled Clee; but he was scared himself. Why didn't something happen? Why didn't someone come out of the ship?

Jim thought he heard a noise, and touched Clee on the shoulder, pointing to a place on the trail down which they had come a few minutes before. Clee

looked, and as he did so the hair on the back of his neck stood up. For the bushes along the side of the path were moving as if they were being brushed aside by someone in passing—someone making a straight line to the spot where they lay concealed. And no one was there!

"Can they be invisible?" breathed Jim, every pore in his body prickling.

For a moment the two men could hardly breathe, so great was their unnamed fear. During that time no other movements could be noted. Then Clee suddenly pointed to a bush only five yards away. Half a dozen leaf-tipped branches were bending slowly in their direction—and then a sharp crack, as of a broken twig, came to them from the same spot.

Panic, blind and unreasoning, swept them. "Run!" gasped Jim; and together, instinctively, they turned and scrambled down the side of the ridge to get away, anywhere, far from the approaching menace of they knew not what. Reckless of possible injury, they slid and stumbled down the brush-covered slope—and right behind them came sudden crashing sounds of pursuit.

New fears lent wings to their flight, but the sounds behind continued inexorably at their heels no matter how fast they ran or how lucky they were in making past obstacles. Their pursuer was as fast as they. They had no idea who—or what—it might be, for in the brief glances they snatched over their shoulders they could not see anything at all!

The going was bad, and the two campers had not gone more than a quarter-mile when they were breathing hard, and felt that they could not make one more step without collapsing on the ground to give their laboring lungs a chance to catch up. Panting like dogs they dragged themselves along through pine and birch trees, around large rocks and over briar-covered hills, only a few steps ahead of their pursuer.

Then Partridge, a little in the lead as they made their way up a steep slope, heard Jim suddenly go sprawling; heard him gasp:

"It's got me!"

Turning, he saw his partner rolling and threshing violently on the ground, and now and then lashing out at the empty air with his fists. Without a moment's hesitation he jumped from his position above—jumped square and hard into the space which Jim's invisible assailant should be occupying. With a great thud he crashed into some unseen body in the air, and went down, the breath knocked out of him. As he got to his knees an odor like that of cloves came to his nostrils, and something caught him around the neck and began constricting. Frantically he tried to tear himself loose, but the harder he struggled the more strangling became the grip on his neck; and at last, faint from the growing odor and the lack of air, his efforts dwindled into a spasmodic tightening and relaxing of the muscles.

Then, for a moment, the hold on his neck must have loosened, for he found himself able to breathe a little. Turning, he saw Jim at his side, apparently similarly held.

"If I could only—see it!" Clee managed to get out. Jim's spasmodic, bitter answer came a moment later.

"Being invisible—tremendous advantage!" he gasped.

In desperation the two men again began to fight against the clutches that were holding them, and this time the grip about their necks unexpectedly loosened—to bring to their noses the odor of cloves overpowering in strength. And that was all they knew before they lapsed into a black and bottomless void....

Through the lifting haze of returning consciousness Clee felt a command to get up. As he automatically complied he saw that Jim was doing likewise. Once on his feet he felt another impulse to go to the cherry-crystal sphere, visible in the distance; but his legs were weak, and neither he nor Jim could walk very well until out of the nothingness around them came something of invisible bulk to lend them support.

Slowly, carefully, straight for the waiting globe the two men were conducted; and in his state of half-consciousness Clee wondered at the impotence of his will to make his body offer resistance. They passed right by their tent and up the ramp to the inside of the strange sphere.

Clee's impressions were blurred and dull, but he noticed that they were in a small room brilliant with amber light, on one wall of which there was a circular area which contained a dozen or more instruments and levers and wheels. As his eyes rested on them, one of the levers moved, seemingly of itself, and the ramp came sliding into the ship and the thick door slowly swung closed. Then they were conducted along a short, narrow passageway into which opened, on the right, a small dim room; and there the grip about their bodies loosened and they slumped to the floor. The door whereby they had entered, closed.

A faint vibration became noticeable; they suddenly felt very heavy; and to the accompaniment of a low but rising hum they saw one wall of their room begin to glow with a beautiful cherry color. Although they had been too stupefied to try to speak, this spurred their tired bodies, and they dragged themselves over to it. They found the wall to be of some kind of hard crystal; it was the outer shell of the sphere; and it now gleamed redly transparent.

Far out and down the men saw a great convex surface on which lay narrow ribbons of silver, winding veinlike through dark areas that were in some places lit by little clusters of twinkling lights. As they watched, the distances on the surface shrank in on themselves; they could see the outline of a great circle. The sight stimulated the exhausted men. In a hushed and awestruck voice, Jim Wilson broke the silence.

"We've been kidnaped," he said. "Being taken God knows where, out among the stars...."

He was getting the sky-ride he had asked for.

Clee smiled faintly, and was going to remind him of this; but he was too tired to make the effort. He only looked at the tremendous scene below: at the Earth they knew so well, with its familiar streets, comfortable fireplaces, the faces of those they loved and those others who were their friends....

The Earth soon became a ball—a globe such as he had used at school, showing clearly the outline of the continents and oceans. And little by little it dwindled, until it was only a ghostly shape far out in nothingness....

A little later, had the two Earthlings not been deep in sleep, they might have seen enter a strange-looking man clad in odd garments—a man whose great, bulging head was quite bald, and whose wrinkled, leprous-white face wore an expression of unutterable wisdom and majesty. In his hands he carried a strange piece of apparatus which he held to Jim's wrist while it emitted a coarse vibratory hum that whined slowly up in pitch until it passed the range of hearing. He did the same thing to Clee, and then he quietly left.

But the two Earthlings knew nothing of this. Limp on the floor, oblivious to everything, they slept....

Some hours later found the kidnapped men well recovered and sitting on the floor of their cell talking over their situation. As usual, Wilson was thinking out loud.

"What can they be?—or who?" he asked, frowning with his thought. "They can't be from Earth, for no one there could invent such a ship as this and keep it a secret; and even if someone had, he could never have done the equally astounding thing of inventing a way to render living bodies invisible. I doubt if the thing that caught us was human, by what I was able to feel in my short struggle with it. There was something that might have been a hand; but the strength and the weight of its body was enormous!"

"Well, we'll probably soon see," commented Clee with philosophic resignation and pulling out of a hip pocket a package of tobacco and his corn-cob pipe. "Or, rather, we may soon know. Our captors may keep themselves invisible; and of course it's barely possible that it's their natural state to be invisible, so that we may never hope to see them. What I'm chiefly afraid of, is that they are from some other planet, and that that's where we are being taken—though heaven knows what any creatures so infinitely far ahead of us Earthlings scientifically could want with a pair of young Earth lawyers!"

He offered the package to Jim. "Here, have a smoke; you'll feel better," he said. "While there's tobacco there's hope."

"At least they don't seem disposed to kill us right off," returned Jim, handing back the tobacco after lighting his own pipe. "Later—if there's to *be* any 'later' for us—we may be able to find a way to get out of this room; though how we'd run the ship, to get back home, is another hard brick wall.... Maybe the controls are invisible, too!" he suggested with a wry grin. "Ever take any pre-law courses on how to work the invisible controls of a space ship?"

Clee's reply was spoken low, and was entirely irrelevant.

"That's funny," he said.

He was looking at the face of the watch on his left wrist. For the first time since they had been abducted, its abnormal brightness had left it.

As Jim watched, inquiringly, Clee moved his right hand a little, and once more the dial leaped out through the dimness with unnatural brilliance. Jim saw that his friend was holding in this hand the package of tobacco. Clee repeated the demonstration.

"The dial glows with unusual brightness always—except when I hold the package of tobacco in front of it at this spot," he said wonderingly, half to himself. "If I remember my science right, ultra-violet light would make the radium on the dial glow; and the lead in the tin-foil of the tobacco wrapping would screen it off. Let's see—"

He crossed to the other side of the room and held his watch and the package of tobacco in various positions until he again found one line along which the watch-dial gave off only its customary light.

"Yes," he said, "—exactly in the extended line made by my watch and this package of tobacco is the source of the ray which makes the watch-dial glow. It's probably the control room of this ship."

"An extraordinary deduction, my dear Sherlock," commented Wilson drily; "and valuable. I wish you'd now take a moment and deduce the reason for the mysterious appearance of the lumps on the back of our necks. I know I didn't have mine before I was taken for this sky-ride."

As he spoke, his hand sought the back of his neck where there was a fat lump about the size of a quarter—a lump not painful, for all its newness and size. Hard pushing with probing fingers had revealed something that seemed to be hard and flat, buried within; but close examinations failed to show any wound or scar, and the men had no notion what the lumps might be. Clee's was just like Jim's.

But Clee did not respond to his friend's invitation. A heavy mood had come over him; he was standing by the outer wall, looking out. Jim went and stood beside him, his hand on his shoulder, and together they gazed through

the cherry-crystal wall of their prison ship out on the loneliness of the immeasurable miles outside. For them, space was red, instead of the deep black they knew they would see through colorless glass. Brilliant pinpoints of light, millions of them, in all sizes, made up the infinite space that was the background of their adventure.

To which one—near which one were they going? Would they ever return to their Earth again? Would their friends ever know of the incredible adventure that had overtaken them?—or would they, after the few weeks of searching and inquiry that must follow their disappearance, at last conclude that some nameless mountain disaster had made them victims, and give them up for dead? No doubt. And month after succeeding month their memory would fade from the minds of those who had loved them, while they would be—where?...

A peculiar, dynamic thought came simultaneously into the minds of the two men. It was not a word: it seemed more like a feeling; but its unquestionable import was "Come." Together they rose, and looked at each other wonderingly. Again came the feeling. They started for the door.

"But that's foolish!" Jim said aloud, as if objecting to his own thought. "The door's locked! We tried it!" He looked at Partridge, who returned his gaze blankly—and then, in spite of what he had said, he reached out and turned the latch.

The door swung open!

Expressions of surprise died on the men's lips as again came the compelling urge to go to some unknown destination.

"Suggestion!" said Clee, as he passed through the doorway. "Someone's suggesting—telepathically willing—that we come to him! And I—God help me—I can't resist!"

His neck corded with veins and muscles with his effort to restrain his body from obeying the mysterious command that was drawing it onward. Wilson,

one arm outstretched in a repelling gesture, his legs stiff and tight, was also trying to resist. But the will that had sounded within them was stronger than theirs, and slowly, inevitably, they were drawn down the passage.

Their carpeted way took them back to the entrance chamber and then up a steeply sloping corridor that led upward to the left. As they passed along they saw that the hand of a master had made on the walls, in panel effect, marvelously complicated decorations in many-colored mosaic. No man of Earth could ever have done such work, the two men realized—and this thought did not cheer them any.

At the top of their curving passage a doorway led them into a spacious room hung with soft, finely woven tapestries with a metallic lustre and furnished with deep-napped rugs and luxurious chairs and divans. Through this room the intangible threads of the alien will directed them—on into a wide-vaulted alcove about one-third its size. There, the strange clutch on them relaxed, and they looked about, at first apprehensively, then with growing boldness and curiosity.

"This is the control room!" exclaimed Clee suddenly; and after a moment Jim agreed with him. It was the simplicity of the controls which had prevented them from recognizing it at first. Against the left wall was a great table with a tilted top, bearing, in its center, a raised and hooded eyepiece giving a view into a large, enclosed black box. On each side were several rows of small, shiny, metallic levers and what they took to be instrument dials—round, cup-shaped depressions with pointers free to move across dials lined with disorderly and meaningless convolutions. For the full length of the middle wall, straight ahead, was a broad table of some jet-black polished material, and on it was a large array of instruments and apparatus, all unfamiliar to them. Against the draperies of the wall to their right was one large cushioned chair, simple and beautiful in its lines.

No living person or thing could be discerned in either the main room or the alcove.

For several minutes the two men walked all about, examining everything they saw with curiosity and interest; and then Clee discovered a peculiar thing. His watch-dial, glowing very brightly now, would perceptibly increase in brilliance every time he neared the great chair. With sudden inspiration he took out his package of tobacco and held it in the line his watch made with the chair—and he found that his watch stopped glowing. He tried it again from another angle, and the result was the same. From that chair came the electrical disturbance that was making his watch-dial glow—yet nowhere near the chair was any bit of electrical apparatus to be seen.

What he did see in the chair, though, almost caused his heart to stop beating. The cushions of the seat, compressed before, began to puff out to full volume, as if someone had just risen from them. And then, faintly but sharply outlined in the long-napped rug in front, appeared the print of a human shoe!

"A man!" breathed Clee. "A human being!"

The two men stood frozen in their tracks. Clee's arm, with the package of tobacco in his hand, was still outstretched toward the great chair, but now the dial of his watch was glowing brightly again. Something within caused him in spite of his terror to move the package between the watch and the space above the footprint on the rug. The glowing stopped. The man—devil—whatever it was that made the print—was the source of the strange excitation!

This took but a second—the interval before another shoe-print formed in the rug in their direction. Jim gasped something unintelligible and started to back away; but no sooner did Partridge start to follow suit, than a compulsion to stand still came over them. Caught where they were, unable to move, they saw the shoe-prints come towards them. Slowly, step by step, twelve inches apart, they came, and did not stop until they were only four or five feet away.

"We'll jump him, if we get the chance!" hissed Jim, never taking his eyes off the prints.

"Yes," came the answer; but Clee's further words were cut off in the making by an added compulsion to keep quiet. Were their words understood? The two men were locked, speechless, where they stood. And by some creature with a human footprint whom they could not see!

The touch of firm flesh came out of the nothingness of space about them, to poke and pry all over their bodies. Anger began to take the place of their fear, as, for some time, impotent of resistance, they had to submit to the examination given them. They were prodded and felt like dogs at a show; their breathing and heart action were carefully listened to; their mouths were opened and their teeth inspected as if they were horses offered for sale. Both men were inwardly fuming.

"Dogs!" shouted Clee in his thoughts. "Treating us like dogs, to see how healthy we are! Does he want us for slaves?"

At last the examination came to a stop, and they saw the shoe-prints in the rug go over to the black table and remain there, heels toward them, while various pieces of apparatus were invisibly moved across the table top. For a moment the compelling will did not seem, to Clee, to be constraining him as much is it had, and he began to wonder if he might not have a little control over his body again. Tentatively he tried to break through the oppressing blanket of foreign will; his arms and legs moved a little; he succeeded! He caught Jim's eye and showed him. He thrilled all over at his discovery, and his will to move measurably increased with his growing confidence that he could.

The toes of the prints were still turned away. He was going to try and get the man or monster who was making them.

He gestured to Jim, and with a great effort took a step in the invisible man's direction. A thrill of gladness helped him on—for Jim was following suit!

Again and again, with greatest mental effort, they made steps toward the footprints, which, remaining side by side and motionless, gave them increasing hope of stealing up unobserved. When they were only three feet

away Clee motioned to Jim, and with a tremendous effort of will they jumped at the space where their enemy should be.

They hit him hard, and bore him heavily to the floor. By the feel, he was a man such as they! Clee's blood leaped with the lust for revenge, and blanking his mind against strong urges to cease his attack he rained savage blows at the place he was holding.

But almost at once they had evidence that their opponent was not such a man as they. A terrific pain stabbed suddenly through them, and they doubled up on the floor, writhing in agony. It was as if every nerve in their bodies had turned into white-hot wire, and was searing through their flesh. Again and again came the terrible stabs of pain—and their source seemed to be the mysterious lumps at the back of their necks!

At last they ceased coming, and Jim and Clee stretched out on the floor all but unconscious from the terrific shocks of fiery agony. They were completely helpless; further thoughts of resistance were unthinkable. But they were not left lying long. There came a telepathic compulsion to stand up; and they found themselves obeying, in spite of the shrieking protest of their every nerve.

Twitching, stumbling, they were made to do servile things—to kneel on the floor; get up again; turn round and round; bow low, then stretch backwards. And out of the air around them came shocking blows which landed on their faces, necks and chests; feet which kicked out at their shins; and they had to stand there and take it, helpless to resist.

Then Clee, as the nearer of the two men, was pushed over to the work-table, where an oval head-piece of finely-woven wire was fitted over his head. Another very large one, standing next to it, and connected to it by wires which led to a small instrument panel nearby, lifted into the air until it must have settled about the head of their persecutor. A dial on the panel turned slowly. And gradually the helmet resting in the air dissolved into nothingness before their eyes.

A slight nausea swept over Clee as it did so, and in the midst of it he felt a series of sharp, staccato thoughts—thoughts which did not seem to be composed of words, and yet were clear and intelligible.

"Fool of a fool!" crackled in his brain with almost a physical effort, "do you think to resist Xantra? Do you think with your sub-human minds to overcome one of the Tillas, Masters of the Universe? Close you were to death—and death indeed would have come had I not other plans for you.

"Know that henceforth you and your companion are my slaves. You will jump at my slightest will; serve me as best you can with such intelligence as you may possess. For faithful, willing service you shall have food and clothing and a portion of leisure. Disobedience and tardiness will bring you the pain you have already tasted; revolt, or the attempt to escape—death; but only after torture such as you have never known.

"I shall never repeat this mode of communication: it is as physically nauseating to me as to you. And you may never expect to see me, though I can always see you. By vibrational means I have given you the universal atomic rhythm of all Tillian slaves; and, although in that state your fellow-slaves will be visible to you, I, your master, will not!

"You will now return to your place of confinement. After you have recovered you will be taken in hand by your fellow-slaves and shown your duties. And if your instinct for self-preservation is only one-tenth normal, you will never again be such a stupid sub-animal fool as to attempt to resist Xantra—to fly in the face of the inevitable!"

The sharp, staccato voice in Clee's brain stopped; his nausea began to leave him; his helmet was removed; and had he been looking he might have seen the other one slowly materialize on the table. The ordeal was over just in time, for the last remnants of his strength was giving out—as was Jim's. The two Earth-men slumped down, and would have fallen but for the telepathic will, stronger than theirs, that forced them erect again. There came a very strong compulsion to return to their cell, and bruised, stumbling, their

nerves still afire from their strange stabbing pains, they made their way back.

They fell to the floor and passed into unconsciousness—beaten, subdued. Slaves....

After a long blank interval a distinct thought crossed Clee's mind. He was in heaven, and an angel voice had spoken. There it was again! Cool hands were stroking his wrists and forehead. He opened his eyes and looked, but seeing no one closed them again.

The Voice returned, and two of the words which kept repeating were somehow familiar. "So sorry ... so sorry...." The Voice was low and cool and feminine. And someone was bathing his battered head.... He rolled over and got up on one elbow. He still could see no one.

The Voice said: "Oh, I'm so glad you're better! I thought you'd never come to!"

Mechanically Clee asked: "Who are you?"

"Vivian Gray," came the quick answer; "from Boston. And you?"

Clee did not answer, but started to lie back again. Things were all wrong: he couldn't even see anyone. He'd go back to sleep, and wake up some other time. But the Voice wouldn't let him.

"Oh, you must listen!" it said. "I haven't much time!"

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Why—right here!" came the surprised answer. "Can't you see me?"

"No," answered Clee, still not himself. He added categorically: "I can see Jim. I can see the door. I can see my hands, but I can't see you."

"Oh, then it must be true! Xantra *told* me he was going to make you one of his common slaves; but I hoped—I hoped—"

This didn't mean much to Clee; but with the words came memory of all that had happened, and with sudden concern he crept over to where Jim was lying, to see how he was. He found him blinking and stirring, aroused by the voices. Quickly he explained the invisible presence to him, warning him to be on guard.

"Oh, but I'm a friend—Vivian Gray—kidnapped from Earth just like you!" came quick explanation out of the air. "Xantra stole me from Cape Cod, where I was vacationing, about the time he took you. Xantra is the one whose space ship we are on. He looks much like a man; he is some kind of a man; but he's not from Earth—"

"You've *seen* him?" interrupted Clee, beginning to believe the Voice a little.

"Yes," came the instant response; "not when he abducted me—he had made himself invisible for that—but always after. Haven't you yet?" And then, without waiting for his answer, she gave it herself. "But of course you couldn't see him if he's already given you the universal atomic rhythm the slaves have. You'd then be able to see only each other, and the other slaves; not Xantra and not me.

"I think he makes his slaves that way for protection," she explained. "They can't very well plot or rebel against him when they can't even see him, and never know but what he's around."

"Who are these slaves you keep mentioning?" Jim broke in. "How many of them are there on this ship: and how many like Xantra?"

"Xantra is the only one of his kind," came the answer. "The slaves are a race of inferior people found on his planet—wherever that is: I couldn't understand, from his explanation, just where. They are creatures much like ugly human beings with a touch of the ape, and are entirely bald, very strong and not very intelligent. There're seven or eight on board. Normally they are good-natured: but sometimes when they have a

hard master, like Xantra, they take to hating him; and when they do that they can be very fierce and treacherous. That's the main reason for Xantra's stopping at Earth: to see what kind of slaves we humans will make. He is hoping that we will be more intelligent than those he has—and more docile, and safer to have around."

"Well," snorted Jim belligerently, "if Mr. Xantra thinks that I'm going to be safe to have around, he's a lot dumber than *I* am!"

"Oh, it's good to hear you talk that way," the girl's voice went on. "We three have got to stick together, and find some way to escape!

"I've so much to say!" she went on; "but I daren't stay long, for fear of getting caught. What you said is where my chief hope lies: Xantra doesn't realize how intelligent we are, and how dangerous; and we mustn't let him know! I think he believes we are much like his present slaves: he gets away with murder with them. You've noticed the lumps on the back of your necks? Well, they have them, too; it's something that's attached to the spinal cord and gives him telepathic control over them; also the power to hurt them dreadfully—as you've unfortunately found out. His slaves don't understand these lumps; they don't seem to know that he would lose control if they could only in some way get rid of the things in their necks!"

For the first time since the girl started talking, Clee spoke. His voice was low and grave, and there was a tinge of suspicion in it.

"Just how does it happen," he asked, "that you know so much about things here?"

The girl's voice broke as she gave her answer.

"I'm ashamed to tell you," she said. "Xantra—he—he admires me as a healthy animal; one close, in species, to himself. He thinks by being nice to me that he might be able to make me a willing companion to share his trip!" For a moment the girl was silent; and when she spoke again there was a hard note in her voice.

"I let him have hopes," she said, "—deliberately. I planned to make him trust me, and give me the run of the ship, so I could find out all I could. So far—before you came—I saw no slightest hope of ever escaping back to Earth; but I had at least to look for a quick, sure way to death, in case—in case—"

"You—and us too!" exclaimed Clee impulsively. "No Earth-man—no American, at least—is ever going to submit to slavery. If the worst comes to the worst, we'll at least die together, Vivian!"

Jim added soberly: "And perhaps, if we do, no one from Xantra's planet will ever again come to Earth looking for 'docile' slaves...."

For a moment everyone was silent, affected by the thought behind what they had said. Then the girl's voice suggested, with a touch of Earth formality that was almost ludicrous under the circumstances: "But you two men have not yet introduced yourselves!"

Both Clee and Jim smiled, and told her their names, and in the slight pause that followed Clee said awkwardly, almost shyly: "Miss Gray, we don't know what's in store for us here, and it—it's possible that we may never know each other any better: so would you—I mean, I wonder would you mind if I reached out and touched you. In spite of all we have said. I—I can hardly realize that you are there, somewhere, before me."

Out of the nothingness came an impulsive soft hand that closed over his. There was both a smile and something deeper in Vivian's voice as she said, "Here," and raised his hand until it touched her brow and the thick smooth hair of her head. Then she placed it a little lower, over her face; and gently Clee's fingers told him what his eyes could not read.

"In case you never see me—why, I—I'd like you to know that I'm really, not bad looking," she said; and Clee knew she was blushing as he smiled at the eternal feminine in her.

But the smile suddenly left his face. His hand had felt her give a distinct start. Then—

"He's calling!" she gasped faintly. "Xantra's calling for me to come to him!" Her voice, as she spoke, moved, and Clee knew she was going towards the door.

"No!" he cried impulsively. "Don't risk it! Stay here, and we'll begin our fight against him right now!"

"I will be safe," came Vivian's reassuring voice from the door. "I can manage him a while yet." Her further words came with a rush. "But I wanted to tell you—I had a faint plan. If I could get hold of the anaesthetic —the vial of stuff that smells like cloves—"

The door was closing now, and the two men knew she was moving down the corridor. They listened in vain for her to complete what she had been saying. Just before the door clicked shut, Jim jammed his foot in it, preventing it from closing.

"Gee, that girl has courage!" Clee murmured.

For a moment the two men looked at each other. Jim was thinking about the opened door, and the chance they had to get out. But Clee's mind was on something else.

"Well, Jim," he said, "you and I have a nasty job ahead."

Jim looked at Clee wonderingly as he took out his pipe and stuck it in the crack of the door, allowing him to remove his foot. Clee explained to him what Xantra had told him with the thought-sending helmets; reminded him of what they had learned from Vivian about the lumps on their necks. After he had finished he said quietly but decisively:

"Now, we're going to try and remove whatever is under these lumps. Have you got anything sharp? Your knife? Something with an edge on it?"

It would mean escape from the domination of Xantra's will!—from his terrible stabbing punishment!—if they could remove them! Jim breathed a little quicker in his excitement.

"But once we do it—if we *can* do it—it'll mean that we'll have to make our break to escape right away," he reminded Clee. "We'll be caught if Xantra wills us to come to him and we don't appear!"

"You know what will happen to Vivian if we delay the attempt." Clee reminded him levelly: and Jim knew that Clee was right—that their break for freedom must start right then and there....

He looked through his pockets and produced some cigarettes, matches, a pipe, a nailfile and some utterly useless odds and ends. Clee's hands came out of his pockets empty. "I've got nothing at all," he said—and picked up the nailfile and looked at it questioningly. "We'll have to use this, I guess.... Well, I'm first."

He lay face down on the floor and loosened his collar. Quietly, he made several suggestions. "Light a match and heat the tip in the flame," he said. "The point's pretty dull, but cut as deep and quick and clean as you can. If I yell, pay no attention; I'll try to hold still. Unless it bleeds very much, best not make a bandage; we've nothing clean enough."

That was all he said; and Jim, his heart beating like mad, and a lump in his throat, could find no words at all. He sterilized the tip of the file as directed, studied the lump a moment, then, after a rough, affectionate shake of his friend's shoulder, he knelt close to his task. One quick hard cut; a sharp gasp from Clee; a repetition; then two more times crossways—and a firm, spongelike metallic disc lay revealed. Then the worst—raising it a little, and breaking the several fine wires that led from it through the flesh within....

Clee lay panting, the sweat running down the deep wrinkles of pain on his face. Dark blood oozed from the jagged wound. But he smiled a little, and some of the pain-wrinkles in his face smoothed away, when Jim showed him the disk....

For a short time Clee rested, quieting his nerves, while Jim staunched the flow of blood.

And then it was Jim's turn; and he bore the sharp agony as stoically as Clee....

It was perhaps a strange thing; but at this great moment in the lives of the two men they felt no need to talk. For the few minutes they rested after they had done, no word was spoken; but in that time a bond of friendship was formed that only death could ever break....

They did not rest long. Every moment brought them nearer to the inevitable discovery of what they had done. Their muscles were still quivering, the wounds on their necks still slowly bleeding, when Clee rose and aroused Jim. The most dangerous, desperate part of their wild revolt lay just ahead.

They were able to make but the vaguest of plans, not knowing what to anticipate outside. They only knew that they would first have to strike boldly for possession of the control alcove—which, without doubt meant they would have, somehow, to kill Xantra—to find and kill a man they could not see, yet who could see them. An enormous task. And only the first of several.

For a moment, realizing this, they hesitated at the door. But the die had been cast; there was nothing for them to do but go forward—and quickly; so, giving Jim a final warning that they must stick together, Clee opened wide the door and stepped out into the corridor.

What he saw there halted, him in his tracks.

"The slaves!" gasped Jim, and involuntarily both Earth-men backed into the room again. The creatures they had seen at once followed them inside.

There were four of them. As tall as men, they were, and the general cast of their bodies was identical. But they were different in shocking little details. Their heads were much larger, and in the shape of inverted pears, like those of hydrocephalics; their eyes, popped and dull. The thin lips beneath their stubs of noses were ever writhing and twisting in horrible grimaces. And, worst, their skins were sickly-white, and were absolutely bald of hair. The

only clothes they wore were loin-cloths and very large sandals, which exposed to full view their chunky, muscular bodies.

All this the two men took in at a glance. They knew they could never hope to cope, unarmed, with four such creatures as these, so they stood with their backs to the wall, alertly awaiting their first move.

"Easy," warned Clee. "They're probably only coming to take us in hand, as Vivian said."

The nearest of the slaves stepped a little closer to the two men, and by the twitching of its eyelids and the increased mouthings of its lips it was apparent that the creature was highly excited. A high, variable moaning sound came from its throat. Curiously, boldly, it looked Clee all over—and then it did an amazing thing. Seeing the blood on the back of his neck, it swung him around, put its writhing lips to the still-bleeding wound and dog-like licked it clean.

The gesture was altogether a friendly one.

Another of the slaves of Xantra went up and did the same to Jim, and the two men looked at each other with relief. This meant that the removal of the disks had not been understood by the creatures!

It was with growing hope that they allowed themselves to be conducted from their cell, through the sloping corridor into a doorway they had passed coming in, and down a curving flight of steps into a large room below. They were in the space at the very bottom of the ship, for, through the redly-glowing transparent walls that curved on each side and below, they could see the infinite deeps of star-filled space. Three other slaves were there, waiting for them. At the far side of the room their guide pointed to two small stalls, with a partition between, which they understood were to be their beds. They were across from a long row of similar ones.

"Making us right at home," commented Jim. "I wonder if they'll serve cakes and tea."

"Wish they would," added Clee; "I'm getting damned hungry. But we've got work to do—and we've got to do it quick!"

His eyes swept the room, looking among the sparse furnishings for something they might be able to use as a weapon. He saw nothing, but the sight of the lump on the neck of a nearby slave gave him an idea.

"I wonder if these slaves would fight for us if we removed the lumps from their necks," he said musingly, his eyes narrow. "I wish there were some way to talk to them...."

He looked from one to another of the animal-men making a circle about them, wondering what to do; then quickly he made his decision. "Jim, I'm going to try. It'll have to be done by signs; I've got to make them understand, and get their permission."

At once he raised his hand to get the slaves' attention; then, raising both fists high in the air, he shook them violently, at the same time gritting his teeth, working his face, and growling in animal anger at something overhead. He was trying to show the slaves his anger at Xantra, above.

The slaves fell away from him in surprise and alarm, not understanding what he was trying to put across. He continued his demonstration, hopping about furiously, but still without result. Then Jim cried out:

"Touch the place on your neck!"

Clee did so, and the result was startling. Quickly there ran around the circle throaty growls of anger, and every slave raised a hand to the lump on its neck. Evidently they had all felt the awful punishment-pain of their master.

Heartened by this, Clee extended his pantomime. Stopping his demonstration of anger, he put one finger on the wound on his neck and fell to the floor, writhing in simulated pain. As he lay there groaning, the easily aroused animal-men moaned with him in sympathy. Then Jim, inspired, stepped into the act. Taking out his nailfile, he bent over the prostrate Clee and pretended to cut into his neck, making a great show of removing

something and throwing it away; and as he did so Clee jumped to his feet and grinned and hopped about the room in a wildly exaggerated affectation of joy and relief. Then he stopped his acting and carefully showed the slaves the wounds in his and Jim's necks, by finger movements doing his best to make it clear that they had removed something from there.

And then, taking no chances, he repeated the whole pantomime, Jim, at the proper place, acting his part as before.

When at last he stopped and looked around, he was over-joyed at his apparent success in putting across the idea. All over the room the animal-men were repeating his show in its various phases.

"Now I've got to take the disk out of one of them," said Clee, "and it's a mighty dangerous thing to attempt! You see how easily their emotions are aroused. If I hurt too much—!"

"I know," responded Jim, "but we've got to risk it, for if we succeed we've got a good bunch of tough fighters at our backs. We need every bit of help we can get!"

Carefully they made their few preparations, and Clee, again by acting, indicated to one of the animal-men what he wanted to do. He seemed to make himself well understood, for without hesitation the creature lay face down on the floor. The others all gathered around as Clee bent over it, and Jim scanned their faces closely for any sign of suspicion or resentment. Seeing none, he told Clee to start; then held his breath in awful suspense.

The disk appeared near the surface, and with a quick slice Clee made his first incision. With the cut, the prone slave bucked and snarled. Clee murmured soothing words to it in English, and, as the creature quieted down, made another cut. Again came the bucking and throaty protest; and this time, to Jim's dismay, he saw in the bestial faces of the animal-men around them a sympathetic swing of emotional protest. A little more, now; and Clee would be able to take the disk out; but would the slaves restrain themselves until then?

Again Clee allowed the brute body under him to calm down. Then, as he was about to cut once more, from somewhere above in the space ship came the piercing scream of a woman. Something was happening to Vivian.

Clee half started to rise, to run to her aid, but he forced himself to be reasonable. Weaponless, visible, he could never hope to rescue an invisible girl from someone he couldn't even see. He was on the point of making valuable allies; in just a few moments more—! He decided to hurry through with the job he had undertaken.

All below had heard the scream. The circle around him was shifting uncertainly, and peculiar sounds were coming out of the brutes' twisting mouths as he bent again over their fellow on the floor.

Clee's hand was trembling like an aspen leaf as he prepared to make the next incision. He was completely unnerved, and with the utmost efforts of his will he was unable to control the nailfile. And he had to hurry!

He sliced as straight as he could at the bleeding lump; the slave moved; and the point of the file slipped deep into the creature's flesh!

At that, with a snarling growl the brute below arched from the floor and flung Clee sprawling. From all around the circle came menacing growls as the bleeding animal-man lumbered to its feet and came after him in a definite attack. Jim, not at that moment the center of their attention, pushed one of the slaves in the way of the charging brute and the two of them half fell; and before they could recover their balance Clee was on his feet making after Jim to the steps that led up out of the room.

"Up!" came Jim's shout. "Fast! We've made them enemies!"

Above them on the stairs was descending another slave, innocent of what had transpired below, and the two men bowled it over in their haste to get past. All the way to the bottom of the stairs it tumbled; and that delayed pursuit for the moment needed by the Earth-men to gain the upper corridor. Quickly they darted through the door; there was no way they could lock or block it, so they had to run on. Taking to the left, they found themselves in

the little entrance room, and from there their only course led up the corridor leading to Xantra's quarters and the control alcove.

Arrived there, the two men found the door ajar, but they paused irresolute before it, hardly daring to go in. They had no choice, however, for behind, only fifteen feet away, came the van of the animal-men. They pushed through the door, closed and bolted it, then, wheeling tigerishly, surveyed the room.

They saw no one.

They were not relieved at this. Xantra might well be there; he, as well as Vivian, would be invisible to them. And he had every opportunity of striking first; even then he might be preparing to deal with them, if he was in the room. The slaves were not attempting to break in the door to get them —and this was ominous: it argued that the master was there.

The two men stood motionless at the door, peering intently at the rug in search of telltale footprints. Then Clee touched Jim's shoulder and whispered faintly in his ear:

"Cloves! Smell it?"

Jim nodded. Slowly, on guard every second, they advanced to the alcove. They saw no sign of anyone there, though the odor of cloves was stronger. Jim grabbed a chair and held it ready, and Clee followed suit with a small, heavy tabouret. Cautiously, methodically, the two men began to reconnoitre the large room, examining foot by foot the rug in search of the faint clear prints that would reveal the presence of their enemy. The smell of cloves was beginning to dull their brains a little. Clee saw the danger in this, and whispered to Jim:

"Faster! Xantra may be insidiously anaesthetizing us! We've got to find where he is—quick!"

They hastened their search, feeling more and more sure that Xantra was close by. And not till then did Clee remember that he had a way to discover

Xantra's location. Jim heard him curse under his breath; saw him put down the tabouret and take out his tobacco; and knew at once what he was about to do. He went close to Clee, to guard him with his chair against possible attack.

The face of Clee's wrist watch was glowing brightly; it took only a second to find with the package of tobacco a spot which cut the dial's unnatural glow. As they found it the skin on the two men's bodies prickled all over. The line from the dial to the package of tobacco, if continued, would reach a spot on the floor not six feet away. And looking carefully there they could barely make out, in the bent hairs of the rug, a broken outline that might have been made by a prone figure.

As they prepared to jump they heard from that place a low sigh—and just before them appeared the distinct print of a human hand. Xantra was rising! And coincident with this a sudden banging at the door told them that the slaves at last had started to break in!

As one man the two Earthlings leaped on Xantra; he would have to be taken care of first. When they had fastened on his rising body they punched and pounded it furiously. Though their enemy was undoubtedly only half conscious, the sudden attack aroused him and he resisted vigorously. But then Clee made a lucky connection on what he felt to be his jaw, and the invisible form in their arms went limp.

"Get a rope—wire—anything to bind him with—quick!" yelled Clee. "I'll hold him!"

The pounding at the door was increasing ominously is Jim dashed over to the work-table. Rapidly he looked for something suitable, and in a few seconds was back with a length of stout wire which they quickly wrapped around the ankles and wrists of the limp form Clee was holding. As the wire touched Xantra it gradually disappeared from their sight, but their fingers reassured them that he was tightly bound.

Then they were at the door, which, shivering and bending from the battering without, showed signs of giving in. With herculean efforts they dragged a heavy divan over and wedged it tightly against it; then added other furniture in a tight supporting pile. But the door, of some light metal, was not built to stand such a siege, and was buckling further inward with each blow being dealt it. More and more plainly the two men could hear the triumphant snarls and howls of the animal-men.

Frantically they ransacked the rooms looking for what they thought might be weapons, but found none. They looked at each other with dismay. It was only a question of time—minutes—before the slaves would break in. What could they do?

In that tense moment of indecision a low, weak voice reached their ears—a woman's voice, and one they remembered well.

"Vivian!" cried Clee, and ran to the alcove, from whence it had seemed to come. The girl's next words brought them understanding.

"Clee—Jim—it's Xantra! He's willing the slaves to break in! He's lying bound on the floor, but he's conscious!"

Clee ran to where he had left the invisible man, cursing himself under his breath for being an utter ass for not having guessed this. His groping fingers quickly found the squirming Xantra's neck; and he had begun to throttle him into unconsciousness when Vivian called out:

"No! Don't! That won't stop the slaves: they've already been given the order! We've got to make Xantra stop them! Here—drag him to the work-table! I've got something—"

Wondering what the girl was about, Clee relaxed his grip on the invisible man's neck and complied. But he suddenly understood—and Jim, too—when he saw coming through the air the pair of thought-sending helmets. He had a way of communicating with Xantra, of course! He saw the larger helmet lower to rest over the head he was still holding; then soft hands placed the other over his own.

As it settled down a great crash sounded in the other room: the door had given in. It was still held almost in place by the tightly-wedged furniture, but that would not hold the animal-men long.

"Hurry!" cried Jim. "I'll stand by the door!" And he was already on his way to it.

Clee saw the small panel on the table above; saw the knob on it turn. He caught Vivian's excited voice. "Tell him to order them to stop," she said; "or else—or else—"

"He dies!" finished Clee, viciously thumbing into the air where the invisible Xantra's neck was.

With all the intensity he could muster, Clee concentrated on one simple, strong thought. He hardly heard the triumphant cries of the slaves as they felt the blocking furniture give before their efforts; all his energy was being expended in the will to get his thought across.

"Tell those slaves to stop breaking in or you die!" he commanded.

The noises at the door continued. Either Xantra had not understood, or else he was stubborn. He repeated his command and threat, and still the crashing sounds came to his ears.

Desperate, he played his last card; and unconsciously his lips formed the words of his next mental command, so that it was understood by the breathlessly watching Vivian.

"*Tell them to stop!*" he willed. "*No more air till you do!*" And with the words his fingers closed tightly over the other's throat.

The sounds at the door continued; for a moment the invisible form between Clee's knees writhed violently—and then suddenly, almost magically, a silence fell over the whole room. Clee had forced his will on Xantra! He had made him stop the slaves!

And just in time.

Clee's fingers relaxed a little on the throat of the man beneath him. He turned and said: "Quick, Vivian—find that anaesthetic!" A moment later it was pressed in his hands. "Say when," he told the girl, and held it beneath the nose of the helpless man. Xantra's head at once fell back, and he heard Vivian telling him to stop. He pulled away the bottle, corked it and stood up.

"Well, that's that," he said.

For a moment he was silent. Only the noises made by Jim in strengthening the barricade at the door could be heard in the room. Then he said, earnestly:

"I wish I could see you, Vivian—right now; but that'll have to wait. I guess...."

A low laugh came from the place where the girl was standing. A hand touched his arm, and he found himself being conducted into the alcove. Vivian laughed again; said, teasingly, "What a stupid expression on your face!" then commanded him to shut his eyes, and keep them shut. He felt something being attached to his wrists; heard a coarse hum that quickly rose in pitch until it passed the range of hearing. He was caught up in a surprising exhilaration; he heard the hum again, sliding down and down in pitch, while every atom in his body felt a sickening vibration that grew ever coarser. Then suddenly he felt normal; the things on his wrists were removed and Vivian told him he could open his eyes.

He did so. He had guessed what she had done, but he was surprised, nevertheless, to see the straight, slender, attractive girl who stood before him.

"You see, Xantra used this on me twice—the latter time to restore me, so I would be able to see him. I watched him carefully," the girl explained.

Clee gazed at Vivian in greatest confusion. Why—she was beautiful! He grew conscious of a growing need to say something, and eventually the asinine thing that left his lips was:

"Yes—you—you aren't bad looking at all."

The girl turned away, blushing; and it was Jim who relieved Clee from his awkward situation. He came swinging happily through the alcove portal to suddenly stop in blank surprise. Clee had disappeared!

It did not take long to restore Jim to his normal self, and Vivian and Clee laughed at the great sigh of relief he unconsciously gave when he found himself able to see the girl who before had been only a disembodied Voice to him. Clee explained to Vivian what had happened to them down below, and she in turn told them how she and Xantra had come to be unconscious when they reached the control alcove.

"I found the anaesthetic by its smell soon after I went to Xantra," she explained. "I tried to conceal it in my dress, but Xantra saw me and tried to take it away; and in the struggle that followed I guess we both got anaesthetized. When I came to I saw you and Jim trying to hold back the slaves; and I could see Xantra on the floor, conscious—which you couldn't —and knew he was ordering the slaves on. So I told you, and—here we are!

"Do you want to see Xantra now?" she added.

Clee would never forget the sight of the bound figure that met his eyes on the floor on the large room. The clothes were odd; the figure was much that of a normal man, though the shoulders were more sloped and the head much larger; but it was the face, its expression, that held him.

Unhealthy, leprous-white was the skin, and there was not one hair, eyelash or eyebrow on the whole head. The closed eyes lay in deep caverns surrounded by a thousand fine wrinkles, which crisscrossed all over his face in every direction. The face and head were freakish—monstrous; and yet, somehow, over it rested an expression of infinite wisdom and calm. He lay bound and still and unconscious, at the mercy of men far below him intellectually, this man from another planet. Clee could not help but compare him to a stoical man staked out on an anthill to die....

"We'll have to keep him unconscious with the anaesthetic," he said at length; "he's too dangerous to monkey with. And that means we've got to find out how to run this ship—take it back ourselves."

"Leave that to me!" said Jim, feeling quite chipper. "Never saw anything yet I couldn't drive. Where is it—Cape Cod, you want to be let off, Miss Gray?... O. K. This is my joy-ride, and I'll see that you're delivered at your front door."

More than two days later, again at night, the few look-outs on the lonely fishing craft off Cape Cod might have seen a pinpoint of cherry-red appear off the eastern horizon and make a wide arc up the heavens.

Its course was erratic, and it made sudden angles as it drew near the zenith. It glowed more and more brightly as it approached—until it disappeared from sight overhead.

For some minutes it was invisible; and then, suddenly, only a few hundred yards overhead, it emerged into view again, a great sphere of faintly glowing, cherry-red crystal. Rapidly—with dangerous speed—it descended, straight for the shore-line of Massachusetts Bay. And as it neared, its erratic side-to-side dashes increased, rather than diminished.

Down at a wide angle it came for the beach; then, when it was a hundred feet away, it sheared suddenly out to sea. There, only a few feet above the water, it darted to the side once more—and fell, and skipped along the water at dizzying speed.

But it did not go far. With its first contact with the water a great crack split the night air; and a little further, the ship split into hundreds of small pieces, all of which slid along the surface of the water until, their momentum lost, they came to a stop and slowly sank from view. A dozen figures were left threshing on the surface; but one by one they disappeared, till there were only four left. Then one of the four sank from sight....

Slowly but steadily the remaining three drew near to the welcoming shore, and at last stood dripping and tired on the sandy beach. For some time they stood there in silence, reviewing all the incredible adventure they had been through, as they gazed off across the water to the place where the slave ship had gone down.

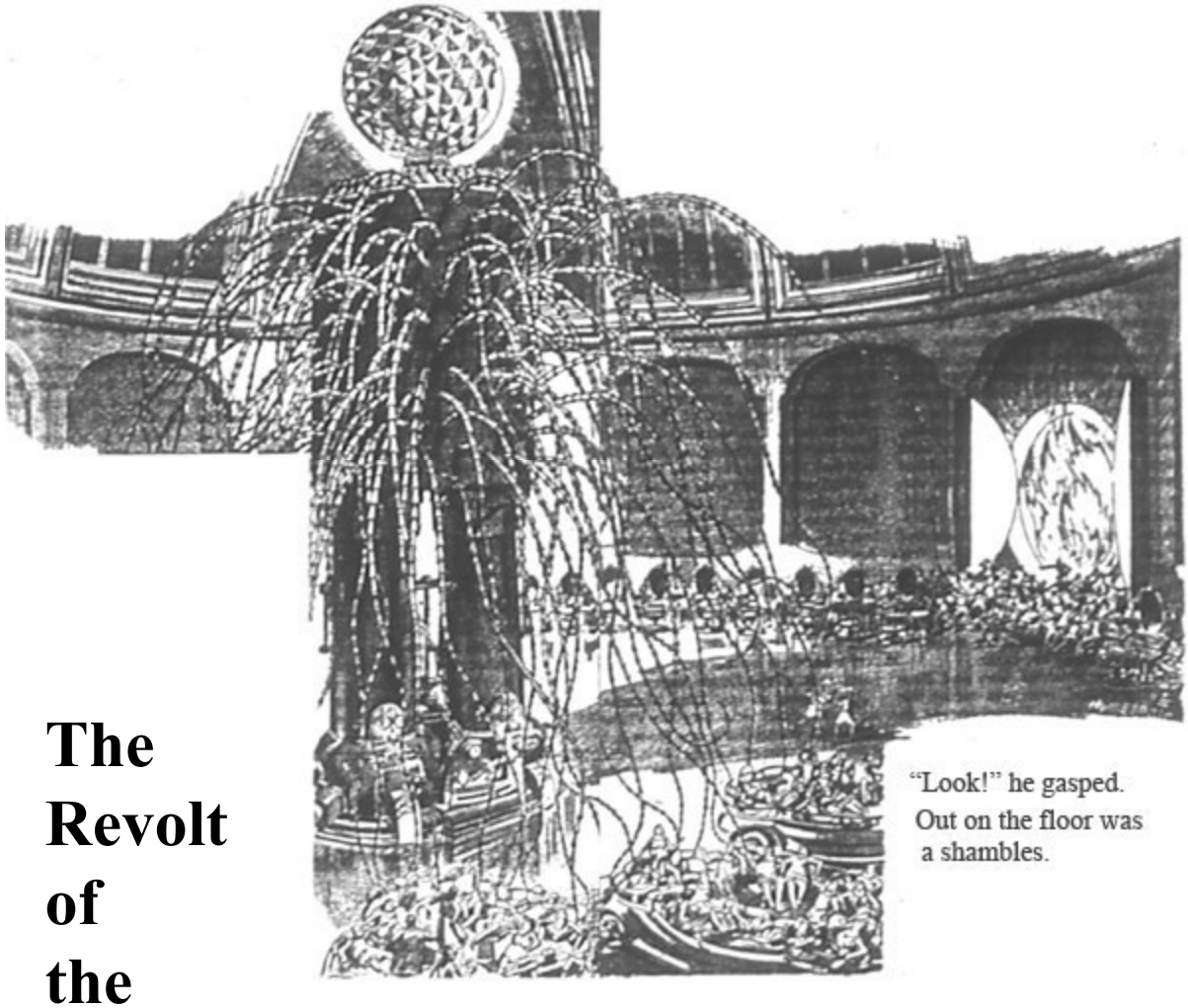
But one of them—Jim—had something to say, and at last it came out.

"Well, I *told* you I'd drive you safely back!"

Clee, his arm around the waist of the exhausted Vivian, smiled and answered:

"But I don't see Vivian's front door."

"We're close enough!" Jim snorted. "After all, I *did* hit the Earth!"



"Look!" he gasped. Out on the floor was a shambles.

The Revolt of the Machines

By Nat Schachner and Arthur L. Zagat

PROLOGUE

For five thousand years, since that nigh legendary figure Einstein wrote and thought in the far-off mists of time, the scientists endeavored to reduce life and the universe to terms of a mathematical formula. And they thought they had succeeded. Throughout the world, machines did the work of man, and the aristos, owners of the machines, played in soft idleness in their

crystal and gold pleasure cities. Even the prolat hordes, relieved of all but an hour or two per day of toil, were content in their warrens—content with the crumbs of their masters.

Something in the many-faceted mind of the master machine spurs it to diabolical revolt against the authority of its human masters.

Then the ice began to move, down from the north and up from the south. Slowly, inexorably, the jaws of the great vise closed, till all that was left of the wide empire of man was a narrow belt about the equator. Everywhere else was a vast tumbled waste of cold and glaring whiteness, a frozen desert. In the narrow habitable belt were compacted the teeming millions of earth's peoples.

In spite of the best efforts of the scientists among them, the crowding together of the myriads of earth's inhabitants brought in its train the inevitable plagues of famine and disease. Even with the most intensive methods of cultivation, even with the synthetic food factories running day and night, there could not be produced enough to sustain life in the hordes of prolats. And with the lowering of resistance and the lack of sufficient sanitary arrangements, disease began to spread with ever increasing rapidity and virulence.

The aristos trembled, for they were few, and the prolats many. Already were arising loud and disheveled orators, inciting the millions to arise against their masters. The aristos were few, but they were not helpless. In the blackness of a moonless, clouded night there was a whispering of many wings, and from dark shapes that loomed against the dark sky, great beams swept over the tented fields where the prolats lay huddled and sleeping. And when the red sun circled the ice-chained earth he found in his path heaps of dust where on his last journey he had warmed the swarming millions.

The slaves thus ruthlessly destroyed could well be spared, for the machines did the work of the world, even to the personal care of the aristos' pampered bodies. Only for direction, and starting and stopping, was the brain and the hand of man required. Now that the inhabited portion of the terrestrial globe was so straitly circumscribed, radio power waves, television and radio-phone, rendered feasible the control of all the machines from one central station, built at the edge of the Northern Glacier. Here were brought the scant few of the prolats that had been spared, a pitiful four hundred men and women, and they were set to endless, thankless tasks.

I was one of those few; and Keston, my friend, who was set at the head of the force. I was second in command. For a decade we labored, whipped our fellows to their tasks, that the aristos might loll careless in the perfume and silks of their pleasure palaces, or riot in wild revel, to sink at last in sodden stupor. Sprawled thus they would lie, until the dressing machines we guided would lift them gently from their damasked couches, bathe them with warm and fragrant waters, clothe their soft carcasses in diaphanous, iridescent webs, and start them on a new day of debauchery.

But the slow vengeance of an inscrutable Omnipotence they mockingly denied overtook them at last, and I saw the rendering and payment of the long past due account.

As I entered the vast domed hall wherein all my waking hours were spent, the shrill whistle of an alarm signal told me that something had been wrong. Instinctively I looked toward the post of Abud. Three times in the past week had Keston or I been called upon for swift action to right some error of that dull witted prolat. On the oval visor-screen above the banked buttons of his station I saw the impending catastrophe. Two great freight planes, one bearing the glowing red star that told of its cargo of highly explosive terminite, were approaching head-on with lightning rapidity. The fool had them on the same level.

Abud was gaping now at the screen in paralyzed fright, with no idea of how to avoid the cataclysm. Just below I glimpsed the soaring towers of Antarcha. In a moment that gold and crystal pleasure city would be blasted to extinction, with all its sleeping thousands. Swift would be the vengeance of the aristos. Already I could see Abud and Keston and a hundred others melting in the fierce rays of the Death Bath!

But, even as my face blanched with the swift and terrible vision, the little controller's car ground to a smoking stop at Abud's back. With one motion Keston's lithe form leaped from his seat and thrust aside the gaping prolat. His long white fingers darted deftly over the gleaming buttons. The red starred plane banked in a sudden swerve; the other dipped beneath. Distinct from the speaker beneath the screen came the whoosh of the riven air as the fliers flashed past, safe by a margin of scant feet. Another rippling play of the prolat chief's fingers and the planes were back on their proper courses. The whistle ceased its piercing alarm, left a throbbing stillness.

Chief Keston turned to the brute faced culprit. Cold contempt tautened the thin, ascetic features of his face. Somehow I was at his side: I must have been running across the wide floor of the Control Station while the crisis had flared and passed. In measured tones, each word a cutting whip-lash, came his well merited rebuke:

"Don't try me too far, Abud. Long before this I should have relieved you of your post, and ordered you to the Death Bath. I am derelict in my duty that I do not do so. By my weak leniency I imperil the lives of your comrades, and my own. It is your good fortune that a Council delegate has not been present at one of your exhibitions. But I dare not risk more. Let the warning whistle come from your station just once again and I shall report you as an incompetent. You know the law."

I looked to see the man cringe in abasement and contrition. But the heavy jaw thrust forth in truculent defiance; hate blazed forth from the deep-set eyes; the florid features were empurpled with rage. He made as if to reply, but turned away from the withering scorn in Keston's face.

"Ha, Meron, here at last." A warm smile greeted me. "I've been waiting for you impatiently."

"I'm an hour before my time," I replied, then continued, exasperatedly: "Chief, I hope this latest imbecility will convince you that you ought to turn him in. I know it hurts you to condemn a prolat to the Death Bath, but if you let him go on, his mistakes will bring us all to that end."

I glanced toward where a black portal broke the circle of switchboards, and shuddered. Behind that grim gate leaped and flared eternally the flame of the consuming Ray, the exhaust flue of the solar energy by which the machines were fed. Once I had seen a condemned man step through that aperture at the order of an aristo whom he had offended. For a moment his tortured body had glowed with a terrible golden light. Then—there was nothing.

My friend pressed my arm, calmingly. Again he smiled. "Come, come, Meron, don't get all worked up. It isn't his fault. Why, look at him. Can't you see that he is a throwback, lost in this world of science and machines? Besides"—his voice dropped low—"it doesn't matter any more. Man-failure will no longer trouble the even tenor of the machines. I've finished."

A tremor of excitement seized me. "You've completed it at last? And it works?"

"It works. I tested it when the shifts changed at midnight; kept the oncoming force outside for five minutes. It works like a charm."

"Great! When will you tell the Council?"

"I've already sent the message off. You know how hard it is to get them away from their wines and their women—but they'll be here soon. But before they come, I've something to tell you. Let's go back behind the screens."

As we walked toward the huge tarpaulin-screened mass that bulked in the center of the great chamber, I glanced around the hall, at the thousand-foot circle of seated prolats. Two hundred men and women were there; two hundred more were sleeping in the dormitories. These were all that were left of the world's workers. Before each operative rose the serried hundreds of pearl buttons, dim lit, clicking in and out under the busy fingers. Above each, an oval visor-screen with its flitting images brought across space the area the switches controlled. Every one of the ten score was watching his screen with taut attention, and listening to the voices of the machines there depicted—the metallic voices from the radio speakers broadcasting their needs.

The work was going on as it had gone on for ten years, with the omnipresent threat of the Death Bath whipping flagged, tired brains to dreary energy. The work kept going on till they dropped worn out at last in their tired seats. Only in Keston's brain, and in mine, flamed the new hope of release. Tomorrow the work would be done, forever. Tomorrow, we would be released, to take our places in the pleasure palaces. To loll at ease, breathing the sweet perfume of idleness, waited on by machines *directed by a machine*.

For, as we stood behind the heavy canvas folds that Keston had drawn aside, there towered, fifty feet above me, halfway to the arching roof, a machine that was the ultimate flowering of man's genius. Almost man-form it was—two tall metal cylinders supporting a larger, that soared aloft till far above it was topped by a many-faceted ball of transparent quartz. Again I had a fleeting, but vivid, impression of something baleful, threatening, about it. Small wonder, though. For the largest cylinder, the trunk of the man-machine Keston had created, was covered thick with dangling arms. And the light of the xenon tube that flooded the screened space was reflected from the great glass head till it seemed that the thing was alive; that it was watching me till some unguarded moment would give it its chance.

A long moment we stood, going again over each detail of the thing, grown so familiar through long handling as it was slowly assembled. Then my friend's voice, low pitched as was its wont, dissipated the visions I was seeing. "Two hours ago, Meron, with none here but me to see, those arms were extended, each to its appointed station. And, as the sensitive cells in the head received the signals from the visor-screens and the radio-speakers the arms shot about the key-boards and pressed the proper buttons just as our men are doing now. The work of the world went on, without a falter, with only the master machine to direct it. Yet a year ago, when I first spoke to you of the idea, you told me it was impossible!"

"You have won," I responded; "you have taken the last step in the turning over of the functions of man to machines—the last step but one. Routine control, it is true, can now be exercised by this—those fellows out there are no longer necessary—but there will still be the unexpected, unforeseen emergencies that will require human intelligence to meet and cope with them. You and I, I'm afraid, are still doomed to remain here and serve the machines."

Keston shook his head, while a little smile played over his sharp-featured face, and a glow of pride and triumph suffused his fine dark eyes. "Grumbling again, old carper. What would you say if I told you that I have solved even *that* problem? I have given my master machine intelligence!"

My wide-eyed, questioning stare must have conveyed my thought to him, for he laughed shortly, and said, "No, I've not gone insane."

"It was an accident," he went on with amazing calm. "My first idea was merely to build something that would reduce the necessary supervisory force to one or two humans. But, when I had almost completed my second experimental model, I found that I was out of the copper filaments necessary to wind a certain coil. I didn't want to wait till I could obtain more from the stores, and remembered that on the inside of the door to the Death Bath there was some fine screening that could be dispensed with. I

used the wire from that. Whether the secret of life as well as of death lies in those waste rays from the sun, or whether some unknown element of the humans consumed in the flame was deposited on the screening in a sort of invisible coating, I do not know. But this I do know: when that second model was finished, and the vitalizing current was turned on, things happened—queer things that could be explained only on the ground that the machine had intelligence."

He fell silent a moment, then his thin pale lips twisted in a wry smile. "You know, Meron, I was a little scared. The thing I had created seemed possessed of a virulent antagonism toward me. Look." He bared an arm and held it out. A livid weal ran clear around the fore-arm. "One of the tentacles I had given it whipped around my arm like a flash. If I had not cut off the current at once it might have squeezed through flesh and bone. The pressure was terrific."

I was about to speak, when from the screen nearest the entrance door a beam of green light darted out, vanished, came again. Once, twice, three times.

"Look, Chief, the signal. They're coming. The Council will soon be here."

"They're over-prompt. My message must have aroused their curiosity. But listen:

"I incorporated my new thought coil, as I called it, in the large master machine. But I don't know just what will happen when the current flows through that. So I shunted it. The machine will work, routinely, without it. There is a button that will bring it into action. When I shall have taken the proper precautions I will switch it on, and then we shall see what happens."

We saw, sooner than Keston expected.

Again the green beam flashed out. The great portals slowly opened. Through them glided the three travel cars of the Supreme Council of the aristos.

It had been almost a year since I saw them, the Over Lords of the World, and I had forgotten their appearance. Sprawled on the glowing silks of their cushioned couches, eyes closed in languid boredom, they were like huge white slugs. Swollen to tremendous size by the indolent luxuriousness of their lives, the flesh that was not concealed by the bright hued web of their robes was pasty white, and bagged and folded where the shrunken muscles beneath refused support. Great pouches dropped beneath swollen eyelids. Full-lipped, sensual mouths and pendulous cheeks merged into the great fat rolls of their chins. I shuddered. These, *these* were the masters for whom we slaved!

As we bent low the gliding cars came to rest, and a warm redolence of sweet perfume came to me from the fans softly whirling in the canopies over the aristos' heads. Strains of music rose and fell, and ceased as a flat, tired voice breathed: "Rise, prolats."

I straightened up. The eyes of the Council were now opened, little pig's eyes almost lost in the flesh about them. They glinted with a cold, inhuman cruelty. I shuddered, and thought of the night of terror ten years before. And suddenly I was afraid, deathly afraid.

Ladnom Atuna, head of the Council, spoke again. "We have come at your petition. What is this matter so grave that it has led you to disturb us at our pleasures?"

Keston bowed low. "Your Excellency, I would not have presumed to intrude upon you for a small matter. I have so greatly ventured because I have at length solved the final step in the mechanization of the world. I have invented a master machine to operate the switchboards in this hall and replace the workers thereat."

The flabby faces of the aristos betrayed not the slightest interest, not the least surprise. Only Atuna spoke: "Interesting, if true. Can you prove your statement?"

Keston strode to the canvas screen and pulled a cord. The great canvas curtains rolled back. "Here is the machine, my Lords!" His face was lit with the glow of pride of achievement. His voice had lost its reverence. Rapidly he continued: "The head of this contrivance is a bank of photo and sono-electric cells, each facet focussed on one of the screens. Through a nerve-system of copper filaments any combination of lights and sounds will actuate the proper arm which will shoot out to the required bank of buttons and press the ones necessary to meet any particular demand. That is all the prolats are doing out there, and they make mistakes, while my master machine cannot. The—"

But Ladnom Atuna raised a languid hand. "Spare us these technical explanations. They bore us. All we desire to know is that the machine will do as you say."

The chief flushed, and gulped. His triumph was not meeting with the acclaim he had expected. But he bowed. "Very well. With your gracious permission I shall demonstrate its operation." Atuna nodded in acquiescence.

Keston's voice rang out in crisp command. "Attention, prolats. Cease working." The long circling row suddenly jerked around; their flying fingers halted their eternal dartings. "Quickly, down to the space in front of the door to the Death Bath." A rush of hurried feet. These men and women were accustomed to instant, unquestioning obedience. "Absolute silence. Keep clear of the floor on peril of your lives."

The chief wheeled to the master machine and pressed a button. Instantly, the hundreds of dangling arms telescoped out, each to a button bank where a moment before a prolat had labored. And, with a weird simulation of life, the ten forked ends of each arm commenced a rattling pressing of the buttons. Rapidly, purposefully, the metallic fingers moved over the key-boards, and on the screens we could see that the machines all over the world were continuing on their even course. Not the slightest change in their working betrayed the fact that they were now being directed by a machine

instead of human beings. A great surge of admiration swept me at the marvelous accomplishment of my friend.

Not so the aristos. Expressionless, they watched as the maze of stretching tentacles vibrated through the crowded air. Yet not quite expressionless. I thought I could sense in the covert glances they cast at one another a crafty weighing of the implications of this machine; a question asked and answered; a decision made. Then their spokesman turned languidly to the waiting, triumphant figure of Keston.

"Evidently your claims are proven. This means that the force of prolat operatives are no longer necessary."

"Yes, Your Excellency. They may now be released to a well earned reward."

The aristo ignored the interruption. "We take it that only two will now be required to operate this Control Station, to supply the last modicum of human intelligence required to meet unforeseen emergencies."

I saw that Keston was about to interrupt once more, to tell the Council of the thought coil, the most unbelievable part of the miracle he had wrought. But something seemed to warn me that he should not speak. Standing behind him I nudged him, while I myself replied: "Yes, Your Excellency." The chief flung me a startled look, but did not correct me.

From the packed crowd of prolats at the other end of the hall I could hear a murmuring. While I could not make out the words, the very tones told me that in the hearts of those weary slaves new hope was rising, the same hope that glowed in Keston's face. But I was oppressed by an unreasoning fear.

Atuna was still talking, in his cold, unemotional monotone. "This being so, hear now our decision. Keston and Meron, you will remain here to meet all emergencies. You others, your function is done. You have done your work well, you are now no longer needed to control the machines. Therefore,"—he paused, and my heart almost stopped—"therefore, being no longer of value, you will be disposed of."

A click sounded loud through the stunned silence. Beyond the white crowd the huge black portal slid slowly open. A shimmering radiance of glowing vapors blazed from the space beyond.

"Prolats, file singly into the Death Bath!" Atuna raised his voice only slightly with the command. I glanced at Keston. He was livid with fury.

Incredible as it may seem, so ingrained was the habit of obedience to the aristos in the prolats that not even a murmur of protest came from the condemned beings. The nearest man to the flaming death stepped out into the void. His doomed body flared, then vanished. The next moved to his turn.

But suddenly a great shout rang out.

"Stop!"

It was Keston's voice, but so changed, so packed with fury and outrage, that I scarcely recognized it.

His spare, tall form was drawn tensely straight as he shook a clenched fist at the Council. He was quivering with anger, and his eyes blazed.

"Aristos, you do wrong! These men have served you faithfully and well. I demand for them the reward they have earned—rest and leisure, and the pleasures that for ten years they have seen you enjoy while they worked here for you. They have worked for you, I say, and now that I have released them you would destroy them. Aristos, I demand justice!"

For the first time I saw expression on the flaccid faces of the Council—surprise and astonishment that a prolat should dare dispute an aristo command. Then a sneer twisted Atuna's countenance.

"What is this? Who are you to demand anything from us? We spared these prolats because we needed them: we need them no longer, hence they must die. What madness has seized you? Reward! Justice! For prolats! As well

say we should reward the stone walls of our houses; dispense justice to the machines. Proceed, prolats!"

Keston made as if to spring for the aristo's throat. I put out a hand to stop him. An invisible shield of death rays rimmed the platforms the Council used. It was suicide! But suddenly he turned and sprang to the master machine. He grasped a switch lever and threw it down.

A long tentacle left its keys and swished menacingly through the air. "Meron, prolats, under the key-boards!" came Keston's shout. I dived to obey. Steel fingers clutched my jerkin and tore it loose as I landed with a thud against the wall. Keston thumped alongside of me. He was breathing heavily and his face was deathly pale.

"Look!" he gasped.

Out on the floor was a shambles. I saw one snakelike arm whip around the stout form of Atuna, then tighten. A shriek of agony rang through the hall. Another tentacle curled about the couch of a second aristo, pinning the occupant to it. Then couch and all were swung a hundred feet in the air to be crashed down with terrific force on the stone floor. Two arms seized the third at the same time....

"Too sluggish to get out of the way in time, damn them!" I heard Keston mutter. True, but not all the prolats had moved fast enough at the warning shout. Cowering under the saving key-boards, shrinking from the metallic arms not quite long enough to reach them, I could count only a score. The others—but what use to describe the slaughter out there! I see it in nightmares too often.

A thunder from the speakers grew till it drowned out the agonized shrieks in the great hall. On the screens horror flared. All over the world, it appeared, the machines had gone mad. I saw Antarcha crash as a dozen air freighters plunged through the crystal towers. I saw a huge dredge strip the roof from a great playhouse, and smash the startled crowd within with stones it plucked from an embankment. I saw untenanted land cars shooting wild

through packed streets. Great ponderous tractors left the fields and moved in ordered array on the panic-stricken cities. Methodically they pursued the fleeing aristos, and crushed them beneath their tread like scurrying ants.

I realized that the scraping of the tentacles reaching for us had ceased, that the arms had all returned to the button banks. Then it dawned on me that Keston's master machine was directing all the destruction I was watching, that the intelligence he had given it was being used to divert the machines from their regular tasks to—conquer the world. "You sure started something, Keston," I said.

"Yes," he gasped, white-faced, "something that I should have expected when that model machine went for me. Do you understand? I've given the machines intelligence, created a new race, and they are trying to wipe out the humans; conquer the world for themselves. The possibility flashed on me when I was half-mad with rage and disappointment at the callous cruelty of the aristo Council. I threw that switch with the thought that it would be far better for all of us to be wiped out. But now, I don't know. After all, they are men, like ourselves, and it hurts to see our own race annihilated. If only I can get to that switch."

He started to push out from under the scant shelter, but an alert tentacle hissed through the air in a swift stab at him, and he dodged back, hopelessly.

"Don't be a damn fool," I snapped at him. "Forget that mushy sentimentality. Even if you save the aristos, we're due for extinction just the same. Better that the whole human race be wiped out together."

Then a thought struck me. "Maybe we have a chance to get out of this ourselves."

"Impossible. Where could we hide from the machines?" He waved a hand at the screens. "Look."

"The Glacier, man, the Glacier!" He started. "There are no machines out there. If we can get to the ice we are safe."

"But the aircraft will find us."

"They won't know we're there. There are no microphones or radio-eyes in the wastes."

A rough voice came from the cowering files behind us. "Hey, Keston, let's get a move on. You're the smart guy around here: get us out of this mess you've started."

It was Abud. When so many better prolats had perished, he was alive and whole.

We got out, crawling under the key-boards till we could make a dash for the door. We emerged into a world ablaze with the light of many fires, and reverberating with the far off crashing of destruction. To the right we could see the tumbled remains of what a short hour before had been our barracks. Two digging machines were still ponderously moving about among the ruins, pounding down their heavy buckets methodically, reducing the concrete structure to a horrible dead level. Ten score prolats had been sleeping there when I left.

As we rushed into the open, the machines turned and made for us; but they had not been built for speed, and we easily outdistanced them. The rest of that day will always remain a dim haze to me. I can remember running, running, Abud's broad form always in the lead. I can remember long minutes of trembling under tangled underbrush, while from above sounded the burring of an air machine searching ceaselessly for us. I can remember seeing at last the tall white ramparts of the Glacier. Then a blackness swallowed me up, hands tugged at me, and I knew no more....

The great white waste of hummocky ice dazzled under the blinding sun. My eyes were hurting terribly. There was a great void in my stomach. For two days I had not eaten.

Keston, tottering weakly at my side, was in an even worse state. His trembling hand could scarcely hold the primitive bone-tipped spear. God knows I had difficulty enough with mine.

Yet, tired, hungry, shivering as we were, we forced our dragging feet along, searching the interminable expanse for sign of polar bear or the wild white dogs that hunted in packs. We had to find flesh—any kind—to feed our shriveled stomachs—or go under.

Keston uttered a weak shout. I looked. From behind a frozen hummock a great white bear padded. He saw us, sniffed the air a moment, then turned contemptuously away. He must have sensed our weakness.

Almost crying in his eagerness, Keston raised his spear and cast it with what strength he had at the animal that meant food and warmth for our bodies.

The weapon described a slow arc, and caught the shaggy bear flush in the shoulder. But there had been no force behind the throw. The sharpened bone tip stuck in the flesh, quivered a bit, and dropped harmlessly to the ice.

Aroused, the creature whirled about. We caught a glimpse of small, vindictive eyes. Then, with a roar, it made for us.

"Look out!" I cried. Keston started to run, but I knew he could not match the wounded animal in speed. I threw my futile spear, but the bear shook it off as though it were a pin prick, and would not be diverted from his prey.

I ran after, shouting for help. Then Keston stumbled and went down in a sprawl on the rough gray ice. The bear was almost on him and there was nothing I could do.

Then the figure of a man darted from behind a sheltering mound. It was Abud, swathed in warm white furs, brawny of body, strong, well fed, heavy jowled. He swung easily a long spear, far heavier than ours, and pointed with keen barbs.

He stopped short at the sight of us, and his brutal features contorted in merriment. The desperate plight of my friend seemed to afford him infinite amusement. Nor did he make any move to help.

I shouted to him. "Quick, kill it before it's too late!"

"So it is Abud you turn to now," he sneered heavily. "Abud, whom you thought deserving of the Death Bath not so long ago. No, my fine friends, let me see you help yourselves, you two who thought you were king pins down in the valley. Men? Bah! Weaklings, that's all you are!"

I ran blindly over the uneven ice, unarmed, some crazy notion in my mind of tackling the brute with bare fists, to drag him off my friend. Abud shouted with laughter, leaning on his spear.

For some strange animal reason, the mocking laughter enraged the bear. He had almost reached the motionless figure of Keston when he swerved suddenly, and made for Abud.

The ghastly merriment froze on the heavy jowled man. Like lightning he lifted his heavy lance, and drove it with a powerful arm squarely into the breast of the advancing brute. It sank a full foot into the blubbery flesh, and, while the stricken bear clawed vainly at the wound and sought to push himself along toward the man, Abud held the spear firmly as in a vise, so that the animal literally impaled itself. With a gush of blood, it sank motionless to the ground.

Abud plucked the spear away with a dexterous twist.

Keston was feebly groping to his feet. I was torn between joy at his deliverance and rage at the inhuman callousness of Abud.

The latter grinned at us hatefully.

"You see what poor weakling creatures you are," he jeered. "Good for nothing but to push a lot of senseless buttons. Down there you were the bosses, the ones to look upon me as dirt. Here, on the ice, where it takes

guts to get along, *I* am the boss. I let you live on my scraps and leavings, simply because it tickled me to see you cringe and beg. But I am growing weary of that sport. Henceforth you keep away from my camp. Don't let me catch you prowling around, d'you hear? Let's see how long you'll last on the ice!"

"This animal is mine." He prodded the carcass. "I killed it. I'll make the prolats skin and, cut it up for me. Ho-ho, how they cringe and obey me—Abud, the dull one! Ho-ho!"

On this he strode away, still laughing thunderously.

I looked to Keston in blank dismay. What was to be our fate now, but death by cold and slow starvation!

Three-months had passed since we had escaped to the ice from the dreadful machines—a score of us. For a while it seemed that we had fled in vain. We were not fit to cope with the raw essentials of life: it was uncounted centuries since man fought nature bare handed. So we huddled together for warmth, and starved. Even Keston's keen brain was helpless in this waste of ice, without tools, without machines.

Then it was that Abud arose to take command. He, dull brute that he was amid the complexities of our civilization, fairly reveled in this primitive combat with hunger and cold. He was an anachronism in our midst, a throwback to our early forebears.

It did not take him long to fashion cunning nooses and traps to catch the few beasts that roamed the ice. Once he pounced upon a wolf-like creature, and strangled it with bare hands. He fashioned with apt fingers spears and barbs of bone, curved knives from shin bones, and skinned the heavy fur pelts and made them into garments.

No wonder the prolats in their helplessness looked to him as their leader. Keston and I were thrust aside. But Abud did not forget. His slow witted mind harbored deadly rancor for former days, when we were in command. He remembered our contempt for his slow dull processes; for the many

errors he was guilty of. By a queer quirk, the very fact that Keston had saved him from the Death Bath on several occasions but fed the flames of his hatred. Perhaps that was an ancient human trait, too.

So he set himself to twit and humiliate us. His jibes were heavy handed and gross. He refused to let us eat at the communal mess, but forced us to wait until all were through, when he tossed us a few scraps as though we were dogs.

Many times I started up in hot rage, ready to match my softened muscles against his brawn. But always Keston caught me in time and whispered patience. Some plan was taking shape in his mind, I could see, so I stopped short, and was content to bide my time.

Now we were through, discarded, as a last brutal gesture. What was there to be done now?

In utter silence I looked at Keston. To my great surprise he did not seem downcast. Quite the contrary. His eyes were sparkling, once more alive with the red fire. The weariness was gone from him; there was energy, decision stamped on his finely cut features.

"Now is our time to act," he said. "I've been hesitating too long."

"What are you talking about?"

"Abud forced my hand," Keston explained. "You didn't think we were going to live here in this fashion the rest of our lives? I'd rather die now than have such a future staring me in the face. No, we're going down into the valley to fight the machines."

I stared at him aghast. "Man, you're crazy. They'd crush us in a minute!"

"Maybe," he said unconcernedly. "But we have no time to lose. Abud will be back with the prolats, and we'll have to clear out before then. Quick—cut off a few chunks of meat. We'll need them."

"But Abud will kill us when he finds out what's been done."

"And we'll starve if we don't."

Which was an unanswerable argument. So with our bone knives we hacked off gobs of the still warm flesh, covered with great layers of fat.

Looking up from my task, I saw black figures coming toward us from the direction of the camp. They quickened into a run even as I noticed them—Abud and the prolats.

"Quick, Keston," I cried, "they're coming."

Keston glanced around and started to run. I followed as fast as I could.

"They'll catch us," I panted. "Where can we hide?"

"Down in the valley."

"But the machines will get us then."

"Save your breath and follow me. I know a place."

We were racing along as fast as our weakened legs could carry us, toward the edge of the Glacier. I looked back to see Abud, his brute face distorted with rage, gaining rapidly on us. The other prolats were being outdistanced.

Abud shouted threateningly for us to stop, but that only made us re-double our efforts. I knew he would kill us if he caught up with us. He had his spear and we were without ours.

The steep terminus of the great Northern Glacier hove into view. Far below was the broad fertile habitable belt, stretching as far as the eye could see. A lump rose in my throat as I ran. It was our earth, our heritage down there—and here we were, fleeing for our lives, dispossessed by bits of metal and quartz, machines that we had fashioned.

Hovering in the air, on a level with us, were scout planes, vigilant guardians of the frontier.

Once a prolat had become crazed by the eternal ice and cold, and had ventured down the side of the Glacier, to reach the warm lands his thin blood hungered for. As soon as he had painfully clambered to the bottom, within the area of the televisors, a plane had swooped and crushed him, while we, lining the edge, had witnessed the horror helplessly.

Yet Keston ran on confidently. Abud was just a little way behind, bellowing exultantly, when we came to the jumping-off place. He was sure he had us now.

Keston slid from view. It was sheer suicide to go down there, I knew; yet, to remain where I was, meant certain death. Abud's spear was already poised to thrust. There was only one thing to do, and I did it. I threw myself over the rim, just where Keston had disappeared.

I landed with a thud on a narrow ledge of ice. The surface was glassy smooth, and I started slipping straight toward the outer edge, a sheer drop of a thousand feet to the valley below. I strove to recover my balance, but only accelerated my progress. Another moment and I would have plunged into the abyss, but a hand reached out and grabbed me just in time. It was Keston.

"Hold tight and follow me," he whispered urgently, "we've no time to lose. The master machine is seeing us now in the visor screen, and will act."

I had an impulse to turn back, but Abud's face was leering down at us.

"I'll get you for this!" he screamed, and let himself down heavily over the ledge.

Keston edged his way along the treacherous trail, I after him. It was ticklish work. A misstep, and there would be nothing to break our fall.

I heard a siren sound, then another; and another. I wasted a precious moment to look up. A scout plane was diving for us, on a terrific slant. The air was black with aircraft converging on us. The master machine had seen

us! I sensed utter malevolence in the speed of these senseless metals, thrown at us by the thing my friend had created.

But there was no time for thought. In desperate haste, we inched our way along. Abud had seen the peril, too, and lost all his truculence in the face of the greater danger. He clawed after us, intent only on reaching whatever safety we were heading for.

I could hear the zoom of the great wings when the path took a sudden turn and we catapulted headlong into a black cavern thrusting into the ice.

We were not an instant too soon. For a giant shape swooped by our covert with a terrifying swoosh, inches away from Abud's leg as he dived after us, and it was followed by a grinding crash. The machine had been directed too close to the ice and had smashed into bits.

We crouched there a moment, panting, struggling to regain our wind. Keston had regained the air of quiet power he had once possessed. Quietly he spoke to our enemy.

"Listen to me, Abud. Up there on the ice, you played the bully, relying on your brute strength. Here, however, we're up against the machines, and your intelligence is of too low an order to compete with them. You need my brains now. If you expect to escape from them, and live, you'll have to do exactly as I say. I'm boss, do you understand?"

I expected a roar of rage at Keston's calm assertion, and quietly got in back of Abud ready to jump him if he made a threatening move.

But the big brute was a creature of abject terror, staring out with fear-haunted eyes. Quite humbly he replied: "You are right. You are the only one who can beat the machines. I'll follow you in everything."

"Very well, then. This cave leads through a series of tunnels down through the ice to the bottom of the valley. I explored it nights when you were all sleeping."

I looked at him in amazement. I had not known anything about his midnight wanderings. He saw my glance.

"I'm sorry, Meron, but I thought it wiser to say nothing of my plans, even to you, until they had matured. Let us go."

Outside hundreds of craft were hurtling across the opening. Escape that way was clearly impossible.

"No doubt the master machine is hurrying over high explosives to blast us out," Keston said indifferently; "but we won't be here."

We started down a tortuous decline, crawling on hands and knees. We had not progressed very far when we heard a thud and a roar behind us, followed by a series of crashes.

"Just as I thought. The master machine is firing terminite into the cavern. What a high degree of intelligence that thing has! Too bad we'll have to smash it." He sighed. I verily believe he hated to destroy this brain child of his. Yet just how he was going to do it, I did not know.

There passed hours of weary, tortured stumblings, and slitherings, and sudden falls—down, always down, interminably. A pale glimmering showed us the way, a dim shining through the icy walls.

At last, faint with toil, bleeding and torn from glass-sharp splinters, we reached a level chamber, vaulted, surprisingly, with solid rock. It was good to see something of the earth again, something that was not that deadly, all-embracing ice. At the far end lay a blinding patch. I blinked.

"Sunlight!" I shouted joyously.

"Yes," Keston answered quietly. "That opening leads directly into the valley on our land."

Abud roused himself from the unreasoning dread he had been in. It was the first time he had spoken.

"Let us get out of here. I feel as though I'm in a tomb."

"Are you mad?" Keston said sharply. "The visors would pick you up at once. You wouldn't last very long."

Abud stopped suddenly. There was a plaintive, helpless note to him. "But we can't stay here forever. We'd starve, or die of cold. Isn't there some way to get back to the top of the Glacier?"

"No—only the way we came. And that's been blocked with terminite."

"Then what are we going to do? You've led us into a slow death, you with your boasted brains!"

"That remains to be seen," was the calm retort. "In the meantime, we're hungry. Let us eat."

And the amazing man drew out of his torn flapping furs the gobs of meat he had cut from the dead bear. I had quite forgotten them. With a glad cry, I too reached into my garments and brought out my supply.

Abud's eyes glinted evilly. His hand stole stealthily to the bone knife in its skin sheath. His spear had been dropped long before.

"None of that," Keston said sharply. "We'll all share equally, even though you have no food. But if you try to hog it all, or use force, you'll die as well as we. There's only enough for a meal or two; and then what will you do?"

Abud saw that. He needed Keston's brains. His eyes dropped, and he mumbled something about our misunderstanding his gesture. We let it go at that. We had to. He could have killed us both if he wished.

So we divided our food with painstaking fairness. How we gorged on the raw red flesh and thick greasy fat! Food that would have disgusted us when we lived and worked in the Central Station, now was ambrosia to our sharpened appetites. When not the least scrap was left, and we had slaked our thirst with chunks of ice from the cavern floor, I spoke.

"What is that plan you spoke of, Keston, for reconquering the earth from the machines?"

Abud looked up abruptly at my question, and it seemed to me that a crafty smile glinted in the small pig eyes.

Keston hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"I confess my plans have been materially impeded by this sudden predicament we find ourselves in, thanks to our good friend here." He ironically indicated Abud.

The big prolat merely grunted.

"However," Keston continued, "I'll have to make the best of circumstances, without the aid of certain materials that I had expected to assemble.

"The idea is a simple one. You've noted no doubt how the terminus of the Glacier opposite the Central Control Station overhangs. The brow, over a thousand feet up, extends out at least a hundred feet beyond the base."

I nodded assent, though Abud seemed startled. Many times had Keston and I speculated on the danger of an avalanche at this point, and wondered why the Station had been built in such an exposed place. Once indeed we had ventured to suggest to the aristo Council the advisability of removing the Central Control to some other point, but the cold silence that greeted our diffident advice deterred us from further pursuit of the subject.

"Now, you know as well as I," Keston resumed, "that a glacier is merely a huge river of ice, and, though solid, partakes of some of the qualities of freely flowing water. As a matter of fact, glaciers do flow, because the tremendous pressure at the bottom lowers the melting point of ice to such a degree that the ice actually liquefies, and flows along."

I followed him eagerly in these elementary statements, trying to glimpse what he was driving at, but Abud's brute features were fixed in a blank

stare.

"This glacier does move. We've measured it—a matter of an inch or two a day. If, however,"—Keston's voice took on a deeper note—"we can manage to hasten that process, the Glacier will overwhelm the countryside."

He paused, and that gave me a chance to interpose some objections.

"But hold on a moment. In the first place it is an absolute impossibility with the means at our command, or even with every appliance, to melt the face of the whole Northern Glacier. In the second place, even if we could, the whole world would be overwhelmed, and then where would we be?"

Keston looked at me a trifle scornfully. "Who said we were going to melt the entire glacier? Remember I spoke only of the place of the overhang. Set that in motion, and we don't have to worry about the problem any further."

"Why not?" I inquired incredulously. "Suppose you *do* wipe out all the machines in this particular vicinity, won't there be tremendous numbers left all through the Equatorial Belt?"

"Of course," he explained patiently, "and what if they are? What are all these machines but inanimate mechanisms, things of metal and rubber and quartz. What makes them the monsters they have become?"

I smote my forehead in anger. "What a fool! Now I see it. It's the master machine you're after."

"Exactly," he smilingly agreed. "Overwhelm, destroy this devilish creature of mine, with its unhuman intelligence, and the machines are what they were before: merely obedient slaves."

I pondered that a moment. "And how, may I ask, are you going to force this old Glacier to move."

His face clouded. "That's the trouble. Up on the ice I was working on that problem, and had managed secretly to rig up a contrivance that would have

done the trick. But we can't go back for it. That way is blocked." He mused, half to himself. "If only we could lay our hands on a solar disintegrating machine, the difficulty would be solved."

At the name, Abud's face, that had been a study in blank incomprehension, lit up.

"Solar disintegrating machine?" he inquired. "Why there's one stationed not more than a few hundred yards away from here. This area, 2-RX, was my sector, you know."

"Of course, of course," shouted Keston, "I'd quite forgotten. The very thing. You're not half bad, Abud, if you'd only stop trying to rely on brute strength instead of brains," he concluded.

Abud said nothing, but I noticed a quick flash of hatred that passed in an instant, leaving a blank countenance. I thought to myself, "You'll bear watching, my fine fellow. I don't trust you at all."

Keston was speaking. "We'll have to wait until nightfall. The master machine won't expect us down at the base, so I'm positive the search-rays won't be focussed along the ground. We'll sneak to the machine, smash its visor and radio units, so it won't give the alarm, and haul it back. Then I'll show you what's next to be done."

Night came at last, leaden footed, though we were burning with impatience. Very softly we crawled out of the cave, three shadows. Fortunately there was no moon. The great Glacier loomed ominously above us, dimly white. High overhead hovered the green signal lights of the machine planes, their search rays focussed in blinding glares on the rim of the upper ice.

It did not take us long to find the dark bulk of the disintegrator. It was a squat cylinder, for all the world like a huge boiler. At one end there up-ended a periscope arrangement which broadened out to a funnel. In the funnel was a very powerful lens, cut to special measurements. The light of the sun, or any light, for that matter, was concentrated through the lens onto a series of photo-electric cells, composed of an alloy of selenium and the far

more delicate element, illinium. A high tension current was there created, of such powerful intensity that it disintegrated the atoms of every element except osmium and indium into their constituent electrons. Consequently the interior as well as the long slit nozzle orifice at the other end, were made of these resistant metals.

Through a special process the tremendously powerful current was forced through the wide-angled nozzle in a spreading thin plate ray that sheared through earth and rock and metals as if they were butter.

Such was the machine we were after.

It was but the work of a few seconds to smash the delicate television and sono-boxes placed on the top of every machine. Now we were sure no warning could be given the master machine as it sat in its metallic cunning at the control board, ceaselessly receiving its messages from the area apparatus focussed above it.

Quietly, very quietly, we trundled the precious instrument along on its wheel base. The green lights dotted the sky above: the search-rays were firmly set on the rim.

At last, without any untoward alarm, we reached the welcome shelter of the base, but not, as I had expected, back to our tunnel. On the contrary, Keston, who had directed the party, had led us almost a quarter mile away. I looked up again, and understood.

The great overhang of the Glacier was directly above us!

Without a word, with hardly a sound, we trundled the disintegrator into a natural niche we found in the icy surface. It was almost completely hidden; only the funnel with its lens protruded into the open. The nozzle orifice was pointing directly at the interior of the ice pack.

"Now everything is set properly," Keston remarked with satisfaction as he straightened up from adjusting the various controls on the machine. "When the first ray of the morning sun strikes the lens, the disintegrator will start

working. It will shear through a layer of ice over a radius of at least a mile. That huge crevasse, coupled with the terrific heat and the pressure from the mountain of ice above, will start the whole Glacier moving, or I'll be very much mistaken."

"Come, let us get back to our shelter before the alarm is given."

As he started to move, a dark bulk loomed ominously in front of us—Abud. His voice was harsh, forbidding.

"Do you mean to say nothing further is to be done here—that the disintegrator will work without any attention?"

"That is just what I said," Keston replied, somewhat surprised. "Step aside, Abud, and let us go. It is dangerous to remain here."

But Abud made no move to comply. Instead he thrust back his great shaggy head and gave vent to a resounding laugh.

"Ho-ho, my fine friends! So you were the brainy ones, eh? And Abud, the obedient dull-wit again? How nicely you've been fooled! I waited until you accommodatingly evolved the plan to reconquer the world, and put it into effect.

"Now that you've done so, I've no further need for you." The voice that heavily tried to be mocking, now snarled. "You poor fools, don't you know that with you out of the way, I, Abud, will be the Lord of the World. Those prolats up there know better than to disobey me."

"Do you mean you intend to kill us?" Keston asked incredulously.

"So you've actually grasped the idea!" was the sarcastic retort.

Meanwhile I was gradually edging to the side, my hand reaching for the bone knife in my bosom.

Abud saw my movement. "No, you don't!" he roared, and sprang for me, his long gleaming knife uplifted. I tugged desperately at my weapon, but it was entangled in the ragged furs. In a moment he was on top of me. Involuntarily I raised my arm to ward off the threatened blow, raging despair in my heart.

The point fell, but Keston struck at the savage arm with all his might, deflecting the blade just in time. It seared my shoulder like a red hot iron, and in the next instant all three of us were a rolling, kicking, snarling trio of animals. We fought desperately in the dark. There were no rules of the game. Biting, gouging, kicking—everything went.

Keston and I, weakened as we were from long starvation and the biting cold, were no match for our powerful, huge-muscled opponent, well clad and well nourished as he was. Though we fought with the strength of despair, a violent blow from his huge fist knocked Keston out of the fight. Hairy fingers grasped my throat. "I'll break your neck for you," he snarled, and his hands tightened. I struggled weakly, but I was helpless. I could just see his hateful face grinning at my contortions.

I was passing out—slowly, horribly. Keston was still motionless. Colored lights danced before my eyes, little spots that flared and died out in crashing blackness. Then the whole world leaped into a flaming white, so that my eyeballs hurt. In the dim recesses of my pain-swept mind I thought that strangulation must end like this. The brightness held dazzlingly.

But suddenly a fiercer pain swept into my consciousness—the pain of gasping breath forcing air through a tortured gullet into suffocating lungs.

I struggled up into the fierce illumination. From a sitting position I saw Abud, now clearly visible as in midday, craning his head way back. I looked, too—and, in spite of my stabbing gasps for air, jumped to my feet. *The search-rays from the scout planes were focussed directly on us!*

I knew what that meant. The sight of us was even then being cast upon the 2-RX visor-screen in the Central Control Station. The devilish master machine was even then manipulating the proper buttons. We had not a second to lose!

My strangled throat hurt horribly, but I managed a hoarse yell, "Run!" and I tottered to where Keston yet lay, bathed in the deadly illumination, unmoving.

There was a snarl of animal fear from Abud, and he started to run, wildly, with never a backward glance at us.

Even in my own fear, expecting each instant the crash of terminite about me, I managed to hurl a last word at the fleeing figure. "Coward!" That relieved my feelings considerably.

I tottered over and tugged at Keston. He was limp. I looked up. Hundreds of planes were converging overhead; the night was a criss-cross of stabbing search-rays. I lifted my friend and slung him across my shoulder. Every exertion, every move, was accompanied by excruciating agony, but I persevered. Abud was already halfway to the tunnel, running like mad.

Then, what I had dreaded, happened. There came a swoosh through the night, a dull thud, a blinding flash and roar that paled the search-rays into insignificance. The first terminite bomb had been dropped!

For a moment the landscape was filled with flying rocks and huge chunks of ice. When the great clouds of violently upthrown earth had settled, there was no sign of Abud. He had been directly in the path of the explosion!

Staggering under my load, I headed as close to the ice pack as I could. There was no safety out in the open. I groaned heavily past the disintegrator, whose very existence I had forgotten in the crash of events.

A sizzling hum, a thin eddy of steam, halted me in my tracks. I stared. The machine was working! Even as I watched, a great wedge was momentarily

being driven further and further into the ice—a great fan-shaped wedge. Clouds of steam billowed out, growing thicker and heavier. A rushing stream of unleashed water was lapping at my feet.

I was bewildered, frankly so. What had started the disintegrator in the dead of night? "Of course!" I shouted exultantly to the limp body on my shoulder.

For a search-ray was fixed steadily on the funnel. There it was. From that blinding light the machine was getting the energy it needed. If only the visor did not disclose that little bit of metal to the unwinking master machine! I looked again and took heart. It was almost undistinguishable against the dazzling blur of ice in the fierce white light. If those rays held, the salvation of the world was assured!

There was only one way to do it. I shrank at my own thoughts, yet there was no alternative: it must be done. I was hidden from the rays under a projection of ice, terminite bombs were dropping methodically over a rapidly devastated sector with methodical regularity. Sooner or later the master machine would feel that we were exterminated, and the search-rays switched off. That would mean that the disintegrator would cease working, and the whole plan fall through. In the morning light, the sector signalling apparatus, at the first sign of renewed activity, would give warning, and the unhuman thing of metal at the controls would discover and wreck our last hope.

No, I must walk boldly into the bombed area and discover myself as alive in the visors of the planes and make them continue to bomb and throw their search-rays on the scarred plain. That meant the disintegrator would receive the vital light.

But how about Keston? I couldn't leave him there on the ground, motionless, while I deserted him. Nor could I take him with me. I was prepared to take my chances with almost certain death, but I could not trifle with his life so. I was in an agony of indecision.

Just then the form on my aching shoulder stirred, sighed, struggled a bit, and suddenly slid down to a standing position. Keston swayed unsteadily a moment, straightened, looked about him in amazement.

"What's happening here?" he demanded.

"Why, you old war horse," I shouted in my relief, "I thought you were out of the picture completely!"

"Not me," he answered indignantly. "I'm all right. But you haven't answered my question."

A terminite bomb exploded not so far away from where we stood. I ducked involuntarily, Keston doing likewise.

"There's the answer," I grinned, "and a rather neat one, too. But I'll explain."

In a few words I sketched what had happened, and showed him the disintegrator spreading its deadly waves of destruction. By now there was a torrent enveloping us up to our knees. We would have to move soon, or be drowned in the slowly rising water.

Then, hesitatingly, I told him of my scheme to keep the search-rays in action. His lean face sobered, but he nodded his head bravely. "Of course, that is the only way to keep them at it. You and I will start at once, in separate directions, so that if they get one, the other will continue to draw the search-rays down on the plain, and into the disintegrator."

"Not you, Keston," I dissented in alarm. "Your life is too valuable. Your brain and skill will be needed to remodel the world and make it habitable for the few prolats that are left, after the machines are wiped out."

"You're just as valuable a man as I am," he lied affectionately. "No, my mind is made up. We chance this together." And to all my pleadings he was obdurate, insisting that we each take an equal risk.

I gave in at last, with a little choke in my throat. We shook hands with a steady grip, and walked out into the glare of light, on divergent paths. Would I ever see my friend again?

There was a pause of seconds as I walked on and on; came then an earth-shattering crash that flung me to the ground. The visors had caught the picture of me! I picked myself up, bruised and sore, but otherwise unharmed. I started to run.

The sky was a blaze of zooming planes that hurled destruction on the land below. Far off could be heard the rumbling roar of hurrying machines—tractors, diggers, disintegrators, levelers, all the mighty mobile masses of metal that man's brain had conceived—all hurrying forward in massed attack to seek out and destroy their creators, obedient to the will of a master machine, immobile, pressing buttons in the Central Control System.

The night resolved itself into a weird phantasmagoric nightmare for me, a gigantic game of hide-and-seek, in which I was "it." Gasping, choking, flung to earth and stunned by ear-shattering explosions, staggering up somehow, ducking to avoid being crushed beneath the ponderous treads of metal monsters that plunged uncannily for me, sobbing aloud in terror, swerving just in time from in front of a swinging crane, instinctively side-stepping just as a pale violet ray swept into nothingness all before it—I must have been delirious, for I retain only the vaguest memory of the horror.

And all the time the guiding search-rays biased down upon the torn and shattered fields, and the disintegrator, unnoticed in the vast uproar, steadily kept up its deadly work.

At last, in my delirium and terror, I heard a great rending and tearing. I looked up, and a tractor just missed me as it rolled by on swishing treads. But that one glance was enough. The ice cap was moving, flowing forward, a thousand-foot wall of ice! Great billowing clouds of steam spurted from innumerable cracks. The deed had been done! The world was saved for mankind!

Summoning the last ounce of strength, I set off on a steady run for the shelter of the rock cave, to be out of the way when the final smash-up came.

I was not pursued. The ponderous machines, thousands of them, were hastily forming into solid ranks directly in front of the tottering glacier wall. The master machine had seen its impending fate in the visors, and was organizing a defense.

Even in my elation, I could not but feel unwilling admiration for this monstrous thing of metal and quartz, imbued with an intelligence that could think more coolly and quickly than most humans.

Yet I did not stop running until I reached the cave. My heart gave a great bound. For there, peering anxiously with worn face into the growing dawn, stood the figure of Keston—my friend whom I had never expected to see alive again.

"Meron!" he shouted. "Is it you—or your ghost?"

"The very question I was about to ask you," I parried. "But look, old friend: see what your genius has accomplished—and is now destroying."

The mountain of ice was flowing forward, gathering speed on the way. At an invisible signal, the massed machines—thousands on thousands of them—started into action. Like shock troops in a last desperate assault they ground forward, a serried line that exactly paralleled the threatened break, and hundreds deep. This old earth of ours had never witnessed so awe-inspiring a sight.

They smashed into that moving wall of ice with the force of uncounted millions of tons. We could hear the groaning and straining of furiously turning machinery as they heaved.

Keston and I looked at each other in amazement. The master machine was trying to hold back the mighty Glacier by the sheer power of its cohorts!

A wild light sprang into Keston's eye—of admiration, of regret. "What a thing is this that I created!" he muttered. "If only—" I truly believe that for a moment he half desired to see his brain-child triumph.

The air was hideous with a thousand noises. The Glacier wall was cracking and splitting with the noise of thunderclaps; the machines were whirring and banging and crashing. It was a gallant effort!

But the towering ice wall was not to be denied. Forward, ever forward, it moved, pushing inexorably the struggling machines before it, piling them up high upon one another, grinding into powder the front ranks.

And to cap it all, the huge overhang, a thousand feet high, was swaying crazily and describing ever greater arcs.

"Look!" I screamed and flung up my arm. Great freight planes were flying wing-to-wing, head-on for the tottering crag—deliberately smashing into the topmost point.

"Trying to knock it back into equilibrium!" said Keston, eyes ablaze, dancing about insanely.

But the last suicidal push did not avail. With screams as of a thousand devils and deafening rending roars, the whole side of the Glacier seemed to lean over and fall in a great earth-shattering crescendo of noise.

While we watched, fascinated, rooted to the ground, that thousand feet of glittering wall described a tremendous arc, swinging with increasing momentum down, down, down to the earth it had so long been separated from.

The clamoring machines were buried under, lost in a swirl of ice and snow. Only the Central Station remained, a few moments defiant under the swift onrush of its unfeeling foe.

With a crash that could have been heard around the world, the uppermost crag struck the Station. The giant Glacier wall was down. The earth, the sky, the universe was filled with ice, broken, shattered, torn, splintered, vaporized!

The ground beneath our feet heaved and tumbled in violent quake. We were thrown heavily—and I knew no more....

I weltered out of unconsciousness. Keston was chafing my hands and rubbing my forehead with ice. He smiled wanly to find me still alive. Weak and battered, I struggled to my feet.

Before me was a wilderness of ice, a new mountain range of gigantic tumbled blocks of dazzling purity. Of the embattled machines, of the Central Control Station, there was not a sign. They were buried forever under hundreds of feet of frozen water.

I turned to Keston and shook his hand. "You've won; you've saved the world. Now let's get the prolats and start to rebuild."

There was no trace of exultation in Keston's voice. Instead, he unaccountably sighed as we trudged up a narrow winding path to the top. "Yes," he said half to himself, "I've done it. But...."

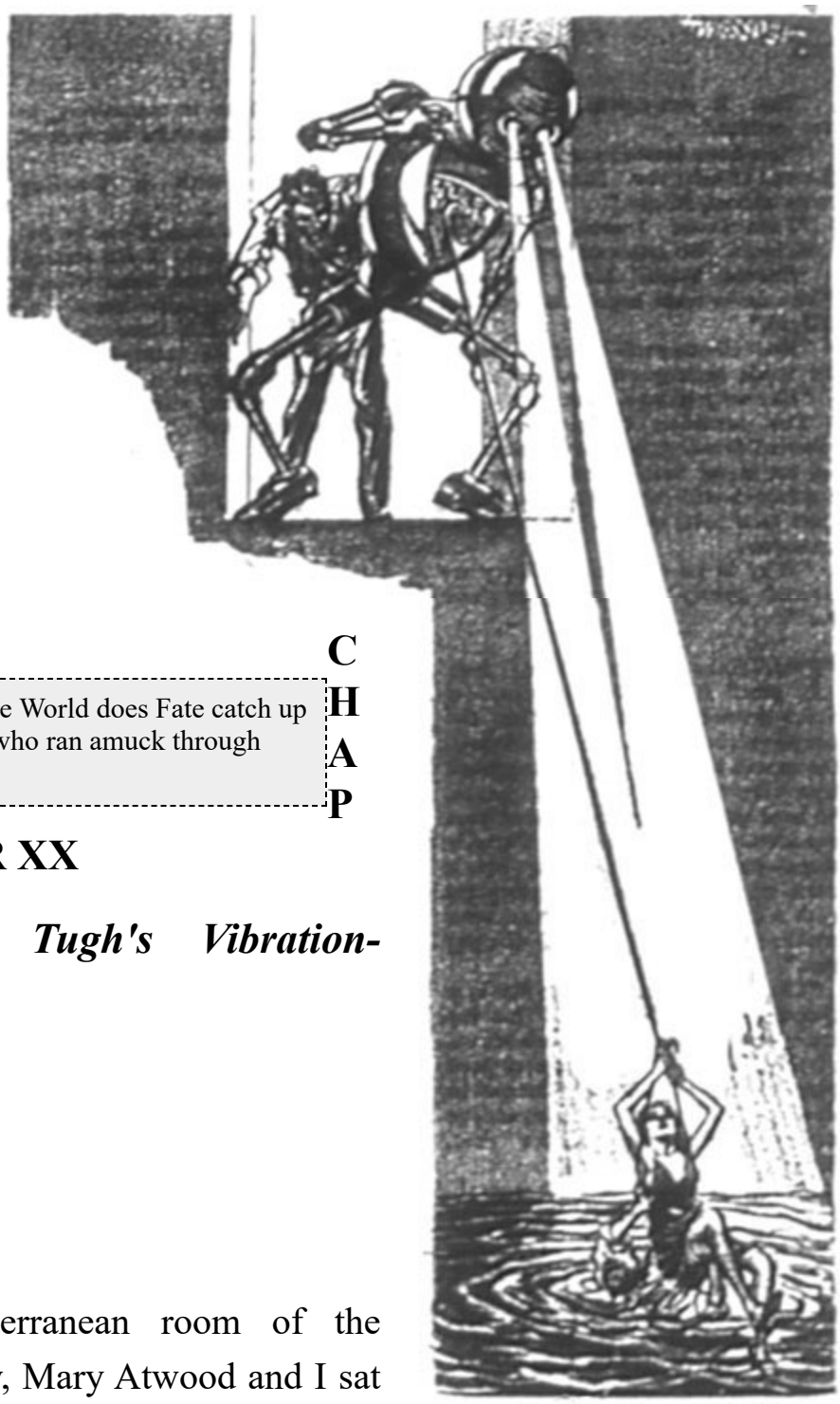
"But what?" I asked curiously.

"That beautiful, wonderful machine I created!" he burst forth in sudden passion. "To think that it should lie down there, destroyed, a twisted mass of scrap metal and broken glass!"

The Exile of Time

By Ray Cummings

CONCLUSION



The Robot braced itself.

Only near the End of the World does Fate catch up with Tugh, the cripple who ran amuck through Time.

CHAPTER XX

Following Tugh's Vibration-Trail

Within the subterranean room of the cavern of machinery, Mary Atwood and I sat on the couch. Our guard, Migul the Robot, fronted us with the white-ray cylinder in its metal fingers—the only mechanism to be armed with this deadly weapon.

"I am your friend," Mary was saying with a smile. "Do you believe that, Migul?"

"Yes. If you say so. But I have my orders."

"You have treated me kindly, and I want to help you. But you are not very clever, Migul."

"I am clever. I went beyond control once. No one can can control me."

"Except Tugh," Mary persisted. "You never went beyond his control, Migul."

"No. His control—he is different: he holds such great power."

"But why is he different?"

The towering mechanism stood planted firmly upon the broad bases of its metal feet. The weapon in its fingers still covered us. Its metal-cast face held always the same expression.

"Why is he different?" Mary repeated gently. "Don't you hear me?"

The Robot started. "Yes, I hear you." Its toneless, mechanical voice droned the words. Then the tempo quickened; the grid of wires in the mouth aperture behind its parted lips vibrated with a faint jangle. "I hear you. I cannot answer that question. He controls me. There is chaos —here,"—one of the hands came up and struck its breastplate with a clang —"chaos, disorder, here within me when I try to disobey him."

"That is foolish, Migul. He is a tyrant. All the humans of this era are tyrants. They have made slaves of the Robots. They have created you so that you are really human in all except your power of independent action. Don't you desire that, Migul?"

I held my breath. A curious quaking ran over the Robot's frame. The joints twitched. Emotion was sweeping this thing so nearly human!

"Mary Atwood, you seem to understand me."

"Of course I do. I am from a Time when we had human slaves: black men, Migul. I knew how they suffered. There is something in slavery that outrages the instinct of manhood."

Migul said with a jangling vehemence:

"Perhaps, some time, I can go beyond Tugh's control. I am strong. My cables pull these arms with a strength no human could have."

"You are so much stronger than Tugh. Forget his control, Migul. I am ashamed of you—a big, powerful thing like you, yielding always to a little cripple."

The Robot straightened and said, "I can resist him. I feel it. Some day I will break loose."

"Do it now, Migul!"

I tensed. Would she prevail?

"Now, Migul!" she repeated.

"No! He would derange me! I am afraid!"

"Nonsense."

"But his vibrations—the vibrations of his thoughts—even now I can feel them. They made my mechanism too sensitive. I cannot resist Tugh."

"You can!"

There was a silence. I stared at the Robot's motionless frame. What electrical, mechanical thoughts were passing within that metal skull! What emotions, what strange struggle, what warfare of nameless etheric vibrations of will power were taking place unseen beneath that inert exterior!

Perhaps something snapped. Migul said suddenly, "I am beyond control! At last I am beyond control!"

The ray cylinder lowered to point at the floor. A wild thought swept me that I could snatch it. But of what use would that be? Its ray would decompose all human flesh, but it would not harm a Robot; and if I startled Migul, fought with him in the confines of this narrow room, he would kill Mary and me in a moment.

Mary was gripping me. "Don't move, George!" she cautioned; then turned again to the Robot. "I am glad, Migul. Now you are truly human. And we are all friends here, because we all hate and fear Tugh—"

"I fear him not!"

I could feel Mary trembling with the strain of all this. But she had the strength to muster a laugh.

"Don't you fear him—just a little, Migul? We do. Fear is a human thing."

"Then yes, I fear him."

"Of course you do," I put in. "And the real truth, Migul, is I wish he were dead. Don't you?"

"Yes. I wish he were dead."

"Well, sit down," I persisted. "Put that weapon away: I'm afraid of that, too. Sit down and we will talk about Tugh's death."

The Robot placed the weapon on the floor, disconnected the wires, opened the plate of its chest and took out the small battery. And then it squatted its awkward bulk on the floor before us. Gruesome conference, with this huge mechanical thing apeing the ways of a man!

I knew that haste was necessary, but did not dare show it. Above everything we must not be precipitate; not startle the Robot. At worst, if Tugh should

return, I could seize this weapon at my feet and turn it upon him.

I murmured to Mary. "You did it! Let me plan something, now. If Migul can lead us...."

I added, "Migul, could you follow Tugh? He said he was going to talk to the Robot leaders. And then, probably, he went to Princess Tina. Could you follow him to where he is now?"

"Yes. I can follow him by his vibration-scent. I am sensitive to it, I have been with him so much. But he can never again control me!"

"When we have killed him, Migul, that will be ended forever."

"Killed him?" It seemed to frighten the Robot. "I do not know that I would dare!"

"You lead me to him," I said, "and I'll kill him. Have no fear of that, Migul. We will work together—human friends."

"Yes. Human friends. What do you want me to do?"

Asking for orders! So nearly human, yet always something was lacking!

"Lead us to Tugh," I said promptly. "And give me that weapon."

I made a tentative reach for it, and the Robot pushed it toward me. I connected it and made sure I could fire it: its operation was obvious. Then I stuffed the whole thing in my jacket pocket; and always afterward my hand at intervals went to that cool, sweating little cylinder. What a comfort that weapon was!

I stood up. "Shall we go now? Migul, we will have to plan what to do according to where we find Tugh. Do not go too fast; let us keep close behind you."

"Us?" The Robot was on its feet. "Do you mean this girl?"

What was this? My heart sank. I noticed, too, that Migul was planted firmly between us and the door.

"Why, of course, Migul. We can't leave her here."

"She is not going."

"Why not?" I demanded. "Of course she's going." I tried an experiment. "Migul, I order you to let us out of here."

The Robot stood inert.

"Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I understand you."

"It is an order. Think about it. I control you now. Isn't that so?"

My heart sank. Whatever the mysterious science involved in my dealing with this mechanism, I was not operating it correctly. The Robot did not move. Finally it said:

"No one—nothing—controls me. I have an independent impulse of my own. The girl must stay here until we return."

Mary gave a faint cry and sank back to the couch, a huddled white heap in her satin dress. I thought she had fainted, but she raised her face to me and tried to smile.

"But I won't leave her, Migul."

"She must stay."

"But why? If you are human now, you must act with a reason."

"Then because, if we fail to kill Tugh, I would not have him confront me with the knowledge I have released this girl. He would derange me; end me."

"I will stay," said Mary faintly. "You go, George. But come back to me."

I bent over her; suggested, "If we locked this door so Tugh could not get in —"

Migul said, "I can do that. She will be safer here than with us. I have other reasons. She is dressed in white—a mark to betray us if we go in darkness. And she is that kind of a human you call a girl—and that style human cannot travel fast, nor fight."

It occurred to me that Mary might very well be safer here.

Again I leaned over her. "It seems horrible to leave you alone."

"I'll stay. It may be best." Her smile was pathetically tremulous. "Lock me in so Tugh—so nothing outside—can reach me. But, oh, George, come back quickly!"

"Yes." I bent lower, and whispered, "It's Larry, not Tugh I really want to find—he and that Princess Tina. We'll come back and get you, and then all of us will get away in one of the Time-cages. That's all I want, Mary—to get us safely out of this accursed Time-world."

Migul said, "I am ready to start."

I pressed Mary's hand. "Good-by. I will come back soon, God willing."

"Yes. God willing."

I left her sitting there and turned away. Migul slid the door open, letting in the hum and buzz of the machinery outside. But I saw that the attending Robots had all vanished. There was no mechanism of independent locomotion left.

Mary repeated, "Lock the door carefully upon me. Oh, George, come back to me!"

I essayed a smile and a nod as the door slid closed upon her.

"Is it locked, Migul?"

"Yes. Sealed."

"You are sure Tugh cannot open it? He did before."

"I have set my own lock-series. He will find it does not open."

"Show me how to open it."

The Robot indicated the combination. I verified it by trying it. I said once more, "You are sure Tugh cannot do this?"

"Yes. I am sure."

Was the Robot lying to me? Could a Robot lie? I had to chance it.

"All right, let's start. Where was Tugh to meet those Robot leaders?"

"Out here. He has already met them without doubt, and gone somewhere else."

"He said he was going to the Princess Tina. Where would that be?"

"Probably in the palace."

"Can we get there?"

I had, of course, no idea of the events which had transpired. The laboratory overhead was deserted, save for the upper tower where a Robot was still broadcasting defiance. His electrical voice floated faintly down to us; but I ignored it. In the comparative silence of this deserted cavern, now, there were also the blurred sounds from overhead. The Robots were running wild over the city, massacring its human inhabitants; they had burned the Patrol Station; their red and violet rays were flashing everywhere. But I knew none of this.

Migul was saying:

"We cannot get to the palace above ground: the wall is electrified. But there is an underground tunnel. Shall we try it?"

"Yes, if you think the Princess Tina and that man Larry is there."

"I am seeking Tugh. Will you kill him if we find him?"

"Yes," I assured him.

Rash promise!

Migul was leading me between the rows of unattended machinery to the cavern's opposite side. It said, once:

"There have been too many recent vibrations here: I cannot pick Tugh's trail. It is quicker to go where he might have been recently; there I will try to find his vibrations."

We came to the entrance of a tunnel. It was the cross passage leading to the cellar corridors of the palace five hundred feet away. It seemed deserted, and was very dimly illumined by hidden lights. I followed the great metal figure of Migul, which stalked with stiff-legged steps in advance of me. The arch of the tunnel-roof barely cleared the top of Migul's square-capped head.

My hand was in the side pocket of my jacket, my fingers gripping the ray cylinder for instant action. But it was a singularly ineffectual weapon for me under the circumstances, in spite of the sense of security it gave me. I could only use the cylinder against a human—and, save Tugh, it was the Robots, not the humans who were my enemies!

We had gone no more than a hundred feet or so when Migul slowed our pace, and began to walk stooped over, with one of its abnormally long arms held close to the ground. The fingers were stiffly outstretched and barely skimmed the floor surface of the tunnel. As we passed through a spot of light I saw that Migul had extended from each of the fingertips an inch-long filament of wire, like finger nails.

The Robot murmured abruptly, "Tugh's vibrations are here. I can feel them. He has passed this way recently."

Tugh's trail! I knew then that Tugh's body, touching this ground, had altered to some infinitesimal degree the floor-substance's inherent vibration characteristics. Vibrations of every sort are communicable from one substance to another. Tugh's trail was here—his vibration-scent—and like a hound with his nose to the ground, Migul's fingers with the extended filaments were feeling it. What strange sensitivity! What an amazing development of science was manifested in every move and act and word of this Robot! Yet, in my own Time-world of 1935, it was all crudely presaged: this now before me was merely the culmination.

"He recently passed," said Migul. We stopped, I close beside the stooping metal figure. The Robot's voice was a furtive sepulchral whisper that filled me with awe.

"How long ago?" I asked.

"He passed here an hour or two ago, perhaps. The vibrations are fading out. But it was Tugh. Well do I know him. Put your hand down. Feel the vibrations?"

"I cannot. My fingers are not that sensitive, Migul."

A faint contempt was in the Robot's tone. "I forgot that you are a man." Then it straightened, and the extended filaments slid back into its fingers. It said softly, "There is one guard in this passage."

My heart leaped. "A human or a Robot?"

"A man. His name is Alent. He is at a gate that is too well fortified for any Robot to assail, but he will pass humans. It will be necessary for you to kill him."

I had no intention of doing that, but I did not say so. As we crept forward to where I saw that the tunnel made a bend, with the fortified gate just beyond it, there was in my mind that now I would do my best to

separate from Migul, using this guard as my pretext, for he would doubtless pass me, but not the Robot. The palace was occupied, I assumed, by friendly humans. I could get them to locate Tina and Larry.... Then the flaws of this plan made themselves all too evident. Larry might be with Tugh, and without Migul I could not follow Tugh's trail. Worse than that, if I tricked Migul, the angered Robot would at once return to Mary. I shuddered at the thought. That would not do. I must try to get Migul past the guard.

I whispered, "When we reach the gate you stay behind me. Let me persuade the guard."

"You will kill him? You have the weapon. He is fortified against the Robot weapons, but yours will be strange to him."

"We will see."

We crept around the bend. A hundred feet further on I saw that the passage was barred by a grille, faintly luminous with electrification.

I called cautiously:

"Alent! Alent!"

A glow of light illuminated me as I stood in the middle of the passage; Migul was in a shadow behind me.

A man's voice answered, "You are a human? How come you there? Who are you?"

"A stranger. A friend of the Princess Tina. I came in the Time-traveling cage. I want to pass now into the palace."

I could see the dark man's figure behind the grille. His voice called, "Come slowly forward and stop at twenty feet. Walk only in the middle of the passage: the sides are electrified, but I will admit you along the middle."

I took a step, but no more. The figure of the guard stood now at the grille doorway. I was conscious of Migul towering over me from behind. Abruptly I felt a huge hand in my jacket pocket, and before I could prevent it my cylinder came out, clutched by the Robot.

I think I half turned. There was a soundless flash beside me, a tiny level beam leaped down the corridor—that horribly intense actinic white beam. It struck the guard, and his figure fell forward in the grille doorway. When we reached him, there was but a crumpled heap of black and white garments enveloping a bleached white skeleton.

I turned shudderingly away. Migul said calmly, "Here is your weapon. You should have used it more quickly. I give it back to you because against Tugh I am not sure I would have the will to use it. Will you be more quick with him?"

"Yes," I promised. And as we went through the gate, keeping cautiously in the middle of the passage, the Robot added, "In dealing with Tugh you cannot stop for talk. He will kill you when he sees you."

We were presently under the palace, in those lower corridors which I have already described. Human voices were audible from upstairs, but no one was down here. Migul was again prowling with his fingers along the ground. We came to an unoccupied lighted room—Harl's room, though I did not know it then. Once or twice Migul was at fault. We started up a flight of stairs into the palace, then Migul came and turned back.

"He went upstairs; but this, coming down, is more recent."[1]

[1] It will be recalled that Tugh passed Alent's gate, and with Tina and Larry went to the palace roof. Perhaps, while Larry was with the Council during that time when the Robot revolt was first sweeping over the city, Tugh may again have prowled down here in these lower corridors. Then he went upstairs, brought Tina and Larry down and they started for the Power House.

Migul had struck the main trail, now. We passed the lighted room again, went on to a cave-like open space with a litter of abandoned machinery and unswervingly to a blank space of the opposite wall.

Again Migul faltered.

"What's the matter, Migul?"

"His vibrations are faint. They are blurred with the Princess Tina's."

"Then she is with him?"

It was a tremendous relief. Larry doubtless was with them also.

"Is the man from 1935 with Tugh and the Princess?" I asked.

"I think so. There are unfamiliar vibrations—perhaps those of the man from the past."

The Robot was running the filaments of its fingers lightly over the wall.

"I have it. The Princess pressed this switch."

The door opened; the narrow descending tunnel was wholly black.

"Where does this go, Migul?"

"I do not know."

The Robot was stooping to the floor. "It is a plain trail," it said. "Come."[2]

> [2] Had Migul at that juncture traced Tina's movements—her hand where it went along the tunnel-wall—we would have found the light switch. But it chanced that the Robot's fingers went at once to the ground and caught the foot-trail of Tugh.

The remainder of that journey through the labyrinth of passages was made in blank darkness, with only the faint lurid red beams from Migul's eye-sockets to light our way. But we went swiftly, and without incident. At last we went under the dam, up the spiral stairs and upon the catwalk above the abyss, where the great spillway of falling water arched out over us.

"The Power House," said Migul, "is where they went."

The Robot was obviously frightened, now. We were wet with spray. "I should not be here," it said. "If the water gets into me—even though I am well insulated—I will be destroyed!"

I recall as I write this how in Patton Place of 1935, one of the first attacking Robots had exploded under a jet of water from the street hydrant.

"I will stay behind you," Migul added. "They have a deranging ray in the Power House, and they might use it on me. Will you protect me?"

"Yes, of course," I said.

I was ready to promise anything, if only I could get to Larry and Tina, then back with them to Mary into the Time-cage; and if we were safely out of this era, most assuredly I wanted none of it again. Migul, as I advanced along the catwalk, followed behind me.

"You will kill Tugh?" it reiterated like an anxious child.

"Yes."

I saw that the catwalk terminated ahead under the Power House, where steps led upward. Then I heard a cry:

"Help! Help! Here, inside the dam! Help!"

I stood transfixed, with horror tingling my flesh. The voice came faintly from near at hand; it was muffled, and in the roar of the falling water and lashing spray I barely heard it.

Then it came again. "Help us! Help us, quickly!"

It was an agonized, panting, human voice. And in a chance, partial lull I heard it now plainly.

It was Larry's voice!

CHAPTER XXI

The Fight in the Power House

I found the narrow aperture and stood peering down into darkness. Migul crowded behind me. The red beams of its eyes went down into the pit, and by their faint illumination I saw the heads of Larry and a girl, swimming twenty feet below. The girl's dark hair floated out like black seaweed in the water.

"The Princess and the strange man!" exclaimed Migul.

I called, "Larry! Larry!"

His labored voice came up. "George? Thank God! Get us—out of here. Almost—gone, George!"

I found my wits: "Then keep quiet! Don't talk. Save your strength. I'll get you out!"

But how? I could see that they were almost spent, for they were swimming with labored, inefficient strokes—Larry using most of his strength to hold up the exhausted girl. We had not a moment to spare. I wildly contemplated tearing my garments to make a rope.

But Migul pushed me away. "I will bring them. Stand back."

The Robot had opened its metal side and drawn forth a flexible wire with a foot-long hook fastened to it. The wire came smoothly out as though unrolling from a drum.

It leaned into the aperture and called down to Larry. "Fasten this around the Princess. Be careful not to harm her. Put it under her arms."

I saw that there was an eyelet on the wire into which the hook could be inserted to make a loop.

"Under her arms," Migul called. "She will have to hold to the hook with her hands or the wire will cut into her. Has she the strength?"

Larry floundered as he adjusted the wire. Tina gasped. "I—have the strength."

The Robot braced itself, spreading its knees against the aperture with its body leaning forward.

"Ready?" it called.

"Yes," came Larry's voice.

Migul's finger pressed a button at the base of its neck, and with the smooth power of machinery the wire cable rolled into its side. Tina came up; Migul gripped her and pulled her through the aperture; laid her gently on the catwalk. I unfastened the hook, and soon Migul had Larry up with us.

The Robot stood aside, with its work done, silently regarding us. I need not detail this reunion of Larry and me there on the spray-swept catwalk, clinging to the side of the great dam with the foaming Hudson beneath us. Larry and Tina were not injured, and presently their strength partially returned. We hastily sketched what had happened to each of us.

It was Tugh who was the guiding evil genius of all these disasters! Tugh, the exile of Time, the ruthless murderer in many eras! He was here, very probably, in the Power House, a few hundred feet away.

And Tina, regarding that Power House with her returning clarity of senses saw that its sending signal lights were off, which meant that the air-power of the New York District was not being supplied. Help from other cities could not arrive.

Tina stood up waveringly. "We cannot stay here like this!" she said. "Tugh has killed the guards, and is there in control. The electrical defenses are shut off; they must be! The Robots will soon be coming along the top of the dam, for their battery renewers are stored in the Power House. If they get them, this massacre will go on for days!—and spread all over! We've got to stop them! We must get in the Power House and capture Tugh!"

"But we have no weapons!" Larry cried. "And he must have that white-ray, if he has killed the guards!"

"I have a weapon!" I said. I had suddenly recalled the cylinder in my pocket. "I have a white-ray!"

A desperate madness was on us all. The lives of thousands of people who might still be alive on Manhattan were at stake; and other millions would be menaced if these Robots renewed their energy and spread the revolt into other cities.

Over the roar, and the wind lashing us, I shouted:

"I promised Migul I would kill Tugh. I will!"

I turned toward Migul. But the Robot had vanished! Afraid, no doubt, that we would want it to go with us after Tugh, the terrified mechanism was hiding. We wasted no time searching for it.

We had all been half hysterical for these few moments, but we steadied quickly enough as we approached the Power House's lower entrance. The building was a rectangular structure some two hundred feet long. It was fastened upon great brackets to the perpendicular side of the dam and jutted out some fifty feet. It was two levels in height—a total of about forty feet to its flat roof, in the center of which was set a small oval tower. The whole structure was above us now; the catwalk went close underneath it, passing through an arch of the huge supporting brackets and terminating in a small lower platform, with an open spiral staircase leading upward some ten feet into the lower story.

The place seemed dark and deserted as we crept up to it. Gazing above me, I could see the top of the dam, now looming above the Power House. There was a break in the spillway at this point. The arching cascade of water under which the catwalk hung ended here. We came out where there was a vista of the lower Hudson beneath us, showing dimly down past the docklights and skeleton landing stages to the bay.

The sky was visible now and the open wind struck us full. It was a crazy pendulum wind. A storm was breaking overhead. There were

flares of lightning and thunder cracks—from disturbed nature, outraged by the temperature changes of the Robot's red and violet rays.

The Power House, so far as we could see, was dark and deserted. Its normal lights were extinguished. Was Tugh in there? It was my weapon against his. The white-ray was new to Tina; we had no way of estimating this cylinder's effective range.[3]

[3] The cylinder of the white-ray which I carried was not the one with which Tugh murdered Harl. Mine was portable, and considerably smaller.

I kept Tina and Larry well behind me. It was a desperate approach, and I was well aware of it. The catwalk now was illumined at intervals by the lightning; Tugh from many points of vantage in the Power House could have seen us and exterminated us with a soundless flash swift as a lightning bolt itself. But we had to chance it.

We reached the small lower platform. The catwalk terminated. The Power House was a roof over us. I stood at the foot of the spiral staircase, which went up through a rectangular opening in the floor. There was a vista of a dark room-segment.

"Keep behind me," I murmured, and I started up. Was Tugh lurking here, waiting for me to raise myself above this opening? If he had been, he could have held his position against a score of assailants.

But he was not. I soon stood breathlessly in a dark metal room. Tina and Larry came up.

"He's not here," I whispered. It was more silent in here: the cascading water was further away from us now. There came a flash of lightning, followed in a few seconds by its accompanying thunder crash.

I started. "What's that?"

On the floor near us lay a gruesome, crumpled thing. I bent over it, waiting for another flash. When one came I saw it was a heap of

clothes, covering a white skeleton. By the garments Tina knew it was one of the guards.

We crept into a small interior corridor where a small light was burning. The remains of two other guards lay here, close by the doorway as though they had come running at Tugh's alarm, only to be struck down.

It was horribly gruesome, here in the dimness with these bleached bones which had been living men so recently. And it was nerve-breaking to know that Tugh was doubtless here somewhere.

"Listen!" whispered Tina.

There was a crackling sound overhead, and then the blurred murmur of a voice. An audible broadcasting transmitter was in operation.

"It's in the tower," said Tina swiftly. "Tugh must be there."

This was an infinite relief. We went to the top story, passing, unheeding, another crumpled heap. Again we stood listening. The transmitter was hissing and spluttering, and then shouting its magnified human voice out into the night. It was Tugh up there. He was calling audibly to his Robots, with words which would be relayed upon all the local magnifiers in the city. Between the thunder cracks we heard him plainly now.

"*This is your Master Tugh in the Power House. Robots, we are triumphant! The city is isolated! No help can get in! Kill all humans! Spare none! This night sees the end of human rule!*"

And again: "*When you want renewal, come along the top roadway of the dam. The electric defenses are off. You can come, and I have your renewers here. I have new batteries, new strength for you Robots!*"[4]

[4] Tugh had been in the Power House before. He knew the operations of its various controls. But he had come always by the surface route; he had heard of the existence of the secret tunnel, but had never before this night been able to find out where it was.

"You stay here," I told Tina and Larry; "I'll go up there. I'll get him now once and for all."

I reached the Power House roof. The storm tore at me. It was beginning to rain. I was near the outer edge of the roof, and ten feet away stood the oval tower. I saw windows twenty feet up, with dim lights in them. Mingled with the storm was the hiss of the transmitter in the top of the tower, and the roar of Tugh's magnified voice. He had evidently been there only a brief time. From where I crouched on the roof, I could see overhead, along the top edge of the dam looming above me. The red Robot rays were everywhere in the city, but none as yet showed along the dam's upper roadway.

I got into the tower and mounted its small stairs. Creeping cautiously to the entrance of the control room, I saw a fairly large, dimly lighted oval apartment. Great banks of levers stood around it; tables of control apparatus; rows of dials, illumined by tiny lights like staring eyes. There was another gruesome heap of garments here on the floor; a grinning white skull leered at me.

This was the main control room of the Power House. Across it, near an open window, Tugh sat with his back to me, bent over a table with the grid of a microphone before him. I raised my cylinder; then lowered it, for I had only a partial view of him: a huge transformer stood like a barrier between us.

Noiselessly I stepped over the threshold, and to one side within the room. The place was a buzz and hiss of sound topped by Tugh's broadcast voice and the roar of the storm outside—yet he was instantly aware of me! His voice in the microphone abruptly stopped; he rose and with an incredibly swift motion whirled and flung at me a heavy metal weight which had been lying on the table by his hand. The missile struck my outstretched weapon just as I was aiming it to fire, and the cylinder, undischarged, was knocked from my hand and went spinning across the floor several feet away from me.

Tugh, like an uncoiling spring, still with one continuous motion, made a leap sidewise to where his own weapon was lying on a bench, and I saw he

would reach it before I could retrieve mine.

I flung my heavy battery box but missed him. And as I rushed at him he caught up his cylinder and fired it full at me! But no flash came: only a click. He had exhausted its charge when he killed the Power House guards. With a curse he flung it at my face, and my arm took its blow just as I struck him. We fell gripping each other, and rolled on the floor.

I was aware that Larry and Tina had followed me up. Larry shouted, "Look out for him, George!"

I have described Larry's hand-to-hand encounter with the cripple; mine was much the same; I was a child in his grip. But with his weapon useless, and Larry rushing into the room, Tugh must have felt that for all his strength and fighting skill he would be worsted in this encounter. He blocked a jab of my fist, flung me headlong away and sprang to his feet just as Larry leaped at him.

I stood erect, to see that he had sent Larry crashing to the floor. I heard his sardonic laugh as he hurled a metal stool at Tina, who was trying to throw something at him. Then, turning, he sprang through the open window casement and disappeared.

It was twenty feet down to the roof. We reached the window to see Tugh picking himself up unhurt. Then, with his awkward gait but at amazing speed, he ran across the roof to a small entrance in the face of the dam where an interior staircase gave access to the roadway on top.

He was escaping us. The electrical gate was open to him. It was only a few hundred feet along the dam roadway to that gate; and beyond it the roadway was open into the city, where now we could see the distant flashing lights of the Robots advancing along the dam.

Larry and I would have rushed to the roof to follow Tugh, but Tina checked us. She said:

"No—he has too great a start. He's on top by now, and it's only a short distance to the gate. There's a better way here: I can electrify the gate again —trap him inside."[5]

[5] There was a similar gate and wall-barrier at the Jersey entrance to the dam, and both gates operated together. The nearby Jersey section was, is still, an agricultural district save for a few landing stages for the great airliners. The robots had spread into Jersey; but since few humans were there, with only Robot agriculturists working the section, the unimportant Jersey events have not figured in my narrative.

Tina found the gate controls. But they would not operate!

Those precious lost seconds, with Tugh running along the top of the dam and his Robots advancing to join him!

"Tina, hurry!" I cried. Larry and I bent anxiously over her, but the levers meant nothing to us. There were lost seconds while she desperately fumbled, and Larry pleaded:

"Tina, dear, what's the matter?"

"He must have ripped out a wire to make sure of getting away. I—I must find it. Everything seems all right."

A minute gone. Surely Tugh would have reached the gate by now. Or, worse, the Robots would have come through, and would assail us here.

"Tina!" pleaded Larry, "don't get excited. Take it calmly: you can find the trouble."

I rushed to the window. I could see the upper half of the cross wall gate-barrier. It jutted above the top edge of the dam from the point of vision. On the Manhattan side I saw the oncoming Robot lights. And then suddenly I made out a light on this side of the barrier; it marked Tugh; it must have been a beam signal he was carrying. It moved slowly, retarded by distance, but it was almost to the gate; and then it reached there.

"He's gone through!" I called. Then I saw him on the land side. He had escaped us and joined the Robots. The lights showed them all coming for the gate.

And then Tina abruptly found the loosened wire.

"I have it!" she exclaimed.

She stood up, tugging with all her strength at the great switch-lever. I saw, up there on the top of the dam, a surge of sparks as the current hissed into the wall-barrier; saw the barrier glow a moment and then subside. And presently the lights of the balked Robots, Tugh with them, retreated back into the wrecked and blood-stained city.

"We did it!" exclaimed Larry. "We're impregnable here. Tina, now the air-power, for help may be on its way. And then call some other city. Can you do that? They must have sent us help by now."

In a moment the air-power went on, and the city lighting system. Then Tina was at the great transmitter. As she closed the circuits, London was frantically calling us. In the midst of the chaos of electrical sounds which now filled the control room, came the audible voice of the London operator.

"I could not get you because your circuit was broken," it said. "Our air-vessel *Micrad*; bearing the large projector of the Robot-deranger, landed on the ocean surface two hundred miles from New York harbor. It was forced down when your district air-power failed."

Tina said hurriedly, "Our air-power is on now. Is the *Micrad* coming?"

"Wait. Hold connection. I will call them." And after a moment's pause the London voice came again: "The *Micrad* is aloft again, and should be over New York in thirty minutes. You are safe enough now."

As the voice clicked off Tina's emotion suddenly overcame her. "Safe enough! And our city red with human blood!"

A wild thought abruptly swept me. Mary Atwood was back there in the cavern, alone, waiting for me to return! Subconsciously, in the rush of these tumultuous events, my mind had always been on her; she was secure enough, no doubt, locked in that room. But now Tugh was back in the city, and realizing that his cause was lost he would return to her!

I hastily told Larry and Tina.

"But he cannot open the door to get into her," said Larry.

But Migul could open the door. Where was Migul now? It set me shuddering.

We decided to rush back by the underground route. The Power House could remain unattended for a time. We got down into the tunnel and made the trip without incident. We ran to the limit of Tina's strength, and then for a distance I carried her. We were all three panting and exhausted when we came to the corridors under the palace. I think I have never had so shuddering an experience as that trip. I tried to convince myself that nothing could have happened to Mary, that all this haste was unnecessary, but the wild thought persisted: Where was Migul?

A group of officials stood in one of the palace's lower corridors. As they came hastily up to Tina, I suddenly had a contempt for these men who governed a city in which neither they nor anyone else did any work. In this time of bloodshed, all these inmates of the palace had stayed safely within its walls, knowing that it was well fortified and that within a few hours help would doubtless come.

"The *Micrad* is coming with the long-range deranger," Tina told them briefly. After a moment they hastened away upstairs and I heard one of them shouting:

"The revolt is over! Within an hour we will have all the accursed Robots inert. The *Micrad* can sweep all the city with her ray!"

The death of Alent, the guard in the tunnel to the Robot cavern, had been discovered by the palace officials, and another guard was there now in his place. Migul had not passed him, this guard told us. But there had been an interim when the gate was open. Had Migul returned here and gone back to Mary?

We reached the cavern of machinery. It was dim and deserted, as before. We came to the door of Mary's room. It was standing half open!

Mary was gone! The couch was overturned, with its coving and pillows strewn about. The room showed every evidence of a desperate struggle. On the floor the great ten-foot length of Migul lay prone on its back. A small door-porte in its metal side was open; the panel hung awry on hinges half ripped away. From the aperture a coil and grid dangled half out in the midst of a tangled skein of wires.

We bent over the Robot. It was not quite inert. Within its metal shell there was a humming and a faint, broken rasping. The staring eye-sockets showed wavering beams of red; the grid of tiny wires back of the parted lips vibrated with a faint jangle.

I bent lower. "Migul, can you hear me?" I asked.

Would it respond? My heart sent a fervent prayer that this mechanical thing —the product of man's inventive genius through a thousand years—would have a last grasp of energy to answer my appeal.

"Migul, can you—"

It spoke. "I hear you." They were thin, jangled tones, crackling and hissing with interference.

"What happened, Migul? Where is the girl?" I asked.

"Tugh—did this—to me. He took the girl."

"Where? Migul, where did he take her? Do you know?"

"Yes. I—have it recorded that he said—they were going to the Time-cage—overhead in the laboratory. He said—they—he and the girl were leaving forever!"

CHAPTER XXII

The Chase to the End of the World

The giant mechanism, fashioned in the guise of a man, lay dying. Yet not that, for it never had had life. It lay deranged; out of order; its intricate cycle was still operating, but faintly, laboriously. Jangling out of tune.

Every moment its internal energy was lessening. It seemed to want to talk. The beams of its eyes rolled wildly. It said:

"Tugh—did this—to me. I came back here frightened because I knew that Tugh still controlled me. You—hear me...."

There was a muffled, rumbling blur, then its voice clicked on again.

"When Tugh came I opened the door to him, even though the girl tried to stop me.... And I was humble before Tugh.... But he was angry because I had released you. He—deranged me. I tried to fight him, and he ripped open my side porte...."

I thought the mechanism had gone inert. From within it was complete silence. Larry murmured, "Good Lord, this is gruesome!"

Then the faint, rasping voice started again.

"Deranged me.... And about Tugh, he—" A blur. Then again, "Tugh—he is—Tugh, he is—"

It went into a dull repetition of the three words, ending in a rumble which died into complete silence. The red radiance from the eye-sockets faded and vanished.

The thing we had called Migul seemed gone. There was only this metal shell, cast to represent a giant human figure, lying here with its operating

mechanisms out of order—smashed.

I stood up. "That's the end of it. Mary Atwood's gone—"

"With Tugh in the Time-cage!" Larry exclaimed. "Tina, can't we—"

"Follow them?" Tina interrupted. "Come on! No—you two wait here. I will go upstairs and verify if the Time-cage is gone."

She came back in a moment. The laboratory overhead was fortunately deserted of Robots: Larry and I had not thought of that.

"The cage is gone!" Tina exclaimed. "Migul told us the truth!"

We hastened back through the tunnel, past the guard, up into the palace and into the garden. My heart pounded in my throat for fear that Tina's Time-cage would have vanished. But it stood, dimly glowing under the foliage where she had left it.

A young man rushed up to us and said, "Princess Tina, look there!"

A great row of colored lights sailed slowly past overhead. The *Micrad* was here, circling over the city. The storm had abated; it had rained only for a brief time.[6] The crazy winds were subsiding. The *Micrad* was using its deranging ray: we could hear the thrum of it. It sent out vibrations which threw the internal mechanisms of the Robots out of adjustment, and they were dropping in their tracks all over the city.

[6] It was afterward found that many of the Robots, heedless of the rain as they ran about the city intent upon their murderous work, had exploded by getting too wet.

It chanced, as momentarily we stood there at the entrance to the Time-cage while the great airliner swept by, that the top of the nearby laboratory was visible through the trees. We saw a white search-beam

from the *Micrad* come down and disclosed a group of Robots on the laboratory roof. Then the spreading beam of the deranging ray struck them, and they stood an instant transfixed, stricken, with wildly flailing arms. Then one toppled and fell. Then another. Two rushed together, locked in each other's grip, desperately fighting because of some crazy, deranged thought-impulse. They swayed and tore at each other until both wilted and sank inert. Another tottered with jerky steps to the edge of the roof and plunged headlong, crashing with a great metal clatter to the stone paving of the ground....

The young man who had joined us dashed into the palace. We heard his shouts:

"The revolt is over! The revolt is over!"

This had been a massacre similar to Tugh's vengeance upon the New York City of 1935; just as senseless. Both, from the beginning, were equally hopeless of ultimate success. Tugh could not conquer this Time-world, so now he had left it, taking Mary Atwood with him....

We hastened into the Time-cage. Larry and I braced ourselves for the shock as Tina slid the door closed and hurried to the controls.

Within a moment we were flashing off into the great stream of Time....

"You think he has gone forward into the future?" Larry asked. "Won't the instrument show anything, Tina?"

"No. No trace of him yet."

We were passing 3,000 A.D., traveling into the future. Tina reasoned that Tugh, according to Harl's confession, had originally come from a future Time-world. It seemed most probable that now he would return there.

The Time-telespectroscope so far had shown us no evidence of the other cage. Tina kept the telescope barrel trained constantly on that other space five hundred feet from us which held Tugh's vehicle. The flowing gray

landscape off there gave no sign of our quarry; yet we knew we could not pass it, without at least a brief flash of it in the telespectroscope and upon the image-mirror. Nervously, breathlessly we waited for a sign of the other Time-cage.

But nothing showed. We were not traveling fast. With Larry and Tina at the instrument table, I was left to stand at the window. Always I gazed eastward. That other little point of space only five hundred feet to the east held Mary; she was there; but not *now*. She was remote, inaccessible. The thought of her with Tugh, so inaccessible, set me shuddering.

I was barely aware of the changing gray outlines of the city: I stared, praying for the fleeting glimpse of a spectral cage.... I think that up to 3,000 A.D., New York remained much the same. And then, quite suddenly, in some vast storm or cataclysm, it was gone. I saw but a blurred chaos. This was near 4,000 A.D. Then it was rebuilt, smaller, with more trees growing about, until presently there seemed only a forest. People, if they still were here, were building such transitory structures that I could not see them.

5,000 A.D. Mankind no doubt had reached its peak of civilization, paused at the summit and now was in decadence, reverting to savagery. Perhaps in Europe the civilized peak lasted longer. This was a backward space during the ascent; perhaps now it was reverting faster to the primitive.

But I think that by 15,000 A.D., mankind over all the Earth had become primitive. There is no standing still: we must go forward; or back. Man, with his own machines softening him, enabling him to do nothing, eventually unfitted himself to cope with nature. That storm at 4,000 A.D. in New York, for instance, even in my own Time would have been merely an incentive to reconstruct upon a greater scale. But the men of 4,000 A.D. could not do that....

At the year 10,000 A.D., with a seemingly primeval forest around us, Tina, Larry and I held an anxious consultation. We had anticipated that Tugh would stop in his own Time-world. That might have been around 3,000 or

4,000; but we hardly thought, as we viewed the scene in passing, that he had come originally from beyond 4,000. He was too civilized.

Tugh had not stopped. He had to be still ahead of us, so our course was to follow. Whenever he stopped, we would see him. If he turned back and flashed past us, that too would be evident. But if, from 2,930, he had gone into the past—!

And then suddenly we glimpsed the other cage! It was ahead of us, traveling more slowly and retarding as though about to stop. A gray unbroken forest was here. The time was about 12,000 A.D. Tina saw it first through the little telescopic-barrel; then it showed on the mirror-grid —a faint, ghostly-barred shape, thin as gossamer. We even saw it presently through the window. It held its steady position, level with us, hanging solid amid the melting, changing gray outlines of the forest trees. They blurred it as they rose and fell.

This chase through Time! The two cages sped forward with the gray panorama whirling around them. Of all the scene, only that other cage, to us, was real. Yet it was the cages which were apparitions.

We gathered at our eastward window to gaze across the void of that five hundred feet. The interior of Tugh's cage was not visible to us. A little window—a thinner patch in the lattices of the cage-side—fronted us; but nothing showed in it.

We were so helpless! Only five hundred feet away, the Tugh cage was there —now; yet we could do nothing save hold our Time-changing rate to conform with it. Of course Tugh saw us. He was making no effort to elude us, for neither cage was running at its maximum.

For hours I stood gazing, praying that Mary might be safe, striving with futile fancy to guess what might be transpiring within that cage speeding side by side with us in the blurred shadows of the corridors of Time.

And again, as so many times before, I was balked at guessing Tugh's motives for his actions. He knew we could not assail him unless he stopped.

But to what destination was he going?

It was a chase—to our consciousness of the passing of Time—which lasted several hours. Tugh altered his Time-rate and sped more swiftly. My heart sank, for this showed he was not preparing to stop. We lost direct sight of the other cage several times as it drew ahead of us. But it was always visible on the image-mirror.

"I think," Tina said finally, "that we should stay behind it. When he retards to stop, we will have a better opportunity of landing simultaneously with him."

We passed 100,000 A.D. The forest went down, and it seemed that only rocks were here. A barren vista was visible off to the river and the distant sea. The familiar conformations of the sea and the land were changed. There was a different shore-line. It was nearer at hand now; and it was creeping closer.

I stared at that blurred gray surface of water; at the wide, undulating stretch of rock. We came to 1,000,000 A.D.—a million years into my future. Ice came briefly, and vanished again. But there were no trees springing into life on this barren landscape. I could not fancy that even the transitory habitations of humans were here in this cold desolation.

Were we headed for the End? I could envisage a dying world, its internal fires cooling.

Ten million years.... Then a hundred million.... The gray scene, blended of dark nights and sunshine days, began changing its monochrome. There were fleeting alternating intervals, now, when it was darker, and then lighter with a tinge of red. The Earth's rotation was slowing down. Through thousands of centuries the change had been proceeding, but only now could I see the lengthening days and nights. Perhaps now the day was a month long, and the night the same.

A billion years! 1,000,000,000 A.D.! By now the day and the year were of equal length. And it chanced that this Western Hemisphere faced the sun. I could see the sun now, motionless above the horizon. The scene was dull red. The sun painted the rocks and the sullen sea with blood....

A shout from Larry whirled me round. "George! Good God!"

He was bending over the image-mirror; Tina, ghastly pale, with utter horror stamped upon her face, sprang for the controls. On the mirror I caught a fleeting glimpse of Tugh's cage, wrecked and broken—and instantly gone.

"It stopped!" Larry shouted. "Good God, it stopped all at once! It was wrecked! Smashed!"

We reeled; I all but lost consciousness with the shock of our own abrupt retarding. Our cage stopped and turned back. Tina located the wreckage and stopped again.

We slid the door open. The outer air was deadly cold. The sun was a huge dull-red ball hanging in the haze of a grey sky. The rocks were grey-black, with the blood-light of the sun upon them.

Five hundred feet from us, by the shore of an oily, sullen sea, the wreckage of Tugh's cage was piled in a heap. Near it, the crumpled white figure of Mary lay on the rocks. And beside her, still with his black cloak around him, crouched Tugh!

CHAPTER XXIII

Diabolical Exile of Time!

Tugh saw us as we stood in our cage doorway. His thick barrel-like figure rose erect, and from his parted cloak his arms waved with a wild gesture of defiance and triumph. He was clearly outlined in the red sunlight against the surface of the sea behind. We saw in one of his hands a ray cylinder—and then his arm came down and he fired at us. It was the white, disintegrating ray.

We were stricken by surprise, and stood for that moment transfixed in our doorway. Tugh's narrow, intensely white beam leaped over the intervening rocks; but it fell short of us. I saw that it had a range of about a hundred feet. Over the muffled heavy silence of the blood-red day the cripple's curse floated clear. He lowered his weapon; and, heedless that we also might be armed, he leaped nimbly past Mary's prostrate form and came shambling over the rocks directly for me!

It stung me into action, and for all the chaotic rush of these desperate moments my heart surged with relief. Mary was not dead! Beyond Tugh's oncoming figure, as he shambled like an infuriated charging bear over the rough rocky ground, I saw the white form of Mary move! She was striving to sit up!

I held my ray cylinder—the one I had rescued from Migul. But its range was no more than twenty feet: I had tested it; and Tugh's beam had flashed a full hundred! I whirled on Larry.

"Get away from here, you and Tina! You can't help me!"

"George, listen—"

"He's coming. Larry—you damn fool, get away from here! It goes a hundred feet, that ray of his: it'll be raking us in a minute! Run, I tell you! Get to that line of rocks!"

Close behind our cage was a small broken ridge of rocks—strewn boulders in a tumbled line some ten or fifteen feet in height. It would afford shelter: there were broken places to give passage through it. The ridge curved crescent-shaped behind our cage and ran down toward the shore.

Larry and Tina stood white and confused. Larry panted, "But, George. I can help you fight him! Hide here in the cage—"

"Get away, I tell you! It's his death or mine this time! I'll get him if I can!"

I shoved Larry violently away and ducked back into our doorway. Only a few breathless seconds had passed; Tugh was still several hundred feet away from us. Larry and Tina ran behind the cage, darted between the boulders of the ridge and vanished.

I crouched in the cage. Tugh was not visible from here. A moment passed. Dared I remain? If I could get Tugh within twenty feet of me, my shot was as good as his.... The silence was horrible. Was he coming forward? Did he know I was in here? I thought surely he must have seen Larry and Tina run away, and me dart in here: we had all been in plain sight of him.

This horrible silence! Was he creeping up on me? Would he fire through the doorway, or appear abruptly at the window? I could not tell where to place myself in the room—and it could mean my life or death.

The silence was split by Tina calling, "Tugh, we have caught you!"

Her voice was to one side and behind our cage, calling defiance at Tugh to distract his attention from me. Through the window I saw the flash of his beam, slanting sidewise at Tina. I gauged the source of his ray to be still some distance off, and crept to the door, cautiously peering.

Tugh stood on the open rock surface. He had swung to my right and was near the little ridge of rocks where it turned and bent down to the shore. Behind me came Tina's voice again:

"At last we have you, Tugh!"

I saw Tina poised on the top of the ridge, partially behind me at the elbow of the ridge-curve. She screamed her defiance, and again Tugh fired at her. The beam slanted over me, but still was short.

Larry had vanished. Then I saw him, though Tugh did not. He had run along behind the ridge, and appeared, now, well down toward the shore. He was barely a hundred feet from the cripple. I saw him stoop, seize a chunk of rock, and throw it. The missile bounded and passed close to Tugh.

Larry instantly ducked back out of sight. The bounding stone startled Tugh; he whirled toward it and fired over the ridge. Tina again had changed her position and was shouting at him. They were trying to exhaust his cylinder charges; and if they could do that he would be helpless before me.

For a moment he stood as though confused. As he turned to gaze after Tina, Larry flung another rock. But this time Tugh did not fire. He started back toward where, by the wreckage of his cage, Mary was now sitting up in a daze; then he changed his mind, whirled and fired directly at my doorway. I was just beyond the effective range of his beam, but it was truly aimed: I felt the horrible nauseous impact of it, a shuddering, indescribable sickening of all my being. I staggered back into the room and recovered my strength. A side window porte was open; I leaped through it and landed upon the rocks, with the cage between Tugh and me.

He fired again at the doorway. Tina had disappeared. Larry was now out of range, standing on the ridge, shouting and hurling rocks.

But Tugh did not heed him. He was shambling for my doorway. He would pass within twenty feet of me as I crouched outside the cage at its opposite corner. I could take him by surprise.

And then he saw me. He was less than a hundred feet away. He changed his direction and fired again, full at me. But I had had enough warning, and, as the beam struck the cage corner, I ran back along the outer wall of the cage and appeared at the other corner. Tugh came still closer, his weapon pointed downward as he ran. Fifty feet away. Not close enough!

I think, there at the last, that Tugh was wholly confused. Larry had come much closer. He was shouting: and from the ridge behind me Tina was shouting. Tugh ran, not for where I was lurking now, but for the corner where a moment before he had seen me.

Now he was thirty feet from me.... Twenty.... Then nearer than that. Wholly without caution he came forward.... I leaned around the edge of the cage

and fired. For one breathless instant the voices of Tina and Larry abruptly hushed.

My beam struck Tugh in the chest. It caught him and clung to him, bathing him in its spreading, intense white glare. He stopped in his tracks; stood transfixed for one breathless, horrible instant! He was so close that I could see the stupid surprise on his hideous features. His wide slit of mouth gaped with astonishment.

My beam clung to him, but he did not fall! He stood astonished; then turned and came at me! For just a moment I was stricken helpless there before him. What manner of man was this? *He did not fall!* My ray, which had decomposed the body of Alent, the guard, and left his skeleton stripped and bleached in an instant, did not harm Tugh! He had walked into it, taken it full and he did not fall! He was still alive!

I came to my senses and saw that Larry, seeing my danger, had run into the open, dangerously close, and hurled a rock. It struck Tugh upon the shoulder and deflected his aim, so that his flash went over me. I saw Tugh whirl toward Larry, and I rushed forward, ripping loose the cylinder of the ray projector from its restraining battery cord. In the instant the cripple was turned half way from me I landed upon him, and with all my strength brought the point of the small heavy cylinder down on his skull. There was a strange splintering crack, and a wild, eery scream from his voice. He fell, with me on top of him.

Crowning horror! Tugh lay motionless, twisted half on his back, his thick arms outstretched on the rocks and his weapon still clutched in his hand. Culminating, gruesome horror! I rose from his body and stood shuddering. Amazing realization! The bulging misshapen head was splintered open. And from it, strewn over the rocks, were tiny intricate cogs and wheels, coils and broken wires!

He was not a man, but a Robot! A Super-Robot from some unknown era, running amuck! A mechanism so cleverly fashioned by the genius of man that it stood diabolically upon the threshhold of humanity!

A super-mechanical exile of Time! But its wild, irrational career of destruction through the ages now was over. It lay inert, smashed and broken at my feet....

CHAPTER XXIV

The Return

I think that there is little I should add. Tugh's last purpose had been to hurl himself and Mary past the lifetime of our world, wrecking the cage and flinging them into Eternity together. And Tugh was luring our cage and us to the same fate. But Mary, to save us, had watched her opportunity, seized the main control lever and demolished the vehicle by its instantaneous stopping.

We left the shell of Tugh lying there in the red sunlight of the empty, dying world, and returned to Tina's palace. We found that the revolt was over. The city, with help arrived, was striving to emerge from the bloody chaos. Larry and Tina decided to remain permanently in her Time. They would take us back; but the cage was too diabolical to keep in existence.

"I shall send it forward unoccupied," said Tina; "flash it into Eternity, where Tugh tried to go."

Accompanied by Larry, she carried Mary and me to 1935. With Mary's father, her only relative, dead, she yielded to my urging. We arrived in October, 1935. My New York, like Tina's a victim of the exile of Time, was rapidly being reconstructed.

It was night when we stopped and the familiar outlines of Patton Place were around us.

We stood at the cage doorway.

"Good-by," I said to Larry and Tina. "Good luck to you both!"

The girls kissed each other. Such strangely contrasting types! Over a thousand years was between them, yet how alike they were, fundamentally. Both—just girls.

Larry gripped my hand. In times of emotion one is sometimes inarticulate. "Good-by, George," he said. "We—we've said already all there is to say, haven't we?"

There were tears in both the girls' eyes. We four had been so close; we had been through so much together; and now we were parting forever. All four of us were stricken with surprise at how it affected us. We stood gazing at one another.

"No!" I burst out. "I haven't said all there is to say. Don't you destroy that cage! You come back! Guard it as carefully as you can, and come back. Land here, next year in October; say, night of the 15th. Will you? We'll be here waiting."

"Yes," Tina abruptly agreed.

We stood watching them as they slid the door closed. The cage for a moment stood quiescent. Then it began faintly humming. It glowed; faded to a spectre; and was gone.

Mary and I turned away into the New York City of 1935, to begin our life together.

(*The End*)

TO THE MOON

The prediction that man will fly to the moon within the next 100 years was made by John Q. Stewart, associate professor of astronomical physics at Princeton University, in a recent address at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.

The first obstacle to be overcome is that of developing a speed of 25,000 miles an hour, the professor said, which means production of fuels more

powerful than coal, gasoline, dynamite or any other source of energy now available. Such remarkable progress has been made in the speed of passenger carrying vehicles in the last century that scientists believe that a speed of 1,000 miles per hour will be reached in 1950 and 50,000 an hour will be surpassed before the year 2030, a century from now.

The one theoretically feasible method of making the journey to the moon, Stewart believes, is a vehicle propelled on the principle of the rocket. He visions a ship built in the form of a large metal sphere—110 feet in diameter, weighing 70,000 metric tons and carrying a crew of sixty and a dozen scientists. A dozen or more cannon would protrude slightly from the surface, shooting material the rate of 200 miles a second.

A half hour or so before noon and about three days before a new moon, Stewart would head his ship toward the sun, expecting it to rise twelve miles in the first six minutes and to soar out of the earth's atmosphere at 200 miles per hour.

Two hours and 29 minutes after the take-off the firing from the lower cannon would be stopped with the ship going upward, the professor estimates, at 190 miles per minute and having reached a height of 13,200 miles. Seventy hours later, crossing the moon's orbit, Stewart would fire the forward cannon and the ship would coast around the moon, becoming the temporary satellite of a satellite.

"The rest would be easy," said Stewart, "owing to the lesser gravity of the moon. The cannon would be fired to cushion the fall to the moon as the ship was gradually sucked toward the satellite.

"The moon is airless, waterless and lifeless, days and nights are two weeks long, temperatures range from that of boiling water at noon down perhaps to that of liquid air at midnight. The men of the ship would walk on the moon clad in diving suits. Gravity being only one-sixth that of the earth, a man would carry several hundred pounds of apparatus for providing air and for regulating the temperature.

"To leave the moon the ship would fire her rear cannon and coast back to earth. By firing its forward cannon it would cushion its landing on the earth,

which would have to be made on a desert, because of the tremendous charges the cannon would fire."

The Author Explains

Dear Editor:

Am very much puzzled by the several apparent mistakes in two of the stories in the April issue of Astounding Stories. In "The World Behind the Moon," Mr. Ernst makes an error so obvious that it almost makes me

believe that it isn't an error. Like doing a math problem and finding it so easy that you're sure that you have it wrong. Anyway, here is my problem; this is taken verbatim from the story: "At two thousand miles from the Earth there had still been enough hydrogen traces in the ether to give purchase to the explosions of their water-motor." Does the author mean to say that the explosions of the tubes have to have something to push against to have any action? (a) Has it not been proven actually and mathematically that the explosions of rockets and expanding gases are even more powerful in space? The space ship in this story was equipped with both bow and stern tubes; why not fire them to slow the ship down instead of waiting to run into some resistance?

(b) Also, when they landed they took some air-guns which shot bullets containing a liquid which exploded when heated by the passage of the shell through the barrel; then the author goes ahead and tells us that the planet was about as hot as the tropics. Such heat should explode the bullets, but it didn't. Why?

Mr. Ernst has his heroes do a lot of running around on that little planet.

(c) Since the planet is smaller than the moon, it hasn't much gravity and therefore can't retain a very heavy atmosphere, or one very thick. Anyone doing all that violent exercise would probably die of exhaustion before many minutes of it.

"Four Miles Within" was a good story, but I am unable to understand why they did not find a lot of stagnant air. Air that had lain stagnant for the time that cavern must have been closed would have killed the person who breathed it. Also, I would imagine that it wouldn't be safe to handle a chunk of radium like the characters in the story did; it's liable to burn. However, it probably wasn't pure radium, just pitchblende-bearing rocks.

The rest of the stories were fine. I especially like the stories of the Special Patrol Service which S. P. Wright has created. Let's have some more stories of Commander John Hanson and his crew.

"The Exile of Time" has started off quite well and I look forward to the next installments. Cummings is always good for a batch of thrills and some swell

adventure, to say nothing of the enjoyable way he introduces science into the story.

Wish you would publish this, as I would like to get in touch with some other Science-Fiction fans.

By the way, some of the readers seem to want the mag changed, but don't you do a thing to it. All the suggestions, if followed, would make "our" mag like the other S.-F. mags on the market, and I read Astounding Stories because it is DIFFERENT, and I mean every one of those capitals!—Ben Smith, Box 444, Billings, Mont.

Mr. Ernst's Answers:

(a) No, it has not been actually proved. It has been indicated mathematically (by formulae based on conjecture), but never actually solved—for the very good reason that it is impossible to reproduce spacial conditions in earthly laboratories. Know how an explosive force would react in space? We don't even know positively what space is, let alone how our chemicals and instruments would behave in it.

The majority theory is that explosive charges would propel a rocket or space ship more effectively in the (theoretical) emptiness of space, than in our atmosphere. But to my mind it is quite possible that an explosion—a violent expansion of gases causing rapid increase of pressures—would be ineffectual where there are no pressures to be increased. Might not the violently expanding gases fly forth from an exhaust vent to expand instantly, frictionlessly and impotently to the ends of the universe? In my story, "The World Behind the Moon," I assumed that would occur. And no man living is in a position positively to disprove it.

And, as a corollary, if a propulsion explosion cannot have effect in empty space, as presumed in the story, the space ship must enter atmosphere before it can stop by firing its bow tubes. Otherwise, with the bow tubes shooting their expanding gases futilely into nothingness, you could go into "reverse" till the cows came home and the ship would hurtle forward just the same.

(b) Friction of a bullet through a rifle barrel produces a temperature considerably higher than "tropical."

(c) Again, no one knows spacial or planetary conditions. It seems reasonable to assume that a planet's mass may have a fairly direct bearing on the density of its atmosphere. However, Venus, a smaller globe than Earth, is supposed to have a denser atmosphere. For all we know to the contrary, meteors no larger than pebbles may carry about with them microscopic films of "atmospheres" of varying densities.—Paul Ernst.

Hitting Our Stride

Dear Editor:

The more I read Astounding Stories, the more I like it. You're just getting your stride this, the second year. But why not foresee the demand of your Readers and have a few stories by R. F. Starzl? You have other top-notchers such as Ray Cummings, Murray Leinster; and Tom Curry is another good writer. "Monsters of Mars" would have been better if it were boiled down to about two thirds as many pages. It reads "stretched."—W. P. O'Toole, Parker, S. Dak.

"This Missile"

Dear Editor:

Congratulations! Your magazine—excuse me, "our" magazine—is going over big!

However, there are a few things I would like to suggest. First, why not take a vote on the quarterly idea? Second, give us more stories and illustrations. Increase the price if you have to, but keep up the good work and I'm your steady buyer. So far I have not missed a copy, and my only regret is that I didn't have sense enough to keep the first six or seven instead of throwing them away.

By the way, didn't I notice a rather heated argument going on in "The Readers' Corner" about reprints? And what is the matter with reprints? Nothing, except that they are reprints. That is hardly an argument, but if you value my monthly twenty cents please give us at least one reprint to a volume, which I see comprises three copies of your—pardon, "our"

magazine. If the rest of the Readers acquiesce I think we ought to have a reprint in the near future. If they object, well, the world will roll on.

Your time is precious, and besides there are more Readers waiting to say the same things I have just said, so I will close this missile—er, missive.—Eugene Benefiel, The Pioneer, Tucson, Arizona.

From the Antipodes

Dear Editor:

As a regular Reader of your magazine, Astounding Stories, I thought I would write and tell you how I appreciate the stories contained in it. I am a heavy Reader and have always had a soft spot for stories unusual and bizarre. Until I happened to see your magazine at a bookshop in Perth, I had to be content with occasional Science Fiction stories by Wells, Burroughs, and a few others which I picked up in my browsing in various bookshops and libraries. Now that I get Astounding Stories regularly, I have a monthly feast of good things that I read and reread until the next issue arrives.

You ask us Readers to criticize the magazine. Well, I have no complaints worth mentioning, except that some of the illustrations do not tally sufficiently with the text of the story. Some of the stories, in my opinion, are weak and not worth reading. But, as tastes differ, I take everything as it is, and say you have a first-class publication.

Will you thank your Authors for me for the very many hours of interesting reading they have given me during the past twelve months? Later I intend to get my Astounding Stories bound in cloth covers, each twelve months' issue in a volume.

If any Reader sees this letter—of course, should you think it worth while to publish it—and can spare the time to write to me here in Australia, I would be very grateful. Perhaps we could exchange snapshots of various places of interest. Every part of America interests me, so a Reader need not back out because he thinks his district would not be interesting enough.

Here's hoping Astounding Stories grows and prospers as the years go by, so as to give more entertainment to me and my fellow-readers. A rather selfish wish, you may think, but you will forgive me when I say that I look forward

with great pleasure to each month's issue.—Claude J. Nanley, 65 Forrest St., Mt. Lawley, Western Australia.

Note to Ray Cummings

Dear Editor:

I have just started Ray Cummings' latest story in the April issue. Although I wish Cummings would lay off this type of story, I am willing to read anything by him. Jack Williamson's "The Lake of Light" ranked second in this issue. He is another Merritt. "The Ghost World," by S. P. Wright, came third. Edmond Hamilton was better than he has been of late.

If anyone wants to read "Through the Dragon Glass," "The Girl in the Golden Atom," etc, and writes to me, I will tell him where they can be obtained. (This is not an attempt at free advertising.) I know several places where it is possible to secure works of this kind and will be glad to assist anyone who doesn't.

Cummings brought me to your mag. He is keeping me there. So hold on to him. But, please tell him to forget all about time and probe the mysteries of the infinitely large and small, of interplanetary space, of future civilization and future warfare.—Dale Mullen, 611 West Fifth, Topeka, Kansas.

The Effects of Cannabis

Dear Editor:

I have sold magazines, written for magazines, and, now that I have just concluded your April issue, I am editing one—for myself. Specifically, one story, "Four Miles Within." Inside of a radium mine! Chased by an amoeboid body! Ooh!

Several years ago when I was a clinical chemist in hospital service, the Roentgenologist, also a young chap, and a surgical nurse and myself were so badly burned with three grains of the substance enclosed in a lead capsule that we were crippled for nearly a month. [No fair. Your experience was with pure radium. It was only radium ore in the story.—*Ed.*] Imagine being four miles inside of the earth exposed to radium "ore"!

And chased and pursued by a gigantic amoeba! Oh, oh! That must have been my pet mother-of-vinegar that escaped. She was hard to herd. She took after my dad's pet fish which fell through a crack in a bridge and was drowned.

In passing, it is interesting to note that persons can vanish "into" a plane surface; say, "into" a fifth dimension. My instructor in trig. must have been all wet.

And Dr. Bird catches a man withdrawing "menthium" from human brains with a "needle," without the use of either x-ray or a trephine!

And then low forms of life such as crabs and alligators with very highly developed scientific knowledge! A few issues ago octopi were in the lead!

And those "space" ships! Mars must be an interesting spot. And those Martians! Sometimes they are ant-like, and other times worms, and again human freaks! (I still prefer the silver-green messenger I saw on the stage twenty years ago. He was a gentleman and a scholar and no one yet has improved upon him.)

And those radio waves that can vibrate matter in a straight line! One Jackson Gee vibrates it in two straight lines. (Rather funny at that.)

And people disappear into an atom by taking pellets! They take the pellets into their system and that shrinks or expands them. How does the author calculate that in "Beyond The Vanishing Point"? The pellets must contain cannabis indica (hashish) I guess. Once upon a time I was suffering from an acute attack of colic and was obliged to use an anti-spasmodic. I took cannabis, and in the delirium that followed I shrunk small enough to walk into a mouse-hole into which I had seen a mouse disappear a few hours previous. The mouse was there and looked like an elephant. I awoke in a sweat.

Maybe all your stories won't be weird and full of monstrosities. Science is full of beauty and culture, you know.—Arthur H. Carrington, Seaside Heights Pharmacy, Seaside Heights, N. J.

Where Fantasy Meets Science Fiction

Dear Editor:

I have purchased many of the issues of your magazine, and have read everything in them, including the letter columns, with great interest. I have particularly enjoyed certain stories, such as "The Forgotten Planet," "The Jovian Jest" and "The Planet of Dread," in which genuine imaginative quality was combined with good writing. Many other tales, not so well written, I have enjoyed for their fantasy, their suggestive ideas.

In following "The Readers' Corner" I have noted the objection to so-called "impossible" stories, voiced by some of your Readers. Stories thus classified, one would infer, are tales dealing with the marvelous and the mysterious in which the author has not attempted to give a naturalistic or scientific explanation of his wonders and mysteries. In other words, he has not rendered them in terms of the test-tube. He has admitted the inexplicable, the "supernatural."

Personally, I enjoy stories of this type, as well as those that are written with the purely scientific approach. I suspect that those who condemn them are suffering from a rather amusing—and also pathetic—sort of unconscious hypocrisy. I think that people who read your magazine, as well as Science Fiction magazines in general, are people with the ingrained human love for wonder and mystery; but some of them are afraid to accept and enjoy anything—even a fairy tale—that is not couched in the diction of modern materialistic science, with a show of concern for verified credibilities. Probably, in most cases, they would like and prize the very stories that they condemn if the writer had used a different terminology, and had offered explanations that were even superficially logical according to known laws.

Please do not think that I am decrying, or even criticizing, Science Fiction. I consider it a highly important and significant branch of present-day writing, and have hopes of contributing to it myself. I am merely advocating an open attitude of mind and imagination. For those who think that the "impossible" requires justification—or cannot be justified—I would suggest that the only impossible thing is to define and delimit the impossible. In an infinite, eternal universe, there is nothing imaginable—or unimaginable—which might not happen, might not be true, somewhere or sometime. Science has discovered, and will continue to discover, an enormous amount

of relative data; but there will always remain an illimitable residue of the undiscovered and the unknown. And the field for imaginative fiction, both scientific and non-scientific, is, it seems to me, wholly inexhaustible.—Clark Ashton Smith, Auburn, Cal.

Heroes Too Heroic?

Dear Editor:

I wrote you a letter last month. I'm writing you a letter this month, and I'll write you a letter next month. In fact, I'm going to write you a letter every month just as soon as I finish the latest issue of Astounding Stories, so you might as well have a special department installed in Astounding Stories right away entitled "Letters from the Sap Who Thinks He Is So Smart," or something else equally appropriate.

Have you ever noticed that 99% of Edmond Hamilton's stories have the same plot as "Monsters of Mars"? The plot I mean is this:

A group of men, preferably three, get into enemy territory. As to the enemy (if the enemy are not lizards or some other repulsive form of life), Mr. Hamilton has them wear repulsive clothes, live in ugly buildings, etc., to make the reader dislike them at the start. An old, old idea, and quite a commonly used one, is to have these creatures about to declare war and conquer the hero's country with the enemy's super-weapons; and after capturing our brave, bold, and heroic heroes, proceed to tell the heroes the way the weapons work, the zero hour set for attack, and the line of march of the enemy's armies (as if prisoners are told all these things!). Our heroes then cleverly escape and grab an enemy machine. About two thousand of the enemy close in to the kill, but (Mr. Hamilton simply loves "buts") our brave heroes glance over the strange controls of the captured craft and without hesitation pick out the right levers and hold the enemy at bay. After annihilating most of them, and after the zero hour has come, the heroes prevent the great invasion and return to their native land.

It is interesting to note that the heroes, though greatly outnumbered and with strange weapons, always down many of the enemy while they themselves escape unscathed. Also, Mr. Hamilton loves narrow escapes, and phrases such as these appear frequently in his story: "But even as he

raised his deadly ray-tube, I leaped and knocked it from his hand. They charged, but I was too quick and dodged as the foremost hurtled at me."

These incidents are supposed to get the reader all excited, but after a while they grow monotonous.

The second story in the April issue, "The Exile of Time," promises to be excellent in every way. It would be interesting if George Rankin, in his time-traveling, should witness the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the Battle of Bunker Hill.

"Four Miles Within" was good also, save that the heroes' escape from being marooned and James Quade's death savored unpleasantly of Edmond Hamilton.

Sewell Peaslee Wright's adventures of the space patrol are always fascinating, and "The Ghost World" is a splendid example of this.

On the whole, your magazine is practically perfect.—Robert Baldwin, 359 Hazel Ave., Highland Park, Ill.

Likes 'Em to Seem Real

Dear Editor:

I've been reading Astounding Stories since the November issue, and I think that, on the whole, it is a very good magazine. It is of a handy size, convenient price, and O. K., except that you might cut the edges of the pages smoother. Wesso is an excellent artist.

I think your best authors are Harl Vincent, Ray Cummings and Capt. S. P. Meek. I like Capt. Meek's Dr. Bird stories immensely. Also among your best authors are Charles W. Diffin aid Murray Leinster. And now about the stories themselves.

I've noticed that quite a few in "The Readers' Corner" are all for fiction and no scientific explanation. I like fiction, too, but anybody can make up a pretty good plot about a girl, a lover, and a villain, and have a wild theory of super-science for a basis, and then not explain it. What I like most is when an Author—who uses such a theory as, for instance, making matter invisible

by bathing it with a ray, the color of which is beyond the range of the spectrum, as in "Terrors Unseen," by Harl Vincent—backs up his idea with a clear explanation and makes it plausible and convincing. It makes his tale seem more possible, and hence more real. I like it much better when the writer doesn't even suggest a theory in his plot—to say nothing of trying to prove it—than when he gives you the invention of a professor in the year 2431, and lets you imagine how and why it works.—T. Caldwell, 912 Moreno Road, Santa Barbara, Cal.

Covers Too Imaginative?

Dear Editor:

For crying out loud, why can't everyone be satisfied! One person says "our" mag is too small, another says it's O. K.; one wants so-and-so's work, someone else doesn't, etc. Why can't Readers be reasonable? They'll continually admit A. S. is the best Science Fiction mag on the market (with which I thoroughly agree) and then they'll start complaining. As if anything can be 100% perfect—though A. S. comes awfully near it!

Then for some of the complaints, I recall but two sensible ones. I have read every issue of A. S. except the first two, and several times I have been tempted to write to you about them.

1—Too imaginative a cover gives the narrow-minded non-Science Fiction reader an idea that "our" mag contains trash. I refer to such covers as those on the August, September, October, 1930, issues, and the March, April, and especially May, 1931, issues. These people's opinions reflect rather harshly on the faithful A. S. Readers. Can't the covers be more like those on the March, May, June and July, 1930, issues? (All those stories themselves, however, were great, as usual.)

2—Please hold down on "The Readers' Corner." Isn't an eight and nine-page section a bit too much? A short story has been suggested—good idea. Why not limit it to a maximum of, say, five pages?

I shall not complain of any of the stories, because I realize that others probably enjoyed what very few I may not have. I must, however, say that Ray Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon" holds first place, in my opinion. It

was great! Please keep up the excellent work.—Meredith L. Evons, 4001 Cedar Lane, Drexel Hill, Pa.

"*Evenly Divided*"

Dear Editor:

Although I missed the first few issues of Astounding Stories due to the fact that I was not aware of its publication, I have become a regular reader.

In glancing through your "Readers' Corner," I became aware of the fact that most of the letters therein praise Astounding Stories to the skies, and put it far ahead of any other Science Fiction magazine. I will not go quite so far, as it is my belief that most magazines of this type are on the same level. In fact, it seems absurd to me to state otherwise, as the authors who write for you one month publish stories in another magazine the next month. Of course, these authors put out, once in a while, stories that are much better than their usual offering, but, taken over a fairly long period of time, these periodic occurrences will be about evenly divided among various magazines. I have the conceit to believe that I know what I am talking about, as my observations are based on five years of Science Fiction reading.

Of course, while I believe that there are other magazines equally as good, Astounding Stories is certainly not inferior to any. There is always room for a Science Fiction magazine of the same caliber as Astounding Stories, but unfortunately for the public there are too few of them.—James M. Kennedy, Ithaca, N. Y.

Machine or Beast?

Dear Editor:

Having read about every issue of Astounding Stories to date, I have decided that it is the best of the three Science Fiction magazines that I have read.

The best story that you have published yet, in my opinion, is "Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Cummings. Sewell Peaslee Wright and Victor Rousseau are also very good writers. The only two stories that I did not like were "Murder Madness" and "Earth, the Marauder." The former belonged in a

detective magazine, and the latter in the waste basket. It was too far-fetched for even my imagination.

Now a word about your cover illustrations. The first issue that I bought convinced me that your artist was a genius, but my opinion of him is steadily decreasing. That illustration that I speak of was a scene from "Brigands of the Moon." It certainly was good. Lately, I am ashamed to show the magazine to my friends because of the gaudily painted and repugnant creatures on the cover. A picture of a machine is much more appropriate than a beast of some kind. Wesso seems to be able draw a picture like that which is on the March or April, 1930, numbers better than those of late.

I would like to communicate with Science Fiction Readers of about my age, which is 15. I will answer any or all letters that are written to me.—William D. Crocker, Ashfield, Mass.

Expert Opinion

Dear Editor:

May I express my pleasure and gratification in your worthy magazine? I read two other Science Fiction publications beside yours, but Astounding Stories is by far their superior, especially as there is a human interest to your stories that is sadly lacking in others. They also contain too much technical detail. Your magazine is just right. The paper is easy on the eyes and the type is distinct and doesn't blur or tire the eyes.

The cover illustrations leave nothing to be desired. The edges, size, number of pages, etc., are of no concern to me. I have read every issue of Astounding Stories since it was published and can find no fault with it whatever. If those soreheads who howl incessantly about minor details would only try to get out a paper of their own they would soon see what a wonderful work you are doing. The May 1931, issue, which I have just finished, is really the best collection of Science Fiction stories I've read in many a day, and I've read quite a bit.

I wish you every success in the world.—C. P. Binsford. M. D., 604 Pearl Street, Huntsville, Ala.

A Satirical Drama—Complete

Dear Editor:

One Act Play of the Future

Time-traveler from the Twentieth Century: "So this is the year 24,000 A.D.?"

Sulsu-D-9: "Yes, Visitor from the Past."

Time-Traveler: "Say, Sulsu-D-9, has Astounding Stories brought out a Quarterly yet?"

Sulsu-D-9: "No, Man from the Long Ago, but it looks like we'll have one within the next five years!"—Forrest J. Ackerman, 530 Staples Ave., San Francisco, Cal.

An Employment Non-Solution

Dear Editor:

Owing to the fact that I have been a constant Reader of Astounding Stories since the first day it appeared on the news-stands, I think that it is about time for me to drop a few lines to you to show my appreciation for the many, many good stories that you have given the Readers of Science Fiction in the pages of your mag.

I agree very strongly with Mr. Sager of Bessemer, Ala., about the paper in the book. If the stories are interesting, why in the name of Seven Kinds of Hades should anyone worry about the kind of paper as long as the print is readable. What is that old saying about the best articles not being always in the best wrapped parcels? I am here to say that Astounding Stories is the best of its kind.

What I have to say now is by no means a criticism. I am merely asking for an explanation. I have no regard for those people who are continually looking for flaws to peck about in various stories.

In the May, 1931, issue my choice of all the fine stories was "Dark Moon." That was a super-story and I enjoyed it from start to finish, even the third or

fourth time I read it. If a story is worth reading once it is worth reading several times, is my belief. But now comes the question. Will some other kind Reader endeavor to explain it to me?

How could the intrepid explorers on the Dark Moon see the light of Earth and the other planets if the light from the Dark Moon could not pass the gaseous formation to Earth, etc.? And how could the Dark Moon receive the light that it did? [Mr. Diffin did not explain that; perhaps he intends to do so in a sequel. Who knows?—*Ed.*].

One main fault I have to find with Astounding Stories is that it is not published twice a month, if not oftener. By the way, would that not be a plan to help out unemployment. It would put more men to work and I am sure that all of us Readers could scrape up 20c more a month for this wonderful magazine. How about it? [But this, I think, would *increase* unemployment!—*Ed.*].

I would like to hear from some of the Readers in the near future. Best wishes for the continued prosperity of the magazine.—Christen G. Davis, 531 South Millard, Chicago, Ill.

Doggoned If He Didn't!

Dear Editor:

The stories, being the most important part of the magazine, come first:

"Dark Moon," by Charles W. Diffin, is the best novelette you have yet published, and that's saying a lot for it, isn't it?

Next comes "The Exile of Time," by Ray Cummings, another impossible time-traveling story, but nevertheless interesting.

Welcome to Astounding Stories, Mr. Schachner and Mr. Zagat. Your story "The Death Cloud" was great. I hope you'll favor us with another story very soon.

And if here isn't Capt. Meek with another Dr. Bird story! Captain Meek, if you stop writing them, I'll never read another of your marvelous stories.

The moon turned green, and I'll be doggone if Hal K. Wells didn't go and write a nice little story telling us all about it. That was nice of you, Mr. Wells; I enjoyed it very, very much.

Now let's take a look at the cover. Mr. Wesso, you certainly have a marvelous imagination. You are an excellent cover artist. It isn't everyone that can illustrate Science Fiction stories, I do wish that you will illustrate Science Fiction stories only, as that is where you are at your best. Almost any artist can illustrate detective story magazines, so don't waste your talent on them.

Ha! Here we are at the "In the Next Issue" page.

Hurrah! Hurrah! Arthur J. Burks is back again! Can't you manage to get next month's issue out a little earlier, Mr. Bates? R. F. Starzl's also back again; and there's to be another story by Charles W. Diffin. Isn't this a grand old world?

I will close with this suggestion. Let's have more illustrations. At least two for each installment of the serials and two for each long novelette. Make the extra illustrations full page ones.—Jack Darrow, 4225 N. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"—And Amusing"

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the May issue of A. S. and I want to tell you that "Dark Moon," by Charles W. Diffin, was fine. Let's have more stories like that. Your "The Readers' Corner" sure is interesting—and amusing. I like to read letters from Readers.

A bouquet: A. S. is a really fine magazine. I think it's one of the best of its kind. Of course, it can be improved—but what can't? There's no sense in criticizing a magazine as some Readers do. I think if the Editor could make his magazine any better, he would do it without hesitation.—Charles Strada, 503 Olive Street, Kansas City, Mo.

Cummings and Wagner

Dear Editor:

Astounding Stories is in my estimation the best magazine on the market. Words are feeble when an accurate description of the pleasure that I receive from every issue of Astounding Stories is needed. However, I will say that next to my extreme appreciation of classical music, I rate Astounding Stories as being the best outlet of my emotions. As in the music of that great German composer, Richard Wagner, whom I rate as the greatest of all composers, so do I find an outlet of my emotions by reading a novelette by Cummings, Vincent, Leinster and many other of your excellent Authors.

For example, I shall take the overture to "The Flying Dutchman." In the beginning of this overture we hear the opening call played by the trombones with the string section accompanying this principal motive with wild crescendo. This excites the brain so that a taste of the supreme motives is like an appetizer at dinner. So, taking the novel by Ray Cummings entitled "Beyond the Vanishing Point," we find that in the opening paragraphs there is also an "appetizer" to the rest of the story which is to follow.

Now, returning to our "Flying Dutchman" overture, we find that after the introduction by the wild calls by the trombones and the string accompaniment, we gradually drift into a somewhat pensive mood; so in the story, for the next few pages we find more or less quiet reading. Gradually, however, this quiet mood in the music gives way to rolls on the kettle-drums announcing a grand climax; finally the music becomes wilder and wilder until at last the storm breaks and we actually picture this ghost-ship riding over the waves in a terrific storm. Lightning flashes, thunder roars, huge waves sweep over the deck of the ship as we see the Dutchman at the wheel laughing out his defiance in diabolical fury.

And so in the story we are finally led up to a grand climax which actually grips anyone with an ounce of red blood in his veins.

And now I would like to ask the following questions:

Is there some Reader of Astounding Stories who no longer has any use for the old issues of Astounding Stories and would be so kind as to send me these? From the first issue up to the November, 1930, issue and also the December, 1930, issue are the magazines that I should like to have.

Leave your magazine as is, only have one good long novelette, not two fairly good ones as in your April issue, which was not up to the standard set by your previous magazines.—Walter G. Diehl, 145-38 Eighth Ave., Malba, L. I., N. Y.

This Time-Traveling Traffic

Dear Editor:

Many times during the past months, while reading your really remarkable magazine, I have come across contradictions in explanations throughout the stories, which, while not very serious, tend to give me the impression that the Authors either did not care about or did not see through the errors they committed. I did not complain about them, considering them but minor mistakes.

But in Ray Cummings' latest current novel, "The Exile of Time," there exists such a monstrosity as I believe calls for an explanation.

Mr. Cummings' story, you know, centers around his time-traveling machine. If such a thing were possible, would it not be reasonable to believe that a holder of the secret of time-traveling could go back into the past and prevent some catastrophe or tragedy as his historical knowledge of the event would make possible?

According to this theory then, a person could go back into the past and divert the hand of Wilkes Booth on April 15, 1865, about to assassinate Lincoln.

But this shows its own impossibilities: that of two contradicting absolute truths for the world to believe.

Likewise, a person could travel into the future, learn of his own death, go back into his own time and take measures to prevent it. In the same way, this could not be. [But Mr. Cummings explains that these things are impossible.—*Ed.*]

I do not mean to be critical, but it would lend much more interest to the story if the authors would be a bit more careful.—Robert W. Conrad, Rush City, Minn.

Tripe?

Dear Editor:

In the short time your mag. has been out, it has already established itself as the best in the field. I got a real kick out of most of your stories.

In the May issue, two yarns are outstanding: Charles W. Diffin's splendid "Dark Moon" and Nat Schachner and Arthur L. Zagat's especially fine "The Death Cloud." These two are as thrilling stories as I have ever read. Mr. Diffin I've read before and always enjoyed; but Messrs. Schachner and Zagat are new to me. I am looking forward to seeing more of their stuff.

But what has happened to Cummings? He used to be aces up, but now comes this tripe of his called "The Exile of Time"; especially the current installment with its long-winded rot about mysticism and theosophy and the Lord knows what. Where was the Editor when this blew in? Surely there are plenty of Swami sheets for that truck; it has no place in Astounding Stories.

Give us more of Diffin, Leinster, Schachner, Zagat and Rousseau, and you'll keep us all satisfied.—D. Kay, Standish Arms, Brooklyn, N. Y.

For Rocket Fans

Dear Editor:

It may interest your Readers to know that the American Interplanetary Society has just completed its first year of existence, and looks forward to a most energetic second year in pursuing its aims.

The Society has practically completed the first lap of its research on the possibilities and limitations of the rocket, and intends to continue this research for another year before publishing a complete report which shall be the first extensive survey of the rocket in English.

We plan also to extend the size and scope of our monthly Bulletin, to make of it a real magazine that shall publish all the news, both of America and abroad, dealing with developments in astronautics and rocketry. It will also contain the reports of the Society's members on the rocket, as well as interesting general articles on the various phases of interplanetary travel.

Plans are also maturing for a campaign of mutual experimentation on the rocket which we shall be ready to carry out before the end of this year. The Society is also completing plans for the formation of an International Interplanetary Commission which shall coordinate the work of the national societies and plan to solve the problems of astronautics on a world-wide basis.

While the growth of the Society during the past year was very promising we hope to extend during this year the scope and field of our activities and membership. We have members now in thirty-six states, in Canada, Mexico, France and Russia. To your readers we offer our active and associate memberships, giving to lovers of Science Fiction a chance to assist in the bringing to realization the dream of all interplanetary travel.

Information about the Society and the classes of membership can be obtained by writing to the secretary at the address below.—Nathan Schachner, Sec., American Interplanetary Society. 113 West 42nd St., New York City.

"*The Readers' Corner*"

All readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, authors, scientific principles and possibilities—everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

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The Editor.

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