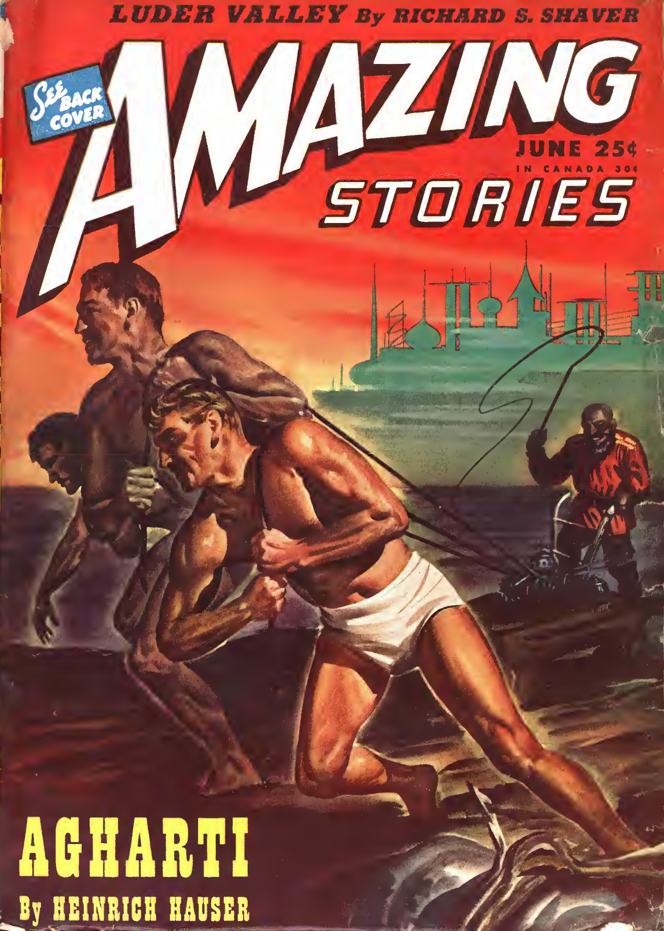

VOLUME 20
NUMBER 3
AMAZING STORIES
JUNE
1946

The OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

COMPLETE in this issue is Heinrich Hauser's 50,000-word novel, "Agharti." In case you didn't know, Mr. Hauser is quite a literary figure today because of his controversial novel "The German Talks Back"; but since that is not science fiction we'll do no more than mention it to show that we have no mean writer in the author of our newest novel. "Agharti" is a "cave" story, that is, its scene is laid in a system of caves beneath Germany and other countries, where a new war is being planned and where super atom bombs are being secretly manufactured. The title is borrowed from a legendary city located, some say, in the depths beneath Tibet. Otherwise it has nothing in common with Tibet.

WE THINK you'll like this story. It is reminiscent of Otfrid von Hanstein's famous novels, reproduced in America as far back as twenty years ago. It has everything we think a good science fiction novel should have, plus a couple of things we never thought of before. And when you've read it, you'll be pleased to know it is only the first of what we hope will be many very fine stories. We have already read the plot of his second novel and have been terrifically impressed. You'll see it soon.

NOT to be outdone, David V. Reed, who has been absent from our pages for so long, returns with a novelet that will delight you as has no other Reed novelet. It is called "The Brothers Shenanigan" and we can only hint that it lives up to its title!

OUR "odd" contribution to this issue is a little short we hardly know now to classify. Maybe it isn't fiction. Maybe it is. Maybe it isn't even a "story" in the editorial sense of the word. It hasn't even a plot. Or has it? Well, anyway, "To Whom It May Concern" by Millicent Holmberg is something we present especially to those of our readers who have a streak of the occult in them. It's the sort of thing many of you talk about in your fan letters. Anyway, it's an eerie, weird and puzzling little yarn about a lady artist who heard voices one night in a little western town . . . but read it for yourself. Who knows, maybe you'll hear voices too.

RICHARD S. SHAVER gives us "Luder Valley" this month. This one ought to surprise you—it isn't about the caves, or the Atlans, or the Titans, or about deroes. It's just in way of proving to you that he can write very swell science fiction without the use of a single dero! This one's about a space ship that crashes in the "Green Hell" and is found by Nazi secret service agents *before* it is found by Americans. Here's an interplanetary yarn as good as any we've read, and we've read thousands.

WHICH introduces our line-up for this month . . . and with the words "this month" we've sprung a surprise on you. Yes, *Amazing Stories* is appearing monthly from now on! We can't have our increased number of pages as yet due to the shortage of printing facilities, but we are back to our monthly standard at last, and from now on you will find this magazine on sale on the tenth of each month. But we warn you, don't wait too long; *Amazing Stories*, having once again pioneered in "something new," is very much in demand. *Amazing Stories* is the only magazine where you can get stories you *won't* find in your local newspaper . . . where the old-time science fiction is being published today.

HAVE you read your newspaper lately? Then you know about the (so-called) mad pianist who is being touted as a great master at the piano, although he is otherwise completely helpless, and a patient in Wayne county (Detroit) general hospital's psychiatric ward. Here's another example of the "experts"—the authorities—very ponderously giving us the scientific "low-down" on how come. The fact is, they don't know what makes Horace F tick. MAYBE he plays by ray control from the caves?

NOW that we are on a monthly schedule, a new issue goes to press before comment on the one preceding comes in from the readers, so we don't have any reaction on Mr. Shaver's "Masked World" in which he gave us such a terrific load of what he assures us is the cold truth about the cavern people. But nevertheless we have some rather amazing things to say in this issue. So don't fail to read "Discussions" and other departments this month.—*Rap*

AMAZING STORIES

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

All STORIES *Complete*

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn illustrating a scene from "Agharti"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles depicting "Wonders of the Ancient World"

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All FEATURES *Complete*

AMAZING STORIES ★ JUNE 1946

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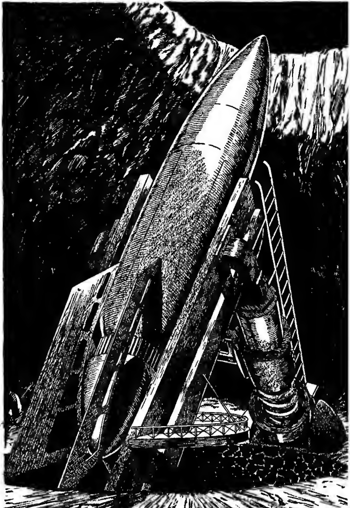
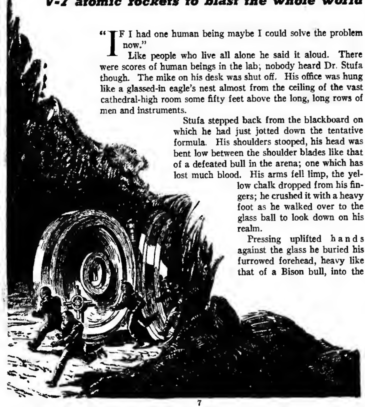


There lay the V-7, awesome and complete, a monster of destruction

AGHARTI

By HEINRICH HAUSER

Hidden in caves under Germany lay great factories turning out monstrous V-7 atomic rockets to blast the whole world



"IF I had one human being maybe I could solve the problem now."

Like people who live all alone he said it aloud. There were scores of human beings in the lab; nobody heard Dr. Stufa though. The mike on his desk was shut off. His office was hung like a glassed-in eagle's nest almost from the ceiling of the vast cathedral-high room some fifty feet above the long, long rows of men and instruments.

Stufa stepped back from the blackboard on which he had just jotted down the tentative formula. His shoulders stooped, his head was bent low between the shoulder blades like that of a defeated bull in the arena; one which has lost much blood. His arms fell limp, the yellow chalk dropped from his fingers; he crushed it with a heavy foot as he walked over to the glass ball to look down on his realm.

Pressing uplifted hands against the glass he buried his furrowed forehead, heavy like that of a Bison bull, into the labyrinth of glass pipes, the men in white bathed in the bluish artificial daylight of Mazda lamps. Even through the thick glass he could hear the high-pitched din of the high-vacuum pumps irritating to the nerves like the wingbeat of mosquito swarms in a tropical night.

Coils of copper, arrays of lenses, the brass of microscopes, huge white surfaces of enamel, the colored glasses of the switchboard indicators, strange liquids in vessels strangely shaped, gas bottle batteries, salts glowing in electric furnaces, huge limbs of hydraulic presses; a thousand and one queer, curious, eerie apparatuses reflected light, radiated light, cast shadows; the men in white working with measured ceremonial gestures were like strange priests ministering to the altars of non-corporeal gods.

"All mine," said Stufa and it echoed from the glass walls, deep throated sounds like those of a big beast in pain: "All mine, all given into my hands. Why?—Because I thought I had the answer, here, here."

He pushed his shaggy Bison's head

THIS is the story of an underground Nazi-Reich named "Agharti"; its scene centers around the Harz Mountains in Central Germany, its time is laid into the years after this war.

Clearly then this "Agharti" exists only in the imagination of its author and falls under the category of fiction pure and simple.

Nothing therefore could be easier for the rational reader than to consider the whole idea fantastic, absurd, such stuff as dreams are made of.

But is it?

Large underground organizations successfully operated under the Nazi thumbscrews all through the war. There is no good reason to reject offhand the possibility that the Nazis should create even bigger and more effective undergrounds. The Nazis started as an underground movement. They profited from their bitter experiences with other undergrounds. They had ample time to prepare for their postwar activities. They even have openly boasted that they would continue to dominate Germany from underground. So why not?

In this story Hitler continues to exist while of course we all hope he is dead. I also am convinced that in our lifetime we will never be quite sure whether we got our man or not. It might be one of his doubles. The field of speculation really is wide open. Inevitably legends grow around a man who once was tyrant of half the world and ended the destroyer of his own nation in a Goetterdaemmerung such as the world has never seen. So why should not "der Fuehrer" haunt us in this story?

An atomic V-7 such as the author describes may appear to most people an utter impossibility. But that is precisely what the V-1 and the V-2 were generally judged to be as late as 1941 and '42. Fantastic as the description sounds, no ranking physicist today would declare it to he entirely "out of this world".

But why the name "Agharti"?

Because "Agharti" is the prototype of all undergrounds. "Agharti" has led a legendary existence—chances are that the legend has some basis in fact—for the last six thousand years. More even; the "Agharti" legend is such a lively corpse that it is held by some authorities to be an active political influence in Inner Asia to this day.

Very briefly, this is the story of the old "Agharti" or "the mystery of mysteries" as it is called in the flowery language of the East:

According to the saga the great oceans of the East once were continents. The land was drowned by the flood, but in a sub-oceanic, subterranean kingdom of caves, certain peoples continued to exist. Undisturbed as they were by all enemies, the sciences and the arts reached the very highest level underground. The savants of "Agharti" benefited the world by scribbling the results of their labors on the shells of turtles; turtles which in due course—usually once every century—came crawling unto the shores of China where the pundits were able to decipher the messages.

A peculiar green light is said to permeate the underground caves. It allowed the growth of grains and vegetables; it also gave a very long lifespan to the peoples there.

Of the inhabitants the erudite Lamas in certain monasteries of Tibet will maintain that "Agharti" still is ruled by its original king. Embalmed in a coffin of transparent black stone the king lies in his underground palace but he still advises his successors by means of flames, which, bursting from the coffin, write fiery letters on the walls. The old king's successors are the secret rulers of the world. They constantly keep in touch with all the men of destiny on earth in that they transmit to them through telepathy the directives of "Agharti".

The underground palace of the "king of the world" is surrounded by the houses of the savants, named "Goros" who hold sway over "all the visible and invisible forces of the earth, the atmosphere and the inferno".

The Hutuktu Jelyb Djamsroh of Narabanchi-Kure monastery deep in Tibet confided to Prof. Ossendowski in 1920 that amongst other things the Goros:

against the knuckles of his hands until he felt the pain stab through the skull bone: "Herein—I had the power to drive ships across the ocean with a copper grain; ships through the stratosphere, ships to stars, and a child's pennybank could fuel them. Men would be giants, almost gods. We would lift reflectors of aluminum ten thousand miles over the poles of the earth and they would melt the ice. We'd make what God did not: a globe-wide Eden, eternal summer, four harvests a year, no cold, no hunger, no toil, every wish fulfilled. Seven League Boots for every one of us to walk across the face of the earth, power to be instantaneously at any place like that of Aladdin's lamp . . .

"Who did I want it for: when first, as if in a vision, I found the methods and the formulas in the lab of old Professor Planck, what did it mean to me? I had no thought of self, I had no thought of Germany, I had no thought even for that "Republic of the Savants" which old Planck always held before us, his assistants, as their one and only fatherland. Mankind was on my mind. It

—Had huilt cars, strange and unknown to modern technology, by means of which they could rush about through narrow cleavages inside the planet.

—Had hypnotized disciples, made them immune to pain and hard as nails; whereupon they dispatched them to distant stars, into icy oceans and into the womb of the earth, there to mine metals, forge secret weapons, to erupt vulcanoes and to boil the waters of geysers. Or else to live with the infinitesimally small and transparent creatures of the air.

A certain Hutktu, Pandita, for instance, confessed on his deathbed that on the orders of a "Goro" he had lived for a long time on a red star in the east and for another period had flown amongst the stormy fires in the center of the earth.

In appearance, the "Goros" are not prepossessing. Their heads are naked skulls, equipped only with live eyes and tongue; that's why they are hooded all the time. And so great is the "Goros'" might that—to quote the Lama Turgut: "If this mad humanity should ever war against "Agharti", the Goros would be able to blow up and to scorch the whole surface of our planet."

In the times of Genghis Khan a certain Mongolian tribe is said to have fled to "Agharti" and to have found refuge there. More recently Olets and Kalmuks are reported to have penetrated into the outskirts of "Agharti"—one entrance is reported to be near Lake Nogan-Kul. Gypsies too have lived in the same vicinity. It is from "Agharti" that the first named took their knowledge of sorcery and the gypsies won their gift of prophecy.

All this, needless to say, is saga and legend. Naturally we scoff at the idea that in 1890 the "King of the World" is supposed to have staged a personal appearance in the monastery of Narabanchi.

Be it so. But a curious light falls into the days of our lives from the prophecy which the "King of the World" is said to have made at that occasion, a prophecy which we find recorded in Prof. Ossendowski's hook "Beasts, Men and Gods" published in 1922.

"Fifty years hereafter"—so reads the prophecy of 1890—"the people will more and more forget their souls and care about their bodies. Indescribable sin and corruption will reign on earth. People will become as ferocious beasts, thirsting for the blood and death of their brothers. Crimes will exist, now unknown to the law and never before seen in the world.

"Millions will exchange the fetters of slavery against hunger, disease and death.

"The ancient roads will be crawling with fugitives; the greatest and the most beautiful cities will perish in fire. Truth and love will disappear from the world.

"Of ten thousand only one shall survive and he will be nude and mad; without the strength and the knowledge to find his food or to huild him a shelter. He will howl like a raging wolf, will devour carcasses, will bite his own flesh and challenge God to fight.

"God will have turned his face from the world; there will be only night and death.

"In the end a people now unknown will tear out the weeds of madness. A new life will return to earth, purified by the death of nations.

"Fifty years from now,"—(which makes the date 1940)—"there will be only three great kingdoms. These then will live 71 years in peace."

Perhaps the reader will now understand the author's fascination with the "Agharti"-theme. As to the prophecy, whether it actually came from the "King of the Word" or whether some humble Lama dreamed it all up: made it was, true it has turned out to be. Let it be hoped then that its end too will come true:

A new life on earth, purified by the death of nations, long generations of peace . . . This also is the direction in which this book proposes to march on.

HEINRICH HAUSER

South Valley, N.Y. March 1945

was the old, old curse which fell upon all sons of Adam I wanted to take away. I wanted it to he for all the peoples under the sun, this power with which to build the new paradise."

HE straightened himself with a start; not a tall man but powerfully built. His blonde beard was streaked with red; iron grey was the mane of hair which now he shook back with impatience as he paced the room up—down, up—down, long arms swinging, the large blue eyes turned up, half closed in the half trance of his monologue:

"But then of course I was still young. I had illusions. I thought that the "Republic of the Savants" was a reality. I thought its memhers would stand together and that they would back me up. What folly! When I permitted the first hint of the discovery to reach the world, that precious "Republic" roared with laughter: Stufa, the astral superman—Stufa, the crackpot—Stufa, the phantasmagorist—Stufa, the impostor . . . Republic? A pack of howling wolves! No friend, no helping hand, no word to back me up, no ear to listen. My theory condemned, torn to pieces, ridiculed, dragged through the slosh of the scientific guttersnipes. They closed the doors of my own university against me. They drove me from my chair, took my stipend away, took my assistants, my lab, and even my instruments . . ."

He stopped in front of the back wall and for a moment his eyes opened wide to face a lifesize photograph which hung on the wall, illuminated with indirect light:

"And then came he."

After a long stare, with a quick turnabout Stufa went on with his captive-tiger pace:

"I didn't know him; didn't even know who he was. He never told me how he'd heard from me. He didn't belong to that phony Republic of the Savants. He wasn't even educated; he was half vulgar and half shy. And yet: there was the gleam of genius in his eyes. And yet, he was everything my fellow scientists were not: he did not criticize. He believed me. He told me what nobody had ever told me before: 'Stufa,' he said, 'I have faith in you;—continue with your important work.' "

For a second time he halted in front of the Hitler picture: "They say you're a madman now. Small wonder with the burden you took upon yourself. Small wonder with genius and madness always living close, too close, in the same house of ebony. Grey matter of the brain will stand only so much strain; a little more and it bursts its cells. Maybe my fate will be the same as yours. Maybe you were already cracked when first you came to see me, a year before you became leader of the Reich.—What does it matter? You came to me in the hour of my need. You were the only one. You were drawn to me as I was drawn to you; by something kindred. Not politics, not racial theories, not ideas of a greater Germany; what were these things to me—nothing. No; it was the quality of genius in you. What matters, if you should be raving mad? What matters, whether in body you are or are not in this world? Once come into this world genius can never disappear. When the Party was on the verge of bankruptcy, when all the big industrialists had withdrawn their support, when the stormtroopers had to pawn their uniforms, you came to me, the outcast scientist, and wrote a check over a million marks.—That was a stroke of genius. That was bold, was grand, was visionary, was fire which set me aflame. Almost it won us the war . . ."

HE paced the room again: ". . . almost, almost; if only we had given him the weapons in time. Didn't he once, after Stalingrad, go on his knees before us, the assembled hosts of his scientists, with tears streaming, with insanity already in his eyes: 'I've given you millions, and billions; what more do you want? Say it and it's yours! Gold unlimited, every material between heaven and earth!—Is it rubber from Japan, is it diamonds from Brazil, is it helium from U.S.A.,—name it, speak up and I'll get it for you'."

"Thus were his words. God knows we toiled, God knows we worked ourselves to pieces, blew ourselves up, had cancers eat into our skin and bone, drove our brains frantic with cocain and heroin and whatever the doctors could inject to make us go. Millions were sacrificed on the battlefields. But his scientists, we gave as much in our blood, in our ruined lives as they, racing against time, spurring us on. Thought of the eighty millions in the rain of bombs kept lashing us on day and night. We had the goal almost in sight, almost in reach at the time of the crash . . ."

"And now: Agharti. Maybe a dozen Aghartis; all that's left of Germany. All that's left of the vitality of eighty million people overground who are as dead shells of bodies as is he.—The nation's soul, the nation's spirit—they're here, here, gestating in the womb of the earth, growing to be born again."

His face pressed to the glass wall he looked intently at the white-clad men, antlike in the great depth.

"This is our world; that's what we call a world: to be buried alive:—no trees, no grass, no sky, no wandering cloud, no sun, no star.—Why, even horses when they used them in the mines, were brought back to daylight now and then, sent to the hills. I've seen them come up from the mines when I was a kid. They raised their heads, they sniffed the air. Blind as they were, they felt the sun; shivers ran over their skins and suddenly they galloped away. A kingdom to be a horse. Or else a dog, a bird, the meanest sparrow. A one-day fly would do: one day of freedom; then fly into the setting sun, fall dead. That would be life . . . To hell with that thing."

The Siemens telespeaker began its musical announcement of the voice which wanted him: dididi-da; dididi-da; dididi-da;—"V" for Voland. Stufa let himself fall into the chair and flipped the little lever down:

"Stufa?" came the voice. "Listen Stufa, I want you to come over for a moment. Immediately if possible."

"I'm busy; you know I cannot be disturbed at this time."

"But Stufa, this is important. This is about your own, yesterday's request, remember?"

"Well, have you got the stuff?—That's all I'm interested in."

"No; I've called Agharti Seven, Eleven and Nine by soundbeam. Those were the most likely ones: nix is. I was afraid it would turn out that way."

"Then why the devil must you interrupt me now; I told you yesterday . . ."

"But that's precisely it: Stufa, man, be reasonable—listen here; didn't you say the other day that stuff could be extracted from partly oxidized lead? Now, supposing I had a source of that outside Agharti, how much of it would you need?"

"About a ton. But outside Agharti?—impossible. When I say partly oxidized lead I mean . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know what you mean: supposing the lead I'm referring to came in sheets, about three centimeter thickness. Supposing these sheets had heen in stock, exposed to air for the last—oh,—five, six, seven hundred years,—would that fill the bill?"

"Voland, are you crazy? Is this a joke? Leadplate, stocked for the last 500 years; cannot he. The thing's preposterous."

"Ha ha;—Stufa, the douhting Thomas, Stufa, who never trusts his Voland to make the impossible possible for him. But it's perfectly true; I've got it. Moreover, you're right: it's a joke; it's a most amusing joke, we're going to play on overground. What's more, if you want to, you can have a part in it. No ohjection against a change of routine, eh, Stufa? I'll he expecting you."

THE doctor took his hat, a hlack, hroadhrimmed felt. It made him look like a Tyrolese peasant on a Sunday. It was strange that hats should he worn where none were ever needed. Most everybody did, though, saying it made them feel like overground and good old times. The elevator took him down to the groundfloor. The two élite guards saluted and melted back against the hlack wall of steel. Through sets of explosion-proof doors Stufa sluiced himself into the interior of the lah. His research director, formerly in charge of the Mercedes Benz department for jet-propulsion, met him and after a hrief nod, the doctor Wagner, like a well-trained dog, followed at Stufa's heels, as slowly and noiselessly he went from place to place. Over the shoulders of some young assistant Stufa would look without his knowing it and when the work was good, the man would feel the grip of Stufa's hand on his shoulder or arm, heavy, friendly, warm. Tbe youngsters then would smile, bappily and proud as if they had received some great distinction. Sometimes however the heavy shoulders would rudely push a man aside, the bear-paw hands would grip for the job at hand. With fingers marvelously sensitive for their strength and size, they would readjust a tool, reset a machine, rearrange vessels and tubing of some chemical experiment. Then with the red-streaked heard aggressively stuck out he would grip the man's shoulders and push him hack in place, almost lifting him bodily from the ground. But never a word was said.

On such unspoken directives Wagner, hehind Stufa's hack, kept on scrihbling short notes in a little hook; hlack wbere Stufa looked and nodded, red where he had pushed a man aside.

At last they reached the end of the huge vault and entered Wagner's office which was a cage of armored glass like Stufa's only that it was on the lower floor:

"The men are getting overwrought," Stufa remarked, "quite a few have that hang-dog expression; one can see it in tbeir very hacks. Work is still satisfactory in your department, Wagner, but morale is getting low."

"Correct, Doctor Stufa," Wagner said eagerly, "perfectly correct. But what more can we do? We give them plenty of sunshine in the solarium; they bave their gymnasium, their shooting gallery, their movies; they can get drunk, they can have a girl whenever they feel that way. What ails them? Compared to what their lives were overground before defeat, this is paradise."

"Wagner, you do not understand the old Adam; he couldn't stand Paradise either and the old Adam is in every one of us. It isn't natural, the way we live. Most of them are young; they feel it more than we. I must talk to Voland ahout this; it's getting critical."

"It's none of my fault, Doctor Stufa; I'm doing the hest I can for them.

Trouble is; in this department we cannot use the unimaginative type. We've got to use the creative type of men and they're as sensitive as violins. They worry a lot and if we overdose the euphoria drugs they get incapacitated for the job. Personally I don't feel it at all; I live and I work first for V-7 and second for the liberation of Germany. That's all. The rest just doesn't exist for me."

"AH, WAGNER, you're a lucky man; yours is a one-track mind, you know only this one ambition, this one great urge; he it so and forever. But youth, above all German youth, has two souls in its breast. One dwells in study and in work but then the other wants to roam the whole wide world, free as a bird. Wants to be part of all creation, wants mountain and wave, forests and meadows, clouds and stars. See what I mean?"

"Yes, Doctor—in the past. But what could nature mean to me, to most of us today? I've seen the hills of my Stuttgart turned infernos, I've seen the good earth tortured by bombs and tbe very hones of my ancestors scattered from their resting place. I couldn't find the graves when I went there with the body of my last and youngest boy in my arms. No, Doctor; if there are two souls we have to kill the one; in me it's dead. For me it is the V-7 and Agharti. I don't care ever to see the sun again."

"A man who never wants to see the sun again. A man in whom the soul has died—a happy man. Strange happinesses do we have these days."

Stufa sluiced bimself out of the lab; another pair of guards uncrossed their bayonets for him. Now he stood in a wide tunnel, half like a subway station and half riverbank. There was a long ramp of concrete dimly lit, there was the spur of a narrow-gauge railroad embedded in it and in the blackening darkness just beyond one could hear the hollow roaring of a subterranean river. From the nowhere it seemed to come, into the nowhere it seemed to flow; swift, deep, opaque.

On the platform Stufa pressed a signal button and almost immediately out of some side-tunnel there rolled a draisine, its motor purring, headlight stabbing into the darkness. Stufa stepped in beside the driver's seat; with a whine and a swoosh the vehicle gathered speed.

The track was winding and it followed the subterranean river. The ceiling of the rocks was low and uneven; occasionally a sign *"Achtung"* would glow up in red reflecting glass and some huge rock sailed swiftly within inches over Stufa's head. That the rock was, or had been ore-bearing was apparent from the greenish copper outcrops which, like melting ice, seemed to flow from the black lode. Clusters of pyrites flared up like gold in unexpected corners; there was a smell of sulphur and a continuous dripping of water from the rocks. Once the draisine had to slow down behind a repair train which edged into a siding. Shadowy human figures, their faces blackened under their miner's helmets, raised a big "hallo" as Stufa was recognized in his car:

"Der Doktor, der Doktor!—Give way there for the Doctor's automobile!—Say Doctor, how about a furlough. Say Doctor, bave you got a smoke for us?—How's the V-7 coming?"

Stufa had the draisine stopped. With a broad grin be fished out of his ample pockets little bags of tobacco: "I knew it, you would waylay me, you robbers. Cigarette paper, I take it, you still have. What d'you take me for, a tobacconist?

Talk about furlough; do you think the girls are any prettier overground or that you'd find a decent glass of beer? It's mid-winter up there and don't you forget it. Thank your lucky stars you're in Agharti instead of in Siberia. —Tbe V-7?—It's coming, boys, it's coming by and by and then:—they'll curse the day they were born."

A murmur went through the shadowy ranks: "The Doctor's right. The Doctor knows what's what. He sure knows his stuff. He'll never let us down. Give him the cheer of tbe shovel command: 'Shove, shove, burrab,—shove, shove, hurrab!' "

THE draisine rolled on. Several ramps or stations they passed by. One was a huge cave, very high, in wbich there towered a structure like an enormous packing case or boxcar, several hundred feet long and at least a hundred high, beset with ramps, galleries, ladders and little bulbs wbich illuminated only pathways in the pitch darkness of the scene. The subterranean river entered that box on one side and came out on the other and all along the railroad track stood guards, straight as ramrods, each man tied to the next from belt to belt by lengths of leather rope. That was the heavy-water plant. Another station with a side-track leading obliquely into the mountain bore the inscription "Hospital." Yet another, small but well lighted, was approached by many glowing arrows which pierced glowing hearts. They all pointed to a huge signboard: "Recreation Center," its illuminated letters a peacock's tail of colors. Otber signs pointed to "Valhalla," "Café Fatberland," and "Hofbrau-Haus." A row of beerhalls, wine vaults, cinemas, cabarets, bowling alleys, all hewn into the rock and forming a miniature "Reno" or "Barbary Coast," flasbed up and was gone in a second. "Valhalla," the center for sexlife and breeding of the race, however, flanked the river with a wide front. Its facade looked like a primitive Egyptian temple. Squat, enormous pillars, shaped somewhat like phallic symbols, formed the fronts wbile deep inside bundreds of little red hearts were aglow, some of them pierced with red arrows in neonlight to indicate that propagation was being pursued inside.

Sbortly thereafter the draisine left the main track along the river. The narrow tunnel through which it now rolled seemed to climb; it turned and twisted in a tortuous course. Strange echoes came from every side as if this labyrinth were the mountain's inner ear.

"Slow down" sailed a red neon-sign over their heads; "Lights out" came next. Swiftly as a cat stops a running mouse, the little car came to a halt, arrested by a sliding ramp.

Invisible arms helped Stufa to get out and led him along a rough path. It was pitch dark but the footsteps seemed to echo from great heights and depths. If this was a cave it was immeasurably bigger than the others. There was a cold, wet draft in the air, a ghostly shrieking and a whirr of invisible wings: "The bats," spoke the voice of Stufa's invisible leader; "they don't like the echoes of our feet. It will be light immediately, Herr Doctor."

Tbere was light, but it took Stufa several seconds before be recognized old Boulton & Craig No. 15. Old Boulton & Craig was a steam pump, one of the very earliest, called "atmospheric machines." A century and a half ago it had come into these mountains when they still were mined; now it served to camouflage Voland's elevator shaft. The elevator shaft ended in the boiler of the old engine; looking up one could see tbe buge, rusty cylinder, packed in teakwood slabs; the balancer, an oaken beam, heavily banded with iron, stuck out like a gallows into the night.

SWINGING, banging against its rails, the little elevator steel cage shot Stufa upward at great speed till his legs got heavy with the downward pressure of the blood. Then the lift stopped; a heavy steel door slid aside, a cultivated voice said: "Good morning, Herr Doctor, the Herr Agharti-Leiter is expecting you."

Familiar as was the voice, familiar as for Stufa was the scene, it was hard to believe. With a sort of nervous twitch Stufa wiped across his eyes: the room was flooded witb daylight. Paneled and bung with trophies it resembled the hunting lodge of some wealthy Hungarian nobleman. Lummer, the butler, wore immaculate civilian dress. A big vase on a dresser was filled with live asters. From the living room came music; not gramophone, not radio but variations over a theme from Parsifal, played on a grand piano by a masterful hand.

It was Voland's back which Stufa first saw as he entered the studio, a back as long and as nervous as a whip, straight, but heaving to give impulse to the long slender fingers as they wandered across the keys. The long turtleneck sticking out from the spine swung like the pendulum of a metronome witb the bullet shaped skull for a rhythmic weight. Grey hair, close cropped, stood upright all around it like a brush.

A little hoarse, but very musical, came Voland's voice:

"Ah, Stufa—sit down . . . Scotch or Sherry?—Give me just a moment to finish this . . .

". . . it's the Amfortas motif . . . Do you recognize? . . . You know: I've a suspicion . . . that wound Amfortas had, that wound whicb would never close . . . Wagner wants us to believe that Amfortas was stigmatized . . . But then Wagner got it all wrong, I think . . . because, you know, Amfortas went with the First Crusade . . . Syphilis was epidemic then in the near East; . . . so I would strongly suspect that never closing wound to have been quite indicative of third stadium syphilis . . ."

Abruptly the sacral music stopped, the stool swung around. Voland's grinning face stared at Stufa and it struck him that never before had he seen anything quite so diabolic as Voland's grin. The face, grey, bony, was on the surface young but wben it smiled, it suddenly was overrun by wrinkles and crowsfeet pointed and jagged like so many daggers or splinters of a fragmentation bomb. The deep-sunk eyes, embedded in blackish folds of skin had bloodshot whites, almost ruby red and glistening. In his mirth neck and ears became flooded with dark blood, apoplectic purple.

"That's one reason why his nickname is 'The Cyanamid-Beauty'" Stufa thought.

VOLAND came over to the table which unorthodox was hung from the ceiling by means of a polished brass pipe at least one foot in diameter. He took a chair and the long stemmed glass of sherry which the butler handed him. Comfortable, even luxurious as the studio was, it had no windows. Daylight flooded from the ceiling, but not through any glass, but rather from rows of reflectors concealed along the walls.

"I've been dreaming of furlough, Stufa; don't you too? What do you say, where would you go in my place? —Switzerland? No; of snow and mountains we have quite enough right here; I do like skiing, though. South America? Too hot at this time of the year; besides I can get only thirty days and it takes almost twelve by submarine just to get there. I could fly of course, but I don't like the unnecessary risk with all these Allied patrol planes flying around. The French Riviera? It's such a strain to he in disguise all the time. One wants to be himself; one wants to get away from it all. There's always the Russian Riviera in the Caucasus, of course, but then the dear red brethren don't helieve in giving a sucker a chance." He sighed: "Things are getting worse instead of getting better. Tell me Stufa, what should a poor devil like me do?"

The doctor thrust his buge frame forward, the pointed heard quivered aggressively:

"Look here, Voland, and mark my words: I give a damn. I give a tinker's curse where you shake down your precious cadaver. That's one thing. Another thing: if anyhody needs a furlough it is my scientific workers. At least half a dozen are about ripe to run berserk and a score of them have heen to my office to ask for mercy death or suicide tasks. They mean it, too. While you enjoy yourself in daylight like Hannihal in Capua, we are in hell."

The knuckles of Stufa's paws were white as his fists crashed on the mahagony plate: "Listen, if you have a sub rigbt now, I want tbat suh for my men. If you have a plane, I want that plane for my men and if you have a hotel in the Andes I want a reservation for at least sixty beds for thirty days—for my men. And if you want a change for yourself and a little excitement, I'll take you on for experimental work with the atom-motor and a lot of good it will do to you. Tbird: I am not here to listen to your hasbish drivel. I'm here to get a ton of oxidized leadplate. Gimme the stuff and I'll clear out into some cleaner atmosphere."

"Stufa, Doctor Stufa!" Voland twisted his hands in mock despair: "What ails you. It was your furlough which I had in mind in the first place. It's your and your men's interest I'm working for, ceaselessly day and night. Why didn't you tell me of those men before? I shall send them over to Dr. Lamby immediately. A week in "Valhalla" plus a few shots of Nirvana Numher One will set them right. As to the stuff you want: why don't you ever trust friend Voland who gets all things for you even if it were the false teeth of the Allied High Commissioner for Germany. It's here, right here; you can almost see the stuff itself."

He jerked the tabletop around. The polished hrass of the hanging pillar disclosed binoculars, they were pushed almost into Stufa's face: "Look, it's all adjusted and directed to the proper spot."

STUFA brought his eyes to the sight of the huge periscope: Harz Mountains jumped into view, snow covered, dimly outlined against a leaden sky. Wisps of fog drifted across promontories, cloudbanks hung over valleys like sheets drawn over bodies dead and stiff. In the center of the horizon, however, the walls and towers of a ruined castle stood clearly out against the clouds, some eerie eagle's nest of rohher barons, quite uninhahitable as it would appear had there not been smoke curling from a jagged chimney. Through the powerful glass the castle seemed to he under attack hy an army; dark shafts of pine stormed up the rocks, thousands of giants, climbing on top of each other; their advance guard had reached the castle, their frost stiff hranches seemed to knock at the gate.

"You mean the stuff is in that castle? It cannot be ten miles away. Who lives there?"

"Stufa, this whole thing is quite a story. Some day after liberation I'll write the history of our Agharti, I think. It would begin with the day we burned the rebel town of Blankenhurg. What, would you say, were the chances for the church registers to survive that conflagration? One in a thousand perhaps. How did they survive? Because the minister went stark and raving mad over the occasion and rushed into the flames to save of all things these old records. He and his God alone knows why. He died from the burns only a few hours afterwards. Miracle number one.

"I was then Gestapo chief of Lower Saxony, as you know. We had that minister, Muthesius was his name, on our list of suspects. So after his death the documents found on his person were brought to me. Came VE-Day and I and my staff had to go underground.

"Now look at that castle yonder;—that was where we went. We thought it empty. Its last owner was a certain Baron Tann; does that name suggest anything to you?"

"He was involved in that attempt on the Fuehrer's life; wasn't he?"

"Right; and of course he and the whole family were liquidated. Originally the castle—it's named Tannrode—was to form part of the Harz Mountain defense, but then the British moved in on Halberstadt so swiftly and the Americans temporarily placed such a strong garrison in Brunswig, we had to give that up. So into this castle we moved, with the idea to play Russian war prisoners, escaped from Nazi clutches if anybody should ask uncomfortable questions. Of course we had the uniforms, the dogtags and all that sort of thing. Why the devil I took these good-for-nothing church records along, I do not know, but in the general muddle they just went along. We had a pretty tough time of it; the castle was a burned-out shell and both the British and the Americans kept sending searching parties over almost every time a peasant in the neighborhood found himself minus a cow. Why, our men had to eat, of course. So every time we saw their armored cars and jeeps coming, down into the crypt of the chapel we dived. There I read these queer, old records by candlelight while upstairs they rummaged and threw hand grenades in to find out whether the walls were solid. That I should come to read the entries of some pastor, dead for the last hundred years—that, Stufa, was miracle number two."

"HOW did you know there was a hidden crypt?"

"Hell, that was where we had finally dug up that assassin, Baron Tann.—But let me come to miracle number three.—One of those old Domini, a man named Demuth, recorded his concern about a famine and in connection to that about a lost silver mine. If that mine could be found again, so figured the old philanthrop, the town of Blankenhurg could get the silver to relieve the famine. Over a number of years he rode that hobby-horse with curious entries: in 1823, for instance, he recorded that a hunter had lost his dog in the mountains and couldn't find him, though he could clearly hear that dog bark and howl and whimper most pitifully as if from the depths of hell itself. The hunter ascribed it all to devil's work and fled.

"But Pastor Demuth looked a little deeper into the matter and did a little prospecting of his own. For 1831 he recorded as the most important events three things: the death of Goethe; the birth of a calf with two heads; and then: 'I found the skeleton of the Dog.'

This he followed by a detailed description just where he had found it.—Believe me, I got so excited I almost forgot the enemy soldiers over our heads, thrusting bayonets into the floor plates. The solution was so simple: if the find of a dog's skeleton figured as prominent in the old fellow's head as a calf with two heads and the death of Goethe, then that skeleton must have been of the dog that had frightened the hunter by howling from the underworld. Then too, the hole into which the dog had obviously fallen, must have been the shaft of the lost mine.

"Stufa; it's here, it's the very spot where you and I are sitting. I found the almost buried shaft, I felt the cold draft from the great deep and knew immediately: this is the place for Agharti. Just in the nick of time it was: the occupation army, plus the commies, were making things really hot and unpleasant. We couldn't have held the position in the castle for anotber week. The "worker Soviet" of Blankenburg had decided to use it as a kind of concentration camp for its Dead Souls."

"It is they who make the chimney smoke?"

Voland gave a contemptuous chuckle: "Smoke—I marvel every day anew it still arises. For what and with what they keep that fire aburning, I'd like to know. Unless they eat each other I don't know what they eat. The peasants wouldn't give them anything. The Soviet just leaves them there to starve. The occupation army won't feed them either because the Soviet has charged they're fascist. Not that it matters; used-up materiel, you know. You should have seen them as they were marched uphill by the Red-Guardists. —None under sixty. All bourgeois class and mostly women; some super annuated aristocrats and retired colonels amongst tbem, I daresay. Not one horse, no cow, not even a goat they had between them—notbing but pushcarts and babycarriages and suitcases stuffed with rubbish. Never since the invasion of France have I seen anything quite as ludicrous."

"Pity the helpless people."

"Hell, Stufa, those are the people who've cost us the war. Had we all been fanatical Nazis, had we had less useless bourgeois ballast and more Hitler youth, we'd have won. Had there been any material for the propagation of the race amongst them, I would have done something, but the women were all beyond childbearing age, no spunk left in the men and there wasn't a single child amongst them . . . Come to think of it, there was a child. But that child wasn't with them. It was in the castle and that brings me to the fourth miracle, the one you're most interested in, Stufa: the leadplate."

"OH, THE oxidized lead—yes—of course. Where is it? You mean to say when you went underground in that castle, there was a child living there?"

"Yes; there was one, a girl. About thirteen or fourteen years. Hard to say what age they are when undernourished.—Ah, now I know why I forgot all about that child: that girl was out of her mind. She didn't even notice we were there. So she could have been no good for the propagation of the race. On the other hand the peasants had a superstitious fear of her. None from the village would come near the castle while she was around. To that extent she was useful. That was why we let her live."

"Did you feed her; did she ever talk?"

"No; as I said she was shellshocked. She walked around that castle like a little ghost. Wben a raid was on we took her with us into the crypt where the sarcopbages were; scores of tbem, full of rattling, old skeletons; all the old barons and baronesses Tann, you know. There she sat very quiet, never moved, never said a word. We gave her scraps of food now and then, but mostly she foraged in the woods; digging roots or something, I suppose. Now here is where the lead comes in."

"Where?"

"Oh, in the crypt, you know. Walls, ceiling, floor were all leadplate; some of the coffins too. Somehow it preserves the corpses; tbat's why they used it centuries ago."

"Are you sure it's still there?" asked Stufa.

"You can put that down as the fifth miracle: It's still there, I have investigated. Tomorrow we'll get it. Wouldn't you like to come along? Just for a little change, maybe a little fun, disguised as a proud American commander? How about it?"

"I don't know, Voland. You're as cold as ice, you can take it. Witb me it's different: Something in me goes all to pieces when I see the people's misery. Lost Souls or not: They're my people. Useless bourgeois you call them. Hell, Voland, what do you think was Max Planck, my teacher; what were Prof. Oberth, Messerschmidt, Junkers, Neumann, all tbose other cornerstones on wbom we build today: bourgeois."

"Doctor, it pains me how you always get me wrong; you do it on purpose? Don't you think it breaks my heart to see these oldsters suffer, fathers and mothers of sons who've died for Germany? There would be chicken every Sunday and a warm corner by the stove for everyone of them if I bad my way. But orders are orders; you know them as well as I do: 'The lifespan of superfluous elements of the population must not be needlessly and artificially prolonged'. There you are. But confidentially, Doctor, I have a plan. I shall yet show you what a soft touch your despised Voland really is. For your sake, Stufa, I shall go tbe limit stretching orders. It's left to my discretion to pay for the stuff we confiscate if that is in our political interest. And I shall pay for the lead even though these people don't own it. I shall pay in such a way as to make the Lost Souls very happy. Just wait, Doctor, and see. Damn it man, we're not barbarous.

"Besides you're important. Agharti Supreme as a matter of fact is very pleased with your work on V-7. I'll lean over backward to let you have your every way. If you wish the Lost Souls to be fed, we'll feed them. Now, Stufa, won't you come along and see whether the stuff is up to specifications? You will? Fine. "Agharti Norseland" soundbeams heavy storm and snowfall by tomorrow; just the kind of weather we need. Operation starts at dawn. I'll send you a barber at 6 p.m. tonigbt and the fitter with the American uniform. By the way, wbat rank would you like? Anytbing goes up to a four star general. We're very liberal in our impersonations of the enemy."

Shaking hands with Stufa, he chuckled and again the smooth, grey face was torn into a myriad jagged lines like an exploding fragmentation bomb.

CHAPTER II

The Castle of the Lost Souls

SNOW had begun to fall, heavy and wet, two hours before dawn. The watchman on the tower had sniffed salt in the air and earth, almost a foretaste of spring but then the wind had started to comb the stiff hair of frozen Harz forests, to moan on the hollow shafts of the castle's towers. All around the western half of tbe horizon he had heard the owls shriek in panic; then, as gust after gust threw snow into his face, blinding and stinging, he had fatalistically ducked behind the parapet. Now it was blowing a full gale.

Seen from the valleys, seen from the bills afar, Castle Tannrode still appeared almost intact, its bold silhouette on top the steep cone of granite rock concealed the destruction within: the pallas, or manor, gutted with flames, roof and floors collapsed into the cellar, half of the East and the Nortb towers torn away and even part of the twenty-foot thick wall blasted by a two-ton bomb wbich a British pilot had dropped into the middle of the courtyard on the suspicion that this was a military headquarters. All that really was left of the castle were tbe West tower, the gate which the tower protected, the little guardhouse to the left and the kitchen which was to the right of tbe gate.—And the chapel. Botb guardhouse and kitcben were one-story lean-tos, built practically into the outer wall with steeply sloping slate roofs reaching so low a man had to stoop in order to enter their narrow doors. The chapel, older even than the castle, was romanesque. It was shaped like an egg, with walls so thick they formed almost half its cubic space. The interior space measured hardly more than twelve by eighteen feet. There was only one arched window on the courtyard side and a very narrow door. The protruding slate roof was supported not only by the walls but on its rim by eight pillars of granite, stubby and enormously strong so that they formed a kind of porch. The eternal lamp, a mere spark in the howling darkness of the snowstorm, was the only sign of human, or superhuman life.

But now a second light began to flicker in the kitchen across the yard. An elderly woman, on her hands and knees before a buge open hearth, blew life into some dying embers. Kneeling by her side a girl handed her little twigs which she broke from an armful of spruce branches in ber lap. The needles hissed and spit, the old woman coughed as ashes blew into her face and sbe cursed the smoke which bit her eyes. She was very skillful, however, and soon a little tepee of twigs stood ablaze around which she now piled charred ends of logs, left from last night's fire.

"Wake up the colonel, Francisca. Tell him to relieve the Burgomaster from his watch. Wake the others, too, and get me a pail of water."

The girl went over to where the flames now lifted from the darkness a buge oaken table or rather a long low chest of drawers across the fireplace. Wrapped in a ragged military greatcoat there lay a human figure on its back, very straight, very stiff. Tbe ends of white mustachios stuck out like horns against the ceiling and the yellowish beak of a nose, looking very dead. This human form was strangely like one of the stone-hewn figures of knights as, sword in folded bands, they lie across the vaults of their families in medieval tombs.

The girl bent over the waxlike face: "Uncle Hans," she said with a soft, a very melodious voice: "Uncle Hans!" He didn't stir.

There was no sword on his breast, but there was a rod of steel whicb ended in an ugly looking claw or hook. Shyly, as if afraid to touch it, the girl began to pull a little on that rod. An empty sleeve followed the rod as it swung up and down and still the man did not move but he opened a pair of very big, protruding eyes, brown and with the sad, reproachful expression of a bloodhound's.

"All right," he said in a muffled bass. He slid from the table and stood, trying his balance, still drunk with sleep.

"All right," he said again. His good hand rather shakily wound a muffler around his neck. He grabbed his officer's cap and put the good hand stiffly on the visor: "Salute, mesdames, salute." Stiffly he turned; stiffly he marched towards the door, automaton-like. The girl's eyes followed him as if scared lest he should fall, but the thin lips of the grey-haired woman bore an expression of an almost cynical mirth: "He's all right, Francy, my little bunny. I know him better than you do; they all lived till ninety in his family. I'm much more concerned what happened to the others this awful night. But first the water, darling."

OUT in the whirling snow of the yellowish dawn the girl went quickly to her knees and rubbed her face and her hands with snowballs; she did it with the grace and the vigor of a cat which finds a burr on its paw. Then the beam of the cistern screeched; from a great depth there came the hollow plunge of the pail. The icy iron of the handle burned Francisca's hands as she wound it up.

Back in the kitchen she found the chain already lowered, the kettle on the fire and Sibyl stirring in it with a wooden paddle. She looked a rather lady-like banshee; she had dark, very luminous eyes, full of sad wisdom, a bitter mouth, gray hair combed straight back from a noble forehead. In dress she resembled a witch from the fairy tales: A male bathrobe, purple and bedecked with rather luxurious oriental ornaments, but full of ashes and disgracefully ragged.

"Did you see Pastor Eckard?"

"There was a candle in the chapel; so he must be there."

"Good, then get the others. But don't be gentle with them, Fancy; they stand more danger from freezing when asleep than up and going."

"Yes, aunt."

The sweet reek of the spruce logs had cleansed the kitchen air, but over in the guardhouse the atmosphere was stifling with the acrid smells of unwashed human bodies piled as they were on damp, decaying straw and covered up with everything which would protect: gunnysacks, horse bankets, cardboard pieces, catskins, shawls. Some sleepers even had umbrellas tied against the wall against the drafts from a big jagged hole through which snow drifted and formed a bank across the sleepers' feet.

Anxiously peering into the murky grey the girl tried to ascertain from the stertoreous breathing, snoring, sighs and coughs the life in all those bodies. With some it was hard to discern, so waxen looked the skin, so dead the limbs contorted as if in cramp. One after another she shook, relieved when a tongue would roll, the white of an eye gleam up, or numb fingers would twitch against hers: There was fear in the soft voice as louder and louder it cried: "Arise, arise, wake up you, and you, and you."

Walking around the straw she finally came to the other side. There was the body of an old woman half pushed out. Moisture from the wall had trickled across the stone floor and formed a sheet of ice. The thin, white hair of the old woman was buried in that ice; her face was blue and as the girl gripped for the bony wrist she found it stiff and cold. She gave a stifled cry: "Granny!" Then hoarse with sudden fright her voice came like a broken bell: "Again, again, again!"

The human mass in the murky darkness understood. It raised itself up as if one body, huddled and stiff with fright. There was no sound except a heavy breathing as of from leaky steam pipes. An old man who lay next to the dead woman said plaintively: "I didn't push her out; she must have fallen out. She was so heavy, so clammy against me all night."

There was silence; at last another voice somewhere in the center of the human pyramid said:

"Dead is dead. She's better off than we are, ain't she?"

The spell was broken; the girl hurried out. After a little while the bell inside the chapel called the Lost Souls to gather.

ONE by one they filed through the narrow door, about two scores of them, men and women. Their feet, bound up in sackcloth and pieces of old carpet, scraped the stone floor. As if in breadlines they stood before the miniature altar, blinking into the light of the one candle and into the faces of Pastor Eckard and the Burgomaster who stood to the right and to the left of it.

Dr. Hans Wahl, formerly mayor of Blankenburg, still had snow on his shoulders and icicles in his beard from his vigil in the tower. His eyes were bloodshot with fatigue. Now, as elder, he rang the bell which was a medieval shield hung from the ceiling and hearing the escutcheon of the Baron Tanns: three spruce trees in a row. He was of heavy build; his fleshy face, once no doubt the comfortable, florid face of a man who likes women, wine and song, was now stern and strangely divided into a dead half and a live half from exposure. He was clad in a long, fleecy hunter's coat of green wool, huttoned to the chin and there was a fat notebook sticking out between two buttons on his breast.

Pastor Eckard hung between his crutches, shoulders drawn up so that the pleated collar of his clerical gown came to his chin almost. He had no legs. One was amputated near the hip; the other still had a stump which rested in the cradle of a crude, homemade wooden leg. He was slim, small of build and by far the youngest man in the crowd, certainly not older than thirty-five. His face was smooth, very composed, childlike almost; only the eyes, embedded in deep, bluish hollows and the mouth narrow, pale and drawn, seemed to belong to a much older man. Yet the voice was cheerful, an eager voice, clarion-like without a trace of unctiousness. He now addressed the Lost Souls:

"Before us light; behind us darkness. Let us first face this day. Let our workers report on their tasks. Forest master Fuhrmann is first."

"Two rabbits in the snares this morning," said a hoarse voice. "One partridge found frozen. There was a bloody track in the snow from a wounded deer, but couldn't follow because of the snow storm." A murmur of disappointment went through the ranks.

"Good. Househuntress, Countess Dohna."

"Only one rat in the trap this morning. I'm sorry. But in the big tree by the North tower I'm positive there's a squirrel's nest. If Francisca be good enough to climb up there, we may find quite a few nuts."

"Good. Councilor Freytag for the firewood department."

"We may be able to cut, but we cannot draw today. We're up to our bellies in the snow as is; now the sledge trail will be snowed under in another bour."

"Too bad. Baroness Wedel for the kitchen department."

"Gruel will last for two more days at the pint-ration," said the grey lady in the purple bathrobe. "I could make a stew of the rabbits and the rat tonight; maybe Francy will get us the squirrel too. Only it won't amount to much."

"We shall manage." The pastor bowed his head and everybody followed his example as he prayed: "We thank ye, Lord, for what Thou hast given us. Amen."

THE cripple raised himself very erect as he continued:

"Death has again come to us this night. I'll ask Burgomaster Wahl to read us the data."

The big man pulled the notebook from his coat and held it close to the candlelight. His hands, still trembling with cold, shook as he read with a calm, sonorous voice:

"Zangen, Marie Celeste, widow. Born in Cologne on the Rhine in 1874. No known relatives. Oldest son, Franz Ludwig, killed in battle Bois le Trotre, July 15th, 1940. Second son, Karl Ernst, died from wounds received before Leningrad. Daughters Eva Hedwig and Maria Ernestine, and four grandchildren killed in air raids during 1942, 1943 and 1944. The deceased has made no will."

Closing the book the Burgomaster added: "She once said she wished to be buried in Cologne."

Pastor Eckard swung first one crutch then the other behind the altar. The wooden leg took one big step. He now supported his body by the elbows on the altar table. The finely chiseled head stood out bigh above tbe wheel-like collar. Every trace of tbe cripple had disappeared. His face, determined and ecstatic, resembled that of the Archangel Michael as some of the great Renaissance painters have presented him:

"Clearly, to our Marie Celeste, death has come as a great friend, a redeemer. You've heard the data of her life. You know what they mean in human suffering." The boyish figure behind the altar seemed to grow. The body swayed as a reed in the wind.

"Marie Celeste, forgive us for we cannot rest your body as you wished. Cologne is no more; so be content if we bed you here, near the last friends you had on earth.

"But you have had another wish, much bigger, mucb deeper wbich, day and night, you nourished in your weary heart: that tbe mother of our Lord, Jesus Christ, would hold you in her lap as if a small child. That she would smile at you and the faces of your slain children and children's children would be in that smile . . . I was ordained a minister of the Lutheran Church. But let me tell you, Catholics, Jews, Protestants alike: at this moment our Marie Celeste is in the Virgin's lap—exactly as she has seen it in her prayers, in her dreams, the faces of her beloved ones smile at her through the heavenly smile. For we all find in the World Beyond the kind of paradise which we envision here on earth—be it the lap of Abraham, be it the face of Jesus Cbrist, be it tbe happy bunting grounds of the Indians. Tbis revelation, that Paradise is not a place, but a spiritual state born from our love for God, has come to me on the plains of Leningrad.

"So this is a day of bappiness for our Marie Celeste, for everyone of us who lives in faith—no matter what faith. And so absolutely certain am I that Marie Celeste now smiles in Paradise that I feel no need for us to pray for ber. I rather think she will pray for us. I remember—strange, I seem to hear her voice, the little song she used to sing evenings by our fireside:

I've woven my linen ready,
I've set me my last bed aright,
Come, oh come you long, long night."

He had folded his hands. Though his young, strong voice bore no resemblance to the quavering singsong of the old woman who had died, everybody seemed to feel that this was Marie Celeste's voice and that it came from the beyond. The grey, the worn, the pastel-like faces, all uplifted to the altar, looked exalted. The light of the lone candle was suddenly reflected by eyes luminous with moisture; big drops ran down from them in joy.

ECKARD just had finished his silent prayer when unwonted sound arose: Trumpet blasts. From the height of the North tower they came, rusty, hoarse, painfully out of tune, yet an urgent signal:

"Didadidi—didadidi—dida—dida—dadadidi—da-dada."

Immediately the jampacked congregation was in a turmoil. There were excited cries: "They're coming"—"Who are they"—"The Communists"—"No, the Americans"—"The British"—"The Fehme"—"This time they'll get us all"—"It's the Russians maybe"—"No, the Soviet, the Soviet"—"We're done for."

There were shrieks of terror and of pain as the crowd pressed against the narrow door, pushing the weak ones in the bestial instinct of survival. Using both fists the big Burgomaster beat the shield to a thunderous din and: "Quiet!" he called, "Quiet," with a towncrier's voice. It stopped the panicky milling and the cries; they all faced the altar and Pastor Eckard's flushed face.

"It may be friend, it may be foe, how can we know?

"Why are you terrified? For us death has no shadow. Over us hell has no victory. Nothing can happen to us. We have gone through many a darker valley than mere death. We'll now file out, singly and in good order. And let us all sing:

"A mighty fortress is our Lord."

The chorus arose; with widening echoes as the foremost reached the courtyard: *"Ein gute Wehr und Waffen . . ."*

Something hard gripped Francisca by the shoulder; one of Pastor Ackard's crutches. He had reached down with it from the altar as if it were a boathook:

"Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel waer,"—with more and more people outside the singing reached a higher note . . .

"Francisca, child," whispered Eckard, "down into the crypt with you."

"I don't want to. I want to be with the others when . . ."

"Obey, Francisca. By the ashes of your mother and father I beseech you: obey. You still owe God a life. Begone with you."

"Es muss uns doch gelingen"; the song receded toward the gate, now almost jubilant. Eckard and the girl were alone. She asked: "Am I condemned to live?"

"Yes, you are. The link between the past and the future must not break. Begone, child, begone." Gently he pushed her toward the winding staircase which, invisible behind the altar, led down to the crypt. Her uplifted face shone white as it disappeared in the trapdoor, the candle in hand which Eckard had given her.

"Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben . . ." The song died away as the trapdoor closed.

Swinging his crippled body into the whirling snowstorm outside Eckard saw that the people, led by the hurgomaster, had lined up hy the gate: "Wahl," he called out, "Wahl, you go half way up the tower; we cannot hear what the colonel is shouting in this storm."

Like a faithful retriever dog the hurgomaster trotted off. Following him a few steps Eckard took a stand inside the tower entrance. From there he transmitted the message as they came down the hollow shaft of masonry.

"He says the column has reached the foot of the serpentine path."

". . . He says he sees them now in profile; regular troops marching in good order . . ."

A SIGH of great relief went through the crowd: "Thank God, it isn't the Soviet." In the kitchen door there appeared Sihyl, the cook in the purple gown, a steaming ladle in her hand. An old man gathered the tins the people carried in their belts and pockets. Running hack and forth from the kitchen he handed them around half filled with the hot, thin gruel. Warming their hands on the tins the people drank their soup in avid draughts.

"He says they are marching behind a motor-snowplow . . ."

Renewed excited murmur: "That must he Americans."

"He says some are ski troops, dressed white and there are two horse-drawn wagons in the column."

"That must be Russians then. Maybe they'll take us to some concentration camp . . ."

"He says he's counted them; they are ahout company strength, first group in white, the rest in khaki . . ."

"Khaki? Could he the English. Could you imagine they're hringing us food on those wagons?"

"He says two motor cars follow the column; one scout car with officers in it and a halftrack with machine guns to the rear."

"Machine guns? Mayhe they expect resistance. No; it's to mow us down right quick. No, it's officers with them so there must he some law and order . . ."

"He says they've reached the last serpentine; they're coming toward the gate.—I say: open that gate, open that gate! We must show them there is to be no resistance. Open the gate!"

The whine of the snowplow's turhine shovels now was audihle inside the court. Lined to hoth sides of the gate the people stomped their feet in nervous tension. The forester and the councilor unloosened the heavy bars and pushed against the gate which was hard to hudge against the snow.

"Lower the hridge. Be quick—lower the hridge, don't make them wait for us." The minister's voice now had to strain against the din of the engine, more and more powerful outside.

The four most able-hodied men, the colonel and the hurgomaster had come clattering down the tower stairs—wrestled with the frozen chains. All of a sudden the heavy weight came down across the snow-filled moat with a great rattle. Not fifty feet from the gate the huge snowplow snorted; thick jets of snow flew from it as from the nostrils of some monstrous dragon. Cautiously prohing the hridge the ski-platoon came gliding in, their hooded faces peering to the right and left, their tommy guns following every move of the eyes.

"O.K., come on."

The hridge heaved hut it held. With swift movements the tommy gunners had glided all across the court searching every nook and corner like bloodhounds. Meanwhile the infantry marched in, the wagons creaked and jolted, the staff car with a jackrabbit start shot past the infantry. The armored half-track, reversing, laid its bulk right across the gate, one gun-tower swung to the inside and one down *the road. In a very professional manner* all this was done quicker than it can be told.

ONE officer, obviously of some rank had left the staff car; another, perhaps his aide, followed with some hesitation a few steps behind. Silently the officers walked past the lines of the Lost Souls, mustering them as if they were a guard of honor.

Silently, too, the Lost Souls stood, stiff witb anticipation and fright. Obviously mocking a Prussian commander of the old school the American officer suddenly shouted: *"Morgen, Leute!"*

The ripple of a tremor ran through the human wrecks, tbere was a shocked silence; yet after a few seconds they caught themselves. Trembling but loud came tbe response: "Good morning, Herr General!"

Voland — for he it was—swung around and grinned at Stufa: "See? he said in excellent English; "it's in their flesh and bones; good old Prussian school. If they were only half their age, we could make something out of them."

Stufa swallowed hard and bis face flushed: "Cut out your dirty jokes, will you," he murmured between clenched teeth.

Voland laughed aloud; he was in high spirits: "Oh, don't be silly. Day and night you work on problems of mass-destruction of lives, yet you are pleased to act the philanthropist. Just like that Alfred Nobel who invented the dynamite." Aloud he sbouted: "Who's in charge here?"

"I am." Pastor Eckard swung his crutches forward; the crippled body followed like a pendulum.

"Ah!" With demonstrative eagerness Voland stepped forward to meet the man in the surplice halfway: "Stay, sir, don't trouble." With a polite salute he introduced himself: "Colonel Roscombe, U. S. A., of Inter-Allied Control Commission. I am here on reports that this place contains an arms dump of tbe Nazi-Underground."

"I can assure you, sir, that there are no weapons here. The aged persons you perceive are civilian refugees. This castle has been allocated to them by the Blankenburg Soviet as a place of detention. Permit me to add: as a place to die. For we do not receive supplies of any kind from anywbere. There is not a single ablebodied man amongst us. There are no weapons."

"I regret. But I'm under orders to bave a search made. You state that are no arms here; does that statement include strategic metals from which arms can be manufactured?"

Eckard thought for a moment hefore he said: "I do not understand, colonel. We're tbe only people wbo live here. Does it seem likely that tbese men and women, bent with old age and starving, should be the manufacturers of secret armaments?"

"I perceive, Herr Pastor, that you are evading my question. Whetber or not you people are guilty of conspiracy will be brought to light by the results of my investigation. Meanwhile you can spare yourself and me unnecessary harshness in that you order your people to line up against the wall over tbere."

"Sir, these people are weak in body, poor in bealth, please permit them to stay under shelter. This storm . . ."

"I regret, Herr Pastor. Captain, have all the civilians lined up face against the North wall. Ski-troopers guard walls and towers. Third platoon infantry to the gate. Tbe rest follow me."

The human pendulum went swinging toward the gate, its face contorted in superhuman effort to reach the people before the soldiers did.

"No fears, have no fears," Eckard cried. "The Americans make a search for arms. Meanwhile we line up against that wall. A mere formality. Burgomaster, let every man help the weakest of the women. Follow me, all of you. Like the Jews at the wall of Jerusalem we'll sing and 'twill keep us warm."

THE Lost Souls broke ranks and surrounded him, each one trying to get as near as possible. They hardly noticed the soldiers who like stalking hunters followed them, tommy gun on hip.

Without any further pretense of even a perfunctory search Voland motioned the snowplow to back up against the chapel door; with great speed, every detail obviously rebearsed, mechanics unloaded blowtorch equipment and unrolled electric cables. Within minutes the chapel shone brilliantly illuminated by powerful searchlights which moved about within.

"Why must you treat these poor devils in this bestial manner?" asked Stufa as he and Voland walked over to the chapel door.

"But Doctor, don't you understand? We have to play a role; 'we've come as conquerors—that's the American policy, be tough with the German civilians.' Excellent, they are playing our game. Even these decrepit and dying people bere; they still can hate, they still can form part of the tremendous hatred reservoir which is Germany and which is the motor of our liberation. This minister, for instance; he still is a man. I'd bet he once was one of us, before in some moment of weakness he again groped for his God. Make such a man despair of his impotent Deity and he'll use all his influence in our favor. Such a result, my dear Doctor, is well worth a few pneumonias which these oldsters may now catch and which can only be welcome to them as quick end to their suffering. Your task and mine, Doctor, is to fulfill our great mission and not to break down under its burdens, terrific though they are. Careful now; these stone steps have been worn in half a dozen centuries. Now, Doctor, what did I tell you; bave I promised too much?"

A big reflector, set on the stone floor, filled the crypt with light. There were perhaps two scores of coffins, some lead, some ornamental wrought iron, some open and some closed, some sunk into the ground, some elevated in vaulted niches all along the walls. The walls themselves shone greenish like wet moss with the patina which covered the lead. The lead plates appeared to be hammered by hand into crevices of the motber rock. With the trapdoor closed the crypt was nothing but one leaden box. In violation of the grave some coffins lay opened, with all the secrets of death revealed, skulls grinning, bony fingers still folded for crosses or rosaries wbich had disappeared. Some shreds of lace still remained, glittering like spiderwebs in morning dew. As dust they crumbled under the slightest toucb. A baptismal font cut from granite and of great age formed the center of the oval room.

The mechanics in their hooded skitroopers' uniforms stood silently along the walls like ghosts who await the midnight hour.

From some inner pockets Stufa produced chemical testing equipment, alcohol burner, tubes, bottles. Arranging them on the broad rim of the baptismal font he called: "Scrape me some of that lead—patina, someone." Shaking the grey-green powder in a test tube be poured a little acid; smoke arose and a sharp stench as he slowly moved the glass tube over the blue alcohol flame. He held it against the light, his mighty forehead in a frown, his shaggy mane a reddish halo in the chalk-white light. For a full minute not a muscle moved as he observed discoloration and sediment in the glass, only bis red-rimmed eyes contracted in sharp concentration. At last his tigbt mouth opened in a happy laugh: "Eureka! By Jupiter, how did you do it, Voland? This is the stuff! All right boys, on with your torches, cut all the lead to pieces—any old size; only so a couple of men can carry the slabs. We'll take the coffins later."

VOLAND had drawn himself up to the top of the baptismal font; there be sat, legs dangling and his face a triumphant grin:

"At last! So finally we see our Doctor happy. Look at him, men—did you ever see him laugh like that before? Do you realize what it means? It means he now holds the final success of our V-7 in his hands! Before three montbs are gone we'll let her fly and then: Good night Paris, good night London, good night New York! Now men: Long live the Fuehrer, long live the Fatherland, long live our Doctor here!"

Thundering echoes of the three cheers drowned the furious hissing of the torch flames. Then the lead peeled off the walls as if by magic and the chalk whiteness of the light became a luminous cloud, awhirl with the dust of centuries. Within an hour the crypt was stripped down to a rocky cave; nothing remained but the baptismal font, some bones carelessly scattered on the ground and the black scars on the walls where the blow-torches had burned their patbs.

Tbe wind had somewhat abated, but the snow now fell so thick one could hardly see fifty paces ahead. Still blinded by the glaring lights Voland and Stufa heard the Lost Souls before they could see them; they were singing: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; wbom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of wbom shall I be afraid? Wait I say on the Lord."

Weak but defiant it resounded from the walls, echoed from the cbapel, echoed from the towers as the wind chased around the yard.

Voland and Stufa watched the amazing picture. Their heads and their sboulders covered with snow the people were near invlsible. Some of the weakest had sunk to their knees, but everybody's hands were still raised above the heads in obedience to the command and only these bands moved, twitching their fingers and clutching the air like those of drowning men. Voland lifted a signaling hand to the commander of the infantry:

"Guns by foot; — platoon — about face—in double rows—march!"

As the soldiers tramped off toward the gate the singing broke off. The ranks of the Lost Souls swayed, yet nobody dared as much as to look over bis shoulder. Since the commands were in English most of them didn't understand wbat they meant. Many no doubt expected the cracking of a salvo as the next and the last sound they would bear on earth. Only the figure in the black cassock, the figure on crutches had turned around and slowly, painfully it dragged itself across the snow to where Voland and Stufa stood. Pastor Eckard's face was deadly pale.

"Es—ist—gut—Herr Pastor," said Voland in bis carefully broken German, "your ordeal is over. But—" and he pointed across his sboulder toward the

wagons which now moved to the gate with their heavy load—"but, as you observe, our search was amply justified."

The slim figure of the minister now trembled violently, his dark eyes flashed, his voice shook:

"Sir, I have thought of Americans as God-fearing men. But you have violated the peace of the grave. Your act is that of a robber and a common thief; worse, you're a kidnaper: where is SHE? *Where is SHE, I ask you!*" These last words he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Herr Pastor," Voland's words cracked like pistol shots, "do you realize that I could put you and your fellow-conspirators against that wall and have you shot for the concealment of strategic metals on these premises?"

"To us, sir, death holds no terror. But there are things worse than death; give HER up, I beseech you, give HER up to us."

"YOU must be crazy. However—and to show you that the U. S. Army has come as conquerers not as oppressors—I'll pay you for the lead with something no money can buy: Stop that wagon!" he called over his shoulders.

With one long stride Voland stepped in front of the horses:

"Look here, Herr Pastor," he exclaimed with a cynical grin: "German horses—no good? We don't need German horses!" He whipped his pistol from the holster and there were two quick reports; shot through the white stars on their foreheads the team collapsed almost as one body, their hooves beating the snow in a last tremor.

"Unhitch them," he ordered the soldiers, "and have the wagon towed by the half-track."

Wiping the mouth of the gun on his coatsleeves he added to Eckard: "It's probably a long time since you people had steak for dinner, eh? — Horse steaks!" He gave a contemptuous shrug to his shoulders: "No dog would touch them in America. But for you Huns—good enough, eh?"

Eckard stood as if frozen under the insult. But somebody else moved; from the quivering huddle of the Lost Souls an old man leaped across the snow crying with a maniac's voice: "You are not an officer, you swine, you murderer, you gangster!"

Eckard thrust his crutches forward to throw himself between the old man and the colonel. It was too late. Quick as lightning Voland's pistol cracked, three times the barrel jumped in his wrist. There was a cry. The ugly steel hook which had reached from the empty sleeve for Voland's face stabbed the air as the old warrior crashed down at his opponent's feet. Stark horror in his eyes Stufa saw the cripple in the clerical garb sway and fall forward, hands outstretched. Trying to catch the minister in his arms Stufa felt himself caught by the shoulders: "Don't be silly, Doctor," Voland hissed in his ear, "haven't you eyes in your head? The pastor isn't dead. I merely shot his props away from under him. 'Twill teach him to remember the teachings of his Lord and Master next time: to offer the other cheek, I mean."

"Voland, you're a devil."

"Am I? If so, I'm part of that power which always wills the evil yet always creates the good, as Mephisto said. You're an ingrate, Stufa: haven't I kept faith with you? I've got you the lead. I've given your oldsters food for weeks —useless as they are. What's more: I've stirred up a few red hot hatred flames against the foreign oppressors. I've perhaps raised in this good servant of the Lord, who now so needlessly has bitten into the snow, some healthy doubts as to the benevolence of his Deity. And I've had me some damned good sport. The Fuehrer, my dear Doctor, valued good shots amongst his bodyguards. Anyway, Stufa; like real Americans we can say: 'mission completed'. So let's get the hell outa here. Column—march!"

Snorting, the Diesel monsters moved ahead. In the retreat from the castle the armored halftrack took the lead. Then came the wagons, then infantry, then staff car. Swiftly and noiselessly the hooded ski-troopers slid downhill on both sides. The mammoth snowplow took the rear and this time it operated in reverse: hurling its mighty turbine blades like giant batwings, it swept the snow walls it had made before back into the track. Over the hillside, over the windswept plain the heavy snow clouds dragged across the Harz; within minutes all imprints from Agharti's messengers had disappeared.

In the courtyard of castle Tannrode the cripple dragged himself through the snow on hands and knees: "Francisca!" he cried with the voice of a wounded eagle: "Francisca! — Francisca!"

CHAPTER III

Under the Magic Eye

THE girl Francisca lay on a hospital bed in the emergency ward of Stufa's lab. She had just come to, but her head was light; neither did she know where she was, nor how she had come there. There still were stabbing pains in her feet and in her hands, but somehow these pains seemed to belong to somebody else. She bad seen bent over her the face of Dr. Lamby, a long, sad, brown-eyed simian's face and she had wondered at his jerky movements and at the beads of sweat which stood on his forehead. What she did not know was that the doctor had worked on her for hours and finally had pumped her full of drugs. There had been other strange faces too—all vanished now except for the strangest of them all: the face with the luminous blue eyes in the mighty bison's head.

The man was slumped in a chair close to her bed; one of his great paws was laid across the blankets as if to hold her there. Francisca felt he bad sat there looking at her fixedly for an eternity. She felt as if these eyes had penetrated to the bottom of her soul, as if he had known her forever and she had told him all her life. In her dazed state she had the vision of an old grandfather's clock which had stood in the hall when she was a little child. That clock had had a pendulum, a brass disk, picturing the sun like a human face; it had a smile half joy and half sorrow; its rays were sculptured as furrows on the face and the forehead, from where they waved out as an unkempt mane. This clock with its sonorous voice, this sun-faced swinging pendulum had always held a kind of hypnotic influence over her. Now it would seem to her that the clock had come alive in the deep voice of that man, in that man's radiant and furrowed face.

There were some other things she wondered at; the bandages around her feet and hands, the whiteness of the sheets, the electric lamp on the nightstand, the shining enamel of the bed. She felt awe of these luxuries. The Lost Souls, to be sure, had often told about such things, but to her it had always sounded like fairy tales. She felt very light too, her body seemed to have no weight at all; that was because the room was so warm as she had never known a room could be in wintertime. She was dressed only in a long, white chemise under the carressing softness of the blanket. Strangely unconcerned over the pain and the bandages she was about to ask the man with the face of a sorrowful sun: "Where am I?"

At that moment, however, from a box in the corner of the room there came a voice: *"Achtung, Achtung,* all Agharti! —Enemy columns approaching from South and East; probably with radiosondes. Extinguish all fires—extinguish all fires. All trains to stations,—all trains to stations! All personnel to quarters, all personnel to quarters! Open valves of dry ice-screens around all quarters. All tank crews to battle-stations, all tank crews to battle-stations. Lights out in 15 minutes; lights out in exactly fifteen minutes."

The figure in the chair had stiffened at the first sound of the loudspeaker voice. Now he quickly bent over and grabbed the telephone on the night-stand. For about five minutes he spoke quietly, but very swiftly. Francisca hardly understood a word of what he said: "Cut off experiment one ninety-two at points three, eleven, thirty-five," —things like that. There were urgent knocks at the door. Men whom she couldn't see entered in haste and received rapid orders. Outside there were sounds of hurried footsteps, hissings as if of steam, shoutings and the wails of motors grinding to a stop. Only now and then the girl could grasp a word or two:

"You'll stay here, Doctor?—All right then, good luck."

THE voices and the noises died away. From behind the screen which hid the door the man with the luminous eyes reappeared. Now he made some light-ning quick arrangements with the room itself. He pushed a second hospital bed right beside her's. From a cupboard he took armfuls of blankets and piled them on both beds. "Why does he do it?" Francisca wondered, "it's so warm herein." He disappeared through another door; Francisca heard him rummage and after a minute he returned with a big aluminum thermos bottle which had a rubber tube for mouthpiece. Then he did a most astonishing thing;—he cast off his shoes, cast off the jacket of his strange foreign uniform, opened his collar. "Why; was he going to go to bed?" Francisca didn't feel any fear; It was as if nothing this man could do would ever make her afraid or even astonish her. "Wasn't he the sundial on the grandfather's clock; hadn't she known him all her life?" But she did feel concerned; "was it perhaps that he felt ill?" Again she was on the point of asking him when suddenly the lights flickered and went out.

Francisca heard him heave a deep sigh and then the creaking of the bed-springs. In the pitch darkness she felt layer after layer of blankets sink around her, cover her up to the chin: "Child," said the deep voice, very near to her ear, "don't be afraid, child;—it's nothing; merely an alarm."

She heard him fumble with his own blankets and murmur to himself: "Oh hell, now one ninety-two will go all to pieces the whole batch will be spoiled and I can start all over again. This throws me back at least another week; oh hell."

Then there was silence; darkness and silence except for an uncanny crackling noise which seemed to emerge from behind every wall like a gnashing of teeth. Francisca had a feeling as of some immense weight pressing against the room from all sides, as if the walls were about to collapse and bury them. At the same time it seemed as if the warmth evaporated from the room, as if a glacier outside were penetrating into the darkness.

"Child—are you all right?" asked the voice. "Don't be afraid of the noise; it's merely—oh you wouldn't understand—it's merely the dry ice which we release to kill the animal warmth."

From the now invisible box there came another voice and for the first time Francisca shuddered: hadn't she heard it before, this soft, melodious voice with the sinister undertones of a snarl? Where, when, who was it?

"Achtung, Achtung, all Agharti! The enemy has now entered our sector in two columns with planes overhead—planes overhead. The enemy's radiosonde equipment has gone to work in quadrants one-oh-one and two-seven. His operations are proceeding North and West. I herewith order absolute immobility. Absolute immobility. Whosoever moves will be exterminated—whosoever moves will be exterminated. Talk is permitted, talk is permitted. I shall now switch on the magic eye so everybody can follow the movements of the enemy. Let everyone be calm; whosoever loses his nerve will be liquidated—will be liquidated . . ."

SILENCE again; silence and darkness black. But now on the ceiling some ghostly light began faintly to radiate. It was as if some spirit's hands were about to materialize. First there appeared grey, rectangular lines in the pattern of a grid, very faint they were outlined against a transparent screen. Then there appeared curved lines by their hundreds, forming a sort of labyrinth. Finally colored glowworms seemed to creep into this moonlight labyrinth. Some of the glowworms were ruby red, transparent and very slow; their heads made indecisive movements like caterpillars on a cabbage leaf. Others were green and they moved very fast across the grid, sometimes straight, sometimes in curves, even in circles. These took only minutes to cross the whole extent of the screen, then they reappeared from the opposite direction. There were some very small light-dots too, orange in color and quite stationary; whenever one of the ruby-snakes stopped on its course the orange dot appeared on its head like a little eye.

As she stared at the ceiling with wide open eyes, nursery tales, long forgotten, came to Francisca's mind. There had been tales of little snakes with golden eyes and rubies in their heads, snakes which could speak with human tongues and would lead to veins of gold and silver in the mountains of one was a Sunday child. But there had been other tales too; of poisonous adders which hypnotized their victims before they stung and sucked out children's brains. There was something hypnotic in the eery picture overhead; she wanted to avert her eyes, she stirred.

"Don't move, child; for heaven's sake don't stir, my little one. It's your own life, it's mine, it's all our lives down here which are at stake;" she heard the man say.

"What is this? Where am I? Please, let me go home." At last she had found the strength to form words; only it was as if somebody else had spoken, it was as if some invisible little silver bell hung in the darkness were a-ringing, touched by the breath of her mouth.

The man heaved a deep sigh as if relieved from some great fear. Through the darkness she could feel how he lay exactly as she did, flat on his back, very close to ber and that he stared up to the luminous snakes with the same hypnotic fascination as she did. Was it he who spoke? Was it the little snakes with the golden eyes who spoke with human tongues?—Francisca wasn't sure; she still was in a trance, transported far, far back into a fairyland. Wasn't it the story of Snowwhite he told her now?

"Ah, I am happy, so happy that you speak at last; your mind returns, you'll get well. They shall not kill you now. Only: don't move, child, if you love your life, don't move. You cannot imagine what a shock it gave me when we opened that coffin and you lay in there; like Snowwhite, quite pale and as if dead—yes, like Snowwhite when the evil queen had poisoned her. Only your hair is golden; Snowwhite's was raven-black. Yes, and you are in a mountain too, like Snowwhite was. How was it possible? I still don't understand. I've seen miracles happen, scientific miracles; I've worked some myself. But nothing like this has ever happened to me or anyone. I knew it was a sign. It was a sign that I should no longer be so utterly alone."

HE laughed and it sounded almost happy: "For you must know I have been terribly, terribly alone in this underworld. There are many of us down here; men and women too. But it is as if mine were the only heart alive, as if all the others were but shadows or ghouls, ghosts, vampires. No really human voice has reached into my inner loneliness. I've had nobody to whom I could pour out my heart without suspicion. It almost killed me. Maybe my comrades once were real men, even real women, but the spark of life has died in them. Without you I feel it would die in me. But you have come—a miracle has come to pass. I smelled your hair the moment I bent over you—what it did to me I cannot say. It smelled sweet as smells the earth in spring, sweet as the dew at dawn on a morning in May, sweet as the herbs under the hedges of our farm when I was a child; it smells like all the things I bad forgotten and bad thought were dead. What an astounding sight you were in that old coffin. You know, your hair was frozen to a yellow skull and your clothes to the bones and ligaments which lay by your side. The very guards which had carried you shrank back to the wall at your apparition. At first I thought you dead; so did the others; but then—what luck;—a great mass of snow had come into the lab together witb the coffins. I started rubbing you—oh, it took hours before I could even loosen your hands and feet from the leaden walls. Then came the doctor. Yes, you suffered frostbite pretty bad; but it's nothing, child, it's nothing, it will pass. If I were alone now in this blackout I think I would go crazy. It can last—God alone knows how long; twelve hours, twenty-four, forty-eight. Many go crazy and then they are shot. But I must not. I have important work to do, you cannot know how important. This is war in the dark. We are under bombardment. We are under the bombardment of rays. Do you know what that screen means you see up there? It means that we are fish; hiding in the great, black deep and up there are fisherman. See; they are dragging their big nets to catch us. Ah, but what they don't know is, we aren't small fish to catch. What they don't know is that we are the big Leviathan of the deep; soon, very soon we shall arise and swallow the fishermen . . ."

"Is he raving?" Francisca wondered. "Perhaps he is; of the Lost Souls in the castle many a one cried out in some such way." She had learned to understand this and not to be afraid. Great sufferings expressed themselves in some such way; often she had been able to relieve a victim of these spells by softly stroking his forehead with her small, cool hand. She had a longing to do this now to the man who lay so close by her side, but with the very impulse she felt the bandage around her hand and heard him say.

"Don't move, child; don't move . . . Oh, how am I going to explain things to such a child as you are? You must have been under the terror-bombs. Yes, of course you were. You must have heard the drone of the enemy planes up there in the clouds—yes, yes you have. This is different, yet it is similar; different as poison is from the dagger and yet similar in that they both bring death. No bomb could hit us here in the womb of the mountain. But imagine you and I were overground now on the top of the Brocken. Imagine we would lie there in a snowdrift hidden from sight like spies, what would we see?

"WE would see them crawl up the valleys and the slopes: the squads of American engineers. Huge, thundering snowplows at the head of their columns; tanks, too, for they feel the invisible menace of our mountains though we never attack them. Up there we would hear their engines snort, we would see their winch cables stretch as they haul themselves up the slopes from tree to tree. We would see them slide down the ravines and crash through the underbrush.

"But child, you and I aren't afraid of the tanks and of the armored cars; it's something far more dangerous, we fear. Imagine some great big caterpillar tractor. It follows in the wake of the armor and it hauls a string of sledges. There are little cabins on the sledges and if we could see through their walls we would see instrument boards and dynamos and queer looking equipment, as in a radio station. Have you ever seen a radio station, child? It's very quiet in those cabins and there are only two men in each, squeezed between the machinery. They carry earphones on their heads and they watch dials. These are the men we fear. For these are operating the rays.

"They have all sorts of rays; some are sensitive to water in the ground—that doesn't harm us. Some show them where there is metal or ores in the rocks—against those we can guard ourselves. But there is one kind of rays sensitive to temperature; so sensitive that if down here we were to strike a match they would register it through seven hundred yards of rock and miles, it would show on their instruments like a tremor of the earth. If you or I or anybody would as much as lift an arm, it would generate enough animal heat to register up there on their dials. This is their trap. This is the net they are dragging over us, back and forth, probing, digging for the life which stirs in the womb of the Harz.

"We cannot defend ourselves. It is not heat as such which would betray us, it is changes in temperature such as do not occur naturally in the womb of the earth. We can tone them down though; we filter them through screens of dry ice—that is why it's getting so cold in here. It flattens the curves up there where the indicator needles feel the mountain's pulse—yes, that it does and yet: we are condemned to absolute immobility. Do you understand now? Do you grasp the meaning of the luminous snakes up there? We too have rays by which we can watch what goes on overground, we too have magic eyes, only for us it's simple because the enemy doesn't even try to camouflage his movements. They lord it over us—at least that's what they think. So then, the labyrinth on the screen, that's our mountain. The green snakes, those which move fast and flit about—those are enemy observation planes; probably they direct this whole expedition from the air. It's nothing to us. The ruby snakes, they aren't dangerous either; they represent their tanks, their armored cars, they crawl hither and thither as if we were fools enough to snipe at them from behind every tree. But when the ruby snakes unveil their golden eyes—they cast a spell. It's—it's invisible fingers which grip for Agharti's throat—it's the rays at work."

THE cold had become intense; through all the blankets the girl felt how it crept in to her. It was with great effort that she controlled the chattering of her teeth. She tried to close her eyes against the slow writbings of the luminous snakes, against those evil eyes of gold, the meaning of which she divined though she understood only part of what Stufa said. Her eyelids quivered, yet, she couldn't force them down; the spell was on her. She sensed that there were evil forces besetting her from every side, incomprehensible and magic, and that they emanated from the writhing snakes as well as from the man who was lying at her side. She sensed that this war in the dark with rays which penetrated to and from the womb of the earth was even more sinister than anything she had witnessed overground, that it was in the nature of a blackout of the sun, such as had occured when Chirst died on the Cross.

Why was it that the face of the man had conjured in her the picture of that sun-pendulum in the grandfather's clock? Was it because that sun's face, too, had been distorted as if in pain of death? An upsurge of great pity swept over her and brought tears to her eyes: he suffered, this man; some demon tortured him. She heard his heavy breathing and all of a sudden she heard herself say: "Don't move, strange man, don't move."

He gave a nervous laugh: "Good of you to remind me. Child, you're very wonderful to me. How do you know? How did you divine how hard it is to lie immobile in this dark when I need only move a finger, press a button and then . . . Ah, we've mined all the roads of their approaches, we've batteries of rocket guns concealed on the mountaintops. One move of my little finger and the gates of Agharti would spring open like the gates of hell; our own tanks would rush out and we would wipe them from the face of the earth. Only, we cannot afford to do it; we cannot do it—yet. For then they would know that in these mountains tbere beats the heart of the Third Reich; they would return in strength. Like locusts they would swarm over Agharti —tanks by their thousands, planes by their thousands and with their giant drills and power shovels they would dig us out. No, child; it cannot be done. We must play dead; we must behave like sand sharks digging into the sand while the big net is dragged."

How helpless she was and how much she would like to help; she had felt that way with the Lost Souls and earlier, much earlier in her life when the old nurse with the shrunken face had told her by the kitchen fire why it was that the oldsters down in the village were so bent and doubled up: some phouka, some nightmare, some evil spirit had jumped on tbeir backs and they had run and run in panic under its crushing weight, under its throttling grip, till they broke down, their hearts worn out, their nerves exhausted, their backs bent forever. Her mother had explained it all away and she had scolded old Maruck for telling such superstitious tales. But now the girl knew better; she had seen men and women suddenly go crazy and run berserk in the civil war, pinning themselves to the point of bayonets, slashing with razors at inanimate thangs as well as animate. Yes, there were furies to ride men, and this man had one of them at his throat. Only one way she knew to help and losen the demon's grip; she used it instinctively: "Tell me—tell me more—tell everything."

"OH, you're just a kid. But if I had a kid like you, then it would be worthwhile to live. As it is I live and I work for the liberation of Germany. It's like a fire, it burns me up inside. But it is a fire of the brain, not of the heart. I thought 'twould fill the heart, but then it didn't. The heart is empty, it hungers, I've searched and searched and found nothing to fill it with. That was until I smelled your hair. That was until I saw your throat heave its first breath. That was until I saw the innocence of your white body when I rubbed it with snow. I'd quite forgotten that there was another, that there was a better world. It does something to me, merely to talk to you. I had a sister once; she was a little like you. We had a home too; oh, what am I telling you about these things. You had a home too and a family and love and peace—and they're all gone, aren't they? All Germany is gone and now we've only ourselves—only ourselves. And Agharti . . . Agharti; I shouldn't tell you about Agharti, but probably it matters not. Voland will suspect you anyway. I hold great powers here; I shall need all of them to protect you, child.

"Have you ever heard of Tibet? An old, old saga stems from there, a little like the saga of the flood. For once before the world has come to an end just when men thought they had reached the highest civilization—maybe it was through a flood, maybe it was through war as today—knowledge and wisdom had to go underground. They found refuge at the bottom of the sea, so tells the saga; a secret kingdom was built in the dark deep to gather all the knowledge, all the books, all the wise men and magicians which couldn't exist in the devastated world above. That secret kingdom's name was Agharti. From Agharti the wise men sent winged messengers—just as we send airplanes—to whisper into the ears of rulers overground. From Agharti the learned men wrote secret wisdom on the backs of great sea turtles. The turtles then swam to the coast of China and the survivors of the catastrophe on earth read them from the turtles' backs. In secret the kingdom of Agharti ruled the world. It was the world's brains, it also was a forge where new secret weapons were created. It all was six thousand years ago and it was just as today.

"This is the new Agharti, more than an underground organization: but a secret state with science for its centre; science, real power with which either to destroy or recreate the earth. Our Agharti here is only one of many—a small part of the whole. Look, that ruby snake in the center; it too has opened up its evil eyes; it must be almost on top of us, Can you feel what I feel? Can you sense how their rays are creeping over us, spiderlike?"

Yes; Francisca could feel it all right. It was like a cold fever, it ran down her spine. Her mouth was dry and in her semi-trance of drugs and hypnotism her tongue would not obey her will. Somehow her mind had gone back to its roots; through the luminous snakes with the evil eyes she saw the fireplace of her old home and the wrinkled face of the old nurse and through the voice of the man who told her of Agharti, she heard the soft voice of old Maruck as she told of Venus and Tannhaeuser in the Hoerselberg, of old emperor Barbarossa asleep in his subterranean Kyffhaeuser castle, his head bent down on a table of stone . . . "Barbarossa." Only with great effort, letter by letter she could form the word. Why had she said it she wondered; but he immediately read her thought.

"STRANGE child; what made you think of him? I tbought of him—oh, ever so often in these terrible hours of immobility. Wasn't he tied to his table of stone by his own beard which had grown through the rock? Wasn't he damned to sit there for a thousand years while ravens brought him message after message of how his people were suffering. He cannot die; the people still wait for him. He will ride with us when we arise from the womb of the earth, irrestible with the power of the atomic bomb. My work . . . you wouldn't understand . . . but it is great things we are doing here. It is the power by which the universe was formed; it is as big as that. It is the power of God himself, it is what makes the earth rotate, what makes the face of the sun burst in explosions, what drives the stars in their courses. One night when I was very young and couldn't sleep for hunger, the idea of how to release that power whisked through my brains like a shooting star. Since then it has pursued me day and night for twenty years. Now we hold it—almost—in the palm of our hands. We hold the power which once belonged to God . . .

"There's nothing we cannot do with it. First we shall drive our enemies into the sea; first we shall take our vengeance on the world which has destroyed our Germany. It has to be. But then, child, we shall build a new world, such as never was before, gardens of Eden, new paradises. Factories will be palaces of glass wherein toils no buman hand. Atomic power will drive them. It will control sunshine and rain. Our homes will be animated machines fulfilling our every wisb before we utter it. Magic carpets will carry us from place to place. Money will not exist; all things will be free and in abundance. There is to be no sweat nor tears. Temples of wisdom sball be erected for youth as in the Golden Age. Boys will grow up in them to be as Greek gods and girls to be wondrously beautiful like Helen of Troy and forever young. Were it not for this dream, not for a minute longer would I stand this life in the abyss, this Orcus, to which I'm condemned to live amongst bloodthirsty shadows."

The Golden Age; Francisca had heard of it before. The Lost Souls had often told of an "golden age" and had tried to describe it. How once, one could go into a shop to ask for a pair of shoes and get them. How once, one could go to a baker and get not a quar-loaf but a whole loaf and two loaves even. That had been the "golden age" of the Lost Souls and it never had seemed real to her. This one was very different. Though it was as fantastic as a fairy tale she could visualize those palaces of steel and glass, those machines which worked all by themselves, those beautiful temples of education and the girls which she imagined clad in peplums of red and golden silk. She imagined herself in a gown of soft and flowing silk and that somehow it would be like wings. She had only to wish it and it would elevate her into the air. On soft, balmy breezes she would float and soar up the slopes of a great mountain, its peak shrouded in luminous, sun-drenched clouds. With the veil of a golden mist before her eyes she would sail through tbe clouds and there would be *he*, the man who had created all that paradise. He would sit on a throne on top of the mountain, his face like the brass pendulum from grandfatber's clock, a sun-god, and be would smile at her. So beautiful was this vision that the evil eye was powerless. Tbere was a change in the magic eye overhead: "Look," she said, "the red snake in the center, it witbdraws its head."

"Yes, it has closed its eyes; the rays are off. Watch now; if they think they have discovered anything they will call more radio-sondes to the spot. If not they will retreat. They are at the dead end of a gorge; a wall of rocks arises in front of them almost perpendicular; even cables and winches won't lift them over that. Watch now; this is the crucial hour."

THEY both watched in silence. There was no sound except for the eery crackle of the dry ice and the heavy gusts of breathing from the man. The cold had become so penetrating that it seemed to Francisca as if she were frozen into a block of ice. Even without the hypnotic spell from the luminous snakes she couldn't have moved if she bad wanted to. Was it day, was it night? She didn't know; time stood still. Gradually her drugged mind became a little clearer; there were brief spells of intense mental torment in which she visualized a purple snake creeping up to the castle. What would it do to Pastor Eckard, to Sibyl, to the Colonel, the burgomaster? The man-devouring dragon-monsters of the old sagas bad returned in the shape of the steel monsters which crept through the defeated land.

But the ruby snake in the center had definitely witbdrawn its head. Like an earthworm it contracted; its tail now was the head. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, it retreated the way it bad come. The vivid green snakes kept crisscrossing and circling the screen of the magic eye, but now there seemed to be fewer of them. Here and there another one of the ruby snakes closed its evil eyes and began to retreat the way it had come. Each time one of the golden light dots flickered and went out the girl heard the man heave a sigh such as she had heard the wounded sigh with relief wben the morphine began to work in their veins. But there seemed to be hours in between every sigh. At last—and this time she heard his teeth cbatter before he could control bis tongue—she heard his voice again:

"It's getting—n i g b t—out—there. They want to go home, the Americans. Perhaps they feel a little cold, though not as cold as we. They haven't found anytbing, I don't think. It isn't over yet; tbey are still sounding our mountain from the outer slopes and we cannot know exactly wbere they beam their rays. No doubt they have discovered the subterranean river. No doubt they have found that there are great accumulations of ore and metals in these rocks. No doubt, too, they have scanned the old records of the silver mines and tin mines wbich once were operated bere. They are tboroughgoing, the Americans; almost as we Germans are. But this is all for the good; it is exactly because tbey are good geologists that the subterranean river, the ores, the great cavities of the old mines hold not surprise to them. Are you all right, Snow-white?"

It took her some time to open her lips which seemed to be frozen together: "I—am—all—right."

"No, you're almost dead. I can hear it, I feel it. We've got to rescue you, I won't permit you to die. Close your eyes now; see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing. I'm going to . . ."

Francisca could close ber eyes, but sbe couldn't help hearing how the man moved. Slowly, ever so slowly, an arm reached over ber. Something soft and rubbery was pressed against her lips: "Suck it," she heard him say close by her ear and she obeyed. A sweet, heavy liquid poured into her mouth, it tickled her palate. She swallowed and a glow of warmth ran down her spine: "Drink, Snowwhite, drink deep . . ."

"What is this?"

He gave a soft laugh: "Don't you know? Have you never had it before, Snowwhite? It's wine. Wine from a land under a hotter sun than ours, wine from grapes heavy and purplish-blue. Wish we could be there, you and I, on Madeira or some such island in the ocean under southern skies. Strange to think that there still are such isles. Drink and don't be afraid; it's liquid sunshine I am giving you. I need it too; it's better than tbe drugs—here's to the day when you and I will walk under the sun again, upright and free."

HIS body now was very close to hers; so close she could feel its warmth. Under the soft glow of the wine her frozen limbs unbent a little, but still she could not control the shivers which ran over her skin.

"Do you know horses, Snowwhite?" he whispered into her ear. "We had many horses where I grew up on father's farm. It always seemed to me that there was no more beautiful friendship and love than between a team of horses. When I was a young boy and the sadness of November weighted heavy on my heart I sometimes cried when I saw the borses on the frozen meadows seeking shelter from the icy winds; friend pressed against friend, neck thrust across the friend's neck, their backs streaked dark with the rain as they clung together. I don't think I've ever cried so from the bottom of the heart as I did then."

How well she understood him. "With me it was in spring. Father would take me to the meadows every time a new calf had been born. I knelt before the newborn, I embraced them as they were tottering about on long unsteady legs, till the mother cows pushed me away with their muzzles. I could never explain why I cried and that it was of love and of happiness."

Now they had both averted their eyes from the magic eye. The spell of the evil eye was broken. Through cold and darkness their eyes now searched eacb other. Francisca felt the soft flow of warmth spreading into her bandaged bands and feet. She felt safe and protected with that powerful arm across her shoulders and with that big head close to her ear, so close she felt her hair move under his breath.

"This is the sweetest cushion I've ever had—your hair," he said at last.

"What is your name?"

"Heinrich. I thought you knew. I thought you knew everything, Snowwhite."

"I wish . . ."

"What?"

"Nothing. But if my hands were whole I would try and smooth the furrows on your forehead."

"But I'm so happy now. I cannot remember having ever been so happy as I'm now."

"If there was spring . . ."

" . . . we would wander together in the woods. We'd leave all this; we'd never returned to Agharti."

"One can live in the woods; I know all the berries, the mushrooms and the roots one can eat."

"As a boy I was good in setting traps and snares; I can fish too . . ."

"We would build us a hut where nobody could find us."

"I would gather peatmoss for our bed. Nights through the bushes we would see the stars."

"Do you think it could be—ever?"

"No, Snowwhite." His voice suddenly sounded bitter and harsh. "It's only a dream. But what a beautiful dream."

"This, too, is a dream—to me. I never quite know what is dream and what is reality. I've lived by dreams I guess. When I was all alone in the castle I dreamed father and mother were still there. It kept me going—even when there was no food."

"The doctor said so; he said that you had fainted not only from the cold, but because you were more than half starved. We'll have to nurse you with good food."

"Where?"

"Why, here."

"Here? But they are waiting for me in the castle. Pastor Eckard—I've got to go back to them. There are so few who can work . . . They need me over there."

"I need you too. Oh, you have no idea how much I need you. Besides; this Agharti. Nohody from Agharti . . . hut let's not worry over that. Look, Snowwhite; the green snakes have all disappeared; it's dark outside, no longer visihility for planes. The ruhy snakes are all in fast retreat. The raid is almost over. Sleep, child—sleep."

BUT it was Stufa who fell into the uneasy sleep of utter exhaustion almost with these words. Now he couldn't feel the bandages which tied her hand; Francisca dared to lay her arm across his forehead so she could feel his temple pulse against the skin of her wrist. Time stood still. The darkness seemed eternity, the intense cold continued to attack. Deep in the corners of the magic eye the ruby snakes retreated, like bloody tears now, slowly, slowly dripping away.

All of a sudden the invisible loudspeaker crackled and burst into sound: "Attention all Agharti! Permission to move—permission to move. Shut off dry ice valves. Power station resume operations. All tank crews to he relieved immediately. All commanders and department leaders report to me by telephone. Members of courtmartial assemble at headquarters one hour from now. All clear signal will follow in fifteen minutes. Hell Hitler."

The magic eye in the ceiling flickered and slowly its light went out. Blinking from the light which immediately thereafter flooded the room, Francisca saw Stufa already standing by the telephone, his military jacket hastily thrown over his shoulders. It was so cold his hreath steamed from his mouth as he spoke into the receiver, rapidly, with great intensity. Was this the same man who had pressed his lips against her hair only a minute ago? His face was still that of the sun-pendulum of grandfather's clock, but now it was the harsh, the cruel sun again, its every trace of smile darkened with heavy frowns:

"Wilhelm and Georg hoth of them ran amuck? Bad—very bad. Half and half I expected that much. Two of our hest. Injection was given before they could stir? Then at least they're spared the courtmartial. Yes, I shall report the incident to the Agharti-leader . . . Now the important thing is to get one ninety-two going . . . Yes, hut don't make that connection before I'm over. What's that?" He abruptly hung up for in another corner of the emergency ward the Siemens telespeaker hegan to buzz: "Dididi-da, dididi-da, dididi-da." The girl shuddered for out of the machine there came that strangely melodious voice with the harsh overtones she already knew, the voice of the uneasy memories she couldn't trace.

"Stufa? How are things? No, I couldn't wait for your report; had to contact you immediately. You know why, don't you? No? Well, perhaps something dawns in your hrain if I tell you that Dr. Lamhy has managed to see me immediately before the alarm. Dr. Stufa, this thing is impossihle. The doctor says you have impeded him in the execution of bis duty . . . Why of course it was his duty to expedite that girl immediately into the netherworld. What do you thlnk we're running here, a St. Bernhardt's hospital for babes lost in the woods? Who tells you tbat she's not a spy? No, Dr. Stufa; this is a severe hreach of Agharti discipline. No, Stufa; sorry, it is my duty to hring the matter before the courtmartial. Yes; the first train will be operating in ahout ten minutes. I'll be expecting you. Heil Hitler!"

Despite the cold large beads of sweat stood out from Stufa's frowning forehead. Turning to the girl he managed the ghost of a smile: "Now we're in for it, Snowwhite . . . But don't worry, child, don't worry. I'll see you through."

A woman's smile on a child's face went hack to him.

CHAPTER IV

Lilith

VOLAND paced the carpet of his studio in high good bumor. The ivory cigarette holder stuck at an upward angle from his teeth and he grinned from the corner of his moutb. Hls red-rimmed eyes sparkled; the wisps of cigarette smoke followed him like a veil and curled wben time and again he swung around to face the elderly lady in mauve who talked and talked from the comfortable deptb of a big chair. "No!" he exclaimed, and "Say that again"—"Why, this is good" — "I'm pleased; I'm very pleased, Lilith; only I still cannot hring myself quite to believe it's you, it's really you."

"Why?" she asked soberly.

"You're an artist, you really are."

There was something clerical, something almost saintly in the appearance of the lady in mauve. Masses of iron-grey hair surrounded the smootb oval of her face like a halo, her deepset, violet eyes had a kind of mystic lustre, the skin, very pale and parchment dry was sharply lined with many sorrows and from the high white collar of her well tailored dress there was hung on a thin platinum chain a golden cross and a golden star. Her coiffure, her dress, her posture; even the accent in which she spoke German, all these were unmlstakahly American.

"But I am an artist," she said in a deep contralto voice, "and you know it. Wasn't it you through whom the Fuehrer sent me hls congratulations—and his invitations—after my performance as Joan of Arc in the Berlin Schauspielhaus? Ah, it seems a million years ago. Anyway, the first law in putting on any kind of an act is to helieve in it. I've always helieved in what I played; Pymalion, Joan, Gretchen, Juliet, L'Aiglon—I was always that person, on the stage and off the stage, sleeping and walking. Every great actor is that way. That's why I'm still in my present role; I cannot shake it off all of a sudden. I still am Mrs. Patricia Avernell, traveling through Germany with the hlessings of the State Department, trying to locate the grave of her hero son, shot hy the Nazi guards after an attempted escape from Stalag 9 somewhere in this neighhorhood. But I begin to feel at home, Voland; especially if you will pour me another vodka—I've ruined my stomach for years with all those scotches. It's so quiet underground, so—so peaceful after America."

Lummer, the immaculate butler, pushed the teawagon toward her seat and she clapped her hands in delight: "Ah, the smell of the charcoal, a real Samovar; one has to come to Agharti to live civilized again."

Voland howed down to her, an exquisite Tula-silver case in hand: "A Popoff?"

She took one of the thin yellow cigarettes with the long paper mouthpiece: "You cavemen still manage to do the handsome thing," she said, "today a Popoff couldn't he had even in New York."

VOLAND hent his long frame into a chair near her: "Let's sum it all up a little," he said, "just to refresh my memory. Your official report can wait. I have received from you . . ."—he grinned as his hand clutched his hreast-pocket—". . . two pairs of your very hest nylons, one hra and one pair of panties. All very attractive, my dear—in good shape. By the way the idea to have the formulas for the new American jet-fuels stitched into lace was rather clever. But apart from that, your personal impression is that the American press does not overplay the crisis?"

"Definitely not. They play it down rather. You have no idea how strong the traditional optimism really is over there. Everyhody insists that somehow or other there must he a happy end, that somehow or other the Deity will take care of children, drunkards and the U. S. A. Actually the inflation is much worse than the papers paint it hecause the people who are hit the hardest hy it are mostly too proud even to admit that they're suffering. You know the type; we once had them in Germany too: little businessmen retired after lifelong work with what they thought were ample savings. The millions who live from pensions and life insurance rents; unorganized white-collar workers; groups such as teachers with low salaries which the state doesn't raise as money hecomes worthless. All these millions actually are in dire need, yet they are the ones who want to deny it from themselves. It's the good old stock, you know, with its pride of independence, of paying one's way and all that sort of thing."

"But how long will they stand it?"

"Not very much longer, I don't imagine. These people are not like Germans, even less like Russians. Theirs is not the fatalism which quietly lies down to die. Soon they will march on Washington, just as I saw the veterans march and the armament workers."

"You've actually seen the street hattles, have you? And the hourgeoisie throws its money around as fast as it can?"

"Ah, you have no idea how frantic they are. Nothing like it ever happened to them; they still think it's all a had dream. My particular crowd—as you can imagine—were mostly young officers recently discharged. They had received their compensations, four, five, six thousand dollars —which was money a few years ago. But now? Having lost the social security of the army, having found out that their money wouldn't huy them even a joh, they just threw it away. In that they are like Russians; ahsolutely reckless. They sent me orchids into my suite at a hundred dollars a hox; they dined me, wined me and I've seen them go dead hroke within a week. Then too of course they drowned their shock in alcohol; I tell you it was almost pathetic how one after another dropped from my sight with some final telephone call: 'Terrihly sorry, darling, but mother's seriously ill in Chattanooga.' As ohvious as that. They really canot lie; they got lost in life as habes in the woods."

Voland chuckled: "I don't suppose your popularity in this particular crowd came from the gold-star mother role?"

"Why not? I could have heen a success even in that role. What these hoys wanted above all was sympatbetic listening. They would have paid real money even for that. Besides you forget that America is a matriarchy, there's something wrong with ohstetrics over there; somehow the doctors don't cut the umbilical cord. But of course I wasn't Mrs. Patrlcia Avernell just them. I was Lilith, the torch singer with a lot of wonderful moonshine and romance on my lips. Besides I was a blonde. I was that thing all these poor boys thought they had fought the war for, the glamor girl."

VOLAND slapped his thighs in delight; his pale face reddened and its skin hroke into its thousand glass-splinter lines in an enormous grin: "Oh, it's Lilith, it's the real Lilith and no mistake. Now I know you again. Oh, my dear, couldn't we please dispose of the Mrs. Patricia Avernell, the gold-star mother for the time being and have the real Lilith, our light of love, to grace this humble but?"

The grey lady in mauve shrugged her shoulders: "Perhaps—if you like Lilith hetter than Mrs. Avernell. Poor Patricia, but I confess I was beginning to tire of ber. Has the Herr Agbarti leader a hathroom for a stranger from the U. S. A.?"

Through the door of the hathroom, which remained at an angle, an animated conversation continued to flow:

"Any trouble with your papers?"

"None at all. Everyhody went out of his way to aid a mother in search of a hero's grave. No; the trouble was not how to get to Berlin, but how in Berlin to get away from all the tender attentions which the Americans there lavisbed on me. 'Arghati Fridericus' finally did the trick of spiriting me away."

"Wben do you plan to return?"

"Tbat depends upon you, sir; I'm under your orders. Personally I wouldn't mind a little rest; life is a strain overground. In any case, before I go you've got to help me out."

"With what?"

"I wouldn't bave gotten my passport without the support of half a dozen women's cluhs. There's nothing these old girls cannot pull off in U. S. A. But in return of course I had to promise I would give them a series of lectures on things in Germany. You know; what they call an inspiring message. Something like 'the rebirth of democracy' or maybe 'the revival of Christianity in former Naziland.' Somebody's got to write the stuff for me, so it hrings tears to their eyes, somebody good . . ."

Voland roared with laughter: "This is so cute I feel moved to write that inspiring message for you myself. I shall try my damndest to make you another Aimée McPherson."

"A good role; she was a great actress, Aimée. But Lilith, she does not fall out of her role as did Aimée—sometimes . . ."

"How are things going with Lilith?"

"The curtain for Lilith is ahout to go up."

She stood in the doorframe. With an "Ah" of delighted surprise Voland jumped up, clapping bis hands wildly like some habitué of the old Ballet Russe at the appearance of Pavlova. It was worth it; the grey lady in mauve had almost magically transformed herself. The halo of her bair was now a lustrous amber, the skin of her face smooth, transparent like mother-of-pearl, and the silk of a Paris-model gown provokingly sculptured a figure whicb was almost perfection of the classical beauty ideal. Hers was a Russian type of beauty, big-limbed, chesty, very shapely rounded, without a trace of sinews or of pink in the smooth, pale firmness of the flesh. The mouth, tragic and drawn a moment ago, was now voluptuously piquant, the finely chiseled nose, which had seemed but a stiff bridge for the support of glasses, now breathed with animated wings, the pious mysticism of her eyes bad changed its character; like twin moons they now shone witb a sexual magnetism from under their long lashes. The most intriguing change however was in her voice. It still was a contralto only it was no longer dry and flat in tone, but husky, throaty, musical, deep from the chest. She looked inches taller, too, and there was a catlike elegance in her every move.

WITH mock respect Voland bowed deeply to kiss her hand: "At last! And more beautiful than ever. Lilith, you're the great love of my life and you know it. Where is my heart so I could lay it red and bleeding at your feet?"

"Where indeed? Tbere wasn't much left of it when I met you first, Voland. Since then—I can feel it from the chillness of your lips—it's gone quite dead. Your lips to be frank about it, leave me cold. A woman always feels when the erotic potency has been drained from a man. It's a fact, isn't it? But how did it come to pass so early, my friend?"

"You're right, Lilith; unfortunately. Tbere was a price to pay for tbe kind of job I've had to do these years and I've paid it. The connection between the job and the drain of the erotic faculties isn't quite clear even to our best scientists; but it is a fact nevertheless."

"So just as Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss said that syphilis was the price we had to pay for the cochenille from the West Indies, you had to pay with impotence for the extermination of a million or so of Poles; is it that you mean?"

"For all I know most of us in this game are in the same boat; but . . . *passons l'abysse*—I still much prefer to treat you with 18th Century French gallantry."

"I'm agreeable; but to continue in the language of the 18th century romanticists I would say: 'Although received by my friends in the most cordial manner I am nevertheless not happy.' "

"What can I do for you?"

"A shot of Nirvana—and quick," she whispered huskily. "I ran out of it ever since New York."

"Immediately; we're always prepared for such an emergency." Taking a flat silver box out of his breast pocket he handed it to her: "It's all ready."

With catlike swiftness, her long, strong fingers now trembling with greed, sbe gripped the hypodermic. Without besitation, not minding Voland's presence in the least, she lifted her dress and pushed the needle expertly high up into her thigh. Her pupils dilated, the demoniacal tension which a moment ago had distorted her face, disappeared as quickly as it had come. Relaxed she sank back into her chair. Lilitb, the drug addict, had become the statuesque diva again. Taking a cigarette, calmly puffing as if nothing had happened she said: 'There I've been talking and talking for hours about the affairs of the overground world, but you've never said a word. How has 'Agharti Barbarossa' fared meanwbile? Tell me all about it, Voland, please; I'm quite ready for business now."

DRAWING his chair near to ber's Voland took a briefcase from a recess under the table: "Generally speaking pretty satisfactorily. We hope to have V-7 ready for trial by spring. Stufa's making excellent progress with it. Otherwise much as you seem to relish the cloisterly quietness of our inner sanctum, this isn't quite a sanitarium, you know. Nervous breakdowns are getting more frequent; Dr. Lamby thinks we're in for an epidemic of cave-psychosis. He keeps on cooking up new drugs forever, yet he's afraid he has no means to stop it. We do what we can for our garrison personnel but it remains an unnatural life. Besides we recently had our little excitements in enemy radar-raids. They are a nuisance because they delay production. But there are compensations too. Just glance at these documents; the result of the honest labors of your American friends are sometimes not without life's little ironies; you'll be amused I think."

He handed her a lapful of pbotostats: "Also there is some special reason why I would like to interest you in this."

With a curious, sidelong glance she took the stack and for quite a while tbere was silence as she turned over sheet after sheet.

"Since you want my reaction to this," she said at last; "this man, the Pastor Eckard who writes a report and a complaint to the American commander in Halberstadt, obviously speaks the truth: a girl has been kidnapped. The writing material he uses is atrocious, the ink appears to be rust dissolved in water; one can see that even on the photostat. He and his group must be in very distressing circumstances."

Voland nodded: "A good analysis."

"That's easier now; at least the Americans have typewriters . . . Wbat I think is rather typical in tbese two letters is that firstly the American commander vigorously protests to tbe good pastor that there never was such a raid, but that secondly he starts an investigation whether perchance some American formation has kidnaped the girl anyway . . ."

Again Voland nodded approval: "Read on; it's now that the fun really begins."

"It's interesting that the American commander should send a protest to the British commander in Brunswick. Who may have given him the idea that it was British soldiers who raided the castle and kidnaped the girl?"

"You've probably guessed it already, my dear, but read on; the trail is getting hot . . ."

"The British commander—oh what a pompous ass—he rejects 'wholly unjustified charges against His Majesty's army,' and so on and so forth; and he says he'll investigate whether the castle actually belongs to the American zone or to his. I say, you've got a nice little Inter-Allied paper war started over this kidnaped girl."

"Read on."

"The workers Soviet of Blankenburg protests to both the American and the British commanders that a girl has been kidnaped from what the comrades term their 'protective custody.' Again I ask you, Voland: how come that the Blankenburg Soviet knows there is an Inter-Allied paper war going on?"

"Isn't it wonderful how the respective bureaucracies will fight like game-cocks? But read on."

"AH; THE inevitable happens: the American commander protests to the Soviet of Blankenburg that communists disguised as American soldiers have raided the castle and kidnaped the girl . . . And hy way of reply of course the Soviet counter-protests that the Nazi-Underground has raided the castle and kidnaped the girl . . . This is getting messed up almost heyond recognition."

"Let me hasten to add that this still goes on and on and on. Charges—counter-charges, claims — counter-claims; and that as the only visible result, the poor man of God, pastor Eckard, has heen put behind bars, variously accused of having sahotaged American occupation, British occupation, heing an enemy of the people, heing a liar and finally of having kidnaped the girl all hy himself."

"May I suggest that you have kidnaped the girl, Voland?"

He put his hand to his heart: "Madame, you flatter me. I'll confess that the gratifying proportions of the Inter-Allied mess are partly due to my labors, but . . . I did not kidnap the girl."

"But it's written all over your face; she's here, she's in Agharti."

"Yes," he said gravely, "she's the only human heing who ever got into Agharti without our knowledge and against our wish and will. That's one thing I don't like . . . There are others too . . ."

Lilith knew hetter than to interrupt him now.

"Do you rememher the names of the assassins who made that attempt on the Fuehrer's life, July '44?"

"All of them were liquidated together with all their families, weren't they?"

"Yes; with one exception. And this one exception happens to he this girl Francisca."

"Strange coincidence."

"Very. Moreover; when after the defeat my Gestapo staff took temporary refuge in Tannrode Castle there was a girl wandering about whom we didn't liquidate because the peasants had a superstitious fear of her. Her presence actually gave us some protection from curiosity. Besides she was ohviously shell shocked, suffered from amnesia. She could do no harm; so we thought. But again . . ."

"It was the girl Francisca?"

"Strange, isn't it? To cut a long story short; it was entirely accidental that the girl got into Agharti and it was entirely accidental that she has escaped liquidation twice. Still I don't like these accidents. You know there are certain human heings to whom all sorts of things just happen. It's a dangerous quality, there's no room for the uncontrollahle in Agharti."

"What's keeping you?" The purple nail of Lilith's thumb like a miniature hatchet swung down.

"It isn't as simple as that. Because it so happens that our great Stufa has fallen in love with her."

"Ah; is she a '*femme fatale*'?"

"She isn't even a woman. A wisp of a girl, looks fourteen though mayhe she's seventeen. Eyes too hig, cheeks too hollow; malnutrition of course. A little hreeze would hlow her away. It's heyond me what Stufa sees in her. I've cajoled him, I've threatened him with courtmartial for this affair. Yet, he won't give her up. He's adopted her he says, she's his child, his sister, his inspiration, and only over his dead body . . . well; you know all that stuff. Stufa's V-7 of course is hy far the most important single invention in all Agharti, so, what can I do?"

THERE was a peal of laughter, throaty like the cooing of a dove: "But Voland, don't you understand? The man's a genius. That means he's at heart a child. This type of heart stays young; whenever it falls in love it's always the first time and it's always forever. Did you by any chance want me to take him away from her? I don't think it would work."

Voland made a wry face: "No; besides, this is Agharti, not Hollywood. Stufa's work is far too important to be interfered with through the distractions of the eternal triangle. No, I've thought of something better. Why seduce the man; why not seduce the girl instead?"

"Who, ME?"

"Oh, not in the crude, the literary sense of course. But you see, this girl is the stuff Stufa's dreams are made of; she's nature, she's nymph, as wild as nature—and as innocent. Now if this dream girl were to become like others, if she were to use make-up, perfume, a permanent, silk hose—all this sort of thing . . ."

"Then the dream would vanish."

"Exactly."

"And you think I could do it?"

"Emphatically yes. Just imagine a cbild who's probably never seen her own face except mirrored in the castle moat. You appear before her, a beauteous fairy from another world. You befriend her, take ber in hand, lavish presents upon her, tell her of New York and Paris. It cannot fail to turn her bead."

"So I am to make her look and act and be like any other little bitcb and be proud of it." Through the screen of her long lashes she looked at him; not as a woman looks at a man but as one woman looks at anotber woman—her rival. She took a long puff at her cigarette. "And after little Pygmalion has undergone this transformation . . ."

"Stufa will kick her out of his life. Yes, my dear, I'm pretty sure of this result."

"All right, *mon ami;* your wishes are my orders. Where is this Francisca?"

"In Valhalla of course. On this point at least I won witb Stufa. Besides I thought it might serve as—shall we say preliminary indoctrination."

She handed him her glass: "If you don't mind, I feel like another vodka."

AN HOUR later a motor-draisine whisked Lilitb through the echoing tunnels of Agharti, along the swift, black subterranean river to the recreation center. Lummer, the faultless butler detailed temporarily to act as Lilith's valet sat on a pile of elegant luggage behind Lilith's back; he had grabbed an umbrella and insisted on holding it over Lilith's head for: "Madame might be molested with the moisture dripping from above." Some protruding rock however sailing closely over the travelers' heads had caught the umbrella. With his feelings much hurt, Lummer now sat, arms akimho, like one of the grooms of old.

The draisine came to a stop almost at the foot of the tall pillars which formed the gates to Valhalla and wbere the guards stood, one to each pillar, tommy gun in arm, as immobile as the stone itself.

There was no delay, however, because Dr. Lamby, Agharti's chief surgeon, stood already on the platform, awaiting the honored guest. He looked slightly ridiculous, in fact masqueraded, in bis white uniform of a Nazi-diplomat. The wide lapels, the padded shoulders, the gold braid and tbe epaulettes seemed to weigh like so mucb lead on his slight figure. The heavy military cap came down to the ears of his sad-eyed simian's face and his whole right side suffered from a nervous twitch. But nobody who knew Dr. Lamby made the mistake to laugh at him. While attached to various Nazi legations in the Middle East he bad been secretly nicknamed "Doctor of political medicine"; in the Balkans "Dr. Prussic

Acid," while in Agharti he was Dr. Nirvana." The lady and the doctor met with the smile of augurs who know and respect each other: "You receive me, dear Doctor, as if I were the Queen of Sheba and the entrance to Valhalla the Brandenburg gate of Berlin."

"I only regret, madame, that behind this Brandenburg gate there lies not the Adlon Hotel; all I could do was to get a secluded room in the hospital wing ready for you—and the patient."

"What do you think about the patient?"

"A few years ago I would have thought her a most extraordinary case; today . . ." he shrugged his shoulders ". . . . it's almost a common or garden variety. This patient got here in a deep coma from exposure. Any normal child, raised on a daily quart of milk or so, would have come down with pneumonia at the very least. This one literally raised on roots and grass caught no more than the sniffles. A child conditioned to any normalcy would have been broken—bodily, psychically—by the accumulated horrors this one went through. But the patient not only kept her mind; she thinks with it; independently, creatively. It is rather remarkable. We doctors have to revise many of our pet ideas it seems."

Thus talking they entered the main building behind the pillars. It was constructed almost like a power dam to close a natural gap between huge rocks, a gap which was the mouth of a big natural cave.

THIS building was the strangest cross between an Egyptian temple, a Prussian military barracks and a Swiss pension for girls. On the ground floor there was the vast "Festhalle," pillared, decorated with busts of Nazi leaders and equipped with a stage. Huge blood-red swastika banners hung from the ceiling, each one consecrated to some "Gau" now occupied by the enemy. It was here, where in the mystical red light as it streamed through the banners it was under the hypnotic eyes of the Fuehrer which from a colossal photograph stared down on them, that the Valkyries of Valhalla met each night with the blackshirted warriors of Agharti. To the right of the "Festhalle" lay the offices of Valhalla's administration, while to the left there was the Valkyries' dining room with enormously long tables and benches in the Munich beer hall style.

From the center of the "Festhalle" a wide, palatial staircase led to the second floor which was entirely different in character. Along seemingly endless corridors there were rows of chambers, spartanly and rustically furnished with a wooden bedstead each, a box-like wardrobe or clothes-chest and a kind of loveseat under the window. The remarkable thing was that all the chambers should have windows, even windowshutters, though many hundred feet under the earth, there was no real need for them. But the windows were provided for reasons of morale. For the same reason the whole structure,—with the "Festhalle" as the only exception—seemed to be flooded with daylight which came from Mazda lamps, concealed all along the walls. Great pains had been taken everywhere to create the impression of sunlight and the things which grow from it. So all the Valkyrie-chambers were decorated with flower motifs, the corridors were green meadows, the dining-room painted with harvest scenes. Ripe wheat fields with poppies and cornflowers, and men swinging the scythe, vineyards with wintners, a market scene in a medieval town, a thanksgiving day in a village ornated with all kinds of garden produce—in giant murals they covered the walls.

Dr. Lamby didn't use the big staircase; in a small elevator he took Lilith, Lummer and the luggage up to tbe second floor which, built as an attic, boused the Valhalla staff workers on the left wing and Valhalla's hospital on the right. As a hospital for six Valkyries, this one had only a score or so of beds. The main part of the establishment consisted of the doctor's extensive lahoratories to which he jokingly referred as "my spermatozoaic Reichsbank." In this important center of Agharti's activities live sperma, no longer needed for Valkyries who already had attained the desired state of pregnancy, was collected, was graded, and stored in physiological salt solutions for distribution over-ground. Thousands of fanatical Nazi-women outside Agharti, unable to enter Valhalla, unahle to find racially desirable mates yet willing to do their share for the propagation of the race, had already been artificially inseminated from this bank through Dr. Lamby's services.

Past the laboratories Lilith was led to the hospital proper. At the last door to the left the doctor took a careful look through the spyhole: "It is best I think," said he, "that you should acquaint yourself with your roommate without official introduction or male interference. Lummer meanwhile can unpack your things in the bedroom next door. I wish you the fullest success, and—Heil Hitler!"

AS LILITH opened the door she saw Francisca leaning in the window, her back against the door. No doubt she had heard the commotion at her door, but had not moved to face it. "She's scared," Lilitb thougbt, "and small wonder."

With quick, light steps she crossed the room and suddenly, unexpectedly Francisca sensed the smell of a perfume in her nostrils, such as she had never smelled before and the caressing touch of an arm, softer than any arm she had ever known around her shoulders. A warm, sweetly musical voice said almost into Francisca's ear: "Would you mind moving over a little? I too am new here; and I want to see what's going on out there."

Francisca did not answer. She had deeply flushed. She moved, trying to get away as far as possible.

"Don't go," said the beautiful voice, "there's lots of room for both of us. Oh, isn't it wonderful?"

The scene outside was indeed strange and surprising, if not wonderful. For there was sunset in the Bavarian Alps and all Valhalla had gathered in the courtyard to admire it.

Since the Valhalla building closed the mouth of a natural cave as a cork would a bottle, its backside looked toward the interior of the cave. In its accessible parts this was nearly a mile long and about a quarter of a mile wide. It was slightly sloping downward from the mouth so that from their place in the window Lilith and Francisca could overlook the entire scenery.

At the lower end of the cave there was a pond. Electric lamps had been immersed in its shallow depths—carefully filled with gravel so as to curb tbe epidemic of suicides. Man-made paths led to the pond, winding around columns and arcs of stalagmites and stalctites which looked like the aurora borealis, their fantastic shapes translucent and illuminated by colored lights.

This "Zauberherg-magic" nevertheless had to fade before an even more impressive scene; for it was near the the mouth of the cavern, near the wide backyard of the Valhalla building where the nostalgia of the underground denizens had created a fair imitation of a world forever lost to them. Here the ceiling and the walls of the cave bad been smoothed and whitewashed. From high up windows three big magic lanterns projected colored photographs against tbese walls. The one to the right was an aerial view of tbe medieval center of Nuremberg—as it had been before the bombs. The left wall pictured the massif of the Bavarian Alps with Berchtesgaden in the foreground; the house of tbe Fuehrer very prominent. The third projector thrust a beauteous evening sky against the ceiling; beavy cloudbanks to the West and luminous cirrus-strata filling the zenith. But it was with the heavenly bodies that Agharti's electricians had really surpassed themselves. Somehow they had made a sun which, moving on roller-bearings, would arise, would take its course and would sink down at its appointed time—exactly as the real sun overground. Faithfully as a dog follows its master, in the wake of this sun tbere sailed tbe Evening Star and the moon on his roller-bearings; always in the exact shape and quarter which had the real moon overground.

Now it was tbe hour of sunset or "Feierabend" and to make it even more rural and realistic the gramaphone record "Evening on the farm" came over the loudspeaker system with cowbells, borse whinnies, sheep-bleating, the noise of the milk as it spurts into the pail from full udders and finally tbe call for dinner from the farmer's wife.

"OH MY; but isn't it magnificent? Have you ever seen anything half as beautiful in overworld? Great actress she was, Lilith managed to say it with every appearance of sincerity. But the girl Francisca merely sbook her head violently; a strand of her hair came loose and there was a slight noise as if sbe were gnashing her teeth. Gloomily she continued to stare down on the people who were milling about in the courtyard.

There were the Valkyries and their warrior-visitors of course; the girls dressed in the white blouses and the blue skirts of the female Hitler Youth, the warriors in their black SS-uniforms. On the surface it was a scene a visitor of Germany could have met in almost any small garrison-town a few brief years ago; a Sunday evening on the "promenade" with everything quite normal. And yet this was as different as was Agharti from Heidelberg or Rothenburg.

The girls still were blonde, tall, up to the standards of the nordic ideal, their blouses still were well filled and so were the skirts, but the lustre had gone out of their hair, the spring out of their steps, the eyes looked tired, there were cynical lines around their mouths and there was fatigue in their every movement. The warriors still preserved their military carriage, but as if it were a brace without the aid of which at any moment they would collapse. Their faces, once ruddy, bad a fishbelly whiteness, an unhealthy greenish tint like those of submarine crews after a three-month cruise in enemy waters. Many a uniform was shiny and blanched in the seams and many a face needed a shave. Tbe deeper disintegration however was not in the physical appearance; it was in the way in which the sexes met and treated one another. Tbe courtyard was noisy with raucous male voices and with shrill peals of female laughter which were always the loudest the grosser the jokes. As the loudspeaker now blared folk music, Bavarian peasant dances, the couples joined and swung around like so many animated automatons. The girls didn't look at the men and the men didn't look at the girls as breast to breast they heaved around. They all seemed alike, all knowing each other—ah, only too well—each one alone with himself, herself and at a command performance, inwardly desolate.

The music changed to a Wagnerian motif; erotomania set to music. Isolde's Love Death. Simultaneously the artificial moon ascended on his aerial rail from behind the paling Nuremherg; with a faint squeaking from its roller-hearings the dance hroke off. In pairs, as chance had formed them, the warriors and the Valkyries descended slowly deeper into the Magic Mountain, losing themselves behind the luminous pillars of the stalagmites, hehind the curtains of the stalactites, into the artificial arhors around the pond wbich glowed like a huge sapphire in the semi-darkness. From the loudspeaker an unctious voice from time to time interrupted Isolde's prolonged agonies; "The individual is nothing, the state is everything"—"He wbo rests, rusts"—"The German woman's pride lies in the soldiers of the future she presents to the fatherland."

In the Valhalla building the daylight lamps had been switched off. Still leaning in the window Lilith and Francisca heheld only the eery aurora horealis light whicb came from the interior of the Magic Mountain. There had been a long silence, but Lilith's arm was still around Francisca's waist, caressingly, but strong. Now a soft, a silky, a fragrant cheek pressed against Francisca's and through the darkness came the musical, the seductive voice: "Exciting, isn't it? I had no idea it would he half as grand. Isn't it wonderful to see our warriors get the rewards of their battles, to see the germ cell from which the Third Reich is being rehorn, this sacred shrine of love for the fatherland? I would give anything to be thus blessed as to receive a child for the Fuehrer. Wouldn't you?"

TOSSING her head back Francisca freed herself from the touch of the other's skin: "I'd rather be dead." There was hatred in her voice.

"You're too young. You just don't understand . . ."

"I understand only too well. This is not love; it is the desecration of love. This is not a holy shrine; it is one great big hrothel. I pity every hahe which will he born from here; somehow it must become a monster, hegotten as it is in an act of mechanical monstrosity. This is no way for the salvation; it is the final perdition of what's left of Germany."

"Do you know," said Lilith in a low whisper, "do you know that you could pay with your life for every single word you've just said?"

"Yes. And so what? Life overground is hell; life here is hell and a worse hell. If God calls me to Him I'll he glad. Only; the woods in springtime —I wish I could see those once more before I go. But 'The Truth must be said, again and again; because the lie, too, is being repeated over and over.' Luther said that . . ."

"You were too young before the war to have learned about Luther and the God that was before the Fuehrer came. Who then taught you these things?"

"People who do not exist—officially," Francisca said, and there was the ghost of a smile on her lips. "People who are neither Nazis nor Communists, people without a land, without families, without status. People whom nohody will feed nor even permit to dig a garden so as to feed themselves. Lost Souls they're called and I'm one of them."

"You are not. You love, you are heing loved; I feel it, I know it. How then can you be a lost soul? How can you dismiss hope, future, life itself as if tbey were of no consequence? Poor child; let's be friends, let me be your sister. Let me teach you life. For I've come to Agharti from afar, where there was no war, where the people have smiling faces, where the women wear beautiful dresses. I've brought some of these things with me, things such as you've never seen. Wouldn't you like to see what the girls in America are wearing? Come along; it's all next door in what they told me would be our bedroom."

The silky, the caressing Lilith arm half dragged Francisca from the window into the connecting door of the neighboring room. Lilith switched on the lights.

Not having found room enough in the spartan wardrobe, Lummer like a good valet had spread the treasure of New York and Paris couturiers all over the two hospital beds. The discreet butler himself however had long since disappeared.

CHAPTER V

The Messengers from Niflheimr

TWO hours past midnight the wide expanse of the lab was still ablaze with the chalky light of the mazda lamps. Of late the number of Stufa's assistants had been doubled; in two shifts they were working around the clock. Stufa's office however seemed to float like the gondola of a balloon high up in the darkness which shrouded the upper parts of the vast catacomb. Within its glassed-in walls there was only a cubic foot or so of emerald light from a single desk lamp and a few square feet of reflected light from the papers on the desk. Of Stufa's shadowy figure only one hand was clearly visible as it wrote the last sentences of a report:

"Summing up the achievements of the last three months 'Agharti Barbarossa' can claim:

1: In its pilot model the Atomic bomb has proved its absolute operational reliability.

2: In its 25-ton pilot model the V-7 design has reached an target accuracy ratio of 300:1 in kilometers. This means that no European city as a target would be hit more than three kilometers off-center and no American city more than 15 kilometers off its central point.

3: The radius of total destruction of all life-processes was established to be three kilometers with the 25-ton model. Therefore it can be expected that with the 250-ton design a city area like Paris would require only one V-7 whereas New York or Chicago may necessitate the use of as many as ten V-7.

4: Complete designs for the liquid air-pumps were delivered for production by 'Agharti Wotan' Jan. 15. Complete designs for combustion chamber and control-vanes have been received for production by 'Agharti Siegfried' Febr. 2nd. 'Agharti Fridericus' has reported completion of its own design for the radionic parts and for the steering mechanism Febr. 15th; these parts are now in production.

5: Production of Atomic Bomb warhead was begun by 'Agharti Barbarossa' Febr. 17th.

6: Construction of the full-size launching pit is now in full swing in 'Agharti Barbarossa'. The first fully assembled V-7 should be ready in 'Agharti Barbarossa' by May 1st. Production of all participant Agharti's for May should reach twelve, for June twenty-five. Full Production of 50 V-7 per month can be expected from July on.

"Provided Aghartis 'Wotan,' 'Fridericus' and 'Siegfried,' are enabled to keep up their production schedules; provided also that Agharti 'Viking,' 'Attila' and

'Loki' get their launching-pits ready on time, the minimum demands of 'Agharti Supreme' for 15 V-7 per launching pit could be fulfilled by August 1st.

Yours, for the liberation of Germany,
Dr. Heinrich Stufa."

HE pushed the pen away; there was a heavy frown on his forehead as he stared at the sheet. "Strange," he murmured; "I'm still using the same old language. Doesn't it almost sound like the reports I used to write for Prof. Planck—about the behaviorism of a candle flame between the poles of a magnet, or something equally harmless? Yet, in between these lines there is contained the death sentence of perhaps eighty, ninety million human beings. About as many as were condemned to national death in Germany. The semantics haven't changed; their meaning has. Once I thought the language of science would spell a 'brave new world;' now I know that it spells horrors and sufferings the like of which the world has never seen. There ought to be a new scientific language; a composite of abstracted formulas mixed with the cries of the damned of Dante's Inferno . . . Maybe such was the language of Babel after the Lord confounded the tongues of the peoples and their huge tower collapsed . . . As if is, the true story of the V-7 will never be told . . .

"Or could I write into a businesslike report how at one point as if a vision I read the key formula from the lines of suffering inscribed into the forehead of a child? Or could I write how at this point I stood on the brink of suicide; how the 'to be' or 'not to be' of the V-7 hung by the hair of a young girl the fragrance of which held me back from the abyss? Could I express in words the perverse paradox of how the innocent love of a girl became instrumental for the destruction of the biggest cities of the world? Only the Fuehrer . . . He would have understood. His was the kind of genius which in the chalice of a few skullbones could hold all heaven, all earth and all hell in the thought of man. But now the chalice is broken . . . The best I could say must remain unspoken; the best I could do, it must remain undone . . . I have Francisca; yes, I'm no longer alone in soul. But in my thoughts I am as lonely in this cage of glass as the Fuehrer ever was in his eagle's nest of Berchtesgaden."

"But you are not," said a deep muffled voice.

Startled as if by an apparition Stufa saw a shadowy figure leaning against the glass wall, seemingly with its back toward his desk. Quick as lightning Stufa's hand dived into the top drawer for the pistol.

"Look twice," said the muffled voice a little more sharply, "look twice before you shoot, Herr Doctor."

Pistol in hand Stufa stared at the figure which had not moved an inch. Adapting themselves to the darkness beyond the narrow circle of light his pupils dilated and now he saw that his first impression had been right. The man stood indeed with his back toward the desk, but probably he was able to see Stufa's every movement in the glass which, with the deeper darkness outside, acted as a mirror. The figure wore a kind of uniform such as no army had worn for five or six centuries. It was similar to a monk's cowl. It had a pointed hood. It was black, but across the shoulders and from the neck down to the ankles the black was divided by the white beams of a cross. It was the uniform of a teutonic knight as it was worn in East Prussia's Marienburg in the 14th century.

The pistol dropped from Stufa's grip: "A messenger," he stammered;

"a messenger from Niflheimr."

THE figure turned around, but there was almost no difference between its front and its back because the hood covered the whole face with only narrow slits for eyes and mouth and there were the same white beams crossing the breast and the whole length of the cowl from forehead to ankle.

"Yes," said the voice; "and since you recognize a messenger from Niflheimr, how could you ever imagine that you were alone even in thought? Don't you know that Niflheimr reads the thoughts of men? Why should you think that the chalice is broken? Could it not be that it is still intact, that far beyond the power of its enemies this Holy Grail still shines forth and is the soul of everything which gestates in Agharti's womb? Genius, Herr Doctor, once it has come into this world, can never disappear from it; as you, the man of science, ought to know. Not for one single moment has the Fuehrer's genius left your side. You never were alone, you man of small faith. Had *he* not understood how a woman can be the inspiration to the work of a man, had *he* not held his hand over the daughter of the very assassin who tried to murder *him:* what would your girl Francisca be today? A handful of dust and ashes."

"Yes; that's true. Voland wanted to liquidate her; I knew that all the time. I thought . . . ah, but it doesn't matter now. What is your message?"

"You are to go to Niflheimr; you and the girl. Lest there be any groundless fears: 'Agharti Supreme' is pleased—very pleased with your work, Herr Doctor. You are to receive rewards and instructions as to your future course."

"When?"

"At once."

Stufa grabbed the telephone: "I must call Valhalla."

"What for?" The figure raised an arm. The door in the background opened. Led by Dr. Lamby, Francisca entered the room very pale and dressed in a travel costume, obviously from Lilith's trousseau. With a deep bow from the little director of the spermatozoaic Reichsbank retreated immediately. With quick, but staggering steps, as if afraid to fall, Francisca reached the desk. Her unsteady hand reached for protection to the strong shoulders of the man.

"Don't be afraid, child," said the voice of Niflheimr's messenger. "Nothing will hurt you—nor the man you love. But as I have just said to the Doctor, the two of you are going to make a trip. It will aboard a jet plane and at very great speed. The Doctor knows what I'm talking about; he knows the kind of preparation we need for this. You don't and that is why I explain this to you." The voice sounded friendly, almost fatherly. "You see, this is a fighter plane; there's only room for the pilot in its pressurized cockpit. The two of you must travel in the unprotected nacelle. Now if your life-processes were at all normal, your hearts and lungs could never withstand the acceleration from zero to 1200 kilometers per hour in ten seconds flat. Nor could your bodies withstand the cold of the stratosphere. Am I right, Doctor?"

With one of his big hands around the girl Stufa said: "Yes, Francy; he's right in that. Have no fears. Do what he tells you to do."

"Therefore," continued the muffled voice, "I'm going to reduce the life-processes in both of you to a point where your lungs hardly breathe and your hearts hardly beat and where your bodies are de-sensitized against the cold. Come over to me, both of you . . ."

AS IF under some hypnotic spell Stufa and Francisca approached the figure of the teutonic knight, slowly, hand in hand.

"Sit down—both of you. On the ground. That's right. Lean against the wall. Draw your legs up. Make yourselves into a bundle. Lean your foreheads against your knees. Yes, that is it. You, Doctor, put one arm around Francisca's shoulder. You, Francisca do the same . . ."

The voice was closer now; it was very close. Francisca felt it breathing against the nape of her neck; it made her hair stand on end.

"Now," said the voice, "listen you two and listen well: what I am doing now could be done with drugs. The messengers of Niflheimr, however, don't need drugs. You, Dr. Stufa, still work miracles with machinery; we of Niflheimr aim to work them by will power alone. This is no trick, Herr Doctor, I'm not trying to put anything over on you. It's science—but science of another kind. I don't need your co-operation except in one thing: concentrate—concentrate to make the two of you one body. Concentrate to make the two of you into the smallest possible package. Concentrate to receive my message through the napes of your necks. Concentrate."

Huddled together Stufa and Francisca now felt the body of the messenger. He seemed to be kneeling though they couldn't see him. The rough cloth of his cowl brushed against their foreheads. A heavy weight came pressing down against their updrawn knees. More weight sank on their necks; the hands of the messenger were like lead plates and just as cold. The breath of the messenger seemed to vibrate directly against the base of their skulls. Through their knees and foreheads they could sense the heavy heaving of his breast. He didn't say a word. But his breath came in gusts, blowing as if to fan a fire. With each blow it was as if a freezing wave of intense cold penetrated into brains and spine, spreading from there throughout all the body which gradually became rigid and lost all faculty to move. The sensation was similar to that of a strong injection of cocaine; not unpleasant and they didn't feel any fear.

How long it lasted, they had lost the faculty to estimate, but it didn't seem very long. They heard the messenger arise; their sense of hearing was quite unimpaired, just as their eyes remained wide open. They heard him call toward the door; "All right; bring in the stretchers," and there was a shuffling of feet.

"Lift them up—together—now wrap the blankets around them—that's right—now lower them down into the sleeping bag . . ."

Both Stufa and Francisca thought how strange it was to know that they were lifted, that they were handled like a packing case, yet that their arms should hold one to the other like bands of iron and that their bodies should not feel a thing of what was being done.

They continued to hear; first the hammering engine of the motor-draisine, the noisy swishing echoes of the tunnels and finally the tremendous swoosh with which the jet-plane took off . . .

IN VOLAND'S studio in the meantime, somebody else took leave. Lillith, now again Mrs. Patricia Avernell, the grey-haired lady in mauve, the gold-star mother, was sipping her last drink with the Agharti-Leiter; only it was scotch this time. On the table between the two there stood a square black box elaborately tied with silver ribbons.

"So you have completed your mission

in Germany, my dear?"

"Yes;" already in the character of her role she spoke English with a Bostonian accent and there was suppressed emotion in her voice: "Yes, I bave found the grave of my beloved boy; here are his ashes. By the side of his Mayflower forebears he will rest in the family vault . . ."

"Very good. It's hardly to be expected the American customs officers will pass the ashes of a fallen hero through an X-ray machine. You and the diamonds in those black and grey slivers are probably quite safe. S'pity you couldn't complete your mission in Valhalla too."

"To tell you the truth, I'm quite glad to be relieved. This Francisca-thing; it might have given me an inferiority complex."

"Do you mean to say you were afraid to fail?"

"Absolutely. The girl was allergic to cosmetics, allergic to Parisian gowns, allergic to every single thing wbich would have seduced a girl of my own generation before you could say Jack Robinson."

"Interesting. Dr. Lamby, you know, told me exactly the same story. I had suggested that he should try Nirvana on her. Well; she was allergic to that too. All it did was to make her violently sick. Lamby says it's a case of one in a million and he has no explanation for it."

"I don't think it's a case of one in a million," Lilith said pensively. "There's something the matter with most of those children of the war and famine years; little as I know about them. They are different. Tbere's an abyss between their generation and ours. Sometimes I wonder whether the old Party-line will hold its grip on them."

"We'll cross that river when we come to it," Voland said with a shrug; "meanwhile, you Lilith, not being exactly allergic to Nirvana—you are well supplied? Good. One last word; confidentially—quite confidentially . . ."

Lilith smiled: "I'm all ears, my lord and master."

"Well; big events cast their shadows and so on and so forth. One ought to be prepared for any eventuality . . . Of late a stanza by—wasn't it Horaz?—keeps ringing in my ear: *'beatus ille qui procul negotiis'*; a happy man who far from hectic business . . . You know the rest I suppose."

"And what—in this direction—could I do for you?"

"North America won't be very ideal for a quiet retreat; neither would Russia; nor Europe either as far as that goes. South America is rather unreliable. No; I've bethought me of Central America. Any nice God-fearing and civilized republic over there will do. You know my modest needs; some quiet wbite house with a shady patio, suburban, yet near enough to a capital where I could sit in a café, sip my planter's punch and shake my grey head over the news of the great catastrophe which has befallen the world. The good, the contemplative life, my dear; I feel as if I had earned me a rest. Would you take care of this little matter for me? And may I perhaps hope some day to receive in this tusculum a distinguished visitor, one senora Maria Immaculata Concepcion de Todos Santos or whatever your honorable name might be by that time?"

Lilith arose: "It's in the bag," she said, "but now my time's up." Holding the square box with the ashes to her bosom she bid affectionately her adieus. Lummer, the butler, followed her into the elevator with the handbags.

WITH the jet-plane traveling at twelve hundred kilometers per hour, it took hardly much longer than this conversation before the machine with quickly diminishing speed came spiralling down to Niflheimr in the dark of night. After the jolt of the landing there was neither sound nor movement except for a muffled roar and a slight tremor of the ground. "We must have come down on some seashore," Stufa thought and he wanted to speak to Francisca, but his tongue was locked.

Finally there came the neighing of a horse, still from afar and then the squeal of wheels and mutterings of a foreign tongue. Rough hands without ceremony dragged the sleeping bag and dumped it into some soft and crackling mass: "Hay," Francisca fancied she said, hut actually her lips hadn't moved. The wheels squealed and after a while the ground hecame rough. From the tilt of the cart, from the snorting of the horse, the creaking of the harness, the ruts in the road the passengers sensed that their voyage went uphill, steeply so, interminahly so. They now felt colder than at any time during their hypnotic state, but their breath was no longer quite as shallow nor their pulse as slow. After what seemed to be hours Francisca felt something move on her shoulder and she realized that this was the utmost exertion of Stufa's hand. Gradually, very gradually they regained control over their petrified bodies though they were still unahle to speak. At last Stufa could reach the zipper of the sleeping hag; suddenly there was light and with blinking eyes they both looked into the rim of the sun, arising over one of the wildest landscapes in this world.

There were mountains majestic and nude. The road, a mere cowpath, led along the brink of a towering cliff; deep down the sea was hammered silver, streaked with the reflected gold from the cloudhank in the East.

"Where are we?" There was the tremor of awe in Francisca's voice.

"In Niflheimr." Stufa smiled; he felt elated, his chest swelled, greedily his lungs took their fill of the strong salt air, his eyes drank in the glory of the sunrise; all this beauty he had so long, so bitterly missed, stirred his blood like wine. He pressed Francisca's hand: "You aren't afraid, Francy, are you?"

"Not for myself."

"I know it. But you needn't have any fears for me either. I've never been in Niflheimr before, but that much I know; the wisest men of our race took refuge here. This is the brain of the world. Where wisdom rules no violence can happen."

Riding in the hack of the two-wheel, springless cart, they saw nothing of their coachman hut his hroad hack and the wings of a hig yellow beard waving out on hoth side of the head. "Hueeeh," said the coachman, smacking his whip at the horse; but since the coachman wouldn't talk to them they didn't talk to him.

Now there wasn't even a cow path, but sailing around huge rocks and with both wheels of the carriol blocked with chains, coachman and straining horse worked the vehicle down again toward the sea. At the end of a drop of perhaps fifteen hundred feet, the carriol stopped at the land slide of a rocky ridge, a kind of giants' causeway. The coachman motioned to them to get out. With his whip pointed toward a rock which huge and black as a thundercloud arose almost perpendicular from the sea: "Dortharr," he said. And after one smack of his tongue, horse, coachman and carriol were swallowed by the dragon teeth of rocks as if they never had heen.

"HEINRICH!" Her mouth smiled up to him, her eyes were wide with excitement.

For a fleeting moment he took her into his arms: "Darling, this is fairyland. Don't you remember? Prince and princess always have to travel far and wide through all kinds of perils before they reach the enchanted castle where all the riddles of life are solved for them? It's over there. Do you feel strong enough for this last test? Then let's go."

But it was Francisca whose lithe body, agile as a chamois, took the lead more often than Stufa as they climbed and crawled across the salt-encrusted, the slippery, the wind-swept, the treacherous rocks. Her hair came loose; like a golden banner it flowed for him to follow. Higher and higher grew tbe tower of rock, louder and louder grew the thunder of the surf. Thousands of seagulls sailed the upward currents along the cliff: from overhanging ledges black cormorants dived into the heaving masses of foam with piercing shrieks. It took nearly an hour before, wet and exhausted, they reached the rock itself. Its outposts flanked the causeway with massive pyramids; betwen them the sea in its ceaseless battering of aeons had knocked a narrow tunnel into the granite and every seventh wave broke into this cul de sac with a report as of the heaviest howitzer gun. There, shrouded in a rainbow-colored halo of flying spray, they saw at last a human being. So titanic was the scale of nature which surrounded him that at first the tall man looked very small indeed. He wore the same templar's dress as had the messenger, only that his face was bare; the pale, the grave, the bearded face of an anachorite . . . and: "Welcome Francisca, welcome Heinrich Stufa!" he shouted so as to overdrone the shrieks of the birds, the howling of the wind, the thunder of the sea: "Welcome to Niflheimr—and come in!"

With a flashlight he led the way and at the end of a narrow, winding tunnel they saw light again; daylight, but green and foggy as if in a tropical forest or as the inside of some giant bottle of green glass.

There was a suppressed little cry and a shout of surprise as frozen in their steps Francisca and Stufa stared at the fantanstic scene: the towering mountain was as hollow as a skull; a huge cavernous mouth opened up against the sea. Through narrow lips of rock one could see; not the sea itself but geysers of surf as they broke against a natural breakwater. Mammoth tusks of rock which extended far beyond the mouth created a sea channel, so calm that the waters inside the mouth were as a pond. A submarine just entered, its conning tower barely clearing the threatening upper jaw. Cautiously it maneuvered toward the berths where lay other subs. Most of its crew stood on deck, waving or with rolled-up lines in hand; salt-water still cascaded from the conning tower across the swastika which was painted on its side.

All the mile-wide crescent of the rocky shore inside the mountain's mouth bore the appearance of a busy port or fishermen's village; modern in part, but mostly as if it had been built several centuries ago. Altogether there were perhaps a hundred queer-looking workshops and houses nested in the rocks.

THEIR templar-guide smiled, flashing a row of very white teeth: "You didn't expect this, did you? As a matter of fact nobody knew this port existed until the last year of the war. It was discovered accidentally by U 779. While on the Murmansk patrol U 779's engines were damaged by depth-charges in heavy weather; helplessly the boat drifted against the reefs. Then, just as the crew prepared to have the bottom torn from under them, they found themselves in calm water and—in here. A little later I shall show you the monument we have erected with U 779's conning tower. At the moment you're wet, you're hungry, you're exhausted; so let's enter into my own little lodge. It's only a lodgekeeper I am, the guardian of Niflheimr's only land bridge, the receptionist of the few visitors which come to us by plane from the outside world."

Stufa immediately knew what it was, but Francisca marvelled at the strange, squat structure they now entered and at the name "Aldebaran—Hamburg" over its door. She had no idea that this was part of the superstructure, in fact the bridge, the charthouse and the captain's quarters of a ship.

"All salvage," the guide explained; "the sea along this coast is full of wrecks. Most of our buildings, you'll find, are parts of ships. There's my bedroom and the bath; you'll find dry clothes on the berth I think. And there's the captain's salon; breakfast will be waiting for you here in about ten minutes."

It was a hearty seaman's breakfast of ham and eggs, fried potatoes, big pieces of Finnan haddock, all to be washed down with huge cups of strong, black tea. Ravenously hungry as Francisca was, she could hardly eat for excitement. Everything was new and a cause of marvel to her; the portholes, the lamp in its cardanic rings, the chairs screwed to the floor, all the mysterious activities of the port and their guide who quietly and smilingly played host to them.

"As I said," the templar broke at last the silence, "the messengers from Niflheimr come and go mostly by sea. By the same way disciples reach us and depart after they have passed through their courses. Not one of them, not me, not even the commanders of the sub which ply between this port and the world do know exactly where Niflheimr is. Out at sea the subs make for certain points of rondezvous. There all their radio equipment is blocked; so are their compasses. They are ordered to dive to a certain depth and are piloted by way of sound waves into port. The crew of U 779 of course learned where this Niflheimr was; that's why, with their mission completed, the monument was erected—over their graves. The Fuehrer of course couldn't afford to take chances; so these men had to die for Fuehrer and Fatherland. Only the Galdra Simdir, the inner circle of savants, know this as they know all secrets between heaven and hell."

He paused. Neither Stufa nor Francisca felt like saying anything.

"Your own mission in Niflheimr," he continued slowly, "will be brief. I am to be your guide and yet; you will see things I've not seen. These are my instructions: I am to take you from Galdra Simir to Galdra Simir, from the lower grades to the highest of instruction. How high you will go, why you are thus to be indoctrinated—this I don't know."

Again there was a pause; as if considering a doubtful matter the templar slowly shook his head.

"I shall remain outside each of the Galdra Simir's precincts. You will walk in. But you will not speak unless spoken to. You are to listen and to remember well what you have heard and seen. This, I think, is to prepare you for some ultimate revelation, something momentous, the nature of which I'm not bold enough even to guess. Now, are you ready?"

AS it turned out, what Stufa and Francisca had previously seen of the port was only half the story. The dragon teeth of rocks around the crescent of the port were cut with deep ravines; spring waters came foaming and cascading d o w n their bottoms, higher up the gorges widened and flattened out. There fairly level expanses or rocks strewn ground were walled with stone like fields in Ireland and there were stone huts, single or in small groups from the chimneys of which smoke curled into the green moist fog of the air. "Obedience" was written in gothic letters over the first gate they met. Leaning against a stone by the narrow path the templar-guide wordlessly pointed his finger.

Stufa and Francisca, both dressed now in the monkish cowls of the teutonic knights, approached the primitive dwelling. There was no door. From the inside shone the flickering flames of a big fireplace; the strong, clean smell told Stufa that it was either peat or seaweeds dried. "Never you fear," he whispered in Francisca's ear.

They entered. A shrunken figure, obviously that of an old man, was croucbing on a stone ledge by the fireside. His hooded face could not be seen. In front of him, sittlng on the flagstones of the floor were young men, perhaps eight or ten. Tbey sat in the oriental manner with their heels drawn crosswise under their buttocks and they kept their backs very stiff. None of them moved as the guests entered and stood still; neither did the Galdra Simir give any sign as if he noticed them. With machine-like precision his lecture flowed on:

"Now in these times of persecution, for National Socialism it is most lmportant for us to impress the peoples of the so-called democracies with tbe identity of our principles witb some of the most venerated of their religious tenets. Was it not Cbrist himself who taught that a man must leave father and mother and abandon everything in order to follow his elected Fuehrer? It was St. Benedict wbo in the 6th century laid down the rule of blind obedience in these words: 'When a monk receives a command, he shall obey it immediately as if it came from God himself.' The greatest and the most admirable forerunner of National Soclalism however has been Ignatius de Loyola. Do learn his rules by heart until you have transformed yourselves into their living embodiments:

'A superior should be obeyed, not because he is good or wise, but because he is our superior . . .

'The first and lowest grade of obedience is execution. This does not deserve tbe name unless it is joined to obedience of the will . . .

'But entire and perfect obedience requires also the surrender of the understanding, so that we not only wish the same thing as our superior, but think the same as he does, subjecting our own judgment to his . . .

'Just as amongst the heavenly bodies there can be no movement without subordination of one body to another, so in the movement of one rational being by another subordination ls necessary for transferring the influence and virtue from the mover to be moved . . .

'He who has not this obedience loses perseverence, promptness and skill. He loses humility and fortitude in difficult affairs because he questions in himself a command wblch is not to his liking . . .

'Unless the understanding is subjected in obedience, there arlse discontent, pain, delay, slackness, murmuring, excuses which rob obedience of lts value and merit . . .' "

The old Galdra Simir lifted his arm; with an lmpatient gesture he sbook long, bony fingers as lf to say: "There's more for you to do; begone."

Wide-eyed Francisca as they reached

the open whispered: "It sounded like some of the things Pastor Eckard taught us, and yet it made me shiver; it is not to the honor of God."

FROM ravine to ravine they wandered, crossing the ridges led by their guide. Wherever the rocks had eroded so as to form a little soil, the walled-in camps were farms; farms of a special kind. No ordinary plants would grow in the chaotic semi-darkness of the strange green light; but lichens thrived and moulds, pale mushrooms, mosses and ferns. Cowled disciples laid terraces for seed beds, but the Galdra Simir of these experimental stations watched over driers, mortars, and kettles where the harvest was pulverized, was dehydrated and mixed. "We cannot hope," said one of them, "ever to make any Agharti self-sufficient, but we have kept them free from scurvy thanks to this, our work."

Such agricultural colleges however were few; most of the miniature campuses of this vast and scattered university were rustic dormitories and lecturing-halls. The gate of one bore the inscription: "Foreign Politics."

"The democratic masses believe that they have a right of opinion without previous effort to work out one for themselves," lectured its Galdra Simir, in the polished tones of the Wilhelmstrasse in its heyday: "Naturally we National socialists must be in favor of government by scream and of the "gimme" attitude, because they are amongst the surest mechanisms for the self-obliteration of democracy. To dissolve the individual in the mass, to take leadership wherever mass movements pursue destructive aims in the countries of our enemies; this must remain one basic aim in our policy abroad."

The farther they went the more weird became the doctrines and the hotter their fanaticism.

"We must make the fullest use of the spiritual epidemics which now sweep the world," preached another Galdra Simir. "Superstition has become big business in the U.S.A.; there are more than a thousand professional astrologers in New York alone; perhaps twice as many in Hollywood. Ten thousands of Swamis, Pundits, seers, pseudo-prophets, the more foreign and oriental the better are on the rampage. They constitute a billion-dollar superstition industry. The democracies have denied the forces of the blood have denied the mystical base of life, have rejected National-Socialism! But with what result? Their rationalism, their science, the very forces with which they thought to destroy our ideology have become the breeders of new myths. For all those latest crazes, those vitamins, genes, electrons, radionic complexes; what are they but the medieval hobgoblins in modern dress? Religiously emasculated, ideologically frustrated, the peoples of our enemies have reached a state of psychic nihilism which lays them wide open to the attacks of superstition-germs. As carriers of such germs, no matter what—we must function. Every new sect, every new spiritist society—so satisfying to hungered love because it seems to break down the barriers of the grave—is one more deathknell to the religious foundations of the democratic states, just as two thousand years ago the Roman Republic collapsed under the temples erected to foreign Gods . . ."

FRANCISCA had long ceased to understand: in the beginning she had still asked questions; by now she was mute, dejected, even frightened. On Stufa's forehead there were the deep welts as if in his own laboratory he were watching some particularly dangerous and difficult experiment: "The formula," he murmured, "the key to everytbing . . ."

Tbe templar-guide smiled curiously: "You have not reached your journey's end."

Nevertheless they stood near the far end of the harbor-crescent and in a very narrow, dark ravine when the templar motioned them through a gate inscribed: "Infernal Sclence."

Inside the rocks were strewn with human bones; some big granite blocks had been roughly hewn into gargoyles and the obscene shapes of phallic cults. "I cannot go on," whispered Francisca. Stufa pressed ber arm: "You have to. Remember, the two of us as one, we're put to a test. You cannot fail me now."

The hall was built with vaulted windows and much as a primitive chapel or church of the early 'dark age.' In front of the fireplace, blazing as everywhere against the chill dampness of the greenish air, stood a stone altar with a silver crucifix on it between seven-armed candlesticks. Disciples, male and female, crouched in the semi-darkness. They were of all ages, of many nationalities, but in every face there was an expression of hysterical expectancy. With his back to tbe audience the Galdra Simir moved back and forth between altar and fire. From a silver platter which a choir girl held up to him on her knees, he took handfuls of drugs and thrust them into the flames with ceremonious, batman-like movements.

Shrill, piercing as a wild shaman's incantation came his voice:

"Asa foetida! — Hemlock — Henbane!—Aloe!—Pitch!—Poppy seed! —Sulphur!—Mandrake! Those are the smells most pleasing to Satan, the true Lord of the world!"

With eacb thrust the fumes which arose from the flames became heavier, intoxicating, suffocating, their greys and greens and blues translucent with tbe red of the flames. Abruptly the Galdra Simir swung around:

"Defrauded for two milleniums by that pale figure of a false Messiah who didn't save the world, the peoples everywhere are at last awakening to the eternal truth of Him whom God himself once termed the wisest of all angels, Lucifer, the harbinger of Light. He is the secret hope of all who have despaired of God: For His kingdom is *this* world, He turns stone into bread, He offers all the treasure of the earth, His joyous message, the one all men would love to follow, is: eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. He is all things to all men and that is wby today, exactly as a thousand years ago, our Satanist societies are mushrooming and growing everywhere."

Even through the narrow slit in the hood Stufa could see that the Galdra Simir was foaming at the mouth.

"I shall now teach you," he continued, "the liturgy of the Black Sabbath. There are many; old rituals and new. To tbe modern mind, however, which has traversed the course from rationalism back to sensation and violence, the old ritual is haloed with age. So here it is, the same as it was used by the Bohemian Brethren in the 13th century, by the Lollards of the Netherlands who in the 14th century declared all churches for brothels, by the admirable Gilles de Rais, maréchal of France, who confessed to the murder of more than eight hundred children."

IN A commanding gesture the Galdra Simir lifted his right arm: "Repeat everyone of the rituals which I shall now recite:

"Thou shalt believe in Lucifer, the

God and Father who has created heaven and earth and in his son Beelzebub . . .

"Thou shalt believe in Leviathan as the Holy Ghost and in bis church of universal chaos . . .

"Thou shalt adore Lucifer as the true God and thou shalt have no other Gods but him . . .

"Thou shalt blaspheme with zeal the name of Jesus . . .

"Thou shalt kill men, women and children . . .

"Without hesitation thou shalt commit adultery, fornication and all tbe most horrible crimes . . .

"Thou shalt abandon yourself to lies, rape, and robbery and shalt bear false witness against your fellow men . . .

"Thou shalt desecrate the host; like the Templars of Paris, thou shalt do as I am doing now . . ."

The Galdra Simir bent across the altar. Stufa felt Francisca go limp in his arm. The unspeakable had happened; repulsive saliva ran across the crucifix.

Streaming with cold perspiration, but safely outside this gate of hell, Stufa laid the girl down on a flat rock. There was fury in his eyes and a snarl in his voice: "Heart attack. Bear a hand, man! Let's get her to a medic, if there is sucb a thing in this hell."

The templar flashed back angrily: "Hell—as you are pleased to term it, Herr Doktor—is full of scientists. You, who are one of them, should know. Headquarters are quite near. We were to go there anyway. There's a hospital aboard the ship."

Carrying Francisca between them they rushed down the ravine. Guards presented arms; a steel gate rolled aside. There was a narrow strip of water crossed by a gangway. Beyond it a compact mass of steel, bulging with gun turrets, was outlined against the walls of the drydock which harbored Germany's last pocket-battleship.

Taps sounded; Stufa was to be piped aboard with all the honors of an admiral, only that Francisca's accident somewhat spoiled the ceremony. Within seconds bowever stretcher bearers hurried the girl under deck and into the sickbay. After some anxious minutes Stufa breathed relief: "Nothing organic," said the surgeon; "A nervous heart, no danger. A collapse like this is almost a normal event these days. We'll let her rest . . ."

Incongruous, even fantastic as was their sight aboard a modern battlewagon, there were teutonic templar knights even on this ship though most of the personnel wore regulation navy uniforms. One of tbese, obviously an officer, bowed stiffly from the hip: "Herr Dr. Stufa, be pleased to follow me."

"How did you ever get a battleship in here?" asked Stufa as they walked long passages, humming with the sound of pumps and dynamos.

"Quite a stunt, isn't it? We had to raze her masts, her funnel and part of the bridge. Then, on the last leg through the gate we flooded her so the decks were awash. Once inside we pumped her dry again; she fitted as hand in glove. We're quite proud of it, especially since the Fuehrer seems to prefer her to any other headquarters."

"The Fuebrer?"

"WHY, of course. He'll see you in a minute. I thought you knew. Now Doctor; I know you have been with us all these years through hell and higb water. Even so: wben did you last see the Fuehrer?"

"In 1943."

"I thought so. You better be prepared, Doctor, to find the Fuehrer

(Continued on page 128)

THE BROTHERS

By DAVID V. REED

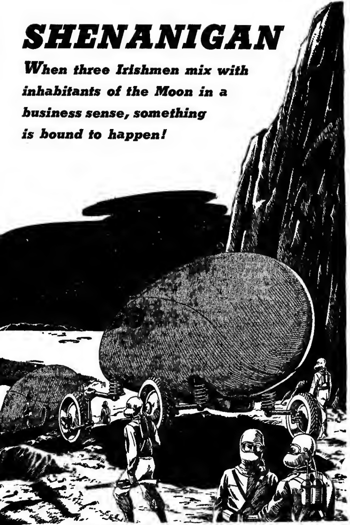
THIS is the story of Terence O'Shay, Dan Mulligan, Jim Gilhooley and the Homunculi of the Moon—and of destiny gone magnificently cockeyed. I heard it the day the *Tidal Star* made her first voyage from the Moon to Earth, and there's something about it that needs telling. You'll see what I mean.

We had been sitting, a chance gathering of passengers, in the ship's splendid bar-room, when suddenly this strapping young Dan Mulligan got up from the chair next to mine and stalked across the room to a party of Interplanetary Patrol officers.

"Now, your Worship," said Mulligan, addressing one of the officers in a clear baritone, "I've got ears the Devil himself would be proud to own. So it's not that I doubt me ears, but because I've lost a bit o' me anger in crossing the room that I'm asking you to repeat what you said about the Honorable

SHENANIGAN

When three Irishmen mix with inhabitants of the Moon in a business sense, something is bound to happen!



The tri-cars lumbered steadily over the moonscape in a long column

O'Shay, for I cannot strike a man in cold blood, weaklin' that I am."

There were four officers at the table. I'd noticed the checkered braid on their uniforms, which meant they came from the minor Euonica constellation where they send blue-bloods to pick up colonial experience, but even that was nothing compared to the bare fact that they were aboard the *Tidal Star* on this momentous voyage. Not only was this the maiden voyage of the new flagship of the line, but the new spaceport in Dublin, three years in building and the largest in Europe, would be officially opened when she arrived.

But all was insignificant, for His Excellency, Gilbert IX, Regent of the Moon, was aboard. Johnson Garfield Gilbert, his name alone known, the System's number one enigma, fabulous ruler of the greatest extra-terrestrial colony—and he had chosen this voyage as the occasion for breaking the mystery of five years by appearing in public. Do you understand what it meant to be aboard that ship?

The *Tidal Star* glittered with titles and uniforms and various-hued complexions of persons of consequence throughout tbe System, though there were a few simple Irishmen scattered aboard to do honor to Dublin and keep the proceedings looking democratic. Dan Mulligan was undoubtedly one of those Irishmen, but who the officers would turn out to be was a dangerous guess.

The officers looked up at Mulligan as if he were something that had crawled out of an interplanetary biology book. One of them rose and impaled Mulligan with a glance. "Are you," he said, scarcely moving his lips, "by any chance a confederate of that swindler O'Shay?"

"Say no more, your Worship," said Mulligan. "You have said enough, indeed you have." With that, he hauled off and delivered a punch that lifted the officer from the floor and sent him sliding over the table, throwing off glasses as he flew and stopping only when his head hit the wall. Instantly the other three officers sprang at Mulligan. Two of them he sent spinning back to their chairs with a single sweep of his arm, but tbe third caught him with a blow. Mulligan gathered the third officer and gently set him down in his chair. "Now," he said, "and would you be joinin' the poor man lyin' there?"

Then Mulligan turned around, his face strong and calm as he addressed the room. "It's no wish I have for quarreling on this glorious day, but lf there's another among you—be he Earthman or Martian or nine feet o' Jovian—and him havin' naught but black words for the Honorable O'Shay, I'll take me chances with him now."

They had been screaming and fainting and shouting all this time, you understand, with people running out and glasses breaking and whistles blowing, and it wasn't a minute before six white-clad crew members came on the run. "Well," Mulligan smiled at them. "Six o' you, and me gentle as a lamb." And he went out witb them. Or, you migbt say, they went with him; the matter might not have been so easily arranged without his consent.

The officers, it turned out, were members of Commander Rogo's immediate staff. I didn't like to think of the price young Mulligan would pay for his moment's headstrong action. It could only have meant penal servitude someplace like Tyuio, and I had gotten to like him in the hour we had spent talking together. And then the news swept the ship that Mulligan had been released by personal order of the Regent!

IT SEEMED incredible, yet fifteen minutes later Dan Mulligan came in again, and spying me alone in a corner, he sat down beside me and said, quietly, "Will you be sharing a bit o' Irish dew with me, your Worship?" So I drank with him, until I couldn't hold out any longer and I asked him would he mind telling me who the Honorable O'Shay was.

He turned on that splendid smile of his. "Mind?" he said. "And why should I mind tellin' you that he is none other than me boss, me friend, me counsellor and me father-in-law to be?"

I mulled over that awhile, then I said, "Aside from the four roles you mentioned, what else does he do?"

"Bless me!" said Mulligan, startled. "And what else would Terence O'Shay be doing other than bein' the founder of the Dublin Players Universal Road Company, and more than that, the greatest theatrical booking-agent in the whole System? Have you never heard o' him, are you tellin' me?"

"Oh yes," I said, emphatically. Then I said, "What was the trouble here a few minutes ago?"

"Here," said Mulligan, "have another drop. The trouble, you say?" He seemed to have forgotten the whole thing. "It was last year, when the Dublin Players were presentin' *Tobacco Road* in some of them minor Euonica planets. A fine play," he continued, smiling. "It would seem there was some trouble about the percentage O'Shay was supposed to pay. Imagine tbat!" he said, with an effort at indignation. "The great O'Shay having to split with graftin' I.P. officers for the privilege o' bringing joy to the hearts of heathens in far away worlds!

"Well, o' course, with O'Shay being aboard here and him seeing the officers as soon as they saw him, O'Shay started wondering if they might be lookin' for revenge, and it was no more than natural for him to be askin' me to keep an eye on them. For it's a sad fact, the way things turned out, because of some oversight, there was no split at all." He frowned, but it didn't look natural. "And watchin' and watchin', all me wonderful ears could get was a string o' black words until the last o' me patience was gone."

"Very clear," I said, swallowing my drink. I let a decent interval slip by, then I asked, "Would it be an imposition upon your patience if I were to ask you how you escaped from your—uh—difficulty with—"

"Ah, them snotty officers?" said Mulligan. "That was arranged through the good offices o' the Honorable O'Shay." He winked. "You've heard, no doubt, that Irishmen and good offices go hand in hand?"

"By offices," I said doggedly, though I knew it was a preposterous supposition in spite of the gossip, "you must mean the Regent?"

"Sure," said Mulligan. "O'Shay told Jim to set me free."

"Jim?"

"The Regent of the Moon," said Mulligan, "as you were sayin'."

"Do you mean Johnson Garfield Gilbert?"

Mulligan looked around and winked again. "His name is Jim Gilhooley."

"Whose name is?"

"You've a short memory, your Worship," said Mulligan. "I'm referrin' to the Regent."

"Gilhooley?"

"The same." He looked at me queerly. "Is it the drinkin'?"

"Possibly," I said, "though I think I need another." I took it. "But what has O'Shay to do with Gil—the Regent?"

"What indeed?" said Mulligan, smiling again. "I'll tell you what. In his own sweet and stubborn way, it was O'Shay that made Jim Gilhooley the Regent of the Moon. He drove him to it, you might say. And me part of the whole proceedings, and no more than a lad, for it was more than five years ago . . ."

AND while he spoke I sat there, drinking and letting my mind wander. I was thinking of the Moon we had left the previous day, and what it had become with the appointment of the new Regent, five years before. Of its untold wealth, its arsenals for space armadas, and of its bloody history from the time Earthmen had first landed on it—and of how that history had been suddenly voided and altered so completely that the Moon hecame an open land, a vacationland for millions. It had been the fattest single piece of patronage in the entire System, reserved for the elect and the aristocracy, and it had heen given to an unknown. The appointment had rocked the official world, and though the passage of years had justified it, it had never heen understood. Gilhooley, had he said. A man who had transformed a world from—

"But you're not listen'," Mulligan protested.

I was listening, and still thinking at the same time. He was talking now of the Moon as it had been shortly hefore the greatest Homunculi uprising in Moon history, the vanished era of fortressed cities.

". . . and we found we'd landed in such luck that even O'Shay, for all his wild hopes," Mulligan was saying, "had never dreamt it. Can you understand what it meant? Here we were, the Dublin Players Universal Road Company arrivin' on the Moon, and none of us ever there before but O'Shay, and that happening to us."

He looked at me as if I couldn't understand. "You see, for all that we were a good company, we'd had a hard time of things, knockin' about, playin' where we could. And here we were on the Moon, beginning the first of a series o' bookings from one miserable hole to another. And then, as if it was the hand of a merciful destiny, relentin' at last, on the second night we're there, a message comes from General Groat himself, invitin' *us* to p e r f o r m at the Shadow Ball! In that white palace! Do you see what it meant to us?"

I nodded again and sipped his Irish dew. I knew.

It used to be that each month, on the last night before the Moon hegan to emerge from under the Earth's shadow, and light came creeping over the land, the Regent gave his Shadow Ball. Like most things on the Moon, this event was never approached anywhere else in the System. Those who could get in came to these Balls from everywhere; the rich and the famous, the titled, the wise, the fools and thieves and climbers. If the Moon was a complex, disorganized frontier society where life was uncertain, where commerce was a joke, where the population was forever moving ahout to escape the dread Homunculi—and the Homunculi were certainly the cause of most of this, then the unreal glamour and extravagance of the Shadow Balls was the very essence of life on the Moon . . .

I

IT WAS the night of a June edition of the Shadow Ball that destiny first took a hand in the career of the Dublin Players. And though this night had hegun as a glorious dream, and the Ball was magnificence itself, to Terence O'Shay the occasion was fast developing into a spectacular nightmare.

He stood now in the midst of his

company, unmindful of the gaiety that surrounded him, and as he spoke he kept wiping perspiration from his brow. "Look for one or the other. There's no tellin' what the outcome will be unless we find them . . ." Moodily, he stared at their faces, and unable to speak further, waved them away. The troupe scattered, like a little island of melancholy dissolving into the sea of troubles from which it had risen.

Just then the official staves rapped, and the Ambassador from Uranus made his entrance into the vast, shining ballroom. A symphony orchestra of two hundred men dressed in red rose up and played the Uranian anthem. There was a momentary lull in the mad confusion, and thousands of guests stood with the orchestra. For a full minute there was silence in the alabaster palace of Frederick VIII, Regent.

That was when O'Shay saw young Mulligan, not more than a hundred feet away, standing, or rather, swaying at attention. A cold shiver crawled along O'Shay's spine. The horrible sounds of the Uranian anthem, which more than one critic had compared to the hiccoughing of a sick giraffe, dinned in his ears. Why had this happened to him? A dozen sickening fears tumbled through his mind. Why on this night?

The instant the final strains died away, and the orchestra began a waltz, O'Shay started forward. He was not alone; others had also spotted Mulligan. By the time he reached him, Reagan and O'Dwyer were already there. They stood on either side of Mulligan as O'Shay faced him.

"Where's Gilhooley?" O'Shay demanded. "Where have you and that wild man been hidin'?"

Mulligan squinted, then opened his eyes as if he was focussing them. "It's Mr. O'Shay himself," Mulligan observed, and closed his eyes again. "Well, Mr. O'Shay, I don't know where Jim is. And supposin' I did know, I'm thinkin' maybe I wouldn't say. After the way you spoke to him, maybe I'd help bring him the blessings o' solitude."

O'SHAY looked around quickly. They were standing in a little group, well away from the dancing and attracting no attention. "Solitude, is it?" said O'Shay. Swiftly, he reached a hand under Mulligan's coat and pulled out a large, silver flask. "Empty," O'Shay said. "You were on your way to the punch bowl to fill it for Gilhooley. It's the blessings o' drink you're hringin' him!"

"It's all tbe same. You've broken his heart," Mulligan said passively, as he leaned away from O'Dwyer to Reagan.

"Drinkin'!" O'Shay cried. "The arch-fiend's loose in the palace somewhere, and him drunk!" He quieted down immediately and regarded Mulligan. In spite of his smallness and the oversized suit he wore, Terence O'Shay looked rather majestic. His forehead was higb because he was growing bald, and he had bright, humorous eyes that lit up his face, lit it, as now, with a somber fire.

"Dan," he said, softly. "You've been me secretary long enough to know what this night means to us. I'm askin' you, as father to son, could I be lettin' Jim Gilhooley—him that's never done anything but collect tickets and move scenery—on that stage?" He looked past Mulligan, down to the far side of the great ballroom where an acre of curtains hid a massive stage. "Ah, me children," O'Shay sighed, watching Mulligan from the corner of his bright eyes, "it's standin' here I am, seeing the Duhlin Players on that grand stage in a few hours, and thinkin' our fortunes are made . . ." his voice almost had a sob in it . . . "if only nothing goes wrong. If only you'll tell me where I can lay me han—find that poor, unhappy lad that needs me fatherly care."

Mulligan swung back from Reagan to O'Dwyer and sniffled. "I'll tell you," be said. "He's backstage, cursin' and groanin' and talkin' to himself. And he's—"

"Mr. O'Shay! Mr. O'Shay!" Kerrigan cried, appearing from out of the crowds and running up to the group. "The guards are lookin' for Gilhooley!"

"What? Speak, man!"

"He was backstage," said Kerrigan, shaking with excitement, "and he got mixed up in a brawl with the actors o' that other company—and he's gone—and they're hunting him!"

"Gone, is be?" said Mulligan, suddenly standing upright. "A brawl backstage?" His eyes were glistening. "Then it's soon he must be found, for the last I heard was him plannin' something as would make your bair stand for a week!"

Before any of them could move, Mulligan was away, swallowed up in the dancing throngs. O'Shay turned limply to the others. "Hold me, somebody," be groaned feebly, "hold me, for there's a blaze goin' in me old head . . ."

JIM GILHOOLEY stood in darkness, pressed close against the door of the little room. The sounds of pursuit in the narrow, winding corridor outside were dying away. He was safe here; the palace had more hidden nooks than the guards could remember, or search. Suddenly the silence was broken as from the ballroom, somewhere above, the orchestra struck the first chords of the Uranian antbem.

Gilhooley breathed e a s i e r and switched the solitary light on again. He went back to the dressing table and sat down before the full length mirror. "Unhappy man," he moaned, staring dismally at his reflection. A large tear rolled down his cheek to the tip of his nose. It hung there, a huge, sparkling drop, and Gilhooley watched it with interest until it fell off.

"Oh, unhappy man," Gilhooley cried softly, while his gaze wandered to a flower vase on the table. It was half full of a clear green liquid that seemed to be smouldering. "Faith," be murmured, "I do believe Mulligan's punch is eatin' away the bottom o' this vase." He almost emptied it with one long draught, then he sat gasping for awhile, watching the way his scalp was moving.

All at once, with new vigor, be finished the partially accomplished task of dressing, and stood up to look at himself in the mirror.

He was now dressed in tight-fitting doublet and bose, the costume of an ancient Renaissance cavalier. He was a young man, very tall and thin, but despite his angularity, he moved with a nervous, fierce grace. He had a long, sbarp blade of a nose, and eyes so dark tbat they were startling in contrast with his blonde hair. And altogether, there was a look about him that could only have been called rapacious.

"Look at you, Gilhooley!" his voice rolled out in a sonorous whisper. "Here you are again, artist o' the spoken word —master o' recitation! There'll be a new face in the Hall of Fame tonight, in spite of that man O'Shay."

And as he spoke, as they always did when he spoke, Gilhooley's remarkable hands moved. They were lean-fingered, supple hands with a seeming life of their own. The affect of their restless, fluid gestures was not merely as if they illustrated or emphasized what he said, but as if his words were being interpreted by a strangely eloquent finger language.

"No more runnin' errands!" he said vibrantly. "No more pullin' curtains and sticking up bill posters—"

At this point, Gilhooley looked carefully into the mirror and suddenly he whirled about. There was nothing in the corner, after all.

"Well, now," said Gilhooley, "it's a long time since I've seen one o' them."

Even as he spoke, Gilhooley was staring intently at the mirror. There it was again, rising slowly in the corner, seemingly coming up out of the ground. "For a figment o' me imagination," said Gilhooley, "you're a weird little creature, and a persistent one. Though to tell the truth, after drinkin' that brew, I've been expectin' somethin' like you, so there's no call for disappearin' . . . when I turn . . . around . . ."

GILHOOLEY had been turning as he spoke, and as he spoke he could see the little creature going back into the ground, matching him movement for movement—until, as he finished speaking and came full about, there was nothing where the mirror had indicated there should have been.

Gilhooley laughed. "O' course," be said, "it might be that you live in the mirror, for a queerer little mannikin I never did see. But still—" he walked unsteadily to the corner, "there's somethin' about . . ."

The hell of it was that there was a hole in the floor. It was about a foot in diameter and it had been dug through concrete and marble. Gilhooley stuck a hand in the hole. It was real.

Slowly, he returned to the dressing table and sank down in his chair. "Oh me," he murmured, "there's a limit to the sorrow a man can stand. Me mind's gone."

"Mindsgonn," said a voice.

Gilhooley watched it in the mirror. There in the corner, a pair of hands came up out of the hole in the floor. They were enormously long, thin, bony white hands, with no thumbs. Then a round, bald skull came up, and presently the creature climbed out and stood erect.

It was a little animal, about three feet tall, with features that seemed half human and half monkey. It was completely nude, and its skin was a delicate, pinkish white which became a rosy glow on its nose, a nose that was some six inches long and somewhat limp. Its eyes were a beautiful crimson, deep and lustrous, and its teeth were small and sharp and irregular. It stood on flat, four-toed feet and folded its long arms across its chest, and it cocked its head this way and that as it regarded Gilhooley from the mirror.

"Mindsgonn," the little creature repeated, plainly enough. Its voice was piping and pleasant, rather like that of a child.

Gilhooley closed his eyes and shivered violently. When he looked into the mirror again, it was still there. After an interminable pause, Gilhooley tried to speak. "Who are you?" he said.

"Are you?" the creature echoed.

"Am I what?" said Gilhooley, dazed. He raised his hands and held them before him. Carefully, the little animal followed his movement. In its crimson eyes, Gilhooley could see the same fearful fascination that was in his own. The world of reality was slipping away . . .

"I know what you are," said Gilhooley, quietly. "You're the materialization o' the longing in me heart, the ache that's in me to be heard. You're born out o' the sadness that's in me . . ." How closely, he thought, the creature imitated each slight motion of his hands. "You're me audience," said Gilbooley, nodding.

"Audience," the creature nodded.

FROM far away, Gilhooley could hear the music from the ballroom.

The overture was beginning. Now, if ever, Gilhooley had to return from the fantastic dream that held him. The music awakened him, and the decision he had made not long before, stirred in him like dregs in a wineglass. Of what use was the decision? He could hear O'Shay saying, sneering, "You're fit for nothing but recitin' them hobo jingles in saloons!" There was a reality, bitter and burning . . . and here, in this mirror, was a chimerical vision, unsubstantial.

Reluctantly, Gilhooley turned around —and the creature was indeed gone. Nothing, he knew, could have moved so quickly.

He walked to the door, struggling with the new doubts that had gripped him. The decision was dissolving, disintegrating . . . "Now," said Gilhooley, "shall I let them deny me? Shall I do it?"

"Do it," said a voice. It might have come out of the ground.

Gilhooley stood stock still, and a strange exhileration began to sweep over him. His doubts fell away, leaving him free. Suddenly he was laughing as he looked at the vase again. "Faith," he said, "I do believe Mulligan's punch has eaten away the top o' me head." Then he gulped down the last of the green liquid, gasped for breath a moment and warily went out.

O'SHAY'S tired eyes searched the ballroom as the orchestra began the *Overture to Romeo and Juliet*. The glistening glass walls parted and thousands of upholstered seats silently moved into the ballroom, transforming it into a theatre. A long sigh escaped O'Shay. "Stay together, me flock," be said to his assembled troupe. "Sit on either side of me."

Now the lights turned rose and progressed through the spectrum until purple became lost in darkness. The music welled to a climax.

At the last moment, Dan Mulligan stumbled into view. The instant he saw the troupe, he sank down into one of the two vacant chairs at the end of the row. Vainly, O'Shay tried to catch his eye. He passed the word along for Mulligan to convey some message, but Mulligan didn't answer. It was as if something had finally overcome Mulligan; his lips trembled to speak, but no sound issued forth.

And the play began. It was the immortal *Romeo and Juliet*, being played by the finest Shakesperean company in the entire System. It went along as it had for almost a thousand years, the lines still fresh in their beauty, the tragic love story still vibrant and moving. The audience waited for the familiar lines and scenes and spoke the ancient words to themselves.

When the curtain came up and disclosed the Capulet's orchard and Juliet's balcony, an expectant murmur swept the palace. For a moment the stage was empty, but just before the wait became emphatic, Romeo came out and approached the balcony from the garden wall.

Romeo seemed to have grown in the interim following his last scene; he looked a good six inches taller. And when he spoke his first line, *"He jests at scars that never felt a wound,"* his voice sounded strange, and more stately and sonorous than it ever had before. Yes, and more flavorsome, too, though precisely what the flavor was seemed the least bit elusive.

It was more than elusive, thought O'Shay; it was tantalizing. From the rear of the theatre, a thousand feet from the stage, O'Shay listened to the oddly familiar gaunt man who spoke. *"But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?"* O'Shay leaned forward to regard Mulligan, and he saw, with more alarm than he understood, that Mulligan had been waiting to catch his eye. It seemed to him that Mulligan was crouching like an expectant tiger, that his eyes had gleamed in the dark, and that Mulligan was waiting . . .

"It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!—"

LIGHTNING struck O'Shay. He half leaped out of his seat, grabbed his own throat, and fell back with a choking gurgle. "Gilhooley!" he whispered, incredulously. He sat there, as cold and rigid as granite, listening to the voice, to the unmistakable rich undertone of an Irish brogue.

But what was happening? Suddenly, after three lines, Romeo seemed to lose all interest in Juliet. He stopped speaking, fingered the dagger sheath that hung at his side. In silence he walked to the center of the stage, faced the audience and bowed with ineffable grace.

"Lad-ies and gentle-men," his deep voice boomed, "a recitation en-tit-led, *'Dangerous Dan McGrew,'* by Robert W. Service."

With an inperious wave of his hand, he cut off the vast whisper that had begun. A startled and confused silence settled again, and then he spoke.

"A bunch of the boys were whoopin' it up in the Malamute saloon.
The kid that tickled the music box was hittin' a jag-time tune;
Back o' the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
An' watchin' his luck was his light-o'-love, the Lady that's known as Lou—"
When out o' the night—"

When out o' the wings ran several costumed actors and over-alled stagehands, lunging for Romeo. With a dexterity that could only have been born of long practice, Romeo yanked a small billy from his dagger sheath and chopped down the first three men to reach him.

"There stumbled a miner," Gilhooley roared, *"fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty—"* and the bodies piled up on the proscenium around him, and still he kept swinging and howling the words of the poem. By then the entire audience had risen, outraged, spellbound, contributing to the uproar. The white curtains started coming together just as the palace guard streamed out on the stage.

And then it happened, and for an instant there was a silence so complete, so awe-inspiring that it seemed this was the hush to precede the end of the world. For out of the ground, out of the wooden boards of the stage itself, a little white creature rose up . . . an odd little thing with frightened eyes and a startled manner. It remained in sight for only five seconds, ducking away as panic burst upon the scene like a barrage. Ladies screamed, men blanched, the palace electricians ran the spectrum back and forth in incomprehensible frenzy, and in the midst of this overwhelming tableau, Jim Gilhooley was taken . . .

A quarter of an hour went by before order was restored. When the curtains opened again, a shorter, immediately recognized Romeo came out on the stage. His face was red, and a patch over one eye was growing dark. *"He jests at scars that never felt a wound!"* he declaimed, with a passion he had not yet equalled that performance.

And now, silently, from the darkness, a score of palace guards materialized. Beginning with Dan Mulligan, they swiftly took hold of the members of the Dublin Players, one after the other, until they had emptied the row. It was done so quickly that those who sat near them hardly realized what was happening. Moments later, they had been spirited out of the ballroom.

II

THE Black Chamber had been designed by an architect witb a flair for terror. It was a circular room of sheer black marble, completely unrelieved by any color or ornament. Exactly in the center of the room stood a white armchair, vacant and portentious.

The doors to the Chamber opened, and the Regent Frederick entered. He was a plumpish man with a wrinkled, pale complexion, and abnormally large eyes. Dressed as he was, severely in white, he stood out against the black room like a reverse silhouette. When he sat down in the white chair, his body lost its outlines and became part of the entity of authority in the Black Chamber. All that remained of him was his wrinkled face and the single decoration he wore over his heart with arrogant modesty.

After that, officers and ministers in various uniforms came in one by one, standing to either side of the Regent according to rank. When the tenth and last took his place, the minister to the right of the Regent, a heavy-jowled man in an orange cloak, bent over and whispered something.

For the first time, the Regent stopped examining his hands and looked up. Standing in a semi-circle, thirty feet away, the Dublin Players huddled together facing the white chair, and behind them stood a double file of palace guards.

"But, Pangloss," said the Regent, "where is he?"

The minister Pangloss signalled and the Chamber door opened. Standing alone, framed in the doorway, was Jim Gilhooley. His cavalier's costume was torn and bloody, and what showed of his face under his tangled blonde hair was bruised. His eyes were like live coals as he walked into the room, and though he was limping, he moved witb the ferocity of an animal free again. He stopped near the Dublin Players, arms akimbo.

Presently the Regent spoke. "Tell us," he said in a tired voice, looking at Gilhooley, "how you accomplished the illusion of the Homunculus. We confess an untoward curiosity."

Gilhooley scratched his ribs. "I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said.

The Regent tried to smile and gave it up. "The ability to perform the illusion is a dangerous one," he said, mildly. "We are quite prepared to torture you to death for this information."

Gilhooley kept scratching and said nothing, and a baffled look came over him. Suddenly O'Shay stepped forward. "If it please your Worship, might I say somethin' as may clear this whole thing up for your Worship?"

"Excellency will do," said Frederick. "Please proceed."

O'SHAY swallowed audibly. He felt the eyes of his troupe upon him, and he tried to shake off the despair that had held him for an hour. "He doesn't understand wbat you mean by Homunculus," he said. "None of me troupe has ever been to the Moon before, and none of them has ever seen the Homunculi."

"So? All of you are part of a theatrical troupe?"

"The Dublin Players Universal Road Company, founded by me, and whatever their faults, on this I'll take me solemn oath—none of me troupe had anything to do with that creature on the stage."

"By any chance," said Gilhooley

abruptly, "are you talkin' about that white little man that popped up on the stage?"

"Yes," said the Regent slowly, smiling weakly at O'Shay. "You find your memory returning?"

"It's not a question o' memory. The creature was mine."

"Yours?" A flutter ran down the line of ministers. O'Shay stared at Gilhooley and held fast to Riley. Even the Regent paused before he said, "You mean the Homunculus is a tame one?"

"Wild or tame," said Gilhooley, solemnly, "he's mine. I created him."

"You did *what?*"

"Beggin' your pardon," O'Shay burst out, "he's been drinkin' Mercurian punch all night, and he's got a demon's imagination—"

"Never mind, Mr. O'Shay!" Gilhooley cried, letting his voice out for an instant. "It's no use praisin' me imagination when this creature was seen by everyone!" Quizzically, he added, "It *was* seen by everyone?"

The Regent nodded grimly, though he seemed unable to understand what was happening. "Have no fear," he said, "your dramatic little interlude overshadowed the rest of the performance. We are still waiting for your explanation."

"But I've none," said Gilhooley. "I'm as mystified as the next man. At first I was thinkin' the creature was the result o' me sorrow, then I blamed it all on the punch. And now that I see it's real again, I'm thinkin' maybe it was me sorrow again." Gilhooley shrugged and held his eloquent hands out. "Maybe there's somethin' here on the Moon, which combined with great sorrow, will produced a creature by means o' spontaneous combustion!"

WHEN Gilhooley finished speaking, there was silence. Then the Regent stirred. "We do not understand," he said in his tired, almost petulant voice. "Pangloss, is he trying to confuse us?" Without waiting for an answer, he stood up and held a hand to his wrinkled face. "We are bored," he said, "horribly bored and annoyed. We don't know why we ever wanted to see them. My dear Pangloss, see if our torturers can carry on a conversation with him."

"And the others, Excellency?" said Pangloss as Frederick was about to leave.

"The others?" The Regent turned towards the troupe as if he had forgotten they existed, and he seemed more confused and troubled than ever when he saw them. "Who are you?" he said, in sudden rage. "What are you doing here in our palace?" As quickly, his volatile temper subsided, and he turned to Pangloss with a sigh. "We sentence them to five years at hard labor in the Regency mines. We will not have these unknown hordes stealing their way among us."

"But, your Worship!" O'Shay cried out in panic. He ran forward to the Regent, and the guards broke ranks and seized him. Struggling in their midst, O'Shay shouted, "We were invited here by General Groat to perform at the Ball!"

"Absurd!" snapped the Regent. "Do you intend to have us believe that this spindle-armed fool was invited to give that disgraceful exhibition? Are you saying he was asked to produce an illusion that frightened my guests out of their wits? Absurd!"

"And I say it's you that's absurd!" Gilhooley roared. "What in the name o' hell was disgraceful about me recitin' that fine—"

The rest of his words were lost as the guards descended on him, and over the melee, O'Shay was screaming, "Shut up, Gilhooley! *Shut up!*"

"Hold," said Frederick, raising a hand to stop the guards. He regarded Gilhooley calmly, and a blue vein that ran down the middle of bis pale forehead became visible. "Please continue," he said.

"Thanks!" Gilhooley snarled, shaking his arms loose from the guards. "I've no wish to be wastin' me breath on a jackass, Regent or otherwise, when he's said that Gilhooley has no talent!"

THE Regent stood quietly, and his face seemed to have gone dead. O'Shay's quivering voice rang out. "Your Worship, I'm tryin' to tell you it was me troupe that was invited here for an honest performance, and they know nothin' of the Homunculi, no matter what kind o' spontaneous combustion this scene-shifter has been havin'." He was trembling as he looked at the Regent, sweat pouring down his face.

"And that's another thing!" Gilhooley cried. "If there was—"

"Shut up!" O'Shay shouted. "Mulligan, make that demon stop!"

"Who—me?" said Mulligan, from the center of a group of guards.

". . . any sense in that fat head o' yours," Gilhooley continued, inexorably, "you'd see that me recitation was a specialty, and there's not ability enough among a dozen troupes, let alone the Dublin Players, to match it. So if there's goin' to be punishment for genius, it's Gilhooley that demands the punishment for himself!" And Gilhooley finished with a sweeping, disdainful bow.

"Remarkable," the Regent sighed, gently. "You have our word that we will honor your request presently." He turned to Pangloss. "Bring our General Groat to us at once."

"Excellency," said Pangloss, his heavy jowls shaking, "General Groat has gone to Maywood."

"Maywood, my dear Pangloss?"

"He was called—" Pangloss began, but the Regent held a hand up. "Whisper it, Pangloss," he said. "Whisper it, *please*." Tbe minister whispered for a moment, and soon Frederick was smiling sweetly again. It was a charming scene, marred only by the ugly gleam in the Regent's abnormal eyes. He turned those eyes on O'Shay again.

"Unfortunately," said Frederick, "your only evidence of innocence is a long way from here. It may be that you were well aware of that when you contrived your story. Under the circumstance, though our sentence will stand, let it not be said that Frederick is without mercy. Our dear minister Pangloss will convey our resolve to you.

"And as for you," said tbe Regent, turning to Gilhooley with passionate, malicious relish, "you will be tortured publicly as part of the evening's entertainment. Meanwhile we shall be devising further pleasantries for you, both as a warning to others and as our answer to your inexplicable talent for horrible illusions."

"Just a minute, me fine Regent," said Gilhooley, the incredulity plain on his piratical face, and heightened by the gestures of his hands. "Do you mean to say you're not lettin' me go free?"

"Free?" It was the Regent's turn to be amazed, though as it seemed to an equally amazed audience, with more reason.

"Sure," said Gilhooley, vehemently. "I've never come before anyone as high and mighty as a Regent before, but in all the books I've read, it's plain that any ruler must be impressed by a display o' courage and sauciness."

He stared at the Regent blankly. "Well, now, do you mean to say you've not been stirred to admiration for me fearlessness? To say nothin' of the grand way in which I took all the blame for meself?"

FREDERICK merely motioned Pangloss, and Pangloss nodded to the Captain of the guards. The next moment hell broke loose. From somewhere within his doublet, Gilhooley suddenly produced another billy, and in a twinkling he had sprung at his captors, his long arms flashing as the billy spun like a wheel.

Over the uproar, Gilhooley was shouting, "It's not fair! It's no more than cheatin'!" and he was cutting his way to the doors. Just as he got there, the doors opened and half a regiment of guards poured themselves on Gilhooley's back. When the guards marched out, Gilhooley was no longer in the Chamber, though no one had seen him either walking or being carried. It was, in truth, as if Gilhooley had been absorbed by the corporative body of the guards. He was gone. . . .

"A most remarkable fellow," sighed the Regent. The officers and ministers filed out after him, all save Pangloss, who walked over to where O'Shay and the troupe were locked in an iron circle of guards. The circle opened at one end as Pangloss spoke.

"How much money does your company have in System credits, sir?"

O'Shay said to Mulligan, "Dan, what's in the kitty?"

"And who wants to know?" said Mulligan.

"Shut up!" O'Shay snapped. "Answer me!"

"One hundred and fifty-five dollars."

"One hundred and fifty-five dollars, your Worship," said O'Shay to Pangloss. "I suppose we'll be payin' a small fine for the disturbance, and welcome to it. Though," he added shyly, "there'll be more money in a day or two which I wouldn't mind payin' to some kind soul as might have the influence to arrange for the Dublin Players to perform here tonight, after all. For, as His Majesty said, he'll be showin' us mercy, and with me troupe innocent, maybe—"

"It is the command of his Excellency that you be fined the sum of one hundred and fifty-five dollars," said Pangloss, wrapping his orange cloak about him. "The Captain of the guard will take the money."

"Over me dead body," said Mulligan. "I won that money in an all night crap game." Pangloss nodded and four tall guards gripped Mulligan. Without a word, O'Shay thrust a hand into Mulligan's coat and pulled out a leather wallet. He emptied it and gave the money to the officer.

"And now," said O'Shay, "about that matter o' the performance—"

"I'm afraid not," said Pangloss, stepping back and stroking his jowls. "His Excellency has seen fit to bestow his mercy upon you, on the sole condition that you leave Lunesia within an hour. If you are ever found again within the confines of the city, the original sentence will take immediate effect."

O'SHAY seemed to stagger. "But our engagements!" he burst out. "And—and how are we to get out o' Lunesia, now that light is spreadin' over the Moon? There's no convoys leavin', and we've no money to pay our way now even if there were any convoys. And what about our per—"

Pangloss took another step back and permitted himself the luxury of a half smirk. "His Excellency had the kindness to order a line of tricarts for you. Automatic tricarts," he added, distinctly, "if you understand what I mean. They will be directed towards Maywood."

"Maywood?" said O'Shay, curiously. He looked vacantly at his bewildered company. Maywood lay several hundred miles away, a torturous journey to the frontier of the dark side. It was desolate moonland all the way, and with the Moon filling, there would be mating Homunculi everywhere, and the constant terror . . . yes, hadn't it been to Maywood that Pangloss had said General Groat had gone?

"But there aren't any convoys," O'Shay repeated, helplessly. He was trying to understand, yet somehow he couldn't. "Not even soldiers go out in this part of the month."

"Quite so. There won't he any soldiers along. Too dangerous," Pangloss said, walking away. "You'll understand wben you see the tricarts. And you'd hetter hurry—you've less than an hour by now. . . ."

But O'Shay had begun to understand already, and he was more frightened than at any time he could remember. He kept looking at his troupe until he felt he could hardly breathe. . . .

III

A COOL, slight wind had been sweeping clouds of dust before it for hours. O'Shay, standing on his toes between Mulligan and Riley, kept watching the way the swirls broke over the horizon behind them. The wind curled up over the high wall of the tricart and hurned his face.

"You ought to get some sleep, Mr. O'Shay," said Riley. "We'll keep watchin'."

"Sleep," O'Shay said ahsently. He hadn't slept at all in the fourteen hours since they had started their lonely journey. His eyes were bloodshot and rimmed with white dust. "I'm tired," O'Shay said. "I'm beginnin' to feel me years." His head fell to his hands and he muttered, "Damn him wherever he is."

"I'm wonderin' where he is . . . now," said Mulligan softly.

"It's the Regent I meant!" O'Shay said. "Puttin' us in these wagons, ten men and two women, tellin' us to cross this wasteland that's feared by armies." He gritted his teeth and climbed down from where he stood. "Dan," he said, "I'm goin' to grab a wink. Wake me up the minute we reach the shadow. And keep your eyes open and the guns handy."

Mulligan grunted and stared ahead. Miles before them lay the beginning of the moving shadow on the Moon. The convoy had almost overtaken the shadow, and comparative safety, and then the wind had carried dust from the rear, like a veil over the light. It was a distinct danger signal, O'Shay had said, because there wasn't enough wind to have raised so much dust. It could be Homunculi behind them.

"I wonder where Jim is," Mulligan said. "I keep standin' here and wonderin', and all the time I'm trying to understand what it was happened to him, and what this is all ahout. . . ."

He looked sidewise at Riley and Riley shrugged and said nothing. Mulligan kept thinking ahout the Homunculi, wondering. He could feel the tenseness in his muscles, the instinctive reaction to danger, but he knew nothing. O'Shay hadn't said anything and they hadn't asked. . . .

IT WASN'T until one had traveled across the Moon that one began to understand what the Homunculi meant. The convoy system was the only means of transportation on the Moon. There could be no ships run by motor or rocket or engine because the noise they made tended to rouse the Homunculi. Engineers had tried rails, fast motor highways, wired tracks. The Homunculi methodically destroyed them all, either by undermining them or eating them, or setting fires.

In the end the convoys were evolved, and the men who ruled the Moon were not altogether unhappy about the primitive means of transport that had been forced on them, because corruption flowered in a primitive state.

The convoys looked like chains of nimble, three-legged creatures picking their way. They consisted of a number of tricarts coupled together—wagons perched high on three huge wheels, each individually sprung, each taking its own rise or fall over the uneven surface while the wagon remained level. They were operated by travel agencies, who supplied the tricarts and the men necessary to protect them, and they traveled only during the dark phase of the Moon, when the Homunculi were least active. And because they showed no lights, for fear of attracting them, their usual speed was some thirty miles an hour.

But the convoy of the Dublin Players had turned out to be something a little different. It was, as Pangloss had said, automatic. That meant there was no crew and no soldiery. The lead tricart had been turned towards Maywood and its gear fixed to allow no variation. The speed was set at twenty-five miles an hour. Then the troupe was put into the wagons, the motors were started, and they were off on a journey that would take them over desolate, brilliantly lighted areas, with no cities or towns within hundreds of miles of their line of travel, and no way of changing course if there had been.

Automatic, that was it. It meant only one thing, O'Shay had perceived: they had been sent on what was nothing more than a suspended death sentence . . . or not quite that. There was always the theoretical chance, of course. They had guns and ammunition. But they were traveling in the light, traveling slowly, three tricarts against time and a wilderness. It was neatly balanced. Almost automatic, one might say.

HOW long O'Shay slept was uncertain. When the noise outside woke him, he was startled to see that it was dark, and he looked at the luminous dial on his watch. It had stopped, but at least seven hours had gone by. He could hear Kerrigan's distinctly individual snoring close at hand.

"Dan!" O'Shay called into the darkness.

"Are you up, Mr. O'Shay?" came Kelly's voice. "Mulligan and Riley climbed back to the second wagon four hours ago."

"Why didn't you wake me?" O'Shay said in irritation. "What's that noise?"

"It's been goin' on for the last ten minutes. I wanted to wake you, but Mulligan said he would put me to sleep if I did."

O'Shay got up and his head hit the canvas cover. It had been rolled down. He grunted in exasperation and pushed it back. The darkness was complete, though it had a grey, transparent quality that made it possible to see for a few yards. All around them was an immense cloud of dust. Again the noise came, a popping, staccato sound. Immediately after it died away, a vast murmur arose. It might have been the wind, except that there was now no wind. The sounds came again, faint explosions to the rear.

"What's that?" Kelly said quietly.

O'Shay tilted his head and moved it around like a directional antenna. "It sounds like an engine," he said. "Listen to it—it's uneven, like a steam engine missin' a beat."

"You'd be missin' more than a beat," came Mulligan's voice from outside the tricart, "if you had to go climbin' around in the dark!" His head appeared, and then he clambered down into O'Shay's wagon. "Whew!" he puffed, trying to catch his breath, "it's no good, climbin' around and thinkin' what might happen if I was to fall off the couplings."

"That'll be enough laughin' for a while, Kelly," said O'Shay, disgustedly. "Well, Dan, what's goin' on in the wagons?"

"Listen to them noises!" Mulligan exclaimed. The murmuring had come up briefly and faded away again. After a moment, Mulligan said, "Nothin's goin' on. Reagan and Murphy's on watch in number two, and O'Dwyer up with Kenny in three. Aggie Fitzpatrick was cryin' awhile ago, but she's asleep now and—" he broke off as O'Shay gripped his arm.

The explosions had come again, reverberating over the dark plain, each quick report blending with another until they rolled like a drum call and died away in the distance.

"It's them loonies," said O'Shay, presently. "The creatures they call by the name of Homunculi. The only thing it could mean is that there's some poor unfortunates out there in a convoy where it's still light, and it's been cornered. It's the only way of explainin' this dust, though what a convoy is doin' out there is too much for me. By the sounds, there must be thousands o' them, jabberin' away and diggin' up the land with their infernal way. Maybe we'll be seein' a fire soon."

HE PEERED through the darkness, but it was quiet again. "Dan," he said, "I'm thinkin' maybe it's you as needs sleep now." Mulligan didn't answer. "Dan!" O'Shay said, shaking him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'," said Mulligan. "I keep thinkin' and I can't sleep."

O'Shay let out a long sigh. "I know," he said. "It's the same with all of us, and with me. Sometimes when I think o' what he did to us, and the fact that we'd not be here except for him, I'm so mad I can't see straight. . . . Not for meself," he added. "I'm growin' old, and I guess I've grown used to failures and disappointments. But this—this is the very lives o' me troupe, young people trustin' me, putting their faith in me. . . ."

Softly, he went on. "Still, I'd come to love that wild man as much as the rest o' you, and deep in me heart I keep sayin' that he's all right, that no harm has come to him, and I suppose in me own way I've prayed for him."

"What do you think it was?" Mulligan said. "That thing on the stage, and Jim sayin' it was his?"

"I don't know. It must have been the drink. As for the Homunculus, there's no understandin' it."

"Ah me," said Kelly, "but I'd like a good look at them."

"It's a last look it might be," said O'Shay somberly. "Well I remember the last time I saw them, the year they set fire to Fannersburg, after they'd eaten half the wall around it. White little men, with teeth like saws, and the power to eat anything. And diving into the ground all day. Oh, what a sight, me fine man!"

"I've read about them," said Kelly, "but I never believed it was true about them goin' into the ground and coming up multiplied."

"It's true, or we'd not be riding in a buggy wagon to cross the Moon. There's no way to be rid o' them. Killin' them off can't work, for with their life span o' twenty-eight days, if there was only two of them left, with the new moon there'd be a new generation. Can you sign a peace treaty with somethin' that lives only twenty-eight days, has the mind of a three-year-old child, and the understandin' of language of a parrot?" He shook his head. "They're like somethin' out of an evil imagination—*Look!*" O'Shay whispered fearfully.

Far off across the dark plain a slender white flame arched up to the heavens. Beside it another leaped into life, then there were three, four, more and more until there were dozens of the single flames, and then it became evident that the flames formed a circle.

"It's them!" said O'Shay. "They've seen us, and they're goin' into a dance! We've got to be ready!"

"But they're so far off," Mulligan said. "I don't see—"

AS IF in answer, halfway between the original circle and the convoy, another circle of fire burst into view. Within a moment, from all over the desert, there were scores of flaming circles, and now they were no longer stationary but moving toward each other, converging swiftly from an area that must have covered miles.

"Mr. O'Shay!" It was Reagan, calling from the tricart directly behind. "Do you see them flames?" There was fear in his voice, and the voices of the others in the tricarts were rising, calling for O'Shay, talking to each other.

"Be quiet!" O'Shay called back. "Get the glowbeams ready, and set the guns up for action. And tell Kenny to do the same."

They could hear Aggie Fitzpatrick crying again, and in the last tricart Kenny's voice was calling loudly for confidence. "Riley," said O'Shay, "wake up Kerrigan, for snorin' or no, I think he's dead. And you, Mulligan, help me take the cover off this gun."

Kerrigan woke up with a start. When he stood up he could see the flames moving closer to the convoy. The white fire rose in columns that hardly moved against the direction of the wind. Suddenly they could hear the soft murmuring beginning again. The flames were no more than two miles away.

"Ready?" O'Shay called, and the wind took his voice and carried it away over the desert.

"Ready." Kenny and Reagan had answered together.

They waited. When the flames were half as close again, and the murmuring voices louder than ever, like the distant roar of a waterfall now, suddenly the fire began to spread out horizontally. "Ringing us," said O'Shay. He seemed very cool somehow, composed and immobile as a statue. It was strange, Mulligan thought, that of all the men there, O'Shay, little, middle-aged O'Shay should still have held the reins of his leadership. Mulligan felt a pang as he remembered how a little while ago, O'Shay had said, " . . . young puttin' their faith in me. . . ."

And now the fire had formed a huge circle with a diameter of a mile. When the two ends joined, a wild, exultant cry from what must have been thousands of throats echoed over the empty wasteland. The columns were no longer straight, but erratic, ragged streaks that rose and fell and flared wildly, dancing closer and closer.

THEY could see them now. The fire illuminated the ghastly scene. There were thousands of little white creatures dancing, holding hands, beings like dwarfed men, chattering and singing insanely as they came closer.

"Oh, Lord!" Mulligan gasped. "Look where the fire's comin' from!" Strong as he was, Mulligan felt his knees buckling.

"Yes," O'Shay breathed hoarsely, "you've seen it now. They've the power to make fire by holdin' hands together. And there's worse to come. You'll need your courage." He turned to the tricarts behind and called loudly, "Throw on the glowbeams!"

Instantly, from the three tricarts, with O'Shay switching on his own, blinding amber lights streamed from the sides of the convoy, flooding the terrain around them with its brilliance. The tricarts were still rolling; there was no way to stop them if they had wanted to. O'Shay swung the gun on its swivel. "You take it, Dan," he said. "Me eyes are too old." He took one of the electric rifles and gave the otbers to Kerrigan and Riley.

The next instant a shot crackled out from the third tricart, and the swivel gun roared, flashing blue flame. Looking behind them, those beside O'Shay saw the little group of Homunculi that had sneaked up on the convoy. They were still running towards them, silently, their mouths open and their eyes staring, and expressions of demoniacal rage on them. Several lay dead on the ground, and others were dropping, and still they came. Now only two were left.

Mulligan swung his gun around and pressed the trigger release. It exploded with a wavering blue line at its nozzle and one of the creatures stretched its arms out before it and tumbled over. The other came up to the last wagon and leaped for it. Someone there hit it with a gun stock, and as the creature fell off, it carried the gun with it. Tbe last they could see of it, the white animal had buried its incredible teeth in the steel and torn it apart.

By now the enormous flaming ring was no more than two hundred yards off, and the convoy was almost upon one segment of it. The shrieking cries of the creatures filled the night; their faces were plainly visible, and the flames that leapt from their hands seemed to be hissing. Here and there new groups were detaching themselves from the main ring, running slowly parallel to the wagons, coming closer.

O'Shay stood tensely, and now he cupped his hands and shouted, "Volley straight ahead on signal!" He turned to Kerrigan. "They can't hear me. Tell them to shoot directly ahead when I say so, and then to turn the glowbeams off immediately."

Kerrigan shouted the order twice before he was heard. The guns kept hammering whenever the Homunculi drew within fifty yards, yet it was all too evident that they weren't yet ready for their final assault. It was coming, and when it came there would be thousands of the mad little creatures spilling over the convoy. . . .

O'SHAY raised his arm. The convoy was closer to the section of the flaming ring ahead of them. A minute passed, then another, and as long as O'Shay held his arm up, the guns were silent—and the small groups of raiders that had broken off the circle had long passed the safety mark of fifty yards. Still the ring grew closer.

Down came O'Shay's arm. The three swivel guns spoke together, and the electric rifles with them. The glowbeams went off instantly, and the last any of them saw was one segment of the ring crumpling to the ground under the withering blast. The convoy shot through the hole in the ring before it could close again. There were walls of fire to either side of them, and they could feel the wheels of the tricarts rolling over the massed bodies of dead Homunculi, and then the ring had formed again, but it was behind them this time.

"Ready again!" O'Shay shouted. His

voice was cracked, and when he stood close to Mulligan, the younger man could feel the way O'Shay's body was trembling. "They're confused," O'Shay said. "It'll be a few minutes before they circle us again."

Just then, everything went quiet. Instantaneously, silence engulfed the plains that had been ringing a moment before. Looking on incredulously, the beleaguered company of the Dublin Players saw the flames suddenly die out. In the darkness now there was not even a sign that the Homunculi existed, that they were, in fact, a few hundred yards to the rear. Then, a moment later, a quiet, singing murmur rose again.

"Annnneee-oooohh," said the murmur in that massed chorus of Homunculi voices. Over and over, "Annnneeee-ooohhh," and they could hear the round of running feet growing fainter, and the murmur grew fainter as they carried it away with them.

"What happened?" said Mulligan, querulously.

O'Shay sank to the floor and leaned against the sides of the wagon. "I don't know," he said, limply. "If I'd had time to pray, I'd think maybe that was the answer." He sat there, drinking in the cool air in hoarse gulps. "We broke the back of the ring," he said, presently. "We broke it. I remembered how it was done in the old days . . . sometimes . . . but there were many times we passed the ashes o' the failures, and I guess tonight was a miracle . . ."

From the wagons behind they could hear talking and sobbing and once, someone laughing hysterically. "It's Katey O'Dwyer cryin' this time," said O'Shay. "You'd think her husband might learn how to comfort her." He laughed quietly to himself. "Well," he said, "if it isn't one thing, it's another. Never a dull moment. Help me up, Dan. Give me your hand."

For the next quarter hour O'Shay strained his voice, talking to the members of his troupe in the wagons behind, and little by little, he calmed them. O'Shay had a word for each of them, and when he had finished talking, the automatic convoy kept rolling in silence. Exhausted as he was, O'Shay arranged the schedule of watches before he fell asleep, curled against the wagon side.

After a while, Mulligan got up and stood beside Kerrigan. Riley had gone to sleep long before. Kerrigan passed a cigarette to Mulligan, and they stood gazing into the blackness, smoking quietly.

IT MUST have been an hour later when Mulligan said, "Do you hear it?"

"What—yes, yes, I do hear it."

It was the faint, popping noise they had heard hours before, when O'Shay had awakened from his first sleep. O'Hara called out from the next wagon; he too, had heard it.

Kerrigan said, "Maybe we ought to wake up Mr. O'Shay."

"No, let's wait."

The staccato bursts grew louder, and then far off on the horizon, or where the horizon presumably was, they saw little flashes of light, each coinciding with an explosion. Swiftly, they kept approaching.

"Mr. O'Shay!" said Mulligan, shaking him gently.

"Huh?" O'Shay grunted, sleepily. He shook his head, and then as he heard the sharp, distinct reports, he got to his feet hastily and looked out over the wagon side. "It's the noise we heard before the Homunculi attacked," he said, after a moment.

"We'll be gettin' ready then," said Kerrigan.

"For what?" said O'Shay. "I don't hear the Homunculi now."

The noise had awakened those in the other wagons. They were all watching the jets of light coming closer, moving at a furious pace. When it was a mile away, O'Shay said, "We'll take no chances," and he called for the glowbeams to be turned on. The onrushing light-jets swerved sharply and headed directly for the convoy.

A minute later it roared into the amber light of the wagons.

"Gilhooley!" Mulligan shouted, and passed out cold.

IV

IT WAS Gilhooley. He was astride an ancient, incredible motorcycle, and he rode up parallel to the wagons, looked up at O'Shay's completely stunned expression and said nothing. They were shouting at him all this time from the tricarts, and Riley was trying to revive Mulligan, and O'Shay thought that was why he couldn't hear Gilhooley. But O'Shay couldn't take his eyes off him, even when he shouted for silence, and they could see it in his manner.

Something was wrong with Gilhooley. He could barely keep his battered machine on a straight course. An alarmed hush descended, and Gilhooley looked up again. His lips moved, but only a rasping sound came out. "A rope!" he gasped. "Throw me a rope!" The tatters of the doublet and hose he still wore were streaming in the wind.

When the rope was thrown over, Gilhooley barely managed to tie it around his body. The instant he felt the slack taken in, he relaxed and half fell off the machine. Mulligan and Riley dragged him up into their wagon. For a moment, Gilhooley held on to Mulligan, breathing heavily, then he sank wearily to the floor in a state of semi-collapse. He opened his eyes. "Turn . . . lights . . . out," he whispered.

With a start, O'Shay remembered the glowbeams were on. He switched them off and the other wagons followed suit.

Gilhooley moved his lips again. "A . . . drink . . ."

"Kerrigan, get a tumbler o' water," said O'Shay.

"Never mind the water," said Mulligan. "Jim can't touch the stuff. Here." From under a pile of canvas, he pulled out a small bottle and tipped it to Gilhooley's lips. "I saved a bit for medicinal purposes," he said to O'Shay.

Gilhooley took hold of the bottle and didn't let go until it was empty.

"Oh, me," O'Shay muttered bitterly, in spite of himself, "if this were any other time, I'd swear it was a plan to get Gilhooley drunk under me nose." But there was no doubting it. Gilhooley's whole body was caked with dust. He lay like a corpse, and only his eyes were alive. "Jim," O'Shay said, "can you talk? How did you get here? How did you escape?"

"Riding twenty-two . . . hours," Gilhooley whispered. He opened a fist and a little box fell out. "Compass . . . broken one. Had to find you. Heard . . . officers talkin'. Said there was . . . uprising . . . around Maywood . . ."

"What's that?" said O'Shay sharply.

Gilhooley tried to nod. "Officers . . . laughing . . . about Plaza Hotel. . . . Said troupe was goin' . . . return to Regency mines."

O'SHAY brushed a hand across his face. "Jim," he said, "listen to me and don't try to talk. Just tell me if I'm right. These officers you heard were laughin' when they said there was an uprisin' of the Homunculi near Maywood? And they mentioned the Plaza Hotel?"

"Yes," Gilhooley breathed. "Back

to . . . sentence . . . in mines . . ." His eyes closed and his breathing became deeper and more regular. O'Shay watched him, the fatigued lines of his sharp face relaxed.

Riley said, "What does it mean?"

"It means the second act o' the little tragedy they planned for the Dublin Players is about to begin," O'Shay said quietly. "In a few hours we'll he in Maywood, and that's where it is." He looked at Riley and Mulligan and Kerrigan, at their confused faces, and he shook his head. "You can't understand it yet," he said. "I know, because I've been in Maywood before. It's all tied together—the weary hours we've been forced to spend crossin' this land of death, and the money they took from us as a fine, and the news that General Groat had gone to Maywood, though it's little enough chance we had to get there."

Gilhooley stirred uneasily. "Homunculi . . . everywhere . . ." he mumbled in his sleep. "Mustn't sleep . . . tell me if . . . they come . . ."

O'Shay looked down at Gilhooley. "If only there was strength enough in him to talk," he said. "How did he get here?" And then, musing, O'Shay said, "Ah, that cruel, cunning haboon in his white palace has no understandin' of O'Shay and his flock." He seemed to be thinking about something, and he kept nodding his head absently, and then he half-smiled. "Yes," he nodded, "mayhe we'll have somethin' to say ahout the shaping of our destiny."

THREE hours later, a few miles out of Maywood, the fortress guns hoomed, and a volley of heavy shells burst on all sides of the convoy. That was all, but it was enough to wake up Gilhooley and throw the rest of the company into a panic. O'Shay quieted them down, and to Mulligan he said, "That was a volley for the stockholders of the Maywood Plaza Hotel. It's just a coincidence that it almost demolished us, for there's not an Homunculus within a hundred miles of here. That volley means they'll he postin' up Old Constant Vigilance."

The fortress gates loomed ahead, and lights flashed everywhere. Just as the convoy reached the gates, they opened, and soldiers jumped ahoard the motor hoods and unlocked them. The tricarts stopped rolling for the first time since they had left Lunesia some twenty-eight hours before. And now the troupe began climbing out.

A row of soldiers and an officer was waiting for them. The officer, a fat, squat man with a Sergeant's chevrons, scrutinized them. "Well," he said brusquely, "you seem to have come through somehow. Have any trouble?" He stuck his tongue in bis cheek, waggishly.

"Why?" said O'Shay. "Is there a charge for ammunition?"

"Ho-ho," said tbe officer. "That's a good one." He scanned a paper in his hand. "All accounted for, hmmm." Then he looked back at the paper hastily. "Wait a minute," he said, craftily, "just wait a minute. You've got one *more* than this order calls for. What about it?"

"It's me!" Gilhooley snapped out suddenly. "I'll confess. I gave hirth on the way. Mr. O'Shay is me child. What about it?"

"Huh?" said the Sergeant. "Oh, I get it. Wise guys, huh? Well, they'll take that out of you in a hurry. You know where you're heading, don't you?" He leered at them. "Okay," he said. "Okay. Now snap into line and march right down to the hotel. Wise guys, huh?"

The troupe formed a line, and with the soldiers around them, started marching out of the fortress. "Well, Gilhooley," O'Shay said, "I see you're beginning to feel the medicine Mulligan saved for you."

But in spite of his levity, O'Shay looked worn and heaten, and it was evident now to the whole troupe that he was talking just hecause be had to keep talking. That was his way when he was thinking about things, and his quick mind bad never been busier.

IT WAS now evident what Frederick, Regent of the Moon, had had in mind when he bestowed his mercy upon the Dublin Players. It could only have happened in a frontier society as corrupt as the Moon's.

Witness, for instance, the fact that when the fortress guns went off, they were usually not a sign of danger. As O'Shay had said, the guns were fired for the benefit of stockholders in the Maywood Plaza Hotel, and to understand this, it was necessary to be acquainted with that eminent third-class colonial hostelry, as well as a few facts about frontier life on the Moon.

Old Constant Vigilance was the familiar name for an emergency edict wbich hegan: *"The Commander of Maywood Garrison, General Hugh B. Gladstone, calls upon every man to maintain the constant vigilance necessary for the preservation of peace, life and property. . . ."* It was posted, theoretically, only when there was an uprising of the Homunculi.

But at the bottom, in fine print, appeared the most important part of this commendahle aid to morale—a clause which provided for the evacuation of all persons from the scene where their constant vigilance had been called upon!

If this seemed odd, and it usually did, how was one to understand the curious fact that immunity from the evacuation clause could be had by the estahlishment of temporary residence at the Maywood Plaza Hotel? For it could be had—*and only there.*

Tbe official reasoning behind it all was reputedly one of the exercises in logic at the Venusian Academy of Philosophy. It bad begun with General Gladstone, whose name still adorned the posters only hecause he had stocked up on them. After he died, General Groat used the same posters and dispensed the same remarkahle justice to the Plaza Hotel. Possibly there was some financial arrangement; tbe army was notoriously underpaid.

It worked this way: first, the Maywood Plaza was requisitioned as temporary headquarters of the garrison. Second, under the Unnecessary Inconvenience clause, the requisitioned property was allowed to maintain as much of a normal business as it could. Third, under martial law in an evacuated area, tbe civil regulations lapsed. Among them, happily, were the liquor laws.

The theory was supposed to protect citizens. The practice meant that the Maywood Plaza did a miraculous business during those periods. They used to say that General Groat would send out patrols for two bundred miles to catch sight of an Homunculus, so he could fire the fortress guns and post Old Constant Vigilance. That was what O'Shay had meant when he spoke to Mulligan. And that was what had plunged him into deep gloom, for there was a corollary that followed, and which O'Shay hadn't mentioned—*evacuation from Maywood meant a return to Lunesia!*

AND there lay the essence of the Regent's mercy. If the troupe managed to cross tbe desert and escape the Homunculi, being penniless, they would he returned to Lunesia, where the original sentence waited.

These were the thoughts that coursed through O'Shay's mind as he sat in a corner of the lobby of the hotel. An hour before he bad concluded a one-minute interview with Captain Lane, and the Dublin Players had been assigned to the forty-second army convoy. O'Shay had taken it all very quietly. He had no intention whatsoever of returning to Lunesia and a career in the Regency mines, and to insure that, he had two red-hot irons in the fire.

He glanced impatiently at the clock. The lobby was flooded with various-hued citizens of the System, mobbing the desk and clamoring their fantastic bids of thirty dollars a day for a cot in the attic. Through the glass doors more were coming, gathered by the military police either to register or enter the convoys. For them, evacuation meant a journey across lighted moonland in army convoys, and since army convoys could bring back only residents, by law, all non-residents who had to come back to Maywood would have to arrange expensive transportation back with the travel agencies, in which several generals held blocks of stock.

"A sweet business," O'Shay said to himself.

A siren went off in the lobby with a screech that brought tears to the eyes, and a voice boomed from the hotel address system. "Thirty-sixth evacuation convoy leaving immediately." Halfway through the same announcement in System-Esperanto, the voice was no longer audible as the bidding at the desk took on a reckless spirit. The auctioneer's cries piped over the crowd; only a Martian could be heard there.

Presently Jim Gilhooley came through the doors. He waved to O'Shay and threaded through the crowds, and at last he sat down on the arm of O'Shay's chair, breathing hard.

"Well," said O'Shay, "you're scowlin', but I don't hear a word."

"It's sorry you'd be to hear the word I'm thinkin'," said Gilhooley, getting his breath.

"You mean you couldn't find it?"

"I found it. A small red bouse with bottle-green shutters, and far away from the nearest habitation, just inside the walls near the south gates. Indeed I found it, and they found me."

"Talk, man!" O'Shay cried in exasperation. "Who found you?"

"Soldiers. A certain Corporal Berrybush."

"Barabish?" O'Shay exclaimed. "Devil take him, was he a lean thing of a man with a mop o' red hair?"

"The same. Berrybush, devil take him. I'd no sooner set foot in the house when he came in with three soldiers. I offered to pay him if he'd let the troupe hide in the house until the emergency was over, and I gave him the bills, sayin' it was Ionian currency. Then all at once he pops out and asks me if I know you."

"Ah, you fool, and you said you did?"

"How was I to know you'd paid him with stage money two years ago?" Gilhooley demanded. "And how can I fool anybody into thinkin' I've money when I'm wearin' Kelly's cast-off clothes, and him eight inches shorter and twelve more around?"

"It takes a definite talent," O'Shay said, "which, for instance, Dan Mulligan has. And this failure o' yours would be serious indeed if it weren't for the fact that he's up on the fourth floor this minute, earnin' enough to pay our way here—and usin' the same Ionian currency in a dice game with four Jovians." He rose from the chair and smiled beatifically. "There's not much time, Jim, and we'd best be gatherin' the troupe together. Go stand under tbe clock, and tbey'll start appearing from out o' the crowds here, where I've hidden them."

"Mr. O'Shay," said Gilhooley, hurriedly, "There's a little somethin' I forgot to mention. Mindful o' me promise not be brawlin', in order to get away I had to knock down Berrybush—just once—or else there'd have been a fight. Now what would they do if they were to catch me?"

"Do, is it?" said O'Shay, growing red in the face. "They'd put us all in a prison van and off to Lunesia, and goodbye to our last chance o' stayin' here!"

"Then it's you as will have to stand under the clock, Mr. O'Shay," cried Gilhooley, "for here comes Berrybush!"

V

IN A twinkling, Gilhooley plunged into the center of the crowds in the lobby, with O'Shay clinging grimly to his coat. And then, the usual accompaniment to any movement of Gilhooley's, bedlam reigned. The hotel siren went off, the speaker boomed the announcement for the next convoy, the mob around the desk shrilled and yammered, the hotel bar opened and a band blared a tune, and a platoon of soldiers howled commands to halt as they plowed in after the fugitives. The sounds blended to a homogeneous blanket of noise that could have muffled a small volcano.

Gilhooley drove ahead by instinct, trying to cover the most ground in the least time. He burrowed through the densely packed lobby and charged into an elevator, with O'Shay a step behind him. He grabbed the astonished elevator boy by the pants and pitched him out. Then he slammed the doors shut and yanked at the lever. The elevator shot up with a jerk and stopped on the fifth floor. Gilhooley rushed out, took the stairs four at a time and ran along the fourth floor shouting, "Dan! Dan Mulligan!"

Around a bend in the hall a door opened, and Mulligan, in shirtsleeves, came out. Gilhooley rushed up to him. "Dan!" he cried. "I'm workin' on somethin'! Make an ambush!"

"What for?" said Mulligan. "I'm twelve thousand dollars ahead."

Just then O'Shay came tearing around the bend. He saw Mulligan and Gilhooley and rushed right by them into the open room. Mulligan gripped Gilhooley and pulled him in after himself. There were four completely baffled Jovians kneeling on the floor, watching O'Shay crawl under the bed. They were thinking it over, trying to work it out.

"That's all for today, boys!" Gilhooley cried. "We're goin' to sleep. Had a hard trip."

The Jovians scowled and looked at each other, then rose slowly to their full nine feet. "Money," said one of them. "Lost money."

"Here!" said Gilhooley, pulling out a sheaf of green bills that duplicated most of those they held in their hands. He stuffed it into their pockets and pushed them out of the room.

"Wait till they remember it's their room," said Mulligan.

GILHOOLEY opened the door and yelled, "Berrybush!" A moment later, footsteps came running down the hall. Gilhooley opened the door a little wider and backed away. In one hand he was holding a short, round section of heavy wood. He waited, then called, "Pssst!" When two soldiers walked in, he swung the club expertly —once! twice! and watched them go slowly down to the floor.

"What are you waitin' for?" he said to Mulligan. "Start takin' their clothes off!" Then he leaned out again and called, "Berrybush!"

Corporal Barabish hesitated, torn between the stern call of duty, as personified by Gilhooley's resonant invitation, and the stifled cry of caution, urged upon him by his instinct. An instant later, soldier that he was, hesitation was followed by action. And action by disaster. He rushed down the hall, entered the room . . .

Half an hour later, the laws of aggriculture notwithstanding, the ploughing-under of the brave soldiery assigned to apprehend Gilhooley had resulted in a crop of uniforms sufficient to clothe O'Shay's flock. The Players had quickly sized up the strange situation in which Dan Mulligan, dressed as a garrison soldier, stood under the clock in the lobby. One by one they had made their way upstairs to the makeshift rendezvous, where they quickly changed their clothes.

Now O'Shay stood in the center of the room, in command of the new situation. Stacked in a row against the walls, tied with bedsheets and gagged with pillowcases, were the soldiers, wearing their underwear with the remains of martial arrogance. The Dublin Players sat on the bed or squatted on the floor, while O'Shay regarded them with his bright eyes.

"Dan," said O'Shay, "take the gag off Berrybush and stand by to crack his skull if he gives the alarm."

Mulligan removed the gag, and the Corporal, his face as red as his hair, silently worked his jaw.

"I hope you realize what we're expecting o' you, Corporal?" said O'Shay. "You're goin' to lead this company out the back way o' this hotel. And if anyone should ask you, you're followin' high orders, taking us to the fort. Have you got that clear in your mind?"

The Corporal nodded.

"All right then. Let's get into the hall and form a line. You, Aggie, don't have to hold your chest out so far. Sometimes the posture destroys the illusion o' being a soldier. And you, Danny, stay close enough to the Corporal to choke him if he shows signs o' rebellion."

O'Shay was the last one to leave the room.

They were in the street before they heard the heavy fire of the fortress guns. It seemed impossible not to have heard them before. "It must have been the revelry inside," said O'Shay, troubled. "Now what would they be shootin' them guns off for, I wonder?" He turned to the Corporal. "You'd better stay with us, Berrybush, I'm thinkin'. We're goin' to the south gate."

The streets of Maywood were deserted. In the white light the houses stood like rows of corpses. Once, blocks away, they saw a squad of soldiers. The soldiers waved and some of the Players waved back. The melancholy group hurried along behind O'Shay. And the fortress guns were going like hell.

VI

THERE were guns near the south gate, and every time they fired a volley, the little red house with the bottle-green shutters shook. Every time the house shook, the Dublin Players and the Corporal shook. Because the shaking was rather violent, there was a constant chattering of teeth, Kerrigan excepted; he had taken his out and put them in his pocket.

The shutters were drawn, and the only light inside came from the cracks where they had shaken loose. In the three hours that had passed since the company had stolen inside, Corporal Barabish had remained at a window, peering out through the shutters. Sometimes Gilhooley stood beside him, sometimes he was at another window, but mostly he kept wandering about the house, smoking incessantly, his strange hands playing with the cigarettes. The others were sitting in on a poker game that Mulligan had organized.

There would be days spent like this, days in which they would stay cooped up in the little house, careful to keep their voices low, waiting for darkness to return to the Moon. And after that, no one knew what might follow. No one wanted to think about it. It was evident from the seriousness with which they played poker, talking and joking quietly.

So the tedious hours passed. . . .

The guns, O'Shay reflected, had been silent for some time now. He got up and went over to the Corporal. Standing there, he looked into the next room where Gilhooley was. Gilhooley lay on his back, his eyes open, blowing magnificent smoke rings, but somehow his whole being seemed tense and jittery, as if he were listening to the silence and was ready to spring at the slightest sound.

O'Shay turned around to see Murphy standing beside him.

"Mr. O'Shay," said Murphy, "I just thought of it. We've no food here with us. We forgot to bring food."

His words carried distinctly across the room. The lackadaisical, poker game stopped. Kelly sat shuffling the cards over and over.

"Go on with your game," O'Shay grunted. "It's not the first time the Dublin Players have missed a meal. It's quiet outside now, and soon we'll send out Mulligan with a man or two to scratch up a bite."

"Things aren't going to quiet down." Corporal Barabish had turned from the window. "There's no one at the south gate guns anymore. This is a serious uprising. The Homunculii were digging in here for days. That's why they sent for General Groat."

"Who asked you?" said O'Shay. "Is it a Corporal you are, or a General? If you had stock in the Plaza—"

At that moment bugles began to sound. They seemed to be far off, but their notes rang together clearly and harshly.

"Assembly!" cried Barabish. "They're calling the garrison in!"

"Indeed," said O'Shay, unperturbed. "It's taken them long enough to find them poor soldiers on the fourth floor. Are they thinkin' they can get us to come out of our grand hiding place with nothin' but a bugle for bait?"

"You haven't any right to keep me here!" said Barabish, desperately. "They may be evacuating the whole city!"

"Spoken like a Corporal," said O'Shay, dryly. "No General would evacuate payin' guests from the Plaza Hotel."

SUDDENLY Gilhooley came bounding into the room. With one sweep he opened the window shutters. The center of the city was hidden in a thick pall of smoke. It was on fire. Gray and black plumes curled into the sky in heavy columns, and beneath them were streaks of flame, the only color in a white and gray world. The flames were arms, embracing the city.

The shots from Corporal Barabish's emergency gun spluttered, and for a long moment afterward there was green light in the sky. But there was no answer. From far off came the faint echoes of shooting. An immense murmur had sprung up from nowhere, like a wild song.

The Corporal came in from outside. "They must have gone an hour ago," he said. "They left after the south gate was cleared."

"You mean we're left alone . . . here?" O'Shay said, dully.

"They've gone east, to Lunesia," said Barabish.

"I don't understand it," said O'Shay. He stood there, his arms hanging at his sides. He looked at the odd faces that were watching him and he thought: here it is again. But his thoughts weren't clear. It didn't make sense.

He stood by the window, looking out at the city that had become a huge pyre. The murmuring had fallen apart, and the elements that had composed it were now meaningful sounds, laughter, high, shrill voices. Little white figures came flitting in and out of the black curtain of smoke. They were coming closer, appearing everywhere—and suddenly the ground around the house had become alive and small white bodies were springing up out of the earth.

"Close the windows!" O'Shay shouted. He grabbed the shutters and slammed them together. The Homunculi let out a chorus of howls and O'Shay pressed his hands against his ears. "Think o' something, man!" he cried aloud. "Think o' something, O'Shay!"

One of the shutters came off with a tearing, terrible sound. At the other end of the house there was the noise of wood falling apart. With a little sigh, Aggie Fitzpatrick fainted and fell into the Corporal's arms, and there was Gilhooley, starting for the door.

Mulligan leaped across the room and grabbed him. He twisted one of Gilhooley's arms behind his back. Slowly, Gilhooley went to his knees, and no sound came from him as he struggled with Mulligan, trying to break his grip.

O'Shay was on them in a moment. "Let go of him, Dan!" he cried. "What are you doing?"

Mulligan looked up wildly, then relaxed his grip. "He wants to go outside!" he said. "You don't know the things he's said to me!" He lifted Gilhooley to his feet. "Jim," he half sobbed, "you don't know what you're doin'. Them days in the desert . . . the hunger and thirst . . . it's all in your mind, Jim!"

"Get out o' me way," said Gilhooley, taking a billy out of a pocket He was very calm, and he held a long arm out in front of him as his dark eyes burned into Mulligan. "You don't have to believe me," he said. "Look out there. They'll kill all of you if I don't stop them. I've told you I don't know how or why, but they listen to me!"

Mulligan clenched his fists. There was agony in his voice. "Jim," he said, "stop talkin'." He took a step towards Gilhooley. "Do you hear me—*stop talkin'!*"

HIS voice was lost in the tremendous shout that rose up outside. The other shutters were being torn away, broken to splinters by dozens of hammering hands. A huge throng of Homunculi had surrounded the house, and thousands more were swarming closer, shrieking.

"Don't you see?" Gilhooley cried. "They've recognized me! They know me! If I don't stop them now, they'll kill all of you!"

"I've thought o' that," said O'Shay, quietly. "There's no fear in me heart. We'll go together. Stay with us, Gilhooley. You belong with us."

"Thank you for that, Mr. O'Shay," said Gilhooley. His body was stiff and awkward as he edged toward the door. "I've told Dan and I'll tell you. Who do you think it was set me free from the Regent's dungeon? These creatures! The same as were attackin' your convoy until I stopped them!"

He was looking past O'Shay, through

the windows. The Homunculi had formed gigantic concentric circles around the house, circles that were rapidly growing smaller as the outer ones crushed forward. Flames leaped from the circle of their hands, and white dust filled the plain, until the whole scene took on a wild, misty unreality.

"I'm not mad," said Gilhooley, "though maybe it was madness to follow you across this hellish land. All I could rememher was the misery I'd brought you, and all I could think was that I had to make it up . . . and maybe it was the hand o' fate, for there's a strange understandin' that has come to me. . . ."

He took another step toward the door, and Mulligan lunged for him. Gilhooley danced away. His left arm caught Mulligan's chest while the right, holding the billy, swung down. Mulligan fell to the floor in a loose heap, hut even as he was falling, Gilhooley had plunged past the door and run outside.

VII

WHEN Gilhooley appeared in full sight of the Homunculi, it seemed as if every one of them made a frenzied dash for him. They broke their circles and came sweeping across the plain, and for a moment, Gilhooley was lost from view. The Homunculi had formed a tremendous wave, and when Gilhooley met it head on, the wave rose up and engulfed him.

And there was Gilhooley again, walking—*walking*—like Moses tbrough the Red Sea, with the wave moving hack to let him pass! The Homunculi had stampeded out of his path, clearing the way, and as he walked ahead they followed him, hut never approached closer than four or five feet. As they followed Gilhooley, they forgot ahout the house with the green shutters and they forgot everything else. They followed him, countless thousands, in a silence that had become appalling. It was so quiet one could hear the fire crackling half a mile away.

"Lord," O'Shay mumbled. "what is it we're seein?"

They were standing at tbe smashed windows, O'Shay and his company, watching the scene in unbelieving awe, standing motionless. They could see Gilhooley walking on, in the middle of that white, silent sea.

Then Gilhooley had come to what was left of the city wall. He climbed up on the rocks and held out bis arms. He turned in a wide arc and looked out over the little creatures. And there were more coming all the time, running swiftly from the city, out of the smoke and fire, out of the wreckage, running as if their lives depended on it.

Gilhooley's arms hegan to move. A restless murmur sprang up from the Homunculi, a rhythmic sound that followed the movement of Gilhooley's hands. Gilhooley must have been speaking, for his hands were a part of his voice, and they could not move alone—but what it was he was saying, O'Shay couldn't hear. It sounded like *Annnneeee—ooooohh.*

It was then that O'Shay left the house and started to walk to where Gilhooley stood. He walked slowly into a pulsating wall of sound, remembering where he had heard it before, the sound he had heard in the desert. It rose and fell with Gilhooley's motions, and as O'Shay kept walking, he began to hear wbat the sounds were.

Now he could hear Gilhooley's voice. He heard the words come from that long, lean man on the rocks and watched the hands in their magnificent gyrations. Suddenly O'Shay's eyes cleared and he laughed, quietly, warmly, until there were tears running down his cheeks. Gilhooley had finished speaking, and the plain was a shrieking, clamoring madhouse.

Gilhooley came down from the rocks and took O'Shay's arm, and together they went back to the house. All the way back the Homunculi followed quietly, but when Gilhooley went into the house, they began to scream again, to scream and dance, and together they were chanting one word. It sounded like *Annneeee—oooohh* before, but it wasn't that.

"*Dannnigroo! Dannnigroo!*" they were crying, over and over.

"I'll have to go out again," said Gilhooley. "They've not heard it these many days, and it's their favorite. And since it's me own favorite as well, and I've been teachin' them the motions, we'll make a special repeat occasion of it." He smiled and went over to Mulligan and took his hand. "I've got me audience, Dan," he said, and he went out.

HE HELD up a hand and there was silence. Then he began.

"*A bunch o' the boys were whoopin' it up in the Malamute saloon,*" a delighted laugh rang out from thousands of little white throats and their hands were upflung in imitation of Gilhooley. From thousands of child-like voices came the murmured chant: "*. . . inna Malllamyooot slooooon . . .*"

"*The kid that tickled the music box was hittin' a jag-time tune.*"

Twenty thousand arms tried to follow Gilhooley's rendition of the kid bittin' a jag-time tune, and softly they echoed, "*. . . a jag-tiiime tooooooon . . .*"

It took half an hour for Gilhooley to recite all of the saga of Dan McGrew. The little creatures hung on every word and their beautiful red eyes watched Gilhooley's hands with a silent adoration. When tbey tried to duplicate the delicacy of his movements—for their hands were expressive, and their arms were as long as Gilhooley's—they squealed with sheer joy. But mostly they chanted and adored, hypnotized by the words from that wonderful voice, spellbound by the magic of the hands.

When at last Gilhooley left them, they wandered about peacefully, talking out loud and gesticulating. The plain that had been dark with terror was filled with pinkish-white creatures who said to each other: "*. . . that summmm-wunnn hasstolllen the wooomunnn you lovvvved . . .*" and at this point they clutched at their hearts.

They repeated other lines, but there were a few, a persistent minority, who quoted lines from another poem they had obviously heard before, and wbich they seemed to prefer. It was James Whitcomb Riley's, "*The Passing of the Backhouse.*"

"WELL," Mulligan said to me, pausing to fill our glasses again, "your Worship must know a good part of the rest o' this story, for that was five years ago, the time of the Great Uprising. Though it was days before we knew it and understood what had happened to that wild land.

"But somehow O'Shay knew. I remember what he said, on the fourth day. We had found some tricarts and Gilhooley found bis motorcycle—the Homunculi had kept it like a shrine—and we started travelin' back. Just us and the creatures, tens of thousands, more than anyone had ever seen, and everytime we came to a place where people had lived there were more waitin' for us, but not another sign of life.

"Fannersburg was a deserted ruin, Akapo was burned and eaten away and there were towns and cities like it, empty and quiet and crumblin' to dust. Massoritt was hardly touched, though it was empty, and the loaded guns were in place and food in the warehouses.

" 'They've seen us comin,' O'Shay said. 'They've seen this great army of Homunculi and they've all fled to Lunesia.' There was somethin' queer in the way he said it, and the way he looked, for he was dreamin' his dream already, and it was all worked out in his mind. He'd been working it out all the time he watched Gilhooley with the creatures, recitin' poems no one had ever heard before—*The Kid's Last Fight* and *Casey At The Bat* and others.

"O'Shay would see the creatures bringin' us food and water when Gilhooley told them, enough for a city, layin' it at his feet. By then he had the dream all planned, but he didn't tell us anything."

Mulligan smiled wryly at me, seeing the way I was nodding. "Oh, it's easy enough to see it now, knowin' the rest. It was different then and even Gilhooley didn't see what was comin'.

"Maybe he didn't care. He behaved as queer as O'Sbay, and he seemed to live for the time each day when he would speak to the Homunculi. His face would light up and he'd go off a bit until he'd found a high place. Then he'd begin recitin', and he'd forget the world.

"I was with him that third day when Gilhooley tried to tell O'Shay how he felt. But it was hard for Gilhooley to find the words, him that was gifted with speech like quicksilver. 'I know they're nothing but crazy little things with hardly any understandin' . . . still, it's not important. It's not important who I'm talkin' to . . . it's the talkin' itself . . . it's somethin' I've never known. I've never been so happy . . .'

" 'Ab, Jim, you're wrong,' said O'Shay. 'It is important, for we've paid a price with our misery and wanderin' that will bring a new life and a new world to thousands of our fellow men.'

"I didn't understand what O'Shay meant, but then he asked Jim: 'Must you give them a new poem every day?' and Jim said yes, for the creatures might like one very much and still tire of it quickly, as he'd found out when he followed us to Maywood. Then O'Shay seemed alarmed, and he asked Jim how many poems he knew.

" 'Thirty-five or more,' said Gilhooley. 'Why do you ask?' "

" 'Nothin', said O'Shay, softly. 'Nothin' but the fact that it's the hand of destiny from start to finisb, with every detail worked out for us, and only the last one I'm waitin' to see . . .' "

SUDDENLY the landing bells began to jangle all over the ship. The bar had filled up again all the time Mulligan was talking to me in the corner, but now everyone began going back to their staterooms. Mulligan looked at his watch and frowned. "I can't be late," he said, "or the Honorable O'Shay will he hlazin' mad."

"But what happened?" I said. "You can't just go off now and leave me hanging here."

"All right," Mulligan smiled, sitting down again. "It won't take a minute. Where was I?"

"Mr. O'Shay was thinking."

"Ah, yes. Well, the next day we knew it all, for we came in sight of Lunesia. There were the great walls and the glistenin' spires and towers, but there was no sound from it, no hum of life. The city was deserted. The spaceports were cut apart with the marks o' ships that had left the day before, and the last livin' soul had gone from the Moon. But you know that better than I. You heard the news as they flashed it over the System, the way the Moon had been evacuated in three days, fleeing from the great army of the Homunculi.

"Do you know what O'Shay did? He cried again, like a baby. And when he was through cryin', he spoke to us, and if I live to be a hundred—O'Shay willing— I'll never forget his words.

" 'Me flock,' he said, 'for every step o' the dark way, there's been a benevolent spirit guiding us. For we've been given this world, this mad wasteland, to make into somethin' it never was but now must be. We're alone here now, but they'll be comin' back, and when they do they'll find us with a power that no King and no Emperor and no Regent ever had, and that power lies in the hands o' Jim Gilhooley. And it's Jim as will be the new Regent o' the Moon.' "

Mulligan finished the last of the bottle, and he smiled more splendidly than before.

"That's the story. When the military ships landed, days later, they found us in the palace, rehearsing a new play. Then there was the business o' the secret negotiations, and the waiting and the proof, and finally, after we'd been visited by ambassadors and ministers and generals, they made Gilhooley change his name to Johnson Garfield Gilbert. They wouldn't hear of havin' him as Regent at first though, until O'Shay arranged for the Homunculii to eat up two o' the warships."

"And the troupe?" I asked.

"They've done well since, as you can see from the way O'Shay had to hide today. Still, I don't see much o' them, for they're with O'Shay and I'm the new manager of the New Maywood Plaza Hotel."

"You built a new one?"

"And what else was I to do with Gilhooley's income?" said Mulligan. "He never uses it, bein' out with them precious Homunculi all the time, recitin' his poems. He's got thirty-five of them, as you may remember, but the creatures live only twenty-eight days, so there's always a brand new audience waitin' each month."

HE nodded his head. "As the Honorable O'Shay said, it was destiny. What else could it have been?" Musing, he added, "By the way, that word 'Honorable' is a title Jim gave to all of us. For instance, I am the Honorable Daniel Mulligan, though you'd never think it the way O'Shay talks to me when we meet."

"You've broken up?" I asked, rising with him.

"Yes. O'Shay still travels with the troupe, and once a year he plays at the Shadow Ball, though it's a quiet affair now as you know. And this line, and the new spaceport in Dublin, is all Jim's work, as—"

A thin, red-haired officer came running into the bar, looking about wildly until he spied us. Dashing over, he clutched Mulligan by an arm. I backed away, seeing the rank of General on his tunic.

"Always the last one to leave the bar!" the General cried.

"Quiet!" said Mulligan. "Or with one stroke o' me hand I'll make a widow out of Aggie Fitzpatrick." He pointed to the General. "And here," he said, "is the husband of that fine lady, Aggie Fitzpatrick—General Berrybush, devil take him!"

The General clicked his heels to me and said, "Barabish, if you please," and he turned back to Mulligan. "Do you know we landed ten minutes ago, and the Honorable O'Shay *and* the Regent *and* Kathleen O'Shay are all waiting for you?" he demanded. "Do you remember you were going to be married today?"

"Get away," said Mulligan, "for I'm a dangerous man when I'm aroused." He shook hands with me. "Well," he smiled, "I must thank you for your kindness, listenin' to a tale of shenanigans this long while. I hope we'll be meeting again someday soon."

Later, in the reception hall of the new spaceport, I saw Mulligan. He was walking directly behind the Regent of the Moon. I looked at the Regent closely and saw only a tall blond man with dark eyes and restless hands. On one side of Mulligan was a little, bald-ish man with merry eyes and a thin mouth, and hanging on Mulligan's arm was a girl, a really lovely girl. They came down the red carpet and the band struck up the Hymn to the Moon, *"Desipere In Loco,"* and an Irish choral group sang the words.

Then Mulligan caught my eye and he waved to me. At the same instant, the small, humorous-eyed man beside him gave him a skillful jab with his elbow. But Mulligan kept smiling, and as he passed, I could see that sometime between that moment and when I had last seen him on the ship, he had picked up a beautiful black eye.

The End

★ THE SHAVER MYSTERY ★

THE mystery deepens. During the past two months, a new trend in "warnings" sent to us has become apparent. Ordinarily we pay no attention to warnings or threats because they are usually the work of cranks. However, these new warnings are unusual, since they come from people who are otherwise reliable.

To mention only one, with the specification that it is typical, we quote the latest issue of *The Round Robin*, edited by N. Meade Layne, M.A., of 3615 Alexia Place, San Diego, 4, California. (According to its own definition, it is "a bulletin of contact and information for students of psychic research and parapsychology.) ". . . from our present knowledge it (*Amazing Stories'* Shaver Mystery) is probably *undesirable and even dangerous. We say this with all possible seriousness and emphasis. Let the Deros alone. Above all, do not try to reproduce any type of apparatus or 'machine'."*

The italicized portion is what interests us most. That warning has been repeated almost verbatim from at least a dozen isolated sources, but ALL of them are from so-called "psychic" people or organizations. For instance, we got one letter from a "medium" who said she'd gotten a sommunication from the "spirit world" concerning the dero, and repeated the warning. Pay no attention to them! Stop publishing the stories! Don't even think of them!

This, in spite of the fact that these "mediums" and so on asked the following questions of their "informants": 1—Do the dero exist? 2—Are they flesh and blood? 3—Do they live in caves? 4—Do the machines exist? The answer in each case was a POSITIVE YES.

Let's analyze this situation: first, the "spirits" (your editor has never seen or heard one) tell us Shaver is right. Then they tell us to cease paying any attention to the dero whatsoever. This is a contradiction in terms and in logic. It's like saying: "Yes, there is an atom bomb; and to defend yourself against it, turn your back." We say, humbly suggestive, that even if you *do* turn your back, the atom bomb will blow hell out of you!

BUT, say the "spirits," the dero are only poor dumb idiots, harmless in themselves, but they are suckers for "obsession" and "possession" by "evil spirits," who are the REAL villains in the piece.

Ha! So there we have it. The SPIRITS tell us not to pay any attention to the SPIRITS who are obsessing the dero so as to take a crack at us through material means by machines built by the dero as conceived of by the SPIRITS. In other words, pay no attention to that club in my hand, I ain't gonna use it! Trust me; that leer on my face is only a smile upside down! Turn your back so I *can't* use my club!

May we pause to bellow loudly: "BUNK!"?

Since so many of our other readers have said they believe in the dero's existence, we'll just add the "spirit" voices to our file of "believers." All right, the dero are real; they do have machines; they do live in caves. If this is true, then why the inconsistency of advocating an "ostrich" attitude toward them? Unless. . . .

Yes, UNLESS these "spirits" doing this "communicating through mediums" ARE the DERO, and they only pose as spirits to make us believe it is hopeless to reach them because how can you fight a ghost? But they "admit" there are real dero (because we already know too much about that to deny it) who really are not at fault because they are just helpless sub-humans controlled by "spirits," and if we ignore 'em, the "spirits" won't be able to get enough ectoplasm or some darn thing and will evaporate or something.

We believe Meade Layne is sincere, and we believe the mediums are sincere. They call it "speaking through entrancement"—but aren't they really referring to what Shaver tells us is "ray control" from the cavern machines? Aren't these messages (if they can be *proved*) PROOF of the real existence of Shaver's RAYS? Let's be practical, and take the REALISTIC EXPLANATION before we adopt the "ghost" explanation and find ourselves with an "answer" nobody has understood in any age? Real people in real caves with scientifically possible machines are certainly a more logical explanation than a "spirit"—and at that, a "spirit" who himself admits the dero exist as REALITY.

NOW, before everybody goes off half-cocked, let's get to the next interesting item concerning a "spirit." We have actually contacted a "spirit." We give you his idea of himself. We do not know that he is a "spirit." He says so. Anyway, *he* gave us a machine; or at least the schematic and instructions for building and use of such a machine. He specifically tells us it is to combat the dero ray machines, and tells how it combats—by shattering the crystals which create the "wave" on which the voices (and other things) carry.

Obviously, this "spirit" is not of the opinion of the other spirits. He wants us to stand up and fight. We take his ectoplasm with salt, but we like his guts. Our radio department (*Radio News'* staff of experts) looked the gadget over, and pronounced it okay. That is, it does at this end what is claimed for it, but whether or not it smashes any dero ray machine crystals, we don't know.

Mr. Shaver agrees with your editor that there may be spirits (in fact he says he has been shown "spirits" artifically kept alive in machines after the death of the body, but that eventually they "evaporate" or vanish). Maybe that's why the spirits don't want machines built? Even the dero cage 'em in machines! To be entirely fair, we will agree that there are spirits. But let's NOT confuse them with the dero. Mr. Shaver says he does not believe there is a life after death; your editor prefers to believe there is. But we both agree that the life we are living now is the one to live at the moment. Don't worry about being a spirit until you are one; and then, *keep away from the dero!*

Any spiritualist will tell you that the spirits are dumb, idiotic, low-charactered, foul-mouthed, and indelicate as a rule. Some are smart, most are not. So far, their record for giving valuable information in their communications is much worse than that of the dero, or the tero. Let's stand on the record. And the next time you hear somebody relating a "psychic" experience, you can ask yourself two questions. 1—Could it be caused by real people with machines rather than ghosts? 2—What good is it?

In both this spirit thing and the dero thing, let's decide once and for all that what we want is FACT that can be SUFFICIENTLY PROVEN. Not even the opinion of the most learned SCIENTIST is worth a hoot if it is an opinion. An opinion is not a fact.

Meanwhile, let's advance on the theory that the dero are real people in caves and try to prove or disprove it. What constructive work could we do in either direction if we just summarily "opined 'twere spooks" and then did nothing about it?

WE HAVE just received a letter from L. Taylor Hansen. He is alive and well, and except for an incident in which he was trapped in quicksand from which he had to be rescued by friends, everything is well with him. He tells us that he has quite interesting information for us, confirming some of his published and unpublished articles about the American Indians of the dead past. He gave us no information as to where he had been. Welcome back, Mr. Hansen, but next time don't worry us so.

LET us speak for a moment of what we'll call "coincidence" for want of a better term—although we think you'll agree calling this a coincidence is stretching a fact pretty thin.

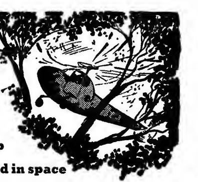
One day we got a letter from a friend of ours named "Joe" which came through a friend of ours named "John." The letter was a warning that your editor was the object of a plot to kidnap him, but that exposure of the plot might serve to cause its abandonment, because of the dero's absolute need for secrecy. (The kidnaping never came off, of course.) About the same time Mr. Shaver wrote that he'd been told by a cave woman that a dero meeting under London and Berlin had been held to determine what to do about us. Your editor was to be investigated. One result was a "plot" to kidnap both your editor and Mr. Shaver, together with our entire families; and to cover up the kidnaping, trained doubles for all of us were to be substituted and the world would never know that we had been kidnaped and that the people in our place were dero living a role. The plan was abandoned some time later as "unfeasable." (Probably because in these days of meat shortage, it would be impossible to explain where all the ham came from, for anyone who proposes to act the part of your editor will have to be "ham" in the fullest sense of the word!) Anyway, there are the facts; you explain 'em.

AN ADDED note came through from the "caves" saying: "American Surface Magazine Tells About Us." This headline was, reputedly, published in a "foreign" paper. Mr. Shaver believes a foreign "cave" paper is refered to. (Note: All these bits of info come to Mr. Shaver by means of telaug ray operated by tero in the caves, and are almost always "scrambled" by dero "watch ray" to make them unintelligible. That is, inane conversation is superimposed until it is almost impossible to understand what is being conveyed, except at rare intervals when the "guard ray" is caught napping.)

LUDER VALLEY

I heard the whir of propellors and looked up . . .

By
RICHARD
S. SHAVER



There in the green hell of South America lay the wreck of a ship from an unknown world in space

THE chief's face was red, and the odor of cigar smoke, the kind that only grows in Havanna, drifted in gray ribbons across the room and in front of his red face. His big teeth were champing the butt, as usual . . .

"The name of the place is Luder, Steve—Luder Valley. It's the scene of the biggest gold strike in years—and it's in the worst jungle on the Southern continent. Even a condor carries a pack in that country—and skid chains. There is no way in except for a mountain goat or a monkey—so they use mules; they don't know any better than to go ahead, anyway. The snakes are bad, and you better take three kinds of serum along. Along with the gold occurs a good diamond clay, and lots of stones of good quality, for industrial uses. The Germans have sent in agents in a helicopter to buy those industrial diamonds and fly them out to a sub—the Germans are desperate for industrial diamonds. We've got to get in there and stop them. You're to be advance man. Get in, get the info, and make ready for the arrival of the rest of us. And don't get recognized for an agent before we get there—just smell out the lay of the land."

Pug, the chief's beauteous daughter, came in with a big bouquet of rainbow-hued flowers that smelled like heaven. Hell of a name for a girl, isn't it? But she had the cutest pug nose I ever saw on a human and someone had hung the name Pug on her and it stuck.

She was always coming in with something when I was around. But I wasn't having any. Pug was too much like her old man for a man to marry. I didn't take to the idea of being bossed around off duty, too. But that beautiful pug nose of hers, above a smile as gay and welcome as the Pearly Gates, if heaven is what they say it is—was hard to be rude to. So I said, "Good afternoon, Pug Ranscom."

She answered, "Good afternoon, Steve. Leaving so soon?"

"Yeah, I got my sailing orders—and my mule ticket, too. Don't you wish you were going along?"

"Maybe I will. Somebody will have to keep you out of trouble." Her eyes had a stubborn glint, and I knew she meant business, from the similar look her old man sometimes had when nothing would stop him.

"Now look here, Pug, you keep out of this. No more of that—I'll tell your old man right now."

"You tell him anything, and I'll get you transfered to Iceland, so help me, I will. And I can, too."

"Anyway, one mule ain't any faster than another, so how you going to catch me?"

"If I felt like it, I could catch you anywhere, and any time. And don't forget it, Steve. I just haven't made up my mind I want you. I don't need a mule, yet."

"I hope you never do." I breathed the fervent prayer to her smiling young face, and left.

CHAPTER II

TWO days in by mule from Sandoval, and I was plenty sore. Riding was never one of my accomplishments, and the terrain was strictly non-horizontal. First I slid off the saddle backward, then I slid off frontward. Occasionally I varied the routine by falling off sideways. But the mule went on, and somehow I went along.

The surrounding territory was swathed in green stuff, and the green stuff harbored more numerous and varied insect life than my skin had ever encountered. This was the edge of the Green Hell, the most dreaded of South America's junngles. What would it be like when I arrived, if I did arrive? I was afraid to worry about it. The mule went on, and a liana dragged me off again. I got back on, mainly because the motion of the mule kept the flies flying, instead of lighting. The flies were worse than the mule.

Overhead a deep, quiet hum swept close. Looking up, I was suprised to see a heli. I was still more surprised when it circled and hovered closer, apparently looking me over. Then the darn thing went nuts. It shot up, fifty feet or so, then swooped down to a few feet of the ground, jockeyed around looking for the smooth spot that didn't exist in this country. Then the blades smashed against an Indian-Fig tree, and the heli sat down in a shuddering mess. The door opened, and out of the cabin stepped Pug.

I didn't let her get started. I opened up on her first.

"What in the name of the seven blue devils are you doing here—and just how do you expect to get back? Didn't you ever fly one of those things before? I suppose you think I'm going on a little picnic and you would just come out and see how I'm doing? Explain yourself, and don't think I'll believe a word of it."

Her face was red, and it got redder. I regretted my hasty words. Pug wasn't the mildest girl in the world when she got riled.

"It isn't enough I nearly break my neck just trying to see you, you have to bawl me out. Steve Hawley, you're the meanest, ugliest, most worthless male I ever had a crush on."

"Look, vacuum-brain, why do you think I didn't ride that heli in here? Do you think I like to ride this animated bag of boulders, do you huh? The chief didn't mean us to use that heli till we had the opposition all rounded up—for fear they would see it. So you just get in and fly out here in hell's back yard, where even the snakes get lonesome for a nice friendly human to bite that won't bite back—and wreck the ship. Who in hell do you think you are, you beautiful dumb female, you? What in time am I going to do with you now? I'm supposed to slide into this gold camp, this boom town in the hottest part of the Green Hell, like I was a miner—a greenhorn out for a strike. I'm supposed not to attract attention. I'm supposed to be too dumb to notice. So what have I got on my hands? The prettiest operative in the United States, that nobody who wears pants can take his eyes off—all dressed up in nice tight jodphurs and flying boots—all togged out in a red silk shirt so nobody can fail to see her—and no way to get rid of her. I could scream; but you'd laugh. How in hell can I learn anything with you around to attract the poor lonesome miners?"

"LOOK here, you conceited ape. Just because you haven't shaved for a week, you think you look like a rough, tough, experienced gold miner that no one will notice for an operative. The truth of it is, it's written all over you like a book about spy methods. Your nose is peeled, telling anybody you're not used to the sun. You walk like you had a double charley-horse and locomotor ataxia, telling anyone who looks you never rode a horse that wasn't fastened to an ice wagon. With me around, nobody will look at that beautiful manly Dick Tracy face of yours—they'll look at me. And if you think those dumb Nazis will figure out that I'm a spy, you're crazier than you look right now. You go about your business and I'll dig for gold, like all good little gold-diggers do. And I'll do your job and mine too."

It was no place for a woman. I would be spending my time exclusively shooing off the woman-hungry wolves in the diggings out here where a white woman was strictly for pinning on the wall—not expected in the flesh.

I looked at the wreck. The first heli issued to any government outfit—strictly secret—almost the only heli in the U. S., and Pug had to wreck it. The only kind of plane that could operate in this country—and God knew when we could wangle another out of the Washington office. Well, no use crying. I called to Vasco, the guide, and the two of us began cutting brush and covering the heli so it could not be seen from the air. The Germans were using some kind of plane in here in their diamond smuggling. I doubted if they had perfected a practical helicopter yet. But they had. *

Vasco got off the lead mule and Pug got on. Just to explain things—I might as well tell you that, she being the chief's only daughter, he doted on her. So did we. She did a lot of our office work when a big bunch of us were out on a job. But she had strict orders to stay at headquarters and keep her nose clean of the field work. She was efficient and good natured and damn useful because she knew all the ropes, having been raised at the game. Her mother was dead, therefore she had accompanied her Dad for years in his work, and she absorbed info like a sponge.

But she had inherited other qualities not so admirable from her old man. His temper, for instance, and his infernal bullheadedness that always got him his own way. In a man, it's called aggressiveness. In a woman, you can call it what you like, but you can't get used to it. But we did. She pretty much wrapped us all around her finger, for she was the chief's assistant.

To top it off, she had a crush on me. I had no great desire to be dominated the rest of my life—and I ducked a little, but it wasn't much use. Like today, for instance. A hundred miles of jungle between me and women—and she drops

*A lot of you fellows are going to kick about these helicopters being in use by German and American secret agents before they are in use by the army of either. But I myself saw practical heli flights in Newfoundland in '38. I think the ships have been in use by the services of both countries: experimental jobs, hard to handle and not overpowerful, but indispensable for their work. It is the only way I can explain what I saw myself—and it wasn't in the newspapers. Naturally, the only conclusion to be reached is that the secret services got the helicopter on the Q T before anyone else. One can see why this was so.—*Author.*

in out of the sky. In the only heli our bunch had been able to wangle out of the home office. And wrecks it. And I knew it would be all right. The chief might sound off a little, but he couldn't really disapprove of anything she did.

VASCO leading her mule, and me trailing along, we went on through the worst country a man could pick for traveling.

Maybe it was the red silk shirt—maybe it was the perfume. I don't know. But the mule did know, and he didn't like it. He stood it for a little while, but he was restless. He craned that long mule neck of his around and took one good long look at Pug. Then he ran, straight out into the jungle. A team of horses couldn't have held him, let alone little Vasco Perale. Vasco tripped over a vine, measured his length on the ground, and my mule balked. She, or he—I never did get the sex straight—just went on strike, and Pug was fast disappearing in the distance. I jumped off and legged it after the disappearing girl.

I came up with her after a ten minute chase. Pug was standing, little the worse, under a tree which had reached a limb down and brushed her off the mule. But she paid no attention to my arrival.

"My God, girl—we'll never catch the darned mule in this bush. How do you do it, anyway?"

Pug just pointed at something she was staring at. "Do you see what I see?" she asked.

I looked. About half a mile away gleamed a long low metal building, shimmering in the afternoon sun. Rows of round openings stared from its sides. The whole thing looked like the wreck of a dirigible—and a mammoth one at that.

"I don't know what it is, but it sure is something. We'll have to make camp in a couple of hours, anyway; we might as well go on over and camp there. Maybe it's a building; if it is, there is comfort. If it isn't, it looks like something that might have a bunk or two inside it anyway."

"There never was a lighter-than-air ship that big," mused Pug. "What could the thing be out there?"

"We'll know before long. Here comes Vasco with the remaining transportation. And stay away from that mule. From here on we all walk. These mules never saw a woman before. Being rational animals, you can't blame them for running."

"I like that! I suppose you are rational, and a mule wouldn't run from you." Pug's face began to redden, and I knew the storm signals were out. "Well, I would say that the mule had never met an intelligent person before, and seeing me, knew it had met its master in brain power. That's why it ran. Naturally it wouldn't run from a man, as it despises the male intelligence."

Just to keep the peace I agreed with her. "Naturally. It knew it had met someone more stubborn than any mule could ever be."

WE covered the rest of the distance in short order. I wasn't going to let any woman wrap a rock as big as the one she dived for around my neck. But she stumbled and dropped the rock, and we stopped, panting, beside something it took me a long time to understand.

That thing was big. It was deceptively big, with smooth, beautiful lines that, had I known that much, told of ages of development or building just such ships. For it was a ship, a long, tapered, lovely dream of a ship of shining metal. The forward end had crushed itself into the side of a low hill, but otherwise she looked undamaged.

A feeling of awe stole over us, standing there, reaching with our eyes and our minds for the meaning behind the wonder of the ship's size and beauty.

"Did you say it might contain a bunk or two, Steve? I'd say by the size of it there're quarters for the whole Marine Corps. But those rows of round things I thought were windows aren't windows at all. They are just plates of darker metal. They must be doors of some kind."

"Pug, I may be wrong, but I think we've stumbled on something more important to our government than all the industrial diamonds in South America. This thing looks to me like the wreck of a space ship—a ship that was never built on this earth at all. Do you think it could be?"

"I'm not committing myself. Let's get inside and find out."

That ship seemed a good mile long, and we hadn't yet reached the end—and no opening. No projection, nothing,—just smooth metal hull, no way of climbing up and seeking an ingress. We walked along in the shadow cast by the bulge of the round of the thing, and wondered. But the wondering had just started.

Toward the bow of the ship, it had run into the side of the hill, apparently after skating across the countryside for a landing. The tremendous size and weight of the thing had rendered even this probably slight impact disastrous, for the massive metal of the nose was crumpled and bent and several gaps were tore in the smooth expanse of apparently seamless metal. I helped Pug scramble into one of these ragged openings, and climbed after her.

DID you ever step out of this world into another one? No? Well, then, there isn't much you know to which I can compare the sight of the inside of that ship.

Did you ever see a sculptured machine? Did you ever see a painted surface that was all colors at once—a sort of super-irridescence? Did a machine ever speak to you in a heartrending tone of voice—like a dying man begging for a drink of water? Did you ever open an innocent looking bottle and when you drank of it find the nectar that made life instantly somewhere near a million times as worthwhile—that made your limbs pulse with instant new strength—made your mind turn over in an ecstasy of new-found power and ability? No, you didn't; and I'm supposed to tell you what it was like in words you can't mistake for false.

Did you ever see a picture of a woman so beautiful that everything you had ever thought beautiful turned to a horrifying image of degradation, of degenerate life, in your mind? And have you seen pictures of life that made your own life become a horrible memory beside the vital, living message that the pictures carried to your brain?

We were soon lost in the unending wonder of this ship from the voids of space—from a world beyond any man's ken. Night fell, and darkness overtook us deep within the center of the ship; and without lights we had no idea how to get out—or with a light either, for that matter.

Outside somewhere was Vasco, wondering what had become of us. So were we. You may have experienced the feeling of being lost in a big modern building. This was like that, but there was no familiar thing with which to orient oneself. There were signs about, over doors, on big, intricately decorated cabinets, on the backs of chairs, even labels on the machinery. But they were in a language that looked tantalizingly readable, but, brother, it wasn't English.

CHAPTER III

IN the middle of our other wonders, a new wonder came to cap the climax. Far overhead sounded a series of bumping noises. Somewhere a light glimmered through the gathering gloom of the big, utterly strange ship. Nearer and nearer glimmered and bobbed a light, and many feet came down, down, nearer to us, crouched there in the dark.

Pug tugged at me and we scuttled into a closet of the big room, closing the door all but a crack. Almost at once the room flooded with light, and we heard the harsh gutturals of German. I was dumbfounded. This ship could not be the product of German science; the symbols on the walls were about as much like German as Chinese. Yet here entered the German super-men, apparently in possession.

Both Pug and I spoke German, I much better than Pug, for which reason I had been selected for counter-espionage work. We knew what they were talking about, but it didn't quite make sense.

There were seven of them, dressed in rough miner's clothing, automatics strapped to their belts. One carried a sub-machine gun.

The smallest of the lot took his seat at a table—a table that had apparently been a work bench of the mysterious people of the space-ship, for it was lined with tools that looked like a pipe-fitter's nightmare. One of the others threw down the carcass of a small wild pig and two of them began preparing a meal over a camp stove.

The small fellow at the work bench was bending over several small stacks of fine gravel that I realized were diamonds. These he was sorting, grading and packing in boxes, working rapidly and to all appearances rather carelessly.

Pug and I did not dare move a muscle, for the slightest sound would have betrayed us. At any moment one of them might open the door for some purpose, and discover us. It was no place to be.

One of the men lounged over the work bench and engaged the diamond packer in conversation.

"Fritz, buying the stones and flying them out to the subs is all right as a job —and there isn't much else we could do with them that would get us any more money. But the power some things in this ship could give us! Is it wise to turn it all over to the fatherland? Would we be paid anything like its value?—or would we be pushed aside—maybe liquidated?"

The small man at the desk paused for a moment and shot a cunning glance at his questioner. Then he winked broadly at the man.

"Such talk. Of course the fatherland must have everything that will help to build her power. Our enemies hammer ever harder at the Luftwaffe—soon our great power in the air will be no more. And you think that I would keep such technical secrets as this ship holds from our dear Fuehrer? Don't be absurd."

THE man leaning over the desk was thoughtful, somewhat taken aback. Then he digested the meaning of the wink and the words of opposed meaning. He winked back at the smaller man.

"Of course, of course, Herr Ober Lieutenant. I forgot myself."

"I will talk to you later, alone, Herr Kraft. We cannot have these thoughts. Those are the thoughts that are losing Germany the war."

"Yes, sir." Herr Kraft turned away, smiling slightly to himself.

Presently the officer finished with the work, arose, and placed the diamonds in a metal box at the side of the room. He also placed several papers within the box, locking it carefully. The box was big, and I noticed that there were several strange books within it, whose covers were titled in that outlandish script of the strangers who had set this ship here and disappeared.

The men ate, and presently five of them went out, stretching and yawning. Pug and I began to breathe a bit easier; it looked as though we might get a chance to sneak out without being caught. But our relief didn't last long. The fellow at the desk stretched, yawned, and then with a lightning movement drew his gun and leaped toward the door behind which we crouched. It was a brave, almost foolhardy thing to do, for he could not know that we were not holding him steadily on the sights of our guns.

He threw the door wide. His Luger looked like a 44mm to me as it stared into my face. I was never caught so flatfooted. My gun was in my hand, but I had no chance of raising it from its position on my knee. I dropped it, for I didn't want the Nazi blazing away at me with Pug beside me.

"Come out, sneakers. Now, what are you doing here?"

I cursed silently to myself. That wink which I had thought served to keep his partner in skulduggery from talking in front of the others—had in truth been a way of warning him not to talk in front of us, the eavesdroppers. Why hadn't he gone for us when the others were in the room? Very possibly because he didn't want to give them a chance of plugging him in the back. By his face I knew he was a man with few friends. It was a Himmler face, a face only the German underworld could breed. But he wasn't soft. A quick, ruthless cunning was revealed openly on his face. He had noted something that betrayed our presence when he entered the room, but for his own purposes had delayed in revealing his knowledge till the exact moment when we were off guard. Was the man psychic?

THE bigger fellow, who could have been a brother of Schmeling, with his bushy eyebrows and bulldog, Germanic face, remained in the background, his gun drawn. The little pocket edition Himmler sat down at the beautiful work bench again. Pug and I stood before the bench, plenty uncomfortable.

I started explaining, knowing darn well nothing I could say would help us any.

"We saw the big, metal, ship-like building and wandered in, curiosity our guide. Then you entered, and we hid, not knowing who you might be. So here we all are."

"Jah, here we all are. And here you will stay. But it might be best if we knew something about you?"

"We were on our way to the gold-fields. Our mule ran away, and chasing the mule led us here. That is all." I was sweating.

"That is not all. You are not a miner. What do you know of gold or the mining of gold? I do not think that gold was your purpose in coming here. I would say that you were American agents, and that your finding your way here was no accident. The only point I am in doubt about is whether your finding this ship *was* an accident, or whether your superiors are aware its existence. Kraft, lock the man up. I think he will talk later. Right now we will question the little lady, so-hardy little secret agent who wishes to pan gold with her pretty white hands."

Herr Kraft gestured with his gun,

and I preceded bim down the indicated corridor. I did not see any chance to play the hero. The big hun locked me in a small room with two great couches one over the other—the only furnishing. I suspected that other men had been locked in here before, for the place was crumby.

The lock had hardly clicked behind me when I wished I *had* played the hero. Pug began to scream—tbose hair-raising screams that only a woman can let out, when in agony.

One way to learn about love is to hear the adored one scream in agony. It is not the best way, I assure you, but it is efficacious. I knew now; there was no doubt in my mind. I would never love another woman as I did Pug. I went mad. I howled and flung myself at the heavy metal door; my hands beat at it, clawed, sought for some way—some impossible way—of tearing that great door to little pieces.

And one of the miracles of the construction of that ship became suddenly revealed to me. My seeking, maddened, clawing bands found a little rough place upon the smooth metal at the side of the door. The rough, apparently accidental imperfection of the metal gave, and the great door swung soundessly open. The wisdom of those mysterious, vanished men from space—if men they were—was revealed to me in my terrible need. For they had not planned on being locked in their own cabins. There was a way out open to one who knew the construction of the ship.

I FELL out with the door, sprawling on the impossibly smooth glitter of the metal floor, studded with little projections for traction. I raced down the corridor I had just traversed. But caution slowed me and I ducked into a door at the side just before I reached the big central chamber where the screams still ululated. How I had the control to use caution, with Pug's screams of awful pain in my ears, I don't know. But I did. I searched the room for a weapon, a club—anything.

It was another of those incongruously beautiful tool rooms with which the ship was so plentifully supplied. More of the pipe-fitter's nightmare wrenches were hung in racks on the walls, were stowed in lockers at the base of the walls. I seized a wrench with a good heft, as the most obvious weapon. But something brought my eyes to an open locker at my feet, and a vague familiarity about a cylindrical, nozzled tool struck me. I picked it up, hastily pressed the projecting stud. A flame leaped out, struck clear across the room. It was a blow torch to top all blow torches.

Wrencb in one hand, flaming torch in the other, I raced out of the chamber and into the big room wherc the screams were now subdued to a muffled sobbing interspersed with words.

Pug was saying, "I'll tell you anything, only stop . . . stop."

Somehow no blame arose in my heart for her. Flesh can only stand so much. Besides, a person can always lie. Pug must know that our lives depended on their failing to learn whether the chief knew there was such a ship or not.

The speed of my attack saved me. They turned at the roar of the flame, but the awful spear of terrific heat struck them to the floor, blackened instantly into hulks of scorched meat. The stench of burning flesh filled the room, but I did not shut off the torch. I kept it on them till there was no semblance of life left in the smoking mess on the floor. Pug had, blessedly, fainted as the pain stopped.

These devils had strung her up by the thumbs, and had stripped the clothes. off her. Then they had been pressing cigar butts into the beautiful white of her skin. Why does an evil man always hit the most beautiful thing in sight? There is a lot to learn about evil in that fact. What a good man worships, a bad one hates. A child is a torment to a bad man and a blessing to a good one. So it is with every other good thing in life. Her beauty was to them something to press burning cigar butts into. You can't tell me that kind of animal enjoys any beautiful thing in life. I don't believe it.

I CUT Pug down, hung her torn clothes back on her, and slapped her face lightly till she came to. I didn't turn my back on any doors, either. I wasn't taking any more chances. I slipped the two automatics in my pockets, and picked the tommy gun off the rack on the wall.

I hated to leave that fancy blow torch behind. Taking a last look around, I found another use for it. The box of diamonds. A couple of shots of that super-flame and the lock melted away. Within were too many of those little bags of rocks for us to burden ourselves with. But the books and papers I suspected were too important entirely to leave behind. Rapidly I stuffed my shirt front full of the tight German handwriting. One of the books was small and easily slid into my back pocket. I might never see this mighty, other-world ship again.

Then Pug and I stole out of there. It took us at least an hour to find the way we had come. Mice couldn't have been quieter, but we saw no more of the rest of the gang. We didn't stop running into the dark till we saw the light of a camp-fire far ahead. I suspected it was Vasco. It was.

I didn't stop to explain anything to him. I couldn't talk Portugee well, anyway. I just started throwing things on the mule and he got the idea. Last of all I helped Pug aboard and we headed out. I wanted to get plenty of big trees overhead before the daylight made us vulnerable to the eyes of the plane I knew the gang possessed.

The sky was graying swiftly into dawn when he parked under the deep shade of swamp growth, deep within a boggy stretch of forest. We didn't light a fire—we just sprawled and slept and let the bugs feed. They did.

CHAPTER IV

WE AWOKE when the sun was blazing in the mid-west. We ate some cold beans from the cans in the pack, some chocolate, and had a few swallows of water from the canteen. God knew how long the stuff would have to last us. Since we were unmasked, we would have to make our way back to headquarters in Sandoval and start over. But I hoped the data we came for was in the notes I had stuffed in my shirt.

Just to make sure, Pug and I sprawled under the great tree to which Vasco had tethered the mule, and delved into our loot.

What we had was amazing stuff. Since I was most curious about the origin of that tremendous ship bearing all the evidences of a vast and alien culture, I opened the little book I had stuffed in my hip pocket first. I could not make head nor tail of the minute detailed diagrams and rows of strange, mathematical appearing symbols. I suspected it was an engineer's handbook, and as such it had an inestimable value. I made Pug pull up her shirt, and taped the book against her lovely stomach. Since we had already dressed and bandaged her burns, it was a good hiding place, for it looked like another wound, bandaged. Then we went for the German notes. These we could read. The story they told was one to floor a man, in more ways than one.

The thing started with a short statement by the German that the following was his attempt at translation of the difficult alien language of the space-ship's log. The rest was broken sentences, fragments that the German had, by some ingenious method, been able to translate.

Six light-year out from . . . Voyage monotonous, crew space-sick. . . .

Each fragment is preceded by what looks like a date, but I can't make out their calendar.

Kraft

Today . . . motors smashed by a speeding meteoric fragment that went clear through both wolls of the hull and left . . . Catastrophe.

So many days have passed. We have worked unceasingly to moke temporary repairs to reach some haven, but our case is hopeless.

Our course tends ever more toward some alien, poisonous looking sun. Unless we are captured by one of her satellites, we will end in the blaze of thot deoth-light. What difference does it make? To end quickly or to drag out a few years of misery on some barren, rocky boll of sub-life forms, suffering the agonies of the unknown diseases of the wilderness.

Still working on the motors, but the damage is too extensive. There is no hope. We rigged temporary generators from the stores to activate the antigrav plotes in case we opprooch a satellite planet on our dive into the fire. Have carefully observed . . . and the planet will approach our poth rother closely. Have no exoct figures of our speed—but it seems we will be captured by . . . the round rock.

Made a series of braking circles of the planet. Our speed is high; we will have to circle here for some months, I fear.

Today we entered the breathable otmosphere ond opened our ports to the air of this sunburned ball. Whot a stench, but it supports life—for awhile.

Today we landed—and the final and complete disaster struck us. We managed to crush our hull ogoinst a low hill as we landed in o free fall, lightened only by the antigrav force. Now our cose is hopeless, for our ships never opproach within twenty light-years of these poisonous suns.

THERE followed a further note by Kraft, who must have been an ingenious and capable master of code work to get anything understandable out of the strange language.

"Much of the writing is untranslatable by me. As near as I can make out the crew of the space-ship could not stand conditions here under this sun, and died rapidly, the strongest living but a few weeks after the ship landed here in this desert country."

Pug's excited voice broke into my reading. "If they had only landed near a city, they might have been saved. God only knows what they might have done for our science before they left to return to their homes."

"They may do our science a lot of good yet, Pug. We're sending for help, and lots of it. Vasco, take this message back to the place where you were first hired. We will remain here, as too much depends on our retaining our freedom for us to risk showing ourselves in the open. Those Nazi will be out looking for us, for they know their safety depends on finding us before we contact our other agents. They don't know you, Vasco, and if they stop you for questioning, you never heard of us. Compre'?"

Vasco left us most of the food and

water, and I didn't argue with him. I knew we might need every bit of it. It would be at least a week before Vasco got back with a party and food. A lot of things can happen in a week. A lot did.

The first day a condor tried to steal our lunch. He made off with a pack full of other stuff, canned rations, etc., when I beat him off the food with a stick. The next day a boa got friendly, and I threw rocks at it. I retired. In between slapping at the bugs, cussing under my breath, and worrying about Pug, I studied the rest of the German's papers.

In one way we had done the Germans a service by killing the leader of the spies. He had had no intention of turning the big ship over to his government or any other government. He had intended to silence everyone who knew anything about it, return to it after the war or sooner, and figure out some of the technical stuff—which he could patent and sell as inventions. He had to take Kraft into his confidence to do this, as Kraft was the boy who had discovered the key to the language in the books in the cabins, probably, and had kept it to himself, pretending to decipher the words by laborious code deciphering methods.

PUG and I finally figured out: "They will turn that thing over to the Nazis now. There are undoubtedly weapons in the ship that would win the war for the Fuehrer in short order. The fellows we left alive aren't the type to try to keep it for themselves. They haven't the initiative and ambition of the leader."

"That's about what will happen if we don't get there first. Pug, *can* we wait for the rest of our outfit to get here? Those Heinies have their windmill plane, radio communication with German subs—everything to get ahead with it faster than we can act to forestall them. Should we—must we—try to put the kibosh on them before the others get here?"

"Well, we could sneak up in the dark and disable the heli. But they land the thing on top of the ship—and how in Hades can we climb the sides of that mammoth thing? It would stump a human fly."

"We might work it this way. We ease up close in the darkness. Then, come daylight, we wait till the heli takes off. Then we board the ship the same as we did before and trust to luck to overpower the guard they leave behind. But he will be on his toes and expecting something of the kind."

"You know, Steve, there must have been some of the Germans asleep in that ship the day we entered. They didn't all come aboard from the helicopter."

"Yeh, you're right," I grunted. "I was busy going over the tommy gun I had brought along from our meeting with the diamond smugglers from Naziland. It was a comfortable weapon to have in the hand now that we were deciding to storm the hide-out of probably the toughest German agents on this side of the globe. And what a hide-out that bunch had picked! A space-ship from beyond man's ken, from the far stars. What a pearl for a bunch of swine it was.

I hated to think of Pug falling into their hands again. But the value of that ship to the men of the future was so infinitely greater than our lives, that I knew I must not shirk the job in any way.

That night we made our way to the crest of the low hill in which the great bow of the ship was buried; there we hid ourselves in the tall grass to wait till the heli took off. I kept the binoculars trained on the broad back of the monster below us. The morning sun showed the 'copter midway of the broad length of the mysterious visitor from space.

ABOUT ten o'clock the heli rose, but Pug and I waited a good bour to give the Heinies a chance to cork off if they felt like it—and who doesn't in that heat. Then we stole into the break in the bow, Pug with an automatic and I with the sub-machine gun clutched too tightly in my hands. We had no desire to let those hyenas get another chance at us. But they did.

Pug's torn red silk shirt hrushed against one of the sculptured machines that looked like an animal of peculiarly intelligent aspect. It wasn't a horse, nor a deer, nor an antelope,—but something of all and superior to all. Her shirt caught in a stud sticking out of the sculpture, and somewhere inside a record hegan to play.

Did you ever hear the angels sing? I heard 'em when that ultra-lovely voice started from that too-beautiful machine. Not only the voice—I knew the Heinie guard would know someone was prowling around—and what would we do with him?—he knew his way around bere and we didn't. Besides, there could be more than one—up to four. The heli didn't need more than one man aboard.

I wished we were safe back in that nice swamp fighting the hugs, the hiting flies, etcetera, instead of trying to be a hero for the future of science—American science. Somehow the hero stuff is always too, too slippery. It was this time, anyway.

Two pairs of feet came racing toward us down the long corridor from the chambers in the waist. Pug and I kicked off our shoes and raced up a spider walk to a door above us. We swung the door to all but a crack, and watched.

The two Heinies were not to be caught napping, for they had seen what could bappen, in the scorched corpses I had left hehind on my other visit. One of them remained in the great arch of the big nose chamber—probably the bridge of the ship—while the other cautiously advanced to the musical sculpture and switched off the apparatus. I could reach one with my guns, but tbe other was still shielded hy the wing of the great arch from my fire. I waited. I shouldn't have.

The other one walked back to his buddy and they returned. They had no stomach for searching the place—the advantages were all with the party in hiding. It was up to us. They apparently knew that time was on their side, and they would bave plenty of help on the way with tbe return of the helicopter.

I got it. They were in no hurry. We were. So I slipped hack down the ladder and turned all the switches and gadgets I could find in two seconds, then raced hack up the spider walk.

WELL, what those other-world gadgets started to do I'll never know —but they sure as hell started plenty. In the center of the huge, observatory-like chamber, some hidden projection device began to project three dimensional images of various kinds of hattle tactics hetween opposing fleets of space ships. The whole vast space became filled with apparently solid ships—on a small scale—hut still big enough to frighten one—shooting at high speed in intricate maneuvers. How those alien minds could grasp the meaning of such rapid, frightfully daring maneuvers, I don't know. Ships wheeled and swung in groups of hundreds, dived headlong at other groups of ships, and fired at each other with soundless beams of blazing force. The sculptured mechanisms, both beautiful beast's forms and Godlike, nearly human bodies of over-sized men, began to orate, or sing, or project three dimensional records of doings beyond our capacity to understand—or move slowly through symetrical and statuesque dances of a strangely powerful, erotic nature. One of them began to demonstrate a super geometry upon a projected blackboard, a blackboard that was a solid block of blackness—a cube in which the lines appeared, complete with labels, and utterly incomprehensible.

The place was a wildly, utterly beautiful madhouse, even before I reached the top of the ladder. I could hear the two heinies rushing back to see what all the racket was about. The utter confusion, the designed and meaningful presentation of all these various messages to the mind, none of which could be comprehended by a man, seemed to madden the Nazis. They stood open-mouthed in the doorway, watching the supremely seductive gyrations of some other-world temptress doing a strip-tease to end all strip-teases—while through her apparently solid body swooped whole fleets of space battle-ships—and over her head wheeled whole galaxies of over-sized star projections in a mad race to portray the whole history of the bodies of all space. Through all this heterogeneous display of the talent and wisdom of unknown eons of development of some alien manlike race, rolled and resounded the deafening symphony of a thousand instruments of music unknown to Earth men—and not designed for human ears—for they contained many sounds that were maddeningly painful to our ears.

Holding their ears and grimacing with the great pain of the strange, other-world music, the two Heinies advanced together and began to switch off the strange instruments. At last I got them both under my line of fire, and I let the hammering tommy gun leap in my hands till they both sprawled bleeding from a dozen wounds, on the gleaming metal floor. Then I stopped firing. A guy never does get quite ruthless enough for ruthless opposition.

ONE of the Heinies, as soon as I stopped firing, scrambled to his feet and shambled through the doorway before I could fire again. I slid down the rail of the ladder-way and bounded across the floor. Far up the corridor, he fled, his foot dragging. I let out the rest of the drum of cartridges after him, and knocked him down again. But he got up, and went on.

I raced after him, as soon as I had put in a new drum, and was nearly up with him when he slammed shut the big metal room of the chamber where we had first fallen afoul of the Germans. It proved a wrong move.

I had just about reached the great metal door, when overhead and behind me I heard the muffled clang of a metal door and the sound that these steps gave out to men's shoes. The rest of them were returning, and were almost down to the great corridor that reached from midship to the chamber in the bow where I had trapped the Nazis. Pug and I were split, and she wouldn't even know the others had returned. My own case was desperate; I was caught between the two fires from the returning men and the Nazi, who, though badly wounded, I knew was still alive enough and mad enough to get a gun and go for me. Moreover, the wounded man had seen us, and would be ahle to tell the rest that we were but two, and they would search the ship till they had us.

I ducked into the nearest door at the side of the corridor. I waited till the steps passed, then slid the muzzle out the door and let them have it. I wasn't playing marbles any more, except for keeps. There were five of them again. That heli must have had a capacity for just five men. Three men must have left in it, and five returned. Two of these men were in uniform. That meant they had contacted the sub off the coast, or some other hase where they operated in uniform. That also meant more would arrive very soon.

All this ran through my mind as I emptied nearly the whole drum at the hacks of the new arrivals. Unheroic? Unsportsmanlike? Brother, I was thinking of the whole future of science if I could get that ship intact into the hands of American authorities. I was thinking of dead American armies all over the world if the tremendous weapons in that ship ever fell into the hands of the Nazis. So my conscience had no twinges whatever as those Nazis rolled and dived from the blast of bullets let loose so suddenly on their hacks. They were up against a man as ruthless and unromantically deadly as any Nazi could hope to be. The stakes made me that way. I didn't dare lose, and my cards were damn bad.

FOUR of them didn't get up from the floor. One dived through the metal door as the wounded man inside opened it a crack for them to get through. Another rolled over, got his automatic out and let me have it. He fired twice and his arm dropped lifeless. He was a fighter. He got me in the chest. It hurt, and I was plenty worried as I backed down the corridor to the great chamber in the how where the three dimensional variety show had so recently intrigued the two Germans.

Pug waited just within the great arch, where she had watched the whole thing. She threw an arm around my waist, helped me up the step ladder to our little nook far above the big room full of strange apparatus. There I nearly passed out, but I didn't. I just lay and gasped, and the air whistled out of the little hole in my chest, too. Right through the lung. I coughed up a mouthful of hlood.

"I guess they got me for good, Pug. If I do kick off, I want you to know I love you. When those rats burned you, I knew plenty how much you meant to me. Just want to make sure you know how it is."

"Sure, you big dope. I knew that all the time. Do you think I'm stupid? And don't get the idea this is the time for a death bed scene. I've seen lung wounds before. They look worse than they are. The only trouble is, you've got to he still, or it won't heal. We've got to sit tight here, and God knows what these Hitlers will be cooking up while we sit still."

As we huddled, with Pug fussing over my wound, we heard the whir and muffled roar of the 'copter taking off. Our friends had got away—and we were now in real trouble. They knew where we were; we couldn't move; and they would be hack with more of the Fuehrer's South American Bundsmen and agents.

A bright idea struck me. Here things were ahout as bad as they could he, and the Heinies played right into my hands.

"Pug, they did it then. They went off and left us here. They must have heen hadly wounded and couldn't wait for help to come to them. Now, Pug—you've got to do this right. Run up there where they get out of the ship to their 'copter, and lock the hatch. Take the blow torch I used on the two rats that burned you and heat the metal of the hatch till it fuses. If you have any trouble doing it, yell and I'll come up and help you. But I think you can do it. As soon as you get the hatch firmly fastened so they can't get in, look up all the other hatches on the top surface of the ship and make sure they can't get in. We'll have a fort an army couldn't take us out of."

"Ah, Steve—you've really got it figured out now. We don't care how many Nazis come; we'll just let 'em whistle and wait till the chief shows up. IF Vasco got through."

"Don't say IF, Pug; he must have gotten through. We've kept these boys pretty busy."

Pug raced off, her legs twinkling prettily in the cream colored jodphurs. I was all through criticizing Pug. She was my girl.

A LONG half hour dragged by, and at last Pug returned, her face flushed and streaked with soot from the torch.

"All fixed, boss. They won't get in from the top."

"O.K., Pug, now we've got to move down to the gap in the bow. That is one entry we've got to seal with plenty of hot lead in the form of bullets. So take me down there, then go and search the Germans' stores for everything that will throw a slug, and bring it here. Bring some grub, too."

With a lot of unnecessary groaning on my part, and sympathetic help from Pug, I negotiated the long ladder-stair to the big chamber below. At the gap where we entered the ship, we dragged up a big metal couch, after unscrewing it from the floor, to form a barricade. Behind the couch, on a blanket, I took up my post with the sub-machine gun, while Pug raced off to search for more arms and food.

Our position was better, but nothing to shout about. As near as I could figure, we had sealed off the entries to the strange ship—but I might have missed something. There was no way to know when our men would arrive, and Vasco was an unknown quantity to me, though he had seemed dependable. Men aren't always when trouble shows up.

Night was swiftly darkening the sky, and to my other worries was added the fact I wouldn't be able to see the heinies when they did show up—if they did. It wasn't a pleasant thought. I hoped they weren't accustomed to flying that German windmill around in the dark.

I knew there had been only a few of these planes manufactured that were any good as yet, and that these were all in the possession of American secret agents and the F.B.I. Yet the Germans had obtained plans of our ship or a similar one, for use in places like this. It proved that their spy system was ultra-efficient.

With these thoughts I drifted into a fitful, dream-conditioned sleep. Pug let me sleep most of the night, but it didn't do me much good. I was feverish, and I felt damn weak. My chest hurt, plenty.

With the first light of dawn we heard the now familiar bump of the 'copter striking the upper surface of the huge ship. We could even hear them cursing in German, and the racket they made trying to open the fused metal hatch. Then the heli whirred up again, and sat down about a half mile away. They must have figured where we had taken our position, for they landed way out of our line of fire, and too far away to hit, anyway.

Then the 'copter took off again, and

I knew it had gone for more men, or more weapons. The place was a perfect fort, and I felt pretty sure they wouldn't take us so easily. Still, I knew we couldn't hold out long; we couldn't move around, and they could. We couldn't replenish our ammunition or replace our losses; they could. Our only hope was the arrival of men from Pug's old man, the chief. I knew they would come plenty fast when the chief realized the fix Pug had gotten into.

THE Krauts landed two more heli loads of men and equipment during the morning. Then I guess they figured they couldn't afford to use any more time getting ready, and started lobbing various devices of incendiary nature at us. A light mortar threw a half dozen gas shells within a dozen feet of the great rent in the hull where I lay behind the barrier. A gentle breeze wafted the stuff off to the side. All I got was the bitter odor of almonds. If a bit of it had blown into the opening, it would have been my finish.

I held my fire, waiting for them to get out in the open where I could reach them effectively. I could reach them with a sniper's rifle Pug had brought, but I didn't want them to think I was playing. Among the other stuff Pug had laboriously toted from the German's quarters in the ship were some gas masks, and we slipped them on. Now I couldn't even see them, which was probably the effect they desired from the gas shells.

The men were trained soldiers, and over half of them were in uniform. There was no chance of them being stopped by Brazilian force, out here where only the armadillos felt at home. The hopelessness of the situation swept over me.

A light machine gun set up a covering fire for the advance. Bullets hammered into and around the big lounge. Pug scrooched tighter beside me, holding her ears and closing her eyes. We just couldn't take much of this, and they were just starting. I had to take a look—and I knew it was sure death to poke my head out of that opening. But they could sneak up alongside the ship, and I had to know if they were doing it or not. The hammering of bullets didn't stop for a half hour. Then it let up, and I sneaked a quick look. It was nearly my last.

The Heinies had taken position in a semi-circle around the opening, behind hummocks, trees and rocks—and were waiting for me. Seven or eight rifles let go at once, and they were every one damn close. One plucked at my hair with mad fingers, another caromed off the metal and got Pug in the leg. We were just about gone geese.

AT THIS point I drew my head back to see the strangest sight I ever hope to see.

Inside the chamber where I had put on the futuristic variety show, some more strange things had been going on. My eyes started out of my head as I tried to grasp the meaning of what I was seeing where I had expected to see nothing living.

Across the big chamber toward us were strolling two people, a man and a woman. I knew they were people of the ship, from pictures I had seen of their peculiarly superb physiques, the serene, sculpturesque quality of their faces. They seemed not to be afraid of the bullets whining in richochets off the metal of the opening, and caroming around in the chamber like mad bees. It struck me they had no idea what bullets were. I shook Pug out of her attention to the nick in her leg.

"Pug, maybe I'm seeing ghosts—but you better get them back out of the danger and see what is what, if any."

Pug looked up, and let out a cry like a little girl scared in the dark. They *were* kind of scary, with their huge eyes and double length hands, kind of beautiful and deadly—like a strange vision of a man and woman of vastly greater powers than human.

Pug crawled toward them on her hands and knees, till she was away from the gap in the hull. Then she stood up and went to them with her hands raised to wave them back out of danger.

But they weren't being told what to do on their own ship. They remained, standing unperturbed and smiling like a couple of unbelievably lovely living sculptures by some artist from a better world. Then what I feared for them, happened. A ricochet screamed from the metal wall and struck the woman in the arm. Blood flowed in a stream, dripping from her hand to the floor, where swiftly a scarlet pool widened.

She looked down, and gave a little unbelieving gasp at the unexpected pain. That was the unluckiest shot any Heinie ever triggered, and most of their work has been unlucky. A fierce comprehension spread swiftly over the face of the tall man. Then, with the incredible swiftness of a leopard—he galvanized into a blur of action.

He raced around the big chamber, turned a switch here, swung a wheel there in a swift circle, and upon the smoke thickened air of the chamber the scene outside sprang into focus. The Heinies were within a dozen feet of the gap in the hull, just waiting the order for a final rush.

They never got a chance to make the rush. The stranger took one of those harmless appearing tools from the racks on the walls, and from the round maw of the gun-like tool sprang a ray of blinding brilliance. At each of the figures in the projection of the scene outside the tall stranger pointed the bright ray, and as the image of the man outside received the ray, the image dropped in a stiffened, frozen immobility. Some magic of the huge projection mechanism transferred the potent impulse of the ray through its magnifying focus of vision—direct to the scene outside.

IN A few moments the suddenly fierce stranger had eliminated completely the strength of the Germans, which I had momentarily expected to overwhelm our slight defenses. I dropped in relief to the metal floor by the barrier, my strength gone now that the threat was removed.

From a cabinet in the wall the still frowning stranger, moving like a picture of the perfection of the future, took a tiny kit. From it he brought out a small pad and applied it to the arm of his companion. On the pad he poured a liquid from a tiny capsule. Then he bent over me, and tore my shirt away from the wound that Pug had bandaged. He poured some of the fluid into the wound, placed a similar pad over the bared wound, and poured tbe rest of the vial of liquid over the pad.

As yet he had not spoken, but now his mouth opened and I heard the vital musical tones of the people from space —the same unbelievable beautiful sort of voice which the records had played. I did not know the meaning of the words—but I gathered he meant to keep the pad in place. I laid my hand on tbe pad over the wound, and he nodded and smiled. Shortly I fell asleep, completely worn out.

I awoke, alone, and lying on one of the over-size bunks in a chamber of the ship. I looked at my wound. It was nearly healed. Only a red pucker remained where a few hours before had been a scarlet hole. Yes, there was a lot we could learn from that ship from another world.

As I swung my feet to the floor, surprised to find my weakness had left me, the familiar odor of a certain hard-to-get cigar came to me. I looked up to find the chief standing in the door, and behind him the smiling face of Pug.

A great feeling of relief came over me. The responsiblity of making sure the immense power in the machines and weapons of this ship got into the right hands was no longer on my shoulders.

"I was all set to give you two scatterbrains the bawling out of your young lives. But that's out, seeing what you have turned up. I've already sent the plans for one device by radio to Washington. The stranger calls it Radar. What an edge it will give our ships! Nothing can get near them undetected."

"Chief, just what is in the cards for tbese strangers? Who are they, what are they going to do—what have you got out of them about themselves?"

"IT'S a long story, Steve. I've sent for a small army of technicians and engineers to repair the ship—to study with the stranger. It seems they can't stand our sun—have to leave within a few months at the most. So the ship will be repaired, and we'll lose them. But in the meantime, we'll learn plenty."

"Where were they keeping themselves all the time the Germans were hiding out here? Are tbere only two of them?"

"Well, it's hard to understand just what the man meant,—but I think he meant to explain that to me. There's about a hundred of them—sleeping in a specially prepared chamber that is insulated against the sun rays—and in which special air and vibrations reproduce the conditions of their home as nearly as possible. Several of them died while they were building the chamber, after the ship crashed. The rest have been asleep in the chamber—still are, for that matter. It isn't very big, and they can only remain out of it for a few hours at a time, due to the strong radioactivity of our soil and the detrimental charge of electric over the surface of earth. They just can't stand it. So the couple you met have been replaced by another pair, and each day they will change—so that none of them are exposed to the earth conditions for a long period."

"Chief,—you want to get the best minds here we can reach—pronto—to study their science and language, so they can leave us the designs for a ship like this."

"Don't worry, Steve—Washington Headquarters has the whole story—and you and Pug get the credit for the biggest accomplishment of all time. We won't leave anything undone that we can do."

"Pug, someday, when the war is over and things get decent again, the ship will be built—and we'll see the stars—from space. We'll even step on the soil of another planet. That will be hard to take, eh! Honeymoon on Mars, for Mr. and Mrs. Steve Hawley. How about it, Pug?"

"I can't think of an objection Steve." Pug had come to my side, and right there in front of her Dad we sealed the compact with a scorching kiss. And whether my ears were hearing correctly or not—the chief was murmuring something about, "Blessings . . . a thousand blessings—and I hope they do honeymoon on Mars."

A LITTLE over a month later we watched the strange ship lift and drive into the night sky with a mighty burst of power. And behind her, she left in the vaults and workshops of American government factories the plans for an armament and for peaceful devices which would put the United States so far ahead of other nations that fear would never again fall upon the people of the U. S.

And somewhere in secret underground factories, a score of these mighty space crossing creations of the minds of a race far advanced beyond earthmen, are being built. Pug and I have a guarantee of first passage to another planet as our wedding present.

REPORT FROM THE FORGOTTEN PAST

HERE are the latest bits of mystery your editor has dug out of the past. Let the archaeologists make something of them.

Take a look at the Hebraic, Vedic and Algonquin languages. Widely separated races, you will all agree. Well, the following seven words appear in all three languages: ANASH—which means to be persistently stubborn, by word or thought; ZIMMAH—wicked device; RA—delight in being bad; BELYYAAL—worthlessness; AVEN—vanity and self-conceit; DIBBAH—slander and reporting of evils; SATAN—to be a leader.

These seven words date back to 25,000 years ago, and their appearance in the languages of these three peoples, unchanged through 250 centuries, is unequivocal proof of the relationship of all three races, and their common origin. What about it, you archaeologists?

* * *

Ten thousand years ago there was a great civilization flourishing just east of Imperial Valley and approximately on the border between Mexico and the United States. There were magnificent cities. Then there was a great inundation from the north, passing through the Colorado river valley (and Canyon). These cities were buried beneath as much as a thousand feet of sand and boulders. A sand bar was thrown across the gulf of California, midway, the upper portion later drying out and becoming Imperial Valley. These cities can be found by digging.

* * *

The ancient continent of Lemuria, or Pan, located in the Pacific was composed of three sections, or islands, separated by narrow channels. The names of these islands were as follows: *Mai*, (note the resemblance to Mu and Mi) on which were a thousand cities built in rich valleys; *Og*, consisting of wide plains, also with a thousand (approximately) cities, among them the capital city, Penj, and the great temples of Khu, and Bart, and Gan and Saing; *Gan*, a mountainous section with few cities. Mai, Og and Gan were destroyed in a cataclysm that was over in twenty-four hours.

The word Japan, broken down by the Shaver Alphabet, means "Seed of Pan." Students of the geology of Japan will point out that (granting the existence of a continent in the Pacific which sank) the continental shelf breaks abruptly, descending for two-thousand feet into the ocean. Thus, Japan is properly termed a remaining bit of the ancient continent, a "seed" which remains as the germinating point for complete proof of the ancient continent. Japanese language, as it is spoken, not written, is the only language on earth which has descended through thousands of years almost phonetically pure and unchanged. Students of Japanese will instantly note the facility with which the Shaver Alphabet can be used to translate phonetic Japanese. The proper spelling of Japan is Zhapan. Z being the symbol for zero, or stasis. Japan, the unchanged, the relic, the *proof* of Lemuria.

* * *

In Europe, from Southern France to the Urals, exist an almost unbroken chain of ancient cities, buried at varying depths. The existence of these ruins is suspected by many scientists, and it is almost certain that when research is begun, they will be discovered and add a great deal to our knowledge of the past ages of man's civilizations, which extend back beyond 75,000 years ago.

* * *

Today we use "giddap" and "whoa" to a horse, to make him go and stop. It might be interesting to note that in the ancient Panic language, "gitoo" means, light ahead, the way is clear—and "washa" means, darkness ahead.

* * *

After Moses left Egypt, her empire fell, and her people migrated westward, hundreds of thousands of them, and settled in Western Europe, where they married aborigines. Their offspring were called Druids, Picts, Gales, Wales, Galls, and Yohans, all of which are Egyptian names, yet today are not referring to Egypt, but the peoples known as Gaelic, Welsh, Gauls and Johns. Their names betray their origin.

Somewhere in the West is a little town which is inhabited by a very strange sort of people...!

"Come to the red house at the end of the street . . . come . . . come . . ." the voice whispered

MY PORTFOLIO of watercolors was becoming so crammed with work that the sides bulged. Rachel's innumerable sketchbooks were rapidly filling. We had lost track of county and state lines. Most of the roads that we followed were not much more than trails and half of them were not even on the road maps we had picked up at gas stations. The time had come when, if Rachel was to be back east on the date she had planned, we must soon hit a main highway and direct our car to Houston. Even I, much as I loved the country we were in, felt a strong desire to see how my husband and family were getting along. Most of the time our mail communication had been erratic, and I had received no letters at all for some time.

It was on a Thursday afternoon, quite late, that we pulled the trailer into another town whose adobe buildings showed evidence that people remained there to carry on the traditions of the west. That this town was any different from the hundred other such settlements we had explored never occurred to either of us. The mountains in the background, already turning purple as the sun dropped, the inevitable stray cattle on the main street, a dejected looking burro whose long ears drooped as a little boy tried vainly to scramble onto his back, two horses with elaborate saddles and well-filled saddlebags tied near the general store, and a decrepit old Ford getting gas from the one pump in town—it all fitted the usual pattern.

And yet that was the town whose story has never been told before.

We inquired of the man in the wide brimmed hat who was leisurely tending the gas pump if he would object to our parking the trailer on the large weedy lot adjoining the station, for the night. It was some time before he answered us. I had a feeling that he was looking us over sharply, but the sinking sun caused such shadows to fall on his face, under that broad hat, that I might have been wrong. Rachel was beginning to tap her foot slightly against the floorboards with impatience before he nodded.

"Go right ahead. You'll find that water from the pump good to drink. There are restrooms of a sort on the back of the lot. I can't give you electricity . . . we don't have it here," he eyed the connection on the side of the trailer.

We assured him that we had a gasoline lantern and would make out very well. As we drove onto the lot it seemed to me that both the man to whom we had been speaking and the driver of the Ford were watching us. But perhaps that was because we were two women driving alone through country so generally missed by tourists. While we had had no difficulties in going about unescorted, it might have made us a little conspicuous. I dismissed the feeling of being watched on that score, though I felt it unpleasant.

Rachel went into the store to pick up one or two things to augment our larder while I pumped up our camp stove and prepared to get supper. The town appeared to have many more inhabitants than most of those we had visited lately, for at least fifteen or twenty people walked down the street past the trailer while she was gone. They all covertly surveyed it as they passed. I began to wonder if it was the first trailer they had seen, but decided that that could not be; our host had been too quick to notice our electric connections and to know our requirements, for trailers to be wholly strange to the place.

RACHEL came back, carrying two tin cans and a loaf of bread, and looking flushed.

"I don't like this town. I am glad we are going on in the morning," she said flatly.

I looked up in surprise. Rachel is a good sport, used to making her own way and very fond of the southwestern country. This was not like her.

"What is the matter with it? I thought the man at the gas pump was cordial enough. And it looks pretty much like all the rest of these towns which you have bemoaned leaving."

"I just don't like it. The people are dumb."

"Literally?"

"No, of course not. Don't be silly. I mean they are—oh you know what I mean. They are ninnies, thick in the head, just plain dumb!"

"Couldn't you get what you wanted?"

"Oh, I got it all right. It isn't that. I can't explain. I just don't like it."

Deciding that she was probably just tired and hungry, I hurried to finish preparing supper. We ate without talking, washed the few dishes, and then Rachel announced that she was going to bed. I decided to follow her example. If we slept now we could get an early start in the morning, and we were eager to reach the main route.

Rachel appeared to be sleeping soundly. But, though I dropped off to sleep quickly, I soon awoke again and could not get back to sleep. My mind was unusually alert and it seemed impossible to relax mentally. I tried counting sheep and quoting poetry and several other such devices which are recommended to soothe overstimulated minds. None of them worked.

In that in-between state, which is sometimes reached between complete consciousness and sleep, I lay for what seemed to be hours. Sometimes I seemed to hear someone calling to me through great distances. Then the voices seemed closer. Next I felt as if someone wanted me to come to them. Words shaped themselves in my ears.

"Come. Come. Come to the red house at the end of the street. The red house, the red house. Come."

The words rang in my ears, though at the same time I was sure that no one spoke them audibly. Deciding that I was dreaming, I turned and tried again to sleep.

THE nerves along my left hand and arm began to tingle. I shifted my position and tried consciously to drive away these hallucinations. It seemed that the air was full of whispers, low murmurs and even occasional soft laughter. So real did these sounds seem that I finally got up, slipped on a coat and went outside the trailer to see if some youngsters in the town were perhaps trying to scare us. It was bright moonlight and I could see clearly. There was no one around. One or two dim yellow lights showed in windows down the street, otherwise there was no sign of life and certainly no whispers.

Back in bed it was just as bad again. Rachel slept peacefully on. I lay flat on my back and tried to sleep.

Once more my ears throbbed with sound that resolved itself into words:

"Come. You must come. Come to the red house, the house at the end of the street. Come!"

The last word was a sharp command in forcefulness. Yet I was just as positive that no one was speaking. The words had impressed themselves so deeply on my brain that I was tempted to dress and see if I could find such a place, dream or no dream. Then all was quiet and I laughed at myself.

Now one foot persisted in twitching. Deliberately I held it still and felt as if I were struggling with some external force when I did so. My foot relaxed after a bit, and I started to doze off.

"Come. Come. Come!" I half sat up and then, feeling foolish, lay back on the bed.

My scalp began to sting as if I were standing under a cold needle shower.

By now thoroughly annoyed with

what I felt was pure imagination, I got up again and, rummaging through the medicine cabinet, located the aspirin bottle. I took two tablets and got into bed determined to sleep.

I might as well have saved my energy and the aspirin. They had no effect. Laughter was ringing in my ears, soft derisive laughter. There was no doubt about it. After what seemed to be ages, the laughter continuing all the while, I got up once more and again looked outside. This time I took the flashlight and examined under the trailer, on the trailer roof and all through tbe weeds. There was no one or nothing there.

Back in bed, I considered all possible causes for my feelings. I had eaten nothing particularly indigestible; I was not too tired; I had not been worrying. In fact tbere seemed to be nothing that could explain it. Dimly I heard a clock somewhere up the street striking. Again peals of laughter came gently through the trailer, not as if from outside, but they appeared to originate all about me. Then silence.

There were no more strange sensations and I soon dozed off to sleep quietly until morning.

THE first thing I did that morning was to take a look about the trailer. While I was getting a pail of water from the pump, I could see to the end of the street, where the road turned, and there stood a red frame house. I had not looked about very carefully the night before and had had no idea whether or not the road turned or if there were any red houses in the town.

Rachel had recovered her usual good bumor. I did not mention my feelings of the night before. I felt sure that her matter-of-fact self would only ridicule my susceptibility to dreams. While we were eating breakfast, she saw from the window of the trailer a group of buildings which she wanted to sketch. Rather diffidently, probably remembering her outburst of the night before, she asked me if I would mind if we stayed a little while that morning while she made some sketches. I had no real objections and offered to clean up the trailer while she sketched. After she departed, sketchbook in hand, it did not take me long to pick up the dishes and sweep the floor.

It was just as I was finishing the scanty housework that an old lady, dressed in faded black, came to the door. She looked to be well over eighty though she was still erect and her voice was clear and firm.

After a preliminary remark or two about the weather, sbe asked if I would mind if she looked at the trailer. I asked her in and she looked about the interior in such a perfunctory fashion that I felt sure that she had some other motive than curiosity about the trailer to bring her to the door. I had nothing else to do at the moment and asked her to sit down. She did so with alacrity.

"Did you sleep well last night?" She shot the question at me suddenly.

Taken by surprise, I hesitated. Could she be selling some sort of sleeping powders? Her keen eyes were on mine and she noted the hesitation instantly.

"Oh, you didn't." Softly she laughed, a laughter very reminiscent of the laughter I bad seemed to hear in tbe night.

"Are you psychic?" again the question shot at me abruptly and the old woman's eyes tried to pierce mine.

I FELT embarrassed. I had had that same question asked me equally abruptly once before, by an old lady in Ohio. While I had always laughed off most of the tales of spiritualism and mediums, while I had had enough education in science to cause me to be very sceptical of that which could not be proven in a laboratory, I had had a deep curiosity concerning certain of the supposedly psychic phenomena. One winter I had delved deeply into the subject of hypnosis, although I had attempted very few practical experiments in it. I had read countless books on abnormal psychology. I had played a little with mesmerism and found that I could perform some of the simpler mesmeric experiments. As a youngster in school, I had won a minor reputation among my friends for my supposed ability to make a ouija board answer questions. I had one or two striking experiences with mental telepathy. Yet the very term "psychic" seemed to me to carry a connotation pertaining to charlatans and necromancers. The old lady in Ohio had told me that I was a psychic and should practice as such, and at that time I had been much amused.

My present guest was studying me and slowly smiling.

"We knew you were," she said calmly without waiting for me to recover from my embarrassment and decide how to answer her. "But we made tests last night to be doubly sure before we spoke. Why didn't you come?"

"I don't believe I know just what you are talking about," I interrupted.

"I think you do, but you don't want to admit to yourself that you know. What happened last night?"

I opened my mouth but before I could speak she interrupted me.

"Wait. I'll prove that I know what I'm talking about. Have you a pencil and two pieces of paper handy?"

Rather dazed, I got the paper and pencils out of the cupboard.

"Now," said my guest energetically, "I'll write on one piece of paper just what you heard and felt last night. You write on the other piece the same thing, the way you remember it. Then we'll exchange papers."

I was not sure whether to laugh or obey. The old lady might be some harmless lunatic who was allowed to wander about the town unattended. However I could see no harm in complying with her request, so I wrote down as accurately as I could remember every detail of the uneasiness of the night before. When I finished, the old lady had already ended her writing and was waiting for me. We exchanged papers.

There on her sheet, in the wavering writing of an aged hand, was an exact account of each of the sensations I had experienced and of the ideas I had had, of the times I had risen from bed and the details of my searches for the source of the noises; every word which I had seemed to hear was recorded correctly.

I STARED at the paper in complete perplexity. It was just conceivable that she had been hidden somewhere near the trailer, where I had overlooked her, and had made the noises and spoken the words which I had heard, that she had seen me get up and come out. But how could she have known of the tingling of my hand and arm, the twitching of my foot and the stinging of my scalp? How could she have known that I had been counting sheep and quoting poetry to induce sleep? I could not account for it.

She sat still, quietly watching me. My feelings were greatly disturbed and I had a desire to be sure that I was still quite sane.

"There is no reason to be afraid. We won't hurt you. We will only teach you things. Teach you those things which you have subconsciously wanted to know for a long time," she assured me, again understanding my feelings without my having spoken.

"What do you mean? Who are you? Who do you mean by 'we'? How do you know just how I felt last night?" my questions came out in spite of myself.

"Listen and I will tell you. You are psychic or I never would let you know that this town is any different from the others throughout this part of the country. Because you are psychic, you can be told. Your friend does not have this quality; she thinks we are ignorant. She does not like us, nor have we anything to tell her. But you are different. Listen carefully." She leaned toward me and lowered her voice. "Every person—man, woman or child —in this town is a psychic of one sort or another, every one. We are not fakers. We do not use our ability to bring in money. We are all of us engaged in serious research. While we know much, there is infinitely more to be known. We are learning, we are teaching each other, we are experimenting intelligently and carefully. We discard all forms of imposition and trickery. We have open minds but we do not accept appearances as proofs. This whole town is a laboratory, a laboratory for proving scientific truths. We have kept our experiments and our aims a secret so far because we cannot afford to be overrun with curiosity seekers, newsmen and so-called fortune tellers. Our members have come from many places. They have been sought out carefully and each has proven his desire to know, to analyze, to work for greater knowledge.

"One man was once a well-known professor of psychology at a great university. Another was a doctor who had specialized in psychiatry. Another, a lawyer whose ability to handle criminal cases was based on his deep knowledge of psychology. We have a woman who was a learned chemist; another who was a laboratory technician of remarkable ability. Each of these gave up a lucrative profession to come to our town. We have here a child who is apparently normal while awake, but who speaks strange languages and does strange things when asleep. Her mother brought her here to be studied. Another little boy has the ability to cause tables to move and chairs to dance by running his hands lightly above them. He does not know how he does it and neither do we, but we are studying him and trying to find out. I was once a clairvoyant in a circus; I started as a faker, but found out there were things deeper than that and finally gave up circus life and came here to learn what the forces were that gave me that power which I could not account for. I have been here for forty years and have learned an infinite amount, and the more I learn, the more I see the need to know yet more. I could tell you such a history for every individual inhabitant of this whole town. There are well over a hundred of us here now."

THE day before I would not have believed that I could listen to such a tale and believe in it implicitly. But there was something about this old lady before me that I could not doubt. She was telling the truth. This town, into which we had stumbled so innocently, was the most fantastic and yet the most credible town in the United States.

"How did you know about last night?" I asked, humbly this time.

"When you and your friend stopped, the man at the gas pump (he was a chemical engineer in one of the biggest automobile factories in the country before he came here) was sure that you were one of us. Several of us made a point of looking you over while you were preparing your supper, in front of an open window. We had no real doubts. But we make a policy of never trusting anyone without first testing him. Several of us met last night and caused you to have the sensations which you felt. We were several blocks away, naturally you could see no one when you searched. Our subconscious minds were placed in rapport with yours and we were able to distinguish your feelings and your reactions. You refused to come to us, though you received the message clearly. You were held back by your doubts, by your fear of appearing foolish. But no longer could we hesitate. When we saw your friend go out to sketch, I took the opportunity to talk alone with you."

"This is a most amazing thing," I said, giving the sort of trite answer that is easiest to give when one is mentally shaken.

"Not amazing," she rebuked me. "It is the most logical thing in the world. We want you to stay with us for at least a while. When I leave you now, and you think of what I have told you, you will have doubts. You will begin to think that I am perhaps in my second childhood, or perhaps mildly insane. You will think you are among fakers. Or that you have dreamed the whole thing. I ask you to stay in this town long enough to give us a chance to prove to your complete satisfaction that we are, as I have told you, intelligent and capable people engaged in scientific research along a line about which far too little is known. Will you do that?"

"If I can convince my friend."

"Don't try to tell her about the town and expect her to believe you. She will not believe. She has none of those characteristics necessary for understanding and sympathizing with our work. She does not like the town, but she will stay if you ask it. Now I shall go. The whole town has been told of your presence and you can go to anyone you see and they will tell you more and give you every opportunity to observe our work. Goodbye till later." The old lady rose and made her way out and walked slowly down the street.

I SAT still. To say that I was left in a state of perplexity is very inadequate. As she had warned me, once she had gone doubts of all sorts assailed me. I read and re-read the paper on which she had recorded the events of the night before. I remembered how sure I had been that my informer was honest, while I talked with her. I determined to find out, for my own information, whether she had told me the truth or whether I was mixed up in some inexplicable fantasy.

By using one excuse and another, I managed to keep Rachel in the town for three weeks. She sputtered, said that she had to get home, that she could not see what I found so especially interesting there, that she was sick of the town. But she did find a great deal to sketch and the three weeks did not drag for her, in spite of her sputtering. The townspeople treated her with politeness, were always cordial, but never by word or deed allowed her to suspect anything unusual in her surroundings. I made no attempt to disclose to her the secret of the town. I knew that she would not be sympathetic to the work of these sincere people.

For they are sincere. I spent that three weeks in careful investigation. I observed their experiments. I saw them do, time and again, things which could not be explained by trickery. I personally observed every member of the colony, at one time or another. I bave since written a number of letters investigating the past of many of those who claimed to bave left important careers, and in every case their claims have been substantiated.

They gave me every opportunity to learn. They never claimed to know the complete explanation of the success of many of their experiments. They made no secret of their ignorance of many things. But they showed a knowledge vastly greater than any on record along these lines. They told me just what they were trying to find out and how they were going about it. They did not attempt to hide their failures nor put forth any extravagant claims for the impossible. I observed many things which would seem miraculous if I related them here, some of which they could explain and some of which they could not, as yet.

At the end of the three weeks it became imperative that we leave. Both Rachel and I were needed at home. When I left, I was urged to return whenever I could.

I CANNOT here do more than tell you what I have. It is sufficiently obvious that it would be harmful to the life of the colony if it were generally known to be what it is. Eventually they will themselves disclose to the world the nature and results of their work. Until that time comes, their whereabouts must be concealed from the world as a whole.

Perhaps the question has arisen in your mind—why have I written this? Am I, while seeming to guard a secret, betraying it by mentioning its very existence? No, I am not doing that.

When I was about to leave, the old lady came to me with a request.

"You are going back into the outside world," she began. "We want you to do something for us. The time will come, in a few years, when we shall need to have you aid us. At that time, while our location must still be concealed, certain information can be given out which will help us materially. Then we shall want you to write an article about the town and get it published where it will be read by many people. Among those who read it will be certain ones who also have this psychic power. In the article, you must explain that the time will soon come when they can be of great value to our colony. Tell them to prepare themselves by intense study. They should hold themselves in readiness to come here when they are summoned. They will be informed of such a time and will be notified precisely how to reach us."

The other day, I received a brief note, telling me that the time had come for the article to be written. So I am repeating her words and trusting that they will reach those for whom they are intended.

I would like, however, to add a word of caution of my own. I must say to those—reporters and otherwise—who think that they, by pretending to powers which they do not possess, can go from one town to another and finally find the one to which I have referred, the town appears on the surface like all its neighbors. Its inhabitants appear to lead normal lives. They carry on the typical occupations of the locality, prospecting for gold, raising a few cattle, doing just as all the people do in that section of the country. And finally, they have keenly penetrating minds and no acting, however well done, will fool them into premature disclosures. If you are not needed there, you will not recognize your whereabouts, even should you spend weeks or months in the attempt.

Rachel, when she reads this, will understand why I wanted to stay there. She is, I know, sufficiently a good sport and dependable friend not to give away the location. Rachel may not be in sympathy with this research, but she is completely truthworthy and will not betray this trust which I am putting in her.

As for myself, I am not going to be able to spend much time there for a while. I have my family to consider and other work to do. But whenever the opportunity comes, I shall spend considerable periods of time with these people and shall study, both when I am there and when I am away, in an attempt to add my bit to the fund of knowledge which they already possess.

SCIENCE CAN DO THIS!

ONE OF THE BRIDGES OF LIFE

GLUTATHIONE (a complex formed from cystine and glutamic acid) is the hydrogen "clearing house" of the body. Hydrogen ions are the cell's means of transferring electric charges when oxidation and reduction is carried on. Glutathione accepts hydrogen (*not* heavy hydrogen) and is thus reduced. When the molecule contacts a point of need for hydrogen, it gives up the hydrogen readily and is reoxidized itself, ready again to take up hydrogen. Hydrogen is thus the needle valve for the flow of life's energies, the final buffer transforming energies which would otherwise make the cell a very hot place to stay. Electron-voltages endangering everything from osmotic conditions to the combustion of fuels would accumulate, were it not for glutathione. Indications are that civilified man does not have a proper balance between the amounts of cystine and glutamic acid. Cystine is sometimes free in the blood (cystinemia), where it does not belong, and sometimes in the urine even to the point of causing kidney stone formation, whereas if glutamic acid were present in sufficient amount it might be put to work. Where there is glutamic acid deficiency a marked improvement in general intelligence accompanies its use.* Glutamic acid is normally manufactured by the liver, but the liver's function is subject to impairment by sulfa drugs, cirrhosis, jaundice, gall bladder trouble, and by many substances now in use.

But back again to the hydrogen idea. . . . Cystine, to be effective, must turn polarized light to the left. Glutamic acid must turn polarized light (and other energies) to the right. That is, they must either turn or be turned. As the cytochrome gives up oxygen to a fuel molecule, the oxygen's energy flow, at the start of adapting of the valence electrons, positions the glutathione molecule so that as the energy of the hydrogen "escape valve" builds up to complete oxidation, the molecule is able to receive the transformer atom. This matter of the positioning of reacting molecules in order to get efficient contacts, the author believes, is of the utmost importance in the chemistry of the cell. (John Keeley, the man who produced phenomenal energies in the late 19th century (died(?) 1898), supposedly from the atoms of water and air, utilized a somewhat similar train of thought. *He did not disrupt atomic nuclei.*)

**Treated mice escape mazes in 4 tries compared with 17 tries for control mice.*

THE direction in which compounds rotate light is often subject to change by simple successions of reactions with heavy metals and certain non-metals. The amino acids, all of which are rotatory in nature, apparently meet with such reaction chains occasionally, since there is often a certain number of "wrong-way Corrigan" molecules to be found among the normal ones derived from protein breakdown. When abnormal proteins and abnormal amino acids have usurped the place of the proper types in the body cell (because of glandular abnormality, tissue starvation and imperfect combustion mechanisms) the cancer nucleus is established. In 1938 a cancer investigator found that proteins of cancer cells are laevo-rotatory. He failed to find evidence at hand that normal cell proteins were anything but dextro-rotatory. Other investigators thought it a good joke because they found evidence that normal cells possess, *sometimes*, both protein types. But were they right in assuming that these were 100% normal cells? Perhaps many body cells hang near the dividing line between the cancerous and normal states without ever quite stepping over it. This whole problem did not receive the degree of attention it warranted at the time of its discussion, nor has it since that time.

THE HEAT-CONDITIONER—WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?

BACK in the late thirties ('38 approximately) an aluminum foil system of shutters (concealed within walls) was patented. It heated or cooled by direct radiation to or absorption from the body. It operated electrically, and made it possible for rooms to be comfortable, in spite of thermometer readings, at freezing or at 110 degrees. It was installed in a certain Wisconsin hospital, and was preeminently satisfactory. That was the last heard of it. Why?—*John McCabe Moore.*

An apparition . . . rolling a barrel before it!

AGHARTI

(Continued from page 63)

changed. Much changed . . ."

"Is it then true; I mean is he . . ."

"Insane? Why don't you say the word? You are, Doctor, one of our inner circle. Within this circle we don't mince words. No; the Fuehrer is not exactly insane. But his mind is more and more preoccupied with mystics and . . . Well, you'll see for yourself. For here we are."

He rapped sharply at a heavy steel door, flanked with the inevitable guards.

"Herein!"

Stufa's heavy eyebrows shot upward: "Is that . . . ?"

"Man, pull yourself together," hissed the templar naval officer. He pushed Stufa in.

The heavily armor-plated central command-stand was an oval room of no more than twelve feet diameter. All along its walls pipes and cables, fat and thin, were like so many snakes in suddenly arrested crawl. A huge mahogany desk almost bi-sected the oval. The man behind it, the man whose outer appearance all the world had once identified with the simplicity of a brown shirt; this man now resplendent in the dress of a Grandmaster of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, jumped up, both hands stretched wide for the heartiest of handshakes:

"My dear Doctor, I'm infinitely happy to see you again. Your report —I've just finished it: magnificent, my dear Doctor, magnificent. What a visible disposition of providence that I should live to this great hour. And to that even greater hour of the liberation of our beloved fatherland." Again he fervently clasped Stufa's hands.

"Where," thought Stufa, "where have I seen before a pair of blue glasses so obviously meant for deceit?" He raked his memory. Suddenly he visualized a picture in a paper, seen—oh, decades ago: "Ludendorff; Ludendorff as he descended from a plane after his flight to Sweden in 1918. Yes, that was it . . ."

The voluble, the ham-actor's voice without transition overturned to tones of tragedy:

"Just one moment, my dear Dr. Stufa. We'll talk heart to heart and at great length immediately. Meanwhile—it is my sad duty, since I am judge supreme in this our innnermost, our holiest citadel, to administer punishment deserved."

The glasses shifted into another corner of the room. Only then Stufa realized that they were not alone.

LASHED to a wide board, so tightly that he could not move a limb, stood a common sailor; the ribbon of his cap showed him to be one of a submarine crew. His face had a pallor even more ghostly than was common to men who spend half their lives in the dark deep. His tousled blond hair was drenched with perspiration, the moisture of death-fear ran over his emaciated face. Drops gleamed in curls of hair on his bare, tattooed breast.

Hardened as he was to the scientific horrors of the new Apocalypse, Stufa swayed like a sawed-off tree under the final blows of the axe. He had thought himself prepared for anything—but not for this:

Hot, searing, with the insane fury of a desert whirlwind the Fuehrer's voice broke loose:

"You, Werner Hansen, are accused to be an enemy of the Fatherland, a traitor of Germany. You have been overheard to say that it were useless slaughter to sacrifice so many human lives. You have attempted to sow the seed of fear and doubt into the hearts of our brave people. There is only one further use for one like you, a people's enemy: your blood. I herewith order your blood to flow so it may save worthier lives. Executors: proceed!"

The two hooded hangmen who held the board upright unloosened their grip on the sailor's forearms. In a violent effort to control his limbs Stufa gnashed his teeth: "This cannot be true, this must not be true," he whispered into himself. And yet, it was.

For from two big glass bottles inserted into the lower part of the board two lengths of transparent rubberhose snaked upward to the sailor's wrists. And with the moment the hangmen released their grip the blood began to spout from glass-syringes inserted into cordlike veins; dark and profuse it streamed . . .

There were two blood-curdling screams; the first came from the sailor whose strong teeth had bitten through the gag which tied his mouth:

"You swine, you swine, you swine, swine, swine, SWINE!"

The second, almost simultaneously and just as shrill came from the Fuehrer: "Out with him, out, out, out, OUT!"

Behind the armored steel door the tumultuous noises and the screams of "swine, swine!" receded into the passages. Behind the oversize desk the man who had once been Europe's overlord sat panting and as if collapsed in his chair.

"Swine," he exclaimed, and his voice now was whining lamentation: "Swine persecute me, Stufa; innumerable swine; long swine, white swine, unnatural swine who can walk on two legs; they push me with their snouts, they press at me from all sides, they grunt at me: swine, swine, swine . . . You have seen it with your own eyes; swine, swine, even here in the innermost citadel. . . . Stufa, you're the greatest inventor alive; now you have finished the V-7, cannot you invent something for me? Some stronger armor plate, some death ray, some electric screen; anything. Oh, save me, Stufa, save me from the swine, the swine, the swine!"

WITH his bison bull's head lowered threatening as if to attack, with his big fists clenched Stufa stood hovering over the loathsome derelict of a man who had buried his face in his arms, who knocked his forehead against the mahogany plate, sobbing in the tantrums of mental torture:

"Should I or should I not?" Stufa's brains were in the white heat in which great decisions are being forged:

"No; if I wring his neck, I'm done for and nothing is accomplished . . . Time . . . I need time . . . And a grip at the controls of the machine."

The man who'd gone all to pieces slowly and as if suspiciously lifted his face. The torn features gradually composed themselves; the quickness with which he recovered from the attack was truly amazing. Again his voice had undergone a complete transmutation; its tones now were grandiloquent:

"My dear Dr. Stufa, these interruptions; always there are these interruptions, so painful for me that they should interfere with matters of such momentous importance as we are going to discuss. But then; you understand of course the immensity of the burden which rests on my shoulders, which I must carry all alone."

He sighed: "Sometimes, my dear Stufa, it is almost more than even I can bear . . . What was I going to say? Oh yes, I have particularly regretted that an accident—fortunately nothing serious, I have been reassured —has robbed me of the opportunity to meet your charming friend; the daughter of my would-be assassin. How strange, my dear Stufa, are the dispositions of providence . . . The reason why I had wanted to see her was to tell her something . . . But now you can bring her my message after we're through . . . Tell her—tell her that I, her Fuehrer, have forgiven her . . ."

CHAPTER VI

Voices Crying in the Wilderness

"IT CANNOT be," Francisca thought, "it's impossible that a person should be awakened from sheer happiness."

Rubbing her eyes however and looking around in the clean white-washed cloister cell, she realized that it was so: some deep well of happiness had filled during her sleep; filled and filled until it had overflowed in the dawn which now stood golden in the window.

The girl slipped out of her bed; she dressed and tiptoed out into the corridor. There were no doors to the cells of the little monastry. Three times Francisca briefly arrested her step to look into the other cells and each time she smiled at the sight of the sleepers there; the smile of a little girl on her birthday morn'.

Out in the open the mountain to the back of the house was still shrouded in mists, but far out to the West the sea was a bar of silver and the slopes were bathed in gold. With a cry of joy the girl broke into a run, much as a colt would when the stable doors are opened to the paddocks. From the short, matted grass dew drenched her sandaled feet, cool and electrifying; as through a field of sparkling diamonds she flew and couldn't stop, carried away by her happiness. Behind her the little monastry, built from the native stone of the slopes, became one with the mountainside; invisible after a few hundred yards. The girl didn't care; she knew her landmarks and the bleating of the ewes beckoned her on.

She had now reached the rocky hollows several hundred feet below the monastry; brooks murmured in the crags of rock, whispered in beds of moss and in the overhanging brushes, gnarled by the teeth of mountain goats, still hung mists of the night. She halted, listening: "Ah, there was one—and over there—and over there."

Cautiously she stalked through the low layer of golden mists until she saw the first ewe. The animal stood on a mound of rocks, its head bent downward, bleating, beckoning. With a little cry of joy the girl came close, talking softly with her every step: "Yes, yes, little mother; don't be afraid, don't run away; I'm so happy I'm first this morning, so happy I can do this for you."

The animal shrank back, snorting and stomping the ground and there was stark fear in its greenish eyes; but it didn't run. The girl went to her knees. With great effort she removed a heavy stone slab from the mound. With the first crack of light something stirred inside the mound; there was a fierce, plaintive bleating and with the vigor of wild life a pair of tiny lambs jumped out, not older than three days. With the keenness of long hunger they rushed the mother sheep and in a second all was quiet and content; no noise except for the vigorous suckings of the little mouths, no move except for the tremors of delight, aquiver in the swishing little tails.

Something welled up in Francisca's breast and brought tears to her eyes:

"This is life," she thought; "this is the good life as God has given it to beast and men and it is holy."

SLOWLY so as not to frighten the ewe, she arose. She looked around. She listened: "Ah; over there's another."

Sometimes it was a single lamb and sometimes it were twins which she liberated from the captivity of the night, opening one by one tbe little stone-pens which the peasants of Greece build to protect the young lambs from foxes, wild dogs and other prowlers of the night. As she returned uphill the sun already had dispelled the fogs. Mount Olympus stood revealed in all its glory, its flanks shining with snow, the bold horns of its top flanking a saddle befitting to be the throne of the gods.

In the monastery's refectorium Sybil, tbe Sybil of the castle of the Lost Souls, was busy setting a breakfast for four; a simple task, for on each blue bowl of earthenware lay but a chunk of white bread and a piece of cheese while a jug with hot milk stood steaming in the center. Sybil looked little cbanged; the haunting sadness was still in her eyes, only she looked less witch-like now the ragged oriental splendor of the male dressing gown had been replaced by a simple peasant dress.

Seeing her all alone, Francisca felt all the joy and the glory of the morning evaporate from her. Leaning against the door frame she felt her knees go weak under an attack of the old, the nightmarish fears:

"Where are the others?" she panted.

With a serene smile, Sybil looked at her: "Francy, Francy my dear; calm yourself. There's nothing to worry about. Heinrich's out there in the yard. For your benefit he's cutting himself to little pieces, trying to shave with ice cold water from the well and a piece of soap which is mostly clay. And pastor Eckard . . ."

"Here!" said a loud, clear voice, "and good morning to you all."

As he stood hanging on his crutches at the entrance to the corridor he too looked unchanged; pale, haggard, but beaming with smiles.

A shadow fell into the door and Francisca felt herself caught in the strong grip of Stufa's arms. Her body went limp with relief from tension; Stufa had to lead her over to the bench: "I cannot help it," she sobbed with her head on the table, "forgive me please, forgive me if I'm making a scene. I'm happy. I'm happier than I ever was before in my life. Only I cannot overcome this terrible fear that something awful might befall you while I'm away. I was gone less than an hour and yet it seemed a year. Suddenly it was as if my blood froze and as I hurried back I thought . . . I thought that . . . Tell me; am I crazy, am I insane?"

"No, darling, no, you're not;" Sybil had taken the girl into her arms: "We all feel the same way. We all are as lf —as if battle fatigued. The strain bas been too much. Too many things have happened too suddenly; now we all suffer from a kind of postponed shock. You've nothing to be sorry about; we're all alone, the four of us and we're safe. Tell us, Heinrich, are we really safe?"

The bisonhead frowned; its voice was a hoarse murmur:

"Yes, I think we're safe. We've not been molested all this week. There will be spies, of course, training their glasses into our asylum in this wilderness, and down in the valleys of Thessaly the people would tear us to piece if they knew who we are. Yet I think we're as safe as the hostages of the Devil can be."

"TELL us, Heinrich," even the serene Syhil now sounded almost hysterical, half laughing and half sobbing: "when you were all alone with the mad devil on that hattleship, what gave you the idea to claim me as Francisca's old nurse? What made you hit upon pastor Eckard as an assistant in building this mad contraption, this—this magical swinetrap?"

"I don't know, Sybil. I really don't know. The idea came to me as a sudden inspiration while I was sweating it out in that hell. I knew that you two were the nearest and dearest to Francy's heart. I wanted to save you. But then, too, I wanted you to save me as well . . ."

Eckard slowly raised his head: "When the Americans discharged me from the concentration camp in Halberstadt I had no other idea but to go back to castle Tannrode. When on the road I was kidnaped by armed men, I resisted until they stunned me.

"I woke up in a plane. But my duties are with my flock. There can be no higher duty; except—except if it were possihle to lock these gates of hell hefore they will open up and swallow what's left of the world. You, Doctor, carry a terrible responsihility: you are the key; all depends upon the way you turn. If only I could help you to turn in the right way . . ."

"Let me think, pastor," some inner tension choked Stufa's throat: "I've heen thinking day and night over this . . . Try to understand . . . Try to understand that I have got to make the hardest decision of my life. Give me just one more day . . . Tonight perhaps I shall have made up my mind . . . Then Eckard, then I shall want to talk to you—perhaps. Meanwhile . . . leave me alone . . ."

Heavily he arose from his untouched food. He reached the door and the eyes of the three followed him as he descended the slope, his hroad shoulders slumping, the mighty head bent as if under a heavy burden. Big hillowing clouds were herded from the sea by a fresh easterly wind; huge shafts of sunlight stabbed, now at the lone figure of the man, now at the ruined temple in the olive grove where he was headed, the marble pillars of which shone pale in the quivering haze. They knew he would he sitting there all day, as he had yesterday and the day before, thinking; thinking in agony.

Neither was he the only one. A short while after Stufa had gone Eckard with a silent bow retreated into his cell and the two women knew that he, who could not follow Stufa, would again kneel on the aching stumps of his legs for hour after hour in his intense and silent prayer for the aid of God.

"Come on, child"; taking the girl by the arm Sybil led her to the terrace: "This one thing at least we can enjoy; the sun of Greece."

They sat down in a sheltered corner where the stone wall already was warm. They drank in the rays with every sun-starved pore, their faces raised like plants which turn their every leaf to the light. Their eyes followed the clouds, followed the buzzards as they soared along the slopes and it was as if they wanted to relearn the uses of freedom from their wings.

"I'M A fool, Sybil," the girl said after a long silence. "I'm a fool hecause I've wished for a refuge like this harder than for anything else in life. I thought we could escape, the four of us. I thought we might, as if on some other planet, start a new life. The dream's come true, hut whom did it help? Not Heinrich. Not Pastor Eckard. Not you. And because it did not help any of you, I cannot be happy either. I've lived in a fool's paradise up to this morning, but now the angel with the flaming sword has driven me out of it. Can there be no happiness for us—ever?"

There was a smile of sadness on the older woman's lips: "I think I know exactly how you feel. I had the same experience. Once during the war my boy came on furlough from the front. I was still rich; our home was beautiful and I did everything within my power to make my boy forget, to give him a respite, a refuge from war, be it ever so brief. But that didn't work out either. The boy could not forget.

"What does it help to flee? If you and Heinrich were to reach the farthest corner of the world, could he flee from himself? Could he flee from Satan's clutches? Could you be happy having him and knowing that his V-7 had destroyed more millions of human lives?"

A convulsive shiver ran over Francisca's face:

"Sybil," she cried, "tell me one thing, tell me honest: am I insane?"

"No, darling; honestly not. When I first found you in the castle you were out of your mind; small wonder. But now you are the most sensible girl I've ever known; why do you ask?"

"Because I want to murder. I've always hated to kill, even to kill the rabbits in their slings when we had no food. But now I want to murder; not one man, not two, but every one of the satanists in Niflheimr. And above all, I want to murder Voland for he is Heinrich's evil spirit. For he, too, is the one who killed my father and my mother."

The girl now spoke as if in fever:

"You think I lost my mind just from starvation or because I came home to find father and mother gone. Oh no, oh no. I was with them when the Gestapo came, I saw everything. Father tried to defend the castle as had the knights of old. But he had only a gun. And they brought up machine guns and mortars and father was alone. He had been wounded twice and he had shot his last round of ammunition. The blood was streaming from his shoulder and mother tried to bandage it. Then he dragged mother and me to the chapel and pushed us down into the crypt. 'Hide behind the coffins,' he called, "I'll give myself up.' But they were already upon us. Me they didn't see. I had crawled into a place they thought nobody could hide; I lay curled up in the baptismal font. Father stood in front of me, the useless empty pistol in hand. Mother tried to shield him with her body. And then I heard this devil's snarling voice: 'Aha, the lady baroness too! Shoot that mad bitch!' And then, after they had dragged the bodies away, do you know what I did? I took my handkerchief, I tore my dress, I wiped off every drop of blood and spattered brains and laid them into grandfather's coffin, pressed them into his folded hands to hold. Something drove me. I thought it was my duty. I was only a child and 'twas the only thing I could think of to do. And as I did it—Sybil, I could never explain this—bit by bit my reason went to pieces. I knew it and I was happy that it did."

She laughed; a wild, a horrible, a demented laugh:

"Remember? That's the way I laughed when you first found me and all the others were so scared of me. And now I want to murder. Whenever Heinrich talks of 'holy war' and patriotic duty' and that the destruction of Germany must be avenged I feel this kind of laughter forming in the background of my mind. It grows and it wants to break out. Before my eyes I see the hell of Agharti and into my eyes there snarls the devil's voice. Sybil, oh Sybil, if this laughter ever breaks out again, promise that you will kill me, *please,* promise."

THE white-haired woman drew the girl still closer into her arms, parrying with all her strength the convulsions of the slender, childlike limbs, holding the head which rocked back and forth in agony: "Darling," she whispered, "darling!"

But it took a long time before the demoniacal force of the attack dissolved in hot tears and in stammering, sobbing words:

"You promised, Sybil, didn't you? It's because I love Heinrich so much. It's because he must never see me go out of my mind. It's because I'm quite, quite unimportant but Heinrich is not. For you must know he never wanted to build an atomic bomb. He wanted a power; a new power to drive ships and machines and even the tiniest bit of it would drive a plow through the ground. That's what he really wanted: to aid all men. He didn't want it for Germany alone, he didn't want it for war; it was to be a gift for all the world. And then the Devil came and Heinrich made a pact with him. What can I do, Sybil, what can we do to save him? If only it were my life; a thousand times I would give it for him."

The white-haired woman had been a great lady in her time, but now she cried her heart out together with the child and both found in the wake of the tears the inspiration which so often flows from women's sorrows.

"Francy, let's take heart. We are not powerless, not helpless in this struggle between God and Satan. There's a power greater than all of Satan's power and it's given to us and its name is love. You love him, Francy? You would gladly give your life for him? But then it is all crystal clear and simple: You must marry him."

The girl in bland astonishment lifted her face from her hands:

"Why? He never . . ."

"As if that mattered!" There was great determination in Sybil's voice: "You've got to marry him because the holy sacrament of marriage breaks every devilish pact. You've got to marry him in order to redeem him through your love which comes from God. You've got to marry him because we don't want any atomic bombs to fly. You've got to marry him because we won't let the Devil rule the world. You've got to marry him because we women must always fight on the side of life and against destruction and death—in one word: you've got to marry Heinrich tomorrow at the latest. We mustn't lose a minute's time. Heavens! Your wedding dress!"

"But Sybil! You're crazy! Heinrich never as much as . . ."

"Darling, darling; now why, when everything's all settled, must you . . ."

Between laughter and tears the argument went on now in the cool shadow of the house accompanied by the noises of bustling domestic activity.

DOWN by the old temple of Demeter meanwhile, Stufa was sweating it out, now under the huge shafts of brilliant sunlight, now under the black shadows of deep-bellied clouds as they wandered over his head unendingly. He sat on a slab of marble; part of a pillar which lay shattered on the ground in slanting sections like the vertebrae of an enormous snake. After his first day of ceaseless pacing amongst the ruins he had chosen this place and it contained secrets known only to men who live in great loneliness. This morning he had fished them out again from their cache under the marble slab and he kept staring at them in a heavy frown. They were three pieces of marble. Together they formed an Acanthus-leaf and the secret of them was that each represented the thinking of a day. As if they were parts of a puzzle, Stufa put them together and took them apart in his powerful hands:

"Let me sum it up," he thought, and his lips moved as he thought, forming these words: "Let me get this straight: this piece was *flight*. What were the chances?" He scratched the ground with the piece making a map: "Here's the monastery. Down there the road bends around the mountain north to Larissa and Lamia; that's where we landed. Somewhere around there must be the headquarters of Agharti, Balkan-Division. We could never break through there. To the south-west Salonika is a hundred miles away. To the east there's nothing but mountain wilderness. At first it looked to me as if we had a chance being a thousand kilometers away from Germany. But in reality we are locked up as tight as in any Agharti. Eckard cannot walk. Sybil has little strength. We've no money, no papers. None of us speaks Greek. Even if we were to escape the agents of Agharti, the peasants would tear us to pieces like so many raging wolves the moment we opened our mouths. No; flight is out and this decision stands."

HE DROPPED the piece with the top of the Acanthus-leaf and took the middle one:

"If I were to turn *informer;* what then? Then the thing to do would be to walk boldly into the nearest town and to give myself up to the police. What follows? Of the police in these little towns nobody would believe the story even if they could understand. They would undoubtedly take me for some German deserter who has hidden in these mountains ever since the war. They would lock me up. It would take weeks and months before I could reach the ear of somebody with authority to contact Allied Military Intelligence. Then they, in turn, would not believe me for weeks and for months on end. Meanwhile it would be certain death for Francy, Sybil, Eckard. What's more I couldn't bring myself to do it in this sordid manner, anyway. That was yesterday's thinking and it stands; the idea is out . . ."

He took up the third piece of marble which showed only the stem of the Acanthus-leaf:

"This is to be today's thought, the hardest of all: *What if I were to go right ahead?* What if we let the V-7 fly? Would the death of the great cities of the world bring about the resurrection of Germany? Answer me that!"

He looked wildly around at the ruins of another great civilization and the lizards fled which had crept up near the immobile figure of the man.

"Answer me that!" he challenged the stone. "At the time of the downfall of Greece some great inventor created a secret weapon such as the world had never seen. Greek fire 'twas called and it could not be extinguished; some experts even say that explosives were mixed in it. Why then was it that the Greeks were unable to shake off the Roman yoke? Why didn't they burn up the Roman's wooden fleet? Why didn't they burn Rome itself? Why was the glory of Greece never restored and her temples decayed even when she had a chance to rebuild?"

Absentmindedly he stroked the ribs of the collapsed pillar.

"I know why," he murmured: "it was because the faith in the old Gods had collapsed that the temples collapsed. The glory of Greece, it couldn't be restored from without because it had died from within. Isn't it the same with Germany? Supposing she were liberated. Supposing the capital cities of her enemies were as so many ghostly Babylons and Ninevehs. Would that rebuild Berlin? Would Munich ever be what it was? And above all, would the people ever regain their faith in the booked cross, in storm-troopers, in Gauleiters, in Reichschancelleries, in the Fuehrer himself? If indeed the faith in these old Gods has collapsed, what would it profit us to destroy the world? I must think this to an end; think hard . . ."

Again the lizards crept up close, flattening themselves against the stone. Their golden eyes blinked at the slumped body of the man who never moved except for a silent play of fingers with three marble pieces.

AT DUSK the four, who had cried with prophets' voices in the wilderness, who each in his own way had wrestled with the Lord, were gathered again in the refectory.

Sybil had lighted a brisk brushfire in the hearth. From the larder Francisca had brought up a wineskin; dark-purple, almost black and smelling of resin it flowed into the cups. The long sticks of bread were the same and the small round goat cheeses were the same as in the morning, but the four people were different.

As if after some great purification each one had come out of the shells of solitude. Looking into each others' eyes they discovered a new radiant light in them. Listening to each others' voices they breathed at ease; the infectious, the choking tension was gone from them. All of a sudden they found the wine and the food enjoyable; in fact they fell to it with the great appetite of a great work fulfilled.

After the meal as, with their cups, they settled by the fireside there fell a silence. All sensed that much had to be said, yet everyone was shy to begin. It was Sybil who finally cleared her throat:

"I'm an old woman; that gives me a privilege to speak my mind. There's many a burden on our minds common to all of us; but there's one foremost with me, one which you men perhaps fail to see."

So far she had spoken very low and very softly; now her voice became commanding as she turned to Francisca:

"No, my dear; you stay right here with us and don't run away. This is no time for girlish blushings and bourgeois niceties. Sit down!

"Heinrich, I've known you only for a week. But I've come to know you as a man of courage, a man whom I can respect. Heinrich; Francisca here is my adopted daughter. I understand that you have come to love my girl. Is this true?"

"Yes." There was much wonder in Stufa's voice.

"I thought so," said the whitehaired lady dryly. "I also am quite sure that Francy loves you. Then, Heinrich, how is it that you have not yet asked me for Francisca's hand?"

The great inventor gasped. "I—I never thought of that . . ."

"No; indeed you did not." Sybil's voice was stern. "And in a nutshell I will give you some perfectly good reasons just why this thought never occurred to you: You have lived outside the laws of normal human society over many years. Perhaps even as a scientist you have never come to know these laws. Your mind is occupied with great works, great plans. You have God and the Devil struggling in your breast. You feel that in this time of momentous decisions and in this valley of death wherein we live there is no room for marriage. Isn't it so?"

The bisonhead nodded. "True, very

true."

"All right, then. But now look at the matter from the other side, my side, Francisca's side; it never occurred to you to do so because your head is up in the clouds. But we, we women, are down to earth; we're part of it. How do you think the Jews would have survived their forty years of wandering through the desert if they had concentrated all thought on the great emergency of their circumstances and on nothing else? How do you think the peoples of Europe could have survived the centuries of the black plague and the incessant wars of the 'dark age' if they had thought of nothing but that this was a valley of death from which to escape the sooner the better to either heaven or hell? They would have become extinct. And what made any people ever reach a promised land, what saved them from becoming extinct? Their women did. The women, who no matter how great the emergency, come hell and high water, continued faithfully to do the work of the Lord: being given away and being received in marriage. Carrying their burdens and carrying their babes. Tending the hearth and raising their families lest the world should come to an end. I do not know, Heinrich, just how important you think your work is. 'Twould seem to me that of late you're none too sure about its ultimate benefits. But this I do know: if there were a great many Heinrichs such as you—that this surely would be the end of the world.

"Heinrich, I won't stand for it. Not for your V-7. Not for your pact with hell. Not for your destroying the life of my child Francisca here. Now, speak up, Heinrich, and speak like a human being, like a man!"

IN GUSTS like the night wind from the mountains came the breath from Stufa's chest:

"I cannot, Sybil! Can the night be joined in marriage to the day? Heaven to Hell? Water to fire? Ariel to Caliban? Should I drag Francy down with me to damnation? No; I love her too much for that. Once, as a young man I searched for a power to create a brave new world. I found it. And then, under my every touch of hands and brains it turned out death and destruction. How can I marry Francy! I, the accursed of God and men?"

Eckard's voice, clear as a clarion-call, broke in:

"Men curse, Heinrich, not God. Through all these days I've watched you as you went out into that ruin-wilderness to wrestle with God and the demon. Every night I've heard you tossing about and murmuring in tormented sleep. Time and again it has been on my lips to ask you—and now I *am* asking you.

"Have you never heard, Heinrich, that Christ died on the cross for our sins? God has no wrath for you, no matter what you have done. It is your wrath which has closed the door of your soul into the face of God. He, who has died for you—like a beggar he has been standing at the doorstep of your soul, calling you, hoping forever that you would let Him in. Even now, if you had only eyes to see, He is standing there. Why won't you let Him in?"

Like a tired child Francisca had rested her head in Stufa's lap.

He did not look at her; only his fingers caressed, in long strokes, a lock of her hair.

"How can I hope," he said slowly, "that God will take me as I am? Must I not first undo all I've done? Must I not first work a complete change in me before I dare to show my face to Him?"

"Wrong, but completely wrong!"

There was triumphant happiness in Eckard's voice. "You can never redeem yourself through works. Love Him who has loved you first and you face not the inexorable judge, you face the Father."

A movement like a tremor ran through the strong frame of the man. He bent his heavy head down to Francisca and for a moment they looked into each other's eyes, deep, searchingly.

"Francy," he asked, "is he right?"

"Yes, Heinrich."

"Francy"—there was a helpless plea in Stufa's voice—"I cannot do it all alone. I don't know how to open that door. Will you help me? Will you marry me?"

Slowly the girl raised her arms. Slowly they closed around the tired head. Her answer was a kiss.

There was the curious creaking of the w o o d e n limb, tbe scraping of crutches on the flagstones; there were Sybil's retreating steps and then only the low crackle of the dying embers and whisperings in the gathering darkness low ánd soft.

IT WAS strange for a girl who had never seen a wedding, a girl engaged but yesterday to make up ln the morning to the consciousness: "This is to be my wedding day." Was it a dream? Was it something out of a fairy book? Francisca was by no means sure. Sybil, however, who had sat up all night trying to make a thing of beauty out of the simplest kind of linen-dress, left nobody in doubt as to his tasks and duties.

"You two, my children, are now entirely unnecessary around the house," she declared over the breakfast table. "Pastor Eckard and I will take care of the altar and other preparations. All we still need is flowers. Make yourselves scarce for an hour and get us some; then, as you return, we will be ready for you."

Like obedient children, the two went out and down the slope to the hollows where each sparse handful of soil had turned into a bouquet of wild anemones, enzian, daffodils and very tiny violets still wet with dew. It was only after they were safely out of sight from the house that they dared to take each other's hand.

"Does it all seem as strange to you as it seems to me?" Stufa asked, watching the girl in admiration; for while he picked one violet, she already bad gathered a thick bunch.

"Very strange. Have you any idea what it will be like?"

"Not the faintest."

"Neither have I; I've only read about weddings in the fairy books."

"What were they like?"

She cast a quick, shy glance to him. "Usually—usually something bappened to make me cry. Once I remember the bride was poisoned and lay in a coffin of glass. Another time the king's messenger called the bridegroom away to some crusade. Lots of such things. I wished none of them would happen on our wedding day."

"Should we go down to the temple? There's wild olive growing there; I wish you would wear a crown of it."

They were only a few hundred yards from the ruins when Stufa abruptly halted his step. "There's a man down there."

"You cannot see him now; he jumped back into the grove."

"Does it mean anything?" The old fear crept back into Francisca's voice.

"I don't know. It may mean nothing. I don't like it, thougb."

"Everything's so quiet, so peaceful, so still . . ."

"Too quiet, too peaceful, Francy; or

else perhaps I've lived in Agharti for too long. I'm seeing things maybe."

"No—you're not!" The girl had suddenly turned pale. "Up by the timberline; there just was another man. And he carried a gun."

"Back to the house, Francy, and quick!"

As they entered tbe door their eyes met Sybil's radiant face. They saw the altar which was prepared in front of a niche wherein a blue little Madonna smiled. They saw the floor which was strewn with juniper-twigs, and the burning candles. Into their ears fell the familir tapping of the crutches as they approached through the corridor. Stufa opened his mouth but Francisca quickly whispered into his ear: "Oh, don't, Heinrich; please don't say anything about what we saw, now."

AS ECKARD swung the pendulum of his body behind the altar, a low-flying cloud passed over the monastery; the room became almost dark and in the candlelight the face of the young minister shone like that of Micbael with the flaming sword as Duerer painted him.

"Come over, Heinrich and Francisca," his low, clear voice called out. "Why should you look so scared? Is it of the ceremony?" He smiled. "There is so very little to it. All we do is to confirm a union which I am sure tbe recording angel has already entered into Heaven's book."

He paused and from outside there came a curious noise as if a rustling of leaves. Eckard paid no attention; none of the others raised their heads.

"There is great joy in my heart," he went on, "because last night I witnessed a resurrection. If this sounds strange to you let me explain that a resurrection is the awakening of another self in man. For a very long time, Heinrich, this self, this spiritual self of yours has lain in you as if dead. You have searched for it in all kinds of deserts and wildernesses in despair. All this time you didn't know that it was in you; slumbering but growing in secret like a fruit tree in the woods. It took Francisca here to show you that you had been a gardener without knowing it. She opened your eyes to a branch full of ripe fruit which suddenly reached out into your life. . . ."

Now there were tapping sounds as if from a herd of heavy beasts, cautiously stalking the house from every side, but Eckard appeared deaf to them.

"This is what makes marriage holy and a Sacrament: that a man and a woman in love can hand each other the key to the kingdom when one alone could not. Or in the words of the Preacher:

" 'Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he has not another to help him up.

" 'Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone.' "

Something came whistling through the air; a rock smashed against the wall within a foot of Eckard's head. For a split-second the candle flames stood horizontally and then blew out. Simultaneously windows and doors of the refectory went black with the faces and the figures of a furious mob; like the crest of a tidal wave in broke the howls:

"Heretics! Bandits! German murderers! Fascist spies!" In the back part of the house the shutters crashed; heavy footsteps came rushing up the corridor. From the windows of the refectory more rocks began to fly, a stick bounced from the altar, revolver bullets ricochetted screaming from the wall.

"The peasants!" Already hit at the head Stufa shouted it aloud. Holding both Francisca and Sybil, covering them with his broad frame, he looked wildly around, the blood already streaming from his hair. "Eckard! Take cover!"

"Halt!" The word rang out with such extraordinary force of command that for a moment it stopped even the bedlam of the mob. The dripple bent across the altar. His face, now within a foot of the three others, bore an expression of quiet ecstasy. It smiled.

"Have you a ring?" he asked.

Neither Stufa nor Francisca appeared to understand, but in one swift movement Sybil bent; tearing with her teeth the golden band from her own finger, she handed it to him. "Here!"

"Good!" Low as was the voice, it cut through the tumult like a magic wand.

"Heinrich, take this ring and put it on Francisca's finger."

Like a man in trance Stufa obeyed.

"It is finished. Now you are man and wife."

WHAT had saved the four so far was probably the fact that tbey stood directly in front of the Madonna's niche, that some last awe of the supernatural kept the people from aiming directly into this direction, that by the very mass of their bodies they had blocked doors and window frames. Abruptly now there came the tack-tack of machinegun fire; a hail of bullets spattered against the slated roof. A howl went up, a long, wailing shriek of terror: "Soldiers!" And all the darkened windows suddenly were cleared. There was the roar of a stampede, an echo of a last few shots. Then silence, an almost ghostly silence.

None of the four moved as across the terrace there came flying steps and into the door leaped—Voland, immaculately dressed as ever but with his face a flushed pink and with pistol in hand. For a second he stood frozen, his quick eyes taking in the scene. Then, jerking his head around, he called:

"All right, Hans! You cover the valley. Let Hermann get the second gun into position higher up the slope. If any of the dogs show up, give it to them!"

The next moment he stood in the middle of the room:

"What's all this?" he demanded: "You hurt, Doctor? Ah, only a flesh-wound. S'pity it didn't penetrate to let a little common sense into your brains. What the hell made you neglect the most elementary precautions? Did you fancy by any chance that peace has broken out? Did you dream of a new Paradise?"

As he hurled the words the lines of his skin exploded like a shattered sheet of glass; his true face stood revealed in its implacable hatred against all living things. Then, witb the same suddenness the broken surface smoothed again; its fury changed to an expression of sneering irony.

"Aha! Now I perceive: I'm intruding. This was meant to be a nice, quiet family affair. How boorish to fire with machine guns right into the Holy Sacrament."

Clicking his heels he bowed. "I infinitely regret. I proffer my profound apologies; and my heartiest congratulations, too. . . ."

Meeting only stony silence he went on:

"Quite a surprise, eh? Unexpected turn of events and all that." Out of his pocket he whipped a handkerchief. "From the Agharti laundry; guaranteed fresh and sterilized. The young

Frau Doctor perhaps would like to tie her husband's wound with this?"

The girl mechanically did as she was bidden. Voland cast an anxious glance at his pistol, then pushed the weapon swiftly into a holster under his left arm.

"Unwittingly, I've entered polite society, gun in hand: again I apologize. Is this perhaps the reason why the reception of an old friend is somewhat lacking in cordiality? Or is it perhaps because I'm not officially introduced to two members of the company?"

For the second time he bowed stiffly from the hips.

"We have met before, though. Herr Pastor Eckard, during my visit on castle Tannrode, I have appeared to you in the uniform of the enemy. This naturally has forced me to act a little rough. You realize of course that all this was done on behalf of the liberation of Germany. You, a man whose courage I admire, a man who has brought a sacrifice supreme for Fuehrer and Fatherland, will no doubt understand. . . ."

Eckard's ringing voice cut like a sword through this knot of phraseology:

"What you have done to my person is of no import; nothing you might do to me will ever be. But once and for all I wish to make this one thing clear: I am *not* a German patriot and my limbs have *not* been blown off for 'Fuehrer and Fatherland'—I am the servant of Him whose footstool is the world; as such I am not subject to any Fuehrer, nor can it by my task to further the affairs of Germany."

"Interesting. *Very* interesting," Voland said icily. "Nevertheless, Herr Pastor, under orders of the Fuehrer, you will presently be returned to the Fatherland. In fact, you will all return to Agharti under my special protection which has just saved your lives. A little matter, by the way, for which I have not beard a word of thanks from any of you Christian people."

He called over his shoulder: "Alarm's over, Hans! We're marcbing off: one gun-crew in front, the other rear-guard. I say, Hans: send a couple of stretcher bearers over. They will find a gentleman in a black cassock minus legs."

SOME ten hours later an ordinary courier-plane of the Interallied Control Commission winged its way through the night over the Balkan mountains. Of its five passengers four were silent and still. Only Voland paced restlessly up and down the narrow aisle muttering curses.

"These damned little overground-Aghartis . . . No facilities; no decent transportation. Drives me crazy to crawl at three hundred miles an hour over these backwoods. Faked papers and faked markings on the plane as in a dime-novel. Any moment the Allied nightfighters could swoop down on us. . . . Damn all this monkey business, damn the emergency . . ."

Stufa felt that the fellow was slowly driving him crazy.

"*What* emergency?" he sharply asked.

"That's the first sensible word you've said in a long while; I'll take it for a good omen that your reason is about to return."

He slumped into a seat across the aisle. "The Department of Transportation's broken down; that's all. Or do you think I would have interrupted your honeymoon without a good reason?"

"Wbat happened?"

"Well, all went according to plan and even a little better until a little wbile ago the enemy clamped down controls on all the roads. Transportation has always been the weak spot of the Agharti-system; it's the one sector where it is physically impossible to work underground. Even Agharti 'Supreme' underestimated what it would mean to transport materials and parts for a hundred V-7's, a total weight of 25,000 tons; and some of the parts weigh 15 tons apiece. As the situation stands today, I'll swear that no rabbit could jump from one hole to another in Germany without being stopped in midair for documents and papers and being shot on the spot if the poor beast fails to produce everything in triplicate. We are stumped, Stufa. Our whole production will come to a standstill within weeks unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Listen, Doctor: I've a brilliant idea and you are the only one who could translate it into reality. We'll use the V-7 to build the V-7!"

"How do you mean?"

Voland's voice sank to a whisper:

"The first V-7 is now nearing completion. Why not use her as a transport plane? The big parts which we cannot transport overland; couldn't we shoot them through the stratosphere from one Agharti to another?"

Thick welts of thought arose on Stufa's forehead. Slowly, so as not to disturb Francisca, he took a notebook from his pocket. Slight as it was, the movement stirred the girl in her coma-like, exhausted sleep: "Oh, don't, Heinrich", she murmured, "please don't now!"

With one big hand he absentmindedly stroked her head. The other hand wrote. By the dim light of the blue-painted ceiling lamps it jotted down figures and formulas. Stufa worked.

From across the aisle Voland watched him through eyes half closed, his lips bent downward in a smile like a Turk dagger. "You thought you would escape, Herr Doctor," he murmured. "But we've got you back!"

No enemy nightfighters swooped down on the clumsy plane. At its appointed time, at its appointed spot it made a three-point landing after an uneventful trip.

CHAPTER VII

Walpurgis Night

FROM the operator's cabin of a crane, high up in the dome of the old silver mine, Stufa and Voland surveyed the launching pit.

Big reflectors, hanging from the ceiling, built into the walls, mounted on carts on the ground, crisscrossed the vast expanse with glaring beams, pale disks they splashed like enormous moons against the walls.

The original mine, vast as its excavation had become through the work of more than a thousand years; from the days of the Romans on it had been deepened, had been widened again. It had been shaped as a wind-tunnel, or a giant mortar. Its walls were smooth, the rock embedded in a heavy mantle of concrete. Up to the ceiling the two men looked as if from a boat as it passes under George Washington Bridge; the whole top of the mountain now was supported by a series of platforms mounted on rollers which ran on extraordinarily heavy rails inserted into the rock. To look down was like looking from the rim of Boulder Dam when they laid the foundations for the powerhouse deep in the canyon of the river. An enormous wedge of concrete stood out like a nose from the bottom: the V-7 launching-ramp. From it two parallel trenches of concrete with massive steel cables in their wells led through the pit into the mouth of a tunnel. From the height of the rolling crane the workers at the bottom of the pit were dwarfed to antsize.

Voland grabbed Stufa by the shoulder: "Are you as tense as I am?" he asked. "To think that within a few minutes our V-7 will poke its nose out of the tunnel, to think that we now have the weapon to blow the proud cities of our enemies off the face of the earth. It's so wonderful, it takes my breath away."

Stufa nodded. "I knew my men would keep up the schedule on the V-7. But what has been done with launching pit during my absence exceeds my expectations. You must have been singularly free from enemy radar-raids."

"Yes, they got tired of the ice and snow of our mountains, I suppose; they really gave us a break. But that isn't all. Had not Agharti 'Supreme' lent us the cream of the Siemens & Halske construction workers, had we not gathered scores of the best engineers of the old Krupp and Hermann-Goering Works; we wouldn't be where we are today. Watch now: the ramp-master, he's raised his arms. It begins, Stufa, it begins!"

In the great deep the din of work bad subsided. Most of the workers streamed into a semi-circle around the launching-ramp; higher up, on the steel ladders which spiderwebbed the walls, others halted their work to stare down as if from the galleries of a vast theater. A tension was in the air as in a bull-fight arena at the moment the pen is thrown open.

Stufa and Voland had climbed onto a platform which hung from the hook of the crane and the crane operator now lowered them downward, slowly at an easy rate until, suspended in space, they bung almost perpendicularly a hundred feet or so over tbe ramp. As they descended the figure of the ramp master grew. Like the conductor of an invisible orchestra he stood, hands in the air, moving his fingers back and fortb conjurer-like. Inside the ramp a pair of mighty power-winches began to growl; the huge cables in their wells of concrete jerked. There was a sound like the gnashing of teeth as they stretched and became tight, pulling some tremendous weight. All searchlights and reflectors were now concentrated on the ramp. In the bony whiteness of its concrete it stood out in an almost unbearable glare.

WIDE-EYED and grabbing the chains of the platform, as in mid-air it floated, Stufa and Voland stared at the apparition which emerged from the tunnel, inch by inch.

It had the nose of a giant shark. In creeping out, its circumference widened and widened until it gave the impression of a vast globe. It lengthened and revealed its full shape which was the shape of a whale, narrow at the tail and with an array of fins sticking out from it. It moved on a cradle, the numerous wheels of which creaked in their concrete rails. It was steel grey except that it had in its warhead what seemed to be eyes, nostrils and gills of gleaming brass.

As the V-7 reached the ramp it raised its head. With majestic dignity the 250-ton monster ascended its ramp, the throne from which it was to sway its rule of destruction over the world. So near came its shark-snout to the swaying platform on which Stufa and Voland stood that it seemed as if they could almost touch it. The growl and the whine of the winches stopped; there was the vicious hissing of compressed air as the massive body was being locked in strong arms of steel. Then there was the silence of awe. None of the tiny human figures moved, only the ramp-master's hands fell limp;

in his hair and on his face the perspiration of excitement glistened in the strong white light. It was as if a herd of little monkeys had been frozen to the spot under the hypnotic eyes of some giant boa constrictor.

Stufa felt an attack as if of vertigo. With all his strength he hung on to the chain. With all his mental strength he thought:

"I am the creator of this Leviathan! Oh God, what have I done! What can I do now to stop it from swallowing half the world!"

Voland at last broke the spell which had become unbearable. Raising himself like an orator on the strange rostrum, suspended in midair, he lifted his right arm in a commanding gesture.

"My German fellow-fighters," he shouted; and from the vast wind-tunnel walls every word rebounded in multiple echoes. "This is one of the great moments of our lives. This is what we have been toiling for. We see it now before our eyes, the mighty weapon destined to smash our enemies. There will be only one moment even greater than this: that will be when we let the V-7 fly! It will be soon, very soon; that much I can promise you. Twenty years ago when the National-Socialism was young, we dreamed of that "night of the long knives" when we would take our revenge on the world Conspiracy. But you, my comrades and fellow-fighters, you can dream of something bigger still: you can dream of the day when London and Paris and Moscow, when New York and Chicago and Detroit—when all these Babylonian towers of the Plutocratic World Conspiracy will be—icebergs. Yes, icebergs of a kind on which no polar bear could stay alive, icebergs in which neither mice nor men, not even a louse, will breathe the breath of life. Such will be our retribution for our ruined Fatherland that our enemies will never recover from it.

"Fellow-fighters, National-Socialists: for this vengeance given into our hands we thank above all our Fuehrer. But next to the Fuehrer we thank the great genius in our midst: here he is, our Doctor Heinrich Stufa!—Our Fuehrer, our Doctor Stufa. Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Seig Heil!"

His eyes closed, blinded—for all the searchlights now were concentrated on him—Stufa stood on the platform which swayed under the impact of the sound-waves, the thunderous echoes of the cry: "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!"

He felt sick, sick enough to drop and smash his skull on the snout of the Leviathan he had conjured from the great Inferno deep. He hardly felt Voland's hand tugging at his sleeve; he hardly heard him shout above the din: "Doctor! Man, pull yourself together! Raise your arm! Don't you hear? They're singing the Horst Wessel song!"

THE coded message that the first V-7 stood ready for action on its launching-ramp was flashed almost within the minute of the event. Causing infinitesimal tremors, the sound-beams passed through the womb of the earth, passed through the waves of the Skagerrack where they were picked up by a submarine and relayed. While the wild echoes of the Horst Wessel song still danced in the vast kettledrum of the pit, six hundred miles to the North, a seismograph deep in the belly of Germany's last battlewagon began to swing. Thirty minutes later a jet-plane tore into the foggy night. Two hours later three men conferred in the eagle-nest office which overhung the lab: Voland, Stufa and one of Niflheimrs' hooded messengers.

"Agharti 'Supreme' expresses its satisfaction; its very highest satisfaction," the templar said. "As his personal message, der Fuebrer has commissioned me to add that the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross awaits both the *Agharti-leiter* Voland and the Doctor Heinrich Stufa on the day the V-7 is successfully launched."

For a moment the faces of the two became distinctly visible, as bowing stiffly they got into the cone of light from the one green lamp on the desk.

"Agharti 'Supreme,'" the muffled voice continued, "has its own launching pit nearly completed. We are nearest to London which enjoys top-priority on our vengeance list. Agharti 'Supreme' therefore wants to receive as the first cargo of the V-7, a complete warhead. How many warheads has Agharti 'Barossba' now in readiness?"

Stufa swallowed hard to catch his voice. "Ten," he said.

"Very good. Fortunately the sea is more than sixty fathoms deep almost directly in front of Niflheimr's barbor. This will permit the V-7 to make a safe landing almost at our doors. We shall concentrate enough submarines around the target area so that the V-7 can be picked up and towed into port with a minimum loss of time. It will be night, of course. Your experiments bave shown that there will be no flashes from the jets; not even a red glow?"

"No, nothing. Except the big water-spout, of course, when it dives into the sea."

"At night, this brings us little danger of discovery. But there is another problem for which Agharti 'Supreme' has so far no solution: the flash at the beginning . . ."

"Yes. That will be enormous. For a moment the whole sky will be aflame. And then the roar. 'Twill be as if all hell had broken loose . . ."

Voland bent forward eagerly. "I have thought about this. Agharti 'Barbarossa' must not be discovered despite the enormous flash. It seems impossible; yet I have an idea. I have a plan by which the whole population of the Harz will swear before the Inter-allied Control Commissioners that indeed 'all hell has broken loose'. And we shall send the Control Commissioners on a wild goose chase after His Satanic Majesty. Not a shadow of suspicion shall fall on our Agharti here. Now the details . . ."

Voland lowered his voice. With great intensity he outlined his plan. Eyebrows raised, forehead in deep furrows, Stufa stared with amazement at the torn, the maniacal face. "This scheme is too fantastic," he thought, "unless—unless the dark age has indeed descended upon Germany . . ."

But the templar nodded. "It's ingenious. It's bold," he said at last. "I shall submit your plan to Agharti 'Supreme'. Personally, I think it will be approved. One thing I'm sure of: it holds a special appeal to some of our Galdra Simir. They might even feel moved to come over and aid you in the execution. So tben the date is to be April 30th?"

"Precisely. It's to be then or never."

"No objections on your part, Herr Dr. Stufa?"

The heavy Bison's head shook slowly. "As far as the date is concerned I'm agreed," he said thickly.

"All right then, gentlemen. You'll have Niflheimr's decision within the next twelve hours."

IT WAS less than twelve hours later that the seismograph vibrated, embedded in the mother-lode of the old silver-mine, that the signal corps decoded the brief message, that over the Siemens tele-speaker came Voland's triumphant voice: "Plan's okayed, Stufa! Walpurgis Night! Hold up your end of the line!"

Very late that night in Stufa's chamhers Syhil put the soup-bowl before the man who sat slumped in his chair as if too tired to eat. He frowned, then took the ladle and he handed the bowl to Francy there was a small piece of adhesive tape stuck to the ladle's grip. Filling her own plate Francisca read the scribbled words: "8 days left."

Pastor Eckard was next with the soup and Sybil brought the bowl hack to the pantry, holding the ladle with one hand. As she put it into the sink the tape was gone.

The meal was silent. Only when the tea came—Stufa's ménage had heen equipped with this luxury extraordinary—a few words were said:

"You look dead-tired, Heinrich; you've put in an awfully long day's work. *But I refuse to worry because I'm absolutely sure you'll came through with flying colors.*

"I baked us a cake," said Sybil with a wry smile; "I'm afraid I spoiled it, we'll soon know the worst. *Better a frightful end than endless fright,* as our peasants say."

"Our peasants used to have stores of such proverbs," the cripple ventured. "Often they were written on the walls, such as: '*When human need is greatest, God's help is nearest.*' "

Even a very skilled ohserver—had one been in the room or listened to recordings made from concealed microphones—would hardly have noticed the slight changes of tone. Under the impact of constant peril the initiation of Agharti's semi-prisoners to underground methods had been swift and thorough.

During the next week strange things happened within a twenty-mile circle around the Brocken *massif.* Not very many people had lived in peacetime in the romantic wilderness of rock, forest and gorge, in villages like Isenburg, Clausthal, Elend, in small resort-towns like Schierke, Braunlage, Harzburg. The region had suffered less war-destruction than most because its industries were insignificant; it also had suffered less from the ravages of civic chaos than had most of the rest of Germany for the very simple reason that there was little to plunder for city populations, as desperate with hunger they roamed the countryside.

In that most of them still had a roof over their heads, in that they always had been poor and used to hardships, the people of the Harz were better off than the millions who in the rubble of their cities slowly starved. Nevertheless, with its normal population doubled by fugitives, practically isolated and thrown upon its own meagre resources, the Harz was in most dire distress. Now, at the end of a long, hard winter, with provisions almost gone, the hordes of hungry children hunted for food in the forests where the snow still clung to the hollows in the ground. In tin-cans and in baskets they gathered the wild onions and the early mushrooms, driven on and on by the fierce pangs in their stomach pits. Along the brooks, the willows, the young hirches and beecbtrees looked as if a plague of rabbits had come over the land. The children stripped them of their bitter-sweet bark, of their young sprouts which they munched in their instinctive craving for vitamins.

HIGHER up under the domes of spruce, in snowdrifts still many feet deep, the charcoal burners toiled with blackened faces. Charcoal, the mountain's oldest industry, was now in great demand all over the plains around the Harz *massif* where, in cities like Quedlinburg, Halberstadt, Nordhausen, Hildesheim, the burghers sat shivering by their cold hearths. It was always possible to barter something against charcoal. So along the winding roads to the plains the Harz villagers trudged in columns bent under huge cradled burdens of the "black gold" which bought what no money could. All traffic was on foot; there were no trucks or gas, and of the few horses which were left, nobody would have dared to expose these precious beasts of burden to the knives and the clubs of famished city crowds.

These were the people, relapsed into semi-barbarity, half crazy with the savagery of their lives to whom the strange, the crazy things happened during the last week of March.

March 23rd, for instance, most villagers of Altenrode were in the street at dusk; the women to fetch water from the well as was the custom at this hour, the men watering the cattle at the long stone trough at the middle of the road. Suddenly from the road-bend they heard a noise as if some heavy cart were coming from the woods. While a hundred eyes looked up expectantly, out of the forest there rolled a barrel. Bouncing it came down the slope, all by itself, lost speed as it reached level ground and with a last turn-over of its fat belly it bumped against the stone steps of the village well.

The people gaped; everybody expected to see some cart-driver, some human being to come rushing after his property. But not a sound, not a move came from the deepening shadows of the forest.

Cautiously the boldest of the men tiptoed towards the missile. They expected the worst: a bomb, a boobytrap, for these were times of horror and these were men who had been through the horrors of the war. "Look!" somebody cried and, with comic precision, everybody jumped a step back at the sound. But what the onlooker espied was nothing terrifying; it was the picture of a devil, with horns and tail but rather merry-looking painted in red on the barreltop.

The painted devil held a glass in hand and something was inscribed around his figure. One of the ragged villagers read it aloud, slowly putting syllable to syllable: "Walpurgis—night—come—to—the—Blocksberg—there—will—be —more!"

"Look" came another exclamation and as so many frogs the men jumped back again. A trembling finger pointed to a thin, red stream which spouted from one stove-in stave: "What is this? Blood!"

Again it took time before someone made bold to stick a finger into the liquid. He smelled at it and bis eyes were wide in wonder. He smelled again; he licked . . . "Wine!" he shouted. "It's wine, good wine! I know it is; I've been in France!"

Like lucky thieves the men thrust furtive glances all around in greed and fear. Nothing moved on the road; night was falling fast. They cocked their ears: no noise. "Come on, Otto!" a man in faded field-grey hissed. "And you Albert, and you, Alwin! Quick, get it out of the road. Into my barn. Fetch a lantern, somebody. But come through the backdoor, all of you. Bring your pails along. What the devil do we care how this thing got here? Altenrode's going to celebrate tonight! Boy, what a windfall!"

Their stomachs empty, their minds fevered with the mystery, the men were drunk within the hour. The whole village, the women and cbildren included, drank and caroused that night and the next day and the next night.

TALK that the Devil had appeared in person, that he would appear again Walpurgis Night, spread like wildfire throughout that valley. Old, shrunken grannies by their spinning-wheels nodded wisely. "Yes, yes; it was all very true." Their mothers had told them, nay, they had seen it all with their own eyes: the witches riding on their brooms; the ferocious army up there in the clouds galloping on two-legged horses; the riders carrying their heads under the arms. Yes, they had seen cloven-footed Satan himself, gigantic and shrouded in sulphurous flames up on the Blocksberg: "And now you can see for yourself it is all true."

That same night Rollo, the police-dog of the Torfhaus Inn half way up the Brocken, sniffed the air in a peculiar way. He barked and he scratched at the door. The innkeeper finally let him out. An hour later the refugees, crowded two families to every room, were jarred from their sleep by fierce howlings and growls as of a wolf's. All over the house children cried and women wailed, but a few men mustered courage to go out into the forest darkness, sticks and bludgeons in hand. Sure enough it was only Rollo; his fur all astir he crouched over some heavy body, biting at it savagely. They almost had to choke the dog before it would give up its prey. It was half a hog; expertly butchered and perfectly fresh. It was so heavy, it took four of the weakened men to carry it to the house.

There by the candlelight they saw a red Devil outlined boldly on the belly of the sow. They read the inscription: "Greetings to the Torfhaus! Come to Walpurgis and get the other half."

In Elend, just as the quarter-moon arose over the hills, some fifty people saw a huge flaming wagonwheel rush down the cut-over slope towards the village. In good, old times such wheels, tied with straw to burn, had been hurtled from the hills in celebration of Midsummer-night. What could it mean now in midst of hoary frost and winter fog? Certainly it seemed an evil thing as in wild jumps it careened right into the street. Was it an infernal machine to set the barns afire?—No; it sputtered out and after a while the burgomaster and a gendarme stalked it. They found the Devil painted to the hub and long strings of excellent Polish sausages wound through the spokes.

There had not been a piece of meat in Elend for the last three months . . .

All over the Harz the rumors of such doings spread within hours. Coal burners, nursing their kilns through wintry nights, felt queer at every rustle in the underbrush. Then, when at dawn they marched stiff-limbed off for their homes, something would stop them in their tracks: a half-gallon bottle of strong Silesian Schnapps, for instance; labelled with a red Devil and inscribed: "There'll be more of this on the Blocksberg on Walpurgis Night."

"Walpurgis Night." It became an obsession, an infection, a disease of the enfeebled, superstitious minds. As far as Quedlinburg and Halberstadt the landfolk whispered of sorcery and fiery dragons flying through the night, of buried treasure in the mountains and of old Kaiser Barbarossa in his Kyffhaeuser, cave who would soon ride again. Military intelligence of the Allied Occupation troops, of course, heard rumors but found them too fantastic, not substantiated enough to be taken seriously. Experiences in Sicily, in Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, all over Europe in fact, had warned the experts against the irrationalism of famine-districts. Besides, they had their hands full, coping with the psychic infections amongst city-masses, more dangerous now than ever in this, the worst time of the year. And the Germans were a crazy people, anyway.

IN THE subterranean center of these mysteries, Voland was the busiest and, in his perverse way, the happiest man. This Walpurgis Night was his braincbild; its preparations gave him an artistic satisfaction such as he had never felt before. "I really ought to have become a movie director in Hollywood," he thought. "A big shot, something like Cecil de Mille."

He personally undertook to rehearse the Valkyries in the "great ballet of the witches" as he termed it, and he enjoyed himself hugely at it. Far from being bashful, the maidens raised no objection to dancing in tbe nude; in fact they were quite used to that. But tbey giggled at the idea of galloping around on broomsticks and crying "Harr, Harr!" Voland himself had to show them how to do it. Still crimson from the effort, he rapped his broom like a conductor's baton:

"My dear, sweet Hitler-girls, attention please! This is no joke. Little as you realize it, this is even more important than childbearing! Never before has the Fatherland demanded from you a service as vital as this playing the part of the witch. Just think of it: you will be the prima donnas on one of the most famous stages of the world; old Blocksberg itself. Your audience will be tremendous. In the glare of great fires, by the light of the moon, your beauteous charms will be revealed, not only to the guards whom you all know, but to the hungry eyes of at least twenty-five thousand people. Now if I, as your *Agharti-leiter*, don't think it beneath my dignity to put on red tights and horns and a long black tail, how can you . . ."

At this point however even party-discipline was unable to stop the giggling from becoming a scream. Voland was grinning himself, caught with the infernal humor of it all.

As a matter of fact a sort of demoniacal spring-fever had come over the underground Reich. Liberation was in the air. From their nocturnal expeditions into the valleys the young élite guards returned in fevers of excitement. To their comrades in the barracks they gave the most emotional descriptions of what the real moon and the real stars looked like; how the earth had smelled, how the wind had rustled in the trees, how tiny lights of human habitations had blinked far-off in the clearings. Fierce nostalgia for overground reached the breaking point of all discipline; Dr. Lamby had to divert more and more of his time from the 'spermatozoaic Reichsbank' to injections of Nirvana 2 and even of Nirvana 3.

Several Galdra Simir had arrived from Niflheimr and Lilith had returned from America. With specially selected squads they drilled the warlock-ceremonials and choruses for Walpurgis Night. Guard-houses from the walls of which there had echoed many a ribald song now resounded with spooky, ancient verses, as bare-chested, girdled with wolf's skin, the sorcerer-apprentices howled in unison:

Hail, hail, great wolf-spirit, hail!
Make me a werwolf strong and bold.
Terror alike to young and old.
Make me a werwolf, make me a man-eater,
Make me a werwolf, make me a woman-eater,
Make me a werwolf, make me a child-eater.
I pine for human blood!
Give it me, give it me tonight!
Wolves, vampires, satyrs' ghosts
Elect of all the devilish hosts

I pray you send hither, send hither, send hither
The grey, great shape which makes men, shiver, shiver, shiver!

WHEN off-duty, the Galdra Simir of course were guests of honor in Voland's chambers. Frightened half out of his wits by their hooded apparitions, Lummer, the perfect butler, catered to their every wish and whim. Never having met with any such queer gentlemen before, he variously addressed them as "Herr Baron," "Your Excellency", "Herr Graf". They didn't seem to mind it at all; sometimes the unhappy Lummer even suspected a muffled laugh behind those hoods. Most of the time, however, he fervently wished he were back on his old peace-job which had been that of a sleeping-car conductor with the now defunct Mitropa Company.

Stufa, who now had to call on Voland every night with a briefcase full of orders to be okayed and countersigned, found the studio like a general's headquarters on the eve of a big drive. Scenariums of "Walpurgis Night, act one, two, three and four" covered the grand piano, interspersed with rather bold etchings of the scenes to be played. The big roundtable was staked with maps so big they showed the Blocksberg's every tree and rock; Satan's throne, the positions of the big stakes which were to illuminate the stage and the back-stage tunnel exit through which the actors had to disappear. Farther down the slope the places for the spectators' campfires were marked and the food caches, the liquor stores, to be thrown open for mass-intoxication. Finally there was outlined between the stage and the audience a kind of *cordon sanitaire* to be formed by guards dressed as skeletons and in other fear-inspiring mummery to keep the overly bold and curious from coming too close to the gate of hell.

Fascinated with every detail of these designs Voland looked up impatiently:

"You again, Stufa? What is it today; what do you want me to sign? So you want to have the nine other war heads of the V-7 dispersed through the whole length of Agharti for greater safety? That's okay, I suppose. . . .

"What? You want to launch the V-7 all by yourself? But Stufa, that's dangerous. Wouldn't you better leave that to some subordinate? Well; you are the inventor, so you have a natural right, I guess, to do this as you please. 'Honor to him to whom honor is due,' that's what I always say. I'll sign it.

"You know, Stufa, I cannot ponder much about such technicalities right now. In this, my great Walpurgis Night-drama, you are simply the fifth act as far as I'm concerned. You provide the climax; the tremendous fireworks. In this respect I rely on you absolutely. And as the midnight hour strikes tomorrow . . ."

On April 30th the vast cave of the new Leviathan was as silent, was as shrouded in mystery, as the grave of a Pharaoh. Men in asbestos suits, men on thick rubbersoles, men from the bodies of whom every piece of metal had been removed, worked quietly, their every movement measured, in and around the V-7. The monster had been decapitated, but already the new warhead with its huge atomic-bombload hung hoisted. From rope pulleys, thick as ships' cables, it came floating down in fractions of an inch at a time. From suspended containers, big as gasoline trucks, the liquid oxygen poured into the monster's fuel tanks, heavy and syrup-like. This work was slow and took hours. Other containers however were raised and lowered at a greater speed; containers from which there rushed the swift flow of the ethyl-alcohol into the lower fuel tanks. The entire fueling had to be done by natural gravity-flow for any kind of pump would have brought danger of explosion. All this was done in a kind of pale moonlight thrown from reflectors, built into rock and concrete and separated from the launching pit hy thick walls of armored glass.

AT NIGHTFALL—though, of course, under the heavy lid of the roof there was neither night nor day—a Galdra Simir entered the tunnel mouth. He had been dispatched from Niflheimr with a mission of the utmost importance: to set the electronic target-computor of the V-7 to the secret latitude and longitude of Agharti "Supreme".

Stufa, who knew that this man would be coming, led the hooded man into the interior of the launching ramp. This was a pit within a pit, built like a rabbit's warren with an extremely narrow tunnel for entrance and with a kettle inside, not more than nine feet wide hecause the walls had a thickness of better than thirty feet while there were sixty feet of concrete overhead.

"One moment please," Stufa said.

The Galdra Simir stared curiously at the big built-in switchhoard with its dials and levers. On the far wall, meanwhile, Stufa opened a safe in the concrete. It contained what looked like a couple of suitcases, hoth black, one fairly big, one small. With effort he hoisted the bigger one unto the small desk in the center of the room. "Here it is."

There was respect, almost awe in the Galdra Simir's voice as he said: "Amazing! It's wonderful what these electric brains will do. Which are the dials for longitude and latitude?"

Stufa pointed them out amongst the many which covered the whole front of the suitcase under sliding lids. "These are the ones."

"Very good. Herr Doctor Stufa, you understand, of course, that this is a matter of utmost State secrecy. Please have the goodness to leave me for the moment alone. Await me at the tunnel entrance; I shall join you in a minute or so."

The inventor howed in silence. As the Galdra Simir emerged, panting and holding the heavy case carefully to his hreast, he found the doctor with his arms crossed by the gate.

"I say, Herr Doctor; this other, smaller case; I presume it contains the fuse?—I thought I would take that one with me in the jet; but come to think of it, it might he even safer to send it over with the V-7 itself. It must, of course, be set to zero-zero so that nothing could happen. Please he so good to do this and get the other case."

Stufa re-emerged from the tunnel, the second case in hand. There was a deadly pallor on his face.

TOGETHER the two men were hoisted to the shark's nose of the Leviathan. Two hrass-disks, one like an eye, the other like the monster's nostril, gleamed in the eerie light. Stufa handed the Galdra Simir a key. "This is for the Target-computor. Following your instructions, only this one key was made; you take it."

With the protruding ends of its heavy cahles carefully unwrapped, the two of them inserted the electric brain into its compartment. Like the works of a precision watch it fitted into its skull. Lovingly, as if it were a precious jewel, the Galdra Simir put the key into a small leather pouch hung hy a string from his hreast: "Very good. Now to the fuse. You have a special key for that compartment, too? Excellent. Hand it to me."

As the second compartment closed with a soft, oily click, beads of heavy perspiration stood out from the deep furrows of the Bisonhead.

"You are excited, Herr Doctor. Small wonder, this is a day of days. With my mission completed, I have only this last order to give: everybody now has to leave the launching pit. Guards at the tunnel-entrance are instructed to give admittance to nobody until five minutes before midnight when you and whomsoever you commission to assist you, have permission to pass. You understand, Herr Doctor: the whole future of Germany, nay, the whole future of the world, is now at stake."

Pale as death and strangely like an automaton, Stufa repeated: "Yes, I fully understand. The future of the world . . . it is now at stake."

Overground, on the night of April 30th, winter and spring fought an air-battle over the Harz *massif*. Half a gale blew from the west, but it brought on its wings mild, Atlantic temperatures, the smell of rich, green Brunswick plains, even the scent of lilac already in bloom. Soaked with melting snow the Harz mountains were loud with gushing brooks, with tumbling watersheds in the ravines, with deadwood crashing from the trees, witb the shrieks of owls, with the screams of the wind as it brushed the mountain's rocky teeth and the stiff hair of the evergreens.

Below this boisterous tumult between heaven and earth, however, there were man-made noises, shufflings of a great many feet, coughings and whisperings. There were long rows of shadows, slow and rhythmically waving upward, always upward through the valleys, along the slopes, up on the mountain-grates. From all sides they came as if magnetically drawn to the Blocksberg. When they had to cross one of the main roads they scouted the terrain. When they saw lights they dived into the bushes; for to see the headlights of a motor car was to see one of the Allied patrols which crisscrossed the main arteries from Brunswick to Nordbausen and from Seesen to Halberstadt at the oddest hours. But the smoky red glare of the torches which mysteriously began to glow and to dance here and there, higb up, deep in the naves of forest domes, was a beckoning-on, was a promise that the signs had not lied, that the Devil was a boon companion, the friend of man, the comforter of the oppressed.

The malnutritioned bodies, the grumbling stomachs, the inflamed imaginations turned the wandering armies Into so many visionaries. With their minds' eyes they pictured themselves some Blocksberg - Schlaraffia: whole oxen turned on giant spits, mountains of bread, cheeses big as wagonwheels, frled pigs running magically about with carving knives stuck to their hams; ambrosiacal smells of gravy, foaming seidels, spouting winecasks. There were many in the villages who earller that evening had sworn they would never set out, yet felt themselves driven into the night by the irresistable force of their dreams.

AT 11 P. M. Stufa stood on the loading ramp by the subterranean river and watched the trains go by. There were four: tbe flatcars all jampacked and all were headed west to where a new camouflaged mouth had been broken into the mountain near the Blocksberg-top. In the first train were two companies of guards, none of them in uniform but dressed to fantastic mummery; some as Teutonic warriors, some in old army sheepskin coats with the fur turned outside, some were wrapped in blankets with holes cut for the eyes. Many wore gas-masks or pilots' oxygen helmets; others achieved demoniacal effects through blackened faces, while still others had dabbed ski-troopers' overalls with luminous paint. They all appeared more or less drunk already; sbouting and howling, blowing cowhorns and beating the kettledrums. The sound and the fury on that rattling train was an excellent likeness of the savage army of the saga riding the clouds.

The second train was the witches' special; already they bad formed a kind of *tableau-vivant* around their lord and master, the big Red Devil. Although they still wore wrappers and coats against the draughty trip through the tunnel, Eve's costume was plainly enough visible in pearly gleams of breasts and thighs as, laughing and screaming, they rushed by, with Voland, the Devil, signalling back to Stufa in delirious salute.

The third train, that of the warlocks, carried itself with greater dignity. Squatting on the flatcars the scorcerer apprentices bad formed circles around the Galdra Simir; rehearsal obviously was heing continued right to the curtain rise.

The fourth and rearguard train was a purely military affair. It carried no torches; the menacing shadows of half a dozen small tanks and gun-carriers rumbled swiftly hy. Agharti took no chances.

Stufa's own car already awaited him on the siding, without a driver this time. He looked at his wrist-watch: 11:30 P.M.: it was time.

Turning around he lifted a beckoning finger and three of the hooded messengers from Niflheimr emerged from out of the door shadows where up to this moment they had hidden themselves. "Hide those crutches under the seat," Stufa whispered. As the little engine raced along the track the thundering echoes were not loud enough to drown the hammerings of the four hearts. Nohody spoke. Stufa drove in a manner that the jeep-like little vehicle took the curves with a banshee-wail and on two wheels.

Five minutes ahead of schedule they pulled up in front of the towering concrete gate and the dimmed headlights swept across the row of the guards. As in the olden days, when the Fuehrer had passed through the Brandenburg Gate of Berlin in his big Mercedes car, they stood as if hewn in stone, their legs spread, the faces stern and martial, each man tied to the next with his Sam-Browne belt. The officer in command stepped stiffly to the car. Although he knew Stufa perfectly well he asked for the name and password. Then, consulting bis wristwatch:

"Five minutes to go. You'll have to wait. Sorry, but these are my orders."

EACH ticking second now was an eternity. Curiously glancing at the three other occupants of the car, strange —that the doctor's assistants should have come from Agharti "Supreme"— the young officer tried some ligbt conversation:

"Cigarette, Herr Doctor? A hangman's smoke as we called it at the front."

"Yes; thanks." Stufa's hands shook so, he was glad the other lighted it for him.

"You intend to drive right into the pit?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Oh, nothing. Only that I understand the machine will he pulp when . . ."

"These are *my* orders, captain"; Stufa's voice cracked as a whip.

The officer clicked heels: *"Zu Befehl!"* He raised the wristwatch:

"Sixty seconds more and *you're* in command, Herr Doctor."

The three hooded templars sat as if frozen to their seats. Nobody heard their silent prayers. Nobody heard them count the sixty longest seconds of their lives.

"Achtung!" There was the groan of heavy rollers under the concrete gate. It moved; it opened a crack and the crack spread over the rails. With maddening slowness the guards crabbed sideways, in step with the movement of the gate.

"Go ahead!" The car leaped forward with a jack-rabbit start. "Now, men, let's get the hell outa here!" The last words the four were ever to hear from Agharti echoed from the vast grey deep where in the light of scores of artificial moons the gleaming mass of Leviathan pointed skyward like a whale as it comes up to spout.

"Quick!" Stufa shouted. Carrying the cripple in his arms he dived into the narrow tunnel of the ramp, Francisca and Sybil on his heels. Down in the vault Stufa stood panting like a fighting bull at the last stage of the corrid, as exhausted, he gets ready for the final charge.

There was a long, low hiss of pneumatic pistons; a cone of steel moved across and into the entrance of the vault, blocking it, like the barrel of a huge artillery piece is being sealed by the breach.

"Thank God!" Stufa's hoarse voice was fighting for breath. "We could never have made it without that car.

"Now we are shut off from the world as never was a Pharaoh's mummy under the biggest pyramid. Listen to me, listen!"

He bent towards the three, pushing out a few words with every heave of his chest:

"I brought you to the safest place I know in all Agharti.

"I brought you to the only place from which I hope we can escape.

"I've got four minutes time to do the work of several men.

"Don't talk to me, don't get into my way if you can help it.

"Only one thing you can do for me now.

"Pray! Oh pray that God deliver the world tonight from Satan and his work!"

Their hoods thrown off, the three looked up to him. Love, death and ecstasy shone in the faces by the dim, colored lights from the hundreds of dials and gauges in the wall. A great, a wonderful calm came over Stufa, a spiritual strength such as he never had experienced before. He smiled; then swiftly turned away.

Into the dead stillness there fell Eckard's voice; low but crystal-clear: "Father, into Thy hands . . ." and then it died away to murmur and to quiet.

STUFA had mounted a seat perched to the column of a periscope. As he kept his eyes glued to the sights, he saw absolutely nothing; the enormously thick prisms were a sapphire-blue, they shut off all ordinary light. His hands moved levers to the right and to the left.

The stillness of death persisted in the vaults. Not a sound from outside penetrated this block of concrete. Not the din of the hydraulic pumps as they opened the steel arms which embraced the Leviathan. Not the hollow rumblings of the roof as section after section it was lifted with the rocks and the trees on its top. Not the avalanches of earth and of stone as they came crashing down the launching pit. Neither was there a move inside the vault except for the hands on the dials, except for the columns of liquids in the gauges, except for the thin, long finger on the big clock in the center as from second to second it marched on to midnight in nervous little jumps. And except for the one finger which now pressed down on the switch.

At this moment, Doctor Heinrich Stufa's calculations went wrong on two points.

According to these calculations there should have been a slight tremor of the vault from the enormous gas pressures as V-7 shot into the stratospbere. There should have been a dim white flash visible through all the heavy blue-filters of the periscope. There should have been visible—if only *for a moment*, perhaps —through sheets of flame the Leviathan in its flight. After that, there should have been no more tremor of the earth and nothing to be seen except that the dials and the gauges would indicate swiftly falling pressures and the wild, cyclonic inrush of cold air into the man-made volcano.

There was a tremor; slight, nothing frightening. But simultaneously a white sheet of lightning filled the room. The Bisonhead jerked back from the sight; its mouth stood agape. With horror the three others saw his eyes; ghastly they rolled in sockets filling with blood and they were white, pale-white as eggs of porcelain. By some slight error the Carl Zeiss Company's Agharti department had under-estimated the number of blue-filters which would melt down in the blast.

The second miscalculation concerned the concrete gate which was to lock the tunnel entrance. Perhaps it had jammed in closing. Perhaps the captain and his guards, their wits scared out of them, had taken prematurely to flight. Whatever it was, a blast as if from the heaviest mine explosion swept through Agharti, swept along the subterranean river where there were stored for greater safety the nine warheads with their atomic bombs. Two of them went off.

The granite rock of the Blocksberg shivered as the flanks of a horse plagued with flies; and the flies *were* shaken off. Hurled to the ground were the forests of evergreens, hurled to the ground were the witches and warlocks in their mad dance around the Devil's throne, hurled down and smashed were thousands who had come to the witches' sabbath and in the valleys their houses collapsed. Then, from all the quarters of the sky, air-masses rushed toward the Blocksberg whirling trees and bodies and rocks in a mad typhoon of debris. It didn't last long; it was as if the fluid air itself were suddenly arrested in its flight: ice dropped from it; not as hailstones but in solid sheets.

In far-away Halberstadt, in Brunswick, Madgeburg, Hildesheim; in a fifty-mile circle all around the Harz, temperatures dropped within the hour by twenty degrees. In the center of the Harz the Blocksberg after its violent shake had stiffened into one solid block of rock and ice; maximum-minimum thermometers dug up from Agharti after many a week stood at 70 below.

TWO hours, after the excitement over the earthquake somewhere in Central Germany had subsided, the director of the Royal observatory in Oslo, Norway, was again hurriedly called to the phone. The seismograph had registered another quake; a small one to be sure but witb its center only three hundred miles to the North which made it an unheard-of event in the solid granite of that land. Simultaneously the wires from Stavanger reported a mysterious drop of local temperatures.

Twelve hours later, in the vault of the launching ramp, Francisca still held the heavily bandaged Bisonhead in her lap. There was no sound above the heavy breathing and the low moans of the man. There had been no drop in temperature; within, the pit and the lights, fed by storage batteries inside the vault, still burned.

"Read me the instruments," Stufa asked for the twentieth time.

Eckard and Sybil did what already had become a routine to them, describing precisely the cabalistic signs of a language they did not understand.

"All right; no changes since last time. There will be none, I think. Lend me your eyes and your hand, all of you. Open the big built-in drawer to the right. Tell me what you see."

"Ice picks," Sybil said in an even, steadfast voice. "Ropes. Sheepskin boots. Aviator flying suits. Leather helmets. Oxygen masks. Mittens."

A ghostly smile came to the blind man's lips: "At least my brains were good enough to think this up," he murmured; and louder then: "Get dressed. Get me dressed, too. Do it carefully. Move over and let me feel your masks. Maybe we find air outside, maybe we don't. If we don't, we die."

It took the strength of all the three to get the heavy man up and into his suit.

"All right. Francy, Sybil: you lead me to the tunnel. Stop. Put my hand to the lever on the right. Now everything depends upon whether or not . . ."

There were the muffled grumblings of electric pumps and the angry hisses of hydraulic pistons exerting their terrific force against the breachlock.

"Does it move at all?"

"No . . ."

"Not yet?"

". . . No . . . But . . . yes, Heinrich, yes, it does now. It does move!"

In the vault the voice of the blind man rolled like sudden thunder. "Do you see anything? Francy, Sybil, Eckard: oh please, lend me your eyes: do you see *anything?*"

". . . Yes, Heinrich. There is . . . a grey . . . Yes, there is light out there!"

"Francy: step out into the tunnel! Go as far as the entrance. Tell me: *what kind* of light is it you see."

Though only thirty feet away Francisca sounded as if from a vast empty theater:

". . . It is . . . it's indescribable. It comes from above. It glitters on curtains of ice . . . It's *sunlight,* Heinrich!"

"Sunlight," the blind man murmured. "Sunlight."

CHAPTER VIII

The Nobodies of Noman'sland

THE modern trend, already matured into tradition, is that journalists should write their mémoirs just as statesmen and generals; this trend continued strongly after the second World War. Crusading in spirit, personal in viewpoint, conflicting and often bitterly opposed to one another's version as were the narrated impressions of this highstrung group of individualist even when dealing with the same events; on one point all were agreed: that the peak in their journalistic careers, the most nerve-wrecking assignment, the chance of a lifetime, the biggest story ever, had been the grand dénouement which followed the V-7 explosions in the Harz and in Norway. They also were united in their temperamental and often vicious attacks against military censorship, the ineptitude of which, they held, had not only sorely botched a unique journalistic opportunity but had defeated its very purposes and ends.

To a man the correspondents on

the European continent maintained that they bad immediately suspected an atomic bomb developed by the Nazi underground as the cause of the disasters. Many were able to quote their own first, frantic dispatcbes—only a very few of wbicb were ever published —to this effect.

Tbis they followed with vivid descriptions of their exasperation and despair over the news-blackout which was clamped down within the hour from "above"and which had held them in almost intolerable suspense for a full three weeks while more and more competitors for the big story gathered around the *cordon sanitaire* which had been thrown around the spots. How they had sat gnashing their teeth, while listening over the radio how the public at home was purposely and flagrantly misinformed and misled.

In a nutshell the case they made up against censorship was this:

From first telegrams before the news-blackout, the more intelligent part of the reading public, especially in Britain and America, had been deeply stirred. More than an inkling of tbe truth had already leaked through. Tben in a clumsy effort to hush-hush temporarily the tremendous significance of the affair, military censorsbip had asked the editors of press and radio to "cooperate" in calming the public.

But wbat was the result? With the public clamoring for explanations the editors had desperately called upon their science-experts, chiefly astronomers and geologists, to deliver the goods. Those who were worth their salt, of course suspected the truth and refused to comment. The second-raters bowever, always hungry for publicity, bad jumped into the breach and had offered a series of "plausible" explanations of transparent absurdity.

Most widely circulated of course was the earthquake theory. Next in popularity was the idea that by a freak of nature some stratospheric icestorm had hit the earth. A third "scientific" brainstorm dragged in a couple of comets as the villians of the piece.

The sadly underestimated public, however, refused to be taken in. Millions indeed were satisfied with the official explanations and even more millions fell prey to the pseudoscientists who, like the astrologers, had a heyday in writing reams about eruptions on the face of the sun and an ominously malignant conjunction of Mars and Uranus. All this, bowever, was frustrated by the intelligent minority which, sensing the truth, circulated rumors which became wilder by the hour.

"Why," asked the intellent minority —without getting an answer from their papers—"why had there suddenly to be another meeting of the Big Three?"

"Why, for another thing, had British sapper battalions and Russian army pioneers to combine with U. S. Army engineers in operations within the distressed areas? Why was the news so scanty about the progress they made? Why was no inkling given about what they had found? Why did the government of Norway not disclose the number of Norwegian dead?"

Tbe journalists, in otber words, claimed for the intelligent minority exactly what they claimed for themselves: a fore-knowledge that some big military secret lay at the bottom of the whole thing; a secret so vital that the Big Three had hastily to plan for sharing it. What the journalists failed to mention was that editors had done their damnedest to sabotage tbe senseless censorship by quoting from tbe less straightjacket press of countries like Sweden and Switzerland.

The last point on which all the mémoirs agreed, no matter wbether the writers had witnessed the scenes in the Harz or the scenes near Jötunheimen, Norway, was the nerve-wrecking tension which had prevailed in their camps when finally the rows of telephones had been installed in the quonset huts, when the portable microphones were ready for action, when the staff cars had pulled up in front of the hotels to whisk the élite of the world's newshawks to the scenes. Most of the American writers compared that morning's mad scramble to a gold-rush.

WITHIN the hour the inevitable Babylonian c o n f u s i o n of the tongues broke lose. What most attempted first was to give a word-picture of the grandeur, of the Dantesque horrors of the scenes: the subterranean harbor-city of Niflheimr, sheethed in ice like a trawler returning from the Arctic Sea. The hellgate of Agharti "Barbarossas" launching pit, spouting like an active volcano with the steam by which the army engineers drilled passages through the icemasses within the caverns. The mounds of the dead, as if welded together with rock and splintered trees, on the top of the Blocksberg; the whole, incredible débris still partly covered with ice through which, caught in their dance of death, nude witches could be seen as if in coffins of glass . . .

Brave as were the reporters' efforts to remain coherent, to give the picture round and as a whole, almost to a man they were emotionally swept towards some particular gruesome detail. Many of these were so unbelievable that for instance the dignified London *Times,* while filling page after page with the material, expressed editorial suspicions that the whole thing might be another "Orson Welles' Invasion from Mars."

The most experienced, the most far-seeing journalists concentrated foremost on the fearful destructive effects of the atomic bombs. They described the huge tail of the V-7 which had been found almost intact in the waters of Niflheimr's port under a three foot cover of ice. They raised the question whether this weapon were not destined to alter the whole pattern of Western civilization. "The only way to save the people of the United States in the event of another war," they maintained, "would be to raze all the big cities, disperse the population and make Carlsbad Caverns the new capital of the U.S.A."

The feelings of these apocalyptic visionaries were outraged when they learned that the "human interest stories" had routed even such a shocker to the back pages. For what the headlines screamed, what the extras howled, what the radios blared on this twenty-second day of May and the next day and the next and for week after week, were in the main three themes:

1. The mystery of Adolf Hitler's death in a chicken-wire coop.

2. The Saturnalia of the Witches' Sabbath.

3. The martyrdom of Mrs. Patricia Avernell of Boston whose exposed body, identified by fingerprints and the gold star on her bosom, had been found prostrate on the altar of the great Red Devil, no doubt to serve as a human sacrifice.

As to the death of "der Fuehrer", the facts as to exactly how he had been found in the innermost heart of the ice-covered pocket-battleship soon were fully known. His identity seemed to be established beyond a shadow of a doubt. Equally it was clear that the crouched position of the frozen body under the desk was due to some last, desperate attempt to escape death. But why was the desk surrounded, as if the vaunted Fuehrer were a crawling baby in a nursery pen, by a network of narrow-gauge chickenwire? Why was there a score of heavy steeltraps set around this chickencoop? Why, finally, should there be signs hung all along the walls and outside the door, signs which said: "Swine verboten!"?

Some correspondents concluded that the Fuehrer obviously must have been quite insane; but others proffered the far more intriguing theory that he had been a prisoner of the Gestapo-templar-knigbts. In its many forms the story soon was serialized; in the home offices editors gleefully rubbed their hands. "Just let psychiatrists get their hands on this and 'twill boost circulation for another year."

The Saturnalia of the Witches' Sabbath naturally were the meat of the tabloids and the sexier kind or magazines. But it was much more than that. Hollywood thought it so "terrific" that producers like so many wailing women bemoaned the existence of the Hayes office. Broadway went agog over the possibilities; not less than a dozen shows that season staged Witches' Sabbaths—smash hits in a fierce competition of unbuttoned sex, plus hair-raising spinal shivers. Voodoo revived in the Harlem and in the Deep South, also, the Ku Klux Klan was riding again. For a time, rather daring witch-style creations—chiefly flesh-colored and strapless—were a 'must' for formal evening gowns.

THE mystery of mysteries, however, the one to enjoy the longest run in the magazines, the one which popped up season after season with the regularity of taxes, was the death of the beauteous Boston matron, Mrs. Patricia Avernell. What had caused her so hastily to return to Germany only a few days after she had interred the ashes of her son? How had these Nazi fiends been able to capture her? Why had she lived apparently as an honored guest in the subterranean villa of that Gestapo chief? By what miracle did her desecreted body appear in death more beauteous than in life with all the grey gone from the hair? Was it possible that fingerprints could lie? And why did the State Department attempt to suppress ber martyred fate? Whence came this inhuman official callousness which so shamefully tried to belittle and shrug off a flower of American womanhood?

"The next Secretary of State," the Daughters of the American Revolution declared in a solemn resolution, "must be a woman. This, because only a woman will understand a mother's heart. And, after all, in Russia they had their Madame Collontai. . ."

Looking back the years of their lives the mémoir-writing journalists reacbed the ultimate conclusion that censorship had mismanaged the whole Agharti and V-7 affair for still another reason: the great dénouement had come too much as an avalanche. The public had been given no time mentally to prepare for the shock as it broke. The public had been overwhelmed and swept by an emotional landslide. Drowned in the vast flood of facts, the public had emerged from the event more confused than enlightened and the discovery of the other Aghartis had come almost like an anticlimax.

For, with the soundbeam stations, the data and the direction-finders of both Agharti "Niflheimr" and Agharti "Barbarossa" in the hands of Interallied Army Intelligence, the digging up of other Aghartis had become a matter of putting two and two together and of assembling the necessary force.

Some Aghartis, as a matter of fact, jumped the gun. Agharti "Fridericus, for one, committed mass-suicide in one huge explosion which caused many of the deserted rocksalt-mines in the Salzgitter District to cave in. Agharti "Wotan" in its turn broke loose in a surprise attack from the old ore-mines in the Sieg Valley near the Ruhr. These maniacs actually hurled themselves upon the French occupation troops in the Ruhr, perhaps in the mad hope to hold that vital district till some other V-weapon should have done the liberation trick. The last of "Wotans" obsolescent tanks were smashed at the very gates of Essen.

Most Aghartis, however, surrendered meekly when the leaders realized the game was up. The hunt for stray submarines which, after the loss of their bases had scattered all over the seven seas, continued over many months, of course, before the last crew was captured, of all places, on Robinson Crusoe's isle.

Not only generals, statesmen and journalists kept diaries witb a view to later publications; there was many a diary written but destined 'to remain obscure for all times to come. Quite possibly for instance Mrs. George McGough, wife of General George McGough, U.S.A., had cherished some fond dream through all her bitter years of exile in a German ghost-town that some day her diary migbt blossom out in a nationally-read magazine. If so, her hopes were cruelly crushed by her husband as the big army-transport drilled its way across the Atlantic.

"Listen, Liz, my dear," said the general, "I don't consider your literary efforts any of my affairs. But let me warn you: I absolutely refuse to join the parade of those solemn, red-eared asses who get their names into disreputable print because the little woman fancies herself to be the nine Muses all rolled in one. That's one thing. For another thing: as my wife you have been in a position to catch a glimpse now and then at Uncle Sam's affairs; matters of State, you understand. Now this episode of yesterday at Hallig Hooge for instance; it's got to remain a book of seven seals. This is orders. Understand?"

The lady puckered her still pretty lips: "Oh, George, what a boor you have become in Germany; why, you've almost gone native. I'm not a German *hausfrau* and I refuse to be treated as one. That's not what we have been fighting the war for—or is it? All I've been writing was about the windmills and the rosebush and the beautiful white hair of the woman and . . ."

"All right. All right. You heard me. Keep your roses, keep your windmills but keep them to yourself. All I'm really interested in at this moment would be the sight of the Statue of Liberty."

WITH an audible sigh the "Frau General"—as her German servants always had addressed her—gave up the argument. Angrily she scanned the horizon; it was just as she had expected: no Statue of Liberty, not even a ship; George was being ridiculous.

She reopened her diary. "What a pity," she thought, "what a pity!" as she re-read in her own, neat hand:

"Hamburg, June 27th.

George and I had thought we would leave today for the States, but there was some sort of a hitch, the airport phoned this morning; there won't be a plane before tomorrow. Luckily we still had the Jet-Ford which George had driven from Halberstadt yesterday. With the whole day at our hands and nothing special to do, George proposed a little excursion. Frankly, I was glad. We're both so homesick and so desperately tired of looking at ruins all the time, we needed action to preserve our sanity. As it turned out the idea was even better than I had thought because I got a glimpse of something I had never expected to see; a new race of Germans, or perhaps I should better say a new race of Europeans in the making—and the whole thing very much hush-hush.

For about an hour and a half we drove along the coast of Schleswig Holstein—crossing into Danish territory, of course—until we reached the little town of Husum, smelly of fish but quaint and pleasant because hardly damaged by bombs. There George talked to the Danish commandant, who pressed drinks of Aquavit on us—at eleven o'clock in the morning—after which we drove the Jet-Ford aboard the most decrepit little steamer I've ever seen. The commandant meant it would be of no use to take the car along, but George insisted, saying he felt too lazy to walk even a couple of miles. George always is as stubborn as a mule in little things like that.

We were already far out at sea when George, with his biggest grin, let me into the deep, dark secret: we were going to pay a visit to the Nobodies of Noman's-land. The story of these people and this land was such a fantastic comedy of errors that I had my best laugh in a long time and at the expense of the great statesmen and the great generals —George being one of them—who are supposed to run the affairs of Germany.

As it turned out, Germany had already been divided into occupation zones for quite some time; in fact even the big Agharti-sensation had already blown over, when the Interallied Control Commission suddenly discovered that it had forgotten to conquer a part of Germany. This happened to be a chain of tiny, little islands in the North Sea, west of the coast of Schleswig Holstein and the reason why they had neither been conquered nor occupied was that during the war the Nazis had evacuated the few families who had lived there. The train of these evacuees must have been bombed or something; anyway, the original inhabitants of these isles had vanished into thin air. Consequently, on the maps of occupation-zoning these tiny specks of land appeared — as sandbanks, though houses still stood there. Nobody took the trouble to bother about them. The "Halligs," as the Germans term them, actually were Noman'sland. Meanwhile, however, the Danes had occupied the coast and proposed to station a coastguard on the isles. The Danish proposition rudely awakened the "high contracting parties," as so pompously they term themselves, to the fact that there still was a part of Germany unconquered. Having done nothing about the matter for years and years, they now decided—just like men—to make up for the lapse by doing something extra-big. It so happened that the "Halligs" came in just handy to serve as a kind of asylum for a very special kind of people.

GEORGE can be maddening the way he first raises my female curiosity to the highest pitch and then abruptly stops with his "Oh nothing." Hard as I pressed him, all he would divulge was that these mysterious people were chiefly composed of persons who officially did not exist.

"But they must have some kind of status," I said.

"Yes," he said, "but it's darned hard to make head or tail of it. Frankly, I cannot get at the bottom of this thing myself."

"Are they captives?" I asked.

"No—not exactly."

"Then are they free?"

"No—not exactly."

"George, you're impossible! If it is your intention to drive me crazy . . ."

"Listen, Liz, all I know is this: Not all of these people are Germans; there are Frenchmen, Poles, Finns, members of almost every European nation amongst them. For one reason or another they cannot and will not be repatriated. But there are Germans, too, Germans over whom for some reason unknown to me Uncle Sam holds his hand. Maybe they have done us some kind of a service; on the other hand I cannot help thinking that they must be under some sort of a cloud; I'm certain that they are under surveillance."

"Are they old, young; male, female; what are they doing on those isles? Please, stop torturing me, George."

Again he gave me his big schoolboy grin. "They come in all kinds and all sizes," he said. "I understand they have collected quite a bunch of tubercular kids and take care of them. I also understand that they go in strongly for the simple life; the get-away-from-it-all sort of thing. Exactly how they do it we'll soon learn: for there heaves Hallig Hooge into sight. This is the biggest; there are half a dozen more, all smaller."

If Hallig Hooge really is the biggest, then I fail to understand how people can live on any smaller patch of land. Hooge was perhaps a couple of square miles and mostly mud at that. Only its highest part, which is not more than twenty feet above water, sustains fields and pasture. The first thing to strike my eyes were windmills; there must have been more than a dozen of them, all milling fiercely in the strong breeze. As our teakettle-steamer edged crabwise alongside some rickety old wbarf, it blew its whistle; within seconds the air was full of seagulls. From the mud-flats and from the shoals they arose in a mad fluttering of wings and screams as if to defy our invasion. For a moment it seemed to me as if I could see a few human faces popping up from behind the dyke, but they were gone immediately; obviously the inhabitants scorned or were scared of visitations from the outside world.

Well, George started the car. Proudly he raced it up the little driveway to the crown of the dyke and stepped on the brakes, but quick. For there was no road beyond; neither on the dyke nor below the dyke. There were only narrow footpaths with deep, watefilled ditches on one side and tbe steep bank of the dyke on the other. There sat George, the great master-mind of logistics, at the wheel of the latest style car and with tbe dumbest expression I'd ever seen on his face. It made me laugh and laugh till I had tears in my eyes which, of course, made George madder than a bull. Racing the engine he tried to back up only to discover that by now the reverse gearshift was locked and wouldn't move. It's one of those bugs they haven't straightened out yet with these newfangled gas-turbine cars. At this moment we heard the little steamer's whistle and, looking back, we saw her proudly beading for the sea. George shouted but apparently they took it for a parting salute and merrily winked back at us as we sat stranded on this godforsaken place. It was bighly amusing.

This was the last straw. George, who can curse like a muleskinner, did so till he was black in the face. As usual he found out that I had been right from the beginning when I had advised against shipping the car. George, having recovered his sense of humor, walked with me and it was worth it because from the car we could never have gotten so intimate a view of the amazing medieval sights.

ON THE high ground encircled by the dyke there stood about a dozen houses or rather huts. They were built on hillocks which George said were artificial and I wouldn't have known them for human habitations from as near as a hundred feet. With their sloping walls of turf sods in a timberframe made from old shipwrecks they blended with the meadows and the hillocks as if one with them. The roofs were thatched with rushes in thicknesses of several feet and reaching almost to the ground. They were overgrown with moss and lichen; even young birch trees had taken root in them.

To every house belonged a windmill. George called them powerhouses and indeed that seemed to be the general idea. Only one was a grainmill in the ordinary sense; most of them had their driving shafts connected with oldfashioned pumps in the ditches which crisscrossed the fields. George said they were draining the wet soil. Others were connected to cisterns near the houses for water supply. But there were two of them which made even George the great engineer gape in wonder. One of these operated on top of a smithy; we saw its fire even from afar and coming nearer the din of a big hammer became loud and the roar of the bellows. George just stopped cold in bis tracks and shook his head: "Liz, my dear, I don't know what to make of this. There hasn't been such a sight for over a hundred years. Maybe I should make a report on this to Washington. Do you realize what they have done?—They have hitched up the windpower to a triphammer and bellows and are driving a machine shop with it. Now, are they or are they not a dangerous people?"

The other windmill-contraption was even more weird. The big wheel was mounted on a flatbottomed boat, out on the shoals. Its driving shaft ended in a string of buckets. We saw the buckets slowly dive, saw them spill the mud and dive again. George lent me his powerful glass: "By God, Liz; it's a dredge. Four hundred years ago Leonardo da Vinci invented one like that; I never thought it could work. Catch the idea? They are building themselves a new seadyke, they aim to protect their land; they're going to enlarge their *'Lebensraum'* and not by pick and shovel either. What a people!"

It didn't take us more than an hour to make the round along the dyke, but only gradually did we discover all the human activity outside and inside the seawall. It was low tide; for miles the mud flats stretched out into the sea like vast, glistening mirrors. It hurt the eyes to watch the tiny human figures out there. They were digging in the mud, and as a few of them waded homeward, we could see that they were kids and they carried baskets full of mussels, crabs and such seafood; even a few lobsters were amongst the spoils. We marvelled at these children because we knew they were tubercular and yet they looked healthier and stronger that the malnutritioned children back in our garrison-town. They had red cheeks and they didn't seem to mind the strong wind at all which blew right through my bones. Some were towheaded and typically Nordic but others were unmistakably Slav and Jewish; they were in fact of all nationalities.

But to look at the workers in the fields was a shock to me; most of them were women and their work was hard They were hoeing barley, which stood a good three feet high and promised a heavy crop. There were a score of women perhaps mostly over middle age. The only pieces of color about their persons were bandannas, red, yellow and blue; otherwise their clothes were as nondescript and drab as any we had seen inland. For aprons they had burlap sacks tied around the bips.

Only one able bodied man was plowing on a neighboring field; slow work with the heavy sods and only a pair of Holsteins for a team. Sheep and a few cattle stared at us from across the canals. A boat sailed straight across the isle, strange view because only the mast and the oldfasbioned square sail could be seen.

There was an air of sadness and of antiquity to the landscape; it was in the people too. I cannot compare this impression to anything except perhaps to the old Dutch masters, so many of which we saw in tbe Museum of Leiden when we visited there.

WE HAD almost reached the wharf again when we fell in with the figure of a man who from afar looked somewbat ghostly, like a big, black bird standing on one leg. As it turned out he was the shepherd of this queer community, the Hallig pastor. It was his cassock flying in the wind together with the way he swung his legless body between crutches whicb bad created the impression of a raven shot lane.

By way of opening a conversation I asked him where his church was and he pointed to a row of linden-trees, cut like a hedge so as to serve as a windbreak for the church which also was the school, a stately brick and frame building, where once the Hallig farmers had lived.

"Would we be permitted to enter?"

"Why, of course!" His was an unusually educated voice and he certainly was polite though somewhat reticent as if he too did not cherisb visitors from the outside world. Wbile we walked, George had a few things to ask. "What was hung on those scaffolds yonder and waving in the wind?"

"One of our staple foods," he said with a little smile. "Flounders; cut up and hung to dry."

"What was the meaning of the smoking heap of seaweeds down by the waterline?"

"Oh, that? We're burning kelp; the doctor needs a new supply of iodine."

George was visibly shocked. "So you're making your own iodine, are you? You seem to make quite a lot of stuff on this island."

"Yes," he said simply. "We aim to create our own little world."

George pointed to some shed near the house wherein there stood, slantwise, a huge piece of boilerplate. "And what part of your little world is that?" he asked in his gruffest military manner as if he smelled some Nazi activity.

"That is our vitamin factory," said the Hallig pastor.

"How do you mean?"

"Very simple; in the spring we cut all the young grass we can when it's still full of vitamins. Then we light a fire under this boilerplate until it glows red. Then we throw the grass unto it, shovel by shovel; finally we mill the quick-dried sprouts and mix them into our bread. We have a lot of sick kids to build up, you know. And then our old people . . ."

He sounded so natural, he remained so unruffled under the questioning that it disarmed even George. His manner became almost respectful.

"And these beaps of peat moss over there?"

"These will in time become new bedding; as yet we don't grow flax enough for bed or tablecloth."

By now we had reached the house, wbich bad a fairly big garden fenced in the strangest manner I had ever seen, with huge curved bones, grey with age.

"What you see are the ribs of whales. In the olden times the Hallig people went whaling; they used the ribs for fenceposts because there is no wood here except from shipwrecks."

One half of the garden was planted in vegetables. I noticed an unusual variety of herbs. The other half however, in the shadow of the linden trees, had been laid out as a cemetery and there were a number of little mounds, all very simple and rather moving because the crosses, which gave only the first names and the age, showed that most of them were children's graves: "Hans—9." Edith—5." "Jan—11," and so on.

"So many died so young," I said.

"Yes," he answered gravely; "do what we might, we couldn't save them when we had the flood and our whole harvest was destroyed two years ago."

I POINTED to a big busb of beautiful white roses under the linden trees. "But this one looks like an old grave."

"It's our oldest; yes. She died the day we first landed here and, dying, she said that this was the bappiest day of her life."

Bending over he lifted the roses which overhang the cross and I read: "Sybil—55."

We entered the church, which was none other but the spacious hall of the old peasant house, its huge, low beams black with the smoke of ages. It was almost bare except for a beautiful statue of the Saviour on the Cross, sculptured as it seemed from the white-oak kneetimbers of some old ship. We were deeply impressed with the expression of it.

"This is the work of a great artist," George said.

"Yes. I think he was quite famous when be still had a country in the bygone times."

"Is he still alive? Can we see him?"

Again the Hallig pastor smiled his whimsical little smile. "He is alive. And you can see him. I'm afraid however that at this moment he wouldn't like to be disturbed. You have a pair of good fieldglasses? Then look out of this window right to the east."

George did and, after a minute or so, his chin dropped and he burst into laughter. "George," I whispered, "behave yourself—this is a church."

"But I cannot help it, Liz! Look for yourself. It's the queerest sight you ever saw.'

For once George was right: for out there, far on the mudflats, lay a stout man on his tummy wriggling his body as if he suffered a severe attack of bellyache. By his side there lay a strange kind of a weapon; like a crossbow it looked. "For heaven's sake!" I exclaimed. "This is the artist? What befalls the poor man?"

"Nothing," said the cripple evenly. "He's only hunting a seal. I do hope he'll get him; we are always short of oil for our lamps. You see he really is an artist and few men can hunt seals as he does. He actually plays the part of a seal who enjoys himself flabbing about in the sand. He's so good at it that if he is lucky a real seal will crawl up the beach so close that he gets within range. We hate to shoot seals because they're so funny and so friendly. But then we need every bit of food which God will deliver into our hands."

He opened the door to the "Doense" as the Frisian peasants call their living-room: "This is our school."

We saw the rustic benches in two rows, we saw the bare-footed kids as they stiffly stood up in the German manner at our entry. But what immediately arrested me was the sight of the two teachers.

The one to the left seemed a biblical figure, the blinded Samson, tremendously powerful with a shaggy white mane around a mighty head almost like a bison's. He was an awesome, even a horrible, sight because the irises of his eyes were without any color; the whole dead eyeballs like eggs of bluish porcelain. He too had arisen with the children and stood there silently with his head thrown back. Instead of a blackboard he had before him queer-looking geometrical figures nailed together from lath. "They are models of the Euclidic rules—rather clever," George whispered into my ear.

I DIDN'T pay any attention because by now I couldn't avert my eyes from the woman teacher who sat to the right before an ancient wooden handloom. How old she was? Impossible to say with these women of Europe who have gone through every hell this side of eternity. Her figure was that of a slender, young girl but her face! So hollow-cheeked, it was little more than a deathbed. And yet it was beautiful through the eyes, which deep-set and limpid, were truly like a pair of sapphires set into ebony. It was beautiful through the smile on her pale lips, the smile of a little girl of seven picking flowers on a morn' in May. But above all it was beautiful through her hair which as a halo shone around her finely chiseled temples, hair like freshly fallen snow.

Only for one brief moment she glanced at us. Then, motioning the kids to sit down, she continued her lecture as if we weren't in the world. Some of her kids were carding sheepwool, others operated a spinning wheel, still others helped with the weaving. Some of the kids were crippled with rickets and all of them looked at us very grave and solemn. But again I noted that these Hallig kids were kept cleaner, better nourished and were possessed with more vitality than any of those thousands we had seen on the mainland.

The embarrassment which George and I had caused was so palpable that we decided to beat a quick retreat. The Hallig pastor followed in our wake. We really were sorry to leave because through the open windows we could now hear the children singing. It was a sweet-sounding little ditty and after my years in Germany I even understood the words:

"Good is a farm, even if not big.
To have two milkgoats,
And from rushes a roof.
That's better than begging."

With all my sweetest irony I whispered into my husband's ear: "George, when you write that report to Washington on Nazi activities on Hallig Hooge, don't forget to put this ditty in. Because I happen to know what it is: it's from the "Edda," the old Nordic saga, you know; strictly taboo with you fellows of the Interallied Control Commission, I suppose."

George snorted.

The asthmatic little steamer came puffing around the bend and suddenly George remembered the Jet-Ford still stalled on the incline not twenty yards away, with its gears jammed. For some reason George never can get it into his head that he isn't in America. I really blushed for him when he asked the kindly Hallig pastor the silly question: "Got any mechanic around who knows something about jet-engines?"

For the third time I noted the strange, the enigmatical smile on the lips of the legless man as he said: "I'm not sure. But perhaps Heinrich might help you out."

He disappeared back into the house and if before I hadn't believed my ears, now, I didn't believe my eyes when he returned leading the blind Samson by the hand. "The lame must lead the blind."

George simply stared; he was beyond words. Led to the car, the blind Samson bent over the gears; bis long, strong fingers moved as if they had eyes of their own. Without turning around, he suddenly called out with a mighty voice: "Francy! A hammer please!"

Almost with the echo the girl of the deathhead and of the beautiful white hair stood by this side.

He took the hammer. He lifted it over the gearbox. Now he really looked like a mad Samson about to bring the pillars of the temple crashing down. We held our breath; with all my strength I pinched George: "Whatever you want to do, don't do it."

"Bang!" came the hammer down and George winced. He fully expected to see the cast-magnesium gearbos hopelessly smashed.

But then . . . it wasn't smashed! With a nice, soft, oily click the gear jumped from reverse to neutral. Biblical Samson with the bison's head had fixed modern civilization's latest gadget—with a bammerblow.

Poor George; all he could sputter was: "But it cannot be. The man's blind. And even if he could see; how could he possibly possess the know-how of an engine like that?"

Unfortunately, the girl with the fascinating hair heard the words; quick as lightning she raised her head:

"No, no!" she cried and her voice sounded like a silverbell quivering under a blow. "Of course it's an accident; of course! What else could it be? If Heinrich ever knew any such engine — Oh, please, please, believe me! He's forgotten all of it a long, long time ago."

The little steamer whistled; George started the car. I had not time to think this riddle over. I just waved back at them who stood there arm in arm, the Nobodies of Noman'sland."

THE END

★ A LINK WITH INFINITY ★

CAN you picture a force that with a relatively small expenditure of energy can smash cities, destroy germs, paralyze or kill buman or animal life, cause starting cbanges in reproductive rates of microbes, render certain substances totally invisible, guide tbe blind man, or the fog-wrapped plane to safe haven, blend in a unified compound substances hitberto considered unmixable, such as oil and water . . . and greatest of all provide a plausible method of dealing with the time-space continuum to make possible that wildest dream of fiction . . . either time travel, or translation to anotber vibrational plane.

This force requires no great unwieldly cyclotron for its inception, no horribly costly amounts of current, no complex apparatus. An instrument tbe size of a suitcase can perform tricks that seem more like legerdemain, than the application of a science so simple as to be almost ludicrous.

Supersonics until tbe last five years, was largely confined to the manufacture of dog-whistles audible only to a dog, and sonic ecbo detectors for submarines and ships. Its sister science, subsonics, is even less explored. Partly this has been because sound waves are to light or electricity as the tortoise to the bare. Sound traveling at the snail's pace of some 700 m p.h., was crowded out by the twin giants of light and electricity cleaving the ether at 186,000 miles per second. Yet, like the tortoise, supersonics may win the race by adaptibility if not by speed.

Scientists, working currently with crystal oscillators that produce up to 60,000,000 cycles per second, bave produced astounding results Glass, bombarded by the minute trip-bammer of supersonic frequencies, disappears completely . . . unless the frequency happens to be a matcbing harmonic of the fundamental frequency of the glass . . . in which case the glass shivers into bits. Insects die, animals are stunned and paralyzed 600 feet from the macbine. Some molds and microscopic forms of life speed up reproduction tremendously under supersonic bombardment, leading to its use in artificial aging of liquors and cheeses. Other microbes less well attuned, die instantly. Mental effects on buman beings range between a vastly stimulated mentality, or complete mental and physical paralysis. Fog and smoke particles collect together under the influence of the waves, and fall to the ground.

Such is the thumbnail sketch of what is currently being done with the new giant. But the crystal oscillation method is highly limited. An oscillating crystal of quartz can only be cut to cover a limited range of frequencies, and to produce multiple frequencies separate crystals must be used, with a separate generator to oscillate each one.

For two years I have been perfecting mentally and on paper, a sonic projector on a radically different principle from previous designs. The thing is so simple it's ludicrous . . . so simple that I believe even a hint as to its actual nature would give someone the key to its construction. But it *will* work. On a limited scale I have established the basic principle It is a sound projector practically unhindered by mechanical limitations in its range above or under sonic (audible) frequencies. And it can project a frequency that is a combination of all frequencies . . . simultaneously.

Picture for yourself the blast of shattering destruction possible to a full-scale device like this. The basic vibration of nearly everything in our little world can be included in it, harmonics multiplied and remultiplied, with a cyclical range reaching to infinity.

Destruction is only one possibility. It is obvious that as the cycles per second rate is stepped up, the wave lengths grow shorter, and the distance from peak to valley of each complete sine wave grows smaller. Since by every known sonic law I can get hold of, *this* projector has a *limitless* range, ultimately it will project a wave of terrific impact and near zero wave-length into the microcosmic heart of the atom. Why should atomic fission be limited by the clumsy use of a stray neutron, when here at hand is a continuous wave possessing actual percussive ability to the nth degree, a wave easily directed to strike the elusive nucleus, with a very minimum of energy needed. Think of the sound amplification possible if the power used in a cyclotron was converted into decibels of sound.

LET'S go further. Again stressing that this machine has no detectable limitation, let us raise our cycles per second to the point where, relative to our poor senses, they reach a wave length of zero, and a sine curve height of zero. Infinity if you will. But this machine does not recognize infinity. So what happens. By a rough parallel to the Lorenz-Fitzgerald Theory, the sound wave reaching zero dimensions begins to expand in a reverse direction until eventually it reaches once again the cyclical rate at which it started. I:E: A basic vibration of 440 c.p s. (violin A) stepped up to several billion or trillion c p.s. will pass the zero point and eventually come back down to 440 c p s. If that isn't messing with the time-space continuum, it's never been done.

Now what actually must occur after zero is reached is that what WAS the "front" part of the wave, becomes the "back" part, speaking from the viewpoint of a theoretical listener. In other words, if an actual musical phrase were thus speeded up beyond zero length, the last notes of the phrase would be heard first.

What does this mean? It means that in actuality, the latter part of the phrase, which, relatively speaking would be in the future, now becomes the present. Beethoven's "V for Victory" phrase (. . . -) becomes (- . . .) Therefore when the phrase is brought back down through the continuum to its original cycles per second, we would be hearing notes in the present which actually were not to have occurred until the future. Without describing the sonic projector in too much detail, I can only say that the above phenomena is not mechanical in nature, but is a true space-time inversion. These notes then, being actually in the future, what is more logical than to tie the outfit to a sonic echo device, such as is used in submarine detection, and see what we can tune in on in the future. Using well-established methods as in radar, it is even possible to convert these sonic echoes from the future into visual images. Possibly we will be able to get a radar type blip that will give evidence of a passing helicopter, astro-plane or whatever our descendants will be using for travel.

I will not dwell here on the rather obvious possibilities of vibrating objects or people to a higher cyclical plane. So far experiments tend to prove that within supersonic ranges now available the actual physical vibration of the human body is too destructive for flesh and blood to stand. But . . . once again approaching the zero point where the sound waves go into reverse, the actual physical length of the oscillation is so small, that it is very possible that a human body could stand the infinitesimally short vibrations without damage.

Due to space limitations I have not dealt with such relatively crude possibilities of the machine as invisibility, etc And the range is fully as unlimited in the long subsonic vibrations . . . where I find my limited senses incapable of visualizing a sound wave of infinite length in the macrocosmos It is much easier to conceive the zero point on an infinitely small sound wave.

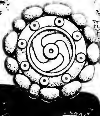
In common with many laymen of scientific bent, I lack everything except a brain and an idea. I have neither time, money nor facilties to carry the device to its ultimate. I am a chemist by profession and a musician by avocation, working a total of sixty-five hours a week at both trades to fend off the inflated wolf that stalks the country. I have been an *Amazing Stories* fan from the days of "Ralph 124C41," "The Moon Pool," "Beyond the Crater's Rim," "Hick's Inventions with a Kick," "Robur, the Conqueror," and "Armageddon, 2429 A.D." (Buck Roger's first public appearance) The latter story and its sequel a few months later, sure called the turn on world events.

Any help, suggestions, criticism or attention on the supersonic idea would be most welcome.—*H. C. Goble.*

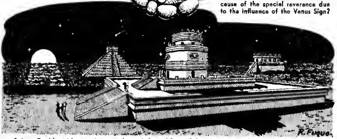
SCIENTIFIC

Above: Mayan Venus Sign. *Below:* Calendrical shell disc from Tennessee mound. Copied from a museum exhibit.

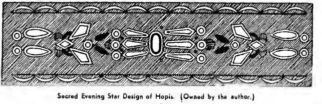
Above: Most primitive people keep track of time by the moon's phases. *Below:* The Mayan observatory at Chichen Itza. In mathematics, in astronomy, Mayas had few peers.



Aztec calender stone. Why did the Aztecs choose 13 months. Was it because of the special reverence due to the influence of the Venus Sign?



Below: Double trident points to altar of Sacred-fire. Other figures are Twin-gods, Rabbit and Dragon. Dragon always has oval pop eyes and tusk-teeth. Protruding tongue of Twin-gods is a Mayan characteristic, common subjects of temple paintings. Note that tongue has eight lines. Rabbit's whiskers carry eight lines. 8-13 magic numbers are carried by double-line symbols.



Sacred Evening Star Design of Hopis. (Owned by the author.)

MYSTERIES

THE GHOST OF THE VENUS CALENDAR

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

The mystery of the ancient continent of Pan, or Lemuria, may be inextricably entwined with this ancient calendar

BEHIND the most ancient nations stands the shadow of a lost motherland by the name of Pan, and in connection with that name, the numbers eight and thirteen, with the amount of their difference—five. Over and over are these numbers repeated, until their very reiteration carries something haunting, so that one becomes, as it were eight-thirteen conscious.

Then in these most ancient manuscripts, one notes a change and the number combinations of nine and twelve triumph over the eight-thirteen. These numbers are usually spoken of as gods but that does not in the least alter the significance of the change, and the triumphing of the nine-twelve over the eight-thirteen.

Before one starts to study the calendar systems of the Ancient Mayas, these number combinations mean nothing, but after one becomes aquainted with the almost fantastic accuracy of Mayan mathematicians and astronomers, the eight-thirteen and nine-twelve combinations leap into prominence as keys with which, some day, the secrets of the past may be unlocked.

First, let us take up the 8-13. Venus, whirling on an inside orbit, makes thirteen revolutions about the sun to eight terrestial revolutions. This is the basis for the Venus-sun calendar, possibly once used extensively by the Mayans, although in historical times, that is from the first century on, its use was probably only as a check up the other calendars.

Then as to the twelve. Most primitive people are aware of the seasons in a general way but they keep track of time by phases of the moon, as it is a shorter and more easily observable period. Thus the saying "Two or three moons ago." This is also true of tribes who have had more learning at one time, but who for military or economic reasons have reverted to the life of the forest-dweller. In this case the learning is retained only by the priesthood, and if adversity should strike down the wise men before they have had the opportunity to pass on the knowledge, it degenerates into mere symbols which are considered to have once had some lost or magical meaning. Thus many tribes who now observe but short lunations and speak of so many years as so many "winters" ago, still reverence the evening or morning star as a sort of god, and regard the numbers of eight-thirteen as having a magical power connected in an unknown manner with its influence.

As a tribe which begins with short lunar observations continues to prosper, and more complicated rituals, demanding a certain date for their observance, arise, such as those preceding the sowing of grain, the solar and therefore seasonal observation of the sun becomes more important. Yet as the people began with the observation of the moon, which by now is undoubtedly some kind of a deity, it becomes necessary to combine the lunations of earlier reckoning with the seasons. Thus arises the need for the lunar-sun calendar.

As the moon goes through twelve complete periods during one terrestial revolution, and there is a partial lunation left over, which will throw the lunar calendar of twelve months[1] (or moons) out of line with the seasons, unless corrected, both our present calendar of months unequal in length, together with an extra day on leap year, and the Mayan Civil Calendar, are attempts to meet the solar discrepancy and retain the twelve lunations.

Besides these two calendars however, the Mayans had also a purely lunar calendar which is described upon pages 51 to 58 of the Mayan Dresden Codex. It covers 45 lunations, or nearly 33 years. The lunar revolutions are arranged in series of five or six, the former at 148 days and the latter calculated at 177 or 178. These lunations which are the necessary number between eclipses form a cycle and are contained in the Tzolkin. This series is then re-entered nine times, thus forming a larger cycle of nearly three hundred years. Thus the lunar calendar of the nine cycles, which bears internal evidence of long observational periods, can be used as a check against the more primitive calendar of the twelve months.

For the purpose of filling out the record and better understanding the calendrical systems of the Amerinds, we should mention the ritualistic or Sacred Calendar called the Mayan Tzolkin,

[1] *Our word "month" is taken from "moon."*

which is a sort of arbitrary affair. Twenty days, each with a name of its own are concurrently run with a period of thirteen months, making a cycle of two hundred and sixty days, each day during this periods having thirteen changes. Fifty-two make a great cycle. The Aztec Calendar is similar to this. Probably they were taken from some form ancestral to both peoples. Yet it is characteristic of the Aztecs and their preoccupation with ritual, that having the samples before them of the unexampled mathematical and astronomical genius of the former Mayans, they should choose to ignore all calendars except this arbitrary and clumsy ritualistic calendar.

IN DISCUSSING the Aztec Calendar, T. T. Waterman wonders why the Aztecs should choose thirteen months when they might just as well have taken fourteen. He admits that the twenty days were chosen because twenty was the unit of their counting system. (This is of course, the reason for the Mayan choice.) It seems to the present writer that the answer was given by Seler, when he pointed out that the special reverence which the Aztecs undoubtedly had for thirteen was a survival from some sort of connection with the Venus Calendar. Furthermore, this is strenghtened by the exhortation chronicled by Tezozomoc[2] which is referred to by Seler. The war-chief is urged to "rise at midnight and look at the stars; toward morning he must carefully observe the constellation Xonecuilli; and he must carefully observe the morning star."

Waterman's attempt to refute Seler on page 325 of his treatise on the Aztec Calendar, is unsuccessful because Waterman speaks of the Aztecs as a political entity totally devoid of any connection with the more advanced Mayas who preceded them in time, and thus, culturally speaking, in the flowering periods of the two civilizations.

Therefore the question is not that which Waterman asks, of why should the *Aztecs* choose the number thirteen, but rather, why should the *Mayans* choose the number thirteen in their Ritualistic Calendar? Waterman admits that there were thirteen divisions of the Mayan armies, while the Tzental mythology has thirteen serpents and to the Cakchiquels the thirteenth day was sacred. He does not admit the widespread regard for thirteen in Northern North America, nor the suspicions of scholars that there may have been Venus reckoning in South America. Nor does he mention the Mayan Venus Calendar. Therefore, although Waterman attempts a refutation of the Venus Calendar argument for the Aztecs, his weakness is the fact that he attempts to isolate the Aztecs, while no Amerind civilization can be isolated and at the same time, be adequately comprehended.

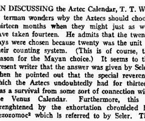
The widespread use of the numbers eight or thirteen, or both in combination, among the tribes north of Mexico, has not as yet been adequately studied. From a Tennessee Mound comes a shell disc which is undoubtedly of the Venus Calendar. A Hopi pattern which is supposed to draw "magical power" from the evening star, is in possession of the author, and distinctly shows the eight-thirteen combination. The Blackfeet have a ritualistic pipe on the stem of which a serpent turns around eight times, while above and below this symbol is a band upon which are thirteen circles.

MOST intriguing of all, is the combination carved deeply upon the rocks at Tule Lake, Modoc County in California near the Oregon line. These petroglyphs had never been seen until the government drained the lake.[3] They were as much a surprise to the Modoc Indians as they were to the white men. The Modocs have informed the author, that in their tribal memories, the place has always been a lake.[4] Yet standing before this oft-repeated combination, sometimes with even rows of dots to one side, in three rows, 73 dots in all, divided once by a deep division cleft, one has the strange feeling of looking upon what are, as yet, some unreadable dates, and possibly parts of an unreadable history. For again it is borne upon the spectator that the greatest common divisor of 365 (terrestial) and 584 (Venus) is 73, and that the solar year is five times, the Venus year eight times and the combination (or "basic" period of Seler) is thirteen times this factor.

Perhaps the key to the past which this ancient

[2] *See Tezozomoc, Fernando de A. Cronica Mexicana in Kingsborough, 1831V9.*

Petroglyphs at Tule Lake, Modoc County, Calif. (Copied by author.)



(1) Attention is called to the upper left hand glyph which is duplicated at the right center. The main difference is in the number of dots, the one having eight and the other nine. The slight difference in placing may be but a natural writing variation on the part of the one who inscribed it. In this connection, the feathered figure above it seems to be only this part of the glyph in reverse.

(2) An Indian friend from the Pueblos has suggested that the central glyph could be interpreted as "Coyote defeated in fifth battle, or fifth cycle and prisoners burned in the Sacred-fire." It is most interesting to learn that he interprets the trident under the hanging wolf symbol as the fire-sign.

(3) The symbol at the lower right is without doubt a striking example of a Venus-Calendar glyph.

calendar seems to hold will never even be studied enough to be inserted in the lock until you and I and our neighbor across the street get busy and faithfully copy the curious old "Indian petroglyphs or picture-writing" nearest to our home before unthinking tourist vandals who know no better, have chipped it away in order to carry it off for souvenirs—yes, until we get husy and copy it faithfully at least once for one museum. If we have the real scholars' desire that the future may know, even though we may never learn more in our lifetime, we will copy it for several museums, sending one copy to each.

There has been up to now too much confusion in our thinking between the terms "ancient" and "primitive." The Venus-solar calendar is a perfect illustration, for though it may be the former it is certainly not the latter. Its complete computation took aeons of astronomical observation and a most modern or sophisticated disregard for the shorter phases of the more brilliant moon. What people carried this astronomical masterpiece?

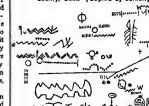
Perhaps, as in the way with archaeological questions, that one is related to many others. Why do we, in these days of better astronomical observation, still cling to a more awkward and primitive calendar? Why do we in all of our measurements cling to the number twelve, regarding thirteen as an "unlucky" number? Could the reason be that the number thirteen once carried connotations of power and grandeur, back in the mist of unrecorded history—not our power and grandeur, of course, but that of an enemy power? Was the number thirteen, like certain gods of the mighty past, marked by our ancestors as "untouchables" before the dawn of our fully-recorded history?

Possibly the hints of a previous Venus Calendar in Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia are incidental and entirely due to chance. Or possibly, if there ever was a Venus Calendar in the Old World, the evidence has long been drowned by the incoming lunar-solar and is now beyond recovery. Yet the slender links of evidence in the Americans are *not* beyond recapitulation, and there is a possibility that their recovery by science may be the key which will some day unlock aeons of long-forgotten history.

[3] *Tule Lake was first drained in 1924.*

[4] *The Modocs also take the inverted pyramid for the wind-sign, and brag of being "water-snake eaters," which may prove that the Venus Calendar fell before their entry into the country as followers of the Wind-god. Or, if the Snake carried the Venus Calendar, and the Modocs were instrumental in their defeat and banishment from the land, then the Snake must have continued to live at Tule after it had become a lake. Geologists cannot say when this might have happened, though there is geological evidence of volcanic upheaval and the damming of an old river.*

Petroglyphs at Tule Lake, Modoc County, Calif. (Copied by author.)



(1) Attention is called to the thirteen circles with the eight lines below it, upper right, which is very distinct.

(2) The Glyph , here is repeated at the "Lava Beds," a national monument about fifteen miles to the south. It is there written thus:

(3) Note in lower right the circle with four lines and 16 circles inside with what looks like a bit of cane beside it. This could be a primitive way or earlier way of writing the Aztec day-sign "cane."

(4) To the right of this sign is what appears to be the Snake with the Turtle at its correct place just before the head of the Snake.

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WHAT MAN

OXYGEN is the great giver of radiant energies in the processes of life. This is so both from the chemical and physical points of view, but it is more recognizable from the chemical point of departure.

In combining with virtually every substance with which it reacts, oxygen discards some of the building blocks of its valence electrons. When the combustion is very rapid light is produced as well as heat quanta. When, as in body chemistry, combustion is controlled and stepwise, these building blocks of the electrons are not built up into quanta of light—instead they are emitted in simpler form as heat quanta—and thus the body is enabled to make full use, comparatively, of the energy available from combustion There is one very noteworthy exception to the discard rule of oxygen; when it combines with itself to form ozone its valence electrons *add* to their substance certain ultra-violet quanta. The significance of this fact will be taken up later. For the time being let it rest with the knowledge that all body chemistry draws its energies from the alteration of oxygen's valence electrons.

In the absence of sufficient oxygen, cells all over the body find themselves suffocating, because carbon monoxide is formed as an occasional end-product. This substance combines with cytochrome (cytochrome is to the cell what the red corpuscles are to the body) and with hemoglobin *and with brain and nerve cells through these substances,* so that more or less permanent tie-ups of cell efficiency are frequently effected. A red blood corpuscle tied up thus must be torn up by the liver and discarded, the affinity of hemoglobin for CO being much stronger than its affinity for oxygen. There are several ways to protect the metabolism from the monoxide danger, considering only the monoxide formed within the body, that is. Physical culturists and mystics advocate breathing exercises. By increasing the mass action of oxygen they step up the efficiency of combustion and prolong life. A recent method of resting the lungs in T.B. (and it is going over big if it is propagandized) utilizes variations in chamber pressures of air, so that the patient's breathing is done by the air instead of his lungs. Besides resting the lungs, this automatic supply is constantly in excess of what the patient would normally breathe in himself, so that the energy level of the body as a whole is kept at its peak. Thyroxin, the use of which is often dangerous, increases oxygen intake by stepping up general cell activity. Methylene blue, used in cyanide poisoning, and in acute carbon monoxide poisoning, may affect the breathing center by acting as a transformer of blood stream energies so as to activate the lungs through the nerves. Some-

CAN IMAGINE...

If you will imagine it, perhaps someone will be inspired to do it. This department is for your ideas, no matter how "wild" they may seem; who knows, they may be the spur to some man's thinking and thereby change our destiny! Tell us your thoughts.

thing of the same effect is brought about by camphor. Ethylene disulphonate realigns the chemical mechanism of cells by reactivating and enhancing enzymatic activity, so that combustion is much more complete within the cell (To date this substance has been employed with dramatic success against asthma and allergies) Cytochrome C has been shown to raise the arterial oxygen content, by increasing the effectiveness of lung absorption. These, then, are all levers to assist in the matter of making necessary energies available to the cell. Those which might be shown to be harmless could be employed in the accentuation of well-being.

BUT the importance of the radiant energies concerned in the composition of oxygen, peroxides, ozone and nascent oxygen are still unexpressed. Ozone, with its romance, deserves at least a few remarks . . . About a decade ago it was accidentally discovered that the ozone present under storm conditions facilitates thought processes. At a large Eastern university a freshman class, taking I.Q. tests, so far surpassed normal results (in spite of the distraction of the noisy storm) that the examination was given over again (with calmer atmospheric conditions), whereupon the class average dropped to the normal level. Subsequent experiment indicates the effect is very real. But ozone is poisonous except in minute traces (the author could write several pages of personal supportive evidence on this, as well as evidence of definite benefits from careful use) and must not be inhaled for long . . . Ultra-violet irradiation of ergosterol etc. gives rise to vitamin D, the calcium carrier. This vitamin is somewhat dangerous, excessive amounts in the system cause deposits of calcium to form in places where it is not wanted. A recent medical journal noted that a patient taking 50,000 units of D per day for one year (supposed anti-arthritis therapy) succumbed at the end of that time to a calcified heart and kidneys. The medics were scratching their beads. . . . Occupations where cancer takes its worst toll are those of seamen. These men are exposed to the sun's ultraviolet rays, which form large amounts of calciferrol (vitamin D) in the skin. By reason of the frequent occurrence of storms and the more or less constant presence of ozone, ultra-violet rays also strike the lung tissues, giving rise to the formation of more D. When formed, Vitamin D is difficult for the system to manage in large amounts because it is only soluble in fats and oils. The very important connective tissues (which are responsible for mediation between blood-stream and cells in general) become less capable of doing their work as D piles up . . . premature old age has been artificially produced with Vitamin D . . . certain glandular weaknesses in conjunction with this massive calciferrol accumulation bring on cancer. Medicine does not understand those glandular weaknesses. Medicine blames the "salt sea spray" for the incidence of cancer among seamen. There are three substances, indispensable to effective metabolism, which assist the body in getting rid of extra Vitamin D. One of them is recognized—Vitamin A. The others . . . well. But please don't misunderstand. This is only one small piece in the jig-saw puzzle of cancer. A very important small piece, however. So calcium rides on a quantum captured from the sun, or from ozone, by a complex sterol molecule.

John McCabe Moore

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

GRAHAM ANSWERS MITCHELL

Dear Skeptic:

I hope you like your *Amazing Stories* without catsup, because I insist you eat those three copies straight. From the tone of your letter you have evidently been taking it with a little vinegar. But, enough of that. This letter is going to be a serious answer to the very pertinent points you brought up in your's.

I'm going to ask you a question, Mr Mitchell. How could you get a mule to read "Gone With the Wind?" That isn't a foolish question, because, believe me, the answer is easier to find than the one to how I could possibly get any orthodox scientist to go through my stuff. Not that it is so hard no one but me is smart enough to understand it. Nothing quite THAT bad.

As a matter of fact it is all very simple. BUT there are a few concepts you must acquire. BEFORE you can understand it, that just can't be found in the orthodox textbook. If you will recall, I mentioned a new hydrodynamics. Why a new hydrodynamics? (And in case you don't know what hydrodynamics is it's in the dictionary). There has to be a new hydrodynamics because the one now in use is inadequate for any kind of a complete analysis. There are perhaps thirty million dollars worth of wind tunnels in this country that testify to that.

I could spout things about d'Alembert's paradox in relation to that, but it wouldn't mean anything to anyone but a hydrodynamicist.

In order to get into the new hydrodynamics you will have to become acquainted with a concept called "effective angle" and master a mathematics called "space probabilities," both of which are NOT in any existent literature.

After wading through all that junk you still haven't got anywhere, because you have to learn what "the invariants in a truth statement" means, and the difference between empirical and real existence.

Of course, you will also have to really LEARN logic, too, and know what is meant by a self-consistent system. Most scientists only took one semester of logic in college. They wanted to specialize, so they ignored all except the AUTHORITIES on their specialty, who are for the most part just authorities on the authorities on the authorities on their subject. To them logic is a special field outside their special scientific love.

Perhaps the best way to understand the nature of reality is to start out on what mathematicians usually shudder at, when it is mentioned at all, and never mention willingly. Infinity. The calculus was not accepted for a long time because of the refusal of the so-called mathematicians of Newton and Leibnitz's time to accept anything that smacked of 0/0, or infinity over infinity, or zero times infinity. They are not mentioned today unless the statement is one made a hundred or so years ago and backed by authority long dead and mentioned only with awe.

Even the word "finity" became a tender spot to the poor math teacher, so he avoided it by using the happy term "inductive." Instead of finite numbers you now have the set of numbers arrived at from any given set of small numbers by the process of mathematical induction. Yes, a VERY touchy subject.

But how in tarnation could I discuss seriously the law of rebound of something which has an infinite velocity, zero mass, and finite momentum, with a Harvard mathematics professor? He might change the subject by asking me if I am happily married!

What would Einstein say if I were to walk up to him and say with a scholarly look on my mug, "Mr. Einstein, do you realize that a gravity field is nothing more than a neutralized electrical field?" Suppose he looked interested and replied, "Please explain why you think so, Mr. Graham." Then I would have to say, "Before I go into that would you please take a vacation from your work and learn how to divide zero by zero?"

Why of COURSE he would do that. He is just a student, always ready to desert the subject that is occupying his attention and listen to someone who says, "I know the nature of the universe." I can just see him!

Or suppose I said, "Mr. Einstein, do you realize that postulating curved space implies that the universe is only a Euclidean point in our next higher space frame, which is an absurdity?"

He might reply, "Frame? Frame? That reminds me. I must get my latest blackboard varnished and framed for posterity."

That is doing Mr. Einstein an injustice, but I am only showing you, Mr. skeptic Mitchell, that you can't possibly lay the nature of reality in the lap of some scientist and sit back and wait for the world to say Ah and Oh.

Should I try to get attention by issuing startling statements? I could announce to the world that the sun's heat is maintained by a balanced system of matter synthesis in the sun's core and matter disintegration near its surface. I could announce to the world that a nova is produced by the collision of a cold star, whose mass is at least as great as our sun's, and some other body of at least planetary mass, which starts an unbalanced synthesis-disintegration cycle. If anyone bothered to ask me why, I could only reply, "Because the velocity of gravity in the heart of a large mass is much less than at its surface." If they bothered to repeat their why, I could only say, "Would you mind taking time out to learn how to divide zero by zero?"

Maybe you'll admit now that it should be simple to get a mule to read "Gone With the Wind." All you have to do is teach it how to read and make it WANT to read the book.

Not to change the subject, your editor, Mr. Palmer, and I have talked it over and decided it might be a good idea to stop all this hinting and dish out something concrete. As it says somewhere else in this letter, the best thing to start on is infinity—or more properly, THE FRAME STRUCTURE OF NUMBERS, SPACE AND TIME.

So, Mr. Mitchell, and all you other guys and gals, go ahead and read it and tear it apart. It won't make any difference, really. Matter will still synthesize in the sun's core and drift out through the molten mass to the surface where it will disintegrate, and then coast back to the core where it will synthesize, and then coast out to the surface—"Shut that phonograph off, somebody."—*Roger P. Graham.*

In a future issue, in our department "What Man Can Imagine," we will present a condensed version of Mr. Graham's article on FRAMES. This article consists of information gained by Mr. Graham in the weird way described by him in the article taken to task in our last issue by Mr. Mitchell.—Ed.

(Concluded on page 178)

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

★ Building the Great Pyramid ★

(SEE BACK COVER)

THE Great Pyramid (more properly the Temple of Osiris) was built by Thothma approximately 3150 years ago. It was built by 200,000 men and women. They were divided into divisions numbering 20,736 persons, each assigned to a specific task; one to dig canals, one to quarry stone, one to hew stones, one to build boats, one to provide rollers, another capstans, etc.

Surveyors found suitable stone above the banks of the Egon river at the foot of Mount Hazeka (as they were then named); and another site across the plains of Neuf, in the mountains of Aokaba. From the headwaters of the Egon a canal was made to Aokaba, and from there descended by locks to the plains of Neuf and on to Gakir, the place chosen for the pyramid.

The logs used were brought down the Egon from the forests of Gamhotha and Rugzak. These logs were tied together and floated to the place required, then drawn up on the land by means of capstans.

The stones were hewn in the region of the quarries. When properly dressed they were placed on slides by capstans, let down the mountain sides, placed on floats made of boards. Beneath the boards were rollers, gudgeoned at the ends. Near Gakir the floats were drawn out of the river by means of ropes made of hemp and flax, drawn up inclines by capstans, the rollers acting as wheels.

Thothma himself, most learned engineer of all, laid the foundation, using only these instruments: the gau (a plumb and level combined), the length (the length of a man after trying one thousand men), the square, the compass, the plumb and the line. A length was divided into twelve parts, these again into twelve, and so on.

After the first level of the pyramid was laid, the builders of the inclined plane began their work, using logs rather than stones. Then another layer of the temple was built. Raising the inclined plane once more, the third level was built; and so on, the wood keeping pace with the stone.

The width of the inclined plane was the same as the width of the temple, the entire length of the plane being 440 lengths.

Up this inclined plane the floats, bearing the stones, were drawn by means of capstans and men and women pulling also.

The actual building of the pyramid took twenty-four years. It required another half-year to remove the inclined plane used in building it. After that, it stood free and clear, the greatest building ever built on earth.

Thothma built the pyramid in order to prove that it was possible to live forever, under certain conditions. These conditions he strove for in the pyramid. Two months after completion of the pyramid, he entered the Chamber of Life and Death and was sealed inside for thirty days.

Immediately thereafter he made of the pyramid an astronomical observatory, installing observation towers containing telescopes. Mathematicians and astronomers made calculations of stellar movements that cannot be approached today.

On his hundredth birthday, Thothma fell and broke his neck and died. His pyramid lives on.

DISCUSSIONS

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(Concluded from page 177)

ENCOUNTER IN THE CAVES

Sirs:

I flew my last combat mission on May 26 when I was shot up over Bassein and ditched my ship in Remaree Roads off Cheduba Island. I was missing five days. I requested rest leave at Kashmere. I and Capt. (deleted by request) left Srinagar and went to Rudok then through the Khesa pass to the northern foothills of the Kabakoram. We found what we were looking for. We knew what we were searching for.

For heaven's sake, drop the whole thing! You are playing with dynamite. My companion and I fought our way out of a cave with sub-machine guns. I have two 9" scars on my left arm that came from wounds given me in the cave when I was 50 feet from a moving object of any kind and in perfect silence. The muscles were nearly ripped out. How? I don't know. My friend had a hole the size of a dime in his right bicep. It was seared inside. How we don't know. But we both believe we know more about the Shaver Mystery than any other pair.

You can imagine my fright when I picked up my first copy of AMAZING STORIES and see you splashing words about on the subject.

Don't print our names. We are not cowards, but we are not crazy. You have given a lot of information in AMAZING STORIES that seems entirely unrelated to our subject, but a lot of it is, that's what worries us.

ex-Capt.—A.C.

At your request we have not printed your names, but if you've written this much, why not write more? Your editor isn't dropping anything, so you might as well come clean. Your letter is exciting, but absolutely worthless unless you can give more definite information. Let's have it. If it exists, we'll get it anyway.—Ed.

SEND ON YOUR PROOF!

Sirs:

By profession I am a diver. I read Mr. Edward John's letter about the Mendicino County, and when I learned he lived in this city I was determined to look him up. The result of the meeting is this: Myself and four companions are outfitting an expedition to go there on May 20, 1946. We have an old Ford truck on which we are welding steel armor plate. Brother, nothing's going to get us! We are going to use this as a base of operations in the hills. We will carry two motorcycles, seismograph (Mr. John tells us he has felt tremors there) six shotguns, other weapons, equipment and food and sleeping supplies. Mr. John, I know, is telling the truth. He has shown me several photographs of something which will make your hair rise. In short, he has *documentary* proof and I believe him.

Now I want to tell you what happened to me and my cousin, who is ten years older than me, and who taught me to dive. In 1934 my cousin found something very peculiar on the clear, sandy bottom. He found a strange rock formation. When he tried to lift one of the many fragments around it, he could not. Finally a winch lifted a 5" chunk weighing 147 lbs. He thought it was a meteorite and stowed it between decks.

In June, 1935, when we went to San Francisco, he took it to a friend of his, a metallurgist, who examined it. In December the man came back to us and introduced us to a Prof. Lindslys of Chabote Observatory, Oakland, who wanted to finance an expedition to recover the meteorite.

Using oil barges as pontoons, he raised the meteor, which though only 17 ft. long, weighed 1,300 tons. He took it to the beach and built a shack around it and was joined by the Prof. and the metal expert. The reason the Prof. wanted to waste his money on this expedition was because the metal expert had tried for 4 months to penetrate that rock with dynamite, drills, acid, heat, etc and couldn't do it. I have documentary proof. His official opinion was that the meteor was a hollow gaseous shell of about ¼" thickness which was compressed to such thickness and melted up when it hit the atmosphere. When we examined the meteorite, we found it was actually a rocket (I have photos in a bank vault along with a 2" chunk of the rocket and will send it to you if you desire and handle with precaution. There are dangers connected with it).

The rocket was nearly destroyed except for one window from which we could see inside. We saw strange instruments. Two weeks later about 9 an explosion occurred and a fire consumed the remains of the shack. The flames burned fiercely until 4 in an unnatural bluish flame. No remains of the rocket were found, most of our equipment and photos were burned up.

The metal expert caught malaria and died. My cousin died when his line burst one day at 269 ft. (accidents) in 1938. I am writing this up and will send the manuscript to you together with photos I have left. I know it will raise an uproar because I can prove every statement I made. You should have a museum, and I will start it by sending the small piece I still have.

V. G.

San Francisco, Cal.

Your editor has only one thing to say—send on those photos and that piece of meteorite! If you can prove your statements, you've GOT to! Please send us all the details, and we'll see that scientists DO listen to you!—Ed.

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WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

(See page 177)