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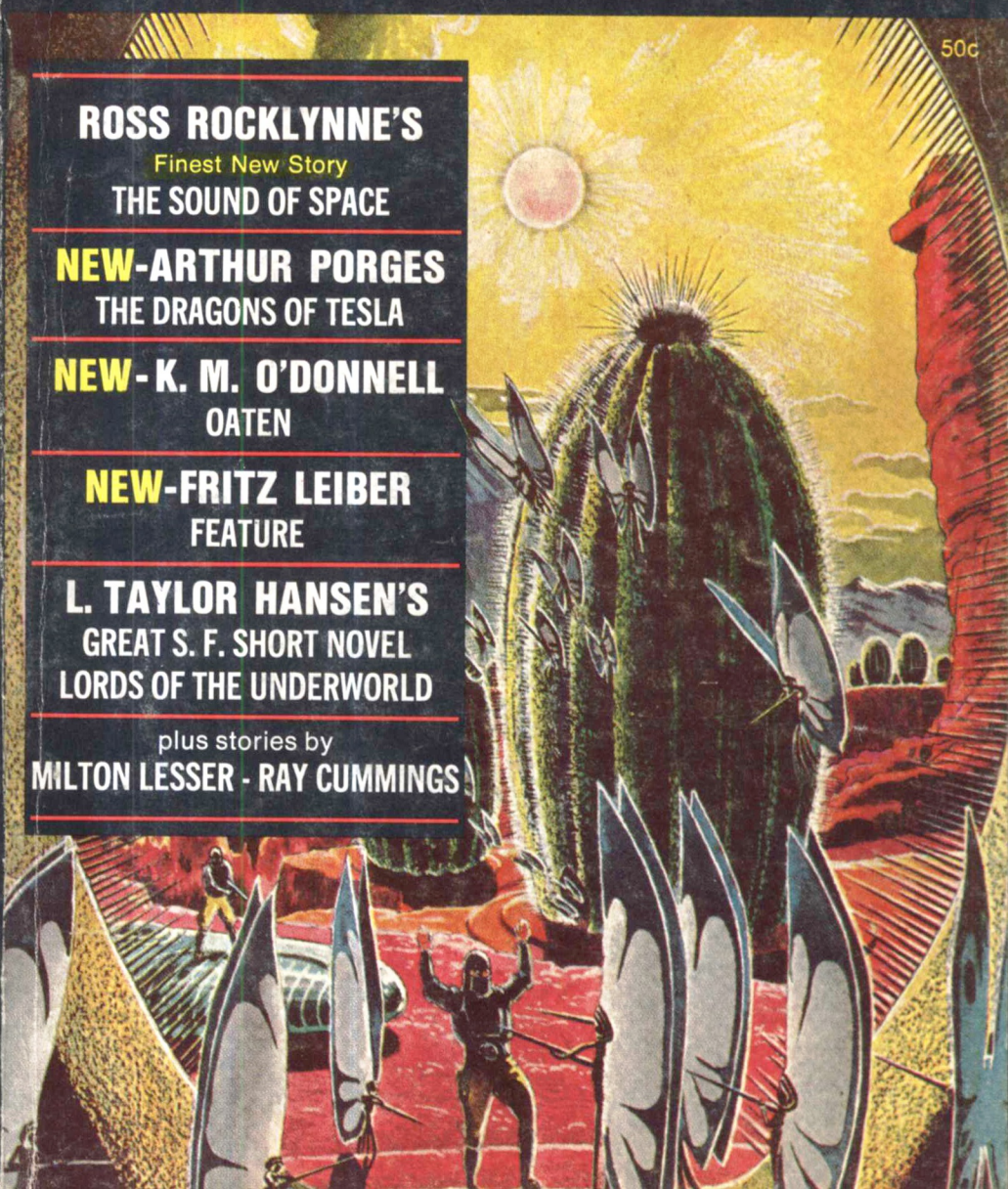

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"THE LIGHT OF SPICA"

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FANTASTIC, Vol. 18, No. 1 OCTOBER 1968 is published bi-monthly by **Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc., 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364.** Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11354. Business Office: Purchase, N.Y., Box 175, Portchester, N.Y. at 50c a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues) United States and possessions: $2.50; Canada and Pan American Union countries: $3.00; all other countries $3.50. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1968 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs, or manuscripts.

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PROVINCIALISM AND SCIENCE FICTION
Editorial by Harry Harrison

I have friends in industrial Milan who have warned me about the slothful inhabitants of the South of Italy. I have friends in Naples who have given me serious advice about avoding the grasping, mercenary, cold-hearted men of the North. To me both groups have been Italians and fine people.

Danes have warned me about the unhumorous Swedes, and Swedes have warned me about the drunken Norwegians. I found all three countries inhabited by likable Scandinavians.

From the outside other people's provincialism look pretty petty. We don't have that sort of thing here—or do we? When I drove to Mexico some years ago I found no trace of the heralded Southern Hospitality. I paid my money for gas and food and that was that. When I returned to this country about a year later I admonished myself for thinking ill of the warm-hearted American people. The owner of a tiny filling station in the middle of nowhere told me to, "Come agin, y'all, y'hear." I heard. I also heard the buxom waitress in the diner who took the baby in the kitchen to play, so that I and my wife could enjoy a peaceful dinner. The South *is* friendly—if you are from the South.

While in Mexico my New York State auto plates had expired and I had to get Texas plates when I crossed the border.

Science fiction is no exception to this universal provincialism. Most of the future societies that are projected are various forms of states we agree with or fear today. Or are cliches—like the Galactic Empire. But the Imperial citizens are all modern Americans to the core, believing in our taboos and eating our contemporary food.

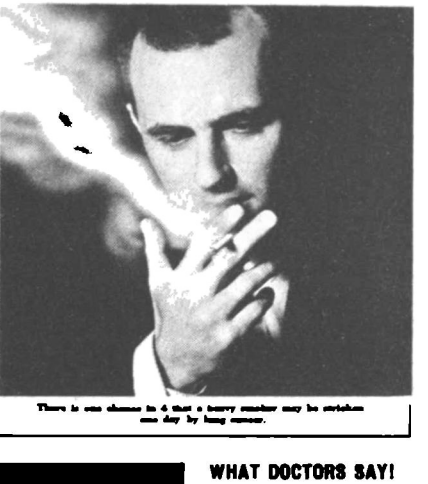
There is another form of provincialism that is rarely considered, temporal provincialism. The best description of this is given by J. Allen Hynek, Director of Northwestern University's Dearborn Observatory, the man who invented the term.

"There is a tendency in the 20th century to forget that there will be a 21st century science, and indeed a 30th century science, from which vantage points our knowledge of the universe may appear quite different. We suffer, perhaps, from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity."

On this point I believe that science fiction scores its biggest success. The physicists in the 21st century laboratory may be 20th century Americans—but they are dealing with an intelligent extrapolation of the 20th century science that is the

(Continued on page 146)

STOP SMOKING FOREVER



There is one chance in 4 that a heavy smoker may be stricken one day by lung cancer.

Over and over again we hear that tobacco is the cause of 98% of all lung cancer cases. Recent studies show that one out of every four smokers is a potential victim of this dread disease. Yes, tobacco is the most deadly poison developed by our civilization. Aside from lung cancer, cigarettes are the cause of other extremely serious diseases.

Tobacco smoke is composed of 84 substances, 5 of which are carcinogenic (cancer causing) and 20 are toxic (poisonous). Every time you draw on a cigarette, cigar or pipe, you are exposed to at least 44 different chemicals and poisons, 23 among the most deadly are: lutirin, rubidin, carbolic acid, formaldehyde, methylamine, acrolin, collidine, viridin, arsenic, formic acid, nicotine, hydrogene, sulphide, pyrrol, furfurol, benzpyrene, methyl alcohol, prussic acid, coradin, ammonia, methane, carbon monoxide, pyridin. Quite a hagful of deadly poison for just one puff of smoke!

In a recent survey conducted by a leading American Doctor the incidence of coronary diseases (infarction, angina pectoris, etc.) has been found to be 68% higher in smokers than in non smokers.

So, if you want to stay healthy, you've got to stop smoking. But, be careful! Don't stop smoking all at once. That could be dangerous.

Now, where's this advice coming from? Some cigarette or pipe tobacco advertiser trying to make the best of a bad situation? Of course not!

This is the advice of the Anti-Tobacco Center of America, an organization designed especially to help you rid yourself of your addiction to tobacco.

OBESITY LURKS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

Well, our experience has shown that a "confirmed" or "heavy" smoker should not stop smoking all at once, as this will seriously endanger his health and well being.

For years your body has been accustomed to its regular daily intake of toxic substances such as nicotine, tars, etc., and by now it is adjusted to that situation. Cutting tobacco out overnight will result in a shock to your physiological system accompanied nearly always by psychic disturbances. Which results in an imbalance of the sympathetic nervous system.

The digestive system becomes disturbed, the central nervous system becomes up-set, you become "bad-tempered", you can't be bothered by friends, spouse, children, etc., as the least little irritation will make you fly off the handle.

Life becomes hell for you and everybody around you.

But, that's not all, it has been effectively proven that anyone who attempts to stop smoking by sheer will power alone, will suffer terrible feelings of frustration.

A VICE THAT CAN KILL

In order to compensate, he begins to eat and eat and eat. This is why so many former smokers put on excess weight and become fat. Stopping smoking all at once has been the cause of many severe cases of obesity.

So, giving up smoking, by yourself, is not the real solution, as it might endanger your health.

Then, how should you stop smoking?

Well, this is what the Anti-Tobacco Center of America is going to teach you.

Just clip and mail the coupon below to receive full information on a program which will help to rid you of your need to smoke. You'll be amazed to learn that you can stop smoking without any danger and without straining your will power; after only a few days the desire to smoke will vanish.

Just think how much happier you will be!

This is the experience of an ex-smoker we all know: MAURICE CHEVALIER "I was sunk in a vice which had left life no meaning at all. I was chronically dominated by a mountain of cigarettes, which like a growing invasion of grasshoppers succeeded in ruining my nerves. I stopped smoking twelve years ago. (Chevalier wrote this in 1960) And it is since this fortunate decision that my mental activities, my intelligence, my memory developed so much, that I — who had lost all interest in life — could escape that growing scepticism and rediscover interest in what happened around me. *I was able again to read and to remember what I had read!*"

Among the 28,683 former smokers helped by the Anti-Tobacco Center, we give you the testimony of some doctors. We have chosen this profession intentionally, because doctors know the harm that tobacco causes. They are able to appreciate the results of our program.

IF YOU STOP SMOKING YOU WILL:

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Dr. E. C. "Since January 23, 1962, I no longer smoke. I have already given the "tip" to several of my friends and patients."

Dr. P. C. "I am happy that I do not smoke any more, this of course being due to the use of your product. All my thanks."

Dr. L. D. "The result was rapid. I think that anybody who wishes to stop smoking can do so."

(Since European law forbids all publicity for doctors, we can only publish their initials.)

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THE SOUND OF SPACE

by ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

A vision of the future, the sensation of being in the new world of space, the relation of a man and a woman. We welcome the return of one of the most famous science fiction writers with this story that touches these things, and many more

THE spaceman came out of his Long Orbit, half-hungry for the first tug of gravity. No matter that the minute he landed Sir Death would be that much closer behind him. To be on Triton, moon of Neptune, was worth the price. In point of fact, he had to get to Triton and start dying a bit.

"Got to get to Triton, old son! Let's pour it on."

The girl at the reception desk of the Hotel de Triton saw the Spaceman come in. That was nice, she thought, gnawing reflectively on her yellow six-sided pencil made by the Dixon Co. of la planéte Earth. Here he was at last: Bill, her dream-hero, come to reclaim her after two years and more with no 'phone call, no space-o-gram, no Hey you, no absolutely nothing. She could say "drop dead" or she could just go on with her work.

He was gnawing his lips anxiously. How nicely brown and smooth his face was, creased a

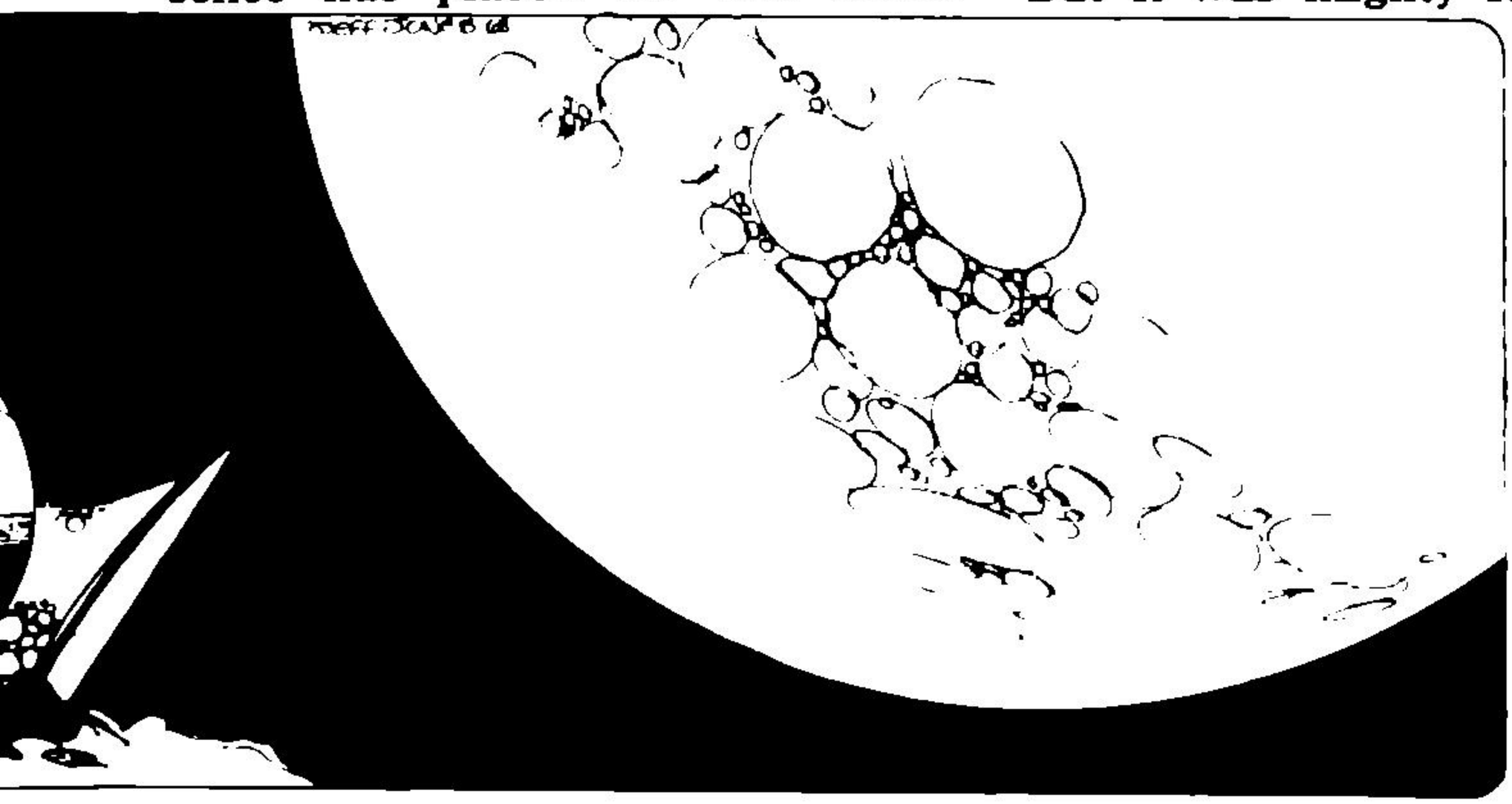
bit about the eyes, but mostly nice and young and unwrinkled, and she couldn't say the same for herself, not hardly, if you wanted to get a little n'est ce pas about it, which she could easily do, working for la compagnie Français who owned Triton and exported diamoons from it.

As he strode anxiously across the simulated concrete floor, she could see he was wobbling a bit. Served him right, she thought caustically. Hadn't kept up with his exercises. Kidded himself he

could skip Tues. and Thurs. mornings, except these outer-spacers didn't divide things up into Tues. or Thurs., or the other bunch of days. Didn't even observe Sun. church services, so the gossip went.

Today, of course, was Sunday, so that "drop dead" salutation was out la fenêtre.

"Look, dear," she said instead as he came to the desk with his wobbly stride, "I fully appreciate that you are aware of the difficult situation in which your long absence has placed us. The reams



of edited double-talk you are about to manufacture, with commas, periods, exclamation points, and question marks correctly inserted so as to extract from me a minimum of le ennui—well, cela ne me dit rien, meaning we can skip all that and go to morning church services. Okay?"

"Okay!" he mumbled.

"My shift is over," she continued, "by a cunning accident of the space-time continuum, so I'll be but a moment."

She disappeared actually five minutes ahead of her shift and sent her replacement in to take over the awkward interval. The replacement studied the Spaceman, knowing the situation, and coldly turned her back.

"Got to get moving, got to figger this one out," the Spaceman said to himself. "Maybe go to church and do a little praying."

Everyone thought it was mighty funny how Spacemen simply forgot God out in the wilderness of no-gravity between the stars. But it was mighty funny too that here with a sixth of a gee pulling at you and setting you up quick-like for Sir Death you began to get religious out of plain fear and then you knew better get off to church and square things. And if you didn't, people would look at you. Maybe in church if you acted like people thought you should and like June thought you should, well, maybe in church you could somehow find a way to answer the accusation in her blue litmus paper eyes, and make her stop talking that padded English.

"I'm back," she said. "Kindly take my arm in the best tradition of those lovers who, gaining comfort and security in each other's magical presence, but beset by problems which at times seem insurmountable, wish to convey to others the unanimity of their special appeal for each other undiminished par le temps ou la absence."

They were on the walkway, arm in arm, free hands casually touching the black belt as they moved along with the few other churchbound inhabitant's of Neptune's moon.

He leaped headlong into the unexpected breach of silence she provided for him.

"You're the same," he said hoarsely. "Silky beautiful with that litmus paper blue in your eyes, and just the right size, and with lots of hair that should have diamoons in it."

"Pretty," she nodded. "Very pretty."

"I used to smell your skin when I was on the Long Flight. Got that hungry for you, if you want the truth. Know what your skin smelled like? Like flowers that would stay fresh forever. That's right. Flowers that would stay fresh forever."

"Better and better," she cried, as, taking its cue from his words, the under-Triton tunnel blossomed out into a huge flower of a church. "Come on. Let's get up close to Sir Preacher. Know what I used to think while you were hurtling through the void, as the phrase goes? Used to think, That's my Spaceman, taking off into the void merely to make money—"

"Merely to make money," he nodded.

"—and while I'm aging here on Triton, he's staying young and fresh as those forever-flowers he likes to talk about—"

The usher was guiding them, however, with June determinedly pushing forward to the front pew.

It was a fine service under the calyxed dome beyond which the wheeling stars showed against utter blackness. Handel's Prelude and Fugue in F Minor floated from the organ loft; came the same composer's Aria, "Concerto in D." The Spaceman was rapt. The deep organ notes touched him most, for by closing his eyes he could imagine himself enclosed by the unifying immensity of space. Oh, June, honey, he thought, opening his eyes and out of the corner of them studying that delightful if sometimes provocative profile, someday we're going to *live* out there—we must live out there if we're going to—

The congregation was rising for the processional hymn. June touched him briefly with her elbow, and rose primly beside him. Sweetly, childishly, her voice sounded in his ear. "For all the Saints from whom their labors rest."

The congregation was seated again. The collection plate was making its muted rounds as the congregation prayed. The collection plate continued its rounds as the congregation sat in silent

meditation. The services continued:

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Earth
Break forth into joyous song and sing praises
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre
With the lyre and the sound of melody
With trumpet and the sound of the horn
A joyful noise before the King the Lord!"

"Amen," whispered the Spaceman, into the ear of his beloved. "It's funny. It's just as if whoever wrote that song knew—"

"*Shh!*" Her hands were clasped around a hymnal in her lap, her blue eyes were determinedly looking straight ahead. She would not allow herself to unbend. Glumly the Spaceman figured his chances. No sir, she wasn't going to give him an edge. He didn't like the plans buzzin' around in that busy busy brain.

Now the ritual lightened as Sir Preacher a handsome young man of the cloth, stepped to the lectern.

"Turn to page 156," he said. The organist with enthusiasm was in to "Brighten The Corner Where You Are." The congregation stood up and walloped it out. This was rousing! It was foot-stompin' stuff! Then came "Beaulah Land," and you couldn't ask for a better hymn to get the blood rolling.

After bawling these numbers out, the Spaceman felt feverish again. Trouble was, even on a low-grav planet like Triton, you had to enjoy singing such songs, you had to get the blood moving, you even had to feel religious awe, just out of pure excitement. Out in space, though, everything was so CALM! My, it was calm! Nothing pulling at you, nothing to lift yourself against, and, somehow, nothing harrassing you. Then you landed on a mass, like 3200-mile Triton, and suddenly you were in a mess!

Oh, he knew he was in a mess, all right, and all because here he was on Triton.

The sermon started, and, predictably enough, it was a sermon the Reverend Bert Hughes had used on returning outer-spacers before. His eye, in fact, was on the Spaceman.

"What hath God wrought?" he asked. "God wrought the Heavens," he answered. "Yet why is it that the Great Void," he asked, "filled to overflowing with the goodness of God, is used by godless men to profane it with their journeys? Yes, I say it again, to profane it with their presumptuous marches across the awesome savannahs of Outer-space, uttering no word of thanks to the Lord, making no abeisance to him who ruleth the Heavens, making no note of God's temple where each star is like the eye of the Supreme Deity—"

"It isn't that way at all," the Spaceman thought in an amazed flurry. "That's plain silly! A star's just a hot piece of junk!"

Sir Preacher went on, considerably aroused with the effort of interesting his slightly bored congregation. He spoke to them of the need for worship in the big church of outer-space. Why, it was well known that those who made the Long Journey outside the Solar System to other stars held no church service. Sunday flew by like any other day of the week.

"It is our duty to aid these poor deluded souls, few though they be—"

"Don't want any help, don't need any!" growled the rebellious Spaceman. June heard him growling, saw him slouching, touched him sharply with her elbow. He only growled lower.

"—and now let us say a prayer to our Heavenly Father, that He may aid them to throw off their iniquities. When these Spacemen return from the stars, it is our duty, as members of the First Methodist Church of Triton, to nurture them with our Faith, so that they will learn to worship and fear their Creator, and never again take their profane selves into the Void. Our Merciful Father, we ask that this man—er—these men notice thee in thy awesome Oneness—"

As the congregation filed out, the Spaceman was seething. He had been attacked with no chance to defend himself. Worse, his girl (*maybe* she was still his girl) was an opponent, obviously intent on keeping him out of space until he could match her own religious fervor. Well, now, look here, Sir Sweetheart, if you think for a minute—

"This way," said June, leaning against him and throwing him out of his exit-bound orbit. "We go talk to Sir Preacher, okay? I saw him give me the high-sign just as he finished his stirring talk. This man, dedicated to the tenets of the First Methodist Church of all the Worlds, is determined to save the lost lambs of space. Consulting with him may ennable us the better to solve—si le coeur vous en dit—the many problems that beset young lovers à l'époque de l'espace when the interstellar firmament itself could be l'objet of the young sweetheart's jealousy. Bien entendu, I'm not that young anymore, bon gré, mal gré—"

His large left hand descended in a swift arc on her mouth, closing against it gently but firmly.

"Mmfff," she mumbled, looking up with blinking blue innocence, and smiling rubberly against the palm of his hand. "Mmmfff? Mmmfff?" She tickled the palm of his hand with her tongue. He removed his hand sternly. "Mmmfff? We go to see the man?"

Sir Preacher in his audience chamber rushed up with hand outstretched. He grasped the Spaceman's hand with one of his hands then brought the other hand in as an added gesture of amity. His eyes were mellow and brown and loving. It was obvious that here was a man who dispensed love, compassion, and understanding. Young though the Reverend Bert Hughes was, he was not only a Certified Space Preacher, but a sincere man of God.

"I don't want you to think," he

said hurriedly, gesturing to two chairs upon which June and the Spaceman sat "—thank you—I don't want you to think—excuse me—" he got himself a chair, and then leaned earnestly forward so that his knees were touching the Spaceman and June's both "—I didn't want you to get the impression, sir, that my sermon today was aimed directly at—well, at *you*."

The Spaceman thought Sir Preacher's knees were pressed a little too firmly against June's. Who would expect a man of God to—?

He said belligerently, "Well, who was it aimed at then?"

June was aghast. "Bill! Don't you realize—"

Then she colored as she saw the direction of his glance. She hastily removed her knees, then shrugged, looked blankly into space, and shrugged again as if things suddenly had gone 'way beyond her.

Sir Preacher coughed, leaned back. Neither his aplomb nor his zeal diminished. He said softly, "My sermon was aimed not at you, sir, but at the Spaceman in all of us. Yes, we all long to leave on the Long Journey away from God. We all yearn for a false ideal of freedom as we ascend the difficult Way to Heaven. In a manner of speaking, we all yearn to fly a ship to Alpha Centauri and thus to shuck off the need for the ritualized teaching that is so important to us of the First Methodist Church of Triton. But ah!" Sir Preacher cried, index finger pointed up. "It is exactly this ritual which is needed if we are to discipline ourselves to follow in His footsteps. For us of our Faith, there are no Long Journeys, not unless we take God with us."

He paused. He looked intently at the Spaceman.

"Tell me, sir. Do you take God with you?"

The Spaceman glanced angrily at June, who still dispensed cool disinterest into space. "No," he said angrily. "I DON'T take God into space with me. I figure if there's Somebody going under the name of God, He's already there. I DON'T observe church services. I don't pray. And I'm not going to! And I don't like the way—"

June flicked her eyes Sir Preacher's way. He nodded.

"Bill," said June, not meeting his eyes, "I've discussed our problem with Mr. Hughes. He knows what you've done to our chance for a happy marriage. He knows about your utter lack of religion—"

The Spaceman wobbled to his feet. "So that's it," he said icily. "You've discussed our so-called problems with him. How many times?"

"Several," she said, as icily. "A couple dozen times. You were gone over two years, Bill, out to Alpha Centauri, on some kind of business."

"On some kind of business," he mimicked. "Only to bring news from the colonies there! Only to make fifty thousand dollars so you and I could—"

"Be that as it may. You were gone—and Mr. Hughes and I—well, *we had to do something*. I had to find out whether I still wanted to marry you. And Mr. Hughes' wife

was dead. He had to find out—" She sniffled, and looked drearily at the floor. "I want you, Bill. But if I can't have you, I want Mr. Hughes to be my husband."

So there it was, the Spaceman thought to himself while his head grew light. Sacrificing himself to the future happiness of himself and his betrothed, he dared the Alpha run. No matter that his brave feat was looked upon with awe by the scientists who hired him, these two, the minute his back was turned—well, the *year* his back was turned—hmm.

He was sitting down again, confused. "All right," he muttered. "I'll stick to my profession as Certified Spaceman of Outer Space. You can go ahead and be a Certified Space Preacher's wife. Obviously I was selfish, merely out there making money so we could build us a space-house, free of gravity, free of death, free of taxes, and—and—"

"And Godless!" she said. She tapped him on his nose so he had to look up. The resolve on the faces of the traitorous pair chilled him.

"You must move in the ways of God," Sir Preacher said softly, his hand extended to pat down any remonstrance. "Yes, June and I have talked this over. If you expect to win this lovely girl for your wife, you *must* go to church, and you *must* read the Bible. And you *must* spend a year on Earth!"

"Earth!"

The Spaceman recoiled.

"Yes, Bill." June looked miserably at the floor. "When you and I met you were older than me. Now *I'm* older, because you've been flirting around in deep space—"

"Don't you mean flitting?" he suggested.

She colored. "A mere Freudian slip, Sir Dream-Hero. But let us not quibble about the mere meanings of words, which, after all, are merely vehicles—" A tear grew in her eye.

"The fact is, you got me older than you! Out there, with three-four years of no-grav, you haven't died even a little bit. And I have! I'm older and beginning to sag and I've got terrible deep wrinkles and the only thing I've really got is my religion and I'm going to hang onto that." Two more tears appeared and began their salty path down a face so smooth and unblemished that he could only stare at her thunderstruck. He took her shoulders in his hands.

"Why, you aren't wrinkled," he said in a tone of awe. "You aren't old. You're sweet and wholesome like the pure white flowers that bloom on Alpha Five everytime the Solside of the Alpha sun turns toward them, and that's once every ten years. You never age, and you never will, not when we get our space-house built—"

"June!" Sir Preacher muttered the word, upon which June struggled free. She got rid of her tears.

"All very sweet," she said mournfully. "All very hypnotic. But you heard the terms, Bill. You go to Earth and die a little bit so we catch up on our ages. That's a kind of discipline I'm asking of you. And you have to read the Bible and go to church. Then come back here and we'll see."

The Spaceman walked the Triton night time with an aquarium on

his head. An aquarium is a slang term for a space-helmet, but the Spaceman hearkened back to the old joke—there's a fish inside. Come to think, he had been born under Pisces.

"I won't stand for it," he decided. "I won't go to Earth!" The very thought of it wobbled his knees. He didn't mind dying a bit for June, but Earth killed you too fast! Those people on the inner-space runs, the Short Hauls inside the Solar System, they were never out in space long enough to really *believe* that gravity pulled at you and made you miserable until you died. They didn't really believe it, so they didn't mind going back, time after time, to where their roots were.

Oh, sure, they heard stories about the so-called deathless Outer-spacers, but they were just stories. And the general feeling was that, because it was well-known that Outer-Spacemen wouldn't or couldn't bother about any form of religious worship, they could be figured for a lying bunch anyway.

He was walking fast, walking furiously. He was in a dark part of town, outside and under the stars, with one segment of bloated Neptune on the horizon. He was in a part of town, near the spaceport, where dangerous men lurked. Men who would kill for money. Men who would smash his aquarium—

Ha! Maybe if he acted dumb and let one of them come up behind him—

That was what one did. The Spaceman felt him. Don't ask him how. But he was a Certified Spaceman. He knocked the fellow down first and then stood over him with his iron boot on his aquarium. A frightened evil face looked back at him. A voice, sandpapered by frequent strong drink, whispered at him,

"My life for a favor. You know the custom?"

The Spaceman nodded. "The favor," he said slowly and desperately, "is to kidnap a couple people for me!"

Gravity was a terrible thing, simply terrible! Gasping, the Spaceman pulled himself up the hatch and into the lighted interior of his ship. He paid hardly any attention to his two captives, dutifully and surely deposited here by Sir Kidnaper, but pushed himself at a thirty degree angle to the bank of rotors and began throwing levers to the takeoff position. The 'Port official had already given him uncontested permission to hit heaven, and he didn't want any other ship to take priority away from him.

June was making gasping sounds through her gag. She pounded the nicely carpeted deck in a frustration of unleashed fury. Sir Preacher was alert, accepting his gag and his humiliating bonds, his proud handsome face showing his faith in God even in this trying circumstance.

The Spaceman paid absolutely no attention to either of them.

"Got to get moving," he chattered. The rotors started. A terrible pounding shook the ship. The Spaceman increased the eccentricity of the main rotor. The sound of the rotors disappeared, but a wave of blue stink moved from the engines along the deck enveloping the ship's

three passengers. Coughing started.

"Don't pay it any never-mind," the Spaceman yelled. "When we get in space that stink'll get took up by the filters, and we'll be up there in no time atall."

"Mmmff," came from June, tears furrowing down her face. But the Spaceman merely grasped his levers, the rotors moved into their highly eccentric position, and by a peculiar subversion of the laws of motion flung the ship up from Triton and at a right angle from the north side of the plane of the ecliptic.

Speed built. Exalted, even though pressed to the deck, pressed even tighter than Triton could pull, the Spaceman urged his craft into the vault of his own heaven. For an hour, for two hours, he was part of his ship, enduring acceleration piled on top of acceleration, and paying scant attention to the slack bundles of humanity captive in the bolted chairs.

Then, suddenly, the dials told him: they were out of the Meson Bowl.

"We're out of the Meson Bowl," he said suddenly. "That's the Solar System. We're out of it!"

They were out of it, up here where nothing was, the Solar System 'way below, diminished 'way down, even Pluto coming in finally to join the other pips on the screen. This was the slacking point. The spaceman kicked himself around and faced his bound and muffled captives.

"Wait'll you feel this," he exulted. "I'm going to bring the rotors into norm. Soon we'll be in null-G, just coasting at half the speed of light. You'll feel a lot of nice things happening to you, but it's going to take a little while. I'll—I guess I'd better get those gags off."

He did so.

June could say nothing.

Then she said: "Bill. Are you aware—?"

"That I had you shanghaied?" He squirmed. "I had to—"

"Confession duly noted," she glowered.

The rotors began to die.

The Spaceman felt wonderful. He was null-G in his head, in his mind, in his body, and in his solar plexus. Already his attitude toward everything was floating, as he was floating in body and merely held down by retaining straps. He grinned most amiably at June.

"June, honey," he began, but she exploded.

"June honey indeed," she cried, floundering around in her chair against her bonds. "What do you mean, kidnapping me, a citizen of Triton and an employee of the most powerful corporation in space? Bill, I'll prosecute you and I'll see that you're extradited to Earth, and I'll have the United States Supreme Court try you in person. I'll tantatlize and torture you and after it's all over, after you're broken and bleeding and begging me for forgiveness, I'll marry Mr. Hughes!"

"Thank you, June," said Sir Preacher tenderly, his eyes mellow with the sweet faith imparted to him by the First Methodist Church of all the Worlds. "But we need not make threats against this man. He has revealed himself for the Godless criminal that he is. God will judge him. This is right and proper.

"In the meantime, Sir Spaceman, you may untie us and fear nothing. After all, God will punish you for your misdeeds."

He sighed deeply. He seemed visibly relaxed.

"Perhaps," he added, "it would be all right to untie June also. How about it, my dear? Sir Spaceman—"

"Never," she cried. "Never, never!" She was bobbling around a bit under null-G; Sir Kidnapper had only knotted her in. She jerked and heaved and kicked the floor, but of a sudden she seemed to lose the urge.

"Come to think of it," she said in an altered tone, "maybe you'd better untie me, Bill. But I want you to know I'm disappointed in you, *terribly* disappointed. It's really disgusting to see how—Whew! Just untie me. I promise to be good."

Her lips, drawn tight and angry before, were softened. She blinked. She tried very hard to be angry again. "I'm ashamed of you," she tried. "*Terribly* ashamed. I think. Just why *did* you kidnap us anyway?" she asked curiously.

The Spaceman untied them, humming a space ditty under his breath and joyously aware of all the spastic pulls in his body popping loose and all the disturbing and ungainly thoughts of the past few hours popping loose with them. My, what gravity did to people! Pulled at them and harrassed them and turned them into a bundle of nerves. Wait 'till June and Sir Preacher saw what it was all about.

June and Sir Preacher gazed upon the Spaceman somewhat dully and very confusedly. Fifteen minutes passed; the Spaceman waited.

Finally Sir Preacher seemed to recall himself. He said slowly, as if searching for a lost impulse, "I—have a duty to perform, Sir Spaceman. You've kidnapped us, sir, for some heinous reason of your own—"

"Oh, it's not heinous at all," the Spaceman hastily assured them. "Got the best intentions in the world, as you'll soon see!"

"—and as a man of God I must say a prayer for you."

"He's right, Bill," cried June, leaning toward him against her retaining straps and grabbing his hands imploringly. "Don't you see? You must be Saved! Saved from the awful iniquity of your Godlessness!"

"Our Heavenly Father," intoned Sir Preacher, closing his eyes. He breathed deeply and opened his eyes again. "Maybe he's not as bad off as all that," he confided to June. "A prayer doesn't seem necessary."

"Perhaps not," she conceded. "Come to think of it, nothing seems necessary at the moment. Enclosed as we are by the immensity of space, enthralled and enraptured by our mighty rush across the soundless savannahs of the Great Void—"

She stopped talking and giggled a little, putting her fingers over her lips to stop the giggle.

She seemed to be floating, in mind and body.

"You know what, Mr. Hughes?" she whispered. "Bill has tricked us. I'm beginning to see some of it. You and I and most people we know just never have really felt null-G. Up from Earth or down from Triton we speed up or slow down or the ship rotates and simulates gravity.

And that's what he's done to us. He's brought us up here to make us feel what he feels! Everything unwinding, everything sliding off—*and God coming in!*"

Sir Preacher's face was a study. Then it seemed to wrench. Suddenly his face was enclosed by his hands, and his fingers were digging into his face.

"It can't be," he muttered. "All that ritual, that discipline, the fear of not finding the Way. Was it all useless?"

"It could be a stepping-stone," said June, her face very pale.

Sir Preacher was shocked. He drew back. "The First Methodist Church of all the Worlds a stepping-stone? A stepping-stone indeed!"

"My Spaceman tricked us," June said bravely.

Sir Preacher struggled and groaned. Peace departed his handsome face, and then Peace came back. He sat straighter, but still lost in himself.

"I see it now," he muttered. "God is more alive in Null-G. That must be it. We are in Heaven, where one needs no church; where one need not worship. This shall be the subject of my next sermon."

"No," June caught him up. "*We're* more alive, Mr. Hughes, therefore we feel God more. We'd better get it all straight while we're up here, so you can preach a *proper* sermon. That is, if you need sermons anymore."

Then both Sir Preacher and June seemed bereft of words. They looked confusedly upon each other, and then confusedly at the squirming spaceman, and then confusedly about the ship. Then Sir Preacher, after all a sincere man of God, faced the issue squarely. Convulsively, he leaned toward the Spaceman.

"We couldn't even listen to what you were trying to tell us," he said huskily. "How often I've quoted Jesus' words about the ears that hear not and the eyes that see not. Tell us now, Sir Spaceman, do we have even any part of the Truth? Have we been able to listen at all?"

"You've listened pretty well," the Spaceman said politely. "It's just like you say, there's something up here that's great—something you don't find on the worlds, what with the gravity and all. This is Church, without even trying to be one. Anyway, that's the reason I brought you up here, so you could feel like I do, and meditate like I do—"

"Meditate, did you say?" Sir Preacher's lips trembled over the word, repeating it. "Then—then, perhaps, there is the need for some kind of ritual, some kind of worship?"

The Spaceman squirmed. "You don't have to *do* anything," he explained. "I'll show you." He was very serious now. He said, "I'm quiet, and the lights are out like this."

He moved a switch on the board nearest him. The lights in the ship were out.

He touched another switch. A rounded partition slid away from the overheads, and all the wild glory of the tangled rivers of heaven flooded on them in torrents of brilliance.

"Then I'm very quiet," said the Spaceman. "I think to myself I

(Continued on page 146)

THE DRAGONS OF TELSA

There be dragons here—beware! But the men of the Herschel *laughed at the warning, which produced rather nasty results*

By ARTHUR PORGES

THE scoutship *Herschel* warped out of overdrive within fifty thousand miles of *Telsa*, which orbits a hot, bluish star somewhat larger than Sol. This was superb navigating, a fact promptly emphasized without false modesty by Lieutenant Burton, who was responsible for the feat.

"There you are, Captain," he said. "Practically underfoot. I don't know how I do it; must be a kind of genius."

"That," was the dry retort, "and a Mark IX Computer, with which a bright baboon could make his way from one dustspeck to another." He turned to Ensign De Ruyter, who was grinning hugely at the squelch. "What do we have on this place? We have to do a MCS* on it."

The young officer, lowest man on the totem-pole of the ship, tapped into the Herschel's library—an electronic storage box three inches on each edge, which held information equivalent to a large warehouse full of books—and listened through the earphone.

"Atmosphere, nitrogen and hydrogen; no oxygen. Hot; mean temperature close to ninety degrees fahrenheit; crust mainly oxides of sodium, potassium, and rubidium. A 'g' of twenty-eight point seven . . . last visted eighty years ago, very briefly. Beware of the dragons! he added, eyes twinkling.

"What?" Captain Morse snapped.

"The first explorers had trouble. Some life-form, like a big lizard, proved ferocious and hard to kill. Just think of it—life there apparently eats sodium oxide, breaks the bond to get oxygen, and excretes the pure metal: wow! Good thing there's no water around. Wonder what they use for blood?"

"They could have water in it," Burton said. "Just as long as they keep the sodium metal clear of the stuff. No reason for blood and excretory vessels to meet, I

*Minimal Contract Survey

suppose. Or," he added brightly, "why not molten sodium as the liquid in their veins? We've seen crazier life-forms."

"Anyhow," the captain said, "we'll heed the warning."

"I wouldn't worry about it," De Ruyter said in an airy voice. "Eighty years ago they had no Markovs—just explosive bullets and things. Nowadays what they called dangerous would just be target practice for us."

Morse cocked his head quizzically. Years ago a shrewd fleet admiral had said of him: "That fellow fears nothing, but protects himself against everything." By which he meant that Morse had courage in the highest degree, but didn't consider it a substitute for intelligent, foresighted planning. To meet an unavoidable crisis bravely was one thing; to create such a crisis by rash action or the inability to see obvious future developments was another matter. The ideal commander would never have a crisis at all; everything would be expected and prepared for.

Now he said: "Nevertheless, we'll assume the animals are belligerent and tough." He looked at Burton. "You wanted to disassemble the control panel. How long will it take?"

"At least fifteen hours."

"You'll do it sitting?"

The lieutenant glanced at his heavily-bandaged ankle, and grimaced. He had injured it a few days before, and couldn't walk more than a dozen steps.

"That's the only way I can; but the whole panel's within easy reach. We should find that malfunction before it gets serious," he added.

"I agree, and this is the best time. De Ruyter and I will make the MCS. It works out perfectly. You're the only one who really knows the inside of that board, and can't get around now anyhow."

"'Ware the dragons!" Burton grinned.

"I intend to," was the reply, given in all earnest. "We'll each take two fully-charged Markovs. I presume the suits are in 'ready' condition," he said to the ensign.

"Yes, sir. I checked them out this morning."

"We'll land near the equator, in some area that will have daylight for at least eight hours. But we'll be back in six. That's the minimum for an MCS, and I'd prefer more, but Burton isn't actually fit for duty, and the ship shouldn't be left to him alone."

"Remember," the lieutenant warned him, "once I take down the panel, *Herschel* sits here for about fifteen hours. So don't get into any trouble that calls for me to take off and do a rescue job."

"I don't intend to get into trouble, period," Morse said crisply. "I hate trouble, and love restful, simple routines."

"I wonder what they chase—and eat—when no explorers are handy?" De Ruyter murmured.

"What?" Burton demanded. "Oh, you mean the dragons."

"If there are predators, then there must be prey," the captain said. "We'll try not to qualify." He

moved to the board. "Well, let's make our planetfall."

"I doubt if they would really eat you," the lieutenant siad. "If that's any comfort. You're both full of water, and I suspect an animal bulging with sodium and such stuff would know better than to put your kind of meat into his tummy. Of course, with no oxygen, sodium and water would create a lot of heat, but none of that fireball act we get on earth. At least, I think so."

"The point is," Captain Morse said gently, "the dragon might not find out we weren't edible until he'd torn us into pieces. Those suits are tough, but not built to resist teeth like, say, a dinosaur or sabre-tooth tiger had."

"Considering that you've set the all-time Fleet Records with the Markov, and De Ruyter isn't exactly slow, I'd say that all my sympathy goes to the dragon—if you meet one."

It was a safe prediction, apparently, but completely wrong. A single three-letter word ruined the statement, as Morse and De Ruyter were to learn.

Rather to their surprise, *Telsa* was far from barren. Even at fifty thousand feet, they could see that the terrain, while rugged and hilly, with great white blocks of alkali salts, also had heavy growths widely distributed.

With casual expertise, Morse found a level clearing, and brought the ship down as gently as a girl might lean back against a cushion. A check of the atmosphere—nothing was ever taken for granted—verified the recorded data: it was hydrogen and nitrogen, with traces of neon, argon, and arsine. Temperature in the hot blue sun was well over a hundred degrees fahrenheit; in the shade, it was only eighty-nine. That was the air; obviously the rocks were much hotter. But in their suits, neither the captain nor De Ruyter needed to worry about that.

They left Burton digging into the control panel, swearing softly, but with a catholic choice of expletives from a dozen different civilizations, as the age-old battle was resumed between man, intelligent and sentient, and the stubborn, malicious, never-defeated innanimate objects of his environment.

Two hours later, Morse and De Ruyter were about a mile from the ship, and had already learned a good deal. The growths were a kind of plant. They took oxides from the ground through a root system, and by means of energy from the sun, extracted oxygen for respiration, and made food of the metal somehow. At least, that was the obvious inference.

A great many herbivores, peaceful and timid, browsed on the plants; and in turn were preyed upon by a variety of carnivores. So far, both types had been relatively small, fleeing at the sight of the two men in their grotesque suits.

Then, they met their first dragon.

In some ways it was more insect-like, having six jointed legs, but the scaled body, about the size of a pony's was indeed reptilian in its contours, but compact, heavily armored with thick plates, and quivering with a kind of terrible vitality. This one charged on sight, and was doing a good thirty miles an hour a few seconds after starting.

Captain Morse had his Markov out in just under one twelve-hundreth of a second, but held his fire, waiting coolly. He could hit the bulls-eye at any reasonable range, but his policy was to shoot at the shortest distance compatible with the speed and power of the attacker. When the dragon, uttering feral croaks that sounded unpleasantly like tally-ho's, was fifty feet away, the captain gave it thirty thousand amps at half a million volts pressure right in its narrow, evil-looking head.

No matter how much life-forms may differ throughout the universe, none had ever been found that didn't function, in the final, sub-molecular analysis, through electricity. It followed that the Markov jolt could disrupt the vital processes of anything alive, and the dragon was no exception. Dead on its feet, the thing skidded and lurched a few more feet, and then collapsed.

"Look at the teeth on that beast!" De Ruyter said in a voice full of awe. His own weapon had been ready only a moment behind Morse's, ready to fire should the impossible happen and the captain miss.

"Pretty bad," his superior admitted, noting the great jagged fangs like splinters of optical glass. "No wonder the browsers seem jittery."

"Still," the boy said, "I was right at that. They're no match for a modern arm."

"You have a point—" Morse began, but the sentence was not to be finished. The flaw in their reasoning now became apparent, for the lone dragon was merely a kind of scout; and now, from only a few hundred yards away, a whole horde of the dreadful killers were charging in on the pair.

Both Markovs were out, and the slaughter was almost unbelievable. But dragons kept coming, and that was the trouble—sheer numbers. Even a Mark VI repeater has its limit. Morse, firing at blinding speed, and with never a miss, finally tossed his exhausted gun aside, and drew the extra. The bodies piled up in nightmare profusion, heaped one on another. De Ruyter blazed away too, occasionally missing or just wounding, whereupon Morse, who seemed to have eyes all over, would send in a quick snapshot to topple the brute before it reached them.

De Ruyter's second Markov was buzzing, and the red warning light on the butt flickered, both indicating that the charge was almost exhausted. The boy had wasted more shots than Morse, largely through inexperience. He hadn't yet learned to husband his ammunition in this kind of situation.

"Not many left now," the captain said. "Keep at it."

A last small group of dragons, quite undiscouraged by the slaughter of their companions, surged forward. The animals were either too feral or stupid to show fear, and charged as if hunting a herd of plant-eaters instead of aliens that had killed nearly two hundred of their assailants.

The ensign fired his last bolt, killing a gnashing brute just a few feet away. Then he went down, yelling, under the fangs and huge talons of another. Morse, shooting with the speed and precision of a computer hunting primes, accounted for three in as many quick firings, caught De Ruyter's danger from the corner of an eye, and sent a last deadly bolt back over his own shoulder to save time. It was a bit weak, but enough for the job, catching the dragon behind one pointed ear, and stunning it.

"De Ruyter!" he cried then, leaping to the ensign. "You all right?"

"I—I think so," the boy gasped, his face still white and damp with the very sweat of imminent death. "He didn't have time to puncture the suit—thanks to you."

"Let's head for the ship," Morse said. "There may be others."

"Impossible," De Ruyter said, grinning weakly. "We must have wiped out the whole population."

"This planet's as big as Jupiter," the captain pointed out in a grim voice. "If it weren't made of such low density stuff, we couldn't move. Oh, Lord!"

"What?"

"Three more coming this way —and not a shot left."

"What'll we do?"

"Run for those rocks. I saw a cave in there."

"Good idea—hope it's got a small entrance!"

They stumbled over the rough ground, with three dragons closing in fast, making those sharp, croaking noises that were more terrifying than a lion's roar or the savage bellow of a Silidor.

Sure enough, there was a black opening in one rocky mound; panting, the two men plunged in, leaving a trio of raging predators outside.

It was characteristic of the cool veteran that even in this moment of last-minute escape, Morse's first act was to face the black interior, switch on his lightpack, and prepare for trouble from the cave itself. His hand flew to a stud on the suit, and came back with a glitter of metal. He held a foot-long dagger, sharp as a bee's sting, with a brass-knuckle handle. It was a poor weapon against anything really big and mean, but a lot better than nothing. Very few knew it, but once, with his right arm broken, and his ribbones gleaming white through a torn side, the captian, using his left hand and this same old commando knife—a family heirloom—had killed a seven-foot tiger-man in the marshes of Saiph X.

Now, the light revealed an amazing sight. The cave had clearly been a kind of factory or workshop at one time—the scene of intelligent and purposeful manufacturing. But Morse gave the

place only enough of an inspection to prove it safe. Then he snapped on his radio, and contacted Burton. In a few terse words he explained their predicament, and gave his orders.

"Put that panel together as fast as you can, malfunction or not, ang get us out of here. It'll be dark in about six hours, I estimate."

"I'll need about five, at least," the lieutenant said, showing none of the annoyance he must have felt. Rather, his voice was full of concern for his friends.

"Do your best," Morse said, and told him their location. "Meanwhile, we'll look this place over; it shows every indication of intelligent life having been here."

Signing off, he turned to De Ruyter.

"This is all my fault; lack of foresight," he said bitterly.

"But, Captain, the other report didn't say the dragons attacked in hundreds."

"Maybe they don't—except at certain seasons." (This was later found to be true.) "But when I was a lieutenant on the old cruiser, *Josiah Willard Gibbs*, we lost three men to a huge pack of dikkols on Procyon III. They're big weasels, the size of wolves. I should of remembered that." He looked at the boy's suit. "Where's your other Markov?"

De Ruyter flushed

"Guess I left it there—after grabbing the extra."

All servicemen are rigorously trained to holster or otherwise retain even an empty gun, since a chance to recharge may occur unexpectedly. Morse, as a battle-wise officer, had managed to pick up his second one up when they fled. But he didn't expect miracles.

"You kept one; you're not used to an extra; they didn't stress that. Some youngsters would've lost both if a dragon climbed 'em. Well, let's have some food and a look around."

He put his light-pack on the floor, with beam at full spread. This part of the cave was a high-ceilinged chamber about forty by sixty feet. At the very back, a pool of silvery stuff shone brightly. De Ruyter stared at it and whistled.

"It can't be that hot in here," he said. "Looks like molten sodium—or one of the alkali metals." He checked his thermometer. "No, only thirty degrees Centigrade inside; cooler than outside, I'd say."

Morse had his optical pyrometer out and focussed on the pool.

"Thirty-nine degrees Centigrade," he said. "That sounds like Rubidium —or an alloy. No matter; I'm more interested in the manufactured things."

They made the rounds wonderingly. There were baskets woven of thin, withy strips; plates and bowls of a light, tough material that might have been mineral or plant, and many lovely items of sheeny silver metal.

"Never tarnishes in this atmosphere," the boy said. "Pity we can't keep such stuff on earth. But they'd have to be under kerosene or in an inert gas."

"This is coming back with us, anyhow," the captain said, his eyes glowing. He was hefting a

shallow bowl, almost five feet across, but light and strong, with a fascinating pattern of grain. "A perfect salad bowl for the big Fleet Party on July Fourth."

"Imagine," De Ruyter said, studying the pool again. "A hot-spring of Rubidium instead of water."

Morse was at the mouth of the cave, peering out cautiously.

"Notice that the dragons aren't just dumb brutes; they didn't even try to force a way in; they knew better. And now one's on guard outside, while the other two forage. Bet if we made a run, he'd croak up his pals fast. Otherwise —" he touched the dagger—"I might go a round with the fellow in a pinch. But only in a pinch," he added wryly, scrutinizing the chunky, fierce beast that snarled at him.

"Look," the ensign said. "A damn nice potter's wheel; at least, that's what it must be."

They examined the disc, two feet in diameter, that turned by an ingenious treadle working cords.

"The way things keep here, this might be a week old or a thousand years," Morse said. "Works perfectly." He looked at his watch. "Well, all we can do is sit tight for another four hours or so. Then Burton will fly over and pull us out of this messy soup. When he turns the big laser beam on these killers, they'll wish they'd gone while the going was good!"

Then he noticed that De Ruyter was oddly silent, and saw that the boy's face had become white and strained.

"What's the matter?" the captain asked him sharply.

"I don't have four hours," the ensign said, a slight quaver in his voice. "My regenerator's conking out; that dragon must have damaged it."

"Let's see." Morse spun the boy and examined the bulge below his neck on the back of the space-suit. There were holes in the thing, all right, where the powerful talons had jabbed home. The complex circuitry inside was obviously torn up. It was a wonder the device worked at all; but it couldn't keep up, even at sixteen per cent capacity, very long, he knew.

"Can you fix it?" The boy's voice was wire-taut.

"Afraid not; needs a specialist—and tools."

"Then . . ." De Ruyter began, and broke off. Why state the obvious?

The captain called Burton. "Any chance of more speed on that board? The boy's regenerator's failing."

"Three hours, at best," was the reply. "Not enough?" He was silent a moment, then said: "I'll grab some Markovs and come on foot."

"You'll stay put!" Morse said. "That's an order. You can't make it over this terrain on that foot. And if you're jumped by another herd of dragons, you wouldn't have a chance. Besides, you know the Fleet directive: we can't just give up the ship. One of us has to get back, and you may be elected."

He signed off, and turned to De Ruyter.

"No officer of mine is going to die without a fight. I'm going after the dragon outside with my knife. You stick right behind. Nothing in here

for a decent club, even, but grab a rock out there. The two of us should be able to take that big lizard. If so, we might get back to the ship without taking on the other two as well."

"No, sir," the ensign said. "I won't do it. You'll be torn to pieces. The other two are near; we know that. This one'll call them. You stay here until Burton comes. I'll take the knife and go; it's my only chance."

Morse glared at him, then his iron face softened.

"I like your guts, ensign, but I'm giving the orders. I know," he added, grimly humorous, "you're a husky lad, and bigger than I am, but I know fifty dirty tricks of infighting you never dreamed of. So you can't stop me from going, and I'll go alone if you won't join me."

De Ruyter stared at him in a kind of wonder, then managed a feeble grin.

"I guess you win," he said. "I doubt if I could hit you in earnest if I tried. It would be like punching my mother! But, Captain," he said, "there's a little time yet. Let's see if we can't find a better way. Plenty of stuff in here; can't we use any of it some way—somehow?"

Morse's gaze shot back to the pool of melted Rubidium.

"I was thinking earlier," he said slowly, "that such stuff is perfect for a solar furnace here. Bright, light; never gets dull from oxidation, as on earth. If we could shape even a spherical reflector, what with that hot sun and no clouds—but there isn't time, damn it!!"

"We could rough out a two-foot one pretty fast."

"Not good enough. These dragons are tough; we were warned, and know it ourselves, now. If we made a small, crude reflector, and goofed—which is almost certain—we'd get no other try. And there wouldn't be time to fight our way back, either; not after wasting our time." He took out the knife. "It'll have to be the hard way."

De Ruyter was looking at the potter's wheel, his eyes feverishly bright.

"Wait," he said thickly. "I'm getting an idea. What if we put melted Rubidium in that 'salad bowl' of yours, and spun the thing? Wouldn't the surface be a paraboloid of revolution? A really perfect reflector?"

"By God!" Morse said softly. "It sure would. Let's see; we'd need a long focus; can't let those brutes get close. Fifty feet would be best. That means a shallow concavity; just a small part of the vertex . . . hmm." He gave the boy a quizzical stare. "You'll be gambling your life on one try."

"It's a better bet than tackling those three killers with just a knife. I say let's do it!"

"All right; it does make sense. If there was only one dragon out there . . . but the others are waiting, too. Look, you lay out the curve on the floor, and make some kind of template we can match the melt against. I'll ladle the metal into the bowl; the less work you do, the longer that regenerator will last. How is it now?"

"Down another two per cent." There was no quaver in his voice this time. "Let's see—a fifty foot focal length. Then the equation would be . . . hmm . . . P over two is fifty; P, a hundred; so Y^2 is 200X."

"Remember," Morse said, busily

ladling the silver liquid into the big bowl, "you need only a part of the vertex—a five foot stretch, so to speak. We'll have to match template to the swirling surface by eye, but the worst that can happen is a different focal length; we can't help getting some kind of parabola, thanks to Newtonian mechanics."

De Ruyter had his scriber and platinum chain measure out. Then he paused, and said: "I'm an idiot; there's a simpler way."

"Which is?" the captain demanded.

"We know the equation and the width of the bowl. I'll just figure how deep the hollow at the center should be to give us the surface we want. Then if we dangle the chain measure from a point in the plane of the bowl's rim—"

"Say no more; you are absolutely right."

"Okay; let me measure that bowl."

Using his glittering chain, he did so, finding a diameter of four feet eight inches.

"So," he muttered. "Then Y equals two and a third feet, and X, the depth—ouch!"

"The depth would be only a bit more than point three inches; we can't even measure that in a big bowl."

"Then we'll just spin out the shallowest parbola we can—say half an inch deep, and let the dragons come closer before frying," the captain said. "It's still our best chance. There!" he added. "That's enough for our purpose. I'll work the treadle, and you let me know when that depth seems about right—from half an inch to a quarter, as nearly as you can tell."

De Ruyter stood by the bowl, watching with almost painful intensity, and dangling the chain measure as a rough check. As Morse pumped the treadle with his foot, the molten metal began to pile up at the rim of the bowl.

"Too fast," the boy warned him, and the captain slowed down on the footwork. After several changes from fast to slow and back again, a reasonable approximation was attained, and the older man tried hard to keep the rotation constant so that the metal would solidify to the proper surface. Finally the rubidium hardened, and they had a glittering paraboloid of revolution. Its focal length was unknown, but they hoped it would be somewhere between thirty and sixty feet.

"Luckily the sun's about as strong now as at noon," Morse said. "Clear atmosphere." He hefted the reflector. "Good thing the metal's so light; this'll be easy to handle." He looked at De Ruyter. "Well, now's as good a time as any; we don't know how long your regenerator will last, so let's go."

They carried the bowl to the cave's mouth.

"All right," Morse said. "We'll scoot out fast, catch the sun sqaurely, and try to put the focal point on his head. We don't know the length, so keep the bright spot on him, and let the brute charge into the beam. When he reaches the right place, he'll drop—I hope. That sun is damn near hot enough to kill without any reflector, if you ask me."

They slipped out of the cave, tilting the bowl on edge to clear the narrow exit. Immediately the dragon on guard, croaking loudly, began his

attack. His head was dark green, which made it easier to center the beam, the light showing up well. For some seconds the beast closed in, quite unharmed, and De Ruyter felt a pang of dismay.

But he needn't have worried. A five-foot spread of light from that intensely hot, blue-white sun, caught by the glittering surface of the paraboloid, and brought to a near-perfect focus, became a beam of titantic power, hot enough to vaporize platinum. When the dragon was about forty feet away, its head seemed to disintegrate in a splatter of pale fluid.

"No flame; that's what fooled me," Morse gritted, his tone indicating only weakly the relief he felt. "Just blew his damned brains out, I guess."

"Back to the cave, until one goes off, leaving the other on watch. That seems to be the way they work. Not too bright."

But it didn't happen that way now. Both of the dragons moved uneasily about, keeping well clear of the entrance. After fifteen minutes of this, De Ruyter said hoarsely, "I can't wait, Captain. The regenerator's going fast. I've enough air for about half an hour—just what I'll need to get back to the ship. I'll have to run for it."

There was no time to argue; every second counted; and Morse knew when action was the thing.

"Do it like this," he snapped. "Move out to the left, fast. When you're clear, I'll come out, too. One of them should take after each of us. I'll try to get yours first, since he'll be off first, and mine won't be well started. Here, take the knife. If I miss him . . ." De Ruyter took it, smiled grimly, and helped the captain with the reflector, bringing it to the mouth of the cave again.

"All right," Morse said. "Go!"

The boy edged through the opening, turned to the left, and ran, making a wide circle to bypass the dragon on that side. It croaked eagerly, and galloped after him. The other one, about to join, hesitated as the captain popped out; it was uncertain what to do, and that gave Morse his chance. Quickly, he set on edge of the reflector on the ground, and sent the beam dancing towards the beast on De Ruyter's trail.

It was a ticklish, immensely difficult operation to carry out quickly, and he didn't get the dragon's head. But the terrible ray seared one shoulder so badly that the animal circled in a kind of daze, croaking at a much higher pitch. Meanwhile, the ensign raced around him.

The second dragon was getting close, and Morse swung the reflector sixty degrees to meet the attack. It was a near thing, since the dragon had almost passed the focal point, but as much by luck as skill, the officer managed to line up the beam in time. With most of its muzzle gone, the dragon whirled in agony, and the captain finished it off. Then he turned his attention to the first one, still thrashing about, and gave it the coup de grace as well.

De Ruyter made it to the ship, meeting no more dragons on the way. He was dazed from too much carbon dioxide and insufficient oxygen; his suit was so humid the viewing panel was clouded, but that didn't matter—he was alive, and safe. A few minutes later, to his great

(Continued on page 33)

OATEN

By K. M. O'DONNELL

Alien. No other race, no other species of animal here on Earth, will ever be as alien as the creatures who may live on other planets. How can we meet them, talk to them—and what will happen when we try ?

SOCIOTHERAPY: A process of cultural integration. (See Structured Programming) 2. Popularized in the Antique Centuries; that process of assembling cultural data through the implantation of a participant-observer called a "Scout" who re-enacted cultural processes at a level of credulity. 3. Later, institutionalized as a means of vicarious entertainment, archaic. *4. In disrepute, disgusting, as, "You sociotherapist!" (perjorative) 5. a discredited science.*
OF THE GRABALZI: Glossary
Windt 114 R.P.

To: Post
From Hellerman
Contents: Top-secret, confidential, etc., etc.

Friends: On a shrewd, sociotherapeutic scout's guess, I would say that this planet's population, perhaps for all future generations, are hopelessly psychotic. A few minutes ago I met their "Chief" for the first time in what they called an "initiation ceremony" before a huge bonfire, dancing natives, flinging beads, etc., etc. This "Chief" is an imposing (for them) creature of some four feet six with blue scales and eyes the shape and color of rubber bands, not that I want you to think my xenophobia is coming to the fore at all. *Greetings*, I said to him in the prescribed fashion, just as the Elders had instructed me. *I do come in Wideness. May I be one of you?* All of this was said in Approved Basic so that the suit's pickup could get it, all of it was so gloomily transparent that even a paranoid would have fallen on his knees, relieved at last to find an uncontentious Familiar. The Codifier,

just to be on the safe side, burbled all of this out in their hideous, glottal language, working on only a three-second lag, and I waited for the next event in the Ceremony which, the Elders had told me, was a handful of Chiefly grease in my face, followed by much dancing and their interesting indigenous wine made, they assure me, from the bowels of the Oaten themselves.

Liar! the "Chief" said to me, so distinctly that even the Codifier blushed. *You come in corruption.* He rubbed his "fingers" in his scales and began to coat my face, not with what I had been assured was mild grease, but something which had the approximate texture and early effects of lye. *Evil!* he said. *Pretender! Diseased! Filth!*

Despite the fact that the circle of natives confronted me with the most whimsical and inoffensive of aspects, I decided, frankly and immediately, that I was beyond my depth. Seizing the Codifier firmly by its straps, I bolted past the Chief, through the bonfire (it singed me slightly but perhaps I will achieve a small reputation for miracles) and into the fields where I was able to make the ship panting only slightly and securing all the doors. Washing my face, I discovered that I had been painted, in fragments, pitch green (surely there is such a color) above the neck with a substance that seemed to create dimples.

I am radioing, of course, for instructions. I have absolutely no objections to my position and the obligations it thrusts upon me. Nevertheless, I do not think that sociotherapy will work here. Perhaps all cultures at all levels force a kind of integration above the level of hostility (you see, I've studied the manual carefully). But the behavior this evening was peculiar; likewise the Oaten which are nervous, foul-smelling beasts which, although they are certainly the subordinate life on the planet, certainly do not occupy that position through merit but only, it seems to me, bad luck. "Chief" indeed! I think that he was an adolescent, put up to this. Frankly, I feel vaguely humiliated.

To: Hellerman
From: Walker

Sam: Relax. Take it easy. In the first place, we're circling you only 400 miles away and in the second place you are, as usual, panicing. I mean it, Sam, this is the last time. We're going to have to find another Scout if this goes on. Granted that a touch of neurosis is essential to the job, you're pushing things a bit far.

The Grabalzi (and *no* more of your phonetic jokes, please) are not only the clear dominant species on the planet; they are a race whose cultural integration in the face of the most limited resources and terrible deprivation has been one of the small wonders of the Galaxy—or at least that fragment of it which practices sociotherapy. No race has ever had poorer luck, to our knowledge . . . congenital sterility, allergies to almost all bacteria on their planet, no metal, no opposing thumb . . . and yet this little people have one of the richest interior lives of any in the Time of Man. (Not to be sentimental).

Last night they were merely performing the Ritual of Test; one in which the Visitor is first primed for Exaltation, then exposed to shock and finally, restored at a level of Celebration; a three-part ceremony whose allegorical significance and parabular economy can only be considered remarkable, particularly since it works on at least 14 levels of Imagic intent, at least as far as we have disassembled their cultural traits. By your stupid and offensive behavior you not only proved yourself unable to work through the simplest acts of persistence and levels of action but stamped yourself to the Grabalzi perhaps perpetually, as an inferior and panicky being permanently barred from that inner circle of knowledge which, to them, is synonymous with their existence. And to think that you did this after all the training and explanation we invested in you. Granted Scouts are supposed to be stupid—it is impossible to get a decent Measurement unless they participate at the most credulous level—this is too much!

Listen to me, Sam. There are millions invested here as well as countless light years of travel as well as the professional lives of half the crew here, the sexual problems of the other, simpler, half. If we are to salvage anything from your fiasco, it can be accomplished only if you return immediately to the Elders—according to our calculations they live 1.8 miles northwest of the cave of the Chief, no?—and explain that you were merely trying to point out a new moral to the Test Ritual and, feeling that you might have offended them, would like to participate now in a more conventional way. That at least gives us a chance to recapitulate the situation and possibly annihilate your own corruption. Permit the Elders to prepare and again take you to the Ritual and this time, Sam, *stand still and keep your mouth shut!*

You think that this is fun? It's a nasty job, preparing little documentaries for the pleasure of morons and the implications are frightening. But it's a job and we have a responsibility. So do you.

By the way, what in hell are Oaten? The Grabalzi are not only the dominant species on the planet, they are, to the best of all official knowledge, the *only* species. Is there something else down there? You better not louse this up, Sam, because we don't have the time, let alone the money. The Grabalzi have reason to be dour, even black; not you, though, not you.

To: Post
From: Sam
Contents: Top-Secret; Not to Be Divulged to a Living Soul; For Your Eyes Only; Watch Out For Spies; etc., etc.

All right, I did it. I did just what you asked. What the hell is sociotherapy, anyway? I'm beginning to question everything except my own suffering.

I don't like those remarks about my brain, either. Despite the fact that I have told myself over and over again that these are the outcome of mere spite because I am the only man within 400 square light years doing anything useful, I must say

that your remarks are pretty inflammatory, Walker, and too damned personal. Remember, I didn't invent sociotherapy in the first place, much less try to make a science out of it. I'm just a working man.

At any rate, immediately upon receiving your offensive message, I took myself to the dwellings of the Elders which, as you say, are exactly 1.8 miles from the cave of the Chief but *due north,* you idiots. I deliberately left the Codifier in the ship, inasmuch as I have established perfect visual communication with the Grabalzi and any dolt over the age of two years in any culture can tell *exactly* what they have on their minds simply by observing what they *do.* I made entrance to the Den of Elders and made clear with handwaving, shouts and reasonable gestures, my intention to once again go through the Ceremony and indicated that I forgave the Chief for his impatience during the previous ritual. All of this was through the ten layers of shielded asphalt that you call a spacesuit, so you should understand that I'm really working down here. I expected that the Elders would hear (or watch) me out and then table the entire matter for a day or so to reorganize matters but my astonishment, and disgust, they indicated to me that the Ceremony was still in progress and were I to return to the "Chief", things could pick up exactly where they were left off. Inasmuch as some three or four hours had elapsed I found this incredible but when the Elders led me to the site I found out that all was precisely true: the same circle of natives stood in the same paralysis, almost as if nothing at all had happened and, wonder of wonders, the "Chief" was in the circle, "fingers" locked into scales, gesturing at me. It was then for the first time that I began to feel distinct unease: having ascertained that 3/5 of the planet was insane, I was now beginning to see it as womewhat malevolent and personalized: *they were out to get me.*

"Greetings again," barked the chief in staggeringly fluent Galactic and began, once again, to lather me richly with his grease. Rather than being green, I found now, by hastily running my fingers over my cheekbones, that I was stark yellow and the stuff had a peculiar porosity. Nevertheless, and after the previous events, I was willing to be reasonable and stand my ground which I did with much aplomb.

"Greetings yourself," I said rather stiffly. "Is it necessary for you to take such an approach to a friendly human?"

"Necessary, Necessary!" the "Chief" said crisply, moving below my face now to work vigorously on the various coils of the suit which bunched tightly from the neck down. "This off too."

"Can't do it," I said, rather pleasantly, I thought. "It's protection."

"Why not protection all over?"

"The atmosphere is satisfactory. I can breathe your air. But they made it very clear to me that I must be dressed so as to appear to you as an alien, frightening being. Don't ask my why. I'd as soon be naked, quite frankly. When does the dancing begin?"

For some reason this enraged the "Chief". "Alien being? Who is 'alien being'?"

"That's what I am. It's all part of the process. That stuff smells, you know?"

"Oaten."

"What's that?"

"Oaten. You are Oaten. Oaten monster."

"Listen, Chief, I am *not* an Oaten or their monster. There isn't an Oaten within a mile of here. They're shy, patient animals that prefer their own company, being slaughtered only for the most necessary of reasons. I boned up on your whole culture. There's no need to act that way."

"That is it," the "Chief" said. I trust you will understand that all this dialogue is a mere approximation, given so that you will get some picture of the situation, but hardly precise word-for-word. Frankly, I was shaken. "Get off this place."

"How's that?"

"I said get off."

"How? Where? You think I *like* your two-bit planet? Hey, you aren't even supposed to know what a planet is yet, are you?"

And at that, things, as they say, deteriorated rapidly. I found myself surrounded abruptly by a circle of approximately 75 natives; as thin and pale as they were, with decaying scales and pleading eyes and consumptive aspects, I found the situation distinctly menacing. Neither pondering nor concerned with alternative, I gave a mighty spring and pushed myself through the group and then, at a dead run, made for the ship once again; a dull feeling of *déja vu* descending upon me as I ran and ran, gradually shedding myself of certain bottom garments to facilitate speed. Behind me were the Grabalzi mumbling what seemed to be distinct curses in Galactic and despite their perilous condition, most of them proved to be fast enough as runners to bring me to the ship within an inch of my life. I scrambled up the stairs, bolted through the open porthole and secured all hatches, putting out some protruding armaments to give them the right idea just in case they decided to rush the boundaries.

So they sat down, still in a circle—what do they have with circles?—and lit fires and there they are right this minute, glaring at me through sick, weak, descending rubber eyes. Do I have permission to return to Post? I think we have reached diminishing returns, here.

To: Sam

From: Post

Listen carefully, Sam. The situation is, perhaps, a little more grim than you think, although it is nothing to get nervous about. Let's take things step by step. Stay calm, Sam, and you have nothing to worry about. Walker, by the way, has been shifted to other duties and hence I'm taking the mike. Don't worry about who I am, it doesn't make any difference. Walker will be soundly punished, Sam Don't think that he'll get away with what he's done.

Now relax and try to follow this. It's very difficult for a man of even average intelligence and although

Walker was uncharitable. he was essentially correct in his evaluation of your gifts. Scouts aren't supposed to be bright, Sam. At any rate, I have something very important to convey to you and you'll have to try to grasp it right off or there will be a great deal of trouble. *You are an Oaten.*

Those friendly, hardy beasts out there in the forests, Sam? *They don't exist.* They're projections of your subconscious mind, as warped by the Grabalzi. *You* are the Oaten and that is what they think of you.

I told you that this wasn't going to be easy, Sam, and you'll have to concentrate now. We have found out a great deal about this planet in the last several hours, not the least important insight being that we have absolutely no business here. These are deft, tricky people, their poor health to the contrary, and we've been able to piece together a good deal from the information you've given us and the materials available here.

I mean, they're deft, *dangerous* people, Sam; perhaps we would be the same way if we were allergic to everything on Earth and had been forced to adapt a culture in which 40 of our years was a rich lifespan and 17 hours sleep a day a dire necessity. Having little else to look forward to, these people have developed the concept of inner space.

What I am trying to say, Sam is that sociotherapy is severely contraindicted with this people and we have decided that their particular resources not only make them poor subjects for our methods but place you—*you*, Sam—in actual, terrible danger. If they can have you, in something less than half a day, positing the whole concept of Oaten, as well as a series of intercultural relationship, they are a *menace*.

Some of us (although there is, admitedly, disagreement here) feel that the two "ceremonies" in which you engaged with the Grabalzi were not as benign as the malevolent Walker would have had you believe, Sam; rather than re-enacting an abstract allegory or parable, they were structuring a fantasy of subjugation which would indeed leave you, as you so aptly put it "stark green" or "brilliant yellow". The fantasy would, of course, work toward your flight and siege and the end might be in sight: there is some question as to whether or not the things you see outside are fires or merely what you *take* to be fires. As I say, there is much disagreement on this point, as well as the inherent nature of the Grabalzi, a people whose name and address we dug from obscure, secret files only through extortionary means. They were not in the "off-limits" sector of the bureaucracy for no reason.

At any rate, Sam, listen and read this very carefully. Lift off *now*. Push the button on the extreme left to activate your motors and then the EMERGENCY panel on the board, the one which has all the stripes on it and looks like a candy-cane. That will take you automatically on a trajectory bringing you to within some hundreds of miles of our own and from there, we can recover you. Do it *now*, Sam.

Do it *now*. The button on the extreme left and then the EMERGENCY panel.

You are in real danger, Sam. You better get going.

To: You
From: Sammy:
Contents: This is a Secret from Me to You.

My friends are outside. They are colored blue. They are colored white. They are colored orange. They are all pretty colors. They are waiting for me to come out and play. My name is Sammy. I am a little boy.

I am a *little*, little boy. I am going to open the door. See the pretty door. I am going to open the pretty, nasty door and go outside. I am going to play with my friends.

I am pushing on the door. See Sammy push. He goes push, push! The door is opening wide. Now it is open. I see my friends. The friends see Sammy.

See all the pretty friends. Here they come. My pretty friends are coming.

See Sammy and his friends.
See Sammy.
See Sammy.
See Sammy.
See.

The End

THE DRAGONS OF TELSA

(continued from page 26)

relief, Captain Morse arrived, still lugging the transformed "salad bowl."

Lieutenant Burton, after trying to hide his pleasure at their escape, looked at the control board and groaned. It resembled something put together out of scraps by an hysterical octopus with palsied tentatcles.

"You might've called in that the kid had another brainstorm," he grumbled. "Now I'll have to start all over. As a good Muggletonian, I say let destruction come upon those dragons unawares; let them go down a dark and slippery way to death; make them to be as blind and deaf adders that see not the hand of the destroyers! Let the Lord spew them out of His mouth!"

"At least, De Ruyter's learned something," the captain said.

"Which is?"

"That not all the best curves are on girls. A parabola has its good points, too."

"Right," the ensign said, grinning. "Infinitely many, in fact." Then he let out a yell, and pointed.

In the oxgenated atmosphere of the ship, the reflector was burning with a violet flame.

"My salad bowl!" Morse exclaimed, jumping to the rescue.

"It may be his salad bowl," Burton quipped. "But it's your bacon-saver!"

The End

A FANTASTIC first! A first story by a new writer that explores some unexpected attributes of the commonplace world that lies about us

WHERE IS MRS. MALCOMN?

By SUSAN A. LEWIN

THE following set of letters was brought to my attention recently by a Mrs. Bea Landers after the disappearance of her widowed sister, Mrs. Ruth Malcomn of Lookout Point, New York. Mrs. Landers became worried when, at the end of three weeks, she had still received no word from her sister, who had been writing to her on the average of once a week.

I don't vouch for the truth of any conclusions the reader may draw from a perusal of these letters. I myself offer no opinion, since I have no proof of anything and since many of the observations made by Mrs. Malcomn are difficult or impossible to substantiate. However, I can't help wondering, as will the readers of this collection, I'm sure: where is Mrs. Malcomn?

June 7, 1967

Dear Bea:

Thanks for the get-well cards; it was a riot. Dr. Jackson loved it, too.

You mustn't worry. It was the mildest of heart attacks. In a couple of weeks the doctor wants me to take walks, so I can't be very near death's door.

Don't worry. I'm still the same dumpy little optimist and as curious as ever. Your big sis is going to be all right.

Love,
Ruth

June 20, 1967

Dear Bea:

Had my first walk today! Just around the block, but boy, did it feel great to get out of the apartment! It's going to be in the 70's tomorrow, lovely for a walk. Maybe I'll walk along Beach Boulevard and see the beach clubs. That reminds me! Dr. Jackson says I can probably go in for a dip by August!

But meanwhile I'm just supposed to walk—farther each day but not

to get tired. Tomorrow I can walk to the first beach club!

Love to all,
Ruth

June 21, 1967

Dear Bea:

You'll never guess what went up while I was sick in bed. Lookout Point now has its own water tower! We won't have to borrow from Sandy Beach any more now, I suppose.

But I wish you could see it: it's the weirdest, most modern-looking water tower you can imagine. It's still too far away, about a quarter mile from town, but when I get up close to it, I'll take a picture and send you a copy. It's sort of a tall tube on an upside-down-cone. The tube bulges out at the top into a kind of flattened sphere. It gives me the willies; looks like it's going to topple over any minute. It's an odd color, too, like steel but with a bluish cast to it, and very shiny. I wonder if it glows in the dark? It looks as though it might.

Why don't you bring the kids out to see me some time soon when I'm better? It's cooler here than where you are, I bet. South Jersey can be hot in summer, can't it?

Love,
Ruth

June 27, 1967

Dear Bea:

Two weeks is an awfully short time to put up a water tower, isn't it? And now that I think of it, when I walked around the block a week ago I didn't notice any tower. Bea, do you suppose we have a mystery here?

Love,
Ruth

July 2, 1967

Dear Bea:

I will *not* forget about the tower and mysteries, and it is *not* bad for my heart. I asked Dr. Jackson, and he says that it would be better if I weren't curious about it, but since I am, it's better to satisfy my curiosity than to let it plague me. Continually wondering about something is even worse for the heart than investigating a mystery.

I spoke to him about your coming out here, and he says it would be all right, perhaps by the end of August, if I don't exert myself. If you'll do the cooking, it would be a nice vacation for the kids before school. How about it?

Love,
Ruth

July 7, 1967

Dear Bea:

It's been a month since my heart attack and I feel wonderful (knock wood). I walk farther every day, and soon I should be able to get a close-up look at that water tower. It's a good thing I have a first-floor apartment, isn't it, or I mightn't be able to go out at all.

I'll be sending you that picture soon.

Love to all,
Ruth

July 14, 1967

Dear Bea:

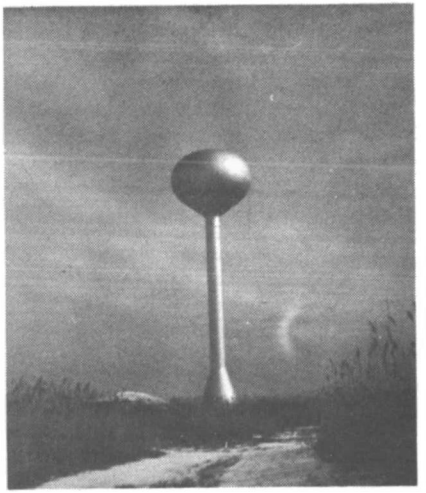
The plot thickens! You remember

Pritchard's Seaplane Base. I found an old *Chronicle* dated June 21st with an article about the Base that really makes me wonder.

Al says in the article that he was working late on a plane the night of June 20th when he stepped outside for a cigaret and saw a round silvery-blue glow in the sky dropping down over Lookout Point.

The paper laughs it off, but I don't know. What do you think, Bea?

Love,
Ruth



July 18, 1967

Dear Bea:

I'm enclosing a few snapshots of my mysterious water tower. Don't show them to the kids. They're too impressionable.

You can see why it upsets me. It does look top-heavy, doesn't it? It looks almost like something from another planet. Now, don't laugh. A sister is supposed to listen when her sister is serious. Remember that article in the *Chronicle*? The night of June 20th, it said.

I didn't notice a water tower on the 20th when I took my first walk, but there it was, big as life, on the 21st. The article said "round and silvery blue." The tower is silvery blue and the top is round. Doesn't it make you wonder?

Love,
Ruth

July 24, 1967

Dear Bea:

You're jumping to conclusions. I said nothing about Martians. There are no Martians. Mariner showed that the surface is probably like the moon, and the atmosphere is too thin. It can't be Martians. All I said was that it seems strange.

In answer to your question—yes, it's perfectly possible that people either haven't noticed the tower or haven't done anything about it. There's no parking allowed on Beach Boulevard, and there are no stop lights, as you know. The speed limit is thirty, but people do sixty going to and from Sandy Beach, Lookout Point, or the beach clubs. They couldn't park anywhere near if they did want to get out and look at the tower. That's point number one.

Number two, it's an awfully long walk beside a lot of very dull weeds, just to look at a water tower; especially in this heat. I'm abnormally curious and I have nothing else to do. But most people just wouldn't bother.

Number three, if they did see it

on the twenty-first of June and not on the twentieth, most people would assume that they just hadn't noticed it. I was aware that first day out that I was living on borrowed time, that I could have had a fatal attack, but was spared. Besides, I'd been cooped up in that apartment for two weeks. I walked very slowly and looked at everything I could see. That's the only reason I'm sure there wasn't any tower.

Number four, most people Don't Want To Get Involved. If they'll stand and watch and then go calmly about their business while someone is drowning or being raped or murdered, then certainly a structure they hadn't noticed before won't stir them to action.

Sorry for the lecture, Bea. Maybe you're right. Maybe the whole thing means nothing.

How's Don's war with the Army?

Love to all,
Ruth

July 30, 1967

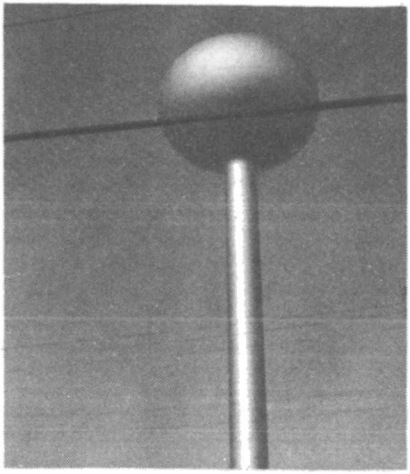
Dear Bea:

The answer to the letter I wrote to the Water District some time ago, the one you didn't know I wrote, just came in today's mail. As far as the district knows, Lookout Point is still getting its water from Sandy Beach's artesian wells. There is not now, nor has there ever been, nor will there be in the immediate future, a water tower on Beach Boulevard!

Bea, there's a path through the weeds near the—what do I call it, now that I know it's not a water tower? Tomorrow I'm going to go up that path and take a close-up look at it. I'll write again tomorrow and let you know what happens.

Glad to hear Don's getting a furlough soon. The kids must miss him. You too, of course. Have fun!

Love,
Ruth



July 31, 1967

Dear Bea:

I still can't believe it myself, so I won't be a bit hurt if you don't believe me. It's fantastic—but not impossible. It looks as though—I think the thing I've been hinting to you all along may be the truth. My observations, Al's sighting, the letter from the water district—it all adds up.

Forgive me, Bea. I know I'm not very coherent. I must calm down. Then I'll start again.

• • •

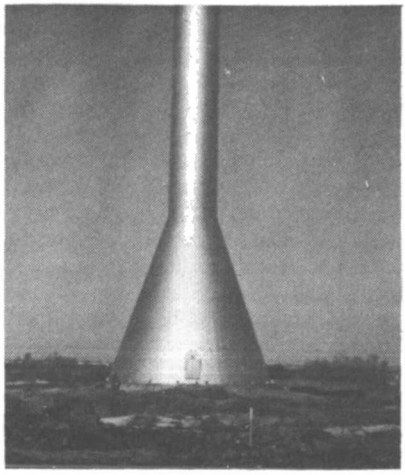
This morning when I reached

the tower, I walked a little way beyond to a path that leads in from the road. (There is no path leading directly from the road to the tower.) I walked up this path, wondering if, after all, my efforts to investigate this odd-looking structure might be doomed to failure for lack of a path through the weeds. However, I hoped for a way and wasn't disappointed. Opposite the tower and intercepting the main path is a trail through the overgrowth. Thus, the tower, though near the Boulevard, is cut off from it, its base shielded by reeds and cattails five feet high. It can be reached solely from a path some distance away that only the most determined sleuth would find.

The distance shot I sent you was taken from the main path, so you have some idea of the length of the trail. After walking down the trail I had to go around to the front of the tower because of the weed hedge which you see around the base. In front, facing the field that lines the boulevard, the weeds are cut away. A picture of the front is enclosed (isn't Polaroid wonderful!). As you can see in the photo, there's a door in the front of the tower base.

Now, Bea, I'll tell you what it was that scared me so badly that I couldn't begin a proper letter.

After taking the picture, which I left in the camera to develop, I went up close and tried the door. Finding it locked, I walked all round the tower, but no other door was visible. My researches had, I thought, reached a dead end. I turned to leave when, on a hunch, I hid myself in the hedge and trained on the base of the tower a pair of opera glasses, the purse-size ones Jerry gave me before he died. In a moment the door opened downward



to form a ramp. A man came out and began to beat the edge of the weed field, working his way toward the trail. I'll never forget what I saw when I focused the glasses on him.

He wore slacks, socks, shoes, and a light spring windbreaker, zipped halfway up. This on the last day of July and with the temperature already 80° in the shade! But his mode of dress, strange as it was, didn't shock me nearly as much as his hands and face.

He had six fingers on each hand, Bea, and his shoes were cut square in front, so there might have been six toes, too. This alone wouldn't have upset me. It has been known to happen, though rarely. But his face! He was absolutely bald. There weren't even eyebrows, or bony

ridges where eyebrows might once have been. His eyes were large, and round like his mouth, giving him a look of perpetual surprise. The lack of bony ridges and the relatively small, flat nose made him look almost as if his face had been painted on the bare brown oval of his skull. My first impression was of a startled decorated Easter egg.

He drew nearer and nearer the end of the clearing. My heart pounded so as he turned the considered the hedge, that I feared another attack. He seemed to be staring in surprise, staring right at me, as though the concealing bank of weeds had dissolved. But then I saw that this staring quality was due to the formation of the eyelids, just as the lids of Orientals make their eyes appear to be slanted.

It seemed an hour that we stood thus, me taking humanity's first close-up look at an alien intelligence, he wondering whether he should search the hedge or let it go and get back inside. At any rate, he must have decided that the hedge would make a poor hiding place since it was surrounded by open space and therefore offered no means of escape without crossing ground that could be seen from the ship. After this period of indecision, which was really only a moment or two, the alien turned back to the weeds, worked his way back to the opposite end of the clearing and, after looking carefully around, finally reentered the ship.

I waited only until the ramp went up behind him to cross the clearing and push my way through the cattails to the road. I rested a while then, not that I wanted to, but I did want to get home alive. Even so, I was still upset when I got home.

I take back what I said when I started this letter, Bea. You've *got* to believe this. It's so obvious. Al's sighting of a silvery-blue glowing thing descending over Lookout Point on the night of the twentieth, the tower I saw on the 21st that I didn't see on the 20th; the letter from the water district saying that there is no tower there; it all points to one conclusion.

I'm not scared anyone, at least not much. I'm going to explore that ship tomorrow, before Dr. Jackson can say I mustn't. Bea, that "man" is not of this earth! I've got to see the inside of his ship if it's the last thing I ever do. I'll write again tomorrow and tell you all about it. Wish me luck!

As always,
Ruth

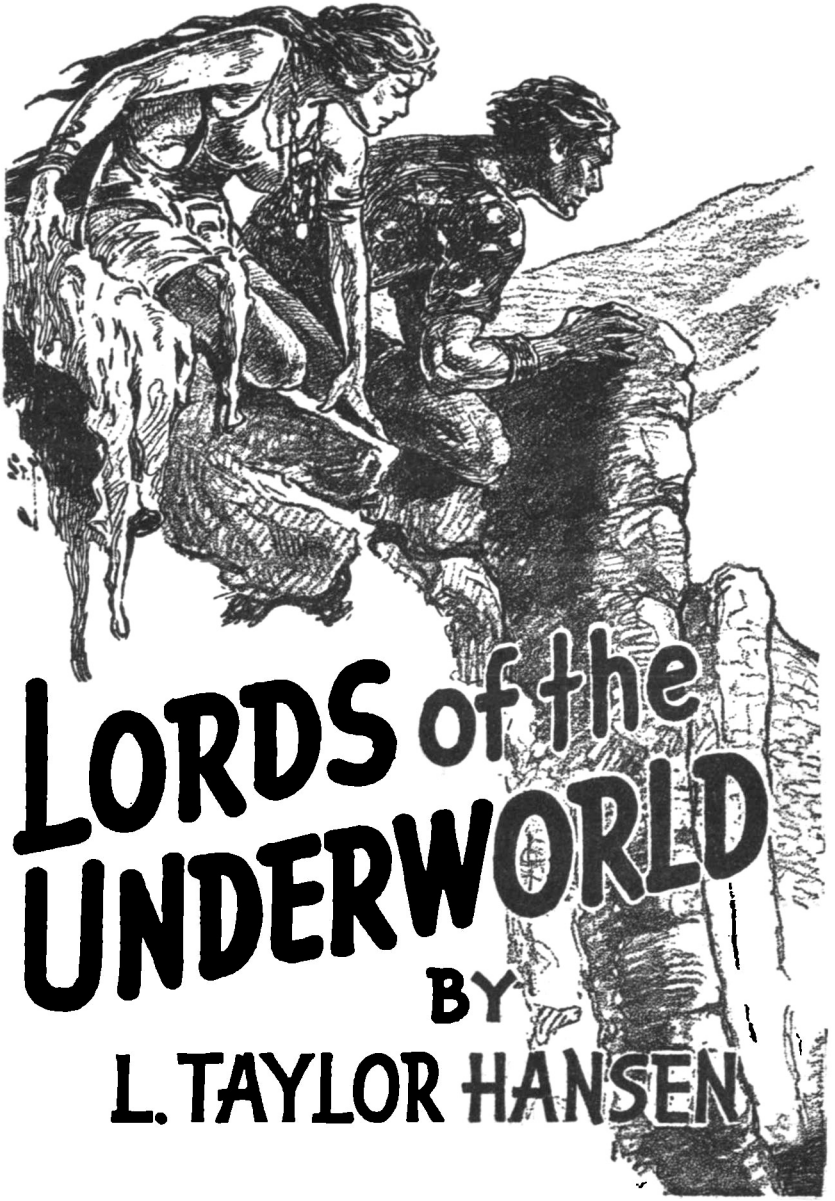
EPILOGUE

This last letter, dated July 31, 1967, was the last Mrs. Landers ever received from her sister.

I have visited Sandy Beach and Lookout Point, and I didn't fail to drive along Beach Boulevard which links them. There is no tower or ship of any kind, nor is there a path. I questioned the owner of the seaplane base, Jim Pritchard. His father Al was unavailable for questioning, having died during the first week of August 1967. The letter from the water district could not be found.

Did Al Pritchard and Ruth Mal-

(Continued on page 146)



LORDS of the UNDERWORLD

BY

L. TAYLOR HANSEN

The Chimu called it Xibalba—but to an archeologist it was the fabled city of Tiahuanaco—the center of a civilization whose culture was such a mixture of sophistication and barbarism that it consumed itself with evil!

DON snorted with exasperation as he turned to me.

"You're a fine pal! We bring you out here into the desert because you are a budding archaeologist. We even build up a climax. We climb these cliffs! We exclaim over the magnificent view of the desert! And we end by pointing to those enormous stone tablets, probably thousands and possibly tens of thousands of years old, carved with the symbols of some unknown script! And what do you do? You develop a toothache!"

"You're right fellows. Perhaps I am being a baby. I realize that I am spoiling your fun—and mine. Tonight in Indio, I intend to find a dentist and have this useless piece of my anatomy yanked out. In the mean time, I will talk archaeology."

I smiled wryly, wishing in vain for something to knock out the pounding

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ache in my jaw, but my eyes could not help but notice the beauty of the sunken valley below us. From the high vantage point to which we had climbed, the sunset view was magnificent. The ochre and mauve of the desert with shadows of purple-blue, blended to the golden mirror of the dead lake split by its lava islands.

"But it seems to me, that standing here as we are, upon an ancient sea-cliff, it is up to the geologist to give us the setting first," I added.

"And quite right." Chuck smiled. "To begin with, this is not a true desert. It is the arm of an ancient sea. At one time this was part of the Gulf of California—and not so many thousand years ago either! There is evidence here that during the time of man there has been considerable elevation of the terrain. For example, we are standing upon travertine-covered cliffs—the result of sea water drying under a hot sun, splashing and drying again, as innumerable waves dashed against the rocks. Yet, if you will notice, we came up here by way of huge fish traps—artificial pools . . ."

"Wait a moment there!" Don interrupted eagerly. "Don't forget that the Colorado overflowed very recently and greatly enlarged the old, dead lake left behind by the retreating Gulf."

"But the lake thus created would not have tides, and the fish traps mean incoming and outgoing tides!"

Don snapped his fingers and laughed.

"Then this land has been raised considerably. Just how much?" I asked.

"Twelve feet above the present sea level for the terrace we are standing upon."

"But these tablets are covered with travertine *over* the writing!"

"Which means?" Chuck asked.

"That they are probably older than the Sphinx of Gizeh. It also means that I am going to copy them if we stay here all night."

"Can you recognize any of the symbols?" Don asked.

"Yes and no. They belong to that unknown type of inscription found by various explorers throughout the Americas. Evidently all are of the same tongue and that is of great antiquity. It strongly resembles the so-called 'stick writing' of Ireland and other locales of the Megalithic builders."

"I may be a bit stupid," Don interrupted, "but if the script is ancient Irish, what were the Irish doing here in America?"

"That is what I came here to find out; that is why I must have a copy of this writing! I said. "Perhaps several copies would not be amiss. I can then compare them for accuracy, as so much of it is almost obliterated. Therefore, everyone get out a pencil, notebook, love-letter or whatever you have—and get busy."

"I know of a better way," Don smiled, "Just photograph the tablets."

"In this light?"

"Of course not. But in the morning, when the light has just the right slant, you will be amazed how the marks stand out. Therefore we go to Indio for the night and return in the morning."

Thus I was induced to leave, but

once in the car, I remembered my tooth. The conversation came to me in snatches through the red barrier of pain.

". . . and my grandfather used to tell of these old miners who reported seeing an ancient ship with totally rotten hull. It was half-buried in the sand dunes which the overflow of the Colorado covered when it refilled the shrunken Salton Sea."

Don snorted.

"That vision was probably the result of whiskey and the desert sun!"

"Wish I had some. I'd take a ride in the ship!" I snapped.

"We might be able to fulfill that wish," Chuck smiled, "for I understand our promising young physicist Don, has started drawing up plans for a time-machine. That should put you on the ship without the aid of the whiskey."

"Maybe it would," Don said, suddenly serious. "Then you could take a ride back to Erin and meet the ancient Irish . . ..but wait! Unless my philology has betrayed me, that sign across the street reads: 'DENTIST'."

Thus it happened that scarcely fifteen minutes later found me sitting in a dentist chair, while my two companions formed an interested audience.

"Now if you will just relax and breathe deeply of this . . ."

"No, not ether! It nauseates me, and I want to be in good condition for . . ."

"Sorry, but I have no local. I have been expecting a supply today, but something must have delayed shipment."

"That's all right Doc. Go right ahead. We'll hold him." Don volunteered, nodding to Chuck.

"No . . . I . . ."

But the gagging stuff was over my face and willing hands held me down. After a dizzy moment, I felt myself sinking into a gulf of darkness through which someone's snicker and the ticking of a clock became the only sounds. The snicker grew to a roar while the ticking lengthened to long gong-like strokes heard through an immeasurable void . . .

However, my worry was entirely useless. Almost immediately I opened my eyes upon my impatient audience, with one difference. The tooth was gone—and with it the ache. I scarcely allowed the dentist to properly doctor my jaw, so anxious was I to get away from the memory of the offending tooth.

When again in the car, Don surprised us by his proposal to spend the night at his own cottage.

"This is a mighty pleasant idea," Chuck commented, "and I was prepared for some kind of a surprise by Don—but not this."

"Remember the time he pulled an uncle out of his hat when we went fishing on Great Bear Lake?" I said laughing at the recollection. "And how surprised the uncle was when the four starving beggars piled into his little summer cabin?"

"This time, however, I have a bigger surprise. In this little shack, I have actually tried out my hand at a time-machine. Of course it won't work. Still, I have had the fun of making it."

"Want a willing subject?" Chuck volunteered.

"I tell you it won't work. Besides, atmospheric conditions are not favorable."

"We shall put our collective brains to work on the thing," I smiled with finality. "Then when it is ready, I shall go."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Chuck snapped back. "I spoke first."

"Until I can get a cat back, no one is going.

"You actually sent out a cat?" I asked, with increasing interest.

"Yes, but it died during the experiment."

"From old age, no doubt." Chuck nodded, as Don turned off the highway, and after following a sand road for some distance, drew up before a little desert bungalow. Above it, in the bright moonlight, stretched the line of travertine cliffs.

"Why didn't you tell us that you had a cute little place like this for us to stay, when you proposed that photography expedition in the morning?" I asked.

"It isn't so much. I built it for my mom when her health broke. After she died, I grew to hate it. That is why. It is all right to experiment with fool ideas, but not as a place to live."

"I wouldn't mind it at all." I commented getting out and breathing deeply of the cool night air. "The desert fascinates me. It is so immeasurable and so changeable."

"And lonesome." Don added as he led the way to the bungalow. "And late at night, like this, it's even worse."

After opening the door with some difficulty, Don held a match to show us what appeared to be a fireplace with wood piled to one side. We went to work building a fire while he hunted up an old and dusty kerosene lamp. After due time, we had the place very liveable. In our tour of inspection, aided by the lamp, Don pointed out a small but useful scientific library, and a makeshift laboratory. It was none of these things, however, that held my attention. It was the curious, throne-like chair in one corner. As if prodded by one impulse, the three of us walked toward it.

"Of course, I cannot offer nine lives . . ." Chuck began.

"Hold on there!" I interrupted. "It seems to me that I have prior claim."

"How's that?"

"I have a mission. Quite a definite mission. It has something to do with the Irish. If anyone rides that old ship . . ."

"Now listen, you two!" Don snorted. "I put the motion before the house that we throw our blankets on the floor and forget the time-machine until we have photographed the tablets."

The motion was carried, my vote being ruled out because of undue prejudice, and so we set about trying to make a suitable bed. Mine was the most impossible conglomeration of overcoat, hard floor and auto cushion I have ever tried to sleep upon. After about a half hour, conversation was ruled out, and my companions fell asleep. But sleep would not come to me. My jaw ached. And my mind still toyed with the idea of that time-machine.

Finally I sat up. My friends were asleep. I decided to have a close look at the thing. A mere examination

wouldn't hurt. Quietly as a thief, I crept past the sleeping forms outlined dimly by the dying firelight. Striking a match, I relit the lamp.

With the aid of the lamp I examined the wires leading to the contraption and the row of batteries to which they were attached. Suppose I did try it out. I couldn't sleep anyhow. Why not spend the night traveling through time? For a moment, I hesitated over the dials, and then the temptation became too strong. I determined to go.

I opened the drawer of Don's desk in search of a pencil to scribble him a note. Before me lay a small revolver. On the back of some physics notes, I wrote the following:

> "Sorry, but when I told the devil to get behind me—he pushed. In case I don't get back, this note should prove to the authorities that I committed suicide. (I borrowed your revolver, in case the Irish prove to be too unreasonable.) Henry."

I propped up the note where the boys would find it, and after making certain the revolver was loaded, I strapped it around my waist under my shirt, and climbed into the weird contraption. Then setting the dials for five thousand years into the past, I turned on the switch and closed my eyes.

I was jerked upward as the machine seemed to go into a tail-spin. Dizzy and somewhat sick, I heard the plunging roar of water in the distance. It was as if I was being borne down a river toward a thundering waterfall. The sound came toward me with unbelievable rapidity. Then suddenly I was in it . . . and it *was* water! Churning torrents fell over my head until I felt that unfathomable tons had covered me and cut off my breath, and with it, memory and finally life itself slipped away

Chapter II
Into the Past

Someone was shaking me. I opened my eyes. I was lying on the rocky shore of a large bay. Within a few feet, the waves were pounding. A foot pushed me. It was a sandaled foot—the high-backed sandal of the ancients. I followed the bare leg up to the short tunic over which was fitted a suit of bronze armor.

The face above the armor had no neck. It was set squarely upon the burly shoulders with a matted red beard hiding all features below the squinting blue eyes and the merry little button of a nose. On the loose red hair was a high bronze helmet crested with the symbol of the double axe. The stubby fingers gripped the handle of a knife whose leather holster was thrust through the belt. Yet the quizzical, almost merry twinkle of the eyes betrayed the fingers.

Slowly I sat up, rubbing my stiff arms and smiling my good intentions. Then it was that I noticed he was not alone. Eight other men were gathered around me, a pace or two back. Some were clad as the one who had prodded me. Others were dressed in a kilt-like tunic over which they wore a wide-sleeved coat. Most of them had dark hair and one

was dark-skinned. Two had a mass of deep auburn curls.

One of these chaps, a fellow of about my own age, held a dripping olla which he had evidently just emptied over my face. They were all watching me—some leaning on spears and others apparently unarmed.

I glanced toward the bay once more. Was this the desert of last night? Out where the roadway should have joined the paved boulevard, a ship was riding—an ancient vessel with curved prow—not over fifty feet in length. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. They were all still there—even to the ship.

I reached out to touch the sandaled foot. I felt I must test its reality. But my movement was misunderstood by a long-nosed man who immediately raised a bronze spear with the business end pointed at me.

Red-beard knocked it up. Then he laughed. I joined him and after a moment, the others joined in. The laugh broke the tension.

After he had sobered down, the rough old pirate with the red beard and merry blue eyes, who was evidently the leader, put some kind of question to me in an unknown tongue.

"I'm sorry Irishman, but I can't even speak modern Gaelic. I can foresee a difficult time, what with you talking a dead language and mine not as yet even dreamt of. On the whole, therefore, your band has the advantage in this impossible situation. You can converse together."

The effect of my words was as if I had tossed a bomb among them. Excitedly they conferred together. In amazement, they again looked at me and commented about my clothes. The fact that I had no beard was evidently a subject of debate. That point, at least, could be easily settled. I began to search my pockets for my safety razor. Then just as I was about to give up in despair, I found it in my vest.

Smiling blandly, I got up on my feet and held it out to Red-beard. Then in my best actor's manner, I proceeded to shave. Red-beard snatched the razor from my hand and drew it along his hairy arm. Cries of astonishment and admiration went up from his cut-throat crew as the red fuzz rolled up before the shining edge.

"After you use it once Red-beard, I'll start raising whiskers." I smiled, bowing gallantly and motioning it toward him.

He bowed deeply in acknowledgment of the complimentary tones, and the interesting present which they gave him.

"You know, Red-beard, I have been a very stupid fool," I continued in my most gracious manner, "for I started out for your century in a time-machine which a stupid friend built below the water of the lake upon whose *shore* I expected to land. Therefore admitting that I didn't discover his mistake in time, I made one on my own score. I should have brought along some silly little trinkets which an old pirate like you would value more than gold. For example, why didn't I bring along that lead pencil?"

Red-beard received this long speech in puzzled silence, while the rest of the men looked at each other, repeating this word or that. It was

obvious that they were trying to fit sounds into their knowledge of languages.

"It's no use." I advised them. "We have forgotten your language and you won't understand mine for some five thousand years."

But Red-beard was not pondering philology. I was afraid that by the way he was eyeing me, he was weighing in his mind the various advantages of turning me either into a deck-hand or a corpse. I decided to argue the point with him.

"Why not take me along?" pointing to the ship. "I am willing to work, flexing my arms, "and besides," pointing to the razor, and then to the point of his companion's spear, "my metal is better than yours."

This bit of advice he well understood for he smiled back at me shrewdly. Then making a circling movement with his hands, he pointed to me questioningly.

"So you want to know if I come from around here. Now that is a more complicated question than you imagine. If I should explain that I motored here yesterday in a shiny black metal monster which is fed with something taken out of the ground, you would, naturally, either run the spear through me, or keep me as Exhibit A for the Prehistoric Liars Club. If I say 'Yes' I must be a Paiute or from a related tribe. Therefore I must say 'No!' " with vigorous headwagging.

Apparently satisfied with this answer, Red-beard picked up a stick and pulled me over to some wet sand.

"So you want me to draw a picture of my country: That is also a complicated problem. Should I sketch Ireland for grandpa Dennis? Or Germany for that other grandma who had a Von in her maiden name before she traded it for the love of an English student?" Then accepting the stick, I drew a crude map of Europe and made a general sweep over the western part.

For a moment Red-beard eyed me skeptically, and then a sudden light dawned in his eyes. Taking the stick; he touched at several points in Europe and then looked at me inquiringly.

"Excellent! You have made me an extensive traveler. Perhaps you are right, but the dimension would amaze you. Yes! I am an extensive traveler! Now will you take me?"

He stood up and clapped both hands on my shoulders, skaking me like a big, friendly bear. Then he turned away but I caught his sleeve.

"Not so fast. I came here just to ask you some questions and I won't be cheated out of the opportunity." I thrust the stick into his hand and pointed to our map.

He erased out the map of Europe with his sandal and sketched the two Americas. Pointing to his ship, he touched the extended Gulf of California and looked at me. I nodded. Then realizing that I fully understood him, he trailed the stick out of the Gulf, down the coast, past the equator and came to rest upon the coast of South America.

"You are a Chimu!" I exclaimed in consternation. "You belong to that legendary people who sailed down the coast in seagoing ships, and disembarking from their fleet, built the city of Chan-Chan! In what century then did the waters pour over

my time-machine and cast me adrift—a wrecked mariner who can never return? Certainly more than five thousand years!"

I glanced down at the rocks upon which we were standing. They were covered with the same travertine which encased them yesterday at sunset when . . . Still the same cloak of rough travertine, only now the cloak was thinner—less impenetrable. How ancient then were the tablets we had discovered yesterday—or was it yesterday, or 20,000 years ago?

Red-beard broke my revery by motioning for me to follow him, and turned toward the ship. Without a word, the crew fell in behind us. Was I being accepted as a friend? Or was I a prisoner? Probably a little of both. They had failed to search me, probably due to the fact that weapons in their world were not easily concealed.

Two canoes which they had dragged upon the rocks took us out to the ship. I found her to be an eminently sea-worthy craft with rough hewn planks and tar-caulked seams. A small shelter at one end acted as a hold in which were stored dried fruits and water jars. A square sail and oars completed the equipment. Almost as soon as the canoes were pulled aboard, the sail was hoisted and we were on our way south.

In the weeks which followed, Red-beard must have often regretted his good natured decision to take me along. It took me some time to harden up to my oar, while I often misunderstood what was expected of me. Yet, in spite of his explosive temper, I was certain that the old pirate's tolerance had on several occasions, prevented the crew from conveniently disposing of me.

Be that as it may, the sun each day rose hotter and passed at noon more directly overhead, while the shores which drifted by became more and more tropical. Sometimes we ran into schools of fish, and on such occasions we would stop sailing and draw in our nets. At other times we would go into the jungles for spring water, and perhaps fresh meat. I was never given any opportunities to shoot, because, though I had been presented with a bow and arrow, as well as a spear, my attempts to manage these weapons had caused such roars of laughter that the game got away. After that, I was left to practice on the beach.

Once we ran into a storm. It was a wild day, yet at no time did the crew seem to be unduly excited. During that crisis, each and every man earned my profound respect for his skill as a unit of a perfect team in which each unit was a skilled navigator. We matched the mountainous seas with superb judgment, and though we were tossed about like a toy, yet we managed to right ourselves again and meet the next wall of thundering foam.

However, the crew which had seemed so calm and self-assured during those breathless moments when one mountain of emerald gray after another rushed upon us, became highly perturbed when once more we hugged the shore. From somewhere behind those obscuring rocks and trees, drums were throbbing. It was evident to me that those drums were carrying a message of

some kind—a message which caused the men to stare at each other in consternation and fear.

I had improved my time upon the long months of voyage, learning the Chimu tongue. It was not what they called themselves. The word Chimu seemed to mean "king" or carry connotations of grandeur. Their name for their city was pronounced Kahn-Kahn which was at once reminiscent of the monarchs of Cathay. And like them, these men revered the dragon or snake. They told me it stood for the sea. Was not the sea also a green and undulating creature of many moods?

As we sailed on, the drums became more insistent. But to my inquiries the same answer was always given: "Bad news. Very bad."

That this was true, was evident. Up to now, we had sailed freely and joyously. Now we began to hide. We sailed by night. We sought coves in the daytime and we whispered while near the shore. I could no longer doubt that these men who had befriended me were afraid—afraid of something abroad in that forest.

Finally I decided to have a showdown with Red-beard, but Curly I (my name for the auburn-haired brothers was Curly I and Curly II) shook his head in the negative. Curly I had become more and more friendly since I taught him some diving and swimming tricks and a few wrestling holds. (So far, my gymnasium work was the only college subject which had helped me.)

"Now listen, Curly I," I insisted in my halting Chimu, "I want to know why we are hiding. If I am to be one of the crew, why not make me one? If I am a prisoner—then treat me like a prisoner. But at least tell me what those drums are saying."

"They are telling bad news."

"So Red-beard himself informed me. But what news?"

He signaled me not to talk on the deck, but that day on the beach, as the ship was riding in a hidden cove, and we crept through the forest for water, he asked:

"You cannot understand those drums? making a significant circling movement with his hand. They were throbbing through the forest as usual.

"If I did, would I be asking for information?" I snapped.

He gave a thoughtful nod, and then asked shrewdly:

"Where is Xibalba?"

"Never heard of it."

He looked at me in amazement.

"You have never heard of Xibalba? You don't know THE LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD?"

"No."

"But the fame of the crown city has spread through the sunset and sunrise seas where it is known by many names, according to their language!"

I was speaking the truth. Though the name had a ring of familiarity, yet I could not place it in my mind, in spite of the fact that I was trying my best to recall the main points of archeological interest in both North and South America, as well as all of their local names.

"No. Perhaps it is the name. Here is a stick and there is some wet sand. Show me where it lies from Chan-Chan."

He took the stick and drew the

coast line of western South America. Then placing a circle at Chan-Chan, he looked at me inquiringly. I nodded. Then mentally counting distance, he drew a large lake which I immediately recognized as Lake Titicaca. As he saw me nod, he made a circling movement around the lake.

"There lies Xibalba."

"Tiahuanaco!" I exclaimed in enthusiasm, using English subconsciously. "The Pre-Incan city of Tiahuanaco whose uncovered mounds in 1940 capture the most stolid scientific imagination! So Tiahuanaco is Xibalba!"

And then as he stared at me suspiciously because of the undisguised enthusiasm in my voice, I asked in my halting Chimu:

"Why should Chan-Chan fear Xibalba?"

Again he looked at me in amazed surprise.

"Because they are our enemies." He answered simply.

"Yes, but why?" I persisted. "Do your nations covet the same land? Or are they fundamentally of a different race? And if so, which one of you came here first—and from where?"

"We are different. The Xibalbans are small and dark-complected. They have always lived here—from time immemorial. Many generations ago, because of tribal wars in our homeland, we set out in our fleet of ships and settled here. We conquered the Xibalbans and married the women."

"The old, old story." I murmured. "The Ionians, Dorians and Corinthians conquered the Megalithic Cretans or Pelasgians and formed the Greeks of the Golden Age."

"What do you mean by Megalithic?"

"It is a word we have made up of two Greek words—mega meaning huge, and lithos meaning stone. The Xibalbans build their walls with giant rocks, do they not?"

"Yes. Many are as large as houses."

And then in an attempt to forestall other questions concerning peoples I had inadvertently mentioned, I asked:

"Would it be possible for us to go to Xibalba?"

His eyes widened in horror.

"If you make such a proposal, Redbeard would have you killed!"

"Yes, I suppose so." I conceded with apparent resignation. But in the back of my mind, a determination was slowly taking shape.

Chapter III
Southward—to Adventure

As our ship proceeded on its way south, our movements became more and more wary. We sought better and better hiding places on the coast. Finally the night came, when rounding a promontory, we saw what seemed to be the entire heavens on fire. All night the destructive reflection had been growing in size and intensity as the men seized their oars and rowed vigorously to hasten the speed which our sail was carrying us. Then suddenly we rounded another point and came in view of a clearing of cultivated fields. From here, as the hellish glare lighted the country, I saw a vast and teeming city being sacked.

The men around me slumped at their oars and burst into low wails of anguish. So that was Chan-Chan! The city of the Chimus from the glorious palace of the sunken gardens, to the great quays, was being over-run and burned by a victorious army!

Thousands battled upon the wide, white walls freakishly lighted by the burning towers and flaming parks of the city, while many fell upon the hordes below. Hundreds struggled upon the wide quays with knives, spears and huge battle-axes—the crash of metal on metal intermingling with the cries of the vanquished. It was ghastly.

I looked around for Red-beard. He was standing on the prow, arms folded, a profound anguish in his eyes. I touched his arm. He glanced at me impatiently.

"Would you listen in this moment of trial to a stranger who wants to be a friend? I know how you feel about all this. If however, there is one man in Xibalba who is responsible, and you can get me into the city, I will kill that man and take my chances in getting out again."

He gave a short, contemptuous laugh and waved me away. But I persisted.

"If I look like a Xibalban, then you would no doubt be afraid to take chances." I argued. "But unless I am mistaken, the Xibalbans are small and dark with deep-sunken eyes and wavy brown hair, are they not?"

He nodded, but continued to stare at the burning city.

"Then I am not a Xibalban. Besides, I have this." I added tapping my gun. "I told you it was a charm, but I lied. It is a weapon. A powerful fighting weapon which throws lightning and kills at a great distance."

Amused unbelief played in a smile around the corners of his lips while he patted my arm as one might an excited but annoying child.

"If you want a demonstration, you shall have one. Pick out the man and I shall kill him before you can count ten. However, remember-this—that I have five shots. Only five. I want three for myself in order to fight my way out of Xibalba. I give you two. One for the man you wish to kill—and one for a demonstration . . . if you still insist upon such an expensive demonstration."

He looked at me in surprise. I had withdrawn the revolver and pulled back the safety catch. As I waited for him to speak, I stared at him, and he sensed for the first time the deadly earnestness of my words. A new respect half-composed of a strange, superstitious fear crept into his eyes as he lowered them from mine to my small weapon. For a few moments he hesitated, evidently debating with himself, and then suddenly he smiled at me warmly, and called the crew.

Briefly he motioned for me to tell them what I had told him. In repeating my story I was aware that they were regarding me with awe-struck eyes. I understood why, when one of the crew, whom I had nicknamed "Long-Nose" for an obvious reason, stood up and addressed the men.

"It is written that such a man—a stranger—would come to us in

our hour of need, and that this stranger with the help of the gods, would single-handed, vanquish the LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD. This man whom we found alone and friendless upon the beach of the inland sea, must be that stranger!"

"But no, you are mistaken!" Curly II protested. "This stranger who is to come will be twins, for it is written that he will be a double."

"And so he is!" my friend Curly I snapped back proudly. "The weapon which he holds in his hand is the mysterious double!"

During the debate, we were drifting nearer and nearer the carnage. Bodies and bits of wreckage floated around us. In the beleaguered city, the battle raged as fiercely as ever, though it seemed to me that the defenders were rallying somewhat and almost holding their own.

Red-beard tapped my arm and asked to examine the gun. I shook my head, warning him that as I had been clumsy in my efforts to manage his weapons, so would he be with mine. The only difference was that mine was dangerous. He understood readily, and therefore, did not press the point, but was content to touch the metal while it lay in my hand, as one might caress a rattler. Then satisfied, he motioned for me to return it to its holster.

Turning again toward the men, Red-beard took a few steps away from me, and I felt instinctively that he wanted to talk to them alone. Therefore I walked back to the prow.

After a moment Red-beard came to me and said:

"We have decided to allow you to undertake this dangerous mission of revenge. If you are able to kill the High-Priest of the Xibalbans, we shall rebuild our city and make you our leader in appreciation for your bravery. We can give you but little help.

"However, there is a woman, a Chimu princess, who is studying from certain famous tutors in the Xibalban capitol. We will contact her in some fashion, and see that she gives you all the help it is in her power to give. And now, we send out some of our men to obtain suitable clothes for our adventure."

"Thank you, my friends. I promise to kill this High-Priest or die in the attempt."

At the sound of my voice, they rose, eyes shining, and each man gripped my hands in warm gratitude, Then dropping beside their oars, they pulled into the comparativels quiet waters of the opposite shore. There, three of them, fastening ugly looking obsidian knives into their belts, lowered themselves into one of our canoes and paddled quickly away into the darkness.

For endless hours, it seemed, we waited for their return, while the horror of battle raged under the burning towers of the city. Now the wooden framework of an enormous pyramid behind the city had caught fire and was blazing like a huge torch, until, suddenly collapsing, it carried both besieger and defender alike into the inferno of its molochian jaws.

Then when we had almost forgotten to expect our men, we heard their low voices calling from under

our stern. Willing hands immediately pulled them up while their canoe came next. They had various types of clothes for us. Though no expert on the subject, these did not appear to me to be particularly Amerind. For example, there was not a single feather-work mantle, of which the western civilizations were so fond.

"Which particular city are they from—Knossos? Babylon? Hattusas?" I asked Red-beard.

"You should know better than I. It was a ship from a nation of the great inland sea."

I accepted the rebuke, but it did not help me in determining the century in which I had landed. Now if there had been some Egyptian clothes in the chests, I might not have been so completely at sea on the matter. But in this hodge-podge of clothes, there probably was not an entire outfit from any one country, but merely a mass of clothing curios, as it were.

I chose an Assyrian robe, but Red-Beard immediately shook his head and tossed me a Celtic-looking kilt-like tunic and a horned helmet.

Some of the men were busy dressing in the new clothes, having thrown their own into the sea. But that wasn't what surprised me. It was the sight of my friends, the "Curly" brothers, combing dye into their hair, while "Long Nose" was doing the same with the flaming beard and hair of the leader. If I had not watched the process of change, I would not have recognized these erstwhile wild-looking white men.

I laughed and pointed to the carroty shade in my now full-sized beard. Red-beard shook his head.

"No. You are our pisoner. We made you a prisoner in our journey through the northern part of the other side of the sun-rise sea. We are traders from the great inland sea. We have objects to trade to the Xibalbans. However, they will not care for our trinkets. They will be interested in you.

"The young monarch, no doubt, will try to obtain you for a favored slave from whom he may extract interesting information on a little-known and rapidly changing world. He is a well-read man. However, should the priesthood desire you for their own dark ends, he will have to give you up. Whatever happens, you must not speak our language. That is our plan."

I nodded thoughtfully.

"For the space of ten moons, we shall wait for you on one pretext or another, trading here and there throughout the city."

"Ten moons?" I gasped. How could they manage to remain ten months without arousing suspicion?

"It is the largest city in the entire world."

I smiled with a trace of irony. He caught the significance of the smile and nodded: "You will see."

I finished dressing and then regarded myself with amusement in red-Beard's mirror. If Don could see me now! Or for that matter, any one else! Surely if I should attempt the return trip in the time-machine (should I ever be able to locate it under the Salton), I would undoubtedly land in an insane asylum, in my efforts to explain such an outfit of clothes!

However, if anyone was able to

gather any amusement, I was that person, for the rest dressed quickly with grim faces and hate in their eyes as they glanced now and then toward their burning city. Then tossing their own clothes into the sea, each man took his place at the oars, pulling out of the harbor, and leaving Chan-Chan to its fate.

Chapter IV
Xibalba—City of the Gods

We pulled at our oars all night, and then toward dawn, we made our way up a river. I thought we were again merely hiding out for the daylight hours, but I was mistaken. After a short sleep, we continued. It soon became apparent, however, that we were continuing in what was not a river, but a canal. After one more night of travel, we began to row by daylight.

As we wound through the mountains, I was amazed at the engineering skill displayed in handling and fitting the enormous rocks with which the walls of this canal were fashioned. Apparently it was in need of continual repair from landslides and the cracking effect of large and active faults. Undoubtedly the canal was first put down when the mountains themselves were not as high, thus necessitating continual deepening, and also suggesting the extreme antiquity of the original structure.

As we passed through the highest points and into the rolling hinterland beyond, I was surprised to see how extensive was the terraced farming carried on by the inhabitants. For days and days we navigated our little craft through the hanging gardens. Some terraces were of various fruits, some of vegetables and some of corn. Here and there we would come upon a walled town, rising acropolis-fashion to its central temple, or again perched precariously on the top of some sheer cliff.

The country was becoming more and more thickly populated. Often the natives, working in their fields or driving their llama trains to market, would stop and stare at us with their lustrous dark eyes. Or leaning on their staffs, their brightly colored cotton garments blowing in the breeze, they would call loudly for their families to come and view our craft.

Finally the day came when we entered the great lake. To my amazement, I found that as far as the eye could see, a network of streets scattered a teeming population in every direction, while the mountains in the background were terraced to the edge of the normal timberline with the usual hanging gardens. For days we sailed through this enormous metropolis whose inhabitants must have numbered millions. New York, Manhattan and London could have been placed side by side with enough room left over for Berlin and Paris! I now realized that Ancient Babylon, entensive though it might have been, could not compare to Ancient Xibalba. Here indeed, was the earth's most powerful city-state.

Yet it was not the amazing size of the metropolis as much as the style of its architecture which fascinated me. Even though I was prepared for an extensive display of gold and silver as well as precious and semi-precious stones, still I could not help

marvelling at the ornate wealth of these buildings. Even the lesser shops seemed to be fretworked with what I still thought of as the *precious* metals.

As we progressed, we came to more enormous pyramids and temples, fashioned of giant blocks of basalt and limestone. We began to trace our path along a sea-wall which grew ever more powerful as the city sank behind it. Was this an older part of the city—extending back into days when the lake was more shallow? I hurried to the side of Red-beard.

"What is the reason for the wall?"

"Long ago when the city was first founded, it is written that they needed no wall. Then came those years when the lands of the earth were flooded and many cities were blotted from the living. When men returned to Xibalba after the waters had receded, they built these walls and gradually reclaimed the ancient part of the city."

This would suggest that the sea level had changed since, or rather during the time of man. I remembered the fish traps on Salton Sea. Was Xibalba more ancient than those traps?

"What other cities were blotted out, and where are they located?"

"Toward the sunrise-sea along the great river are the crumbling remains of many powerful cities whose inhabitants were overwhelmed."

"Have your people a memory of those days?"

"They were long, long ago when the northern lands were colder than they are now, and the sun was dim. So it is written."

Was he speaking of the end of the ice age when the glaciers poured their melting contents into the rising seas? But with a sweep of his arm, he recalled my attention to the gigantic wall.

"See. They are expecting us."

I glanced up and was surprised to see a huge draw-bridge with a landing quay attached, being lowered toward the water, some few hundred feet in front of us. I nodded to Red-beard in agreement, and he signaled with his eyes for me to note all the attention we were attracting. Boats and craft of all descriptions pressed around us and followed us curiously.

We dropped anchor, and leaving three men to guard the ship, we shinnied down the ropes to our waiting barks. The men looked innocent enough, but under their clothes I knew they had buckled wicked obsidian knives around their waists. Their faces, too, had a grim set not usually found upon traders.

As I watched the slowly descending bridge-monster with great log ribs and rivets of shining silver settle upon the water, the suspicion crossed my mind that this long tongue of the serpent would lick us into a trap from which we would never escape alive. Yet at that moment, none of us were as anxious to enter the kingdom of the "LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD" as I. Perhaps that is why I was the first to scramble up the draw-bridge and stand in speechless awe at the sight of the lake behind me.

From this high point of vantage, our ship was a mere toy lying on the green expanse of the water, while the magnificent metropolis stretched

to every side, the crowning jewels of which were the exquisitely templed islands.

Yet if I had thought this sight awe-inspiring, the vision which was spread below me as I crossed the esplanade checked my hasty steps with an abruptness which left me momentarily paralyzed. Here was the ancient capitol in all of its thundering glory.

Lifting its glittering temple upon our left, and in fact dominating the entire scene, was a sixteen-sided, seven-hundred-foot-square pyramid. Its golden sides were covered with hieroglyphic symbols, as it rose tier after tier, platform after platform in a graceful design of sunken panels, the meaning of which I knew to be the cycles of the past, four hundred years to the cycle—each carved with its own events, and each bearing its minute relation to the whole.

On the top of this tremendous structure, stood a temple whose black, polished pillars and gold-fretted, black roof crowned the golden base with exquisite though ornate beauty.

Huge stairs of carved monoliths, inlaid with sacred jade and malachite climbed the eastern face of the structure, pausing before the doorway of each platform in turn before they finally reached the temple.

Upon each side of this stairway undulated two dragons of emerald mosaic whose glittering open mouths guarded the first step, while the tails curved to brace the roof of the crowning temple.

I realized that another drawbridge had been lowered into the city.

We descended into the street with its colorful crowds, swaying palanquins, and burdened llamas. We were the object of all eyes. Women with children astride their hips, or others with one or two little ones peeking from their skirts, as well as barking dogs, shouting vendors (momentarily hushed), porters carrying great baskets of goods, or girls bearing graceful jars upon their heads, all made way for us, marveling at our strangeness.

The sun was sinking rapidly, for the last rays now only touched the gold-fretted roof of the temple on top of the great pyramid. The street already lay in that blue dusk which precedes twilight. Suddenly the flourish of trumpets cut through the tumult which the sight of us was causing, and the throng pressed back against the buildings as every eye was turned in anticipation toward the temple. We also stopped and waited.

Another flourish of trumpets and then the procession came into view. Moving to the oriental rhythm of drums, gourd rattles, pans, pipes and flutes, came a wave of bronze-clad lancers followed by a row of torch bearers and then more lancers bearing shields embossed with the golden insignia of the sun whose armor glinted with a million pin-pricks of fire in the reflected glow of the torches. Then borne upon the naked shoulders of four huge, white-skinned porters was the magnificent royal palanquin.

As if they had been a field of grain

blown upon by a strong wind, every head among the people bowed before their monarch. I forgot my Chimu friends standing behind me, as I folded my arms and awaited his Highness' nearer approach.

First I could make out his olive-tanned leg carelessly swinging its golden sandal over the edge of the embossed leather cushions upon which he rode, and then as his litter was brought to a halt before me and a rich carpet unrolled upon the stone-flagged street to receive his royal feet, I studied his clothes and finally his face.

His tunic was of the finest silk-like wool, embroidered with threads of gold and silver and studded with pearls, while a feather mantle of extreme delicacy flowed from his shoulders. He had removed his golden helnet with its gleaming emeralds and irridescent green quetzal plumes, and tossed it carelessly aside. His dark hair, bobbed at the chin line, gave his eager face the look of a little boy as he sprang lightly down upon the carpet.

Curiously we eyed each other. To me he was a rather likeable chap of about my own age. Yet somehow he seemed to me to be much younger. Perhaps it was because, standing as he did, among these powerfully muscled porters, he appeared to be slight and frail by comparison. To him I was, and would probably remain, a mystery. Yet if fate could only somehow have allowed us to share our two such different worlds, how much richer we might have both become for that experience! It was a hope that I had no right to form, harboring as I did, such treasonable intentions. Yet this was such an intriguing thought that the realization we were being silently surrounded by the lancers, came as almost a shock. We were indeed prisoners of this would-be Caesar who had undoubtedly conquered Chan-Chan in order to insure his fame to posterity, while here before him, posterity was wondering who he was.

Chapter V
The Man I Must Kill

Then suddenly the roar of a thousand cannon exploded upon the silence of that moment. The eyes of the populace which had been cast upon the ground in deference to the monarch, were suddenly raised in fear to the great pyramid. The lancers stopped. Even the young ruler looked up. Yet in his dark, deep-set eyes I saw, or imagined I saw, a fury of insolent defiance . . .

I turned to Red-beard questioningly, but his stony expression did not give me a clue as to what might have caused that growling clap of thunder. The boyish face of the king still stared grimly at the pyramid, and I turned back again to that tremendous structure with a feeling of expectancy.

The pyramid was in shadow except for a strange white glow from the inside of the crowning temple. Even as I wondered at this light, a figure in black silhouetted itself shadow-wise in the portal, and raised its arms aloft. Again the multitude bowed with the exception of the young monarch and Red-beard's crew.

Stepping slightly aside, I saw them standing behind me as I had been standing—legs slightly apart, arms folded across their breasts.

Now from the temple came the throb of a weird rhythm, as guided by a torch-bearer, a procession of black-robed priests began to wend their way down. For what seemed an endless time they came and the crowd waited—yet I was not aware of the flight of the minutes, so entranced was I with the exotic unreality of it all.

Finally the procession reached us and I saw what I shall always consider the most evil face I ever hope to look upon. I do not know why I should have suddenly taken such an instant loathing to this High-Priest with the beady eyes and eagle-beaked nose. Yet to me at that moment, he was the embodiment of evil cunning, and I felt a surge of relief at the realization that he was to be my adversary instead of the boyish ruler.

In the deep blue twilight, splashed through with the red fire of the torches, these evil eyes ran over our little group and came to rest upon my own. Slowly my hand slipped to my belt, but suddenly I felt the hazel-blue eyes of Red-beard upon me. I looked at him. He gave a tiny negative movement of the head, looking from me to the surrounding lancers. Yes, perhaps he was right. I should be able to find a less dangerous moment than this.

I glanced back at the High-Priest and caught the fleeting ghost of a smile. Had he seen me signal Red-beard? And above all, had he caught the significance of Red-beard's reply?

The hot words of the young monarch began to tumble over each other in a strange, musical tongue. Acidly and laconically the High-Priest replied. They were bidding for me!

Again the warm, impassioned voice of the youthful ruler. My eyes strayed from the torch-lit face of the head-priest to his train of satellites who trailed away into the blue dusk like a flock of black buzzards.

Then "Long Nose" stepped forward from our crew, apparently offering his services as interpreter. For some time the three harangued. Sometimes "Long Nose" appeared to consult with Red-beard but the language they spoke was apparently pure gibberish. Not one word of Chimu was spoken. The plot was working excellently well.

Suddenly the young monarch capitulated. The porters picked up his palanuuin and he seated himself a trifle petulantly upon the cushions.

At the same time the High-Priest brought forth a small pouch and opening the leather draw-strings, thrust his hand in to the contents, allowing emeralds, rubies, pearls, lapis and other jems to trickle through his long, slim brown fingers before he again pulled the strings and tossed the pouch to Red-beard. Thus, for what appeared to me to be a good price, I had been sold.

If I entertained a moment of regret for this adventure which I had embarked upon so blithely, it was during that long march through the deepening dusk up the face of the

pyramid. I had hoped that we might go all the way to the temple where I could catch a glimpse of the inner light, but in this I was to be disappointed.

Before we had climbed through four platforms, the torch-bearer turned inside, and we followed him down what then appeared to be a descending passageway, barely wide enough for two to walk abreast.

Once I thought of drawing my revolver, but as I turned around to "spot" the High-Priest, I realized that he was gone. Therefore I followed my captors meekly and allowed them to close huge bronze doors upon me, through the barred window of which I watched the torch retreat into the distance, leaving me alone in the dark.

As the shuffle of their sandaled steps came back ever more faintly, I sank down against the cold metal with a heavy heart. My head sagged down wearily, and in a few minutes I was asleep.

A horrible roar which caused the entire building to reverberate with its dying echoes, brought me to my feet. I must have slept for hours, for it was a moment before I could remember where I was. When I did review the events of the past day, I looked back with a refreshed spirit. After all, the High-Priest would not have paid such a large sum for me if he had intended to let me starve. I would let them know I was awake. And hungry. But how?

Suddenly I made up my mind, and simultaneously let out a war-whoop which would have done justice to a Comanche. Then I listened. Nothing happened. My shout echoed and reechoed down endless corridors until at last silence returned—silence broken by the dripping of water upon stone, I tried again. Still no answer.

I began to have my doubts about the High-Priest's intentions. Perhaps jewels were common as dirt and the price was niggardly. And perhaps the lancers had killed Red-beard and had brought back the jewels. Or possibly even Red-beard . . .

I gripped my head. This was getting me no place fast. After all, I had not explored the cell. Possibly there was some way out.

With a kind of wild hope, I began to trace ny way around the cell. Here was a wall—rough and a trifle damp. Then suddenly I stopped—every sense alert. Was this a door? With nervous excitement, my groping fingers assured me that it was a sort of passageway. It was damp, narrow and slanted rather steeply down. For a moment I listened with sinking heart. Was that water running— The sound came up with a kind of mockery. So this passage ended in running water! Before I took it, better be certain that there was no other choice.

Once again I groped my way forward and around to the bronze barred door. After another futile yell, I decided it was the passage into the water or starvation. Better drowning than that. Possibly there was a way around the water. Probably not. At any rate, I had to take the chance.

Slowly I began to grope my way along. In the complete blackness, I could feel that the tunnel seemed to

go down at a very steep angle. At this rate, I must be already under ground. However, it was not the sharp pitch, but the wet sliminess of the huge stones over which I crept that kept my hair on end. Twice I slipped, only managing to check myself in a mad, downward plunge by pressing upon the side walls. I felt my tunic ripping while I had already skinned both my knuckles and knees.

Cautiously, for one convinced that his moments were numbered, I felt my way forward. The floor of the passage way had now become a series of slimy stone steps over which I half slid along a level platform. Beyond was empty space. I leaned over the ledge and listened. Water was flowing below. I tried to feel it with my arm but I could not then as I brought my arm up, it touched a rope.

A rope! My end was fastened in the rock, the other end was evidently hanging free though a long way way down. Ropes did not place themselves in rock. This one was here for a purpose. Possibly this river was sometimes used . . . a boat perhaps—It was a wild, a most forlorn hope. Quickly I gripped the rope and shinnied down.

As I slid down, I bore more of the pressure than I had realized against my gunbelt, until suddenly I felt it loosening, Horror-stricken, I clutched at it, lost my grip and plunged headlong, I managed to grasp a breath of air before the water closed over my head, and now as I fought my way to the top, I only had one thought—that welcome weight around my waist was gone. I had lost my gun!

Chapter VI
I Find a Nymph Swimming

Sick with this misfortune, but grateful that I was still alive, I allowed myself to drift with the stream. After what must have been hours, it seemed to me that the inky blackness of the tunnel was lifting. At times I could almost make out the rocky roof above my head. I was certain that the speed of the river had diminished.

Raising my body upright for a moment and treading water, I tried tc look around. That was when I discovered the cause of this ghostly light. It was in the water itself. The river was becoming more and more phosphorescent.

I splashed my hand through it, and the splash became a spray of green fire, lighting up the wet rocks some four or five feet above my head. Farther than this I could not see. I tried making two large splashes, but the eerie greenish glow only revealed an expanse of black water beneath a low-hanging, uneven, rocky vault. Then as I was about to drop back again I heard, or thought I heard a long-drawn-out "Haloo-oo."

I immediately answered with a similar call and listened. Yes! There it was again!

"Haloo-oo."

This time I was able to tell the exact direction. I cupped my hands and called back. Then I began to swim, every few moments stopping to call and await the answer as a check upon my directions. The call came from what was evidently one of the banks.

I had decided the voice was that of a woman—perhaps a young woman.

Then as I neared it, it became softer, finally ceasing altogether. Once I reared upright to look around me when my eye was attracted by the occasional splash of green fire as something swam toward me through the black water. Was this the owner of the voice, or was it some kind of animal?

After a moment of hesitancy I decided to meet it. Streaking through the water, and leaving a trail of glowing green flame behind me, I quickly shortened the distance between us. Then before I came upon it, I stopped for one last look, so that if it should prove to be an alligator, I would be better prepared to ward off the attack. Not that an alligator can imitate a woman's voice, but I wasn't taking any chances.

As I reared up and splashed the glowing water, however, I found myself looking down upon the glowing white, breath-takingly beautiful body of a young woman, around which her floating tunic resembled a veil of living green flame. She raised her lovely face and looked at me, the spray around her slim throat lighting the smooth wetness of her curving breasts. We allowed ourselves to drift close, only our heads out of the water, facing each other as if we were two lost souls meeting in some nether world.

"At last you have come. I was beginning to worry."

The Chimu tongue never sounded so musical.

"Have I kept you waiting long?" I asked foolishly, while I noted, with the help of a few splashes, that her tilted eyes were long and as green as the flame from the water.

"For half the span of a sun! But you must listen closely if you wish to retain life. Even if you have been sent by the gods, there are many dangers."

"Why should I brave any dangers when I can stay here and talk to you?"

"Because it is written that you are to overcome the LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD!"

"Is it?"

"And besides you have promised."

"Oh but that was before . . ." I gasped. How could she know of my bargain with Red-beard?

"Before what?"

"Nothing."

"Then we must not waste time. I fear that I may have been followed. If I am suspected, it will mean the death of us both. Therefore listen carefully. Drift with the river until you come to the HOUSE OF COLD. There you must leave the water, for it plunges into a new canyon. Join the river after you have passed The Falls and remain with it until you have passed the HOUSE OF FIRE. But don't forget to take fire with you! It will see you through the two caves which lead to the GREAT COURT of THE LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD. There, you must bow only to the living. Accept no food nor drink. Decline the seat of honor. That is all I know. Yet I am certain that there we shall meet again."

"I hope so."

"Have you understood all that I told you?"

"Not exactly." I confessed, "but perhaps it will become more sensible as I go on. However, there is something you forgot to tell me."

"What is that?"

"Who may you be—rising like a lovely water-nymph out of this underground river."

"I am the princess of Chan-Chan. I am betrothed to the monarch of Xibalba."

"I saw your city on fire. That was quite an engagement present he gave you."

"Yes. He has broken his promised word. Yet my people tell me that it was the fault of the High-Priest."

"What do you think?"

"I care not for either of them."

"What is your name?"

Her eyes smiled a little as she answered: "My name is Tah-ee. It means the deep, green sea."

"I said that you were a water-nymph. Your eyes told me so. They remind me of the sea."

"What is your name—stranger from whose mouth flows perfumed flowers?"

"My name? Oh, it's Henry."

"Ahnree. That is a pretty name. What does it mean?"

"Names don't have meanings in my world."

"Where is this world of yours?"

"If I told you the truth, you wouldn't believe me."

"Yes I would—if you told me the truth."

"Then I have come to your world through milleniums of time from a world in which Xibalba and Chan-Chan are only legends and their sites are crumbling mounds. Now, do you believe me?"

"I do not understand how such things can be, but" gazing through my eyes into my very soul, "I believe that you are telling the truth."

"It is the truth. I do not quite understand it myself. But oh, I am so anxious to learn of this world of yours . . ."

"But our libraries? We are giving them to the future. They contain our literature, philosophy, mathematics, mythology, astronomy, history . . ."

"Between my world and yours there are many wars and conquests. Other nations have risen: the Incas; the Aztecs; names which you never heard of."

"It matters not. Libraries and pyramids are respected. They may be carried off as treasures. But they are not destroyed."

"Yet the libraries of the last nations were destroyed. They were purposely burned . . . without being read."

"Who would do this barbarous act?"

"One of the men of my race. I mean he was akin to my people . . . he came from over the sun-rise sea," I ended miserably.

"By what right did he do this thing?" The question, etched in acid, hung between us.

"Because he thought they were heathenish . . . I mean he thought they disagreed with his religion. And because he was stupid. It has proved to be an irrepairable tragedy . . . impossible for his posterity to forgive . . ."

The lines of her face softened.

"After all, it was not your fault Ahnree. Tell me of this world of yours."

"We have learned to travel under the water and through the air, but we are no happier, and we still have war . . . Yet we know now that we are not the last generation. We know that the world will last milleniums

after we are gone, even as Xibalba has gone, and we hope to someday reach a stage when there will be more chance for happiness. And we hope to someday outlaw war. Perhaps that is the first sign that humanity is at last becoming of age."

For a few moments we were silent. Then she said softly:

"Ahnree, I hate to remind you, but if you are late to THE GREAT COURT they will know that you have dallied. Yet," smiling roguishly, "I would keep you here against my better judgment. Come, I have food for you."

"Food? You think of everything!"

Through the dark water, I followed the green fire of her trail until she pulled her white body up against a dark bulk which proved to be a canoe. Bracing myself upon the other side, in order to balance our weights, I laughed as she handed me some slices of a light-colored substance.

"This is Turku, a large bird which we have domesticated for many centuries. We use its meat for food and its feathers for decoration."

"Turkey!" I smiled as my teeth closed down upon its tasty slices. She indicated other food, which I later found to be corn-bread, cheese and a baked potato.

For conversation as I munched the food she told me the story of a man she called Viracocha.

"He led the many Tribes of the Tiger away from their homeland when the great flood engulfed it."

"What was the name of this land?"

"We called it Antis. The northern tribes call it Aztlan.* He brought us here in ships. He brought plants. That is why he is sometimes portrayed in a ship with the rising sun behind him, and sometimes holding plants in his hands. That is why the serpent is his slave, and the tiger heads adorn his tunic."

"But why the tiger heads? Did they keep tigers?"

"They were called the Tiger Tribes because that was their totem. He was the leader of them all. That is why we place the tiger upon the gates of our cities. And why we sometimes picture our kings as standing upon a tiger, or with a man's head upon a tiger's body. It is an acknowledgment of our origin in those ancient times when we spoke in the same language."

"And why was the serpent his slave?"

"Because that is the totem of the sea, and the Tiger Tribes ruled the sea."

There were a thousand other questions I wanted to ask. Yet I kept thinking that she resembled a sphinx herself—a very attractive one, with the water beading her lashes and dripping from her little chin. Instead I made some remark about wishing that I could have seen the sunken gardens of Chan-Chan or have wandered through her Romanesque public baths.

"Ahnree, you must go . . ."

"Very well. Until we meet in this . . . this . . ."

"No! Wait! This world of yours . . . when are you going back?"

"I am afraid I shall never be able to go back."

"Is it wrong for me to say that I am pleased with what must be for you a very discouraging answer?"

I liked the little trick that she had of smiling with her long, slightly tilted, green eyes.

"As wrong as it would be for me to say that I am beginning to care less and less about returning!"

And then as she laughed, I dove in and swam down stream.

Chapter VII
Journey of the Ordeals

Alternating swimming with floating, I hoped to rest part time and also make up for some of the time I had lost. Soon however, I began to realize that the river was gaining speed, and that I might need my strength for a trial ahead. Therefore I again floated. Yet I could not completely relax. The speed of the flow was steadily increasing, and now, still some distance ahead, I could hear an ominous roar. The Falls!

If this place where I was supposed to leave the river was only one turn from that din, I would never make it unless I was close enough to the edge to take advantage of the eddies in the current, such as Tah-ee had done when she had left her canoe. But on which side of the river was this HOUSE OF COLD?

I lifted my head from the water and looked around. The tunnel was growing perceptibly lighter. I could make out the fact that I was coming to a large bend from beyond which a pale, greenish glow seemed to be shining. The current, which was momentarily gaining momentum, swept me sharply around a great elbow of rock, and into one of the weirdest chambers one could imagine. With a gasp of amazement I stared at the fantastic beauty unrolled before me.

From the vast vault of the roof, poured a waterfall that struck the center of a dark lake like a huge fountain of luminescent emeralds. On the sides of this lake towered enormous ice cliffs reflecting the green light from their thousands of faceted sides. Undoubtedly this was the HOUSE OF COLD, but which side of the lake should I choose? I stared from one to the other, wondering idly which was the most exotically spectacular, as I swam away from the clutching currents of the waterfall. Yet once past this fountain of green flame, I realized that the forward sweep of the river as it gathered momentum for the deafening falls ahead, gave me but numbered moments to make up my mind.

Determined to find out which way the river was swirling me, I reared up. The chimerical land of emerald ice towered all around me and through it the dark river hurried for its great plunge. I could now see quite plainly the direction of The Falls. I knew they must lay in the sudden turn to the right, because the ice-cliffs upon the opposite shore were hazed with a green illumination which must have been caused by the reflection of the phosphorescent falls upon the rising spray. At almost the same moment I remembered what Tah-ee had said about later rejoining the river. This meant that I must ascend the right bank.

The decision had almost come too late. As hard as I fought against the current, it seemed that I must in-

exorably be swept past the icy bank I was struggling to gain. Finally with that super-human strength which is born of despair, I made a last lashing try, using my best stroke and keeping my face in the water for more power.

I had the feeling that I was losing . . . that the clutching fingers of the current were dragging me into the maelstrom of fury, but knowing that the sight of that receding bank would be too heart-breaking, I determined to die fighting. Suddenly I felt my body caught in a cross-current and swirled to the bank. At the same moment my knees came into contact with some rounded boulders and bits of flotsam that felt like water-logged sticks.

I sank down upon them in exhaustion. I would have liked to have rested there indefinitely, but the freezing breath which the icy bank exhaled into the river forbade it.

Struggling into a kneeling posture preparatory to climbing out of the water, I was surprised to feel one of my knees break through what I had accepted as rounded rocks. I reached into the water and lifted one out. By the eerie light, I was shocked to see that I held a skull. With a shudder which was not entirely caused by the cold, I clambered upon the icy platform and looked around.

At no place could I find the slightest depression which might serve as an excuse for a trail, so I merely followed the ice at a safe distance from the edge, lest the platform, being undermined by the warmer water of the river, might collapse with my weight.

Just opposite the great ice-cliff, around which the river swirled with ever-increasing fury, a cleft ran through the ice—a sort of bottomless crevass. Yet through it seemed to come a greenish glow. This would mean that it ended upon The Falls, or near that thundering torrent. There was no way by which I could skirt the outer edge of the ice-cliff above the turbulent water. If there was a way through, this must be the trail.

Groping along the crevass with my hands, I felt a narrow ledge upon which I might creep. Moving with extreme caution, lest I slide those few fatal inches, I hitched myself along. I was bitterly cold. My fingers were numb. My sandals, which during all my experiences in the water, had never left my feet, now seemed to have become clods of ice.

Then when I had almost forgotten to expect it, I came out upon the other side of the canyon. Below me plunged the torrent of green flame as the river poured over its first drop and cascaded into a steaming bowl of refulgent vapor. Tiny particles of ice filled the air, gathering upon my eyelashes and freezing on my wet hair. I was altogether too miserable to appreciate the wild beauty of the scene.

Clinging precariously to the face of the icy cliff, and making my way down from jutting ledge to jutting ledge, I was within some one hundred and fifty feet of the cauldron when my numb fingers slipped, and I fell headlong.

Striking my shoulder and the side of my head upon an icy pinnacle, and breaking it off with me in the crash, I was hurtled through the icy

air toward the river. Undoubtedly I owed my life to my ability as a diver, for as I saw the dark river rushing up to meet me, I made a desperate effort to get my body under control for the contact. Then drawing in a long breath of air, I met the water.

After what seemed hours, I managed to fight my way to the top through strangling waves of warm liquid until at last I was able to breathe. For a few dizzy moments I was more dead than alive.

My jaw and shoulder ached from the crash against the ice-cliff, while to my cold-numbed body, the water seemed to be extremely hot. However in some inexplicable fashion, I managed to stay afloat until my mind had cleared and life surged back into my half-frozen limbs.

By that time, the HOUSE OF COLD with its incandescent mist and gleaming ice-cliffs was far behind, for the river had again carried my drifting body into another tunnel of darkness.

For hours I floated lazily while my ears, feet, and hands burned to the flow of returning blood. It was indeed a much needed rest, and I allowed myself to take advantage of it while my mind kept one eye open, as it were.

After a time I became aware that I was once more beginning to be able to see the rocky projections upon the uneven roof. It also seemed to me that in spite of my condition, in which any heat would naturally tend to be exaggerated, the water was becoming warmer. This conviction was intensified when I began to perceive a red glow through the twisting tunnel. At each turn of the river, this crimson light was increased, until at last I was swept around the last bend and into the magnificent ampitheatre of the HOUSE OF FIRE.

Upon one bank boiled a gigantic cauldron of bubling lava, while the river swirled me around the edge of the furnace. For a few moments I was able to look down into the blinding white heart of it while the deadly fumes streaked upward through a sort of giant blow-hole. In the next minute I had been swept past.

Yet the main core of the volcano was only the beginning of the HOUSE OF FIRE. I now found myself in a cavern of grotesque but breath-taking beauty. Numerous fumeroles flashed their scarlet light upon the monstrous crusted stalactites which supported the dim-vaulted roof, thus turning the two sides of the cavern into a giant edifice whose floor was made of mosaiced fire while the strange pillars were formed of a billion living rubies.

I had again almost drifted past when I remembered Tah-ee's admonition to take fire with me. Accordingly, I turned back and swam toward the bank. How I was to carry out this advice, I had no idea. Which bank to choose was an equally puzzling question. However, for one thing I was grateful—the river had slowed down as it spread out into this cavern, and I had no current to battle.

The warm water of the river had done much to help my injured jaw and shoulder, for now I was able to move my head without too much pain, while the fact that I could still

swim, proved to me that I had sustained no broken bones. For this, I was also grateful, though the fact occupied no more than a momentary flash of my attention which was in reality riveted upon gaining the shiny, black obsidian bank, and finding something which would burn slowly enough to be carried.

Climbing up carefully, in order not to cut myself upon the glass-like projections, I picked my way over the cracked and sometimes hot surface. The bottom of my sandals were steaming with the contact, and I blessed their thick leather soles. Hurriedly I went from kettle-hole to kettle-hole, trying to breathe as little of the poisonous air as possible—holding the tattered remnants of the tunic which still clung wetly to me, against my nostrils. I could find nothing acceptable. After all, what had I expected to find? Trees and bushes do not grow around an underground volcano.

I was just about to give up and return to the river, to rest my scorching sandals, when my eye caught sight of what seemed to be some twisted stalks behind a fallen stalactite. Picking my way over the glassy black floor, and one large stalagmite, I discovered to my unutterable delight, that I had come across a cache of torches. It was like having received a reprieve after having been condemned to death. Choosing the longest, I dipped it into the nearest kettle-hole, and like one of the ancient Greek runners in the torch race, hurried back to the river.

Now the water seemed actually cool, and the relief to my smoking sandals was like a blessing. After resting a moment, I again set off down stream, swimming with one arm and holding my precious burden aloft with the other.

Through three more turns in the tunnel the river wound, and then once more the walls widened. I was in another lake. I must explore to see if this had a shore. I could not take a chance of missing the trail. So far, I had not gotten off my course. Was this one of those caves which Tah-ee had said led to THE GREAT COURT?

Holding my torch high above my head, I tried to make out the extent of this lake of blackness. With no light to guide me save the one I myself carried, it seemed that I could see nothing but a black expanse of water. But no. To one side, there were twin points of light—two glorious golden-green jewels. Then suddenly they vanished. Puzzled, I started swimming toward them.

With the aid of my torch, I could now make out the river bank. There seemed to be a grass or straw of some kind along the edge of the water. That was strange. What was straw doing down here? Yes, it was straw. Feeling the fine black sand of the edge against my knees, I stood up and stared at the straw. Then I began to look up and down the bank, when my eyes encountered a sight which raised the hair of my head right up by the roots.

Not five feet from me stood the most enormous specimen of sabertooth tiger I had ever laid eyes upon. Only this one was alive!

I stood looking at the tiger and he looked at me. A thousand thoughts were racing through my mind. Para-

mount was the thought that Tah-ee had evidently expected to see me again. Had she even suspected the dangers of this trip so far? She had not even mentioned a tiger except as a totem. Should I go back into the river? A step back would probably be as dangerous as one ahead.

He had not sprung so far, and he had had a good chance when I was looking at the straw. Straw! There was my answer. Someone put that here! Therefore the trail must be here. I took a step toward him and he still stood his ground staring at me curiously.

He was very beautiful in his way. His rippling coat had a silky sheen in the flickering light. Instinctively, I lowered the torch so that it was between us. He watched the movement and the gold-green jewels of his eyes followed the flame. I then took another step forward. This time he backed up one step. I smiled. Perhaps Tah-ee was right about the fact that the torch would help me through the last two caves. She had not been wrong so far. And I must be certain of this ledge.

I began to take quick glances from the tiger to the ledge and back again to the animal. Why was this creature—which needed sunshine in order to live—here in the first place? Perhaps there was a way out of this lair of his. It was a sort of wild hope. I noticed with gratitude that he seemed to be well-nourished. Was it possible that he was a captive of the priests who pretended to have some religious interest in tigers? Yes. That was it! The tiger was the totem of the Xibalbans. This must be the trail!

I took another step forward and he took another step back. I was standing on the bank now, where he could easily have sprung at me. Yet, he showed no disposition to do so. This heartened me enough for me to glance at the ground for a trail before I glanced back at him. Yes, here was a path. It seemed to run into this dark cave with the low roof from which much straw protruded. However, might not this, on the other hand, be the animal's den, the intrusion upon which would arouse him to instant ferocity?

There was only one way to find out. I took a step forward. This time he did not retreat. Instead his tail switched and his lip curled back. No, this was not the trail. Definitely not. Very slowly and deliberately, I stood my ground and looked around. Of course, I was mistaken. Over there in the shadows was a small boat which had been dragged up on the rocks.

Slowly, very slowly, I retreated toward it. I saw instantly that it was not Tah-ee's skiff. The tiger stood his ground. Only his glowing eyes followed the light of my torch. Then taking my eyes from his, I glanced into the boat. In surprise I exclaimed: "Hello! What's this?"

Startled at the sound of my own voice, I glanced quickly back at the cave's other occupant, but he did not seem to mind at all that I had spoken aloud. Perhaps it would not be such a bad idea to talk to him. Accordingly, I began to frame my thoughts aloud.

"You see," I said softly, as if explaining to a human being, "I had not expected to find more torches in

this boat. Nor even more surprising, a footprint." Then becoming bold enough to lean over and examine it, I continued: "Rather fresh, I should say. Someone pulled in not too far ahead of me. He was decidedly in a hurry. Well the torches will come in handy. Mine is quite low."

I murmured this aloud while changing torches and sizzling my old one out in the river, but my thoughts were not with the new torch I chose, nor the smaller spare I decided to take for that margin of safety. Nor for the moment, were they concerned with the tiger. I was thinking of this man who had pulled his boat up on the rocks in such a hurry. Of course, he had not been eaten on the spot. That was important. But more important was the thought that he might have noted my arrival.

The tiger had taken a step toward me, sniffing slightly, and therefore I said soothingly:

"I shall be bidding you farewell kitty. This man has done me one favor. He has played Theseus, and left me a trail throught the labyrinth!"

I started out briskly to follow, but I had reckoned without the tiger. He made a short spring toward me. Instantly I stopped and waved the torch between us.

"So I was moving too fast, was I? Then I shall be more circumspect. But if you choose to eat me, you are going to have one badly burned nose first!"

As the tiger stopped, I again moved along the trail—slowly—one step at a time. The footsteps entered a large cave. I followed the footprints, and the tiger followed me. With one glance for the trail ahead, and one for the huge animal slinking through the shadows after me, I made my way forward.

I was almost glad that the cave had narrowed down to the point where only one could walk, for I knew that if once he passed me, I would indeed be lost. I could not go back now. That I was on the right trail, I was certain.

Sometimes the roof came down so low that I had to crawl. At such times, I could hear the tiger wriggling his belly over the wet rocks. Once I came to what seemed to be the edge. A pebble becoming dislodged under my sandal, dropped with a "plunk" into a pool of water. My heart sank. I had followed the trail every step of the way, but now I could not turn back because of the tiger behind me, nor could I go ahead, for if I jumped into that river, my torch must surely be extinguished!

For a moment I thought it over while the gold-green eyes watched me. The other man came this way. He also had a torch. How did he make it? Then I thought of the rope on the other ledge which ended in water. Perhaps this ledge had a rope too. I groped along the smooth rock. Yes, there it was. But how could I hold a torch and climb down a rope? Yet there must be some way. The other man had done it.

I decided to do a bold thing. I removed the torch from between my crouching body and that of the animal, and rapidly searched the outer face of the rock. I was well rewarded. There were holes in the

rock which would serve to brace the torch, while the climb down was a very short one. And most important of all, the tiger had not moved.

I placed my torch in the first brace and shinnied down. Then reaching up and placing the torch in the lowest brace, I slipped into the water. Thus I saved my light. As I swam away, I saw the tiger sitting on the edge, watching the red pool of my torch as it bobbed over the water. After about forty feet, I could make out the black hulk of a small boat pulled up on the shore. I headed toward it.

Walking out of the water, upon a sort of fine black sand, I studied the footprints around the bark. Yes, the occupant had certainly been in a hurry. Well, at least I now had one advantage. I could hurry too. I had left the tiger behind!

At that moment, a great splash disillusioned me. And in another moment, my torch picked up the glow of his great jewel-eyes. In the few moments before he would arrive and take up all of my attention again, I determined to orient myself and find my trail of tell-tale prints. The glance about the cave was a hunch which probably saved my life. A huge, vampire-bat swooped against me!

In another second he would have succeeded in knocking me down and hurling my torch away from me or putting it out with his great black wings! I forgot the tiger completely. I had to make a fire and make it quickly!

Chapter VIII
Tah-ee Again

Shielding my precious light with my body, I looked around desperately for some means of starting a flame. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the tiger wading toward me. As he came out of the water, he stopped to sniff at something on the sand. His unexpected movement drew my glance. The object was a skull. In fact, there were several. However, I wasn't interested, because skulls won't readily burn.

Dodging the long swoops of the monster bats, which were quite agile in spite of their bulk, I began hunting in concentric circles for something which would burn. If the priests of the pyramid, ever used this route, and I had evidence that they had, then there must be a cache somewhere. However, it was with a sinking heart that I now realized that the man before me must have known that this was a bat cave. He must have known that the animals sleep during the day, suspended from the roof by their tails. And when he came through he must have also known that the external day was almost over and the bats would soon by flying! That was how he got through. And that was also the reason that I was going to be trapped! Unless I could get a fire crackling . . . unless . . .

And then I saw it! A huge cache of pine cones and cedar boughs piled up behind a large stalagmite. I had hardly a moment to spare, for the air was already black with the squeaking creatures!

Leaping over the fallen stalactites in between, I plunged my torch into the smaller cache of pine cones. For an agonizing second I thought the light had been extinguished by a pair of great black wings which swooped upon me, knocking the

torch from my hands. But in another second the cones were blazing furiously, and the smoking torch, no longer necessary, was lying beside the smaller spare while I was preparing to feed these split logs to my fire.

At last, as the shower of sparks ascended into the vast vault of the cave, I crouched down and looked around me at the grotesque beauty of the cavern. Stalactites, marching away into the dim recesses, rose file on file like the mighty pipes of some giant organ, or the pillars of some madman's temple, whose diamond-encrusted sides scintillated in the flickering light of my fire. The musty smell of bats, however, amounted to almost an overwhelming stench.

A quick, sudden movement on the edge of the pool drew my attention from the soaring arches of the roof and their whirling black legions. I had completely forgotten the tiger. And now I saw him standing on his hind paws like a great cat engaged in clawing a bird out of the air.

"Well I'll be . . ." I exclaimed aloud as he pulled down an enormous bat. "So that is why you are so well fed? I thought you had designs on me, and here you only intended to use the fire I would have had to build, for your own hunting purposes! Kitty, I have certainly been doing you an injustice!"

The night dragged wearily on. I fed the fire with logs and the tiger caught bats. He continued to kill long after he had been surfeited with food. I wondered idly what he would do with the pile of dead bats around him. Probably he would carry them to his lair. I could not remember seeing any dead bats when I waded out of the water. Of course, there were those skulls. But they were probably poor devils who had been killed by the bats, after they had wandered into, or had been condemned to The Bat Cave . . .

I must have dozed for a few moments, for I awoke with a start and noted first of all that my roaring fire had died out to a few embers. The bats had vanished. The tiger was lying upon a couch of black wings—apparently asleep.

Nursing the fire back, enough for it to catch my torch (I was using the spare now), I walked quietly over to the trail and started away. I had hoped to be able to move on without arousing the tiger. Again I was mistaken. He yawned and looked at me like a sleepy cat. Then stretching indolently, he rose to his feet and after hesitating a moment between me and the dead bats, he strolled after me.

"I appreciate the compliment, Kitty," I said in my softest tones, "but you make me nervous. Perhaps that is because of my suspicion that in spite of your huge dinner of dark fowl, you still prefer white meat."

Yet I laughed to myself at the thought of what an odd pair we made, as we tramped through that vast cavern, the crystal incrustations of the stalactites flashing my torchlight back with all the prismatic hues of a million diamonds.

In spite of the uncomfortable distrust I felt for my companion, however, I could not help but notice two things. The first fact was that we had been steadily climbing since I had clambered out of the river into the saber-tooth's front yard. The sec-

ond fact was one that aroused all of the scientist in me to the fever-pitch. These cave drippings for some time now had been assuming some very strange shapes. Huge buildings followed one another in grandeur, each one eerily misshapen, as if some mischievous genii had drenched it in a bath of half-cooled wax and then dusted the result with spangles. Finally the truth began to dawn upon my tiger-preoccupied brain. These were actual buildings! I was looking upon an abandoned and very ancient city which the cave was attempting to reclaim again.

Is this what Tah-ee meant when she called the Xibalbans the LORDS OF THE UNDERWORLD? Or was it Curly I who had called them by that name? At any rate, had the Xibalbans once lived here before the world deluge came down upon all low-lying cities and those built underground? Was this the reason that such an excellently fortified place as this must have been, had been abandoned?

I began to stare around me hungrily. Unknown Karnaks! Long-forgotten Mycaean lion-gates covered with rock-candy! Palaces of Knossos! And here a half-buried Sphinx! I looked at the gigantic man's head on the crouching animal body and then back at my companion. And I laughed at the realization that, though undoubtedly disconcerting, yet it was not altogether improper that my silent comrade through the streets of this kingdom of the dead, should be the monarch of all the giant cats.

I had been so completely absorbed in the remains of this ancient city, that I had not noticed for some time, the cavern had been gradually getting lighter. Now as I strolled slowly through this sort of twilight, which at the same time was not a dusk as much as a kind of half-light, the realization broke upon me suddenly. Apparently I was coming up to the daylight. Yet it was with a feeling of regret—regret that my too-faithful companion had kept me from exploring these relics of an unknown antiquity.

However, in spite of any feelings I might have upon the matter, it was becoming evident that only one turn lay between me and the daylight. I made the turn, expecting to find myself in the upperworld. Instead I stopped in consternation. I was in a vast chamber. The light was not the sun at all, but a huge, incandescent, blue-white ball swinging from the blue vault of the roof. As I stood there blinking in the glare, I began to realize I was either in a temple or palace of manificent dimensions.

Apparently I had been expected. Or were these silent figures seated on either side of the mosaiced walk leading to that golden, jewel-encrusted empty throne—*a court of the dead*?

I looked at them more closely. The robes and mantles of these seated figures were woven of the finest silky wool and embroidered in brocades of precious metals, freighted with jems. But I could not decide whether their faces, which, under their headdresses of iridescent quetzal plumes had been painted black and white to resemble owls, were those of once-living men or cleverly modeled figures. Not one moved even a frac-

tion of an inch as he sat upon his tiger-skin chair to either side of the mosaiced jade and silver causeway which led to the throne.

As for the temple itself, it beggarded description. Over the lavishly mosaiced floor, the walls extended the vision both through time and space, for as one looked upon them he saw not walls, but the cataclysmic destruction by volcanic fire and cyclonic waves of a shining gold and marble city from which maddened throngs fled in ships, fishing craft, boats—anything which might carry them away from the holocaust.

Yet to me the most amazing sight was neither these silent figures bordering the walk which led to the empty throne, nor the frescoed walls, but the glow of that blue-white globe. I stared at it in unbelief, rubbed my eyes and stared again. Yes, there it was! One of those mysterious lights from Brazil's impenetrable "Green Hell"—the very rumors of which have so mesmerized our scientifically-minded moderns! One of those lights which are reported to shine from the ruined temples of "lost cities," and which many a white explorer has given his life to behold! I stared at it with aching eyes. Was it some unknown ray? Or an enormous piece of radio-active substance? How could . . .

A warm breath swept across my bare leg and a furry coat touched my ankle just above my frazzled sandal. My hair rose involuntarily.

"Don't be impatient, Kitty." I said softly in my most winning tones as I stepped away from him. "I was just about to continue our little stroll anyway. Besides, it wouldn't be polite to keep such a distinguished company waiting."

I had almost forgotten the tiger in my interest, first in the encrusted ruins and now in the palace before me. Perhaps he was tame. At least he had had a number of chances to attack me in the last two hours, but had not done so. I glanced at him thoughtfully.

He was not looking at me, but at the strange scene spread before us. Very slightly, his tail was switching back and forth—a sign in the cat family, of impatience, or some type of nervous tension. I decided to move forward again without delay.

Yet even as I moved onward, I wondered how I could possibly carry out Tah-ee's instructions. Undoubtedly, this was the GREAT COURT where she was supposed to meet me. Needless to say, she was nowhere in sight. Yet as I remembered those rules, I was to do several things here before I would see her. It would be easy enough to refuse the seat of honor, somewhat harder to refuse food or drink in my present ravenous condition, but to bow only to the living! How was one to tell which of these silent figures was alive? If any?

Hoping for some kind of a miracle, I started slowly along the exquisitely mosaiced jade and silver walk. Critically watching the eyes of these creatures for some sign of life, my attention was suddenly attracted to the third figure. The eyes, under their face-paint, so still a moment before, now widened in amazement as the head turned toward me. But the eyes were not staring at me. They were focused in terror upon

something which was following me. I could not but help a little chuckle as I made a sweeping bow.

"Thank you Kitty!" I said in a voice whose warm tones echoed hollowly through the hall.

The sound of my voice was too much for human curiosity. One after another, the living figures turned, and each time the eyes widened in amazement and fear. It was simple to note those who had turned and to bow to them. And so I arrived before the throne.

At that moment, two young women who had been standing like stationary attendants at the end of one line of figures, stepped forward. One placed a beautiful feather-worked mantle made heavy with emeralds around my shoulders over the tattered remnants of my torn and dirty tunic, while the other put a head-dress of quetzal plumes upon my head.

I submitted to this decoration willingly enough because I couldn't remember any instruction from Tahee to the contrary, but when two more of these life-sized dolls became alive and offered me fruits and liquid from a golden bowl, I shook my head.

I came no nearer to the throne. I merely waited for something else to happen. Frankly, I was afraid that the expected "something" would be contributed by the tiger. He didn't approve of the fluttering white garments of these women. And he didn't like so many people around him. He paced back and forth across the walk fretfully, his tail swinging to and fro.

I remembered that I still carried an almost burnt-out torch over my shoulder, the light from which was still sufficient to keep him at bay. However, ridiculous as it might seem, I was becoming rather attached to him, and I would have much preferred using the torch on the missing High-Priest.

The tiger, as if reading my thoughts, raised his yellow-green eyes from my face to the dazzling blue-white globe whose rays lighted this weird assemblage. Following his gaze, I was surprised to see a slender spiral stairway of silver descending from the roof, while my ear caught the thin, sing-song wail of flutes punctuated by the savage throb of drums.

"Boom-2-3-4! Boom-2-3-4!"

Some kind of ritualistic procession was nearing that opening in the vault. The tiger snarled softly.

"So you don't like him either, Kitty? I wonder why. Was he your trainer since cub-hood? And if so, I imagine that he was cruel. If he had been mine . . . Hatred has made u partners. And perhaps you will be a better weapon than the lost revolver. We shall see . . . If I am not mistaken, I shall be needing help, for that is the deathmarch, and the Death-god will be leading the parade. Yes, I had the correct 'hunch' all right—here they come!"

"Boom-2-3-4! Boom-2-3-4!"

Each throb of the drum was a step nearer for this strange procession. In the lead was a grotesque figure made up to represent the skeleton form and skull face of the Death-god. After him, came a horrible old hag. Was this the benevolent Earth-mother of the Megaliths, in her

vicious aspect of storms and floods? And this swaying one in tiger skins with his long tiger tail . . . who was he? While that fang-toothed creature with the small beard and popeyes—was he meant to be the plant-giving Viracocha? If so, what untold milleniums of rituals with their fungus growth of other religions, had so changed this great hero of the "Tiger-Tribes!" Even the Bat-god was represented, but I had eyes for only one now—the High-Priest!

"Boom-2-3-4! Boom-2-3-4!"

They were getting very close. The tiger was pressing against me. I could feel his trembling body. Before I had realized what I was doing, I had stroked his ruffled coat. I withdrew my hand quickly. It would be unwise to touch such an excited animal. I would speak to him again in English. Perhaps the sound of my voice would quiet him for a few moments.

"That is the man you both fear and hate, isn't it?" I said softly. He paid no attention to me, still pressing against me heavily as he stared at the High-Priest. Yet I continued to talk.

"He is the eighth in line, and unless I am mistaken, nine was the mystic number. Yes, there is a ninth! A figure veiled in black. Even the head is covered! Is there another victim?"

"Boom-2-3-4! Boom-2-3-4!"

The weird procession had reached the mosaiced floor and were spreading out in a fan-like movement with a shuffling step. The fan was moving around the back of the empty throne. Now as they chanted softly to the sing-song notes of the flutes, the High-priest led the victim toward us.

As this man approached us, the trembling body of the tiger pressed so heavily against me that he pushed me into one of the seated figures. I clutched at it to steady myself, and it came tumbling from its chair of tiger-skins in a cloud of bones and dust. It had evidently been a mummy. But I didn't have time to think about it.

The sabertooth, frightened afresh at the noise, leaped to one side snarling and striking at me with an outstretched claw. Luckily I was able to jump out of reach and balance the torch between us. Again I spoke softly to calm him.

"Now don't start losing your head, Kitty. I am not the High-priest. There he is over there. See with what an expression of amused contempt he is watching us? We shall have to prove to him that he who laughs last has usually the best point to his joke."

The circle of priests was swaying and shuffling to the slow rhythm of the ritual dance, and this once more attracted the attention of the tiger. He forgot me, and breathing more easily, I put the torch again over my shoulder. Then the victim began to sway, dropping the hand which had led him to the spot just in front of the throne. The High-priest caught one end of the wrapping veil. To the almost intolerable throb of the drums, the victim began to turn—faster and faster.

The weird chant which was even setting my teeth on edge was driving the tiger crazy. He began to growl

ferociously. His eyes were on the High-priest. Was that black-robed incarnation of devilishness giving some command to the tiger? Why was he staring at the animal and chanting to it like that? Why was he leaning forward with that intent expression of expectation as he watched the least muscle ripple beneath that coat of glistening fur?

Then suddenly the victim began to give a strange half-whirling shuffle as the veils gathered in the hands of the High-priest. With a shock, I began to realize that this was not a man. The small pink-stained toes of the bare feet were those of a woman, while the long chestnut waves of her hair . . .

I clapped my hands over my mouth to suppress my cry of horror as the thinning veils began to outline her face! The victim was Tah-ee!

Was she mad to dance like that before the tiger, especially when there was some kind of flimsy red skirt on the bottom of her shimmering green dress, which fluttered around her bare feet like bloody, wounded wings? Or didn't she realize her danger? Her eyes were closed and her hands were folded as one asleep.

I whirled around and looked at the tiger. It wasn't a moment too soon! His maddened eye had caught the fluttering red veils! He was already crouched for the death-spring!

Chapter IX
Cabrakan, the Earthquake Monster

With a bound I leaped in front of the girl and swung her to one side as I faced him from here. With a thud he landed where we had been a moment before, and snarling furiously, he turned and thrust a claw at me. Deliberately I waved the torch before his face.

For the fraction of a minute he hesitated, before he began gathering himself for a second spring. In that fraction of time, I gave the sagging veil which still bound Tah-ee to the High-priest a sudden jerk. It slapped the tiger sharply on the flank, and yanked the unprepared "sphinx of evil" toward the infuriated animal.

The effect was instantaneous! The maddened cat whirled around and leaped upon the staggering figure. Snarls! Screams! And spurting blood dying the sacred jade of the pavement with scarlet!

Shifting the torch, and flinging Tah-ee over my shoulder, I dashed for the spiral staircase. Below us, bedlam had broken loose, as we fled upward on the swinging stairs! The giant cat had simply run amuck. He was clawing, biting, mauling and killing every thing which dared to move. Black-robed priests, their vestments in bloody shreds, were crawling about among a mass of crumbling and falling mummies while the sabertooth leaped through the melee like an incarnated demon.

"Ahnree, won't you please put me down? I am able to walk as well as you are!"

I was decidedly pleased to comply with her request, for my injured shoulder, which had never entirely ceased to hurt, was now aching all the way up to the top of my head. But as I set her on her feet upon the step in front of me, I growled:

"I should have tossed you to the tiger—you little fool!"

"But I did not know that Baala was there! I have always been taught to do the dance with my eyes closed until the last veil had fallen."

"By that time you wouldn't have had any eyes!"

"Yes, I know that now."

I looked up. "Tah-ee, what is that light? What makes it burn?"

"It is a gift from the ancients. But you must not look at it or your eyes will only know darkness."

"What magnificent frescoes on the walls!" What city . . ."

"Ahnree, we must hurry! We still have to pass Cabrakan!"

"And who is that?"

"The earthquake monster."

I did not know why I had hung onto my torch, but as we climbed through the trap-door at the head of the stairs, I was glad that I still carried my rapidly-dimming light, for the corridor which faced us was dark indeed. For a way, the white light from below lighted a passage of huge wet stones. It was narrow. There was only room enough for one to pass.

I held the torch so that its flickering light would guide our passage through the tunnel, while behind us, our shadows danced along the walls like two absurd stilt-walkers. Sometimes the corridor was cut through solid rock, and sometimes it was lined with giant fitted stones.

One fact which caused me no end of amazement was the fact that we were descending most of the time, though there were many short ascents. In this winding maze, from which side passages led now and then into the blackness, Tah-ee hurried ahead of me, never even hesitating at these cross roads.

Suddenly my torch flickered and went out. I stopped in dismay, but Tah-ee took my hand and led me on through the blackness. Up, down and around we twisted until I began to marvel at the extent of this underground network. Where were we? Were we still under that great metropolis of the ancient world whose inhabitants left legends which persist—even to the twentieth century—of vast underground ruins?

Tah-ee stopped as if listening. Instinctively I listened too, but all I heard was a deep rumbling roar from somewhere.

"Cabrakan!"

"You haven't seen this . . . boogey-thing have you?"

"No. He usually stays at the island temple because it is open to the sun. There is a passage between it and the great pyramid—a passage under the lake. I have never been to the island temple. That is why I have never seen him."

"Of course, I hate to spoil a pet delusion, but we have learned that earthquakes are caused by faults and not by gods who live in pools . . ."

"What are faults?"

"Great cracks in the earth's crust along which one crustal block is sliding in relation to another crustal block. But perhaps it would be just as wise to postpone this geological lesson until we are in a safer place. You stop asking questions and so will I—for the present."

We had no more than started forward again than she stopped once more.

"What's the matter now?"

"Ssh! Someone is coming!"

She was right. I could hear the

slip-slip of sandals in the distance over the stone flagging before the gleam of a torch upon the wet rocks ahead was reflected from around a turn in the passage. Silently I pushed her behind me and crept up to the elbow of the tunnel.

In a moment, a figure came hurrying around the corner, and I leaped upon him. Before he had time to raise his voice in alarm, I had delivered a well-aimed blow at his jaw. As he crumpled up, I stripped off his black robe, tore it into strips and trussed him up. In the brief struggle, his torch had gone out and therefore we did not bother to retrieve it but continued on our flight through the blackness.

After awhile I began to see, or I thought I began to see, daylight ahead, filtering dimly down what appeared to be a long flight of stone stairs. Like two shadows, we hurried with all possible speed up this flight which seemed to be endless, and slowed down only near the top because I had almost stumbled upon the extreme narrowness of the footing.

"Someone once remarked that it was death to climb the steps of Mayan temples, and what he said about the Mayas goes for . . ."

Tah-ee had put a warning finger across my mouth. Then creeping up the last few steps, she raised her head cautiously above the trap-door opening which was standing ajar. Quickly she motioned for me to follow, and hurried over the top.

We found ourselves standing in a corridor upon one side of which was a large silver door with engraved panels. Upon the other side was an open portal in which heavy blue drapes were slightly blowing. I moved toward the open one but Tah-ee shook her head and pointed at the silver door. By now I was right in front of the drapes and could see most of the room inside. Apparently it was empty. Cautiously I peered in. It was empty.

"We must not stay here Ahnree!" tugging at my mantle.

Quickly I glanced around at the furnishings. It was not a large room but there was an air of spaciousness about it. On one side, slender black columns formed window-like openings through which the late afternoon sun poured over the mosaiced floor of pink porphyry and blue turquoise, interspersed with sapphires. The walls, which were covered with exquisite tapestries that featured a feather of iridescent blue, found a repetition of their color motif in the woven mats which were scattered around a low table. Yet it was the table which held my eye, for upon it was a large golden dish of ripe fruits. A blue bottle-fly, buzzing noisily around the open dish, emphasized the silence.

"Ahnree, I have a strange feeling that we are being followed . . . I have listened, it is true, and have heard nothing," she added, forestalling my question.

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled, not so much to dismiss what I considered the fears induced by overwrought nerves, as the realization of the truly comical picture we made in these palatial quarters—especially me with my dirty, bedraggled tunic still flapping around my scratched knees, while

an embroidered mantle worth a national indebtedness, trailed from my shoulders.

"Don't be silly. Who would be following us? You know that not one priest escaped from that maddened tiger. And as for the one we tied up—he is going to stay tied up until someone finds him." I said, eyeing the fruit with dishonest intentions.

"Which may have already happened."

My hand stopped half way to the fruit. After all, she might be right. There were so many other passages . . .

Suddenly the long-drawn, sobbing and yet animal-like scream of a woman split the silence. It came from a distance and echoed hollowly as if through innumerable corridors.

"Baala!" Tah-ee cried in terror.

We raced to the silver door. It resisted my frantic effort to throw it open, until the girl showed me that it was built on a balance principle, moving only to steady pressure.

"But we cannot shut it against him then!"

"No. We must press through just as soon as the opening is large enough for us to squeeze through. It will hold him back for a few moments trying to make it big enough for him."

Peering cautiously over the threshold, I was amazed to find that we were facing the hollow center of a vast pyramid, the same into which I had been led a prisoner! Enormous silver bars braced the terraced halls which opened upon the central lake—for a huge green pool occupied the core of this magnificent skeleton of masonry. Into this man-made lake with its small island of rushes and swamp grasses, one could have dropped a number of ordinary city office buildings and had enough space left over for a park.

"This is the home of Cabrakan." Tah-ee whispered. "It is written that as long as he is imprisoned, Xibalba shall rule."

As we fled down the deserted dusk of the hallway, like two shades from a nether world, a thousand questions raced through my mind. What now, that the High-priest was dead, and freedom was in sight? Could we hope to escape through the city—clad in these startling garments—and with no weapons to defend our flight? Would it not be better to waylay two priests and steal their garments? While they were swimming out of that convenient pool, we might make our exit a success! But then—the tiger! we turned the corner of the structure, passing a door in which a pair of green curtains were blowing slightly. The thought of the trailing tiger had spurred us to such flight that silence was no longer possible. Would listening ears hear our fleeing steps? We had to take that chance!

Ahead of us was the colonnade through which daylight poured into the twilight of the interior. Yet just as my heart leaped in elation at the sight of this exit, Tah-ee pointed a slim finger down the hall behind us. Two priests were emerging from the room in which the curtains had been blowing. Their attitude suggested that they had heard our running steps and were about to start in pursuit. But farther on down the

hall behind them, and as yet unsuspected by them, I saw the great silver door being pushed outward by a large furry paw!

It was too late to hide. The priests had already seen us and there was nothing else to do but go on. The two black-robed figures raised their voices in alarm, filling the mighty structure with their shouts. Suddenly one of those shouts ended in a horrible half-choked cry of terror and agony. I did not need to turn, to tell me what had happened! The blood-curdling snarls of the tiger filled the air.

I kept on running, even though I knew that something fleeing would only infuriate the killing instinct in the cat. What else could we do? I had no torch now.

Suddenly Tah-ee stopped dead in her tracks and faced the pool with terror-stricken eyes. And pointing a trembling finger at it she whispered:

"Cabrakan!"

Half-turning, even as I slid to check myself, I felt my hair stiffen, and my eyes bulge with sheer unbelief at what I saw. Breaking the unrippled top of the pool came a huge green head—a monstrous dragon-head! I saw its horrible sword-like teeth bared in a reverberating, earth-shaking snarl, while its vicious little eyes ran down the hallway and came to rest upon the tiger. Could I believe my eyes? They told me that I was looking upon a dinosaur! A captive tyrannosaurus—that meat-eating nightmare of the hot, Mesozoic jungles! The monarch of all the dinosaurs!

It was Tah-ee who succeeded in shaking me out of my paralysis.

"Ahnree, who tells me that you come from another world, but who has conquered all the terrors of mine, I know now that you are the stranger who is to overthrow the power of ancient Xibalba!"

"I won't overthrow anthing if that big lizard takes it into his under-sized brain to step on me! Come, we still have a chance!"

Chapter X
The Fall of Xibalba

Reaching the black colonnade, I saw a part of the stairway of the giant pyramid lay before us, and beyond that, the street with its slowly moving, sunset traffic. This was not the main magnificent stairway up which I had been led a prisoner. My memory of this side exit was confused. I only knew that stairs and the undisturbed traffic of the city lay ahead of us. Terror lay behind.

We had almost reached the bottom of the staircase, without attracting more than a few curious stares from the well-filled street, when the sounds of scratching claws flying over stone, told me that the tiger was within springing distance behind us. We were now going too fast to stop, but I tried to brace myself for the expected blow. Instead of that, the sabertooth leaped through the air in a giant spring, his hair erect with desperation as he dashed wildly into the street.

Behind us, came a horrible, earsplitting, thundering roar—shattering the hum of traffic into a moment of surprised silence before the crowds in the street scattered madly before the charge of the

bloody-mouthed tiger. Women screamed and fainted. Men fought for cover of a doorway. Children ran around pitifully in circles. Burdened llama trains ran blindly here and there. A pet monkey jumped to a roof-top and gibbered frantically.

Reaching the street at last, I pointed to the sea-wall where the draw-bridge was alive with a stream of slow-moving traffic. Beyond that lay one ship—and safety!

Now a tremendous crash shook the city. A huge block of masonry rolled end over end past us, missing us by a mere fifty feet and plowing its way into a near-by building.

"Look!" Tah-ee screamed into my ear, "Cabrakan is getting loose!"

What I saw was utterly unbelievable. The monster had actually forced his way through the door from which we had fled. It was utterly inadequate, but that had not bothered him in the least. He had heaved himself through the masonry, which was now crumbling around him like a pyramid of chocolate bars. Then jumping free of the crashing structure, he landed in the street, crushing one house beneath a powerful hind leg as if it had been made of delicate china.

The roar of falling masonry mingled with the scream of the terror-stricken inhabitants and the bellowing thunder of the enraged dragon. The sabertooth had taken refuge on top of the palace wall and the dinosaur was attempting to pull him down.

More masonry crashed. Golden friezes cracked from the roofs and clattered upon terror-stricken crowds. Whole rows of columns with their heavy roofs, thundered over one another like a row of toy posts.

"Whether we escape from doomed Xibalba or not," Tah-ee said, "promise that you will not leave me!"

I could not hear her voice in the din. I could only read her lips, as with a nod of my head, I promised. Her steps were beginning to lag behind, it seemed. I put my arm around her to give her extra strength to cover the ground faster, while the detonations of falling masonry told me that the terror was coming our way.

A wild fear crossed my mind, that the frantic cat might seek my presence for protection against this demonical foe from the earth's past. I did not dare look back.

"Ahnree, they are coming! Quickly—back of this wall!"

We leaped to safety and crouched down, while I tried to hold my heavy mantle around her to shield her from I knew not what. The bridge ahead was so near and yet so far!

"We are too late now, Ahnree." I heard her say sadly.

It was indeed true. The draw-bridge was being raised—even as fear-crazed crowds fought to climb on. Finally it swung clear, with several human figures clinging to the edge. At that moment the tiger passed us. He wasn't thinking of me. He was thinking of that bridge.

With flying claws, he fairly sailed through the air. Then crouching, he sprang. Clutching the planking with his great claws as the crowds below scattered and some of the human flies fell back, he started to scramble up the bridge toward the wall. Instantly the bridge dropped back with

a crash as those who tended it dropped their ropes and ran.

By now, however, the tiger was already upon the wall, and it mattered not that the top part of the bridge broke off and fell heavily back to earth like a wounded thing, carrying its human freight with it. The progress of the tiger upon the wall could be marked by the screams of the populace. Then something appeared beside us which caused me to pull Tah-ee closer and shrink even more completely into our little corner. It was a huge, scaly, three-toed foot!

Slowly and heavily the ponderous creature waddled in the open space beyond our little hide-away, and there it pulled in its powerful tail as it crouched for a spring.

"Can he jump?"

"Most scientists have thought so," I answered thoughtfully, "because of its kangaroo build . . ."

"What is a kangaroo?"

I don't believe she expected an answer. I am sure I didn't give one. It was one of those moments when time seems to lengthen out tenuously. Our eyes were fastened on the slow and deliberate movements of the monster as its tremendous muscles rippled in readiness under that green, scaly skin. Slowly it gathered itself, and then with a rush of wind, it sailed through the air. Tah-ee screamed.

"He is going to land on the sea-wall! He will break it down! And sobbing, she turned her face against my shoulder as if to shut out the inevitable.

It was indeed, just what the giant lizard was bent on doing. The minute which followed was one of those agonizing intervals between the second when fate has stamped her seal of doom, and the ultimate drop of the curtain.

For a moment the ancient dragon sailed through the air, his magnificent muscles working with perfect precision. I remember even finding him beautiful, as the long rays of the setting sun flashed upon his dark green scales. And then with a sickening crunch, he landed astride of what had been the giant-sea-wall. Under his weight, it crumpled slowly, like a toy dam made of pebbles might crumble under the hoof of a plowhorse. The mighty, green wall of the sea poured in through the breach.

In that first second of destruction, the water too, was beautiful. With the sunlight shining upon it as upon green glass, and the spray dashing high under the blow of the concussion, it afforded a picture of fantastic beauty.

And then with a roar, it poured upon the city, breaking more of the wall as it came. A second's vision of the green wave sweeping toy houses before it! Then it was upon us with all its relentless finality! Instinctively I held my breath. Tah-ee's arms gripped me. I heard her terror-stricken voice calling:

"Ahnree . . . stay with me! Ahnree!"

A churning, foaming, topsy-turvy world of green! I tried to hold on to Tah-ee but something ripped us apart. And once more I heard her voice—plaintive and more distant . . .

"Ahnree!"

I tried to answer. Something was bearing down on me. Something very heavy. It struck me in the jaw with a force that almost tore my head from my shoulders. As I felt the strangling green water rushing into my broken mouth and placing its smothering liquid fingers over my nose, I heard once more a plaintive voice from far . . . far away

"Ahnree!"

And finally unutterable darkness . . . and silence.

Suddenly, I don't know how, I became aware of the fact that I was breathing again. I was lying on a huge block of masonry, at the base of which the sea washed angrily. I was stiff and sore, and my almost nude body was seared red by the sun, high in the sky.

Dazed still, I staggered to my feet and gazed uncomprehendingly about. All around me lay a desolate scene; on one side the emerald-green of the sea, and on the other an incredible tumble of ruins, half submerged under the water that lashed foam about them.

Xibalba! Gone! Destroyed!

I groaned suddenly, full realization striking me with a fearful blow.

"Tah-ee!" I moaned. "Tah-ee!"

She was dead. I could not but be certain of it. For nowhere in all this desolation was visible any living thing, but myself. Tah-ee, the lovely Princess of Chan-Chan; she of the glorious white body, the emerald-green eyes, the chestnut tresses—dead! The thought crushed me, and I sank once more to the stone, clutching its scarred, carven surface with fingers that bled with the agony of my grip.

But then, as I lay there, a vision rose before me; a vision of travertine covered cliffs, of massive tablets upon whose surface still was to be seen the faint outline of indecipherable inscriptions.

Shoreline of the Salton Sea!

It was there that hope lay—sunken beneath thirty feet of water; the time seat! Far to the north, in the Gulf of California, or what would be California in twenty thousand years. Once before it had carried me into the past; once again it could carry me there—back to the time before the destruction of Xibalba.

If the time seat were brought to this spot—it would be here to rescue Tah-ee and myself before that fatal moment when we were torn from each other's arms. Its paradoxical aspects struck me—yet, what is time? Once already I had defied its precepts . . . why not again?.

And if the fates of time had decreed Tah-ee's death, no matter what my efforts . . . but I could not think of that. I *must* try it!

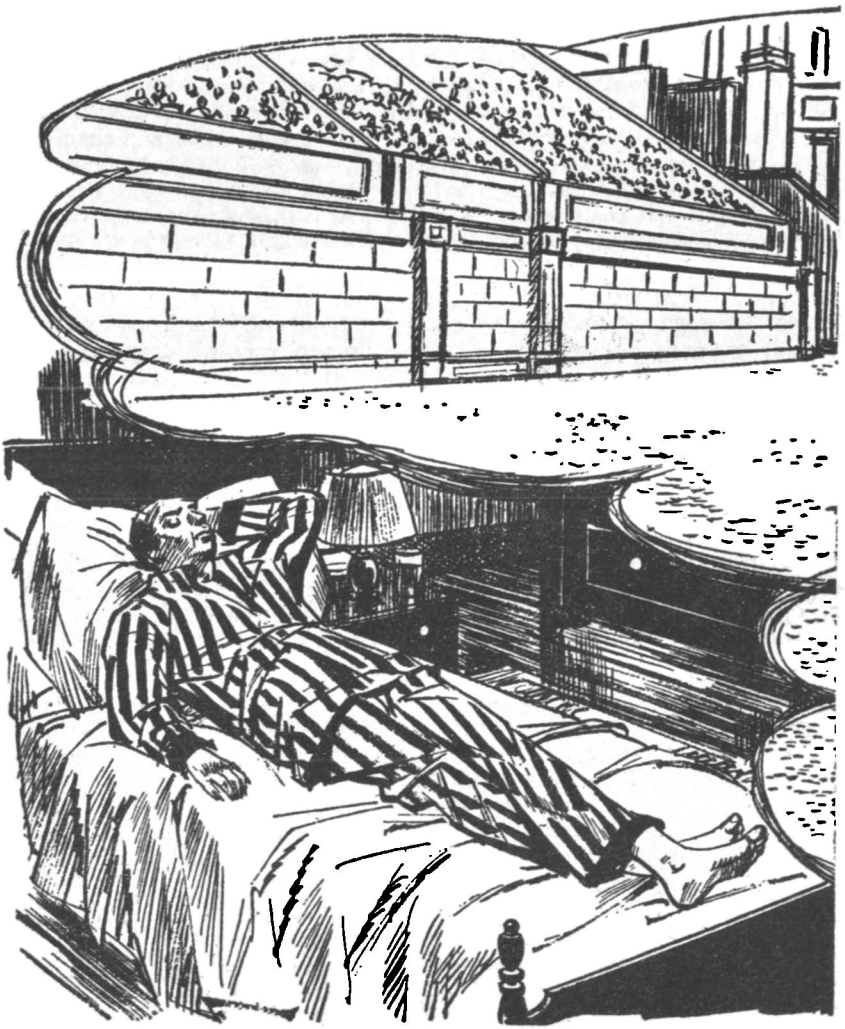
I stumbled to my feet, clambered down from the great basalt block, and splashed through shallow water to the shoreline—where once was the terraced portion of the city. Then I turned my face toward the north and set out.

I will reach the Salton Sea and the time ship—or die trying.

By the Tiger God I swear it!

The End

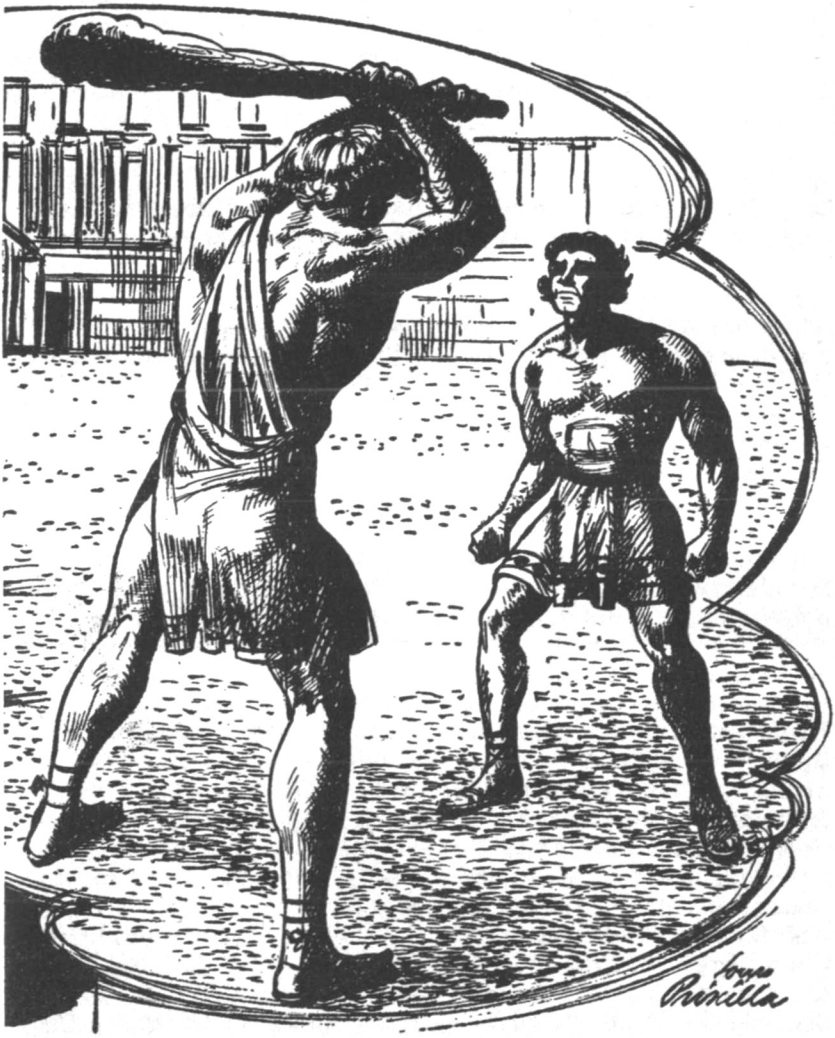
BETWEEN TWO



Was he asleep in his lonely bed or . . .

WORLDS

By MILTON LESSER



. . . was he fighting for his life in the Past?

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

To the world of today he was Jason Weatherby, a mild-mannered little bank clerk. But to the world of long ago —ah, there he lived as the most heroic figure of the Golden Age! Only . . . which of these two lives was the real one? Which lovely girl the dream?

JASON awoke.

There was the smell of brine, there was the great heaving rise and fall of a small ship at sea. Wind-driven spray beat against his cheeks and somewhere nearby was the chord-plucked music of a lute. The only other sound, except for the slap-slap-slapping of the waves against the prow, was the steady rhythmic creak of oarlocks.

Jason smiled without opening his eyes. No, he thought. I am not awake. I am dreaming again.

Dreaming? But it had never been this real before. Every night Jason would read the tales of wonder from the ancient mythology books. His favorite was the *Quest of the Golden Fleece*, the story of the first long sea voyage, a perilous journey in uncharted waters, undertaken a generation before the Trojan War by the greatest heroes in Greek Mythology. Jason would fall asleep reading of the Argonauts and sometimes dreamed of them with a fierce envy.

He kept his eyes tight shut, unwilling to break the spell. And he heard a voice saying:

"The *Argo* is a fine ship, the finest ever, its hull of cypress wood and the interior fittings of stone-pine and plane wood. And we have a fine crew assembled, don't we, friend Orpheus?"

The lute was plucked again. "Yes," said Orpheus. "That's true, Hercules."

"Far to the uncharted east we sail," said Hercules. "Where no man has gone before, in a stout galley with a hand-picked crew. But we'll never get back alive." Hercules spat contemptuously. "Our luck to be saddled with a leader who's not right in the mind."

"Quiet," said Orpheus, plucking a new melody from his lute. "He may hear you."

"What of it?" Hercules de-

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clared bitterly. "I say it now and I'll say it to his face. The heir to Athamas' throne is an idiot who can neither think nor speak, yet we must follow him and obey."

"He's very handsome," a woman's voice said.

"Handsome!" Hercules, in exasperation, mimed her tone. "Spoken like a true woman, Atalanta."

Orpheus strummed a quick martial melody on his lute. "But a woman the Argonauts can be proud of, Hercules," he said. "A woman strong as a man and gifted with sword and spear but still beautiful."

"You'll make me blush," Atalanta said. "Anyway, I think he is very handsome."

"But his mind is clouded."

"Luckily for you, Hercules," Atalanta retorted. "Look at him, at Jason sleeping there. With a sound mind he would be your equal in prowess."

"An idiot," Hercules insisted.

The dream had never been this real before, Jason thought. He opened his eyes slowly, tentatively, ready to shut them at once if the four walls of his furnished room impinged on his vision. Instead, he saw Hercules' broad muscular back and Orpheus squatting cross-legged with his lute and the woman Atalanta, standing wind-whipped in the prow of the ship, very tall and very fair and formed like the Greecian demigoddess she was.

"Hello," Jason said shyly.

Hercules whirled around, his craggy face showing disbelief. "He speaks!"

Atalanta's eyes, as she turned to face Jason, were green as the sea is green. With a glad cry she ran toward him, but Orpheus stood up, shook his head and restrained the impetuous girl with a hand. "He's uttered single words before, Atalanta, but it is even as Hercules said. His mind is under a cloud, a curse of the usurper king. It's ironic, is it not? When we Greeks finally get the chance to seek the Golden Fleece which rightfully is ours, we are led by an idiot sent to meet his death in the unknown east so a usurper king may keep his throne."

"Jason was not always under this curse!" Atalanta cried. "I knew him as a child, and a finer boy never lived in Greece. But now—"

"So I'm on the Argosy," Jason said, waving a hand before his eyes to see if the vision would remain.

"He understands," Atalanta

said tremulously. "He understands."

"Wait," said Hercules. Then he addressed Jason: "Who are you?"

"I am Jason—" *Jason Weatherby,* he was going to say, but with a second glad cry Atalanta came to him and kissed his cheek with her soft lips. She was tall, almost as tall as Jason, and she wore a warrior's garb. Her skin was white as the marble quarried from Pentelecus in rock-bound Attica. Her breasts were high and firm and her eyes brimmed with tears as she looked deep into Jason's face. Jason smiled at her. His heart was suddenly a wild thing, pounding against his ribs. I am Jason, he thought. Not Jason Weatherby, but Jason the hero. I am strong, strong as this man Hercules, but I have the mind of Jason Weatherby and although this is wonderful, I am afraid. As Jason Weatherby I am five-foot-five, a hundred-twenty pounds. I would barely reach this girl's chin . . .

"Where are you?" Hercules boomed, new hope in his voice.

"On the Argo in quest of the Golden Fleece," Jason answered promptly. "In the Euxine Sea."

"You see?" Atalanta cried joyously. Then all the other fabled heroes were gathering about him, smiling, thumping his back, congratulating him, talking of the curse which had lifted suddenly from his mind like a night-fast storm cloud dissipated by the morning sun's warmth. There was Peleus, who Jason knew would one day sire Achilles, that greatest of Greek heroes. There were Castor and Pollux, the twins.

Castor said: "With Jason to lead in quest of the Fleece, we have a chance."

"A splendid chance," agreed Orpheus, taking up his lute and strumming a wild happy melody on it.

That night they put into shore, as was the custom of old, and they feasted the return of Jason's sanity. There were fish from the Euxine Sea and a wild boar, roasted whole, which Castor and Pollux brought down with their arrows not three stadia from the rugged shore. There was much singing and libations poured to the gods in thanksgiving and some which were not poured on the white sands but down dry gullets instead. And there was Atalanta—Atalanta who would not leave Jason's side, who sang to him as Orpheus played his lute, who stroked his hair and

thrilled to his kisses for they both had drunk their share of the heady pramnian wine.

"My Jason," she said, and together in the bright leaping firelight they watched the games and the races and the wrestling match in which Peleus bested first Pollux and then Castor, and then as the firelight waned and there was drowsy talk of the days ahead and their quest and more wine and a boastful but friendly challenge from Peleus; half drunk now, Jason found himself all at once wrestling with Peleus and in a few moments had pinned him on the sand, then returned to Atalanta, hardly sweating, his muscles like steel, and they slept there on the sand near the dying fire, innocently, in each other's arms.

In the morning as they prepared to get the Argo underway, there was a great flapping of wings overhead and a raucous cawing, screeching challenge flung down at them from the bright blue sky, and Orpheus cried:

"The harpies!" He plucked a single clarion note on his lute, let it fall and grasped instead the hilt of his sword. "Ungirt your swords," he added unnecessarily, for the heroes were already preparing to meet the winged, hook-beaked creatures which dwelled here on the coast of the Euxine Sea and, when they could, devoured men alive.

Jason's sword flashed a song of death that morning, leaping and singing and weaving a net of gleaming steel about himself and Atalanta. Their blood reddening the sand, the harpies fell, wings severed, feather breasts spitted. And then Atalanta said. "Behind you, Jason. Behind you!"

He whirled, saw the harpy, half again as big as a man, skimming low over the sand. He lifted his sword, suddenly, unexpectedly horrified because this was thrilling, this was what he had always dreamed about to make the humdrum life he led more palatable but this was also dangerous, this was how a man might die . . .

He held the sword on high, waiting, but he did not strike. Atalanta screamed again, and he thought he saw Hercules lumbering across the sand toward them. The harpy's beaked face, the hideous eyes, blurred toward him. The beak snapped open, fastened on his shoulder, slicing through the leather armor he wore——

Jason awoke, sweating, in bed. He felt weak and giddy,

smiling foolishly at the image of Jason Weatherby in the mirror at the head of the room, the image, gaunt-cheeked and wide-eyed, looking back at him in the first gray light of dawn. A dream, he thought. Exhilarating, but thank God it was no more than a dream.

The smile faded from his lips abruptly. He felt the pain and wetness in his shoulder. With trembling fingers, he slipped off his pajama jacket and saw the blood, bright red, where the harpy's beak had struck.

II

"DON'T I get to stretch out on a couch or something?" Jason asked the psychiatrist with a shy smile.

Dr. Strill shook his gray head. "That won't be necessary on your first visit," he said. "We more or less have to get acquainted with you and your problem. Have you anything more to add? I mean, aside from that very vivid dream you just told me about?"

Instead of replying, Jason removed his jacket and shirt, baring scrawny shoulders and a concave chest. His left shoulder was covered with a large bandage. "It took seven stitches," he said, his lips trembling.

Dr. Strill nodded. "That's not as uncommon as you might believe, Mr. Weatherby. To you, the dream was very real. Part of your mind, you see, wanted it to be real. You wanted to live the sort of life your namesake led, three thousand years ago. Jason and the Golden Fleece, Mr. Weatherby. What man, in his secret heart, doesn't want to find the Golden Fleece?"

"Yes, but—"

"Let me finish, please. But you're a product of the Twentieth Century. You take for granted the comforts of your life and the comparative safety of living here in New York, with the benefits of Twentieth Century culture all around you. One part of your mind, Mr. Weatherby, wants to be the hero Jason, but another part of your mind rebels, is afraid. Ambivalence, you see? It is quite possible that the frightened part of your mind, determined that the dream should not recur, inflicted that wound. Do you have a history of sleep-walking?"

"No," said Jason, with firm emphasis.

"There is, of course, always a first time. Still sleeping, you went to the kitchen, took out a knife, inflicted the wound

yourself. Determined, you see, to stop the dream at all costs."

"I live alone in a furnished room, Doctor. There is no kitchen. No knife."

"Then you inflicted it some other way. I am sure—"

"Doctor, am I losing my mind?"

"Now, Mr. Weatherby. Calm down. The results of your ink-blot test were perfectly normal. Extremely normal, I might add. You're as sane as I am."

"I mean, split personality or something—"

"Nonsense. How old are you, Mr. Weatherby?"

"I'm thirty-six."

"Married?"

"No.

"You see now? That could explain the girl Atalanta, too. She's strong as an Amazon, you say, but unlike an Amazon, she's beautiful. A man in your position would dream of a woman like that, especially if the alter-ego of your dream were still stronger. You wouldn't necessarily want a shinking violet type of woman, to protect. You'd want a companion to share your great adventure. It all fits."

"But, Doctor, what am I going to do? I know I shouldn't hope that dream will return, but I—at least part of me—wants it to."

"You've been reading mythology, you say? It began like that?"

"Yes."

"Then my advice—"

"Dr. Strill, if you tell me to stop reading those books, I'm afraid I won't listen. It's my only joy in life . . ."

"That's exactly what I *won't* tell you to do. You'll never conquer this illusion by hiding from it. Face it, Mr. Weatherby. Go home tonight and read those myths. Convince yourself they are nothing but that—stories, perhaps wonderful stories, but fantastic and impossible nevertheless. I suggest, however, that once you begin to understand this, you go out at night. Drink occasionally, Mr. Weatherby. Do you drink?"

"Why, no."

"You ought to try it. And be with people. Join a gym. Take up a hobby, perhaps. Something which will get you outside, like photography. You must learn to live in the real world. You must learn to . . ."

Dr. Strill's voice droned on and on, but now Jason was no longer listening. If he stared straight ahead, not at the psychiatrist but through him, he could almost imagine he was looking at Atalanta again, or

sleeping with her in his arms as the firelight died on the far coast of the Euxine Sea while Orpheus strummed his lute. The wound in his shoulder throbbed dully with pain, but almost he found himself enjoying the sensation. For he would never believe that the wound was self-inflicted. He knew now, all at once, it had been a mistake making this appointment with Dr. Strill. The wound proved it. He might accept everything the doctor said—even the impossibility of Atalanta whom, he suddenly knew, he loved—except for the wound. The wound was real and had been made by the beak of a harpy swooping low across the sands on the shore of the Euxine Sea.

Jason shook hands with Dr. Strill automatically. He made an appointment for next week but knew he would never keep it. He returned the doctor's smile and left the office, already counting the hours until he could return home to his dream. For he knew, without knowing how he knew, that the dream would come again.

Dream?

But which was dream-world and which real world? "Atalanta," he murmured. And the psychiatrist's receptionist looked at him.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing, it was nothing."

Atalanta. She alone was real. Nothing else mattered. Nothing. Tonight, he thought. Tonight if I go to bed with my Greek mythology and read it as before, as last night, if I recreate the spell—if spell it was—I will see her again. I will see her again and smell the fragrance of her skin and touch her. That was real. Nothing else mattered.

I will see her—but face death with the brave Argonauts, he thought, shuddering. It was one thing to read about a world without automobiles and canned food and policemen on every corner and electricity and psychiatrists to tell you nothing was wrong, and quite another to find yourself thrust suddenly into a primitive world where a man would survive if his blade were sharp and his sword arm strong and if, in battling across the uncharted eastern sea with a band of legendary heroes, he could maintain his position of leadership . . .

He was sweating when he reached the street. Don't think about it, he told himself. Think about Atalanta.

"Hey, you!" someone called. "Hey, now—"

He looked up. He heard a screeching sound. A cop was bellowing at him from the curb. A big semi-trailer lurched to a stop, its front bumper inches from his hip.

He smiled at the cop, who was scowling. The truck driver leaned out of the cab and shook his fist. Jason shrugged and crossed over toward the other side of the street. People were looking at him. He blinked his eyes. The sounds of the traffic roared in his ears.

III

THE traffic roared in his ears.

Not traffic. Water, swirling and eddying and rushing among rocks, foaming and frothing, the rocks, keen-fanged, waiting to crush the Argo.

"All right," Hercules said. "All right, you heard me. If we get through these Clashing Rocks alive—which I doubt—we are going to leave Jason on the farther shore. A man under a curse like that, he's bad luck."

"You saw how normal he was until the harpies came that morning," Atalanta said seriously.

"But now look at him. Cloud or demon or whatever, it has returned to blanket his mind. Well, look at him."

Jason opened his eyes and smiled at Atalanta. She wasn't looking at him, though. Her face was in profile and she was scowling at Hercules. Castor and Pollux were seated nearby, staring ahead at the foaming waters. Orpheus, grim-lipped, strummed his lute to keep time for the banks of rowers. Jason almost imagined he could smell the rowers' fear as their great oars rose and dipped, carrying the Argo toward the Clashing Rocks. He shuddered, then grinned at his baseless terror.

Wasn't it written in mythology? The Argo got through the Symplegades, the Clashing Rocks, safely.

Again he shuddered. The mythology said nothing about Jason's mind enfeebled under a curse, and nothing about Jason Weatherby, late of New York, U.S.A., inhabiting Jason's body with his own mind.

"Atalanta," he said.

She turned, faced him. Hercules walked stiffly to the prow, muttering an oath.

"The fever," Atalanta said, "and the muteness—gone, Jason?"

He nodded. He watched Peleus and Hercules talking in low tones. He couldn't hear the words, but from the way

Peleus was looking at him and at Atalanta, he knew they were the subject of the conversation.

"Hold her steady!" Hercules bellowed suddenly, his voice booming above the crash of the waves. "Up oars, Orpheus!"

Orpheus gave a final pluck to his lute, a high note. The rowers instantly shipped their long oars, but even so, three or four in the lower bank were sheared off like matchsticks by the jagged rocks.

"Do we have a passage?" Castor called.

Hercules shrugged his massive shoulders. Peleus shook his head. Abruptly, Jason found himself striding forward swiftly. He reached the slim prow of the Argo and shouldered his way between Hercules and Peleus, shading his eyes from the sun and peering ahead. "Left," he called over his shoulder. "Left bank, Orpheus."

Orpheus, however, did not strum his lute as a signal for the rowers. "Left, by Zeus!" Jason cried in a terrible voice. "Unless you want to kill us all."

Orpheus merely looked at Hercules.

"I see nothing," Hercules insisted. "No channel, despite what this madman is hollering."

In another moment, Jason knew, they would spit themselves on the rocks unless they turned. He didn't have time to run back to Orpheus, grab the lute and give the rowers their signal. This, then, was how it would end, drowning here in the Euxine Sea, trapped, perhaps for all time, in the sunken wreck of the Argo—

But Atalanta, who was not half a dozen feet from the reluctant Orpheus, plucked the lute from his hands and strummed the signal which brought the left bank of oars flashing up in the sunlight and dipping down, like the legs of a giant spider, into the white-capped waters.

The Argo veered. More oars were snapped in twain. A rower near the stern of the ship screamed horribly as his oar was shattered on the rocks, the shaft driven deep into his bowels, skewering him. But the Argo, finding the channel which Jason had somehow seen, floated serenely through the perilous passage. With a haughty word, Atalanta returned the lute to Orpheus, who shrugged and renewed the rowers' beat.

"Well?" Atalanta called her

challenge to Hercules, still standing, carved of marble it seemed, in the prow with Peleus and Jason.

"A lucky accident," Hercules snapped. "He didn't know what he was doing. I go no further with a madman to lead me. Nor do Peleus and the Twins."

Peleus nodded his stubborn agreement but Castor and Pollux seemed undecided.

"We near Colchis, where King Aetes rules," Hercules went on. "Colchis, where King Aetes keeps the Golden Fleece. Either Jason shall not be aboard the Argo when we reach the Colchian shore, or Hercules. You may take your choice, my friends."

"And either Jason or Peleus," Peleus agreed. "I go no further with this cursed leader."

Hercules gave a signal to Orpheus, who not with words but the music of his lute told the rowers to beach the Argo on the desolate, wind-swept shore beyond the Clashing Rocks.

"If you give your ultimatum," Atalanta said as they approached land, "then I must give mine. The moment Jason leaves our company, Atalanta goes with him."

Smiling, Orpheus strummed a battle paen. *Up oars,* his lute said, and the Argo's prow nosed into the sand. Peleus leaped nimbly into the surf and waded to the sandy beach. All the other heroes followed him and the rowers moved off gratefully to the shade of a grove of pines which, on one end of the beach, grew almost to the water's edge.

Atalanta and Jason were the last to leave the ship. "Tell me," she said, "if Hercules challenges you to individual battle, will you accept?" She placed her hand lightly on his shoulder.

They waded to shore together. Jason knew she was waiting for his answer, but he was silent. Would he accept. How could he accept? The very thought of it made his limbs weak with terror. Do battle with Hercules? Ask a man armed with a pea-shooter to take on the United States Army, he thought in despair. It would be the same. He, Jason Weatherby, would stand no better chance than that against the mighty Hercules.

But he wasn't Jason Weatherby. He was Jason, Captain of the Argo; Jason leading an expedition to Colchis to reclaim the Golden Fleece for Greece, and reclaiming it, win back his rightful king-

dom, usurped in the Peloponnese when he was an infant. Jason, who could do battle with Hercules on even terms . . .

"My brother and I," Pollux was saying when they reached the firm sand at the edge of the tide, "are neutral. With the rest of you, we seek the Golden Fleece. We care not who accompanies us and who does not. We would like to point out, though, that there is strength in numbers."

"Against the wily King Aetes?" Hercules scoffed. "Strength in stealth and treachery, you mean. I won't be led by a madman."

"He is not mad," Atalanta said. "Now."

"Nor shipmate of a woman, if it comes to that," Hercules added.

"Have you decided?" Atalanta whispered to Jason.

He nodded. His tongue was thick. He couldn't trust his voice. He squeezed her hand once, then waited for Hercules to make the first move.

But Peleus moved first. Peleus lifted his spear and drove it, point first, into the sand at Jason's feet, the shaft quivering. "There is my challenge, Jason," he said.

"And after Peleus," Hercules roared, "if you get by Peleus, which you won't, you will find Hercules' spear at your feet."

Jason swallowed and took a deep breath. The sun was very hot on his shoulders and his left shoulder, where the harpy had bitten, throbbed. A soft wind brought the scent of pines to his nostrils. He said, "Then leave Peleus to the boys, Castor and Pollux, or to a woman. My spear is for Hercules."

So saying, he cast his own weapon at the feet of Hercules. The giant smiled his welcome of the challenge, but Peleus had turned pale. Smiling herself, Atalanta removed Peleus' spear from the sand and drove it into the ground at his feet.

"But a woman!" Castor gasped.

From a corner of his eye, Jason saw Atalanta closing with Peleus, the tall slender girl, lithe and very feminine, and the bronzed giant of a man. At once, he wanted to go to her aid, but found himself whirling suddenly to face Hercules' wild attack.

The only sound was the scuffling of feet on the sand and the battle paen of Orpheus' lute.

Homer should have been there, or Pindar, Jason found himself thinking in the swift split-second it took Hercules

to launch his attack: the one to write in epic form of this struggle and the other to celebrate it with an ode. He blinked his eyes. Jason—Captain Jason of the Argo—would not think now of books. But Jason Weatherby—

Suddenly he felt himself borne upward, flung far across the wet sands. He landed with a splash in the water and heard Hercules' booming laugh as the giant came charging at him, kicking spray with his great-thewed legs. Jason dipped his hand underwater, brought it up with sand and sea-weed slime, hurled it at Hercules' face. The giant bellowed and swung wildly, a blow which—had it landed—would have broken Jason's neck. But he moved in under it swiftly and pumped his own fists to Hercules' superbly muscled torso. The giant grunted and came on, wrapping his thick arms around Jason's chest and squeezing. He felt the breath leave his body and knew in another moment his ribs would crack, the splintered ends of bone piercing his lungs.

He butted his head against Hercules' jaw, snapping the leering face back and away from him. He got both hands on either side of the giant's jaw, pushing. The muscled neck arched, the muscles bulged on Hercules' shoulders. But slowly the pressure on Jason's ribs was relaxed, and all at once, panting and giddy, he stood free.

Swiftly, his eyes took in the beach: Castor and Pollux, wide-eyed, watching the double-battle; Orpheus, a faint smile on his lips, plucking the notes of a paen to Ares, God of War, on his lute; Peleus and Atalanta circling each other warily; the rowers, straggling back in groups of two and three to watch the fray; and Hercules, charging at him again.

He met the wild charge calmly this time, knowing he would have to strike at bone to bring Hercules down, not doubling his fists but using the edge of his hands on the massive shoulders, on the square line of the jaw, across the bridge of the nose. Hercules sank to his knees, floundering in the shallow water, blood streaming copiously from his shattered nose. Jason brought his left leg up, smashing the knee against Hercules' deep chest. The giant flipped over on his back in the shallow water and Jason leaped at him, hands seeking his throat, forcing his head under, the eyes wide-staring through the swirling

brine, beseeching him. Jason released the throat and as the face broke water crossed his right fist with all his strength at the exposed and vulnerable jaw. Hercules fell back and lay there without moving, the waves washing over his face.

"Here is your hero!" Jason cried contemptuously, the blood racing through his veins. He floundered up the beach toward Peleus and Atalanta, glimpsing Castor and Pollux · sprinting into the water to drag out the unconscious Hercules.

"I'm coming, Atalanta," he said grimly, and stopped. The warrior-maid needed no help. She stood, a wild thing with the sea-wind in her hair, while Orpheus, for once without his lute, administered to the battered Peleus.

"You?" Jason gasped. "A woman—"

She spoke, smiling, and part of him heard her words, but part of him was thinking: you read about things like this, and that is very wonderful. But to live them? To live them with the battle paen ringing in your ears and the shadow of death hovering, to live them when the glory wilts before pain and violence and the threat of death? Was that what he wanted? What he really wanted? I don't know, he thought. I won't know—until we reach Colchis, King Aetes and the Golden Fleece.

"My father, Iasus," Atalanta was saying, smiling at Jason, "wanted a boy. When I was born he had me carried, naked and helpless, to a mountaintop. It is common enough. Some hunters found me, though, and raised me as one of them, teaching me use of spear and bow and how to fight as well. Teaching Atalanta that, and somehow, she was vouchsafed the strength of a man in the body of a woman. I don't know how this is so: Atalanta is before you; Peleus has felt her strength."

"Why do you speak of yourself like that?" Jason asked her. "You use your name, you say Atalanta, as if you were talking of someone else."

For an instant, Atalanta's beautiful face drained of all color, but then she smiled, shrugging. "It is nothing," she said, and would not talk of it further.

Presently, Hercules regained consciousness. He sat up, scowling darkly. His broken nose, bloated and swollen now, covered half his face. "I was beaten in fair fight," he said, not looking at Jason, "and so I must go. I take my leave of the Argo, Orpheus, but I tell

you this: I shall reach Colchis by the overland route, perhaps before you do. And if in Colchis King Aetes wants to keep his Golden Fleece, I shall fight on his side if fight there is."

"But you're a Greek!" Castor shouted his disbelief.

"I am—Hercules." And the giant would say no more. He waited until Peleus was strong enough to accompany him, then set out silently across the sands toward the nearby copse of pines. Soon the two great figures were lost to sight.

Orpheus plucked a note of finality on his lute. "When the songs of our deeds are sung," he predicted, "they will not say Hercules left the Argo for this reason. And of Peleus? What will they sing of Peleus?"

Atalanta grinned. "Probably, they won't say he left the Argo at all. Perhaps they'll sing of him here on the fine cypress ship instead of Atalanta, for Atalanta is a maid, strong or not, and it is unseemly, is it not, for her to take his place aboard ship?"

Orpheus shrugged, laughing. "Ho! Rowers," he called. "Board ship."

Ten minutes later, with the sun-flashing oars leaving their invisible footprints on the surface of the water, they were underway again.

That night, to make up for the time they had lost and despite the superstitious protests of the rowers, they journeyed on without stopping. Jason was given the final watch before dawn and sat silently for a long time, waiting for the first faint gray gleam of dawn in the east, listening to the rhythmic creaking of the oarlocks. They could not stop this night, he knew, for Colchis was close—too close. It was important, it might be vital, that they reach Colchis ahead of Hercules and Peleus.

Starlight faded slowly, not to the first trace of dawn but to the final deeper darkness of night which ushers in the day. Jason sat, knees up, head propped on knee, listening to the music of the oars.

"Jason?" It was Atalanta's voice, softly. "I cannot sleep."

"I'm over here," he said, and heard her moving quietly toward him.

She settled herself down against him, resting her head on his other knee. He could feel her long silken tresses on his bare skin and all at once he wanted to reach out and press her to him, but he held back. She belonged to this

world, she would one day belong to its legends which would be sung and read as long as there were voices to sing and eyes to read. But he? He was a changeling, an alien, adrift between worlds, neither belonging entirely to the one nor to the other.

"Atalanta," he said the music of her name.

"What is it, Jason? Your tongue is heavy, is it not? You would say something?"

"I—it is nothing."

"No. Tell me. Please tell me."

He could smell the faint musky perfume of her skin, feel the beat of her heart fluttering against his thigh. He stroked her hair and was silent.

"Free yourself of the thought, Jason."

"Atalanta, what do we actually know of the universe? What, in our ignorance, have we been able to see?"

"I don't understand."

"I am thinking of another world, a far world removed not in space but in time, a world which knows of this, our world, through legends and songs, a world where—"

"Your words are strange." Unexpectedly, he could feel her body going tense against him, as if, somehow, she were afraid to hear his words.

"I was thinking. It's nothing. I was trying to—well, trying to picture you, Atalanta, in that world." But how could that ever be? he mused, tormenting himself. Atalanta —a free, wild thing, the most beautiful woman he had ever known, but strong with the strength of a man, Atalanta in the Twentieth Century . . . The thought of it brought a smile to his lips.

"What do you know of such a world, Jason?" she asked. There was grave concern in her voice—and a suggestion of awe.

Instead of answering, he took her in his arms. They remained that way, breast to breast, while slowly the darkness fled before the new day, first gray, then pink in the eastern sky. The slaves were singing a sad ancient chant, their voices deep and faraway, swept up by the sound of the spraying surf as they plied their oars, steadily, without care, without hope, without dreams.

"Is my destiny the same?" Jason asked himself. No hopes, no dreams. Because this is what I thought I wanted, what my soul cried for, but I was wrong. I did not want Jason or the Argo—not even, I think, the Golden Fleece. But Atalanta. I wanted her.

Not knowing it, all my life I wanted her. But to have her, in this wild hostile world, or to go back to sanity alone, without her . . . for surely Atalanta would feel trapped, would wilt and die hemmed in by civilization, like some exotic bloom drowned in concrete . . .

He kissed her, gently at first and then firecely and all his longing, all the pent up yearning for the world he had never known and now, knowing, did not want, and all his longing for what could never be with Atalanta, flowed from his lips in that kiss. And she returned it from the depths of her own passion—

"Atalanta," he murmured.

"Dawn!" the head oarsman shouted. "I see the Colchian coast!"

Castor and Pollux awoke together from their slumber and said, their voices merging, "Colchis. And the Golden Fleece."

Jason stood up, walked with Atalanta to the Argo's prow. She lifted her arm, white as marble, and pointed toward the low pale fringe of green on the horizon. Together they heard the first waking notes of Orpheus' lute.

And something took possession of Jason, snapped him, magically, from his body, swept him far up and over the Argo so that it seemed a toy ship on an ocean painted, crawling like a midge toward the shore. He called out to it, lifted his arms. He saw the tiny figures below him, far below and out of reach rushing toward Jason in the prow of the toy Argo.

No! he pleaded. Not now. She needs me. Colchis—with no Hercules, no Peleus to share the burden, she needs me. Jason is a mindless hulk without me, but to reach the Golden Fleece and find it . . .

Something shook him, as a frail branch is shaken in a storm. He felt himself swept up in an eddy, engulfed, whirled down an infinite vortex—

And opened his eyes on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

IV

"WEATHERBY, I'm talking to you."

"Yes, Mr. Fairchild?"

Don't you like your position with us? You're not a teller, you know. A teller's work is automatic. You're head cashier of the bank. You have to think."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fairchild."

"Well, I caught three mistakes, three in one afternoon.

How long have you been with us, Weatherby?"

"I—twelve years."

Now the bank's doors were closed and the day's final tallying was being done. Whitlock, the L-Z teller was watching them, a faint smile on his thin lips.. Whitlock had also been with the bank for an even dozen years. Whitlock was next in line for the cashier's job, if Jason were let go.

"Twelve years," Mr. Fairchild was saying. "A long time. I would hate to think the edge of enthusiasm has worn thin for you, Weatherby. In just eighteen more years you could be eligible for our pension plan. But eighteen years can be a long time."

"It won't happen again, sir."

"Well, see that it doesn't."

Last night. And the night before. And the night before that. He had tried. He had gone crazy with trying. But somehow, he had lost contact. Only a dream? It did not seem possible to him. Everything, everything might have been a dream—but not Atalanta.

He had been unable to return. He had done everything he could think of. The books. The drowsiness. Dim lights, so after a while the words faded, blurred, became indistinct. And he had slept silently, as if the slim, invisible, unthinkable strand which somehow connected him with Atalanta's world had been forever severed. Atalanta, he thought. Where are you now? In Colchis, where King Aetes, wily and cruel, reigns. Facing peril with the mute, mindless Jason beside you, unable to help, unable even to think. Atalanta . . .

"Weatherby!"

"Yes—yes, sir?"

"You sit there, mooning. Enthusiasm, man. Where is your enthusiasm?"

"Atalanta," he said aloud.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, sir. Nothing."

But Mr. Fairchild looked at him contemptuously and crooked a finger in the eagerly watching Whitlock's direction. "Here you, Whitlock," he called. "Weatherby is ill. He'll take the rest of the afternoon off. Can you handle the cashier's desk?"

"Yes, sir," Whitlock fairly bleated. "Yes, *sir!*"

"I'll see you tomorrow, Weatherby," Mr. Fairchild said. "I'll expect a marked improvement."

Jason nodded numbly. Whitlock smiled condescendingly at him. It was almost a sneer. He wanted suddenly to strike Whitlock. He had all

he could do to check himself. It was the other world, he thought. It was the way of Atalanta's world. It would solve nothing here.

He hurried from the bank, nodding at the door guards without seeing them.

Outside, a steady cold rain was falling. Jason walked two blocks, hardly knowing which way his legs carried him. Bar and Grill, a sign said. He walked inside, sat down. There was the smell of stale beer.

"Cheeseburger," he said. "No, make that whiskey. Any kind. A double."

He drank. He had another. He made little circles with the wet glass bottom on the surface of the table. He could feel the whiskey, warm in his stomach. It rushed through his blood to his head, clouding it, to his limbs, weakening them.

" 'Nother," he mumbled. The barman looked at him, served the drink reluctantly. He drank it, and another. He looked at himself in the mirror behind the bar. He saw two Jasons—the pale, sunken chested bank cashier. The hero of the Argo. Two Jasons, side by side.

"Atalanta," he said. He picked up his shot glass and hurled it at the mirror. The glass shattered, long jagged cracks sundering his image but leaving the image of Jason, the Argo's captain.

"Hey, you!" the barman cried.

Jason leered at him, struck out feebly with his right fist. The barman caught it and twisted. Jason yelped. From somewhere, the barman got a sawed-off baseball bat and brandished it menacingly. When Jason, thoroughly drunk and thoroughly ornery, tried to hit him again, he caught the clumsy blow with his left hand and swiped at Jason's head with the baseball bat.

He swiped at air. He gawked.

Jason wasn't there. For a brief moment, the image of the other Jason remained in the shattered mirror. Then that, too, faded.

V

SOMEWHERE nearby, a fountain bubbled in a glade of pomegranate trees. He had a pomegranate in his hand, the seeds red as blood. He sat on a couch and became aware of the woman, gazing at him intently, a faint smile on her lips, lips red as the seeds of pomegranate, red as blood.

The woman clapped her small delicate hands, and a krater of wine was brought. The woman was very beautiful, with hair like shimmering gold and pale limbs now revealed now concealed by the diaphanous mantle she wore as she approached him with the wine. But her face—her face was hard and cruel although the features were lovely.

"What cruel jests my father plays," she mused, talking as much to herself as to Jason. "You are as Adonis, but your mind is blighted." She came to him, lifted the wine to his lips. "Still, I must do my duty."

"Who are you?" Jason gasped.

She recoiled away from him, as if struck. "You speak!" she cried. "What trickery, what mockery . . ."

"I asked who you were."

"But how can this be? They told me you understood nothing. Nothing."

He drank the wine and waited for her answer. Instead of giving it, the woman came to him boldly and kissed his lips. The kiss, like wine, sent fire coursing through his veins. Had he not held Atalanta in his arms, the woman's kisses might have made him forget everything. But after Atalanta, what woman could touch him with her kisses?

She must have sensed it, for finally she leaned away from him and sighed. "I am Medea," she said, "daughter of King Aetes." Her eyes were filled with wonder, as if she still could not believe Jason had spoken. "My father said if I drank with you this night and loved you, if I saw that sleep did not come, you would fail in the tasks which await you tomorrow." She clapped a hand to her mouth, as if she had said too much.

Jason grabbed her slim arms and brought her back to the couch. "What tasks?" he demanded.

"You don't know? You remember nothing?"

"Is this place Colchis?"

"Colchis, yes. But I can tell you nothing."

"Where is Atalanta? Where are the Twins and Orpheus?"

"Safe enough, Jason. King Aetes wishes them no harm because they can do him no harm without you. But forget them, Jason. When I looked upon you, I said 'there is a man'— until I learned that your mind was under a dark cloud. But now—now . . ."

Desire flared in the woman Medea's eyes. She wanted to kiss him again. Her lips part-

ed moistly. Her arms trembled. If I had not known Atalanta, Jason thought, my desire would match this woman's own. He stood up and hurled the wine cup away, shattering it on the tiled wall.

"I can't let you die tomorrow," she said softly.

"Then tell me."

"You came in quest of the Golden Fleece. My father, the King, proposed a contest, to which you agreed through the musician, who spoke for you. He did not want to but he had no choice, because King Aetes made it plain you all would have been put to death had you refused. Thus tomorrow, when the sun rises, you go to your doom."

Jason smiled. His Twentieth Century mind balked at her words. Going to his doom? For an ancient Greek it might be very real; if the doom were sufficiently horrible, it might turn his limbs to water. If my courage comes through ignorance, Jason thought, so what? It is still courage.

"What is my doom going to be?" he said.

"Tomorrow, when the first rays of the sun make gold the eastern sky, you will attempt to yoke two wild bullocks and —should you succeed—you will then sow the dragon's teeth. But Jason, Jason! The bullocks are like no animals you have ever seen. They breathe fire. They—"

"I know about your bullocks," Jason said. He was almost going to say he read about them in his mythology books. And the dragon's teeth, he thought. You sowed them in soil which had been drenched with the blood of Prometheus, who first brought fire to mankind, and at once they sprouted.

They sprouted full-grown warriors, armed to the teeth . . .

"I am sorry," Medea said. "There is nothing I can do to stop the contest. I wish . . . I wish . . ."

"What do you wish?"

"If you somehow triumph and receive the Golden Fleece as your reward, I would give you another reward. Some men would think it greater. I would give you myself, Jason of Greece."

He said nothing. He looked at her and felt pity. Yes, he thought, she can have Jason. For if I am alive when the sun sets tomorrow, I am returning to my own world and unless the power which somehow draws me here is greater than I think, I shall not return. She can have Jason: the mindless Jason from the world of mythology.

But, he knew, he would take Atalanta back with him.

She would tower over him, she would feel strange and alone and confined in his world but there was no preventing it. The real treasure was not the Golden Fleece, the real treasure was Atalanta. He knew, without knowing how he knew, that if he held her hand and willed himself back to the Twentieth Century, she would accompany him.

He would do it, he thought with bitterness, but she might hate him for it all the rest of her life. Still, life without Atalanta was utterly meaningless for him.

He felt pity for Medea, whose love he could not return. "Very well," he said, "Jason will take you back to Greece with him, if Jason lives." For wasn't it written that way in the mythologies? "Now, where are my friends?"

"You promise? You truly promise?" She sank to her knees before him, clutching his legs desperately. When he nodded she stood up and pointed through an archway. "They await you there," she said. "But my father, the King, believes—"

"Dismiss your servants," Jason told her. "Your father won't know the difference. Tell him you kept me here all night. Tell him we loved. Tell him what you want. I won't deny anything."

She looked like she wanted to kiss him again. "Would that it could have been true," she said, and watched him walk swiftly through the archway.

"You're here!" Atalanta cried a few moments later. "Oh, you're here! We didn't know what had happened to you. We only knew the sickness had returned to your mind, and . . ."

He silenced her lips with a kiss. Castor and Pollux grinned and left the room, but Orpheus remained with his lute, strumming a paen to love.

"Jason," Atalanta breathed tremulously. "How can it be that way with you? One moment you seem in full possession of your mind. The next—"

"It will never happen again," he vowed. "And Atalanta, listen to me. If I triumph tomorrow, if I yoke the bullocks and sow the dragon's teeth and defeat the warriors which will rise up from the blood of Prometheus, I shall ask you to accompany me somewhere—"

"Anywhere, Jason. Oh, anywhere."

"To a world like none you have ever known."

"To the ends of the earth!"

"A world of strange conventions, a world that might crush you with its order and pattern—"

"Jason, your words are so strange, I might almost believe, if I dared—" Her voice trailed off.

"What might you believe?"

"Nothing. It's nothing. It's too much to hope for."

Orpheus plucked a final note from his lute. "I will leave you two lovers," he said.

Atalanta smiled. "No," she said. "Stay. I won't even kiss him this night. For Jason needs all his strength tomorrow."

Shrugging, Orpheus sought a new melody on his lute. Jason said, "Musician, listen to me. If we win tomorrow, your song of our deeds shall live forever."

"I am only a poor musician who—"

"Hear me. I ask you to sing of the Jason you know now, tonight. Sing of him and not of the poor sick Jason, the mindless Jason. Will you promise that?"

Orpheus nodded. "Who would want to hear a song of a madman?"

"Good," Jason said. "Then it's settled."

"Settled?" Orpheus laughed nervously. "If you yoke the bullocks, and if you sow the dragon's seed, and if you slay the warriors who will spring, full grown, from the furrows."

"I will," Jason vowed.

"But you're still forgetting something," Orpheus insisted. "Late this afternoon, the servants provided by King Aetes informed us that Hercules and Peleus arrived in Colchis. They had an audience with the King, and afterwards the King seemed very pleased."

Atalanta had turned very pale at his words, but Jason said, "We will worry about Hercules and Peleus after I conquer the spawn of the dragon's seed."

VI

IT WAS an enormous natural amphitheater in a small valley nestled between steep hills on which, tier on tier, the people of Colchis sat. Far away, Jason could see the royal box, draped with purple and the tiny crowned figure of King Aetes seated beside a smaller figure, his daughter Medea. The bullocks, Jason had ben told, would be released from a cavern under the

hill. But first, as was the custom, he must pay his homage to the King.

He walked across the brown earth, conscious of the eyes of the multitude upon him. He walked slowly with the sun warm on his back and wondered if this early morning sun was the last he would ever see. The sky was a perfect blue and a warm wind swept down between the low shoulders of hills.

"King of Colchis," Jason said, reaching the royal box, "I salute you."

The crowd was still, expectant. The King, handsome in his regal robes, smiled down on Jason. Jason thought he would signal for the release of the fire-breathing bullocks, but the King lifted his hand for silence and said: "My daughter Medea and I have decided that you are to be granted help."

Jason frowned. Aetes would not actually help him, he knew. The King continued: The Princess Medea has suggested that your companion, Atalanta, shall undergo your trials with you."

"No," Jason protested. "I need no help." By the gods, he thought, I do need help, but I won't subject Atalanta to what I must face.

"I have spoken," King Aetes said. "It shall be as the Princess Medea suggested."

A horn blared its melancholy note across the amphitheater as Aetes raised the royal hand in signal. "Fool!" Medea whispered, leaning down from the royal box. "Think you I didn't know of the maid, Atalanta? Think you I did not know why my kisses did not capture you as they have captured other men? If you must go to your death, let the maid of Greece accompany you. If you survive, perhaps she will not. And if you both survive, there is present here today a Greek named Peleus who vows that your precious Atalanta shall not leave this amphitheater alive."

Jason was going to answer but became aware of a snuffling and bellowing behind him. Far across the arena, he saw the bullocks coming. They pawed the ground, heads down, their flaring nostrils spewing jets of flame as they galloped toward him.

"Jason!" Atalanta cried. Her voice was distant, and he saw her coming, sprinting in his direction from the far side of the arena, opposite the fire-breathing bullocks. She wore a crimson mantle which, even as she ran, she removed from her shoulders. Beneath

it, she was all ivory loveliness in the sunlight and it took Jason several seconds, at this distance, to realize she was stark naked.

"Jason, wait! It's something I learned at Cnossus, in Crete. They call it bull-baiting. Jason!"

The snorting bullocks were two hundred yards off now—and closer. A hundred yards, breathing jets of fire . . .

A bold smile on her lips, Atalanta ran toward them, swirling the crimson mantle before her. She brought the mantle up and swept it down suddenly to one side, holding it out stiffly, the heavy cloth billowing in the hot wind. And both bullocks, pawing the ground with their fore-hooves, plunged toward the mantle, flank to flank, sweeping by Atalanta so close that Jason thought at first the nearer one had gored her with its terrible horns.

"Enough of . . . it," she panted, "bewilders them. In Crete it's the national sport, Jason. If I can tire them, if you can get the plow and the yokes and—"

Her words were lost in angry bellow as the bullocks came again. Jason ran to the twin yokes, half a hundred yards away, grasping the metal collars with the leather harnesses trailing. Vaguely he was aware of Atalanta, all grace and speed and fluid motion, pirouetting with her mantle before the angry bullocks. Once the fire from their nostrils actually scorched the cloak; he could see it smouldering. Once, daringly, carrying out the sport of Crete to perfection, Atalanta leaped nimbly, cloak and all, to the back of one of the bullocks. She rode it that way for several seconds, unfurling the crimson mantle in the face of the second beast. And then, limbs sleek with sweat, she was on the ground again, flashing this way and that with her cloak, wearing out the bullocks, tiring them, confusing them.

Jason had seen the same thing done in a motion picture of a bull fight. Eventually, if the matador knew his business, the huge animal was reduced to a slow, uncertain thing waiting stupidly for the death thrust of his cloak-draped sword.

Now Jason was running toward Atalanta, dragging the massive yokes and harness. To tire one bull, to confuse one and not the other, would hardly help. They had to both be stilled and lined up, wait-

ing for the collar which would enslave them—

"Now!" Atalanta screamed. "Now!"

Snuffling, pawing the ground, their hides bathed in lather, the two bullocks were suddenly motionless. With all his strength, Jason lifted the double harness overhead and brought it down across their massive shoulders. They bellowed at once and set off at a furious gallop, Atalanta barely jumping to one side and covering her nakedness with the crimson cloak.

Jason clung to the reins grimly as the bullocks galloped wildly, trying to shake from their backs the unknown thing of metal and leather which had suddenly imprisoned them. Jason felt the reins slipping, his hands blistering as he pulled back on the reins, digging his heels into the soft earth. It is not possible, he told himself. One man cannot stop two beasts such as these with only the strength of his arms.

One man could not. But he was Jason, Captain of the Argo, not a man but a mythological hero, a demigod. The muscles stood out on his back, across his shoulders, he could feel the play of the muscles on his arms and chest—

And slowly, very slowly, he brought the wild bullocks to a halt. They pawed the ground nervously. They tried to turn their massive heads and see the puny man who had succeeded in capturing them, but he held the reins firmly, wrapping several coils of them about his wrists.

"The dragon's seed," Atalanta said, approaching him. She slung a strapped pouch from his shoulder, then stopped fearless before Jason, between him and the bullocks, to lower the bronze blade of the plow.

"Keep back," he said.

"I'll walk at your side," Atalanta told him simply.

He walked the bullocks slowly, the plow turning a deep furrow in the earth as they went. Into this through the fingers of his right hand he sowed the dragon's seed. There was not a sound from the hills which surrounded the great amphitheater. All Colchis was watching this deed—speechless, unbelieving, stunned.

When the seed pouch was empty, Jason released the reins, half-expecting the bullocks to turn on him and Atalanta. Instead, they galloped off toward the cavern from which they had come, dragging the plow behind them.

Jason placed his hand on Atalanta's shoulder, smiling. He had forgotten the dragon's teeth.

"Jason—"

He whirled, hearing a loud clamor behind him. He blinked and knew in all his days he would not forget this sight. Full-grown warriors, armed to the teeth—hundreds of them, bearded and fierce of visage—were rising from the freshly plowed furrow.

Who sows the dragon's teeth shall reap . . . It was written in the ancient legends he knew so well.

"For Zeus and Colchis!" the leader of the warriors cried, and, sword upraised, charged at Jason.

Amazingly, he was calm. He had never felt such calm in all his life although never, until this moment, had he faced such peril. Like Atalanta, he was unarmed. There must have been five-hundred warriors, grouping behind their leader in a deadly phalanx. They were armed with spear and sword. They wore greaves of bronze, cuirasses of hide and pale blue mantles of Colchian azure. And there was murder in their eyes.

And Jason, facing death in this world and hoping for life in another, stood calmly, sure of himself, and came up heft-

ing a large stone in his right hand. He waited until the leader of the warriors was almost upon him, then hurled the stone.

It struck the leader's shoulder, stunning him. Instead of continuing toward Jason, he whirled on the man nearest him and smote him with his short sword. Instantly, as if Jason was the director of some epic play, all the warriors fell on one another, forgetting their all-but-helpless quarry.

Atalanta turned away, burying her face against Jason's chest. He stood watching, fascinated. He wanted this memory to take back with him. It would last for all the days of his life, and if ever—back in the Twentieth Century—he longed for a world long dead, he would remember this scene, this wild battle of berserk warriors, and be content with what he had.

Their swords flashed in the sunlight, their spears sped at one another with quick death, as it had been written. Jason remembered the words from his favorite book on the subject:

> *"And then Jason did hurl a stone among the warriors and they fell on one another with death in*

their eyes and did do battle until not one of them was left alive on the plain of Colchis, their blood running like a river in the furrow Jason had sowed with the teeth of the dragon . . .

When the carnage came to an end, the prophetic words had been fulfilled. Body piled on dead body, the new-born warriors sprawled in the furrow, their blood running red . . .

A wild clamor resounded from the hills. "The fleece! The Golden Fleece! He has earned it! Tó Jason the Golden Fleece . . ."

Linking his arm with Atalanta's, he walked boldly toward the royal box. King Aetes' face was very pale but his daughter's was livid with rage. She was not looking at Jason; her eyes saw only Atalanta, walking at his side, arm linked in his.

Aetes' voice trembled. "The Golden Fleece is yours," he said. "It shall be delivered to your ship, the Argo." He would say no more.

The Princess Medea, however, stood up and lifted her hand. "Hercules!" she called in an imperious voice. And armed with a great gnarled club, Hercules leaped from the tier behind the royal box, to land directly in front of Jason.

The crowd was stunned to silence, but Atalanta said, "Fool. Don't you remember? You're a Greek."

"I vowed that Jason would not get the Golden Fleece."

"And I," said another voice. It was Peleus who, armed with a short Lacedaemonian sword, took his place beside Hercules.

Jason whispered to Atalanta, "Do they know of your bull-baiting? Have they been to Crete?"

"I don't think so."

"Then fetch the two bullocks."

Atalanta was off at a run and Hercules taunted Jason: "She won't fight at your side now."

Instead of answering, Jason removed his mantle, whirled it overhead and let its folds billow across Hercules' head. Muttering an oath, the giant swung his club. But Jason was already leaping aside and turning to face Peleus who came to finish him with one thrust of the short sword.

Jason waited until the last moment, then ducked under Peleus' outstretched arm, grabbing it at the elbow and, spinning deftly, dropping to one knee and sending Peleus

spinning over his head at Hercules, who had succeeded in removing the cloak from his face. They fell together in a tangle of arms and legs and Jason, not waiting until they could regain their advantage, leaped at them and plucked Peleus' sword from his hand.

Hercules climbed to his feet, roared a challenge, and charged with his upraised sword, and a third of the club. He brought it down in a savage arc which Jason met with Peleus' gnarled club, the thick end, was sliced off and fell at Hercules' feet.

Jason was about to press his advantage, but just then Atalanta came running into view, holding her crimson cloak aloft, the eyes of the two bullocks on it as they galloped after her, dragging the plowshare behind them.

Kill Hercules now? Jason thought. The man deserved it—but a wonderful legend would die with him. And if this distant untamed world was not one Jason could learn to love, he could not learn to hate the legends of it which had always captured his heart. Orpheus was wise, he thought. Orpheus would not sing of this Hercules, but of the Hercules whose deeds would thrill a million million youths for the next few thousand years . . .

"Here," Jason said, tossing the sword hilt-first to Peleus. "You'll need it."

Atalanta fastened her cloak as the bullocks loomed up behind her. Hercules and Peleus, armed with half a club and a short sword, turned to face the beasts.

"Come," Jason said.

"Back to the Argo, my love?"

"This poor body will return to the Argo and claim the Golden Fleece for Greece. Or rather, Orpheus will claim it for Jason, for Jason will be mindless once more. Medea can go with him if she wants, but I—"

"Yes, my love?"

"I go elsewhere. Listen to me, Atalanta. I have no right to ask you to come. You may loathe my world, you may be unable to adjust to it as I am unable to adjust to yours. But if you're willing—"

"Wherever you go, I want to go," she said simply.

He took her hand. An effort of will, he thought. It would take a tremendous effort of will. Once done, though, he knew the bridge to heroic Greece could forever be sundered . . .

"Atalanta," he murmured, clutching her hand as the am-

phitheater and the green hills began to fade . . .

He awoke in his own furnished room. It was dark and he went to the wall to put on the light. "Atalanta?" he called softly.

"I am here."

He stood for a moment at the light switch, not daring to turn it on. He was small, thin, a runt of a man compared with the mighty Jason. But this was his world and he belonged here, and if Atalanta could learn to adjust to it, to tame civilization and to a man whose strength was as nothing compared to hers . . .

He put on the light.

"Who are you?" he gasped, looking at the girl standing there and watching him. She was small, perhaps five-two in height. She had mousey hair but he liked the way it was arranged. She wore a skirt and blouse and while her figure was not breath-takingly lovely like Atalanta's, it was curved in the right places.

"I—" she said. She could not go on for a time. "I was hoping, when first I saw you."

"Wait a minute!" he cried. "The way you spoke about Atalanta that morning on the Argo, in the third person, as if you spoke of someone else—"

"Yes," she said softly. "You are Jason?"

"I'm Jason. But you—"

"I was back there longer than you. The moment you entered Jason's body and gave him sanity, I—I loved you. I was afraid you loved only Atalanta and wouldn't have me, not the real me, not the me back here, or my world either. When you said those strange things, I didn't dare hope . . ."

"Then you're from this world too!"

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"And you wanted to come back but not without me, but you were afraid of what I would think, back here—with the real you!"

"Yes, Jason. I'm sorry. I hope I won't disappoint you. I . . . I'll go away."

He looked at her. He said nothing. They had their memories of adventure. And now, their souls cemented by those memories, they would have each other. Two plain people, two ordinary people, with a lot of wonderful memories and a wonderful future together.

"Come here," he said. Outside, a horn blared. A bus rumbled away from the curb. It was a very different world, but they were home.

THE END

BANDITS OF TIME

RAY CUMMINGS

Illustrated by ROD RUTH

The raiders came out of time to steal only the weak, the outcast and the criminal! For somehow Tork was an imperfect villain incapable of creating an empire composed of the strong:

"I look like a tramp, Doris," I said. "Like a bum from the bowery."

We sat on a bench gazing out at the moonlit Hudson River with the glittering George Washington Bridge before us. I was dressed in a greasy tattered blue serge suit, a peaked cap pulled low over my eyes; no collar, and I hadn't shaved for four days. My name is Bob Manse. I'm a Shadow Newsman; my job is to ferret out undercover stuff. I was going to do some of that ferreting later on tonight.

Doris Blake didn't mind how I looked because she was blind. Only yesterday the bandages had been removed from her eyes after an operation. She had been blind from birth. The surgeons had thought now that they could give her her sight—and they had failed.

Her hand went out to touch my face, now as I joked about my looks. "Just the same, Bob—I—I do wish I could see you." She was smiling a twisted, pathetic little smile. And then she tried bravely to turn it into a whimsical grin. "That surgeon said I was born too soon. In a hundred years or so, science would be able to fix my eyes."

"Fine," I said. "We'll wait, Doris—gives us an excuse to live a long time. . . There comes the Albany Night Line, just coming under the bridge."

Eyes of the blind. I had sworn I would be her eyes, for all the rest of our lives. We were engaged, planning to marry next year. She had wanted to break it, now that the operation had failed.

A man slouched past us, hesitating as though listening to our talk. Then he passed again, sat on a nearby bench, then on one still closer. Staring at us; at Doris' slim little figure, her pale-blonde gentle beauty. And then he came and sat down beside me.

"You look as though I could interest you," he said softly. "I am looking for young men and young—women."

He was a queer looking fellow, something about him so indefinably weird that involuntarily I hitched

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away from him on the bench, staring at him blankly. He was big, as big as myself and I am a good six feet tall. Wide, high thin shoulders—his figure lean, but with a suggestion of immense power. His clothes were queer—a suit, jacket and trousers of a black material that seemed to pick up and reflect the sheen of starlight. His hair was straight, black glistening like polished leather. He wore a white ruffled shirt, ruffled neckpiece edged with black.

But more than any of that, it was his face and his voice that startled me. Smooth-shaven face, lean, perhaps handsome with high-bridged nose, thin wide mouth, high cheek bones and deep-sunk dark eyes under thin pencilled brows. I try to recall it now. A face without age. Twenty—or fifty? The skin was smooth—the smooth, unlined skin of youth. But the greyness of age was in it so that here in the moonlight it had a waxen quality—like a man bloodless. A man who had died.

The thought stabbed into me as I heard myself murmuring:

"Interest me? How is that?"

His luminous gaze roved my shabby clothes. His lips drew apart with a faint ironic smile.

"You would like to improve things?" he suggested softly. "Life is not so good, for you and the young —woman?"

Queer voice. Measured words, with a strange rhythmic intonation. A voice so unusual, so unnatural that surely I had heard nothing like it before. He was smiling more broadly now.

"I can offer you a chance at a life—quite wonderful," he added. "You and your—woman."

Doris murmured,

"Bob, who is that? What does he say?"

"My name is Tork," the man said quickly. "Just—Tork. I am glad to meet you, my dear. You are blind?" His voice gave a little hiss of commiseration. "Terrible misfortune. But that can be fixed, that and all your other troubles. Do you want to hear more?"

He was a foreigner, an Oriental perhaps. A charlatan who now would see if, despite my down and out appearance, I might have ten dollars he could get away from me. I grinned at him, but I hitched myself forward on the bench so that I was squarely between him and Doris—so that his weird gaze might not rove over her.

"Go ahead," I said.

I am building a New Era," he responded slowly. "A little New Empire. We need—converts, you see? Men and young women. A new life, no troubles, no worries. The Empire of Tork. You two will like it, I am sure. Just to live—for love—with no troubles—no struggle. Everything you need or want is provided for you—"

Recruiting us into some Love Cult? Many fanatics have been lured into that sort of thing. Giving themselves into the hands of tricksters; and giving all their worldly possessions. There might be a news story in this. The Empire of Tork—that was a new one.

"What's it cost?" I said. "And where is it?"

"Cost? Why, nothing. Nothing at

all. We need only you—to help us populate our realm. Where is it? Ah, that I will tell you when you come to our meeting place of those who would perhaps join us. It is not far from here—"

He described a place hardly more than two miles away, where the upper reaches of Washington Heights look down upon Spuyten Duyvil creek and there is still a little open country with patches of woods crowded by the growing city. The time he named was 3 A. M. tonight.

"You will come?" he said. "But let me warn you to say nothing of this." His eyes seemed to gleam with a new intensity. "We have ways of knowing whether or not you play fair—and ways of punishing. And we want only eligibles like you. We choose very carefully."

"All right," I agreed.

"And the young woman—she will get her eyesight. That I promise you. You think I talk wild? You are mistaken." He stood up suddenly, smiled and with a queer, jerky little gesture, saluted us and turned away. My gaze followed him; and again I had that feeling of an indefinable weirdness about him. His walk was measured, as though he were carefully calculating each step.

Doris was gripping me.

"Oh Bob, what did all that mean? He said I could get my sight—"

Poor Doris, clutching at any straw.

"I'll tell Jim about it," I said. Jim Blake is her brother; his desk was in the same newsroom with mine. "We'll go take a look at that meeting, maybe."

I took her home presently. She and her brother had an apartment here in the neighborhood. He was down at the office now, I knew. I left Doris there alone; went upon my routine job downtown.

It was nearly two A. M. when I reached my desk. Blake was there. A fellow about my age; red-headed, freckle-faced; blue-eyed, pugnacious. Usually with a grinning, breezy manner. But he wasn't grinning now. Soberly he tossed a sheaf of the latest news-flimsies at me.

"Take a look, Bob. Something damn queer going on tonight. Green thinks it's some kind of a joke—the humorous angle for him—"

Young Pete Green, at the desk next to us, let out a guffaw. "*Costume Ball Disgorges Peeping Toms*—there's my catch-line. Pretty neat? I'll be on the air with that at 8 A. M."

"The eternal comedian," Blake said. "I'll be damned if I see anything funny in it."

I riffled through the flimsies, noting the items he had marked. Occurences all within the last few hours; all in New York City and its suburbs . . ." "*Redskin climbs to porch roof. A marauder garbed as an American Indian . . .*" And another: "*Girl frightens burglar, fantastically dressed as Colonial Soldier. Janet Scudder (19) was seized by a man in the costume of a Colonial Soldier . . .*" And another: "*Man in weird costume tries to abduct farm girl. Mary Hoskins, eighteen, is in Centerville hospital, recovering from attack by unknown assailiant in fancy dress futuristic costume.*

Items of humor? There was

nothing funny in them to me. I sat staring, with a vague shudder. An office boy came with another sheaf of flimsies. Blake gasped as he glanced at them. This time, several girls were missing; a girl had been heard screaming. . . . A running Indian, two-thirds naked, paint-smeared, had flung a tomahawk at a policeman. With unerring precision, at a distance of a hundred feet, the policeman's skull had been split as though it was an apple.

Nothing funny in that. Nor another: *"Patrolman John Cafferty, 28th Precinct, found dead in alley. No wound except queer burned spot on forehead as though from electrical high voltage contact . . ."*

I drew young Blake aside; told him of the man who had accosted me up on Riverside. He stared numbly; and suddenly we were both shuddering.

"Dead people—" he murmured. "Or—or—"

Or what? Wild thoughts were in my mind. Was this some band of normal criminals, fantastically garbed? What about that Indian's skill with a tomahawk? That weird burned spot on the policeman's forehead? The man on Riverside had said: "We need young men and young—women." More than once, that queer emphasis, young—women. . .

"Well—" Blake murmured again. "Good Lord, Bob—something supernatural—"

"It was two-thirty A.M.

"He said three o'clock," I told Blake. "Shall we go? Or tell the police?"

It was possible of course, that the man who had met me on Riverside had nothing to do with these attacks upon girls. And his talk to me might have been a hoax. Or, to the contary, there might be a big news story here, which we certainly wanted to get unaided if we could.

We told no one of our purpose. It was just before three A.M. when on foot we were apprroaching the region which the man who had called himself Tork had designated. Ragged trees, rocky terrain lay ahead of us, a long and then precipitous slope which ended down at winding Spuyten Duyvil Creek. Clouds were overhead now; the night was darkening. The little creek, far below us, spanned by its several railroad bridges, was a silver thread, darkening as a cloud patch effaced the moon. The yellow-lighted city behind us faded as we entered the woods.

"This ought to be about the place," I whispered.

We melted down, crouching in a thicket. The silence was queerly heavy here, surrounded by the great throbbing city. Its faint blended hum was audible; and the distant grind of trains rounding the curves, crossing the bridges, sometimes was a spluttering glare from the third-rail contacts. . .

"Bob—look—" Blake's whisper was in my ear, his hand on my arm. We tensed, crouched staring. Ahead of us in the gloom a figure had appeared. Short, thick-set man in an ancient Dutch costume. He had an old fowling piece in his hand. He stood with his back to a tree, peering down the slope. Then suddenly he moved into a deeper shadow and vanished.

"Shall we follow him?" Blake whispered. "Or shall we—"

He got no further. The words died on his lips as he sucked in his breath with a little gasp. Ahead of us in an open space where for two or three hundred feet there was an oblong patch of level ground devoid of trees, something was appearing. The ghost of a ship. For a second or two it looked like that—a shimmering wraith of cylindrical hull a hundred feet long and twenty feet or so high. Fantastic—the skeleton of a ship and white shining ribs. Bars crossing its long line of little windows; a bulging front bow-end, with a round protruding turret.

All in a second or two it materialized, with a faint humming coming from it. Then the humming ceased. Blankly we stared, transfixed. The thing was real, lying there a hundred feet from us. Long, low dark shape now.

Lightless. Soundless No! There was the faint sound of a frightened girl's voice; then another, checked by a low gutteral command. And the sound suddenly, of a metal door grinding open. An oval doorway yawned in the ship's side; the figures of men came out.

Three A.M. A distant church spire in the city behind us boomed the hour, floating here on the heavy night-air. Abruptly figures were around us in the woods; arriving men. A man carying the limp form of a girl. From the ship a tiny beam of white light struck on them. Tork! I recognized him. But more than that Blake and I both recognized the unconscious, inert girl. So great a horrow sept me that for a second the weird scene blurred before me.

The girl was Doris!

Blake and I leaped to our feet together. Neither of us were armed. We did not think of that. There was nothing save the horror of Doris being carried into the doorway of the weird ghost-ship. I recall that I shouted wildly, and that Blake seized a rock which he flung in futile frenzy as we ran forward.

But suddenly we stopped. Blake stumbled, fell and lay twitching, jerking as though he were bound by invisible ropes to the ground. A second later the thing hit me. A force; it seemed to jump from the ground into the ground. My feet struck. I swayed forward, then back. With all my strength I lifted one foot, but it snapped back to the ground. Rooted there. A chuckling laugh came through the darkness. A voice said in queer, clipped English:

"Not to kill them. The master says one minute. There is no other stop until the end of the voyage."

Weird figures engulfed Blake and me. For a moment we fought widly. I saw Blake being carried bodily as he struggled. Then something was crushing on my head. My senses faded, with just enough consciousness left so that I was aware of being hoisted into the dark doorway. It slid closed with a soft grind of metal. Then there was a faint throbbing hum—and a shock hurled into all my body so that what little consciousness I had left was flung from me.

My senses must have come back within a few seconds. I was aware throbbing hum—and a shock hurled window near me. Then it faded into night again. The daylight and night of Tomorrow!

I was being carried through Time!

Chapter II
The Voyage of Two Million Years

I had been carried forward, into the round turret room at the bow of the ship. The humming had faded now to a faint throb. With full returning consciousness I found myself lying on the floor grid.

The figures of men were here in a flat, dead-gray luminescence—a roughly clad, bearded fellow who squatted near me, smoking a weird-looking pipe, with a small cylinder weapon on his lap; and a group across the circular room, playing some sort of game with a board between them. Incongruous figures, their dress suggesting the past of New York City, and its future.

Their murmured voices sounded with fragments of English, yet so different of wording and intonation that some could barely understand the others. Comrades they were, but they seemed from worlds far apart. Yet there was one thing all of them had in common—men of villainous look, criminals branded together here by a common outlawry.

Their rough laughter rose at intervals. Drink was in a great flagon beside them. Some of them were flushed with it. Then in the humming silence of the time-ship, from down the dim, opalescent corridor came the murmured frightened voices of girls. One of the men laughted raucously.

"Our big day, when we arrive, eh Greggson? Hope I get a good one—it will be nice to start married life again."

At the ship's controls I saw Tork sitting, with a great bank of whirring mechanisms before him—levers and little switches, electronic pressure gauges and whirring time-dials. Weird, almost gruesome figure now with the glowing opalescent light tinting his sleek black clothes. His grim, hawk-nosed face was gray, bloodless in the lightsheen. He turned to survey the man who had spoken.

"The drawing will be fair, you may be sure of that, Thomass."

The group assented jovially. The one called Greggson—a burly, bullet-headed giant in red silk shirt, blue tight trousers and big flaring gaudy boots—retorted ironically:

"Quite so, Master. And you, crowned Emperor and for Empress we have Rhadana? She is worthy of any man—I would like her myself." He raised his cup with an applauding gesture. "To Rhadana—Mistress of the New Era. If I had lived in 5140, where she came from, I might have had her myself, long before this, eh fellows?"

Then I saw Doris sitting in a little chair across the room; Doris with terror on her white face, but seemingly unharmed. And beside me here on the floor, Jim Blake was lying. He was hitched up on one elbow, aware that I had stirred, that my eyes were open; and his hand touched me.

"Doris, she's all right," he murmured.

"Yes, I see—"

Our guard heard us and called Tork. He left his dials and came with a pounce, standing over us.

"So? You have recovered?"

"Yes," I said. "What's the idea of this—you—"

His waxen hand, with long lean

fingers heavily jeweled, rose to silence me.

"So you would trick me? Telling your friend—"

The red-shirted giant across the control turret suddenly laughed.

"What will we do with them, Master. Why not kill them? Or should we toss them out?"

Tork's thin smile widened. "They shall be the first criminals of the New Era. That will be interesting—punishing them with death after our festival. "He stood with his eyes flashing as he drew himself erect. "And it will show the rest of you that Tork will tolerate nothing."

He turned, went back to his controls; and as he passed Doris, his hand lightly touched her hair with a caress. It made her cry out; and Blake exclaimed:

"You let her alone, damn you—"

"Oh she shall not be harmed," Tork smiled. "She is too gentle. . . You two—sit with her, if you like. You want them by you, little Doris?"

"Oh yes—yes, please," she murmured.

"Whatever you wish," he said grandiloquently. "You see, little Doris, how kind Tork can be to you? It will be that way, always in our New Era. Look out the window—certainly there is much to see. You can tell her about it," he added to me.

We sat on a little metal bench beside Doris; whispered to her, comforting her. How terrible all this must have been to her, in her eternal darkness! Tork quite evidently had followed her and me when I took her home; and then he had gotten in, seized her, with a drug that had rendered her unconscious. . .

"Two thousand ten," Tork said suddenly to his men. He chuckled. "We are making speed—and no more stops, this trip.

Blake and I stared out the window between its luminous, faintly humming grey bars. During all this time I had been aware that at first there was alternate light and darkness outside—brief periods which marked the passing days and nights as we sped into Time. There was a steady acceleration; light and darkness which soon were brief puffs. And then their speed blended them; a greyness outside. I had seen a green tinge to it, alternating with white—the summers, the winters, and then they too were blended into drab monochrome of grey as the years, merged with one another, sped by.

I stared, breathless, awed and then with murmured words tried futilely to describe it to Doris. The ghostly grey outlines of the landscape and the city outside our window were changing with a slow flow of movement. Great shadowy buildings rose. It was a strange form of movement; things melting down, leprous and in a second gone, and others, always larger, rising to take their place.

The time-dials in front of Tork were whirring. The dial for the years was a blur with its whirling pointer. Great New York!—It had flowed up and around us, engulfing us. Monstrous metal terraces, gigantic arches, buildings that towered into the sky. All grey with the blended

daylight and darkness, winter and summer.

But now I could see spots of color. Buildings of glistening yellow metal which endured for a hundred years or more, and then were gone with something else replacing them. Great archways on which permanent lights were mounted, so that at least for what to us was a second or two, we could see the spots and glare of the lights.

Had the great city here reached its height? It seemed so. Down the slope, where the little Spuyten Duyvil Creek wound into the broad Hudson, all had been engulfed by the bridges, terraces and arcades.

Now we plunged into blankness. Great structures were built on this space we were occupying. A blankness here, with our ship perhaps within the metal itself of the vast structure. Then that was gone and we came again into the open.

The great city at its height. I could envisage all the myriad little events transpiring here—the daily movements of millions of people here in these buildings, on the towering terraced streets. The giant vehicles in the air. A billion-billion little events, so brief that they were merged into a grey nothingness before us.

Beyond where the Spuyten Duyvil and the Hudson now doubtlessly flowed submerged beneath solid arcades under them, a monstrous spired tower swiftly rose into the air. Fifty years perhaps to build it. For what to us was a moment or two, it held on its top a great multi-colored beacon—a ring of red and green eyes. They endured—a hundred, two hundred years.

Then all in the blinking of an eye, the tower was gone. A leprous hole there; a grey leprous patch to the left and to the right; a blur down where a segment of the Hudson was exposed, as though a litter of wreckage were lying there—wreckage which for a hundred years did not seem to be cleared away.

A monstrous cataclysm? I was murmuring it to Doris; and then I was aware that a man had come and was quietly sitting beside us.

"War," he said. "The war of 5550. So much destroyed, and there was no one left here with the heart to rebuild."

I turned to face him. His soft voice, with queer clipped accent with not like the rough voices of these other men. He was a smallish pallid young fellow, in a grey-white, embroidered tunic with tight cloth trousers beneath. His head, small and round, was surmounted by close-clipped blond hair. His face, smooth-shaven, was clean-cut, patrician highly intelligent.

"I am George Allaire," he said through thin lips. "Queer to stare out now at my time-world. I was born in 6000—just after the war. It was terrible—the end of civilization here."

Tork momentarily had moved away. Blake and I talked in half whispers to young Allaire. He had been a surgeon here in the unbuilt ruins of Great New York—a vassal state then of the Great Dictator. A surgeon—

His gaze went to Doris as he told us. And she heard him.

"Oh," she murmured. "And you will give me my sight? Could you?"

He smiled his gentle smile; and left us. He had freedom of movement here. He went down the grey,

luminous ship's corridor. In a moment he was back.

With goggles on his eyes and an instrument in his hand, he examined Doris carefully. More than four thousand years of medical progress!—My mind, with expanded viewpoint, flung back to my own unenlightened time—our physcians and surgeons, back there in 1950—what puny knowledge they had possessed!

Then Allaire nodded, spoke strange medical words which we had no way of understanding.

"A simple growth-spore," he said. "Non-malignant, but it desensitizes the sheating of the optic nerves. I could remove it in half an hour. How terrible and stupid that it should have been left there so long."

I held Doris as she trembled with her happiness. Blake leaned closer to Allaire.

"You're not like the rest of this outfit, "Blake whispered. "How did you happen to—"

"I had trouble." Allaire's smile was a little wistful. "I was glad to escape."

"Where is he taking us?", I demanded. "His New Era—"

"Yes. You'll see." He suddenly felt perhaps that he should not tell us too much. He had made several trips on the time-ship—from the New Era, back almost to the first coming of the Indians on Manhattan Island. Gathering supplies. Stealing things of science. Recruiting men. . . Stealing women. . . A new civilization to be built by Tork—its Emperor.

"Only some five hundred of us men are there now," Allaire was saying. "And we're taking thirty women this trip. Several hundred have already been taken. That will be enough, they say, for the drawing, when we get there. The men are very impatient."

His slow smile was whimsical.

"They have made me the physician and surgeon. We had casulities this trip. One of our men was wounded when we stopped at 3000. And back in 1950 (where you came aboard—one was shot with what I hear you call a bullet—a leaden, base-metal chunk. I am afraid he will die."

Tork suddenly joined us. He saw the optical instruments in Allaire's hand.

"So? What is this?" he demanded.

"Her eyes," Allaire said. "I am going to give her sight."

"Oh you are?" Tork's grin was ironic, but his eyes gleamed with a suppressed fury. "I do not wish it."

"Why," I gasped, "you told me—".

"I have changed my mind." He bent with his jeweled hand touching Doris' head. "I think I would rather have her without sight," he said. "Do not be too unhappy, my dear. There is little to see of any glories where we are going. You will stay by me, and I will be your eyes. And you will know what a wonderful man is Tork—your Master, and yet—your servant."

His hand toyed with his belt where a tiny weapon of gold, jewel-like, hung dangling.

"I should kill you, Allaire," he added calmly. But I won't. I need you. Go attend our men who are wounded."

He turned away. Allaire leaned over me.

"I'll find my chance—I'll fix her eyes."

Three days of our trip passed. They were awesome days indeed. Since we could not possibly escape, Tork ironically gave us a fair freedom of movement. Much of the time we spent with him in the ship's glowing, humming control turret.

There was something queer about him—something that I could never quite seem to fathom. He radiated power, yet with it there was a simple childishness. Pleasant enough with us—and then he would gloat that we were his first condemned men, to be put to death at the great festival the night of our arrival. Our deaths—with ghastly torture which he delighted in picturing—would show all his men what a wonderful Emperor they had in him. And that he meant it, and would do it with the same smiling irony, I could not doubt.

There was a woman here who ministered to Doris. The woman Rhadana—she whom the red-shirted giant Greggson had toasted as their future Empress. She had joined Tork's band during one of the stops—at 6140. I recall my emotions when first I saw her. Tork had given me a little cubby alone, and Blake the one next to it. It was near the first time of sleep; and Rhadana came with food for me.

"You are called Bob Manse?" she said softly. "Here is your meal."

She had very much the same clipped accent as young Allaire. But her voice was throaty, purring. I had been staring out of the barred window of my dim little room—staring at the vast panorama which the changing centuries were bringing to this little vista of Space. The great city had risen to its height, been devasted by war most horrible—war that all the perverted genius of science could make terrible beyound anything my mind was capable of understanding. For centuries the city had lain in ruins, its despondent people the vassals of tyrants.

And then the city began to rise again. Perhaps a different civilization. I saw rising what seemed great pyramids, with their apex sliced off, with streets running along their steplike terraces. Another monstrous city, with buildings as far as my vision extended—great structures a thousand feet or more in height, with parks on the tops. And all the original grounds and the rivers again covered with the tangle of traffic arteries.

The time-ship's acceleration seemed to have reached its height now. Structures which endured only a hundred years were melted together in the scene before me. Everywhere now there was a vast stir of things changing. And then there seemed a pause. Mankind on the height. Perhaps it was so all over the world. Peaks of civilization—the genius of man's accomplishment taking him to the height. And there he was resting, content. A thousand years? Two thousand? And then the inevitable decadence began.

And I saw the triumphant city come down. Faster, faster through the centuries.

Through the window of my cubby I was watching it. The city here—perhaps the pride of all the Earth—at last sank back into a blur of ruins, decay and desolation.

"You are called Bob Manse?" the

voice at my doorway repeated impatiently. "Come, take your meal."

I turned to face the woman Rhadana. Amazingly voluptuous creature, this harlot from the city of 5140 A.D. A blue-colored cloth was wound wide around her swelling hips, with a tasseled sash hanging knee-length down one side. Sandals were on her bare feet. Her torso was bare save for breast-plates of gleaming metal and a low-cut collar of cloth, covered with shining little golden coins, flat on her upper chest and cut wide to cover her shoulders. Her black hair, glistening with oil, was braided and coiled on her head, with a gauze headdress of crimson which fell like a bridal veil down her back.

And there was in her eyes as she stared at me, all the lure which her aspect promised; and a little mocking half-smile upon her heavily carmined lips.

For that instant, startled, I blankly stared; and then I took the terraced little tray of food and drink she proffered.

"Thank you. You are Rhadana?" I said.

"Yes. You have heard of me?" She lingered in my doorway, a jeweled hand on her hip.

"The blind girl, Doris— you have been kind to her, she says. I thank you."

"Oh, she?" Her gesture was of faint contempt. "A sweet little child. She wants her eyesight. Tork should let her have it."

"Yes, so I think Your are to be the Empress of the New Era world?"

She nodded carelessly. "And Tork the Emperor." She was looking at me strangely; and suddenly she glided forward. Jewels hanging on a bracelet at one of her knees tinkled. Suddenly her hand went out and touched my shoulder. And she added furtively, in her queer throaty, purring voice:

"I have been watching you—Bob. I can see you are not like these other bellystabbers—more like that Georg Allaire. Except—"

Her hand lightly caressed my arm.

"Except—that you are more of a man," she finished. "I am to be Empress, you see? That is why I joined this—adventure. Power to rule. How I have always wanted it—and now I am going to have it, you see?"

"I see," I said.

She was suddenly breathless.

"To rule with Tork!" She spat it out. "And he is less than—"

She checked herself. What was this? I couldn't imagine.

"I have some ideas," she suddenly added. still more softly. Her furtive gaze back to my door made my heart begin to pound.

"What?" I murmured. "Ideas of what? Surely you realize you can trust me, Rhadana?"

She nodded. Stood staring at me an instant, with her bosom rising and falling with the emotion of her pondered plans. Whatever they were, it seemed to me suddenly that I could use this woman, perhaps to escape with Doris and Blake. Did she hate Tork, and yet want to be Empress of this new world?

"We will talk again," she murmured. At my door she regarded me again with that mocking little half smile, and then she glided away into the luminous humming corridor.

Two days; two nights more of that weird fantastic trip. The first time of

sleep was over. And all through those next hours of existence as we were living it here on the ship, I stared out at the tumbled, blurred ruins of the great city. The hills and rivers here was obvious now. Changed, eroded contours from those I had known in my own time-world. Ruins of a city. Storms were burying them in silt.

Then there was a cataclysm. For a time it seemed that water was here; but then it receded, so that off to the right the huge Atlantic ocean was rolling up, grey and blurred, fairly close to us; and to the left, the buried city sank under silt and tangled vegetation.

Our forward acceleration was slowing now; a retardation of time-flow for a while more rapid than our acceleration. And the scene which I had thought was empty, now suddenly began to show movement again—transitory little structures that man was struggling to erect, which could endure perhaps hardly a century. I could see them rising, then breaking and melting away. And others coming. Always smaller. Enduring now only a year or two, but our slow velocity at last made them apparent; crude little dwellings.

That day passed for us; and still another time of sleep. The time-dials were nearing two million A.D. when the sound of tramping feet and the frightened voices of girls aroused me, made me realize that we were almost ready to disembark. In the control turret, Blake gripped me.

"If only we could get Doris away from them," he whispered. Get this damned ship and run it back. I've been studying how it operates, Bob."

"Yes, so have I. If only—"

Futile plans. The big red-shirted fellow named Greggson was watching us now, a leer on his face, his hand at a weapon which dangled by his side.

"Almost there," Tork said. "Two million and ten A.D. The New Era. The world of Tork—Emperor of the Earth. . . Oh, there you are, little Doris. Come here by me. You see how fortunate you are that Tork likes you."

Rhadana brought Doris to us, evidently at Tork's command. The woman flung me a furtive, seemingly significant glance, then glided away. Tork did not see it, but Blake did.

"What the devil," he whispered.

"Quiet, I'll tell you later. Just a chance for us, maybe."

Tork called out a warning and flung the last time-switch. My senses reeled. Down the corridor, I could hear the voices of the captive girls crying out, and Rhadana quieting them.

Then the humming was gone. The luminous, opalescent ribs of the ship were solid and dark-grey. Through the barred window, a dull-red sunlight was streaming. And sounds were floating in. The shouts of men—Tork's comrades here—calling out in greeting. And other voices; the voices of the natives here . . . our descendents—yours and mine.

As Tork and Greggson shoved us out through the oval doorway and down the incline, Blake and I stood numbed, gasping at the weird sight.

Chapter III
The New Era

The sun was low in the west—a huge dull-red round ball. It looked startlingly close, and sullen; lifeless. The cloudless sky was a sodden bronze. The landscape had almost nothing in it of any familiar configuration, save that the sea was at the east—a glassy, oily-Looking surface, with the red-bronze sunlight on it.

Undulations of almost naked, rocky hills, with stunted trees; and to the west a great eroded canyon with a babbling ribbon of dark water, far down.

Instant impressions. Then my gaze swept to the babbling throng that pressed close toward us on the rocky slope. Humans? Our ancestors. Men and women. . . Women carrying children in their arms. . . Adults hardly taller than my waist. Ghastly little things. Naked lumps of flesh—grey-brown skin, covered with scraggling, mangy-looking black hair-growth. The heads were round, over-large. Bulging forehead; big brain-pan, with large brain, most of it long since attrophied.

These weird humans stood milling on the slope—a thousand of them perhaps. Mankind reverting to savagery? Already they were beyond that; merging into animals. Yet not quite that either. For somehow on them was stamped the traditions of their heritage of transient glory, lost now so that they were helpless.

Blake stood gripping me.

"Those—the people here? Is that all that's left of mankind?

It was, undoubtedly. Perhaps in the struggle, the animals, birds, insects all had died. Certainly we saw none of them. The little babble of human voices rolled at us—brief fragments of sounds, animalistic. Like a chattering, milling throng of apes they stood with frightened curiosity, staring. Lumps of women, wide-hipped with flowing tangled hair half enveloping them, held up their little lumps of children to see us better—children with round, wondering faces of staring dark eyes. All staring with apathetic gazes, dulled by the blight of the centuries.

"Get back there!" Tork was roaring. "Out of the way—you—get back!"

As though scattering a group of domestic animals, he lunged at them, waving his arms; and before him, with frightened squeals, they ran. I could see, off by the Hudson-canyon, little mounds of stones piled into the shape of dwellings. The scurrying figures ran into them; and into holes in a nearby broken cliff. A patch of stunted woods was nearby; trees on which food might be growing. And there was a distant field. A little agriculture left. Blighted; pathetic. . .

The red-shirted swaggering Greggson shoved at Blake and me.

"Come on, you two. Your house—" He laughed racuously. "Your last day—you might as well get what comfort you can."

I suddenly resisted him.

"I'm going with Tork—Tork and Doris—"

Men were bringing the girls out from the time-ship now. Amazingly hetero-geneous group of swaggering villains—and amazing captives. . .

Two or three girls of my own time-world. And my future, and my past. There was one with long flaxen braids—a little Dutch-American costume of tight bodice and flaring skirt. Another—half naked Indian girl of Dutch Nieuw Amsterdam. A man was dragging her as she screamed with her terror; and then he cuffed her into silence.

They passed around an angle of nearby hill. Close to us, Tork was leading Doris with an arm around her. I saw the slim dark figure of young Georg Allaire, enveloped now in a dark cloak, press close after them.

"You let us alone," Blake was protesting to Greggson. "You—"

Then Tork heard us.

"Bring them," he called. "This way, Greggson."

In the light of the dying red sunset, we advanced around the corner of the hill; and then upon us there burst a new amazing sight. Tork's village. His new civilization, here in this aged, dying world. His New Era.

Like the captive girls, and the motley bandits themselves, in this little group of fantastic dwellings there was the blending of the past ages when man was glorious. Perhaps a hundred small structures had been erected here. Weird metal houses, like fantastic shanties thrown together of the small parts of other structures which had been brought here. Some, with lean-to-walls of shining metal, had roofs of crude thatch. Or a wall of alumite, glistening like burnished copper in the red-bronze sunset, with oval window set with prismpanes to catch and fling the light inside—and incongruously the adjoining wall was of piled stones.

Motley, half finished little dwellings, waiting for more materials to come that they might be completed. They were set in rows, with a curving street or two between them. A broken statue stood ludicrously askew at an intersection—a pilfered work of art brought here from some past age. Platforms, hastily built of handsome colored marble blocks, had been erected at the end of a street

Lights were winking on now—the glow of lights in windows—soft radiance from braziers in the street, with crudely connected wires leading to strewn batteries lying in a nearby heap. From a cliff close by, a light projector suddenly flashed on, like a rainbow bathing the village in prismatic splendour. And a great brazier of incense—the toy of some past voluptuary—cast off its exotic odor, wafted by the heavy, sluggish night-breeze.

Some five hundred of Tork's men were here; and now perhaps as many maidens. I saw a long, rambling shed of thatch patrolled by armed guards, in which they were confined. The thirty new arrivals were flung in there; waiting for tonight, the choosing of mates for the population of this New World.

I saw Tork now with his arm around Doris as he led her toward one of the strange half-metal houses, with Greggson shoving us after them. Did Tork want Rhadana—or Doris? Why was he so ironically gentle with Doris? So ironically anx-

ious to please her?" "I am your Emperor—and your servant." I had heard him say it to her several times. And why that burst of rage from him at the idea of having her regain her sight? Why should he like her better—blind?

Guards were pacing in the red-bronze twilight outside our little house when Tork left us with Doris—and with Rhadana here to give us our supper.

"Your last meal," he told Blake and me with his twisted, ironic smile. "Have Rhadana make it a good one. You shall see the choosing of mates. And then comes your great honor—the first criminals to be put to death here. You will go down in history for that." He thumped his chest, on which now a miscellaneous collection of little pilfered ornaments were fastened, to denote his rank. "The history of Tork's New Empire—and I am writing it now. And tonight your names go in it."

A madman? Was he that? I stared at him. "Stop that!" he said sharply. "You—you—" As though a stab of terror had gone into him, under my stare. Then he turned. "I am busy with arrangements. I will come for you later."

The woman Rhadana—queerly incongruous in her voluptuous garb as she quietly moved about her tasks—was preparing us the evening meal. In a corner of the ramshackle room—its metal walls sloping, its thatched ceiling askew, with metal furniture and luxurious colorful drapes representing a dozen past ages—Blake sat with Doris. We knew we could not escape from here. The watchful guards outside were armed with weapons of what diabolic lethal power we could only imagine.

And suddenly the dark-cloaked Georg Allaire came in. His little instrument-case was under his cloak.

"I will give her her sight now," he murmured. "Only a few minutes with the facilities I have here." He was pale, intense, his eyes burning. "Have no fear—his vengeance will come on me—not her."

He led Doris, and young Blake with them, into an adjoining room. Just the simple removal of blighting, clinging spores.

I started with them, but abruptly Rhadana checked me.

"You—Bob—I am ready to talk now." Again she was breathless with her emotion. She swayed against me; her heavy, exotic perfume enveloped us. "You like me a little?" she murmured.

"Why—why of course, Rhadana."

"Because you are a man—of course. I will be Empress here. It was my idea—" She breathlesly paused. Her eyes darted like daggers—like the little jeweled dagger that suddenly her jeweled fingers were gripping. "My idea—I would like to have—you for my mate. The men would not mind—not with the promises I could give them." The mocking half smile played on her lips. "I have always been able to control men. I could—promise them much—"

"And Tork?" I murmured.

"Tork. To him will I attend—you need do nothing of that. He—can be killed. A stab—and the acid I have,

to melt him apart. I know him—you see? He is—"

A faint cry from Doris made me whirl.

"Just hold still—just a minute," Blake's voice was saying with harrassed anxiety. "He won't hurt you, Dorrie—just a minute now—"

I rushed in to them; stood silent, breathless. Miracle of science of the year 5,000. Spores that could be killed with a gentle light-beam. It was no more than the effort of a druggist, in my day, removing a cinder from a woman's eye.

"All right," Allaire said at last. "Now—I'll wash them out—and then the vapors—"

Doris, now with closed lids, stood trembling.

"You take her," Blake murmured to me. "Take her to the window."

I stood with her, holding her trembling body against me as she opened her eyes—opened them, closed them again—and then was blinking, staring with wordless wonderment. Strange trick of fate that after a lifetime of darkness her first vision should bring so weird, fantastic a sight as this beyond our window—the motley little street in the red-bronze twilight with the prismatic rainbow of the distant projector bathing it.

"And what is this?" Tork stood behind us. He saw Doris; he understood. For that second, so great a wrath was upon him that his contorted face seemed suddenly inhuman. There was a little hiss from his belt—a tiny darting point of light.

Quite visibly it floated across the room, struck young Allaire in the face; point of light which suddenly expanded to be a puff of blackness. Allaire stood wavering. His face was a ghastly, puckered black mask with empty eye-sockets and goggling mouth.

Then he fell. Tork, with a burst of laughter, strode from the room. We bent over the dying Allaire. His groping hands found Doris, clung to her.

"I am very glad," he murmured. "You see—in my own world I was condemned to death—disgraced. I—tried an operation on the daughter of our ruler—hopeless but I tried it—and failed. I am glad I could—help you—"

His breath suddenly stopped; he was gone.

We sat presently—Blake, Doris and I—at our little meal. The woman Rhadana did not join us. At the doorway she stood somberly staring. The last meal for Blake and me. And for Doris—what? We had no chance to plan even if planning anything could be more than futile, fatuous hope.

The swaggering giant Greggson came in and sat close to us watching us with his grinning, leering gaze. He said little but I noticed that his gaze often strayed to the watching, voluptuous Rhadana. Was Greggson too, planning something for tonight?

Tork's New Era! This new civilization where he thought that he could rule supreme! The irony of it struck at me. There is nowhere in the Universe—no time-world from the Beginning to the End—where man could go and avoid the passions of greed, love, hate, jealousy, because he brings them with him.

Tork's Empire was hardly yet set up, and in this single room of this one little house all of us sat pondering, brooding with different motives—smouldering passions wanting the spark of opportunity to flare them into violence and bloodshed.

"All right, we start now," Greggson said suddenly. "You two men—I will take you."

For an hour past there had been the commotion of preparations outside. The red-bronze twilight was long—Earth had slowed its rotation as it sank nearer and nearer the dying Sun. There was still faint daylight in the west engulfed by the glare of the village lights as Greggson, despite our protests, pushed Blake and me from the house. Other men leaped on us; shoved us along the weird busy little street until beyond its end, we were flung to the top of a little dais, where we crouched with a red light bathing us.

At first, in the crimson glare, I could see nothing. There was just the vast murmur of blended sounds—voices, the tramp of feet, the faint hissing throb of the lectronic lights. Then my eyes grew accustomed to the radiance.

To one side, on a long platform, the lines of the several hundred girls were ranged. Indescribable collection of young females from a score of time-worlds. They were all still dressed in the garments in which they had been seized, save that most of them were now partially denuded. Prismatic light, glorious rainbow sheen as though from a painter's palette, bathed them as they stood terrified, clutching at each other.

On each of them was a big ticket, with a number. The men were jostling each other, crowding around the raised platform, noting the numbers, calling out to each other the number which they hoped they would get. Roistering men examing the prizes now to be awarded them.

Facing the girls' platform at a distance of some fifty feet, a raised dais stood with its back against a dark little rock-cliff. Dais with a great golden, canopied throne. I sucked in my breath as I stared, and felt young Blake tense beside me. Tork was on the throne—Tork resplendent with pilfered stolen robe of red and ermine. And it was Doris beside him. Doris, gentle, dove-like with a great headdress and a long shimmering blue robe.

She sat white-faced. Her lips had been carmined; her brows heavily pencilled. Her eyes were wide; terrified, wondering—gazing at the fantastic motley world, incomprehensible to her.

The lights here were like a five hundred foot spot of rainbow. Beyond it, the dusk was gathering. Blurred stars were in the sky. The distant sea was a sullen surface of dark glass, the hills close at hand held purple shadows. And on the nearby slopes a great throng of the little lumps of humans were gathering. Like animals attracted by the lights—gathering, milling among themselves at a safe distance. Their jabbering voices blended with the other sounds.

Behind us, the strange village now was deserted, just a few spots of radiance in the house windows. And beyond the hill corner, the long dark outlines of the time-ship were

apparent, merged with the purple rocky hillside behind it.

"The ticket-drawing," Blake muttered to me. "They're starting. Oh Bob—what the devil can we do—Doris there—if only—"

Nothing that we could do. Here beside us our guards were alert. Then I saw, on the throne-dais to one side of Tork, the woman Rhadana was standing. Soft music from some distant point flooded the scene. Rhadana stood swaying to it, instinctive sway perhaps.

She was dressed differently now. Scarf around her hips; breastplates; and over her nearly nude body a flow of gauze crimson draperies. A shaft of light struck her sensuous face. Venom was on it as she gazed at Tork, with her hand sliding under her draperies to her hip.

And then I saw the burly, red-shirted Greggson. He was near Rhadana; watching her. And then slowly I saw him edging toward Tork.

The lottery. A huge brazier of cloisonné stood before Doris. One by one now, Tork was calling the men's names. One by one they came and Doris, reaching into the brazier, handed them a ticket. Their shouts presently were rising:then they were at the girls which had been given them, embracing them—and standing aside in couples, waiting impatiently for Tork, their Emperor, to address them.

Some of the girls were passive, numbed; others struggled, fought with little whimpering screams against the crude caresses forced upon them.

Breathless drama, pregnant with silent expectancy that seemed about to burst into a scream. Tork was on his feet now, with Doris standing beside him. His arms raised with an imperious gesture as he made ready to address his people. There was a breathless instant when I saw Rhadana silently drop her draperies. The prismatic sheen painted her milk-white body, clothing her with color. And now she was gliding forward; the light glinting on the knife-blade in her hand. But suddenly she stopped. Greggson had seen her. He gestured, and she slunk aside.

And then Greggson was raising his weapon. By some miracle Tork suddenly was aware of the danger. He whirled. Greggson's flash of weapon was met in mid-air by one from Tork—a little shower of red, green and yellow sparks with a tiny thunderclap. And then from Tork's belt some other ray spat. It cut through the spark-shower. Greggson's body fell.

There was a sudden shock of silence. Then into it came the muttering of the startled, angry men. Greggson; one of them, perhaps their favorite. A mutter as they surged forward. It was a little fire in prairie grass—it spread. A shout; a thrown missle; girls screaming.

I was aware in that pregnant second that the guards here by Blake and me had jumped forward. One of them called with a burst of profanity at Tork.

Blake seized me. "Come on! Around the back of that throne—"

We jumped together. A hiss of rays added to the turmoil—confusion—and in another second, chaos. Some of the girls had escaped

from the men holding them. They ran, screaming. Down on the dark slopes the little watching creatures also were shouting, milling, surging forward to see better. A hundred or so of them, like stampeded, bewildered animals, came plunging into the light area. A little wave of them got between me and the throne. I plunged into them, scattering them as with squeals of terror they tried to avoid me.

Myriad things happening at once, in those crowded seconds. Up on the throne-platform, close before me now, Tork stood motionless, gazing down at the body of Greggson and then at the surging chaos before him. Tork, with an expression so weird on his face that it made me gasp. A stricken tableau up there. . .

Doris, to one side, was crouching, huddled in her Empress robe—staring numbed, with a hand at her breast in her terror.

Tableau—and in it, only the voluptuous figure of Rhadana was moving; again with sinuous glide advancing upon Tork. And as he had been aware of Greggson, so now he was aware of her. With a little muttered scream of anger he whirled. Her white, painted body wilted under his flash—wilted and fell in a quivering heap at his feet.

In the distance I saw some of the men running now for the time-ship, dragging the girls with them. Between me and the throne there was a solid mass of struggling natives. Blake was gone; separated from me in the rush.

All in only a few crowded, chaotic seconds. The collapse of Tork's world. Up on the platform he was still standing stricken, on his face amazement, disillusionment, despair. Emperor here. Of what? Just chaos. And suddenly his face was contorted by ghastly rage—the maniacal rage of his disillusionment, his despair.

From his belt he whipped a jeweled weapon. It spat with a spreading, electronic blast. Amazing pyrotechnics of hurtling free electricity! It went out in a wave of crackling, sparkling color.

Other blasts from some of the running men came stabbing, but Tork's current beat them back. The air crackled and hissed with showers of sparks, gleaming in the lights. And then the lights were extinguished. There was only the light of the sparks—crackling showers; pinpoints of bursting stars high in the air, and on the ground.

Screams sounded. A spark-shower in an instant was over all the scene. Just a second when the running men and girls were stumbling, dropping, electrocuted by the free-electron, high voltage of the sparks that leaped at them. Sparks like living things in a torrent surging down the slope, blighting the running, naked little creatures. Blighting everything.

Tork, destroying his world.

With an eerie scream he turned his almost exhausted weapon upon his village. The houses shook, crackled with sparks, glowed with interference heat. The thatch roofs burst into puffs of flame. Then the fused, glowing walls collapsed. Rumbles, grinding little crashes of

tumbling metal, mingling with the crackling, hissing of the sparks, every spark a million-volt exploding charge.

I had leaped to one side crawled on the ground and then was up again with the first pyrotechnic shower going over me. And then I came to the side of the platform. Tork's weapon, suddenly dark, exhausted in his hand, went silent. With a wild, maniacal laugh he threw it away. From behind the platform a figure leaped up upon it—a man, seizing Doris. . . Blake! My heart pounded with a rush of thankfulness as I jumped up and Tork saw me; rushed for me.

Our bodies collided, with my arms around him. Weird, ghastly combat. What was this? My gouging fingers clutched his face. Weird smooth feeling—his skin, so queer. Then I struck him. Gripped his shoulder. It seemed to break. In that second his shirt tore. I saw where the flesh of his shoulder had split apart. Bloodless. His flesh? The substance there showed a reinforcement of wire mesh!

Man of the year 6,000. A man? The weird truth rushed at me, with memory of my own vague gropings, and what Rhadana had almost told me. Not a human man. Synthetic; built, moulded in a laboratory. Supreme product of man's inventive, scientific genius at the peak of man's skill—this Thing, cast with such ghastly irony in the fashion of a human man. A Thing, made only to be a slave. And Tork had seen his chance to ape his human masters.

I had cast him off with a gasp of numbed astonishment. And as I stared at him, saw him partly smashed by my clutching grip, he gazed back at me. That same weird look he had given me in the house a while ago—his look of fear at me, a human master!

He felt it now, his helplessness. And with a wild scream he jumped from the platform, scrambled to a nearby rock. For a second he poised, with the gasclouds rolling at him and the lurid glare painting him. Stood poised, gazing at the wreck of his little Empire. Balanced on the rock, fifty feet above us—and then head down, he dove. His body splattered on the rocks, ghastly, twitching, broken thing. The turgid green gas of the electronic fire rolled over it.

We ran through the choking clouds, Blake and I half carrying Doris; leaping over the dead and dying, passing the crumpled, wrecked little village—running for the time-ship. At its door I paused to look back; stood for an instant with my arm around Doris as we gazed.

The spots of light were dulling into little red glows. The heavy gasclouds were settling—a great green-yellow, sodden shroud of death, so that under it Tork's Empire was gone.

The End

FANTASY BOOKS

THE WEREWOLF PRINCIPLE, by Clifford D. Simak, Putnam's, $3.95
THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION, by Samuel R. Delany, Ace, 40c

FRITZ LEIBER

Two SF novels with comparable plots. A hero seeks to know himself, or his several selves. He also hunts a vocation and searches for a lost and semmingly unattainable beloved. He makes a grueling trip through rough country. In the end he sets off for the stars, still a man seeking to come to terms with the fact of change in the universe.

A chance to compare one of the older SF voices, warmly human and individual, with the most poetic of the new voices. For Delany is the most poetry to have hit SF since Bradbury. His images are as pure and vividly colorful, and in addition they have in them a lot of body contact kinesthesia, and blood, sweat, and tears—and a boisterous laughter. While Bradbury's—here much like Simak's, incidentally—are full of the woodsmoke nostalgia for a small-town, country, or small-neighborhood childhood.

Werewolf's language is a third that and two thirds gray and abstract. *Einstein's* is concrete and vividly sensory, leaping occasionally to scientific and philosophic generalities, but always swiftly back again.

Simak manipulates once more these archetypes that have been among his favorites since *City:* the humanly intelligent but loyal dog always eager for a romp across woody hills or the surface of a strange planet; the solicitous robot servant, here taking the form of the talking house that cares for its master even while flying from one foundation pad to another; and the man who must face all the universe's strangeness, but whose deepest yearing is for family continuity and the old home-town.

Delany makes genetics, with a touch of math, the hard-science spine of his book, just as *Babel-17* had a core of linguistics. *Einstein's* setting is chaotic: primitive villages overlying a radioactivity-blasted past; dragon herders; a hypermodern city; a culture capable of sending out starships—elements which could never be held together except for Delany's poetry and gargantuanly violect action (with never a hint of sadism for its own sake—the curse of most fictional violence these days).

It is in the use made of myth that one finds the sharpest difference between *Einstein* and *Werewolf.* The latter hardly evokes the werewolf legend at all, only the primeval fear of wolves. While Delany's hero Lo Lobey starts off by living a futurian variant of the Theseus-Minatour legend, then lives through an interweaving of the myths of Orpheus, Christ, Odin and Baldur, Ringo Beatle—and I'm sure I've missed

some. One more example: the two American—myth characters who make up all of the police-harassed play *The Beard*, Billy the Kid and Jean Harlow, are only two more figures in Delany's exotic pantheon. In his journal of a trip through Italy and Greece which he made while writing *Einstein* and excerpts of which appear in the book, Delany tells us that Billy the Kid is the last "image of youth" which he has excised from himself. He does a good job of exorcism, as he did with James Bond in *Babel-17*.

Werewolf tackles the three-minds-in-one-body problem, and mostly does an unconvincing job of it. I think this is an illusion which takes *all* a writer's talents and tricks to make plausible. Daniel F. Galouye's "Descent into the Maelstrom," with its typographical devices and mind-is-a-vast-house image, points toward one solution, but it seems to me that much work is needed here, and by mainstream as well as SF writers. Psychologists and many of us laymen talk glibly about a human being having many selves, but good fictional presentations of this are rare to the vanishing point. Even non-fictions such as *The Three Faces of Eve* *do better. (Though maybe I've forgot some good fictional stuff here.)*

I also find the psi, telekinesis, and telepathy in *Einstein* and *Werewolf* unconvincing, as in most SF. It seems to me that believers in ESP do the worst job of writing about it, just as believers in the occult and spiritualism turn out the most insipid supernatural-horror and ghost stories.

Of course Delany simply takes ESP as one more element from past science fiction and reworks it, just as he does with everything from mutants to spaceships. He is among other things a great eclectic. *Einstein* is scattered with quotes which display a praiseworthy breadth of reading.

While Simak continues to cultivate his own garden.

It is easy, and also accurate, to see in *Werewolf* and *Einstein* the opposition of the older upper-middle-class generation and Youth in Revolt. Delany is one of the very few articulate observer-participants of the beat and hippie generations. While I imagine Simak would think of the latter as soon-to-be-damped vibrations across the moss-grown, granite face of America.

Werewolf pictures a conformist and tradition-bound future, in which the vast majority of mankind will still cringe from the unknown, *Einstein* a generation whose most primal memories will chiefly be those of 33 and 45 discs. Which will turn out closer to the truth?

At any rate, both authors seem to believe with Empedocles that you can't ever step into the same river twice.

And at one point in *Werewolf* the hero goes to sleep in the clean dirt of a hollow oak, with a roughneck wolf-mind sleeping inside him, and with a wounded raccoon in his arms—and watched over by an ET "brownie." There he approximates Lo Lobey and one knows for sure that the authors are two men who can talk to each other.

THE MONUMENT

By HENRY SLESAR

Far out on the route of the big space liners, they had a monument which was a symbol of Man's conquest of space. But those who expected heroic grandeur carved in stone were due for a rude awakening.

THE woman in the feathered cloche came out of the acceleration "coma" first. Norwich, the youthful Captain of the Uppman VI, was surprised. She was fat, almost too fat by space-passenger standards, and he hadn't credited her with the wind. But he was wrong. Her wind was very good indeed.

"They never told us it would be *that* bad!" she wheezed. "You'd think they'd *do* something about it, wouldn't you?"

The heavy-jowled man in the gray business suit grunted his agreement. "It sure costs enough. Three thousand dollars, and a second-class flight at that."

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"It's just as bad on the first-class flight," said the Captain, helping the fat woman with her straps. He smiled at her, not too convincingly. "Just a few more frills on first-class service, that's all."

A thin-faced woman behind her asked: "Can we see outside?"

"We'll open the observation window in a few minutes. Then you'll all get a look at space. It's pretty exciting," he added.

"My seat's stuck," the fat woman said testily. "Can you fix it?"

"Stuck? Oh, I see. Sorry, but seats can't be shifted back and forth. It's for your own protection."

"Pretty uncomfortable, if you ask me." The heavy jowled man reached into his suit and came out with a plump cigar.

"Sorry, sir." The Captain stopped him from flicking his lighter. "No smoking permitted. Our ventilation equipment can handle just exactly the oxygen and carbon dioxide we have now. Cigar smoke could throw us off." Norwich allowed a note of severity to creep into his voice. "You were told all that before the blast-off."

"Are we in free orbit now?" said a young man with horn-rimmed glasses and a briefcase.

"That's right," said the Captain. "I'll have to go forward now. We'll be accelerating again in half an hour."

The fat woman looked dismayed. "Again?"

"It won't be so bad this time," the thin-faced woman said, leaning forward. "Once we're in free orbit, it's easy."

"Have you been up before?" said the young man, a little awe plain in his voice.

"My husband works at New Luna Park. He's the Managing Director." She smiled proudly.

"You must be Mrs. Schonberg, then," the young man said. "I'm Harris of the Architectural Company. I'll be seeing your husband."

"Really?" The thin-faced woman looked pleased. "Isn't that nice? We must all get together some night."

"I hear they charge an arm and a leg at that New Luna Park," said the fat woman. "Special prices for the tourists no doubt."

"I'll just pay so much and no more," said the man in the gray suit. "I got a going price list from my accountant, so I'll know just what I'm paying for."

The fat woman nodded sagely. "Good idea," she said.

She looked up as the co-pilot came striding down the passageway, his lead boots clanking dully. If anything, he was younger than the Captain.

"Is *that* our pilot?" the fat woman whispered.

"Co-pilot," said Mrs. Schonberg.

"He looks like a kid," said the man in the gray suit. "Trusting our lives to kids!"

"Guess you got to be young for space travel," said the youthful architect. He realized the possible implication of his words a little too late. The heavy-jowled man grunted at him and brought out the cigar again.

"You're not going to smoke that?" Mrs. Schonberg asked with a worried frown.

"I'm going to chew it, Madam, *chew* it! Is that all right?"

"When do we eat? I'm starved!" The fat lady reached across the aisle and stopped the co-pilot.

"I'm just going to open the observation window," he said. "I'll be right back." He grinned at her and proceeded on his way.

"But when do we eat?"

"Probably after our second acceleration," said Mrs. Schonberg. "It's only ten o'clock."

"Yes, but we had breakfast hours ago. I don't see why we had to take off so early anyway."

"It's a tight schedule," said the young man. "They have to time the rendezvous pretty close."

"They have to *waste* time, if you want my opinion." The heavy-jowled man shifted his cigar violently to the other side of his mouth. "I thought they were heavy on the red tape in Washington. Hah! They could take lessons from these space jockeys."

"And how!" The fat woman took a candy bar from her purse and munched on it hungrily. "Do you know how many physicals I had to take before I could come on this thing? Four! Can you imagine?"

"I only had one," said the young man mildly.

"Well, the fuss they made over a few pounds! I had to starve myself — literally starve myself! I would have told them where to go—you know, *that* place— except I promised myself this vacation." She looked helplessly around her. "I've *been* everywhere on earth."

"It will all be worthwhile," Mrs. Schonberg assured her. "You'll love the Moon. It's really different, yet you'll be

amazed how much at home you'll feel."

"Well, the shopping ought to be interesting anyway."

"It's all interesting. New Luna Park, of course, and the Uppman Museum . . ."

"Museum?" The cigar really danced in the businessman's mouth. "I've seen every museum worth seeing from the Louvre on. Not one worth writing home about."

"Well, the Uppman Museum is a little different—"

"What is it with this Uppman?" The fat woman crumpled the candy wrapper for emphasis. "Seems to me we've made some sort of tin god out of him. That's not very healthy, if you ask me."

"He *was* a great man," said the thin-faced woman gently.

"We probably wouldn't be here, would we?" said the young man. "I mean, Uppman was a great pioneer—"

"There's a fine statue of him in the Park," said Mrs. Schonberg. "You'll see it, of course."

"Uppman this and Uppman that." The fat woman shoved the wrapper into the seat pocket before her. "I still say it's unhealthy."

The co-pilot came by again. He smiled with official good humor at the passengers, and said: "We'll be accelerating again in a few minutes. We'll announce the time over the loudspeaker. Hope everything's okay."

Before anyone could answer, he was back in the cabin.

It was the last day of the journey.

The fat woman looked unhappily at the food tray in her lap. "Veal again?" she said.

"If my club wants a report on this trip," said the man in the gray suit, chomping on a muffin, "I'll give it to them in three words: uncomfortable, underfed, and overpriced."

"We don't really *need* too much food on a trip like this," said Mrs. Schonberg. "After all, we get so little exercise . . ."

"You're telling me!" The young man stretched his long legs and grinned.

"Say, you must be working for this company," said the fat woman to Mrs. Schonberg. "Everything they do is okay with you. They could spit on you and you'd like it."

The thin-faced woman blushed deeply. "Well, it's sort of an adventure," she said lamely. "You expect some inconvenience on an adventure." She looked for sympathy towards the architect.

"Think it's getting warm in here?" he said, seeking to change the subject.

"You're right," said the heavy-jowled man, using his napkin across his broad face. "I'm sweating like a pig."

"I hadn't noticed it before," the young man said, loosening his collar. "Temperature's been the same for days."

"Well, it better not get much warmer," said the fat woman threateningly. "I get simply faint with the heat. I spend every summer up north in Canada. Much better for the heart, you know."

The door to the pilot's cabin opened, and Captain Norwich came through.

"C a p t a i n !" The heavy-jowled man stopped him.

"I know." Norwich grinned. "We're having a little heat wave. Got a bug in the ventilation, but we'll have it fixed in no time."

"I knew it!" The fat woman began to fan herself feverishly with her purse. "Something's gone wrong. We'll all be roasted to death!"

"It's nothing serious," said the Captain in a reassuring tone. "We'll have it set to rights in five minutes." He continued up the aisle.

Norwich's guess was optimistic. The air grew staler and hotter by the minute as he e x p l o r e d the ventilating chambers.

"Air! Air!" The fat woman panted heavily, leaned her head back and rolled her eyes. "I'm suffocating!"

"Defective e q u i p m e n t, that's what it is!" The man in the gray suit was so enraged he almost bit his cigar in two. "These old Uppman rockets oughta be broken up for scrap. Mismanagement, that's what I call it!"

"It sure *is* hot," the young architect admitted, thinking about the stories of space burn he had heard.

"Where's that Captain? He's been gone an hour!"

The co-pilot appeared.

"What's happening?" cried the fat woman. "Are we falling into the sun?"

"Certainly not," the co-pilot answered. "Don't worry. It's just a valve. We ought to have it fixed soon. Even if we did run into some difficulty, we're already in the Moon's gravitational field. We could have a rescue ship here in ten minutes."

"Rescue ship?" the fat woman said. It was obviously the wrong kind of answer to give her. "We're in trouble!" she shrieked. "We'll all be killed!"

Luckily, Captain Norwich came out of the chambers in

time to calm her. "It's all fixed," he said. "We ought to be back at normal temperature in a few minutes. Sorry for the inconvenience."

"Sorry?" The man in the gray suit shifted himself in his chair and snapped the cigar out of his mouth. "You'll be sorry when we land, young man. I'm going to report this."

"It's already been reported, sir," said Norwich, impatiently. "This isn't the newest ship in the world, and little things happen to it. But the Uppman VI is as safe as anything in space."

"It's a dirty old wreck of a ship," said the fat woman heedlessly. "And don't think I won't let the company know it. I can assure you I've never had such an unpleasant trip in my life!"

"Look!"

It was the young architect, eyes on the observation window.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Schonberg.

The man in the gray suit looked worried. "What's going on? What's happening now?"

The architect swallowed hard. "There's something out there."

"Where?"

"Floating in space. I'm sure I saw it."

"Probably a meteorite or something," said Mrs. Schonberg.

"Meteor?" said the heavy-jowled man.

"Oh, my God, my God!" wailed the fat woman. She began to sob. "I knew something would happen to me! I knew when I first stepped on this thing!"

"It's not a meteor," said the Captain sharply. "There's no reason to be afraid."

"It's a body." The young man's voice dropped to a whisper. "It's a man in a space suit. Just floating out there."

"My God!" The cigar dropped from the businessman's mouth and fell to the floor. It lay there forgotten, its end black and moist.

"Do something!" said Mrs. Schonberg. "Can't we do something?"

The architect mopped his brow. "He can't be alive."

"He isn't." The Captain walked to the observation window and studied the still form as it floated to the glass. Then he removed his cap, slowly. The movement was respectful.

"Then what is it?" said the fat woman. "What's it doing out there?" She looked plead-

ingly at the others. "Haven't they done enough to us on this trip?"

"It's nothing to be afraid of. I told you that. It's only a monument," said the Captain softly. "The grave of a great man."

The passengers looked at each other.

"You mean it's Uppman?" the architect said. "John Uppman?"

"But he's dead," the man in the gray suit said. "He's been dead for fifty years!"

"It's horrible!" The fat woman covered her eyes. "Why don't they take him in. Why don't they bury him?"

"He is buried," said the Captain. "This is the grave he requested in his last will and testament."

The co-pilot came out of the cabin and joined the Captain by the window.

"But *why?*" said the fat woman.

The Captain turned to her.

"As a reminder," he said curtly, slapping the cap back on his head. "To remind us all how tough it was to get here."

Almost angrily, he pulled the lever that closed off the observation window. But before the doors met, they caught one last glimpse of the body as it drifted in stately procession past their eyes.

THE END

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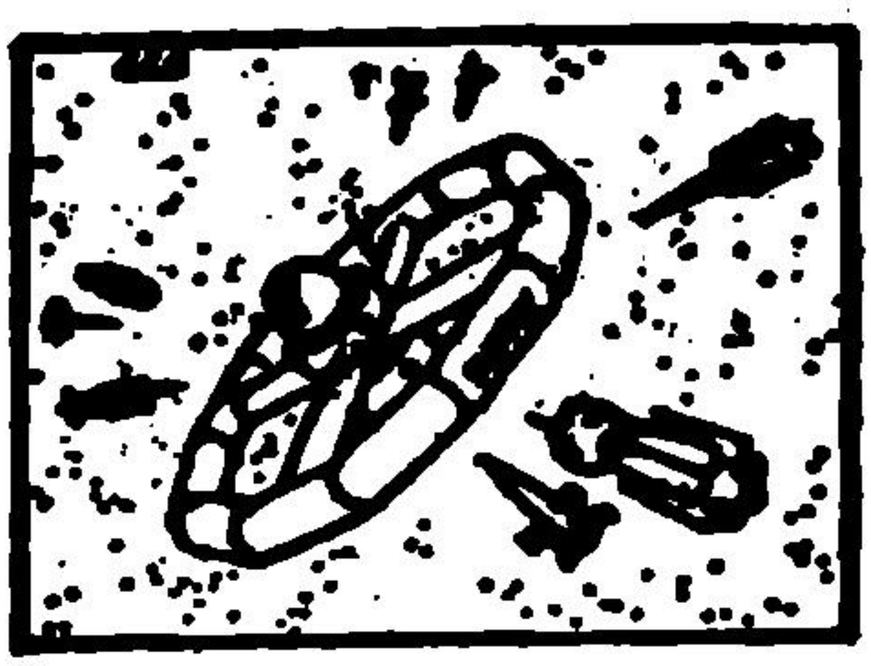

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THE SOUND OF SPACE(continued from page 16)

couldn't be any happier. It's funny how I feel. Full. Like everything's here. And then I listen."

"Listen?" whispered June.

"Listen?" repeated Sir Preacher, his breath slowed to a tremble. "But what do you listen for? What should we listen for?"

"The sound of space," said the Spaceman solemnly. "On the worlds, some people can hear it. Out here, away from the Meson Bowl, you can't help but hear it. It's the sound of space."

They listened, and then they heard the sound of space. It did not begin, but was something they recognized as always being there. The chilling voice of space, lower than any organ note, yet threaded with the indescribably sweet harmonics of the lyre and the trumpet, and the distant sound of the horn. The chilling voice of space, shaking the universe everywhere at one time, sounding everywhere at one time, never changing, always the same, eternal, beloved, comforting, the voice of the One; Om.

After a timeless interval, came Sir Preacher's solemn whisper. "You will be married here in space," he told June and the Spaceman as he lovingly joined their hands together. "Surely there can be no other place for a sacrament so blessed. If necessary," he added thoughtfully, "we shall bring members of my congregation to assist in the ceremony, whether they wish to come or not. Shanghai them, as it were. Later on, they too will begin to Understand."

The End

EDITORIAL (continued from page 4)

closest we can come to any knowledge of what will be happening then. Science fiction has always been known for its gadgetry, to the point where people even talk about "the device as hero." It's true too. Rocket ships, tanks, submarines, atomic bombs, these and much other hardware were predicted and have come true. It is to be hoped that we are still predicting with some degree of accuracy. And in their temporal provincialism busting, the SF writers have certainly not been arrogant: provincialism fades away when you write about a better and more knowledgeable future. Perhaps we ought to put those initials on our cover as a reminder that things were not always as they are now, nor will they remain this way in the future.

SF means TPB! Harry Harrison

WHERE IS MRS. MALCOMN? (continued from page 39)

comn, then, imagine all they said they saw? But what of the pictures? Are they clever tricks? Can a Polaroid photograph, which develops itself *inside* the camera, be faked? But if the ship is the hallucination of a deranged mind, then where is Mrs. Malcomn?

The End

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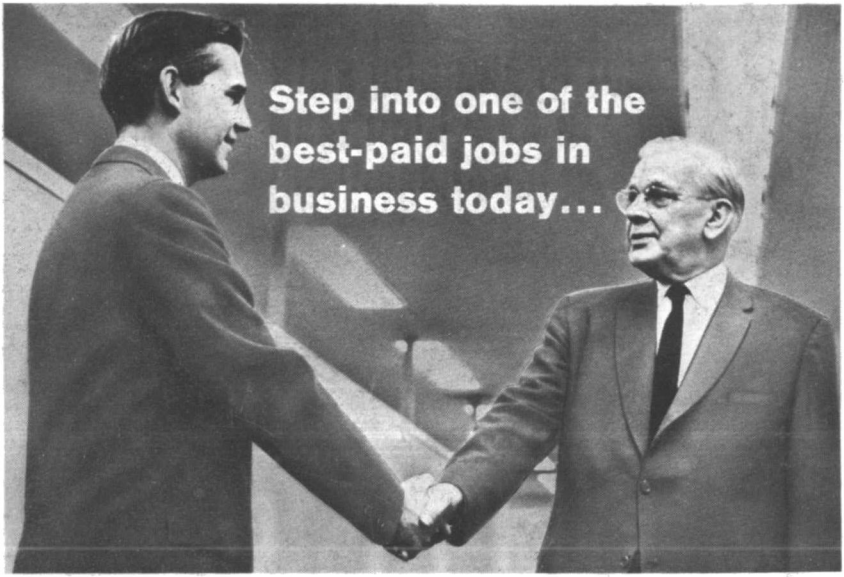

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