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AMAZING STORIES

Scientific Fiction

Vol. 6 **January, 1932** **No. 10**

In Our Next Issue

TROYANA, by Capt. S. P. Meek, U.S.A. (A Serial in three parts) Part I. Into the *tierra prohibitiva* Nankivell rushed once more against the strictest orders. What happened to him, how he got through, and what happened in Troyana are questions that are vividly answered by this favorite author in this sequel to his much praised serial, "The Drums of Tapajos." Those who clamored for a sequel will be more than satisfied and there is a treat in store for the others who unfortunately missed the first story.

THE HERITAGE OF THE EARTH, by Harley S. Aldinger. Perhaps if diligent search were made among the records of past ages—not before civilization—some astounding discoveries might be made, such as records hidden carefully away, lest their publication earn the discoverer or inventor burning at the stake. Our author's conception of such a possibility is graphically set forth in this altogether plausible and well-told story.

THE RACKETEER RAY, by Murray Leinster. There is a growing demand for this well-known author's work. And no wonder, when he can give us such stories as this one. Even scientists must be careful to keep out of the clutches of gangdom, or what Murray Leinster ably pictures here might easily occur.

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN, by Neil R. Jones. Here is a sequel relating the extraordinary adventures of Professor Jameson, who first started his voyage in a ship of his own construction, in which he was placed in suspended animation and from which he was later rescued and resuscitated when his ship was found, and was at first mistaken for a satellite. (Crowded out of January issue.)

And other unusual science fiction

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Our Cover

this issue depicts a scene from the story entitled, "Power," by Harl Vincent, in which Scott Terris is shown carrying Gail Destinn, *via* the moving platforms, back to the highest level, to get the best medical aid, after Destinn had been struck with a deadly weapon known as the "needle gun," when he attempts to avert a mad and premature revolution which is fraught with bloodshed and destruction.

Cover illustration by Morey

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VOLUME 6

AMAZING STORIES

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENTIFICTION

JANUARY, 1932 No. 10

T. O'CONOR SLOANE, Ph.D., *Editor* MIRIAM BOURNE, *Managing Editor*

Editorial and General Offices: 350 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y.

Extravagant Fiction Today - - - - - - - - - - Cold Fact Tomorrow

Motes and Beams

By T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D.

THE mote and beam have acquired a place in literature in a quotation from the Bible to the effect that you should take care of the beam in your own eye before troubling yourself to see a mote in your neighbor's eye—the beam denoting the large imperfection and the mote the almost invisible one.

We have all seen and traced the course of a ray of sunlight entering a room. We have seen it passing probably diagonally across the room sharply defined, because it is full of minute particles of matter or dust. These are so small that if looked at directly, the eye could not see them. But there is a phenomenon of light called diffraction. If light passes through an aperture, especially if it has a sharp edge on the outgoing side, as we may term it, the light will experience diffraction and will spread a little to the right or left. If a minute particle be placed in a beam of light, although the particle may be so small as to be invisible to the naked eye, it will diffract the light and thereby become indirectly visible.

A very interesting exhibition of this property can be made by passing a strong beam of light through apertures in a box, these apertures being tightly closed by glass. A peep hole is required, also to be glazed, so that the material in the box can be watched.

Now, in letting a ray of sunlight or electric light pass through one of the windows, the beam will be distinctly visible and its visibility will be due to the fact that it is full of minute particles of dust. But to see one of these particles with the microscope would be no easy task, but when a ray of light strikes one of them, the light is diffracted in all directions, so that these invisible particles, as we may call them, reveal themselves to us. It is not too much to say that we do not see these motes but can recognize their presence by the effect they have upon light. If, now, the box is allowed to stand for a while, the motes will gradually and with extreme slowness sink down to the bottom. In this way, they will deprive the beam of its minute particles, and, after a sufficient length of time has passed, there will be no beam visible.

In other words, when we look at one of these beams of light with which we are all familiar, they are charged with dust. We do not see the beam, we do not see the dust particles, but the light is so diffracted by the dust particles, that we see exactly where and what the beam is. We often see this phenomenon in a room where the setting sun perhaps shines through a window and where the room is a bit dark, but the experiments tried with the box enable us to get rid of these particles, to dispose of the motes, and to remove them from the beam of light, at which time the beam is reduced to invisibility as far as we are concerned. It is a sort of case of subjectiveness and objectiveness. The beam is there all the while, whether we see it or not. The question is whether the motes are there to show it to us. This constitutes what we may call the subjective parts of the question.

In the lecture room, when the reflection and refraction of light is being exhibited, frequently light from a powerful electric lamp will be sent through various lenses. If the path of these rays is not perfectly clear, because the atmosphere has not sufficient motes in it, by blowing tobacco smoke into the path of the rays, or even by beating a blackboard eraser so as to fill the air with the chalk dust, the rays will be at once seen in their path and a beautiful demonstration of the action of lenses or prisms and similar phenomena can be given.

Even in the box to which we alluded in the beginning of this article, we exhibit the beam of light for a long period because the motes, as we may definitely term them, are so extremely minute that they settle out of the air very slowly. But the box, airtight as it is, has a specific experimental turn to it. The idea is that the air within it will be kept absolutely without motion so that the motes will not be disturbed by any breeze or movement of the air and will gradually settle down. When they reach the bottom of the box, the beam will be absolutely invisible, although it is still there. Now, it is enough to tap the sides of the box so as to disturb the little particles and at once the beam of light will spring into visibility. Professor Tyndall gave considerable attention to this very interesting demonstration and lately it has acquired a very wonderful status in the subject of the molecule.

On this subject there is quite an interesting bit of science history. We read that the one phase of the experiment we are speaking of was described in the last century by a botanist, not by a physicist. The botanist, a most eminent man, presumably did not know what it meant and the discovery rested in peace and quiet for many years until the present time, when it has become a very important element in the study of the constitution of the molecule and in the relation of the molecules to each other.

This extremely fine subdivision of matter has its application not only in solids but also in liquids. The clouds which we see in the sky, some of which are very beautiful and others which seem somber, and which torment the flyer by forcing him to fly blind, are made up of minutest imaginable bits of water which accumulate just like a pile of any grain. They fill up these massive looking clouds, which are far from being massive, because an extremely small amount of moisture will form a cloud of considerable volume.

It is fair to say that the amount of moisture in a faint mist or fog or in what looks like a heavy cloud, such as Hamlet alluded to in order to make a fool out of Polonius, is astonishingly small.

Dripping agonized perspiration, the terrified financier waved the police away. Only too glad to escape the awful menace of the thing that danced there, blinding them and causing their very blood to boil in their veins, they slunk off. . . .

Power

By Harl Vincent

Author of "Barton's Island," "The Seventh Generation," etc.

THE days of wind-mills and water-mills are over—most likely forever. But there is absolutely no assurance that our present forms of power are going to remain the best for all time. And with the change in power control must come change in economic and even in social control, for to him who controls power comes the ability to be master of all, for the destiny of the world depends largely upon that commodity known as "power." Harl Vincent, who is himself a high authority on the subject of electricity and power and their attendant social significance, offers some astonishing possibilities of certain changes in the future, around which he weaves a unique story.

Illustration by MOREY

CHAPTER I

The Darkness Before

NIGHT, whose magic was unknown in the levels below, was a thing of wondrous beauty when viewed from the continuous rooftops of twenty-third century New York. To the wearers of the gray, in the lowest levels of all, it was only a word, a vaguely disturbing term for one of the strange moods of nature that brought darkness and terror to the mysterious wilderness and jungles of the uninhabitable territory that lay between the great cities of United North America.

They shivered in dread of the darkness, that multitude in gray denim, for daylight was always with them; the artificial daylight of the Power Syndicate that came to them as unfailingly as did the humidified and iodized air they breathed. Of the same intensity and blue-white color throughout each twenty-four hours, it searched out every nook and cranny of the maze of passages and shaftways that separated as well as connected their living and working quarters. It was with them even as they slept; for them there was neither night nor day, only the passing of time.

But the wearers of the purple were more fortunate; for those so wealthy or favored as to reside in the topmost levels there was the opportunity of faring forth on the vast roof surface, where they might feast their eyes on the beauties of the heavens by night, if they so desired. A view of the moon and the stars, or the grandeur of a storm-tossed sky shot with luminous streaks, that were the night-flying ships of the government lines, was theirs for the asking. But there were few who availed themselves of the privilege; the rigors of nature were not to be braved with impunity by those whose bodies were accustomed to the uniform temperature and humidity of the interior, whose eyes were unused to the darkness and ears to the murmuring silence of the outside world.

Scott Terris, that virile and brilliant young physicist, who was chief of the Science Research Bureau, had long made a habit of taking nightly walks along the railed footpath that skirted the edge of the fifteen hundred foot precipice that was the west wall of windowless, steel-cased New York. Here it was that his mind worked at its best; away from the muffled roar and the carefully regulated synthetic existence of the interior, his vast accumulation of scientific deductions of the day's research could be marshalled in orderly array to form the basis of some new theory or discovery that would startle the Americas on the following morning.

Tonight was an exception. The moonlit ripples of the Hudson River, and the sweet-scented breeze that drifted over from the forest lands which extended to the very edge of the Palisades on the Jersey side, had none of their usual soothing effect. A solitary muffled figure, he dallied near the trapdoor that opened into his private laboratory below, his thoughts in an unwonted turmoil of vague unrest.

The pulsating life of the great city made itself felt in

the metal plates beneath his feet. Fifty million souls there were, down there in that seething hive of industry and idle folly, of hopeless ignorance and scintillating genius, of monotonous routine existences and pleasure-mad lives. Sixty-five levels crammed with those of the gray denim, thirty levels of the soulless mechanicals, and five where the wearers of the purple dwelt in the utmost prodigality of freedom and spaciousness. And everywhere there were the red police. One city of the eight of equal size now housed the entire population of United North America. It was an artificial life; concentration of the inhabitants to the *nth* degree, and utter waste of the land that lay between.

He was startled from his reverie by a sharp detonation somewhere below—in his laboratory, it seemed. But the place was deserted; it had been for hours. In the next instant he was at the trapdoor, his eyes straining in the effort to pierce the gloom of the huge workroom.

A sudden blinding light-shaft sprang into being as the door of one of his electric furnaces was opened. There was the momentary glimpse of a muscular arm and a hand that gripped a slender pair of tongs in calloused fingers. There was the withdrawal of a tiny crucible from the white heat of the furnace, and the sliding back of the door, and then the crucible was a dazzling light fleck that danced through the blackness toward one of the workbenches.

Scott slipped down the iron ladder and fumbled for the light button, flooding the laboratory with its normal sun-glow illumination. He could scarcely believe his eyes when they rested on the figure that bent over the sizzling crucible. A powerfully built young fellow, in the gray denim of fifty levels below, straightened up quickly at the coming of the light and faced him, surprised but unafraid.

"What are you doing here?" Terris snapped, his amazement overcome by a rising flood of indignation.

The intruder lay aside his tongs with calm deliberation, grinning suddenly in disarming fashion. "Oh," he said softly, "just working on a little idea of my own. I didn't expect you back for an hour."

"Didn't expect me back!" Scott exploded. "You have your nerve breaking into my place and——"

He was advancing toward the astonishing young fellow in gray, his emotions alternating between deep curiosity as to the meaning of the intrusion and grim determination to deal summarily with the sneaking workman—to turn him over to the red police. But there was something in the intruder's level gaze that gave him pause.

Remarkably keen gray eyes regarded him from underneath a tousled thatch of flaming red hair. And in those eyes there lurked a fixity of purpose that was overwhelming in its intensity, a hint of the indomitable will of the possessor and of almost fanatical devotion to some great impelling ambition that was the primal urge of his being. Stern eyes, and knowing, yet they smiled into his own. Scott's wrath evaporated.

"Sorry you caught me," his visitor said in even tones, "I had hoped to accomplish something before that happened. And I might tell you that I have done no harm here, nor have I taken anything from the laboratory at any time."

"At any time!" Scott exclaimed blankly. "Then you have been here before—often perhaps?"

"Oh yes." He was a strange anomaly, this wearer of the gray, and obviously had risen far above his station. He studied Scott's expression carefully for a moment; then, "I'm Gail Destinn," he said. "Perhaps I'd better explain."

"I think you had," Scott returned, forcing the assumption of what he considered a tone of severity. In spite of himself he was enjoying the encounter; this Destinn was a likable chap, and his self-assurance and poise were so serenely unaffected as to compel respect. It was incredible that one who wore the gray should have developed these qualities; that he should display the scientific knowledge and aptitude evidenced by his nocturnal activities.

"Yes," Destinn was saying thoughtfully, "I owe you an explanation and an apology as well." He hesitated, and his eyes strayed to a corner of the room where a hidden panel was open, revealing the cage of a gravity-control lift. "Mr. Terris," he blurted out, "You look to be a good scout. I wonder if you'd consent to taking a trip down below with me; let me show you something of the life of my kind and of what is going on down there in the lower levels. I can explain much better then, and I'm sure you'll not think the time wasted."

Scott stared in amazement at the open panel in the wall of his supposedly secret retreat. A concealed shaftway connected his laboratory with the lower levels! He saw that his uninvited guest awaited his reply with poorly concealed eagerness. And there was sincerity of purpose and a longing for friendly understanding in his anxious gaze.

"All right, Destinn," he decided, "I'll go with you. And I know I'il enjoy the visit."

SCOTT TERRIS was a man who had given little thought to those who inhabited the lower levels; he had never been below the levels of the mechanicals and had had little contact with those of the gray denim, with the exception of a few menials in his own household and those who tended the mechanicals of the intermediate sections. He knew there was poverty and ignorance among them, of course, and knew of the troubles of the red police when they became unruly down there. But his science was an exacting taskmaster, crowding from his waking thoughts all alien considerations. True, he loved humanity—collectively—and strove for its betterment in all things that science could provide. But, as an individual, man had taken little place in his interest.

As the cage of the lift dropped swiftly into the depths of its shaft, he appraised the straight youthful figure of Gail Destinn with something of envy in his heart. Suddenly it came to him that there was much in life that he had missed; much that he was missing. Apparently the gray-clad workers felt less of the monotony of existence than did he; perhaps even his pleasure-mad fellows of the purple were wiser in their pursuits than he had suspected. Certainly, he was thrilling to the novelty of this situation and to the sense of adventure that came with the swift descent into regions unknown.

They stepped out into a narrow corridor, when the lift came to rest, and Scott followed mechanically when his host led the way to a tiny cubicle which proved to be his sleeping quarters. Scott marveled that a human being could live and think sanely in the crowded space.

"Not much of a place, Mr. Terris," Gail Destinn

apologized, "but it serves its purpose. Here, sir, you'd better put these on before we go out in the Square."

He grinned eagagingly as he tossed a suit of the despised gray denim on the cot; then sat cross-legged on the floor as Scott nodded his understanding.

"You see," he explained, "I want you to observe things as they are, and everyone would shut up like government witnesses if they saw you out there in the purple. I'd like you to listen to some of the conversation in the ways and other public places before I tell you of the experiment I'm working on."

Scott Terris struggled with the buttonless gray shirt, emerging with a grunt of relief when he finally conquered the thing. "Experiment?" he asked. "You were using my laboratory in some research work of your own?" Strange that he could feel no animosity toward this smiling youth who had so calmly invaded his sanctum and then inveigled him into this visit.

"Why yes, of course. That furnace, you see, is the only one in existence that is capable of producing the extreme temperature I need. I simply had to have access to it, and I knew the only way of getting it, was to take it. The forgotten shaftway made it easy."

"I see." Scott frowned in perplexity; he didn't see. That particular furnace was used only for involved research into the structure of the atom. This Destinn couldn't possibly . . .

"What the devil are you up to, Gail?" a gruff voice broke in from the doorway. "I thought you were at work up top."

"I was," Destinn replied suavely, his hand moving to Scott's arm with swift warning pressure. "Had to quit early to meet my friend."

"Oh yeah! And who's he?"

Scott turned to look at the stocky, blue-jowled man who regarded him with suspicion, if not with open antagonism. Gail, with a quick movement, had hidden the discarded purple raiment and now faced the newcomer with easy confidence.

"Firmin—Bill Firmin, from the forty-ninth level," he said evenly. "You've heard me speak of him, Tom. Shake hands, you two. Bill, I want you to know Tom Prouty, our ward leader here."

A flabby hand was stretched there before him, and, as Scott hesitated, he saw Gail Destinn's jaw muscles tense spasmodically. There must be a hidden danger here; this Prouty had a sinister look about him, that was not at all in keeping with the direct frankness of young Destinn. But the younger fellow was afraid of Prouty for some reason; Scott saw those taut jaw muscles relax in a relieved smile when he took the cold limp hand of the politician in his own.

"Glad to know you, Bill," said Prouty. "If you're a friend of Gail's, I suppose you're all right. And, take it from me, big boy, you'd better be right; things are popping pretty soon and you guys in the forties better be with us."

"Bill's the best there is, Tom," Destinn interposed hastily. "I'm taking him over to the Square with me."

"Well, make it snappy," Prouty growled. "May do him some good. Meeting's on, you know, and Sarovin is talking tonight. Afterwards I want to see you in my office alone—don't bring this guy along."

For a moment Scott thought his young host was about to explode. But Prouty scowled him down; then turned on his heel and was gone.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Terris," Destinn whispered. "I've let you in for something, I'm afraid. Tom's a bad actor, and he's suspicious of you. Guess we'd better get you back up top where you belong."

"You mean I'm to run away?" Scott's blood boiled at the idea of sneaking off in fear of this ignorant bully. "Not on your life!" he grated, "I'm here now, and here I stay until I learn what it's all about. Let's go to this Square of yours."

Young Destinn grinned anew and his fine eyes twinkled. "You *are* a good scout," he breathed delightedly. "Come on—Bill."

Responding somehow to the savage call of the danger he saw ahead, Scott Terris followed eagerly when his new friend dashed off down the corridor toward the moving way.

CHAPTER II

The Storm

THEY found a sizable gathering of the gray-clad workers in one corner of the Square whose massive columns extended from the fiftieth to the sixtieth levels in the Food Company section. A fiery little hunchback with abnormally large head and long arms that waved in wild gestures as he talked, was addressing them from a platform near one of the public newscasting stations. His voice was raised in harsh competition with the announcer's, and the attention of his audience strayed ever and anon to the changing views on the bright screen.

"Sarovin," Gail Destinn whispered hoarsely, "the most dangerous agitator we have down here. Notice how the police watch him?"

Scott saw that a half dozen of the red-coated guards were close by, far more alert in their interest than was usual. These meetings of the workers, which were numerous, were smiled upon by the authorities and rarely occasioned them serious concern. But this Sarovin, one knew instinctively, was a personage, a power; there was an ominous note in his voice, a ring of insolent defiance, that carried with it the assurance that comes only with the certainty of powerful backing and political protection.

"Comrades," he was shouting, "I call upon you now to give up this milk-and-water plan of the Council of Five and their scientists. As things are going, it will be years before results are obtained—if ever they are. Forget it, I say; let us rise in our might and take what is ours. We have earned it by the sweat of our brows, this vast wealth that is in the hands of the few who wear the purple. We, who toil for a pittance that they may live their lives of luxury and ease; we, whom they consider as inferior to the mechanicals and as dust beneath their feet—we have made of this so-called republic a power so great that the entire world is prostrate before us. And they have taken it from us, these bloated plutocrats of the upper levels. It is high time we asserted ourselves, comrades, and there is only one way of regaining what is rightfully ours—by force. I am here to tell you that force is to be used; blood must be spilled in the cause. Blood, I tell you! It is only with their lives that they can pay for what they have done. And the time is at hand."

"Easy there, Sarovin," a lieutenant of the red police

called out good-naturedly, "that's becoming a bit strong."

Gail Destinn gripped Scott's arm with fingers that trembled, and his face was flushed to match the hue of his tousled thatch. There were rumblings of approval from the audience, and eyes no longer were turned to the screen of the newscasts. Sarovin had struck answering chords in the breasts of his hearers.

"To hell with the police!" a voice thundered. "Go on, Sarovin."

"There spoke a man," the hunchback gloated. "If the rest of you had half his guts there'd be nothing to it. Why listen, comrades, the red police can't stop us; neither can those of the purple. Think of our many millions, aroused, and of the handful with whom we have to deal. After all, there are only a score or so we must get out of the way—the President and his cabinet, who are but tools of the Power Syndicate—Matt Crawford, the real Dictator, and——"

"Sarovin! Wait—you're crazy!" Young Destinn was ploughing his way through the milling crowd toward the platform, despite hands that clutched and voices that screeched in protest.

The lieutenant of red police yelled an order to his men and they bored into the crowd with maces swinging. Instant uproar echoed in the Square as the shriek of a siren rang out in frantic call for police reserves. A swelling cadence of angry voices came booming from the balconies surrounding the enclosure at the levels above.

There was the popping of riot pistols in the hands of the red police, and the gurgling bursts of their rubbery missiles, as twining tentacles spurted forth to imprison the flailing arms of the workers and bring them helpless to the pavement. From the vaulted reaches overhead, cable cars of the police swooped down as the wearers of the gray streamed into the Square in ever-increasing number.

"Comrades!" Destinn was shouting from the platform, where he held Sarovin squirming in his long arms, "Don't listen to this fool. It'll mean war if you do; murder and destruction—rapine—"

"Let it be war!" Sarovin screamed, and Gail clamped a huge hand over his mouth.

"No!" he bellowed, "There's a better way. And it won't take years, either. We're almost ready now to lick the Power Syndicate at their own game. This cosmic energy of theirs will be supplanted by a source we will control. Their sting will be gone then, and we'll have the situation in hand—peaceably."

His words fell on unheeding ears or were drowned out by the cries of the angry mob. Scott forced his way closer to the platform and saw that others were climbing over its edge. Tom Prouty, red of face and spouting profanity, was first to reach young Destinn. Something flashed bright in his hand, crackling spitefully. A needle-gun!—one of those dread weapons of the war of 2212.

And then Gail Destinn was swaying there, clawing at the slender dart that had pierced his shoulder. Prouty, clubbing his pistol, was hammering away at him as his hands worked frantically to free the thing that even now glowed to its destroying incandescence and brought wisps of smoke curling from the flesh it scorched. But the ward leader's blows rained on him unnoticed; with a mighty wrench he tore the dart free and dashed it to the platform, where it sang its shrill song of death in the furious and murderous discharge of atomic energy.

Screeching in mortal terror as a dazzling spray of hissing metal cascaded from the platform, Tom Prouty flung himself into the mass of humanity that fell back in sudden blind panic. Fighting madly among themselves and against the cordon of red police which hemmed them in; trampling those of their number who were borne down by the crush, they retreated before the roaring inferno the energy needle had created by expending its mighty forces in the steel floorplates instead of in the human flesh for which it was intended.

Scott found himself alone, close by the consuming blast of molten particles. Destinn was dragging himself painfully away from the searing flame, his features contorted in agony and his right side useless in the paralysis that had gripped him.

"Look!" he gasped, when Scott reached him. "Up there—Sarovin! It got him." Then Gail Destinn collapsed and lay still.

The platform was sagging in blobs of flowing metal. And, standing erect in the white heat of the atomic blast that spouted there, was the thing which had been Sarovin. Like a flaming, bloated statue it stood there with arms outstretched as if to ward off the fires of hell that encompassed it. Pinpoints of flashing brilliance exploded rapidly in the distorted mass, and then, in a puff of swirling gases, it was gone.

There swelled a mighty roar from the throats of the thousands of gray-clad observers in the balconies. Voices, terrified and unintelligible at first, then coming in unison like a practised and prearranged chorus of long-suppressed hatred.

"Down with those of the purple! Down with the government! It is Sarovin they've killed. Sarovin! Death to the President and to Crawford. Death in the upper levels!"

Dazed by the vast tumult of sound and awed by the tremor that assailed the huge structure of the city under the measured stamping of thousands of feet, Scott Terris gazed out over the scene with eyes that saw only its wider significance. Here was a tremendous force unleashed, a savage fury that would spread to every city in the country through the mysterious communication channels of the gray-clad multitude. A reign of terror in the making; civil war that would threaten the very foundations of the nation—of civilization itself.

FROM out the press of the howling mob there dashed a slim figure, a girl-figure in gray, that sped to kneel at Gail Destinn's side. Her swift white fingers explored his wounds and then she looked up with startled wide eyes to regard the tall stranger who stood there as if rooted to the spot. Rendered speechless by the quick revelation of the girl's fresh beauty, Scott was able only to smile in sickly fashion at her suddenly contemptuous stare.

"Are you a friend of his?" she asked.

"Why—why yes," he stammered.

"Then why don't you do something? He's terribly hurt—dying. Here, help me with him—if you can come out of the trance."

Suddenly Scott wanted more than anything else in the world to see young Destinn recover and to know more of this lovely bit of femininity in the gray of the sub-levels. Gail was conscious, he saw quickly, but was unable to move a muscle. The pain-glazed eyes regarded

him with something of the beseeching look of a helpless dumb creature about to be used in a laboratory experiment.

With a swift return of his normal alertness, he lifted the limp form in his arms and straightened with a jerk. "All right," he growled in the girl's ear, "Where'll I take him?"

"This way—hurry." The girl's voice was a bare whisper above the din of the Square. She pointed into the shadows of the great pillars where it seemed to be deserted of human presence.

The battle raged furiously behind them as they made their way in the direction she had indicated. The roaring destruction of the energy needle had spent itself and only a gaping opening, its edges cooled already to dull red heat, showed where it had fused its way through the floorplates into the level below. Fresh detachments of the red police were arriving continuously and it seemed that they were getting the situation in hand—temporarily at least.

"Here, to the westbound way," the girl was saying, "A dispensary is close by."

They were on the swiftly moving platform then, and Scott shifted his burden so that the wabbling head rested on his shoulder. Gail Destinn moaned feebly and mumbled words came from his lips.

"No, no," he objected. "Not to the dispensary. Take me—up top. To your laboratory, Terris. There is work—must be done."

The girl heard and understood. "You are Scott Terris," she exclaimed angrily, "Down here, wearing the gray and misleading poor Gail. Getting him into this terrible trouble. Well, you can just put him down, Mr. Terris. I'll see him to the dispensary myself."

"Terris, don't do it," Destinn begged. "Tell her it's all right. I must go on."

"Put him down at once," the girl snapped.

"Did you hear his last words?" Scott bridled.

"No," coldly aloof, "I didn't. But I know what's for his good."

Scott had little knowledge of the ways of the fair sex. Perhaps he would not have dared lose his temper as he did now, had he been more experienced. But he had made up his mind about Destinn and no mere woman could change it.

"Look here, young lady," he rasped, "I'm taking charge of this man. He's going up top as he desires, and my own physician will attend him. Get that?"

The girl faced him, white and speechless with indignation, as the moving platform sped on its smooth way to the west side. He thought he heard the injured man chuckle, but decided it was a cough.

"Thanks," Destinn whispered weakly, "Stay on this Way until you reach the turn. Norine will show you the entrance . . . to secret lift . . . she's a good sport . . . underneath. . . ." A gasp of pain cut short his words and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Across the corridor the eastbound way was suddenly jammed with vociferous crowds of the gray-clad workers. They had heard of the affair in the Square and were on their way to join forces with their fellows. A few there were who shouted over the intervening space, but for the most part they paid no attention to the little group on the westbound platform.

The girl Norine huddled closely to his side as if she feared she would be recognized. She stroked Destinn's limp hand now, but kept her eyes averted from his face.

In the next instant her slight body was racked with dry sobs.

CHAPTER III

Judgment

DOCTOR MOWRY shook his head gravely. "Your friend will live, Scott," he said, "but as a hopeless paralytic. He'll never walk again, nor will he be able to raise a finger to the simplest task. Normal nerve currents, you see, were blocked by the energy—permanently."

"You're sure there's no chance, Doc?" Sick at heart, Scott was grasping at straws. He had waited many hours in fearful anticipation of this verdict, but now he was unwilling to abide by it.

"Not a chance," the doctor asserted, "The usual experience in 2212, you'll recall. Even when they escaped the extreme penalty of the vicious needle energy, slightly wounded combatants were doomed to this living death of inactivity and impotence."

"God! No wonder we abolished war and jettisoned all stocks of the needle guns." Scott sat thinking bitterly for a long time after the doctor left. He'd like to lay hands on this Prouty—a cowardly blackguard who would use one of the forbidden weapons on a man like Gail Destinn! Probably stole the thing from a museum and . . .

The voice of the newscast announcer droned from the sound mechanism of his private visiphone. Colby, another of the cabinet members, had been assassinated. President Owens closely guarded in fresh outbreaks from sub-levels of Washington. Matt Crawford fleeing in a rocket car to one of his cosmic energy globes out there in the stratosphere. Another coward!

Snorting his disgust with conditions in general, Scott arose from his easy chair and made his way to the room where Destinn lay.

The girl Norine started noticeably at his entrance and moved from the bedside. Her eyes were red with weeping, but she tossed her head and averted her gaze when Scott addressed her.

"Has Gail been told?" he asked her gently.

A nod of grim assent was the girl's only reply, but the sick man answered in a tense whisper through lips that were white and pinched, "Yes, Terris, they told me."

He was silent then, but his eyes shone bright with that same indomitable spirit they had held when Scott first encountered him as an intruder in the laboratory.

"It's a tough break for me," he continued, "but my work isn't finished yet. Terris, I'd like you to help me."

"I'll do anything I can," Scott assured him, shakily.

"Norine, will you please leave us alone?" came from the pinched lips as the bright eyes caressed the drooping girl.

She left silently and the sick man looked long and earnestly at the famous scientist of the upper levels. "You've done much for me, Terris," he said then, "More than I can tell you. And, somehow, I feel that you'll do more—for the real Cause."

"You mean that of the gray multitude?"

"I mean the cause of true Democracy; not what you saw exemplified last night. You know now that the

workers are a class gone crazy under the oppression of the purple-clad minority—or rather I should say, of the capitalistic system. Yet they are fools, Terris, and so easily swayed as to make their foolishness dangerous. But I need not tell you of that; you saw for yourself. Already their mistaken and misled zeal is manifest in the carnage which has started and which may end in widespread disaster. It is to prevent such disaster that I am asking for your assistance."

"You speak of the alternative you mentioned when you shut off Sarovin down there?"

"Yes. And to explain further I will tell you what you must recognize of your own knowledge. Terris, our country is at the mercy of the Power Syndicate; Matt Crawford is the man who runs it to suit himself and his greedy associates. There is no true representation of the people in the government; even you who wear the purple must perforce do as Crawford dictates. And it pleases him to favor you who live up top; it adds to his own personal glory. But he and his 'yes-men' have nothing but contempt for those of the sub-levels; that and starvation wages, and the persecution of the red police is their lot. Am I right?"

"I hadn't thought much about it, Gail," Scott returned, "That is, not until last night. My interest, as you know, is wrapped up in science, but I'm beginning to see certain things in a new light. Go on with your story—if you can stand it."

"Oh, I'm all right; for talking, at least." The courageous lips actually twisted themselves into a smile. "The whole thing is wrong in principle, Terris. It goes back to the dark ages when first the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few became evident. We are not socialistic in these days; we know of the failure of the soviets in the twentieth century, and we know why they failed. Men were *not* created equal, and to those of superior aggression and mentality there must come superior reward. But not to the extent that now exists; and a disproportionate reward must not come to the undeserving through the efforts of others who are starved into submission. Do you follow me?"

"Sure." Scott was deeply interested; he never had approved of the grasping methods of the Power Syndicate. "Forget the preliminaries," he said. "Let's come to this plan for a peacable solution of the problem."

"Attaboy!" Destinn approved. "Since you put it that way, the idea is this: Crawford controls the power supply of United North America today. With the passing of the use of natural fuels, we were forced to turn to the cosmic rays of outer space for our power. Our very existence depends on this vast industry which Crawford acquired by inheritance and later financial manipulation. Were he to cut off the energy supply radiated to our cities from his globes that float out there in the stratosphere, we should perish. Our synthetic foods could not be produced, our artificial sunlight would die out; our heat, the essential labors of the mechanicals—all would stop. Everything we wear and use in this life to which we have become accustomed would automatically cease to exist for us as replaceable and renewable necessities. We should revert to a savage state and be compelled to venture out into the wilderness where most of us would perish. It is our vital need for power that gives Crawford the whip hand over us all."

"And to remedy this you propose——"

"Another and simpler source of power. Cheap and unlimited energy as the emancipator of our modern slaves. The death of this tyranny, and the return to a true republican form of government." The stricken idealist closed his lids and a blissful expression spread over his features.

Scott's interest as a scientist overcame any possible exception he might otherwise have taken. "This new energy," he suggested, "is to be obtained from the atom?"

"Yes, but not by its disruption. All we have ever accomplished by destroying the atom is further destruction—of life or of other matter. Witness the subatomic energy of the needle gun."

Scott looked hastily away from the pain that came to replace the enthusiasm which had radiated from those fine eyes. But Destinn shook off the black mood instantly and continued:

"Terris, I can produce usable energy in inconceivable amounts by a building-up of atoms rather than by their disintegration. The method provides a virtual reproduction of cosmic ray energy. The birth of atoms radiates a tremendous force that we have learned how to use and control. Think of it! By building up only four grams of helium—about a seventh of an ounce—from hydrogen atoms, we release nuclear energy equivalent to a million horsepower for an hour. Duplicate the natural processes of outer space that give rise to this birth of atoms; force the hydrogen nuclei to combine with electrons to form helium nuclei and the vast energy release is effected. We manufacture our own cosmic rays, and our own energy, from practically nothing!"

"Yes, but try and do it." Scott was frankly skeptical.

"Terris, I can do it; I have done it! Listen!"

And Scott Terris listened while the sick man, in enthusiastic if somewhat weakening voice, expounded his theories and told of his hopes; explained the plans of the Council of Five, and detailed the results of the experiments already conducted.

AN hour later, convinced and marveling, he stepped forth into the corridor to come face to face with Norine Rosov.

In his excitement he failed to notice that the girl's finely chiseled features had regained their normal composure and that her color had returned. He did observe that the close-cropped golden hair gleamed with the lustre imparted by a recent smoothing; that there was something less strained in her attitude. She was more at ease in his presence than she had been since their first meeting.

"He has talked with you of his plans?" she inquired.

"Indeed, he has, Miss Norine. And, since you are so deeply concerned in the important matter, I feel we should have an understanding without delay. Will you come into my library?"

There was no hesitation on the girl's part when she preceded him into the spacious and luxurious room, where it was his wont to retire in privacy for his studies. But there was a haunting something in her wide stare when she seated herself across from him, a hint of some fear of himself or of the surroundings, that she could not quite down. Her slim, white fingers trembled noticeably as she lighted a cigarette.

"Gail has asked that you be permitted to help me," he said in a strained voice he could not have accounted for.

"He tells me that you have helped him in the work and that you know a great deal about what he has done. Of course, you know that he wants me to go ahead with the experiments?"

"Yes; he told me. And you consented?"

"I did. I likewise agreed to use your knowledge and assistance in the work, providing, of course, this is satisfactory to you."

The girl frowned. "You are doing this," she asked, "for what purpose? Surely you have not espoused the cause of the gray-clad workers?"

"I'm doing it in the interest of science," he returned stiffly, "and of the general good to humanity that is involved. You need have no fear that it will work to the disadvantage of your comrades."

"You'll not betray us—betray Gail, I mean—to the Power Syndicate?" The girl's expression was dubious.

"Certainly not!" Scott flushed uncomfortably. It was impossible that he come out flatly in support of the gray multitude; too many of them were of the type of Tom Prouty or the one who had been known as Sarovin. Nor could he fully approve of the opposite side—his own fellows of the upper levels. There was justice and injustice, both up top and down below, with the wearers of the gray getting somewhat the worse of existing conditions. But how to explain this attitude of mind to this beauteous and imperious girl who regarded him with such open suspicion if not with actual dislike. How to . . .

"Gail trusts you," she broke in then, with a quick half-smile. "And, that being the case, I suppose I can. We start work at once?"

Surprised, Scott jumped to his feet with alacrity. It would be great to have the girl around, at that. "Right away!" he exclaimed. "And you'll make your home here?" Then, aghast at his own temerity, "To be near Gail, of course," he finished lamely.

"Yes—to be near Gail." The girl rose unsteadily and swift tears came trembling on her long lashes. An hysterical sob caught in her throat. "Poor, poor Gail," she moaned.

And Scott, moving with soft steps in deference to her feeling, made his way toward the laboratory.

CHAPTER IV

Accomplishment

VAGUELY disturbed by a realization of his growing concern over this girl who had come into his life under such trying circumstances, Scott set himself half-heartedly to the task of arranging his apparatus for the work that he must do. She was the companionate mate of Gail Destinn, the paralyzed man had admitted, but it seemed apparent that the relationship was a one-sided arrangement. Certainly Destinn had not exhibited the depth of emotion one would have expected in the fortunate possessor of so beautiful and talented a companion.

Norine, on the other hand, was deeply and madly in love. That was quite evident from her bearing. She'd fight for her man like a tigress, if occasion demanded, and stick to him through thick and thin. To her it would not matter that he was no longer able to protect her; that his marvelous vitality of body had been taken from him in that horrible instant when the needle-energy struck him down. To a girl like that, the union was a permanent and sacred thing; a responsibility not to be cast aside. And yet she was, above all, a woman . . . primitive in her emotions and a creature of strange caprice. Intoxicating the senses in her exotic allure . . . chilling them to sub-zero frigidity in the next instant with her aloof disapproval . . .

Scott shook his head angrily and turned his eyes to the fluorescent screen of the radio-microscope. He'd have to keep his mind free of such thoughts. There was work to be done, important work, and he needed his every faculty under control.

The laboratory visiphone buzzed an insistent call and he flipped the lever that illuminated its disc. An anxious face appeared there, the face of his first assistant at the Research Bureau.

"When will you be at the Bureau offices?" the white lips asked.

"Not today, Warren,." Scott returned impatiently. "I've something to do here. May shut myself in for a week."

"But—but say! President Owens has called a conference. The devil's to pay, Terris. You'll have to come down."

"Can't. Tell 'em I'm sick; dead, if you want to—anything."

His eyes had strayed to the green-lit screen of the super-microscope, where a dazzling light-burst showed for an instant in the path of the theta rays, and then was gone. A single atom of helium created! The process was successful in its initial stage.

"But, Terris," the visiphone was pleading, "Crawford has returned. He's fighting mad, and he wants you to——"

"Oh, damn Crawford! Tell him I refuse!" The visiphone disc went dark and the panicky voice broke off as he slammed the lever back.

So Matt Crawford was taking up the challenge of the gray-clad multitude—and wanting him to do some of his dirty work of reprisal, Scott thought grimly. This was to be war all right; the civil war Destinn had predicted, with bloodshed and misery—the Lord only knew what might happen with Crawford's diabolical mind at work! And Scott was in the middle, he knew; he'd be cast off by his fellows of the purple for his defection, and scorned by those of the gray on account of his wealth and position.

A second flash of light showed there before him and all else was forgotten as he saw that it persisted in its uncanny swelling brilliance. He increased the generation of theta rays and watched breathlessly as a twin star was formed there in the microcosmos that whirled on the screen. They fused together then, those two newly born atoms, joining forces in a violent accession of energy.

"The theta ray should be further concentrated," a cool, crisp voice spoke at his elbow.

He had not noticed the girl's presence in the laboratory, so engrossed was he in the miracle that was taking place within the tiny capsule of hydrogen.

"Yes, close to iota intensity," he replied in professional tones. "I believe that is what Gail said."

"That's right." The girl refocused the view on the screen as he adjusted the ray generator. She was an ideal assistant.

The magnification now was less than a million diam-

eters, and still the man-made energy center was brilliantly visible and growing larger. It was taking on mass with the capture of new electrons.

"You have the primary screen?" the girl asked.

"Over there, with the small crucible he left here last night." Scott drew in a quick breath as the energy burst forth with trebled vigor, and his fingers trembled on the control of the ray generator.

"We'll need it shortly," the girl said, returning with a shiny cylinder which she placed beside him.

"And the secondary screens? They are in the laboratory of the fifty-third level?" he asked.

"Yes. In the keeping of the Council of Five. I'll go for them whenever you are ready."

"You have notified the Council, I presume. Gail said you were to do so." Scott slipped the pirmary screen in over his hydrogen capsule, and the radiation of the energy center was dimmed momentarily to a dull, sputtering red.

"I have, and they approve of what we are doing," the girl replied. She was busy with the calculating machine, determining the rate of mass increase of the energy center.

"Then why can't they send those secondary screens up here?" Scott asked gruffly.

"Sarovin's crowd has spies watching them. It would be too risky."

"How about the risk to yourself in going down there?"

"No risk at all," the girl sniffed. "I can twist them around my finger, any of them."

Scott was not so sure; they were a desperate bunch, these who had been followers of the defunct agitator, and would stop at nothing now. Especially if Crawford had started something.

A rapid flare-up of the energy center made haste imperative. He cut back slightly into the theta ray band. "Can't he helped, I guess," he growled. "You'd better go now, Miss Rosov. Be careful, though."

"Of course." She slipped a sheet of calculations into his hand and was gone by way of the secret lift.

Remarkable girl, that. Scott checked her figures rapidly and found they were correct. It was incredible that the rate of energy increase should have reached so enormous a value. Why, in less than an hour they'd be radiating sufficient power to operate the entire pneumatic tube system of the city! . . . If it could be used.

The energy center was visible now with not more than a thousand diameters of magnification. He slipped the cylindrical screen and its percious contents out of the microscope and transferred it to the wave reflector of his spectrometer.

For the first time he gave attention to the imperative call of the visiphone. Its buzzer had shrilled for many minutes unnoticed. Matt Crawford probably—in person. He reached for the activating lever, then changed his mind and rang for his head caretaker instead.

"Wilson," he said when the man came in, "take this call on the library extension, and, if it's Matt Crawford, tell him I can't be interrupted. I'll not talk to him."

"Yes, sir, very well, sir." Wilson backed out with horrified amazement written large on his wrinkled countenance. The master must be out of his mind, snubbing the kilowatt king; bringing the crippled radical from the fighting in the sub-levels. And the girl! But he hastened to do as he was bidden.

THE spectrometer readings showed that the radiations of the energy center held steady within a fraction of one per cent of the frequency selected from the cosmic rays by the globes of the Power Syndicate.

He returned the screened capsule to the stream of exciting rays and saw immediately that the energy center was now visible without the aid of the super-microscope. It was a pulsating pinpoint of light, the germ of a latent energy that would become so enormous in potentiality that cold calculation of the values was staggering to contemplate.

The open panel of the secret lift reminded him that the girl had been away for a much longer time than the trip should have required. A cold fear gripped him as the vibrating energy within that tiny screen sent forth an audible note. If those devils down there had harmed a hair of her head, he'd rend the sub-levels asunder with an atomic blast that would be heard around the world!

"Mr. Terris, sir, I beg pardon." Wilson stood there, pale and shaken—apologizing.

"What is it, man? Have it out."

"It—it *was* Mr. Crawford, sir, and he was furious. He said he was coming here at once, sir."

"You'll not admit him, Wilson. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. That is, no sir, I'll not." The old fellow turned, trembling to leave. But he straightened his shoulders as he passed through the door and Scott knew that the main entrance to the apartment would remain bolted.

The hydrogen capsule had vanished utterly and the energy center now hung suspended and enormously enlarged in the hollow cylindrical screen. A sputtering light-ball of the size of a food pellet, it cast a circle of such intense brilliance on the metal ceiling that the sunglow illumination was dim by comparison. Alternately expanding and contracting like a living breathing thing, it was radiating thousands of horsepowers of energy into space even now.

And still Norine had not returned. Scott cut back still further on the theta rays and strode to the open panel of the secret shaft, where he listened anxiously for the lift. But all was silence in the blackness down there. He dashed from the laboratory and into the room where Destinn lay.

"Norine went for the secondary screens," he groaned, "and she's been gone for more than an hour. Tell me where to find her, Gail."

The nurse remonstrated with him for exciting her patient, but he waved her away.

"She'll be all right, Terris," the sick man said calmly. "Never fear for that girl's safety."

"But if she isn't—if something has happened to her!" Beads of perspiration glistened on Scott's brow.

But Destinn coolly ignored his excitement. "Nothing will happen," he whispered confidently. "How far have you progressed?"

"A stable energy center now glows in the primary screen. Radiations are increasing as the ninety-first power every ten seconds."

"Good Lord, Terris!" Destinn's weak voice betrayed excitement now and the nurse tried frantically to silence him. "She must return soon," he moaned, despite the woman's efforts, "else it will get beyond control. The primary screen . . . Terris . . ."

And then Gail Destinn fainted.

CHAPTER V

Awakening

INSTANTLY sensing the tremendous importance of the thing Destinn had been trying to tell him, Scott made desperate efforts to revive him. If only he had told him the definite composition of the metal used in those protective secondary screens; if only he could get him to speak the few necessary words!

But it was useless. Gail Destinn had slipped into a coma from which he might not awaken for many hours, the nurse told him sternly. And, if Mr. Terris had any sense of human kindness; if he had any consideration at all for a man who was desperately ill, he would leave the sick room at once.

Scott left. He dashed into the laboratory and listened once more at the panel of the secret shaftway. But, if there was any sound of the lift rising he could not have heard it for the intense note of the raging fury within that primary screen. The thing nearly filled the tiny cylinder now, and it was bouncing about at a terrific rate.

He shut off the theta rays without result. The thing seemed to take on new energy with their cessation. Of course! Excitation had been completed; the madly whirling thing would continue now in its acquisition of mass unaided. And, if not properly screened and its vast potentiality directed into the intended channels, it would go on and on until it had destroyed New York and all of its millions—until it had destroyed the earth itself; the solar system, perhaps.

He searched through his crucibles in a frenzy. Selecting one of pure tungsten, he placed it gingerly over the small cylinder. There was a tremendous thump that seemed to wrench the very space about him, and the crucible vanished in a puff of light that left him blinking and blinded.

"Scott—Scott Terris!" a voice sobbed then in his consciousness. "Am I too late?"

It was Norine. His vision was clearing and he saw her swaying before him, her face marble-white and her eyes staring at some nameless horror they still beheld. In her arms was a shimmering metallic object, a hollow cone with a hinged lid on the flaring end.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned, letting the cone clatter to the floor. "It's dark down there in the sub-levels—dark. They've shut off the power, Scott, and the Ways are stopped. There's terror down there and vile murdering of innocent people. The Council; I found them wallowing in their own blood, all five. And Prouty—I killed him with my bare hands!"

She swayed toward him, and somehow Scott found her in his arms. The white gleam of her body through rents in her clothing set his blood afire and he crushed her to him. For a moment she yielded, sighing. Soft, moist lips met his own and clung passionately.

Then she had pushed him away. Her eyes blazed scornfully and the white of her neck and cheeks flared a sudden angry red.

"I'm sorry, Norine, sorry," he mumbled, reaching for the all-important secondary screen. "I was mad, I guess."

In another moment he'd have the terrific thing they had created safely controlled; the energy center, at least. The other—the feeling she had created in him—could never be quenched. He wasn't sorry; he was a man insane with the new flame that burned within him.

WILSON was there, sputtering, "Crawford, sir, Crawford—the big boy himself is at the entrance. Th-three of the red police are with him, sir. They're cutting down the door with acetylene torches."

Norine screamed, "Gail, Gail! They'll get him, Scott."

She ran from the room as Scott advanced hastily to where the ball of raw energy spun crazily within the tottering primary screen. In a daze, he fumbled with the lid of the cone.

The crash of the massive steel door out there falling inward gave warning that the time was short. Damn that lid! He couldn't open the thing. The primary screen had careened violently and threatened to spew forth its fearful content.

And then they were in the laboratory; a lieutenant of red police with two of his men. Crawford bringing up the rear; dragging Norine back into the room, the swine!

"You're under arrest, Terris!" the lieutenant snapped.

"Arrest, hell!" The lid of the cone swung back and Carr had the mighty energy center under control.

In after years, when he thought back on that scene, he realized he must have lost his senses completely after that. Norine, when they had released her and closed the door, stood there a cold fury. He had taken advantage of the legalized companion of another man, her eyes accused him—a man who lay helpless but a few steps away. And in that maddening gaze of hers there was unforgiving antipathy—abhorrence.

What mattered it to him now that terror stalked down there in the sub-levels? What mattered the class distinctions of modern life; the injustice? All that mattered was power—power to take and to smash; to bring the highest and the lowliest to their knees. And he, Scott Terris, was master of that power. It spun there, waiting to be used, in that unassuming cone of metal that reposed on his workbench.

"Arrest!" His maniacal laugh set the lieutenant back on his heels. Terris, the mild-mannered scientist, had gone crazy!

"Drop it!" Scott yelled, as the officer reached for his riot pistol. "Drop it, I say!" He grabbed the cone, and the angry hum that arose from within silenced even the babblings of Crawford.

He snapped back the lid and withdrew the cone with a flipping motion, leaving the mysterious roaring thing it had contained to spin there in mid-air a blinding ball of fire. Fully an inch in diameter now, its note rose to a scream as it took on additional mass by the acquisition of new electrons from the disintegrated components of the surrounding atmosphere. The metal walls, the floor and ceiling of the great room emitted fearful sounds of harmonic vibration that added to the din.

Crawford, his flabby jowls sagging, opened his thiek lips to cry out, but no sound came from the vocal chords that were paralyzed with fear. The lieutenant struck out at the whirling thing with the butt of his pistol. There was a thumping wrench of surrounding space and the weapon was dissolved in one of those blinding light flashes, only to add further to the mass of the dancing horror that spun so swiftly before him. Screaming, he fell back waving the cauterized stump of his forearm, from which hand and wrist had vanished.

"Power! Power!" Scott yelled, advancing on Crawford. "I'll show you what power is. Arrest me, will you? Crawford, you're through; your reign is over. I shall be Dictator in United North America. Come here!"

"YOU—can't do this, Terris," the man faltered, extending a pudgy hand before his face in feeble attempt to shield it from the searing radiations of that incredible whirling thing which had struck terror to his craven soul.

"Can't I? You haven't seen the half of what I can do. Call off your men, Crawford. . . . You withdraw your charges, don't you?"

"W-what do you intend to do?"

"All in good time. Call them off, I say!" Scott brought the open end of the cone close to the screaming energy center and the thing drifted several feet nearer the erstwhile king of the kilowatts.

Dripping agonized perspiration, the terrified financier waved the police away. Only too glad to escape the awful menace of the thing that danced there blinding them and causing their very blood to boil in their veins, they slunk off, supporting the collapsed and moaning lieutenant between them.

Scott brought the insulating cone down over the energy center and returned it to the workbench. "That, Crawford," he said grimly, in the deathly silence that followed, "is the secret of your downfall. A man-made thing that will revolutionize the production of power and render useless all of your vast plant units out there in the stratosphere."

"You're bluffing," with a trace of his usual courage returning. "It's a laboratory trick of yours, designed to frighten us." Crawford mopped his brow nervously and straightened his slumped shoulders.

"Frightened you, too, didn't it?" Scott grinned. "No, it's not a bluff; it's the real thing. Observe the readings of the spectrometer, Crawford, and the radiation meter. Here, make it snappy!"

Cowed anew and paling visibly when Scott's fingers strayed toward the cone, he bent over the instruments indicated. The sheaf of calculations fluttered in his nerveless grip as he examined the figures that spelled the ruin of his vast enterprises, the collapse of the mighty organization he had built up.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked abjectly.

"First of all, you will obtain visiphone connection with the executive chambers in Washington—using my instrument here. You will present me to the President as your successor. Following that, you will call together the dummies who are supposed to be the directors of the Power Syndicate. You will resign as President and Chairman of the Board, appointing me to succeed you in those positions."

"But my stock, Terris—I own controlling interest."

"Bah! It'll not be worth the paper it's engraved on when I've finished. After you have done the things I've mentioned, you will establish connections with your representatives in each of the cities of our country; you will resign from each and every industrial board of which you are a member; you will transfer your proxies to me. And you will notify your spies and your undercover men in the various departments of the government of the new order of things. Get busy now, Crawford."

"Terris, the thing's impossible," the broken man pleaded. "I just can't do it—I can't!"

Scott looked at his pocket chronometer. "Crawford," he said in brittle tones, "if you're not at the visiphone in sixty seconds, making that first call, your worthless carcass will go to swell the mass of the energy center. I mean it. This power is mine; I'm taking it, and a piffling thing like the life of a man like you will not stand in my way. Step now!"

Matt Crawford moved with ludicrous haste. His fat fingers fumbled with the visiphone lever and he put in the call for President Owens.

Scott turned slowly to face Norine Rosov. The girl had stood there a rigid and scornful figure throughout the proceedings; now her pale lips moved in low, tense monosyllables.

"Thief! Cad!" she whispered huskily. "Oh, you—you——"

"Norine," he interrupted her, and his voice was silky and even. "I don't expect that you'll understand. Women never do. But this thing I'm doing is the only thing possible under the circumstances. And don't think I'll weaken in my purpose. I shall do exactly as I have said, and tomorrow the cities of United North America will have their first taste of the medicine I shall prescribe."

His jaw set in taut lines as the girl flushed in swift anger. She crouched there, braced against the wall as if about to spring upon him clawing and tearing like some wild creature of the jungle.

His next words were clipped off in steely determination. "But one thing I ask—no, I command it. You will leave Gail with me so that he can be properly treated. I give you my word he will be provided with all the attention that money can buy—the finest medical care—everything."

The fierce look of a beautiful animal went suddenly from her face and her lips trembled. "You—you promise?" she faltered.

"Solemnly."

"Yes . . . yes, it is better so. I couldn't provide for him," she agreed, her voice choking. "And, Scott, may I . . . visit him?"

"Certainly."

Crawford was talking rapidly before the disc of the visiphone where President Owens regarded him with open-mouthed astonishment.

Deliberately cruel, Scott snarled at the girl, "Go, now! Go, I say! Can't you see that you're in the way? Go!"

And Norine Rosov, beaten and sobbing, made her uncertain way to the secret lift.

CHAPTER VI

The Old Order Changes

WITHIN two hours Scott Terris sat facing the President in the secret room of the executive chambers in Washington. He had laid down the law in no uncertain words and was regarding through eyes that were narrowed to slits, the vacillating politician who had been the catspaw of the old money-oiled machine.

Matt Crawford had departed without baggage on an extended tour of the pleasure cities of southern Europe. His letter of credit, though more limited than he would have wished, bore the official seal of the government of United North America. It was his decree of banishment.

"But, Terris," the President remonstrated mildly.

"What you are doing is the acme of high-handedness. This is a republic; the people will not stand for it."

"Tommyrot! We haven't been a republic, excepting in name, for more than a century, and you know it. The people will stand for anything, provided they are moderately prosperous. They believe they would like to rule themselves, but they're incapable—they've proved it time and again all through our history and the history of the rest of the world. The best form of government for them is an absolute monarchy, and that is what we will now become. I am the absolute monarch, though I shall assume no title as such, and my word is to be the law of the land as truly as was that of the czars and emperors of old. You understand?"

President Owens dropped his tired old eyes before the flinty orbs that bored into his very soul. "You'll do nothing rash, I hope?" he quavered, glad in his heart that a strong man was taking the reins.

"Nothing at all; excepting to turn the entire country topsy-turvy and reorganize society and industry. Nothing rash, I assure you."

"Good Lord!" the President gasped.

"You haven't heard anything yet," Scott grinned. "Listen——"

He talked for more than an hour, rapidly and forcefully, and when he finished, it seemed that the President had shed twenty years of his age. There was a healthier color in his gaunt cheeks and smile wrinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes.

"Terris," he beamed. "The thing will work. I know it will work. And, six months hence, our country will be envied by the entire world. I'll call the extra session of Congress immediately."

"Oh, *that* formality," Scott sniffed. "After the newscast speech, Mr. President, after that has had time to sink in."

"Yes, yes." President Owens fluttered about, adjusting his cravat and smoothing his hair, for all the world like a little old lady preening and primping for a Sunday stroll in the ozone promenade.

For the first time during his two terms of office he was about to make a speech that would add to his self-respect. Under the magic of Scott's persuasion he had completely forgotten that he was still no more than the mouthpiece of another and greater man.

AFTER giving his orders to the Newscasting Corporation heads, Scott Terris retired to the room he had chosen for his own in the huge executive suite. The ether would be entirely cleared of traffic on the newscast wave band so that all public and private visiphones must respond to the special message of the President.

He then cut his own instrument in on the private band of the police network, calling an immediate visiphone conference of the Chiefs of Police in all cities. There was other and less public instruction to be given, and this he would take care of personally.

One by one the department heads reported in until all eight faced him in the bright disc. Merkel, of New York, he knew personally, but all of the others were strangers to him. He had greeted each in turn with a curt nod, noting with satisfaction that their bearing was subservient and respectful. The word had gone out through the secret agents of the machine and they had accepted the new Dictator without cavil. Power! He knew the secret of it, at last.

"Men," he said, "you know who I am and what has happened, so I will eliminate all preliminaries. It is sufficient for the present that you understand that all orders as to the policies and activities of the red police will come from me. I am open to suggestion, but, when I have made a decision it is final—there is no appeal. Is this clear to all of you?"

He watched them keenly as they replied in the affirmative, some with quick eagerness as welcoming the change, others dubious and hesitant, yet not daring to dissent.

"Fine," he went on. "And now for the first general order. You will immediately re-allocate your men so that the upper levels are as fully patrolled in accordance with the density of population as the sub-levels. From this time forth, you are not to discriminate one whit between those of the purple and those who wear the gray. One is as liable to arrest and punishment as the other, for the slightest infraction of the law. Starting at once, and during the next twenty-four hours, all furloughs are canceled. Reserves are to be concentrated in the public squares and along the Ways to break up any and all disturbances that may follow upon the President's speech. And—get this—you are to arrest all agitators and objectors, regardless of class, and mobilize them on the roof surfaces for immediate transportation to the space globes of the Power Syndicate, where they will be sentenced to labor for an indefinite period of time—without bail. That is all for the present; good day, gentlemen."

"But, Mr. Terris," expostulated Shapley of San Francisco, "there will be trouble."

"Hm, a police chief worried about trouble! Of course there'll be trouble—and plenty of it. That's your job, Shapley, to face trouble and fight it."

He flicked the lever and the disc went blank. That preliminary was over, and Scott had not the slightest doubt that his orders would be carried out.

A SPECIAL frequency band was assigned to him by the Radio Bureau in order to avoid interference on the newscast wave. He glanced at his watch—Owens' speech would be on the air in ten minutes.

In quick succession he obtained connections with headquarters offices of the Power Syndicate, the Food Company, and the Air Conditioning Bureau, snapping out orders that left their officials aghast and palpitating but submissive withal. The under-cover men must have done their work well, spreading the reputation of this new Dictator as a hell-raiser. Scott permitted himself a sardonic smile.

He had his first assistant, Warren, on the air then and promoted that amazed individual to his old position as chief of the Research Bureau. Before the man could stammer his thanks, he was instructing him minutely in the matter of the energy center, which was to be duplicated in huge quantities at once, including spectroscopic analyses of the primary and secondary screens so that their materials might be reproduced, and plans for the projectors in which the new energy source was to be used. Power! His very words vibrated with it. Warren, a clever lad and ambitious, was quick to absorb the astounding knowledge that was imparted so unexpectedly and swiftly by his superior. Again Scott was confident of the results—they would be more than satisfactory. Warren was one chap who would get ahead.

Biting the end from his first cigar that day, he settled back comfortably to listen to the message that would create such a turmoil that the customary labor troubles, even the more serious recent ones, would pale into insignificance in the annals of the country.

He observed that the President was speaking with confidence and that his entire bearing was that of a man who believed in his subject. Power! Something of its meaning had taken hold of the little man. He positively radiated it.

The "Ladies and Gentlemen" part was over with and Owens' eyes sparkled as he got at the meat of the thing. "We are about to embark on an experiment, a most noble one," he stated crisply; "an experiment that will not meet with approval on all sides. Yet it has become a thing of grave necessity and I ask the United Americas to support the administration as it has never done before. A new era will result, an era of happiness and prosperity, I promise you, such as the world has never known."

Scott grunted. That old political ballyhoo, it would persist!

But the next was good: "We are changing our entire social and economic structure, let the axe fall where it may. For centuries we have functioned on a basis that was entirely wrong, a basis where wealth and influence determined a man's status regardless of his real worth as a member of society. All that is to be changed; beginning this day, the government will confiscate all wealth, all individual and corporate holdings, this wealth to be controlled and redistributed by a new Department of Finance that will be headed by Scott Terris, former chief of the Science Research Bureau. All wage scales are to be readjusted in accordance with the real value of the individual in the economic scheme, the individual ratings to be determined by the Boards of Education and Industrial Training in the various centers. No man or woman, from this day on, will receive more or less compensation than his or her ability merits. This will result in advancement to the ambitious and able; conversely, in demotion for the indolent and inept. A grading process, as it were, that will give every individual an opportunity as great as that of his neighbor. He will have free admission to the educational and vocational institutions, and any mental or bodily deficiency that might handicap him will be cured by our great medical and surgical men, who, in these times, are balked by nothing."

The President hesitated, wetting his lips. Scott thought with a sudden pang of Gail Destinn. But he threw off the feeling; it was not to be allowed that sentiment creep in now to interfere with straight thinking. Besides, Owens was carrying on with his message:

"Every man will have his chance; no man the advantage. The day of unemployment and economic depression is past. With the elimination of concentrated wealth and the institution of the twenty-hour working week which is likewise a part of the plan, such situations, as that now existing, will become impossible. There will be work for everyone, and all must work in order to live. The fluctuations in supply and demand will be met by reducing or increasing the labor turnout of the mechanicals, who require no compensation or food, only power to keep them alive. And power, incidentally, is to be plentiful and cheap. This, our most vital commodity, is the crux of the situation and is to undergo a radical change in its manner and cost of production. A new process, that produces energy directly from minute and inexpensive quantities of matter, has been developed by Scott Terris, who, in addition to his other duties, has taken over the leadership of the Power Syndicate from Matt Crawford, who has resigned."

Scott grinned appreciatively. Owens was doing the thing to a turn; he hadn't thought it was in the old man, after some of his weak parrot-like speeches that Crawford had inspired.

More was to follow, but the main facts had been covered. The rest was mere detail. Scott cut back to his private frequency band and requested a sound-vision flash of the Food Company Square in level fifty, New York. About time for the fireworks to begin, and somehow he felt an especial interest in the reactions of the workers in that particular gathering place.

The sound mechanism burst forth in a terrific din when the connection was established. The remainder of the President's message would go unheard by that frantic mob. In the great central rotunda, a howling, singing group milled about and voiced their jubilation with irrepressible ardor. At other points there were gatherings of angry and disgruntled workers who formed little circles around long-haired agitators who spouted invectives against the government. But the red police were on the job. They swiftly broke up such crowds, making free use of mace and riot pistol.

He looked for the place where Sarovin had died and saw that a makeshift platform had been erected over the gaping opening in the floorplates. Here centered the most violent demonstration he had observed, hemmed in by the red police and fighting desperately against their rushing tactics. And, on that platform stood Norine Rosov—aflame with passion and shouting her defiance over the heads of her listeners.

A fervent prayer that he might not be too late escaped his lips as he cut back to the police wave band. He must get Merkel instanter. Oh God—Norine! He'd never forgive himself if they harmed her.

CHAPTER VII

Progress

IN New York City, where the concentration of wealth was greatest, the President's message was at first received by the pleasure-seekers and idlers of the upper levels with languid amusement. This was only another of Crawford's clever moves to still the clamor of the gray-clad multitude and to further enrich the coffers of those of the purple, a holding out to the workers of the bait of increased compensation for increased industry and ability, when all knew that he would only squeeze and bleed them the harder under the guise of this new scheme that was designed only to deceive them into superhuman effort in his behalf. For themselves, stockholders and directors in the many corporations he controlled, there was not the slightest cause for anxiety.

But, when they discovered that their corporation credits were no longer honored in payment for commodities or service, when t hey learned of the issuance of new paper by the government that was known as labor credit and could only be obtained in exchange for useful productive or directive effort, such a howl was raised as to put to shame the feeble demonstrations of the sub-

levels. Suddenly it was brought home to them that this thing was no joke; they were virtual paupers, and might actually starve if drastic action were not taken.

In Central Square, the huge crystal-domed recreation center of the upper levels, there gathered as choice an assemblage of the *ultra-élite* as had ever congregated in a public place. In the great amphitheatre, where nightly they were accustomed to parade their finery in attendance upon the performances of the opera, they collected in angry sputtering groups in the case of the younger set and in pompous sneering aloofness where those of great power and influence met.

What was particularly amazing and abhorrent to their sensibilities was the presence of the red police in unprecedented force—an unwarranted and inexcusable invasion of their privileged immunity from such interference. It was incredible that Crawford would permit this indignity to come to them. Where was Crawford, anyway? President Owens had said he resigned from the Power Syndicate in favor of this scientist, Scott Terris. Was this, after all, the truth and not a blind? What right had Terris, who had never strayed into the realm of politics and industry from his commendable research work, to take upon himself this position of authority he seemed to have usurped? They must communicate with Crawford immediately.

Someone ferreted out Arthur Mason, Crawford's close confidant and nominal President of the Water Supply Syndicate, and was forcing a way to the stage, where gray-clad employés of the Newscasting Corporation were completing the erection of one of the raucous-throated and flickering-screened apparatuses of the public information system. Another high-handed invasion of their rights!

Mason, his massive features apoplectic in hue, and his vast bulk aquiver with righteous indignation, raised a shrill voice to address them. A semblance of quiet came then in the huge gathering-place and the red police could be observed drawing in their lines. Incredible that they should be watched like the common herd in the sub-levels! But Mason would be worth listening to; he would surely know something of what had really transpired—at least he might be expected to have knowledge of the whereabouts of Matt Crawford.

"Folks!" he shouted. "This is an outrage! Why—why, do you know they have actually refused to recognize my enormous credit. My very household has deserted me—the servants will not accept corporation credits in payment for their service. There is not sufficient food, even, in the larders of Arthur Mason. Imagine it! Something must be done."

"Yah!" a disrespectful voice sang out from the crowd, "You're not the only one, Mason. Tell us what to do if you're so smart. What about Crawford?"

"Crawford!" the great man yelled. "He's out, just as Owens said; deserted us—gone! This young whelp, Terris, has taken things in his own hands. And the government backs him up. It's a gigantic steal—robbery! We must organize and fight him in Congress."

"Congress, hell!" the same scornful voice retorted. "They passed the necessary legislation this morning. You should know how those things are forced through, Mason—you've done it enough times."

There was instant commotion in the section from which that voice had come. An exchange of quick blows and wrathful bellowings as the man was attacked by the aroused mob. A police whistle shrilled and a dozen of the red-coated minions of the law were on the spot. Maces fell resounding on unprotected skulls and the disturbers were dragged off amid the swelling protest of the astounded audience.

Mason paled visibly. This was the real thing; this Terris had laid his plans well. From some mysterious source he had support that was making him a power in the land. Raising his voice anew, Mason yelled hoarsely in a futile attempt to shout down the rising din of the chattering, milling crowd. Like animals, they were, each intent on his own problem, each fighting for his own real or fancied wrongs and jabbering of his troubles to his neighbor. A siren shrieked and the reserves rushed into the Square to quell the incipient riot. Exactly like the rabble of the sub-levels, it was! In disgust he turned from the sight and found himself staring at a grinning workman of the Newscast crew.

"Boo!" yelled the fellow in gray, wriggling his fingers derisively at his nose. "How do you like it, you fat slob?"

Arthur Mason had never been so addressed in his life. Shaking his fists and screeching impotent rage, he advanced on the laughing workman. The screams of women and the hoarse shouts of men battling for their lost lives of luxury rose a monstrous unthinkable babble in his ears. His world of affluence and ease was toppling there before him.

And still that workman grinned. He'd have the satisfaction, at least, of trouncing the fellow soundly. Swinging awkwardly and with stiff joints, he drove a blubbery fist into the pit of the man's stomach. *That* would put him in his place. But, quick as light, the slim youngster struck out, still smiling, and hard knuckles crashed home to the point of Arthur Mason's jaw.

After that there was confusion. Somehow he had slumped to the floor and an infernal hubbub surged there around him, whirling madly and interspersed with bright specks that floated and danced in the haze. A friend bent over him—Warner Merkel in the full regalia of his office.

"Help me out of this, Merks," he whined.

But the grim face drifting there was unsympathetic. "Sorry, old man," its lips seemed to whisper, "It's no go. I have to place you under arrest."

Truly, the world had gone topsy-turvy.

EIGHT levels below, a little knot of young men and women worked swiftly at the master controls of a humming foundry section of the mechanicals. Some of them there were who wore the purple and some the gray, but they thought and planned and labored together as a unit with no hint of the old class distinction or the turmoil in the public places of the city. These workers were in harmony, believing in the ultimate success of the change that was creating such a disturbance both above and below, accepting as their due the new independence which had come to them as individuals with their classification as capable, intelligent operatives.

All around them were the soulless, brainless mechanicals, busily engaged in the tasks to which they were assigned by the operatives. Massive man-made creatures of copper and steel, which labored at furnace and forge, at press and rolling mill in fabricating the conical secondary screens for this new energy, which the Power Syndicate was to adopt.

"They're tearing things apart down in the thirties, I heard," a bright-eyed lass in gray denim remarked to the serious youth in purple, who worked at the adjoining control board. Her nimble fingers flashed over the buttons as she spoke and the quick lighting of return signals apprised her of the proper performance of the duties of the eighty mechanicals she supervised.

"Yes, and in Central Square up top," her neighbor replied. "They arrested Mason himself when he got up to speak. Crawford's old buddy, can you beat it? And a hundred others of the fools were shipped off with him to globe 819. They'll work there."

"He's a terror, this Scott Terris," said the girl in awed voice. "Did you know him?"

"Only by sight. I worked under Warren in the Research Bureau, a political appointment, you know. Got my goat, that job—nothing to do and nobody caring." The lad puckered his brow in a puzzled frown. "Funny thing, too," he said, "I used to see Terris around. He wasn't that kind. A hard worker himself, but easy on his force. Not at all the fire-eater he has turned out to be lately."

"Bet there's a woman behind it, somewhere."

"Lord no! He wouldn't look at a woman."

"Oh yeah? Neither did Napoleon."

"Anyway," the lad in purple maintained stoutly, "I'm for him. He may be tough and hard-boiled, but the way things are going now, we'll be better off. Why can't the others see it?"

"They'll come around—when they're hungry. I've been hungry and I know."

"You have? Good Lord!" The boy was silent after that.

He stole a furtive look at the girl after a while and marveled at the flush of excitement that mantled her pretty cheeks at each new move of the huge creatures she controlled. Power! that was it; she was thrilling to the sense of it that surged through her new being.

OVER across the Hudson River a gang of laborers worked swiftly with power-saw and block and tackle, clearing away a section of woodland on the Palisades to make way for one of the new projector towers of the Power Syndicate. Many of them were breathing the outside air for the first time; some had never viewed the sun save in the travelogues of the visiphone programs. All of them worked with a will.

Only one wore the purple, a man of middle age, stoop-shouldered and hollow of eye. The others had given him a wide berth from the beginning; he seemed so out of place, resentful, rather, in the aloof manner he maintained. But, as time went on, the foreman took notice of number 91. He was a conscientious worker and minded his business, which some of the others didn't. And now he was taking on new color; his back was straightening, and the furtive look of him was leaving. Already his first sullen manner was brightening. Once he burst forth in song, a swift snatch of sonorous baritone that rose with thrilling power and clarity, then broke off short—abashed.

Tom Carey, the foreman, walked over to where number 91 was working and consulted his pay-roll list before addressing him.

"Your name's Cabane, isn't it?" he inquired gruffly.

Number 91 did not look up. "Yes," he replied mumbling.

"Mine's Carey."

"I know."

Tom Carey scratched his head. Queer bird, this one. And then he remembered. "Used to sing in the opera, didn't you?" he blurted out, and then was sorry.

The man drew himself suddenly erect and fire flashed from his eye. "I was Manuel Cabane," he said proudly. And then his eyes dropped and his shoulders sagged.

"Booze, wasn't it?" Carey asked softly. He expected number 91 to turn on him then, but the man only nodded.

A moment Tom Carey stood thinking. Then, "Like your job?" he inquired. He was curious about this fellow who had been somebody.

"I love it!" Manuel Cabane threw his head back and stared out over the river to the great steel wall that gleamed over there, hiding its millions from view. "It provides an outlet for Cabane, an outlet for those feelings that smoulder here!" He thumped his chest. "I had too much money," he continued, "and was a great fool. Now that this wealth I did not know how to use has been taken from me, I shall become a new man. I shall return once more to the opera, and this time I shall have wisdom. This devil of a Terris is an angel in disguise. They are dying over there in the city, some of them, and they say he is killing them. If so, it is for the best. Iron Terris, they are calling him—the fools. He has restored the mind of Cabane, as well as of others." And then number 91 raised his voice in all its old richness and power.

Power!—hand in hand with beauty and art. Regeneration.

CHAPTER VIII

Two Months Have Passed

"THERE'S a thousand labor credits in it for you, Conrad."

"Yuh got the needle gun?"

"Yes—here." Peter McKay shoved the wicked little weapon over the table-top to the low-browed individual who faced him.

"Gimme the thousand."

"When you've finished the job."

"Nothin' doin'. Pay now, or there ain't no job." Con Burdig, once a mighty power in New York's fast dwindling underworld, was not taking any chances. These guys up top were crooks, especially those who lost a couple of million and had to work for a living.

"All right." McKay counted out the paper and handed it over. "There'll be no slips, Conrad?"

"Naw. I get 'em when I go after 'em, Mac." Burdig rose leering exultantly as he stuffed the credits in his pocket and patted the shiny pistol affectionately. "Don't worry about me not gettin' Terris," he grinned. "I'd kill the dam' slave driver just to own this gun. I'd kill him for nothin' almost—he's busted my racket wide open, the lousy robber!"

Peter McKay mused grimly when the man had gone. Set a thief to catch a thief; that was the way to rid the country of this tyrant who had risen up over night to tear down financial structures that had been centuries in the building and to set up a new structure of his own. Lord, how he had put it over on the rabble! And, strangely, on the great majority of his own kind. Fools!

Why, there were some of them who'd never done a tap and whose top-level establishments numbered a hundred or more rooms, living in one room now, and working hard. Plugging away at trades; keeping late hours in night school—doing anything to curry favor with the Classification Bureau.

Not for Peter McKay. He had managed to scrape together a few thousand labor credits by sacrificing his air-yacht and the art objects he had collected for their value but secretly snickered over. Weird things of the past centuries and ugly, he thought them.

Nina, his companion, had gotten a severance decree and tied herself to that opera singer. Good riddance! she'd always been a poor sport anyway. Always wanting to do things that were not being done by the old clique; slumming in the sub-levels, and spending his money on a gang of bums who hung around the charity centers. The oily baritone was welcome to her!

No, he was too wise to fall for this Utopia stuff; he had his few thousand and was biding his time. With Terris out of the way, other lines he had laid could be picked up. What a bombshell he had planted! Terris, the hypocrite, was the wealthiest man in the world for all his smooth talk of equitable distribution. Well, those vast holdings would be redivided in accordance with the man's own laws after that energy needle had gotten in its work.

The schemer leaned back in his chair and a satisfied smile spread over his face as he puffed luxuriously on his cigar. He, Peter McKay, would become a power in the land after that. He was as clever as the next one, and he had friends; influence. His plans could not fail. Perhaps even, he might aspire to the position of Dictator and take to himself all of the things that great power brought. Power—and greed.

ATTIRED in the serviceable khaki of a convict laborer, a heavy-set man worked perspiringly diligent with cloth and metal polish on the brass rail that enclosed the high tension switching mechanisms of globe 819. His flesh hung in loose folds about the chin, due to the loss of the obesity he once had carried. He whistled as he worked, and would permit his eyes to wander occasionally to the viewing port where the earth was visible as an enormous ball of mottled green filling the sky in its nearby majestic immensity. He sighed after each such lapse, and the cheerful whistle was stilled for a space.

One would not have recognized in this lowliest of workers the man who had been Arthur Mason but two months ago. Out here, a hundred miles from the surface, where the great sphere drifted under gravity control that kept it at a constant distance and angle over New York, things were vastly different. One did as he was told, and there was no shirking of duty nor talking back to superiors. But one lived; the food was the best synthetic product and was amply supplied. There was every convenience; crude and elemental, of course, where cosmetics and the luxuries of the bath were concerned, but one kept clean and comfortable, and surprisingly fit.

There had been much time in which to think, and Mason had done his share of thinking. It had brought him nowhere, it was true, but he found that he no longer thrilled to certain desires that had flamed in his spirit at first, nor was he as irked over the situation as he had been in the beginning. As a matter of fact, though he would not have admitted it, there was a satisfaction in the convict life aboard the huge transforming and radiating station of the Power Syndicate he had never before experienced. Since the first week or so, when there had been much trouble and a number of casualties in rioting of the prisoners, the life had been singularly peaceful and enlightening. Some of his fellow prisoners were mighty good company, and there were the hours of recreation and amusement; opportunities for study—all one could wish for but freedom.

Most of all he missed contact with the world. There was only one visiphone on board and this was in the Chief Engineer's office, inaccessible to the prisoners. Posted bulletins were few and far between; their information meagre and carefully censored. But it was generally known that conditions were improving back home. Iron Terris was running things to suit himself and with a grip that never loosened. He was relentless and cold; a man who smashed down the old and built up the new. But it seemed that his dictatorship was meeting with growing approval.

An unusual excitement was in the conditioned air of the globe today, for a rocket ship was expected from home. Officers and engineers conversed in low tones not intended for the ears of the prisoners, but news had leaked out that globe 819 was to be relieved of its load by fifty percent and that some of the convicts would be released and returned. Speculation was rife as to who the lucky ones might be.

The call bell rang out, summoning the prisoners to the central assembly hall. Mason saw the blaze of gases as the rocket ship circled the globe, slowing down for a landing in their airlock. A flutter of anxiety came over him; it just might be that he would be one of the releases—if only he were, he'd get into things back home and use some sense about it. No reason he couldn't rate a fair classification and at least be able to get along.

Special engineers of the Power Syndicate came with their test apparatus, and a detail of the red police. They had a prisoner, a ferret-eyed, dapper youth who looked out at them and at his jailers with assumed jauntiness. They'd soon take that out of him here.

And then the warden was addressing them. He called a number—108—Mason's. The trembling man stepped forward.

"You are hereby appointed trusty, 108," the warden was saying. "This prisoner, 243, is remanded to your care. Take him and see that he is bathed and uniformed."

Mason's heart sank as he led number 243 away. No release this time! But to be made a trusty; *that* was something. He straightened unconsciously and his chest swelled.

"What are you in for?" he asked, when the man was dressing after his shower.

"Felonious assault, they called it."

"You tried to kill someone?"

"Yeah—Terris!"

"The Dictator—good Lord!"

The new prisoner became voluble; almost it seemed he was glad to be here. "Queer fish, this Terris," he volunteered, "I coulda got him if I half tried. Had him covered with a needle gun and dam 'f he didn't talk me out of it. Made me lay down the gun—with those eyes of his. He's a tough guy, all right. Then told me there

was a gang of cops watching. Showed me too. There was a dozen of 'em, spread around his apartment. Gets me why he didn't let 'em bump me off."

"Good Lord! Why did you want to kill him?"

"Guy by the name of McKay hired me."

"Peter McKay?"

"Yeah, that's him. Know what that nut done? I squealed when they got me up and that bum took cyanide when they come for him."

"No! McKay killed himself!"

"Sure. No guts; they never have any, these guys that used to be rich. No guts to face the music."

"Lord!" Arthur Mason was only able to stare at the youth, who so calmly told of his crime and so discerningly judged the man who had hired him for his dirty work.

Guts! That was what they had lacked, he and his fellows of the purple.

FOOD COMPANY SQUARE in level fifty faced its visitors with a new air of prosperity. Gone were the long lines of gray-clad mendicants who awaited the daily ration of the charity center. And gone were the thousands of loiterers and the little gathering knots where red-faced agitators had been wont to air their views. But a single guard of the red police was in sight.

Over in a corner of the vast enclosure a young man and a girl sat hand in hand on one of the benches. Dressed in the smartly tailored khaki worn now by everyone who was anyone, they were a handsome couple and obviously very much in love. That they were newly mated was evidenced no more by the slender bracelet of the legalized companion that encircled the girl's firm rounded arm than by the adoration with which the lad at her side regarded her.

"Happy, kid?" he might have been heard to ask.

"You bet."

"Not sorry—for anything?"

"I should say not. Mother was furious at first. She had the old-fashioned idea that every man who wore the purple ever in his life was a scoundrel and a deceiver of women. But she knows better now. I'm afraid she's a little in love with you herself."

The boy laughed and squeezed her arm. "Honestly?" he asked. "Was that the opinion down here—before? Were we painted as black as all that?"

"Blacker. Why, a girl of the gray who would associate with one of the purple was done for; thrown out of home and ostracized by her friends. She'd *have* to go bad after that, or become a servant."

"Gosh!" The boy was silent for a time. "Then I sure was in luck," he whispered then.

"Silly! I'm the lucky one."

More silence, broken only by the gentle throb of the city's life and the occasional swishing rush of a pneumatic tube car beneath their feet. An incongruous figure came into view, an uncommonly beautiful girl whose close-cropped golden hair attracted instant attention as did the rather shabby gray denim in which she had clothed her magnificent figure. She walked directly to the small platform alongside the now silent newscast station and mounted it with slow steps.

"Look!" said the man, "There's that girl again."

"Yes. She comes here every night at this time. Funny about her too, Fred. I heard she has a fine position in the Air Conditioning Service, classified high in science. She's a research engineer."

"I know it. Warren told me. And yet she dresses up in the old gray every evening and comes down here to try and get an audience who will listen to her ravings against Terris."

"Wonder why she's so rabid. She's better off than she ever was; and who cares whether he stole this energy idea of his? Fellow by the name of Destinn, isn't it, she says he robbed?"

"Yes. I never heard of him."

"Neither did I. Probably an assistant in the Research Bureau when Terris was chief. But, what's the diff? They always took the credit for inventions of their men in those days."

"Why not? Nobody recognized what a man was really worth then. It would be another matter now."

The slender figure on the platform stood there uncertainly as if waiting. Now and again the girl made as if to raise her voice, but each time thought better of it. There was no one to listen. The only ones within earshot were the young couple on the bench and they were too obviously engrossed in each other to pay attention if she spoke.

"It's odd the police never bother her," whispered the girl on the bench. "Even in the beginning, before the rioting was over, they let her talk as much as she pleased."

"Probably someone higher up is protecting her. She's harmless, anyway. What do you say, honey, we go home?"

"Let's do. I want to hear Cabane; he's on the visi tonight for the first time since his come-back."

Like two happy children they rose and scampered off along the path to the moving ways.

Norine Rosov stood proudly erect on the platform. With the running off of the young lovers went her last hope. What a fool she had been! Suddenly her cheeks flared an angry red.

Alone and unheeded she had fought for Gail. Battling a power that was impregnable and invincible. And to what end? Nothing she could do or that anyone else could do would make Gail happier, and no power on earth was able to do more for him than was being done.

That much she conceded to Scott Terris; he had kept his word with regard to the care of the helpless man who had discovered the energy center. But the fame and the power were Scott's, while Gail lay there unheralded and unknown. It wasn't fair!

She had kept things from the sick man on her frequent visits; told him only that which she thought would not upset him. She'd go—now—and tell him everything; how Terris had robbed him . . . how . . .

Swift feet and a turmoil of emotions carried her on the way to the secret lift.

CHAPTER IX

Changeover

ON the seventy-fifth day following the President's message the new energy projectors of the Power Syndicate were pronounced ready for the change-over from cosmic ray power. Twelve steel towers with their titanic energy charges surrounded each of the eight great cities, ready to radiate power that would

replace that of the twelve hundred globes out there in the stratosphere.

The entire cost of the project was scarcely greater than that of one of the huge globes, and, there being no necessity for attendance at the projectors, one hundred and twenty thousand men and women were to be released from their duties aloft to more pleasant tasks at home. Electric power, the most essential of all the requirements of modern civilization, was to be produced henceforth for less than five percent of its former cost. Due to the savings effected in reorganization of the industry, the cost to the consumer was to be reduced in still greater proportion.

And the vast investment in the globes was not to be wasted, for they were to be returned to earth and their materials and machinery used in the construction of the ninth city already being planned to relieve congestion, which, even with the subdividing of the large apartments of the former wearers of the purple, was acute.

A new era was about to be ushered into being and Scott Terris was at the main control switchboard in Washington in person. His hand was to throw the lever that would set into motion the automatic switches and relays which would provide for the progressive withdrawing of the secondary screens that surrounded the new energy centers. And with him were the President, the members of the new Cabinet, and many prominent personages of the new regime. It was a momentous occasion.

At the main control panel of the vast system of receiving screens that spread over the roof surface of New York a network of gleaming metallic filaments, sat Ralph Warren, chief of the Science Research Bureau. Members of his staff and heads of the several departments of the city administration were grouped around him before the disc of the visiphone where was pictured the scene in Washington.

"Terris looks tired," whispered Warner Merkel, who stood at his elbow. "The job is telling on him."

"It isn't the job, Merks," Warren returned gravely. "Something else is eating him. He's been up to some secret experimenting with a new air yacht he had constructed. Been coming over to New York every night and hiding himself in his hangar on the west roof stage; working all night sometimes. And he's been asking me for the craziest things. He has installed a small energy projector on the ship, I am certain, and a lot of experimental apparatus. Something has gone wrong there quite recently and he's been uncommunicative as the devil."

"Hm-m." Chief Merkel had some ideas of his own on the subject but dared not voice them. He thought he knew more about what was wrong with Iron Terris than did Warren, but he wasn't certain at all. Some hidden weakness of the Dictator would crop out sooner or later, perhaps. It hadn't been evidenced as yet, that was sure.

"Look!" Warren exclaimed. "He has thrown the switch." All eyes turned to the huge panel, when one hundred and fifty small indicating lamps glowed brightly, each showing that one of New York's power supply globes was in operation.

A group of the lamps dimmed slowly and flickered out. The master wattmeter showed no change in the total city load. But more than ten million kilowatts had been transferred from the old supply source to the new. They saw Terris smile as the frequency meter showed not a flicker of variation.

All over the country the same thing was happening; without a hitch or a single interruption of the flow of power the great change-over went forward. Within the hour more than two billion kilowatts, roughly three billion horsepower, would have been transferred to the new system.

"817, 818, 819, 820," an assistant intoned as others of the lamps flickered out on the New York panel.

"Arthur Mason is on globe 819," Merkel remarked. "I got his release order from Washington only this morning."

"Is he classified?" young Warren asked, his eyes glued to the face of the master wattmeter.

"No, but there have been good reports on him from out there. He is to report personally to Terris."

Ralph Warren whistled. "That's unusual, isn't it, Merks?"

"First time it's happened."

There was silence then in the control room, save for the clicking of relays and the calling off of globe numbers by the assistant.

"Say!" Merkel hissed, as the thought struck him, "I wonder what's become of Matt Crawford. There hasn't been a word about him since he left. And Matt wasn't one to give up without a struggle."

Warren stared. That *was* an idea. He'd like to mention it to Terris when next he saw him. But he'd not dare; no one dared approach him these days—on a subject like that.

Later that same day, Iron Terris made his first appearance before the public, speaking briefly over the newscast system. And, all over the land, the people in their homes and at their tasks, in the public squares and ways, turned eyes and ears to the visiphone. Not one who had reached the age of reason would have missed the event; they waited with bated breath for the stern lips to open.

When he spoke it was with a smile, and it was afterwards said by many that the smile came as a benediction, by others that it was a satiric and sneering thing which belied the worded intent of his speech. But all were in agreement as to the greatness of the man. In more than two centuries, the students of history said, there had not been a greater in American public life and politics.

They had not expected him to speak as he did, simply and humbly in his sincerity, yet with a hint of the inward strength which had given him the mighty power he wielded.

"Citizens," he had said, "I come before you to tell you of what is unquestionably the greatest accomplishment of modern times. We have succeeded in harnessing some of the energy of the atom to turn the wheels of industry, to light our cities and purify the water we drink and the air we breathe. Many changes have preceded the accomplishment between the time of its inception and of its completion; more will follow. And you will agree, I am sure, that the trend of these changes has been and is toward the greatest betterment of the lives of the greatest number of our people. This new power, which will come to you plentifully and cheaply, is the thing which has brought about all of these changes, and it is a thing for which we are indebted to a man of whom little or nothing is known. The man of whom I speak discovered the basic principle that has been used in the de-

velopment, and in his efforts was so unfortunate as to meet with an accident which has made of him a life-long invalid—helpless and uncomplaining.

"This man's name is Gail Destinn. Probably not a hundred of you who are living today know who this man is, or care. Nevertheless, he is our greatest benefactor and we are honoring him by christening the new energy with his name. No longer will you hear of the Power Syndicate, but of Destinn Power, as the cooperative organization which has risen from the ashes of the old syndicate will be known by that name in the future. In addition to this, the Department of Finance has today conferred upon the inventor a life income of ten thousand credits a month. My only wish otherwise in furtherance of his welfare is that his lost health might be restored, so that he might take over the position now held by me as head of the great industry that will bear his name.

"That wish being impossible of fulfillment, I must carry on in the work. However—and I leave you with this thought—Gail Destinn must receive his full measure of reward, either in this world or elsewhere. Many of us in these days give little thought to the personal Deity whose name we take in vain, or to the after life that was so real an expectation to our remote ancestors. But, as surely as I stand here facing you, there *is* a Higher Power we do not understand and can never hope to approach. Whatever that Power is, it is something that takes the souls of men and lifts them to the heights or lets go and allows them to fall to the depths. And, it is to such a Power that I ask you to send prayers for the soul of Gail Destinn. Farewell, citizens, and may you prosper and gain happiness in the new order of things."

That was all, yet it left the hearers prey to emotions they had not experienced in their lifetimes—and uncertainties that confused them and left them to wonder as to the manner of man who had spoken.

WHEN darkness had come to the east coast cities, Scott Terris arrived in New York on one of the fast intercity liners. Several of the "800" globes already had drifted in from the positions they had maintained in the stratosphere for periods of time up to a half century. They lay, great dark mounds over against the skyline in the forests on the Jersey side, their outlines vast blurs in the hazy night and the many lighted ports gleaming tiny blue-white dots in the gloom.

But Scott gave little thought to the unusual beauty of the sight, nor heeded the spell of the night. His mind was too filled, and his heart, with memories of that moment of tempestuous passion when Norine Rosov had melted into his embrace as if she belonged there and would forever remain. The lawful companion of another man, yet belonging to him in that swift yielding as surely as was he certain that the flame had burned itself out in that one mad instant of hers and left her despising him and herself for the lapse.

He had power that would enable him to take anything save the one thing he wanted most of all. He had ridden roughshod and unfeeling over others who had stood in his way, but to do the one thing that might enable him to take her was impossible—unthinkable.

Possessed of the opportunity to make happiness possible for others, he was utterly helpless to provide it for himself.

But he would visit Destinn this very night; advise him in person of the success of the new energy and of the recognition he had been given. That much he could do for the poor devil, at least. He had not seen him in weeks and rather looked forward to the meeting, hoping yet fearing he might find Norine at the bedside. The sight of the girl, hating him as she did, would bring intense pain, but there would be pleasure in that pain . . . the chance to drink in her unattainable loveliness and to think . . . of what might have been . . .

Wilson beamed when he admitted him to the apartment that now was maintained solely for the comfort of Gail Destinn. The old fellow had become the proudest servitor of the upper level since his master came to be so eminent a personage.

"H'lo Wilson," Scott greeted him brusquely. "How's the patient?"

The old man's face fell. "Not so well, sir, I fear," he said.

"What! Why, Mowry has been reporting satisfactory progress."

"Yes sir, begging your pardon, sir," Wilson quavered, "But Miss Norine was here about two weeks ago and it seems she excited him unduly. He has been sinking ever since, the nurse tells me."

"Norine has not seen him in two weeks?"

"No sir. And it's odd, sir; she came frequently before."

"I know." Scott was filled with strange foreboding; come to think of it, he had had no reports from his agents on the girl in about that length of time. He stepped into the sickroom.

Gail lay there immobile and with eyes closed as when he had last seen him. Almost one would have thought that life had left the stricken body, so white was the man and so utterly inert.

The nurse warned him with a quick gesture. "He's sleeping, Mr. Terris," she said, "and must not be awakened. The least excitement would be certain to cause his death."

Scott looked down at the man whose once virile features were so pinched and still. Certainly his life hung by a thread. What if he were to awaken him and shout out his love for Norine? The nurse had said that any excitement. . . . And with the power that now was his no man would be the wiser . . . *she* could be silenced —the nurse . . . and there would be Norine. He'd take her, whether or no.

Great beads of cold perspiration stood out on his brow as the battle raged furiously within. The man was completely in his power—and the girl who had been his mate. So simple, the thing would be. He groaned in agony of spirit and breathed a silent plea for strength to that Power he had spoken of in the afternoon.

Turning then with sudden decision he beckoned the nurse into the corridor. "What's all this?" he hissed. "Tell me what's wrong." He trembled as with the ague from the stress of emotion that had torn him. But he had himself under control; his senses had returned.

The nurse paled. "It is not for me to say, sir," she whispered nervously.

"You know?" he snapped, eyeing her keenly.

"Y-yes, but I dare not tell. Please don't ask me to, sir."

"I command it!" Afraid of her job, just as in the old days, he realized. These damned ethics of the medical

profession, how they did hold on in spite of everything.

"You—you'll protect me with the registrar?"

"Of course," impatiently. "Out with it, nurse."

"It—it's Doctor Mowry. Oh, I shouldn't be telling you, but he is not all that he has been considered. In fact, he's been derated by the Medical Classification Board. And, his treatment has been all wrong. Oh, it's terrible, Mr. Terris—Destinn is dying, when he might well have been saved." The woman wrung her hands in agitation.

What was this? The great Mowry not what he had been cracked up to be! And here Scott had thought Gail was getting the best there was in attention, when actually he was being neglected. The devil take Mowry! Perhaps wrong in his first diagnosis; poor old Destinn might have been made well and strong—in proper hands.

He rushed to the library and bellowed hoarsely into the visiphone for the wave channel of the Medical Center. Doctor Travis and young Bedworth—the best there were—he'd have them all in consultation. Right here, in his own apartment, without delay!

A half hour later he hunched nerveless in his chair from the reaction. Yes, Travis would operate. It was a delicate adjustment, but there was every chance that Destinn would be restored to normal health and strength. A miracle, almost!

And to think he had been on the point of causing Gail's death! To have considered it even for a moment was horrible—horrible.

Scott shuddered.

CHAPTER X

Ultimatum

THE visiphone broke in on his thoughts with its shrill clamor. It was Warner Merkel. What could he be wanting at this hour?

"Sorry to bother you," the Police Chief apologized, "but you asked me to notify you immediately when Arthur Mason reported with his release. Mason is here, Mr. Terris."

Might as well see Mason at once. It would be something to occupy his mind while he awaited the report from Travis on the operation.

"Good," he returned. "Bring him right over, Merkel."

Excellent reports he had had on Mason. Most surprising of any of the cases of individual adaptation to extreme reverses which had come to his attention. A model prisoner, he had applied himself to his duties and to self-imposed studies with the enthusiasm of a schoolboy. Worked himself to the position of trusty; then covered himself with glory by saving the warden's life from that same young maniac whom McKay had hired to assassinate Scott. Actually broke the fellow's neck with his hands when he dragged him from the strangle hold he had on the warden. Stout fellow, Mason! He'd have to do something for him; perhaps he might give him a little the better in classification by attending to it personally.

Thirty pounds lighter and looking fifteen years younger, Arthur Mason came to him as a distinct surprise even when he fully considered his record. It was an astounding transformation.

"Any hard feelings, Mason?" he asked, when Merkel brought him in.

"None." The man faced him with sparkling eyes. "I have only thanks to give you, Terris, for what this thing has done for me and mine—and for millions of others."

"Your son, too?"

"Surest thing, you know. Fred wasn't worth a whoop in the job I wangled out of you for him in the Research Bureau. They classified him in the mechanical controls and he's making good; a foreman already. And, would you believe it, he has mated up with a wonderful girl and settled down. A little black-eyed thing who thinks he's a god and is as clever and pretty as she can be. They met me at headquarters when I came in. Imagine this, Terris; her father was a worthless scamp, one of those who never would work and always yelled his head off about conditions. A professional dissenter. Got mauled fierce in the early uprisings and finally went to work in the pneumatic tube service—best he could do. But the girl worked herself up out of it to the same sort of job Fred's first classification set him at. She came up and he down—to meet. And now they're working up together."

This was the sort of thing that renewed Scott's belief in the thing he had done. Sometimes he was aghast at the bloodshed and the privation of those first mad days, but a case like this brought new faith and a warm glow of satisfaction.

"That's great, Mason," he grinned. "And now, how about yourself? Where would you like to be classified?"

The man drew himself up proudly. "I'm willing to take my chance with the others," he averred. "Whatever classification the Board sees fit to give me is the one I want. And I'll make good, Terris."

Merkel smiled broadly and winked at Scott. Here was something with which to silence the objectors, and a man who could do it, if given the chance.

"We'll see, Arthur, we'll see," Scott said absently. The call of the visiphone had rung out and he reached quickly for the lever. Must be Travis, to tell him of Gail's chances.

But the face that appeared in the disc was not the doctor's. It came as a shock, that countenance imaged there a distorted and fear-ridden thing. Carpenter, President Owen's private secretary, it was.

"You!" Scott gasped, "Speak up, man, what is it?"

"The President, Mr. Terris! He's been killed, and the executive chambers are in ruin. Bombs, sir, from the air."

A brilliant flash then and a deafening roar as Carpenter's agonized face was blasted from the disc. The visiphone went dead.

"I KNEW it!" Scott shouted. "Bound to happen, sooner or later. Get me some volunteers, Merkel—quick! Crew for my yacht." He was half out of his robe and reaching for his khaki coat in quick energy.

"Right!" Chief Merkel put in an emergency call for headquarters, "But, Terris, good Lord! This is impossible—what the devil is it?"

"Crawford, as sure as you were born. My men lost track of him two months ago in Cannes. I've been suspicious ever since. But I hardly expected it this soon."

"But he had little means. What could he do?"

"Pirates, man. Plenty of them in the mountain fastnesses of Asia. Don't you see? He promised them the privilege of looting our cities if they'd help him take his old place here. Hell, it's as plain as day to me—but

the President! I hadn't counted on that . . . somehow."

Merkel was speaking rapidly to his local captain, who nodded in quick understanding. "Need a pilot?" he asked, turning to Scott.

"Yes. I'll have other duties," grimly. "A good one, Merks, and three engineers."

"I can pilot your yacht," Mason broke in eagerly.

"You!" Scott saw he was white with excitement.

"Sure, I had my own license as a private owner. And, Terris, I hate to think of Matt getting away with this."

"Good stuff! Let's go."

"Only the engineers, then?" Merkel asked, holding his connection.

"Yes. Have 'em on the west landing stage, midtown, in fifteen minutes," Terris flung back from the doorway.

And then he was gone, Mason following on his heels. Warner Merkel stared after them, thinking of his conversation with Ralph Warren that afternoon. It all fitted in to perfection—excepting the girl of the lower levels. The weakness of Iron Terris had not yet come to light; perhaps it never would.

The calamitous tidings were already on the newscasts when the two reached the pneumatic tube and were whirled rapidly downtown. Every tongue babbled of the incredible thing Crawford had done. Aligned himself with the cutthroats of the Himalayas, he had; bringing them to prey upon the defenseless cities of America. And murdered Owens in his bed first thing. Destroyed three of the new energy towers, leaving Washington short of power; then shot skyward in the pirate vessel and calmly cut in on the visiphone system, laying down the law to the people of United North America.

Mason turned meaning eyes to Scott as a girl in the aisle of the car repeated the story of the ultimatum issued by Crawford. Good thing the Dictator was unrecognized by his fellow-passengers. There would have been a delay—possibly worse.

Crawford demanded that Terris be given up to him as the price of immunity from further attacks, the girl said. He was giving to the American people exactly one hour in which to comply with his demand and was awaiting official visiphone reply. Failing in this, they were to be subjected to a murderous bombardment of all eastern cities. The destruction of the new energy towers would leave them in utter darkness and without means of transportation while the slaughter went on. He was certain, however, that the American people were far too intelligent to refuse his demand. He fully expected them to have this tyrant Terris under guard on the roof surface of Washington well within the prescribed time. And he, Crawford, would then return to the position from which he had been ousted and they, the people, would benefit by his restoration of conditions to their former desirable state.

"Nice program," Scott muttered, "for *him*. If he were able to carry it out."

But the crowded car was in an uproar when they alighted at the station beneath the midtown stage. Opinion was divided and feeling ran high. Where was Terris anyway? He would be able to do something. Wasn't it better to give him up and return to the old ways than be murdered in their beds and in darkness? Mighty tough though to give up what some of them had gained. Terris was a wizard; he had the right idea of the way to run things. But he was a hard master. Enriched himself, too, while he was about this reorganization of the country. Vehemently, the lie was given to that last remark and a fight had started when the car doors were opened.

They were out then, on the great stage, he and Mason. Scott ran swiftly to where the slim tapered cylinder which was his yacht rested in its cradle.

"I'll see him in an hour, all right," he grated, jerking open the steel door, "But he'll not see me, Arthur. Give him a chance to let loose those devils in our cities, and to upset the work of the past eleven weeks? I guess not!"

"You have weapons?" Mason inquired, when they were in the control room, "Weapons of sufficient power?"

"And then some. Look here!"

Scott uncovered a gleaming cylinder that poked its nose through the vessel's bow after the fashion of one of the ancient needle guns of the largest calibre.

The engineers trooped in then, interrupting, and Scott directed them aft. Immediately the rising whine of the main motors apprised him of their activity in the engine room. Destinn Power, radiated to the sky lanes for regular traffic requirements, was being converted to their own uses aboard. In a moment the anti-gravity force lightened the vessel and she rocked gently as she drifted from her berth. Mason grinned delightedly as he turned her nose skyward.

THE metamorphosed financier proved himself an excellent pilot and a cheerful shipmate. He pushed the vessel to her utmost in following the radio beacon lane to Washington, while Scott busied himself with the ray projector he had developed during his mysterious visits to New York. The reaction tubes astern throbbed steadily under the continuous emission of their repelling rays.

"How does that weapon work?" Mason asked.

"It's a most amazing thing, Arthur, and I discovered it quite by accident. Curiously, it utilizes the new energy, though the radiations have no power in themselves of destroying matter at any distance. The frequency is too great, and must be converted before we can even use it for power. But I stumbled on a principle that derives from it a most destructive force. It's simple, too. An energy center is at work in the tube, and its radiations are projected along a carrier beam that is of ultra-violet frequency and so adjusted as to heterodyne the Destinn wave. A harmonic of the resulting beat frequency is in the infra-red range at the most intense peak, and we thus have the heat ray; a tremendous blast that will fuse the hardest metals instantly."

"Oh, I see." Arthur Mason laughed. "For all the camouflage of big words," he said, "I take it the thing is a heat ray. That ought to be enough for me to absorb at one sitting."

"There'll be plenty for the fellow at the business end of the ray to absorb, you can bet." Scott opened the breech of the weapon and withdrew the secondary screen from a fully developed energy center, slamming the block home vigorously to confine it.

He saw Mason pale at sight of the weirdly roaring thing whose emanations set every metallic object in the control room in shrieking vibration in the brief instant of exposure. But his hands were as steady at their tasks as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Scott marveled anew at the change in the man, and at his composure in the face of the thing they had set out to do.

"You realize what this trip means, don't you, Mason?" he said, after regarding him for a moment. "You know we are going out to kill your old buddy—unless he should get us first."

"Sure, I know." Mason stared out through the forward port into the blackness. "It doesn't bother me, either, Scott. Strange thing about it is that I've practically no feeling in the matter personally. I used to eat out of his hand—before. Thought he was my best friend and I his. But something has come over me to change all that; it is as if he were a total stranger, an enemy. He is an enemy, Scott—the worst the country has ever had. And if he gets us before we get him (which he won't) it will be an unthinkable disaster. Not for ourselves; we'd be out of it, but think what would happen down there. We've *got* to get him, Terris."

"Glad you feel that way."

From the tone of Mason's voice and the glitter in his eye, Scott knew well that he had a pilot in whom he could trust.

CHAPTER XI

Nemesis

"IT beats me how he got them to come over here, at that," Mason remarked, when they were within a few miles of their goal.

"Yes, though undoubtedly he promised them the world with a fence around it. And fuel for their return. They'll be heavily armed, too. These pirates have been the terror of the skylanes over there ever since the war and have taken billions in loot from the trade vessels. Thousands of lives have been lost in the many attempts to wipe out their strongholds. Their ships, you know, are converted cruisers of 2212 and they have plenty of the old armament."

"Yes. Pity our cities haven't some sort of protection."

"Oh, it was never necessary over here. The disarmament league would have allowed us such defenses as they did overseas, if we needed them. But, depending on rocket propulsion as they must, none of these pirate ships would dare make the crossing with no hope of refueling; that's why we've always been safe. But with Crawford promising them a free hand, it's different."

"Promises he couldn't keep if they did succeed," Mason grunted. "The people would never give you up to him, and, even without this ship you've armed, we would drive them out eventually."

"Eventually is right. They'd smear several of our cities over the map in the meantime, though. We mustn't let them do it, Arthur."

Lightning flashes ahead revealed suddenly a bank of low-flung storm clouds and the wind-whipped waters of the Potomac below. Mason turned the vessel's nose sharply upward. "We *won't* let 'em, Scott," he grated. "You do the shooting and I'll run circles around 'em with this ship." He signalled the engine room for full speed ahead.

Scott glanced at the chronometer. It lacked but seven minutes of Crawford's hour. He cut the visiphone in on the open wave band.

The storm raged furiously beneath them as they climbed higher, and the yacht bumped heavily in air-pockets created by the disturbance below. It was a wild night Crawford had chosen for the attack.

Five minutes! Scott pressed the release of the heat ray to try out his weapon. The projector tube sang spitefully clamorous and he saw the swift stabbing pencil of green that marked the path of the ray out there in the night. A harmonic in that portion of the spectrum made the beam visible. Satisfied, he peered through the gloom in the direction of the capital city.

And then the visiphone spoke. No image was pictured in the disc but a familiar voice snarled from the sound mechanism. Crawford! He was using only the voice transmitter on the pirate ship.

"THREE minutes left!" the voice snarled, "Only three minutes in which to save yourselves. I am directly above the northeast landing stage, awaiting the appearance of the upstart Terris. If he's not there on the minute, I keep my word."

"He's down there already," Scott shouted, "Hop to it, Arthur!"

The altimeter showed twelve thousand feet, and the light spot on the chart indicated their position as directly over the city. But the tossing storm clouds hid its vast area from view. There was nothing for it but to make the dive and have it out with the pirate vessel in the midst of the tempest.

"Right-o," Mason sang out cheerily. And he put down the nose of the little ship in a power dive that carried them earthward at terrific speed.

They were in the thick of it then, flying utterly blind, the yacht buffeted and tossed so violently that the great motors aft groaned in lurching waves of sound from the gyroscopic effect. A tremendous flash lighted the control room in a glare that left them blinking and sightless as the very universe crashed in a maelstrom of ear-splitting sound. It was as if they were caught helpless in the very maw of a titanic disrupting force that caved in the sides of the vessel upon them and drove their breath from their lungs in explosive blasts. The air in the control room was charged to such intensity that miniature repetitions of the lightning flash chased from deck to deck and died sputtering in the steel framework of the hull.

And then they were through; the great roof surface of the capital city lay beneath them, the edges of its towering cliffs and the landing stages lighted with the neon glow that marked them for the ships of the air. Hovering over there above the northeast stage was a huge bellied monster with a multitude of topside ports brightly lighted. It was the pirate vessel, as large as one of the transoceanic trade ships, and capable of carrying no less than three thousand fighters.

Mason pulled the little yacht out of the dive with consummate skill, his eyes popping and the veins in his temples swelled to bursting with the effort it cost him. They skimmed the roof surface and zoomed up once more in the pelting rain to get the advantage of altitude.

They had not been observed and Mason nosed the ship down to give Scott opportunity of getting the pirate vessel on his sights.

Crawford's voice snarled once more in the visiphone. "Time's up!" it announced.

On the second word a vast explosion tore away the

great landing stage underneath and left a gaping opening that extended down through at least five of the upper levels. Huge girders and twisted sections of steel plate crashed down again to add to the destruction, and Scott had a momentary glimpse of bodies, ant-like and still, huddled in grotesque piles where the sun-glow of the interior filtered through the wreckage.

He pressed the release of the ray and a furrow of dazzling white cut across the stern of the pirate ship. Huge blobs of molten steel sloughed away and fell sputtering to the roof surface, which sagged and caved in under the incandescent masses.

"Hey!" Scott yelled, "This won't do. We'll have to get 'em out from over the city or we'll do as much damage down there as to them."

His words were drowned out by a terrific thunderclap that came simultaneously with a lightning flash which struck the roof and spread weblike over the surface in tiny rivulets of light that died out as they were grounded in the steel structure.

The pirate vessel lurched heavily from the sudden loss of weight astern. She canted nose down, then leveled off and sped across the city to drop a second bomb.

"Probably mistook your first shot for lightning," Mason gloated. "They haven't sighted us."

"Looks that way. But how the devil will we get them out in the open?" Scott's finger tensed on the trigger of his projector, yet he dared not pull it again. The weight of that enormous vessel crashing below would take more terrible toll than a dozen of their bombs.

And then the pirate ship turned sharply upward and hurtled off into the night. A sustained lightning flash revealed her dark bulk speeding off over the river where a second large ship drifted lazily toward the city.

"Good Lord!" Mason gasped. "The night liner from Moscow. They'll get her sure."

Quick as a flash he was after them, and Scott sent forth the heat ray in repeated spurts that showed dazzling and dripping punctures of the pirate's hull where they contacted. But he had not reached a vital spot, for the ship of death sped on toward the ill-fated liner. Her nose spouted fire, again and again, and swift-flying light-pencils darted forth to bury themselves in the curving bow of the unarmed and unprotected vessel.

"What needle guns!" Scott groaned. "Must be three inch tubes, at least. They're done for, poor devils."

The bow of the liner mushroomed in brilliant pyrotechnics now, lighting the scene with the intensity of a huge magnesium flare. A moment the great hulk hesitated, staggering, then commenced her swift wabbling dive to the river. Disintegrating before their eyes, her interior a roaring furnace, she spewed forth her passengers and crew in masses of struggling and screaming humans who hurled themselves to their death in the dark waters a half mile below rather than to face the more horrible destruction of the searing energy.

Cursing, Mason drove in toward the pirate, and the heat ray traced a wandering, deep-boring pattern on her side as Scott searched for her vitals.

A FLASHING shape rose up from the plunging liner, darting straight for the nose of the pirate.

"The captain's yacht!" Scott exclaimed. "Can he be armed?" He withheld his fire as the slim shape whizzed across his sights.

"Armed? It isn't permitted," Mason grunted sarcastically. "Watch him, Scott! What in the—"

There were flashes of the pirate's big needle guns, but that tiny flitting yacht drove in unmindful of their thunderous crackling. One of the energy needles, driving down from above, carried away a section of the hull amidships and the gnat-like attacker reeled drunkenly from its course. But, doggedly persistent in his mad purpose, the captain wrenched his little vessel into the line of fire once more and flung it headlong at his monstrous enemy.

Driven nose on at full speed, the slender steel yacht buried half its length in the control room of the pirate, smashing observation ports and tearing hull plates in the magnificent attempt of the captain to wreak some measure of vengeance for the thing that had been done.

"There's a man!" Scott yelled. "Killed himself trying to cripple them. Probably did it, too."

"No—look! They're under control." Mason swung the yacht over and into a swift spiral as the pirate turned with suddenly flaring searchlights.

In the dark waters below, the liner was settling to her last berth, a plunging mutilated monster that vanished in the steaming geyser which rose to mark the spot. And, above them in the wreckage of the tiny ship which clung welded to the pirate, her captain lay a formless pulp, his gallant life crushed out in that vain attempt to get at the murderers of those who had trusted their lives to him.

A roaring light-pencil flashed by and Mason was flung forward as the vessel careened violently into the air-pocket that followed in its wake. But he clung to the controls and brought the ship over in a loop to swing in toward the monster once more.

"Not too close," Scott warned him. "I'm trying for the magazine."

The pirate had located them now and was maneuvering to get them in range of her needle guns. As if in shame before the demonstration of man-made power and ferocity below, the storm was scudding off before the wind. The lightning flashes at the horizon seemed but weak imitation of the stabbing flares that spurted from the great ship where Matt Crawford was making his last stand.

But Mason was quick as thought at the controls and the little ship fluttered and dodged in the storm of energy like a thing alive. Clinging to the projector pedestal, Scott kept his finger on the ray release as he bored relentlessly into the pirate.

A huge splash of molten metal came slithering down from the belly of the big ship and washed across the ports before his eyes, sending glass splinters flying, as the windows burst in under the intense heat. A river of the stuff washed in and spattered, the odor of scorched flesh rising in the suddenly stifling air of the control room as both Mason and he were seared.

But ever the green ray bored deeper into the vast circling bulk above them, and Arthur Mason maneuvered the little ship like a veteran dog-fighter of the old days.

Scott yelled as a shining cylinder dropped from a knob-like protuberance on the under-side of the pirate vessel. Mason saw it in the same instant and yanked the yacht out from underneath as the bomb screamed past to burst in the river far beneath them and send a flaming waterspout reaching skyward.

But the green ray was bright on that protuberance now and Scott twisted rapidly at the sighting controls as he strove to hold it there. The knob glowed swiftly white and there came an explosion that lifted the great vessel like a toy and sent forth an eruption of liquid fire and hurtling wreckage that battered them down in its iron hail.

The universe was ablaze in a frightful blast that hammered at their eardrums like the crack of doom. A terrific jolt sent them reeling and clinging to the stanchions for support.

"We're hit, Scott!" Mason gasped. "Two of the motors are dead."

He was tugging at the controls then, pulling up the nose to gain altitude. The little vessel responded feebly with one third of normal power, groaning and shuddering as she climbed slowly to where the pirate hovered foundering. The great searchlights had flickered out and the needle guns ceased firing; the pirate, suddenly without power and with her midsection blown away, was poised for her last dive.

Scott switched on their own lights and they circled to the nose of the stricken vessel. Under the intense glare they could see a mass of men that huddled in the battered control room as the big ship went down by the stern.

"See if Crawford is there!" Mason hissed, following them down.

They drifted in closer until their ports were but a few feet from where those panic-stricken yellow devils crawled around and fought and scrambled to climb through to the outer surface of the hull in forlorn hope that they might swim away from the wreck when she hit the water.

His finger tensed on the ray release, Scott looked for Crawford. Faster and faster the big ship slipped down into the blackness. Some of those who had crawled out followed the example of the victims on the liner and cast themselves from the doomed ship. Others clung to the projecting girders and flapping sections of the torn hull, fighting off those of their fellows who coveted the points of vantage.

And then Scott saw Crawford; terrified, trembling, and with great beads of perspiration glistening on his forehead, the man stared directly at him. Seeing Terris, he fell to his knees and stretched forth his hands with palms outspread as if to ward off the ray he expected would come. But that avenging beam of green light was not forthcoming; Scott could not find it within himself to press the trigger.

Suddenly the black waters were very near and Mason leveled off to turn upward. But not before they had seen an evil yellow face that grimaced horribly as it was pressed close to Crawford's. The flash of a small needle gun, and a flare within the wreck that was quenched in bright bubbles as the waters closed in over all and it was over.

CHAPTER XII

Revelation

IN solemn ceremony Washington buried its dead while the whole world buzzed of this battle in the clouds and of the triumph of Iron Terris. That Arthur Mason had piloted the tiny ship, whose mysterious ray had shot the pirate down, was a nine-day wonder. And in many sections of Asia and Central Europe officialdom breathed easier in the knowledge that the most dangerous of the several pirate bands had been exterminated. Perhaps even they might expect aid from America's Dictator in making a similar end to those who still infested the mountains.

Vice-President Peterson had taken the oath of office and now was recognized as President. His succession to the title in replacement of the murdered Owens was hailed with scarcely a flutter of excitement, for the world knew that Iron Terris remained at the helm and in that knowledge was serenely confident of what the immediate future held. Terris was a young man—not yet thirty-five—and many years of his firm and sagacious guidance might be expected to work miracles for United North America and the world at large.

But Scott would have none of the adulation they tried to force upon him, for well he remembered those first frenzied weeks so short a while back, when, in open rebellion and in secret plottings, in rioting mobs and in the more sinister attempts of the would-be assassins, they had worked against him. And only too well did he know that his power over them would wane with the first sign of softening or relaxation of his iron grip. He was worn and tired and most gladly would have welcomed a release and rest, but, knowing that he must carry on in order to prevent a return to the old ways, he held himself sternly aloof and unapproachable, a mysteriously inflexible personage that was the more strongly entrenched in the popular fancy.

Confidential advice had come to him from the Medical Center in New York that Gail Destinn was fully restored to his normal capabilities by the operation Travis had performed, and was now recuperating in Scott's own apartments. Forgetting all else, he hastened to the great city which sprawled in its steel-cased irregularity of outline along the Hudson River.

For some reason, he could not have explained, he had kept Arthur Mason with him. There was a quality in the man's new character he could not define; a quality that adapted him to some particular niche where he would be most valuable to society. He had not been able to determine the location of that niche as yet and was waiting for the inspiration that would come sooner or later. Together, they made the trip on one of the fast intercity liners.

GAIL DESTINN rose from his wheel-chair with alacrity when they were admitted to the sick room. He was thin and somewhat pale as yet, but the sparkle had returned to his eyes with the ability to use his body once more. The nurse, radiantly respectful, bowed herself from the room.

"Terris," Gail said, "This is a strange reunion—for me. In the past few days I have learned the news. All of it, I think. And I don't know what to say to you; how to express my gratitude."

"There's nothing to say, Destinn," Scott returned gruffly.

"Oh, yes there is—plenty. But I can't say it properly, except this: what you've done for the country speaks for itself; what you've done for me is a debt I may never repay. And the thing you accomplished with my discovery is a miracle far beyond the wildest dreams I had entertained. No one but yourself could have put the

thing across—I see it now. With my lack of prestige and influence, I was helpless. And the plans of the Council of Five would have gone for naught, even had they succeeded. Only in the way it was done and by the man who did it, could things have turned out as they have. I'm amazed, and—and humble, Terris. I—I—"

"That's enough, Gail. You're lying like a gentleman and entirely forgetting your part in the matter; the hard work and the vision in the research which made the whole thing possible." Scott gripped his hand in sudden appreciation of the friendship that showed there in the fine eyes under that flaming thatch. He needed friends now, friends who would stick close and who would understand. "And you'll be able to take over your new duties when?" he asked.

"You mean at the head of the Power Syndicate? I listened to the recordings of your speech, Terris. I—I can't do it. It's too big a thing."

"Nonsense! You can do anything you set out to do. And this job is yours, Gail; you are the one man for it. Not as head of the Power Syndicate—forget that old designation—but of Destinn Power."

Gail Destinn looked long and earnestly at the man they called Iron Terris. Perhaps what he said was true; perhaps he *could* hold down the responsible position at the head of the reorganized industry that bore his own name. One felt impelled to almost any impossible task and to its accomplishment by the determined look of that lean jaw and by the knowledge of the powerful backing his approval and support provided.

"Where's Norine?" Scott asked irrelevantly.

Destinn flushed hotly. "I—I don't know," he stammered.

"What! She hasn't come to you?"

"No."

There was a curiously sheepish look about young Destinn. Chagrin, that was it. He was abashed that his companion's loyalty and concern seemed to be under question. A prey to sudden fierce emotion, Scott rushed into the library and called for a visiphone connection with Police Headquarters.

"Merkel," he snapped, when the face of the Chief stared out in astonishment from the disc, "I want the girl Norine at once."

"But Terris, you said not to molest her or—"

"Never mind what I said—get her! I want her at my place here inside of fifteen minutes, or there'll be hell to pay."

"Yes sir. As you say."

Scott swore as he broke the connection. What in the devil was wrong with things anyway? Three weeks and more, it was now, since the girl had visited her stricken mate. What had happened at that time; had they quarreled? No, that couldn't be; she wouldn't desert a sick man, a man who had been part of her life—whom she had loved with all her intense nature. What then? His throat tightened in awful fear at the swift thought that harm might have come to her; she rose up before him in her vivid beauty, a vision to haunt him . . . memories came, that blasted and seared. . . .

NORINE arrived, cool and collected, with two of the red guards. Scott felt the hot blood pounding at his temples as his eyes drank in her loveliness, and his heart leaped as his fears for her safety were dispelled.

"You sent for me?" she asked without emotion.

"Yes, Norine, it's Gail. He's well again—completely cured."

"No!" Her lips whispered the word and her eyes widened with a sudden glad light that brought in its wake a radiant smile and a flush of happiness. "Oh, Scott, where is he? I can't believe it. He—he can walk again? And use those strong capable hands—everything?"

"Yes, yes—come and see." Forgetting his own pain in her joy, Scott led her to the room where Gail and Arthur Mason waited unknowing.

"Norine!"

"Gail!"

The girl stood staring as the man advanced a step, stretching his hands toward her. Then she was across the room in a single bound, clinging to his fingers, laughing and sobbing in the same breath.

"Oh, Gail, Gail. I'm so glad—and so sorry."

"Sorry?" Destinn's eyes misted.

"Yes—about my last visit."

"Oh, that was nothing. You see, I knew the reason."

"Gail!"

Scott and Mason were tiptoeing to the door.

"Wait!" Destinn called out, "Wait, Scott. I think Norine owes you an explanation."

"No, no." The girl was pleading, obviously distraught.

"Yes." Gail was sternly insistent.

"All right then." Norine drew herself erect, flushing painfully as she faced Scott. "I'll explain. I'm not Gail's companion, nor the companion of any other man. I've never mated, legally or otherwise. I'm free as the air, Scott Terris, and intend to remain so. I made Gail tell you what he did because I hated those of the purple and was afraid; afraid of you and of myself. I've always hated those of the upper levels and their memory will forever remain a festering sore in my breast. The unsavory reputation of your men amongst the women of the sub-levels must have been known even to you, Scott. And there was my mother." She hesitated.

"Your mother!" Scott caught his breath. Angry, she was positively the most enticing. . . .

"Yes, my mother. Twenty-five years ago a man who wore the purple broke her heart. The old, old story of a woman very much in love and a man who was too far above her station to marry. I am the natural child of this man. I don't know who he was, but I've hated him with every fibre of my being—I hate him now, and all his kind—"

"Norine!" Mason was advancing upon the girl, devouring her with eyes that held something of recognition, something of fear, and much of regret. "What was your mother's name, girl?"

"Rosov—I took it!" Norine stared wondering, her red lips trembling and her breast heaving with the stress of emotion.

"Norine Rosov!" Mason paled and his step faltered. "Norine! Great God, girl, I'm your father."

"You!" The girl recoiled, then flung herself sobbing into the nearest chair.

Scott made his way swiftly and silently from the room.

HIS mind awhirl, Scott wandered through the laboratory and climbed to his old haunt on the rooftop. A cool sweet breeze from the river fanned his heated

brow and the faint throb of the city's activity beneath lulled his turbulent senses as it always had done. He could think clearly here—and reason.

Arthur Mason's daughter! The thing was horrible to contemplate, in the thought of the wrecked life of the girl's mother and the undying hatred which had been implanted in Norine's heart. And yet, somehow, there had been an undertone of longing in her voice when she spoke so bitterly of the man who had loved and gone away; a hint of softening when the tremendous truth was brought home to her by Mason's admission. And Mason, he knew, was a changed man; he'd do everything in his power to make things up to the girl now. If only she would accept him.

And to think how she had fooled him about Gail and herself! In her hatred and mistrust of the men of the upper levels she had made Destinn a party to her little scheme, believing that Scott would not dare to take advantage in a situation of the kind that was pictured. And then he had taken that very advantage in a moment of madness and desire. No wonder she had turned from him in loathing and disgust!

They had quarreled about it too, she and Gail. Quite likely he had disapproved of her continued rebellion and had tried to argue her into a more charitable attitude. Good old Destinn; he had wanted to smooth things over and had failed.

It was no use. Norine was the high-spirited sort who would never unbend. She'd never forgive him for that moment of weakness—nor herself. With an infinite capacity for loving, she would steel herself against the possibility of again yielding to that power he knew had gripped her in that unforgettable moment in the laboratory.

And yet. . . .

"Scott!" a soft voice whispered out of the shadows.

His heart missed a beat—two beats. Norine's fragrant nearness set it pounding madly once more.

"Oh Scott," she said hurriedly, and the white oval of her face looked up at him from its frame of golden hair made more glorious by the moonlight, "I couldn't hold out down there; there were two of them you know. And Arthur Mason is a wonderful man; he has driven all the bitterness away and—and things are different."

"Norine—you've forgiven him after all these years of hating?" Scott marveled. Anything might happen if this were true.

"Yes," in an agitated whisper, "And Scott, I want you to know about Gail. I've loved him—as a sister. But never . . . you must understand that I was afraid . . ."

"I know." Scott roused suddenly from his wondering daze.

She was in his arms then, miraculously, and the power of a great love swept down over them to carry them away from the world and from all thought of the past in its overwhelming might.

No words were spoken; none was necessary in that merging of two souls whom the vagaries of life had kept too long apart. Understanding came, and peace—the peace of that mighty yet tender passion that was to hold with them an undying force to the end of time.

Power! And love.

THE END

What Do You Know?

READERS of AMAZING STORIES have frequently commented upon the fact that there is more actual knowledge to be gained through reading its pages than from many a text-book. Moreover, most of the stories are written in a popular vein, making it possible for anyone to grasp important facts.

The questions which we give below are all answered on the pages as listed at the end of the questions. Please see if you can answer the questions without looking for the answer, and see how well you check up on your general knowledge of science.

1. What is the meaning of the "mote and beam" quotation in reference to seeing the faults of your neighbor? (See page 871.)
2. What makes a sunbeam visible in a darkened room? (See page 871.)
3. How can it be shown experimentally? (See page 871.)
4. Can liquids form "motes"? (See page 871.)
5. What are clouds composed of? (See page 871.)
6. What two methods of generating atomic power can be suggested? (See page 878.)
7. What peculiarity of its atmosphere is characteristic of Venus? (See page 901.)
8. What limitation of knowledge is possible to be attributed to the inhabitants of Venus? (See page 901.)
9. Is Venus supposed to have a night and day in alternation? (See page 901.)
10. What would be the effect on audibility if the pitch of a siren were raised sufficiently? (See page 914.)
11. Can time be taken as a coordinate? (See page 954.)
12. How would you make a serviceable electro-magnet to "play with"? (See page 954.)
13. Is iron, of which so few mines exist, a plentiful element on the earth? (See page 955.)
14. What is the composition of one class of meteorites? (See page 955.)
15. Does the above give any suggestions for a theory of the polarity of the earth? (See page 955.)
16. Can you distinguish between the internal energy of atoms and the energy of masses? (See page 958.)
17. What is a misogynist? (See page 959.)

IT is natural that a people completely and terribly vanquished by a ruthless adversary should bring forth generations highly fearful of possible further attacks by that enemy. But generally, in all the mass of fear-stricken humans, it is inevitable that at least one leader should arise as an avenging angel. Driven by despair and in panic ever deeper into the earth, seemingly the only safe refuge, the hero of this story, fanatically certain of his ultimate success, sets forth through corridor after corridor to the surface. What he accomplishes, and how, is vividly set forth in this interesting science fiction novelette.

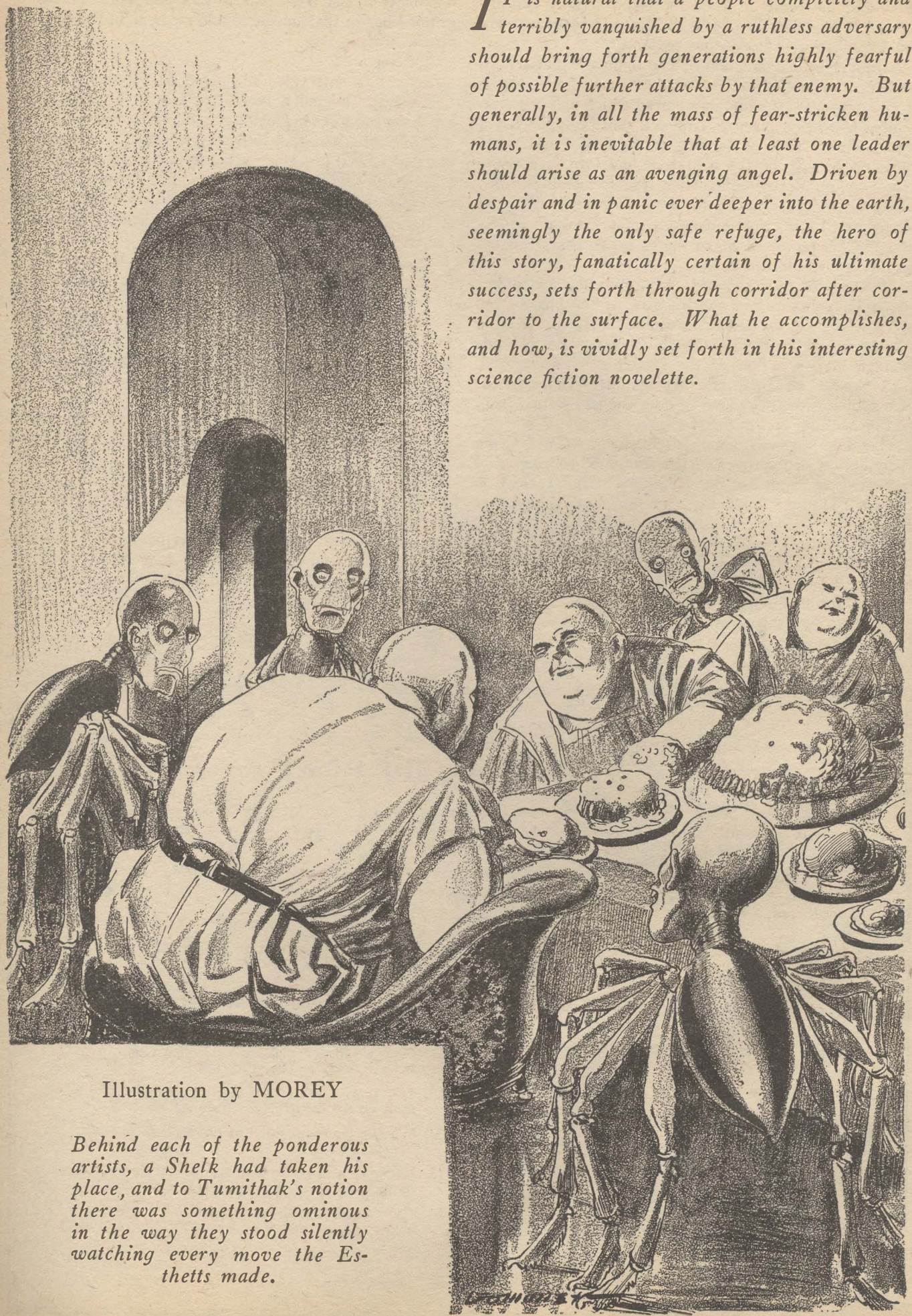


Illustration by MOREY

Behind each of the ponderous artists, a Shelk had taken his place, and to Tumithak's notion there was something ominous in the way they stood silently watching every move the Esthetts made.

Tumithak of the Corridors

By Charles R. Tanner

Foreword

IT is only within the last few years that archeological science has reached a point where we may begin to appreciate the astonishing advances in science that our ancestors had achieved before the Great Invasion. Excavations in the ruins of London and New York have been especially prolific in yielding knowledge of the life that those ancestors led. That they possessed the secret of flying, and a knowledge of chemistry and electricity far beyond ours is now certain; and there is even some evidence that they surpassed us in medicine and some of the arts. Taking their civilization as a whole, it is quite doubtful if we have even yet surpassed them in general knowledge.

Until the time of the Invasion, their discoveries of the secrets of Nature seem to have been made steadily in regular geometric progression, and we have good cause to believe that it was the people of earth who first solved the secret of interplanetary flight. The many romances that have been written by novelists dealing with this time, testify to the interest which we of today take in the history of what we call the Golden Age.

But the present story deals neither with the days of the Invasion, nor with life as it was in the Golden Age before it. It tells, instead, of the life of that semi-mythical, semi-historical character, Tumithak of Loor, who, legend tells us, was the first man to rebel against the savage shelks. Although innumerable facts are still lacking, recent investigations in the Pits and Corridors have thrown much light on what was obscure in this hero's life. That he really lived and fought is now certain to be true; that he accomplished the miracles accredited to him by legend is just as certain to be untrue.

We can feel sure, for instance, that he never lived for the two hundred and fifty years that are ascribed to him; that his wonderful strength and imperviousness to the rays of the shelks are mythical, as are doubtless the stories of his destruction of the six cities.

But our knowledge of his life increases as our credibility in the legends decreases, and the time has come when we can grasp dimly, but with a more rational viewpoint, the truth about his deeds. So, in this tale, the author makes an attempt to rationalize, to place properly in its historical setting, the early life of a great hero who dared to strike boldly for Mankind, in the days when the Beasts of Venus held all the earth in thrall. . . .

CHAPTER I

The Boy and the Book

AS far as eye could see extended the long somber corridor. Fifteen feet high and as many wide it ran on and on, its brown, glassy walls presenting an unvarying sameness. At intervals along the center line of the ceiling large glowing lights appeared, flat plates of cool white luminescence that had shone without attention for centuries. At intervals equally frequent, were deep-cut doors, draped with a rough burlap-like cloth, their sills worn down by the passing of generations of feet. Nowhere was the monotony of the scene broken unless it were in some places, where the corridor was crossed by another of equal simplicity.

The passage was by no means deserted. Here and there, throughout its length, scattered figures appeared—men, for the most part blue-eyed and red-haired and dressed in rough burlap tunics that were gathered at the waist by wide, pocketed belts with enormous buckles. A few women were also in evidence, differing from the men in the length of their hair and tunics. All moved with a furtive slinking air, for though it was many years since the Terror had been seen, the habits of a hundred generations were not easily thrown off. And so the hall, its frequenters, their clothes and even their habits combined to complete the somber monotone.

From somewhere far below this corridor came the steady beat and throb of some gigantic machine, a beat that continued unceasingly and was so much a part of the life of these people that it was only with difficulty that they could be brought to notice it at all. Yet its beat bore down on them, penetrated their minds, and, with its steady rhythm, affected all that they did.

One part of the hall seemed to be more populous than any other. The lights here glowed brighter, the cloths that covered the doorways were cleaner and newer, and many more people appeared. Sneaking in and out of the doorways they went, for all the world like rabbits engaged in some big business enterprise.

Out of one of the side doorways, a boy and girl appeared. About fourteen years of age, they were exceptionally tall for children, apparently having already reached their full growth, though their immaturity was evident. They, too, like their elders, were blue-eyed and red-haired, a complexion due to the eternal lack of sunshine and lifelong exposure to the rays of the corridor

lights. There was a certain boldness and quickness about them that caused many of the folk of the corridor to frown disapprovingly as they passed. One could see that these older ones felt that the younger generation was fast riding to destruction. Certainly, sooner or later, this boldness and loudness would bring down the Terror from the Surface.

But sublimely indifferent to the disapproval that was so in evidence around them, the two youngsters continued upon their way. They turned from the main corridor into one less brilliantly lighted, and after traversing it for nearly a mile, turned into another. The hall in which they now found themselves was narrow and inclined upward at a decided angle. It was entirely deserted and the thick dust and neglected condition of the lights showed that it was long since men had lived here. The many doorways were without the draped curtains that concealed the interior of the inhabited apartments in the larger corridors; but many of the doorways were almost entirely covered with draperies of cobwebs covered with dust. The girl drew closer to the boy as they continued up the passage; but aside from this she showed no sign of fear. After some time the passageway grew steeper, and at last ended in a cul-de-sac. The two seated themselves in the rubble that littered the floor and presently began to talk in a low tone.

"It must have been years since men have come here," said the girl, softly. "Perhaps we will find something of great value that was left here when men deserted this corridor."

"I think Tumithak is too hopeful, when he tells us of possible treasures in these halls," answered the boy. "Surely there have been men in these halls, searching as we are, since they were abandoned."

"Tumithak should be here by now," the girl said, after a while. "Do you think he will come?" Her eyes strove vainly to pierce the gloom down the hallway.

"Why, of course, he will come, Thupra," said her companion. "Has Tumithak ever failed to meet us as he promised?"

"But to come here, alone!" protested Thupra. "I should die of fright, Nikadur, if you weren't here."

"There isn't really any danger here," he said. "The men of Yakra could never enter these halls without passing through the main corridor. And many, many years have passed since Loor has seen a shelk."

"Grandfather Koniak once saw a shelk," reminded Thupra.

"Yes, but not here in Loor. He saw it in Yakra, years ago, when he fought the Yakrans as a young man. Remember, the Loorians were successful in their campaign against the Yakrans and drove them out of their city and into the corridors beyond. And then suddenly there was flame and terror, and a band of shelks appeared. Grandfather Koniak saw but one, and that one almost caught him before he escaped." Nikadur smiled. "It is a wonderful tale, but I think we have only Grandfather Koniak's word for it."

"But really, Nikadur—" the girl was beginning, when she was interrupted by a rustling noise from one of the web-hung doorways. Like a flash, boy and girl both leapt to their feet and sped in panic down the passage without so much as a single glance backward, totally unaware of the youth who had stepped from the doorway and who was now leaning against the wall, watching their flight with a cynical smile on his face.

At a glance, this youth seemed not unlike the others who lived in the corridors. The same red hair and clear translucent skin, the same rough tunic and enormous belt characterized this lad as it did all the others of Loor. But the discerning eye would have noticed in the immense brow, the narrow, hooked nose and the keen eyes, a promise of the greatness that was to some day be his.

THE boy watched his fleeing friends for a moment and then gave a low bird-like whistle. Thupra stopped suddenly and turned around, and then, seeing the newcomer, called to Nikadur. The boy stopped his flight, too, and together they returned, rather shamefaced, to the end of the passage.

"You frightened us, Tumithak," said the girl, reproachfully. "What in the world were you doing in that room? Weren't you afraid to go in there alone?"

"Nothing is in there to hurt me," answered Tumithak, loftily. "Often and often I have browsed around through these corridors and apartments and never yet have I seen any living thing, save the spiders and the bats. I was seeking for forgotten things," he went on, and his eyes grew suddenly brighter. "And look! I have found a book!" And, reaching into the bosom of his tunic, he drew forth his prize and exhibited it proudly to the others.

"This is an *old* book," he said. "See?"

It certainly was an old book. The cover was gone, more than half the leaves were missing, and the thin metal sheets of which the leaves were composed were even beginning to oxidize on the edges. Certainly, this book had been lying forgotten for centuries.

Nikadur and Thupra looked at it in awe, the awe that an illiterate person naturally holds for all the mysteries of the magic black marks that transmit thoughts. But Tumithak could read. He was the son of Tumlook, one of the food men, the men who held the secret of preparing the synthetic food that these people lived on, and these food men, as well as the doctors and the light and power men, retained many of the secrets of the wisdom of their ancestors. Foremost among these secrets was the very necessary art of reading; and as Tumithak was intended to follow in his father's footsteps, Tumlook had early trained him in this wonderful art.

So, after the two had looked at the book and held it in their hands, and wondered, they beseeched Tumithak to read it to them. Often, they had listened in wide-eyed wonder as he read to them from some of the rare works that the food men owned, and they never wasted a chance to watch the apparently mystifying process of changing the queer marks on the metal sheets into sounds and sentences.

Tumithak smiled at their importuning, and then, because secretly he was as anxious as they to know what the long-forgotten script contained, he motioned them to be seated on the floor beside him, and opening the book, began to read:

"The manuscript of Davon Starros; written at Pitmouth, Sol 22nd, in the year of the Invasion, 161, or in the old style—A. D. 3218."

Tumithak paused.

"That *is* an old book," whispered Nikadur in an awed voice, and Tumithak nodded.

"Nearly two thousand years!" he answered. "I wonder what the figures A. D. 3218 stand for."

He puzzled over the book for a moment and then resumed his reading.

"I am an old man, in these latter days, and to one who can remember the day when men still dared to fight, now and then, for liberty, it is indeed a bitter thing to see how the race has fallen.

"There is growing up among men in these days a hopeless superstition to the effect that man can never conquer, and must never attempt to even battle with the shelks, and it is to combat this superstition that the author here writes the story of the conquest of earth, in the hope that at some future time, a man will arise who will have the courage to face the conquerors of Man and again do battle. In the hope that this man will appear and that he may know the creatures against whom he fights, this story is written.

"The scientists who tell of the days before the Invasion, inform us that man was once little more than a beast. Through thousands of years he gradually worked his way upward to civilization, learning the arts of living, until he conquered all the world for his own.

"He learned the secret of producing food from the very elements themselves, he learned the secret of imitating the life-giving light of the sun, his great airships sped through the atmosphere as easily as his watercraft sped through the seas. Wonderful, disintegrating rays dissolved the hills that stood in his way, and as a result, long canals brought water from the ocean to inaccessible deserts, making them blossom like earth's most fertile regions. From pole to pole, man's mighty cities grew, and from pole to pole man was supreme.

"For thousands of years, men quarreled among themselves, and great wars tore the earth, until at last their civilization reached a point where these wars ceased. A great era of peace settled down upon the earth, sea and land alike were conquered by man, and he began to look out to the other worlds that swung about the sun, wondering if these, too, might not be conquered.

"It was many centuries before they learned enough to attempt a journey into the depths of space. A way had to be found to avoid the countless meteors that filled the paths between the planets. A way had to be found to insulate against the deadly cosmic rays. It seemed that no sooner was one difficulty overcome than another arose to take its place. But one after another the difficulties in the way of interplanetary flight disappeared and at last the day came when a mighty vessel, hundreds of feet long, lay ready to leap into space to explore the other worlds."

Tumithak again paused in his reading.

"It must be a wonderful secret," he said. "I seem to be reading words, but I do not know what they mean. Some one is going somewhere, but that's about all I can make of it. Shall I go on?"

"Yes! Yes!" they cried; so he continued:

"It was under the command of a man named Henric Sudiven; and, of all the great company that manned it, he only returned to the world of men to tell of the terrible adventures that they met with on the planet Venus, the world to which they traveled.

"The trip to Venus was a highly successful one, and quite uneventful. Week after week passed, while the evening star, as men called it, grew ever brighter and larger. The ship worked perfectly, and though the journey was a long one to those who were used to crossing an ocean in a single night, the time did not hang heavy on their hands. The day came when they sailed over the low rolling plains and broad valleys of Venus, under the thick mantle of clouds that forever hides the surface of that planet from the sun, and marveled at the great cities and works of civilization that were in evidence everywhere.

"After hovering over a great city for some time, they landed and were welcomed by the strange, intelligent creatures that ruled over Venus, the same creatures that we know today by the name of shelks. The shelks thought them demi-gods and would have worshiped them; but Sudiven and his companions, true products of earth's noblest culture, scorned to dissemble; and when they had learned the language of the shelks, told them quite truthfully just who they were and from whence they came.

"The astonishment of the shelks knew no bounds. They were skilled far more than men in mechanical science; their knowledge of electricity and chemistry was quite as great; but astronomy and its kindred sciences were totally unknown to them. Imprisoned as they were under the eternal canopy of clouds that hides forever the sight of outer space, they had never dreamed of other worlds than the one they knew; and it was only with difficulty that they were at last persuaded that Sudiven's story was true.

"But, once convinced, the attitude of the shelks underwent a decided change. No longer were they deferential and friendly. They suspected that man had come only to conquer them and they determined to beat him at his own game. There was a certain lack of the more humane feelings in the make-up of the shelks, and they were quite unable to conceive of a friendly visit from strangers of another world.

"The Tellurians soon found themselves locked up in a great metal tower, many miles from their space flier. In a moment of carelessness, one of Sudiven's companions had let drop the remark that this flier was the only one yet built upon the earth, and the shelks decided to take advantage of this fact, to begin at once the conquest of earth.

"They took possession at once of the Tellurians' vessel, and with that unity of purpose that is so characteristic of the shelks and so lacking in man, began at once the construction of a vast number of similar machines. All over the planet, the great machine-shops hummed and clattered with the noise of the work; and while the earth awaited the triumphal return of her explorers, the day of her doom drew nearer and nearer.

"But Sudiven and the other Tellurians, locked up in their tower, had not given up to despair. Time after time, they attempted to escape, and there is no doubt but that the shelks would have slain them to a man, had they not hoped to extract further knowledge from them before they killed them. For once the shelks were in error; they should have slain the Tellurians, every one; for about a week before the date set for the departure of the shelks' great fleet of machines, Sudiven and about a dozen of his companions managed to escape.

"At terrific risk they made their way across the country to the place where their space car lay. An idea can be had of the dangers of the journey when one realizes that on Venus, that is, on the inhabited side, it is always day. There was no concealing night to enable the Tellurians to travel without hope of discovery. But at last they came upon their car, guarded only by a few un-

armed shelks. The battle that ensued is one that should go down in man's history, to inspire him in all the ages to come. When it was over the shelks were all dead and only seven men were left to man the space-flier on its journey back to the earth.

"For weeks, the great bullet-shaped flier sped across the vast emptiness of space and at last landed upon the earth. Sudiven alone remained alive when it landed; the others had succumbed to some strange disease, a disease that had been given to them by the shelks in order to dispose of them.

"But Sudiven was alive and remained alive long enough to warn the world. Faced with this sudden terror, the world had little time for any but defensive measures. The construction of vast underground pits and caverns was begun at once, the intention being to construct great underground cities, in which man could hide himself and from which he could emerge to conquer his enemies at his leisure. But before they were well started, the shelks arrived and the war was on!

"Never, in the days when man warred with man, had anyone dreamed of a war like this. The shelks had arrived by the millions; it was estimated that fully two hundred thousand space cars took part in the invasion. For days man's defensive measures kept the shelks from gaining a landing place on the earth; they were forced to fly far above the surface, dropping their deadly gases and explosives where they could. From his subterranean halls, man sent up vast quantities of gases as deadly as those of the shelks, and their disintegrating rays sent hundreds of the space-cars into nothingness, killing off the shelks like flies. And from their fliers, the shelks dropped vast quantities of flaming chemicals into the pits that men had dug, chemicals that burned with terrific violence and exhausted the oxygen of the caverns, causing men to perish by the thousand.

"Ever, as men found themselves defeated by the shelks, they drove deeper and deeper into the earth, their wonderful disintegrations dissolving the rock almost as fast as a man could walk through the corridor it dug. Men were forced from the Surface at last, and a million intricate warrens of corridors and passages honeycombed the earth for miles beneath the surface. It was impossible for the shelks to ever thread the mazes of the innumerable labyrinths, and so man reached a position of comparative safety.

"And thus came the deadlock.

"The Surface had become the property of the savage shelks, while far below them in the pits and corridors, man labored to hold on to the dregs of civilization that were left him. An unequal game it was, for man was sadly handicapped—the supplies of elements that produced the disintegrating rays gradually diminished, and there was no way of renewing them; they were unable to secure wood, or the thousand and one varieties of vegetation on which their industries were based; the men of one set of corridors had no way of communicating with the men of another; and always came hordes of shelks, down into the corridors, hunting men for sport!

The only thing that enabled them to live at all was the wonderful ability to create synthetic foods out of the very rock itself.

"So it was that man's civilization, fought for and won after centuries of struggle, collapsed in a dozen years; and over it was imposed the Terror. Men, like rabbits, lived a life of fear and trembling in their underground holes, daring less each year, as time went by, and spending all their time and energy in devising means to sink their pits deeper and deeper into the ground. Today it seems that man's subjugation is complete. For over a hundred years, no man has dared to think of revolt against the shelks, any more than a rat would think of revolt against man. Unable to form a unified government, unable even to communicate with his brethren in the neighboring corridors, man has come to accept, far too willingly, his place as merely the highest of the lower animals. The spider-like Beasts of Venus are the supreme Masters of our planet, and—"

The manuscript had come to an end. Although the book had originally been much longer, although, indeed, what was left of it was probably little more than an introduction to some work on the life and customs of the shelks, the remainder was missing and the droning sing-song voice of Tumithak ceased as he read the concluding unfinished sentence. For several moments there was silence and then—

"How hard it was to understand," said Thupra. "I only know that men were fighting with shelks, just as though they were Yakrans."

"Who could have conceived such a story?" murmured Nikadur, "Men fighting with shelks: Of all the impossible tales!"

Tumithak did not answer. For quite a while he sat in silence and stared at the book as one who suddenly beheld some dazzling vision.

At last he spoke.

"Nikadur, that is history!" he exclaimed. "That is no strange impossible tale of fancy. Something tells me that those men really lived; that that war was really fought: How else can we explain the life that we live? Have we not wondered often—have not our fathers wondered before us—how our wise ancestors ever gained the wisdom to build the great pits and corridors? We know that our ancestors had great knowledge; how did they come to lose it?

"Oh, I know that no legend of ours even suggests such a thing as men ruling this world," he went on, as he saw the incredulous look in the eyes of his companion. "But there is something—something in that book that tells me it is surely true. Just think, Nikadur! That book was written only a hundred and sixty years after the savage shelks invaded the earth! How much more that writer must have known than we who live two thousand years later. Nikadur, once men fought with shelks!" He arose, his eyes gleaming with the first glow of the fanatical light that, in after years, was to make him a man apart from his fellows, "*Once men fought with shelks* and with the help of the High One, they shall do so again! Nikadur! Thupra! Some day *I* shall fight a shelk," he flung his arms wide, "some day I shall *slay* a shelk!

"And to that I dedicate my life!"

He stood for a moment with his arms outstretched, and then, as if oblivious of their presence, he dashed down the hallway and in a moment was lost in the gloom. For a moment the two stared after him in amazement, and then, clasping hands, they walked slowly, soberly after him. They knew that something had suddenly inspired their friend, but whether it was genius or madness they could not tell. And they were not to know with certainty for many years.

CHAPTER II

The Three Strange Gifts

TUMLOOK contemplated his son proudly. The years that had passed since he had discovered the strange manuscript and acquired his strange obsession may have ruined his mind, as some said, but they had certainly been kind to him, physically. Six feet tall, Tumithak stood (an exceptional height for these dwellers in the corridors), and every inch seemed to be of iron muscle. Today, on his twentieth birthday, there was not a man that would not have hailed him as one of the leaders of the city, had it not been for his preposterous mania. For Tumithak was resolved to kill a shelk!

For years—in fact, since he had found the manuscript, at the age of fourteen—he had directed all his studies to this end. He had poured over maps of the corridors, ancient maps that had not been used for centuries—maps that showed the way to the Surface—and he was known to be an authority on all the secret passages in the pit. He had little idea of what the Surface was really like; there was little in the stories of his people to tell him of it. But of one thing he was certain, and that was, that on the Surface he would find the shelks.

He had studied the various weapons that man could still rely on—the sling, the sword, and the bow; and had made himself proficient in the use of all three. Indeed, in every way possible, he had prepared himself for the great work to which he had decided to devote his life. Of course, he had met with the opposition of his father, of the whole tribe, for that matter; but with the singleness of purpose that only a fanatic can attain, he persisted in his idea, resolved that when he was of age he would bid his people adieu, and set out for the Surface. He had given little thought to the details of what he would do when he arrived there. That would all depend on what he found. One thing he was sure of—that he would kill a shelk and bring its body back to show his people that men could still triumph over those who thought they were man's masters.

And today he became of age; today he was twenty. Tumlook could not resist being secretly proud of this astounding son of his, even though he had done everything in his power to turn him from the impossible dream that he had conceived. Now that the day had come when Tumithak was to start on his absurd quest, Tumlook had to admit that in his heart, he had long been one with Tumithak, and that now he was eager to see the boy started on his way. He spoke:

"Tumithak," he said, "For years, I have sought to turn you from the impossible task that you have set yourself. For years, you have opposed me and persisted in believing in the actual possibility of achieving your dream. And now the day has come when you are to actually set out to achieve it. Do not think that it was anything other than a father's love that led me to oppose your ambition, and to try and keep you in Loor. But now that the day has come when you are free to do as you please, and as you are still determined to make your incredible attempt, you must at least allow your father to help you all he can."

He paused and lifted to the table a box about a foot square. He opened it and drew from it three strange-looking objects.

"Here," he said, impressively, "Are three of the most precious treasures of the food-men; implements devised by our wise ancestors of old. "This one," and he picked up a cylindrical tube about an inch in diameter and a foot long, "is a torch, a wonderful torch that will give you light in the dark corridors, by merely pressing this button. Take care not to waste its power, it is not made of the eternal light that our ancestors set in the ceilings. It is based on a different principle and after a certain time its power is exhausted."

Tumlook picked up the next object gingerly.

"This, too, is something that will surely help you, though it is neither so rare nor so wonderful as the other two. It is a charge of high explosive, such as we use occasionally for closing a corridor, or in mining the elements from which our food is made. There is no telling when it may come in handy, on your way to the Surface.

"And here," he picked up the last article, which looked like a small pipe with a handle set on one end, at right angles, "Here is the most wonderful article of all. It shoots a small pellet of lead, and it shoots it with such force that it will pierce even a sheet of metal! Each time this small trigger on the side is pressed, a pellet is ejected from the mouth of the pipe, with terrific force. It kills, Tumithak, kills even quicker than an arrow, and much surer. Use it carefully, for there are but ten pellets, and when they are gone, the instrument is useless."

He laid the three articles on the table before him, and pushed them across to Tumithak. The younger man took them and stowed them carefully in the pockets of his wide belt.

"Father," he said, slowly, "You know it is not anything in my heart that commands me to leave you and go on this quest. There is something, higher than either of you or I, that has spoken to me and that I must obey. Since mother's death, you have been both mother and father to me, and so I probably love you more than the average man loves his father. But I have had a Vision! I dream of a time when Man will once again rule on the Surface and not a shelk will exist to oppose him. But that time can never come as long as men believe the shelks to be invincible, and so I am going to prove that they can really be slain—and by men!"

He paused and before he could continue, the door opened and Nikadur and Thupra entered. The former was a man now, the responsibility of a householder having fallen upon him at his father's death, two years before. And the latter had grown into a beautiful woman, a woman that Nikadur was soon to marry. They both greeted Tumithak with deference and when Thupra spoke, it was in an awed voice, as one who addressed a demi-god; and Nikadur, too, had obviously come to look upon Tumithak as something more than mortal. These two, with the possible exception of Tumlook, were the only ones who took Tumithak seriously, and so they were the only ones that he would call his friends.

"Do you leave us today, Tumithak?" asked Thupra.

Tumithak nodded. "Yes," he answered. "This very day, I start for the Surface. Before a month has gone by, I will lie dead in some distant corridor, or you shall look on the head of a shelk!"

Thupra shuddered. Either of these alternatives seemed terrible enough to her. But Nikadur was thinking of the more immediate dangers of the journey.

"You will have no trouble on the road to Nonone," he said, thoughtfully, "But mustn't you pass through the town of Yakra on the way to the Surface?"

"Yes," answered Tumithak. "There is no road to the Surface, except through Yakra. And beyond Yakra are the Dark Corridors, where men have not ventured for hundreds of years."

Nikadur considered. The city of Yakra had for over a century been the enemy of the people of Loor. Situated as it was, more than twenty miles nearer the Surface than Loor, it was inevitable that it should be much more conscious of the Terror. And it was just as inevitable that the people of Yakra should envy the Loorians their comparative safety, and continually make attempts to seize the city for their own. The small town of Nonone, located between the two larger cities, found itself sometimes fighting with the Yakrans, sometimes against them, as suited the convenience of the chiefs of the more powerful cities. Just at present, and indeed for the past twenty years, it was allied to Loor, and so Tumithak expected no trouble on his journey until he attempted to pass through Yakra.

"And the Dark Corridors?" questioned Nikadur.

"Beyond Yakra, there are no lights," replied Tumithak. "Men have avoided these passages for centuries. They are entirely too near the Surface for safety. Yakrans have at times attempted to explore them, but the parties that went out never returned. At least, so the men of Nonone have told me."

Thupra was about to make some remark, but Tumithak turned and busied himself with the pack of foodstuff that he intended to take with him on his journey. He slung it over his back and turned toward the door.

"The time has come for me to begin my journey," he said impressively. "This is the moment that I have awaited for years. Farewell, father! Farewell, Thupra! Nikadur, take good care of my little friend, and—if I do not return, name your first-born after me."

With a dramatic gesture that was characteristic of him, he thrust the door curtain aside and strode out into the corridor. The three followed him, calling and waving as he walked on up the hallway, but without so much as a backward glance, he strode along until he disappeared in the distant gloom.

They stood, then, for a while, and then, with a dry sob, Tumlook turned and re-entered the apartment.

"He'll never return," he muttered to Nikadur. "He'll never return, of course."

Nikadur and Thupra answered nothing, only standing in uncomfortable silence. There was nothing consoling that they might say. Tumlook was right and it would have been foolish to attempt words of condolence that would have obviously been false.

THE road that led from Loor to Nonone inclined very gradually upward. It was not an entirely strange road to Tumithak, for long ago he had been to that small town with his father; but the memory of the road was faint and now he found much to interest him as he left the lights of the populous portion of the town behind him. The entrances of other corridors continually appeared, corridors that were constructed to add to the labyrinthine maze, that made it impossible for the creatures from the upper Surface to find their way into the great pits. The way did not lead along the broad main corridor for long. Often Tumithak would take his own way down what appeared to be quite an insignificant hallway, only to have it suddenly branch into another larger one, farther on.

It must not be supposed that Tumithak had so quickly forgotten his home in his anxiety to be on his quest. Often, as he passed some familiar sight, a lump would come into his throat and he would almost be tempted to give up his journey and return. Twice Tumithak passed food-rooms, rooms where the familiar mystic machines throbbed eternally, building up out of the very rocks their own fuel and the tasteless biscuits of food that these people lived on. It was then that his homesickness was the greatest, for many times he had watched his father operating such machines as these, and the memory made him realize poignantly all that he was leaving behind. But like all of the inspired geniuses of humanity, at times such as this, it almost seemed as if something outside of himself took charge of him and forced him on.

Tumithak turned from the last large corridor to a single winding hall not more than a half dozen feet in width. There were no doorways along this hall and it was much steeper than any he had yet climbed. It ran on for several miles and then entered a larger passage through a door that was seemingly but one of a hundred similar ones that lined this new passage. These doors were apparently those of apartments, but the apartments seemed to be unused, for there were no signs of inhabitants in this district. Probably this corridor had been abandoned for some reason many years ago.

There was nothing strange in this to Tumithak, however. He knew quite well that these doorways were only to add extra confusion to the ones who sought to thread the maze of corridors, and he continued on his way, without paying the slightest attention to the many branching hallways, until he came to the room he sought.

It was an ordinary apartment, to all appearances, but when Tumithak found himself inside, he hastened to the rear and began to feel carefully over the walls. In a corner, he found what he was searching for—a ladder of metal bars, leading upward. Confidently, he began the ascent, mounting steadily upward in the dark; and as minute followed minute, the faint glow of light that shone in from the corridor below grew smaller and smaller.

At last he reached the top of the ladder, and found himself standing at the mouth of the pit, in a room similar to the one he had left below. He strode out of the room into another of the familiar door-lined corridors and turning in the direction that led upward, continued his journey. He was on the level of Nonone now, and if he hurried, he knew that he might reach that town before the time of sleep.

He hastened along, and presently he perceived a party of men in the distance, who gradually approached him. He drew into an apartment from which he peered out cautiously, until he assured himself that they were Nononese. The red color of their tunics, their narrow belts, and the peculiar way they had of dressing their long hair convinced him that these were friends and so Tumithak showed himself and waited for the party to approach him. When they saw him, the foremost man, who was evidently the leader, hailed him.

"Is not this Tumithak of Loor?" he asked, and as Tumithak replied in the affirmative, he continued, "I am Nennapuss, chief of the people of Nonone. Your father has acquainted us with the facts of your journey and asked us to be looking for you about this time. We trust that you will spend the next sleep with us; and if there is anything that we can do to add to your comfort or

safety on your journey, you have but to command us."

Tumithak almost smiled at the rather pompous speech which the chief had evidently prepared beforehand, but he answered gravely that he would indeed be indebted if Nennapuss could provide him with sleeping quarters. The chief assured him that the best in the town would be provided and, turning, led Tumithak off in the direction from which he and his party had come.

They traversed several miles of deserted passages before they finally came to the inhabited halls of Nonone, but once here, the hospitality of Nennapuss knew no bounds. The people of Nonone were assembled in the "Great Square," as the juncture of the two main corridors was called, and in a florid, flowing speech that was characteristic of him, Nennapuss told them of Tumithak and his quest; and presented him, as it were, with the keys of the city.

After an answering speech by Tumithak, in which the Loorian worked himself up into a fine fury of eloquence on his favorite subject—his journey—a banquet was prepared; and even though the food was only the tasteless biscuits that constituted the sole diet of these people, they gorged themselves to repletion. When Tumithak at last fell asleep, it was with the feeling that here, at least, a tentative slayer of shelks might find appreciation. Had not the proverb been buried in centuries of ignorance and forgetfulness, he might have mused that a prophet is, verily, not without honor save in his own country.

Tumithak arose about ten hours later and prepared to bid good-by to the people of Nonone. Nennapuss insisted that the Loorian have breakfast with his family and Tumithak willingly complied. The sons of Nennapuss, two lads in their early teens, were enthusiastic, during the meal, with the wonderful idea that Tumithak had conceived. Though the idea of any other man facing a shelk was incredible to them, they seemed to think that Tumithak was something more than the average mortal, and plied him with a hundred questions as to his plans. But, beyond having studied the long route to the Surface, Tumithak's plans were decidedly vague, and he was unable to tell them how he would slay his shelk.

After the meal, he again shouldered his pack and started up the corridor. The chief and his retinue followed him for several miles and as they went, Tumithak questioned Nennapuss closely as to the condition of the passages to Yakra and beyond.

"The road on this level is quite safe," said Nennapuss, in answer to his questions. "It is patrolled by men of my city and no Yakran ever enters it without our being aware of it. But the pit that leads to the level of Yakra is always guarded at the top by the Yakrans, and I do not doubt but that you will have trouble when you try to get out of that pit."

Tumithak promised to use an extra amount of caution when he reached this spot, and a short time later, Nennapuss and his companions said good-by to him and he trudged on alone.

He moved more warily, now, for though the Nononese patrolled these corridors, he knew quite well that it was possible for enemies to evade the guards and raid the corridors as had often been done in the past. He kept well in the middle of the corridor, away from the many doorways, any one of which may have concealed a secret road to Yakra, and he seldom passed one of the branching ways without peering carefully up and down it, before venturing to cross it.

But Tumithak was fortunate in meeting no one in the corridors, and after half a day he came at last to another apartment in which was located a shaft almost exactly similar to the one that had brought him to Nonone.

He mounted this ladder much more stealthily than he had the first one, for he was quite confident that a Yakran guard was at the top and he had no desire to be toppled backward into the pit when he reached there. As he drew near the end of the ladder, he drew his sword, but again luck favored him, for the guard had apparently left the room at the top of the well, and Tumithak drew himself up into the room and prepared to enter the corridor.

But he had moved only a scant half dozen feet when his luck deserted him. He bumped violently into a table that he had failed to notice in the gloom, and the resulting noise brought a bull-like bellow from the corridor without. The next moment, sword in hand, a veritable giant of a man dashed through the door and made for Tumithak.

CHAPTER III

The Passing of Yakra

THAT the man was a Yakran, Tumithak would have known, had he met him in the depths of Loor. Though the Loorian knew of the Yakrans only through the stories of the older men, who remembered the wars with that city, he saw at once that this was just the kind of barbarian that had figured in the stories. He was fully four inches taller than Tumithak, and far broader and heavier, and his chin was covered with a tremendous, bristly growth of beard—sufficient evidence in itself that the owner was of Yakra. His tunic was covered with bits of bone and metal sewn into the cloth, the former stained in various colors and sewn in a crude pattern. Around his neck was a necklace made of dozens of finger-bones threaded on a thin strip of skin.

Tumithak saw in an instant that he would have little chance with this huge Yakran if he were to stand fairly up to him, and so, even as he drew his sword and prepared to defend himself, he was casting about in his mind for some method to overcome him by strategy. The most probable plan, he decided at once, would be to drive him somehow into the pit; but to drive this colossus was almost as impossible as to defeat him by face to face fighting methods. And before Tumithak could devise any more subtle method of overcoming his adversary, he found his entire mind taken up with methods of defending himself.

The Yakran rushed at him, still shouting his rumbling war-cry, and it was but the merest luck that enabled Tumithak to avoid the first terrific blow aimed at him. Tumithak dropped to one knee, but in a moment was up again and only just in time to avoid another sweep of that glistening sword. On his feet again, however, his defense was perfect, and the Yakran found it necessary to retire a step or two, in order to prepare another of his lunging rushes.

Again and again the Yakran rushed at Tumithak, and it was only the Loorian's uncanny skill at fencing, learned through many years in the hope of facing a shelk, that saved him. Around and around the table, now close to the pit and now farther away, they fought; until even Tumithak's steel-like muscles began to tire.

But as his body tired, his brain quickened, and at last a plan came to him to defeat the Yakran. He allowed himself to be gradually forced to the edge of the pit and then, as he parried a particularly powerful lunge, he suddenly threw one hand high in the air and screamed. The Yakran, believing that he had struck him, smiled a vicious smile and stepped back for a final rush. Sword pointing at Tumithak's breast, he dashed forward, and as he did so, Tumithak threw himself at his opponent's feet.

There was a wild howl from the giant as he stumbled over the recumbent form, but before he could recover himself, he dropped heavily at the very edge of the pit. Tumithak kicked wildly, and the great Yakran, grasping frantically at the air, dropped into the well! There was a hoarse cry from the darkness below, a heavy thud and then silence.

For several minutes, Tumithak lay panting at the edge of the pit. This was the first battle he had ever had with a man, and though he was the victor, it was only by a miracle, it seemed, that he had not been defeated. What would the people of Loor and Nonone say, he wondered, if they knew that their self-appointed slayer of shelks had been so nearly defeated by the first enemy that had attacked him—and that enemy not a shelk, but a man, and a man of despised Yakra, at that? For several minutes, the Loorian lay, filled with self-reproach, and then, reflecting that if all his enemies were conquered with a margin even so small as this, his victory was certain, he arose, pulled himself together and left the room.

HE was in Yakra now, and it was necessary for him to find some means of passing safely through the city in order to reach the dark corridors beyond. For only through these dark corridors might he win his way to the upper Surface. He continued cautiously on his way, turning over in his brain plan after plan that would enable him to deceive the Yakrans; but he was almost within sight of the inhabited walls of Yakra before he conceived an idea that seemed to him to be feasible. There was but one thing that all men in these pits feared, with a fear that was quite unreasoning. And it was upon this unreasoning fear that Tumithak decided to play.

He began to run. He ran slowly at first, a mere trot, but as he drew nearer the corridors where men lived, he increased his pace, running faster and faster until he was fleeing along like one who had all the demons of hell at his back. Which was precisely the effect that he wished to produce.

In the distance he saw a group of Yakrans approaching. They beheld him at the same time that he spied them, and in a moment more were charging down on him; quite aware, as he knew, that he was not a Yakran. Instead of trying to avoid them, he charged straight into their midst, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Shelks!" he shouted, as though in the last stages of terror, "Shelks!"

The bellicose attitude of the men changed at once to one of extreme fright. Without a word to Tumithak or even so much as a backward glance, they turned, and as he dashed past them, they sped panic-stricken after him. Had they been men of Loor, they might have paused long enough to investigate, or at least, have held Tumithak and questioned him. But not these Yakrans. This town was many miles nearer the Surface than Loor, and many of the older men could still remember the last time that the shelks had raided these halls on one of their rare hunting expeditions, leaving a trail of death and destruction that would never be forgotten while those that witnessed it lived. So the terror was far more of a living thing to Yakra than it was to Loor, to whom it was little more than a terrible legend of the past.

And so, without a word of question, the Yakrans fled down the long corridor after Tumithak, through branching hallways and through doorways that seemed mere entrances to apartments, but were actually roads to the main corridor. Several times they passed other men or groups of men, but at the fearful cry of "Shelks" these always dropped whatever they were doing and followed the frightened throng. A good many dashed down branching corridors, in which, they imagined, lay greater safety; but the majority continued on their way to the heart of the city, the direction in which Tumithak was going.

The Loorian was no longer in the lead now, several of the fleeter Yakrans had passed him, terror lending wings to their feet. And so the size of the mob grew, and was augmented by greater and greater numbers as they came closer to the town center; until at last the corridor was filled with a screaming, terrified multitude in which Tumithak was completely lost.

They neared the wide main corridor, and here they found a great mass of people that had surged in from every one of the branching corridors. How the news had traveled so quickly, Tumithak was unable to guess, but apparently the entire city was already aware of the supposed danger. And like sheep, or rather, like the humans they were, all had been seized with the same idea—the desire to reach the center of the city, where, they supposed, the greatest safety lay in the presence of the greatest numbers.

But now this frenzied confusion bade fair to defeat the plan that Tumithak had devised to cross the city safely under cover of the excitement he caused. To be sure, he had almost won to the center of the city without discovery, and the inhabitants were so wrought up that there would be little chance of anyone noticing that he was a stranger; but so thickly packed was the crowd that it became more and more certain that the Loorian was not going to be able to work his way through, in order to reach the corridors beyond. Yet in spite of the apparent hopelessness, Tumithak struggled along with the frantic mob, hoping against hope that he might gain a comparatively clear corridor beyond the city's center before the fright of the people died down to the point where they would begin the inevitable search for the one who had started the panic.

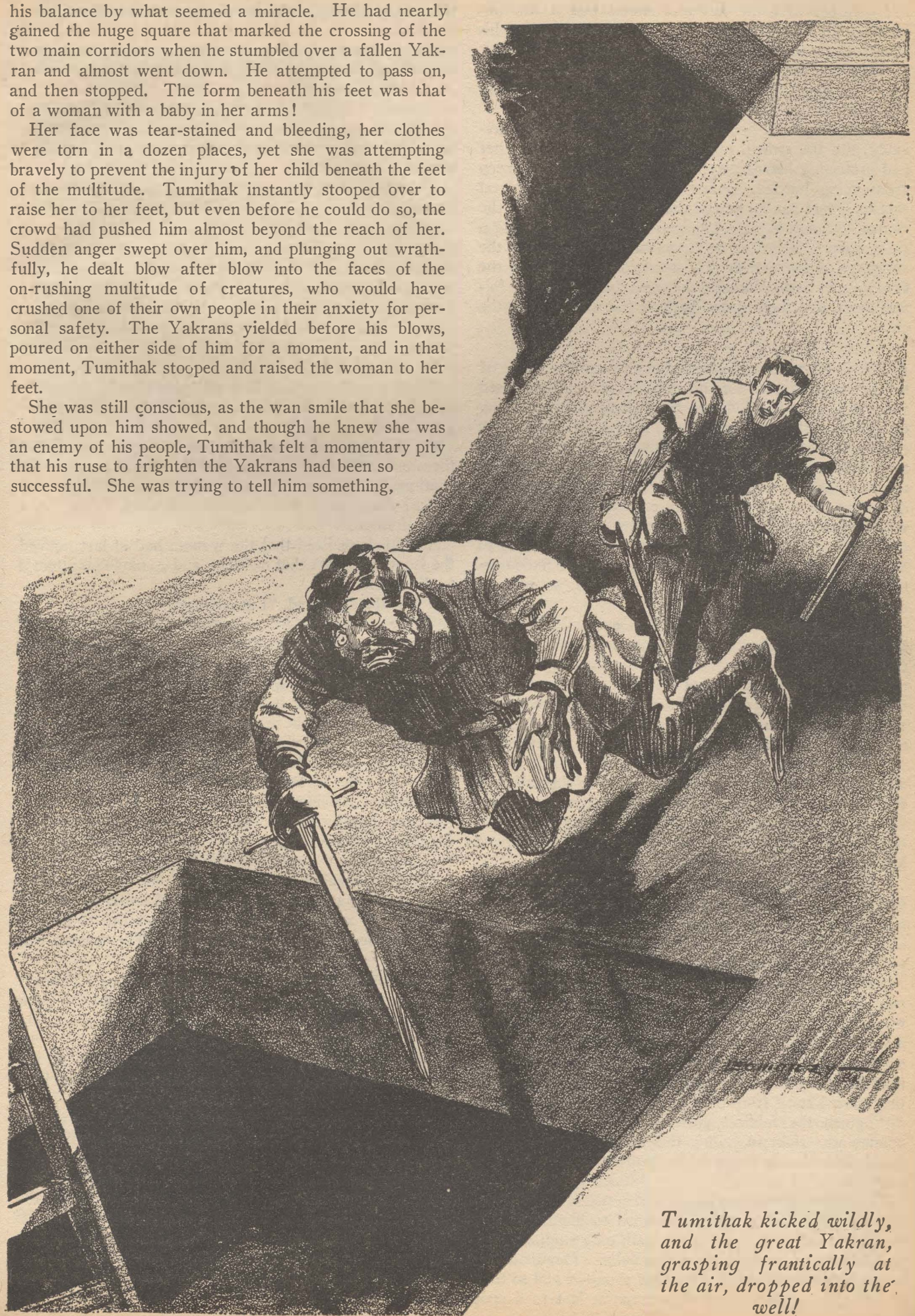
The crowd, its fright enhanced by that strange sense of telepathy that is evident in any large assembly of people, was becoming dangerous. Men were using their fists freely to batter their way, they passed their weaker brothers, and here and there voices could be heard, high pitched with anger. Tumithak saw a man stumble and fall, and a moment later, heard a scream as the unfortunate one was trampled on by the ones behind him. Hardly had the scream died away when there was another cry from the opposite side of the passage, where another man had fallen and found himself unable to regain his feet.

The Loorian seemed little more than a leaf borne along on the stream of shouting, gesticulating Yakrans by the time he reached the center of the city. Time after time, he had almost been swept from his feet, only to regain

his balance by what seemed a miracle. He had nearly gained the huge square that marked the crossing of the two main corridors when he stumbled over a fallen Yakran and almost went down. He attempted to pass on, and then stopped. The form beneath his feet was that of a woman with a baby in her arms!

Her face was tear-stained and bleeding, her clothes were torn in a dozen places, yet she was attempting bravely to prevent the injury of her child beneath the feet of the multitude. Tumithak instantly stooped over to raise her to her feet, but even before he could do so, the crowd had pushed him almost beyond the reach of her. Sudden anger swept over him, and plunging out wrathfully, he dealt blow after blow into the faces of the on-rushing multitude of creatures, who would have crushed one of their own people in their anxiety for personal safety. The Yakrans yielded before his blows, poured on either side of him for a moment, and in that moment, Tumithak stooped and raised the woman to her feet.

She was still conscious, as the wan smile that she bestowed upon him showed, and though he knew she was an enemy of his people, Tumithak felt a momentary pity that his ruse to frighten the Yakrans had been so successful. She was trying to tell him something,



Tumithak kicked wildly, and the great Yakran, grasping frantically at the air, dropped into the well!

but so great were the confused shouts that it was impossible for him to understand her. He bent down his head to hers to hear what she had to say.

"The doorway across the hall," she screamed in his ear, "Try to get through the crowd to the third doorway across the hall! There is safety there!"

Tumithak placed her in front of him and drove savagely into the crowd, his fists flashing out around her and protecting her as they moved. It was hard to keep from being hustled, against his will, into the central square, but at last he gained the doorway and thrust the woman through it. He followed her inside, and gave a great gasp of relief as he found himself free from the struggles of the crowd. He stood for a moment in the doorway, to assure himself that nobody intended to follow them, and then turned back to the woman with the child.

SHE had torn a small piece of cloth from the sleeve of her tattered garment and as he faced her, she paused from wiping the blood and tears from her face long enough to flash him a frightened, little smile. Tumithak could not but wonder at the apparent gentleness and refinement of this woman of savage Yakra. He had been taught to believe, since childhood, that the Yakrans were a strange race, not unlike our concept of goblins and witches, and yet, this woman might have been a daughter of one of the best families of Loor. Tumithak had to learn that in no matter what nation or age one finds oneself, he will find gentleness, if he looks, as well as savagery.

All this while the child, who had evidently been too frightened to cry, had been as silent as though dead, but now it set up a lusty screaming. The mother, after attempting for several moments to silence it with croonings and whispers, at last applied nature's first silencer, and as the child quieted down and began nursing, she arose and motioning Tumithak to follow, led the way to the doorway across the room and entered the rear of the apartment. She was gone a moment, and then she called to the Loorian, and with a realization of what she meant dawning in his mind, he followed her. In the next room, sure enough, the woman pointed to the ceiling and showed him the circular hole of a shaft leading upward.

"Here is the entrance to an old corridor that is not known to more than twenty people in all Yakra," she said, "It leads across the square to the upper end of the city. We can hide up there for days and the shelks will probably never know that we exist. Here is safety."

Tumithak nodded and began the ascent of the ladder, pausing only long enough to assure himself that the woman was following him. The ladder extended not more than thirty feet upward and then they found themselves in the dark in a corridor that must have been unused for many centuries. So dark was it that as soon as they moved away from the pit shaft, it was impossible to distinguish the faintest glow of light. Certainly the woman was right in calling this an unknown corridor. Even Tumithak's maps had never told him of this passage.

The woman seemed to be quite at home in the passage, however, for with a whispered word to Tumithak, she began to feel her way along the wall, only stopping now and then to whisper softly to her baby. Tumithak followed her, keeping one hand on her shoulder and so they felt their way along until they came at last to a spot where a single light glowed dimly, and here the woman sat down to rest. Tumithak did likewise, and the woman, reaching into her pocket, drew out a crude needle and thread and began to stitch the tears in her garment. Presently she spoke.

"Isn't it terrible," she whispered, her voice hushed as though she feared that even here the shelks might be listening. "What has started them to hunting again, I wonder?"

Tumithak made no reply and in a moment, she continued:

"My grandfather was killed in a shelk raid. That must have been nearly forty years ago. And now they have come upon us again! My poor husband! I separated from him almost as soon as we left our apartment. Oh! I do hope he reaches safety. He doesn't know about this corridor." She looked to him for comfort. "Do you think he will be safe?"

Tumithak smiled.

"Will you believe me if I tell you that he is surely safe from the shelks?" he asked, "Truly, I can assure you that he will not be slain by the shelks in this raid."

"I only hope you are right," the woman began, and then, as if she had noticed him for the first time, she continued, suddenly, "You are not of Yakra!"

And then, quite positively and harshly, "You are a man of Loor!"

Tumithak realized that the woman had at last noticed the Loorian clothes that he wore, and so made no attempt to dissemble.

"Yes," he answered, "I am of Loor."

The woman arose in consternation, clasping her baby tighter to her breast, as though to protect it from this ogre from the lower corridors.

"What are you doing in these halls?" she asked, fearfully, "Is it you that have brought this raid down upon us? I could well believe that the men of Loor would ally themselves with the shelks, if such a thing were possible. And surely, this is the first time in history that the shelks ever came upon us from the lower end of the city."

Tumithak considered for a moment. He saw no reason why he should not tell this woman the truth. It could do him no harm, and might at least put her mind at rest, regarding the safety of her husband.

"It will probably be the last time that the shelks ever come upon you from the lower end of the city, too," he said, and in a few brief words, he explained to her his ruse and its rather appalling success. The woman was puzzled.

"But why should you desire to pass through Yakra?" she asked, incredulously, "Are you going into the dark corridors? What man in his senses would desire to explore them?"

"I am not seeking to explore the dark corridors," the Loorian answered. "My goal lies even beyond them!"

"Beyond the dark corridors?"

"Yes," said Tumithak, and rose to his feet. As always when he spoke of his "mission," he was, for the moment, a dreamer, a fanatic.

"I am Tumithak," he said, "I am the slayer of the shelk! You wish to know why I seek to go beyond the dark corridors? It is because I am on my way to the Surface. For on the Surface is a shelk that, all unknowing, awaits his doom! I am going to slay a shelk!"

The woman gazed at him in consternation. She was quite certain, now, that she was alone with a madman.

No other could even conceive such an incredible thought. She clasped her child tighter to her and drew away from him.

Tumithak was quick to notice her attitude. He had, many times before, seen people draw away from him in just the same manner, when he spoke of his mission. And so, quite unoffended by her unflattering opinion of him, he began to explain to her why he believed it possible for men to once more engage in battle with the masters of the Surface.

The woman listened for a while, and as he waxed more and more eloquent on his subject, Tumithak saw that she was beginning to believe. He told her of the book he had found, and how it had decided for him what his mission in life should be. He told her of the three strange gifts of his father, and how he hoped they would help him to be successful in his quest. And at last, he saw the look come into her eyes that he had often seen in Thupra's, and knew that she believed.

THE woman's thoughts, however, had been quite different from what Tumithak believed. She had listened, to be sure, but as she listened, she was thinking of the fury with which Tumithak had attacked the terror-stricken mob that had nearly crushed her. She was studying the erect, handsome form of him, the smooth-shaven face and keen eyes; and comparing him with the men of Yakra. And at last she believed, not because of Tumithak's eloquence, but because of the age-old appeal of sex.

"It is well that you saved me," she said at last, when the Loorian paused in his story. "It would have hardly been possible for you to force your way through the lower corridors. Up here, you may cross Yakra at your leisure, and leave it whenever you will. I will show you the way to the upper end of the city, now, if you wish."

She arose.

"Come, I will guide you. You are a Loorian and an enemy, but you saved my life, and one who would slay a shelk is surely the friend of all mankind."

She took him by the hand (though that was hardly necessary), and led him on into the darkness. Minute after minute passed in silence and then, at last, she paused and whispered, "The corridor ends here."

She stepped into the doorway, and following her, Tumithak discerned a faint light coming up through a shaft from the corridor below.

He dropped down the ladder that he could see dimly in the gloom, and in a moment was in the lower corridor. The woman followed him, and when she reached the ground she pointed up the corridor.

"If you are really going to the Surface, your road lies that way," she said, "and we must part here. My road lies back into the town. I wish I might know you better, O Loorian," she paused and then, as she strode off, she turned to exclaim, "Go on to the Surface, strange one, and if you succeed in your quest, do not fear to pass through Yakra on your return. All the city would worship you then, and do you reverence."

As if afraid to say more, she hurried down the passage. Tumithak watched her for a moment and then, with a shrug, turned and walked away in the opposite direction.

He had expected to reach the dark corridors soon after leaving Yakra; but although his maps told him much concerning the route he must take, they were silent concerning the conditions of the various corridors; and it soon became evident to Tumithak that he was not to reach the dark corridors that day. Fatigue overcame him at last, and entering one of the many deserted apartments that lined the passage, he threw himself upon the floor and in a moment was sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV

The Dark Corridors

HOURS after, the Loorian awakened with a start. He looked about him vaguely for a moment, and then started into full wakefulness. In the corridor without, he had heard a soft rustling. Scarcely breathing, he arose and, tiptoeing to the doorway, peered cautiously out. The corridor was empty, yet Tumithak was certain that he had heard soft footsteps.

He stepped back into the room, picked up his pack, which he had removed before falling asleep, and adjusted it on his back. Then, once more carefully scanning the empty corridor, he stepped out and prepared to resume his journey.

Before going on, though, he drew his sword and looked thoroughly through all the neighboring apartments. It puzzled him to find them all deserted. He was quite sure that he had heard a noise, was quite sure, he felt, that someone, from somewhere, was watching him. But at last, he was forced to admit that, unless he was mistaken in their existence, the watchers were more clever than he; and so, keeping well to the center of the corridor, he took up his journey again.

For hours, he kept up a continuous, monotonous pace. The route was steadily upward, the corridor was broad, and to Tumithak's surprise, the lights continued undimmed. He had almost forgotten the cause of his sudden awakening, when, after traveling some eight or nine miles, he was suddenly aware of another soft, rustling sound, quite similar to the former one. It came from one of the apartments on his left, and he had scarcely heard it, when he sprang like lightning to the door from which it came, his sword flashing from its sheath. He dashed into the apartment, through the front room and into the rear one, and then stood foolishly, looking around him at the bare brown walls. Like the apartment which he had examined in the morning, this one was quite empty. There were no ladders up which the mysterious one might have escaped; indeed, there seemed to be no way in which anyone might have escaped discovery and, at last, Tumithak was forced to continue on his way.

But he moved more warily, now. He was as cautious as he had been before entering Yakra; in fact, even more so, for then he had known what to expect, and now he was facing the unknown.

As the hours passed, Tumithak became increasingly certain of the fact that he was being followed—was being watched. Time after time, he would hear the slight rustling noise, sometimes from the dark recesses of an apartment, sometimes from down the path of some dimly lighted branching corridor. Once he was certain that he heard the sound far ahead of him, in the hall that he was traversing. But never was he able to catch so much as a glimpse of the beings that caused the sound.

At last he came to a section of the corridors where the lights began to dim. At first only a few were affected, their light coming from the plates with a peculiar bluish glow, but before long the bluish tint was the rule rather

than the exception, and many of the lights were out entirely. Tumithak traveled on in an increasing gloom, and realized that he was, at last, really approaching the legendary dark corridors.

Now, Tumithak was the product of a hundred generations of men who had fled from the slightest suspicious sound. For hundreds of years after the Invasion, an unusual sound had meant a man-hunting shelk, and a shelk had meant death, sudden, sure and unmistakable. So men had become a skulking, fleeing race of creatures that fled panic-stricken from the least suspicion of danger.

In deep-cut Loor, however, men had made a warren so intricate and lengthy that years had passed since a shelk had been seen. And so it came about that men grew more courageous in Loor, until there arose, at last, a visionary who dared to dream of slaying a shelk.

But although Tumithak was bolder by far than any other man of his generation, it must not be supposed that he had overcome, entirely, the heritage that was man's. Even now as he trudged so firmly up the apparently endless hallway, his heart was beating wildly, and it would have taken little to send him back on the way he had come, his heart almost smothering him in his fright.

But apparently those who followed him knew well not to agitate his fears too greatly. As the corridors grew darker, the noises lessened and, at last, Tumithak decided that he was quite alone. Whatever had been following him, he felt, had turned back or continued down one of the branching halls. For over an hour, he strained his ears in an attempt to hear again the soft noises, but only silence was his reward; so his vigilance gradually lessened and he trod more and more carelessly up the hall.

He passed from a corridor of eternal gloom to one of eternal darkness. Here the lights, if there had ever been any, had long since ceased to glow, and for some time Tumithak felt his way along the passage, depending only on his sense of touch.

And in the corridor below, a number of dark, gaunt figures moved from the gloom to the darkness and hurried silently toward him.

As they went, they would have presented a strange appearance, could anyone have seen them. Gaunt almost to the point of emaciation, with strange, slate-colored skins, perhaps the most surprising thing about their appearance was their heads, which were wrapped with layer after layer of strips of cloth which completely covered their eyes, making it impossible for the slightest ray of light to reach them.

For these were the savages of the dark corridors—men born and raised in the halls of eternal night—and so sensitive were their eyes that the least light was an intolerable pain. All day long they had been shadowing Tumithak, and all day long their eyes had been veiled with the bandages, leaving the savages to move by their astounding senses of hearing and feeling alone. But now that they were again in the halls that were their home, they hastened to remove the cumbering cloths. And when this was accomplished they gradually closed in upon their intended victim.

THE first intimation of their presence that Tumithak had after entering the darkness was when he heard a sudden rush behind him. He turned quickly, drew his sword and lashed out savagely. His sword cut through the air, he heard a sardonic laugh, and then silence. Furiously he lunged again, and again his sword met only empty air, and then he heard a new rustling in the hall behind him.

He turned, realizing that they had surrounded him. Sword flashing furiously, he backed to the wall prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. He felt his blade strike something that yielded, heard a cry of pain and then suddenly quiet descended on the corridor. The Loorian was not to be deceived, however, he kept up the vicious beating about him with his sword, and presently had the satisfaction of hearing another groan of pain as he struck one of the savages who had attempted to creep under his guard.

But, though Tumithak continued to defend himself to the best of his ability, and lashed about with the courage born of desperation, he had little doubt as to the outcome of the struggle. He was alone, with his back to the wall; while his enemies, already numbering he knew not how many, were constantly having their numbers added to, by the arrival of others. Tumithak prepared to die fighting, his only regret was that he must die in this stygian darkness, unable even to see the opponents who conquered him—and then suddenly he remembered the torch, the first of his father's strange gifts.

With his left hand, he fumbled in his belt and drew out the cylinder. At least, he would have the satisfaction of knowing what sort of creatures these were that had attacked him. In a moment he had found the switch and filled the hall with light.

He was totally unprepared for the effect that the brilliant beam of light had upon his enemies. Cries of pain and dismay burst from them, and Tumithak's first sight of the savages was that of a dozen or more scrawny, dark-colored figures that buried their heads in their arms and turned to flee in terror down the passage. Panic-stricken, bawling strange, harsh words to their companions, they fled from the light, as if Tumithak had suddenly been reinforced by all the men of Loor.

For a moment, Tumithak stood dazed. He was, of course, unable to account for the sudden flight of his attackers. The idea occurred to him that they fled from some danger that he was unable to see and he flashed his light about the corridor fearfully, but at last, as their cries diminished in the distance, the truth gradually dawned on him. These creatures were so much at home in the dark that it must really be, thought Tumithak, that they feared the light; and though he could not understand why this should be, he determined to keep the torch burning as long as his route remained in the dark.

So flashing its rays this way and that, up branching corridors and into open doorways, the Loorian continued on his way. He knew that any thought of sleeping in these dark halls was out of the question, but this bothered him little. Shut up in the pits and corridors for centuries, man had forgotten the regular hours that he had once kept, and although he usually slept eight or ten hours out of thirty, it was entirely possible for a man to go forty or fifty hours before he felt the necessity of sleep. Tumithak had often worked steadily, under his father, for as many hours as this, and so now he felt confident that he would be out of the dark corridors long before he gave way to fatigue.

He munched, now and then, on the biscuits of synthetic food that he had brought with him; but for the most part, his entire time was spent in carefully scanning the corridors before and behind him. And so the hours

passed. He had almost reached the point where his fears were allayed sufficiently to allow him to enter one of the apartments and seek slumber, when he heard, far behind him in the corridor, a strange inhuman snarl. Fear seized him instantly, he felt a sudden crawling sensation at the back of his neck, and, darting instantly into the nearest doorway, he extinguished his torch and lay trembling in an excess of fear.

It must not be supposed that Tumithak had suddenly become a coward. Remember the courage with which he had faced the Yakran, and the dark savages. But it was the inhumanity of the sound that terrified him. In the lower passages, with the exception of rats, bats and a few other small creatures, no animals had ever been known. Except the shelks. They alone had followed man into his pits, and so it was natural that to them alone could Tumithak attribute the sound that had certainly come from some large creature other than man. He was yet to learn that there were other animals from the Surface that had been driven into these upper corridors.

So now he cowered in the apartment, vainly attempting to lash his courage to the point where he could go out and face his enemy. Suppose it were a shelk, he argued. Had he not come all these dangerous miles for the sole purpose of facing a shelk? Was he not Tumithak, the hero whom the high one had called to deliver Man from the heritage of fear that was his? And so, with arguments such as this, his indomitable spirit lashed his body into a semblance of courage, until at last he arose and again entered the corridor.

As he might have known, it appeared empty. His flashlight lit up the passage fully five hundred feet away, but the corridor was apparently quite deserted. He continued on his way; but as he went, he now paid more attention to the lower corridor than he did to the corridor above. And so, presently, he noticed, at the very limit of the light, a number of strange, slinking figures that followed him at a safe distance. His sharp eyes told him that these creatures were neither shelks nor men; but what they were, he was at a loss to guess. It was many generations since the men of the lower corridors had even heard of man's one-time friend, the dog.

He paused uncertainly and watched these strange creatures. They slunk out of reach of the torch's rays at once, and after a moment Tumithak turned and continued his journey, half convinced that, in spite of their size, they were merely some large species of rat, as cowardly as their smaller brethren.

In this he was soon to find himself mistaken. He had continued for but a short distance, when he heard a snarl in the corridor ahead of him; and as though this were a signal, the beasts behind him began to draw steadily closer: Tumithak increased his pace, broke into a trot, and finally into a run; but fast as he went, the beasts behind him were faster, and gradually closed in on him.

It was when they were but a little less than a hundred feet behind him that he noticed their masters. The savages that he had vanquished a few hours before had returned, their faces buried in the swathings that they had worn when they stalked him in the corridors beyond Yakra. And with whispered urgings, they drove the dogs on until Tumithak again found it necessary to draw forth his sword and prepare to defend himself.

The beasts from the upper end of the corridor had appeared by this time and the Loorian soon found himself surrounded by a snarling, snapping pack of creatures, against whose numbers it was utterly useless to attempt to defend himself. He slew one, another fell snapping at a great gash across its mangy back; but before he could do more, his light was knocked out of his hand and he felt a half dozen hairy forms leap upon him. He fell heavily to the ground with the dogs on top of him, his sword flying from his hand and disappearing in the darkness.

Tumithak expected to die then and there. He felt the hot breath of the monsters on various parts of his body, and that strange feeling of resignation came over him that almost every one feels in the presence of almost certain death, and then—the dogs were pulled away, and he felt hands on him and heard soft, muttering words as the savages felt over his body. He was pinioned to the ground by a half dozen wiry hands, and a moment later a band was tightened around him, fastening his arms firmly to his sides. He was picked up and carried away.

They carried him on up the corridor for some distance, turned after a while into one of the branching halls and continued for a long time before they at last halted and threw him upon the ground. Around him he heard many soft sounds, whispered conversation and the rustling of moving bodies, and he decided that he had been taken to the central halls of these creatures. After lying for some time, he was rolled over and a pair of thin hands felt him all over, and then a voice spoke firmly and with authority. Again he was picked up, and carried for a short distance and then he was unceremoniously dumped down upon the floor of what he suspected was the floor of an apartment. Something metallic clanged on the floor beside him and he heard the departing footsteps of his captors in the corridor without.

FOR a while Tumithak lay still, gathering his thoughts. He wondered vaguely why he had not been killed, little dreaming that the savages knew well enough not to kill their meat until they were ready for the feast. For these savages had no knowledge of the preparation of the machine-made food, and lived by preying on Yakra and other smaller towns that existed far down the branching corridors. Reduced to such desperate straits, anything that would provide sustenance became their food and for many generations they had been cannibals.

After a while, Tumithak arose. He had little trouble in working loose the bonds of cloth that he was tied with; the knowledge of knots that the savages possessed was elementary, and so it took less than an hour for the Loorian to free himself. He began feeling carefully over the walls of the apartment, in an attempt to acquaint himself with the features of his prison.

The room was little more than ten feet square, and the walls were broken by but a single door, the entrance. Tumithak attempted to pass through this door, but was halted immediately by a growl and a snarl, and a rough, hairy body pushed against his legs, driving him back into the apartment. The savages had left the dogs to guard the entrance to his prison.

Tumithak stepped back into the room and as he did so, his foot struck an object that rolled across the floor. He remembered the metallic object that had been thrown into the apartment with him and wondered curiously what it was. Groping around, he finally located it, and to his joy realized that it was his flashlight. He was quite unable to understand why the savages had brought it here, but he decided that to their superstitious minds, it

was something to fear, and that they thought it best to keep these two dangerous enemies imprisoned together. At any rate, here it was, and for that Tumithak was grateful.

He turned it on, and looked around as its rays filled the apartment with light. Yes, he had been right about its size and simplicity. There was little chance, none at all, in fact, of his escaping unless he passed through the beast-guarded doorway. And in the light, Tumithak saw that the savages had left him but little chance to escape that way. The entire pack of over twenty dogs stood just without the doorway, their eyes dazzled and blinking in the sudden light.

From within the doorway, Tumithak could look far up the corridor, and he could see no one at all in all that stretch of hallway, as far as his light reached. He flashed it down the hallway; it, too, was empty. He decided that it was probably the time of sleep for these savages, and realized that if he was to escape, no better time would offer itself than the present. He sat down on the floor of the apartment and gave himself up to thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind an idea was glimmering, a faint conviction that he possessed the means to escape from these animals. He arose and looked at the pack, huddled together in the corridor as if to protect themselves from the unwelcome rays of the torch. He turned to study the room, but apparently found little there to favor his half-formed plan. Suddenly, though, he reached a decision, and feeling in the pocket of his belt, he removed a round, pointed object, and pulling a pin from it, hurled it out among the pack and threw himself flat on his face!

It was the bomb, the second of his father's strange gifts. It struck the floor of the corridor without, and burst with a roar that was nothing short of deafening. In the confined space of the passage, the expanding gases acted with terrific force. Flat on the floor though he was, Tumithak was lifted and hurled violently against the opposite wall of the apartment. As for the beasts in the corridor without, they were practically annihilated. Torn bodies were flung in every direction, and when Tumithak, bruised and shaken, entered the corridor a few minutes later, he found it deserted of every living thing. But the scene resembled a shambles, with blood and torn bodies strewn all over the corridor.

Sick with the unaccustomed sight of blood and death, Tumithak hastened to put as much distance as possible between himself and the gruesome scene. He hurried on up the corridor, through the still smoke-laden air, until at last the air cleared and the horrors of the scene could be forgotten. He saw no signs of the savages, although twice he heard a whimpering from the doorway of some apartment and knew that a dark form probably cowered, terror-stricken, in the darkness. It would be many, many sleeps before the savages of the dark corridors forgot the enemy who had caused such destruction among them.

Tumithak emerged again into the corridor that led to the Surface. For the first time since he set out on that route, he retraced his steps, but it was with a definite object in view. He arrived at the place where he had battled with the dogs, and retrieved his sword, finding it without difficulty and noting with satisfaction that it was entirely unharmed. Then he once again took up his journey to the Surface, continuing for long without meeting with anything that could give him cause for alarm. At last he decided that he was past the dangerous parts of these halls, and entering one of the apartments he prepared himself for a long-needed rest. . . .

He slept long and dreamlessly, awaking at last after more than fourteen hours of sleep. He immediately took up his journey again, partaking of his food as he went and wondering what this new march would mean for him.

But he was not to wonder for long. He was quite aware, from his maps, that he was now more than half through with his journey, and so he was not surprised when the walls of the corridors, which, ever since leaving Loor had continued as smooth and glossy as those of his own home, now began to assume a rough, irregular appearance, almost like that of a natural cavern. He was, he knew, approaching that section of the corridors which man had carved out in the days of his first panic-stricken flight into the earth. There had been little time, in those first days, to smooth down the walls of the corridors or to give them the regular rectangular appearance that they were to have in the lower corridors.

But though he was not surprised at this appearance of the passages, he was totally unprepared for their next change. He had travelled perhaps three or four miles through the winding, narrow caverns, when he came upon a well-concealed pit-mouth that led far up into the darkness. He could see that there was a light at the top, and gave a sigh of gratitude, for his light had begun to show the first signs of failing. He climbed the ladder slowly, with his usual caution, and at last, emerging warily from the mouth of the shaft, he stepped into the strangest corridor that he had ever beheld.

CHAPTER IV

The Hall of the Esthetts

THE hall in which Tumithak found himself was more brilliantly lighted than any he had ever seen. The lights were not all of the usual clear white, here and there blues and greens vied with reds and golden yellows to add beauty to a scene that was already beautiful beyond anything that Tumithak had ever imagined. For a moment, he was at a loss to understand just where the luminescence was coming from, for there were no shining plates in the center of the ceiling, such as he had always been familiar with. But after a while, an explanation of the system of lighting dawned on him, and he saw that all the plates were cleverly concealed in the walls, so that the light reflected from them produced an effect of soft, creamy mellowness.

And the walls—the walls were no longer of the familiar glossy brown stone; they were of stone of the purest milky white! And though this in itself was a wonder that must have excited the Loorian's astonishment, it was not the color of the walls that held his attention riveted to them. It was the fact that the walls were covered with designs and pictures, intaglios and bas-reliefs, to such an extent that not a clear space was visible on walls or ceiling, at any place along the corridor. And even the floor bore an intricate design of varicolored inlaid stone.

Now, Tumithak had never dreamed of the possibility of such a thing as this. There was no art in the lower corridors, there never had been. That had been lost to man long before the first passage had been blasted down to Loor. And so Tumithak stood lost in wonder at the marvel that confronted him.

Although most of the wall was covered with design, there were many pictures, too. They showed in detail many wonderful things, things that Tumithak could scarcely believe existed. Yet here they were before him, and to his simple mind the fact that they were here in pictures were proof that somewhere they existed in reality.

Here, for instance, was a group of men and women dancing. They were in a circle, and they danced around something in the center; something that could only partly be seen. But as he looked at it, Tumithak again felt the hair on the back on his neck begin to rise—the creature had long and spidery legs, and from somewhere in his subconscious mind a voice whispered, "Shelk."

Turning with a puzzled feeling of disgust from that picture, he came upon another one—it depicted a long corridor, and in it a cylindrical object that must have been eighteen or twenty feet long. It was mounted on wheels and around it were gathered a group of eager, waiting humans, with happy, excited looks on their faces. Tumithak puzzled over the pictures for many moments, unable to understand them. They didn't make sense. These people did not seem to fear the shelks! He came upon a picture that proved it. It showed again the long cylindrical object, and at its side were three beings that could be nothing but shelks. And grouped around them, talking and gesticulating, were another group of humans.

There was one thing that particularly impressed Tumithak in these pictures. The people were all fat. Not a one of them but was florid and grossly overweight. But it was probably natural, thought the Loorian, of people who lived near the Surface and were apparently without any fear of the terrible shelk. Such a people would naturally have little to do but live and grow fat.

And so, musing and looking at the pictures, he continued along on his way, until he saw in the distance, up the corridor a ponderous human form and realized that he was reaching the inhabited part of these corridors. The form disappeared down a branching corridor, almost as soon as he glimpsed it, but it was enough to make Tumithak realize that he must go much more carefully. So, for a long while, he slipped cautiously along the side of the passage, using every opportunity that was offered for concealment. He found a thousand things to excite his wonder; indeed, ere long he found himself in a constant state of astonishment. Great tapestries were hung along the wall at one spot; at another, his heart leapt into his mouth as he came suddenly upon a group of statues. It was hard for him to realize that these carven stones were not really men.

There had been no doorways on the sides of the corridors at first; but now the corridor widened until it must have been full forty feet broad, and apartment entrances began to appear. High and wide, these doorways were, and the "curtains" that covered them were of metal! It was Tumithak's first contact with true doors, for in Loor the cloth curtains were all that ever separated the apartments from the corridor without.

Minute after minute passed, as Tumithak continued on his way. The pictures on the walls grew more elaborate, the corridor grew higher and even wider; and then, in the distance, Tumithak saw a number of human forms approaching him. He knew that he must not be seen, debated for a moment the advisability of turning about and retreating, and then he noticed an open door close to him. Before him was discovery and danger, behind him lay an unthinkable retreat. Tumithak had little choice in the matter; in a moment he had made his decision, had pushed the door wide open and stepped inside.

For a moment he stood, his eyes, used to the brilliant light without, failing him in the gloom of the apartment. Then he realized that he was not alone, for the room was occupied by a man who, to all appearances, was so frightened at Tumithak's sudden appearance as to be quite speechless. Tumithak took advantage of the other's evident fright to observe him carefully and to look about the room for some means of escape or concealment.

THE room was lighted much more dimly than the hall, the light coming from two plates concealed in the wall near the ceiling. The walls were of a uniform dull blue and in the rear a tapestried door led to the back room. A table, a huge, padded chair, a bed, and a shelf that was filled with books, made up the furniture of the room. And in the midst of the bed lay this huge man.

The man was a veritable mountain of flesh. Tumithak estimated that he certainly must have weighed four hundred pounds. He was well over six feet tall, and the bed on which he lay, and which would easily have held three of Tumithak's fellow citizens, was completely filled with his bulk. He was a florid, full-blooded type of man; and his pale blond hair and beard only served to accentuate the redness of his face and neck.

But the coarseness of the man's features was offset by the refinement of his surroundings. Never had such luxuries been dreamed of by the man of Loor. The clothes that the man wore were of the finest texture imaginable, sheer gauzes that were dyed in the most delicate shades of nacreous pinks, and greens, and blues. They flowed down over his form, softening and dignifying the immense obesity of him. The bed-clothes were as fine and sheer as the man's garments, but of a deep shade of greens and browns. The bed itself was a revelation, a glorious triumph in inlaid metals that might have been wrought by some wonderful artisan of the Golden Age. And flung across the floor was a rug—And the pictures on the wall—

The man suddenly regained control of himself. He set up a scream, a high-pitched womanly scream that seemed strangely absurd coming from one of his bulk. Tumithak was at his side in an instant, with his sword at the fat one's throat.

"Stop that!" he ordered peremptorily. "Stop it at once, or I'll kill you!"

The other subsided, his screams at once becoming a series of involuntary agonized groans. Tumithak stood listening, fearful that the first scream might have been effective, but the silence from without was unbroken. After fully a minute, the man spoke.

"You are a wild man," he said, and his voice was full of terror. "You are a wild man of the lower corridors! What are you doing here among the Chosen Ones?"

Tumithak ignored the question.

"Make another sound, fat one," he whispered, fiercely, "and there will be one less mouth to feed in these halls." He looked toward the door anxiously. "Is any one likely to enter here?" he asked.

The other attempted to answer, but apparently his fear had by now rendered him speechless. Tumithak laughed

scornfully, a strange elation possessing him. It was indeed pleasant to the Loorian to find some one that feared him so terribly. Man had not felt this strange sense of power often in the preceding centuries and Tumithak was half tempted to increase the other's fears, but in the end this emotion was overcome by his curiosity. Seeing that the fat man's terror of the sword was a very real one, he lowered it and returned it to its sheath.

The fat man breathed easier then, but it was some moments before speech returned. Then when he did speak, it was only to repeat the question he had asked before.

"What are you doing here in the halls of the Esthetts?" he gulped fearfully.

Tumithak considered his answer carefully. These people, he knew, did not fear the shelk; clearly, then, they were friendly with them. The Loorian doubted the advisability of confiding in the obese craven, but at the same time it seemed absurd to fear him or any others like him. And the natural conceit that is a part of every great genius made Tumithak long to boast of his mission so that at last he decided to answer the question.

"I am on my way to the Surface," he said. "I come from the lowest pit of all, so far down that we have never even heard of the halls of the Esthetts, as you call them. Are you one of the Esthetts?"

"On your way to the Surface!" said the other, who was now fast losing his fear. "But you have not been called! You will be killed at once. Think you that the Holy Shelks will permit any one to attain the Surface uncalled for?" His nose twitched scornfully. "And a wild man of the lower corridors at that!"

Tumithak was stung by the scorn in the other's voice.

"Listen, fat one," he said, "I do not ask the permission of any one to visit the Surface. As for the shelks, my whole object in reaching the Surface is that I might kill one of them."

The other looked at him with a look that Tumithak was at a loss to interpret.

"You will soon die," said the Esthett, calmly. "There is no need of my fearing you any longer. Surely any one who speaks such unthinkable blasphemy is doomed even as he says it." He settled himself more comfortably in his bed as he spoke, and looked at Tumithak curiously.

"From where, Oh, Wild One, did such an impossible idea come to you?" he asked.

The Loorian might have had a feeling of anger at the other's attitude, had not this question shown him a loophole for expounding his favorite subject. He began to tell the Esthett, in elaborate detail, all the story of his mission. The latter listened attentively, so interested, apparently, that Tumithak grew more and more interested in the telling.

He spoke of his early life, of the finding of the book, and the inspiration it had given him; he told of the many years of preparation for his journey, and of the many adventures he had had since he left Loor.

The fat one was strangely interested, but to Tumithak, wrapped up in the story of his mission, it never once occurred that the Esthett was sparring for time. And so, when he was finished with his story at last, he was quite willing to listen to the Chosen One's story of his own life in the marble halls.

"We who live in these halls," began the Esthett, "are those chosen ones of the race of mankind who possess the one thing that the Holy Shelks lack—the power of creating beauty. Mighty as the Masters are, they have no artistic ability, but in spite of this they are quite capable of appreciating our art, and so they have come to rely upon us for the beauties of life, and they have given it to us to produce all the great works of art that decorate their wonderful palaces on the Surface! All the great art works that you see on the walls of these corridors have been executed by me and my fellow-citizens. All the rich paintings and statuary that you will see later, in our great square, all these are the rejected specimens that the Holy Shelks have no need of. Can you imagine the beauties of the accepted pieces that have found their way to the Surface?

"And in return for our beauty, the shelks feed us and give us every luxury imaginable. Of all mankind, we alone have been chosen as worthy of being the friends and companions of the world's masters."

He paused for a moment, breathless with what was apparently an exceptionally long speech, for him. After resting a while, he went on:

"Here in these marble corridors, we of the Esthetts are born and educated. We work only at our art; we work only when it suits us, and our work is carried from here to the Surface above. There it is carefully examined by the shelks, and the choicest is preserved. The artists who produce this work—listen carefully, wild man—the artists who produce this work are called from their home to join the great guild of Chosen Ones who live on the Surface and spend the rest of their lives decorating the glorious palaces and gardens of the Holy Shelks! They are the happiest of men, for they know that their work is praised by the very Lords of Creation themselves."

He was panting with the effort caused by his story, but he struggled bravely on:

"Can you wonder that we feel ourselves superior to the men who have allowed themselves to become little better than animals, little more than rabbits skulking in their warrens, miles below the ground? Can you wonder that——"

His speech was suddenly cut off by a sound from the corridor without. It was the sound of a siren, whose tones grew shriller and shriller, higher and higher until it seemed to pass entirely beyond the range of sound heard by human ears. The Esthett was suddenly beside himself with eagerness. He began to struggle out of his bed, managed after several failures to get to his feet, waddled to the door and then turned.

"The Masters!" he cried. "The Holy Shelks! They have come to take another group of artists to the Surface. I knew they would be here soon, wild man, and it was not for nothing that I listened to your long, tiresome story. Try to escape if you can, but you know as well as I that none can escape from the Masters. And now I go to tell them of your presence!"

He slammed the door suddenly in Tumithak's face and was gone.

FOR several minutes, Tumithak remained motionless in the apartment. That shelks were so near to him seemed incredible. Yet he expected every minute to see the door open and to have the horrible spider-like creatures rush in and slay him. At last, it seemed, he was in a trap from which there was no escape. He shivered with fear, and then, as always, the very in-

tensity of his fear shamed him and caused him to take a new grip upon himself; and though he trembled violently at what he was about to do, he moved to the door and examined it carefully. He had decided that the chances of escape would be greater in the corridor than if he waited here for the shelks to capture him. It was several minutes before he discovered the secret of the latch, but then he swung the door open and stepped into the corridor.

The corridor in Tumithak's vicinity was fortunately empty, but far up the hallway, the obese Esthett could still be seen, bustling ponderously on his way. He had been joined by others, many as fat as he; and all were hastening, as fast as their weight would let them, up the corridor, in the direction in which the square of the city evidently lay. Tumithak followed them at a discreet distance, and after a while, saw them turn into another corridor. He approached the corridor cautiously, the determination forming in his mind to slay the fat one that intended to betray him, at the first opportunity. It was well that he used care in his approach, for when he peered around the corner he saw that he was not a hundred feet from the town's great square.

He had never seen such a great square. It was a huge hall over a hundred yards in diameter, its tesselated marble floor and carved walls presenting an appearance that made Tumithak gasp in wonder. Here and there statutes stood on vari-colored pedestals, and all the doorways were hung with beautiful tapestries. The entire square was almost filled with Esthetts, over five hundred being present.

Not the hall, its furnishings nor its inhabitants had much effect on Tumithak. His eyes were occupied in observing the great cylinder of metal that lay in the center of the hall. It was just such a cylinder as the one he had seen on the carving when he first entered the city—eighteen or twenty feet long, mounted on four thickly tired wheels and having, he now perceived, a round opening in the top.

While he looked, a number of objects shot out of the opening and dropped lightly before the crowd. One after another, just as jacks from a box, they leapt from the opening, and as they nimbly struck the ground the Esthetts raised a cheer. Tumithak drew hastily back, and then, his curiosity overcoming his caution, dared to peep again into the hall. For the first time in over a hundred years, a man of Loor gazed upon a shelk!

Standing about four feet high, they were indeed spider-like, just as tradition said. But a close look showed that this was only a superficial resemblance. For these creatures were hairless, and possessed ten legs, rather than the eight that belong to a true spider. The legs were long and triple-jointed and on the tip of each was a short rudimentary claw much like a finger nail. There were two bunches of these legs, five on each side, and they joined the creature at a point midway between the head and the body. The body was shaped much like the abdomen of a wasp, and was about the same size as the head, which was certainly the strangest part of the entire creature.

For the head was the head of a man: The same eyes, the same broad brow, a mouth with tight, thin lips, and a chin—all these gave the head of the creature a startling resemblance to that of a man. The nose and hair alone were missing, to make the face perfectly human.

As Tumithak looked, they entered at once upon the business that had brought them down into the corridor. One of them took a paper from a pouch strapped to his body, grasping it nimbly between two of his limbs, and began to speak. His voice had a queer, metallic clack about it, but it was not a bit hard for Tumithak to distinguish every word he said.

"Brothers of the Pits," he cried, "the time has come for another group of you to make your homes on the Surface! The friends who left you last week are eagerly awaiting your arrival there, and it only remains for us to call the names of the ones to whom the great honor has fallen. Listen carefully, and let each one enter the cylinder as his name is called."

He paused, allowing his words to sink in, and then in a silence that was impressive, he began to call the names.

"Korystalis! Vintiania! Lathrumidor!" he called, and one after another, great, bull-bodied men strutted forward and climbed up a small ladder that was lowered from the cylinder. The third man called, Tumithak noticed, was the one who had conversed with him in the apartment. The look on his face, as well as on the faces of the others, was one of surprise and joy, as if some incredible piece of good luck had befallen him.

Now Tumithak had been so absorbed in observing the shelks and their vehicle that he had forgotten momentarily the threat that the Esthett had made, but when he saw him approaching the shelks, the Loorian's terror returned. He stood, rooted in his tracks with fear. But his fear was unnecessary, for apparently this unexpected piece of good fortune had driven everything else from the simple mind of the Chosen One, for he climbed into the cylinder without so much as a word to the shelks standing about. And Tumithak gave a great sigh of relief as he disappeared into the hole.

There were six shelks, and six Esthett's names were called; and as fast as they were called, their owners stepped forward and clambered, puffing and grunting, into the car. At last, the sixth had struggled down into the round opening and the shelks turned and followed. A lid covered the hole from below, and silence reigned in the hall. After a moment, the Esthetts began to drift away, and as several moved toward the corridor in which Tumithak was concealed, he was forced to dart back through the passage some distance and slip into an apartment to avoid discovery.

He half expected some Esthett to enter the apartment and discover him, but this time luck was with him and after a few moments, he peered cautiously through the door to find the corridor empty. He emerged and quickly made his way to the main hall. It was deserted of Esthetts, now, but for some reason the cylinder still remained in the same spot; and Tumithak was suddenly seized with an idea that made him tremble with its magnitude.

These shelks had obviously come from the Surface in this car! And now they were going back to the Surface in it. Had not the Esthett, whom the shelks named Lathrumidor, told him that occasionally artists were called to live upon the Surface among the shelks? Yes, this car was certainly going to return to the Surface. And, with a sudden rush of inspired determination, Tumithak knew that he was going with it.

He hastened forward and in a moment was clinging to the rear of the machine, clambering for a foothold on the few projections that he could find. He was not a

moment too soon, for hardly had he gotten a firm grip on the machine than it leaped silently forward and sped at a vertiginous speed up the corridor!

CHAPTER VI

The Slaying of the Shelk

TUMITHAK'S memory of that ride was a wild kaleidoscopic jumble of incidents. So fast did the car speed, that it was only occasionally, as they slowed to turn a corner or passed through an exceptionally narrow hall, that he could lift his eyes and look about him.

They passed through halls more brilliantly lighted than any he had yet seen. He saw halls of metal, polished and gleaming, and corridors of unpolished rock where strange things fled wildly out of their path, howling mournfully. There were passages where the car rolled smoothly and swiftly over a polished glistening floor, and corridors where the vibration of passing over rough rock threatened to hurl him at any moment from his precarious position.

Once they passed slowly through a marble passageway where Esthetts were lined on either side, chanting a solemn and sonorous hymn as the car of the shelks passed through. Tumithak was certain that he would be discovered, but if any of the singers saw him they paid little heed, evidently believing him to be a captive of the shelks. There were no longer any pits or branching hallways now, the entire road to the surface was one broad main corridor, and along this corridor the car sped, carrying Tumithak ever nearer to his goal.

Although the car's speed was not great as measured by the speed of the cars we use today, it must be remembered that the fastest speed the Loorian had ever conceived was a fast run. So it seemed to him now that he rode upon the very wings of the wind, and his thankfulness knew no bounds when the car at last slowed to a speed that enabled him to drop to the ground in a section of the corridor that had apparently been uninhabited for many years. All thought of continuing the ride was abandoned, now, his only desire was to end the devil's ride that he had so foolhardily undertaken.

For a moment, Tumithak was inclined to lie where he had fallen, at least long enough to regain control of his dazed faculties, but the sudden realization that the car of the shelks had stopped, not a hundred yards away, brought him instantly to his feet, and he flung himself hurriedly through the nearest open door. The apartment in which he found himself was dustladen and bare of furniture; it was obvious that it had been long unused, and so, convinced that no danger awaited him there, Tumithak returned to the door and looked out at the car.

He saw at once that the queer door or hatchway in the top of the car was open, but it was several moments before the occupants began to emerge. Then the fat head of one of the Esthetts appeared and its owner laboriously dragged himself up and over the side of the car. He was followed by a shelk, who leaped nimbly to the ground, after which the car slowly emptied until all twelve of its occupants were in the corridor. They all turned, then, and entered an apartment, the only one visible that bore a curtain over the door.

For a while, Tumithak remained in his hiding place debating his next move. His instinctive timidity urged him to remain in hiding, to wait—for days, if necessary—until the shelks had re-entered the car and departed. His curiosity demanded that he attempt to discover what the strangely allied party was doing beyond that great tapestry-covered door. And his wisdom told him that if he intended to continue on his quest, the best course was to keep on at once up the corridor, while the shelks were still within the apartment—for he knew that he was but a few short miles from the surface, toward which he had been traveling for so long.

His better judgment conquered at last and he chose the latter course, determined to forget the party, and so emerged from the room and began to run lightly and silently on his way; but as he passed the great doorway and saw how voluminous were the folds of the draperies and how easily one might conceal himself in them, he determined to have one last look at the shelks and their strange friends before continuing. So, suiting the action to the thought, he stepped to the opening and, drawing the curtains around him, parted them slightly and looked into the room.

The first thing to strike his attention was the immense size of the room. It must have been eighty feet long and half as many wide, truly an enormous room to the Loorian; and its ceiling was lost in gloom. So high was it that the lights, which were arranged around the room at the level of the shoulder, were not bright enough to show any of its detail. Tumithak had a queer idea that there was no ceiling, that perhaps the walls rose higher and higher until at last they reached the Surface. He had little time to speculate on this possibility, however, for he had hardly noticed it when his eyes fell upon the table. A great low table, it was, a long table covered with a cloth of snowy whiteness and piled high with strange articles that Tumithak saw were intended to be foods. But the Loorian looked at them in wonder, for they were foods such as he had never before heard of, such as his ancestors had not known for many a generation, the thousand and one succulent viands of the Surface. And around the table were a dozen low divans, and on some of these divans the Esthetts were even now reclining, greedily partaking of the varied foods.

The shelks, strangely enough, were not joining them in the feast. Behind each of the ponderous artists, a shelk had taken his place, and to Tumithak's notion, there was something ominous in the way they stood, silently watching every move the Esthetts made. But the self-styled Chosen Ones were quite at ease, gobbling their food and grunting appreciative interjections to each other, until Tumithak turned from looking at them in disgust.

And then, suddenly, there came a sharp command from the shelk at the head of the table. The Esthetts looked up in consternation, dismay and a pitiable incredulity in their faces. Ere they could move, however, ere they could even cry out, on each a shelk had leaped, his thin-lipped mouth seeking, finding unerringly, the jugular vein beneath the folds of flesh in the fat one's heavy throat.

Vainly the artists struggled, their slow, helpless movements were unavailing, the nimble shelks easily avoiding their groping arms while all the time their teeth sank deeper into the flesh. Tumithak gasped in horror. As one in a trance, he watched the movements of the

Esthetts become feebler and feebler until at last all motion ceased. The Loorian's brain was in a daze. What—what on Venus could be the meaning of this? What connection could this grisly scene have with the lengthy explanation of the lives of these people that Lathrumidor had given him in the marble halls below? He gazed at the scene in horror, unable to move his eyes.

THE Esthetts were quiet now, and the shelks had raised themselves from them and were busy with some new occupation. From beneath the table they had drawn several huge, transparent jars and half a dozen small machines with long hoses attached. These hoses were fastened to the wounds in the necks of the Eshetts and as Tumithak looked on, he saw the blood swiftly pumped from the bodies and ejected into the jars.

As the jars filled with the liquid, the bodies of the Esthetts collapsed like punctured balloons, and in a few moments they lay, pallid and wrinkled, on the floor about the table. The shelks showed no excitement in their work; apparently it was merely a routine duty with them, and their calm business-like methods served only to add to Tumithak's terror; but at last he overcame the paralytic fear that held him, and he turned and sped frantically away. Up the corridor he ran, faster and faster, farther and farther, and at last, spent and breathless, unable to run another step, he darted into an open door, and flung himself gasping and panting upon the floor of the apartment it led into.

Slowly he regained control of himself, his breath returned, and with it some small measure of confidence. He berated himself harshly for his cowardice in so losing control of himself, yet, even as he did so, he trembled at the thought of the terrible sight that he had witnessed. As he grew calmer, he began to wonder at the meaning of the events that he had seen. Lathrumidor, the Esthett, had led him to believe that the shelks were the kindly masters of the immense artists. He had spoken of the journey to the Surface as being the culminating honor of an Esthett's life. The shelk who had spoken in the great hall, too, had intimated as much. Yet for some strange reason, at the first opportunity after leaving the city, the shelks had slain their worshiping servants, and slain them in a way that seemed quite usual and commonplace to them. Strive as he might, Tumithak could not account for this apparent anomaly. And so, cowering in the rear room of the apartment, puzzling over the unnaturalness of the day's adventures, the Loorian fell into a troubled sleep.

It is not to be wondered that Tumithak was puzzled at the strange events of the day. He knew of no relationship between animals, such as existed between the Esthetts and the shelks. There were no domestic animals in the pits and man had not known of them for centuries. Other centuries were to go by before they were to know of them again, so there was nothing in Tumithak's life analogous to the status in which the shelks held the Esthetts.

Today we know that they were—cattle! Lulled into a sense of false security by hypocritical lies, bred for centuries for the full-blooded, bovine stupidity that was characteristic of them, allowed no means of intellectual expression except the artistic impulse which the shelks scorned, they had become, after many generations, the willing creatures of the Beasts of Venus.

And by a strange combination of the lies of the shelks and their own immense conceit, they had come to look forward, from earliest childhood, to that happy day when they would be taken to the Surface—to become, unknowing, the food of their masters. Such were the Esthetts, strangest, perhaps, of all the various races of men evolved by the breeding of the shelks.

All this, however, was far beyond the comprehension of Tumithak—or of any man of his generation. And so it was that even after he awoke and resumed his journey, he was still unable to account for the strange relationship. But the puzzles which a semi-savage mind cannot solve, it soon forgets, and so it was that before long Tumithak was strolling along on his way, his mind entirely at ease.

Since passing the hall of the singing Esthetts, during his wild ride, Tumithak had seen no signs of habitation. Apparently the corridors were entirely too near the surface to be inhabited by man. So Tumithak saw no one in the corridors and traveled for several miles undisturbed. At last he came to an abrupt end of the passage, and here found a ladder of metal set into the wall that rose higher and higher in the gloom. Filled with a suppressed excitement, his heart beating noticeably again, Tumithak began the ascent of what he knew to be the last pit before he reached the surface. He emerged from it in a hall of strange black stone, and removing from his pouch the last of his father's gifts, he started along the upward slope, the weapon held gingerly in his hand. The corridor was narrower than any Tumithak had ever seen, and as he walked along the walls drew still closer together, until it was not more than two feet wide. The grade became steeper and steeper and at last became a flight of stairs. Up these Tumithak strode, every moment his heart beating wilder, and at last he saw what he knew to be his goal. Far ahead, a light shone down in the corridor from above, a light far brighter and harsher than any of the lights of the corridors, and of a strange reddish tint. Tumithak knew, as he looked on it in awe, that the light was the light of the Surface.

He hurried forward; the ceiling became lower and lower and for the last few yards he was forced to stoop, and then—He reached the top of the steps and found himself standing in a shallow pit, not more than five feet deep. He raised his head, and a low gasp of absolute unbelief escaped from him.

For Tumithak had looked upon the Surface. . . .

THE vastness of the scene was enough to unnerve the Loorian. It seemed that he had emerged into a mighty room or hall, so tremendous that he could not even comprehend its immensity. The ceiling and walls of this room merged into each other to form a stupendous vault like an inverted bowl, which touched the floor of the vault at a distance so far away that it seemed utterly incredible. And this ceiling and these walls in places were of a beautiful blue, the color of a woman's eyes. This blue glowed like a jewel, and was mottled with great billowy areas of white and rose, and as Tumithak looked he had a vague feeling that those enormous billowy spots were slowly moving and changing in shape.

Unable to take his eyes from the sky above him, Tumithak's wonder and awe began to turn into a great fear. The more he looked, the further away the great

dome seemed to be, and yet, curiously and terribly, it seemed to be closing in on him, too. He was sure, after a moment, that the great billowy spots were moving, and he had a dreadful feeling that they were about to fall and crush him. Sick and terrified at the enormity of the scene before him, he darted back into the passageway and cowered against the wall, trembling with a strange, unreasoning fear. For, raised as he had been in the close confines of the corridor walls, living his whole life under the ground, Tumithak, when he first looked upon the Surface, became a victim of agoraphobia, that strange fear of open spaces, that in some people, even today, amounts to a disease.

It was nearly an hour before his reason was able to gain control over this strange fear. Had he come thus far, he argued with himself, only to return because of the appearance of the Surface? Surely, if that mighty blue and cloudy vault was to fall, it would not have waited all these years just to fall on him. He took a deep breath, and reason prevailing at last, he again looked out upon the Surface.

But this time his eyes avoided the sky, and he directed his attention to the floor of the "room." In the vicinity of the pit this floor consisted of a thick brown dust, but not far away this dust was covered with a strange carpet consisting of thousands of long green hairs thickly matted together, completely hiding the dusty floor beneath. In the middle distance were a number of tall, irregular pillars whose tops were covered with a great huge bunch of stuff, of the same color and appearance as the hairs of the carpet.

And then, as Tumithak looked beyond the grass and the trees, he beheld a wonder that surpassed all the other wonders that he had seen, for hanging low in the dome above the trees was the light of the Surface, a brilliant, blinding orb that lit up, redly, all that vast space of the Surface.

Speechless with awe, Tumithak looked upon the sunset. Again came the dizzy, sickening rush of agoraphobia, but with it came a sense of beauty that made him forget his fear, and gradually calmed him. After a while he turned his eyes and looked in the opposite direction; and there, towering high above him, were the homes of the shelks!

Fully a dozen of the high towers were visible, obelisk-like they stood there, their metal walls gleaming redly in the light of the sinking sun. Very few of them stood perfectly erect, the strange unearthly artistic sense of the shelks causing them to be built at various angles from the perpendicular, some as much as thirty degrees. They were of varying heights, some fifty, some as much as two hundred feet high, and from their tops long cables hung, linking all the towers together. Windowless they were, and the only mode of ingress was a small round door at the bottom. Not one of all these towers was more than fifteen feet in circumference, so that they gave an appearance not unlike a bundle of huge needles.

For how long the Loorian gazed at these amazing scenes, he could not tell. Of all the wondrous sights, the strangest, to him, was the sunset, the gradual sinking of the great red light into what seemed to be the floor of the vast chamber. Even after the sun had disappeared, he remained gazing absorbedly at the walls, which still glowed redly where it had been. . . . And then——

Tumithak had not heard a sound. Lost in wonder though he was, his ears had remained instinctively on the alert, and yet he had heard nothing. Until suddenly there was a scratching, rustling noise behind him and a clattering, metallic voice barked staccato words of command.

"Get—back—in—that—hole!" it spat, and Tumithak's blood turned to water as he realized that a shelk had stolen up behind him!

The next second seemed a year to the Loorian. He turned to face the beast, and in that turning a thousand thoughts raced through his mind. He thought of Nikadur and Thupra, and of the many years that he had known them; he thought of his father and even of his little remembered mother; he thought, strangely enough, of the huge Yakran that he had tumbled into the pit, and of how he had bellowed as he fell. All these thoughts rushed through his mind as he turned and then his arm flew up to protect himself. Utterly instinctive, the action was; it seemed that he was not in control of his body at all. Something outside of him—greater than himself—caused him to flex his fingers, and as he did so the revolver, the last of his father's three strange gifts, spat flame and thunder! As in a dream, he heard its spitting bark, once, twice, thrice—seven times; and into the shallow pit tumbled the dead body of the shelk!

For a moment, the hero stared at it dumbly. Then, as the realization that he had accomplished his mission came over him, a great feeling of exultation seized him. Quickly drawing his sword, he began to slash at the ten long finger-like legs of the shelk, humming, as he did so, the song that the Loorians sang when they marched against the Yakrans; and though there were strange, questioning clacks and clatters from the direction of the homes of the shelks, he methodically continued hacking until the head was free from the body.

Then, realizing that the voices of the shelks were much nearer, he stuffed the bleeding head into the bosom of his tunic, and sped like the wind down the steps of the corridor.

CHAPTER VII

The Power and the Glory

TUMLOOK of Loor, the father of Tumithak, sat in the doorway of his apartment, gazing out into the corridor. It was a lonely life that he had led for the past few weeks, for although his friends had tried to cheer him with the customary optimistic chatter, he could see that they all believed that his son would never return. And indeed, it would have been a bold man that would argue that Tumithak had even so much as passed the city of Yakra.

Tumlook knew the opinions of his friends and he was beginning to believe as they did, in spite of the fact that they did their best to make him think that they expected wondrous things of his son. Why, he wondered, had he ever let the youth depart on such a hopeless quest? Why had he not been more stern with him, and driven the idea out of his head while he was still young? So he sat and berated himself, in this hour just before the time of sleep, as the life of Loor passed by him in an irregular, intermittent stream.

After a while his face brightened a little. Coming down the hall toward him were the two lovers whose long friendship with Tumithak had made a bond that

Tumlook felt that he had somehow inherited. Nikadur hailed him, and as they drew near, Thupra ran up and kissed him impulsively on the cheek.

"Have you heard aught of Tumithak?" she cried, the question that had become almost a form of greeting between them.

Tumlook shook his head.

"Is it likely?" he asked. "Surely, after all these weeks, we must look upon him as dead."

But Thupra was not to be discouraged. Indeed, of all Loor, it is probable that she alone still maintained the confidence that amounted to a certainty that Tumithak was safe and would return in triumph.

"I think he will return," she said now. "You know, we are sure that he reached Yakra. And has not Nennapuss told us of the huge giant that was found dead at the foot of the Yakran shaft? If Tumithak could conquer such a man as that, who could overcome him?"

"Thupra may be right," said Nikadur, gravely. "There are rumors in Nonone of a great panic in Yakra, during which a man of these corridors is supposed to have passed through the town. The rumors are vague and may be only gossip, but perhaps Tumithak did reach the dark corridors."

"Tumithak will return, I know," Thupra repeated. "He is mighty, and——" she paused. Far up the corridor, her ears caught a sound and she listened questioningly. Then Nikadur heard it, too, and last of all, it reached the ears of Tumlook.

A shouting, a distant shouting that grew louder even as they listened. Several passing pedestrians heard it, too, and paused; and then two men turned and hastened off in its direction. The trio strained their ears in an endeavor to distinguish the meaning of the cries. Several more men came speeding up the corridor, running in the direction of the noise.

"Come," cried Nikadur suddenly, consternation written in his face. "If this be a raid of the Yakrans——" In spite of the cries of Thupra, he sped off, and Tumlook hesitated only long enough to dart back into his apartment and arm himself before he followed.

Thupra, however, was not to be left behind. She caught up with Nikadur in a moment, and in spite of his protestations, persisted in going with him. And so the three, joined soon by many others, rushed on in the direction of the excitement.

A man passed them, running the other way. "What is it?" came a chorus of a dozen voices, but the man's only answer was an unintelligible gabble of words as he ran on. The crowd's ignorance was not to continue for long, though, for at the very next turn of the corridor, they beheld the cause of the tumult.

Down the corridor came marching an incredible procession. A group of Loorians led the parade, dancing and cheering like mad, while behind them came marching a well-known figure—Nennapuss, chief of the Nononese, with his retinue of officers. Nennapuss was followed by what must have been almost the entire population of Nonone, all gabbling and shouting madly to the Loorians whom they passed. It was not at the Nononese that the Loorians stared, however, but at the ones who followed them. Behind Nennapuss' men came a crowd of Yakrans, each carrying aloft a white cloth on a stick that still, after so many hundreds of years, denoted a truce. Datto was there, the burly chief of the Yakrans, and his huge nephew, Thopf, and many others of whom the Loorians had heard from the Nononese, and there, high on the shoulders of two of the mightiest Yakrans, was riding—Tumithak!

But when the eyes of the Loorians looked upon Tumithak, they looked no further. For the sight they beheld was so incredible that it seemed impossible to believe that they were not dreaming.

He was dressed in garments that, to their eyes, were beautiful beyond telling. They were of the finest texture imaginable, sheer gauzes that were dyed in the most delicate shades of nacreous pinks and greens and blues. They flowed down over his form, clinging to his body and giving him all the appearance of a god. Around his head was a metal band not unlike a crown, such a band as legend said the king shelks were wont to wear.

And, most unbelievable of all, he held his arm aloft, and in his hand was the wrinkled head of a shelk!

Tumlook, Nikadur and Thupra never knew when they joined the crowd. One moment they were rushing down the corridor toward the incredible procession, the next, it had absorbed them and they, too, were a part of the howling, enthusiastic mob that fought and laughed its way toward the great square of Loor.

They reached the crossing of the two main corridors and formed an immense crowd with Tumithak and the Yakrans in its center. The crowd continued its chattering and cheering for some moments and then Tumithak, mounting the stone pedestal that had long been used for speakers, held up his hand for silence. Quiet reigned almost instantly, and in the lull, the voice of Nennapuss, that instinctive master of ceremonies, could be heard.

"Friends of Loor," he cried. "Today is the day that will live forever in the archives of the three cities of the lower corridors. It has been unnumbered years since the three cities have all met on a friendly footing, and to bring that about it has taken an event so incredible that it is well-nigh impossible to believe. For at last a man has slain a shelk——"

He was interrupted by the booming voice of Datto, the much-decorated chief of the Yakrans.

"Enough of this talk," he shouted. "We are here to do honor to Tumithak, the Loorian, who has slain a shelk. Let us shout and sing songs in his praise. Let us bow to him, Nennapuss, we who are chiefs, let us call upon the chiefs of Loor to bow to him also, for who could slay a shelk if he were not far greater than we."

NENNAPUSS looked a little nettled at having been interrupted at his favorite pastime, but before he could answer, Tumithak began to speak. And at his word, Yakran and Nononese alike listened with respect.

"Fellow Loorians," he began. "Brothers of Nonone and Yakra, it was not for honor that I journeyed to the Surface and slew the beast whose head I hold in my hand. Since I was a boy I have felt that men could fight with shelks. It has been the ambition of my life to prove that fact to everyone. Surely no citizen of Loor was less of a fighter than I. Many, indeed, have scorned me for a mere dreamer of dreams. And I assure you that I was little more. Can you not see that man is not the weak, insignificant creature that you seem to think? You Yakrans have never cowered in fear when the men of Loor came against you! Loorians, have you ever trembled in your apartments when the Yakrans raided your halls?

(*Continued on page* 950)

The Lemurian Documents

A Series of Short Stories

By J. Lewis Burtt, B.Sc.

No. 1—Pygmalion

Illustrated by MOREY

Introductory

IT invariably happens that way! Just as I was peacefully preparing for a quiet week-end vacation, the phone must start its infernal jangling.

Disgustedly I picked up the receiver.

"Hello! That you Lewis? Come on over right away. It's the find of a century!"

The voice was vibrant with excitement. It could mean only one thing. My old friend, Professor Diston, archeologist, had come upon it at last.

Five minutes to phone and cancel my trip, and I was on my way to the professor's home-like little bungalow.

He met me at the door, dragged me into his study and pushed me bodily towards a little table. On it were what looked like stenographers' notes that had been first scorched and then soaked for a week. I reached out to examine them, knowing that they must be manuscripts of unusual antiquity.

"Don't *TOUCH* them!" he yelled, grabbing my arm so violently that I nearly upset the lot. "They're as flimsy as burnt paper," he added by way of explanation.

I suppose I looked rather puzzled as Diston, his excitement beginning to wear off, pushed me into a chair and sat down opposite me.

"Now, prof, do please relieve my terrible anxiety. Tell me where you got them. What are they? Why the excitement and all that sort of thing? For goodness sake let me in on it before sheer curiosity overcomes me entirely.

"I got 'em—you'd never guess—but Marston found 'em!"

"Marston!" I exclaimed incredulously, for Commander Marston, R. N., was the last man to worry over antiques. His hobby was making his destroyer the smartest ship in the British navy. As he himself put it; antiques were "So beastly untidy!"

"Yes, Marston," interpolated Diston, who continued his narrative in somewhat incoherent fashion, "He hauled them up out of the ocean. He was on some stunt taking soundings off the Polynesian Islands—you know, where the old continent of Lemuria was." (This was one of Diston's pet lines of controversy, his belief in the former existence of Atlantis and Lemuria.) "In one particular dredging—I've got the latitude and longitude somewhere—his drags caught something on the bottom, where apparently only mud should have been. Eventually he recovered his grapnels—It's lucky it *WAS* Marston; he'd hang around for a month rather than lose one of his precious mud-hooks!—Well, when he unearthed it, or rather un-sea-ed it, it brought with it this box."

I had not noticed the box before. It was cylindrical in shape, made of a reddish metal, and had been beautifully decorated, although now it was rather battered.

"Copper?" I queried.

"Copper!" he grunted in disgust, "Don't you recognize the ancient metal 'orichalcum', the secret of which was lost in the sinking of Atlantis?"

I withered under his righteous indignation.

"Old Marston's an ass, but he did have the sense to bring the thing to me unopened. Took me two days to open it, and I found these." He indicated the manuscripts.

"Well, what are they?" I prompted.

"I DON'T KNOW" he almost shrieked, "but they're OLD!—Lemurian, I think."

All the excitement was explained. Something "old" to the professor meant at least ten thousand years. And since they came from mid-Pacific, it certainly looked as though he might at last be able to prove his theory—that the race of peoples—the Lemurians— had ACTUALLY EXISTED.

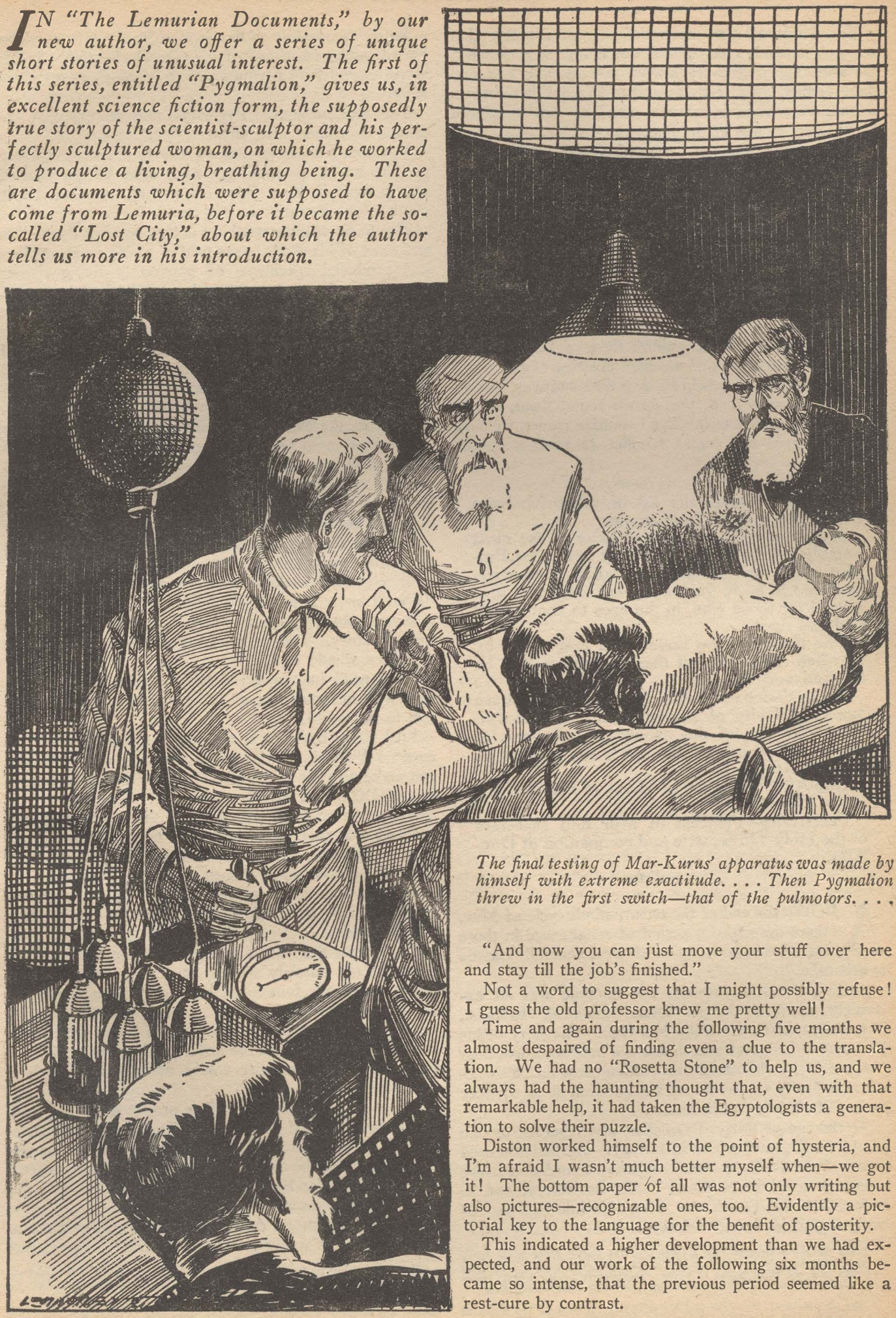
"Anyway, prof," I asked, "What's the use of them if you can't read them?"

"That's where you come in," he chuckled. "You know more about ancient tongues and ciphers than any man on this continent. (This, needless to say, is a gross exaggeration.) Between us, we're simply *GOING* to translate them!"

"But my work?" I stammered.

"That's all right. I phoned the university before I got you, and told them they must give you a year's vacation." He grinned. "They did it, too. Kicked, of course, when I insisted on a vacation *WITH* salary!"

IN "The Lemurian Documents," by our new author, we offer a series of unique short stories of unusual interest. The first of this series, entitled "Pygmalion," gives us, in excellent science fiction form, the supposedly true story of the scientist-sculptor and his perfectly sculptured woman, on which he worked to produce a living, breathing being. These are documents which were supposed to have come from Lemuria, before it became the so-called "Lost City," about which the author tells us more in his introduction.



The final testing of Mar-Kurus' apparatus was made by himself with extreme exactitude. . . . Then Pygmalion threw in the first switch—that of the pulmotors. . . .

"And now you can just move your stuff over here and stay till the job's finished."

Not a word to suggest that I might possibly refuse! I guess the old professor knew me pretty well!

Time and again during the following five months we almost despaired of finding even a clue to the translation. We had no "Rosetta Stone" to help us, and we always had the haunting thought that, even with that remarkable help, it had taken the Egyptologists a generation to solve their puzzle.

Diston worked himself to the point of hysteria, and I'm afraid I wasn't much better myself when—we got it! The bottom paper of all was not only writing but also pictures—recognizable ones, too. Evidently a pictorial key to the language for the benefit of posterity.

This indicated a higher development than we had expected, and our work of the following six months became so intense, that the previous period seemed like a rest-cure by contrast.

But the translation—so weird—so unbelievable that we could scarcely credit that it was not a hoax. In fact, we tried applying every known test to both box and paper, which latter really proved to be a fabric unknown to modern science, before we ourselves were convinced of the genuineness of the find.

Now at last was the explanation and origin of the legends and myths of antiquity. Not the supernatural visitations of supermen and gods, but merely the development of a scientific knowledge so far beyond ours as to be almost incredible to us.

Story after story we read and recognized as a scientific version of an old legend. What should we do? If we published them, would the world believe? We doubted it. Neither of us fancied becoming food for the comic strips.

Finally we decided to publish them as fiction stories and let those believe who would. The rest of the world could find out the truth in its own time and way.

Here they are then, just as we found them, except that, in place of the unfamiliar Lemurian names, we have generally used the names familiar to readers of the classics.

INSCRIPTION

Engraved inside the lid of the orichalcum box is the following statement:

Herein are the records of some of the most notable events in the history of our great Empire of Mur (sometimes called Lemuria), gathered in haste during the last days and preserved for those who, in the ages to come, shall find and read.

The chest will be sealed and cast adrift by us when the terrors of these last days shall be finished and written.

Given under our hand, above the place where our capital city of Rapani stood; in the two hundredth day of the twenty-seventh year, of the second third, of the thirty-third cycle of our Empire of Mur.*

Duc-Allu—Prince of Mur and Priest of the Holy Three.**

Peer-Rana—Princess of Mur and Priestess of the Holy Three, wife and companion of Duc-Allu.

Pygmalion

ABOUT the end of the twenty-ninth cycle of Mur, there developed a period of renaissance in those branches of learning which were generally classed as scientific.

Among the experimenters of the time was an extremely capable, though rather fanatical, biologist, Prince Pygmalion (or Vaag-Mel-On). The story of his life, and of his great experiment are here recorded, both because of its almost uncanny strangeness and also because it finally settled for us the question as to whether or not life is inherent in matter.

At the age of thirty, Pygmalion was regarded as one of the leading authorities in biology. He had followed closely the experiments of those who claimed that living creatures could be produced in the laboratory, and so enthusiastic did he become along this line that he entirely neglected his social duties.

So much was this so that eventually the girl to whom he was affianced, tiring of his eternal absorption in his work, eloped with a young prince of much gayer character.

This incident soured Pygmalion and he very soon became a confirmed misogynist.

Our young students of this generation, however, being used to mental pampering, prefer their history handed out to them in story form, so, perhaps, we had better continue the narrative in that way.

The thing really started in a debate between Pygmalion and some of his rivals in the field of biology. Pygmalion had produced specimens of apparently living tissues from inert chemical compounds, and he had contended that it was only a matter of time before it would be possible to synthesize living beings.

His opponents "pooh-poohed" the idea and the final outcome was the now proverbial "Pygmalion Wager." Backing his arguments to the extent of a full "mar-rat" of "fenals"* he contended that he could and would produce from the elements a living being of any type his challengers cared to name.

"It's a shame to take the money!" was the ironic comment of one of the challengers, "especially as *WE* have the choice of the subject."

"Let's make it a hard one," chimed in another.

"The harder the better, gentlemen," was Pygmalion's apparently unconcerned reply.

"I've got it!" exclaimed the one who had first spoken, "We all know Pygmalion's fondness for the fair sex—a snort from Pygmalion—"Let him make a woman in his laboratory. Then he can show us just what he thinks a woman should be like."

"No, no!" interrupted another. "He might fall in love with her and then all his genius would be forever lost to the world!"

"All right, boys," was the rather unexpected acceptance of Pygmalion, "I'll make you a woman, and you can make up your minds that she'll outshine any woman any of *YOU* ever saw!"

This was said so seriously that the jokers suddenly realized that their jests had been taken seriously, and that, by the code of honour of Lemurian nobility, they were committed to this absurd wager.

Aghast, they stared at each other. The fanatic was *ACTUALLY GOING TO ATTEMPT THE IMPOSSIBLE!*

They knew that it meant utter ruination to him, since he could not possibly succeed, and they feared that it might cause his fanaticism to develop into actual insanity. However, they were helpless. Much as they regretted the outcome of their absurd jokes, they knew it was too late to recall the action. They knew that the obstinate young scientist would never refuse such a challenge.

Going to his desk, Pygmalion produced writing materials and recorded the wager in detail, he himself staking the full amount from his own fortune, while his opponents divided the amount among four men—Par-Actu, the biologist; Mar-Kurus, the magnetician; Tan-Fal, the physician; Sol-Kana, the surgeon.

"It is not because I doubt YOUR honour, gentlemen, that I wish this wager to be put in writing, signed and

*From the key it appears that a cycle was 343 years. This figure being derived from the sacred Lemurian method of reckoning in three and seven—in this case the third power of seven. Thirty-three cycles would, therefore, give a history extending over some eleven thousand years.

**For the story of Duc-Allu and his wife, see the last of the series of stories which gives an account of the final destruction of Lemuria.

*Their reckoning in 3 and 7 gave them the "rat" equaling 7 cubed or 343, and the "mar-rat" which was the square of that number, or 117,649 in our decimal reckoning.

The "fenal" had apparently a purchasing value equal to about two and a half of our dollars. The wager, therefore, amounted to about a quarter of a million dollars—small wonder it became proverbial.

witnessed, but so that, when I have succeeded, no one shall be able to say that it is all a fake. You will see that I have included a condition that any one of you shall have the right to inspect my laboratory at any time, or even to place there a permanent guard as a guarantee against my smuggling in a subject."

Reluctantly, but without any alternative, the challengers signed the document, which was immediately placed (according to custom) in care of the Department of Records for safe keeping.

There were one or two interesting conditions attached to the wager. Only one of these is, however, of any importance to us. It stated that at the end of each year, Pygmalion should show that he was making satisfactory progress—a neutral umpire to decide in case of disagreement—and that his experiments must be concluded within ten years, an extension of time of one year to be allowed in case he should appear to be on the point of success—again at the decision of a neutral umpire if necessary.

These conditions were insisted on by Pygmalion himself, his opponents not having the slightest intention of ever attempting to collect the wager under any conditions

WITHIN a few days of the making of the bet, Pygmalion had finished off the work he had in hand and was ready to start his big experiment.

He first of all constructed a wax model of a woman. BUT unlike any ordinary model, this one was in itself a masterpiece of skill. Every bone, every muscle, every organ, down to the tiniest detail, was modeled with the most remarkable exactness, even the colorings of the various waxes used being made as in the natural body. No smallest detail was omitted, not even the tiny pores of the skin.

The challengers, as they watched the progress of the model, would stand and marvel. Even though they could actually watch the progress of the operations as they were performed, they were utterly at a loss to understand how any man could work with such incredible delicacy. Had Pygmalion done no other thing in his lifetime, his fame would assuredly have gone down through history as the most marvelous sculptor ever known.

Imagine the skill and delicacy of touch required to build a perfect model of, say, a finger—every bone exact, every tiny muscle in place, every wrinkle showing in the skin.

Often he would spend hours over what appeared to be an unimportant detail. He knew that, if this structure was to live at all, it must be exact, absolutely exact, in every detail.

At last the model was completed. Every detail was finished. To look at it was almost to be convinced that the actual body of a real woman lay there—the body of a remarkably beautiful woman too. Pygmalion was by nature an artist as well as a biologist and nothing but beauty would satisfy him.

Only the eyes were not natural in appearance. Here was the greatest difficulty, and the young biologist did not even attempt to make exact models of these delicate structures.

The building of the model had taken fully three years, but so fascinating was the work, that the four challengers had never once tired of watching the growth of this waxen miracle.

WHEN the model was finished, Pygmalion paid a visit to the Royal Laboratories at Rapani, where he secured supplies of all the substances he required. Each sample was carefully analyzed to insure that none but absolutely pure materials were obtained. This work occupied nearly a season.

On his return to his own palace, Pygmalion invited his friends to dine with him. The dinner, like everything else arranged by this remarkable man, was a marvel of perfection. Never had a group of men sat down to a more pleasurable meal. Music was provided by a specially chosen orchestra, instead of the conventional radi-visor service, and the guests were invited to select their own pieces, and also to indicate so far as possible their own choice of instrumentation.

During the meal no mention was made of biology although everyone felt that they had been invited to witness something in connection with Cal-Atna*, as Pygmalion had facetiously named his model. Consequently, no one was surprised when, shortly after the conclusion of the meal, Pygmalion requested his guests to accompany him to the laboratory.

In the outer laboratory he stopped and, indicating a bench stacked with rows and rows of containers of various shapes and sizes, said:

"My friends, my first model is, as you know, completed. Here on this bench are materials I require for the construction of the living creature. Our wager requires that all parts of the body shall be synthesized from their elements. Now you will concede that many of the simpler organic structures have already been synthesized. Therefore I do not consider that the spirit of the agreement is broken if I save time and tedious work by making use of such compounds. Are you in agreement, gentlemen?"

"Why, certainly!" they exclaimed. "We never supposed you would do otherwise."

"Thank you, gentlemen," was the reply. "These substances," he went on, "are all compounds that have been synthesized by chemists. They include such things as glycerols, esters, aldehydes, sugars, complex hydrocarbons, simple albumens. These supplies are all specially purified and care has been taken that no living cell structures are present—not even the yeasts and bacteria.

"It is my particular wish, gentlemen, that you arrange to have these substances tested and examined, and that any of which you have the slightest doubt as to sterility, purity or synthetic nature, shall be rejected by you."

"But that is totally unnecessary," responded Mar-Kurus. "Surely your word is enough for us."

"That is not the point, friends," continued Pygmalion. "I know that my word is enough for YOU, but I wish to have absolute confirmation of every detail in order to prove my work and conclusions to the world."

"Very well, then," agreed Mar-Kurus, "We will, in that case, divide the task among us, and will at the end of three times seven days give you a sworn statement that each sample has been tested and approved by at least one of us personally. And," he went on, "maybe, at the end of that period, invite ourselves to a repetition of your hospitality?"

"If we are twice privileged to eat such a dinner as we had tonight, then we shall consider ourselves most definitely favoured of the gods. Such repasts come but once in a lifetime to ordinary mortals."

*There appears to have been something humorous connected with the name, but the joke is not apparent in the translation.

Pygmalion, who was more human in his emotions than he cared to admit, was eager to renew his invitations. That his efforts as host should have been so much appreciated pleased him even more than the success he had had with his work, and, although he masked it under a cloak of brusquerie, his friends knew it too.

AFTER the second dinner, the party again adjourned to the laboratories. This time, when they had entered the antechamber, Pygmalion took from the lockers five complete suits and masks, and, to their surprise, told them to put them on.

"These suits," he explained, "are absolutely impervious to the passage of anything except through two specially designed valves. They are even supplied with an artificial air supply, waste air being sterilized perfectly before it escapes. From now on, no person may enter my inner lab, unless equipped with one of these suits."

When all were dressed, they passed from the antechamber through a perfectly fitting door into a small room where their suits were sprayed with a strong sterilizing solution and then dried in a current of pure nitrogen.

From this room, through another self-sealing door, they entered the inner laboratory. Here they found ranged the supplies and apparatus, and on a white marble table, perfectly shaped to the body, they saw the waxen image of Cal-Atna.

Pygmalion now commenced a series of tests. His voice sounded thin and unnatural through the mask as he explained: "Not only must my materials be sterile but there must also be no trace of living cells present in my laboratory, except such as are cut off by the mask suits, and those which are artificially constructed during the experiments. I shall ask you to certify to this also, if you will be so good."

By now the four had fully entered into the spirit of the experiment, and this time they not only watched every test carefully, but they even suggested one or two additional ones.

At last all were satisfied as to the absolute sterility of the laboratory and everything in it and, leaving the place with the same care as they had used in entering it, they returned to Pygmalion's private den.

After some little time spent in more or less general conversation, Par-Actu asked, "Would it be straining your generosity too far, Pygmalion, if we asked you to give us some hint as to your proposed methods of procedure?"

"Why, of course not," eagerly exclaimed the scientist. "On the contrary, it gives me exceedingly great pleasure to know that you are so much interested. You'll all be converted long before the experiments are finished," he added slyly.

"Oh, no we shan't!" came back the chorus.

"We'll already admit," continued Sol-Kana, "that you can construct a perfect copy of the human body. After seeing your model, we can't deny that, but we still maintain that that body *WILL NOT LIVE.*"

Pygmalion's reply to this was merely a very confident smile. Then, settling back on his couch, he began his explanation.

"I propose first of all, gentlemen, to synthesize from my materials a sufficient quantity of the simpler structures such as the protoplasms. For this I shall make use of the processes discovered by our learned friend Par-Actu—You see," he parenthesized with a boyish grin, "I propose to use at least one process invented by each of you, thereby making you all contribute to your mutual downfall."

Mingled groans and laughter greeted this sally. Pygmalion continued.

"These and the more complex structures which will follow I intend to keep in Tan-Fal's famous preserving solution—that ropes HIM in.

"From the simple cell structures I can proceed on the lines mapped out by Col-Kana to build up masses of muscle, nerve and bone tissues, etc. For the brain tissues I'm afraid I must use a process of my own which I am not yet quite ready to divulge. I can, however, use your method, Par-Actu, for uniting these tissues into muscles and organs, and for making them grow and develop.

"I must admit that I have been somewhat at a loss to make use of any of our friend Mar-Kurus' inventions, but I fancy that, when the structure is complete, we shall need his electro-tensional machines to stimulate the first muscular activity. That, gets you all involved."

"In the building of the body itself I shall use a process of substitution, replacing the waxes with tissues, section by section, until the whole is complete. Your preservative has no action on waxes I hope, Tan-Fal?" he queried maliciously.

"But will you be able to accomplish all that in six years?" queried Mar-Kurus.

"Oh! I shall not do it all alone." replied Pygmalion. "I shall need three or four assistants. You see, at times it will be necessary for several operations to be conducted simultaneously, which will make assistance imperative."

"Have you any particular men in mind?" asked Mar-Kurus.

"No, not definitely," replied Pygmalion, "I shall have to select men who know sufficient to be trusted absolutely with very delicate processes, and they are not easy to find. Perhaps you gentlemen have some suggestions to offer?"

They thought for some moments, then, rather hesitantly, Sol-Kana spoke.

"I wonder, Pygmalion—I hardly like to make the suggestion, but, do you think you could trust us four so far as to allow us to become your fellow workers?"

In absolute surprise Pygmalion stared at him.

"You!" he exclaimed at length. "Do you men mean that you would actually be willing to assist me in winning this wager against yourselves?"

"Why not?" replied Sol-Kana, "without flattering ourselves, I think we can say that we four can do the work better than anyone else, and that we are all to be trusted with the most delicate of operations. As for working against ourselves, there's nothing to that. We know you can build this body either with or without our assistance, and we may as well admit the truth and confess that we are all rather keen on getting as close to this experiment as we possibly can. Are we agreed, gentlemen?" he added, turning to his colleagues.

"Why, of course, if Pygmalion will have us," they exclaimed in unison.

"Gentlemen, this is indeed a surprise," stammered out the amazed experimenter. "There could be no one to whom I would as soon entrust the work, but I should never have dared suggest such a thing to you."

"That's all settled, then," commented Par-Actu. "When do we start work?"

THE following years were a period of great interest to all five men. In spite of the length of time which their work took, there was no flagging of their interest. The periods spent in building up masses of tissues of various kinds were more or less routine; however, only one incident producing any particular excitement.

One day Pygmalion came over to where Par-Actu was busy stimulating the growth and development of a group of membranous tissues. For a long time he looked from one section to another of the various specimens. Then he indicated one specimen.

"That one will do, I think," was his rather cryptic comment. "Now I'd like you to take that particular specimen of membrane and graft it on to a piece of bone tissue. When it is firmly united, take some ..... (Here the manuscript goes into an involved technical explanation of various processes. A satisfactory translation was found to be impossible as the substances used and the methods employed do not seem to have any counterpart in our modern biology. Also, since these translations are being published as ostensibly fictional, it would be of no interest to readers. For these reasons we have decided to omit a part of the narrative here and in one or two other places. To biologists and others who are technically interested, we shall be pleased to give as much of a translation as we have been able to make.—The Translators.)

"What do you expect to result from this?" asked Par-Actu, somewhat mystified. He could see no possible point in some of the operations.

"You'll see as you progress," was all the satisfaction he could get.

Sure enough, some nine days after the various treatments had been completed, Par-Actu and his friends did, indeed, begin to see a most surprising result. From the artificial skin was beginning to grow *A LUXURIANT CROP OF HAIR!*

"Why all the amazement?" was Pygmalion's comment. "You know that hair is really more of a vegetable than an animal growth. Why, then, should it not be the easier to stimulate artificially?"

"Then why all the mystery?" was Par-Actu's challenge. To confess the truth, he had been a little piqued at the mysterious manner of Pygmalion.

"Partly my alleged sense of humor, partly because I wasn't sure just whether I should get the right kind of growth—I couldn't guarantee that it might not be scales or feathers, or even some remarkable new type of covering."

ABOUT a year and a half after the completion of the waxen image, Pygmalion was ready to commence substituting actual tissues for the waxes. His skill in this surprised even his friends, accustomed as they now were to his genius. At times they would leave their own work and watch the master for hours, fascinated by the delicate manipulations of those marvelously sensitive fingers, handicapped even as they were with their covering gloves.

One thing puzzled them. Pygmalion did not seem to have any ordered plan for this substitution. One time he would take a part of an internal organ and build that up. Then again it would be a bone or nerve ganglion.

This erratic behavior was so utterly unlike the precisely methodical Pygmalion, that his friends began to wonder whether his intense concentration on the one idea had at last begun to affect his reason.

"Don't like it!" commented Mar-Kurus, "I'm afraid there's something wrong with him."

"It certainly looks suspicious," was Par-Actu's comment. "But don't forget his remarkable mysticism about the hair."

"Wasn't that possibly the first symptom, don't you think?" followed up Sol-Kana.

The discussion swung back and forth for some time without leading to any definite conclusion. Finally Mar-Kurus offered the only reasonable way out of the impasse. "Let's ask him about it," was his suggestion.

But Pygmalion's reply to their questions was none too satisfactory.

"No, gentlemen, I'm afraid I can't give you any satisfactory explanation of my apparently unreasoning method. I'm really inclined to think that the order of procedure at this stage does not matter much, but every now and then I have a strange feeling that it is the right time to replace some particular part of the model with the proper tissues, so, having no reason to do otherwise, I go ahead and follow my impulse."

This explanation, such as it was, did not by any means satisfy the four, but, since in every other particular, their friend seemed exactly as before, they could only continue in the ordinary way. Still they decided to keep a close watch on him and, as far as possible, to relieve him of the strain under which he was obviously working.

With this object in view, they importuned him to join them in a holiday. All four claimed that they were feeling the effects of such long continued work, especially as they had to work all the time in their masked suits.

Pygmalion laughingly taunted them with their lack of the "true scientific spirit," but in the end, they persuaded him to accompany them for a season to the popular playgrounds of Ko-Nant.

The trip was only a partial success. For a little while —about a half moon—they enjoyed themselves like schoolboys on a holiday—bathing, surf-riding, hiking, rock-climbing, etc. Then quite suddenly, Pygmalion began to fidget to get back to his Cal-Atna.

"I do believe our woman-hater has fallen in love with his own model," commented Tan-Fal jokingly.

"I'm afraid so," was Par-Actu's quiet and serious response. "And I'm afraid—very much afraid—of what will happen when he fails to produce life in her beautiful body. To him she is already a real woman. I've even heard him whispering to her when he thought he was alone."

The seriousness of such a situation now struck them with something of a shock. However, they were helpless, and, seeing that Pygmalion was really beginning to fret they gave in to his wishes and returned to the laboratories.

FOR almost three years they worked. Pygmalion's infatuation for Cal-Atna was by this time openly acknowledged. As he worked, he would tell his friends of the wonderful life he and Cal-Atna would have together when she has been "awakened." Always now he spoke of the present time as "while she is still sleeping."

His emotions became so intense at times that the four more than once found themselves on the verge of praying to the Holy Three to grant him success, even though they felt in their hearts that it was utterly impossible.

Altogether nearly nine years from the date of the wager had passed before the whole of the wax had been replaced by tissues. Now there remained only two

things to be done—to prepare the various fluids for the blood-vessels and glands, and to construct the eyes, which, you will recall, had not been included in the wax model.

This latter task occupied Pygmalion's whole attention to the exclusion of everything else. Two seasons passed. The various fluids, prepared chiefly by Par-Actu, were ready. The electro-tensional exciters, with all their hundreds of batteries and connections, were ready for attachment.

Still Pygmalion labored on. This was a task beyond even his skill. Lens, iris, cornea, all were perfect, but the construction of the retina proved absolutely beyond him.

In despair he turned to his friends.

"Tell me," he pleaded with infinite pathos in his tones, "what can I do? My beloved lady must not awake to find herself blind. Help me in this if you can, my friends. I am willing to forego the wager if only you can help me give sight to my Cal-Atna."

The tragedy of it was not lost on the four. For many, many days they all experimented and planned, but all in vain. Here apparently was a thing beyond human skill to accomplish.

Then one day Sol-Kana came excitedly into the laboratory, bearing a small case.

"Here is the solution, friends," he cried joyously. "This morning in a land-car crash a woman was fatally injured. Before she died I agreed with her to adopt and care for her two small children if after death she would let me use her eyes. I explained to her that they were to be used to give sight to a beautiful woman who would otherwise always be totally blind.

"Oh, yes! I know it was a gruesome thing to do, but you know as well as I do, that the doctors would have dissected her body anyway, and I felt I wanted everything here to be arranged perfectly honestly."

Pygmalion looked at him with an inscrutable expression, then quietly said, "Sol-Kana, deeply do I appreciate your action and your generosity, but I am afraid I cannot accept your solution. Those eyes are from a body that once was living, and some living cells may remain in them."

"No, Pygmalion," Sol-Kana reassured him, "I purposely remained silent about them until I had applied every one of our sterility tests. The eyes, though perfectly preserved, do not contain any sign of life. Test them for yourself."

Still Pygmalion hesitated. For the rest of that day the four pressed argument after argument on him. When he finally did yield, it was to Mar-Kurus' plea made, not on behalf of the experiment, but on behalf of Cal-Atna. To his searching question, "Would you not sacrifice even your pride to give sight to your Cal-Atna?" Pygmalion, torn between two courses, gave an almost inaudible, "Yes—I must."

THE time limit set by Pygmalion was indeed well chosen. The tenth year was well advanced before everything was finished. Towards the end, Pygmalion's mental tension became intense. There were times when his companions could scarcely endure his abruptness and apparently studied rudeness. He would snap out orders to them as if they were slaves, and would fly into rages if the least little thing dissatisfied him.

Fortunately, the others were also experimenters and geniuses of the same calibre. They understood just what their friend was feeling, and each one of them could recall similar behavior on his own part as some great task had neared its completion.

At other times, Pygmalion would be almost tearfully apologetic for his seeming discourtesy, and the others, themselves overwrought, found this phase so trying that one day Par-Actu broke out with, "Shut up, Pygmalion. If you apologize to us again we'll take you and duck you in the lake.' Of course we don't think you are discourteous. We're all the same before a big crisis. You've got to relieve the tension somehow and I guess we can stand it all right." Then, recalling an incident in his own career, he began to chuckle. "Do you remember the time I got excited over an operation and took and heaved one of the assistants out of the window because he gave me the wrong instrument?"

That cleared the air for a while, but the four were now deadly afraid for the stability of that wonderful intellect. Pygmalion would scarcely eat or sleep. They tried coaxing, bullying—almost physical force—to make him look after himself. The only plea that had any effect at all was the argument that he must at least look fit and well to welcome Cal-Atna when she first saw him.

THE fateful day arrived at last. Every detail had been checked over, the electro-tensionals connected up, the various fluids made ready for injection.

The little company of five had decided that they alone should be present at the final operations. They felt that anyone else would be an intruder.

Now for the first time in years they entered the inner laboratory without their ugly suits. There was no longer any danger of living cells affecting the synthetic body.

Carefully the preserving fluids were drained off. Very slowly, and with infinite care, the prepared fluids were injected and, at last, everything was in readiness for the supreme test.

As she lay there, the five men could scarcely believe that she was not just a sleeping woman. Every detail was perfect, even to the long, curved eyelashes. Not a mark or a scar was there to show how the body had been built up. Only on the arms and on one or two parts of the body were there tiny scars where the last injections had been made.

The final testing of Mar-Kurus' apparatus was made by himself with extreme exactitude. The various muscle operating motors were each tried out separately and set to work at the normal speed. The electro-tensionals were adjusted to the exact voltage required by the various nerve systems—this had taken Mar-Kurus two years to work out—and the position of every one of the hundreds of contacts checked to a hair's breadth.

Then Pygmalion threw in the first switch—that of the pulmotors. Steadily the chest began to rise and fall. With an even beat the air surged in and out of the nostrils.

Motor after motor was coupled in until all were in operation. The gentle muscular movement now enveloped the entire body. Tests with "X-ray" fluoroscopes showed that the internal organs were now moving rhythmically.*

For some little time no alteration was made and then Pygmalion carefully threw in the electro-tensionals to stimulate the nervous system to activity.

When all was complete, he began to cut out the vari-

*We have translated the Lemurian word by "X-ray" although it is obvious that something far more efficient than any of our rays must have been used.

ous muscle-motors and to cause them to operate intermittently, producing movements of the limbs, body, eyelids, etc. These movements were so natural that young Tan-Fal, convinced at last, exclaimed in an awed whisper, "By the Holy Three, she *LIVES!*"

"Not yet, my friend," was Pygmalion's quiet reply, "See!"

He grasped the lever controlling the heart action and reduced the power. The heart immediately slowed its beat.

"There, did you observe that?" he queried. "The appearance of life just at present is merely mechanical."

"Now," he continued, "I think we may safely leave her as she is till morning. These motors must continue their work for a full day before I dare stimulate the brain centres and make this body control itself."

"Then you don't know *YET?*" asked Tan-Fal in surprise.

"Not yet," replied Pygmalion. "There is no life there yet, only mechanical and magnetic movement. Come. Let us close and seal the laboratory and leave Cal-Atna in peace for one more night."

NOT one of them had a moment's sleep that night. At dawn they were all at the palace, and as soon as the farce of breakfasting was over, they adjourned to the laboratory.

All was well. Everything was functioning perfectly.

But now Pygmalion's confidence seemed to have deserted him entirely. His hand reached out for the lever that controlled the last bank of tensionals—those connected to the brain centres—hesitated—drew back.

"I cannot! I *DARE* not!" he muttered.

"Let me," interposed Mar-Kurus. "Tell me just what to do and I'll do it."

So, following directions with exact care, Mar-Kurus set in action the brain tensionals. Gently at first, and with a minimum of power, he started them. Then by infinitesimal degrees he raised the tension to the full calculated amount.

Now was the supreme moment!

For a long time Pygmalion watched, his face growing more and more ashen. Then—"Increase the power," he muttered hoarsely. "No, give *me* the lever!"

Almost roughly he snatched the controls from Mar-Kurus' hands. Gradually, while his friends stood alarmed and anxious, he moved lever after lever. No result!

"She *MUST* live!" he kept muttering, "Oh, ye Gods, do not fail me *NOW!*"

Hour after hour the struggle continued. Pygmalion by now was utterly distraught, his face like the face of a corpse.

Then the end came!

The overloaded motors could no longer stand the tension. With a crackle of sparks they burned out. The rush of current seared through the delicate brain-tissues like a red-hot iron. The experiment had *FAILED!*

Stunned and uncomprehending, the five men stared down at the body. Not one of them had really believed that Pygmalion would fail. The work had been so marvelous, that they had all come to look on Cal-Atna as a living woman.

For a long time there was utter silence and stillness. Then, with a heart-rending cry, Pygmalion threw himself on the body of his beloved Cal-Atna.

He raved; he wept; he prayed; he cursed his gods. A very madman, indeed, he seemed.

Eventually, worn out by his bitter grief, he collapsed and his friends, themselves almost as exhausted and grief-stricken, carried him back to his own apartment, where for full two days they guarded and watched him.

When he awoke from his stupor he was but the ghost of his former self. White faced and uncertain in all his movements, yet still full of indomitable courage, he returned to his laboratory.

For three days he shut himself in, and neither his friends nor anyone else could approach him. Then on the fourth day he called the four together in his den.

"My dear friends," he began. "In spite of everything, my experiments have failed. You do not, I know, intend to claim your wager. That, however, is all arranged, but I did not call you here to discuss trifles of that sort.

"My records are now complete. All traces of my experiments are destroyed, and only these papers remain to be placed in the Royal Records.

"I have been sorely tempted to declare my life a failure and to end it myself, but somehow, my love for Cal-Atna, foolish as it now seems, prevents me.

"These records—or at any rate the conclusions to be drawn from them—must be made public for the benefit of the people.

"Never again will there be any point in any man daring the anger of the Holy Ones by presuming to usurp their control of the life principle.

"My failure proves definitely and conclusively that I was wrong. Had success been possible we should have achieved it, as we all well know.

"There is now no shadow of doubt that life is not inherent in matter. Matter can be stimulated to give a counterfeit appearance of life, but that is all. Life itself is a thing—a power—call it what you will—apart. It is the gift of the Holy Ones alone.

"As for myself, this is my last talk with you, my friends, in this world."

"No, protest not," he continued as they all started to contradict this statement, "My life is finished. My heart is broken. Since yesterday I have known that I cannot live. It is my punishment for defying the Holy Three.

"Yet I think they have forgiven, for there is still given to me strength to complete my task and to take leave of you, most loyal and faithful of friends."

As his voice ceased, he rose and stretched out his hands to each in turn. Then, with a whispered, "Cal-Atna, beloved!" he passed into eternity.

Weeping unashamed, the four friends stood for a long while. Then, with an effort, Mar-Kurus looked up and smiled.

"My friends," he said, "Let us not weep for the passing of a great man—a noble prince—splendid even in defeat.

"I feel—I know not why, yet I know you, too, feel it—that our royal friend, Pygmalion, has at last found his living and awakened Cal-Atna."

THE END.

Part II

The Inevitable Conflict

Illustration by MOREY

NOW that the seeming inadequacy of certain political bodies has been proven and disproven so many times, one must necessarily begin to wonder what a régime under women would be like. Numerous times women were known to be the "powers behind the throne," and often that has been true, although it was not generally known. But that is all incidental—only one woman, or a few, quietly dominant in a world ruled by men. What would happen in a world ruled entirely by women? One thing seems certain—conflict would be inevitable. How, where and why is graphically told by this well-known author in the concluding chapters of this story.

WHAT WENT BEFORE:

GENERAL K'UNG, Mongolia's ambassador to America, visits Victoria Arston, Eminent Matriarch of America, now a country ruled exclusively for women by women, and the only country in the world left that is not under the rule of the Emperor of Mongolia. The Matriarchy of America has thus far maintained its independence by virtue of enormous tribute in money and commodities paid by them to Mongolia. Ostensibly the Mongolian ambassador comes to America to ask the Matriarch to aid in stopping certain agitation which was supposed to have been started by American women in Mongolia for the overthrow of the Emperor in favor of a female government.

In the meanwhile, Stephen Mowbray, a member of the Council, a scientist and head of the Power Houses, and one of the very few males of the upper caste who has retained an old-time independence, has secretly trained in the art of warfare a vast army of men of the lower classes, particularly to defend their country against a Mongolian invasion, which Mowbray is certain must take place in the very near future. He devises, first, an instrument to nullify the effects of the Death Ray, which the female army of police use as a last resort against any known rebels of the lower caste, and then a machine which makes it impossible for the members of the government to know what the masses are thinking.

On the eve of the entrance into the country of the Mongolian Emperor and his vast army an internal struggle of no mean proportions takes place within the Matriarchal government. Victoria Arston and her immediate Council propose drastic steps to quell Mowbray's insurgence, and even go so far as to attempt a bargain with the Mongolian Emperor to help them fight Mowbray and what they call his band of thieves.

The Women of the Legion, refugees from the various countries that were conquered by Mongolia, are with Mowbray. Harmon, also a member of the Council, and head of the Food Companies, pledges his assistance to Mowbray, only for the duration of the struggle with Mongolia, a danger which has now become obvious even to the Matriarch. But the Amazons, the army of the Matriarchal government, rebel and refuse to fight the Mongolians. Commander Bullvers of the Amazon army valiantly loses her life in an attempt to force them to fight. Only the Women of the Legion and Mowbray's half-trained army of men are left to combat the invasion which seems certain to take its toll on the morrow.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

THE Mongolian encampment had been pitched on a mountain plateau, overlooking the road to the American capital, a broad thoroughfare which followed the windings of a racing stream that, in countless centuries, had carved a course through high, rocky canyons. At times, the river meandered sedately amid mountain meadows, rich and populous until the coming of the invaders, but now deserted by their inhabitants. Again, it stormed through narrow gorges rising up abruptly by almost unscalable walls. The Emperor's banner floated arrogantly over a huge radiomotor in the center of the array, where he held council with a half-score hawk-visaged officers.

"Victory is in my grasp," he observed, exultantly.

"It is, your serene majesty," assented a hard-bitten commander.

"This government, grown soft by generations of peace, cannot withstand attack. Its Amazons are sufficient to hold the masses in subjection, but will find another problem when they face my veterans of a hundred victorious fields."

"America is doomed," the officer agreed.

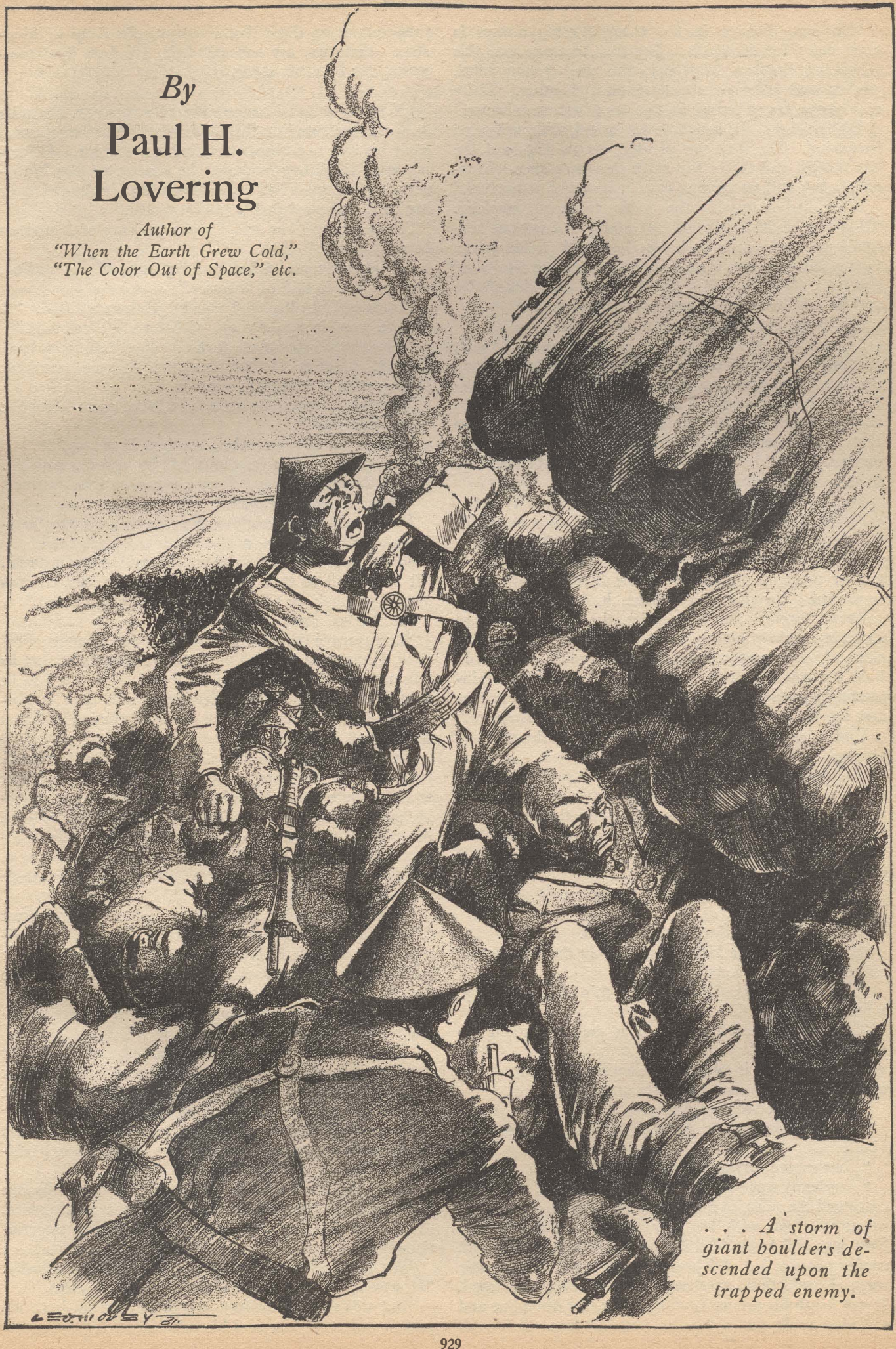
"What of the clash in the city last night, observed by our air scouts?" asked a moody youth, the Emperor's heir. "They said it seemed a division of male troops had exterminated a revolting force of Amazons."

For a moment, the conqueror's brow blackened ominously. Then he smiled and the assembly relaxed with obvious relief.

By

Paul H. Lovering

Author of
"When the Earth Grew Cold,"
"The Color Out of Space," etc.



. . . A storm of giant boulders descended upon the trapped enemy.

"My son, division in the enemy's camp always is good news for Mongolia. Let the Amazons and this rabble of Stephen Mowbray, the mad young rebel, weaken each other by attacks upon each other. There will be the fewer troops to face us when we advance."

"Why delay?" the heir apparent asked, with unwonted hardihood. "If they are divided, let us bombard the city tonight and throw the army into it at once. Mongolia's flag will be floating over it by dawn tomorrow."

"Not bad counsel," the ruler conceded, genially. "However, it is the thought of youth and not the seasoned view of one who holds the world in his grasp. Know this, my son, that Mongolia needs the wealth of this land. What would it profit me if I gained America and its rebellious people made it a wilderness?"

His brow clouded irritably.

"Remember, in the European Alps the seeds of revolt still linger. Thibet remains only half-conquered. From the Australian deserts miserable rebels defy my authority. In the Mountains of the Moon, a fragment of hostility persists. We have been campaigning against these centers of discontent for years, but without complete success. Would you add another and greater peril to these in a desperately rebellious America?"

He shook a humorous head in mock reproval.

"Even a decadent nation, such as this, has some devoted souls who prate of liberty and the traditional independence of the white race. This man, Mowbray, is one of them. No one may know how strongly he is supported. Imagine a half-dozen leaders, such as he, scattered through the Alleghenies, the Rockies and the Cascades, perhaps hiding in caves, sneaking through forests and warring upon conquering Mongolia. We would hold the country, it is true, but at the cost of an interminable guerilla war, which would exhaust our troops and sap the resources of both Mongolia and America."

Under his raillery, the fat heir apparent shrank back abashed.

"We will take the city in due time, my son. However, it is my duty to see that when we enter it, America is pacified. Thus, I shall pass on to you the first world empire, not only united but free from dissension that would tax your military capacity and the resources of your treasury."

"These people are dogs," the younger man protested. "They will not fight."

"Chang Yu!" the Emperor thundered.

A tall, keen-faced Mongolian, clad in the habiliments of princely rank, stepped forward.

"Tell my son this, Chang Yu—is this man, Mowbray, a foe to be despised?"

"No, serene majesty. He is a dangerous and resourceful enemy."

"How long did it take your scientific cabinet to devise a defense for his new magnetic arm?"

"Six months, serene majesty."

"Did we dare attack America until it has been devised?"

"Your serene majesty declared not."

"You learn some things you did not know, my son," continued the ruler, in a quieter tone. "Mowbray thought to surprise me with his new weapon. He will fail. This war will be decided by the death ray, which both armies possess, but which we have brought to a greater stage of perfection than that of the one he has developed. It will brush his armies from our path, for discipline and experience will war with us and against him. It is such preparations as these that constitute the duty of kingship. Victories, my son and heir, are won by intelligence, not by arms alone."

An officer entered and whispered a message. Surprise was mirrored on the emperor's face as he rose and made his way to a huge tent near his warmotor. Thrusting aside the heavy hangings, he confronted the Matriarch. With splendid, insolent courtesy he bowed over her hand and motioned her to be seated.

"I am honored," he said, "by the presence of America's beautiful ruler."

"I did not come to bandy compliments," she replied, crisply, "but to talk of business."

"Business?" he inquired, ironic eyebrows uplifted. "A strange word in a war camp of Mongolia's veterans."

"You need money more than conquest," she answered, sharply. "I offer a tribute ten times that we have been paying, even if it beggars America."

"A noble tribute," he agreed. "What must Mongolia do to deserve it?"

"Crush this insolent rebel, Stephen Mowbray."

"That should not be difficult," he agreed, amiably. "What then?"

"Leave America at once."

He seemed to be weighing the proposal, his eyes half-closed, a smile playing about his lips.

"That might not be so easy," he said, after a pause. "It is difficult to turn Mongolia from the path of conquest—particularly when victory already is assured."

He checked reply with a gesture.

"Let us leave that condition aside for a moment. Possibly, I might be induced even to consider that. Let us talk more of this matter of—business. How am I to be assured this vast ransom, greater wealth than is possessed by all Mongolia, will be forthcoming? From whom shall it be collected?"

"It will come from the Companies," she answered, curtly. "We also are prepared to pay a much larger annual tribute in consideration of a new treaty guaranteeing peace. We will recognize—privately, of course—the sovereignty of yourself and will perform faithfully whatever Mongolia requires of us."

"You will commit America to all these things to assure peace and tranquillity for trade?"

"Yes," she replied, decisively. "Peace is the great thing—that and tranquillity for trade. Business is business. By making that principle the inspiration of our government, the Companies have brought industry to the highest state of efficiency ever known."

"Pardon a foreigner's curiosity, but in advancing industry, what has been the benefit to men?"

"There are no workers as well housed, as well fed, as moral, as law-abiding as ours. We have no poor. Work is provided for all and all must labor. The sick, halt and infirm are segregated in institutions, where their physical insufficiencies will not impair the productiveness of the well and strong. Even these work and are self-supporting."

"Being so admirably cared for, they undoubtedly are patriotic," he commented, with apparent indifference. "Will any considerable element oppose our negotiations?"

"We have efficient Amazons," she replied, uneasily. "However, I trust there will be no resort to arms."

"But this man, Mowbray, whom you would have me punish—what of him and his rebels?"

"He has trained a number of low-caste workers in arms."

"Efficiently?" he insisted, gently.

"I did not come to speak of him," she replied, with asperity. "Had you not appeared, he and his rabble would be even now in the depths of our deepest mines."

He nodded thoughtfully and arose.

"I shall be pleased to discuss terms with him."

He turned, as if to depart. The Matriarch, amazed, laid a hand on his arm. With a haughty gesture, he drew away.

"Am I to tell the Companies," she cried, in astonishment, "that the world's master declines their proffer of peace and treasure?"

"The King of Mongolia does not sell his honor for gold," he replied, coldly, "nor the destiny of his race for an annual tribute wrung from a mean-spirited people. There can be no peace on such terms between Mongolia and America."

With a royal gesture, he flung aside the hangings and exposed his mighty camp.

"Would those veterans follow a leader who sold their loyalty for gold? There is more nobility in that single sentry, who scans your land with his hawk's eye, than in all your Companies."

He dropped the curtain.

"Send this man, Mowbray, to me. I may discuss with him terms for this nation, which already is at my feet."

A stern smile swept his face.

"If he finds favor in my sight, it will be well for America. If he does not, I shall crush your city flat. There will be an end to this last government of the white race."

CHAPTER IX

An arsenal of the Foreign Legion had been selected by Stephen as his headquarters. Hands clasped behind his back, he paced meditatively across his office, revolving a thousand plans for meeting Mongolia and wrestling with the problem of assembling and co-ordinating America's resources to serve the need of the immense army he had called into service. He had been amazed by the numbers who had responded. The work of his lieutenants had been far-reaching beyond his expectations. He did not under-estimate the inexperience of his legions, but was inspired by their numbers.

He stepped to a window and glanced down upon passing regiments. The first was in the uniform of the Foreign Legion, splendid women, who marched proudly and with magnificent discipline. Their colonel saw him at a window and rasped a command, which brought every eye upward to his lonely figure. He saluted proudly and stood at attention until the column passed. Behind them came a column of his citizen soldiers, stolid elders and eager youths, all clad in the olive-drab of the old American army. As he was observed, rhythmic cheers rose from their ranks. A smile of hope lighted up his tired face and remained as he resumed his thoughtful walk. Conquist entered.

"Your work here is concluded, General," he told the brilliant woman commander. "Delachaise and Hardtmuth will command the popular armies. I have placed the Foreign Legion and the loyal Amazons under Simeon."

"Former commander of the Thieves Division?" she laughed. "I do not know but what it is a good choice. They will despise him so thoroughly, particularly the Amazons, that they will fight the harder."

"Unfortunately, there are all too few of the Amazons. They and the Legion are our best trained troops. Indications are that the divisions of the Corps in the provinces have seized control of local governments and are preparing for defense."

He paused meditatively.

"It may be as well. If we fail, they may unite and succeed."

"I doubt it, Commander. Bullvers had had trouble with them previous to the revolt here. They long have been discontented and mutinous. I shall be surprised if the outside divisions can be induced to fight Mongolia, particularly if we are defeated."

"After all, that is a matter of indifference at this time. Later, when we drive the Emperor from America, we shall have to deal with them, but I shall not relish the task. I detested the necessity for cutting down the rebels in this city."

"Because they were women?" Conquist asked.

"Yes."

"Have no compunctions on that score," she declared, forcefully. "They are the cruellest product of the Matriarchy—unfortunate, sexless creatures, who are neither women nor men. Pity them if you will," she continued, bitterly, "but deal with them unsparingly."

"We shall cross that bridge when we come to it, General. First, we must draw Mongolia's fangs."

He placed a commanding hand on the other's shoulder.

"Convey to the gallant women of the Foreign Legion my final instructions. I rely on them as I do on the most loyal of my own troops."

"We are not Americans," she replied, proudly, "but we have a debt to settle with the Emperor far more terrible than yours. You have not seen your country overrun, your flag dishonored, your armies slaughtered, your women—God! Your women the prize of a victorious foe!"

Her blazing eyes tear-dimmed, the young officer paused to recover her poise. With a gesture of indescribable pathos and dignity, she turned toward him.

"Have no fear of our steadfastness, Commander. We are fighting the battle of our race against the most powerful foe it ever has known. Place these women—French, German, Spanish, Italian, British—in the forefront of your army and see whether they will not acquit themselves with honor. Theirs is a terrible score, Commander, and my only dread is lest wild rage urge them to useless sacrifice of life."

He nodded gravely. The spirit of these women was not exactly that of his own citizen soldiers, but it bespoke the same determination, the same will to conquer.

"Until I can take active command, General," he said, gently, "you will direct field operations."

"I am honored by the promotion, but is it proper that I, a foreigner and a woman, should be so designated?"

"We have been worshiping peace so long," he replied, gravely, "we have almost forgotten how to fight. You know Mongolia better than we and are most competent to lead our raw levies."

He signaled Hardtmuth and Delachaise, who had entered the room. With them was Simeon, former leader of the Thieves Division and now commander of the loyal Amazons and the Foreign Legion. Over his scowling face a jaunty military cap set oddly. Mowbray acquaint-

ed them with Conquist's promotion and their assignments to command. Simeon leered at the young woman.

"We shall fight none the worse together," he said, tongue in cheek, "because we have fought each other so hard in the past."

"Leave at once for the front," Commander Mowbray ordered. "There is no time to be lost, for you must bring order from the chaos resulting from our haste and military inexperience."

HE delayed Conquist as the others departed.

"Our new equipment is ready. I have seen it tried in a special apartment, which limited its effectiveness."

"Is it successful?" she demanded, her eyes alight with interest.

"Even more than I had anticipated. It is our last resort, remember. You must send out skirmishers to ascertain whether Mongolia has a defense for the new magnetic arm. If not, we are equipped with a weapon that will give us inestimable superiority over the enemy."

She nodded understandingly.

"Your orders shall be obeyed immediately, Commander. What if Mongolia has a defense?"

"Then, we shall use the new machines to rob all America of power, as a final, desperate measure of defense."

The young general smiled confidently.

"Now, I know the Emperor has been delivered into our hands and also the character of the conflict we must wage to assure victory. Are rifles and cannon being produced in sufficient quantity?"

A cloud obscured his brow.

"That is the greatest of our problems. We cannot improvise these weapons. Even with America's enormous industrial machinery at our command, I cannot obtain all the supplies we need. We should be doomed, if it were not for the stores previously manufactured and our experienced workmen who are teaching others these new, strange operations."

"Even if only partially armed, we shall have an advantage over the enemy," she pointed out.

"True, but he also has the advantage of discipline and a record of unswerving victory. What success are you having with the artillery regiments? How are the troops taking to the rifles?"

Her brow clouded now.

"We should have months of preparation and training," she confessed. "However, there are a few in each company who have had a little experience in your training squads. We are using these to instruct the others."

"At best, it is a makeshift," he replied, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly. "Still, it is all we can do. At least, we shall not be so completely surprised by the cessation of power as will the enemy, and that will count heavily in our favor."

Conquist met Harmon as she left the room, the burly autocrat shouldering his way through a press of military clerks as indifferently, as though they were laborers in the offices of his own Food Company. Brushing aside attendants, who would have barred his way, he addressed Mowbray with characteristic bluntness.

"You sent for me, Stephen—or, should I say 'Commander'?"

His voice was confident, dominating, ironic. Change had not awed him. The Commander replied smilingly.

"We will not quibble over words. I am as proud of the title, 'Master of Thieves' as any other. It may be appropriate, for I seem to have stolen America from the Council as our ancestors stole it from the people."

Harmon's grim face relaxed in a smile.

"If I had had you with me on the council," he said, "It would have taken more than a mutinous rabble to unseat the Matriarchy."

His tone changed.

"You did not send for me to bandy words. What do you wish?"

"I need some one to organize the industrial machinery of the government for the support of my armies while I am fighting and I ask you to accept the task."

Harmon's eyes opened wide with amazement.

"Are you mad? Or, am I?"

"Answer both questions yourself," the Commander smiled.

"We never can agree. You cherish the delusion that our sensible, efficient government must yield to a republic. Bah! That had its chance and failed. Do you expect me to help you ring up the curtain for another disastrous experiment?"

"Not at all. I ask only co-operation while I am fighting the invader."

"Then what?"

"How can I tell? I may not be here to answer your question."

"I'm not blind to that possibility. Also, I am not blind to the fact that if I do what you suggest, I'll be in honor bound to fight for you against those with whose views I wholly sympathize. It's a difficult decision."

"This thing is too big for me to handle alone. I need help and must have it. We have a common purpose in warring on Mongolia, even if we should be at each other's throats later, to decide the future government of America."

"I agree with both statements."

Stephen confronted the burly autocrat, his eyes stern and commanding.

"Harmon, there is a legend that, during a civil war of the early republic, the section known as the United States was threatened by a European power. Invasion might have assured triumph for the Confederacy. In the crisis, General Lee, commanding the Confederate forces, is said to have notified the foreign power that if invasion were attempted, he would join with General Grant to repulse the common foe, and then would fight out the internecine quarrel."

"I have heard the legend."

"Can't you see its application to the present situation?"

Harmon's answer was characteristically sharp and vigorous.

"I can. I'll enlist with you, Mowbray, but remember—only for the duration of this war."

CHAPTER X

THE preservation of the Matriarchy and the United Companies is the primary necessity of America."

Arston, her eyes tired and strained, stared dully at Ardis Moore, who seemed on the verge of collapse, although the fires of fanatic purpose flamed in her cheeks. Proudly defiant, the young girl faced the autocrat.

Arston spoke: "Mowbray cannot be controlled. He scorns all constituted authority. His mad hordes are amenable to no discipline. They will give the Emperor

the excuse he needs to refuse all proffers of subsidy and peace. This monstrous situation must end."

The cold contempt of the younger woman's manner pierced even the weary self-sufficiency of the Matriarch. She continued in a firmer, colder voice.

"Where we cannot coerce or buy, we may placate. The Companies will triumph. Trade, capital, commerce and the orderly processes of government will not crash before the attacks of an unbalanced dreamer."

"Do I menace these things you mention?" said Ardis.

The autocrat ignored the question, and went on:

"This war must cease. Mowbray's childish emotionalism is a menace to the nation's life. The Emperor will defeat him and, in retaliation, seize our vast wealth-producing agencies. Stephen has no regard for capital. Councillor Meering this morning demanded troops to protect her steel plants. He laughed and told her the steel plants now belonged to the armies of the Commonwealth. Heresy such as this cannot be tolerated."

Oddly, she seemed to appeal to the silent girl for approval and support.

"You are of the executive class—or would have been but for this man's folly. You must realize the monstrous absurdity of his policy. The United Companies always have been the State. If they are ruined, what else matters?"

"Nationality, race, liberty—these things count for something," Ardis declared, her lip curling.

"You parrot his wild talk," the Matriarch replied, with a flare of petulant anger. "He annoys me. There is no place in America for a man who annoys me."

She mumbled to herself, regardless of the girl.

"Where was I? Oh, yes! Armed opposition to Mongolia must cease. The King will not be purchased. He is a typical masculine idiot, setting himself above money. He rants of fame, of power, of world-wide dominion. Rank nonsense! But, where we cannot buy, we may seduce. You are the appointed sacrifice."

"I!" exclaimed Ardis, recoiling.

The deposed leader's lips relaxed in a cackling laugh.

"I would have preferred to keep you with me until Mowbray returned victorious. Then, I would have made him grovel and beg for his bride-to-be and I should have spurned him——"

She struck out vigorously with her foot, amused malice mirrored on her face.

"Thought of that moment has been the pleasantest dream of my life, but it may not be."

She turned briskly to Ardis.

"The Emperor knows I am no party to Mowbray's mad schemes, but he has refused my offers of peace and tribute. He awaits more substantial proof of good will."

She leered at Ardis, calculating craft in her eyes.

"Mowbray loves you."

"I do not deny it."

"Tell that to the Emperor."

The Matriarch rubbed her hands gleefully.

"I do not understand."

"Tell him I send you as evidence of my good faith and desire for his success. Tell him," leaning forward confidentially, "that, with you as hostage, he may dictate terms to Mowbray."

She nodded briskly. Then her brow clouded.

"On second thought, I will tell your attendants what to say to him. You are too much under control of this man and would lie like a masculine puppet. The Emperor would not trust you."

She thought rapidly into the Electrano and nodded as a voiceless answer came to her commands.

"Leave at once. My secretary will accompany you to the Emperor."

Appalled, but helpless, Ardis followed the attendant. Almost in an hour, she had been torn from the place of security devised by Stephen, hurried to the deposed Matriarch's palace and, by her orders, dispatched as a hostage to Mongolia. Under the glooming mass of the radiomotor, poised for flight, she paused meditating resistance, but several Amazons closed about her and forced her into the vehicle. As it drove over a suburb, she caught a glimpse of long lines of marching men and surmised they were Stephen's soldiers. Then, the machine shot toward the mountains at enormous speed and the city sank from view.

AS Ardis left the room, Fordyce Meering entered.

"Who is that woman?" she demanded.

"A girl of the people I am sending to the Emperor!"

The Matriarch answered carelessly. She was interested in Ardis only as a means to an end. Concerning her fate in the Mongolian camp, she was indifferent. She would have sacrificed a thousand like her to win a single improved peace term from the invader.

"Why did you select her?"

"She is beautiful, in a coarse, low-caste way. Moreover, Stephen Mowbray loves her."

"Mowbray!" exclaimed Fordyce. "I did not know he had had an affair."

"Oh, he intends marrying her, I understand," the autocrat replied, carelessly. "With her in his hands, the Emperor can whip the rebel into submission."

"You would betray Mowbray?"

"Betray! Your choice of words is almost insulting. I am protecting my interests, the interests of the Companies, the interests of the great group you will head some day, my child."

"True," Fordyce nodded. "Still, it seems ignoble to decline war, when it is forced upon the country by this insolent, Asiatic upstart."

"I am an industrialist, not a soldier. I do not know how to fight. I have no desire to learn. What does it matter who rules nominally, if I am secure as mistress of the Companies with the continuity of trade assured?"

Fordyce nodded.

"Have you heard about Harmon?" she inquired.

"He is a good man," the deposed autocrat approved. "What of him?"

"He has accepted the office of governor-general, in charge of all civil affairs while Mowbray is in the field."

"Harmon! In control!"

The Matriarch shouted the words in pleased surprise.

"Why, Fordyce, this Mowbray has delivered himself into our hands. Through Harmon, I shall control this nation tomorrow!"

An agitated forefinger stilled questions trembling on the other's lips.

"Recall Ardis Moore! I will not miss one iota of my revenge on this betrayer of his own caste. Hasten! I will make him writhe at my feet before I send both of them to the executioner."

News of Ardis' disappearance was brought to Stephen by Malcolm MacArthur.

"She left in response to a message from you," the man declared.

"I sent no message."

"She said it was in your handwriting."

"A miserable forgery. How did she receive it?"

"An aged woman, an attendant at one of the Community Houses, brought it."

"How did she know where Ardis was hidden?"

"I do not know. I told her Ardis was not there. She leered at me and insisted that I deliver the message. 'It is from him,' she whispered. 'She will know.'"

"Ardis believed her?"

"She told me the message came from you. I accompanied her to a radiomotor station, where she dismissed me and went on with the old woman."

"I commence to see light," Stephen declared, his eyes blazing. "The Companies seek to strike at me through this defenseless girl."

The fire in his eyes had grown coldly intense.

"Leave no stone unturned in your search for her. I will send other aid."

He strode into Harmon's office. The burly autocrat did not lift his eyes from the piled-up masses of papers upon which his attention was concentrated.

"Ardis is gone!" Stephen exclaimed.

"Ardis?"

Harmon raised a puzzled face from his labors.

"Who is she?"

"A girl of the people, whom I intend to marry."

"Where has she gone?"

"I do not know. The Companies discovered the secret hiding place where I had placed her."

"You are sure it was the Companies?"

"She would not have left otherwise."

Harmon smiled broadly.

"You assume too much obedience from our young women, even of the lower castes. They are not as docile as our young men. They are more disposed to give orders than to take them."

Mowbray brushed aside the remark.

"I see the Matriarch's hand in this. What are you going to do about it?"

"I?" asked the burly dictator in amazement.

His heavy face suddenly grew black with anger.

"Do you intimate I had a hand in this?"

"I know you had not."

"It is well you realize that fact. If I had an idea you suspected me of such cowardly treachery, I'd throttle you where you stand. I'll fight you, Stephen, but it will be with a man's weapons and not with a defenseless girl."

He ran a huge hand through his clipped hair until each individual spear stood erect.

"Undoubtedly, they hope to bend you to some purpose. I don't know exactly what that purpose may be, but I'll find out."

Abruptly, his manner changed.

"I'm talking strongly, Stephen," he continued ruefully, "but, as a matter of fact, I don't know how to proceed."

"I see you keep Mallay."

"The Prison Master? Yes. He serves as a counter-irritant. When I remember him as a product of the Companies, it serves as a lame justification for assisting you in your plans to destroy them."

Stephen's lips entertained the shadow of a smile.

"He is a good dog on the trail?"

"None better, by nature and training."

"He must know by what means Arston has been accustomed to achieve her ends."

Harmon's eyes lighted as he caught the drift of the questions.

"He's a cowardly sneak, but we could not ask a better agent for such a commission. I'll attend to this matter at once."

Mowbray nodded wearily.

"I am leaving at once for the front."

"Best wishes. I hope you win. Why can't you dismiss your plans for domestic change and thus obtain the backing of the Matriarchy? Surely, you do not really harbor a hope of reviving a republic dominated by men?"

The Commander did not answer. Harmon drew closer.

"Can't you see the futility of attempting to convert these millions of industrialized human machines to a new theory?"

"With an invader on our soil, must we argue these questions now?"

"Your pernicious theories haunt me. You know, as I do, that the very word 'republic' came to typify masculine incompetence and venality, the rule of ignorance through numbers, the triumph of petty men. Have you considered the unreliable material from which you must mould a man-ruled government after a model which even Washington and Lincoln could not make enduring?"

"Perhaps they have learned a bitter lesson," the Commander replied, gently. "The second experiment may profit from the mistakes of the first."

"A vain hope! The United Companies and the Matriarchy never would have come into existence had it not been for the incapacity of the masculine republic. Why, they could not command even the respect of their own households! That's history. So is their failure to outlaw war and eliminate crime. You know, as I do, that the men of America had abrogated their power long before the efficient women who founded this government seized it."

"At least, they proved dependable soldiers in time of war."

"War! Always war! That was all they dreamed of. Is there no objective for humanity other than slaughter?"

"Why not ask that question of Mongolia?" Mowbray replied, soberly.

Harmon smiled ruefully.

"I am not thinking of today, but of America's tomorrow," he declared. "The republic surrendered to the Companies because it could not rule them and they could control it. People demand and respect a strong government. They want regulated living, moderate toil, sure subsistence. Most of all, they want some one to do their thinking for them. We have furnished all these things. The old republic did not."

"If the wisdom of the nation is insufficient to guide its destinies, it deserves to fall," Mowbray exclaimed. "Government must emanate from the governed."

"You mean its governed men?" he replied, satirically. "Poor, muscle-bound creatures that have known nothing for generations except obedience to the command of a more intelligent sex?"

"They failed once," Stephen conceded. "They may fail again—but, at least, they may be taught to go down to defeat fighting!"

"Idle, vicious theories," Harmon replied, contemptuously.

He turned to the mass of papers on his desk.

"We will continue this conversation later. We are agreed the primary duty is to bring the Emperor to terms."

Burdened by a new, personal sorrow, Stephen made last hasty preparations for departure. His little private world, resolutely separated from the one into which public necessity had thrust him, had tumbled about his ears. He knew well the chill selfishness of the ruling caste. The heart, the happiness, even the life of a girl like Ardis would weigh no more in the balance of their plans, than would a grain of dust in the hand of Infinity. Through an open window, he gazed down upon the glowing street. Was it worth while to strive, through appalling darkness and doubt, toward an end not visible to his own eyes? What was leadership but sorrow, and patriotism but a mocking ideal?

"Ardis!" he murmured.

A regiment, one of the last, marched past. He was seen and a deep-throated cheer beat up from the masses. He bent forward and a hot, unbidden tear coursed down his cheek.

"Poor fellows!" he thought. "Their devotion to duty reproves my doubts."

Duty! The word rang in his ears. What were his private griefs that they must obtrude upon his plans for the future of his country, the destiny of his race? He turned from the window.

A guard of war flyers escorted his machine. As it rose, bearing the new government's splendid banner of Stars and Stripes, a roar of applause surged upward from hordes of massed forms crowded into a suburb. Stephen perceived a half-naked, eerie figure on a towering industrial monolith, its arms outstretched to the sky.

"Woe to the city!" the man cried.

And again:

"Woe to the city!"

Stephen recognized the mad prophet as Hare, deposed Master of the Animal Industries Company, stricken insane by the startling changes that had overthrown the old rule and given birth to a new.

CHAPTER XI

As the radiomotor bearing her to the Emperor's camp raced toward the mountain eyrie of the Asiatic conqueror, Ardis, schooled in the stern training of her caste and sex, did not weep. Hers was an apprehension too grave for such expression of grief. The reputation of the rough veterans of masterly Mongolia left little doubt in her mind as to her fate. These slashing swashbucklers, who had swept victorious around the world, were of another breed than the docile, easily controlled men of America. She knew that when they had swept like a flame through Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia, they had held no people too great to attack and nothing in any land they dominated too sacred to be ravaged. Rising, she searched the spacious apartment, outside which an Amazonian sentry stood guard. From a decorative panel on the wall, she gleaned a thin, keen-edged dagger, part of a display of ancient arms.

"I shall not be without a final recourse," she thought, pressing the steel to her side until its needle-like point pierced her clothing and pricked the skin beneath.

Strengthened by this thought, she gazed long and thoughtfully toward the mountains, their huge shoulders revealed by the rising moon. With a shock she realized that scattered illuminations dead ahead must be the lights of the enemy's camp. Just below the racing machine was another smaller cluster of lights which, she surmised, must mark the advanced American positions.

"Stephen is there," she murmured.

Despite her desperate peril, she was thrilled by the thought.

"If he only knew! How quickly he would come to my rescue!"

She did not remove her eyes from the flickering lights of the American encampment until a sudden glare caught the radiomotor in its blinding grasp and held it unwaveringly. The Emperor had seized the major power houses in the vicinity of his camp immediately following disembarkation of his forces, and was employing the energy for the operations of gigantic dark lights, which surrounded his position and safeguarded it from surprise attack.

These rays caused no illumination except when coming in contact with an obstruction along their course. Vibrating at a speed below that of light, they were sent into the night from huge ejectors. To the eye, they were invisible and remained so until an object entered their stream. Instantly and automatically, the intruder was noted by the projecting instrument, the vibrations were speeded up and the subject was flooded with light. Delicate audiodetectors, with which armies had been supplied for generations, long since had picked up the slight hum of the radiomotor's propelling mechanism and the dark rays had been searching the heavens for it. A menacing command sounded in the radio ear of the speeding machine. The Amazon in command replied, explaining her mission.

Ardis could not hear the conversation between the Amazon and the distant Mongolian sentinel, but after the flyer had circled twice over a designated spot, constantly bathed in light and evidently under the stern scrutiny of enemy eyes, it swooped to a landing. Then, for the first time, she perceived dimly the orderly array of military tent-houses, in which the invading horde was accommodated. The Amazon entered her compartment, accompanied by an Asiatic officer.

"Come!" the woman commanded.

She followed submissively, but her right hand convulsively clutched the handle of the slender dagger. They paused at a magnificent tent, the rich tapestry of which shone with dull brilliance in the subdued light of the camp street.

"Enter," the Mongolian commanded.

He thrust a haughty hand before the Amazon, who would have followed.

"Your work is done."

"I was instructed by the Matriarch to convey a message to his majesty, the Emperor," the woman protested.

"Your instructions are countermanded," he replied, ironically. "Go!"

The woman hesitated. He turned savagely to a silent detail of hard-bitten veterans, who guarded the magnificent tent.

"Drive them from this camp! They contaminate it by their presence!"

WITHOUT waiting to see the manner in which his order was obeyed, he took Ardis' arm, thrust aside the heavy hangings and proceeded to the center of the tent, which reeked of pungent drugs. As she suppressed a cough, an emaciated figure glided out of the semi-

darkness. The newcomer was a hollow-cheeked Mongolian, his face lined by suffering but his eyes alive with intelligence. He dispatched the young officer with a curt command.

"I live in this atmosphere," he said, turning to her. "Could you become accustomed to it?"

"I?" she asked, recoiling.

"It may not be necessary," he pursued, thoughtfully. "I am stronger today."

He indicated a couch.

"You are sent as a hostage to the King?"

The words were more a statement than a question. She bowed silently.

"You were sent by the Matriarch?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

He leaned toward her eagerly.

"You must know," she replied, shrinking away.

"Because Stephen Mowbray loves you?"

His voice was harsh, forbidding.

"He loves me," she answered, in a low voice.

"With you as a hostage, the Matriarch declared we could compel Mowbray to lay down his arms."

She did not answer.

"Do you think he will yield?" he pursued, insistently.

Gripping the dagger convulsively beneath the folds of her cloak, she flung her answer into his intent face.

"No!"

He smiled inscrutably.

"You shall write him a letter I shall dictate. You shall tell him that if he ever hopes to see you again, he must yield as the Emperor dictates."

She smiled bravely into his eyes.

"He will not yield."

She grasped the dagger tighter and hastened on, lest traitor tongue prove coward to her intrepid soul.

"I shall not write such a letter."

The smile on his face gave way to an expression of admiration and respect.

"You are dallying with peril to cross the King's will—you, a girl of the American lower caste."

She did not reply.

"You fear to tempt your lover," he accused. "You doubt whether his love will prove as great as his devotion to this doomed nation."

She found words at last.

"He loves me, but he will not be swayed from his duty. I should hate him, if he were."

The curtains were flung aside by a heavy-set, powerful Mongolian.

"I lose," he said, coming forward and addressing the ailing man. "I had not expected to find so much courage and honor in this entire nation."

"I did not know the woman, great Emperor," replied the other, his voice grown old and inexpressibly weary, "but I knew the man."

With a contraction of her heart, Ardis realized she was in the presence of the Asiatic conqueror. He turned to her, his face noble and commanding.

"Mongolia does not war on the helpless. You are as safe in my camp as in your own city—safer, I imagine."

A disdainful smile flickered across his strong face.

"What miserable cowards your government develops! I would send you back were it not that a friend of the man you love believes you more secure here than there. Special accommodations and a maid of your own people will be provided."

As the curtains dropped behind his regal form, the pallid man addressed her.

"I am Mowbray's friend. Years ago, I warred under the great Emperor, but had to flee to America, where I became a contract slave and fell ill. Mowbray surrounded me with every care and all the skill medicine could command and prolonged a life-thread that had all but snapped. To him, I then was 'Drusus,' a Mongolian, whom a sentiment of common humanity had led him to rescue. I never dreamed an hour would come when I might repay, in part at least, the debt of gratitude I owe him."

He paused and suppressed a cough with difficulty.

"He knows now that I am Lee Chang, one-time marshal of the Emperor's armies."

"I have heard of your name," she said, her eyes wide.

IT was difficult to believe that this wasted shell of a man was the soldier who had carried Mongolia's banner to continued victory over three continents. He smiled gravely.

"The Emperor forgives greatly, as he punishes magnificently. However, enough of my personal affairs. Remain here, I shall summon your attendant."

He returned, escorting a young woman, whose agitation was so extreme, she scarcely could walk. Indicating Ardis, he issued curt commands.

"Serve her well and faithfully. See there is no cause for complaint from her. You have seen Mongolia's soldiers?"

She wailed an affirmative, shielding her head in her arms, her shoulders bowed as though fearing a lash.

"See the memory does not fade from your mind," he warned, menacingly.

She shrank beneath his glance. With a bow to Ardis, he disappeared. The other woman fell at her feet, weeping.

"Who are you?" Ardis asked, gently.

"Fordyce Meering. I was captured by a war motor of the Mongolian fleet."

She did not add that her machine had fallen into the enemy's hands while fulfilling the Matriarch's savage command to bring Ardis back, that Stephen's humiliation might be made complete.

"You were to marry Mowbray?" Ardis asked, with a curious tightening at her throat.

"The fool!" snarled the prostrate one. "He is responsible for all this horrible disorder."

"You were to marry him?" Ardis persisted.

Fordyce raised her head. Recollection flashed across her face. She sat up and brushed her hair with her fingers, her eyes running insolently over the other's face.

"What could he have seen in you to attract him? A creature of the lowest caste!"

She smiled derisively.

"I was willing to take and train him in right thinking. Some day, after all this silly war is ended, I may ask the Matriarch to spare his life in order to have the pleasure of lashing his silly, masculine notions from his head."

Ardis smiled and sank on a couch.

"You think you could do that with Stephen?" she asked.

"Give me the chance!" exclaimed Fordyce, springing to her feet. "Had we been married six months, I'll guarantee he would not now be adventuring on his fore-doomed military fiasco. Mongolia would be in the city and the country would be at peace."

She studied her companion with cold, hard eyes.

"It seems we must play a little game to blind these stupid Mongolian men. See that you do it well, Moore. One false step and I'll have you flayed with whips."

"Indeed?" Ardis asked, still smiling. "Where will you have this whipping administered?"

The arrogance abruptly faded from the young autocrat's eyes. She glanced apprehensively toward the curtain through which K'ung Fo had disappeared.

"There will be another day," she replied, after a pause, but in a more moderate voice. "A wholly idiotic turn of fate has made you a favorite of this Mongolian—."

"Were you saying something?" asked a soft voice.

She whirled to face the Asiatic Marshal, who stood at the curtained entrance, his lips wreathed in an ironic smile but his eyes blazing. Ardis rose from the couch.

"Please leave us together, Lee Chang," she said. "My maid is receiving her instructions."

He laughed aloud and nodded approvingly. One hand on the curtains, he flung back a smiling answer.

"I should worry for my Emperor, if all the women of America were such as you, Ardis Moore."

CHAPTER XII

"I FAIL to see the justification for the heavy loss of life an air raid on the Mongolian camp would entail," Stephen declared, sternly. "Unless all our calculations are in error, we have two surprises for the enemy—the magnetic war arm and, in final extremity, the means by which to rob him and his military machines of power. I see no reason for a desperate venture by inexperienced troops, who would fall easy victims to the Emperor's trained legions."

General Conquist dissented vigorously.

"This is a war to the death, not only for ourselves and for this nation, but for the very civilization our race has developed. We can leave nothing to chance nor depend too much on the possibility of outguessing so shrewd a field commander as the Emperor. Even if the air raid resulted in the loss of half our fleet, if it crippled the enemy, the results would be justified, in our own somewhat desperate extremity."

Simeon thrust himself forward, his grim, lined face alight with fanatic purpose.

"Aye, she's right, Commander," he cried. "How do we know the old fox hasn't a surprise for us—and maybe more? Did he come here, knowing we had the magnetic arm, unless he had something with which to counter it? Man! He's up there now in his mountain camp smiling at us because we're silly enough to believe he adventured to America unprepared. Strike him, I say! What matters the cost? If we waste five of our machines to crush one of his, we can replace our losses a hundredfold easier than he can replace his."

Mowbray nodded slowly, his eyes serious, his forehead lined with evidence of deep thought.

"Have you overlooked the fact that the magnetic arm is uncertain except at close quarters and completely powerless against inorganic substances? If you are to accomplish anything, it must be with the death ray and our weapons are much less efficient than those of the enemy, which can be depended upon for accuracy at distances of not more than ten thousand feet."

He shook his head impatiently.

"If you were to lead a drive over the Mongolian camp at a distance under 10,000 feet, Simeon, every war motor in your fleet would be destroyed before it came within a mile of the enemy's camp. I should not object to the venture, desperate as it is, if our men had a chance of success."

"You forget something, Commander," Conquist replied, leaning forward eagerly. "What of the ancient weapons we have resurrected—the bombs that were used with such terrible effect in the last of the European wars prior to the Mongolian conquest?"

"Aye, there's the chance, Master!" echoed Simeon, springing to his feet and pacing the length of the commander's tent, in which the conference was being held. "Ten thousand feet mean no more to a bomb than ten hundred. Give us the element of surprise—and what a stunning shock it will be to the old devil to have the Americans attack him in his own picked camp—and we'll send down a hail of death that will leave his air motor fleet a wreck."

Conquist pushed the decision to a close, reading in Mowbray's face surprise and cautious hope.

"We will divide the fleet. One half of it will start early and swing around to the east, approaching the camp with the sun at its back, which will be an added advantage. The other half, taking off later, will rise to the level of thirty thousand feet, sweep over the camp and dive down to the ten thousand foot level. Even if the latter force is destroyed, it will distract the attention of the Mongolian so the other fleet can race in, rain down its projectiles and, probably escape serious damage."

"Failure would entail frightful loss of life," Stephen replied, soberly.

"Why think of failure?" demanded Simeon, hunching his broad shoulders disparagingly. "If we do not come back, try something else. As for this venture, let me command it."

"Can you obtain volunteers?"

"Volunteers? Those devils of mine would dare anything rather than gnaw their fingers in idleness!"

"How many machines can you muster?"

"Of war motors, few enough. We should be scattered by the Mongolian in a pitched battle before you could wink an eye. But any air motor can carry bombs. Let it drop one in the right place and what does it matter if it is brought down?"

Stephen appealed to the other generals for opinions. They endorsed the plan with clamorous insistence. They were weary, they said, of inaction. Their troops began to doubt whether America really could wage war—whether, when the test came, the dreaded Mongolian might not sweep down on the hastily improvised host and sweep it back to the metropolis as the wind whirls dust from bare ground in a time of drought.

"You have my permission," he said, rising abruptly. "Simeon, command this forlorn hope. Only, make your preparations hastily and at night in order that the enemy may not suspect your intentions."

The conclave broke up hurriedly. Simeon, his face alight with dare-devil purpose, hurried to the American air motor park to give preliminary orders. Night fell on a scene of feverish activity. Speaking in low tones, as though they feared voices might carry over the intervening leagues to the Mongolian camp, soldiers hastened the work of preparation. Hundreds of carriers were overhauled and tuned up to the last degree of perfection for the mad and deadly dash. Long, ant-like lines wound up from underground arsenals, hurriedly constructed to

protect the old-style ammunition from a chance raid by an enemy ship. Snatches of song and bursts of low laughter arose from the hastening throngs. The air was electric with enthusiasm. Patrols on distant duty felt the impulse and the sentinel, standing solitary under a starless and cloudy sky, gripped his weapon tighter and peered more alertly into the thick darkness.

"The first squadron leaves in an hour," Conquist said, in a low tone. "These machines will swing in a wide circle to the south and then northeast. They will approach the enemy camp from the east just at sunrise, when the attack is launched simultaneously from this side."

Mowbray, his keen eyes studying every detail of the hurried preparations, nodded.

"Am I to accompany the expedition, Commander?" the Legion leader asked, eagerly.

"No."

Stephen softened the curt answer with a later statement:

"I have other and more important work for you, general."

It was too dark to read the disappointment on her face, but her silence was eloquent. He asked a question, after a brief pause.

"Has Simeon all the volunteers he needs?"

"Ten came forward to one he could accept," she replied, shortly.

The thief leader hurried out of the gloom, his huge bulk grotesquely large and indistinct.

"We are ready," he laughed, hoarsely. "Pray for dawn, Master. It will be a brave day for America."

An aid stumbled through the darkness to Mowbray's side.

"The governor-general has arrived, Commander."

"Harmon?" he queried, surprised.

"Yes, Commander."

"Conduct him to my tent—or, better, ask him to come here."

A MOMENT later, Harmon's heavy voice was heard as he swore vigorously after stumbling over a mass of camp equipment.

"What devil's doings are these, Mowbray?" he demanded.

"See for yourself."

The autocrat stared downward to the fluttering pinpoints of light, dimly revealing hurrying forms.

"Deplorable disorder!" he grunted. "If I had a superintendent who permitted such damnable conditions, I'd reduce him to a contract laborer."

He peered downward more intently.

"They're carrying something. What are those things?"

"Bombs to destroy the Mongolian air fleet."

In a few words Stephen sketched the plan of the raid.

"Do you mean that those madmen are to swoop over the Emperor's camp at sunrise and try to land those archaic missiles on his parked war motors?"

"Precisely."

"Magnificent—if it succeeds. Suppose it doesn't?"

"I hope they return to the protection of our camp—those who survive the attack," Mowbray replied, grimly.

"You *hope,* but you *know* they will not! Man, it's idiotic!"

He stamped heavily, first with one foot and then with the other. "All war is idiocy," he declared challengingly. "Command a war motor for me. I shall go with them to the attack."

"Impossible!"

"Why? If you go, why should I not accompany you?"

There was ironic challenge in his voice.

"Neither you, nor I, nor Conquist are going," Mowbray replied, quietly. "We are willing enough, but America cannot afford to risk everything upon one throw of the battle dice."

"Sense for once," he agreed, with acid emphasis.

For a moment, the burly autocrat gazed instinctively to the east, where the grim enemy camp crouched on the broad shoulder of the hills.

"It will be difficult for your people to approach without detection," he challenged.

"They will circle to the south and then east and northeast, approaching the enemy camp finally with the sun at their backs."

"All of them?" Harmon demanded, inexorably inquisitive.

"Half of them," Stephen replied, in a low voice.

"And the others?"

"They are the forlorn hope. Theirs is the duty of holding the enemy's attention while the fleet from the east races in and showers bombs on the Mongolian camp."

"I suppose it is all part of this absurd thing you call war," the autocrat commented, heavily, "but it seems like madness to me, this slaying of men who could be put to better use in industry."

Mowbray changed the subject.

"Is the city peaceful?"

"As much so as any place can be when the population thinks and talks of nothing but war. Your citizen guards have the mob in hand. We have plenty of food and, so far, have been able to supply your army."

He sank heavily on a camp stool before the commander's tent, toward which they had been walking.

"I have become infected like the rest, with the madness of the moment," he declared, with a wry face. "In my spare moment, I have arranged for the enlistment of additional volunteers. I have been amazed to find so many men ready to exchange the certainty of food, raiment and shelter for the doubtful provender and perils of army life."

"I won't attempt to thank you," Stephen said quietly, "but you know I appreciate your efforts."

"It may be well not to hasten thanks," Harmon replied, in rough banter. "Possibly, I am raising a force of my own for that little personal altercation which is due when you have driven out the Mongolian and I am released from my absurd promise."

A sudden disturbance among the parked air motors attracted both to the entrance to the tent. A figure clad in white harangued the surprised soldiers. They could not hear the low-toned words but the attitude of the men, even in the dim light, indicated amazement and distrust. The intruder's sight must have been preternatural, for he perceived the two figures standing just outside the commander's domicile.

"Woe to the city!" he shrilled.

His enshrouded arms were flung toward them.

"Woe to the city!" he repeated.

"Hare!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Yes—and stark mad!" Harmon agreed.

The insane autocrat seemed on the point of mounting the slight hill on which the commander's tent was pitched. A light gleamed on a knife in his hand. On impulse, he turned and fled toward the massed machines. Stephen sensed his purpose.

"Seize him!" he ordered.

Soldiers sprang forward but before they could lay hands on the madman, he sprang into an air motor, already throbbing in preparation for flight. A maniacal laugh was drowned in the throb of its racing motors. With a graceful sweep, the machine, one of the largest and most heavily laden of the fleet, rose in the air and darted into the night. A hundred pilots sprang to their machines to pursue him, but Mowbray's sharp command called them back.

"We have no time to follow a madman," he declared.

SIMEON, his voice husky with rage, vented his anger on his silent soldiers.

"They are more fearful of a ghost than of the Mongolian," he cried, striding to Mowbray's side. "Another ten minutes and we would have been gone."

"This will not interfere with your plans," the Commander replied, curtly. "One machine less means nothing. I do not hold you responsible. You could not anticipate the vagaries of a lunatic."

Harmon by his side, he waited patiently until the first machine took the air. On the side removed from Mongolian gaze, it showed a light as a guide to those that followed. Simeon appeared for final instructions.

"The fate of the raid is in your hands," Stephen said, soberly. "I can say no more."

Visibly moved, the burly thief saluted silently. Harmon extended his hand. With a grim smile, Simeon shook it and then hastened to his air motor. A moment later it rose into the darkness.

"There is nothing more we can do?" Harmon asked, after a pause.

"Simeon commands," Mowbray replied, wearily. "All we can do is to pray that good fortune attends him and his command."

Silently, he reentered the tent, Harmon following. As he dropped on a stool, the latter shot a sudden question.

"Where is Ardis Moore?"

"In the Mongolian camp?"

"You knew, then?" asked the burly autocrat, in amazement.

"I was informed by the King himself."

"Then, you know about Fordyce Meering as well?"

"No."

"You had not heard she also was captured by the enemy?"

"It is news to me."

"Arston told me. She sent Ardis to the Mongolian as a peace offering. A moment later she heard I had accepted the office of governor-general and had the absurd thought I could be influenced to betray you. So, she sent Fordyce to recall the air motor carrying Ardis, and she also was captured."

He strove vainly to restrain a groan.

"I dread to think of her fate. What can I do?" he demanded, turning a drawn and haggard face toward his companion. "I love her, Stephen, I'd go single-handed into the Emperor's camp to rescue her. There isn't a man in America with brains enough to advise me except yourself."

"I can offer only this slight solace—I believe the Emperor will treat her honorably."

He sketched rapidly his last meeting and conversation with Field Marshal Lee Chang, the Asiatic conqueror's representative, recalling particularly the proud declaration that the master of the world did not war on women. Harmon's drawn face relaxed.

"I feel we can rely on this assurance," Stephen declared. "The Emperor's nature is chivalrous. He feels himself so superior to any man or combination of men, he could not stoop to despicable conduct toward the defenseless."

"You hold him in higher esteem than I. Yet, I hope your estimate of him is correct."

"What of your administrative problems?"

"Nothing worth mentioning," Harmon replied, brushing the thought aside with a contemptuous hand. "Arston tried to incite an uprising among her immediate retainers. However, others of her caste refused to join the conspiracy, fearing confiscation of their property. They are awaiting the outcome of your war with Mongolia. I had little trouble restoring order. From the southern, middle and northern units, I have called for supplies and volunteers. The former have come in sufficient amount, but I do not expect soldiers. Dissension and doubt are rife and they do not quite understand what is occurring or what is safest and best for them to do."

The Commander nodded thoughtfully.

"At this time, their defection is unimportant," Harmon continued, "but it might become vital if the struggle should be prolonged."

"It will not be prolonged," Stephen replied, quietly. "Either the Mongolian will surrender before he emerges from the foothills or all America will lie as prostrate under his feet as Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia now are."

The burly autocrat drew in his breath sharply.

"Are you gambling everything on this one campaign?" he asked, in wonderment.

Mowbray laughed harshly.

"Do you think I ever should find time or place to recruit and train another army if this one should fail?" he demanded. "I should be doubly proscribed—by my own caste in America and by the Mongolian overlord."

Harmon nodded, this time slowly, thoughtfully and somberly. Stephen arose nervously and stepped to the tent opening.

The triangle of light, shining through the opening, was reflected on a thin white blanket.

"Fog!" he exclaimed, joyfully.

"Thick, too," Harmon agreed. "A nasty night for your air motor fleet."

"Give thanks for it! Under its cover, our machines, guided by men who know this mountain country intimately, will race miles nearer the enemy camp before being brought under a destructive ground fire than they could have hoped to be able to do under other circumstances."

"I see what you mean. It is a stroke of golden luck."

"It is and for two reasons. The fog will cloak the raid and the Mongolian, not being as well acquainted with the terrain, will risk fewer patrol ships in the air."

A new confidence thrilled his voice as he continued.

"Harmon, by this time tomorrow night, I believe we shall be celebrating the first victory of American arms in this struggle!"

CHAPTER XIII

ROUSING from restless slumber, Ardis pressed aside a hanging and stepped outside her tent. Heavy mist hung over the encampment, through the dense mass of which came muffled the noises of the army. She stood solitary in a world of fog. Behind her, a voice cried her name and Fordyce stumbled to her side.

"I thought you had left me," she cried.

The other's presence dispelled Ardis' sense of isolation. She returned to the tent, but did not go inside. The light gradually grew stronger, but she could only guess at the hour. Her thoughts turned to Stephen and she wondered what he was doing and how he was hastily improvising a defense for helpless America from the menace of war-trimmed Mongolia. As she dreamed a terrific explosion shook the camp, flames tore the fog curtain and a gust of wind struck the tent, causing it to rock crazily. Other explosions followed rapidly and the camp was in an instant uproar, as soldiers rushed to their weapons and began searching the brightening sky with lights and death rays.

Abruptly, the mist, torn by successive heavy explosions, opened up before her eyes and she perceived a fleet of air motors which, she knew, must be American machines. After the first stunning moment of surprise, the Mongolian veterans had began a systematic attack upon the racing flyers.

"What is it?" demanded Fordyce, hysterically.

"It is our people," Ardis replied. "They are attacking the Emperor in his own camp."

"Oh, the cowards! The stupid, blundering cowards!" moaned Fordyce. "To subject me to such peril! They must be mad!"

A hundred crimson Mongolian war motors seemed to leap from the ground. As they shot upward, war birds seeking greedily to close with their foes, the death ray gunners picked off the attackers. Machines whirled in crazy circles to the ground, to explode as their freight of bombs detonated. Even this destruction brought consternation to the enemy; as each doomed machine's contents spread destruction far and wide. One American craft, far in the van, had swung away from its companions. It seemed in ignominious flight but even as Ardis watched, it swerved back over the camp until it was directly over the parked air fleet, where thousands of soldiers strove frantically to get their charges into the air.

A death ray battery swung toward the long voyager. She prayed with paralyzed, unmoving lips, that the daring adventurer might succeed in his mission. Abruptly, the machine drove earthward in a screaming rush that brought it down until she could perceive its white-robed pilot spread one arm over the massed red war motors in a gesture of demoniac joy. In an agony of apprehension, she flung her hands upward in a gesture of appeal.

"Now!" Ardis screamed. "Now!"

As if in answer to her command, the man thrust right and left with nervous hand. Again and again, as the machine raced over the helpless enemy fleet, he made the same motion. From the air motor descended a rain of black dots, falling at terrific speed upon the Mongolian ships and their laboring crews. A blast hurled her to the ground. Others followed rapidly, until she was deafened by the noise and bruised by repeated shocks as she was raised from the ground and thrown down again. She was dimly conscious that the tent had fallen and thankful that none of its supports had dropped upon her prostrate form. She wondered vaguely what had become of Fordyce and whether her companion had been injured. The explosions stopped as abruptly as they had begun. However, the surcease was only temporary. She heard a roar of amazement from the Mongolian camp and the din recommenced. The whole world seemed reeling. Yet, she experienced no sensation of fear, but instead, was sustained by an emotion of proud thankfulness.

"Stephen has won!" her heart sang madly.

The blasts terminated as abruptly as they had recommenced. The second attack from the east, although planned as a surprise, found the Mongolian gunners at their weapons. Only a few machines of this group penetrated the death-ray barrage. Still, their bombs added enormously to the total of destruction effected by the surprise attack of the first squadron. By the time the survivors of the American fleet had drawn off and were racing back to their camp with news of the first victory over the Mongolian, Ardis was becoming conscious of a smothering sensation. Burrowing under the heavy tent, she reached the air.

The scene that greeted her eyes was so frightful that she drew back, horrified. Fearful as had been the pictures of war painted by the textbooks of her schools, which declared conflict sanguinary insanity, they had not prepared her for such slaughter. The graceful air motors that had been surprised while still on the ground, were masses of metalwork, down which trickled a bloody stream more sinister than the paint with which they had been decorated. Tents had been leveled in every direction, including the palatial one in which the Emperor had had his headquarters. Doctors and nurses were moving swiftly among the injured, whose groans and screams filled the air. She clasped hands to her ears and raised her eyes to search the heavens for the American fleet.

A single air motor, torn and blackened by the death rays, had pitched upon a nearby hillside. As she gazed, a white-robed figure painfully reared itself erect. Somewhere in the Mongolian camp, an alert gunner saw the solitary survivor and turned his weapon in that direction. She saw the searing ray strike the machine, but the American leaped from sight behind a boulder and disappeared. Ardis became conscious of fear for her own safety. She had no difficulty in visualizing her fate if she was seen by the maddened soldiery, roused to fury by the unexpectedly successful American attack. She crawled back under the tent flap and lay quiet.

HOURS passed with leaden feet. As the sun mounted in the heavens, its heat beat down upon her until her refuge became an inferno. She longed for water and air, but knew better than to venture out. Even if she could reach the Mongolian ruler, she doubted whether she could be sure of his protection. With his plans for the conquest of America in jeopardy, he would have no time or thought for other matters.

Trampling feet passed her hiding place and great war machines, recklessly guided, rumbled on, only a few yards from her head. Fortunately, the military street in front of the tent was broad and open. Passage along it was easier than across the tangle of leveled tents. Soldiers and weapons followed the easier route. The dust raised by passing thousands of feet settled on her dried lips and parched throat. Once she coughed and

listened for moments, in agonized suspense lest the noise had betrayed her hiding place. She heard her name called faintly.

"Ardis!"

Although muffled, the voice was recognizable as that of Fordyce. She thrust her hands out on either side and encountered soft, yielding flesh. A despairing scream left no doubt the form was that of the young autocrat.

"Hush!" she whispered. "They will hear you!"

Fordyce crept to her side, trembling and weeping. Ardis comforted her with signs. She dared not speak, for the heavy tread of marching men sounded only a few feet distant. In a pause of the shuffling march, she rounded out a tiny tunnel in the tent covering. The breath of air from the outside was as delicious as water to a wanderer in the desert. New detachments of soldiers appeared, their lean faces grim with resolve. Immense war machines, evidently including many rescued from the wrecked war fleet, rumbled by, some painfully dragged by men hitched to rudely improvised gear. Following them came others staggering under packs of munitions or boxes of foodstuffs. She knew that never before, in all the history of their campaigns, had the royal veterans been forced to such drudgery. She sensed that they were bewildered, surprised and, most of all, enraged at those who had engineered the coup, which had robbed them of so large a part of their transport.

As the sun declined, a cool breeze swept the mountain plateau and the heat grew less oppressive. The passing lines thinned, the intervals between detachments became more extended. The breeze grew chill and blew more briskly. The hidden pair enlarged the tunnel-like opening and drank in refreshing draughts with avid lungs. The great camp was silent. Even the wounded had been removed as the vast array wound its way from the heights to the lowlands, seeking the American army and battle.

"I think we can escape now," Ardis whispered.

"Where shall we go?" wailed Fordyce.

"Anywhere, except along the trail followed by the Mongolians."

"Nowhere in the world can we be safe from these horrible barbarians."

"Is it just to speak so harshly of those who treated us with so much generosity?" Ardis asked, gently.

"Generosity!" echoed the other, haughtily. "Was it generous to make me the servant of a middle-class woman?"

The other's silence brought repentance.

"Forgive me," she sobbed. "I am unstrung."

Ardis did not reply. Her quick ear caught the sound of voices and she gestured for silence. Two men were conversing in English.

"This is their tent," one said.

"I see no trace of the bodies," the other replied.

He spoke with difficulty, his utterance interrupted by a dry, rasping cough.

"They may have been covered when it was blown down."

"If so, they probably were smothered under its thick covering."

The speaker cleared his throat and coughed huskily.

"Ardis!" he called. "It is I, Lee Chang."

For a moment, she lay irresolute then, with decision, flung aside the enveloping folds and stood up, Fordyce following, fearful of emerging, but in greater fear lest she be left behind. Beside Drusus stood his youthful secretary. "It is fortunate I found you," the Mongolian noble declared.

"We must leave at once. The King has given orders that the camp be abandoned."

They ran through the gathering dusk, Lee Chang leaning heavily on his youthful companion's arm. He gasped a warning.

"Faster!"

Worn by excitement and waiting, the young women had been lagging, but the foreboding in his voice lashed their weary feet. They stumbled into a shallow canyon in the hillside cutting off at right angles from the road the royal veterans had followed in their march to the lowlands. Drusus permitted a momentary pause, then urged them forward again.

"Climb!" he gasped, pointing to a narrow, precipitous path.

The rude trail ascended the canyon for a short distance, abruptly turned and led into a mere gash, up which they toiled with difficulty. For the first time, they observed the mouth of a shallow cave.

"At last!" Drusus cried, coughing violently. "I feared we might be too late."

Unable to control his labored breathing, he sank to the rocky floor of the cave, leaning back against its rough walls and desperately striving to gain control of heart and laboring lungs. Ardis glanced out, but could not see the King's abandoned camp and surmised the cave faced to the west. After a time Drusus controlled his coughing and spoke rapidly.

"I discovered this cave by chance and while the army was marching out today stocked it with a few supplies. Remain here until after the battle that is now in the process of making. It will decide the campaign. If the Emperor wins, it will be safe for you to return to the city."

He shot a curt command at his companion, which sent the latter stumbling down the dim path.

"I can speak of other possibilities now that he has gone," he continued. "Should the Emperor be defeated —a possibility not altogether remote, now that his transport has been crippled—you must follow your own devices. It is probable I shall not be alive to aid you."

The young Mongolian scrambled swiftly up the path, as though in fear of danger. He shouted a warning and Lee Chang hastily urged the young women to seek the safety of the cave's inner recesses.

"It is coming!" he warned. "The King has been forced to abandon vast stores of war materials and will destroy them to prevent their capture by your people."

He thrust a weapon into Ardis' hand.

"Keep it," he ordered. "It is a last, bitter resort for those threatened with worse than death."

An unearthly flare of light revealed his lined, anxious face. They reeled under a shock that seemed to rend the mountain to its foundations. The light died and she heard Fordyce cry out in fear. Again, the sky was illuminated by the ghastly light. She saw her companion, head flung back and arms out-thrust rigidly, in the arms of Drusus' secretary, whose eyes blazed with passion. The next moment the Mongolian nobleman had dragged the girl from the other's grasp and sent the man reeling with a savage thrust, which told of the gigantic strength which had been his in days of martial leadership.

"Go!" he commanded.

The next horrible flash of light revealed a cave tenanted only by the two women, one prone on the rocky

floor and the other hovering above, seeking to restore her unconscious companion.

CHAPTER XIV

THE flaming destruction of the Mongolian camp signaled a warning to alert American patrols, who flung hasty messages to the Commander's headquarters.

"He is preparing to evacuate his position on the plateau," Conquist declared.

Simeon, a broken arm strapped in splints to a sling—and his face lined with suffering and weariness, nodded assent. Stephen flung a question at him.

"What proportion of his war-fleet is available for service?"

"At most, not more than one-half. Of course, that is only a guess. We were too busy unloading our bombs, fighting the enemy in the air, dodging death ray barrages and, finally drawing off after our mission had been accomplished, to be certain of our observations. However, I believe we destroyed fifty percent of the Mongolian warships."

"He still has a formidable fleet, although not enough to transport his troops and equipment. We have crippled the Mongolian lion, but he still is powerful and dangerous."

Hardmuth nodded vigorous assent.

"We have compelled him to march at least half his troops overland, through terrain where we can select a battlefield in advance. That gives us a tremendous advantage, particularly as our soldiers are new and untried, while his are seasoned veterans. Still, he can cover his advance with the remnant of his air navy and I doubt whether we have the ships, trained men or equipment to challenge his supremacy in this arm."

"There is our greatest weakness," Delachaise admitted. "I gravely question whether our untrained levies will stand up long under an attack by skilled death ray gunners, whose fire is accurately directed by aerial observers."

"There still is a chance our new magnetic weapon will be a surprise to the enemy and you will remember we have a defense against the death ray," Stephen argued, studying his generals thoughtfully.

"Against such small weapons as those employed by the Amazons—yes," Hardmuth agreed, "but we know, from the reports of our scouts, that the defense is utterly insufficient when men are exposed to the improved and more powerful weapons with which the Emperor's veterans are armed."

"You forget the magnetic arm," Mowbray objected.

"True, that involves a possibility of surprise for the foe and surprise is an important element in war," Delachaise declared. "Still, I would feel more comfortable if I knew the Mongolian war fleet had been completely eliminated."

An aid entered hurriedly.

"Commander, a report from the commanding officer of the advance forces," he said, saluting.

Mowbray turned to the thought-transmission machine, from which leaped a red spot of light, centering on his forehead and completing connection with the distant officer.

"Colonel Caesar Calmetti reporting. My scouts announce a movement of the enemy, in considerable force westward from his camp on foot toward the plains."

"Yes," Mowbray commented voicelessly. The voice droned on:

"I regret to report our magnetic ray weapons are valueless. The enemy evidently has perfected a defense. By Etherscope observations, I gain the impression he had developed a mask or a simple solution with which clothing and exposed portions of body and equipment are immunized. Our only effective arm is the ancient rifle, with which hits have been made, but the powerful Mongolian death ray artillery has forced our scouts to retreat on the main advanced force."

"Is there anything more?"

"We are contesting the advance and losing heavily. I am reporting by order of the Brigadier-General commanding in this sector."

"Very good. I will communicate with him direct."

The red-spot died. Stephen turned to his Commanders.

"The time has come to use our final defense agency. Professor Sconeff, are the radionic de-energizing machines in readiness?"

A tall, scholarly man rose, saluted awkwardly and nodded.

"This is the crucial moment of the campaign," Mowbray declared. "We are depriving the enemy of power. Simultaneously, we are terminating our own command of the same instrument. It is a desperate expedient, justifiable only because the situation will be more unexpected and, therefore, more harassing to the Mongolian than to ourselves. Are you ready, gentlemen, for this final expedient?"

He glanced slowly around the circle of faces and saw grim resolution and assent.

"Remember, that from the moment Professor Sconeff sets his machines in motion, we shall be without transport and also without communication, except such archaic methods as flag and semaphore signals, carrier pigeons and couriers. Each one of you will be compelled to carry on in accordance with the general plan of campaign as discussed and agreed upon at our councils. This is understood?"

One after another, the assembled commanders signified assent. He signaled them to rise.

"To your posts! I shall make a last round of our positions and you may check with me then on final disposition of forces and equipment. An hour after I give the signal, Sconeff will start his giant machines. This will still all energy—our own and the enemy's. Consider it is the signal to advance to designated positions in preparations for the final conflict that will decide the fate of the Mongolian invasion."

Accompanied by Simeon and Conquist, the Commander made a swift tour of his front. By Etherscope observation, he discerned the massing of considerable enemy forces along the course of the stream flowing down from the mountain plateau where the Emperor had pitched his camp. Its easy gradient and broad paving furnished a splendid highway over which to advance troops and heavy machines, the latter moved by men and such hastily improvised power plants as could be salvaged from wrecked warmotors. Of the surviving flyers in the Mongolian fleet, he saw a number.

"They are awaiting the emergence of the main army from the comparatively restricted confines of the mountain road before launching an attack," Conquist said, quietly. "It is good strategy. Once the advance guard has reached the open country, where it can deploy, the

air navy will swoop down on our troops and try to shake their formations and shatter their morale."

Mowbray nodded.

"He is somewhat disorganized by the loss of part of his fleet," the Commander commented. "He will be completely disorganized when the others are put out of action while his death ray artillery and other arms are rendered useless through loss of the radionic power upon which they depend. Then, he must drive through to victory by sheer physical force against our old-style weapons or face complete defeat."

"The Emperor will make a fight of it," Hardmuth replied, positively. "Surrender will be the last thing he will consider."

"It will be a desperate situation for him," Conquist replied, quickly. "His only route to the plains is along this road, which we now command."

"Here he is to be halted," Stephen declared, sternly. "The road has been mined as I directed?"

"Yes."

"Material is at hand for the erection of barricades and the troops supplied with intrenching tools to throw up breastworks?"

"We have taken every precaution to be in readiness, Commander," Hardmuth replied.

MOWBRAY made a swift visit to the selected position, viewed the final arrangements and nodded approval. On either side of a canyon, at the bottom of which ran the main road, the enemy must travel; troops were massed behind every patch of cover. Grim-faced and confident, the men watched their commander and ripples of subdued applause ran down their lines. Delachaise hastened up, his face flushed with exertion but wreathed in smiles.

"We have prepared still another little surprise, *mon general*. On the cliffs above are massed my giants, the strongest of the strong, each with his shoulder to a boulder. When the word comes—pouf! They will thrust like Titans and rocks shall fall upon the enemy until he thinks the very skies are raining death."

Stephen rewarded him with a word of praise and passed on to the artillery.

"Clumsy weapons, Commander," agreed the general heading this arm of the patriot forces, "but better than none, particularly when the enemy possesses nothing with which to counter our attack."

"Are your supplies of ammunition adequate?"

"Not for a prolonged engagement. However, we have everything that has been manufactured, including even the supplies turned out yesterday in our munitions factories."

"Let us pray, then, general, for a short fight and victory."

The phrase was caught up by his suite and passed on to the rank and file. It rippled through the lines like a prophecy.

"A short fight and victory!"

"Our work is concluded," Mowbray said, turning to Simeon and Conquist. "Let us hasten to headquarters."

Conquist laid a hand on his arm.

"Am I to be denied the right to lead my Legion?"

"I had hoped we should not need them."

"Why not?" she demanded, challengingly.

"This is a war of men."

She frowned sternly.

"This is a war of Americans defending their homes. My command is trained and loyal. Why should we not stand shoulder to shoulder with your militia?"

"Go, if you will, General. We shall need every trained soldier we can muster."

She saluted and left. Accompanied by the wounded thief leader, Mowbray returned to his headquarters. A delegation headed by Arston awaited him.

"What do you desire?" he demanded sharply, his mind on the coming battle.

"Peace," the Matriarch replied, as sharply.

"For whom?"

"The nation—ourselves—the Mongolian."

"Have you interviewed the Emperor?" he asked, ironically.

"How can we enter his camp now?" she replied, with asperity.

"Then, how can you speak for him?"

"This is silly bandying of words. We demand that useless slaughter of our people—our workers and craftsmen—shall cease. We are prepared to make a truce with the Emperor and free America of his soldiers."

"You would buy off an already defeated foe?" Simeon demanded, contemptuously.

"You, I believe," she replied, running a haughty eye over him from head to foot, "are the man they call the 'Thieves General?'"

"Did you come here to insult my commanders?" Stephen interposed, sternly.

"We came to ascertain what plans have been made for the safety of our property and our workers," she replied, curtly.

"My plans are my own and my generals'," he said. "Was there anything else?"

"You mock us!" she exclaimed. "Our mission is one of help for our doomed and distracted nation."

"Then, go down there," he said, pointing to where soldiers were streaming to the front, flanked on both sides by lines of trucks straining every effort in a last race against time to get their freight of supplies to the battleground before power was cut off. "You can be of real benefit to America by fronting the enemy at our gates as those men are preparing to do."

"You would risk our valuable lives with those of the rabble you have led into this mad adventure!" she exclaimed, haughtily. "Preposterous! I command that you cease this mad nonsense. Advise the Emperor we will make peace on any terms and at any price."

An aid hastened to his side.

"A message from Professor Sconeff, Commander. He is in readiness."

"You intend going through with your mad plan to resist the Emperor?" Arston asked, her eyes wide with amazement. "You reject our effort to bring peace?"

"Peace at the price he would demand and you would pay—yes!"

He flung a warning over his shoulder as he entered his tent.

"If you would return safely to the city, leave immediately. In ten minutes, you will be too late."

Soldiers barred Arston's way when she would have followed him.

"The Commander is not to be disturbed," said a grim militiaman.

She laid a hand on his mighty arm, as though to thrust him aside, reconsidered and rejoined her delegation, the members of which had been silent auditors of her vain argument. Dejectedly the group clambered

into an airmotor and disappeared in the direction of the city. Stephen had made connection with Sconeff through voiceless communication.

"In eight minutes, Commander, I shall act," the professor reported.

"You have your orders," was the silent answer. "Obey them explicitly."

Followed by Simeon, Mowbray raced to a waiting warmotor and darted toward the front. He planed down literally under the shadows of enemy flyers patrolling a front only a short distance removed from the advanced American positions. The morning sun glinted sanguinely on their red-painted sides. Orders evidently had been given for a concentration, as ships were racing from the far-flung wings of the squadron toward a machine bearing the proud flag of Mongolia. Stephen wondered whether the Emperor had elected to assume personal command of the air fleet, unconscious of the doom that impended over it.

Abruptly, he was conscious of sudden, overwhelming silence. Down below, where the laboring trucks and engines had been making last hasty disposition of troops and artillery, all movement had stopped. Simultaneously, the enemy warmotors wavered in their swift flight. His eyes were glued to the flagship, which seemed to glide gently earthward. A second later, its downward movement was accelerated and it turned slowly on its side, overbalanced by its engines or weapons. As it revolved, forms were thrown out. He surmised these were members of its crew who had been on the upper deck. Then, its gravity-dispelling machinery inoperative, it became a mere mass of metal, hurtling earthward with terrific acceleration and followed by all others in the fleet.

The air was swept clear of enemy fighting-craft in the twinkling of an eye. From a distance came the sound of terrific explosions as the doomed machines struck the ground, throwing up immense clouds of dust. Stephen shuddered involuntarily, as he thought of the frightful slaughter precipitated, when Sconeff started his generators. Simeon came running to his side, face aflame with savage joy.

"It works!" he screamed. "The enemy is helpless. Victory is ours!"

CHAPTER XV

THE moments succeeding the explosion and prior to the departure of Lee Chang and his aid were periods of almost delirious suspense for Ardis. At no time since she had entered the Mongolian camp had she experienced terror such as now overwhelmed her. She trembled before the menace of an unmentionable dread, as she leaned over Fordyce, dashed water on her face and chafed her cold hands. The yawning cave-mouth exerted a strange fascination. She kept glancing over her shoulder toward it, anticipating the return of the chivalrous Field Marshal's treacherous secretary. The death ray weapon that had been pressed into her hand by the Mongolian nobleman had fallen to the floor of the cavern. She recovered it as her companion regained consciousness and simultaneously began screaming incoherently, her half-waking thoughts filled with dread. With surprising strength, the young autocrat flung aside a hand laid upon her arm, but Ardis drew her close, whispering a soothing message.

"Has he gone?" whispered Fordyce, terrorized eyes searching every dark nook of the cave.

"We are alone, dear."

"Horrible!" the girl cried, glancing about wildly. "Did you see his eyes?"

She sprang to her feet, weariness forgotten.

"Let us escape!"

"Where can we go?" Ardis asked, gently. "We might walk into his arms if we left the cave."

"When will this terrible night end?" Fordyce exclaimed. "Oh, Ardis, I never dreamed anything ever could happen like—like this!"

Forgetting her own fears, Ardis comforted her. Locked in each other's arms, they waited for an interminable period, no sound breaking the stillness except the young aristocrat's convulsive sobs. A pale moon bathed the cave mouth in thin, cold light. Ardis thought she heard a voice speaking in the Mongolian tongue, but as the sound was not repeated, became assured she had been tricked by an overstrung imagination, which magnified the rustle of a falling pebble until it became the labored approach of a climbing man.

Hours passed and Fordyce slept, head pillowed on her companion's shoulder. Ardis fought sleep valiantly, but weariness weighed down her eyelids. She was tempted to rise and walk about the cave, thinking thus to fight off drowsiness but at her first gentle motion, arms were coiled about her in the grip of fear. Strange, unreal phantoms seemed to dance at the cave mouth. She nodded and then started in wonder whether she had dreamed or had perceived a flitting, uncanny figure pass the entrance, its flapping robes trailing in the light breeze. She drowsed and awoke to find the muscles of her neck and shoulders grown stiff and cramped. A moment later, she heard a sound, as of some one scrambling cautiously up the steep path. A moment later, a stone slipped with a rattle into the narrow gully on which the cavern faced. It was followed by a hail of pebbles.

She sprang to her feet, nervously clutching the weapon Lee Chang had pressed into her hand before his departure. There was a sound of falling rocks at the entrance, a scraping of metal-shod footgear on the rocky path and a muffled sound. She entertained a fleeting hope the intruder might be an animal. In her desperate situation, she would have welcomed any creature, no matter how savage, rather than the hated Mongolian. Fordyce crouched at her feet, her voice paralyzed by fear. Nothing could be hoped for from her. Whatever defense they offered against the skulking intruder, it must be hers to provide it. The opening was darkened by the figure of a man, who paused uncertainly, vainly striving to pierce the darkness of the cave.

"Stop!" she cried.

She heard the man utter an exclamation of satisfaction.

"I am armed," she continued. "If you enter, I shall shoot!"

Fordyce's terrors no longer could be restrained.

"Help!" she screamed. "Help!"

"Silence!" the man ordered, his exultant voice booming through the cave.

"Stop where you are!" Ardis commanded, "or you die."

"Fool!" he replied coarsely. "Your death ray is impotent."

She pressed the button as he advanced, but no answering deathly flash followed. The man laughed exultantly. The next instant, he was flung to the floor of the cave by a leaping form which sprawled over his prone body,

its rags flapping as they rolled about at the cave mouth. Above their labored breathing sounded occasional words in Mongolian and American. Though taken by surprise, Drusus' aid fought savagely. Once he called out in his own language, as though seeking to discover the identity of his opponent, but received no answer.

Ardis perceived the stranger was tiring and that the Mongolian was on the point of overcoming him. A note of triumph broke from the Asiatic's lips. He of the flapping rags gathered himself for a final effort, which brought him astride his adversary. She saw something bright flash and heard the Oriental utter a cry of fear. Then, a shriek rang through the cave. For a moment, neither man moved. Slowly, the white-clad visitor rose and hung over his foe, who writhed and subsided into dreadful quietude. Spurning the prone form with his foot, the victor stumbled to the cave mouth, where he paused and flung his hands upward.

"Woe to the city!" he cried.

With the halting slowness of complete fatigue, he passed from sight. Fordyce raced to Ardis and flung her arms about her companion. On the verge of nervous exhaustion, the two cowered in the rear of the cave, agonizingly watching the glooming entrance in fear lest their mysterious rescuer or another, even more dreaded, appear. The body on the moonlighted portal had a strange fascination for both. At times, it seemed to move an arm or leg or to mutter unintelligible words. Terror magnified every noise of the night a thousand times and lent to it a fearsome portent.

DAWN came on leaden wings, but as soon as it was light Ardis resolutely stole to the cave mouth, followed by Fordyce, who feared above everything else that she might be left alone. Bent double, as though surprised by death in a moment of triumphant physical effort, the young Mongolian rested on his right side, his left arm flung back to reveal a gaping wound, from which blood had welled until it formed a sinister pool.

"Let us leave this frightful place!" Fordyce exclaimed.

Ardis snatched up food and light clothing and, with head averted, led her companion past the corpse and along the narrow path. Eager to place as much distance as possible between themselves and the scene of their fearsome adventures, they raced down the steep hillside to the plateau where the Emperor's camp had been pitched. With a cry of warning Ardis thrust her companion behind a bush and studied the abandoned site. Gigantic machines were scattered everywhere, overturned by hasty hands; which had smashed the delicate equipment for concentrating radionic energy in the production of death rays. From their vantage point, they could perceive the terrific damage wrought by the American bombs. Chasms had been opened in the ground, trees shattered, tents rent and war equipment torn into fragments. The warmotors, that had been the especial objective of the raid and which had been surprised while on the ground, were riven masses of metal.

"Is there no end to these horrors?" Fordyce asked, in an agonized whisper. "Can men do nothing but destroy those things which other men create."

"It is war," Ardis answered. "Had it not been for the success of our countrymen in wrecking this equipment, greater damage and life loss might have been inflicted on the city by these Mongolian military flyers."

"As you explain it," the other answered in weary agreement, "all this turmoil and disaster seem inevitable. I am commencing to understand something of what you mean, Ardis. In a way, it all seems so senseless, so useless. However, when I remember what happened last night in the cave"—She shuddered and drew closer to her companion—"when I remember those frightful hours, I seem to see big causes behind this apparent madness."

Ardis did not pursue the subject.

"We must hurry on," she urged. "While the camp now is deserted, some of the Emperor's soldiers might return at any moment."

Skirting the edge of the wrecked encampment, they hastened in the direction of the city, prudently following trails high above the mountain road, down which the Mongolian legions had advanced to their defeat by the American troops. The region was wild and unpeopled. It comprised an area the Companies with customary decisiveness had ruled, as unfit for cultivation. Those among its people, chiefly forest rangers and miners, who had not fled before the enemy advance, had been driven out by the invader following a ruthless policy of preventing spying by the complete elimination of hostile populations. The flight told heavily upon physical strength and they paused frequently. Ardis could have pressed on faster than her companion, but Fordyce, unaccustomed to walking, needed rest. She stretched out on the turf beneath an overhanging rock, which partially screened them from the goat path they had been following.

"I can't go on any farther," she said, hopelessly.

Ardis found a tiny spring at the base of the rock, where they bathed hands and faces and then ate sparingly. Her friend, utterly exhausted, fell asleep almost immediately. Head pillowed on her arm, Ardis drowsed. A figure in flying rays stole up the road, skulking from shelter to shelter and peering around constantly as if in fear of attack. Over the man's face fell a mass of tangled hair. His eyes were glazed and his lips worked tremulously, while one arm hung stiff at his side, as though rendered almost helpless by recent injury. Thorns and sharp stones had cut his feet and he limped painfully.

Unconscious of the sleeping girls, he stole to a basin below their hiding place and dashed water into his mouth with quick, animal-like motions. After thirst had been assuaged, he thrust his torn feet into the pool and gazed about furtively. The sleeping women caught his eye and he leaped erect, fumbling at a knife in his belt. A moment later, he stole forward, seized a box of concentrated food and wolfed it silently. While he ate, he studied their faces and gradually an expression of bewilderment appeared on his own drawn countenance.

After a time, he crept away a short distance and sat down, still watching the sleepers. The sun mounted higher in the heavens and a beam, striking Ardis, awakened her. The first object upon which her eyes rested was the silent, white-clad man, his rags fluttering in the light morning breeze. He indicated neither fear nor hostility.

"Who is that?" he croaked, pointing to her companion.

"Fordyce Meering," she replied, fearfully.

He nodded slowly and smiled. His grin, if anything, appeared more menacing than his former expression.

"How did she come here?"

The words were broken, uneven, groping, as though connected thought was difficult.

"She was captured by the Mongolians."

A fierce light flamed in his eyes and he flung his hands upward.

"Woe to the city!" he shrilled.

Fordyce awakened, screamed as she saw the stranger visitant and sprang toward Ardis. A moment later, however, recognition dawned. She rose and advanced toward the wanderer, scanning his face intently.

"Martin Hare!"

The man's bewildered countenance worked pitifully.

"Mad!" she exclaimed, in mingled horror and surprise. "Oh, God! What next!"

Hare had arisen to his feet and now confronted her silently.

"How did you get here?" she demanded.

He replied in unintelligible gibberings, pointing upward toward the Emperor's abandoned encampment, beyond which lay the cave in which they had found refuge, and then downward in the direction of the city. He beckoned them to follow and they hastened after him. Despite his bare feet, at which the stones of the trail tore painfully, he plodded forward determinedly, pausing only when his companions signified, by words and signs, that they must have rest. After a time Ardis heard distant explosions and a passing breeze brought to her ear a roar of voices, sounding like the distant beating of the surf on a storm-swept coast.

"What is that?" Fordyce asked, startled.

"I am not certain, but I think it is the noise of battle," said Ardis.

Hare had heard the noises and now quickened his steps. Despite their protestations, he refused to delay longer, seemingly being driven onward by an inward compulsion to seek and find the source of the strange noises. Pushing themselves to the extreme of exhaustion, the girls followed. Abruptly, a voice challenged them. Hare vanished instantly into a clump of low-branched trees as a detachment of soldiers came into sight, their weapons menacing the women. For a single heart-sickening moment, Ardis was silent. Then, she clutched Fordyce's arm in a crushing grip.

"They are Americans" she cried. "We are safe, at last, among our own people!"

CHAPTER XVI

STEPHEN watched a thin line of enemy skirmishers creeping slowly down the canyon road. Availing themselves of every shelter, the Mongolian veterans advanced to a great gap in the highway, where explosives had been detonated at the moment the crimson air navy plunged to its doom. The American soldiers had completed their hasty trench and breastwork. Crouched behind it, they awaited in silence the slow approach of the Mongolian foe, many of whom glanced up curiously and fearfully along the precipitous walls, obviously speculating on the dangers to be apprehended from this direction. An order halted them at some distance from the barricade.

Thus far, there had been no exchanges. The barricade might have been a peaceful wall, erected by husbandmen to safeguard a field from straying cattle. The canyon top appeared void of life. Stephen saw a crouching officer, distinguished only by his bright red collar, rise to his knees and peer at the intrenchment from the shelter of a rock. He went about his work coolly and methodically, studying the breastwork, the ground in front of it and searching with keen eyes for signs of its defenders. It seemed a trivial matter, a petty prelude to the gigantic impending conflict. Mowbray was startled to observe the crouching figure fling up its arms and crumple at the base of the rock behind which the man had been sheltered. He had not seen a rifle flash but now the echoing crack came to his ears. The first American shot had been fired!

The thin line of skirmishers retreated. A soldier paused for a moment beside the stricken officer, running a practiced hand over his heart to ascertain whether his wound had been fatal. Assured the man was dead, the Asiatic veteran followed his retreating fellows, skillfully taking advantage of every protection the canyon bottom afforded. The dust raised by the movement of the scouting patrol swiftly subsided. Stephen was impressed by the grim silence that prevailed over the sinister war theatre. The Americans had concluded their shovel labors and now crouched behind their breastwork. Not an enemy was in sight. Only the still body of the Mongolian officer testified to the grim actuality of the scene. An aid raced to his side with word that a Mongolian column was advancing. The Lion of Asia had elected to go down fighting! It was what Mowbray had expected.

He marveled at the audacity of the Oriental commander and the intrepidity of his troops, moving to an assault without weapons other than their bare hands and the clubs represented by their impotent death ray weapons. The column swept into sight at the bend in the canyon wall and advanced calmly, methodically to the great pit created by the American explosions. There was no delay. On either flank, parties commenced creeping along the shattered lips of the depression and closed up at the foot of the barricade. A burst of rifle-fire swept the rampart, littering the ground with dead and dying. The decimated attack was swept back, a few survivors reaching the shelter of the bend in the canyon wall. The first clash had ended.

To Stephen, it seemed the battle was being fought without conscious direction by himself. Cut off from his generals by the severance of familiar forms of communication, he could only watch the slow unrolling of the campaign plan he had laid out in advance with his war council. A massive Mongol machine was thrust forward from the shelter of the canyon wall, the men propelling it sheltering themselves behind its massive sides. He wondered what they were planning. The weapon was impotent, like those of the infantrymen who trundled it forward, crouched behind its heavily armored guards. In a moment, he understood their purpose. Without pausing, they pushed it to the edge of the trench and tumbled it in. The crash, as it rolled to the bottom and careened on its side, was heard above the roar of American rifle fire, which swept the ranks of the racing Asiatics, taking a heavy toll from the daring column.

Another machine appeared. This time, systematic sniping picked off numbers of the veterans tugging at its immense weight, but they dragged it to the dry moat and shoved it over the edge, scattering instantly and seeking shelter. The third machine was crippled by an accurately placed shell from an American cannon, firing over the men at the barricade, but more Mongols swarmed out from shelter and by sheer brute strength, toppled it into the depression.

The American infantry played remorselessly upon the

procession of enemy machines, but the Mongols were able as well as brave. They increased the number of men at each useless weapon, rushing the bulky mechanisms to the pit edge at a run. Their mission accomplished, they scattered instantly, racing at top speed to shelter. Occasional shells wrought terrific havoc in their ranks, but the Americans had been without training and the efficiency of the artillery did not compare with that of the riflemen at the barricade. The ground was strewn with Asian dead, over which the huge weapons rolled like juggernauts, but the work proceeded remorselessly.

An officer who seemed to bear a charmed life directed the enemy efforts. It was Lee Chang. Untouched by the storm of missiles under which his men were swept to death, his voice could be heard barking hoarse commands. Stephen watched him with sadly fascinated gaze, wondering just how long the intrepid soldier would survive the scathing American fire. An acrid smoke, caused by exploding shells, filled the canyon, partially cloaking the Mongolian operations. Only at times, when vagrant morning breezes brushed the gray pall aside, could the Americans see how rapidly the work of filling the pit was proceeding.

Stephen, spellbound at the spectacle of enemy devotion and courage, remembered the story of the mythical Russian general, who had ordered his soldiers to make of their bodies a corduroy road, over which artillery galloped to a new position on his battle line. With steel and human bodies, the Emperor was laying a road for the advance of a storming column, upon the success of whose efforts depended the fate of his army and of the American defense. But the cost was too great, even for him, had the emergency not been desperate almost to hopelessness. In this awesome labor, Stephen read the lesson that the world conqueror, checked for the first time in his military career, now pinned the desperate fortunes of baffled Asia to a forlorn hope, ordered to sweep through that narrow valley to victory or death.

An aid dropped down by his side, but he did not notice the man's arrival for several moments.

"Where are you from?" he demanded.

"The barricade, Commander. General Conquist reporting."

"How near is the trench to being filled?"

"She reports it is ready for the enemy advance."

"Does she ask reinforcements?"

"No, but she urges that more reserves be stationed in the second and third lines, as she believes the enemy never will relax his efforts so long as men are available to be poured into the attack."

He dictated an order, which was seismographed to a distant division.

"I have ordered additional troops to close in on either flank and their generals to report to General Conquist for instructions. Advise her immediately."

The firing slackened and for long, tense moments, the canyon battleground echoed only to spasmodic rifle shots and occasional shell explosions. The heavy smoke pall gradually dissipated. Stephen could perceive the masses of Mongol dead, a few on the road, but more thrust aside by their living comrades to make way for the passage of the last machines. A runner from Delachaise raced to his side, chest heaving.

"General Delachaise begs to report, sir, that a dense body of enemy infantry has advanced to within a short distance of the turn in the road and is preparing to move out for an attack on the barricade."

"Signal this information to General Conquist," he commanded.

THE crucial moment had arrived: The Emperor, knowing that delay meant siege, starvation and eventual ignominious surrender, had determined to hazard all on an attempt to storm the American defence with unarmed men!

"It is magnificent," he murmured, recalling a famous phrase of an earlier era, "but it is not war."

A column of enemy infantry swept past the turn in the canyon road, its men roaring the deep-throated Mongol war cry that had echoed over victorious battlefields around the civilized world. They had stripped the guards of their useless weapons and advanced under cover of them. The scene recalled to Mowbray pictures he had seen of Roman and Medieval men-at-arms advancing to assault under a roof and wall of shields. Their lines accurately spaced, as calmly as though on parade, they advanced toward the trench and barricade at the double quick.

To Stephen, watching with every nerve tense, it seemed they traveled the space in breathless time. It seemed impossible their determined rush could be checked. Crossing the trench, their lines were broken by the unevenness of the footway, but those who survived closed up instantly and continued the charge. In unending flood, the column poured from behind the shelter of the bend in the road until it seemed that those in the lead were being thrust forward by the very press of the courageous thousands at their backs.

General Conquist had reserved her fire until the greater portion of the Mongol force was in the open. Now, a blaze of flame lighted the top of the American parapet. Under the hail of missiles, the shield bearers stumbled and fell, the huge defenses clanging to the road. Others snatched them up and pressed forward doggedly. Lightning flashed above the massed troops behind. The batteries had come into action. The raging masses of Asiatics were decimated. Men fell in windrows, until the column, closing up even under this terrible punishment, was struggling through masses of its own dead. It seemed impossible that men could be brought to endure such prodigious losses, but the Emperor's veterans did not falter. They broke into a run as they neared the barricade, in such masses it seemed they could tear the defense to pieces with their hands. They had ceased to be an army fighting only for conquest—they were an elemental force moving irresistibly, against all odds, toward a victory that meant food! In their desperation, Stephen read acknowledgment that the Mongols, bereft of transportation, also had found themselves perilously short of supplies.

The first Asiatics appeared at the foot of the barricade. Hand grenades rained down upon them. Their bodies formed a parapet for the next wave, which leaped upward. American bayonets gleamed in the sun, while Mongol death ray weapons, useless except as clubs, rose and fell like flails. One instant the barricade was clear. The next, it was covered anew with assailants. At several points, the Mongols broke through and Stephen could detect raging knots of conflict as his militiamen and Amazons closed with the desperate enemy in close combat. Abruptly, a roaring American cheer rose to his ears. The second line of defense came in, like a sea wave, washing clear to the barricade and clearing the ground behind the parapet of all foemen. Simultane-

ously, the attack slackened. The last desperate survivors died before the barricade, but the main column withdrew, at a run, behind the shelter of the turn in the road, leaving the road piled high with dead and dying. A runner hastened to Stephen's side.

"General Delachaise asks if it is time for him to launch his attack, Commander."

"I will go with you," he replied, rising.

Unconscious of fatigue, he strode up a winding path leading to the canyon top and along an uneven path to the headquarters of the officer commanding the heights. Delachaise saluted and pointed downward with eloquent hand. The defeated assaulting troops had filtered through another gigantic column, which filled the canyon behind the turn in the road from side to side. Behind a body of stalwart veterans, carrying more shields taken from useless weapons, was arrayed a body of men armed with bows and arrows! In desperation, the Emperor had his men manufacture rude and primitive weapons from timber growing wild on the mountainside. Stephen saw them trying their crude bows and fitting arrows to the strings with clumsy and unfamiliar fingers.

"It-is absurd—mad!" gesticulated Delachaise. "Storming modern defenses with the weapons of primitive man!"

"Absurd, yes!" Stephen replied, soberly. "But, general, such courage!"

"We, too, had courage," the soldier replied, grimly. "We, too, knew how to die in Europe, when these Mongols swept over our armies. But valor alone did not win victories nor did contemplation of our devotion stay the hand of the Asiatic conqueror and his hordes."

He indicated the piled-up masses of stones on the canyon edge and gestured toward similar preparations on the opposite side of the gorge.

"I am ready," he said.

Mowbray glanced downward. A portly officer, distinguishable from those surrounding him, advanced along one side of the road, the massed ranks parting. Stephen recognized him instantly. The King of Mongolia was adventuring his royal life in the final assault! Lion-hearted to the end, he had elected to win victory that would assure world conquest, or perish among the men he had led to repeated victories. With a groan at the impossibility of such a contingency, the Commander entertained a momentary hope that, in some way, the chivalrous monarch might be spared. A weird figure flashed to the brink of the chasm on the opposite side. Its tattered rags waved in the breeze, its unkempt hair hung low over its face as it peered into the depths.

"Woe to the city!" the man screamed, flinging his arms aloft.

"Hare!" ejaculated Stephen.

While the massed Mongolian soldiers gazed upward with surprise and alarm, the mad autocrat drew something from his girdle and whirled it rapidly around his head. It was a sling, a primitive weapon such as a shepherd boy of old had used in defense of his homeland and people. From the loosened weapon sped a stone. Downward it flew to where the Mongolian monarch, momentarily suspending the direction of his entrapped troops, stared upward. It struck squarely on his forehead and without a cry he fell forward upon his face.

A hoarse roar of rage and grief burst from the trapped hordes. Bows were trained upon the white-clad figure, which now bent forward in full view peering upon the prostrate form of the man to whom the world had seemed too small a conquest. A lone soldier, who had crept to a precarious perch far up the canyon wall, deliberately drew back the string of his rude weapon. Stephen watched the arrow as it drove upward, saw it strike Hare and witnessed the sudden jerking of the madman's body as he drew himself erect and gazed uncomprehendingly upon the missile buried in his body. A moment later, he whirled to the brink, tottered a moment and plunged into the depths.

As though this were the signal for which the Americans had been waiting, a storm of giant boulders descended upon the trapped enemy. Enormous stones rolled through the packed ranks, sweeping men to death in half companies. For a moment, officers sought to rally the doomed column, but as the avalanche increased, they turned to the mountain entrance of the canyon, seeking only escape. Simultaneously, an American column debouched from the other end of the road, having swarmed over the barricade at a signal from Mowbray. Rifles belching flame, they swept the ranks of the fleeing enemy and took up the pursuit, while Delachaise's men, abandoning their stone heaps, leaped along the canyon top to fire down upon the routed foe.

"It is over!" said Delachaise, folding his arms and confronting Stephen. "Mongolia's empire crashed to ruins in that canyon. America has rescued the world from the terror of Asiatic conquest!"

CHAPTER XVII

"ARDIS!" cried Stephen, joy and amazement mingled in his voice.

She came to him on swift feet, her eyes alight with love and happiness.

"How did you escape?" he demanded.

She sketched her adventures in a few words.

"And Hare brought you to our outposts?" he asked, in surprise. "The man had a glimmering of reason at the last."

"Is it true that you have been victorious?" she asked.

"The disordered remnant of the Mongolian army raised a flag of truce an hour ago. Their position is hopeless. Unarmed, in an enemy country and without a leader, they will surrender to escape annihilation by my troops. I am awaiting the prince royal, now the Emperor, to state the terms on which I will permit them to lay down their useless arms."

"The danger of invasion is over?"

"So far as this force is concerned, it is. Personally, I believe it is ended forever. The new Emperor has neither the ability nor the ambition of his father. I believe the world-girdling Mongol empire will fall to pieces, particularly as one of my conditions of surrender will be that its troops shall be withdrawn immediately from all conquered countries into Asia."

She clung to him, studying the tremendous import of the statement.

"Death of the Emperor and of Drusus clouds my victory," he continued. "However, it may be best for the world. So long as the monarch lived, we always would have had to fear a resumption of warfare. Never would one like himself have been satisfied, cooped up in his own country, after having had all the world except America at his feet."

The familiar red spot appeared at the Electrono at his

side. He centered the ray on his forehead for a moment. The electric power had been turned on.

"The new king and his generals have arrived," he told her, as the radiance subsided. "I must go."

Unconscious of their presence, Harmon brushed aside the hangings of the Commander's tent and entered, accompanied by Fordyce. Her face was bright with happiness and she nestled close by the burly autocrat, whose arm was thrown protectingly about her.

"I cannot tell you how happy I am," she murmured.

"The future is ours, dear," he replied. "We have broken the Mongolian. Stephen has saved the nation and we shall have peace for years. America becomes again the greatest nation of earth."

"He is a superman," she replied. "I know he must be to win your loyalty so completely."

"He is greater than our age," he declared, with conviction. "I cannot understand where he is headed. Sometimes, I wonder whether he knows himself. However he has proved master of every emergency thus far and I am willing to follow and work with him and under him to accomplish whatever ends he considers best for our country and its people."

"I'm afraid we are unconscious intruders," Stephen whispered, mischievously, beckoning to Ardis.

He thrust aside hangings and led her to another apartment in the huge tent.

"Sit here, at your ease, behind the curtains," he said, softly, "and witness the closing acts in the drama."

With a nod, he stepped into the adjoining room, to exchange greetings with his commanders and a heavy-lidded, obese young Mongolian, behind whom grim Asiatic soldiers had grouped themselves. Had she not been aware of America's victory, the attitude of the opposing groups would have told her the whole story. The Americans were triumphant, assured; their late enemies stern and grave. The stolid successor to the great Asiatic conqueror alone remained impassive.

"Let me express to your majesty my profound regret at the death of your father," Stephen said.

The fat young man nodded slowly.

"He died as he would have preferred—in battle. It was idiotic—this invasion of America. I urged against it, but he brushed my advice aside. Now I reign."

He glanced, with calm complacency, over the soldierly suite at his back.

"Your terms?" he asked, after a pause.

His eyes lighted up with satisfaction as Stephen stated his conditions.

"Mongolia is war-weary and bled to death with slaughter of her sons," the new emperor declared. "We will retire within our own borders. I seek only to be known in history as The Peaceful."

Followed by his silent suite, he left the tent in company with Delachaise, to whom Mowbray had committed the entertainment of the royal captive until he and his troops had been transported across the broad Pacific. Stephen came to Ardis, his face alight with excitement.

"More history was written in those few moments, dear," he exclaimed, "than in any similar period in American annals. Not only have we rescued America from invasion and Europe from conquest, but the way has been paved for the reforms I project, which will revive free government in this country and in all others prepared to exercise its rights and duties."

"You will have one faithful follower," she smiled.

"You mean Harmon?" He smiled reminiscently.

"I knew he would be with me, in the end. The man is an idealist, though he hates the very sound of the word. I needed him badly but wondered whether his idealism would take the form of devotion to the old cause or to the new. When he consented to cooperate for the duration of the war, I had no further fears. He will be a tower of strength in the reconstruction work I see ahead of us."

He paused and his smiling face grew sober.

"I almost forgot another mission," he continued. "Come, dear, there is one whom we both want to see."

He led her to a hospital tent where Hare, delirious in his dying moment, lay outstretched upon a pallet. Four attendants restrained the unfortunate. Stephen placed his hand upon the doomed autocrat's forehead while a physician whispered information.

"The wound is not necessarily fatal, sir. However, he is certain to succumb. He is a complete wreck."

Disjointed sentences, snatches of song and bursts of maniacal laughter broke from the sufferer's lips. Mowbray leaned over him. "Listen!" he commanded.

Hare's eyes opened slowly.

"Do you know me?" the commander asked, sternly.

"Yes! You are destiny!"

He reached up a trembling hand, clasped the other's fingers, and spoke.

"I saw you tonight—was it tonight? What matter! You planted a seed. It was such a little seed—such a tiny seed placed in rank earth, that gave forth noxious vapors. Serpents writhed above it. Dank grass strove to strangle it. I laughed and you whispered: 'Wait'!"

"He is dreaming mad dreams," Stephen whispered.

"A tiny shoot came forth," Hare continued in a weary voice. "It was so helpless, I smiled and stamped upon it. It pierced my foot and I shrieked in pain. Again, you whispered: 'Wait'!"

The physician, his face stamped with astonishment, drew near as if to relieve Mowbray, but the latter motioned him aside.

"It grew until it towered above me, above the dank grass and the hissing serpents. It was greater than anything—anything, except you! Then, you spoke again: 'This is the tree of liberty. God planted the seed and it shall never die'!"

He sighed heavily and the hand clasping Stephen's fingers relaxed. The physician leaned forward and pressed an instrument to his chest.

"He is dead," the practitioner announced, softly.

Mowbray drew Ardis gently from the awesome scene. In silence, they returned to his office.

"What is the next step, dear?" she asked gently.

He rested a weary head on his hand for long moments before replying.

"Checkmating the invasion was only the opening skirmish in the battle," he replied, after a pause. "Greater struggles loom in the future."

"You are confident of the outcome?"

He thought soberly before answering.

"In some respects, yes; in others, not so sure. However, of one thing I am assured."

"What is that?" she whispered.

"That the tree of liberty Hare saw, in his mad moment of prophecy, was planted by God and it shall never die."

THE END

Tumithak of the Corridors

By Charles R. Tanner

(*Continued from page* 919)

"Yet the cry of 'Shelk!' will send you all fleeing panic-stricken to your homes! Can you not see that these shelks, although mighty, are only mortal creatures like yourselves? Listen to the story of my deeds, now, and see if I have done aught that you could not have done."

He took up the recital of his adventures. He told of the passing of Yakra, and though the Loorians cheered a bit there was silence among the people of Yakra, and then he told of the dark corridors, and the Yakrans, too, cheered as he recited his story of the slaying of the dogs. He told of the halls of the Esthetts, and in glowing colors described to them the beauties there, hoping that he might arouse in them the desire to possess these beauties.

And then he tried to tell them of the Surface, but here words failed him; it was hardly possible, in the limited vocabulary of the corridors, to tell of the things he had seen. So he went on from this to tell of the slaying of the shelk, and at last the story of his return.

"For some reason the shelks did not follow me," he said, "and I reached the first halls of the Esthetts in safety. And here I was discovered, and had to fight a battle with a half dozen of the fat ones before I could go farther. I slew them all," Tumithak, in that sublime unconscious conceit of his, failed to say how easy it had been to slaughter his huge opponents, "and taking from them these garments, continued on my way.

"I came again to the dark corridors, but even here no one opposed me. Perhaps the terrible smell of shelk was so great that the savages feared to come near me. So at last I came to Yakra, and found that the woman whom I had met on my upward journey had told her story to Datto, the chief, who was ready and eager to do me honor on my return home. And so I came to Nonone, and after a time to Loor.

He ceased his story, and again the crowd broke into cheers. The cheers increased, echoed back against the walls until the great hall range like a bell. "Great is Tumithak of the Loorians!" they cried, "Great is Tumithak, slayer of shelks!" And Tumithak folded his arms and drank in the praise, forgetful for the moment that his entire mission had been to prove that it did not take a great man to kill a shelk.

After a while, the tumult began to die and the voice of Datto was heard again.

"Loorians," he shouted. "For many, many years, the men of Yakra have fought unending war with the men of Loor. Today that war ceases. Today we have found a Loorian who is greater than all Yakrans, and so we fight with Loor no more. And to prove that I speak truth, Datto bows in allegiance to Tumithak!"

Again the cheers, and at last Nennapuss arose.

"It is a good thing that you have done, O Datto," he said, "and truly Tumithak is a chief of chiefs if there ever was one. Now there has been little enmity between Loor and Nonone in the past, and so our cases are different. For it is said that in the olden days, the people of Loor and Nonone were one. Thus, we hear of the days of the great chief, Ampithat, who ruled——" here Datto whispered something fiercely into his ear, and the Nononese flushed and went on, "But enough of that. Suffice it that Nennapuss, too, bows to Tumithak, chief of chiefs and chief of Nonone."

Again there was a great demonstration and after a while, Datto began to speak again. Would it not be a seemly thing, he asked frowning fiercely, for the Loorians to recognize Tumithak as their chief also, thus making him king of all the lower corridors? The Loorians raised a cheer, and then Tagivos, the eldest of the doctors, arose to speak.

"The people of Loor have a government somewhat different from that of Nonone and Yakra," he said. "We have not had a chief for many years. However, it might be a good thing for the three towns to be united and so I will call a meeting of the council to decide on it."

The council was soon grouped together; Tagivos, Tumlook and old Sidango leading them, and after a while they announced that they were agreed to recognize Tumithak as their chief also. And so, amid wild cheering, that made it utterly impossible to distinguish a word that was said, Tumithak became chief of all the lower corridors.

Datto and his huge nephew, Thopf, the foremost of the Yakrans, were the first to swear allegiance to him, then he accepted the fealty of Sidango, Tagivos and the other Loorians. It gave Tumithak a queer feeling to touch the sword of his father and to hear his oath, but he maintained his dignified bearing, and treated Tumlook in just the same fashion as the others, until the ceremony was over. Then he called for attention.

"Friends of the lower corridors," he said. "A new day dawns for man today. It has been over thirty years since war has visited these corridors and in all those years men have almost forgotten the arts of war. We have lived in a spirit of slothful peace, while above us the enemies of all mankind have grown stronger and stronger. But in making me your chief, you have ended that era of peace and brought upon yourselves new lives of action. I will not be a peaceful ruler, for I, who have seen so much of the world, will not be content to skulk idly in the deepest corridor. Already I plan to lead you against the savages of the dark corridors, to claim those halls as our own, and to fill them with the lights that still gleam in the deserted corridors that we no longer use.

"And if we conquer those savages, I shall take you against the huge Esthetts to show you what beauty can do for the life of man. And the time will surely come, if the High One be willing, when I shall lead you against the shelks themselves, for what I have done, every one of you can do, and shall do.

"And if anyone feels that the task I call upon you to do is too great, let him speak now for I will not rule over man against his will."

Again the cheers broke out, and gathered volume, and rang from wall to wall of the great square. In the excitement and enthusiasm of the moment, there was not a man in all the crowd that did not feel that he, too, might become a slayer of shelks.

And while they cheered and sang, and worked themselves into a frenzy, Tumithak stepped down from the stone and strode off in the direction of his home.

THE END.

In the Realm of Books

German Science Fiction

"By Rocket to the Moon," by Otto Willi Gail. Translated from the German Juvenile edition and published by the Sears Publishing Company, New York. $2.50.

IN the language of the day, "it gets my goat" to hear someone say "impossible" when a scientific fiction story is discussed, or a possible future invention or discovery is mentioned. In years gone by, everything to which we are thoroughly accustomed, such as trains, airplanes, submarines, telephones, radios, etc., has been branded as "impossible" by the, at times, highest scientific authorities of those times. How ridiculous statements sound, that were uttered in all earnestness, not so long ago by eminent scientists, that a speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour would be injurious to human health, etc. There is no such thing as "impossible," and the fiction of today becomes a fact tomorrow, through liberal appreciation of imagination. And if anything will give an impetus to imaginative thinking, it is "scientific fiction." For this reason I think Mr. Gail's idea of rewriting his splendid book "Der Schuss ins All" (The Trip into Infinity) into a juvenile, is a splendid one. The Sears Publishing Company have brought out an excellent translation, infinitely better than the rather poor translation of the original book which appeared serially some time ago. The only fault I have to find with the Sears translation is the name of the American reporter, who has the obvious name of "Bighead," a name which jars wherever it appears. I imagine that this grossly overdrawn character is supposed to furnish the comic relief, otherwise the book is thoroughly interesting, not only to youngsters but to older readers as well, to whom it will bring back fond memories of the thrills produced by Jules Verne's "Trip to the Moon," etc. Hans Hardt, inventor of the rocket flying machine, flies from Berlin to Detroit in an hour and a half, where he meets with the reporter "Bighead," who later accompanies him on his flight to the Moon. The story is crowded with easily understood science and is entirely plausible and realistic throughout, and is heartily recommended to all our younger readers.—*C. A. Brandt.*

A Good Juvenile

"Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Cummings. Published by A. C. McClurg & Company, Chicago, Illinois. $2.00.

NO matter how far humanity advances, the bandit and the gangster is always present and always in possession of the latest scientific weapons. The scene of Cummings' latest book is laid in the year 2070. Commercial relations have been established between the inner planets and Martians and Venerians are frequent visitors on Earth. Venerian mines yield wonderful gems and a large quantity of them is earthbound on the spaceliner *Planetara* in command of one Gregg Halyan. In midspace the *Planetara* is seized by Martian brigands led by one Miko. The passengers are marooned on a large Asteroid and the *Planetara* is headed for the Moon, there to rob Grantline of his Radium ore concentrates, which he and his companions have been winning under incredible difficulties. Haljan, being a first class navigator, is piloting the *Planetara*, but crashes when landing on the Moon. Most of the Martian bandits are killed, but Miko, their leader with a few followers escape, and are later reenforced by a bandit ship from Mars. Haljan has joined forces with Grantline, but they are almost overcome when they are rescued by a police-ship from Earth, which, fortunately enough arrives just in the nick of time.

"Brigands of the Moon" is a good fantastic adventure type of story, full of thrills, fights, capture, rescues, etc., so dear to the heart of the young, to whom it will appeal chiefly, as Brigands of the Moon is really a juvenile of the better sort.—*C. A. Brandt.*

In this department we shall discuss, every month, topics of interest to readers. The editors invite correspondence on all subjects directly or indirectly related to the stories appearing in this magazine. In case a special personal answer is required, a nominal fee of 25c to cover time and postage is required.

A CAPITAL LETTER, CRITICAL AND PICTURESQUE. IT WAS FINISHED AT 4 A. M.!

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

May a reader from the first issue air his views? I've got a real brickbat against Campbell. Does he think all his readers are technicians, experts or engineers, or something? I make a study of all the sciences as a hobby and thus know the basic laws and theories, but when an author goes into exhaustive mathematics as he does, I'm lost. Due to a law of my nature I force myself to read all stories minutely, whether I like them or not, but when reading his stories I alternately fume, curse and doze. One struggles through two pages of technical description and expects to continue with the plot; to his dismay, after a few lines of banter 'twixt the demi-god heroes, a continuance of explanations comes, through which one unhappily struggles. . . . In his favor, I'll say he's obviously intelligent, could write better and at times is interesting. If I've been too vitriolic in this—I'm sorry *"Voila tout, bon sang"!*

Concerning your covers—"They're there." Pertaining to colors, I think combinations of dull orange, rich purple, black and all blues are best.

Why in the name of malignant fevers must your authors take space-traveling so casually, *via*—after two or three months of happy traveling they blithely land, casually greet the six-legged, three-eyed potentate of the gaping local boys, and immediately are in full telepathic "communication" with him, he, of course, immediately surmises they're from good old Terra. Not so?

In another manner visualize the real terrors of such a trip: The awesome silence, the morale-shattering sameness, heat and cold, the dread sensation of not moving or of constantly falling, the Cosmic rays, lack of weight, feeling of impotence, homesickness, etc., etc. My opinion is that unless the trip were short, the most courageous would become fearful, the most sane become panicky or raving mad.

And incidentally, those of your readers who have crossed the "pond" as I have, may recall the terrible pangs of homesickness they experienced the first few days. Other readers may recall having read how the Crusaders prostrated themselves, weeping and rejoicing, upon reaching the Holy Land.

Therefore, I surmise that our aforementioned space-pioneers would have a queer sensation according to their various natures, upon reaching an alien planet. Some would become hysterical with joy, others would be dumb (staring, probably, with an expression a cross between Harpo Marx, Stan Laurel and John Barrymore), some would be unable to stand the feeling of depression (not the local version); others, yet, might go mad. And why? Oh, why? must they be almost always met by a welcoming committee led by the local Grover Whalen. My idea is that on no two bodies are the flora and fauna remotely similar. 'Nough o' this.

By the way, why must some authors who desire to paint a picture of the future, project a fellow there through a time machine? Can't they speak through the mouth of a dweller of the remote age. I can see no sense in atomic or in time traveling stories, although I don't mind stories of a different sphere of vibration around us.

Concerning E. E. Smith, I surely enjoyed his stories concerning "Pip" Stevens and the planetarians with Russian and Italian names (same as for Campbell, no offense meant). But why must his scientists speak like some *"gamins des rues"*? By the way, I'd like to see one of these scientists I'm always hearing about. Outside of Rudaux, Flammarion, Einstein, Edison, Burbank and Millikan, one doesn't even read about them. It seems that all our great inventions are brought about by steps and degrees by many men and there are few really great scientists.

I believe great men of the past weren't only

(Continued on page 952)

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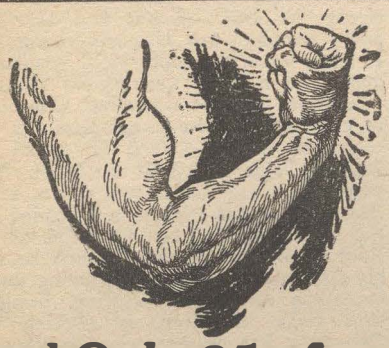

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better developed physically, but also mentally from those of today; besides, they were held back by the spirit of the times and then they were the beginners of the sciences and had no antecedents whom they could use as guides. (Why is it the mechanical sciences are so far ahead of social developments?) Men like Archimedes, Newton, Nostradamus, Rienzi, etc., would surely be appreciated today.

Lastly, I'd like to make a plea for another story like "The Murgatroyd Experiment," which I consider a masterpiece; also "Island of Dr. Moreau."

Bernard Buridan,
St. Simon,
1459 Erie St.,
Toledo, O.

(If we find that an author is a general favorite, which Mr. Campbell has proved himself to be, it seems the Editor's duty to accept him and stand up for him, for an Editor has to subordinate his views to those of his readers. You should make considerable allowance for space-traveling stories. They will become utterly impossible if they will be treated in other than what we call a casual way. We think that you are probably quite correct in your terrors of space travel. The writer has crossed the ocean to Europe, has gone to some of the West Indies and never felt homesick, but did he feel seasick? As the boy's say, "and how!" but the author's seasickness certainly masked any homesickness. We are glad to get your little discussion how space traveling would affect the traveler. There certainly are, as you say, few really great scientists. There are always quite a number who are really going to do something, but when the time comes, they break down. We shall hope to hear from you again with another interesting letter.—EDITOR.)

THE COVER ILLUSTRATIONS—POSSIBILITY OF STORIES GOING ON THE SCREEN

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been a regular reader of the AMAZING STORIES for some considerable time and I must express my appreciation of the high standard that is maintained after over five years of existence. I hope that this standard continues to be maintained, if it is only for the reason that AMAZING STORIES has been the pioneer of science fiction magazines. I regret that I was not acquainted with this magazine from its inception as I missed several back numbers. I want to communicate with readers who can supply any of the following back numbers: May, June, July, September, 1926, June, 1928, Annual, 1927, Quarterly, Vol. I, Nos. 1-12.

I am surprised that there are any objections to the magazine cover, one reader in the July issue objecting to the extent of leaving off the covers. I first noticed AMAZING STORIES because the cover was different from that of other magazines. The more unusual the covers of AMAZING STORIES are, the more likely is it to attract attention and consequently becomes an important factor in extending its sale to new readers.

So far, science fiction has been confined to the printing press, but there is a more modern invention, the cinema, that could more realistically illustrate science fiction. The technical progress of the cinema has been so rapid that the presentation of such films are possible. There have already been produced a few films that can be considered as science fiction productions—such as "The Lost World," "The Girl in the Moon," and "The Mystery Island." If the science fiction clubs develop into a national organization, one of its objects should be to suggest this possibility to the film producers. This type of film would be as welcome a change from the ordinary film, as science fiction literature is from the ordinary type of literature.

S. Nyman,
19 High Road,
S. Tottenham, London, N. 15, England.

(You will find that announcements of available back issues are constantly appearing in the magazine. You should consult several of the back issues to get addresses of readers who may have what you want. We are inclined to agree with you that the covers of AMAZING STORIES are perfectly adapted to what they stand for. We would be very glad indeed to have some of our stories appear on the film. Perhaps if our readers bring enough pressure to bear upon the movie producers, they can be made to realize the practical value of such procedure. We certainly agree that a great number of our stories would stand effective reproduction on the screen.—EDITOR.)

A LETTER OF CHEERING CRITICISM BUT WHAT IS WRONG WITH "THRONE" AND "DAIS"?

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Just a few words to set forth some of my impressions as to your writers. First, my favorites are: R. F. Starzl, Harl Vincent, Edmond Hamilton, Dr. Wm. Lemkin, Capt. Meek and Dr. Keller. There are others good enough; but the stories of a few I find myself unable to read to a finish. John W. Campbell, Jr., has some whirling, energetic ideas; but his slap-dash, careless style of composition, apparently oblivious to the elementary principles of rhetoric, and sometimes of grammar, deprives his work of half its interest to me. He is also sometimes very inexact in his science. He is not the only offender, however, either as to English or exactness; but inasmuch as the chief function of the science fictionist is to entertain and broaden the minds of his audience, and since no human is perfect in every respect, your writers on the whole are a commendable aggregate.

I agree with your Australian correspondent, Alan Connell, in his conviction that "Time-Machine" adventures are absurd. Also with another writer who disparages the bloodshed and warfare which seem almost inevitable in the interplanetary stories. Alas, must the beings of various worlds proceed at once to cut each other's throats—slash, bang, kill and slaughter each other—as soon as they meet? Rather should we regard some of the other-world inhabitants as very highly civilized, and beyond such pettiness and savagery. Another thing: If I come across that barbaric, moss-covered, mildewed thing called a *throne* again in one of these stories, I think I must immediately be carried to a hospital! And *dais!* And abject courtiers who bow and humiliate themselves before idiotic kings, queens, emperors, and so on—all of it is amazingly disgusting. Pig-headed bosses who *always* "bark" their orders—who *must* be addressed as "Sirs," on pain of some kind of damnation! The grovelling, trifling, backboneless, infantile rôles of some interplanetary-story characters in the presence of these "superiors"—even in the year A. D. 2570—are particularly nauseating. In the name of goodness let's have, for a change, please, *intelligence and civilization!* (I am addressing the writers chiefly: they are theoretically intelligent, civilized, educated beings, so let them utilize these qualities.)

The interplanetary stories are my decided preference—when they are rationally and logically ultra-modern, and not medieval. But I care nothing whatever for stories based upon the insaner hypotheses of relativity—such as "a finite but unbounded universe," "curved space," and "hyper-dimensions." These are but fantastic dreams, not only absolutely inconceivable as actualities in space-time—the *possibility* of their ultimate conceivability is out of the question. We need not be duped too childishly by "profound" mathematics, and a show of learning. The people are prone to being so duped—without question, and, indeed, without much of a capacity for any offsetting ideas of their own whatever. The hypotheses just mentioned are infinite and unbounded nonsense, without a single *fact,* empirically or scientifically observed, to support them. The sooner we get entirely beyond such pseudo-science the better. *Time* is the sole possible "fourth" dimension, and it is not a dimension in the fundamental sense of the term. The idea of a "fifth" or "sixth dimension," or any others beyond these, is just a little better than Munchausen. All stories of time-conquering, *physical* (!) machines, and of "hyper-dimensions," are precisely on a par with Grimm's fairy-tales; if they entertain and amuse children of forty years and upwards—well, let them be published! I confess that they sometimes entertain me; but I am none the less conscious that they are fairy-tales.

Miss Stone's "Across the Void" pleased me rather well—until I came across the inevitable *"throne"* and *"dais"!* Then I almost became violently ill! Ah, me! Can we not get beyond these barbaric considerations?

Your editorials are good; art work O. K. usually; format excellent.

R. Frederick Hester,
340 Fifth St.,
New York City.

(We are glad that you approve of some of our writers. Mr. Campbell, Jr., in his own way, is one of the most striking of all. He knows that some errors have crept into his stories and he has been waiting with some enjoyment, we imagine, to see them found out. As for absurdity in stories, it is hard to see how it

can be avoided in the field of science fiction. Would it not be very dry to have a story based on the fact that the attraction of gravitation is about 32 feet per second if we measure it by acceleration? Is it not better to do as our writers do, to try to be a bit in advance of what we know of the world we live in and to go on the principle which we have so often emphasized, that our knowledge of things is advancing and that a good guess or even a seeming absurdity based on what we know or can guess at, may be truth and fact in the near future? People are beyond being astonished. The last half century has been an age of miracles. It seems to the writer that it would be pretty hard to find some of the things you allude to in your letter. We may be wrong, but you seem not to be very fond of the developments brought by relativity. Your strange objection to throne and dais may be modified, we think, when you recollect that there is a dais in most schoolrooms.—EDITOR.)

THE WORK OF OUR ARTISTS—OUR BEST AUTHOR—BACK NUMBERS OF AMAZING STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Although I have been an ardent reader of AMAZING STORIES for some time, I have never contributed my bit to the "Discussions" column. This letter probably never would have been written if I had not been so indignant at the criticisms of Muller's work. Is there no justice in this world? Are all the readers so contrary that they are opposed to anything new and original? Can't they realize that Muller's drawings are just the type for this sort of magazine? Please give this talented artist another chance. I know that there are any number of our readers who will be as pleased as myself if you give us some of Muller's illustrations.

Wesso is a good artist, although his figures of human beings are too angular. They resemble his machines more closely than anything. Tell Paul that a person's forehead does not have to be so extraordinarily high to show intellect. Morey is improving with every issue.

Captain Meek is by far the best writer. I never read a better story than "Drums of Tapajos." I certainly am looking forward to a sequel. Just as Meek is good, Eshbach is bad. "The Valley of the Titans" read like a nightmare. It started splendidly, but grew worse page by page until I threw the magazine down in disgust.

I notice that a number of readers have inquired concerning back numbers. Why not print a column in the back of the magazine giving a list of the back numbers that are available? Also allow any readers that wish to dispose of their old magazines to advertise in the same column. I'm sure that it would help a great deal.

To the readers who are interested, I would like to say that A. Merritt's latest book, "The Face in the Abyss," has been recently published by the Liveright Co. and that a new non-fiction book by Stanton A. Coblentz is about to be issued by the Cosmopolitan Book Company.

In closing, I wish to state that I am fifteen years old.

Blake Nevins,
169 W. Broadway,
Winona, Minnesota.

(We, too, were quite impressed by the artist Muller's work, but unfortunately the majority of our readers did not react in a similar manner, though his work was not offensively modernistic. But we do feel that we have an excellent basis for our art work in the two artists that you named—Wesso and Morey. Any readers who have back numbers that they want to dispose of may write to us and we will be very glad to have a list of back issues for those who ask for such. You will find that a number of letters which we publish contain requests for back issues. It is difficult to name any one author as our *best*. What pleases one person does not please another, so we do not try to name any one man as supreme. We will always be glad to hear from you. It is curious how many letters in appreciation of Dr. Smith are reaching us from day to day. He has made himself a very much liked author. You do not realize that with our large Quarterly and our regular monthly, we are virtually giving a semi-monthly magazine to our subscribers. The Quarterly is nearly twice as large in material as the monthly edition. You will also observe that the Quarterly differs somewhat in character from the Monthly, being almost entirely devoted to fiction and giving comparatively few discussions.—EDITOR.)

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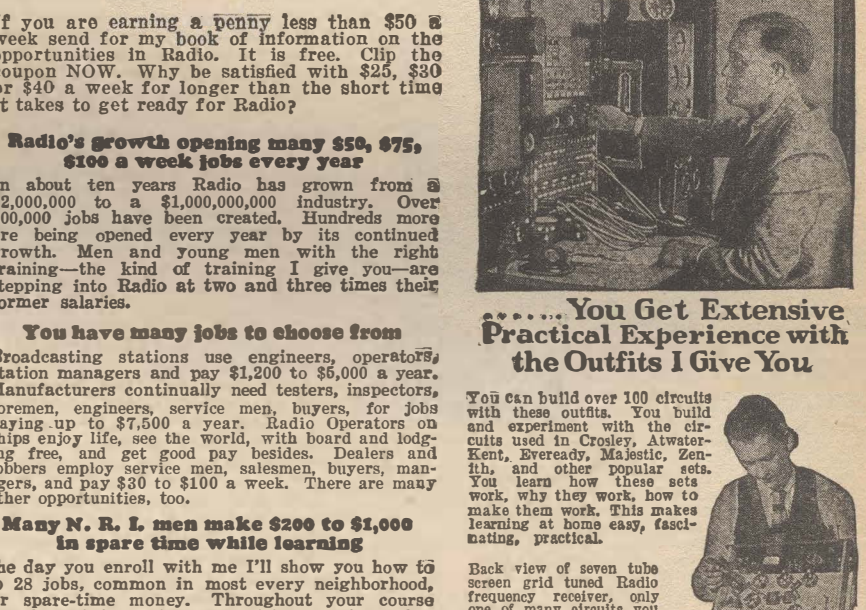

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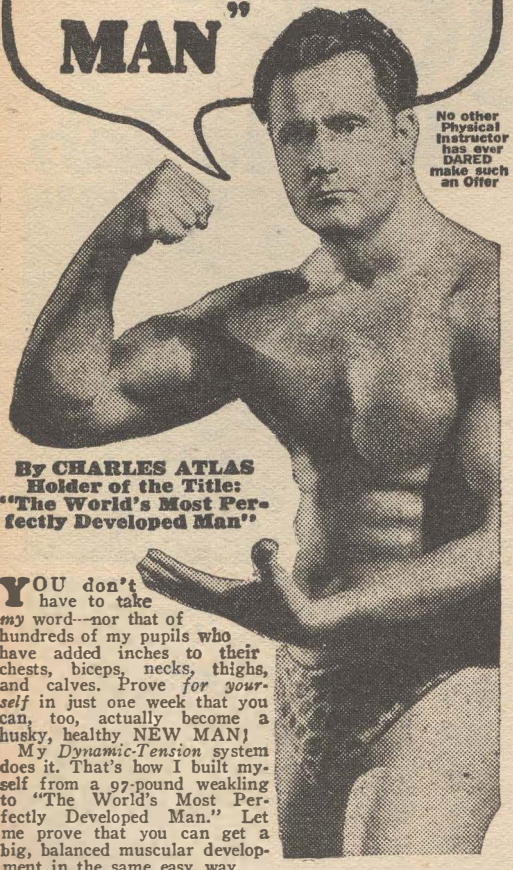

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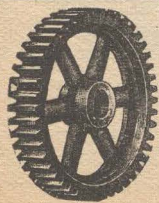

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SOME EXCELLENT QUESTIONS FOR SOME OF OUR CORRESPONDENTS TO ANSWER

Edit r, AMAZING STORIES:

Another letter from your sixteen-year-old friend and critic.

I have been reading scientifiction ever since January, 1925, when I happened to pick up a copy of "Science and Invention" with the story, "The Living Death" in it. I think I have soaked up quite a little bit of science since that time, but there are still a few things in your stories that I do not understand: they have not been explained clearly enough. Your author, John W. Campbell, Jr., seems to understand such things and perhaps he could explain, but if you will print this in the "Discussions" column, I will not bar anyone from trying, authors, readers and even the Editor. Here they are, so explain them—if you can:

1. Why is time considered as a dimension, usually the fourth dimension? It seems to me that time is no more a dimension than a microfarad or a kilaliter is.

2. I read an article somewhere, in which the writer was trying to explain one of Einstein's theories, and he said that one of the things Einstein believed in was a limited universe without limits—yes, you heard me right the first time. He was comparing it to the earth which has no end but exists in a limited space. Now, if you go in a third, straight up, you leave this old world. Perhaps in Einstein's universe you can leave it by going in another dimension, the fourth; but where would you go to? Another universe? Wouldn't it be simpler to have just one big unlimited universe?

3. Has there ever been any actual proof that the Lorenz-Fitzgerald contraction theory is anything other than a lot of mathematical hokum? Until it is proved to be right I will believe in unlimited speed just as I believe in an unlimited universe. Maybe you can get around this by using something similar to the fourth dimension idea—or sumpin'.

4. I believe that James Mackaye says the ether is a radiation or vibration of extremely short wavelength. A vibration of what? Certainly not of the ether, for the ether is a vibration, according to him. Somebody answer that one.

5. If J. W. Campbell, Jr., can explain to me without using equations and mathematics why, as he says in his "Islands of Space," vibrations, such as cosmic rays, have weight, I would very much appreciate it. Does it make the ether weigh more to have it vibrate?

Well, that's all I can think of today; we'll save the rest until later.

Now a few questions about "our mag." When are we going to have another story by A. Merritt and John W. Campbell, Jr.? When are we going to have sequels to "Spacehounds of IPC," "Television Hill," and "Drums of Tapajos"? And when are you going to have Wesso and Paul do at least half of the covers and story heads? Have Wesso do about three and Paul, if you can find a picture of machinery, do two of the twelve covers per year. I would say let them do all of it, but they work for other magazines, too, and I suppose Morey has more time. About reprints, I've changed my mind. There's only one that I would like to see out of the whole bunch and that is "The Blind Spot" from the early "Argosy." I would like to see "Skylark of Space" in book form though, because it came out in the days before I was a regular subscriber and I happened to be in a town where A. S. wasn't sold.

L. M. Jensen,
Lovell, Wyoming.

(Your questions are rather abstract. The condition of an entity is primarily affected by three coordinates, but for some calculations, a fourth comes in Geometrically microfarad, kilometer is not a dimension although each one is made up of dimensions. Can you not take it that time, being a simple quantity, may be taken as a coordinate, and thereby established as a dimension? I have nothing to say about your second query. Einstein's work is beyond simple mathematics. We do not think it is safe to call the Lorenz-Fitzgerald Contraction theory a lot of mathematical hokum. To carry it out to the full extent, we believe, gives very amusing results. As far as we know there is no simple proof of its truth. Your fifth question we will leave for Mr. Campbell to answer. The sequel to "The Drums of Tapajos" is coming along, beginning with the February issue. We would refer you to Jeans and for your comfort quote the following few lines: "It implies merely a growing conviction that the ultimate realities of the universe are at present quite beyond the reach of science, and may be—and probably are—far even beyond the comprehension of the human mind." So you see what one of the world's greatest scientists says of the limitations of the human mind.—EDITOR.)

CALCULATIONS FOR AN ELECTRO-MAGNET WANTED. COMMENTS ON OUR EDITORIALS

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Would you do me a favor and publish this in your "Discussions" Department? I realize that the many readers of AMAZING STORIES have professions and trades of all natures, therefore, surely some of them are interested in the subject of electricity and may have good knowledge pertaining to magnetism.

I desire to make an electromagnet, whose flux will have power sufficient to attract material, of say, one, two or three pounds in weight.

So far I have failed in my tests and experiments but I realize my knowledge of the subject is scanty.

I would deeply appreciate this favor if any reader could supply me with this information.

I enjoy your stories immensely; also enjoy "Discussions" very much but the articles by T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D., interest me to the superlative point because the subjects are food for the mind and I always will be fascinated by knowledge that is written so it attracts one's attention instead of repelling.

Raymont C. Yost,
3501 Foster Avenue,
Baltimore, Md.

(The calculations for your electromagnet have to be based not only on the power of attraction but on the distance you want to obtain two or three pounds of attraction to be exerted. If you will make up a core, U-shaped, three-quarters of an inch in diameter, and wind it with No. 18 wire, giving two or three layers, you will find that this will be powerful enough to answer your description. The best thing for you to do would be to make a few such magnets, until you find just what you want. To increase their action at a distance, make the legs rather long and parallel to each other. We hope some of our readers will take this subject up with you. We are greatly complimented with your remarks concerning the Editorials in AMAZING STORIES. It has been a great pleasure to write them and we are glad to learn that they give equal pleasure in reading. There is a lot of romance in science.—EDITOR.)

AN INTERESTING AND WELL FORMULATED REJOINDER FROM AN AUTHOR TO A LETTER CRITICIZING ONE OF OUR STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

When I saw Harvey Pollack's letter in the November AMAZING STORIES, I was very much surprised. He makes the rash statement that I have no training or background for making comments on scientific truths, but nevertheless, he could not give one true reason that showed I was wrong.

In order to criticize me, he claims I made a most irrational statement when I said that light waves could not be sent by any other means than that of refraction. In my letter, which was published in September AMAZING STORIES, I said: We learn in physics that light can not be bent to any appreciable degree except by refraction. I did not state that refraction was the only means, but only that it was the only means to bend a ray around a small object. This breaks down Mr. Pollack's third argument.

In his first statement he states that some gas which will diffuse light, might be used for invisibility. If the light which strikes this gas is diffused, you could not see a regular background. If you could not see a background in regularity, then you cannot have invisibility.

He is in error in his second statement, even if it can not be disputed as he claims. Reflected light is not the original light wave, but just its image. In this case the original light wave is not bent.

In the fourth statement, Mr. Pollack formulates a theory based on the corpuscular theory of light. He states that when a stream of moving air strikes a solid, a partial vacuum would be formed immediately behind the object, but if the corpuscular theory were true, the corpuscles of light would act the same way as

the air molecules, if its inner layer would pass a material of a certain kind. Now this is only a theory so he cannot use it as an argument against my claims.

Seeing the fifth reason has been so well explained by the Editor, I need say no more about it. I am always glad to be criticized when someone points out my errors in a friendly attitude, because then I will not make the same mistake again. The Editor of the "mag" has been very fair in his statement that he publishes all letters that are of interest. I feel that it is my duty to write this letter and vindicate my claims.

Wishing the magazine the best of luck in the future and hoping that the magazine remains in its present superior form, I must bring this letter to a close.

Edward F. Gervais,
512 South Pennsylvania Ave.,
Lansing, Mich.

(In this letter an author rises in his might to smite a critic and we think that he has done very well. We are not going to go over his points of science, but will leave them to speak for themselves. We think that no one can accuse Mr. Gervais of not saying what he thinks. It is precisely such letters as this which we are delighted to get for our Discussions Columns. We wish our letters to be of high order and to show thought. To tell the truth, we are rather proud of this department of our magazine.—EDITOR.)

A CRITICISM OF CRITICS BY A FRIENDLY CORRESPONDENT

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been a reader of AMAZING STORIES since the August issue of 1926 and as this is only the second time that I have pressed my opinions on you, please hear me out.

First, let me get a few things off of my mind that have been particularly annoying to me. My loudest howl goes out against those who insist on taking up perfectly good space in Discussions, asking for reprints.

If these poor souls (they are few in number, thank Heaven!) want reprints and can't get along without them, let them read a magazine that has an editorial staff weak-kneed enough to accede to their demands and so quit bothering you Mr. Editor and trying to make you ruin a truly ideal magazine.

And another thing! How I would like to consign to the executioner those people who seemingly burn the midnight oil and strain their eyes trying to find a tiny flaw in the material description, or plot, of truly great stories like the "Skylarks" or some of Hamilton's or Williamson's masterpieces.

And yet one more! Those whose minds are in so deep a rut that they cannot appreciate a gem of scientifiction because they deem it improbable. They seem to be unable to read a story for the beauty of its description, the intricacies of its plot and the characters which it contains.

Without a doubt the "Skylark" stories occupy a niche in Scientifiction's Hall of Fame which no others can hope to attain, although "Spacehounds of I.P.C.," Dr. Smith's latest accomplishment is yet to be reckoned with. For sheer clarity of thought, arrangement of plot, description and characters, these stories cannot be equalled.

As I read through the May "Discussions," I noticed a letter from a Mr. Hasse endorsing a story entitled "The Purple Plague" by Russell Hays. Permit me to add my congratulations to those of Mr. Hasse and ask for more of Mr. Hays' efforts.

As a whole, I sincerely believe that AMAZING STORIES is as near as, if not nearer to, the ideal magazine than any other one published at this time.

I believe in bestowing flowers upon the living, so Mr. Editor, let me give you and your entire staff my heartiest congratulations for publishing such a fine publication as AMAZING STORIES.

I have 30 copies of back numbers of AMAZING STORIES dating from October, 1926, to January, 1930. If there are any readers who might be interested in purchasing these, they may write me. I would not consider breaking the lot and only those wanting the whole lot need get in touch with me.

Rufus E. Bowland, Jr.,
1208 Overton St.,
Old Hickory, Tenn.

(You have been a reader of AMAZING STORIES almost from the beginning and we are glad that you agree with us in the matter of reprints. It has always seemed to us better to give new material rather than to print the old over again. We admit however, that it would not be a bad plan to print a special edition from time to time made up entirely of reprints. We do not know what some of our critics will think after reading your very amusing letter. A great many readers want back numbers and we are glad to publish what you say about the ones you have for sale. We must thank you sincerely for your kind expressions of appreciation, which certainly help an Editor in his thorny path.—EDITOR.)

THE CURIOUS ELEMENT IRON

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have just finished reading the October number of AMAZING STORIES and can safely say that it exceeded all my expectations. The new serial, "The Stone from the Green Star," is very promising, and "The Master of Mystery" is, I think, the best story published for some months, excepting "Spacehounds of IPC," which finished last month.

Strange to say, the element iron has always interested me, appearing as meteors, etc., and I was exceedingly glad when I saw your article on iron in the new edition.

There was only one thing which did not appear feasible to me in "The Master of Mystery." I do not think a catapult strong enough to hurl a piece of "dry ice," so that it would crush a man's skull, could have been hidden in a canopy of proportions such as was depicted in the illustration on P. 627. If the "dry ice" was only dropped, instead of crushing a man's skull, it would only cause perhaps concussion or merely just discomfort to the victim. Of course, I don't profess to know as much about these things as the writer does, but my ideas are as stated above. Nevertheless, I agree with Mr. Craney of Scotland as to the "Aristocracy of AMAZING STORIES."

Charles C. Yeoger, Jr.,
8058 Crispin St.,
Holmesburg, Phila., Pa.

(Iron is a very curious metal. It forms a comparatively small portion of the surface of the earth. Iron mines, as we know, are not over plenty. Yet there is a strong probability that the entire center of the earth is what we may call meteoric iron. A great quantity of the meteorites that fall on the earth are metallic iron, with a small alloy of nickel. The fact that the earth has a north and a south pole which are disclosed by the compass, undoubtedly indicates that if the earth is a mass of iron it is polarized and is an enormous magnet. But we do not know! As regards the catapult for storing dry ice, the mere weight of a mass of material would suffice to crush one's skull. It would certainly produce much more than a mere percussion, as you intimate. The author of the story is a mathematician. I do not think that you need feel that there is any error.—EDITOR.)

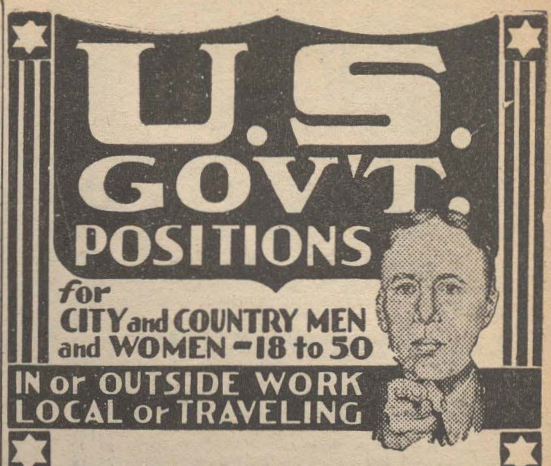
A CORRESPONDENT WHO SAYS WE ARE A VERY GOOD EDITOR—BUT POOR AMAZING STORIES GETS IT

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I beg of you to print this. You've been publishing letters containing brickbats lately so you should surely accept this.

First: Every letter I read in "our" magazine asks for more work by Artist Muller and yet you consistently reply that his work was not generally well liked. *That's a lot of bologna.* Who didn't like his illustration of "Anachronism"? Who? Perhaps a few people didn't but the majority are for him. Do you get that? It seems that one has to make things extremely emphatic to get you to understand. Bring back Muller full and strong.

In the November issue, a certain reader wrote: "As I hold before me Vol. 1, No. 1 and Vol. 6, No. 5, it is a pleasure to be able to congratulate you on your wonderful improvement over the first issue that reached the newsstands in April, 1926." Well, as *I* hold before me *my* copy of AMAZING STORIES, Vol. 1, No. 1, and compare it with Vol. 6, No. 5 (or this, the November issue, Vol. 6, No. 8), I can only say that I am utterly disappointed. AMAZING STORIES was all right until recently. But it's awful now. Where are the stories and authors and artists of yesterday? Gone—gone to other scientifiction magazines. Some are dead, it's true, like Gray and Verne and Serviss; but there's no denying the fact that you *could* get the others back if you wanted to. How many times must you be told that? Get Frank R. Paul, Mr.



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Muller and Elliott Dold to *illustrate* "our" mag. and get Philip Nowlan, A. Hyatt Verrill, Francis Flagg, the Wallis Bros., Homer Eon Flint, Earl T. Bell, Austin Hall, Murray Leinster, Edgar Rice Burroughs and the rest of the boys back to *write* for us. Then—and then only—will we again have a good magazine. AMAZING STORIES, as it stands today, is the worst stf. mag. on the market. We readers only write such letters as this to try to pull you back to what you used to be. I hope it's not too late.

Now, I would suggest—because of the fact that we all want reprints—that you publish an Annual selling for $1.00 and containing a myriad of stf. stories of long ago that are tried and true. Then the readers who yell for reprints will be satisfied and those who think they don't want 'em will find that they *do*—when they can be gotten in such convenient form. Also, I'd suggest you have some contests and print some Stf. Booklets. Liven things up a bit. AMAZING STORIES is pretty dead lately. No contest for several years. No more Stf. Booklets such as "The Vanguard of Venus" that you used to give away. C'mon, do things in a big way.

In conclusion I want to say that I think you are no doubt a very good Editor, but evidently you're just not getting the right support. Anything we can do?

Forrest J. Ackerman,
530 Staples Avenue,
San Francisco,
California.

(You say that AMAZING STORIES was all right until recently. We have two things that comfort us. One is that we are shown by simple arithmetic to be very widely appreciated. The other is that we get a quantity of letters commending us for our efforts. Your idea of an annual selling for a dollar and devoted to reprints might be worth considering. And as for getting back our old authors—we never lost them. Unfortunately, we cannot print a magazine many times thicker than we do. As it is, how can we use all the authors you name plus the number of other first-rate authors we have very frequently? We have stories on hand by practically all you name, which will be published in due time.—EDITOR.)

A FIRST COMMUNICATION TO DISCUSSIONS—WE HOPE THERE WILL BE MORE FROM THIS WRITER

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

This is the first time I have ever tried to break into the "Discussions" column and maybe it will be the last. The reason for this letter is that in your "Discussions" for August, I noticed several things that should receive attention and also I have been reading AMAZING STORIES for a good while now and there is a lot I want to say about it.

First, let's take the magazine. It will probably surprise you, but I haven't a brickbat to throw. No, indeed, AMAZING STORIES is the finest scientific magazine out. The covers are wonderful. They attract the attention of the eyes and keep it attracted until a copy is bought, at least that is the way it works with me. I note your rivals have reduced the size of their magazine to seven by ten inches while they used to have it the size of AMAZING STORIES. They are using cheap paper too. Don't let this happen to A. S. "The Superman" by Johnson sure was a fine story. Let's have some more on bacteriology.

Now for the Discussions. I certainly agree with Mr. Glasser that scientific stories should get into the movies. Boy, what a picture one of the Skylark tales would make! It would be a relief for the theatre goers to see something besides mushy romances and gang pictures for a change. What do you say we readers get together and follow Mr. Glasser's suggestion and write to some of the motion picture producers and ask for some scientific plays? Something that is really scientific and not like that foolish and impossible "Just Imagine" that just came out. Who pays to see the movies anyway?

I enjoyed reading the ideas of Mr. Cook concerning his theory of the universe. I agreed with much he stated, but, I am sorry to say, not with all. Mr. Cook evidently does not believe that there are near as many stars in the heavens as we see. He believes that the points of light we think to be stars are but the duplicates of a few stars constantly moving in huge orbits. Thus the number of stars in the universe is greatly lessened. Maybe I am dumb and can't see the point of Mr. Cook's argument, but I can't understand why, if these countless stars are but the images of a few, why the stars differ so in physical properties. The spectrum of two stars are very rarely, if ever, exactly alike. It is true there are many stars of the same type but never are they identical in color, size, magnitude, proper and radial motions, etc. Also, if each star were an image of one star, I would think that all the duplicates of the star would be connected in one long streak, which would be the path of the original star on its trip around its orbit. But this would be impossible, because, as the star moved along, its images would follow it up. You know that if a star wasn't there, its image after a certain length of time, depending on its distance, would disappear too. So the duplicates of the original star would vanish, one by one, as the original moved along in its path. I pity the poor Astronomers if this were true. They would have to make a new star map for every night, listing the images that disappeared the night before, on account of the movement of the source of light.

Phew! it was a job explaining that and maybe you don't know what I was trying to say after all. Oh well, every man is entitled to his own opinion.

Robert Coughlin,
504 Hutchinson St.,
Big Rapids, Michigan

(Your very nice letter is most welcome. We hope it will not be the last. What you write is so much to the point that it has a special value and interest. We are quite ready to admit that your idea about our stories being put upon a screen is a good one. Perhaps if enough of our readers wrote to the various movie picture producers, they might also become convinced of the practical value of such procedure. We hope so.—EDITOR.)

TIME AND THE FOURTH DIMENSION. ENERGY'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

The letter of Mr. Frank Bridge in the latest issue causes me to come forward and state that to me, the whole subject of time traveling appears to be based on a fallacy. The conception of time as a fourth dimension seems erroneous since time cannot be as closely related to space as it would be were it a dimension. Time and space are absolute. By definition of "absolute" we perceive that time and space are free from relation, hence unrelated.

I would like to offer a new concept as to the nature of time. My idea in essence is this: *Time may be energy.*

Let us compare the time-stream to a ray of light. Light is energy. Time may be energy. Light is composed of quanta, little "packages" of energy, according to Planck's Quantum Theory. Let us assume that time is composed of quanta of time-energy. This concept can explain time-traveling phenomena quite simply.

Instead of vaguely speaking of warps in time, fourth dimensions, etc., we now can form some definite concept of the theory of time traveling. Every second a certain number of these time quanta flow past us. To travel into the future we need merely *to increase the number of time quanta passing us each second!* To travel into the past we reverse the process, that is, decrease the number of time quanta passing us each second. This can be accomplished more readily perhaps than excursions into the fourth dimension.

It is my belief that the ultimate component of the cosmos, space, time, matter and so forth, is energy. If space were accepted as being energy, the explanation of the expansion of the universe would be simple. We could assume that the stars are constantly generating the energy of which space consists. The source of time-energy, if it exists, may be the stars also.

Not being a scientist, I cannot substantiate my statements. Yet were you to squeeze this into a corner of "Discussions," some ingenious reader of "our" mag or Ye Editor might offer proof of the truth or falsity of all the above.

Milton Kaletsky,
2301 Morris Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

(The fourth dimension gives our readers lots to think about and it serves as a motive in some excellent stories, so from the Editorial standpoint we certainly should like it. It gives us great pleasure to publish this letter and we hope that it may open an interesting discussion among our correspondents. A definite formula is given for traveling into the future or going back into the past. You only have to alter the rate at which the time quanta pass. This is very simple, but, and it is a big *but*—how are you going to make these quanta do as you desire?—EDITOR.)

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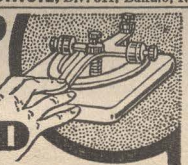

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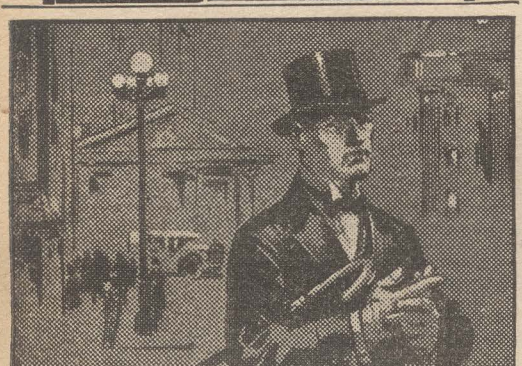

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A SEMI-MONTHLY AMAZING STORIES ASKED FOR. THE QUARTERLY

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

This is the first letter I have ever written to any magazine editor, and I'll make it a brief one, at that.

I have not missed a single issue in nearly four years; indeed, AMAZING STORIES is the only publication I can say *that* for.

Absolutely no complaints, with one exception. I would much prefer a semi-monthly instead of a monthly. There are several on the market, why don't you get in line?

Also, in the October issue, while "The Master of Mystery" and "A Matter of Ethics" were both good, they seemed to me to be more fit for a publication such as the AMAZING DETECTIVE STORIES.

The real object of this letter is an appeal through you to Dr. Edward E. Smith for more Seaton and Crane stories.

In them he has created two of the most remarkable personalities that I have ever encountered in 25 years of fiction reading.

I had the two Skylark Serials rebound, and get more enjoyment out of re-reading them than I do from any of the issues published since, but did not like "Spacehounds of the IPC" half as much, because I suppose, I unconsciously compared it to the Skylark Stories, and in my opinion it was not up to that standard.

So, says I, why not extract more gold from a proven mine before digging another prospect hole?

It may not grade up as well! In my opinion, it hasn't.

Dr. Smith has, whether purposely or not, left himself several opportunities to carry on. For example, Skylark III, Part II, Page 554, Second Column, "However, after we get this Fena chrone mess cleared up," etc., and so on during the entire series.

Now, as Seaton himself so aptly says, "I'll be kicked to death by little red spiders" if I can understand why Dr. Smith dropped that perfect team for something else.

Maybe you can get him to give us the answer. I say us, because I feel sure most of our readers feel the same way about this.

They, Seaton and Crane, were so darn human and manly in their personalities, that I was forced to alter my ideas of the so called "cold blooded and precise scientist."

Could Dr. Smith ask for higher appreciation? Let's hear what he has to say.

B. L. Adler,
244 West 72nd St.,
New York City.

(Dr. Smith is winning such approbation from our readers that we are afraid his head will be turned. Nevertheless, we consider him as practically one of our staff and we are sure he will do more very good work for us. Your letter, we know, will greatly please our authors. You may take our word for it that Dr. Smith is a "precise Scientist," but there is nothing cold-blooded about him. If you had had the pleasure of meeting him, you would have found that he was a very delightful man but his stories alone tell that.—EDITOR.)

A YOUNG CONTRIBUTOR TO DISCUSSIONS COLUMNS

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I am fifteen years of age and have read your magazine for about a year, having enjoyed most of the stories very much. I am a regular reader of "Discussions" also, and here I want to get something off my mind. It always seems to be the stories which are six months or a year old that are discussed in this column. Why don't you discuss those we have just read, and that are freshest in our memory?

I will list below which I think are the best stories beginninig October, 1930.

1. Prince of Liars
2. Drums of Tapajos
3. Via the Time Accelerator
4. Purple Plague
5. Cerebral Library
6. Spacehounds of IPC
7. Jameson Satellete

I think "The Purple Plague" to be the most outstanding one of all. "Spacehounds of IPC" promised to be a great serial, and one of Mr. Smith's best.

I will sign off with a plea for more of Mr. Muller's drawings. They are something new in AMAZING atmosphere.

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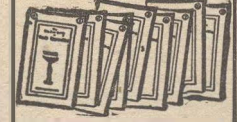

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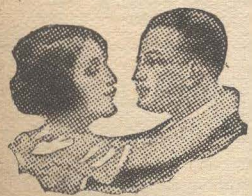

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(We get a good many letters from readers of your age and they are often very good ones. The discussion of various stories inevitably will be a little behind, owing to the circumstances of publishing. The stories you named have all been highly appreciated. You are evidently a good selector and judge of literature.—EDITOR.)

NOTES ON THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF AMAZING STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have just finished reading the September issue of AMAZING STORIES. It is one of the best in a long time. "Spacehounds of IPC" by Edward E. Smith was excellent, of course, but it resembled his "Skylark" stories too much in plot and the conversation of the characters. I suppose the author cannot change his style but he can vary his ideas a little. "Awlo of Ulm," by Capt. Meek was fairly good but it is too much like most of that sort of stories. "The Steam Shovel," by Dr. Keller was a fine short story with a new idea finely handled. That was a story which said something shortly and snappily and to the point. Most of the stories ramble too much and are too full of machines and devices which the author doesn't explain anyway. That is a fault of many of the stories in A. S.

"The Arrhenius Horror," was really good. P. Schuyler Miller usually gives us a good one. The idea of the crystal thing is a good one and totally plausible, as far as I can see. The cover was good but Morey got his various ray arms a little mixed. The other illustrations were exceptionally good and effective.

In regards to the cover, Courtney was supposed to have thirty arms and Rapioma forty. They each have six in the illustration. In general, A. S. is going along pretty well, but where are John W. Campbell, Jr. and G. Peyton Wertenhaker, my two favorite authors? And what is the difference between the energy of atoms and that of matter?

Alan E. Blume,
2820 Avenue I,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(Dr. Keller possesses the art of telling his story in a short and snappy manner and he has a special talent in bringing out a good conclusion almost *à le* O. Henry. Our stories do not ramble. It would not do to make stories too short; they might be quite unreadable. Mr. Miller does excellent work and we feel sure that you will enjoy his stories. He is a devotée of mathematics, in a sense, and they play a great part in his yarns. The figures depicted on the cover are not having their final battle in which all is decided. This is an earlier and preliminary battle, which accounts for the smaller number of arms in the two fighting suits. Your last question might be taken in this way—that every atom has bottled up within it its own internal attractions and that these are the measure of its energy, while the energy of matter applies to the energy which may be exerted by large masses—at least, large in comparison with the atom.—EDITOR.)

THE MAGAZINE IN ENGLAND; LOW PRICE OF UNSOLD COPIES; NOTES IN STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

As other of your English readers have pointed out, we cannot get copies of AMAZING STORIES in regular succession, but during August last I obtained the July number—brand new— for the sum of threepence, about six cents in U. S. currency. Now how does one account for the fact that a magazine, selling for 25c in the States and 30c in Canada, sells for 6c in England?

However, what I want to point out is this. A reader in your July discussions states that some of the stories are not sufficiently scientific. Why should they be? The title does not suggest that all the stories are scientific—amazing stories can be woven about other themes besides science, although I admit those about the latter are more astonishing. I think a few stories apart from science would be welcomed. You are handicapped in this direction, I suppose, because underneath your inner title are the words "Scientific Fiction."

I like the interplanetary and space stories best. "Spacehounds of IPC" (July), is very good; the feminine intrusion on the part of Nadia relieving it from what would otherwise be a "hard, scientific fact" tale. According to most letters published, however, I don't believe your readers like too much "sex stuff." In this connection there is nothing to shout about for there is just the right amount, I find, in the majority of your stories.

"Cleon of Yzdral," was a bit confusing in parts (to my poor brain at least)), though otherwise a really good yarn. "The Jameson Satellite" was the second best, "Spacehounds" being first. The "Metal Monster" good, "The Stolen Chrysalis" mediocre and "The Raid of the Mercury" like "Cleon of Yzdral," was slightly confusing, but otherwise interesting.

Most people read the stories first and the small features afterwards, so it is rather a bore when, turning to "What do you know" one finds one has to reread sometimes a whole page before coming to the explanation asked for in the question. Couldn't you state the column and paragraph?

I am afraid I have thrown not a few brickbats, but I honestly think that AMAZING STORIES is a fine mag., even though over here people are wont to class it as third-rate stuff. But they haven't all read it!

Geo. A. Powderhill,
27 Fentham Road, Birchfield,
Birmingham, Eng.

(We have a London agent and he will be able to arrange for you to receive the magazine regularly. The simplest way is for you to subscribe. As regards science in our stories, some may appear to have no science in them, but our specific desire is that there should be such. No one is more desirous to avoid what is called sex stuff in our stories than are the Editors, but there is no need for our stories to be constructed on the theory that there are no such things as women in the world. We are of the opinion that there is not a bit too much of the female element in our stories. Isn't it better for you to find the column and paragraph for yourself? As far as the English appraisal, of the magazine is concerned, English letters are generally very kind and laudatory and such a letter as yours coming three thousand miles is certainly encouraging.—EDITOR.)

A PLEASANT LETTER FROM OUR ENGLISH CORRESPONDENTS IS ALWAYS CHEERING

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

May I, through your magazine, thank those readers who have been at so much trouble to write to me since the publication of my letter in your March issue. In particular I wish to thank Mr. L. J. J. of Liverpool, England, Mr. C. N., of Three Rivers, Michigan, U. S. A., Mr. E. R., of Philadelphia, Pa., and a Mr. R. T., of my own town, Blackpool, England. Their letters have done a great deal to spread the cause of science across the ocean, and to each one a personal reply has been sent.

I would like to thank you, Dr. Sloane, also, for your helpful criticism on the effect of sound vibrations; and also to remark how educative A. S. has become, and will become as time goes on. I have hopes of the conversion of three young men to science before long.

In England here, the effects of science are, little by little, becoming distinctly insistent. Upon every hand the skeptic finds himself confronted with some new manifestation of science; by radio, newspaper, and books, the small unshatterable voice of Science demands a hearing—until finally, after being buried so many years under a shroud of what we may term the Great Obscure, it will rise up and command the world. Like all the great achievements it rises from insignificance to a mighty all-conquering power. Some day, maybe, some enterprising English publisher will start a similar magazine. Beyond question, the time is ripe for it—not in competition with A. S., but as a brother paper—each inseparable from the other, run in conjunction. What do others think about it? Undoubtedly the tone in England is "Why the dickens don't they bring one out over here?" *Why?* That is the question!

On the whole, we may as well call ourselves pioneers, I suppose. A relatively small circle, adhering to a great path of ultimate progress—laughed at by the skeptical; somewhat shamefaced and even self-conscious before the scoffers—but never once shaken off our beliefs. What a treat it is to hear from somebody who is scientific-minded like oneself! An average, at present, of about 5% in England, I imagine.

Another thing about scientific writing is—it can never descend into the squalidity of the sexual and banal. If it ever does touch the sexual it is purely for the purposes of scientific comparison. To avoid the feminine element

altogether in a story is almost an impossible tax upon a writer—and after all one can introduce the ladies without being sentimental. Both sexes read A S anyhow. It is interesting to note that A S never descends to those iron-jawed, ruthless, blood-curdling scientists so common to the less intellectually governed contemporary papers, which mix science with the fantastical, get the facts wrong, and then serve it up as "sparkling scientifiction."

No: AMAZING STORIES stands first, and if it keeps up to its standard, it always will.

Unquestionably the stories are up to class at present. The only one I find fault with is "Cleon of Yzdral." Mr. Miller has written the story with good eloquence, but the trend of the theme doesn't seem altogether clear. Other readers I know have said the same thing.

With regard to "Beings of the Boundless Blue," by Walter Kately. How was it, that, if the world beyond the Heaviside Layer was solid, we below here can see the stars? Or, adversely, if Mr. Kingston became tenuous and invisible, how did the beings of the Overworld see him? If the world he visited were tenuous we *would* see the stars from below—but Mr. Kateley did not make this altogether clear. It will be recollected that in the world of the giants they *dug the soil* of their world. How could we see stars through that? Or any celestial phenomena at all, for that matter?

What has happened to G. Peyton Wertenbaker lately? When he does write he writes a masterpiece. Where has he gone to? Need I ask what's become of Merritt?

"Spacehounds" is splendid so far—but not quite as magnificent as that positive orgy of science—"Skylark Three."

Well, that's that: Having radiated my opinion I'll close down, with best wishes for continued success.

John Russell Fearn,
25 Langfield Ave.,
Blackpool, England.

(For some reason, we get very delightful letters from England. The Editors of AMAZING STORIES are to a certain extent in a difficult position. They want to have the magazine thoroughly interesting from the standpoint of fiction and, of course, literature, and then on the other hand, science is to be taken care of. It is not an easy thing to keep both ends of this balance, as we may term it, in equipoise. Sometimes the literary art runs away with the science and eventually drowns it out. There is no object whatever that we can see in trying to definitely avoid the feminine element. The most confirmed old bachelor and misogynist (which means a woman hater) must remember that he had a mother and that women play a definite rôle in the scheme of life. AMAZING STORIES has many friends in England, and we hope to retain them.—EDITOR.)

A SAMPLE "CROSS SECTION" OF THE READERS OF AMAZING STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been a reader of AMAZING STORIES since the day the first copies appeared on the newsstands, but have never written in; the magazine has given me a great deal of pleasure, and the stories I have not cared for have been very few.

Interplanetary stories, of course, are my favorites, and you cannot publish too many to suit me. All stories dealing with the future are of great interest, but most of us regulars realize that a magazine which has such a general appeal as ours, must carry a diversity of stories to satisfy every one.

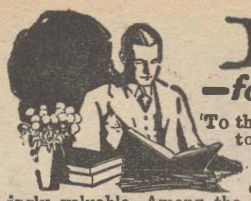
Among friends of mine here who are regulars are two doctors, a lawyer, a preacher, and two engineers; quite a cross-section of the reading public.

I have noticed a number of inquiries in the past for back numbers. The first two years or so that I read the magazine I gave the copies away, but since 1927 I have kept them. They are in good condition, and I would be glad to sell them to any one interested, as I am through with them.

Anyone interested, may write to me.

L. C. Coe,
1846 Beni Ct.,
Akron, Ohio.

(Your sample "Cross Section" of readers of AMAZING STORIES coincides definitely with our own findings. We think we discern that the unfavorable criticisms come from people who do not know the magazine.—EDITOR.)



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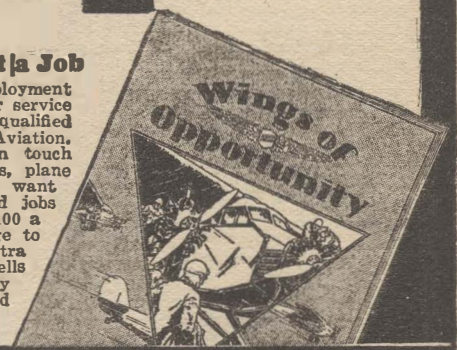

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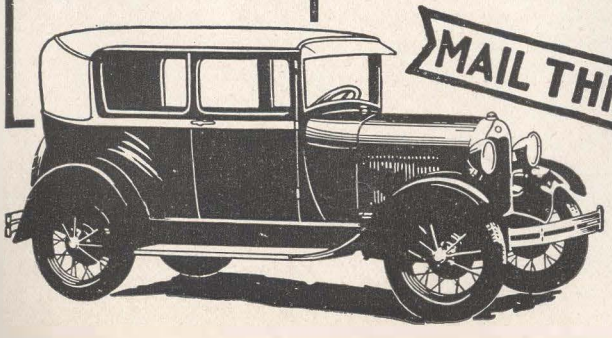

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