CORONATION NUMBER
of
GOOD HUMOUR
No. 8 Illustrated /-

THE DIGGLE SISTERS SEE THE CORONATION
by Dennis Rooke

CORONATION DAY, 1836
by Angela Thirkell

Jeanne de Casalis : Gilbert Frankau
Edgar Wallace : : : John Aye

At all newsagents and bookstalls
INTRODUCTION

The Editor

SUPERHUMAN

Geoffrey Armstrong

A Colossus and his mate stride through the city.

SEEDS FROM SPACE

John Russell Fearn

The Martian Weed smothered Earth and saved it from cosmic disaster.

REVOLT ON VENUS

W. P. Cockroft

Pioneers of space kidnapped by the despot's of an alien world.

MAN OF THE FUTURE

Festus Pragnell

A Genius of 2950 A.D.—born a thousand years too soon.

MONSTERS OF THE MOON

Francis Parnell

Peril amid the gigantic animal life of Luna.

THE PRR-R-EET

Eric Frank Russell

It hopped like a kangaroo and whistled like a bird—what was it?

INVADERS FROM THE ATOM

Maurice G. Hugi

Whole armies fled before the might of the twenty men from nowhere.

THE PERFECT CREATURE

John Beynon

The synthetic man was super-efficient, but he had his limitations!
Introducing—

TALES OF WONDER
And Super-Science

Foreseeing the Amazing
World of the Future

We live in a wonderful world—an age of scientific marvels that were nothing more than fantastic dreams half a century ago. Talking pictures . . . radio . . . aeroplanes . . . and now, television. These and a thousand other modern miracles surround us every day of our lives, tributes to man’s amazing ingenuity.

We take them for granted, of course; but our forefathers would have called them impossible. Though some of them, more far-seeing than the rest, imagined them as probable developments of the future . . . and were scoffed at for their extravagant ideas.

But we are learning to look into the future with greater vision than our forefathers had. Day by day, more miracles of super-science are being performed about us; new discoveries are being made, the significance of which leaves us absolutely astounded. We dare not say that the predictions of to-day’s imaginative prophets are mere flights of fancy. For time has shown that their dreams may come true to-morrow . . .

What immense possibilities lie ahead? What startling things have yet to come? What further surprises are in store for us—and for our descendants?

A scientist says we shall rocket to the Moon in 1950. Another suggests that by the year 2000 we may be breeding babies in the laboratory. A third goes so far as to say that, in a thousand years from now, human beings will converse with each other by telepathy!

Gradually, as time goes on, century after century, man will discover those secrets of the Universe which have hitherto eluded him. As he evolves, so he will soar to still greater heights of scientific achievement.

He will build an even more wonderful world, live in huge underground cities, manufacture his own weather and devise all sorts of amazing machines to serve him. Then he will seek out into space for millions of miles beyond his little sphere, com-
INTRODUCTION

municate with distant planets and hurtle through the void in marvellous ships, exploring the whole vast Solar System, encountering the strange inhabitants of Mars, Venus, and other alien worlds. . . . Unless they, with their superior knowledge, anticipate our triumphs and visit us first. . . . There is always that possibility.

We shall not live to witness these marvels. But these fascinating TALES OF WONDER, told by masters of Science Fiction, the startling new literature of to-day, will enable you to peer into the Future and see what the world will be like hundreds—thousands of years hence . . . what astounding things may even happen to-morrow.

Bold, calculating prophets have conjured up for your enchantment strange, exciting visions that may one day materialise into cold fact; depicted in vivid detail the wonders of an age yet unborn. If their imaginative romances seem too fantastic to be taken seriously, remember that they are based on possibilities revealed to us by the wizard Science, which has wrought miracles in the past and will do stranger things in the Future.

THE EDITOR
SUPERHUMAN

By

GEOFFREY ARMSTRONG

He Was a Giant Among Men, Not Only in Stature But in Brain Power . . . And He Planned to Usher in a New Era

CHAPTER I

The Secret Experiment

DOCTOR ADISON BOYD was recognisable to the outer world as a model husband, a consistent example of sobriety, tenderness and good spirits. Indeed, he had only two faults: one that he was a scientist, and the other that he was very dissatisfied with the world in which he lived.

His wife, Ena, tolerated his calculated, disapproving comments upon the world at large with due wifely detachment, until one day he burst upon her the most shattering bombshell of her young life.

"Ena, Teddy is two months old, isn’t he?" he demanded, almost fiercely.

She nodded, and cast a fond glance at the infant lying in the armchair opposite her own.

"Yes, Ad. Why?"

"I’ve been doing some hard thinking. Frankly, I believe he can save mankind!”

"Save mankind! Whatever is the matter with you, Ad? He can’t even talk yet; besides—"

Ena stopped. Her husband was pacing the drawing-room with methodical steps, driving his right fist into his left palm with rhythmic precision.

“I’ve got it, I’ve got it!” he reiterated persistently. "I know I’ve got it! Listen, Ena . . .” He went down unceremoniously on his knees beside her chair and took her hand tightly.

"I want you to listen carefully,” he said, gravely. "I am a scientist, my main line being biology and pathology—you know that. For years, ever since I was eleven years old, I have struggled persistently to find a way to help humanity grow out of its appalling, humdrum littleness . . . this—barrenness! Expand its knowledge! And in our son lies the solution. . . . Tell me, my dear, what do you know of the pituitary glands?”
"Pituitary glands?" she repeated, startled. "Why—nothing, Ad."

"I'll explain to you; it is essential that you know what I'm talking about. The two pituitary glands in the neck control growth; the thyroid gland keeps us firm and supple of body; the parathyroid gland controls the bloodstream's lime supply, and the two suprarenal glands give strength and energy. These glands are the foundations of a powerful and well-developed body. You see?"

Ena nodded, but her face was still puzzled.

"Well, I propose, with the various chemicals at my command—calcium being the main basis—to treat our son's various controlling glands in such a manner that he will ultimately grow up into a gigantic genius among men. A creature of as yet indeterminable height, possessed of colossal strength, unshatterable endurance, and a super-mind. It is all in the glands—and I can do it!

"Now do you see how our son can become a leader among me? How he can perhaps straighten out the muddles of life and leave the way clear for similar gigantic creatures to follow him? Until—who knows?—the entire world may be peopled by such beings, and the old order of lilliteness, undersize and weak intelligence be stamped out."

"It's horrible!" Ena declared promptly, without the least hesitation. "You'll play no such pranks on my child! Find something else to experiment on!"

But Adison Boyd was tenacious. He tried every means he could invent to obtain his wife's consent, only to be met by stolid refusal. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders and got to his feet.

"Very well, my dear," he said, with ominous quietness. "Like hundreds of others before you, you are making the mistake of hindering the course of scientific progress; and I, as a scientist and inventor of the gland — treatment, cannot be expected to stand for that. For the moment you win, of course . . . but I do not give up hope."

Ena nodded contentedly and went on with her sewing. How was she to know that her husband had firmly resolved in his own mind that the experiment should proceed in secret? Hinder the course of science? Heavens, no! Not even his own flesh and blood could do that . . .

The Drug of Destiny

Two nights later, Ena Boyd, summoned by a telephone call from a friend, departed from her home to keep a theatre engagement in the West End, leaving the infant in charge of the nurse.

Half an hour after her departure, Adison Boyd returned from his daily round at the laboratory in company
with his closest friend, Professor Bruce Kemphill, several years his senior. An air of innocent quietness hung over them as they partook of a hasty dinner, but when the cigar stage was reached Boyd began to converse on more technical matters.

"My wife objected to the scheme, Bruce, so the only thing to do is to work without her knowledge. I've got rid of her for a couple of hours this evening, on the strength of a fake telephone call from my secretary at the laboratory. In that time, whilst Ena is waiting for her friend, we can do all we need.

"The initial operation won't take longer than four minutes, if that. Years will pass before the results will begin to show. I don't like descending to this trickery with my wife, but I could see no other way. She's with the baby night and day, and if he gets too old the experiment will be useless. Understand?"

Kemphill nodded. "Perfectly. Go on."

"It may be just a dream; the whole thing may fail," Adison Boyd went on grimly. "That is the chance we must take with such an experiment. But to elucidate...

"I shall inject into the pituitary glands a drug, the basis being calcium, which by a process of natural expansion will cause the walls of these two glands to alter their natural dimensions, and so cause a different balance to be struck. The result will inevitably be gigantism of enormous magnitude.

"I shall take great care how I work, because a slight error might produce an excessive acromegaly, which would change the entire condition of the face and hair; indeed, produce premature death. The injections will continue afterwards at the three-monthly intervals and should, if I'm right, produce the desired effects."

"It's a risk, Adison," Kemphill said pensively. "If you go wrong, you'll never forgive yourself."

"I won't go wrong; I've spent too much time on preliminary experiment to do that. Besides, I hope that the enlargement of the pituitary glands will produce a tremendous brain-power and endurance beyond the normal. It ought to do. The only thing I am afraid of is that it will bring a cruelty and callousness, just as the opposite will bring over-sentimentality. We must watch that carefully...

"The thyroid gland, of course, will be treated the same way and, we hope, will produce enormous energy, which in turn will feed the brain and produce—a genius! Linked to this will be the treatment of the supra-renal glands, and so on... Yes, I have great hopes!"

"Well, since you're determined on it, I'm quite ready. When do we start?"

"To-night—now. Nurse is caring for Baby, but I think I can manage her all right. Just wait here a moment."

Boyd left the room, full of purpose. Professor Kemphill rose slowly to his feet and stroked his chin. He was a much older man than Boyd; had, perhaps, more mature perceptions of the future, and to judge from his expression his present perceptions were none too sanguine. A troubled light rested in his kindly, grey eyes.

"It's All Wrong..."

Presently Adison Boyd returned, bearing his son in his arms. It was crying a little at its father's clumsy handling, but at length its bright blue eyes alighted on Professor Kemphill's heavy watch-chain. Immediately the crying ceased; an expression of intelligent curiosity settled on the infant's cherubic face.

"I managed it!" Boyd said delightedly. "Come into the lab."

The two men passed into the adjoining laboratory, where the baby was laid down on a table-top upon a soft blanket. Kemphill fondled its head thoughtfully, then glanced at its father.
“You’re not going to use the hypodermic syringe, are you?” he inquired.

“Good heavens, no! My drug is taken in the ordinary way, by the mouth, but I could not administer the first lot—pure drug—without bringing baby in the laboratory here. After this, at three-month intervals, small amounts of the drug in milk or food can be administered. Now, Bruce, get hold of him and I’ll get busy.”

The Professor complied, and amused himself playing with the infant while the father busied himself amongst test tubes, jars and bottles, finally holding up a long, thin phial containing a liquid resembling very pale port wine. With great care he poured this into a small feeding-bottle; then, bracing himself in the manner of a man who plunges into an icy river, he very delicately allowed his son to swallow the liquid drop by drop.

“I’m sure it’s all wrong, Adison,” Kemphill muttered, his eyes on the infant’s delighted face. “You’re dabbling in things too deep for you, man!”

“Oh, hell!” Boyd retorted, without turning from his task. “What’s come over you to-night? You’re worse than an old woman with your sentiments! Where’s your love of scientific progress?”

Kemphill shrugged, but did not reply. Soon the feeding-bottle was empty.

“There we are!” the Doctor chuckled, lifting the cooing child in his arms. “It didn’t take more than four minutes, Bruce, but it may change the destiny of mankind. . . . Now, back to bed you go.”

The infant safely returned to its cot and the care of the unsuspecting nurse, the two men returned to the drawing-room. They had hardly been seated ten minutes when Ena returned, irritated and sharp in her movements.

“I wish when people make appointments they’d keep to them!” she snapped. “Would you believe it, Ad? Louise didn’t come, and I’ve been cooling my heels all this time. Next time I see her— Oh, good evening, Professor; I didn’t notice you behind the high back of that chair. How are you? Some time since you’ve been over.”

Kemphill rose courteously to his feet. “Ad and I have been discussing the progress of humanity . . .”

Ena smiled cynically. “Really? That’s Ad’s pet subject. He had the audacity, a few days ago, to ask me to lend Baby to the cause of science! What do you think of that?”

“Science never accepts defeat, Mrs. Boyd,” the Professor answered defiantly, and with a shrug, Ena drew off her gloves.

CHAPTER II

The Boy Hercules

The gland drug had been administered on the night of March 21st, 1936. But it was another March 21st, in 1939, before distinct evidences of the strange stuff which Boyd had administered surreptitiously every three months for three years, began to become noticeable.

Throughout this period, Professor Kemphill was a constant visitor to the Boyd home, much to Mrs. Boyd’s growing puzzlement. She, however, gave no thought to a possible connection between her son and the Professor. How could she? Besides, the presence of a now one-year-old daughter occupied much of her time, deflecting her attention a good deal from her first-born.

“It’s showing!” Adison Boyd breathed in Kemphill’s ear, on the evening of March 21st, 1939, as they watched the child gambolling on the hearth-rug. “Notice anything?”

“He’s big for his age—very big. He has a bright, intelligent face, too, and good cranial development. And look at those biceps of his. . . ! I wonder, Ad, if you’ve actually managed it? Beaten Nature at her own game?”

“I’m sure of it,” Boyd answered con-
fidently. "Ena talks of little else but his fine strength and sturdy limbs. I measured him to-day and he's two feet nine inches, which is a deuce of a lot for a child of three and a half years."

Kemphill nodded slowly; then the conversation assumed different channels as Mrs. Boyd walked in, bearing her daughter in her arms. For quite a while she sat in the chair looking at her son, as though some feminine intuition was deeply disturbed. Abruptly she looked up to find her husband's eyes upon her.

"It looks as though Teddy will be big, doesn't it?" she said with pride. "I think maybe he takes after his grandfather; he was six foot three, you know. Neither Ad nor I are particularly tall, Professor, so he can't be taking after us. . . ."

"You know, there are times when he looks at me with an expression that almost scares me. His blue eyes are so wide and round and full of intent, as though he's trying to read my mind. Somehow he never has seemed an ordinary, commonplace child, like Baby Mary here."

"He is merely a very healthy child," Kemphill commented, with a saturnine and professional detachment. "You are both to be congratulated on so fine a son."

Bigger and Bigger . . .

E

NA nodded and studied the boy again, a puzzled frown on her face, a frown that deepened as the weeks went by and Edward began to grow with a rapidity which was nothing short of phenomenal. In the space of a month he added four more inches to his height, and three feet one inch was a remarkable height for a child of three years and seven months.

As he grew, his appetite increased. Adison Boyd, understanding chemicals and knowing the course his experiment would take, provided his son with all the highly vitaminised products he could devise, with the result that the young giant grew steadily and expansively day by day, increasing not only in stature but in mental power and endurance as time passed. Mary, his sister, seemed singularly microscopic beside him, pursuing a natural line of growth from babyhood to maturity.

"By Jove, he is growing!" his father confided to Professor Kemphill, almost in alarm, as the middle-aged scientist arrived on one of his visits of inspection. "I never for a moment expected such terrific growth. It's beyond all reason!"

"Well, I warned you," Kemphill answered quietly. But even his calm was shaken when he beheld the youngster on the lawn in the early summer sunlight, spending his time crushing small pieces of coal to powder by the sheer strength of his hands.

"What on earth have we precipitated, I wonder?" Boyd muttered. "The kid has the grip of a Hercules already, and he's not five years old yet! The ghastly thing is, now I've started the trouble with the glands I can't stop it! There is a way, I suppose, to turn the balance in the opposite direction, but I've never troubled to find it. I thought he might grow to, say, twelve feet, and be as intelligent again as a normal man. . . . But this. . . !"

Words failed him utterly. He stood breathing hard, staring blankly at the huge child.

"Russian scientists making similar experiments have grown mice the size of donkeys," murmured Kemphill. "On the same scale, I don't dare to think how big a human being might become."

The Confession

T

US started the beginnings of discomfiture. But if Adison Boyd was troubled it was nothing compared to his poor wife's state of mind. She became almost distracted as
her giant offspring began to cultivate the habit of sitting for hours on end in utter quiet, staring at her unwinkingly, hypnotically, like a cat watching a mouse. And there was in those brilliant blue orbs such a kindled glow of intellect, such a suggestion of mental force and genius undreamed of, that her own normal will-power more often than not came near to breaking under the strain.

Hypnotised by a child of five! Only this astounding thought enabled her to overcome her son’s mental grip upon her. . . .

The addition of a further six and a half inches was too much! And at last she went and sought out her husband in his small study. She found him not working, but sitting with his head in his hands.

"Ad, I want you to tell me something," she said curtly. "It's about Teddy. Something is wrong with him. A few years ago you said something about a fool experiment to produce a superhuman man, and I refused to grant your request that you should experiment on Edward. . . . Did you do something, secretly?"

Adison Boyd rose slowly from his chair, took his wife’s shoulders in a firm grip.

"Ena, my dear, I have a confession to make," he answered quietly. "I’ve been a fool—an idiot! The Professor warned me against it at the time. . . ."

"That night you had a 'phone call and went to meet Louise—it was all arranged. You remember how, when you questioned her, Louise did not know anything about it? My secretary put the call through from the lab. I tipped her to imitate Louise’s high-pitched, jerky voice, which was by no means a difficult feat. That night I experimented on Edward, with the Professor—and this is the result of it!"

Ena recoiled. "Ad, you don’t mean you—? Oh, heaven, you mean he will be exactly what you planned? Excessive in everything?"

"Maybe even more than that," he muttered. "You see, he’s exceeding everything I expected. It is a well-known scientific fact that accumulation of bodily structure and cells has no limit except that set by Nature, and when Nature is discounted, as in Edward’s case, heaven knows what will happen. There must be a limit, but the varying metabolism and formation of cellular structure through which he is passing is beyond all calculation. . . ."

"I cannot undo the wrong I’ve done except in one way. That way, my dear is—death!" He said the word almost inaudibly.

"Oh, Ad, Ad! Why did you have to do it?" Ena’s face was suddenly wet with tears. "Why did you have to ruin him? Turn him into a caricature of a human being? Our child, a freak! A lumbering mountain of a creature with a will-power of devastating strength. . . . You have defied Nature, Ad, and for that there must be a penalty."

"I know—I know; but what can we do? Let him go on like this until he’s finished when he’s twenty-one years old, or stop him before it’s too late?"

Through a long interval, Ena Boyd regained a grip on herself.

"I can never forgive you, Ad," she said brokenly. "All the same, as your wife, I shall stand by you, because Edward is our child. For no other reason . . . Let him finish his course . . ."

And with her face in her handkerchief, she went swiftly from the room.

CHAPTER III

A World Endangered

For a long time, there being no further need of secrecy, Boyd, his wife, and the faithful Professor Kemphill viewed the progress of the child gigantic with more amazement on each occasion, until finally they came to be beyond expressing any words at all. They were speechless with astonishment.
Another year brought tremendous transformations in Edward Boyd. A few months added to that produced even more, until, at six years of age, he was the unparalleleed height of eight feet two inches, possessing a proportionate strength, and the mind and face of a fully matured man; indeed, a mind far superior to that of the cleverest man alive. Childhood had never existed for him; adolescence had passed him completely by.

His gigantic, powerful figure stalked about the fairly comfortable residence of his father as though he were constantly on the prowl. His baby sister, a little over two feet high, he regarded with a growing irritation each passing day. She, for her part, still half-formed in intelligence, considered him a lumbering enigma who often trod on her or lifted her through space out of his way.

When he spoke, which was rarely, he assumed a very deep and pleasant tone, using perfect English despite the fact that he had never been taught to speak.

"Father," he said, on his sixth birthday, "I seem to possess many accomplishments which natural people do not. For one thing, I can read thoughts without the least effort. I have read your mind and Mother's, and know all there is to know—and a good deal more besides.

"You have done something novel and bizarre, Father—have made me into a giant, superhumanly strong and intelligent. You did it so that I could improve humanity. I shall do so, in my own way, when I reach maturity, which will not be for another fifteen years. It will be fifteen years of physical growth and expansion of knowledge. I have no idea what size I shall be when I am finished; I tremble to think of it, and I curse the day when you thought of doing this to me!"

"Why?" Adison demanded. "You have enormous advantages, Edward."

"And enormous disadvantages," the six-year-old voice growled back. "It is the same with all such experiments. You forgot to provide me with a companion—of the opposite sex! You forget that all my emotions now, sexual and otherwise, are those of a fully developed man.

"I have read from your minds that you hope to produce a race of monsters like me; but you did not provide the wherewithal with which to do it! You are an idiot, Father! I shall rectify the error myself, that's all."

"How?" Adison asked, paling slightly.

"I will find a female baby somewhere. She will be only five years or so younger than I at maturity. I will give her an injection of the drug . . . Oh, yes; I know the formula. I read it from your mind long ago. . . ."

"Which reminds me. There is a baby girl at the house across the way—the Morgans'. I've seen her in her pram. She'll do!"

"But Edward, for the love of heaven——!" Adison began, then stopped, lost for words, as the giant turned and, stooping beneath the door, walked into the hall and out of the house.

The Giant Pair

Such was the beginning. A hue-and-cry was raised when the baby daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Morgan suddenly disappeared one day from her pram. She was found again shortly afterwards, apparently quite unharmed, on the garage roof. How she got there remained an unsolved mystery to everybody save Edward Boyd.

From then on, despite constant precautions, she was subject to mysterious disappearances at three-monthly intervals. Nobody guessed it was for the purpose of injections by Edward Boyd and, though suspicion did rest on him, due to his abnormal height, there was never any proof. . . .

And so, after a while, Grace Morgan, only child of the Morgans, began to
develop the same astounding characteristics as the mighty Edward Boyd.

Within another year Edward was twelve feet seven in height—a colossal monster of a fellow, likewise increased in intellect as in stature. Grace, of course, being so far behind him, was a mere four feet, but her intelligence, if anything, was even quicker than his had been. She held conversations with him upon scientific topics over the adjoining garden wall, and Edward in turn discoursed on subjects that were beyond the ken of normalcy.

The years rolled on. Edward took to sleeping outdoors, being too large for interior accommodation, covering himself only with a huge blanket in the thickest frost of winter, and lying almost naked in summer, entirely oblivious to either heat or cold, never ailing, and possessed of colossal energy and power.

Two sets of parents found their faces more deeply chiselled with worry as the years passed. They lived in a world where they had suddenly become pettifying and unimportant. The Boyds, united again now by a common fear, and the quiet but speculative Professor Kemphill, were overshadowed mentally and physically by the stupendous Edward. Whilst the Morgans tried in vain to conceive what had happened to produce about their home a full thirteen feet of massive-shouldered, blonde-headed girlhood, shrewd and calculating, having claims even to beauty, and walking when outdoors with ramrod erectness. That was when she was nine, and Edward just over fifteen.

It came as a cold, stunning shock to Adison Boyd when he realised that the two young people, now almost constantly in each other’s company, compatriots in giantism, talking on topics so advanced that nobody could understand them, had still another nine years or so left to reach actual maturity—if maturity could be applied to such hypertrophied creatures.

Be it said for Edward that he now had some regard for his sister, and listened quite often to her pleas with him. In some way she seemed to understand the trend of his nature towards cold-blooded, merciless achievement, and tried to divert it into better channels, an effort which was wasted on account of his wrongly balanced glands making him unable to appreciate a sentimental viewpoint.

It was odd to see them holding these discussions. She, four feet six, he nearly twenty-one feet, squatting on the lawn with her standing by his shoulder. Doctor Boyd came near to weeping as he beheld these sights; Ena actually did weep. There only felt their utter helplessness, and wondered how Mary managed to keep in her brother’s good books at all. Evidently she had some strain in her nature that appealed to the young monster’s ruthlessly avaricious mind.

**The Stalking Terror**

YEAR succeeded year. Steadily and inevitably the young man and woman grew. Onwards and onwards, until a broiling June day in 1956. On the 15th of that month the leading London papers were bedecked with raging headlines:

**GIGANTIC MONSTER INVADES LONDON**

**100ft. Man Terrorises Fleeing Crowds**

Subsequent details revealed that a gigantic man, all of one hundred feet in height, and attired in a suit of what appeared to be solid steel casing, had been sighted amidst London’s buildings; a creature so vast, so huge, that the tallest prehistoric monster passed into insignificance by comparison.

True, he had done no harm as yet, picking his way with behemoth feet
through the fleeing people. Where he had gone, what his object was, nobody seemed to know . . . save a grey-haired man and woman and their daughter, and an old Professor, in the comfortable residence on London’s outskirts.

Adison Boyd, incredibly aged with the passing years, was talking with his daughter, now nineteen years of age, slim, intelligent, and possessing in an even greater degree than her father his love of science and ability to utilise its limitless powers.

“Father, Edward and Grace Morgan begin their campaign for world-subjection to-morrow—you know that,” she said steadily. “Edward will be twenty-one to-morrow and, we hope, at the end of his wild growth. Grace, of course, is fifteen, but possessing all the characteristics of a woman of twenty-five.

“Do not forget their intelligence. Between them they can crush the world! Do not forget their uncanny knowledge of dimensions, atomic structures, light-waves, sound-vibrations and a thousand other astounding things. Nobody in this world will be able to stand against them!”

Her father shrugged. “My dear Mary, you used to have some sort of influence over Edward, but since he went his own way four years ago that influence has been broken. What do you propose doing? How do you propose overcoming that hundred-foot brother of yours and the seventy-five foot woman whom, we presume, is now his wife?”

Mary seated herself composedly and took hold of her father’s hand.

“I’ve evolved a way, Father, but I must work fast and have your aid to do it. It will mean the destruction of my brother and your son, but it has to be done if the world is to be saved. That woman Grace Morgan will also be extinguished.

“When I was a young girl I used to talk to Edward a lot, and during those talks I learned all about the formula that caused the trouble. He told me calcium was the basis. Is that right?”

Adison Boyd nodded dully. “Quite right, Mary—but what of it?”

“It will save the world from Edward and Grace,” Mary replied calmly. “That may sound wild, but it’s true—and ultimately you’ll see why. For the time being, we have got to keep on their track. I know where they are hiding because I’ve made it my business to find out. Then we’ve got to get through those steel coverings of theirs, and you can leave the rest to me.

“Before we start off to find them I have some calcium experiments to complete, experiments which will speed up the known efficiency of calcium by something like one hundred times.”

“And what good is that?” Adison demanded helplessly. “You talk in riddles, Mary. Which reminds me! Why do Edward and Grace wear those coverings, anyhow?”

“Because they are so stupendously tall. If they didn’t they would fall to pieces by their own weight; that’s why they have to have rigid, immovable support. Those suits, I presume, are hinged at the necessary joints, otherwise quite inflexible. I imagine that the only time Edward and Grace take them off is when they are resting. Lying down flat they would be all right.

“Now, Father, don’t worry whilst I finish off my calcium experiment. Calcium it must be; I’d thought of poison, but it would have no lasting effect. And to-night we’ll get busy . . . You know, Father, you ought to have checked this in its incipiency!”

“I know,” Adison agreed in a low voice. “It was only for your Mother’s sake that I refrained . . .”

CHAPTER IV

The Battle with the Giants

In the depths of a wood, twenty-five miles south of London, a titanic figure in glittering integuments laid himself flat on the warm, leafy ground,
crushing down saplings and small trees beneath his stupendous weight. A moment or two elapsed, then another figure, less tall but still gigantic, came into view and lay down beside him.

Came strange clicking sounds and the steel coverings fell apart along unexpected seams and dropped noisily to one side. The now white-garbed figures turned and looked at each other from their supine positions.

"Grace, we begin to-morrow," rumbled Edward's profound bass voice. "I have it all planned. We will start with London itself and force the populace into doing whatever we command; our colossal size will bring immediate acquiescence. If it does not we have merely to commence a reign of terror. We have our one weapon, remember—the one I made in my father's laboratory—which splits the atomic structure of light-mass by the use of force and causes instant disintegration of any object over any predetermined distance. I do not expect resistance; we've evaded the watchful police so far."

"And then what?" Grace asked, passing the hand of a Colossus through her jungle of golden hair. "Conquest of the Earth?"

"Of course. What is there to stop it? Our knowledge, our size, everything is in our favour. The strongest shell ever made would bounce off our steel coatings like a stone hurled at an express train. We could tear the gunners themselves to pieces before they could even start to fire.

"We're normal beings in a toy world, Grace; a world where we can lift everything bar the Earth itself. To reach other countries, such as America, we will bind liners together and use them as a raft. All such things we can do."

"And the various inventions we've planned for mankind's destruction? We will use them?" Grace asked keenly, massive lips curling back in a vicious smile from eight-inch teeth.

Edward nodded. "Exactly. To-morrow. For the time being, we need sleep..."

So the two giant figures dragged themselves along the ground, by sheer muscular effort, to a clearing which they had chosen as their rendezvous many months before. There, quite impervious to cold or heat, they sank down on the grass at full length, to presently fall into deep slumber, chests rising and falling like small hills against the green sward.

While the Monsters Slept

The sun had been set half an hour when they went to sleep; and it was the closest approach to the real darkness of a summer night when four tiny figures crept up with infinite caution through the trees, paused at the sight of the sleeping titans, and engaged in whispered conversation.

An observer might have remarked that the quartette comprised Dr. Boyd, Mary, Mrs. Boyd and, as ever, Professor Kemphill.

"You knew their hide-out all right, Mary," Adison Boyd mumbled. "They've got those steel coverings off, too. That's luck!"

"No—judgment," Mary answered calmly. "I assumed that they would discard them when lying down. Now is our chance!"

From under her coat she brought out an object resembling a garden-syringe and looked pensively at the needle-like point with the open-nozzle and.

"Excessively energised calcium contained in liquid," she said, in response to the questioning looks directed at her in the starlight. "Unless my scientific training is all wrong, this will bring about the end of these two. I don't regard Ted as my brother any longer, but as a dangerous monstrosity. You see, bullets or cannons or poison can never hurt them; nothing normal can
destroy them. It has got to be something abnormal—inside them.

"Now comes the difficult part of the job. Come with me."

Silently, though still mystified as to the girl's real intentions, her father, mother and the Professor crept silently after her through the shadows, until they came within three feet of those stupendous masses of sleeping flesh. Edward's right arm, a cored mass of iron muscle, lay stretched in the grass like the trunk of some pink-coloured tree.

For a moment his sister stood looking at him. Then, steeling herself, she pushed the syringe instrument forward, pulling the long pressure-handle out to its fullest extent. An instant's hesitation, then she sank the needle-pointed tip into a vein of his arm, distinguishable like knotted cable.

The giant moved slightly, but did not waken; his deep breathing drowned the soughing of the night breeze through the foliage of the trees.

By the united efforts of the four tiny figures, the pressure-handle was pushed down half-way, until a bulge appeared under the skin of Edward's arm, to gradually disappear as the liquid assimilated itself into the blood-stream. At this point Mary desisted, withdrew the huge hypodermic syringe, and walked round to where Grace lay.

With infinite care, the same treatment was meted out to the girl Colossus. Perhaps because she was more sensitive than Edward, she felt the sudden sting of the needle, and a hand, as large as a full-grown man, came round and lazily investigated the spot. Then it relaxed as its owner continued to sleep.

"Right!" Mary breathed tensely, the syringe handle depressed to its limit and the contents completely emptied into the two sleeping monsters. "Our work is finished. We can only await results. Come, before we're discovered."

Without a second's hesitation, the four conspirators made their way back through the trees until they reached the fast car in which they had come, parked by the side of the main highway.

Edward's Ultimatum

THE following morning London awoke to a literal reign of terror. At eight o'clock, when sleep-eyed people were congregated on station platforms preparatory to starting their journey to business, there strode into the midst of the City streets, wading through the traffic about Trafalgar Square, the monstrous forms of Edward and Grace, glittering in their steel coverings, each carrying a strange weapon.

The hurrying crowds emerging from trains and buses promptly fled in terror, but were brought to an abrupt halt by a sudden tremendous wave of mental force. The mighty brains of Edward and Grace, working in unison, and possessed of four hundred and eighty times more power than a normally intelligent person, produced a terrific effect. Everybody within radius was held spellbound, gazing upwards at the fantastic creatures subjecting them to their will.

"This is the era of the giants!" thundered Edward's voice at length, beating along the ground. "The time has come for the little people who dwell in the dark and small places of the Earth to be eradicated! The entire Earth is destined to become an habitation fit for monsters such as my companion and me. The day of the Little is over; it is the day of the Big!

"You are tiny—unintelligent—incapable! We can, and will, transform the world. And unless we are voluntarily permitted to do this we will do it by force, which will mean war of a type you have never yet encountered. You will be crushed and obliterated into extinction, your homes and buildings torn down, your banks smashed asunder, your friends and children
ripped in shreds, until you learn! Learn that we are the masters!

"Because of the fact that our brains-powers, tremendous though they are, do not permit us to rule the entire world by mental force alone, we shall match the physical with the mental and thereby produce an invincible strength. Our first command is the relinquishment of London to us, and we shall determine what is to be done and choose suitable people to carry out our plans. The second command is the voluntary surrender of all babies, male and female, under one year old, to the care of laboratory technicians whom we shall appoint, and whom we shall instruct in the uses and effects of giantism and excessive hypertrophy.

"These two commands must be obeyed, and from your acquiescence there will grow up through the years a new era—the day of the Big, a world of strength, power and invincible formidable!"

As his words died away, Edward relaxed his mental forces that he might hear the people answer, and their voices floated up to him and Grace in a babel of unintelligible sound. Then came the answer—very effectively. Missiles of all descriptions began to hurtle through the air, glancing off the steel coverings, and at best hitting no higher than the knees.

"They refuse!" Edward snapped curtly. "Use force!"

So saying, he strode forward, Grace by his side, and between them they crushed people by the dozen beneath their titanic, steel-shod feet. Pausing a moment, they switched on the instruments they carried. Immediately, stabbing blasts of force split the air—the instant disintegration of light-mass. In a vicious circle of destruction the invisible power beams swept round, razing tall buildings to the ground in clouds of dust and spreading immeasurable havoc over a wide area.

Swelling uproar rose to the giants as they went grimly on, striding over the smaller buildings, smashing some of them down like cardboard boxes. Because of their size, the movements of the colossal pair were slow and ponderous; only their steel supports kept them upright at all, and even that was with great difficulty.

The orgy of destruction and massacre was halted for a time by the arrival of a brave army of police, who hurled bombs at the monsters; but they exploded harmlessly, with no more effect than a cheap firework, about the waists of the impregnable invaders. Later, as the uncanny battle raged, anti-aircraft guns came into play, and for a while shells whistled dangerously near the heads of the two giants. Until, with one huge hand, Edward bent down and snuffed the aggressors into extinction, as a normal man would a garden grub.

The End of the Giants

By noon London became a city of panic and destruction. The giants, only beaten in height by the tallest buildings, were wreaking incalculable damage on all sides; the whole western section of the metropolis was smashing visibly under the onslaught of light-mass destroyers and steel-clad, pile-driving fists. Even the aeroplanes that flew to the attack were reduced to wreckage, Edward and Grace dealing with them with their force rays as though the powerful machines were nothing more than slow-moving house flies.

Mary Boyd, her father, mother, and the Professor, could distinctly see the huge figures against the skyline from their home, and watched with growing anxiety as they beheld building after building hurtle down to destruction. Through the entire day they watched, scarcely moving, binoculars glued to their eyes.

Then, towards sunset, when the red glare was flooding across from the battered silhouettes of the city, the two
gigantic figures were seen to suddenly become curiously rigid. Both of them stood quite still with arms upraised in mid-air preparatory to destroying a building!

"I—I believe it's worked!" Mary gasped hoarsely. "Come on; get the car out and we'll go and see."

At top speed they headed for the city, where they left the car and joined the milling multitudes of people who were gazing in awe at two rigid, immovable figures, each with one foot planted in one street and the other in a neighbouring one, mighty arms raised to the darkening skies.

"What's happened to them?" Adison Boyd breathed at last. "Mary! What did you do?"

A light of infinite relief was in his daughter's eyes as she turned to him.

"The calcium I used and energised to become one hundred times more effective than normal, entered the blood-streams of Edward and Grace and, following chemical law, turned their flesh and blood into the basis of lime. . . . That went on until—well, surely you can see for yourself?"

"By Jove, yes!" Kemphill ejaculated. "I understand, Mary. Either these two will stand here for ever, or they'll have to be removed and destroyed. It depends how the people feel about it."

"But I still don't understand!" Boyd protested.

"They have been turned to stone!" Mary replied quietly. "It is a chemical fact that flesh and blood containing an abnormal amount of calcium will cause the limbs and organs to actually turn to stone with the passage of time. I could quote many instances. Death ensues, of course, when a vital organ is affected.

"In this case I used calcium speeded up exactly one hundred times, by laboratory processes, and injected it into the arms of both of them. Until the stuff was equally distributed over their bodies they felt nothing, then suddenly it took devastating effect, halting them in mid-action, turning them to figures of stone!"

Adison Boyd gazed up once more at the rigid, glittering figures.

"Then they are dead?"

"Utterly," the girl answered in a sombre voice.

* * * * *

T

HE figures of stone, by popular assent, remained where they were, and London grew up again around them. Twenty years later they were still standing in the same position, mighty monuments to an astounding invasion—a stupendous man and woman whose heads seemed wreathed in clouds, carven granite faces staring into the sky.

The world went on its way, the affair of the giants, forgotten. Dr. Adison Boyd, the instigator of it all, his wife, Professor Kemphill and Mary, all grew old and died, Mary leaving a son who alone knew the rudiments of the story of the monstrous invasion.

But the figures still stood on, the steel integuments rusted with the elements, behemoth arms upraised as though poised ready for destruction, above the teeming, midget-world below.
SEEDS FROM SPACE

By JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

(Author of Earth’s Mausoleum, Invaders from Time, Mathematica, etc.)

A Titanic Weed Whose Seed Came from Mars Enveloped Earth in its Grip . . . But the Creeping Menace Saved Mankind from a Far Greater Disaster

CHAPTER I

The Spore Doom

FOR several minutes Price Driscoll had been silent, eyes fixed on the summer dust at his feet. It seemed that he had forgotten the park in which he was seated, the warm sunshine, and the girl by his side.

A cough from the girl aroused him. He looked up with a guilty start to find her blue eyes upon him.

“Well, it’s not before it’s time!” she commented frankly.

“I’m sorry, Lucy.” He smiled apologetically. “I’m worried. There’s something coming to this old world of ours that never came before.”

“I know—but it has been before,” the girl answered promptly. “You mean war?”

“Good heavens, no—something infinitely more terrible than war! A menace that will make war seem like a child’s pastime by comparison.” You see, it’s my job to know all about it. And because I dared to tell what I know to be the truth I have been asked to resign my position. A fine thing to befall a young astronomer full of ideals, isn’t it?”

The girl’s eyes went wide. “You mean you’ve—you’ve lost your post? Oh, Price, I’m so—”

“I know; you’re sorry. That’s all anybody can say. If only they would listen to me instead! Me, the only man in the world who knows what is coming, and I’m not heeded.

“The entire Earth is doomed to destruction! And, so far as I know, there’s no remedy. One can take precautions, of course; but since I’m discredited, what’s the use?”

Lucy Harridge compressed her lips. “Price, what is the matter?” she demanded. “Tell me!”

“Well, until I was dismissed, I was, as you know, a responsible young astronomer at the observatory. One night recently, I made a remarkable dis-
covery in connection with the planet Mars, a discovery which would have been impossible without the aid of our giant telescopic-reflector. Briefly, I saw a colossal cloud of seed-spores literally spewed into space from the planet.”

“Seed-spores? Mars?” Lucy was clearly baffled.

“Let me explain. Mars, if you know anything of astronomy, is subject to terrific wind and dust storms. The planet also possesses a type of plant life, not unlike our ivy, which grows very fast in the Martian deserts. These markings, until the installation of our new reflector, were mistaken for water-channels. The famous ‘canals,’ you know. . . .

“Naturally, this plant life casts off seeds, which immediately take root, but according to my observations the terribly dry state of Mars’ surface hinders growth enormously. That brings me to my second point. . . .

“Whilst observing this wind storm on Mars I distinctly saw one vast mass of seeds blown into the Martian atmosphere with such terrific force that the relatively weak pull of the planet’s gravity did not bring them down again. They just scattered into the void. You understand?”

Lucy nodded slowly. “I see what you mean. I suppose that once they passed into space they would be seen no more because of the blackness of the void?”

“Exactly. Which brings me to the theory of the great scientist, Svante August Arrhenius.”

“Whom?”

“He was an eminent Swedish scientist who put forward the theory that life could, and no doubt did, travel from other worlds and germinate on entirely different planets. You see, seeds are absolutely impervious to the frightful cold of space, and after being blown from their native planet’s surface they move through space, to eventually fall on a neighbouring world, maybe. There, granting favourable conditions, they germinate and sprout. Our life probably began like that.”

“Go on.”

“I saw those spores blown from Mars about eight weeks ago, and whilst I was interested, I did not think a great deal more about the matter. But this morning I saw a small notice in the newspaper—a seemingly unimportant little thing, but it spells the approach of a grave menace to mankind. Listen to this.”

Price tugged a morning paper from his pocket, and after some searching began to read:

“‘The liner Baltic, just docked from New York, reports a curious occurrence in the Atlantic Ocean, two hundred miles from the shores of Ireland. According to the Captain, the liner ran into a mass of brown seaweed; but investigation revealed this ten-mile carpet to be actually composed of billions of tiny seeds, similar to those
of the sweet-pea. The mass is apparently sinking to the ocean floor. After some delay, caused by the seeds entangling with the screw, the Baltic continued on her way.

Price stopped, his face set. The girl's eyes were upon him.

"Then, Price, you think that—that those seeds you saw——?"

"Exactly! This morning I told Professor Webster of my theory, and we had a group of experts consider it. The damned fools! They decided I was letting fancy run away with common sense, and I'm to leave in a month. When I phoned you and asked you to meet me down here, I knew that you, at least, would listen to me."

"Of course; but are you sure there's a connection between Martian seeds and Atlantic seaweed? How can you be so certain that those seeds would strike Earth, with all the other planets there are?"

"It's mathematical law! We're the nearest to Mars. I've checked up on everything: the direction the spores took, the positions of Earth and Mars, their comparative nearness — every detail.

"There can be no mistake! That ten-mile carpet of brown seed spells the dawn of humanity's destruction. And to think that a few tons of dynamite dropped on them now could stop the whole business! It's enough to make a man go mad!"

"That'll get you nowhere," the girl said quietly. "England will come to its senses when things begin to happen—never fear."

Price grunted. "It doesn't just mean England. It means the whole world! Those seeds will thrive in the salt water of the ocean, absorbing moisture. They once lived in a salty desert, the floor of what once was an ocean on Mars' surface. Imagine them now—roots in the sea-bed, thrusting out their branches along the ocean floor until they reach land!"

"Then indeed will things begin to happen!"

The Strange Paralysis

THE furious heat of July changed into the close enervation of the London August. None in the metropolis gave a thought to the fact that the unusually hot summer also existed in mid-Atlantic, where now, according to report, the ten-mile carpet of brown seeds had diminished to one mile; and that, too, was rapidly vanishing.

To Price Driscoll the news was ominous. The heat was a deadly foe. It would hasten the trouble which he insisted was certainly coming.

Though something of his early fear had subsided in the interval. His new post in an analytical laboratory gave him little time for conjecture; and whilst he worked, the threat of a second World War hung ever more imminent above human activity. Mars was indeed influencing Earth, both in the literal and abstract sense.

Early in July of the following year, Price was able to snatch a week's rest. With Lucy, now his wife, he chose a Somerset farm in a little village called Mandory, which they found distinctly suited to their taste after the noise and bustle of the capital.

"It is just eighteen months since you were worrying over that dead seashore," Lucy remarked casually, as they strolled, hand in hand, down a deserted country lane, hedged in on either side.

"Is it?" he said, in some surprise, and suddenly stopped in his stride.

"Yes; and it's a good job for you that you found a steady job."

"Perhaps you're right," he agreed, and fell into step beside the girl as they walked on.

Presently they halted again and sat down on the grass at the side of the lane.

"Not a bad view," Price commented,
approvingly. "Now the hedge has ended we can see it all. Lovely, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is," the girl murmured. 

"Oh, Price, how can men and women think of war in such a glorious world?"

"Men don't think of that when they want something," Price answered grimly. "They just seem to——"

He paused, and a puzzled look came into his eyes. Shielding his gaze, he stared fixedly into the distance for a space.

"What is it?" the girl questioned, lazily.

"A flash." Price's voice was strange. 

"H'mm; do you feel anything?"

The girl did not answer for a moment, then sat up with a sudden effort.

"Yes, I do," she admitted slowly. "As though I've lost control over my limbs! I—I feel ill!"

She passed a puzzled hand over her forehead. Price slipped an arm round her shoulders and looked again into the distance at a square, massively built structure raised upon a hill, dominating the whole of this stretch of countryside.

It came to him suddenly that he and his wife were on an absolutely unbeaten track; and as he looked at the building another brilliant flash radiated from it, akin to a mammoth mirror reflecting sunlight. He felt himself become limp; his legs tingled queerly.

"Damn'd odd!" he muttered. "Lucy, there's something strange here. Perhaps it's the heat. Surely that mirror can't have anything to do with it——?"

The girl lay back, her face pale. "I don't believe my legs will bear my weight!" she said, presently.

"Mine aren't much better," Price answered grimly; then, with sudden determination, he struggled to his feet.

"Come on, let's get into the shade. We've got sunstroke or something. Ah! That flash again——! Come on!"

But the girl seemed quite incapable of standing up, despite all her efforts. She gained her knees, then rocked sideways into the grass again, to lie there without making any further attempts.

Scarcely a whit the better, seized with that uncanny paralysis, Price staggered forward, clutched her, and dragged her with superhuman effort into the shade of the hedge a short distance away.

For perhaps ten minutes they lay there, then gradually strength returned, and at last they got to their feet. Puzzled, they dusted their clothes and looked about them.

"What was it?" the girl asked finally, baffled. "That was no sunstroke!"

"It certainly was not," Price agreed grimly. "It was something else; something very different to anything we've ever known before. Perhaps some new-fangled weapon of destruction."

He paused, then drew her to him, filled with a sudden impulse to protect her. "We'll find out about it," he murmured. "To-night."

"To-night?" Her eyes were startled.

"Afraid?" he chided gently, and at that she shook her head vehemently.

"Not with you, Price. I wish I knew what it was, though."

Price moved forward and looked round the end of the hedge towards the squat edifice on the hill. Thoughtfully he stroked his chin.

"I'm convinced it's a weapon of warfare!" he declared again. "You notice how that building on the hill is fenced round with seven-foot high railings, and also has an inner wall of metal? Why such unusual precautions? If there is something in that building that is a menace to humanity it has got to be destroyed!"

"Yes, Price." The girl's reply was quiet and submissive. Then she shook his arm as he still stood gazing around. "Suppose we get on the move? This place isn't particularly pleasant now, after what's happened."

"Yes—we'll go." Price drew her arm through his and held her to his side as they made the return journey up the lane.

It was as they walked, absorbed in their own thoughts, that their eyes suddenly became aware of something at
their feet. Imbedded in the dust lay motor-car wheel tracks. Once again perplexity settled on Price’s face.

“A car? Along here?” he muttered. “That’s strange! It leads direct to that building on the hill.”

“So it does!” The girl moved forward to look more closely, only to jump quickly aside as a high-powered car suddenly swept into view, coming away from the building on the hill, advancing amidst a cloud of choking dust.

In an instant it had passed, and went bouncing away along the iron-hard ruts, lost in the clouds of dust it had created. Wind-blown and ruffled, Price Driscoll and his wife joined each other again and stood staring after it. Presently it became dimly visible again, heading for Mandory village, its yellow colour quite discernible.

“That’s what I call hogging!” Price snapped. “Never even saw the fellow at the wheel, more’s the pity. If we hadn’t have jumped we wouldn’t have stood an earthly chance!”

“I wonder who he was?” the girl murmured, thoughtfully. “Obviously he’s connected with that mysterious building. Do you think we should tell the police?”

Price shook his head. “No, it’s no ordinary matter; it requires personal investigation. We’ll stick to the original plan and look the place over to-night. Now let’s carry on—we’ll be back in comfortable time for tea.”

They resumed their trudging and, a considerable time later, topped the rise of the lane to behold sleepy Mandory before them, broiling in the sun. There was something else, too; a yellow car outside the portico of Mawson’s Farm. Upon the little portico itself sat a hardly distinguishable figure, drinking with apparent enthusiasm.

“Good Lord, there he is!” Price ejaculated, pointing. “The chap with the yellow car! Come on”

“I Am Out to Stop War . . .”

A HURRIED run across the square and they were both up the portico steps, facing the man, who seemed not the least perturbed by their sudden appearance before him. He quietly finished his drink and laid down the glass.

Inwardly, Price and Lucy were willing to admit that he had no sinister appearance whatever. His face was calm, intelligent, and remarkably handsome. The hair was black, the forehead expansive, and the eyes a strange shade of grey. Even when seated, he was obviously a man of considerable stature and strength.

“Good afternoon,” he said presently, in a mellow voice.

It became increasingly hard to dislike him when he spoke. With feelings of discomfort, Price and his wife slowly sat down and faced him.

“A little while ago you came along the lane,” Price said finally. “You nearly ran us down! Do you know that?”

“Did I?” The man’s face evinced surprise. “I am very sorry. Frankly, the lane was so dusty I didn’t see anything to either side of it. I am sure you will both accept my deepest regrets, won’t you? By the way, Benton is my name—Hugh Benton. I am a scientist.”

“Don’t think I’m inquisitive or anything,” Price went on, “but what sort of a place is that of yours on the hill? It is yours, isn’t it?”

Hugh Benton shrugged. “It is my home and laboratory.” He smiled, reservedly. “You see, I have strange ways of living. Perhaps you might call me a super-philanthropist as well as a scientist.”

“Philanthropist!” Price echoed, desirously. “If you call it philanthropic to make my wife and I thoroughly ill with some kind of paralysis, you certainly have strange ideas! What sort of a stunt were you up to this afternoon? You made the pair of us as weak as table jellies!”
“Dear me, how very awkward,” Benton muttered. “That means I shall have to take you into my confidence. I had hoped that would never become necessary. However, I think I can trust you. . . . I—er—I am out to stop war.”

“Men have tried that before, sir—and failed.”

“Truly, but I am privileged in that I have an infallible method. The only way to stop men warring is to stifle the minds and bodies of those who fight! I have that something—an all-potent weapon, with an all-embracing power.

“It so happened that you and your wife came within range of my apparatus this afternoon, whilst I was experimenting. . . . Naturally, you want to know all about it?”

“All!” Price said unawervingly.

“Very well, then. What I do is to use a machine which emits electric waves, these waves being identical with those issuing forth from the sun itself. They are known as inazan waves, and exist some distance below infra-red frequency. You will know that the sun can bring heat-prostration and sunstroke; popular belief is that the heat does it. That isn’t so; it is the pure inazan waves of the sun which are responsible, for they affect the brain and create mild paralysis.

“Now, my machine, issuing forth these waves, produces a paralysis that is entirely complete. Everything possessing active life falls beneath its influence, and remains so until I use my counteracter. Also, my machine has the power to encircle the entire world if necessary, or, if desired, it can affect any specific part of the world. So, should a war be in progress, I have merely to exert it over the offending parties and they will immediately collapse, to stay thus, apparently lifeless, until my counteracter is operated. You understand?”

“Perfectly,” Price nodded; “but if your power encircles the world why wasn’t everybody affected this after-

noon when Lucy and I were?”

“Because, as I have said, it was a test. I was using only eight per cent of the power possible—and, unfortunately, I had no idea you were so near at hand when I experimented. I set the apparatus so that the village would not be affected, but I didn’t expect you would be in the countryside; it’s usually so deserted. Luckily I used my counteracter as well, otherwise you would still be paralysed.

“Really, I am sorry. . . . Suppose, as a slight consolation, you come and view my machinery for yourselves to-night? I feel sure that you’ll be interested.”

“Well, thanks, sir,” Price said sheepishly. “That’s very kind of you. I’m awfully sorry to have made such an ass of myself. Forgive me, won’t you?”

“There is nothing to forgive, Mr. — What is your name, by the way?”

“Oh—I’m Price Driscoll, an analyst from London. This is my wife, Lucy.”

“Charmed,” Benton smiled. “You see, up there in my isolated abode I make many experiments; indeed I never leave unless urgency compels me. That happened this afternoon when I ran out of some chemicals and had to come to the chemist’s here for fresh supplies. However, with so many walls and railings round my dwelling I fancy my apparatus is quite safe. . . . And now, how about a drink together?”

“No, allow me!” Price interjected firmly. “My wife and I are staying here on a short holiday. I insist that you accept my invitation, after all I’ve said to you.”

“Very well,” Benton smiled.

“Right; that’s settled then,” Price said in satisfaction, and went off in search of the husky farmer who owned the small establishment.

Between Lucy and Hugh Benton a sudden silence fell. For some odd reason the girl’s mind had reverted to those spores of seed that had been lying far out on the Atlantic. . .
CHAPTER II

Man or —?

HUGH BENTON kept his promise, and that same evening drove Price and Lucy to his isolated abode. The two did not attempt to calculate how many gates and doors they passed through before they finally entered a large room equipped after the fashion of some super power-house. Upon every side reposed gleaming machines of unusual design, with Benton hovering in the midst of them, a calm and explanatory host.

For the second time he went through the exposition of how his apparatus worked, tapped this and that machine, and finally led the way to two machines standing side by side.

"Most interesting devices," he commented. "Look at them, each in turn. Stand close and I'll start them up for you."

Deeply interested, Lucy and Price stood by as directed, watching the mysterious engines, fascinated by the display of electrical power actuated by the moving of a switch.

"And is all this apparatus necessary for inducing paralysis?" Price asked when the display was over.

"Not altogether; these machines serve other purposes as well," was Benton's ambiguous reply. Then, in a different tone: "Doesn't it strike you as peculiar that I, one man alone, should be gifted with the genius to evolve all this apparatus? Apparatus to save a world from itself . . ."

"You must be wonderfully clever, sir," Lucy remarked admiringly, her blue eyes very bright.

Hugh Benton shook his head; his answer was surprising.

"Not clever, young lady; just possessed of an intellect several times greater than any other being on Earth. That is not egotism; it is pure fact."

The girl looked away, half frightened. His deep, mysterious, grey eyes were upon her. She felt in them a sense of terrific solitudes, of loneliness supernal, of coldness—the utter coldness of interstellar space itself. It came to her in a suddenly vivid thought that Hugh Benton was not a man at all. He was . . .

But that was impossible. She straightened up to find him serenely smiling again.

"I hope you have both enjoyed the demonstration?" he asked politely. "Perhaps I am not altogether the perfect host, but it pleases me to show you my machines. I love them, take a pride and joy in their upkeep and maintenance."

As he talked he led the way into a comfortable lounge, where he provided a light and palatable refreshment. During a lull in the conversation, Price looked at the strange scientist with a very direct gaze.

"Mr. Benton, there is something which I feel you ought to know," he said quietly. "I am, of course, a scientist—though nothing approaching your cleverness ever happened to me—and I feel you ought to know that something far worse than any war is threatening the world. Namely, destruction by plant life."

"Indeed?" Benton's eyebrows rose. "In what way?"

Quickly and concisely Price related once more his theory of the spores from outer space, the story of how they had been seen on the Atlantic eighteen months before, and of the hot, scorching summer that undoubtedly must have aided their growth.

"Remarkable," Benton said finally, thinking. "Your theory is, of course, correct; but you may take my word for it that no harm will befall the Earth. There is nothing to fear.

"I am sorry to hear that you were discredited by so-called experts, but it does not surprise me when one considers the narrow limits of the average human brain. I can only repeat; there is nothing to fear."

"You are certain of that?" Lucy demanded quickly.
Benton shrugged. "Absolutely, Mrs. Driscoll." Then he stood in silence for a space, and Price and the girl again felt that air of intangible mysticism hanging over him.

"I—I think, Mr. Benton, that we'd better be getting along," Price ventured at length. "Please don't think us discourteous, but——"

"Quite so, quite so," Benton responded pleasantly. "I'm to blame for having kept you so long. Come; my car is at your disposal."

Again followed the curriculum of door-locking and gate-slamming, then the return journey along the narrow lane commenced. Benton sat in silence at the wheel, lost in thought, his driving purely mechanical. Price and Lucy watched him, fascinated.

Who was he? What was he? Just an enigma, with a personality as obscure and unplumbed as space itself.

The Alien Growths

HUGH BENTON did not make his presence felt again at the farm, and Price and Lucy, as the days of their holiday slipped by, could not help but wonder why he had so suddenly and mysteriously come into their lives and then as suddenly vanished. Once they debated the idea of a second visit to him, but the memory of calm yet strangely friendless grey eyes made them decide otherwise.

Consequently, they spent the waning time in almost childish pursuits. On the day before they were due to return to London, they became explorers of forest undergrowth a mile away from the farm. With sandwiches in haversacks upon their backs, hatless and happy-go-lucky man and woman were suddenly transformed by the irresistible magic of perfect summer weather into a boy and girl again.

No sense of things unexpected touched them until, in a mad gambol for the shelter of a tree where they might lunch, Lucy tripped headlong over a hidden root and went sprawling into a mass of cool bracken and fern. In a moment Price was after her, had hauled her laughing to her feet.

Then, with solemn pomp, he returned to the offending root and kicked it vengefully. To his stupefied amazement, a brilliant, sickly green sap oozed from the abrasion to the ground below.

The sap's colour was remarkable enough; but even more astounding was the fact that from its treacly unpleasantness there sprang up what appeared to be thousands of tiny weeds, exactly similar to the parent branch. There was something nauseating, repulsive, about its stupendous rate of growth.

"Good Lord!" Price said at last, in utter amazement.

"Whatever makes it grow like that?" the girl asked, wide eyes fixed on the now eight-inch high weeds as they quivered into more leaf and stem. "It's uncanny!"

For a long time Price stood quite still, his eyes fixed on that tumultuous growth. Even as he looked the things spread. With another savage kick he broke four of them; they oozed sap, and more weeds sprang up to take their place.

"Lucy, it's come!" he exclaimed at last, clutching her arm. "The spores from Mars!"

The girl looked at him, stupefied. He seized her by the shoulders and shook her, to bring her to her senses.

"Lucy! Lucy! Don't you begin to understand? All this time—these eighteen months—those spores that settled on the Atlantic have pushed their roots right the way to land, up through the soil of England. This great log here is but one of the roots.

"You can't stop it growing! As fast as you break it, it drips more sap, and that in turn transforms into plants. Oh, God! Why didn't I warn the world when I had the chance?"

With an effort, Lucy tore her eyes from the swaying, thriving weeds. "But, Price, Mr. Benton said——"
“Damn Benton! This convinces me! He didn’t know what he was talking about. These weeds will be everywhere before long. . . . Come on; let’s get out of this confounded wood; it gives me the creeps!”

Clutching the girl by the hand, Price forced her along at a rapid pace. As they ran they realised for the first time that the plants on all sides of them were identical to the miniature ones they had seen growing. The place was a mass of the deadly weed!

Panting and hot, they arrived at last in the lane near which the wood was situated. Price’s face was grim and perspiring; the girl’s flushed and troubled.

“Well, what now?” she asked, breathlessly. “Even if we have found the weed, what can we do about it? See Benton?”

Price shook his head. “Useless, I’m afraid. Besides, he’s such a queer sort of chap. . . . No, we’d better get back to London to-morrow—away from all this.”

So, the picnic forgotten, they retraced their steps to the village and farmhouse. On the way they beheld further evidences of alien growth. Here and there were outcroppings of the silently swaying, growing vegetation. At first it seemed it was the wind blowing them; then the two realised with a jolt that it was—expansion!

Everywhere, it seemed, the ground was infested with Martian plant life. The seal of danger and insecurity had settled upon Earth’s face . . .

**War!**

Back in London again, the memory of the holiday and Hngh Benton rapidly becoming forgotten, Price wondered whether the strange plant life that he and Lucy had encountered had not, after all, been something akin to the rapidly growing puff-ball. Once or twice he examined the saner aspects of the matter and finally decided that, even if the affair had been genuine, nobody would believe him in any case. Besides, he had a lot of work to catch up with.

So came the return to monotony. He went to and from his work every day, dreaming of ideals and vaguely realising that he had not the finance with which to mature them. Lucy, for her part, pursued an equally unremarkable course in keeping the little out-London bungalow presentable.

Then, like a bombshell, came—war! Two of the world’s principal countries had declared war against the remainder of the world. The outcome was inevitable. There would be a terrific, all-embracing battle. Nobody knew just what the war was about. It was just . . . well, war.

Price found himself called upon to enlist within four days. The news was half expected, but bitter. On the verge of securing for himself a sound position in life, he was now to be plunged into the welter of ruin and chaos . . .

Grim-faced, disillusioned, he stood in the drawing-room two nights before he was due to depart for the front.

“And after all that fool Benton had to say!” he growled. “He was going to stop war! I don’t know what he wasn’t going to do! And look at the world—just inside out! Civilisation against civilisation, Lucy, and there’s only one end to that! Wholesale annihilation! For years mankind has simmered on the brink of such an outburst as this, and now it has come I shudder to think of the results.”

“If only we could find Benton again,” the girl said, thoughtfully. “I feel sure, in spite of all you say, Price, that he spoke the truth. I read it once in his eyes. There was something in them that was . . . well, godlike! I can’t explain it.”

“Pshaw!” Price snapped irritably. “Switch on the radio, will you? We might as well learn how much butchery is going on since I’m to be in it.”

The girl reached out and pressed the switch. Followed a few slight adjust-
ments, then the early news bulletin from London came through. For a space the announcer rambled through irrelevant preliminaries, then—

"A remarkable state of affairs has arisen on the First Frontier. Reports from an official source state that the entire front line of infantry collapsed to-day whilst advancing on the opposing side. The opposers, believing they had an easy victory, advanced to the attack, when they too were overtaken by some strange form of paralysis which petrified them at their posts.

"Surgeons have conducted rigorous examinations and are quite at a loss to account for the malady. It seems to be a condition of advanced catalepsy, in which state the victim is alive, and yet apparently dead. The heartbeats drop to minimum, and there is only just enough respiration to keep the victim alive.

"How long the condition will last cannot be conjectured; the latest bulletin reports no change in the men's condition, and the cause is equally unaccountable. A germ attack could be the probable cause, were it not for the fact that both armies are suffering from the same trouble. It is understood that the malady is rapidly spreading. . . ."

The announcer paused, and Price looked round amazedly.

"Benton!" he expostulated. "He spoke the truth after all! He's stopping the war, and—"

"A further remarkable news item in this troubled world comes from Cornwall," the announcer continued. "The inhabitants of the little village of Rendford reports the appearance of a strange type of plant life that seems to have its roots in the sea. It is rapidly growing, and the English Channel is green with the mysterious weed as far as the eye can see.

"According to accounts, nothing can be done about it. It seems impervious to fire; indeed, it extinguishes fire, and cutting only makes it grow the faster. The report has yet to be verified, but steps are being taken to ensure its authenticity. That concludes the—"

With a hand that shook slightly Lucy switched the instrument off and got to her feet.

"Price," she said slowly, "that plant we saw wasn't a dream. It was all too real. And you were right! That thing we found must have been a root. Now the plant is appearing from the Atlantic as well, where the spores originally fell."

"I know, and that might not have been the only place they fell," Price replied, sombrely. "They may have been disseminated all over the world, for all we know."

He stopped, thinking deeply, then resumed in a grim voice. "Lucy, I'm not going to the war, even though I've enlisted. For one thing, there will soon be no war to demand my presence; and for another, this weed is getting a hold. It will grow and grow . . . unless a means is found to stop it."

"But what can stop it?"

"I don't know off-hand, but being an analyst I can find out. Ultra-violet might do it, or germs of some kind. . . ."You know, I still can't fathom why Benton said that weed meant nothing. He lied!"

"Perhaps he was only diplomatic," Lucy corrected, quietly.

CHAPTER III

"It's the End of the World . . .!"

PARALYSIS, mysterious and complete, overtook all the armies on every battlefield the following day. Not only the soldiers, airmen and surgeons were affected, but also the sailors at sea. From every quarter of the globe flashed frenzied messages of universal paralysis creeping over the entire world. Nobody was dead, and yet nobody was alive!

The affair was taking on a deadly seriousness. War? What time was there
for that now? Man had turned to fighting a common enemy, a mysterious disease that made life a perpetual sleep from which there was perhaps no awakening.

Whole countries began to get uneasy. Price Driscoll and his wife became uneasy, too, when they learned that the decision to cease hostilities had not stopped the paralysis.

It was rapidly spreading to affect everybody. Already the entire American continent was dead from Mains to California, and those liners which were mid-way between England and the United States had come to a standstill, passengers and crew somnolent, rigid.

"This is going too far!" Price breathed, the following evening. "One more day and the whole world will go under! What on Earth does Benton think he's playing at, I wonder? I understood he was only going to stop war, not wipe out mankind. It's—it's unthinkable! Isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," Lucy admitted. "Why don't we go and see him again? He could tell us something, no doubt."

Price considered for a moment, then nodded quickly.

"All right, we will! Get dressed and I'll get the car out."

Fifteen minutes later they were on their way through London's busy thoroughfares, a few odds and ends slung in the car's rumble-seat. Knowing the drive was to be a long one, Lucy made herself comfortable in the corner of the two-seater, and alternately dozed and watched the darkening countryside.

The sun had been set for some time; darkness came with the slowness common to summer. Still the little car rattled on, its engine humming strongly, keeping up an almost constant speed of forty miles an hour along the deserted country roads.

Blackness came at last. The headlights flooded into being. Wearied, Lucy tried to compose herself for a brief sleep. Her thoughts had trailed off into dim channels when suddenly she heard Price give a sharp exclamation. Shot out of her doze, she jerked upright, then screamed in alarm.

A mighty wall of livid green was directly in front of the car's bonnet, stretching across the lane. The steering-wheel flew round in a circle, and the car veered off to the left. A second later, it slid down a bank, turned over, and crashed heavily on to its side.

Dazed, but not hurt, Price clambered from beneath the overturned vehicle, dragging Lucy after him. A quick examination revealed that they had suffered nothing worse than abrasions.

"What on earth was it?—a hedge?" Lucy demanded, pushing back her disordered hair and trying to see her husband's face in the rising moonlight.

"Hedge nothing!" he retorted savagely. "It was a huge branch of that weed! Come back with me, and we'll have a look at what's going on."

They scrambled up the bank to the slightly rising ground bordering the road. At the sight they beheld, horror clutched at their hearts, and they stood utterly dumbfounded.

The Moon was now clear of horizon-mist, and in its yellow light lay a scene never before witnessed by living creatures. From their slightly higher vantage point the two could see right across the countryside, and upon every hand, like a vast sea, there stretched billowing green—wringing, struggling green that swayed sickeningly in the silence. Leaves upon leaves, branches upon branches, countless millions of feet of tendrils. A plant, smothering the entire south of England in a steadily advancing blanket!

Even as the two stood, stunned, the nearer branches and shoots of the incredible stuff were coming down the road. Dimly, Price realised that it was the sea of vegetation with which he had nearly collided.

"Great heavens!" he said at last. "Now I begin to understand why nobody is recovering from the paralysis. Don't you see? Benton must have been
overwhelmed—killed, before he could use his counteract. It's—it's the end of the world, Lucy! The end of the world!"

Tendrils of Death

The girl clung closer to him. Her voice broke. "What—what can we do?"

"Get back to London at top speed. It's the only chance of survival!"

They raced back to the overturned car and set about trying to right it. It was only a small two-seater, but all the same its weight was considerable. Desperately they heaved and pushed. The engine, still in order, roared fitfully, but the frantic spinning of the one wheel remaining on the ground did nothing save move dirt.

At last, panting and drenched with perspiration, the two ceased their struggles. Price swore softly, while Lucy mopped her face.

Then the girl started at a light touch on her ankle. She glanced down, puzzled, then uttered a scream. A thin, whip-like tendril, similar to that of Virginia creeper, had securely noosed itself round her leg!

"Price! Price!" she shouted frantically, starting to run forward; but three more powerful tendrils reached out and clutched her flailing arms, her waist. She toppled over helplessly, unable to retain her balance.

"Good God!" Price gasped in horror, wheeling round, to behold in the moonlight a mighty streamer of the advancing weed cascading over the bank and smothering all before it.

He had a vision of his struggling, screaming wife in the midst of the frightful stuff, wrapping round her body like cotton round a reel... She moved within it, struggling feebly. It gained the car and rapidly began to bury it in bands of swelling green.

Price saw his wife in danger of death from strangulation unless he acted at lightning speed. Already she was difficult to see through the tangle of branches and speeding tendrils. Whipping off his coat, he snatched his penknife from his pocket, snapped open the largest blade, and charged to the attack.

In another second he was in the midst of the awful mass, fighting the most terrific and nauseating battle of his life. Branches writhed away to the ground as he cut them asunder. Brilliant green sap flew through the air, dropped to the smothered ground, and sprouted. Tendrils pulled at his legs, tore at his arms, curled round his neck.

Right and left he slashed, the keen blade cutting the stuff through in all directions, until at last he reached his wife's side. She was unconscious, and yet, strangely enough, the stuff no longer tried to curl round her now that she was still. Six more cuts, and the main stems that clamped about her were slashed in twain. With desperate speed, Price cut the remaining coil that was twisted about her neck.

Glancing round, he was staggered to see how far the weed had travelled. It was hemming him in on every side. Tossing the girl over his shoulder, he battled his way back again, hacking and hewing like a madman, stumbling and falling, his clothes spattered with the evil, green sap. Until finally, utterly spent, he staggered through the edge of the advancing stuff and went reeling away, drunk with horror and strain.

Yet even now there was no respite. The plant was still advancing. He picked Lucy up once more and staggered on across the adjoining meadow, heart bursting with the exertion.

As he reeled crazily onwards he cast horrified glances over his shoulder towards that behemoth sea of vegetation, so silent yet so invincible, spreading through the moonlight. Then he found he had reached the road again.

Here, exhausted, he paused for a moment, then set about reviving his wife. It took him five minutes, but by that time she was able to stand on her
feet again. It was curious to note that she had sustained but little physical injury; the awful shock had been mainly responsible for her collapse.

She stood now, panting and shaky, in the moonlight, drawing her torn clothes together.

"Now what?" she asked finally, anxiously. "We can't outstrip it, Price."

"That's what's worrying me," he answered, breathing hard. "I'm about all in, and I can't think of any—"

He paused and looked up with a puzzled frown as a sudden deep, beating hum came upon the air. It became louder, until at last two pairs of eyes were treated to the surprising sight of a silvery, peculiarly-shaped air machine—wingless, remarkably enough—speeding along close to the ground, not a mile away.

Presently it swung round and headed towards the road. It seemed to actually stop in mid-air, then dropped in a straight, vertical line to earth.

The two onlookers did not stop to consider the machine's unorthodox behaviour; they screwed up all their remaining energy and raced towards the spot where it had alighted. As they reached it a door opened in the glittering side, and a tall, familiar figure became visible.

"Hugh Benton!" Price gasped in amazement.

"How well you remember names, my young friend," the strange scientist responded. "Get inside, both of you. I'll explain later. Hurry! The weed is moving fast!"

Without further ado, Price and Lucy tumbled into the softly sprung seats at the rear of Benton's machine. The door closed by some automatic process, then the remarkable craft, quite different to an ordinary aeroplane, rose vertically into the air and swept over the billowing sea of vegetation.

Gazing down, Price and Lucy both shuddered involuntarily. One slip and it meant doom of the most horrible kind in the midst of that all-destructive plant. But Hugh Benton did not seem in the least perturbed. He drove steadily towards the south, high above the seething life below, and never uttered a single word.

Drugged ...

TO the complete amazement of both young people, Hugh Benton's dwelling on the hill, when eventually they reached what had been the Somerset countryside, was the only place free from the all-embracing, wriggling plant-life. The sea of leaves reached to the railings of his abode and there stopped, as though an unseen power had bidden them advance no further...

With the same calmness of manner, Benton brought his strange air-machine round in a wide circle, then dropped direct to the flat roof below. A slight jolt, and the flyer was still.

Silently he opened the rear door, assisted the two to alight, then led the way down through a trapdoor into his familiar laboratory. Passing through this—and as they went Price and Lucy both noticed that the strange machines were now humming with power—he preceded them into the lounge, switching on an electric fire and light by a synchronic switch.

"Make yourselves at home," he invited, cordially. "The sooner you get into practice, the better."

"You mean—? You mean we're prisoners?" Price demanded; but Benton shook his head.

"Not my prisoners, Mr. Driscoll—prisoners of the weed," he responded quietly. "In fact . . ."

He hesitated, stood thinking for a moment, then shrugged. "It doesn't matter now. Later, perhaps. I will bring you some refreshment. I am sure you must both be tired and nerve-racked after your ordeal. I'll return in a moment."

When he came back he was carrying a bottle in his hand.
“Champagne,” he explained, in response to the glances of the two. “It will revive you wonderfully after its first effects have passed off. My—er—champagne is different to most brands in that it leaves no after-effects the following morning. You really must try it.”

Without waiting for an acceptance, he crossed to the sideboard and filled two glasses to the brim; for some curious reason he omitted himself, and handed them to his two guests. A faintly amused smile hung about his lips as he watched them drain the glasses to the last drop.

“By jove, sir; it’s marvellous” Price declared emphatically. “Sets you on fire! What do you say, Lucy?”

“Never tasted anything quite like it!” she affirmed, passing an uncertain hand over her forehead. “What—what brand is it? Do you mind telling us?”

“I have no objection to telling you; but the trouble is that it is quite unobtainable except by me. However, we can discuss that later. I would suggest that you retire now without having any food. This particular champagne does not agree with food. I had a very comfortable room in the south wing of this building which will amply suit your needs. It was just as well I knew you were coming and saved you from the weed.”

His strong hands helped the exhausted pair to their feet and piloted them down an adjoining corridor, up a broad staircase, and finally into a wide and expansive bedroom, tastefully furnished, the window draped in red velvet curtains.

“I feel sure you will be comfortable here,” he said, his face full of smiles. “You will find a bolt on the inside of this door. Lock the door; I shall not be offended. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Goo’ ni!” Lucy exclaimed, with a wild wave of her arm flopping on to the billowing bed; and Price’s response was a loud bass hiccup.

Quietly, Benton closed the door behind him, then locked two outer bolts as well. Manifestly, the fact that the two could lock themselves in did not prevent him from ensuring that they could not leave. The bolts moved very silently; then, with the same calmness, Benton strolled up the passage.

Within the bedroom, after a befuddled effort to move over the bolt, Price fell full length on the bed beside the stupefied Lucy. Almost instantly, they both fell into a deep, drugged sleep. So deeply did they sleep, indeed, that they failed to hear, for a period lasting from two until four in the morning, a persistent stabbing of powerful Morse from a super radio-transmitter, or the seeming echo of those messages in a strong loud-speaker somewhere downstairs.

Hugh Benton did not attempt to sleep; it seemed to be the thought furthest from his extraordinary mind. Instead he viewed the approaching dawn with a wakefulness and calmness foreign to the strongest man. . . .

CHAPTER IV

The Creeping Menace

PRICE DRISCOLL awoke with a start. Why, he did not exactly know. He swivelled an eye round and found sunlight streaming through a niche in the red velvet curtains.

Remarking his amazement at finding no trace of stiffness or headache after the champagne of the night before, he scrambled off the broad bed and dropped to the floor. For a moment he was puzzled at finding himself dressed in the remnants of his previous night’s clothing; then, with a grim smile, he remembered. . . .

Suddenly recollecting his wife, he turned to find her face downwards on the heavy quilt, arms outflung, hands clutching the heavy material as though she were afraid of slipping off it—a
silent revelation of her previous night’s thoughts.

She shook her head as Price tapped her on the shoulder, then twisted into a sitting position and rubbed her tousled hair sleepily.

“How are you?” Price asked.

“All right; never felt better. That champagne of Mr. Benton’s is about the best thing I’ve struck. . . . H’m’m!” She cast a disapproving eye down her ripped garments. “Wonder if there are any clothes anywhere?”

Price shrugged. “We can but ask. Let’s get moving; I’m hungry.”

He crossed to the window and flung back the curtains, then stood gripping them, staring transfixed with shock for a moment. From this high position he could see the entire countryside, and everywhere except the scientist’s lonely abode was buried in a turbulent mass of green.

It was as though an entire Sargossa Sea had arisen overnight. Mile upon mile of it, in every direction, swelling and swaying in the exuberance of bounding growth, increasing its pace now under the rays of the hot summer sun.

“We certainly were lucky to be picked up,” Lucy commented quietly, looking over her husband’s shoulder. “This stuff is smothering the world.”

Perplexity settled on her brow. “I still can’t fathom why this place is left untouched. See, down there by the railings it isn’t getting a hold at all. But out there there’s nothing but weed. Price, dear, do you think we’re in a dangerous position?” she asked worriedly, turning to him.

“Not inside here,” he replied; and, satisfied with the view, he turned to the door and slipped back the bolt. Timidly, like children, they both crept out into the corridor, ragged, dirty, and faintly apprehensive.

“Ah, good morning, my young friends. I trust you are feeling better?”

It was Hugh Benton himself, standing behind them, immaculate in a lounge suit. That faint suggestion of an amused smile still hung about his lips. “Oh—er—good morning, sir,” Price stammered, and Lucy took refuge in a faint smile.

“You seem ill at ease,” Benton remarked in surprise. “I assure you that you have nothing to fear. I may be strange in manner, but I am the perfect host. Breakfast is awaiting us downstairs; after we have had it I will arrange clothing for you. Come along.”

At breakfast Benton ate little; instead he watched his guests detachedly, as though studying them. Not that this made the pair self-conscious; they were too hungry to care.

When they were satisfied, Benton looked at them thoughtfully.

“To-day, my young friend, we will tour the world and see how far this weed has moved,” he announced. “We can be back before dark, and still have fairly long stays in London, New York, Berlin, and other principal cities.

“I am anxious to see how things are progressing. I could use television, but I prefer to see with my own eyes. Besides, I think you will enjoy the trip.”

“Did—did you say the world?” Price asked, incredulously. “Back before dark?”

“Easily,” Benton nodded, calmly. “My air-machine moves at half the speed of light itself; namely, ninety-three thousand miles a second, when at maximum. I rarely use maximum speed, of course. We can soon cover the globe on half that rate. You will be interested, surely?”

“Oh, very!” Price agreed dazedly, almost convinced he was dealing with a lunatic.

“Very well, then. Run along and smarten up a bit; you will find several articles of clothing in your room, which have been put there whilst we breakfasted. I have a mechanical servant. You need fresh clothes. Also, if your faces are any guide, you missed the shower and washbowl in the corner of
your room, behind the curtain. With all due deference to both of you, use it. I'll prepare my ship meantime."

The Smothered Metropolis

HALF an hour later the two were seated comfortably in the rear of Benton's amazing air-machine. He clambered up in front of them, flicked a button, and the engine purred softly. It had none of the harsh, blasting roar of an aeroplane; its smooth rhythm was something to wonder at.

A lever moved, then with easy grace the machine rose in vertical ascent, turned, and began to gather terrific momentum as it shot across the sea of vegetation below. Price and Lucy, enthralled by the view, forgot the mysterious personality of their host as they gazed down upon the massive banks of weed struggling and battling with each other to reach the hot sunlight.

With almost incredible speed—yet, strangely enough, without any unpleasant effects, despite the tremendous acceleration—the vessel ate up distance. The roar of the wind outside became distinctly noticeable through the immensely thick walls, a point which presently brought a question from Price.

"Mr. Benton, if you travelled at your maximum rate of ninety-three thousand miles a second, surely the friction of the atmosphere would burn up your entire ship?"

"Not the metal of this machine," Benton replied. "It is known as Oillian steel, and has a melting point several thousand degrees Centigrade above tungsten, one of Earth's toughest metals. Besides that, Oillian steel is very light; and again, between the inner and outer walls of this ship is a perfect vacuum—or, at least, the nearest approach to one—which stops either cold or heat affecting the interior. The wind you hear is from the window-sockets, not the walls. Sound can't pass through a vacuum."

Price digested these remarks before speaking again.

"I can't understand why, with such knowledge as yours, you don't make money!"

"Probably because money doesn't interest me," came the grave response; and Price said no more.

Seven minutes later London was reached. Switches moved and clicked once more, and the air-machine became stationary.

"I use a radio-motor," Benton explained, turning to read the wonder in the faces of the two passengers. "Generated from my abode is a special class of radio-waves, which propel my motor, the motor being attuned to those waves. Since these waves are powerful enough to encircle the world, I travel round the world in them. That is why my machine can achieve such terrific velocity, because radio waves move at the same speed as light—one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second. I find, though, that half that speed is a safe maximum; once I get past it my automatic acceleration neutralisers and gyroscopic-seats behave faultily, being unable to cope with the excessive inertia . . ."

"The radio-waves also explain why I can go up and down vertically, and why I can remain stationary in mid-air. Since this vessel has a radio-motor at each end, controlled from this switch-board, an equal pressure can be radiated from both ends; hence the ship remains still. You understand?"

"Vaguely," Price said doubtfully.

"Well, why try?" Benton asked, smiling. "Look down there! Interesting, is it not?"

The three turned to the windows. The air-machine was hovering over Trafalgar Square, permitting a wide view of London on every hand. Never in their lives had Price or Lucy expected to see what they did then.

For London was already being
attacked by the weed. During the night it must have moved at tremendous speed from the south country, besides having burst out in various other quarters of the city of its own accord. It was clear that, in the main, the mighty weed had come up the river, for from end to end the wide bosom of the Thames was choked with crawling, struggling green life.

It stretched forth its squirming tentacles on both sides of the river. The Westminster, Tower and Waterloo Bridges were already cloaked in green, making them appear oddly like medieval castles with a covering of ivy.

Directly below, people were lying prone in the streets, hundreds upon hundreds of them, obviously first stricken down by the amazing paralysis. And towards them, covering them, rolled and expanded the monstrous columns of Martian vegetation.

A colossal main branch, quite eight feet in diameter, lay down the centre of the Strand. The taller buildings, too, made excellent holds for the stuff. Big Ben had already vanished amidst the smother. Fleet Street, place of ink and news, had also succumbed.

A World Engulfed

EVEN as the trio watched, the weed continued to envelope the city with almost uncanny speed. The dark, natural green of Hyde Park was gradually obliterated as the mass crept over it. Building after building disappeared; streets and people vanished before that irresistible tidal wave of astounding growth.

Presently Lucy’s voice broke the silence.

“Those poor people down there! The stuff will kill them—choke them!”

“On the contrary,” Benton answered, shaking his head. “The Martian weed, from the tests I have made of it, will not strangle or even harm a sleeping or unconscious person or animal. It is the things which give resistance, like struggling people or animals, which it chokes.

“That is why you were in danger last night, when you tried to fight free from the weed. The instant you became unconscious and limp it ceased to try and overcome you. No buildings will suffer, either, because they offer no resistance. They will be covered, yes; but nothing more.”

“You seem to know a lot about it, sir,” Price ventured. “Why on Earth don’t you remove the paralysis from the world? You said it was to stop war, and you managed it. But why let the world go to pot?”

“When I realised that the weed would cover the Earth I decided to increase the power of my paralysis-machine and render every living soul unconscious. Dead, and yet alive. In that way the weed will grow over them, and they will not suffer because they offer no resistance.

“In perhaps sixteen or seventeen hours Earth will be covered from end to end. From here we will fly northwards and see how the rest of the world is faring. Those Martian seeds, contrary to your belief, were not confined to the Atlantic Ocean. They were widely scattered, some falling in the Atlantic, some in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and others in various parts of different continents. Don’t question how I know all this . . .”

The controls moved again, and the journey across England to Scotland was covered at a stupendous rate. Central England had so far escaped the creeping menace, but it was rapidly approaching from the Irish and North Seas.

Then began the most amazing journey Price and his wife had ever known. Flying with unremitting velocity, they travelled over a weed-infested sea to Iceland, to find that country entirely obliterated, and so across a super-Sargossa to Greenland. Here, near the Arctic Circle, the weed was not so prolific. The cold was hindering it somewhat, but nevertheless it was growing
Inevitably, forcing great roots through the massive ice-packs.

The whole edge of the Arctic Circle, right into the misty reaches of the Arctic itself, was a pounding, beating mass of spray, ice and weed... and the weed was winning!

The air-machine turned, flew across the blocked Atlantic to North America, which was completely out of sight, there being no distinction between sea and land, so thick had the growth become. Touching the now vanished frontiers of Alaska, the machine swung back to the Pacific Ocean and across South America, which was just as thickly covered with the relentless plant.

So on and on, searching assiduously, across the Indian Ocean to Australia, then high above the Philippines to the vast continent of Asia. Here some parts were still visible, but manifestly doomed. During much of the journey the speeding flyers were enveloped in darkness, but powerful searchlights in the base of their machine made the scene of utter destruction below only too clearly visible....

Over Asia, Benton turned at last, flew back across buried Africa, and so to the British Isles again. The setting sun smote the hurtling air-machine as it neared the weed-infested shores of England. A slackening of speed, a vertical descent, and the journey was ended.

Some Mysteries Explained

"I FEEL," Benton said, when dinner was over, "that you are entitled to some explanations. Some of these explanations I shall give you now, and others I shall reserve until a more opportune time.

"For one thing, I knew you were coming to see me the other night because, ever since I met you down here on your vacation, I have kept you constantly in range with a radio-televisor. This instrument is tuned to the frequencies of people, or objects, and follows them constantly if they be movable, no matter how far they may go, reproducing their movements upon a screen, even viewing them through solid buildings. All sounds made by these people are likewise trapped and reproduced through a loud-speaker. So, you see, I have watched over you both ever since that evening when you came up here to look round.

"You remember that I asked you to examine two machines? One of those automatically registered your frequencies—your electrical body-energy—and after that my radio-televisor had merely to be tuned to those frequencies in order to follow you everywhere. The other machine emitted, all unknown to you, a force which made you both incapable of being affected by my paralysis-machine.

"That is why you escaped the effects. I, too, being likewise treated, also came to no harm, although the rest of the world succumbed when I extended the waves, instead of concentrating them upon the warring armies."

"But why did you bother to watch us?" Price asked puzzled.

"Because I admired you both from the first moment I met you. You were young and fresh, full of ideals and hopes. There was another reason, too. You knew about the spores from Mars; you two were the only ones who knew about them, and I felt it was only fair you should see your once despised theory bear fruit.

"I saw you find that root in the wood, too..."

"What amazing knowledge you have!" Lucy exclaimed. "You're a genius!"

"Maybe I am," Benton admitted with a faint smile. "As for our meals here, they are synthetic; practically everything here is synthetic or automatic. Everything you have found—beds, clothes, and so forth, I created specially for you. For my own part, I rarely sleep."

"You think up all these things and
yet rarely sleep?” Price breathed. “Then who on Earth are you, sir? What are you? There’s something about you—”

“All in good time,” the scientist interrupted, evasively. “I trust I have explained everything else?”

“Not altogether, sir. There’s that champagne of yours, and also why the weed has not attacked your home. Why, when you can stop the weed, do you allow it to go on?”

“In that, my friend, you probe too deeply. Later, perhaps.”

Benton took out his watch and regarded it. “At midnight precisely, according to my calculation, the entire Earth will be covered in the weed, buried under a dense, impenetrable blanket that no power can smash or break. A vast, super shock-absorber.”

“You sound as though you’ve premeditated it, sir!”

“Twenty feet thickness of rebounding weed,” Benton went on, his voice suddenly tense. “If everything has gone to plan, there is nothing to fear.”

He put his watch back, calm and serene again. “Another hour will bring midnight,” he commented. “I suggest that we adjourn to the laboratory, and there I think I can promise you the most astounding experience you’ve had so far. . . . This way.”

CHAPTER V

“Earth is Saved!”

Benton closed the door of the laboratory softly and for a time inspected his gently humming machinery; then he crossed to a massive lever and pulled it over. From somewhere on the roof came a grinding roar that soon subsided.

“That was a thick metal sheathing covering the roof of my home,” he explained. “Only the windows are free, and they are unbreakable.”

“But what’s it all for?” Price questioned in bewilderment.

“You will learn only too soon.”

Benton hesitated for a moment, as though considering some inner thought, then resumed in a meditative voice. “I have something to tell you both . . .”

“A million and a half years ago—so long ago that earthly man has no record of the incident—Earth’s surface was rendered a pitted and scarred ruin by a bombardment from outer space. Geologists believe it was Earth’s internal upheavals that produced its mountains and sea-beds. They are wrong, as I have reason to know. The sea-beds were blasted out of the then fairly malleable Earth by showers of colossal stones and boulders from interstellar space, and the hills were created by the upward pushing of matter from the displaced areas, later to become the floors of its present-day oceans.

“At that period, a million and a half years ago, Earth, travelling in her orbit, happened to cross the enormously elongated orbit of a slowly-travelling mass of rock and stone. By mass I mean an area some million miles wide, consisting of the remains of a planet which once burst assunder and whose fragments, in the form of titanic rocks, still move through space. Earth became bombarded with these fragments as she crossed this broken planet’s orbit, and the upheavals I’ve mentioned, with several others, took place.

“Then Earth began to recover and man appeared, to invent other explanations for sea-beds and mountain ranges. The disintegrated planet passed on its way in its orbit, and Earth continued in hers. But calculation showed that a million and a half years later the same thing would happen again, when the two orbits crossed once more, and that unless steps were taken to prevent it, Earth would suffer something approaching annihilation—most certainly the destruction of all her cities and all her peoples.

“The time for this terrific second
bombardment has now arrived. Thanks to the giant weed, however, the shocks will be reduced to a minimum. Being elastic and springy in nature, as well as amazingly strong, the weed now covering the entire Earth will cause this rain of missiles to rebound somewhat, and so break the tremendous force of their fall. Hence Man and his handiwork will be protected.

"Nor can the frightful heat of these missiles cause any damage, because the weed destroys the phenomenon known as fire and won't burn. So Man, buried deep beneath twenty feet of vegetation, will be untouched. Being unconscious, he will know and feel nothing. You understand?"

"But—but how do you know what happened a million and a half years ago?" Price almost shouted. "And how did the weed happen to appear on Earth so opportunely?"

"Nothing happens in the realm of Science; everything is planned," Benton replied calmly. "Now you know why I placed metal protections around this dwelling, to save it being destroyed in the approaching bombardment . . . ."

The Meteoric Onslaught

For the remainder of the time until within a few minutes of midnight Benton hovered between the window and his machines. Then, at a minute to twelve, he became feverishly industrious. Seeming to forget the presence of the two young people, he busied himself with a switchboard, pulling over a number of two-pole switches with swift and dexterous hands.

As a result the humming engines in the laboratory became silent. Price shivered involuntarily; Lucy crept closer to him. The atmosphere seemed indescribably eerie.

His work done, Benton stood contemplatively by the window again, gazing out at the starlit sky. Suddenly, with an emotion rare to him, he gave an exclamation and pointed.

"Here they come!" he panted. "Calculation has been justified! Look!"

Price and Lucy went to his side, craning their necks. Then their gaze became fixed as, out of the blackness of the sky appeared colossal festoons of enormous falling stars, like titanic blazing hallstones thundering to Earth—planetary matter ignited by its terrific rush through the atmosphere.

A remote and persistent drumming became evident. Some of the boulders and stones were striking the roof above their heads.

The drumming became louder, while the skies grew brighter with the hurtling bolts. As far as the eye could see, the heavens were alive with darting, criss-crossing points of blazing effulgence—tens of thousands of gigantic meteors battering Earth's vegetation-sheathed surface. Many of the celestial rocks fell in showers of white-heat, but the instant they touched the massed plant below they expired strangely into harmless darkness.

For nearly two hours the onslaught persisted, an onslaught which must have taken place in every quarter of the globe as the Earth moved along in its orbit. Then the meteoric rain became less heavy; fewer blazing bodies streaked across the heavens, and the stars, which had been blotted out, commenced to re-appear through the blaze. Presently the drumming on the roof ceased.

"Finished!" Benton breathed, thankfully. "We passed through the tail-end of the shower, instead of the central million-mile expanse. The time proves it. Earth is saved!"

He turned away from the window and seated himself before an immense radio-apparatus. In another moment he had switched on the power and commenced to operate the huge instrument. Immediately, terrific stabs of strange Morse pervaded the laboratory, and after an interval of several seconds,
answering stabs, much fainter, came from a loud-speaker sunk in the wall above the transmitter.

Benton listened with the ghost of a smile on his face, and for quite a while the exchange of messages went on. Price, who understood Morse, vainly tried to comprehend the message, only to realise it was not a code with which he was conversant. At length, the communication was over.

"My transmitter is on the roof," Benton explained. "Queer radio, mine; rather advanced. Works on the infra-red principle."

"But to whom were you signalling?" Price demanded. "The world is dead!"

"I know . . . but Mars is not dead," Benton replied, quietly. "You see, I—I am a Martian."

"A what?" Price and Lucy ejaculated, blankly.

"Is it so very strange? I'll explain in a moment. I must first use the Counter-actor to stop the universal paralysis. Also, I must cut out the controls of the machines which force the Martian weed to grow . . ."

"Yes, I know what you're thinking. That weed grew by induced methods—from here. But now the danger is finished. Come with me into the lounge. I have much to tell you."

The Martian's Story

"I t is, perhaps, a strange story," Benton began, when they were all three seated. "On Mars I am a scientist, and, naturally, utterly unlike the man you see now.

"My laboratory companion on Mars discovered long ago that Earth was due to be again subjected to the terrific bombardment that ravaged her a million and a half years ago. Martians, you understand, live immeasurably long lives, and my companion was a young man when the previous bombardment of Earth occurred.

"He showed me photographic records of the cosmic event, and we decided we must save our sister planet from a second distaster. Our ultimate experiments resulted in the discovery of a fast-growing weed which flourishes in the Martian deserts, and produced colossal growth from primary spores and seeds. We also produced a process which quickly destroyed the results of our experiments and withered the plants to atoms. Then we searched for, and found, a method of inducing harmless paralysis in living organisms. So, gradually, we evolved a scheme, with the consent of our ruler, through which we might save your world from destruction.

"As the time for the second swarm of meteors approached, we fired a vast cloud of plant spores into space and guided them to Earth by directional radio impulses. Then my brain was removed from my own Martian body and transferred to a synthetic one, modelled on terrestrial lines. The study of human beings through our powerful telescopes, which also possess X-ray properties, enabled us to duplicate an Earthly body almost exactly, both in appearance and organic structure.

"So, in human form, I came to Earth, making the journey in a space-ship, and bringing with me the machinery necessary for carrying out the rest of the scheme to a successful conclusion. Once here, I had no difficulty in learning your language, being some ten times as advanced in intellect as the inhabitants of this planet, whom we of Mars have safely delivered from a terrible menace.

"Until you came, nobody suspected that I was anything but a human being, slightly eccentric, perhaps. Knowing the value of the metal on Earth, I transmuted base metals into gold and became fabulously wealthy. I engaged men to build me this place, and installed my machinery, with which I promoted the growth of the weed and created hot
summers to stimulate it further. On Mars, of course, we produce our own weather...

"You know the rest: how the paralysis-machines were put into operation, how they stopped the war and eventually paralysed the whole of humanity. I have now cut off the waves and started the machines which will destroy the weed in a very short time. My work is finished, and I must return to Mars, to resume my natural body."

"Hugh Benton" stopped, and for an instant both Price and Lucy saw in his eyes that queer look which the girl had detected before—the light of infinite solitude.

"You were naturally curious," he went on. "I told you I was out to stop war. I didn't know at that time how you might upset my plans. To all appearances I was just one of yourselves, and even when I asked you if my knowledge didn't seem unusual you didn't grasp the point.

"There is little else to explain. That 'champagne' I gave you was a powerful Martian drug. I wanted you asleep whilst I radioed my planet for further information. As I told you, I never sleep, and I very rarely eat. . . . What more is there to say?"

"I cannot believe I am sitting here talking to a Martian," Lucy breathed.

"Why not? What am I but a distant foreigner? My name is not, of course, Hugh Benton, but Zal-Iked, First in Science of the planet Ralkan, or Mars . . . and I have something here that may repay you for my strange demands upon you."

"Benton" dived into his pocket, and when he opened his palm there rolled on to the table two immense, glittering objects.

"Good heavens, they're not—" Lucy began, hardly daring to say the word.

"Yes—diamonds," the Martian nodded. "We have thousands of them on my planet and they're valueless; but I find they are worth something on this world, so take them with my compliments."

"But they're as big as hens' eggs!" Price protested. "We can't—"

"Don't be absurd, my young friend. Take them; all the better if they are big. They are the least I can offer after the way I've behaved towards you, and they will serve to remember me by . . .

"I shall never return to Earth. A million and a half years hence the same danger will again threaten your planet; but it is up to man to fight it for himself. If he has not the intellect to do it by then . . . well, he deserves to suffer."

Man's Awakening

WITHIN two days the weed became a withered mass, crumbling to powder the world over. The power employed, so Benton explained, was similar to that which, used in a lesser degree, had prevented the plant from covering his home.

So, before the eyes of the two young people, now immensely wealthy for the remainder of their lives, the Earth's face began to reappear from beneath the protective vegetation. The mighty branches wilted into the consistency of fine ash which was blown on the winds to the four corners of the Earth.

Then humanity, the counteracter having done its work, recovered from its insensibility, quite unaware of what had taken place, but utterly amazed at discovering thousands of stones and boulders in every civilised city. These, however, were soon disposed of. Only a few buildings were damaged; for the most part the stones were dumped in the sea.

With the memory of the strange paralysis hanging over mankind, for quite a time a subdued world went about his business; but it was not long before the old order of bickering, villainy and greed reared its ugly head again.

Price and Lucy took their farewell
of Hugh Benton with deep regret, though he viewed their departure with that calm detachment so common to him. Back in London, they could well have believed the whole thing a dream save for the massive diamonds, which ultimately netted them a huge fortune, and the vision of countrysides the world over mangled and twisted where the Martian roots had preyed upon weaker vegetation. Buildings had stood the strain, being immovable, but trees blowing in the wind had immediately offered that resistance that made of the plant a ruthless destroyer.

But Nature took charge of the rest, and the following Spring, after the Martian plant had disappeared, was more redundant with green than ever before.

With the coming of Summer, Price and Lucy went again for their holiday to the farmhouse in Somerset; but when they looked for the massive building on the hill they saw that it was missing. One afternoon they travelled to the actual site, and found only a patch of new grass where the building had been. Hugh Benton—Zal-Iked, the Martian—had returned to his native planet.

If you are interested in the type of stories in this magazine, you should subscribe to

**SCIENTIFICTION**

The British Fantasy Review

which gives you news of what is happening in the Science Fiction field, and articles by, and interviews with, leading fantasy authors such as John Russell Fearn, Olaf Stapledon, Festus Pragnell, John Beynon and Eric Frank Russell.

Send sixpence for a specimen copy, or three shillings for a six-issue subscription, to:

**SCIENTIFICTION, 15, Shere Rd., ILFORD, ESSEX**
REVOLT ON VENUS

By W. P. COCKROFT
(Author of Cataclysm, City of Mars, etc.)

Space Adventurers from Earth, Captured by the Invisible Tyrants of Venus, Made a Desperate Bid for Freedom . . . Then Hell Broke Loose!

CHAPTER I

The Voyage of Death

It was the eccentric, mad-brained Vorst who conceived the idea of calling the space-ship Ad Astra. Bodin thought of giving it the name of the girl who had helped them create it; but this suggestion Vorst had immediately quashed on the ground that it was undignified.

His lean face had flushed with fervour as he gesticulated to them and said: "There is only one name we can give it. Ad Astra—to the stars! It expresses exactly this urge we feel to solve the secrets of those distant worlds which beckon us out into space. With such a name, our venture cannot be anything but a success!

"You may think I'm crazy; but I think it's a fine name for the first space-ship . . ."

Bodin hardly thought him crazy, for he knew that Vorst, though somewhat eccentric, was indispensable. He had often smiled to himself at the sight of the zealous young German standing with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, staring up at the stars as though he would probe their secrets with his naked eyes. But he realised that without the imaginative brain of Vorst the trip they had planned would be no more than a dream.

For Vorst was a strange mixture of humanity; and his mind, though warped in some ways, was practical enough to enable them to attempt the seemingly impossible with every chance of success.

Though sometimes Bodin had doubts about the whole venture. It would occur to him that the thing was wildly fantastic and that it was only the enthusiasm of Vorst, the dreamer, that had made him believe it was feasible.

Then he would be seized with a fit of intense depression, would sit and stare despondently at the vast skeleton of the space-ship and wonder why he was ever
fool enough to take part in this crazy scheme.

But now the ship was completed. Shining metal plates concealed the ribs; the complicated propulsive mechanism was installed. Problem after problem which seemed insurmountable at first had given way to Vorst’s indomitable will to achieve their ambitious goal. Ad Astra was ready for the sky.

Yet, on the eve of their departure into the unknown, Bodin’s thoughts were bitter. For it seemed there were only three of them going on this perilous but glorious adventure; and there should have been four. One had failed, almost at the eleventh hour. Bodin winced as he thought of the reason why.

Ruth Denham!
The four men who were to go—Vorst, Madden, himself and Graham—had met at the girl’s house the night before. She had stood nearby and listened to every word that was said, while her dark eyes passed from speaker to speaker.

To Bodin she had seemed more desirable than ever as he watched her anxious face that night. But he had known for a long time that there was more between Graham and Ruth than mere friendship.

Graham was strangely silent as the other men discussed their final arrangements, wearing a sullen look on his face. Then suddenly he stood up and faced them; and as though by a terrific effort of will, he had spoken those words which damned him utterly in the eyes of his fellows, which had burned like fire into Bodin’s brain.

“I Am Not Going . . .”

“LOOK here, I’m sorry; but I am not going on this trip. I want you to release me from the contract I made to commit suicide with you three in this mad venture. For we all know it means certain death, even though we have been outwardly confident of success. In our hearts we have all been dreading the time when the space-ship was ready for the sky.

“Two years ago I came to you. You, Bodin, wanted men who were ready to commit suicide, but who had brains. Men who were faced with defeat in the world, yet were ready to pledge themselves to a great ideal and to work to bring it about.

“Such a man was I when I heard of your rash venture. I had nothing to live for. The firm for whom I worked had gone smash, and I was penniless. My employer’s daughter, to whom I was engaged to be married, was killed in a car crash soon afterwards, either by accident or design; I do not know. . . .

“At that time, I was a desperate man, ready for anything—especially death. But I had the necessary engineering training to be useful to you and your crazy scheme. So I came to you and signed that binding contract.

“But now things are different. I have

IF there are creatures on other worlds more intelligent than we of Earth, why have they never visited us? This thrilling story of the first space-flight provides an answer to that oft-repeated question.

It is feasible that, although the inhabitants of another planet may exceed us in their scientific prowess, they might think us cleverer and stronger than they and prefer to give us a wide berth. But what if they found out their mistake and had ideas of conquering Earth . . . ?
love and I have money, things which I did not have then. I have to thank you for both these things, which have given me a new interest in life. Yet I now stand before you and ask you to release me from the contract of death—for death it will be; we should be fools to imagine that we have any chance of escaping death.

“Well, what are you going to say, now that I have asked you to release me from my contract...?”

Vorst stood frowning, his head sunk deep on his chest, staring at the carpet. Then, in a flash, his answer came.

“You are a coward, Graham. Any man can commit suicide when he has nothing to live for; but to face death when one has everything to live for—that takes courage!

“But I am not going to press you to go. I have no wish for a coward to accompany us on such a grand adventure. Though it is for Bodin to say, as the financier of the scheme which I conceived.”

Bodin was silent for a while. Then he made his reply:

“So you want to let us down? How do you think we are going to manage without you? You have worked with us for two years, and on this venture we need four men to ensure every possible chance of success.

“We five here are the only people who understand the space-ship. It is impossible, of course, for Ruth to go. It was for us four to go, and now you refuse. Is it any use asking you to think it over?”

Graham shook his head stubbornly. Bodin turned to the other member of the group, who had not yet spoken, the silent and taciturn Madden.

“What do you think?”

Madden glared across at Graham with wild eyes beneath shaggy brows, then said gruffly: “We don’t want him. I knew he would fail when the time came.”

Several seconds passed. Bodin looked at the girl, who paled under his soul-searching scrutiny.

“It is not my wish that he should stay behind. I—I love him; but I want you to understand that I have not asked him to break his contract. It is his own wish.”

“Ruth!” burst out Graham. “You know that if you want me to go I shall. But I shall not come back! Do you want me to stay here with you or go with them—to certain death?”

The Fourth Traveller

The girl shook her head and smiled sadly. “It is not for me to say. I have no desire to send any man to his death, especially you. You have given your word to go. You must decide for yourself whether you will keep it.”

On this uncertain note the matter had closed, and the men had left to go their different ways. Bodin had spent a miserable night, and the whole of the following day his mind was in an agony of suspense. For the next night had been chosen for the launching of the Ad Astra, and no fourth man had been found to take the place of Graham.

Though the girl had inspired a last hope. She had told Bodin to wait and promised to come to him that night, bringing with her the fourth traveller. Bodin had waited, torn between his faith in the girl and his doubts of the existence of an efficient substitute for Graham.

His heart skipped a beat when Ruth entered his apartment. She was alone.

“I have found you your fourth traveller,” were the first words she spoke as she stood before him, a diminutive figure.

Bodin’s face brightened. “Graham?” There was a bitter droop to her mouth as the girl shook her head. “He will not go!”

“Then who is it? Do I know him?”

“You know her—a little. Perhaps more than she knows herself.”
“A woman? But——”

“Yes; I am the fourth traveller!”

Bodin slumped into a seat. “My dear Ruth! You cannot be serious. It is impossible; you can’t go!”

“Why not? I am quite competent. I have worked with you all. I know the space-ship as well as you do.”

“I know; but you are a girl.”

“What difference does that make? Girls can endure as well as men; as least, women can, and I am a woman.”

“But what will Graham say?”

“Graham!” She laughed mockingly. “I have no use for cowards. I told him I would take his place if he did not go. I thought it would make him change his mind. He argued a long time; but in the end it was obvious that he was determined to stay at all costs. Therefore, I am the one who will go.

“See how much he loves me! Death and I were on one side of the scales, his money and life on the other. He chose money and life, so I go on the voyage of death——”

Abruptly, Ruth broke down, her spirit broken by disillusionment. Unwilling Bodin rose and stared out of the window, fearing to look at her in case she saw what was in his eyes. Then he tried to take her mind from Graham.

“Don’t call it the voyage of death,” he said. “It is a voyage of life—of discovery.”

“It’s all the same thing, really,” she replied, composing herself. “Well, can I go?”

“I shall have to see what Vorst and Madden have to say first. They may not agree——”

“They must agree. There is no more suitable candidate than I for the vacant berth; in fact, there is nobody else available.”

“But it’s insane for you to throw your life away on such a desperate venture. You are only twenty-four——”

“And you?” she countered gently. “You are only a few years older. Why should you sacrifice your life?”

Bodin threw up his hands in surrender. “All right!” he consented. “But it must rest with Vorst and Madden. If they are willing, you shall go.”

CHAPTER II

Adrift in Space

VORST and Madden needed little persuasion before agreeing to the suggestion that the girl should accompany them into space. During the time they had worked together on the ship, she had been to them a loyal companion and a staunch supporter of the enterprise. And although they would have preferred her not to run the risks of such a journey, they admired her courageous spirit, which inspired in them a greater confidence of success in the face of the tremendous odds against them.

For they had no illusions as to the hazards of their bold undertaking. It was the first attempt at space flight that man had ever made, and although it might lead the way to the eventual fulfilment of an age-old dream, this initial experiment seemed almost inevitably doomed to failure, and the pioneers to certain death.

The Moon shone down on a scene of orderly activity the following evening; and it was to this self-same orb that the adventurers planned to travel through the void in the Ad Astra, despite its high-sounding name.

Stocks of provisions had been stowed away in the space-ship. Everything was in readiness for its departure. Finally, at the appointed hour, the party of three men and one woman entered the massive projectile, climbed into their springy hammocks and prepared themselves for the terrible ordeal of being shot into starry depths.

Graham was not there to see them go. He could not bear to watch the gleaming monster carry off the girl he loved and the men he had betrayed, perhaps
never to return them to their native planet.

For the moment preceding the uprush of the ship, Ruth’s thoughts were centred on the man who was content to see her go in his stead. Then she banished him from her mind as she steeled herself for the supreme test, in which levers were forced over until the last atom of consciousness fled from her and her whole soul seemed to scream in agony, tormented beyond endurance.

In a few minutes everything was blotted out in a merciful oblivion which wrapped them all alike...

When they recovered, the tiny Earth was left far behind the black hulk which was their world, careering on its long flight through the sunless depths. Until at last, as the Earth fell away beneath them, there came a time when the sun burst upon them in all its glory, flooding their craft with the blinding light of space.

As they swept on their way at terrific speed, free from all gravitation, the travellers stared from the thick quartz windows of the space-ship, speechless with wonder at the vastness of the void. All except Vorst, who spent most of the time making calculations, checking and re-checking.

Suddenly, after a time they had no way of knowing, he sprang from his seat with a cry which startled his companions, jerking them back to realisation of the dangers of their journey.

“Our calculations are at fault!”

“What do you mean?” asked Bodin, as the faces of the travellers blanched.

“I mean that we shall miss the Moon! It will beat us to our trysting place. Our speed is tremendous—but it is not enough!”

“But we can increase it. We have not yet used all our rockets.”

“Even then, it will be insufficient. All we can do is to go on... on beyond the Moon’s orbit.”

THE girl uttered a little cry. Bodin feigned a careless laugh and shrugged his sturdy shoulders.

“Well, what does it matter? We should probably flatten ourselves out on the Moon’s rocky surface if we tried to land on her. So we might as well go on—on to the stars, in the hope of making a landing on one of the planets. Personally, I should prefer Mars myself.”

And so they went on, until it was obvious to all of them, without the help of Vorst’s figures, that the Moon could never be their destination. For countless days the ship hurtled on its seemingly eternal journey, until their nerves were all on edge and the terror of the unknown was master of all their souls.

Then there came into the mind of Vorst a presentiment that something was going to happen. It was a strange prescience, but it did not fail. For on the thirtieth day of their journey, according to Earth-time reckoning, something did happen.

They were far from the Moon’s orbit, and rapidly approaching Mars, though according to calculations made from time to time there was little likelihood of landing on the red planet. As Vorst bitterly remarked, it was strange that they had chosen so fitting a name for the space-ship; and he liked to dream of the probable end of their adventure.

It seemed to him that Ad Astra would go on and on, perhaps to find an orbit of its own somewhere, millions of miles away from its natural home. As for themselves, their provisions would run out and they would starve. They had a good supply of oxygen; but this might fail before the food was exhausted, in which case they would die of asphyxiation. In any case, as Bodin said, it did not matter how they died; they might just as well put themselves out of their misery once their fate was definitely established...

Such was their hopelessness as they sat listlessly gazing out of the windows
They of the space-ship on the thirtieth day of its headlong flight. Dead silence pervaded the little compartment, a stillness which was broken by a heavy sigh from the girl as she turned away from the window and stared dreamily across to the opposite wall.

Bodin also turned his head. His eyes met those of the girl, and they both smiled. A stronger bond had grown between them on this endless voyage. Bodin thought of what it would mean if they could return to Earth; but it was too late now.

It was at this moment that the thing happened. A sudden convulsion shook the space-ship, and the travellers were flung about in all directions as though by some gigantic hand. Frantically they clutched at the table and chairs which were fixed to the floor of the compartment.

As suddenly as it commenced, the movement ceased. Then, having collected their scattered wits, they tried to fathom the reason for the disturbance. But no sooner had the shock of the first convulsion passed than the hapless vessel was seized with a series of further jerks and twists, sending its occupants flying again.

It was not until Bodin glanced at the speed gauge that they had any idea of what was happening.

"Vorst," he screamed, pointing a trembling finger. "Look—look at the speed gauge!"

Vorst flung his long hair back out of his eyes and stared across at the mass of instruments arranged on one side of the compartment. There was an incredulous look on his face as he read the figure on one of the dials. It could not possibly be correct!

Their speed a few moments before had been 17,000 miles per hour. Now it had fallen to just over 1,000! The figure of the gauge oscillated madly, then fell still further as another convulsion shook the ship, straining every fibre of its metal being.

The Grey Dust

A CASE of provisions which had been dislodged by the previous shocks came hurtling across the compartment and smashed itself against the opposite wall, bringing a muttered oath from Madden; the first word he had uttered for days. At the same time he and his bewildered companions felt a tremendous tug at their muscles.

The girl screamed in terror. Bodin clutched her tightly round the waist with his free hand, keeping his eye on the gauge. Six thousand! They were stopping—but why? What could have interfered with the swift passage of their ship through the frictionless void?

He felt a chill of fear as he half-believed some strange supernatural force was at work. For he knew they were too far away from any planet to be affected by its pull. All he could think of was that some large wandering body had passed close behind them, attracting the ship and checking its headlong flight. Yet he could not understand why it did not slow up gradually, if that were so, instead of stopping in a series of jerks.

Abruptly there came another sharp tug. The finger of the speed gauge fell backwards to the 800 mark, moved forward again to 1,200, crept slowly back to 800, and then on down the entire scale until it came to rest at zero.

The ship was motionless in space!

Bodin glanced at another gauge—the retard measurer—to see if they were being drawn back by any object in their wake. But the finger of the gauge was at rest. The Ad Astra was as still as a rock, floating freely in the void.

Mystified, the travellers stared from the windows, seeking the explanation for this phenomenon. A concerted gasp came from their lips as they gazed unbelievingly at a great hulk, twice the size of their space-ship, which hung suspended directly in front of the Ad Astra.

It was cylindrical in shape, with the
top portion tapering off like a huge shell; and they searched in vain for signs of windows in its smooth surface. Gradually the astounded terrestrials were forced to the conclusion that the great object must be some kind of space vessel, and that its occupants had halted their own ship's mad race to the stars.

How long they stood there silently staring through the window they did not know. It was perhaps intuition that prompted the girl to turn round at length; and it was the piercing scream she gave at what she saw that caused the men to do likewise.

In the white light which flooded the room, something had materialised. It was as if the dust particles in the manufactured air had been gathered together in a rectangular mass, for all they saw was a greyish expanse hanging in the space between them and the table. How it had formed or what it was they did not attempt to guess.

“What is this—a nightmare?” Bodin muttered between his teeth. The appearance of the huge shell outside had seemed like a figment of his imagination; but this—this was uncanny.

He cast an anxious look at Ruth, saw that she was quite self-possessed, though deathly pale. Instinctively, she shrank closer to him as the weird oblong patch hung before them.

Minutes passed, each one seeming an eternity. Then, abruptly, the thing dissolved, and clouds of dust, after circling and eddying in the air, fell to rest on the floor. Fearful of what might happen next, Bodin tried to get a grip on himself. Vorst and Madden remained silent, staring at the space where the dust had been.

Then the control of the girl broke. She flung herself across the compartment on to one of the couches where they slept, and buried her face in her hands, sobbing quietly.

Bodin stood hesitant in the centre of the room. At that moment a gentle vibration shook the space-ship. They were moving again.

CHAPTER III

Planet of Splendour

THE Earth vessel gathered momentum. Soon it was rushing through the void at a speed of 20,000 miles per hour. From its windows the Earthmen could see the strange craft which was apparently “towing” them hurtling onwards, point-foremost. With speed unchecked they went on into the unknown . . .

Although bewildered by the sudden change in their situation, the mystified terrestrials were soon forced to the inevitable conclusion that they had been captured, space-ship and all, by highly intelligent beings. The true nature and origin of their captors they could but guess at, and what they intended to do with them was equally a matter for speculation.

But it was obvious they had far to go. Day followed day, in Earth-time, as they were drawn ever onwards, and there was no indication of when or where the tedious journey would end.

At regular intervals the oblong patch of dust would collect, and they would feel that they were being scrutinised by the mysterious creatures in the other space-ship. For each time it materialised they had the distinct impression of being watched. Then, gradually, the dust would dissipate and their tense nerves would relax . . .

For what seemed ages they went on. But before them at last shone a brilliant orb; and it became increasingly evident as they approached that this was to be their goal.

It was the world of Venus, planet of splendour, whose cloud-wrapped form filled them with awe as it loomed ever larger before them.

Closer and closer they came, their speed rapidly diminishing as they entered the planet's atmosphere, plunging through a thick blanket of cloud. Until at last it lay beneath them in all its glory and weirdness. This, then, was
the abode of their captors, the home of the vast shell-like vessel which had drawn them hither.

The Earth people hardly knew whether to welcome or dread their arrival at their destination as they gazed on the scene below. A swarm of flying things, which Bodin adjudged to be aeroplanes, circled in the skies around them, heedless of the hurtling monsters which had just burst upon them from space.

In the far distance nothing could be seen, owing to the low-hanging clouds which seemed almost to meet the ground. Nearer were flat, fertile-looking plains, vivid green patches on the surface of the planet. Immediately below the travellers was what they decided to be a great city; but they had no time to study it intently.

Swiftly the two space-ships descended over a square expanse dotted with deep pits, to come to rest smoothly and gently, both in an upright position. With some degree of comfort the terrestrials noticed that their own craft had settled, under the influence of the other, on a solid stretch of ground, whereas the vast shell hung suspended over one of the great pits.

Their mystification increased when, shortly afterwards, the Venusian ship continued its descent until it had sunk out of sight into the gaping hole.

Bodin looked ruefully at his companions, who had become too interested in their strange surroundings to ponder their probable fate on this alien world. Though the girl still wore an apprehensive look on her chalk-white face.

“Well,” he said. “We're here. Now what happens?”

Into the Pit

Vorst stared wistfully through the window. “Perhaps they want us to go outside,” he suggested.

“But what of the atmosphere?”

“I will risk seeing what it’s like. We can’t stay in here for ever.”

With a careless wave to the others, Vorst opened the door to the air-lock and disappeared. Two minutes later he was laughing at them through the glass, and they hurried to join him. It was good to feel solid ground under their feet.

“Not bad,” Bodin commented, filling his lungs.

The atmosphere was very sultry, and it was apparently late in the Venusian day. Overhead was a pallid white sky, thick with clouds.

The party stared into the distance. At regular intervals were high, square towers, the purpose of which they could not fathom. The air vessels swarmed above them. For all the notice Venus seemed to take of them, the strangers felt they might not have been there.

Everything was strangely silent as they wandered aimlessly between the great pits yawning at their feet. Most of these seemed bottomless, their depths obscured in blackness. Others were covered by massive plates of dull metal, like huge steel doors. All were obviously artificial, as though providing entrance to a subterranean realm beyond their puny reach.

It was while they were standing near one of the covered pits that Ruth’s cry of alarm broke the deathly stillness. Tremblingly she pointed as the great metal cover bisected itself and the two parts slowly slid back, leaving a circular opening in the ground before them. Simultaneously, an almost inaudible hum reached their ears, like the purring of a huge dynamo a tremendous distance away.

In awe the startled terrestrials waited for something to emerge from the opening, whose depths were faintly illuminated by a pale amber glow. Though what they awaited they knew not.

As they stood quivering on the edge of the pit, a sudden impulse caused them to turn. They gasped as they looked at the space-ship, which now hung in mid-air a few yards above them, as out of reach as if it were miles
high. Then Bodin laughed; and Ruth gave him an anxious glance, as though she feared he was losing his sanity.

"This gets more like a nightmare than ever!" he remarked. "You can never tell what will happen next. What do you make of it, Vorst?"

"Evidently our hosts' way of telling us to make ourselves at home," the German replied, smiling reassuringly at the girl.

"And this," said Bodin, indicating the open pit, "is an invitation to us to enter?"

"Obviously. Although it seems we have no real choice in the matter."

The promise of things exciting and strange was reflected in the eyes of Vorst as he gazed silently into the pit, thoughtfully fingering his rough beard. Then he suddenly swung himself over the edge and commenced the descent, beckoning the others to follow.

They hesitated for a moment, watching Vorst go down, finding a sure foothold on ledges let deep into the sides. Without a word, Madden followed, stoical as ever. Then, helped by Bodin, the girl let herself carefully over the side.

Finally Bodin himself began the descent; and no sooner had his head reached the level of the ground than the sliding doors closed over him, shutting out the light of day. Glancing down, he saw his three companions dimly illumined by the amber glow which came from below.

The Robots

As they descended deeper and deeper into the mighty shaft, the low, monotonous hum became steadily louder and more pronounced. Slowly and carefully they went down, until at last their painful climb ended, and they stepped from the last ledge on to some soft substance which spread itself for an interminable distance in all directions.

The amber light was stronger here; but it was not until they had searched about that they discerned on either side of them the openings to two great tunnels leading off from the foot of the shaft. For a while they paused, wondering which way to take. As they hesitated, a door slid over one of the openings, blocking it, as though to indicate that they were to enter the other tunnel.

Again Vorst led the way. They had not gone far before they came to another opening, from which emerged four silent figures, the sight of which caused the girl to cling tightly to Bodin's arm.

They were not men; rather, they appeared mad travesties of mankind. About four feet in height, their bodies were stocky and egg-shaped, and equipped with eight limbs which could obviously be used either as legs or arms. They had tiny heads, but were devoid of features. A blank expanse served as a face, surmounted by a grey oblong where the forehead should have been.

The inhumanity of the strange creatures filled the Earth people with horror. The ugliest, most monstrous visage could not have been more repugnant than the expressionless countenances before them. The girl shuddered and looked away.

Robot-like, the four beings fell into line behind the travellers, who followed the direction they had been taking, more swiftly—but more reluctantly—than before. Occasionally they glanced behind at the ghastly creatures who urged them on, until they came to another opening in the tunnel.

Once they had passed through a door closed after them, sealing the opening. Soon afterwards they passed through yet another door and found themselves in daylight again.

They were in a narrow passage-way between square blocks of masonry, gigantic buildings, colourless and plain, which towered upwards on all sides and in whose walls no windows could be seen. Into one of these buildings they
were led—or, rather, impelled—by the things behind them, until they found themselves in a large room.

Through narrow apertures in the ceiling the amber light filtered. Instantly their guards withdrew, the door slid shut and they were alone.

"Not exactly a royal suite, is it?" Bodin jested, vainly seeking to avert all fear in the girl’s mind.

"What are they going to do with us?" she demanded of the men, who were asking themselves the self-same question.

Bodin was about to give an evasive reply when the familiar grey rectangles began to take shape in the room, compelling their attention. About a dozen of them formed at various angles, remained visible for several minutes, and gradually faded in the manner to which they had become accustomed. Though this was the first time that more than one had appeared, strengthening the conviction that they were being spied upon.

Then, with startling abruptness, the robot-like figures entered the room. Silently but purposefully, they marched up to the imperturbable Madden, seized him by the arms and led him, unresisting, out of their sight.

CHAPTER IV

Metropolis of Venus

For several hours the captives waited for Madden to return, but the door did not open. To ease the suspense and allay the pangs of hunger, they fell to discussing their position, sanely and dispassionately.

"I don’t like the look of things," Vorst had begun, forgetful of the girl’s agony of mind. "Why don’t these Venusians show themselves? For it’s pretty certain the things who brought us here are only machines—robots created by the real Venusians, who have been spying upon us ever since we were captured."

"Madden seems to have been singled out to meet them personally," Bodin observed. "But, as you say, we have been under their surveillance the whole time, through these oblong patches of dust. I imagine they act as a screen of some kind, by means of which the Venusians can watch our movements. Something like television, only much more complicated. Don’t you think so, Vorst?"

"Obviously," the other man agreed. "What they look like nobody knows—except possibly Madden—but it’s evident from what we have seen of their methods that these Venusian fellows have brains. For instance, they are expert space travellers; their ships are ample evidence of that. Our little craft must have looked strange to them when they sighted it and pulled us up.

"The fact that they were able to stop our mad flight is another indication of their genius. How they did it I don’t know; evidently by some powerful electrical influence—some repulsive ray we know nothing of. Attractive, too, for they dragged us all the way to Venus with it.

"Then there’s the robots——"

"But if they are used to space travel, and can perform all these miracles, how is it the Venusians have never visited our world, Vorst?"

"Heaven knows. Perhaps they think we are more clever than they are, and consequently more powerful. They may have been scared to set foot on Earth, for this reason. Though they seem to be in the habit of journeying to Mars, otherwise they would not be so far out in space."

Ruth, who had listened intently, put the next question: "Have you any idea why the robots should take Madden away and leave us here?"

"Perhaps their creators want to question him, or examine him more closely than by means of the dust screens."
Though they might just as well have taken one of us . . ."

So they went on speculating, hour after hour, without getting any nearer a solution of the problem of what would happen to them. Until at last they were interrupted by the reappearance of their guards, who had entered the room almost before they realised the door had opened.

This time there was another shock in store for the terrestrials. For on the grey panel surmounting the face of each robot, in brilliant letters, was the word: "Follow."

Wonderingly, they obeyed. Then, one by one, the mysteries of the Venusian planet were revealed to them, until they were incapable of appreciating the wonders they saw, so frequently did they came upon the performance of some fresh miracle.

Conducted by the soulless robots, they passed through countless rooms, bathed in the all-pervading amber glow, where strange, half-human creatures were at work. They went through vast halls filled with marvellous machines, running in perfect silence. Ever downwards they went, until the humming noise grew loud in their ears and the heat of the atmosphere became insufferable.

At last their guides led them to another room, where they were again left alone, to pass the most dreadful hours they had ever experienced. They were too utterly fatigued to protest against a further incarceration. The robots had gone and the door closed upon them before they had time to demand food and drink.

Having looked in vain for some way of escape from their bare prison, Vorst and Bodin decided that next time the door was opened they would make a desperate bid for freedom, even though it might end in failure. For what seemed an eternity they waited, penned in that oppressive room, until they felt they would go mad with thirst, and the girl broke down and wept.

The Writing Machine

But eventually the door opened. The two Earthmen were ready. Giving vent to the pent-up feelings in a shout of violent hate, they rushed at the two foremost guards as they entered.

Bodin’s flying fist smashed into the oblong screen of the first robot, bursting it assunder. A numbing pain passed up his arm, but he did not heed it. The thing stopped in its tracks, swayed drunkenly, and crashed to the floor.

While Vorst dealt similarly with the second robot, the girl was grappling with the third in the doorway. But she was helpless against its mechanical strength, and cried out in terror as it wrapped her in four steely arms. Furiously, Bodin leaped to her rescue, plunging his fist through the creature’s grey forehead and shattering the glass into fragments.

Immediately, as though some vital part had been smashed, the robot’s grip relaxed. As it fell to the floor both men turned to tackle the remaining robot, only to find that it was no longer in the doorway. Sensing, with its mechanical mind, that it might meet the fate of its three companions, it had gone to summon assistance before facing the maddened Earthmen.

They had hardly rushed out into the narrow passage, dragging Ruth after them, before a group of six robots barred their way.

"Come on!” cried Vorst, as he threw himself at the nearest of the monsters. "Give it to them, Bodin!"

Bodin needed no encouragement. With arms flying, he plunged anew into the fray. But this time the Earthmen had no chance. Both they and the girl were quickly seized by the many arms of the robots and their own arms pinned to their sides. They found themselves lifted bodily and carried, struggling and kicking wildly, along the passage.

Unceremoniously, their captors bundled them into yet another chamber
and, withdrawing swiftly, closed the door upon them once again. Breathing heavily after their fruitless exertions, the Earth people stayed for a while stretched out on the floor, their strength completely exhausted. Eventually, Bodin rose to his feet.

“Well, we made a fight for it, anyway,” he said, smiling, as he helped the girl to her feet. “I’m sorry we couldn’t do more, Ruth, but—”

“You were wonderful! You too, Vorst,” she smiled back, bravely. “I knew, as you did, that forceful methods would get us nowhere, but it gave us a chance to work off steam. Next time, though, we must be more subtle.”

Bodin admired the girl’s spirit. He had expected her to break down again from sheer hopelessness at their predicament. But their tussle with the robots had acted like a tonic to them all, after the prolonged inactivity.

“At least,” remarked Vorst, who had clambered to his feet, and was now looking round their new quarters, “it got us into a more interesting prison.”

He indicated a box-like contrivance which stood in the centre of the room, on the top surface of which was a square grey panel similar to those in the forehead of the robots, but several times larger. There was a still bigger panel on the wall a few feet away. And as they looked, a message appeared on the screen.

“Come nearer,” it commanded, “and reply by means of the machine before you.”

Hesitantly, they obeyed. As they did so, the writing on the wall faded and a new message took its place:

“Press the button at the side of the machine.”

Bodin did so, and a faint amber glow suffused the surface of the panel. Again the message faded, to be followed by another:

“Write in answer to our questions on the face of the panel. . . . Why did you try to escape?”

Nervously Bodin took up the queer-looking pen which was attached by a wire to the box. The others watched anxiously as he wrote:

“We are hungry and thirsty. Nor are we used to captivity. Let us go.”

“Go where?” asked the unknown questioner.

For a moment Bodin was puzzled. Then he wrote:

“Back to our space-ship, where we have food and can rest.”

“You will be allowed to return to it for a short period,” came the reply, “but you may not depart from this planet.”

The girl caught her breath and clutched at Bodin’s arm. Vorst cast them both a quick glance. It was just as they had feared.

“What do you want with us?” Bodin questioned.

“We wish to examine your space-ship, to see what metals you have on your world, and how you succeeded in crossing space.”

“What have you done with Madden?” Bodin asked, familiarity making him more daring.

“We have examined him. That is how we got to know your language. We have discovered many things about your planet, through his brain.”

“Is he alive?”

“No. He died.”

The Dread Menace

The girl paled, and Vorst muttered something through clenched teeth. But Bodin went on writing on the panel before him, which cleared every time an answering message appeared on the screen on the wall.

“What little we have seen of your world interests us,” he wrote next. “Can we see more, and have explained to us the meaning of what we have already seen?”

The answer came immediately:

“What do you wish to know?”
"How you can tell what we are doing, how you brought us here out of space, and how you run your world."

"We can follow your movements by means of the screens of dust-particles. We can form such screens at will, so it is useless for you to try and avoid us. We shall always know what you are doing and where you are. There is no escape from us. Even when you return to your space-ship, you cannot escape, for we shall render the vessel immovable."

"How will you do that?" Bodin was seeking—and receiving—confirmation of the theories they had formed during their imprisonment. The reply came again:

"By the same method as we stopped your flight in space, using electrical rays. You know little of the power of electricity as yet, Madden's mind tells us. Our world is run entirely by electricity, applied in various ways of which you are ignorant."

Then Bodin put the question that had occurred to him before: "If you are used to space travel, as it appears to us, why have you never visited our planet, Earth?"

Again Vorst's suppositions proved correct.

"We knew Earth was inhabited by intelligent beings, but we believed them to possess greater scientific knowledge than ourselves, making them insuperable. We therefore avoided your planet; although we found that the creatures on Mars, despite their learning, were small in number and easily conquered."

Bodin marvelled at the cleverness of Vorst's reasoning. But the message was not finished:

"Sometimes we doubted whether the people of Earth, though great in numbers, were as powerful as we imagined. The impression we receive from our cursory examination of you is that we were mistaken. If Madden's brain is an average specimen, you and your kind are far inferior to us and will be easily subdued."

"But first we intend to study you more intently and make you the subject of a few preliminary experiments. We shall observe what effect our various weapons have upon you. Bacteria, we think, may prove the most effective, especially the bacteria of this planet..."

The terrestrials stood aghast at the import of the dread message; at the horrible fate in store, not only for them, but for the whole of Earth's millions. Ruth lurched forward heavily on Bodin's arm as she passed a trembling hand over her eyes, shutting out the evil words. He caught her as she swooned, then lifted her and carried her limp form to a low couch in the corner of the room.

"The devils!" Vorst muttered, a murderous gleam in his eye as he took Bodin's place at the machine. Then suddenly the madness passed, his eyes softened, and he was the earnest student again.

"One thing more I wish to know," he wrote. "What are the strange creatures we saw as we passed through the rooms? Not the robots, but the others; are they Venuians?"

"No," was the reply. "They are Martians we have captured and put to work for us—work that the robots cannot do. No Venusian wastes his time in manual labour."

There was a pause during which the screen was blank. Then the final message came:

"You will now be conducted back to your space-ship, where you may remain for a time. On your return, when you will be placed in quarters prepared for you, we shall begin our experiments. Your guards will bring to you anything you require; and remember—there is no escape."

The words dissolved, and immediately the door opened to admit their robot escort. Slowly, with dragging footsteps, the doomed terrestrials made their way back to the Ad Astra, Bodin supporting the half-conscious girl.
CHAPTER V

The Holocaust

They were spared the long climb to the surface, for the space-ship had been moved, by means of the attractive rays, to the bottom of one of the vast pits which led to the underground city. They went back, too, by a more direct route than that by which they had come, catching a glimpse of the immense transparent roof spreading dome-like over the metropolis.

It was through this roof that they had first sighted the city as they dropped through the clouds above, although they had not thought it was actually beneath the surface of the planet. And when they had landed on the pitted outskirts of the city, the flat, low-lying dome was invisible to them.

But they were too tired, too full of thoughts of their dismal future, to recapitulate when they arrived back in the space-ship. Even their impending fate was forgotten for a time, while they were wrapped in soothing sleep.

Though when at last they awoke, mentally and physically refreshed, it was to a greater realisation of their own wretched plight and the disaster that threatened their native planet.

“We must do something!” Bodin determined. “Don’t you realise, Vorst? The destiny of mankind may depend upon us three!” Although thoughts of Ruth’s immediate safety were uppermost in his mind.

“I know,” said Vorst. “We have a great responsibility on our shoulders. Graham was right; ours was indeed a voyage of death. Death, not only for ourselves, but perhaps for the whole of humanity. . . . Nevertheless, it was—and still is—a great adventure. I wouldn’t have missed it for anything.”

“Can’t we make a break for it?” Bodin was desperate. “Far better to die in an attempt to get away than to suffer a lingering death at the hands of those fiends—if they have hands”}

Vorst paced the width of the compartment, stopping now and then to stare through the windows of the spaceship, through which the amber light shone dimly. Bodin and the girl sat together, hands tightly clasped, watching his nervous movements.

“Even if we discharged all our rockets, the Ad Astra would not budge an inch,” he reminded them, softly. “Besides, it is not enough that we should escape; the menace would still exist. There is only one thing to do. We must destroy the city.”

Bodin stared at him. “But—but how can we—”

“It is quite simple, really. The city is run by electricity; so are the robots. It is the robots that we have to contend with. We have not yet seen any of their masters, and I think I know why. They have not revealed themselves to us because they do not want us to know how weak they are physically, quite apart from their mental powers.

“I believe the Venusians are so feeble that they are unable to do manual labour, and have to depend on the robots to do everything for them. It is the robots, therefore, who would prevent our escape. But they in turn are dependent on the power that animates them, and the city. If that power were cut off . . .

“There must be something which controls that power, some complicated machine which acts as the heart and brain of the whole metropolis. If we could stop that machine, we might bring the whole city of machines to a standstill. In the confusion that would result we might then be able to make our escape in the space-ship, which would no longer be chained down by the Venusians’ rays.

“Who knows?” Vorst finished, excitedly. “The Venusians themselves may depend for their existence on the vital electric force!”

The audaciousness of the plan appealed to Bodin; but he shook his head doubtfully.
"Your ideas are usually pretty sound, Vorst. We've had proof of that quite recently. But I'm afraid you'd never be allowed to go near that master machine, even if you could find it. Don't forget that we are prisoners, that we are closely watched, although it seems we can talk without being overheard."

"I have not forgotten," the German replied, confidently. "But I think I can find that machine. If we employ more subtle methods than we have used up to now, just as Ruth suggested, I may be able to get them to take me to the control room——"

He stopped short as a shadow passed across a window, to be followed by others. Then he hissed:

"The robots have come to take us away. We can do nothing yet. But have patience!"

The Master Machine

The heavy inner door of the air-lock swung open. Outside were six robots, their grey foreheads bearing the command to follow. Meekly, the terrestrials obeyed, but with rebellion in their hearts. . . .

They were conducted through a maze of passages once more, and finally, to their new quarters—a room much like the last one they had been in, but containing more couches. There were utterly unlike anything on Earth, and seemed to be made of some strange soft substance. Evidently the Venusians were lovers of comfort.

But Vorst did not look at the couches. His face lighted up when he saw, on entering the room, that it was fitted with a writing machine, complete with receiving screen on the wall. For it was essential to the carrying out of his plan that he should first get in touch with the Venusians.

As the door closed behind the robots, he went straight to the machine and switched it on. Then he wrote on the panel:

"I wish to make one last request before I am used in your experiments, in which, I presume, I shall die. It is the custom on Earth to grant such requests."

The reply came: "It depends on what your request is whether we grant it or not. What is it?"

Bodin, looking over Vorst's shoulder, saw him write: "I am keenly interested in this city of yours. I should like to see more of it, and how it is run."

"Alone?"

"Yes—alone. My friends are not as interested as I."

"Then we will grant your request. Guards will accompany you and act as guides. We shall be interested to observe your reactions."

This last was evidently a reminder to Vorst that he would be kept under strict observation. But he was too elated inwardly to take notice of restrictions. The fact that he could go was enough.

He pulled Bodin aside and whispered in his ear, ignoring the girl's reawakened interest.

"When I have gone, keep trying the door. Sooner or later it should open. When it does, take the girl and run for the space-ship; you can find your way. Don't wait for me, for if I'm not there first I shall not be able to make it at all. Good-by, and good luck!"

Bodin had no time to reply, or even to shake Vorst's hand, before two robots entered the room and led the German away. But there was a lump in his throat. For he knew he would never see him again . . .

Vorst was led down through another maze of tunnels to the heart of the great metropolis. He passed through many halls of massive machinery, the purpose of which was this time explained to him by messages that flashed across the foreheads of the robots. He tried to pretend he was interested, knowing the Venusians were watching his reactions to it all. But his thoughts were centred...
on that master machine for which he sought.

His heart beat faster when at length they came to a colossal chamber, bigger than any of the rest, the walls of which shook with the vibration of a score of great dynamos. In the centre was a gigantic machine, shining like silver, and towering its bulk high up to the roof. Dozens of robots worked around it, and on a platform at the top a small group of them stood before a huge control panel covered with levers.

Across the face of one of Vorst’s strange escort ran messages, confirming his suspicions and sending his pulse racing with wild excitement:

“This is where the city gets its power and strength from. That central machine is the heart and brain of the whole metropolis; all the other machines depend upon it and are controlled by it. Were it to stop, the machines which supply the city with light, heat and air would stop also.

“Ten robots work constantly upon the platform above, guarding the controls at our directions. Some of those levers on the control board govern the air supply, others the lighting, while some control the robots themselves. Thus we have robots controlling robots, guided by ourselves. It is a triumph of machinery; man of Earth . . .”

Slowly they ascended to the narrow platform; but Vorst was thinking at lightning speed as he went upward. This was the master machine, the machine that controlled everything, the heart and brain of the whole vast system. These levers controlled the power which animated the robots, which worked the sliding doors and the writing machines—which anchored the Ad Astra to this alien planet!

The messages still flashed in praise of the vast machine: “So important is it that it is protected by an electrical barrier. . . . We shall build such marvellous machines on Earth when we take it from you, to create a great race on that world of yours, a race far superior to mankind. . . .”

The Escape

Vorst smiled to himself as he stood before the control board of the master machine. The fate of the whole human race depended now upon him, and him alone. He stood for a moment, eyes closed, breathing a silent prayer. Then every nerve of his being tensed as he threw himself forward.

He seized the nearest lever and swung it round. Two of the robots clawed at him from behind. He whirled about and smashed his fists into their faces, bringing them crashing to the floor. Instantly, the others were upon him, but before they could grasp him with their many arms he had seized another lever and thrown it over.

The machine-men hesitated, arms outstretched, then tottered and fell in a heap at his feet. Vorst let out a yell of triumph. For the second lever controlled the machine which gave life to the robots; never since their creation had that machine stopped—until now.

Throughout the entire city the robots staggered and collapsed, their vital force cut off. The enslaved Martians stood aghast at the spectacle of their guards falling lifeless about them. The machines had failed! Such a catastrophe was unknown on Venus. But to them it was a glorious opportunity, for it meant that they were free. Free to wreak vengeance on their unseen captors, who were helpless without the robots.

Shrieking horribly, the Martians ran in all directions through the city, combing those parts from which they had been barred, in search of the Venusians. “Death to the unseen tyrants!” was the cry. “Death to the Venusians!”

Meanwhile, Vorst, without the robots to restrain him, was frenziedly throwing over lever after lever, all unknow-
ing of the damage he was causing. For although there was as yet no outward sign of the fact, his movement of the first lever had stopped the renewing of the city's air supply, and the remaining air was being slowly consumed. Eventually it would become too foul to breathe. But Vorst would have finished his destructive work long before that...

He was enjoying himself now. Shouting exultantly, he went the whole length of the control board, tugging at the heavy levers. His blood surged in a mad desire to smash things.

Fury lending him strength, he picked up one of the inert robots and hurled it down on the silver machine. A terrific explosion rent the thin air, accompanied by a blinding flash.

The platform shivered as Vorst, knocked off his fret, rolled to its edge and fell over. He grabbed wildly at a stanchion, missed, and as the platform collapsed, went hurtling down towards the machine, a dozen robots tumbling after him.

There was a series of flashes, followed by a thunderous burst of flying metal, as the master machine disrupted itself like a great exploding shell.

The amber light flickered and went out. The dying hum of the dynamos was lost in the tumult of sound which filled the vast hall of smashing machinery. Vorst died as he had always wanted to die, in a supreme burst of glory...

Yet because of the distance and the howling of the Martian hordes, the noise of the explosion did not reach the ears of Bodin and the girl, who, freed from their prison, were speeding through the dim-lit tunnels towards the space-ship. On the strength of making good their escape, Bodin had memorised the way, and they had managed to reach the straight passage leading to the bottom of the pit before the light failed.

Ruth clung to him, panting, as in a final burst of speed they ran the length of the tunnel, arms outstretched in front of them. Until at last they could make out the vague outline of the Ad Astra in the darkness.

As he staggered through the air-lock, pushing the fainting girl before him, Bodin wondered whether there was enough power in the rocket-tubes to take the ship beyond the gravitational pull of the planet. But there was no time to consider such trifles. They must risk everything in this one chance of escape.

He lifted the girl into her hammock, then bent over and kissed her pale cheek. It was no easy task to do the work of four men in preparing for the launch into space; but after an interval of ten minutes he was ready to pull the lever.

A roar like the rushing of a mighty wind swept through the tunnels on either side of the shaft, and the spaceship shot out of the pit like a shell from some colossal gun, with greater speed than any Venusian vessel had ever done.

It rose above a plain littered with the remnants of air vehicles that had crashed to the ground when the power which propelled them had been extinguished. It shot into a sky turned red with the angry flames that consumed the city below, melting the great sheltering dome and completing the destruction a lone Earth man had started, removing for ever the threat to his planet.

Then it plunged into the clouds.
He Seemed Only a Freak—a Dwarf—But He Was a Thousand Years Before His Time

The Freak

As the visitor mounted the tall stone steps, he glanced about the front of the house, reflected on the ugliness of Georgian architecture, then passed between the massive pillars into the long porch, with its ornamental ironwork and coloured glass. Arriving at the huge front door, he paused for a moment to recover his breath, then placed a delicately gloved forefinger on the white bell-push in its disc of brass.

The man at the door gave a little cry and shrank back. His heart gave a curious leap.

Instantly, the door had opened. That, of course, was what he wanted; he had rung the bell for just that purpose. But it was the extreme promptness of the door’s response that startled him. It was as if he had touched some hidden spring, or the door were a thing alive.

Only for a second was he visibly disturbed, then he pulled himself together. He became less of a human being and more an imitator of a pattern. Slim, erect, calm, white-haired and faultlessly dressed—an English gentleman.

It was a boy who had opened the door, or so he thought at first; a slim boy, five feet tall, in evening dress. The boy had a large head—very large—and the visitor saw at once that his smooth, black hair was a wig. Then he met the boy’s eyes, and shivered.

They were huge eyes, nearly double the normal length and width. There was barely room for them on the face, so that they almost met.

A freak, thought the visitor. The large head on the small, delicate body; the absence of hair and the huge eyes could belong only to the most curious freak, for this boy was old enough to have reached a full man’s stature. He looked healthy, and his huge eyes gazed at the visitor with frank curiosity.

He was somehow very likeable, perhaps because of the openness of his childish stare, and the cheery redness of his cheeks and lips.
“Mr. Ben Posset?” asked the freak. His voice had neither the high-pitched quality of a boy nor the deep strength of a man. It was soft and musical, like an organ heard in the distance. “Come in. Mr. Howlett is expecting you.”

Posset surrendered his hat and gloves to the freak, who turned and ran along the hall and up the stairs. He was so light and swift that he made practically no noise. His feet twinkled over the polished floor.

That would partly explain the prompt opening of the door, thought Posset, as he slowly followed. Bare, polished boards were beneath his feet. Three years ago, he remembered, there had been a deep carpet there. There were more pictures on the walls then, too, and more furniture about. Howlett must have fallen on bad times; but so had many other people these last few years. Even Posset himself, to some extent....

He heard his name called, and a man ran out of a room to the head of the stairs. At sight of him, Posset began to wish he hadn’t come.

For this man was untidy. His chin was dark with unshaven beard, and his hair was in disorder. He had become much fatter than when Posset had seen him last. When the visitor mounted the stairs and stood before him, he saw that his clothes were badly crumpled, that his face was white from spending too much time indoors, and his eyes looked as though he had been drinking heavily and persistently. Altogether, he was a very different man from the Howlett of yesteryear, the specialist in obscure diseases.

**Howlett Talks About Glands**

“Posset!” he called. “So glad you’ve come.” He sounded tremulously eager.

“Pleased to see you, old man,” responded Posset mechanically.

An effusive Howlett shepherded him into the drawing-room. This floor, Posset remembered, was all drawing-room, except for the conservatory. The drawing-room was shaped like a fat letter L, some former tenant having apparently knocked two rooms into one to make it.

But the room he entered was quite a small one. He saw that a partition had been put across, shutting off this arm of the L. Heavy velvet curtains had formerly hung where varnished panelling was now. Thus shut off, the room became dark and gloomy. It looked out at the back of the house, on to the roofs of the mews. How could a man prefer such an outlook to the flowers and playing children in Regent’s Park?

The massive mahogany piano was gone, as had the settee on which a horse might have stretched itself. In their place was a table and a desk, both badly worn and littered with papers, bottles, packages and queer-shaped knives. The bookcase was full of medical works, except for the lowest shelf, which con-
tained more bottles and test-tubes.

On the whole, the room was clean and tidy, but according to a man’s ideas of cleanliness and tidiness. It had none of that bright homeliness that shows a woman’s touch.

The two huge armchairs remained, one on each side of the dummy fireplace. Howlett sprawled in one of these, while Posset sat in the other, his stiff little figure seeming to ridicule the size and comfort of the chair.

“Drink?” said Howlett. “Sorry I can’t offer you any of the drinks I used to keep. Got some fair whisky, though. Quite a kick in it.”

Leaning over the arm of his chair and opening a cupboard, he took out a bottle and glasses. They drank.

“I had some doubt whether you’d come,” observed Howlett. “But I thought I could trust old Pussy. Pussy will come, I told myself.”

Posset started slightly on hearing the nickname of his boyhood. “Always pleased to see an old schoolfellow,” he replied.

“Yes, the Alma Mater.” Howlett seemed a shade disappointed at the other’s tone. “We were boys together. How long ago it seems! Then there was the matter of your nephew.”

“Yes; Archibald. I shall always be grateful for that.”

“Perfectly simple case. Stunted development, low mentality. Under-activity of the thyroid gland. How is he now?”

“Quite normal. Fine young man. Married three months ago.”

“Really? I hadn’t heard. Congrats. You know, Pussy, when I took up my specialisation in glandular troubles I had no idea where it would lead me. I went further and further into it. Investigated on my own. I always had a passion for research, hadn’t I?”

“I remember you causing a dickens of a mess in the stinks room.”

“Yes, I was working on a idea of my own. The retort exploded. Old Collis was wild, wasn’t he?”

“But to come back to glands. . . . Wonderful things, glands. Ductless glands, pouring mysterious substances into the blood. They are the sergeant-majors of the body. A man is not an individual, you know; he is a nation, an army, consisting of millions upon millions of cells. How do they all know what to do? How to grow, where to grow, when not to grow? From the orders of the glands—the mysterious chemicals sent by them . . .”

Howlett’s Experiment

POSSET moved uneasily. “We went into this before. We discussed it when we talked over the case of Archibald.”

“All right, I’ll cut it short. It’s not often I get anybody to talk to, Pussy, and when I do my enthusiasm carries me away. I have to be very careful what I say to Jack.” His voice sank, conspirator-like, at these last words.

“Jack—?”

“That young fellow you saw. The dwarf,” explained Howlett.

“I’ve done wonderful things with glands, Pussy,” he went on. “Found out marvellous things. All the wonderful knowledge of medical science—all that is just a beginning, a glimmering of light, compared with what I have found out. I can cure lunacy; I can cure cancer; I can cure nearly all diseases. I can double the span of human life! Nearly all our troubles, I find, are due to a deficiency of some gland—even old age. I can put them right.”

He took another drink, and noticed how unbelieving Posset looked.

“You think I exaggerate? But that’s not all I can do.” His excited voice sank again to a whisper.

“I can speed up evolution. But I’ll come to that presently . . .

“Three of the glands are in the head, one above another. There is the pineal, in the centre of the brain, the pituitary
beneath the brain, and the thyroid in the throat.

"I published my first discoveries. Remember that? No, of course you wouldn't. I was ridiculed, by stupid old fogies who couldn't see an inch before their noses. I had published too soon, and some of my conclusions were a trifle hasty. After that I was cautious. I decided to keep everything dark until I was quite ready, until I had all the facts in my hands, because already I had inklings of how this thing was opening out.

"I had no idea, though, how big a job I was tackling. Already it has taken me over twenty years, and it's not quite finished yet. Other men have blundered on odd points in my work and become famous. While I knew most of the alphabet, they only found a letter here and there. I could afford to smile and wait.

"My practice dwindled. I had lost interest in it. I had also annoyed several influential old fools by pointing out their stick-in-the-mud ignorance. That did me much harm.

"Three years ago I gave up my practice and devoted myself entirely to research. I needed all my time, you see. Things had become fascinating, and there were points I had to be always watching. There was—danger. . . .

"I had investments to live on, but they dwindled too, somehow. I can't quite understand it. Everybody talks about a depression, but I haven't been able to spare much time for the outside world.

"But I rubbed along. I sold some of my furniture and packed off all the servants but one old woman. Then when Jack came I told her I should not want her any more. Quite useful, Jack has been—"

He stopped suddenly, listening. Then—

"It's all right. He's upstairs, tending to the animals. Couldn't hear him for the moment."

"Animals?"

"Dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea-pigs. What I experiment on."

"Ah, that accounts for the noises I've been hearing. Mewing, whining, and so on. And that's why the blinds were drawn on the second floor," said Posset slowly, wondering.

"Monkeys tore the curtains down," explained Howlett, dismissing them with a wave of his hand. "What I've been trying to do is to produce animals with intelligence; animals able to work problems in arithmetic, understand all sorts of orders, and make simple drawings with blackboard and chalk, like the trained animals one sees at the circus, only very much better. I had a dog able to do all those things."

"A dog that could do arithmetic?"

"Yes; almost human, Bill was, with his big, expressive eyes. Yet, but for me, he would have been just one of those dirty black-and-white mongrels you can count by the thousand in London."

The Man of 2950

"But how did you do it?" demanded Posset.

"Thyroid gland extracts. You know that if you feed a young tadpole with thyroid extract, you can make it turn into a toad in a few days. You speed up the development, but not the growth. Toads can be produced no bigger than flies, that way.

"That was how I started. I produced dwarf cats, dwarf dogs, dwarf canaries, dwarf all sorts of things. Nothing useful in that, of course, nothing but scientific curiosities; but I was finding out more and more about glands, especially thyroid glands.

"I began to meddle, to try this and that. Presently I was producing all sorts of freaks. I got a cat with three eyes, a dog that walked on its hind legs, a canary with teeth. I couldn't understand why, at first, then I realised that I was meddling with the forces of evo-
ution. I began to ask myself, 'Why not do it deliberately?'

"Here was I, playing about with a great natural force, blindly and hap-hazardly. Why not do it systematically? What, for instance, is the next step in the evolution of the dog? Will it become as intelligent as man himself, or will all the canine race sink to the level of lap-dogs? Will they remain the servants of man, or will they break free?

"Fascinating questions, Pussy.... What of man himself? What will he be like in a thousand years' time? I have been twenty years trying to answer those questions."

"And Jack is your human experiment?"

"Yes. He represents the man of 2950 A.D. about. Did you notice his eyes?"

"Notice them?" replied Posset, shivering. "They gave me a nasty shock. It wasn't only their size; it was the way they looked at me. Sort of patient and enquiring, as if they saw everything.

"You know the feeling some doctors give one, of being able to see right into you? Of seeing your liver and kidneys and all the rest of you? Well, it was like that, only much worse. He seemed to be thinking, 'Miserable specimen, this!'"

"'H'm. So Jack gave you the shivers, did he?" said Howlett. "He does with some people. Queer, how many people can't meet an honest, friendly, open gaze. Jack wouldn't hurt a fly, you know.

"'Wonder why his eyes are so big,' he mused. "I suppose the man of the future will use his eyes a lot. We do, you know, more than we realise. Reading, writing, driving cars, at the cinema or theatre, watching games—always we are using our eyes. It seems that the eyes of our remote descendants will expand to meet the demand on them.

"'Imagine it, man! Imagine a world peopled entirely by beings like Jack. Your descendants, and mine, too. Seems revolting, does it? But imagine how you would look to your own ancestors of ten thousand years ago, and how they would appear to you—hairy, dirty, smelly, bestial. And our descendants—"

"Didn't you know I had any descendants? I haven't yet; but I shall have! Don't laugh. I'll get 'em out of those bottles. Don't you see how?" He laughed, hoarsely.

"Youth, health and wealth. The three blessings of mankind, and all in those bottles, Pussy. Come, let's drink to them. Come on, come on! Here's to youth! Here's to health! Here's to wealth! Ah——!"

He lay back with eyes closed. Suddenly he opened them again and sat up.

"Do you doubt me? 'Pon my word, I believe you do!"

He seemed to reflect, then continued, his eyes bright with cunning: "See here, Pussy, how would you like to be a young man again? Black hair instead of white. Get rid of those wrinkles. Take an interest in young girls again? Yes, and be attractive to them, too. Eh, Pussy? What do you say to that?"

Posset's reasoning powers were gone, drowned in drink, in the stuffy, smoky air of the room, and in the curious animal smells that seeped into the place. Howlett seemed like some horrible fat ogre. Once let that fellow get his claws into my brain, he thought, dazedly, and I'm done. I must watch him. I'll find some excuse to go presently. If I tried to get away now... He's a big fellow—and there's Jack. How many other queer servants has the fellow got? I wonder.

A Proposition

HOWLETT lurched across the room. He rummaged in the desk, taking out small bottles and putting them back.

"Here you are." He produced a tiny bottle filled with green fluid. "Youth re-newer; guaranteed. Not much of it, eh? Ah, but you don't need much of
these things. Enough for fifty doses, there.

"It can be taken in two ways; by drinking in water, or by injection. Injection is best as it gives quicker and more lasting results, for the stomach juices have a way of reducing its potency. Of course, I could operate directly on your pineal and thyroid glands the same as I did with Jack. That would be a really lasting job, but I don't suppose you'd care to take that risk yet. . . ."

"Now what do you say? Just a little prick on the arm? You would hardly feel it."

Once let him get his claws into my brain, thought Posset. . . . Where does he get his gland extract? From dead men—or live ones?

"Would it—would it upset me?" he ventured. "I am in a very low state of health at the moment. I remember Archibald——"

"Well, possibly you might be slightly unwell; a little sick, perhaps. But it would soon pass off. You'd be quite all right, say, by to-morrow evening."

Heaven-sent excuse. "Then I really can't, to-day. I have a very important engagement to-morrow, and really must be at my best. I'd be delighted, say, Thursday. How would that suit you?"

His host looked disappointed. "I don't believe you. You're afraid. Oh, well, if you won't let me prove my claims that way, I'll have to find some other way of convincing you. . . ."

He pulled his chair closer. "Now see here. These are my plans. Listen carefully. You and I have got to start a nursing home, convalescent home, home for invalids—anything. We'd keep our methods secret and receive wealthy patients, hopelessly ill, at death's door and all that sort of thing. Then we'd send them out a month later, fit as fiddles. Turn 'em into young men and women, too, while we are about it. What do you say to that? Four cases like that, and our names are made.

"Or we could do it some other way. Advertise. A cure for cancer, rejuvenation—anything. Biggest medical discovery ever known. Only—and this is the point, Pussy—all our patients would have to come back to us every month for renewed treatment. I can make it fatal to miss a dose. Get me?

"We can stick the price up. Hundreds of wealthy persons will be under our thumbs, knowing that if they offend us we shall leave them to die. Rightly handled, we can become millionaires, we can rule the country, dictate to governments. . . . Only, I must have money to start with."

"So," said Posset, thickly, "you planned to get me under your thumb, did you?"

"Oh, no!" Howlett sounded oddly unconvincing. "I wouldn't think of it. You'll be my partner. Posset and Howlett. Couldn't you fork up a couple of thousand to help an old schoolfellow? Look on it as an investment. . . ."

"Oh, all right! If you won't give me the money I'll get it somehow, even if I turn myself into a circus troupe. Professor Howlett and his performing dogs. Or performing cats. . . . Cats would be more novel. You wouldn't drive an old schoolfellow to that, would you, Pussy?"

Posset tried to shake his head free of fumes.

"Give me time. Your proposition is so startling; it needs thinking over. Don't rush me. Things like this are not to be rushed into. You forget that all this is new to me. You have been thinking it over for a long time. It's got me—bewildered. Give me a couple of days to think. . . . But first I want proof. Up to now you've shown me no proof, Howlett. Jack is proof, I suppose, in a way; but Jack alone is not enough."

Eleanor

HOWLETT puffed at his pipe for a while, frowning, an ugly gleam in his eyes.

"So you don't mean to help me, eh?" he muttered, his voice becoming more
and more threatening.

Posset, alarmed, jumped to his feet. "Really, I must be going now. I can't stay any longer."

"You'll stay exactly where you are," Howlett shouted at the top of his voice, waving an arm and pointing to the chair. Then, as Posset stood, undecided, a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he laughed queerly.

"You shall meet Eleanor," he declared. "She'll give you all the proof you need; enough proof for anybody. ... Eleanor!" he called in a shrill voice, then gave a long, high-pitched whistle.

Posset could not make up his mind whether to make another protest or open the door and try to walk out. If he took the latter course it seemed obvious that Howlett would detain him by force, and probably this Eleanor would be waiting outside the door.

He wondered who Eleanor could be, and remembered thinking, when he first came in, that there could be no woman in the house. This man, he reflected, had such a strange way of naming his creations. His super-intelligent dwarf he called simply Jack; the super-dog, Bill. Who could Eleanor be?

Now I'm taking Howlett at his word and believing everything he tells me, he thought. One part of his brain believed Howlett implicitly, and was terrified, while another part wanted to laugh at the whole thing as a silly tale invented to get money out of him. He did not know which to believe.

Slip-slop; Flip-flop! Something light was coming down the stairs, something that moved with a dry sliding noise, like the rustling of dead leaves. Howlett flung open the door and whistled again.

"Come in, Eleanor! There, what do you think of her, Pussy? Persuasive little brute, eh?"

Posset looked, but saw nothing. Howlett shut the door. What extraordinary obsessions could be filling the man's brain? he wondered. Then he heard the dry sliding noise again, and saw that Howlett's gaze was directed at the floor.

The sinuous form of Eleanor was stretched along the floor, all beautiful colours, gentle curves and swift, graceful movement. Eleanor was a snake—a cobra, about two feet long. He knew her for a cobra at once, because of the hood with the markings on it. He knew, too, that the cobra was one of the most poisonous reptiles in the world.

"Eleanor," said Howlett, pointing at Posset, "this is Pussy."

The reptile's head moved as though it understood, and it moved up to the shrinking Posset, almost affectionately.

"Climb up Pussy's legs," commanded Howlett, and though Posset jumped hastily back, the reptile, in the swift, effortless way that snakes have, moved quicker and slithered up to him, coiling its cold, scaly body round his legs.

Posset, badly scared, raised a hand to beat it off.

"Don't slap her," exclaimed Howlett sharply, "or I won't be responsible for the results; and put your hand down in case she thinks you are going to."

He surveyed the pair with a grin, gloating over Posset’s fear. "Now will you write me out a cheque?" he demanded.

"All right. I give in," said Posset weakly. "But I haven’t my cheque-book with me."

"That doesn’t matter. A plain piece of paper will do."

As he turned to get writing materials, the door opened again, and Jack, the little man with the big head and eyes looked in. Is this another of these creatures come to frighten me? thought Posset wildly.

The man of the future looked round sadly and knitted his brows at the plight Posset was in. "Eleanor, come!" he called in his soft voice, holding out a hand.

**The Vison**

Oh, BEDIENTLY, the deadly snake detached its coils from Posset's body, and at Jack’s command
went away through the door to regions unknown.

Howlett had whirled round at Jack's voice, and stood now looking abashed, like a child caught stealing sweets.

"I was only trying to get the money we need," he defended himself.

"Your methods," said Jack dryly, "are rather drastic. Sit down." As Howlett did so, as obediently as the snake had obeyed his commands, Jack turned to Posset.

"I must apologise to you for your fright," he said. "Eleanor's poison glands were taken out by myself many months ago, so that she could not harm you; but the idea of his using her like this had not occurred to me. I have been very busy, and have not been able to give my friend the attention I should have done. I see that I shall have to watch him more closely in future."

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Posset weakly, dropping into a chair and mopping his brow.

"It is a long story," said Jack, evenly. "Your friend, Howlett, is a genius in medical research, and with some assistance from myself, has made many wonderful discoveries in the working of the ductless glands that control the growth, development and working of the body. I myself am one of his experiments.

"There is no doubt that between us we can do an enormous amount of good in the world, both in the removal of pain and ill-health and in the development of super-intelligent men and women to solve many of the problems that perplex mankind."

"Then what he told me was true?"

"Some of it, but not all. He has been working too hard of late and has had something of a nervous breakdown, so that he exaggerates a little, and gets wild ideas. We need money, both for skilled aid to nurse him back to health, and to enable us to start our convalescent home, of which he no doubt has told you. Can we count on you to help us?"

Then a vision came to Posset, a beautiful vision of a world freed from ill-health and the blundering stupidity of greed; a world of beautiful men and women, all superbly healthy and intelligent, living and working happily together. As he looked into the open gaze of Jack's huge, brooding eyes, he knew that this was not a wild dream, but a possibility—a thing that could be, and should be; that he could help to bring about.

He saw himself as a famous benefactor of mankind. "You shall have the money," he said, "and I'll make the cheque out to you personally."

* * *

AFTER he had given his promise, Posset had no clear recollection of what happened. Things were, to him, vague and disjointed, with no proper sequence of events. The excitement, the fright, and many strange things he had seen and heard, produced a sense of bewilderment in his brain, and he was no longer able to think clearly.

Vaguely, he knew that he was in a taxi, but could not recollect who had sent for it or where it was taking him. Then he found himself ringing the bell at his home and being let in; and presently he was writing out a cheque and handing it to a sleepy housemaid with orders that it was to be posted at once.

After that he knew nothing until he woke up with a start at about four a.m. and tried, his brain clear at last, to piece together his ideas of what had happened and what he had done.

The light of a street lamp shone through his bedroom window, throwing the pattern of the curtains on the ceiling and shedding an uncertain light on his clothes, which he seemed to have thrown with an unusual carelessness on to a chair. He could hear the slow, heavy tread of a policeman on his beat outside; but otherwise, all was dark and silent.

What have I done? he wondered.

He had sent a cheque for two thou-
sand pounds to a curious creature, a monstrosity, a freak created by his one-time friend, Howlett. It was not like Posset to give money away.

Why did I do it? he asked himself. Was it because he had been so relieved to be free from the snake—the intelligent cobra he remembered with a shudder—or was it simply that he had been so impressed with the story the dwarf had told of the tremendous good that Howlett and he could work in the world?

He knew that neither of these things could wholly account for his action.

“It was his eyes,” he said aloud, and somehow it seemed to relieve his mind of a problem. Those huge eyes of Jack’s; there seemed to be something magnetic about them, as though their owner, being evolved to a stage of mental power far beyond that usual to the 20th century, could bend others to his will by gazing at them.

Then I have been robbed, he thought. There was plenty of time to stop the cheque before the bank opened. For a time he played with this idea, but he knew that he would not do it. He was afraid of Howlett, with his intelligent dogs and snakes, and still more afraid of Jack, with his extraordinary mental powers—probably, he suspected, much greater than either Howlett or he knew yet.

Jack, he decided, was likely to be a tremendous power in the world, with his knowledge, his power of influencing men against their will, and the subtle strength of his mind. Would that supermind be used for good or ill?

Jack could build, or he could destroy. He could build a new civilisation, far more wonderful than the one we knew at present, or he could smash and destroy. Probably, thought Posset, he did not yet realise more than a fraction of his powers. The money that Posset had just sent to him would be the means of bringing him out of his seclusion, out into the world of men, where those powers would be used . . . for good or ill.

Suddenly Posset raised his clenched fist to his face, as though to shield his eyes from a blow.

“My God! Have I done right, or have I done wrong?” he cried in a hoarse voice.

It was the first time he had spoken to his Maker for thirty years.
MONSTERS OF THE MOON

By

FRANCIS PARNELL

A Young Star-Gazer Pits His Strength Against the Colossal Fauna of the Moon, Where Water is More Precious Than Gold

Under the Spinning Earth

It was a place of deathly stillness... Harry Johnson, young recruit to the great Lunar Observatory, found the strange silence a little frightening. The Earth, now so far distant, had always been full of noise and movement; but the Moon seemed for ever wrapped in a sombre cloak of lifelessness.

Johnson's face was covered by a canvas mask and his hands with light gloves, to protect him from sunburn. Beside him the enormous telescope sloped up like some monstrous cannon to the glass dome of the observatory, towering around him like a gigantic soap bubble.

Like a bubble, too, that fragile structure would have burst had it been on Earth; but here on the Moon, where all things weighed less than a sixth of their Earth weight and there were no winds, it was as firm as the rock on which it was built.

The Sun was rising, and making a very slow job of it. For three days Johnson had watched its upward crawl and the gradual shortening of the inky shadows. It would be another four days yet before it reached its highest point in the sky.

Outside the observatory, those jagged rocks which lay in the shade were unthinkably cold—hundreds of degrees below zero—while those in the sunshine were at furnace heat. The Sun itself was blue and twice as bright as it seemed from Earth, while the sky was jet black and the stars glittered with a brightness that hurt the eyes—all because there was so little air.

Earth was half full, looking sixteen times as big as the Sun, steadily spinning in her fixed place in the sky...

A telephone bell interrupted Johnson's thoughts. Glad even of this break in the deadly monotony, he lifted the receiver, placed it to his hooded head.

"Harry Johnson speaking," he announced, "Look-out at Observa-
tory A, in the Gulf of Dew.”

“What, Johnson,” came the reply. “Tycho Crater look-out speaking. I have an urgent message for you. A herd of flying bulls, about ten in number, has been sighted on the plain between us, moving rapidly in your direction. Will you warn the people at the settlement and the mine to watch in case the bulls pass close to them?”

Johnson replied, grimly: “Thanks! I’ll warn all stations at once. The bulls are not visible from here yet.”

As he promptly passed on the warning to the settlement and the mine, his face wore an anxious look, yet in his eyes was the light of keen curiosity. When first he set foot on Earth’s satellite he had heard of the “flying bulls,” but up to now he had never actually seen any of them.

Yet he knew that these great lunar monsters, something like the extinct buffalo of Earth, but many times bigger than elephants, were one of the gravest problems the settlers on the Moon had to contend with. Actually, they did not fly, but covered the ground in tremendous leaps, their immense bulk scarcely affected by the slight gravitation.

Ordinarily they lived in the vast lunar craters, where there was air, vegetation and moisture sufficient to sustain them. But like the few other surviving species of lunar life, they were so constituted that they could venture out on the airless plains to seek fresh herbage in other craters.

It was on these mercifully rare occasions that they became a menace to the adventurous souls of Earth who had come to work in the great Moon mines or observatories. For in spite of their reduced weight, the hurrying forms of the massive beasts could smash any flimsy structure that was in their path.

To the Rescue

After entering the warning in his logbook, Johnson went to the eyepiece of the small telescope to see if the approaching herd had yet come into view. The observatory was built high up on the rocks, but he could see for only a comparatively short distance owing to the sharp curvature of the lunar surface.

The landscape was nothing but barren rocks with jagged edges and bottomless ravines. In the Sun they shone dazzlingly, but the shadows were an intense black, softened only by the pale earthlight. As he gazed, it occurred to Johnson that whoever had named this place the Gulf of Dew must have a quaint sense of humour. For, like all the Moon, it consisted of nothing but naked rock; there was no air, no moisture of any sort, except for what lingered at the bottom of the deep craters.

Directly in his line of vision was a small collection of settlers’ houses, built of heat-resisting metal to withstand the pitiless glare of the Sun. Away to his right was the mine which supplied
them, not with valuable minerals, but ice. But for that mine none of the settlements could have existed, for the immense frozen underground lake it tapped was the only source of water that had been found on the Moon.

On the near-by horizon, sharp and jagged as the edge of a saw, and so close that he felt he could reach out and touch it, Johnson saw something move. Swinging his telescope, he picked out two moving grey lumps, and realised that he had caught his first glimpse of the dreaded flying bulls.

Then something else caught his eye: a tiny flashing light in a dark shadow. As he swung the telescope round again, the pin-point of light flickered on and off, and with a start he remembered that half an hour before he had seen a clumsy, space-suited figure coming from that direction. Now, apparently, the occupant of the suit was in trouble. There could be no other explanation for the flickering light.

Picking up an electric torch, Johnson flashed an answering signal through the glass wall of the observatory, then gasped as the answer came, in Morse.

"Harry," the light spelled out. "It's Mary. Come quick. A big rock has fallen on my leg and I can't move."

Johnson crossed the floor of the observatory in two giant strides. Mary Black, daughter of the Chief Engineer at the mine, was among the few women settlers on the Moon who ventured forth in the open more than was absolutely necessary. She often came to visit him at the observatory during his long vigil, for they were firm friends; and the fact that she was in danger made him forget all else, even his duty to guard the great dome.

With a shudder he had realised when he first caught sight of the flashing light that the signaller, whoever it might be, was in deadly peril. But Mary! Her danger was greater than she knew; greater than the slow advance of numbing cold or the possibility of a torn suit allowing her air supply to escape into the vacuum.

For while he was spelling out her message to himself, Johnson had again caught sight of the flying bulls—and they were bearing straight down on the spot where she lay helpless in the shadow!

A double door—for all doors on the Moon are double, to prevent loss of air—admitted him to a room where a dozen space-suits hung on the wall. With trembling fingers, he hastily fitted a metal helmet over his head, drew on a suit of fur and rubber, tightened the connections and made the air-tanks secure under his arm-pits. Then, after assuring himself that the supply was working properly, he put thick fur gloves over the only part of himself still exposed.

The Moon Bouncer

While going through this tedious process, which could not be rushed, he was thinking rapidly, trying to decide how he could best get to the girl in time to save her. The ground between the observatory and where she lay was a treacherous mass of high precipices and yawning crevasses. To make this journey on foot was out of the question. He might take a roundabout route in a caterpillar-wheeled tractor; but even then he would not get there in time.

There was only one way of covering the distance in anything like the time it would take the flying bulls to get there; and that was to ride a Moon bouncer. This would enable him to progress in a series of leaps and bounds, just as the monsters did.

The bouncer was a curious contrivance of rubber and air used by the settlers mainly for sport. It required a great deal of practice to become adept in its use and it became an extremely dangerous toy on anything but a fairly level stretch of ground. But Johnson had spent nearly all his time off duty in
mastering the art of bouncing; and he was prepared to take risks in a situation like this.

Being so keen on the sport, he always kept his bouncer in one of the buildings near the observatory; and he lost no time in getting there. Out through the four exit doors he went, passing through each one as the others closed behind him. Until, once out in the open, where there was practically no air, his suit billowed out around him, giving him the appearance of a stout, furry animal with a shiny metal globe for a head.

The Moon bouncer rested in its rack in the little out-building, a steel-tipped rubber cylinder ten feet high, which he rolled outside and stood against the wall. Climbing on the roof, he entered the tiny compartment at the top of the bouncer and set the machine going.

Down he sank as the bouncer compressed itself, ready to take its first leap upward. Johnson thought he had never known these things take so long to start; and all the time those hurtling beasts were drawing nearer . . .

The rubber cylinder shut itself up like a concertina until it was scarcely a yard high. Then suddenly the machine slipped its catch, allowing the rubber to spring back to normal, and Johnson’s body sank deep into the cushion of air as it bore him aloft.

In the slight gravity and airlessness of the lunar surface these bouncers soared to astonishing heights, bounding along like elongated rubber balls. Johnson found himself high above, looking down on the great glass dome of the observatory. For a moment he hung poised up there; then began the downward plunge, and he steeled himself for the sickening drop.

Human bodies are built for earthly conditions; and even practised bouncer-men like Johnson often felt as they looked down from that tremendous height that they could not fall all that way and live. For the beginner it was a frightful ordeal, for one had to lie on one’s face in the little compartment and keep both hands on the controls.

He seemed to fall at a terrific speed, yet the rocky landscape came up beneath him with almost painful slowness. Then there was a grinding concussion as the steel bottom of the cylinder struck the rocks, crushing him into the soft rubber on which he lay.

A moment later he was shooting upwards again, and he noticed that the bouncer was developing a slight tilt. Carefully, he moved the controls, bringing the cylinder upright before it could overbalance. For if a bouncer inverted itself in its flight and struck the ground upside down it meant almost certain death for the occupant.

His first bounce had carried him about three hundred yards. His second bore him a little farther; and with each subsequent leap he so managed the controls that he bounced a greater distance, though not so high. Soon he had left the observatory far behind and was travelling over tumbled rocks in the direction of where Mary lay.

Leaping Juggernauts

THE metal base of the bouncer crashed down on the smooth space in front of the ice mine, then up again, down again a quarter of a mile beyond, and still on . . . and on . . . . Not far ahead Johnson could see the grey, hairy forms of the Moon beasts rising and falling as they leaped towards him, travelling like kangaroos, but with bounds as huge as his own.

Somewhere between them was Mary. He could not see her yet; but he kept a watchful eye on the rock in whose shade she was hidden. With each leap, he glanced ahead at the approaching monsters and tried to calculate whether he would reach the girl before those hurtling juggernauts descended upon her. Yes; he could just do it, but there would be no time to stop the bouncer and get out . . .

Then his whole attention was taken
up in controlling the bouncer. So rough were the rocks beneath him that he could not find a level stretch on which to descend until he had almost struck the ground. Once he bounded off a sharp slope and rose again so awkwardly that it took him three more bounces to regain proper control.

It was then that he saw that his next bounce would carry him beyond where Mary lay. Straining his eyes, he managed to catch the gleam of the earthlight on her metal helmet as she lay in the black shadows. How cold she must be as the icy touch of those frigid rocks crept through her protective suit!

He saw that the flying bulls were close upon her; a dozen great forms herded closely together, slowly bobbing up and down as they bounded towards him. For a moment he was stricken with panic at the sight of that headlong dash of many hundred tons of flesh. It seemed sheer madness for one puny human being, encased in a rubber cylinder, to oppose such tremendous weight.

The first four beasts bounded harmlessly past the spot where the girl lay helpless; but the rest bore down upon her, and Johnson saw that one would land right on her in its next leap. Bitterly he realised that his vague idea of freeing the girl and dragging her to safety had been impossible from the start. Before he could bring the bouncer to a halt the herd would have passed over both of them.

It was a desperate impulse that led him to guide the bouncer to meet the nearest of the remaining beasts, as it rose in a spring that seemed certain to end in awful death for the girl.

The force of the impact knocked him almost senseless as the bouncer struck the monster in the flank, sending it hurtling sideways to the ground. Though the weight of the machine was nothing to that of the great, shaggy beast, its speed was sufficient to give it a severe jolt and change the course of its downward flight.

But Johnson did not see where it landed. He felt the bouncer slip sideways as it fell after the monster. Then it struck a rough rock awkwardly and rose again in a low somersault.

Hazily he was aware of lying on his back with the bouncer falling upside down. The steel tip pointed to the Earth, hanging in the sky, and for a moment he had the curious feeling that he had bounced off the Moon altogether to fall all those hundreds of thousands of miles to the parent planet . . .

There was no way of knowing how high he was above the tumbled rocks, nor how fast he fell. Expert though he was, it was impossible for him to turn the bouncer the right way up before it struck the ground; he had fallen too far for that.

Above him loomed the huge bulk of the last of the flying bulls as it leaped after its fellows. The shock could not be far off. He tensed himself and held his breath.

There came the thud of rubber on rock, and the bouncer changed its course. It had struck a sharp pinnacle of rock a glancing blow which had torn a huge gash in its side.

A moment later, it hit something squarely, yet not with the annihilating crash Johnson expected. Instead, it seemed to meet something soft; then it slowed up and stopped.

All was dark and silent . . .

The Lake of Ash

A t first he thought he must have fallen into a lake; then he remembered that there was no such thing on the Moon. Soon he realised that, by an amazing stroke of luck, he had come down on one of those huge stretches of volcanic ash that dotted the surface of the Moon.

When Earth's satellite was young, her volcanoes belched forth lava and light ashes like those that buried Pompeii. Without winds to scatter
them, great heaps of these ashes still remained, to be disturbed only when some lunar animal burrowed into them to sleep through the long night.

Johnson remembered that some of these lakes of feathery ash were as dangerous as quicksands. Whether he could get out of this one or not depended on the weight of the ash. If the particles were light and loosely packed he might be able to struggle out of the bouncer and reach solid rock.

He tried the door of the compartment. It would only open a little way; but as he scraped the ash into the bouncer with his hands, he found that it had been rammed tight by the impact. Soon he came to where it was loose, enabling him to open the door wide enough to provide an exit.

Hopefully he began to burrow his way through the ash like a mole, pushing it behind him into the compartment, until at length a pale grey light filtered down to where he floundered about beneath the surface. Then he paused awhile to rest. The space-suit was big and cumbersome, and he was very hot inside it.

He did not stop for long. For despite his own perilous position, he had not forgotten the girl's plight up above. Would he be able to escape this insufferable heat and reach the solid surface before she succumbed to the awful cold?

His renewed struggles were useless, however. For the light above grew dimmer, showing that he was only getting deeper into the ashes. Presently his feet touched something solid; it was evidently the rocky bottom of the lake of ash. He breathed a prayer of thankfulness that at least he could not sink any farther and paused again to recover his breath.

He wondered how much more of this his suit would stand without developing a hole that would let the air out and leave him to suffocate. It was very uncomfortable, he reflected, to be so hot about the head and chest and yet have his feet nearly frost bitten. For the rock beneath seemed as cold as ice, even through his thick, lead-weighted boots.

He thought the deathly silence must be playing him tricks when he seemed to hear someone calling his name. Nevertheless, it stirred him to renewed activity, and he again struggled to free himself from the clinging ashes. But this time he pushed himself forward, following the gentle slope of the bed of rock beneath his feet in the hope that it might lead him to the edge of the lake.

Desperately he struggled, until the light shone brightly above him and at last he realised that his head was above the surface of the ash. Rubbing the dust from the window of his helmet, he looked up and saw the black sky with its glittering stars. A few more steps and he stood at the foot of a towering cliff, while far behind him the great stretch of ash shone in the sun like dusty snow.

Skirting the edge of the lake, he scrambled up the face of a jagged rock and thence to the top of the cliff, which gave him a view of the shadowy regions beyond.

Anxiously, he searched for signs of the helpless girl, praying that she had not only escaped the hurtling monsters, but had managed to withstand the frightful cold. Then he caught sight of her glinting metal helmet, only fifty yards away. The next moment he was taking swift, ten-feet strides towards her.

Her space-suit ed figure lay with a huge rock across one of its legs. He caught a glimpse of her pale face inside the helmet as he flung himself against the farthest end of the rock.

Then he saw her mouth open in a soundless scream as she raised her arm and pointed in the direction in which his back was turned.
The Serpent

He swung round, and gasped in astonishment at what he saw. Making its way over the rocks towards them was a tremendous snake-like creature, a brilliant red in colour, sixty feet long and two feet thick!

Instantly he recognised it as one of the fierce Moon snakes which he had seen before, though not at such unpleasantly close quarters. These monstrous serpents preyed upon the flying bulls; no doubt this had been one of a number which had been pursuing the huge beasts, and having got left behind, had turned its attention to easier prey.

Amazingly agile, they could leap over the rocks like coiled springs, writhe along like the serpents of Earth, or crawl like a centipede on the dozens of legs which lined their long bodies. Usually, their attack was unexpected because of the tumbled landscape, which provided them with numberless hiding places, and the eternal silence that gave no warnings.

But, fortunately, the girl had seen the loathsome creature as it crawled over a rocky crag. Johnson gave it one horrified look, then again put his shoulder to the rock and heaved, motioning to Mary to pull her leg clear. But the girl lay quite still, staring at the approaching monster. Extreme cold had numbed her limbs; she was helpless.

Frantically, Johnson pushed and shoved, until at last the huge boulder overbalanced and rolled out of the way. The snake was not far from them now. Mary tried to stand up, but could not. Feebly she tried to push Johnson away, pointing towards the settlement as though telling him to leave her there and save himself.

For a moment he thought of picking her up and carrying her to safety; but the snake was now only a few yards away. It was travelling slowly as though certain of its prey, but in a second, Johnson knew, it would launch itself at them with lightning speed.

Mary was wearing a belt with space-pistol and ammunition, to guard herself against such terrors as these. In his haste to leave the observatory, Johnson had forgotten to arm himself. Touching her helmet with his own, he shouted as he hurriedly tore off the belt:

"Get down that hole—quick!"

He pointed to a crack in the rocks, leading down into blackness, just wide enough to admit her body. Painfully Mary crawled towards it while he turned to face the monster, determined to hold it off until the girl had lowered herself into the crevasse.

Raising the pistol in his gloved hand, he pressed the button even as the reptile hurled itself at him. He felt the recoil, saw the flash, but heard no sound except for a slight puff which reached his ears via the bones of his arm.

The monster shivered throughout its length as it sank to the ground, a ragged hole in its side showing where the explosive bullet had struck. As it fell Johnson leaped aside and fired a second shot at the ghastly head, between the beady eyes.

Simultaneously, the three lobster-like pincers on one side of its body moved swiftly towards him; but another leap carried him beyond their reach. Mortally wounded, the monster threshed and writhed, lashing its long tail in all directions, snapping at him with its huge jaws while he leaped from rock to rock to avoid them.

But his main object was to escape those menacing claws which sprouted out behind the head, three on either side. For he knew that a bite from these dreadful pincers was just as poisonous as the serpent's sting. At the same time, he had to avoid being crushed to pulp by its lashing tail.

It was only his puny size compared with the monster's huge bulk that enabled him to evade his formidable enemy as he darted about between the putting rocks, constantly jumpping out of its reach like an elusive grasshopper
on Earth. But he had no time to take aim and fire more shots at the reptile. Until, after several minutes, which seemed an eternity to Johnson, it began to show signs of succumbing to the injuries he had inflicted.

The creature's struggles became weaker, its pincer-claws snapped feebly. Finding temporary refuge behind a massive rock, Johnson levelled his pistol again at the Moon snake's monstrous head.

**In the Cavern**

T**WICE** he fired, just as the serpent coiled itself up and sprang at him in a last desperate plunge. The shots went home, blasting the head to nothingness; but as he turned and leaped away he felt something sharp strike his hand, knocking the pistol from his grasp.

One of the flailing pincers had cut through his thick glove into his flesh; and he felt the bite of the deadly poison as he fled from the monster, now writhing wildly in its death throes, and bounded towards the hole in the rocks down which Mary had disappeared.

Even as he slithered into the crack, he pulled the glove from his injured hand and deliberately pressed the wound against the unthinkably cold rock which lay in the shadow. Oddly, he felt nothing, since the nerves were destroyed so rapidly they had not time to transmit pain. Then he was falling freely through the black depths.

Owing to the slowness of his fall, he seemed to drop for hundreds of feet into what was a vast subterranean cavern, of which there were many on the Moon. Just before he landed he saw the gleam of an electric torch beneath him and realised that Mary was safe. As he touched the rocky floor with his feet she came limping up to him.

Touching his helmet with her own, so as to carry the sound, she inquired anxiously: "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he lied, trying to hide his injured hand behind him. "How do you feel now, Mary?"

"Much better, thanks to you. I'd have frozen to death if you hadn't come to my rescue when you did—or been swallowed alive by that frightful snake. But there is something the matter with you. You look as though you were going to faint—and what's wrong with your arm?"

"I got bitten," he admitted. "I had to cauterise it. It didn't hurt at first, but it's beginning to now—a little."

He swayed and slumped to the floor. Mary bent over him, a horrified expression on her face as she saw the injured hand. Johnson smiled weakly.

"Do you think you could find your way out of here and bring help? I'm afraid I can't make it myself."

"I think so," said the girl. "But I don't like leaving you here. You're badly hurt——"

"Oh, I'll be all right till you get back. It won't take you long once you've found a way out of here."

Though inwardly he was wondering if they would meet again as Mary, with a doubtful look, turned her back on him and limped off into the darkness. He watched her wavering, flickering light as she picked her way along the floor of the cavern, searching for an exit within her reach. He had no doubt that she would find one, for the Moon was full of enormous caves such as this, from which many holes and cracks led to the surface.

Then the glimmer of the torch was swallowed up in the blackness. All was dark and silent as the grave once more. . . .

Patiently, Johnson waited; how long he could not tell, nor did he care. For although he did not realise it, some of the poison from the snake's bite had found its way into his system in spite of his prompt, courageous treatment, and was affecting his brain, breaking down his resistance.

He wondered how long it would be before he froze to death, lying there on
the hard stone floor of the cave. Though as he felt about him with his gloved hand he encountered small patches of soft moss, something like the plant which grew in the craters, supporting the monsters which took refuge in them. That meant that it could not be very cold in here and that there must be a little air.

He was more comfortable now. A numbness crept over him, making him insensible to the pain of his injured hand. Perhaps that meant he had not long to live. What did it matter? Better to die now than be rescued, half revived, and then die slowly and painfully. Or recover, only to become a one-armed wreck.

Better to die now . . .

Putting his left hand round the back of his neck—for his right was useless—he took hold of the tap which would let his air supply out into the near-void. It was only when he tried to turn it that he realised how weak he must be. He had to exert every ounce of his remaining strength to move it.

Exhausted, he let his arm fall back, then prepared to await the end. Through the crack in the roof of the cave whence he had come, he could see a star—one blue, glittering star. That was all he could see, all he would ever see again.

One bright blue star . . .

The Discovery

JOHNSON awoke to find a nurse bending over him. Hazily, he realised that he was lying in bed in the little hospital near the observatory. All pain—all numbness—had left his body; he felt fresh and alert, as though new life had been instilled in it by some powerful stimulant.

"You reacted wonderfully to the new energising treatment," said the nurse. "We're quite up-to-date here, you know. You'll be up and about again in a couple of days."

"But—but I turned my air-tap off. How—?"

The nurse smiled.

"You thought you did; but because you used your left hand you turned it on farther instead of cutting off the supply."

Puzzled still, Johnson scratched his chin, on which was several days' growth of beard. The look and feel of his arm seemed somehow unfamiliar to him.

"That's a very nice artificial limb," said the nurse. "You'll be able to do anything with that arm when you get used to it."

She left the room, and Johnson sat up in bed to gaze out of the window in the direction of the observatory. He could distinctly see the great telescope glinting in the sunlight, but of the shiny glass dome there was no sign.

He stared for a moment, bewildered, then suddenly the explanation dawned on him. The flying bulls! They must have charged up the mountainside past the settlement and smashed their way through the expensive dome while he, who was entrusted with the task of guarding it, was struggling in the lake of ash over a mile away!

Ruefully he gazed towards the observatory, visualising the shattered fragments which must lie around it; unless by now they had been cleared away by his fellow assistants. Apparently none of them, working in the surrounding buildings, had been aware of the onrushing monsters, or an attempt would have been made to divert their path of destruction.

He should have been there to warn them. Not that they themselves would have been in danger, for their quarters were strongly built against such emergencies. He had warned the settlement and the mine as a matter of routine; but he never imagined the hurtling beasts would ever pass that way.

Despondently Johnson faced the thought that this meant the end of his career on the Moon. He would have to return to Earth now and start afresh, for the astronomical body which employed him would not accept any excuse
for his deserting his post and causing a loss of thousands of pounds.

The following day, Mary came to visit him, looking none the worse for her adventure. Excitedly she explained how she had found a way out of the cavern and run right into a search party which, led by her father, had gone out to look for them once their absence was discovered.

Johnson winced at this, then blurted out:

"I—I wish you hadn't rescued me. Why didn't you leave me in the cavern to die? It would have been far better—"

Mary stood aghast, amazed at his outburst. "What are you saying?" she demanded.

"I love you, Mary," he went on, miserably. "I was going to ask you to marry me, but I can't expect you to marry a poor man."

"What do you mean—a poor man?"

"Why, they are sure to discharge me for leaving the observatory to get smashed. You couldn't have a husband without a job, could you?"

"But, Harry," she exclaimed breathlessly. "Haven't they told you? It may cost two thousand pounds to replace the dome, but the lake of ice you discovered is worth twice that much!"

"Lake of ice—?" he stammered, mystified.

"Yes! You see, when Dad picked up the glove you tore off your injured hand there was ice on it. You must have come in contact with moisture under that ash where your bouncer landed; or, rather, the warmth of your body melted some of the ice.

"Anyway, Dad fetched the shoveling machines, and there under the ash, only a few feet down, was a huge lake of ice stretching for at least a mile below the surface. It's what all the Moon companies have been searching for since they first came here and there's a big reward for anyone who makes such an important discovery.

"Why, Harry," she cried, as the cloud lifted from Johnson's face, "you're rich!"

**FRIENDSHIPS**

can be formed immediately through the U.C.C., an up-to-date, GENUINE and reputable introductory medium with over 10,000 members, both at home and abroad. All classes suited, either sex. Established over 25 years. Suitable introductions guaranteed. Write confidentially to:

Mr. A. M. CLARE, Sec. U.C.C.

**ART STUDIES**

Superb range of exclusive studies from life. Especially recommended to Artists, Students, Sculptors, Designers, Etc.
Special Assortments 2/-, 5/-, 10/-, 20/-
Magazine of German Nudist Studies 3/-

1/- brings Catalogue and Samples.

*CATALOGUE-COLLECTION OF 500 SPECIMEN PHOTOS 2/-*

Please state age or profession.

**FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHS**

High-grade photographic prints of models of all ages for the use of artists and students as an aid to figure sketching.
Specimen Selections: 1s., 2s. 6d., 5s., 10s., 20s. (Catalogue free.)
Please state profession or age.

W. W. LEON PUBLISHING COMPANY, 55, George Street, Baker Street, London, W.1.

**The Book of Etiquette**

By Lady Troubridge

SOLVES EVERY SOCIAL PROBLEM

Send 5s. 6d. to-day in full payment to

THE ASSOCIATED BOOKBUYERS' CO.
Kingswood, Surrey
THE PRR-R-EET

By

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

(Author of The Great Radio Peril, etc.)

Such an Unearthly Creature Must Have Come from Another World. . . . But Which?

CHAPTER I

What the Traveller Saw

BEWHISKERED Dan Steadmer, the oldest inhabitant, was leaning against the counter, a glass of beer clenched in his gnarled fingers. His rheumy eyes rested upon a couple of dozen matches left over from Jimmy Rogers’ impromptu demonstration of ingenious tricks. He continued to argue stubbornly.

“I sez there’s twenty-three,” said Old Dan.

Jimmy Rogers counted them for the third time, and said, “Twenty-four! You need your spectacles, Dan!”

“Stand drinks all round if I’m wrong?”

“Certainly,” said Rogers, without hesitation.

“Okay, I’m wrong—mine’s a bitter!” said Dan, chuckling gleefully.

A burst of laughter resounded through the room, drowning the noise of an opening door. A draught of cool air flowed over the old oak seats, sending wreaths of tobacco smoke swirling into disintegration. The laughter ceased abruptly when, at its loudest, somebody said, “Gawd!”

I turned, followed the direction of the others’ stares. There in the doorway swayed a figure, at the top of which was a bloody mask in which a pair of eyes glowed feverishly.

The object tottered forward, the group at the bar drew back. A glass of beer fell with a liquid swish, followed by a harsh splintering sound. Nobody took any notice; eyes remained fixed on the doorway. A burly labourer standing next to me muttered under his breath, a limp cigarette hanging from his lips.

“It’s all right,” said the object, weakly. “Had an accident . . . motor accident . . . nasty cut on the forehead. Mile up the road it was . . . this is the nearest place . . . wan’ a wash ‘n’ drink . . . feel rotten!”
He collapsed as he uttered the last word. Willing hands lifted his limp form, carried him to the parlour, and laid him on a sofa. Mrs. Ankers, the landlady, bustled around collecting bandages, lint, iodine and hot water. The crimson face was bathed, revealing the clean-shaven features of a man about thirty-five years of age. On his brow he had a deep gash, two inches long, just below the hair level.

Brandy trickled between his teeth and brought him upright spluttering. He sat patiently while Mrs. Ankers deftly rolled a bandage round his head and pinned it at the back. He accepted a cup of tea in preference to spirits, rested on the sofa and stirred vigorously while he told us his story.

"I'm a commercial," he said. "Name's Lawson. I left Hereford about eight, making for Clinton, where I intended to stay the night. About a mile on the Hereford side of here something went wrong. I was doing forty-five, mounted the grass verge and went smack into a big tree. Steering-gear trouble, perhaps.

"The crash threw me upward and forward. I hit the mirror, smashing it completely, and received this wound from the mirror-bracket. The car is an absolute wreck; when you see it you'll wonder how I escaped alive. The whole engine has been pushed back, the radiator is a foot from the windscreens and the near-side front wheel is on the other side of the hedge. I'll have to find a garage and get the mess towed in. Is there a garage near here?"

"There's none in this village," I told him. "The nearest is at Ross-on-Wye, seven miles away."

"I'll have to phone them." He looked at his watch. "Five to ten, h'm! What a fix to be in! No use moving the car at this time of night; it's off the road and should be safe until morning. I'll have to get my bags and put up somewhere."

He transferred his gaze to Mrs. Ankers. "May I have a room, or can you recommend any place where I can stay over-night?"

"If it suits you," I interjected, "you can stop the night with me. My house lies a mile and a quarter along the Hereford road, so it must be quite near to the scene of your accident."

"I didn't see it," he remarked. "This was the first place I came to."

"Probably that is because you passed my house before you crashed. If you care to stay with me you are quite welcome, and we could pick up your bags on the way home."

"It is very kind of you," he said, accepting the offer.

**Was it a Ghost?**

Twenty minutes later we left the *Wheatseaf* and trudged along the road, talking. A full moon shone brightly overhead revealing a landscape moulded in gleams and shadows. Owls hooted in the gloom of wooded areas, bats silently banked and dived through the cool, still air of night.
Lawson was not loquacious. He paced along buried in his thoughts, a cigarette glowing redly before his nose. Questions from me brought forth the information that he travelled in shoes, was not married, considered travelling a dog's life, and was interested in astronomy.

He grew silent and displayed increasing signs of nervousness as we came nearer and nearer to the scene of his accident. Suddenly he stopped, laid a hand on my arm.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he asked, earnestly.

"Of course—I get my living out of them."

"You get your living. . . ! What d'you mean?"

"I'm a cinema operator," I told him.

"Oh, I see!" He paused for a moment, then continued: "I'm not referring to shades upon celluloid, but to real ghosts."

"How can I believe in something that doesn't exist?" I demanded.

"Well, I've been sceptical about such matters, but now . . ."

"Now what?"

He lit a fresh cigarette from the stump of his last, sucked in a lungful of smoke, and stared up the road with obvious apprehension.

"Listen! I must tell you the truth before we reach the car. That accident was not caused by a mechanical defect. Here's what happened. I was driving along a straight piece of road running through a wood, and at the end of it I came to a hairpin bend with a large pond on the left-hand side."

"I know it," I put in. "It's only a couple of hundred yards this side of my house."

"Is it? Anyway, I took the bend and noticed a curious green light or glow moving steadily up and down in the middle of the road between twenty and thirty yards ahead. As the car straightened up the headlamps planted themselves squarely on a ghost, and . . ."

"A ghost!" I echoed, incredulously.

"That's what I'm calling it for lack of a better name. It was standing in the path of the car waving a green light with its right hand. The lamps gave me a momentary glimpse of a figure so fantastic that, seeing it almost under my bonnet, I whirled the steering-wheel, skidded off the road on to the verge and went into a tree—wallop!"

"And then?" I encouraged him.

"Then I got this sock on the forehead when I hit the mirror. The blow stupefied me for a short time; then I crawled out of the car and staggered along the verge, my feet hushed by the thick carpet of grass, my face smothered with blood.

"I had got a good distance from the car when I heard a metallic sound as if somebody, some thing, was meddling with it. The sound reminded me of what I had seen. I forgot my wound, my bags, everything. I ran like hell!"

"What was the ghost like?" I asked.

"All I got was one second's glimpse of a figure much bigger than any man, with a face like a bad dream, a long, skinny body and legs that weren't quite legs, somehow. Another thing I remember is that as I rushed along the road I heard another noise from the direction of the car. It was a loud chirruping sound like that of a bird, but stronger, more penetrating and different in some inexplicable way."

"If you had told that tale at the Wheatsheaf they'd have thought you mad or drunk."

"Quite! That's exactly why I didn't tell it," Lawson retorted.

"Let's get going," I suggested.

"Ghost or no ghost, we will never get home while we stand and talk about it."

"Does there happen to be a fancy-dress ball in the neighbourhood?" asked Lawson as we tramped to the edge of the wood and the road became veiled in darkness.

"No! This district is too truly rural for the making of organised whoopee. I don't think you'll find that a practical joker is to blame. There must be a per-
fectly natural explanation, and it’s up to us to find it. All this talk of ghosts, banshees, and the like is just so much bunkum, and I for one . . .”

“Hush!” he exclaimed, stopping dead and pulling me up with him.

He peered into the gloom ahead. For a dozen heart-beats we stood in silence undisturbed except by the rustling of leaves in the trees. Then out of the blackness came a noise affecting us like a physical shock.

A door slammed!

CHAPTER II

The Creature in the Light

Hearing this sound had the strange effect of making us reverse our former attitudes. I, who had been scornful of supernatural happenings, became a prey to doubt. Lawson lost the vestiges of his temporary faith and jumped forward shouting, “Come on! Some tramp’s after my samples.”

We broke into a run, rounded a slight bend and saw a vagrant moonbeam creating a steely glitter where it struck the plating of the crumpled radiator. The outline of the wrecked automobile was faintly discernible as a patch of deeper black in the encompassing darkness.

Something moved behind the car, a greenish glow bloomed six-feet high in the air and cast an unearthly pallor over our startled faces. Lawson faltered in his stride, hesitated and stopped.

I stopped beside him. Like rabbits hypnotised by a snake, we stared fascinated at the phenomenon before us. The light seemed to hang without wavering for an interminable time ere the spell was broken. Then a piping voice said, “Sweet-sweet! Tee-e-e-rip!”

The sound resembled the fluting of a blackbird, yet there was an alien quality about it. In some manner it reassured us; we felt fear fall away from us like a cloak. The green light trembled in mid-air, and the voice spoke again.

“Sweet-sweet! Tee-e-e-rip!”

I fumbled in my overcoat pocket and lugged out a powerful electric torch which I usually carried to light my way through the wood. I aimed it at the green glow, which did not move. Then I pressed the button and threw a circle of brilliant light that framed a picture so unexpected that I had to make a deliberate mental effort to retain my grip on the torch. At my side, Lawson gasped.

Standing in the centre of the illumination was a creature about eight feet tall. Its skin was grey, reptilian, like the hide of a chameleon; its eyes, too, were chameleonic. They were large, horny, and swivelled independently in a way that gave us the creeps. Even as we surveyed it, its right eye looked fixedly along the beam while its left moved round to the car and back again to the torch.

A beak-like protuberance jutted aggressively from the middle of its face, throwing a shadow over a small mouth, perfectly rounded as if pursed. A thin neck connected its head to a long, lean trunk encased in a garment resembling the leather jerkin favoured by Cromwell’s Ironsides.

Long, skinny arms hung from its shoulders to within two feet of the ground, where they ended in bunches of eight flexible fingers. Its trunk divided into a pair of legs as far as joints which I regarded as its knees, and at the knee each leg split into eight members that curved outwards to the ground, where they finished as domed pads.

Looking at its pedal extremities, I found difficulty in comprehending its mode of locomotion. The problem was solved for me. The Creature sank slightly, its bottom members arched out, and it hopped a yard nearer to us with all the springiness of a kangaroo.

“Chee-u-er, whit!” it exclaimed, offering us the green light.
An Attempt at Telepathy

WITH great daring Lawson stepped forward and took the object. He held it in the light of my torch, turning it over and over. It was a lamp, about the size of an ordinary bicycle lamp, made of metal highly polished or plated. Behind the glass lens lay a phosphorescent substance, fluid in appearance, which radiated a steady greenish glow. The light was permanent and could not be switched off, but was exposed or obscured by an iris diaphragm device operated by a lever.

Lawson pressed a palm against the fiery lens. “The scientist’s dream,” he said, “Cold light! Feel it!”

“Chu-whee-e-chu!” the Creature fluted. “Now where did he get this from?” demanded Lawson, ignoring the interruption.

“Probably he’s succeeded in bottling some glow-worm juice,” I offered.

Lawson sniffed. I posed him one in return, “Never mind where the lamp came from; tell me where its owner comes from.”

“Oh, that’s obvious,” he replied, airily.

“Obvious! Then perhaps you’ll take pity on my stupidity, for the only thing that’s obvious to me is that I’m in bed sound asleep and I will probably wake up soon.”

He laughed, pointed to the sky and said: “He’s not of this world, so there’s nothing else for it that he’s come from some other.”

“Perfect logic, my dear Socrates,” I conceded. “Now tell me—which?”

“That’s what we’ve got to find out. Have you an alternative suggestion?”

“No!” I told him. “If we were near a large town I would be quite prepared to believe that this gentleman”—gesturing towards the Creature—“was doing it to advertise something.”

He grinned. “But under the circum-
stances I am willing to agree that your idea is better than mine,” I added, graciously.

“Thanks!” said Lawson, grinning more broadly than ever. “Now, what we have to do is to arrive at an understanding with this bloke.”

“Oh, that should be easy,” I said.

“Should it? Elucidate, O Oracle!”

He spoke with the air of one thoroughly enjoying himself. Curiously enough, I felt in the best of humours, too. Looking back, I have more than a Sneaking suspicion that the Creature exerted some influence over us, soothing our minds and assisting us in becoming accustomed to his alien personality. I know that scarcely five minutes had passed since first we saw him, yet in that short time our fear had turned to levity.

I nodded in the direction of the Creature and said: “All you’ve got to do is to look him straight in the eye. You will then feel a prickling sensation at the base of your brain, a powerful influence will take hold of your mentality, and thought-waves will impinge upon your mind. If it doesn’t work out like that I suggest you ask him for his menore.”

“Menore? What the devil is that?”

“Oh, they’ve all got one knocking about somewhere,” I answered. “I’ve read hundreds of yarns depicting situations such as this. According to what I’ve read, the large majority of these other-worldly races possess telepathic powers developed to an intense degree, and the few that haven’t invariably wander around the cosmos with a large stock of menores ready to hand.”

“The gadget is a sort of fireman’s helmet affair. They tote it with ’em for the benefit of those whose intellect is too defunct to be receptive. When they come across such a case they treat the patient by ramming the menore on his cranium, and what won’t work without the adornment works with it.”

“Very interesting,” Lawson sniggered. “We’ll try it.”
He turned to the Creature, transfixed it with a frown which he held for a minute, then said: "D—n it! I wish he wouldn't let his eyes wander about that way!"

"Ween!" said the Creature, pointing to Lawson and then to the ground.

"Pardon me, but have you a menore?" Lawson asked.

"Quirrup?" said the Creature.

"I give it up!" Lawson pulled at the bandage around his head and eased it a little. "We can stand here all night and get nowhere. If you've no objection to this object coming with us to your house, we might make more progress with the aid of pencil and paper."

"Come on," I responded.

Lawson went to the car, opened a door and hauled out a large, heavy suitcase. He handed it to me, dived his arm in again and produced a small attaché case, which he placed on the ground. A third dip into the interior of the car brought forth another big suitcase.

He shut the door, and was about to lift the two cases when, to our intense surprise, the Creature grabbed the big suitcase and demonstrated its willingness to carry it by a series of signs.

My torch faded to a dismal yellow at that moment. The battery had become exhausted. I crammed it into my pocket and borrowed the Creature's green light. I told Lawson to watch for the lighted windows of my house three to four-hundred yards down the road on the right-hand side, and with him in the lead we started off.

CHAPTER III

The Visitor Explains

A SHORT distance down the road we passed a five-barred gate and a faint sound drew my attention as I came abreast of it. I looked to the side and threw a momentary glance at a courting couple half-hidden in the shadow.

The girl had her eyes shut and was hanging limp as if she had fainted. She was supported by a youth whose mouth hung wide open while his bulging eyes followed the procession.

I have no idea of what he was thinking, but I can well imagine how we looked. First came Lawson carrying his attaché case in one hand and his hat in the other, a heavy bandage encircling his head, his hair sticking up like an array of spikes. Next came the Creature hopping along grotesquely, the suitcase swinging at its side, its eyes moving in two directions at once. Both were bathed in the eerie light radiating from the green lamp carried by an invisible being in the person of myself.

I thought it best to ignore the lovers; there was nothing else to do under the circumstances. We had passed them by ten paces when a half-stifled groan from the youth testified to the quality of the show we had put on.

We reached my house, and I stood at the front door fumbling with the key. The door opened, and as we went inside I heard stumbling footsteps receding into the night.

My Mother had gone to bed. Invariably she retired at half-past ten, leaving a light for me if I was not back by that time. I knew she would not come down, and did not worry about the possibility of her meeting the Creature face to face.

The fire burned brightly, and the room was warm and cheerful. Lawson sank into an easy chair with a sigh of relief.

With body crouched to avoid a blow from the ceiling or the hanging oil-lamp, the Creature bounced around the furniture picking up various articles, examining them and carefully replacing them in their correct positions.

It toyed with vases, ash-trays and bric-a-brac, studied the pictures hanging on the wall and played with my decrepit typewriter. Eventually, it
picked up the clock, watched the sluggish crawl of its minute hand, took the back off and peered intently into the works, then held the timepiece to its nose.

"By gosh! I never thought of that," Lawson said, his features expressing surprise. "That schnozzle of his is what he hears with. Look at him! He's listening to the tick."

There could be no doubt that Lawson was right. I noticed that the Creature had nothing resembling ears at the sides of its head, and evidently was using an organ of hearing placed in the centre of its face.

"He doesn't breathe, either," Lawson continued. "Have you observed that? He must be a form of life designed to exist where there is little or no atmosphere, in which case I imagine our atmosphere must make him feel something like we would under water."

"It seems to be lively enough," I remarked. Somehow, the Creature persisted in being 'It' to me, and 'He' to Lawson.

"A human being can be lively under water for as long as he can hold his breath," the traveller went on. "I'll bet ten bob that's how he feels. What I mean is, I think this pressure of fourteen pounds to the square inch is something he can endure only for a limited time, and when he's had enough he'll depart in a hurry."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because I can't imagine a non-breathing form of life evolving anywhere except on an airless world. What's more, how is it that he's the only one of his kind we've seen?"

Lawson was wrong when he made this last comment, but neither of us knew that at the time.

"I'll gamble he didn't get here all by himself," he added. "Where's the contraption that brought him, and where's his companions?"

"What's your guess?" I countered.

"My guess is that he has come in some sort of space-ship, which has dropped its hardiest specimen to scout around for a fixed time, while the ship hangs in the more comfortable regions of the stratosphere."

A Novel Time-piece

"WOO-E-E-TER-PEEK!" said the Creature, taking a chain from around its neck, handing it to Lawson and signing from chain to the clock. A small, metallic object hung upon the chain and Lawson examined it intently.

"What is it?" I asked, bursting with curiosity.

"A watch," Lawson replied. He handed it to me, adding, "And a cunning one at that!"

It was a cunning one. Imagine a small metal frame like a belt buckle, one long side having an ornamental scroll to which the chain was fastened, the opposite long side flat, polished and marked along its full length with a finely drawn scale.

The centre bar, running parallel to the long sides, formed a spindle for a polished metal cylinder of diameter just sufficient to fill the rectangular frame. A very narrow, deeply cut line ran in a spiral around the cylinder, making one complete turn in its length. The cylinder concealed within itself a device which produced a tiny, almost imperceptible hum like a Lilliputian dynamo.

The method of telling the time was absurdly simple. The cylinder made one complete revolution in whatever the Creature regarded as a day, and the time of day was determined by the point upon the scale matched by the spiral line.

I returned the watch to its owner, who held it up by its chain, pointed to it and then to the clock, and released a veritable flood of whistles and chirrups. We listened to his piping and fluting for a full minute before the same thought came to both of us simultaneously.

"Time's flying," I said.
"Just what I was about to say," Lawson responded. "He wants us to get down to business. If you've a pencil and some paper handy, bring them out and we'll see what we can do."

I produced the materials he required and placed them on the table. The Creature tried to sit at the table, found that it couldn't occupy a chair comfortably, turned the chair side-on to the table, folded a cushion over the top of the chair-back and sat astride on that. Its octobrachiate feet just touched the floor.

Lawson took a sheet of paper and sketched a circle edged by rays to represent the Sun. I knew exactly how he intended to proceed; a hundred brain children of as many science fiction authors had done the same thing years before he thought of it.

But the Creature had its own ideas. It took the pencil from Lawson's fingers and used it far more rapidly and expertly than either of us could have done. As it sketched, I noticed that it had folded five fingers into a tight bunch and was gripping the pencil with the other three.

It drew a circle round the Sun, placed a small ring on its line to represent Mercury, shaded the ring in a way that carried an impression of a hard, craggy surface, and said, "Eel!" In the same manner the Creature depicted Venus, complete with clouds, and gave it an unpronounceable whistle for a name.

With lightning speed Earth was drawn, a fair study of its cloud layers, partially hiding familiar land contours, making it easy to identify. The swiftly gliding pencil placed by its side a crater-pitted Moon.

A Revelation

The Creature pointed to Earth and said, "Weenie." It jabbed Lawson in the chest with a snaky finger and said, "Ween!" It repeated the performance with me, giving me the same name, as near as it is possible to put bird-talk into writing. Bending down, it rapped upon the floor, pointed to the drawing of Earth and said, "Weenie."

This was perfectly clear to us. In the Creature's language Earth was Weenie, and all the inhabitants thereof were Weens. I pointed to myself, to Lawson, the sketch of Earth and then to the floor, reciting the appropriate words as I did so. Despite my utter failure to imitate the high piping voice of our tutor, I succeeded in showing that we understood.

The pencil again travelled over the paper, produced a picture of Mars with its polar caps, its typical markings, and its two satellites, Phobos and Deimos. I noticed particularly that the Creature showed no straight lines which could be regarded as canals. Mars received a name that defied all our efforts to pronounce.

Next came a circle liberally sprinkled with dots. We recognised it as the Asteroid Belt. The artist then marked the orbit of Jupiter, showing the planet with its cloudy streaks and its large family of satellites.

To our astonishment, the Creature returned to the Asteroid Belt and carefully placed seven tiny circles amid its multitude of dots. It pointed to each of the circles in turn, held up seven fingers and said, "Prr-e-ee." It placed a finger against its own middle and said, "Prr-r-eet!"

We were dumbfounded. So well has Mars been advertised that the tendency of most people is to imagine any visitor from another world as a Martian. A revelation that the Creature came from Mars was what I had been expecting. I was wrong. It came from the Asteroid Belt. It was a Prr-r-eet!

Lawson picked up the paper and stared at it, saying, "Who'd have thought there's intelligent life on seven of the Asteroids? And here's something else I'd like to know: why did they pick on Earth for a visit when Mars is much nearer to them?"
“Ask me another,” I said, wearily.
He reached for a fresh sheet of paper, remarking that he would put the question pictorially. I watched him sleepily. Whether it was due to the warmth of the fire, the satisfaction of part of my curiosity, or the excitement of the evening, I do not know; but I saw a misty vision of Lawson manipulating the pencil while the Prr-r-eet leaned over his shoulder, and the next instant I was buried in slumber.

CHAPTER IV

Why the Prr-r-eets Came to Earth

I was standing with my back to the edge of a high cliff, facing a gigantic lizard, which was doing its best to send me hurtling over by butting me on the chest. It prodded me off my balance; I swayed over a yawning chasm and clutched desperately at the lizard’s head. . . .

I opened my eyes and mouth preparatory to giving a loud yell, and found I was clinging to Lawson’s arm. He was tapping me in the ribs, saying, “Wake up, lazybones, wake up! Cheep’s got to go.”

“Cheep?” I rubbed my eyes. “Who’s Cheep?”

“Our visitor,” he replied. “He has to go back, and we’re going with him.”

“You don’t catch me going to the Asteroids,” I said, with sudden energy. “I don’t relish the idea of trying to live without air. And where d’you get the ‘Cheep’ from? I thought its name was Prr-r-eet.”

“We’re not going to the Asteroids; only to his ship, which lies not far from this house. And his name is Cheep. I’m a man but my name isn’t Man, it’s Lawson. Similarly, he’s a Prr-r-eet, and his own name is Cheep.”

Lawson placed a cup and saucer on the arm of my chair, saying, “I took the liberty of raiding your larder and made a jug of cocoa. Hope you don’t mind. . . . Drink it while it’s hot.”

“It’s quite okay,” I assured him. “What’s the time?”

He looked at his watch, then at the clock. “Twenty minutes past three. I’ve been chewing the fat with Cheep for more than four hours.”

“Found out much?”

“Well, I have and I haven’t. Progress has been fair considering the fact that speech between us has been quite impossible, and we’ve had to communicate by means of picture-talk, helped out with gesture. Gosh! I realize now how hectic must have been the world of commerce in the days of colonial expansion, when one bargained for hours in this manner before the bargain was closed and thirty yards of striped calico was swapped for a ton of monkey-nuts.”

“You said it!” I responded, inelegantly.

“But when I think of the amount of time I’ve spent it seems that what I’ve got isn’t much. I’ve had to acknowledge the principle of fair exchange, with the result that half the time has been used in selling him about commonplace things.”

The Prr-r-eet stood in the opposite corner of the room turning over the pages of a book. Lawson looked a little embarrassed and said:

“Cheep’s people have a social system based on common ownership of property. I don’t know if that’s got anything to do with it, but he wants to take some of your books.”

“Which books does he want?”

“He’s not interested in the printed ones; they mean nothing to him, of course. He has selected nine or ten volumes containing practically nothing but illustrations—photographs and the like. That Story Of The World In Pictures he’s looking at now is one he’s very keen about.

“He wants your Peoples Of All Nations, Animal Life Of The World, Modern World Atlas, and several others. I’ve explained to him that they belong to you and he said that he was
willing to give you something equally valuable in return.”

“Did Cheep say what?”

“Yes; but I couldn’t understand him properly. All I could gather was that it is some sort of entertainment device.”

“Hah! that’s right up my street. He can have the books with pleasure.”

“Well, if you’ve finished your cocoa let’s put a move on. I’ll tell you the rest as we go along.”

Lawson’s Impressions

Lawson gathered together the books chosen by Cheep, found a piece of string, and tied them into a bundle. Cheep, watching the proceedings, gathered that he was to have the books, so bounced across the room, opened and closed his fingers under my nose, and ejaculated, “Whit-hoo!”

I accepted the thanks with a casual salute, gave the fire a poke, and struggled into my leather greatcoat. Lawson tried to get his hat on, forgetting about the bandage, gave up the attempt and decided to go out without it.

I said to him, “You should have had a doctor for that gash. When I saw it I thought it could do with a couple of stitches.”

He replied, “Cheep asked me about the head wrappings and I had to take them off and show him the cut. He looked it over and told me it would be attended to properly when we got to the ship.”

I opened the front door quietly, lest the sound of our exit should awaken the sleeper upstairs. We passed out and moved along the road still lit in the middle by the brilliant Moon, still gloomy at the sides where great trees overhung it. We travelled abreast this time, the Prr-r-eet keeping to the right-hand side and directing the light of the uncanny lamp over the grass bordering the road.

Lawson talked rapidly, in whispers. “I attribute the progress of these Prr-r-eet people, in the science of astrodynamics, to the natural advantages they have in being native to a portion of the cosmos where thousands of tiny bodies circle within easy reach of each other. Cheep says they were hopping from one asteroid to another about a thousand years ago, but it was not until a couple of centuries ago they succeeded in getting to Mars.”

“Ah, so they did get to Mars?”

“Oh, yes! Cheep came here from Mars. They’ve made dozens of flights to the Red Planet, and quite a big colony has been established there. They found Mars uninhabited, supporting vegetable and insect forms of life, but nothing higher. Cheep says that the Martian atmosphere is sufficiently rarefied to cause them no inconvenience.

“He tells me that after they’d got to Mars, and settled it, Earth was the next logical jump. His ship started from Vesta, reached Mars, where it was overhauled, and then came to Earth.”

“They can’t get here direct from the Asteroids then?”

“I don’t think so. Cheep didn’t say so definitely, but he seemed to doubt the possibility. Another thing that interested me very much is the fact that they don’t use rocket propulsion.”

“Indeed!”

“I’m blessed if I could make out exactly how they do their travelling; the limitations of picture-talk were too much of a handicap. Cheep conveyed to me an impression of lines of force running between the poles of a bar magnet, then gave me a sketch of something similar streaming out from the Sun and forming what looked like whirlpools around the planets, satellites and planetoids. The best I could make of it is that their ship makes use of lines of natural force pervading the cosmos.”

“T see! Something of an electromagnetic nature, I imagine. How is it we’ve not seen his companions, and why is he in such a hurry to get back?”

“My guess was right,” said Lawson, with satisfaction. “They can’t stand the
air, so they go out only one at a time. They can summon up enough resistance to keep 'em going for about six hours; then they've had enough. Cheep's had nearly as much as he can stand; that's why he's returning to the ship.

"It's queer to think of it, but their ship is made airtight so as to keep air out, not in. . . . By the way, Cheep is not the one who caused me to wreck my car. That was Tchu-eirch."

"Chew-what?"

"Tchu-eirch. You see, they've been on Earth a week, and I gather that this period of time has been enough to give them a very low opinion of us. When they tried to make a landing they picked on a prohibited area somewhere in the Far East, and an anti-aircraft battery opened out on them, cracking the shell of their ship.

"They fled hastily, made an emergency landing for repairs on the southern border of Persia, and had to move in a hurry when the repairs were only half completed. They went skyward accompanied by a volley of shots from a border patrol."

**A Peaceful Mission**

"I bet they felt they were being picked on," I remarked.

"They were damned unfortunate," said Lawson sorrowfully, "and that's not the whole of it. According to what Cheep showed me on the map their next landing was near Khorkhol, French Senegal. They completed their repairs there, but failed to get in touch with the blacks. Couldn't come within a mile of a native before he ran as though the Devil himself was after him.

"So they flew over the Atlantic and, while travelling north, saw a ship towing something. It was a torpedo-boat towing a naval target. Of course, they must descend to take a closer look at it, and choose the very moment when half-a-dozen battleships on the horizon let fly from every turret."

"Ye Gods!" I exclaimed.

"They weren't hurt, but they didn't like the screams of the shells and the fountains of water that spurted up at them. These people know absolutely nothing about warfare or killing. They haven't had a war as far back as their historical records go, and, believe it or not, they didn't bring a single weapon with them; in fact, I doubt if they know of any weapons which they might have brought.

"You can imagine what they think about us! After that demonstration that someone-or-other rules the waves, they went up into the stratosphere and held a conference."

"And what did they do then?"

"They thought they'd have another try, because they didn't want to return with empty hands. They decided to find a quiet spot in some country that looked civilised and well populated, land under cover of darkness in some place where they wouldn't attract too much attention, and let out a scout to try and get in touch with humans while the rest of the crew held the ship ready to scoot at the first sign of danger."

"Not a bad idea, at that!"

"They chose a spot near here, yesterday. The first scout out was Tchu-eirch, who hung about until darkness fell, partly because he was afraid of humans and partly because a Prr-r-eet can see better in darkness than in daylight. That lamp Cheep's playing with, for instance, gives out a light which is nothing like as powerful as your torch. They don't use it as a lamp, but as a signal. . . ."

"Well, I happened to come along just at the moment when Tchu-eirch plucked up his courage and signalled to me. Then came the crash. Poor old Tchu-eirch wouldn't chase me down the road in case I fired something at him, so he gave the car a thorough examination and returned to the ship to report. His spell of atmosphere was ended by then, and he was relieved by Cheep, who was giving the car another look over when we came along."
“Chee-u-er, whit!” exclaimed Cheep suddenly, shining his green light on a wall for our benefit.

“He’s used that particular expression before,” Lawson remarked, “I think it means ‘here we are.’”

CHAPTER V
In the Space-Ship

“WHAT didn’t improve matters any,” Lawson continued, as we came to a stop facing the wall, “is that Tchu-eirch had gone only a hundred yards from the ship when he found a rabbit caught in a gin-trap. Its hind leg was broken.”

“Did he put it out of its misery?” I asked.

“Not him! He released it from the trap and carried it back to the ship. One of the crew filled the air-lock with air, converted it into an impromptu surgery, set the rabbit’s leg, and administered a dose of some concoction they’ve got which hastens the healing process like nobody’s business.

“According to Cheep, they’ve made a mascot of the animal, and are building an air-chamber for it so that they can take it to Mars, where they think it will manage to live.”

“It seems they’re tender-hearted,” I remarked.

“More so than us. What with one thing and another, they’ve come to the conclusion that human beings are an exceedingly bloodthirsty gang of ruffians. Use your imagination, and you’ll see that Cheep needed plenty of guts to stay by the car when he heard us approaching.”

“Chee-u-er, whit!” Cheep ejaculated, more urgently.

I saw that he was directing the green light more for our benefit than his own. It shone upon a fifteen-feet high wall, topped with a frieze of broken glass. “Whipple-sweet!” said Cheep, pointing to the wall.

“What’s this place?” queried Lawson.

“The wall runs right round the Livermore estate,” I told him. “Fine place for Cheep’s pals to choose, I don’t think! Old man Livermore boiled away the milk of human kindness in India, long before he made his pile and retired. He’s a surly old yak who explodes if a schoolboy gets away with one of his blackberries. The estate simply bristles with gamekeepers, and Livermore says that the next poacher he gets his bunch of fives on he’ll swing so high the police won’t know about it until the astronomers tell ‘em.”

“H’m! I might sell him a pair of shoes to kick us out with.” Lawson threw an up-and-down glance at the wall and eyed the glassy protection.

“How’re we going to get over? Are you looking forward to slicing your hams on that array of knives?”

“I am not!” I admitted.

“Quirrup?” enquired Cheep. “Ween, terr-r-rip!” He pointed to each of us in turn, then to himself and finally made a swooping motion with his hand.

“He suggests we jump over,” said Lawson, facetiously.

“How?”

I addressed the question to Cheep. Much to our surprise, he understood. In an instant he was fifty yards down the road, and as he went I knew why his locomotion had seemed so awkward, so ungainly. It became obvious to both of us that his natural speed was so greatly in excess of ours that he must have had much difficulty in accommodating himself to our slow pace.

He covered that fifty yards in five splendid bounds of ten yards each. Then he turned, faced our startled eyes, and bounded forward at an astounding speed, a creature of grace and beauty. With a magnificent leap that would have shamed any springbok, he soared over the wall, clearing it by a margin of many feet.

“Ye Gods!” exclaimed Lawson, stealing the words from my lips.
Cheep's Leap

We heard a faint thump behind the wall. A dark shape shot to the tree tops, slid downwards, and landed beside us. Cheep was back.

He took the bundle of books from Lawson's grasp and tossed them over the wall. Bending down, he signed to Lawson to climb upon his back.

They looked a queer sight preparatory to the jump. Cheep arched his feet members, swayed up and down a couple of times while Lawson hugged his neck. The feet made a thrust . . . and he flew through the air in a way that was neat, the daring young man on the leaping Prr-r-eet!

Then came my turn, and I retained sufficient presence of mind to estimate the height by which we cleared the wall. The result was truly astonishing. I found that, despite the burden of my weight upon his back, Cheep had jumped fully twenty-five feet. We landed with a rubbery bounce entirely devoid of jar.

Lawson picked up the books and we marched in single file through the trees, Cheep leading the way. The surface of leaf-mould silenced our feet, and we progressed without noise except for the rare cracking of a twig. Tiny, nocturnal animals scuttled out of our path, while bushes shook their branches and rustled their leaves as they granted passage to things unseen.

We walked half a mile before we came to a moonlit clearing in which the space-ship rested. I felt disappointed immediately I saw the vessel, for I had expected something like a cover design for Stupendous Stories. This ship was merely a silver egg with a small, circular door set in its little end, and an equally small, circular window in its big end.

The ship itself was quite tiny, according to my ideas of what a space-ship should conform to in the way of size. It was no more than one-hundred feet along its major axis, by sixty feet along its minor axis. It lay there in the clear-
writhed into a different combination, the music changed in sympathy. In a short time we had seen a veritable multitude of coloured patterns, all indescribably beautiful, and all accompanied by appropriate notes of ethereal music.

Illumination returned to the room, and I examined the apparatus with keen interest. It possessed the simplicity of true genius. A compound kaleidoscope revolved while its changing patterns were projected upon a screen; the screen was scanned by a cell having some degree of similarity to those used in television sets. The cell was connected with a peculiar, but most efficient, talkie apparatus. Thus, coloured patterns were converted into sympathetic sound in somewhat the same manner as the inscribed margin of talking films is translated into speech.

I could not understand why it was necessary for the cell to scan the screen rather than the kaleidoscope itself, but I soon found out. A little experimenting showed that the coloured patterns seen without the accompaniment of music were only mildly interesting, while the music, when heard without the accompaniment of the patterns, sounded the most awful discord one can imagine.

Lawson and myself shut our eyes, listened to the music, then opened our eyes and watched the play of the patterns. We were amazed to note the difference. It was evident that the apparatus could provide novel entertainment by co-ordinating the eye and ear and thus producing strange harmony.

I remembered that a few months before much interest had been aroused by a young artist's production of a film in which coloured designs expressed themselves in sympathy with music. Here was an idea fundamentally the same, having greater scope, offering much more variety and operating automatically. My examination showed that the variation of patterns and corresponding tones was almost infinite, for the kaleidoscope altered not only its designs, but also the geometrical power of them, producing its colour-poems in stages ranging from eight to twenty-four segments.

“What do you think of it?” Lawson asked.

“It’s hot!” I said, enthusiastically. “The beauty of it is that it’s not too advanced for us to duplicate. That cell is the only thing that I’m doubtful about, and when . . .”

A shrill whistle resounded along the passage. Hastily Cheep packed the apparatus into its box, thrust it into my arms and urged us out of the room.

CHAPTER VI

A Hasty Departure

“WHAT’S the hurry?” I grumbled, as we moved rapidly along the corridor. A whining noise came from the depths of the ship, followed by the thump, swish, thump of hidden engines.

“They’ve got to return before Mars gets too far along its orbit,” Lawson told me. “If they don’t start soon they’ll have to wait here for months.”

The whistle was repeated, Cheep increased his speed and we broke into a run. A Prr-r-eet standing outside the ship stretched his lanky arms through the door, grabbed my box and helped me to the ground. He gestured to the trees, indicated that someone was coming, and climbed through the door after Lawson and Cheep had emerged.

Cheep opened and closed his fingers before Lawson's face, duplicated the performance before me, and signed to us to depart as quickly as possible. His weird eyes regarded us simultaneously, a baffling expression wrinkled his grey features, and I felt that he regretted the parting.

Twigs cracked and branches scraped in the undergrowth to our left. A dark figure burst from the bushes, raised its
arms and bellowed, "Over here, you varmints!"

Cheep went through the door with a lithe bound, and it slammed behind him instantly. Flame spurted in front of the dark figure, and a charge of shot rattled against the side of the ship. Lawson plucked at my sleeve and we ran for the shelter of the bushes on the right, placing the ship between ourselves and the man with the gun.

A rush of wind caught me and flung me on to my back. My eyes saw the space-ship shrinking in the sky, a spout of leaves and twigs swirling after it from the ground below. Another gun crashed and shot whizzed through a bush by my side.

I scrambled to my feet, picked up the box and sprinted. Behind me, a voice roared, "There's one! After him!"

Like one possessed, I fled through the wood, the box hugged in my arms. Branches whipped at my face, creepers plucked at my feet as I plunged onwards. My boots slipped on a steep bank of clay, precipitating me into a little brook purling at the bottom. Lawson slid down after me, snatched up the box and jerked me to my feet.

Puffing and panting, we charged up the opposite bank and merged into the gloom. A heavy splash sounded in the rear and somebody bellowed like an enraged bull. Far to our left, a gun exploded, but no shot came our way.

We rushed around a tangled mass of brambles and discovered we had reached the wall. It was only five feet high on this side, the estate being well above the level of the road. Lawson handed me the box, picked up a heavy stone, battered the glass spikes into powder, and threw his coat across the top of the wall. He struggled up and sat athwart the wall, clinging to the box, while I took the heavy drop on the other side.

Lawson hung by his fingers and then let go, snatching the tails of his coat as he fell. The coat ripped with a loud sound, and he dropped into my waiting arms with a force that sent us rolling on the grass.

We scrambled to our feet, took the box between us, and dashed along the road with all the guilty haste of a pair of body-snatchers making off with a coffin. No sight was more welcome than that of my front door. Gasping and perspiring, we entered the house, closed and locked the door silently, and dumped the box in the kitchen.

"Quick! Get upstairs and into your pyjamas," I breathed. "This is the nearest house, and they're certain to come here making enquiries."

The Law Investigates

TOGETHER we went upstairs, flung off our clothes and put on our night attire. Lawson climbed into bed, and I was about to follow his example when a handful of pebbles rattled against the window. I ignored the signal; we had no light shining, and I wished it thought that we were asleep.

After a long pause, the pebbles rattled again. Another pause, then a gentle tapping on the door. I threw on my dressing-gown, stuck my head out of the window and saw Gregory, the local constable, standing in the roadway. Sam Emsworth, a farm-hand, was at his side, a miniature repeater lying in the crook of his arm.

"Oh, so you're there, Mister Russell!" said Gregory.

"Where else d'you think I'd be at this infernal hour?" I snapped. "What's the matter?"

"Have you got with you the gent who had the car smash?"

"Of course! He's asleep, but I'll wake him if you want to speak to him."

"No need," he said, hastily, "I'll take your word for it. You see, it's like this: Joe Mullins, who's courting Farmer Blakemore's daughter Sally, came running after me out at Emsworth's and says him and Sally had been seeing things."

"What things?"
“Joe says they were talking by the gate up there when somebody walked past them, somebody who answers the description of the gent you took home. Behind this person, hopping along on footstools tied to his feet, was a feller dressed like those devil-dancers you showed at the pictures last week.”

He stopped and stared at me severely as if to impress me that there was a connection here—for those who had the wit to see it.

“Behind these two, floating in the air, was a green spook!” he said, ponderously.

“Nonsense! Utter nonsense! And what the deuce has this fairy-tale got to do with me?” I demanded.

“Joe says he ran with Sally in the direction of the village, and when they got by the wrecked car they looked back and saw this crowd go into your house.”

“There’s no ghosts or devil-dancers in this humble abode,” I told him, truthfully. “You may come in and take a look round if you wish to.”

“No; I won’t trouble you.”

The moonlight sparkled on the spike of his helmet as he jerked his head at Sam. “I picked up Sam on the way out, and when we were passing the wall of Livermore’s grounds, Ted Durkin, the second gamekeeper, popped his head over the wall and called us. He said that an army of Japanese acrobats was prancing all over the estate and would we lend him a hand.”

He looked ruefully at his uniform and continued; “We got into the grounds and we’ve been chasing about like bits of blown paper ever since. What with poachers, acrobats, airships . . .”

“Airships?” I echoed.

“Yes! And you know what that means? It means smuggling! The Revenue authorities will have to look into this. Wait till old Livermore hears about smugglers pulling up his roots. A couple of the scallywags ran down the road. You haven’t seen them, have you?”

“I’m sorry, I haven’t, Gregory.”

I looked him straight in the face and said; “I hope you don’t think I would have anything to do with evading the customs?”

“Oh, no, Mister Russell, not at all! Well, I’d better let you finish your sleep.”

He touched the peak of his helmet, turned and marched away with barrel-chested majesty, Sam slouching by his side.

I looked into the sky just in time to see a tiny globule pass across the face of the Moon. Somewhere in the woods a night-bird called to its mate and, as I laid my head upon the pillow, I heard the piping response come threading through the leafy glades.

Prr-r-eet!
They came from a Dying Universe Locked Up in a Stone, to Claim a New World for Their Glorious Race in the Realm of the Infinitely Great!

CHAPTER I

The Dying Universe

They stood at the edge of the wide platform surmounting the tremendous tower which reared its lofty height three thousand feet above the city. A few dim lights in the distance revealed the immensity of the metropolis sprawling beneath them. But not a single star gleamed in the black vault of the heavens above their heads.

For all those far-off worlds had long since ceased to twinkle. One by one they had flickered out as the centuries sped by, until there was nothing in the limitless void left to shine. The stars had died, just as this world would die, leaving its offspring to perish in the midst of a dying universe.

A heavy sigh escaped the lips of one of the three creatures as they stood gazing up into the blackness.

“Well, Hogar San; it is the end. A billion years we have lived—for this!”

Hogar San nodded his furry head. The expression on his face, beneath the bulging brow, changed from despair to bitter resentment as his thoughts went back over the centuries.

For Hogar San was ten thousand years old, and had yet long to live. Ten times the massive brain which was his original being had been transferred to another body. When first he was born a few stars still glimmered in the darkening heavens and the San race numbered two thousand millions. Now there were scarcely four millions left. Left... to die.

As Ki San, President of the Planet, he had seen the need for exercising rigid control over the population of the
doomed world, just in case a way of escape should present itself. Millions of brains had been left to die with their spent bodies, only the best being preserved to live anew in another frame.

Hogar San's delicate features twisted in a wry smile as he contemplated the glorious past.

"Yes, Gel San, we have done well. We have wrested the secrets from the stars; have plumbed the depths of our universe. We have conquered death—yet Nature ordains that we die! It is a poor reward for our pains."

With a gesture of resignation, he turned his back on the empty vista and walked to the mouth of the great shaft which pierced the centre of the tower. His two companions fell in behind him. Then, after touching a switch at their belts, the three beings stepped over the edge of the shaft into space, to fall swiftly but gently downwards.

Floor after floor flashed by as they descended, their fall controlled by apparatus in their belts which lessened the force of gravity, enabling them to govern their weight at will.

The speed of their hurtling forms decreased as they neared the sixty-fourth level, where they hung poised in mid-air like pieces of thistledown. A lunge and a twist of their bodies sent them gliding sideways to the floor, where they made their way down a corridor lighted by countless tubes of brilliant, pulsating fire.

As they padded softly along, their shimmering garments fluttering in a slight breeze, a faint glow enveloped each short, sturdy figure. This glow meant everlasting life to them, or did until universal death threatened. It was electrical in nature, pervading their bodies with invigorating currents of power, giving them warmth and allowing only electrically filtered air to reach their delicate lungs.

The possibility of living creatures inhabiting the electrons that whirl round the nucleus of the atom like planets round the Sun seems too fantastic for words—yet Science itself has seriously considered the suggestion. Our author takes the idea a step further and visualises those beings of the infinitely small finding a way to increase their size to such a degree that they can enter the greater Cosmos which we occupy.

He gives us an amazing story indeed, full of ideas so tremendous that they must seem incredible to all but the most imaginative reader. But when reading the story, try to remember that these astounding things are only a matter of Relativity.

The Fateful Verdict

At length they entered the vast assembly hall of the Council of San, which was packed with two thousand glowing, furry beings like themselves. An intense hush settled over the throng as Hogar San mounted the dais and seated himself on the great central chair, his companions taking two vacant seats in the circle around him.

A moment later, one of the gathering voiced the expectancy which was reflected in the faces of them all.

"The assembly awaits the honourable Ki San's verdict," he announced, bowing low towards the President of the Planet.

Hesitantly, Hogar San stood up. His lips trembled as he surveyed the Councilor's anxious faces. Then he spoke:

"My people, it is a painful thing I have to say. We have reached the end of our journey—"

A murmur of protest and dismay rose from the vast assembly, but died instantly as Hogar San held up his hand for silence.
"It is hard, I know; but there is no way out. Gel San, our greatest astronomer, and Rama San, chief of the physicists, are agreed on the issue. Our race, which has thrived for millions of centuries, must die, even as our sun is dying.

"Ages ago, when our ancestors faced the prospect of a dying sun they traversed space to a younger star, to find refuge on another planet. There they remained for millions of years, moving ever nearer to the luminary as it cooled. Until, when it was no longer able to support life, they passed on to yet another star.

"But for us, my people, there are no more stars. All the suns in our universe except our own have burned themselves out, while ours is fast becoming spent. In a few brief centuries it will flicker out, leaving us to face extinction ourselves.

"For we need solar power to go on living. Our heat, our food, everything on which we depend is derived from our sun; and when it dies, we too must die!"

Hogar San paused for a moment to watch the effect of his fateful words upon the hushed assembly. Then he resumed his seat, buried his face in his hands to shut out the sight of those horrified faces.

Slowly Rama San arose, bowed towards the still figure of the President and advanced towards the dais.

"You have all heard the sad message of our beloved Ki San. It is true that our universe cannot offer us further shelter. Where, then, can we go to find refuge, to perpetuate our glorious race?

"We might extend its span for a few short centuries by consuming the crust of our planet to form fuel for our machines. But what is the use of staving off death for a matter of centuries when we have lived for millions of years? It is but a day's respite for a condemned man.

"Yet there is no other world in the whole of this vast universe to which we can go. Even the great nebulae which once gleamed afar have all been extinguished. Our galaxy was the greatest of them all; it outlived its neighbours. But now its day is done."

A chill wind seemed to sweep through the Council Chamber and clutch at the hearts of the doomed beings as Rama San paused for a moment, just as the President had done. But instead of resuming his seat, he went on:

"But what if were to venture beyond the confines of our own universe to regions so remote as to seem unattainable? I have an idea which is so wild that I hesitated to speak of it before, even to our President and my friend, Gel San. Yet I feel I must offer it as the last resort; a plan which, though desperate—almost foolish—may yet lead to our salvation."

The Amazing Plan

The icy threat of doom seemed to vanish, and renewed hope surged in each breast as the Councillors hung on the great physicist's every word. What was this daring plan which Rama San had thought of just when it seemed there was no escape from universal annihilation?

"Some two million years ago," Rama San continued, "one of my ancestors, Garv San, designed a strange machine which he believed would pass beyond the limits of our universe. He postulated a fantastic theory that this great universe was but a speck—a molecule—existing in an infinitely greater universe. His machine was designed to increase its size over and over again until it became so vast that it would penetrate that super-universe beyond, and actually become part of it.

"Garv San died before he could complete his machine and test his amazing theory, and since it was never taken seriously by his contemporaries, it was soon forgotten. But his designs are still in the museum. I have spent much time studying them, and can find no flaw in his figures."
"If we could build Garv San's machine—and in the light of our present knowledge it should not prove an insuperable task—we might send an expedition into the realms of super-space to see what refuge it can offer our doomed people. It is a fantastic hope, I admit, for the journey would be fraught with many unknown perils. But it is our only hope!"

There was a confused babble of voices raised in excitement as Rama San stepped from the dais, leaving his bewildered fellows to accept or reject his suggestion. It was astounding—impossible! Yet it offered hope of salvation when all else had failed. Could such a tremendous thing be achieved?

Hogar San, suddenly alert, called the assembly to order. The dreadful menace no longer showed itself in his eyes, which were bright with renewed confidence in the miraculous powers of San science and the determination of his people to survive.

"No venture can be too desperate for us," he announced. "If you believe there is a chance to save our race by this means, Rama San, we must take that chance, however slim it may be!"

Again pandemonium reigned in the vast hall as the ten thousand Councillors, jerked from their stupor, voiced their approval of these sentiments in a series of resounding cheers. Again Hogar San held up his hand to quieten the throng. As the noise died away, he turned towards the chief of the physicists and added:

"Recruit all the assistance you need from the best of our scientists, Rama San, and set to work to build that machine straight away, so that we can make the venture without delay. From the enthusiasm with which your project has been received, I have no doubt that we shall succeed. Indeed, we must succeed! The future of the San nation depends upon it."

"I will do my best," answered Rama San, quietly, as with lighter steps and brighter faces the concourse dispersed.

CHAPTER II

The Voyage Into Super-Space

TEN years later, the machine on which the future of the San race depended was complete. During that short space of time the pick of San's scientists and engineers, led by Rama San, had been labouring ceaselessly to bring to reality a dream which had originated two million years before.*

Unexpected problems which at first seemed insurmountable had hindered their progress, but had all been solved by dint of intense concentration and an indomitable will to succeed, until at length the fantastic conception of a brain long dead took the form of actuality.

The machine, whose intricacies were beyond the comprehension of all but those who took part in its construction, was fitted to a space-ship specially built for the purpose, just as Garv San had originally planned. Obviously there could be no trial trip; but if the apparatus worked according to expectations, based on the success of preliminary experiments, the space-vehicle would increase its proportions to such a degree that it would eventually pass out of the dying universe into another and vastly greater one, bearing its occupants with it.

They, too, if their calculations were correct—and the mathematicians had checked their figures again and again—would expand likewise, without feeling

* Although the San year was considerably longer than ours, consisting of 473 days (a day being of thirty hours' duration), the completion of the machine in ten years was a remarkably speedy achievement from the Sans' point of view. Such was their conception of time that a century to them was equivalent to about ten years in our reckoning. This warped time-sense was due to the fact that their lives were practically unending. As their natural bodies wore out, their brains were transferred to new ones, produced synthetically in the laboratory. Each of these artificial bodies lasted a thousand years, at the end of which period the operation was repeated; and so their life-span was extended indefinitely.
any discomfort, to become explorers in super-space, free to roam between the planets as though they were in their own tiny system.

There was no lack of volunteers when it came to deciding who should go on this strange voyage. Although it was felt that the President could not risk his life in such a dangerous venture, but should remain behind to await the return of the expedition, Hogar San insisted on leading the chosen pioneers into the unknown.

Gel San, the chief astronomer, was appointed navigator of the vessel, and Rama San, as prime mover of the project, was also to go. The rest of the crew—twenty in all—comprised representatives of the other sciences, all experts in their particular sphere.

Since no one knew what perils lay before them, or what hostile beings they might encounter, the space-ship was equipped with many weapons and protective devices, all of which had to be specially contrived, since war had long ago been banished from the planet. Long forgotten methods by which whole armies could be annihilated were sought out of museum records, and the necessary apparatus assembled. Finally, the ship was provisioned for a long absence.

When the day of departure dawned, a feast was held in honour of those who were to participate in this last desperate bid to save their kind from extinction. A feast, not of food, but of light; a series of strange chromatic displays staged in the vast pleasure buildings, where the whole San nation exulted in a riot of rapturous splendour!

These celebrations called for tremendous raids on their precious stores of solar energy, and darkened the sun still further; but the importance of the occasion demanded it.

The Departure

The tracery of twisted spires surmounting the last stronghold of the San nation glowed blood-red in the dull light of the dying sun as the twenty heroes mounted the ramp leading into the great cigar-shaped vessel which was to bear them into the realm of super-space.

Hogar San was last to enter, and as he disappeared from their view the vast throng which had gathered to witness the departure breathed a silent prayer for the safety of their loved ones. Then the great ramp was raised into place, sealing the entrance port and shutting the crew from the gaze of the multitude.

Once inside, each man went straight to his post and climbed into the special harness which protected his body from the inertia-surge caused by violent acceleration. Gongs clanged, signal lights flickered, and orders were rapped out through loudspeakers in every quarter of the ship.

Hogar San immediately relinquished his command to Gel San, who, as chief astronomer, was best fitted for the task of navigating the huge vessel. Gel San took up his position before the gleaming control board and scanned the vision panel which gave him a clear view of the world outside.

There came a series of sound signals from each department of the ship. Gel San reached out and threw over a lever. A leaping jet of flame danced through a vacuum-tube, while a machine at the rear of the control room sighed a soft song of power. Then a tremendous weight bore every man down in his harness as the great ship leaped into the dark sky.

The hazardous voyage had begun!

Gel San piloted the ship well out into space, nearly a hundred million miles from the dying system. Then he flashed a message to the crew that they might leave their protecting harness. A second signal summoned them all to the control room.

"Comrades," the astronomer announced, "we are now drifting at a steady speed into space, far removed from our home planet. The time has come to test the mechanism which was
devised by Garv San two million years ago. It only needs someone to throw the switch. Let our leader be the one to cast the die!”

Hogar San stepped forward to the centre of the compartment where a pedestal was set in the floor, surmounted by a small black box. Above the box was a series of dials calibrated in thousands, millions and tens of millions. The Ki San rested his hand upon the master switch after setting movable needles over prescribed figures, supplied by Rama San. He glanced around at the tense faces of the crew, then plunged the switch home.

Nobody knew quite what to expect, and every man felt disappointed when apparently nothing happened. There was no sound, no change in their conditions. Only the needle on the gauge marked in thousands began to creep round the dial.

“Queer,” the astronomer muttered, then hurried to the vision panel. One look, and a startled cry escaped him.

The others crowded round him, peering into the darkened plate. Their native world—their dull-red sun—were nowhere to be seen!

“It works; it works!” cried Hogar San exultantly. “See! Our system has vanished, shrunk beyond vision.”

Garv San had been right. The vessel, together with its occupants, were rapidly expanding, and they were passing out of their tiny universe into a greater one . . .

The Strange Planet

So continued one of the strangest voyages since time began. The rate of expansion was steady, and the ship soon filled the dying system, to pass through others similarly doomed—growing, ever growing.

Eventually they glimpsed the vast scheme of the Cosmos, with its thousands of universes crowded together like grains of rice in a bowl. Between each grain were ages of time and infinities of space. Soon the vessel was a million times greater than any of them, as with each passing second it expanded to immensely vaster proportions.

Then they began to get a glimpse of the shape of their Cosmos. It was like a huge kidney bean, impenetrably dark, with here and there an occasional glow from some universe which still retained a spark of energy. And at last they were out—out into the realm of super-space!

A pale, silvery light shone through the vision panel as they grew up out of a gigantic rock which gradually dwindled, revealing a tumbled plain covered with tremendous vegetable growths. It was the light of Earth’s satellite, gleaming on the hull of a tiny space-ship which had come from an electronic world—a world belonging to an atom of hydrogen locked up in a pebble!

Gel San threw back the switch of the amazing invention which had brought the explorers through infinity.

“The miracle is accomplished!” he cried. “See, our world in its tiny universe—somewhere within that stone! We must mark the stone well, lest we lose it.”

The space-ship, now about the size of an egg in earthly standards, hovered some ten inches above the ground, coarse blades of grass reaching up to its silver prow. Rama San now took charge of the expedition. Samples of atmosphere were taken, the air pressure measured, and telescopic examination of the Moon made.

“We are still grossly undersized,” Rama San observed. “The surface of this strange planet has a curvature which leads me to believe it is some twenty thousand rusas* in circumference. That is nearly half the size of our world. I think it will be safe for a small party to venture out and retrieve the stone that contains our universe, in case it is lost to us for ever.

* Rusa.—About one mile.
But first we must enlarge the ship still further, to adjust ourselves to this world's standards."

Once more they allowed the vessel to expand until it was over a hundred feet long. A careful watch was kept meanwhile on the kidney-shaped fragment of stone that comprised their entire Cosmos. Then the ramp was lowered, and two of the crew were sent to bring the stone into the ship, where it was placed in safe keeping.

Hogar San decided that it would be best for them to venture forth for a short distance in all directions to spy out the land. As yet no living thing had been seen on the alien world, for had they but known, it was just an hour past midnight. But they heard from a distance the lowing of cattle in a stall, and this strange sound did nothing to assure them of safety: indeed, to them the plaintive bellow sounded somewhat menacing.

"We must prepare ourselves for all manner of monsters and dangerous beasts," Hogar San warned his followers. "In our history, as our forebears passed from planet to planet, they recorded their adventures with the most fearsome creatures. Therefore we must be ready for any emergency. Arm yourselves well, for we do not know what we may have to contend with.

"We shall take four men each, in two parties, the rest staying to guard the ship. Rama San shall lead one party and I will take the other, going in opposite directions."

"You must be back before dawn," Gel San broke in. "I have been measuring the light from this planet's satellite. I believe that it reflects light from a luminary far brighter than our sun, and until we know the nature of the sunlight on this world, it brilliancy and temperature, it would be best that we remain under shelter. If my calculations are correct, dawn cannot be more than four hours away."

CHAPTER III

The First Encounter

It was Rama San and his three companions who came upon the little village of Tyler's Hill, antique and old-worldly as only a Kentish hamlet can be. The tiny thatched cottages drew the San scientist's gaze like magnets.

"The denizens of this strange planet must be very crude in their ways," he observed. "See, they make vegetation grow upon their dwellings to give them roofs! And such quaint structures they are, having no towers, and only two storeys high!

"There are some queer buildings over there," he added, pointing to the row of small shops that occupied the centre of the village. "They have glass fronts. Why glass? Do their inhabitants wish all and sundry to see what goes on inside them?"

They paused before the nearest shop window.

"I wonder what is the meaning of those strange characters?" the physicist pondered, pointing at the inscription above the door:

W. KEENE
NEWSAGENT & TOBACCONIST
TYLER'S HILL POST OFFICE

Then the Sans' attention was attracted to the weird assortment of goods in the window. Here was a display such as only a village store can show: peppermints and notepaper, toy pistols and fountain-pens, imitation jewellery and picture post cards. But it was a little open book that held Rama San's attention above all else—an atlas!

It was only a sixpenny edition, but to the voyagers from the infinitely small this little book was worth its weight in gold. Without more ado, Rama San pressed his finger-tips against the window, and the glass disappeared in a fine vapour. He lifted out the atlas and
scanned its pages in the light of the brilliant summer Moon.

Meanwhile, another member of the party was examining the pillar-box outside the Post Office. The peculiar object intrigued him immensely, and eventually he worked upon it the same miracle that Rama San had wrought upon the shop window, determined to discover what the red cylinder might contain.

Had any sleepless villager been peering out of his bedroom window at that time, he would have gaped in amazement to see an unearthly, furry being cause the atomic structure of matter to disperse by simply placing his fingertips upon the painted metal surface of the pillar-box. Yet the scientific principle employed was quite simple.*

The contents of the wrecked box aroused great curiosity, for the written note was unknown to the San nation. For thousands of centuries, everybody had communicated over a distance by means of transmitting and receiving apparatus suspended on a metal chain round the neck.

P.C. Stubbs Gets a Shock

It was perhaps unfortunate for P.C. Stubbs that he had been up at the Hall helping Jarvis, the gamekeeper, to capture a persistent poacher. Shortly before midnight the miscreant had been caught and the village constable had proudly hauled him before Sir John Stedman, the occupant of the Hall. Sir John had given the poacher in charge straightway, necessitating his immediate removal to Canterbury, for the village had no goal.

* The Sans’ space-ship was radiating power which was picked up by a belt worn round their bodies, and containing an aerial. It was then converted into a form of electrical energy which Earth’s technicians have not yet discovered. This strange power set up a rapid vibratory motion which broke up the atomic structure of matter and caused it to dissolve into a mist. The current did not harm the Sans’ bodies in any way since it was merely conducted by them, and only after passing from the fingers began to vibrate destructively.

So it came about that, about two hours later, the constable was cycling his way homeward when he ran into the four men from the electron. Though Stubbs did not know where they came from, and would not have understood had he been told. But it was sufficient for him that one of His Majesty’s letter-boxes had been broken open and that four men were rummaging amongst the contents.

At first Stubbs thought that his eyes must be playing him tricks, for the men were such strange-looking beings. Their heads were huge and their limbs covered with fur, while each wore only a single garment—what looked like a short, silk smock. The constable decided that they must be freaks escaped from a travelling circus. There could be no other explanation for such peculiar creatures, and for their presence in the High Street at that hour.

Although lacking in imagination, P.C. Stubbs was not deficient in his devotion to duty.

“T say! What’s going on ’ere?” he demanded as he dismounted from his cycle. “And what might you think you’re doing of, bursting open that there pillar-box?”

Rama San and his followers turned to face the man in blue, whose silver buttons glinted in the moonlight. The San scientist eyed the uniform, and somehow sensed the authority it carried. Evidently its wearer was one of the rulers of this primitive planet.

Rama San stretched out his hand in the universal sign of peace. “Hondar!” he said, using the San greeting. “Rama San,” he announced, by way of introducing himself, then inquired the stranger’s name in the only language he knew—the language of San:

“Chi goro nonda?”

The constable gave a blank stare, then remembering his duty, substituted for it an officious frown.

“I don’t know what blessed lingo you’re talking, my lad; but you can’t go running about like this, busting open
letter-boxes and all. You'll 'ave to come along with me."

Stubbs made a sign that the men must accompany him to his cottage while he telephoned to Canterbury for a police van. Rama San looked puzzled. Here was their first difficulty. How were they to converse with the people of this world in super-space?

Then the officer caught sight of the gaping hole in the Post Office window. "'Oly smoke!" he ejaculated. "You've been busting winders, too! I say, this is serious. I'll 'ave to arrest you good and proper."

Suitsing the action to the word, he laid a none too gentle hand upon Rama San, ignoring the other furry things completely. But they could not overlook this affront to their leader. Instantly three pairs of hands shot cut and the hapless policeman found himself torn away from his prisoner and pinned against the pillar-box with considerable force.

Shocked though he was by this violent treatment, it came as a greater shock to realise that actually no hand had touched him, but that he was pressed against the upright metal cylinder—or that part of it which remained—by an invisible agency. Vainly he struggled against the uncanny power, the sweat pouring down his face, as a sharp tingling sensation prickled his skin and a faint electric glow illumined his metal buttons.

For some unknown reason, his vocal cords were just as paralysed as his aching muscles and he found it impossible to shout for assistance. Then Rama San stretched out his hand, and P.C. Stubbs felt rather than saw the bolt of tremendous power that leaped from his fingers. The next instant the whole world was blotted out.

With one look at the crumpled form of the unconscious policeman, Rama San signed to his companions to follow and led the way back towards the spaceship.

It was Mr. Keene, newsagent and tobacconist, who found Stubbs in the light of dawn that morning. The constable was curled up asleep on the cobbled pavement, his hair badly singed, the buttons of his uniform shorn of their silver polish and changed to a dull blue metal. Near-by, half a letter-box remained standing.

**Inspector Voss Investigates**

At break of dawn, Hogar San and his two lieutenants held a council-of-war in their space-ship. The San president and his party had encountered no human beings on their excursion into the countryside, but Rama San's experience with the village constable was enough to convince them that on their future expeditions they were likely to be met with further hostility.

Gel San laid great emphasis on the size of the world on which they found themselves, using the sixpenny atlas with which to demonstrate. He had soon mastered the principles of Mercator's Projection, and by sunrise had managed to fix their approximate position on the map. All three were rather surprised—and disappointed—to find that they were on a small island instead of the great continental mass near-by.

They had, however, been pleased to find that conditions on this alien world were, on the whole, quite suited to their kind. Only one thing inconvenienced them; the brilliant sunlight.

After the subdued red glow which dimly illuminated their native planet in the dying system, they found the light that flooded Earth blindingly powerful and slightly harmful, owing to the immensely greater ultra-violet emanation. Sets of goggles had to be hastily improvised to shield their eyes from the intense glare, and small helmets of heat-resisting material worn to protect their craniums from the ultra-violet rays.

Meanwhile, scarcely a mile away, tense excitement reigned in the ordinarily peaceful village of Tyler's Hill.
P.C. Stubbs was rushed to hospital when it was discovered that his sleep was deeper than it appeared at first. Simultaneously, Police-Inspector Voss hastened from Canterbury to solve the mystery of where a large portion of the village letter-box had vanished, together with the greater part of Mr. Keene's shop window.

He was frankly baffled when he found that the thieves, whoever they were, had taken nothing more than a sixpenny atlas, and had merely opened and scattered a few letters after breaking open the pillar-box. But a greater crime was that of somehow electrocuting the village constable.

The house surgeon subsequently confided that it was a wonder poor Stubbs wasn't frizzled to a cinder, for his buttons and the buckle of his belt had been almost completely fused, indicating that at least 5,000 volts had been discharged into his body. Though where the villains got the current from was more than he or the Inspector could fathom, for electricity was unknown for miles around.

It was all too mysterious and unreal for the Inspector. Stealing a sixpenny atlas; carrying off half a letter-box; electrocuting a constable; there was no rhyme or reason to the uncanny business. Tongues wagged tirelessly throughout the morning as the local inhabitants sought an explanation for the mystery, of which no adequate solution was forthcoming. Such "goings on" in the village had never been known for many a day.

Excitement increased a hundred-fold when, just before noon, old Farmer Lawson came careering along the road, lashing his pony furiously, and pulled up with a jerk outside the Post Office. A terrified expression on his wrinkled face, his beard bristling in his agitation, the farmer threw himself from the trap into the arms of Inspector Voss.

"Two mile away—up near Harpdon," he spluttered. "Gurt silver air-ship in my field! All glowing with sparks . . . field burned to a cinder . . . funny-looking folks—unearthly, I calls 'em—a setting up all sorts of fandangles round their gasbag!" "Hurry up, I tell 'ee! An invasion—that's what it be! Bolsheviks or summat, I reckon!"

Voss pulled nervously at his moustache as an anxious crowd gathered round, then, looking as dignified as possible, climbed into his car. Accompanied by Sergeant Lane, and cheered by the admiring villagers, he drove along the dusty road in the direction from which the farmer had come.

CHAPTER IV

At War with the Invaders

A FEW scared-looking labourers were hurrying away from Lawson's Farm when the two policemen arrived. As the last one departed, he found time to inform the Inspector that the "airship" had settled in Five Acre Field, then went scurrying off after the others towards the security of the village.

Voss knew the field well, and with the Sergeant puffing at his heels, hurried across the meadows to the other side of the hill which hid the ship from view. The two men did not speak. Voss did not care to commit himself until he saw the ship with his own eyes, although he almost made up his mind that the presence of strange men in the field had some connection with the events of the night before. As for the Sergeant, he hadn't the vaguest idea what all the excitement was about.

But when they reached Five Acre Field, both men stopped short at the amazing scene before them. At the far end of the cigar-shaped vessel lying in the centre of the field, a metal mast now sprouted. At its tip, a hundred feet from the ground, was a gleaming ball of metal which sent out a shower
of blue sparks. Forming a square the sides of which were two hundred feet in length, four metal pegs had been rammed into the turf, and from the top of the mast to each side of the square a transparent curtain of blue radiance shimmered and danced.

Within the pyramid of fire twenty furry beings worked industriously, erecting astronomical instruments and other pieces of apparatus which were unrecognisable to earthly eyes. So busy were they at their various tasks that they did not see the two wide-eyed policemen standing a short distance away from the edge of the fiery curtain nearest them.

“What the blue blazes is it?” the Inspector muttered, appropriately, though the question was addressed more to himself than to the mystified man at his heels.

Determined to discover whether the radiant curtain was as impassable as it looked, Voss picked up a stone and tossed it at the glittering screen. The blue curtain gave a slight flicker as the pebble came in contact with it; but instead of passing through it, the stone burst with a loud report.

Voss frowned, while the Sergeant’s mouth opened wider. Though neither of them suspected it, the screen was composed of heat—pure heat! No wonder the very earth boiled and bubbled wherever it touched the ground. . . .

The report of the exploding stone drew Hogar San’s attention, and the two officers stepped back involuntarily as he approached them. They gasped when they saw the white-smocked figure pass through the fiery curtain without a moment’s hesitation and emerge on the other side absolutely unharmed. There was a tremendous flash as the circuit was broken and reformed, but to all appearances this huge-headed, furry-faced being was fireproof!

Voss stepped forward hesitantly and introduced himself, though his heart thumped painfully as he stared at the unearthly creature before him.

“I am Inspector Voss, from Canterbury,” he began. “I am making inquiries into—”

The man from the electron made a gesture of impatience. He could not understand this gibberish.

“Hogar San,” he announced, tapping his breast. “Chi goro nonda?”

Voss looked puzzled. What language was this? Where did these strange foreigners come from? He whispered something over his shoulder to the ogling Sergeant, then moved closer to the man from infinity and laid his hand lightly on his shoulder.

“I’m afraid you will have to come with us to Canterbury,” he explained, knowing full well that this unworldly being could not understand a word he said.

Hogar San brushed the Inspector’s hand aside. He could read in the officers’ faces that they wished him to accompany them, but it would not be wise for him to leave his companions and go with these barbarians into needless danger. He took a step backwards towards the screen of fire, shaking his head negatively.

But Voss had decided that an arrest was called for. Here was an opportunity that might not occur again. He made a sudden grab at Hogar San, who gave vent to a cry of alarm and shot out his hand towards the Inspector.

Voss gave a slight gasp, writhed in pain for a moment, then sank to the ground—dead—electrocuted.

Sergeant Lane hurriedly drew back, his usually ruddy face paling, his eyes bulging out of their sockets. Hogar San advanced towards him with outstretched hand. The terrified policeman drew his truncheon and brandished it menacingly.

“Keep your distance, you murderer!” he cried, as he back away out of reach of that deadly touch.

Then Hogar San adjusted a switch at his belt, and a vivid bolt of lightning struck the ground at the Sergeant’s
feet. The officer gave a great leap backwards, then turned and fled from the field.

The Attack on the Pyramid

SERGEANT LANE'S babbled report to headquarters at Canterbury caused a sensation, not only amongst his fellow minions of the law, but throughout the whole county. Major Willard, the city's Chief Constable, ordered a dozen patrol cars crammed with men to be rushed to the scene immediately, and he and the Sergeant led the squad in the first car.

But Hogar San had expected this, and had the protecting heat curtain extended over an area fully a mile wide. Hedges, fields and roads, wherever the foot of the pyramid touched, were blackened and charred.

Rounding a corner in the leading police car, not far from their destination, Major Willard, the Sergeant and three other policeman plunged into the curtain of death before they were aware of its presence.Instantly the five men were burned to a cinder, the car reduced to a charred heap of wreckage.

The other cars stopped just in time. Frantic calls were made to the city and neighbouring towns; Whitehall was informed, and within an hour a battalion of khaki-clad troops and two batteries of field guns were advancing on the invaders.

By the time they arrived on the scene, excited crowds of people in cars, and on bicycles, had gathered within a respectful distance of the field where the Sans lurked behind their protecting curtain. In vain the squad of policemen tried to persuade them to leave the forbidden area, and finally contented themselves by forming cordon at strategic points to keep the inquisitive onlookers in check.

The infantry took up their positions with the artillery at the rear on the hill overlooking Lawson's Farm. Staff officers barked out their commands while all the equipment of modern warfare appeared like magic.

Confident that the sight of his gallant troops would cause the handful of men round their silver craft to surrender straightway, the Commanding Officer made an attempt to get in touch with the enemy before opening hostilities. At his orders, two men advanced to within a few feet of the shimmering screen and gestured to the creatures within the pyramid.

But Hogar San and his fellows ignored the overtures completely. For the heroes of San had made up their minds as to their plan of action. It was obvious to them that the denizens of this alien world were crude savages, and before Earth was ready for Sanoccupation its inhabitants must be taught that the invaders were far superior to them, and that it was useless to try to restrain them. Without doubt, the barbarians seemed determined to defy them, but Hogar San did not place much store in the ancient weapons the savages had mustered.

"Oh, well," Colonel Thomson decided. "We must let 'em have it. No good monkeying about with queer devils like this. Let's show 'em who's who."

A ragged volley of rifle fire was directed at the curtain of heat. Little sparks of radiant electricity flew from the sides of the pyramid, but the bullets melted before they could pass through the glittering barrier. It was strange to see the Sans at work on their instruments on the other side of the transparent shield, completely regardless of the fusillade.

Observing that the rifle fire had no effect, the Colonel ordered the artillery to open fire. A faint sound of cheering came from the crowds in the distance as the gunners took aim at the foot of the pyramid; then was drowned in the roar of the field-guns echoing over the countryside.

There was a series of resounding explosions as the shells burst against the heat curtain, sending out showers of
sparks and molten metal. As the smoke cleared away, it was evident that no damage had been done within the protective canopy of shimmering heat.

"Rapid fire!" barked the Commanding Officer. "Independent aim."

The Purple Ray

AGAIN came the thunder of the artillery, interspersed with the crackle of rifle fire, while the blue pyramid threw off constant streams of sparks in all directions. Then a shell struck one of the pegs which formed the boundary of the heat curtain, and there was a terrific flash as the circuit broke, to re-form into triangular formation.

Colonel Thomson's eyes narrowed as he gazed at the now three-sided pyramid of leaping blue fire. Through his binoculars, he picked out the other pegs and rapidly gave orders for them to be destroyed.

The pegs were copper rods about twelve inches tall, tipped with some strange substance that held the shimmering curtain of heat in a closed circuit. But the pegs were such tiny targets that only a chance shot could strike them.

As the barrage continued, the Sans seemed to sense the attackers' intentions. Hogar San was seen to approach his two lieutenants and hold a conversation with them. Then he turned to one of his followers, who hurried into the silver space-ship and returned carrying what appeared to be a small rifle with a short, thick barrel.

Examining the object through his glasses, the Colonel gave a contemptuous snort as he saw the white-smocked creature raise the weapon to his shoulder and train it on the foremost of the little group of field guns.

But the effect of the apparently harmless weapon was devastating. The Colonel gasped and the troops stood transfixed with horror as a vivid beam of purple light slashed through the fiery curtain towards the gun and its crew. The next instant, both gun and crew were non-existent.

Again the purple ray flashed, and another gun dissolved into nothingness. Panic-stricken, the remaining artillery men turned and fled for their lives, leaving the other six guns to be reduced to invisibility like the rest. Within a minute, the whole battery had vanished!

At this demonstration of the Sans' fighting equipment, the demoralised troops fled after the gunners, shrieking in terror. For here was power beyond all human ken, against which resistance was futile. The Colonel and his staff likewise decided that discretion was the better part of valour when it came to battling with such uncanny forces, and with blanched faces beat a hasty retreat. Similarly, the crowds in the distance melted away. . . .

The result of the battle was immediately transmitted to the War Office. But the authorities, unable to appreciate the unusual severity of the Sans' methods of warfare, decided that they could not give in so easily. Stronger measures must be employed to rout the invaders.

A message flashed from Whitehall to Manston Aerodrome. Within half an hour of the infantry's retreat, a squadron of giant bombing planes, loaded with death, came roaring over the field where the silver space-ship lay at rest.

Hogar San gazed into the sky with surprise written on his furry features.

"These people of the infinitely large are not so primitive as we thought," he remarked to Rama San. "They can fly, even if their machines are clumsy things. It would be a pity to destroy them wantonly."

The physicist shrugged his broad shoulders.

"If our forefathers had harboured such merciful feelings I cannot believe that they would have wrested whole worlds from less advanced races, and
so enabled our own race to survive. Nature has ordained the creed of the survival of the fittest. Therefore we must destroy the lowly creatures of this planet, in order that our kind may live.”

“True,” Hogar San replied sadly. “Then see to it that these flying machines are removed.”

At Rama San's bidding, the furious being who had blasted the field guns into nothingness once more raised his devastating weapon. A bolt of purple fire leaped up into the sky and engulfed the first of the bombers. No sooner had it vanished than a second pillar of force shot up and reduced another great plane to dust; and so one by one the machines were swallowed up, the atoms of matter which composed them disintegrated, until not a single one remained.

Once again the invaders had demonstrated the vastly superior, almost miraculous forces at their command.

CHAPTER V

The World at Bay

The news of the destruction of the bombarding planes, whose complete annihilation had been witnessed by the few remaining people in the surrounding villages, was a severe jolt to the confidence of the high officials at Whitehall, who were at a loss to account for such stubborn resistance on the part of the invaders.

Despite all precautions to prevent the ignominious defeat of Colonel Thomson's battalion from reaching the ears of the public, disturbing rumours were already spreading through the country as a result of garbled reports of the battle which appeared in the evening papers. To prevent panic, a ruthless censorship promptly curtailed further alarmist reports, while the War Office set about taking steps to exterminate the menace once and for all.

Simultaneously, Parliament was hastily summoned to an emergency session, and a state of war was declared. No declaration could be made to the enemy, for it was not known from whence the mysterious invaders came, and the suggestions of Fleet Street that they must have come from Mars or from some subterranean world were generally considered too romantic to be taken seriously.

But wherever they came from, one thing was certain: they had to be wiped out immediately, before they follow up the temporary advantage they had gained.

The same evening, while radio informed the whole world that mighty Britain was at war with a small army of men from nowhere, thousands of troops began to entrain for Kent in all parts of the country; stores, guns, ammunition and tanks clattered up roads and railways towards the invaders' lair, and the inhabitants of villages for miles around made haste to leave the danger zone.

Within twelve hours, an army of over 100,000 men surrounded the immense, squat pyramid of blue radiance which throughout the night cast a ghostly light over the countryside. Heavy artillery and monstrous tanks were lined up all around, within half a mile of each side of the pyramid, which had regained its former rectangular base.

While these preparations were being made, the invaders had also been busy. Anticipating another attack, they had assembled at the centre of the pyramid all sorts of strange apparatus with which to resist and rout their foolish attackers; devilish weapons of super-scientific warfare which had passed out of use on their native planet thousands of years ago.

Hogar San viewed the assemblage with sad eyes, for he was a lover of peace and loath to destroy life—even barbarian life such as this. . . .

At dawn, the first attack was launched. The blue pyramid of fire was subjected to an intensive bombardment by heavy
artillery. Within minutes the narrow belt of land surrounding the base of the pyramid was pitted and scarred, while fire and smoke spewed from the ground like a volcanic eruption. Nothing could possibly withstand such a terrific onslaught.

But when the tumult died down and the smoke cleared away; the blue pyramid was still intact, and within its walls the ground lay smooth and unbroken as before. Nothing had passed beyond that protective barrier, although all around it were heaped-up remnants of hundreds of exploded shells which had come in contact with the fiery screen.

In the centre of the field the silver space-ship could be clearly seen, and around it a dozen white-garbed figures.

**Streamers of Death**

The whole vast army, officers and men, stared dazedly at the futile results of the bombardment. At the rear, among his lieutenants, General Carter swore softly.

What amazing fortress was this that could stand up to such an onslaught without so much as a quiver? Why didn't the enemy fight back instead of simply ignoring the attack? Who were the blasted enemy, anyway?

Then, almost as though they had sensed his thoughts, the invaders came into action. The watching troops stood motionless, filled with terror at the sight, as at different points outside the protecting curtain, hundreds of little spheres of green fire appeared from nowhere.

They seemed to float lazily in the air, about twenty feet from the ground, on all sides of the blue pyramid; then they began to move slowly, forming an ever-widening circle, towards the dumb-founded soldiers.

As they moved they grew bigger, gathered speed, and increased their height from the ground, so that by the time they reached the front line of troops they were two hundred feet above their heads. Then each fiery ball began to spin on its axis and to emit a trail of sparks like a giant catherine wheel.

The army of soldiers waited, wondering what to expect, yet filled with a sense of impending disaster. The green spheres had ceased to move forward, but had now begun to descend, spinning faster and faster, looming larger and larger, until they hung suspended once more about thirty feet above their heads.

A few of the men raised their rifles and fired up at the menacing orbs, but without the slightest effect. Then, with startling abruptness, long streamers of green fire leaped from each sphere downwards in all directions as the balls continued to advance over the heads of the terror-stricken soldiers.

Vivid emerald tongues of flame licking at their heels, the front line of troops threw down their guns and ran for their lives before the advancing horror. Soon the whole vast circle of men broke into a dozen segments and began to move swiftly outwards, away from the great blue pyramid.

General Carter watched from afar through powerful glasses. He saw the trailing net of fire sweep down upon the fleeing troops, saw the ragged lines of men drop dead in their tracks as the green flames enveloped them, leaving their bodies wrapped in a vaporous shroud of emerald hue.

And still the spinning spheres came on, moving just a little faster than the rushing hordes of troops, urging them forward like cattle, striking down those in the rear and gradually decreasing the fugitives' numbers. Until when the fields had been strewed with misty corpses, the balls suddenly ceased their flight, withdrew their fiery tentacles of death and began to move slowly back towards the invaders' lair.

As the circle drew in round the pyramid, the green spheres grew smaller and smaller and finally disappeared. The General's glasses dropped from his nerveless fingers. His eyes reflected stark terror.
“God!” he cried. “This is horrible! It’s—uncanny!”

He little guessed that the spheres of death had been controlled by radio impulses, or that the invaders viewed the field of battle from directly overhead, through a vision panel which hung in the air a thousand feet above. It seemed to him, and to each terrified soldier who fled from them, that the green spheres of fire were endowed with sentient life.

Wringing his hands in despair, General Carter turned to his horrified lieutenants and screamed: “This isn’t war—it’s murder! What can we do against such devilish weapons? What can anybody do?”

No answer came for a moment; then a white-faced major replied hopelessly: “We can do nothing, sir, I’m afraid. It’s useless to pit our strength against such power, though heaven knows what it is, and who wields it.

“The world is at bay, it seems, against unconquerable forces!”

No Surrender!

It was, for the most part, a sadly disillusioned group of men which gathered in an office at Whitehall later that morning, faced with the task of reviewing a situation that had become truly formidable.

General Carter’s account of how the greater part of his army had been massacred by the invaders brought home to his superiors the realisation that they had to deal with an enemy whose military tactics were unique, and whose strange defensive measures rendered them both deadly and invulnerable.

In response to frantic demands from the Cabinet, all the resources of the War Office were instantly called to bear upon the problem of how they were to combat these alien forces. So far, they had been displayed solely for the purpose of defence; but how much more destructive would they be if the invaders took the offensive? What terrible weapons would they bring into play if they started out to conquer?

For that, surely, must be their object. So argued the military and scientific experts who had been hurriedly summoned to the conference.

Obviously, said one, the invaders would not be content to remain anchored in the fields of East Kent for ever, resisting every attempt to drive them back to wherever they came from. Sooner or later they would draw in their protecting curtain, take to the air in their curious vessel, and embark on a campaign of conquest, wreaking widespread destruction until they compelled those in authority to pay heed to their demands, whatever they might be.

For the country would be practically defenceless against the dreadful death-dealing weapons wielded by the attackers. It would only be a matter of time before they were forced to surrender.

But there was another consensus of opinion which would not admit for a moment any suggestion of surrender; and those who took this belligerent attitude were in the majority, despite the repeated demonstrations they had been given of the enemy’s superior strength.

“Give in to these fantastic creatures? Bah!” thundered the veteran General Ponsonby indignantly. “Who the devil are they, sir, to think they can intimidate the British Army with their new-fangled weapons? Surrender’s out of the question, sir!

“Why, we’ve not tackled ’em properly yet! We’ve got the whole of our fighting forces to draw upon, sir, and they’re only a handful of men—if they’re men at all. What we want is more men and more guns, and crush ’em by sheer weight of numbers.”

“Better still,” put in a grey-haired but youthful-looking man who had been called from the Air Ministry, “wait until they come out in the open in that ship of theirs. While they’re locked up in that blue pyramid we can’t get at
them, although they can get at us, as we know to our cost. But once they take to the air, that single ship won't get far with a whole fleet of fighting planes to contend with!"

There were murmurs of approval from the majority whose faith in Britain's fighting forces was roused by these expressions of stern tenacity. Then the Secretary for War, who was presiding over the conference, held up his hand for silence as a blue-eyed little man got to his feet.

Instantly, the murmurs died down and every man listened attentively to what the meek little civilian had to say. For everyone knew Professor Rapson, and although few generally agreed with his radical views, he earned their respect as one whose inventive genius had done much to infuse into the services the scientific improvements which modern militarism demanded.

If there was anybody who was qualified to speak upon the super-scientific warfare waged by the invaders, it was he. Although he frankly confessed that the amazing forces at their command transcended his and all earthly knowledge.

CHAPTER VI

In the Invaders' Lair

"I CANNOT conceive," Professor Rapson announced, "that any weapons of ours can ever be used successfully against these alien beings, either in attacking them further or for purely defensive purposes. You must realise, gentlemen, after these distressing manifestations, that we are vainly attempting to oppose creatures whose scientific prowess far exceeds that of humankind.

"Although I have not yet had an opportunity of seeing these beings with my own eyes, I have made it my business to interview the unfortunate police constable who was the first human being to come into contact with them, and I was able to gather from his somewhat uncouth description a pretty good idea of what they look like.

"From his knowledge, and from the accounts we have all had of the methods they employ, I feel satisfied in my conclusion that these people are not the agents of some foreign power which has designs upon our country, but that they are creatures of another world altogether; the spawn of some yet unknown planet which has come to Earth through space."

Low sounds expressive of their unbelief came from the hard-headed military men as the Professor paused for a moment. This was too utterly fantastic to be considered. Beings from another world? An interplanetary invasion? It was the preposterous scare-stuff of Fleet Street!

"It has been suggested that the invaders, whoever they may be and whatever their mission, are intent on conquering our nation; indeed, that it is their ambition to conquer the world. I have no hesitation in saying that, if this is their eventual object, then all the resources of the human race cannot prevent them from carrying it out.

"For although they may be but a handful of men, they have at their disposal immensely destructive forces which, I am sure, can outweigh all the superior numbers and inferior weapons that we can muster. It is probable, too, that they are but an advance guard, and that unlimited numbers of their kind will follow them as soon as it becomes necessary."

Reluctant though they were to credit such remote possibilities, the Professor's audience listened intently, realising that his conclusions, though startling, were based upon knowledge of things beyond their comprehension, and that a scientist of his standing would never make such extraordinary statements without feeling sure that he was on safe ground.

"Of course," he was saying, "all this
is pure speculation, but I feel certain that what I am suggesting is not far from the truth. What is more important is to ascertain precisely who these people are, where they come from, and what they want here. So far, no endeavours of this kind have been made.

"They were no sooner discovered in our midst than they were regarded as enemies and treated with violence, with what dire results to us we are only too familiar. Although the fact that they have not yet attacked mankind except for the purpose of defending themselves seems to suggest that their mission is a peaceful one."

"But overtures of peace were made," the chairman intervened, "and were only ignored. Before that, too, they had shown hostility by striking down members of the local police force. Besides, if they are not of earthly origin, as you suggest, how are we to communicate with them?"

The Professor smiled, then answered the question with another: "Would you be prepared to give me an opportunity to try?"

"Certainly," was the Secretary's reply. "It is worth making the attempt, and it will give us a chance to consider what further steps we must take should the invaders still prove hostile."

"Thank you," said the Professor, whereupon the meeting adjourned, amid signs of bewildered disapproval from the belligerent majority.

**A Mission of Peace**

**T**WO hours later, Professor Rapson was speeding in an armoured car through the streets of Canterbury on his way to Lawson's Farm. By his side was P.C. Stubbs, whom he had picked up at the hospital, and who, though hardly fit enough to be discharged, had dutifully agreed to accompany the Professor into the invaders' lair.

"Them furry faces didn't seem none too friendly to me," he had said, ruefully, "but if you think I'll be any 'elp, I reckon as 'ow I can stand the sight of their ugly mugs again."

"You will be of great assistance, Stubbs," the Professor assured him. "In fact, your presence is indispensable. I think the creatures will recognise you, and the fact that one who has suffered at their hands is willing to venture amongst them a second time should help to convince them that we come in peace."

On reaching the edge of the ravaged area where the terrified troops had been put to flight early that morning, the Professor and the constable left the car and proceeded on foot across the scarred and pitted fields. But apart from the shell-torn ground, all evidence of the encounter had been erased.

Not a sign was there of the thousands of men that had been mowed down by the streamers of death. The green fire had utterly consumed their bodies, leaving no trace of them whatever.

Nor was there a single abandoned gun remaining to mark the sites of the heavy artillery which had proved so ineffective against the protecting curtain. Every one of the batteries in the circular area had been completely demolished by the enemy's annihilating rays after the gunners had deserted their posts to escape the advancing green spheres.

The heaped-up remnants of exploded shells had also been removed from each side of the great blue pyramid, which alone remained undisturbed as when the first attack was launched the day before. Through its transparent walls, as they approached, the two men could see the cigar-shaped vessel of the invaders. Surrounding it still was what looked like a mass of strange machines and apparatus, while beneath the shade of its gleaming hull two white-garbed figures stood guard.

The men halted when they came within a few yards of the foot of the pyramid. A moment later, one of the figures at its centre turned in their direction, then hurried up the ramp into the ship.
He reappeared almost immediately with two other creatures like himself, and together the three came swiftly across the field towards the spot where the two emissaries stood.

"Now we’re for it, Professor," said Stubbs, pulling nervously at the buttons of his new tunic.

"Whatever you do, don’t show hostil- ity," the other instructed him. "Keep cool, and try to give them the impression that we bear them no ill-will."

They remained silent as the three furry creatures came nearer and eventually reached the barrier of heat. There was a flash, and they had passed through it and were standing before the two men on the other side.

While Stubbs watched apprehensively, Professor Rapson stepped forward unhesitatingly, his right hand outstretched in friendship. Instantly, one of the creatures came nearer and repeated the gesture.

"Hanno resat fin San nonda?" asked Hogar San, a hopeful expression on his strange face.

"I’m afraid we don’t understand one another very well," Rapson responded with a smile. But although his words were meaningless to the San president, he evidently interpreted the smile, for his own furry features wrinkled in a friendly grimace.

Raising a little contrivance which he wore on a chain round his neck, he spoke a few words into it. A moment later, the blue pyramid disappeared in a flash. Then, pointing towards the space-ship, he motioned to the two Earthmen to follow.

The Talking Corpse

Giving his companion’s arm a reassuring grip, Rapson went after the San leader, Stubbs falling in behind him while the other two beings followed in the rear. No sooner had they passed within the bounds of the protecting screen than it flashed into being again, forming a great trans-
labourer's head. This helmet was also connected up with the machine, on the front of which were a number of strange dials and switches.

While the two Earthmen stared in wonderment, more words came from the lips of the corpse, which spoke in the dialect it had used in life.

"We are using this man's body in order to talk to you. We do it by sending our thoughts to his brain and making them turn into human speech. He does not know what is happening. He is alive, but in a state of sus...sus—pen—ded ani—mation."

The words came only with difficulty. The Sans, quite inadvertently, had chosen a poor subject for experiment; one whose brain was extremely limited in expressing its natural thoughts in the form of speech, and whose lips had difficulty in framing the unfamiliar words which the induced thoughts were striving to convey.

"It is hard to make ourselves understood as we would like," the voice went on. "This man's feeble mind contains very few words. We have looked into it in an attempt to discover the sum of human knowledge. It can tell us very little, but we think it responds well enough for us to speak to you.

"We have been wanting to get in touch with your kind since we came here. As we do not know your language we assembled this device. If you will put on this helmet you will be able to speak to us through the mouth of one of ourselves."

The creature standing beside the box held out towards Rapson a helmet like the others, while one of his fellows stretched himself upon the low metal table beside the farm labourer and allowed Hogar San to fix a fourth helmet over his head. Then the Ki San touched a switch on the machine and the San's eyes closed, while his features gradually assumed the appearance of death.

CHAPTER VII

Time, the Conqueror!

RAPSON accepted the preferred helmet from Rama San and placed it over his head, at the same time trying to collect his scattered thoughts. He must be careful not to reveal too much to these creatures, but to convey to them only those impressions which it was desirable they should receive.

But he could not conceal the admiration he felt for these alien beings. Here was a contrivance against which man's most ingenious inventions seemed child's toys by comparison; and they had produced it solely for the purpose of communicating with mankind when the opportunity arose.

This difficulty having been solved for him, Rapson looked forward to discovering where these amazing creatures had come from and what they wanted of humanity.

He had no sooner fixed the helmet securely on his head, noticing that through the glass-like substance of which it was composed ran a fine network of wires, than the San lying on the metal slab began to speak, slowly and deliberately, in his native tongue.

The watching Sars who had gathered round listened interestedly. Rapson struggled to banish all thoughts from his mind, so as to prepare it for a single mental impression of earnest inquiry. He had never imagined it so difficult to make one's mind a blank... But the creatures had already learned what was in his brain a moment before. As soon as the San had ceased to interpret his escaping thoughts, Rama San made his reply through the lips of the farm labourer.

"You are filled with admiration at the scope of our science. Your mind tells us that quite clearly; it works better than this man's. Such feats as this are simple to us. We come of a civilisation which is far more advanced than your
crude state.”

Rapson concentrated on the question which had baffled everybody since the invaders first made their presence felt, and to which he was so anxious to learn the answer.

“Where do you come from? What is your native planet? I am satisfied that you are not of Earth.”

There was no reply for some time; then the man on the table mouthed the words:

“We understand your question, but it is hard for us to answer. This man’s mind does not know the difference between one world and another, even among those that go round your sun.”

Rapson bit his lip. Here was an obstruction which even San science could not surmount. But there was a simple way out. Turning to the constable standing in a daze at his heels, he asked for his notebook and pencil. Stubbs produced them, mystified.

The Professor moved closer to Rama San, motioned to him to watch, then sketched a rough plan of the Solar System on a page of the notebook. Laying his pencil on the central circle, he pointed to the Sun hanging low in the sky above the western horizon. Then he sent through the brain of the sleeping San a request that Rama San should indicate which planet they came from, and pointed to each of them in turn, moving slowly outwards from the centre of the page until he reached the outermost circle, representing remote Pluto.

But, to his surprise, Rama San only looked puzzled. Thinking that he might not have made his meaning clear, Rapson repeated his request and started to go through the process again, but stopped abruptly as he heard the labourer speaking.

“No, we do not come from your system at all. We come from another universe, hidden from human eyes.”

Rapson’s mouth opened wide. Another universe? These creatures came from some remote planetary system—perhaps in another galaxy, billions of miles away! Surely, it was impossible.

“Watch,” said the labourer. Then Rama San took the pencil in his furry fingers and drew a small circle in the centre of another page. Deftly he described a bigger circle around it and placed another small circle on this outer ring. Then he motioned to one of the Sans at his side to fetch something from the space-ship.

“See! Our world and its sun,” the farm labourer intoned. “Ours is the only world in the system we come from.”

This time Rapson looked mystified. The San came running back from the space-ship and placed something in Rama San’s hand. He held it out for Rapson to see.

It was a small pebble.

The Ultimatum

“OUR world—our universe—is locked up in that stone,” came the voice of the inert labourer.

Rapson’s mouth opened wider.

“Good lord! You don’t mean—an atom of hydrogen?” he gasped. “That—that your world is—an electron?”

Rama San nodded sagely, while the rest looked on amused at the Earthman’s astonishment. Stubbs merely stood by, incomprehensible.

“Our sun is nearly dead,” the voice went on. “Soon our world will be cold and lifeless. Our people, our glorious civilisation, must be preserved. We came from the realm of the little into the infinitely big in search of a younger world where we might carry on our race.”

From within the folds of his white smock the San physicist produced a little book—an atlas. He opened it to show a map of the world and laid a long, furry finger on the tiny red spot that was Great Britain.

“We find we are here. It is a very small part of your planet’s surface, and we want it for our people. Here we can build up our great civilisation again. As
our numbers increase, our race will spread over the rest of the planet. If you do not give us what we want, we shall take it from you by force. It is our right. Our civilisation is older and wiser than yours. It must not die, but go on to greater heights than you could ever reach.

"Will you grant us refuge here, or must we banish you and all your kind from this world to make way for us?"

Rapson felt his brain reeling. Creatures from an electron—from a dying universe—hidden in a pebble...! These small-minded military men couldn't grasp the possibility of the invaders coming from another world within the Solar System. What would they say to this! And what would be their reaction to the amazing ultimatum of these people, who threatened to exterminate the whole of humanity—and were well able to do it—if their demands were refused?

These astounding creatures evidently imagined that he alone could speak on behalf of those millions of people inhabiting this little speck on Earth's surface, of which they had no knowledge. He knew what the answer of those in authority would be, and shuddered to think of the carnage that would result from defiance of these alien beings, who saw nothing wrong in removing mankind from his native planet in order that the San race might be saved from extinction.

Despairingly, Rapson tore the helmet from his head, stopping the torrent of words that poured from the lips of the creature who translated his tumbling thoughts. What a responsibility, to be called upon to speak for the whole human race! For in giving Britain's answer, as he was expected to do, he would be determining the fate of the rest of Earth's teeming millions.

Though whatever happened, it seemed they were doomed to die sooner or later. The Sans would transfer the remnants of their race to their new home with or without man's consent, and gradually oust him from his Earth...

Then suddenly, like a revelation, realisation came; the thought that perhaps these creatures were not so clever after all. They were supremely confident, but they had overlooked one vital element in the scheme of things which, if he was right, meant that mankind might be saved.

He would give the Sans their answer, and if his theory was correct, he might remove this dreadful menace for ever. In fact, if what he believed was true, the menace did not exist! If only he could prevent them from discovering what was in his mind...

Carefully shutting out all thoughts that might arouse the Sans' suspicions, Professor Rapson replaced the helmet on his head and framed his reply to the ultimatum:

"I cannot speak for the rest of world, but my country will have no objection to you establishing yourselves here. As you say, it is your right, and our people will be ready to recognise it and give you refuge in this land."

Rama San's beady eyes gleamed as he responded:

"Good! We thank you, and shall be merciful to your people. There are but four millions of our race left, and we shall not require much space at first, although when our future is assured we shall allow our people to expand... But now we must set about the task of shifting our nation into this new world.

"One half of our number will return at once to tell our people of our success and to prepare plans for the migration, for which many ships like ours will be needed. Our President will make the journey with nine of our brave men, while the rest stay behind with me to guard the stone wherein our world lies hidden.

"You must remain here with us until the ship returns. It may be for a long time, in your reckoning, but we can learn much from you meanwhile about your world and its peoples."
Einstein Was Right!

THE San leaders held a brief consultation together, then without further delay Hogar San led his followers up the ramp into the ship, while those that were to stay behind gathered round to watch the departure.

The ramp was raised into place. Rama San placed the pebble which contained the dying universe beneath the prow of the huge vessel, which quickly rose from the ground and began to decrease its size as it hung suspended in the air.

Even the watching Sans stood fascinated as the gleaming silver shape grew smaller and smaller, settling down over the stone as it did so. Rapson stared in utter amazement at the sight of the shrinking vessel, while Stubbs, who had witnessed so many miracles that he had ceased to be surprised at what he saw, gazed at this latest spectacle with a vacant expression on his rosy face.

The space-ship shrank rapidly until it was the size of a rifle bullet. It was only just discernable between the blades of grass as it hovered an inch above the pebble. A moment later, as they crowded round to watch it more closely, it was a tiny pin-point of light on the surface of the stone. Then it vanished. . . . It had re-entered the minute cosmos from which it came.

Rapson turned to the dumbfounded constable and again removed the helmet from his head.

"Now we shall see," he murmured, half to himself. "These creatures are clever, heaven knows, but I'm backing Einstein every time!"

"All this magician stuff beats me," Stubbs confessed dazedly, and lapsed once more into his coma.

Rapson stood deep in thought, stroking his chin, his gaze fixed on the pebble. Rama San watched him curiously, while the rest busied themselves amongst their mysterious machines.

Five minutes had passed when suddenly Rapson let out a cry. "Look!" he shouted, pointing a trembling finger at the ground.

Rama San and his startled fellows hurried to the spot. There in the grass lay the pebble, and upon its smooth surface gleamed a tiny pin-point of light.

"The ship!" cried the San leader in his native language. "Can it be that they are returning so soon? I had expected they would not be back for a long time yet. I wonder . . . ?"

Rapson peered intently at the stone as the point of light grew bigger and became a tiny sliver of metal, looming ever larger. The surprised Sans drew back, expressions of tense expectancy on their furry faces, until at last the spaceship had grown to its full extent and settled lightly on the ground in the position it had occupied but a few minutes before.

Somehow, it did not seem to shine so brightly as it did when it began the return journey. Then the ramp was lowered, revealing Hogar San and his faithful crew.

But what a crew! As they tottered down the ramp, those that had remained behind stared agast at the sight of ten incredibly aged Sans, thin and bent, but a shadow of their former selves, with deep despair on their wrinkled faces. What had caused such a change in their appearance in so short a time?

Rapson smiled, sadly. He knew! It was just as he had expected; just what he had hoped for. Einstein was right!

"What has happened?" cried Rama San excitedly, hurrying forward to assist the aged crew's leader, who seemed even more ancient and decrepit than the rest.

"How long have we been gone, Rama San?" the Ki San croaked to his lieutenant.

"Only a very short period, in the time of this planet," the San physicist replied. "But you——?"

"We have been gone nearly a thousand years, Rama San—a thousand years, in our reckoning. This body of mine—my tenth body—is completely
worn out, like those of my faithful crew. We are near the point of death. We would have died long ago if we had not manufactured food and managed to replenish the power which propelled our ship.

“All this time we have been searching . . . searching for our universe amongst the millions of dead universes within the pebble. At last we found it—dead like the rest!”

“Dead?” echoed the bewildered Rama San. “But it was only a short time ago that we first left it to enter this super-universe, and it had then still several centuries to live. What of our people; have they, too, perished?”

“They are no more,” sighed Hogar San. “Our race vanished into extinction thousands—nay, millions of years ago, even while we were seeking a new world where it might find refuge. All—all are dead!”

The End of the Sans

LOUD cries of dismay came from the bewildered Sans who had stayed for five minutes in the realm of the big while their fellows returned to the infinitely small, to wander through space within the pebble, century after century, seeking a world which had died long before they embarked on their homeward journey.

Time had defeated them, just when they had seemed certain of success. Einstein had discovered the secret, whereas they had not. Einstein had said that time was purely relative with motion. The tiny electronic world circling around its protonic sun millions of millions of times a second had perished countless revolutions ago.

Time was the conqueror!

Silently Rama San freed the farm labourer from his bonds and pressed a switch on the box-like machine. Gradually the warmth of life flowed through the inanimate body. The man opened his eyes, rose from the metal table and stared vacantly about him.

The San scientist took his arm and led him to the spot where Rapson and the constable stood watching, then dismissed the three Earthmen with a gesture of resignation and motioned them towards the edge of the blue pyramid.

Rapson grasped the arms of the other two men and led them away. They had not gone very far when, looking back, Rapson saw three of the Sans train their devastating weapons on the mass of machinery and apparatus surrounding the space-ship. It vanished into nothingness, and when he turned round again the blue pyramid was no longer there.

On reaching the edge of the field, the three men stopped and looked back at the space-ship. They saw that the Sans were mounting the ramp leading into the silver vessel, those that had remained behind assisting their feeble fellows. As the last one disappeared through the great entrance port, the ramp was raised into place. A moment later, the ship rose swiftly into the air, to hang suspended two hundred feet above the ground.

For several seconds the silver vessel gleamed dully in the light of the setting sun. Then a terrific flash of lightning lit up the whole landscape for miles around, dazzling the three men, who flung their arms up over their eyes to shut out the blinding glare.

When they looked up again, there was nothing. . . . The invaders from the infinitely small had gone to join their nation.
THE PERFECT CREATURE

By

JOHN BEYNON

(Author of The Moon Devils, The Man from Beyond, Stowaway to Mars, etc.)

A Scientist Creates Life . . . and Produces a Monster

The first knowledge I had of the Dixon affair was when a deputation from the village of Membury arrived to ask me if I would investigate certain curious happenings connected with Membury Grange.

Perhaps it would make matters clearer if I explained at this point why they should make this request of me.

Just then it happened that I held the post of a district investigator for the S.S.M.A.—that is, in full, the Society for the Suppression of the Maltreatment of Animals. It was not a job of which I was proud nor even fond. I am not, and never was, one of those persons who describes himself as an "animal lover." I like some animals and dislike others, just as I like some human beings but certainly not all of them.

However, it was a job of a sort and I was in no position to pick and choose. A friend who had influence with the Society had got me the berth and I was doing my best to do the job as it should be done. The only obstacle to a peaceful routine existence was my co-inspector, Alfred Weston.

It may be that you know (though it is probable that you do not), that the S.S.M.A. follows the system of appointing two investigators—or inspectors, as they call them—to each district. Whether this is because they do not trust their agents and expect them to be squared, or whether the two witnesses are necessary should the matter come to law, I do not know. All that I am aware of is that the practice associated me daily with Alfred.

Now, you might describe Alfred as the perfect animal lover. He was short, though well built, wore large horn-rimmed glasses, was very earnest, and had a habit of talking to any subhuman member of the animal kingdom as though it were a dear friend slightly affected by lunacy.

In addition to this he had an imagina-

tion like a microscope. The pitch of
THE PERFECT CREATURE

excitement to which a commonplace complaint would raise him exasperated me continually. A perfectly ordinary allegation of horse-thrashing would be so magnified in his mind that he was visibly disappointed when we found, as we invariably did, that the man had been drunk or of a lurid temper.

He was full, too, of catch phrases about "brutes in human form" and the like, though I could never understand how he reconciled the expression with the fact that he considered any dumb brute incapable of wrong-doing by the very fact that it was a dumb brute. You will realise that he was a very trying person with whom to work.

We were together in the office when the deputation was announced. It was a more impressive gathering than usual, whereas Alfred's eyes gleamed in anticipation of something really good. Obviously it concerned something more important than was told us by our regular visitors—mostly indignant old ladies who had observed small boys tying cans to cats' tails.

I asked them to be seated while Alfred gawped at them in growing excitement.

"Well, gentlemen," I said, looking round the group, "what can I do for you?"

There appeared to be some difficulty about beginning. They looked inquiringly at one another. I addressed myself to the oldest of the villagers.

"What's the trouble? Who's been misbehaving this time?"

"Well," he replied, hesitantly, "it's like this. We all saw 'em plain in the village street—plain as I see you now. It didn't seem right, some'ow. No creatures ain't like that; not natural. So we thought as 'ow you ought to look into it."

"Quite right, I'm sure," I agreed. "But if you will tell me what you are talking about, I will be able to do it better."

Another of them chimed in at this.

"That's quite right, what 'e said, sir. We all saw 'em. 'Orrible, they was." He gave a dramatic shudder.

"Yes, but—" I began. Then they all started at once.

The Human Turtles

T took some time to get the story pieced together, but at last we thought we had it straight, and Alfred's eyes gleamed more than ever behind the big round glasses.

Though, for my part, I began to think that we had a deputation from the lunatic asylum.

Tim Darrell, it seemed, had been on his job as usual. Every morning, as soon as the milk had been cooled, he took a load of churns down to the railway halt.

It was just the same as any other day until he came round the corner at the top of the village. Then he let out a yell which brought the whole place to its doors or windows. All the women set up a scream when they looked out and saw two creatures standing in the middle of the road.
It was difficult to get a good description of these apparitions, since there was a tendency among the superstitiously inclined to confuse them with devils. There were, in fact, two lines of thought; one was for asking the vicar to exorcise while the other held out for the S.S.M.A.

The impression we finally gathered was that the things were like turtles as much as anything, but walked upright upon two legs. Their overall height would seem to have been about five feet six inches. They were covered with oval carapaces, not only at the back but similarly in front. The heads were the size of a normal human head, but of an uncovered horny nature, like the sharp beaks they carried beneath their bright, black eyes.

This description seemed wild enough, but the most troublesome characteristic was yet to come. On this point they were all at one, however much their general impressions varied.

From the ridges joining the back and front carapaces there protruded, half-way up, a pair of human hands and arms!

I suppressed my tendency to laugh, for I know my yokels and they were in dead earnest.

"Someone has been hoaxing you," I suggested. "They've dressed themselves up as imitation turtles to give you a scare."

There were loud expostulations; everyone had a dozen contradictions for my theory. No practical joker was going to stand gunfire without during something about it; but old Halliday, who kept the sports shop, had given them several rounds of shot—and the pellets had simply bounced off.

"What happened then?" I asked.

"For a bit," said the one who had emerged as spokesman, "they stood around like they was dazed. They didn't mind the shot what was rattlin' on 'em; not a bit. But they seemed scared by the sight of the crowd of us—more scared than we was of them.

"Then, all of a sudden like, one of 'em gives a kind of short squawk and they ran off. We followed 'em quite a way; but to cut a long story short, they went and sunk theirselves in the marsh."

"Do you mean they took to the marsh as a natural home, or that they are dead there?"

"Dead, I'd say, guv'nor. They didn't 'arf kick up a squawkin' as they was sinkin'."

By this time I began to get really angry.

"What on earth have you come here for, then? If the creatures are dead, it seems to me the best thing I can do is tell the police that the lot of you are responsible for hounding the poor creatures to death. Not that they would believe such things ever existed."

They looked dashed at that. Then—

"That's not right, sir," one of them objected. "We found where they came from, and there's more to it than that. We followed their tracks to Mr. Dixon's place. Let Bill, 'ere, tell you what 'e saw."

Bill, conscious of all eyes upon him, spat refreshingly and started with no further bidding.

"Well, sir, about six months ago I was going round on business——"

I smiled to myself. Bill's business, as everyone knew, was chiefly concerned with other people's rabbits.

"—and some'ow I found myself in Mr. Dixon's place. And in the new wing—what they call the lab—lab—any'ow the new wing 'e built when 'e bought the Grange, there was a chink of light showin' between the curtains. There's been queer tales about the place, so I thought I'd take a keek——"

"A what?"

"Dekko—squint—look."

"Oh, yes, and what did you see?"

"I couldn't see a deal sideways—it was a small chink; but I could see some of the back wall, and what do you think was there?"

"How the devil do I know? Get on with it, man!"
“Cages, they was. A blinkin’ line of ’em. Great thick steel bars they ’ad, too. Only what with the light ’ung as it was, I couldn’t see what was inside of ’em. Then I looked down at the floor and there was a ’orrible sight—a ’orrible sight, it was!”

Bill shuddered, and we awaited his dramatic pleasure. He looked up and ran his eye round the group.

“None of these ’ere did nothin’ but laugh at me when I told ’em; but now they’ve seen some’at too, and——”

“Damn it, man, what did you see?”

I demanded, impatiently.

“It ’adn’t got no real shape. It was more like a white bolster than anything; and it didn’t exactly crawl, it more oozed like. But what it did ’ave was a pair of ’ands a-stickin’ out from its sides! ’Orrible, it was—like a great movin’ sausage.”

“Hell!” I said, “what is this, a fairy tale telling circle?”

“I thought you wouldn’t believe it,” Bill concluded. “The others didn’t till they seen what they seen—its true, all the same!”

Alfred’s Theory

WHEN the deputation left us, with all manifestations of displeasure, I observed that Alfred was trembling with excitement.

“Sit down,” I suggested. “You don’t want to shake to bits, do you?”

I waited for his inevitable dissertation. It was certain to be something even more incredible than the yarn we had just heard. Probably it was on account of some ancestor of Alfred’s that the saying about mountains and molehills was first invented.

But this time he wanted to hear my theory of the affair first. There was an air about him as there is about the child who keeps the cherry off the cake till the end.

“Seems pretty simple to me,” I said. “It’s just one of two things. Either somebody really was playing a joke on the village or else these tales are just imagination. I don’t mean to cast any slur on them; but you must remember that most of them have never been out of the village in their lives, and on the whole they have had a pretty poor education.

“Imagine yourself in the same position. Had you never seen a zoo or a picture book of animals, there are lots of them which you would not believe possible. And it would be difficult, with a limited vocabulary, to describe them.”

“Yes, that’s all very well; but they all agree both about the carapaces and the arms. Now, those are thoroughly incompatible, if ever two structures were. I don’t see how you can square them with any animal living—or extinct, for that matter.”

I had to hand it to Alfred over that. The presence of arms was a big puzzle. And arms again had been a feature—the feature—of the sausage-like shape that Bill claimed to have seen at the Grange.

Mind you, I wasn’t too keen on my explanation myself; but when you have a fellow like Alfred simply bursting with a theory, you must put up some kind of a show. He gave me several excellent reasons why I was incorrect, then paused meaningly.

“I am convinced that we are on the track of something big,” he announced, impressively. “Something which will really stir the consciousness of the people to the iniquities that are practised under the cloak of scientific research. Do you know what I think is happening at our very doorstep?”

“No I don’t,,” I replied. “What do you think?”

Dramatically, he declared: “We have to deal with a super-vivisectionist.”

“Cut it out,” I suggested. “Tell me what you really mean.”

“I mean that we are up against a man who is changing the forms of animals until they are no longer recognisable
as what they were before he changed them,” he replied, involuntarily.

Then it began to dawn on me what a truly Alfredian theory was being propounded. His imagination was working at full power and, though later events proved that this time it was not powerful enough, I laughed.

“I get you,” I said. “I’ve read Wells’ Island of Doctor Moreau too. You expect to go up to the Grange and be greeted by a horse walking on its hind legs and talking about the weather. Or perhaps you hope that a super-dog will open the door to you and ask your name?

“A thrilling idea, Alfred, but I beg to remind you that this is real life. You will penetrate into no house reeking sickly of ether, and hideous with the cries of tortured animals. Just you come down to earth, old man.”

But Alfred was not to be put off so easily. His fantasies were a great deal of his life and they were not to be blown away at the first puff. He was irritated to my reference to the Wellsian work, for obviously that had been the fount of his notion; but he would not abandon it. Instead, he went on turning it over in his mind and adding touches here and there.

“Wonder why turtles?” I heard him mutter, and I agreed that in any experiment of this kind it seemed more reasonable to deal with mammals.

He was quiet for a time. Then he said suddenly:

“Arms? Where on earth did he get arms from?”

“Shut up! You’re getting too confoundedly gruesome,” I growled.

The Professor’s Claim

ALFRED and I presented ourselves at the lodge of Membury Grange and stated our names and business to the truculent, suspicious-looking individual who guarded the drive. He shook his head to indicate that we had no hope of approaching any nearer the house, and picked up the ‘phone.

I rather hoped that his discouraging attitude would be confirmed. It was the fault of Alfred’s agitation that we were here at all, and I was feeling something of a fool for having given in to him.

The morning following the deputation’s call he was in a worse state than ever. It seemed that all through the night the most horrid nightmares had galloped his sleep. The fancies of Poe and Zola were nothing compared with Alfred’s in full spate.

He had become so full of the “wanton torturing of our dumb friends” by “the fiendish wielders of the knife,” and the “shuddering cries of a million quivering victims ascending to high heaven,” that there was no holding him. Had I allowed him to go to the interview alone, he would have been lucky if he escaped a broken head as a result of the accusations of mayhem and mutilation with which he was sure to open the conversation.

But it was now agreed between us that I was to make the pace and that Alfred, if he was not satisfied, could plunge in later.

The guardian turned back from the telephone wearing an expression of surprise.

“E says as ’ow ’e’ll see you, sir,” he said, as though uncertain that he had heard aright. “You’ll find ’im in the new wing, sir. The red brick part there.”

The new wing, into which the poaching Bill had spied, proved to be a much larger block than I had anticipated. It was almost the size of the original Grange itself, though only one storey in height.

A door in the end opened as we approached and a tall, loosely-clad figure with an untidy beard called on us to enter.

“Good Lord,” said I, as soon as I caught sight of his face. “So that was why we got in so easily. Who would have thought of finding you here?”

“Come to that,” the man replied,
"you seem to be in a surprising position for a man of intelligence yourself."

"Alfred," I said, suddenly remembering my companion, "I want to introduce you to Professor Dixon. He wasted a long time trying to teach me biology when I was at school."

Alfred looked suspicious. Obviously, everything was going all wrong; here we were, fraternising with the enemy at the outset!

He nodded ungraciously.

"Come in and sit down," suggested the Professor: "then we can talk over the accusations which you say have been laid against me."

"I think you're right, sir," I said as I sank into an easy chair. "We'd better get the business done before we celebrate the reunion. My friend Alfred is seething like seltzer with bottled emotions. I'll hand the yarn on to you as we received it."

When we reached the account of the turtle-like creatures, the Professor looked relieved.

"Oh, so that is what happened to them!"

"Ah!" shouted Alfred, his voice squeaking with excitement. "So you admit it! You admit that you are responsible for those two unhappy creatures."

Dixon looked at him wonderingly.

"Of course, though I must admit I did not know they were unhappy."

"That's what we want!" squeaked Alfred. "He admits it, he—"

"Oh, shut up, man!" I protested. "Let's get on with it."

I got on with it for a few sentences; then Alfredbethought himself of something else.

"Where did you get the arms?" he demanded with deadly meaning.

"Your friend seems a little dramatic," complained the Professor, with a touch of amusement.

"Look here, Alfred," I said, "stop behaving like a cheap thriller and let me get the story finished."

When it was done, I felt that our call required an excuse.

"I'm sorry, Professor, to intrude on you like this, but you see how we stand. It is our job to investigate any case which may be put before us of ill-treatment of animals, and though this is not strictly in this category, yet my friend was sure that it should be examined.

"Now, Alfred," I added, turning, "I believe you have a question or two to ask, but do kindly remember that the name of this gentleman is Professor Dixon and not Doctor Moreau."

Ignoring the facetiousness, Alfred leapt in.

"What I want to know," he cried, "is the meaning, the reason and the method of these outrages against nature. I demand to be told by what right happy creatures are turned into an unnatural mockery of natural forms."

The Professor nodded gently.

"A comprehensive inquiry," he admitted, "though I deplore the recurrence of the word 'nature' and would like to point out that 'unnatural' does not make sense. Obviously if anything is done, it was in some one's nature to do it. One cannot go against nature; that is an axiom. However, I think I understand you to mean, how has nature used me to modify her own raw material. Am I right?"

"You can put it that way if you like," said Alfred "but I call it vivisection—vivisection! And what I want to know is, can you give us any explanation or are we to go at once to the police?"

"I do not think the police would take you very seriously, but they might prove troublesome in the end. So, as the matter will become public property fairly soon, I will tell you. I think my ex-pupil will have inbibed enough knowledge from my classes to enable him to understand in part, at any rate. After I have satisfied you, I shall ask you to keep quiet until my experiments are finished."
The Professor paused for a moment, then resumed:

"I have not, as you thought, grafted, adjusted nor distorted living forms. I have built them."

At first, neither of us quite grasped the significance of the statement. Though Alfred thought he had it.

"Ha! You can quibble," he said. "But there must have been a basis. You must have had a living animal upon which to build, and which you evilly mutilated."

"You're wrong. I mean that I have discovered what life is."

We gaped. Then I asked: "Do you mean that you can create living creatures?"

"Pooh! Anybody can do that with the help of a female of the species. What I mean is that I have found the life force. I can animate the inert."

"I don't believe it," shouted Alfred. "That you, here in this village, have solved the mystery of life! You are just trying to hoax us because you are afraid of what we might find if we searched."

Dixon smiled calmly.

"I admit it's difficult to believe; but after all, why shouldn't I find it here? Someone was bound to find it somewhere. The really surprising thing is that it was not discovered before."

Alfred was not to be stopped.

"I demand proof of your ridiculous claim," he said, with all his dignity at the back of him.

"That is easy," replied the Professor. "If you examine any of my specimens you will find that many of their parts, although they look familiar, are only synthetic. In this matter of the arms, which seems to worry you so much, if you look at the hands you will find that there are no whorls nor other finger markings—it was not worth while to make such things.

"Could I have obtained real arms immediately after the death of their owner—that is to say, before any decay had set in—I might have been able to use them. Unfortunately, such things are not usually handy. But the mechanics of building parts is not really difficult. Merely a mixture of ingenuity, chemistry and common sense. Indeed, it has been possible for some time; but without the life force for its animation there was nothing to be gained from the performance of it.

"I observe that our friend, Mr. Weston, is still incredulous. I assure you, sir, that my specimens are not treated unkindly. On the contrary, I might almost describe them as coddled, for they have cost me a great deal both in money and labour. Even should you consider them not too cheerful, you would find it a little difficult to prosecute me for cruelty to an animal of whom no one knows the natural habits."

"The best way to settle this question is by a demonstration," said Alfred with a slight sneer in his voice. The poor fellow was so upset by the impending extinction of his theory that a sense of the real magnitude of the Professor's claim had not yet touched him.

"Follow me," said Dixon.

The Demonstration

BILL'S report of his spying exploit had prepared us for the steel-barred cells in the laboratory, but not for the many other things we found there. One of the latter was the smell.

"I am sorry," said the Professor, as he stood watching the two of us choking and gasping. "I forgot to warn you about my preservatives, I am so used to them."

"I am glad they preserve," I spluttered between paroxysms. "It's reassuring."

The room must have been nearly a hundred feet in length and about thirty in height. Bill certainly had seen precious little through his chink in the curtain. I stared in amazement at the amount of apparatus gathered together there.
THE PERFECT CREATURE

The whole place was divided up into sections. A well-fitted chemistry department occupied one corner, a maze of electrical apparatus another. A sort of bay contained an operating table and cases of instruments; at this, I saw Alfred's eyes widen and a smile of triumph spread over his face. There was another bay in which plaster moulds and casts lay about, giving the effect of a sculptor's studio. Small electric furnaces were visible at the far end, and near them implements and machines whose uses were a puzzle to me.

"Seems as if the only thing you lack to complete the sciences is a super-telescope for astronomy," I suggested.

The Professor looked pleased. "Yes, it's a pretty good array, isn't it?" he said. "Hullo, your friend's off!"

Alfred had made a bee-line for the operating table, peering intently all around and under it, presumably in the hope of finding gruesome relics in the form of bloodstains.

We walked after him.

"Here is one of those arms which so excited your ghastly imagination. Take a look at that." Dixon opened a drawer and took from it an object as he spoke. He placed it on the table before us.

The thing certainly did have a close resemblance to a human arm; but as he had said, the palm of the hand was smooth and unmarked in any way, save for ordinary pores. The thing was cut off short about half-way between the elbow and the shoulder.

"What's that?" asked Alfred, pointing to a piece of protruding metal.

"Stainless steel," replied Dixon, "It's much less trouble and quicker to make than bones, although heavier for its strength."

"Do you always use it?" I asked.

"For the rough experiments, at any rate. I may abandon it later."

Alfred was looking worried again. There was nothing vivisectional about that arm.

"But why an arm?" he inquired. "Why any of this?"—with a wave which included the whole laboratory.

"To take your questions in order. An arm, or rather, a hand because it is the most useful tool ever evolved. Man would never have reached his present eminence had it not been for that opposed thumb.

"The reason I did 'any of this,' as you call it, was because I wished to build the perfect creature, or as near to that as one's finite mind can conceive. Those turtle-like creatures were a step on the way. But I gave them only enough brain to live and not sufficient for constructive thought."

"You intend to give your perfect creature a brain as big as man's?" I asked.

"I have already given it a brain bigger than a man's," he corrected.

"But I thought the human brain was supposed to have an infinite capacity?"

"Why should it? It would have no need of size at all if that were so. Why should the infinite be contained in a vessel one size larger than that holding the finite? No, my creature has a bigger brain: he learns more quickly than man and he will gather more knowledge."

"Can we see him?"

He sighed.

"Soon," he said regretfully. "I should have liked to take you step by step through all the work, but everyone always wants to jump straight to the final result. First, however, I think we will have a little demonstration to cure your friend of his doubts of my veracity, which I observe are still lingering. Do you mind coming over here?"

From a preserving cupboard near the surgical instrument cases he withdrew a shapeless white mass. He placed it carefully upon the operating table and wheeled the whole towards the electrical apparatus, further up the room. From beneath the pallid, sagging object I noticed a hand protruding.

"Good heavens!" I said, "Bill's 'bolster with hands!'"

"Yes, that spy was not entirely wrong, though I imagine his rustic fancy exaggerated both the size and the
fearsomeness. Actually, this little fellow has been most useful to me. He contains all the essential parts of alimentary, nervous, vascular and respiratory systems. In fact, he can live, but is not restrained as to form. When I have constructed any kind of appendage, I attach it to him to see whether it works as it should. He is, as you might say, my testing motor.”

He busied himself with the electrical connections.

“Mr. Weston,” he said, “I should like you to examine my specimen in any way you think fit, short of injuring it, and convince yourself that it is not alive.”

Alfred approached the white mass, and with a grimace of distaste began to prod it nervously.

“So the basis of life is electrical?” I asked Dixon.

He smiled and measured some concoction into a beaker.

“It may be. Then, again, it may be chemical. When you see me vivify this creature on the table, you will notice that I use both chemicals and electricity. It may be both or it may be either that does the trick. You don’t think that I am going to tell you all my secrets, do you?”

“I am sorry,” I apologised, “but you can hardly blame me for showing some curiosity in the matter.”

“Now, are you quite satisfied, Mr. Weston?” Dixon asked suddenly. “Make quite certain. I do not wish to be accused of having played a conjuring trick on you.”

“Yes,” said Alfred.

The Professor fastened electrodes to the white mass. Then he carefully chose a spot on its surface and drove in the needle of a hypodermic containing a pale blue liquid. Next, he sprayed the whole form by means of an atomizer and finally closed four or five switches in rapid succession.

“Now,” he said with a grin, “we wait for five minutes during which you may wonder which, or how many, of my actions were critical.”

Slowly the flaccid mass started to pulsate. Gentle rhythmic waves seemed to pass up and down its length. Gradually it rolled to one side, exposing the other hand as it did so. I saw the fingers tense and attempt to clutch the smooth surface of the table.

I gave an indeterminate cry. Somehow, until this moment, I did not realise the full marvel of what I was about to see. Subconsciously, my mind had refused to believe it possible. Now the real potentialities of the thing flooded my mind.

I grabbed Dixon by the arm, shaking him in my excitement.

“Man,” I shouted, “it’s amazing! it’s incredible! You—you have solved the mystery of the ages. You’ve conquered death!”

He shook his head.

“You go too fast; it’s not the same thing. Most of the dead are worn out or broken. But, in some degree, I have solved that stupendous mystery which was so simple after all.”

I knew that I saw before me the seed of revolution; the greatest discovery man had ever made; and all the time that fool Alfred was poking around as though the thing were a side show at a circus, making sure that no one was working it with a bit of string.

It served him right when he got a couple of hundred volts through his fingers.

“Number One”

“And now,” said Alfred, satisfied at last that no one was putting anything over on him, “we’d like to see this ‘perfect creature’ you spoke about.”

“You shall,” Dixon promised. “By the way, I call him Number One. He is certainly the first of his kind, and no name that I knew seemed really adequate.”

He led us to the last and largest of the row of cages, and called to the occupant to come forward.
I do not know what I had expected to see, nor what Alfred had considered likely. But neither of us had the breath for a comment when we saw the object which lumbered out into the lighted front of the cell.

The "Perfect Creature" was the most horrible grotesquerie that I have ever seen in dreams or life!

Imagine, if you can, a sharply conical carapace, six feet high, poised upon three short cylindrical supports. Four arm, freakish parodies of the human appendages, projected from joints half-way up, while about twelve inches from the apex, compound eyes regarded us from beneath long, coarse lids. It was so truly frightful to look at that I came near to having hysteric.

"Visitors to see you, Number One," said Dixon.

"They are as inefficently made as yourself and of no interest," replied a deep, resonant voice.

"God Lord!" said Alfred. "The appalling thing can talk."

"Were you referring to me?" asked the voice, menacingly, though Alfred had spoken in little more than a whisper.

"Be quiet," said the Professor.

"Number One," he added, turning to us, "has not a good temper, and there is nothing to be gained by offending him. If you will listen, I will explain to you just why he looks like he does."

A lecturing note crept into his voice.

"When I decided to construct Number One, I resolved to eliminate or alter all those points which seemed to me to be wrongly or weakly designed in man. He is the logical result."

"Well, I'm damned," I said, and felt just that.

Alfred merely stared at the apparition for a time and then, as his face lost its first formation of surprise, it took on that expression of sympathy he considers fit for all lesser creations.

"I do not consider," he objected, "that so large an animal should be confined in so small a space."

One of the compound eyes turned upon him.

"Be silent, you ridiculous little man!" said the great voice, with the emphasis of contempt on the word "man."

Alfred wilted. To the end he could never fully understand that a brain bigger than his own reposed in the monstrosity.

The Professor started his explanation.

"You will observe, of course, that Number One has no distinct head. That was one of the first things to be altered. The head is firstly too exposed and is only there to keep the eyes, which must be high, close to the brain.

"This propinquity is customary, but not essential. I gave him instead three eyes, the two which you can see and one round the back, as one might express it, though properly speaking he has no back. Thus he is enabled to look in all directions without the complicated device of a turning head.

"Though his shape almost insures that any falling object would glance off him, I have considered it safer to put the brain, safely insulated from shock, where one might expect the stomach to be. The latter is situated as high up as possible, allowing for a better disposition of the intestines.

"I admit that the provision of four arms gives an impression of wanton foolery; but as I said, the hand is the perfect tool—if it is the right size. You will see, therefore, that Number One's upper pair are delicately moulded, while the lower are heavy and muscular.

"His breathing may interest you. It is on a straight through principle. That is to say, he inhales through one port and exhales from the other end of the lungs through another. It has always seemed to me that the human system of respiration is most inefficient, and about as primitive as the starfish's method of feeding and excreting by means of the same orifice.

"Although the conical carapace affords almost entire protection, and is
so hard that it will deflect a rifle bullet, it is necessarily heavy; the total weight of the creature is between six and seven hundred pounds. This fact caused me to design the legs and feet after the pattern of those of the elephant and thus spread the weight as much as possible.

"There are three legs because it is obvious that the biped, in any form, wastes, consciously or unconsciously, a great deal of muscular energy purely in maintaining its balance. The tripod is an efficient support adaptable to any kind of ground. . . . Is there another point you would like explained?"

"Only one," said I. "Can it dance?"

End of the Monster

LUCKILY he was too absorbed to hear me, and Alfred chose that moment to create a diversion.

"There is just one thing plain to me," he said, "and that is that you are quite mad. I don't know what you did to obtain this—this creature, but it is clear to me that no sane man would possess such a thing."

He turned to me.

"Listen! Would any man is his senses, making the greatest discovery of all time, choose to use it as a plaything? Making a mess—yes, a horrible mess, that's what this is—like a child let loose with modelling clay."

I began to respect Alfred. He was talking sense. I had been so bowled over by the discovery as to lose my instinct of proportion.

"The man's hopelessly unbalanced. He's not safe to have around; there's no telling what he might make next!" Alfred went on. "The very best thing we can do is to inform the police and get this monster destroyed."

A shout of rage from the cell suddenly reminded him that both the creature and the madman were listening. His anger had egged him on to say far more than he meant to in their presence.

On the Professor's face, however, no rage showed. He stood smiling, his hand resting on a switch.

"So Mr. Weston would like to get me certified, would he? You poor fools! Do you think you are ever going to get out of here?"

He paused and then added conversationally:

"Do you know, I don't think I told you that Number One is carnivorous and does not mind his food raw."

As he said the last word he pressed the switch. There was a click at the cell gate-fastening and the monster lurched forward.

Alfred, with the agility of an acrobat, went through the nearest window, taking the glass and woodwork with him. The creature charged in pursuit, demolishing the sill and the brickwork below with its impact.

They were half-way down the drive before my surprise allowed me to move. Alfred slipped through the small gate, luckily left ajar. The lodge-keeper emerged just in time to receive the fright of his life as the main gates were flattened by the pursuer. The two of them—man and monster—passed round the corner and out of our sight.

The Professor, coat and beard flowing, was well away in the chase. I followed as well as I could: running is not my forté.

The passage of the monster's bulk left no doubt as to the direction they had taken, and presently I heard Alfred's voice calling my name. Rounding the end of a hedge, I saw him swimming towards me over the placid surface of the river. Of the rest, there was no sign.

He landed and came slowly towards me, panting.

"Where are they?" I gasped.

He pointed to the river.

"Both of them?"

"Yes," he nodded. "Dixon got here just in time to see his pet horror disappearing, and went in after it. He hasn't come up yet."
“And you?”

“Oh, I just swam out a bit. I guessed that if the brute had been shut up all its life, it wouldn’t know what a large piece of water was when it saw it—nor what mud would do under its weight.”

“Thank God it’s gone,” I breathed. “Have a cigarette, old man?”

“Thanks,” said Alfred, with a sigh of relief.

He lit it and inhaled. For a moment we rested, then a serious expression passed over his face.

“I say!”

“Yes?”

“I suppose there’s no chance that he gave the damned thing gills, is there?”
Master Thriller Series

The following titles are still obtainable at 1/- and more will follow.

No 3 Tales of THE SEVEN SEAS
No 4 Tales of MYSTERY AND DETECTION
No 5 Tales of THE FOREIGN LEGION (Second Series)
No 6 Tales of THE UNCANNY
No 7 Tales of AFRICAN ADVENTURE
No 8 Tales of THE ORIENT
No 9 Tales of THE JUNGLE
No 10 Tales of THE FOREIGN LEGION (Third Series)
No 11 Tales of THE SEA
No 12 Tales of VALOUR
No 13 Tales of THE LEVANT
No 14 Tales of THE AIR
No 15 Tales of THE FOREIGN LEGION (Fourth Series)
No 16 Tales of ADVENTURE
No 17 Tales of TERROR
CRIME! TERROR! DETECTION!

IN

MYSTERY STORIES

Quarterly :: 1/-

Sometimes one needs and deserves a mental stimulant—a brisk change of mental scene to clear one's brain of fatigue, snap it back into condition and restore the fresh alertness that has petered out under the strain of daily cares and worries.

And there's nothing like an exciting story of crime and detection to DO just that! Doctors, psychologists, readers themselves all agree. For stories like these stand alone. There's other reading, naturally, that you want and must have. But the few hours that you can now spend plunged deeply in the fascinating pages of MYSTERY STORIES, will supply the most eager anticipation and the most genuine excitement of all your reading hours.

THE WORLD'S WORK (1913) LTD.
LONDON :: KINGSWOOD