

Adventures in Space and The World of Tomorrow

THRILLS



INCORPORATED

CRIMELESS LAND
A FUTURISTIC NOVEL

and

SPACEWAYS STORIES by

RON CONWAY, OTTO KENSCH, WOLFE HERSCHOFT

No 4

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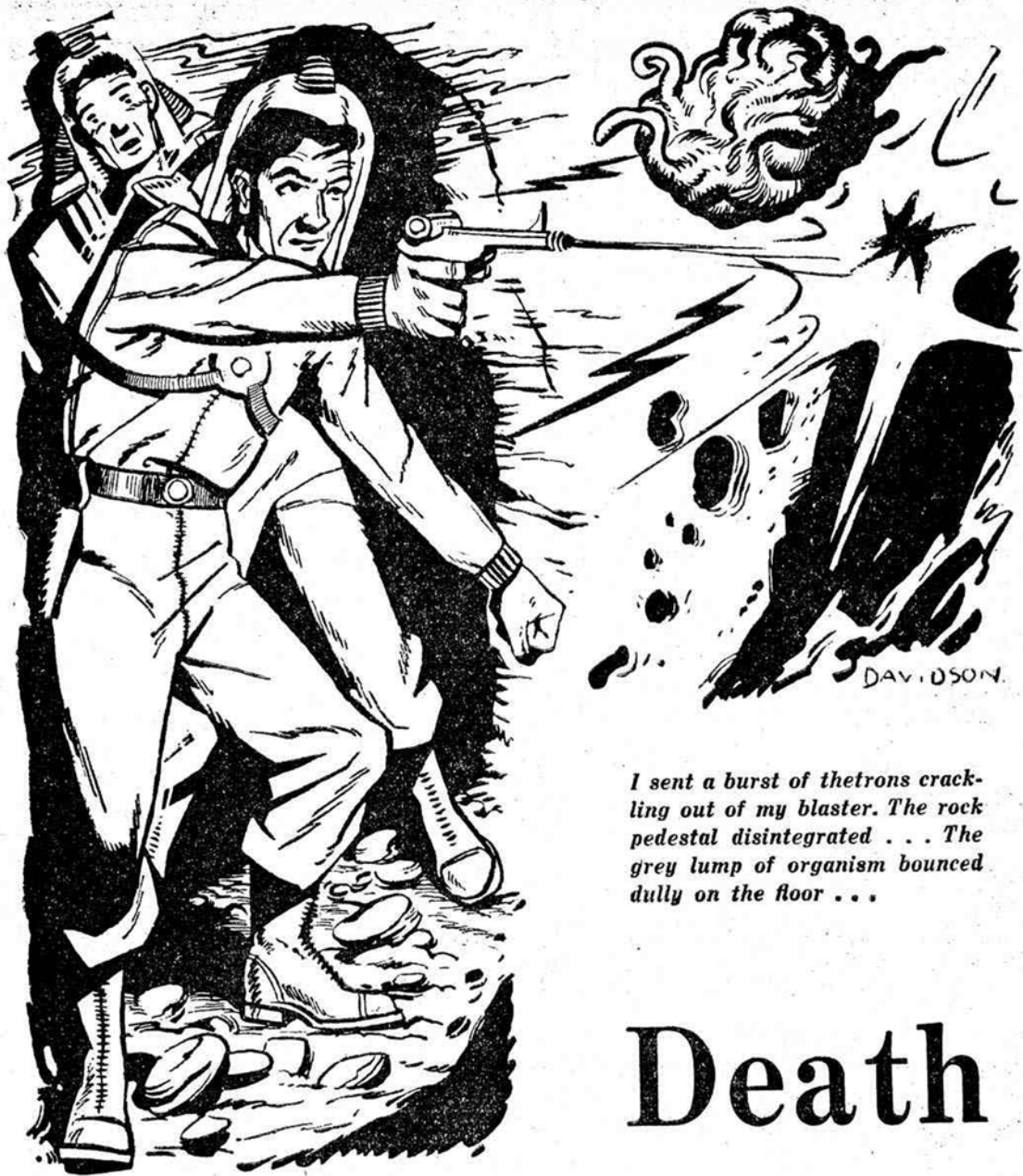
*Adventures in Space And
The World of Tomorrow*

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I sent a burst of thetrons crackling out of my blaster. The rock pedestal disintegrated . . . The grey lump of organism bounced dully on the floor . . .

Death

THE teletapes ran hot. I took a shot of Atomaxadrene, and it didn't cure my headache, and I cursed the stuff.

These reports were enough to drive anyone off his nut. They came in from all over the United American Continent. From Bogota clear down to Buenos Aires panicked crowds gathered in town squares. Every town, village and two-bit hamlet had the same story, and they all flashed 'em in to the Admin-Centre at Washington. In due course, everything filtered through to me.

It was two days now since they'd been first sighted. Then alarms had crashed out from coast to coast, alarms which hadn't been sounded in thirty years, since the threatened Jap invasion during World War II.

Something had swept over the Sun, darkening it. And the watchers had known it was no lunar eclipse.

Sure, it was some new satellite. Only it wasn't. The Moon is a satellite of the Earth, and it revolves round the mother planet in its own fixed orbit. But this damned thing just hovered there. Astronomers reckoned it was around seven hundred miles from the Earth, which meant it was outside the atmosphere. But by what unholy trick of witchcraft had the thing been made to stop in the one position, as though held there by some intangible magnetic field or nuclear force? It didn't have an orbit of its own. It just moved as the Earth did, as though some snooper had planted it there, to keep an eye on the

*An Otto Kensch thriller of a science baffling organism
which killed by thought. What chance did man have
against such a menace?*

old United States. An eye! Could be.

It seemed to take a liking to New York. That's where it was, anchored in space, over New York. I didn't think much of its taste.

The wise boys in the State Department got into a panic, and they had a strato-rocket fleet loaded up with atom bombs, ready to take off for Russia, until they got a sizzler of a note from Moscow. And what do you think?

You've guessed it. There was another one over Moscow! Okay, so we paid off the rocket fleet, and we traded information on the size, location, etc., of the Satellites. They'd gotten into the capital S class by this time. And they were the same all right. Astronomers and amateur observers worked overtime, all across Old North America and Soviet Europe, checking their calculations and making reports.

They were being tapped into my office in Washington in a steady stream until I had a nightmare that looked like a Disney cartoon, only it wasn't, and I had a tangled mass of formulae and Greek letters fighting across my eyes faster than anyone has yet made a movie camera flick images on to a screen.

All this happened in two days. It was like a lost weekend, only I didn't drink

to get you for a couple of hours, and that girl of yours won't let me through. Pretty, isn't she?"

I just grunted.

He laughed openly then. "All right, so you won't talk. In case you don't know it, sucker, I'm the Department of Information. Always one step ahead of Nuclear Research. I'm the guy who organised the ship. We're taking off in just one hour to make a survey of our own, home-grown Satellite. Rod Berryman's coming, from the Post . . ."

"Do we have to have him as well as you?"

"Then you are coming? Good."

"Sure, I'm coming. You'd lose yourself without me."

"Okay. See you at the 'drome in an hour."

"So long," I said.

There were six of us on the tarmac of the spacedrome. I knew Rod Berryman. I didn't like newspaper reporters, and he knew it. Schuman and Ross came from the Biological Bureau. There was Pirov, the scientific attache of the Soviet Embassy, and Lyle Mumford, from Information, and I was representing the Department of Nuclear Research.

by Atmosphere!!

more than one bottle. And it was Bourbon, too. I had a slug of it after I'd swallowed the Atomaxadrene. It still didn't work.

A buzzer pounded my brain and I leaned wearily across my plex-topped desk and switched on the visor. I saw the switchgirl.

"Dr. Brompton," she said. "Mr. Mumford wants to get through. He said it was urgent."

"Sure," I said. "Put him through."

The vision faded out, and I saw Lyle Mumford's rugged and ugly face leering at me.

I said, "What are you so happy about?"

"Listen, Garry," he said. "When are you going up?"

"Going up? Up where?" I growled.

"Aw, hell, why so cagey? I've been trying

We wore space-suits up to our necks, not yet having screwed down the helmets. We were all around the same height, and we looked like a row of giant skittles standing there until the rocket guardship's pilot taxied the craft out in front of us.

When Lyle saw me, he walked across to greet me. There was a big, rugged grin on his face.

"Hallo, sourpuss. What's eatin' you?" I didn't get a chance to answer because as soon as he was close enough to see the colour of my face he whistled out, "Say, what's up with you? You look washed out. Party last night?"

I shook my head. "I haven't had a wink

of sleep since those damned Satellites happened on us."

"The Department, I guess," Lyle said sympathetically. He looked quickly at me. "Any sign of radioactivity from those things?"

"Not much. The background count of the Geiger-Muller tubes wavers between 3 and 5, but that's not serious." The normal was 1-3 per minute, per square centimetre of surface.

"No," I went on, "it's not that. I just haven't been able to sleep. I'd sort of drop into a coma, and dream. I feel like I'd had a cop standing over me all night, shooting questions at me, bashing me till I answered. Only it wasn't a cop."



"That's good, anyway," Lyle murmured.

"I'm not so sure. It must've been a dream, and nothing else. But it was as though someone were trying to prevent me going up to the Satellite . . . Oh, I don't know. Let's get aboard. We're late already."

We screwed our helmets in place, and followed the others.

When we had taken our seats and adjusted the straps, the pilot let the guardship go. There was a kick of the rockets; a muffled roar told us in our insulated cabin that we were off.

One hour later we were cruising in space, making an orbit round the Satellite, and looking for a place to land.



There was nothing remarkable about the surface of the Satellites. It was flattish rock. There wasn't a sign of vegetation. No water. No life.

It was spinning, and near one polar axis there was a great slab of rock jutting skyward, like a primitive temple, with an altar raised to the Sun. It must have been a

thousand feet high, and it looked more, rising as it did sheer up from a plain of dead-surfaced rock.

This was a Department of Information show, and Lyle acted as captain. He looked round to all of us and asked, "What do you say we land by that rock at the pole? It seems to be the only spot of interest."

I didn't like it. But everyone else said "Yes." I didn't answer. I had a sort of premonition, and black, unlovely fear battled with the ache in my head. Maybe, I was going mad.

We went down in one of those steep, fast, multi-G dives. I was used to them. That didn't explain why I was sick and then blacked out.

I don't know how long I was unconscious. We were resting on the surface of the Satellite when I came to, and Lyle was standing over me. I caught an anxious gleam in his eyes through the plastiglass of his helmet. I smiled back.

"You don't need to worry, Lyle," I said through the two-way microphone amplifier which is built in to all our space-suits. "Just a bit groggy."

The pilot stayed inside his machine. The rest of the expedition stepped to the ground. Gravity was slight and it made us seem feathery. It wasn't exactly a pleasant feeling, even though, of course, we knew the physical reason for it. I was still distinctly uneasy, but I didn't mention my fears to the others.

Now that we could inspect the ground at close quarters, we saw that it was composed of a granite type of rock, which undulated smoothly. It wasn't completely flat, but with reduced gravitational pull on our legs, and the absence of any sharp edges to the rock, it was easy going.

The slab of rock rose high above the horizon. It was like an Arizona butte, a great pillar of stone laid bare by the erosion of strata upon strata of softer rock above and around it.

Yet I had the feeling that this pillar was an edifice that had been made by some consciousness, some agency of the mind. Human? But how could it be? No, it must be something completely outside human comprehension. Or else I was already mad.

We hurried to the foot of the mountain. It rose above us, stark and grey and magnificent, glittering in the morning sunshine.

We started to walk all round the base of the rock. It was close on a mile in circumference. The only thing of interest that we noted on the journey was a black, six-foot square hole in the pillar, and it was at ground level. I shall always remember the chill of fear I had when we looked at it, trying to see the end of it. We could not.

When we regained our starting point Schuman said, "It doesn't look too promising for us, eh, Ross?"

"I don't see what good this trip'll do any of us," I growled, voicing thus mildly my fear. It was close to terror now.

"Well," said Pirov gently, "we are scientists, and it is our duty to investigate these things. And make our reports to the people."

Ross said, "I don't like it. Since we've been close to this damned rock I've felt

... "Yes?" I said eagerly.

"I've felt as though someone's watching all we do . . . Oh, it's fantastic! Hell, let's get away from this thing and look over the ground a bit more, and then get back to Earth. I'll feel a hell of a sight safer when I've got good old Terra under my feet again."

I knew Lyle was going to disagree. I said it first.

"No. It's obvious that if there's something here for us to investigate it's inside this rock. I say let us try to get through that hole we saw on the other side. There *might* be life inside it."

Lyle cut in, "Yes. After all, there's absolutely no form of life on the surface. There's some sort of heat generated inside the Satellite. It hasn't been within range of the Sun long enough to get heated by induction. And if there's heat inside the rock, there may be life, too, with a sub-surface atmosphere to support it."

The fear chilling my spine was like a knife of liquid air now. My instincts told me that we should follow Ross's advice and get back to Earth. But there was something more, something greater than my instinct for self-preservation demanding that we enter the menacing, black hole, our only means of getting inside the pillar and testing this new possibility.

"Let's go," Lyle said.



I could only guess at Ross's feelings as we gazed into that black nothingness which

was six feet in breadth at ground level and six feet in height. It wasn't quite tall enough for us to move in a comfortably upright position as we walked. Our space-suit helmets tended to scrape along the roof, and we had to droop our shoulders slightly.

The tunnel, for such it seemed to be, narrowed inside the rock, and we were compelled to walk in single file. We'd all switched on our lighting equipment, but though it worked at full power and would normally have thrown a wide aura of light around each one of us, the atomic batteries could do no better than put out a luminous glow. This wasn't the darkness of Earth, an absence of light, apathetic, it was something more positive, a force of darkness that was attacking us, draining us of energy.

Some glimmering of the truth was creeping through to me, but it was still too monstrous for me to be able to express my thoughts, my deepest fears. I knew that this darkness was a protective covering. The very darkness was a living tissue that held its menace for every man in our party. For me, perhaps, least of all, because I was beginning to understand it. And, paradoxically, it was most dangerous to me, because I knew that I would ultimately be the one to oppose it.

I knew, quite impersonally, that Ross would be the first one to fall. He was susceptible to the influence, yet he could not understand it. Suddenly I knew how he would feel.

Lyle, as the skipper, was number one in the file. Behind him came Ross and Schuman, then Pirov, I was number five and Berryman come at the rear.

Schuman gave the alarm first. He saw the shining outline ahead of him simply fold up and flop to the ground. Lyle stopped and turned around. The remaining four of us crowded up close to see.

Lyle barked, "Rod. You and Schuman take him back to the outside surface and see if you can do anything for him. If necessary get him back to the rocket-ship."

I said, "Don't bother, anyone. Ross is dead!"

Silence met my words. A shocked, unbelieving silence.

At last Lyle said slowly, "How do you know that, Garry?"

"I felt it myself," I said, without confidence. How could I explain to them?

Either you felt it, or you didn't. I did. They didn't. I added, "I saw death in my mind."

Berryman laughed shakily. "Let us know when you see it again, Dr. Brompton. Only just give us ten seconds' warning. So we can get outa here."

I smiled thinly inside my helmet. Berryman would never understand. He was only a fool newspaperman.

"I'll try, anyway," I said.

"Well, we can't leave him here," Lyle said, looking uncertainly at Ross's inert body, blocking the passage.

"Why can't we?" I wanted to know, harshly. Then, "For heaven's sake, Lyle, try to get it in your head that this is not a Sunday afternoon excursion to the Botanical Gardens. We're dealing here with some-



thing that may have vast, deadly effect on the whole human race. We can't waste time on one dead man!"

I detected a strangeness in the way Lyle stared at me. And my passionate tirade left me suddenly cold, drained of emotion.

"All right," Lyle said, abruptly. "We'll leave him here." He turned inward again and led off, deeper into the rock. We followed him in silence. A silence that was drawn out, strained to the limit, barring all speech. We kept on walking. It seemed endless. I guess Lyle was beginning to worry about our oxygen supply. I wasn't. I knew we would soon come to the end of the tunnel.

As we walked we could touch the walls on either side, which we did often. I fancy it encouraged the others. It gave them something concrete to hang on to, in the midst of this horror which had caused the death of Ross. The glow from our space-suits could not light up the tunnel wall. So it was only when our gloved hands felt the walls receding on both sides of us that we knew we had got somewhere.

The back of my neck prickled and went clammy. This was where I had been in

my dream the last two nights. I knew it by the feel of the place, just as you say on Earth that you know the atmosphere that a room or locality creates in your mind. That was it! The creation of an "atmosphere" in the mind!

I saw it first. It was the strange questioner of my dream. It had no terror for me now. My understanding of it was growing with every passing second of time, dispelling my fears.

"Garry! What . . . ?" Lyle said sharply, as he saw my light-outlined, space-suited figure break from the orderly file, and walk quickly into the blanket of darkness. The four of them followed me, more cautiously. Sure-footed, I went straight to the centre of this awesome, cavernous pocket in the midst of the pinnacle of living rock. Then I hauled up dead. The others grouped round me, and saw what I was pointing at.

"There it is, Lyle," I said, unemotionally. "That's the essence of this strange Satellite. The reason for its existence."

I was looking at a matt, grey sphere, supported on a pedestal rock. No one else said anything. They gazed in wonderment.

"Does it remind you of anything? You, Schuman. You're a biologist."

Schuman said, "There's only a slight resemblance. But, yes, I'd say it reminded me of a disembodied brain."

We made a slight, evanescent circle of light around the thing. I reached out my hand to touch it. And as my fingers made contact, it vibrated! A blinding flash of light crossed my brain. It was as if my immediate, physical contact with the thing had at last put to flight all the barriers of communication which it had been trying to break down in my mind during the last two days, since the Satellites had first descended upon the Earth.

Speech is communication by word of mouth. Those words conjure up images in the mind of the listener, which convey the meaning of the person who is talking. That is, images are transferred from one mind to another through their association with words. That is the way ordinary human beings understand the process.

Now I was receiving images from this brain, this entity, in front of us. But no words passed between us. Indeed, they could not, for this brain had no material means of making sound vibrations. I suspected then that this utter darkness was a medium for accelerating the transference of

thought waves. This thing in front of us could transmit waves to all of us. But, out of this party, I was the only one who could pick up these waves and translate them into images.

Hence our awful, black fear at the sight of the hole in the base of the rock. Hence Ross' death. He had been killed by a sudden, violent thought wave vibration. It was fear, really, which had been induced in his mind by this thing in front of us, causing death by heart failure, a sudden seizing up of his whole nervous system. This aspect of thought waves was new to us, and therefore terrifying. Understanding of a problem, or at least its recognition, drives out fear. I could only hope that my understanding of this monstrosity was adequate . . . !

With a conscious effort I shut out the thought manifestations of the brain, and turned to my companions.

Quietly I told them what I knew.

"So that was it," Lyle said, and his voice sounded hollow and awed. "That was the strength of your dreams."

"Yes," I said.

Schuman said coldly, "It killed Ross. It had no god-dam right to do that!" I hadn't heard him so nettled before.

Lyle drew out his blaster, and pointed it at the brain.

He said slowly, "I'm skipper of this crew. I take full responsibility for this. If that damned thing killed Ross, there's no knowing when it'll start again . . ."

I tried to stop him, but I wasn't quick enough.

Lyle didn't fire his blaster. Not another sound came from him. The gun slid out of his fingers and rattled dully as it struck the ground. Lyle fell on top of it. He'd never understand it now.

My mind was full of images. They said to me, "Tell them that anyone who tries to destroy me will die in the same way." It was stilted speech, but that is the only way I can record what the brain communicated to me.

I told it to Schuman and Pirov and Berryman.

Berryman shuddered. "Anyone got a cigarette?" he asked. "My nerves ain't what they used to be."

"Shut up, Berryman," I said. I was in charge here now, whether they liked it or not, and they knew it.

I formed images in my mind, and I spoke wordlessly to the brain. It was rather like a prayer. I said, "What do you want of us? And why do you kill?"

"Why do you invade my territory here?"

I countered with another question. I started from the beginning. "Why have you come to look down on the Earth?"

The answer came: "I was interested. Is that enough?"

"No," I said.

"I have come from the Arcturus Solar System. I came in search of life. I am an explorer, you understand. The human race on Earth is the most developed form of life in your Solar System. Your society and your thought have developed to its highest level in America and Europe. Europe is



ahead of you Americans, but nevertheless I was interested . . ."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Do you mean that you are also over Europe now. That these two Satellites are both instruments of your mind?"

"I do."

The other three members of the party were fidgeting, uncomfortable. They must have been scared to death, just standing there, watching me acting like I was in a trance.

I heard Berryman say, "Christ, if only I had a movie camera. They'd offer me a directorship on the 'March of Time' . . ."

"Time, my friend," said Pirov dryly, "does not march. At this moment it does not matter either."

Schuman said, "God-dam." I knew he was badly shaken. I wasn't exactly bloodless either. Lyle had been my friend, and now he was heaped on the floor of this creature's brain-box. But I tried to stay cool, and scientific in my outlook.

"Why did you kill Ross?" I pursued.

"To discourage you from entering. I did not intend his death. I tried **only** to scare you away."

"And Lyle?"

"Self-protection."

The answers came pat, and their images were forming in my brain even as my question was completed. This way of talking had its disadvantages, though. It was so damned cold and impersonal. There was no way of telling what this brain was getting at. How could I believe everything that was told to me? I had no means of proving the truth of the brain's statements.

I said, "Why did you pick on me to communicate with?"

"Only highly developed, mathematical brains respond to the process of thought. Communication takes place at a deep level of consciousness. You were not the only one on Earth, in America even, with whom I communicated. But you are the only one who has attempted to invade the inner fortress of my thoughts."

I had a mental struggle with myself. And not one of my thoughts was private



any longer. Anything that went on in my mind was transmitted instantly to this greedy, all-devouring object, set on the pedestal!

The brain forestalled me. "Remember the warning I gave you on the death of your friend," it said.

I was chilled, but a stubborn determination was battling for supremacy. I told myself that I wasn't just scared because this thing was strange, because even though I'd understood the nature of the Satellite and this deep black tunnel we were in, this malignant object which I called a brain still represented an unknown potentiality, with roots stretching back milliards of light years through space. I knew enough about the Satellite to recognise the danger which could threaten the Earth. It seemed to me that this creature from Arcturus, while lacking the characteristics of Earth life, would

obviously be in a position to dominate Man, if only by virtue of its amazing power of thought.

I had a feeling, and it was growing on me, that this thing was here to probe the secrets of the Earth's form of life. What came after that? I was wondering. Was this just the beginning of attacks on the Earth? Attacks from outer space?

I could feel the tension building up inside of me as the brain followed my thinking, not liking it. I risked one more question.

"Are these Satellites in turn an instrument of your brain? Is this you or is this just a part of you?"

I felt the scorn in the clipped images that crossed my mind. "These are my eyes, and a sufficient portion of my brain to be able to communicate with the parent organism on Arcturus."

"Who are you? Are you just one, or is there a race like you on Arcturus?"

"There are many of us, yes. But we are not numerous like the Earth races. There are exactly seventy-eight other such entities as myself on Arcturus."

"What form do you take there?"

"That you would not understand."

Somehow I had to destroy this thing. More and more I could feel its cynical menace, its cloaking of its real purpose under a series of pictures in my mind. The brain was wakening to its danger, and already I could feel its strange, compelling influence at work on my mind. A sort of creeping paralysis.

I whipped out my blaster.

Berryman saw it and yelled, "Look out, Brompton!"

I called out to the other three, "Get outside fast as you can. Bring the guardship round to this side. Take off if you've got to, and be ready to pick me up in the basket . . ."

They took to their heels, the three of them. I felt the cold hammer blows of the brain's thought waves, battering at my consciousness. My head ached violently. I vomited. But I brought the blaster to bear on the thing on the pedestal.

I felt an easing of the pain in my head. Sickened, I turned to look for the others. Two of them dropped in their tracks. Soberly I knew that Pirov and Schuman had gone. Two of the best scientific minds of this generation sacrificed to this malignant creature.

One man kept running. I didn't need to be told that it was Berryman. Nothing could get through that thick skull of his!

I sent a burst of thetrons crackling out of my blaster. The rock pedestal disintegrated. The grey lump of organism bounced dully on the floor. There was a momentary lull inside my head.

I could hardly move my muscles now. But I managed to flex my wrist so that the blaster pointed down at my feet, and I directed it on to the brain. The racket was terrific! My head was seesawing wildly. Pins and needles were shooting through my bloodstream, and my heart thudded with the strain. But still all I felt was physical pain. And I wasn't afraid!

The only thing that scared me was the thought that my blaster wouldn't affect the thing. I kept on shooting till I wondered if the atomic charge would give out. Still, I'd get away. Next time I'd bring atom-shells and space artillery!

A crack split through the floor of the cave. My vision reeked blood-red. I thought that was the mind image symbol that the thing was disintegrating at last. There came a thunder crash that was pure, external sound, and I knew that the end had come. I put a last burst of thetron particles into the object. Then I turned and ran for my life. Yes, my life!

I didn't know how long the Satellite could exist independently of its motive force. I didn't know when it would disintegrate completely and, by the force of the explosion, go rocketing off, a free body in space.

Space-suits aren't made for running in. But gravity was almost non-existent. I could feel the pull growing less with every stride I took. Which meant the Satellite must have split up already. Maybe I'd never see sunlight again.

I ran, and ran. I passed Ross' body. I saw the square of bright, welcoming day ahead of me. My heart gladdened at the sight of it. Then I was out upon the gentle rock surface again.

My heart was in bad shape. It had been tested to the full inside that cavern of evil, and it was pounding like an old steam hammer after the exertion of my run. It didn't do my heart any good to see the ground split right in front of me. And a chasm of sheer, empty space yawned up at me.

I heard the hiss of the guardship overhead. Like an angel of deliverance! I spoke to the pilot by radio.

They couldn't land, but I didn't mind that. The craft was braking now, and a basket came jerking downward out of a hatch in its belly, held there by two wire cords. The basket dragged over the ground, slowly, slowly.

With a great upsurge of relief, I leaped inside it. Then I was hauled up. The basket stowed away, and the hatch closed. I collapsed. I must have slept then, because the next thing I knew was waking up in a cool, white-walled sanatorium. And I stayed there a week.



I had plenty of time to think of my friends who'd been lost, -away out there in space. They were grey, sober thoughts. Of the five of them, only Rod Berryman had pulled through. Grim irony of fate! Maybe, I thought, it was just as well he did come through. No one would have believed the fantastic story I had to tell them. And they must believe it. The whole world must know, and be on guard against interstellar invasion from Arcturus. Anyway, they'd believe Berryman. They'd know that his hard knothed wouldn't dream up a story like mine.

I saw Berryman at the end of that week.

He said, "You know the Satellite over Europe blew up at the same time ours did?"

I nodded. "Tell me, did they offer you that directorship? On the strength of your story, I mean."

Berryman looked sour. "March of Time? Not a chance! They didn't even believe my story. Said they'd wait till you got fit again. They wanted to hear it from you."

I just looked at him and laughed.

He stole thoughts, cheating his closest friends out of their unspoken plans — then he stole the thought that they wished to destroy him ... the ...

Thought Thief

EMILE Audez worked crouched down over his drafting board in an attitude of complete concentration. But one thing was strange about the way he worked. His eyes were closed and his hands moved as if in obedience to some mind other than his own. Swiftly the sketches took shape on the papers and when three hours were elapsed they were complete. Only then did the hands cease their labours and the man straightened up, his cadaverous black eyes opening and becoming alive with excited interest as he viewed the sketches.

"Excellent!" he muttered to himself excitedly. "Once more I will triumph. Once more reap the riches that come from another's labours."

Swiftly he sorted the sketches and the written matter that was with them and then, carefully locking one set in an electronically controlled safe in the wall, he bundled the others

into a small attache case and hurried from the room and up the elevator to the roof of the house. On the flat roof stood a small hangar and through the open door of this could be seen the small rocket machine which waited there.

Once within the cabin of the machine Emile deftly worked the controls and a couple of moments later he had the rocket-car zooming up into the sky and he circled off to the east and headed across the vast lands of fertile agriculture where the land was kept vigorous by the latest fertilisers and the plants fed by the rain which was created artificially whenever required and prevented from materialising when it threatened to rain naturally at the wrong time.

One invention of which he held the patent was concerned with this prevention of natural precipitation of rain. It had brought vast wealth to him by way of the royalties he collected on it. Too, through a vast range of inventions and discoveries, the name of Emile Audez was known across the land. Fabulous luck was said to have accompanied his researches for on almost every occasion on which he had filed a

patent he had beaten another man and twice it had been big research organisations.

It was sometimes less than hours after his patent had been filed that another exactly similar had been brought in for registration. Though these men and their organisations cursed and argued they were told that the law was quite definite on the point and that the full benefit of the patent must go to Emile Audez.

Now, he was speeding toward the Patents building in Metropolis to file a claim on yet another invention. This time it was an ejector device for a space ship, which would eject a space-suited man directly into space without the need of the tiresome routine of operating an air lock. To the engineers who had to service the giant inter-planetary liners which broke down in space the device would be a tremendous advantage and Emile smiled wryly as he calculated the possible profits from his patent.

Landing quietly on the roof of the office building he hurried down in the elevator car and was promptly ushered through to the man in charge of the office of patents.

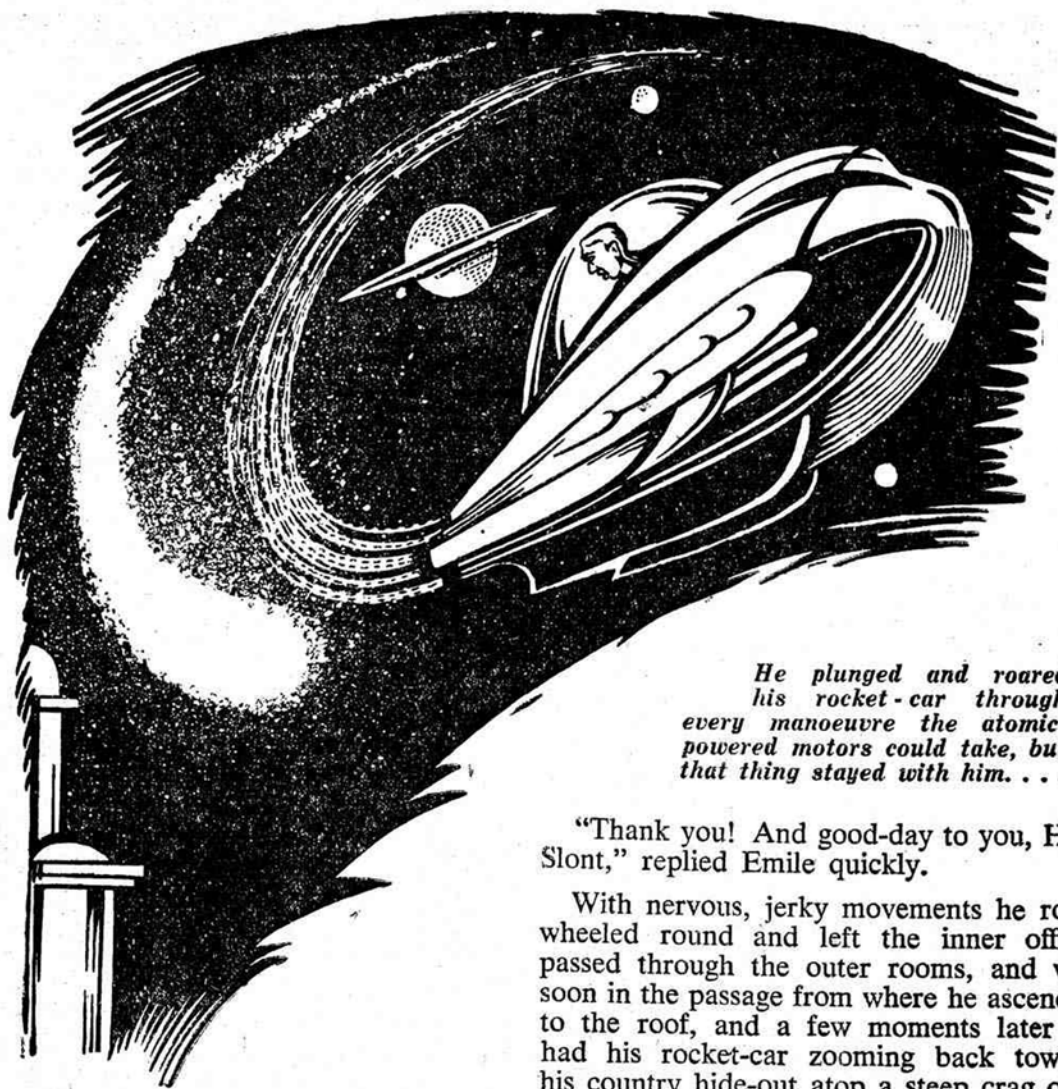
"Well, Audez!" Marcus Slont, the egg-headed jovial man cried, his keen penetrating eyes watching the man closely. "What is it this time?"

Swiftly Audez spread the sketches before Slont and that man became engrossed in the sketches and diagrams. Then, carefully he read through the written matter and nodded his head quietly. For all his seeming joviality he was considered one of the most advanced men in his field of science and he was intrigued by the design and arrangement of the device.

"Excellent!" he nodded his head approvingly. "I'll have it filed immediately and see that you get an official receipt."

"Thank you!" nodded Audez quickly. "And Slont! There's a matter troubling me considerably. As you know, in the past certain persons and groups of people have come by my secrets in time to make an

by Wolfe Herscholt



He plunged and roared his rocket-car through every manoeuvre the atomic-powered motors could take, but that thing stayed with him. . . .

"Thank you! And good-day to you, Herr Slont," replied Emile quickly.

With nervous, jerky movements he rose, wheeled round and left the inner office, passed through the outer rooms, and was soon in the passage from where he ascended to the roof, and a few moments later he had his rocket-car zooming back toward his country hide-out atop a steep crag of a mountain, which dominated all the lands from Metropolis out across the fertile plains.

Something seemed to be amiss with Emile as he parked his car and went down to the room where he had been working so feverishly such a short while before. Once there he sat down and closed his eyes and all the power of his will he concentrated on the image of Slont's face. For a long while he picked up nothing that was of interest and then he listened to the thoughts of Slont as the officer of the Patents office received the man who presented the space-ejector for patent filing.

Emile smiled grimly to himself as he heard the argument as it registered on the mind of Slont. Then, a time elapsed and the Bureau of Investigation was called and an officer of that department was talking with Slont. Then fierce wild thoughts began flashing into Audez's mind and he realised that the man who had come to present the patent for the space-ejector was escaping.

effort to beat me to the recording of the patents on my inventions. Once more I am worried about such an attempt. If any person or persons should make an attempt to file such a device as this I ask that you hold them here and contact the Central Bureau of Investigation and have them arrested. It is most important to me that I find how and where the leak is occurring."

"Something big coming up?" queried Marcus Slont eagerly.

"Exactly!" nodded Audez quickly. "You understand that I work under a great strain when I am afraid all the time of thieves who are stealing my secrets."

"I understand!" nodded Slont. "I will do as you request. It has only been your personal requests in the past that have prevented such action previously."

"Before it didn't seem necessary," Emile explained. "Now it is most essential."

"Very well, then. Your receipt, Audez."

Angrily Emile cursed as he picked up the thoughts from the man Slont's mind. Then, with a final angry snarl he realised that it was of no further use tapping the mind of the man Slont. The prisoner had successfully made his escape from the roof of the Patents office and was gone. Emile smiled nervously as he got up and paced back and forth up and down the room.

He cursed himself for a fool. He had known that he was playing with fire when he tapped the brains of the under-cover organisation—Fitstip Squadron. They were a dangerous bunch of rebels with a brilliant scientific core of men attached to them. By patenting inventions and reaping the profits from them the organisation was building up its strength to assume world domination and smash the tight hold held by the freedom-loving authorities of the present.

That didn't matter to Audez for he had sufficient wealth now, after years of stealing the inventions of others by the simple, to him, method of tapping the thoughts of the inventors and so relaying them through his own mind to paper and then rushing to the Patents office with the result. The extra-sensitive method of telepathy he used was a technique which he had discovered quite accidentally many years before and which was the only original discovery he had made. Too, it was the only one that didn't find a place in the files of the Patents office, and that for obvious reasons.

So, over the years, with the more and more acute development of his telepathic mind-tapping technique he stole idea and invention one after another until he was among the wealthiest men alive and renowned as the greatest inventor of all time. But now, he slumped into his chair again and concentrated on another man and in a few seconds he was listening in on a conversation being carried on between the man who had escaped from the Patents office and the man from whom he had stolen his sketches.

"Emile Audez has beaten me," the escapee was snarling fiercely as he began ripping off a mask which had completely transformed his face and now, facing the inventor of the space-ejector he growled, "That swine has stolen our way to wealth. Has stolen our means to power. We must call a meeting to-night to decide the fate of Audez. How he does this I cannot tell, but it is plain enough that he does steal our

inventions. Call a meeting for this evening at eight at the usual spot."

"As you say!" nodded the inventor slowly. "But it seems impossible that Audez could have stolen our invention. Perhaps . . ."

"Perhaps what?" snapped the man angrily.

"Perhaps it is that Emile Audez is a genius. Perhaps it is that he has succeeded before us, as with the other cases."

"Perhaps no such thing!" barked the other gent angrily. "No philosophy ever dreamed of could allow such a possible number of coincidences to be acts of nature. This man is a thief, but in what manner he steals I cannot tell."

"Then we'll discuss him when the council meets."

"Exactly!"

That was all Emile was interested in right then and he paced nervously up and down the room for a while and cursed himself for being such a fool as to line himself up against the Fitstip Squadron. But there was nothing more now that he could do until the evening when the council of that under-cover organisation would meet. Then, he would have to be alert and spying on them, knowing all that was being planned.

But now, after the savage demands he had been making on himself in his concentrated mental activities, Emile was very tired and he went to his sleeping apartment and lay down, turning on the soft arcs of the vitamin lamps and then relaxed and was soon asleep. His sleep was heavy and restful under the gentle soothing influence of the lamps. He slept soundly, and long—too long.

When he woke it was with a start to realise that the lamps had automatically switched themselves off when they had restored him and that he had slept long past the appointed time for the meeting of the council of the Fitstip Squadron. Anxiously he glanced around, but everything seemed to be in order. Then he hurried to his viewers and examined the surrounding air and countryside. Apart from a small object high up, which he reasoned to be a bird, he could see nothing and, reassured, he went back to his study and dialled through on video and contacted the Bureau of Investigation. To them he gave particulars

that would enable them to wipe out the ruthless organisation known as Fitstip Squadron.

Then, more content, he relaxed and willed his mind to pick up the thoughts of the inventor whom he had robbed. He realised, with a sudden shudder of fear, that the council meeting was over already and that the man was planning some attack on the jet-rocket works of the government. It was a sabotage effort designed to reduce the forces available to the government at the time when Fitstip attacked in their attempt to overthrow the forces in power.

For a tedious hour he was forced to concentrate on these matters and then the thoughts suddenly changed and the man at the other end was thinking about Emile Audez and a cry of horror escaped the lips of the thought thief as he realised that this was one time he wished he had not been listening. He picked up the thought—"The Rocket-Dematerialiser will not attack for twelve hours yet, but by then we will be in power in the land and may well find the secret of this man's robberies before he dies."

A shudder of horror ran through Emile Audez. He didn't need to be told what the Rocket-Dematerialiser was. During the last war he had filed a patent on the device and it had been the chief factor in finally bringing his country's enemies to their knees.

The small, rocket-driven apparatus was completely self-guided once it had been given a target and no matter whether the target was man, machine, or place, the Rocket-Dematerialiser would attack at the appointed time and shatter the target into nothingness immediately it released its cosmic ray explosion.

"God!" cried Emile, and it was a prayer. "The fiends! What's happened to the Bureau of Investigation?"

Then, flashing from the ether to his mind came the panicked thoughts of the inventor of the Fitstip Squadron.

"Police! A raid! I've got to escape! Even if I alone escape there'll still be a chance for the Fitstip Squadron to reform."

Suddenly, with a slashing shock of pain to Emile's mind, tuned as it was to that of the other man, all was blackness and Audez knew that the Bureau of Investigation were

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carrying out a successful raid on the headquarters of the Fitstip Squadron.

Eagerly he ran to the video and flicked it on and after an interval of a few minutes the programme was cut short and a flash of news came from the government news office.

"An illegal organisation known as Fitstip Squadron was raided in its headquarters a few minutes ago. The raid is still proceeding, with the casualties heavy on both sides. These traitors are extremely well armed and are believed to have released some Rocket-Dematerialisers. Any person having cause to fear this organisation should take whatever precautions may seem best to him."

The video screen went blank then and the original programme was revived within a few seconds. But by now Emile Audez, Thought Thief, and wealthy and respected man of his country, was a fear-ridden mass of trembling horror. He went up to the roof and climbed into his rocket-car, his huge cadaverous eyes peering into the sky and struggling to convince himself that there was nothing there, that death in its horrible form did not lurk above, waiting the hour at which to strike.

With a savage jerk of the controls, Audez lunged his rocket-car high up into the night sky and opened the throttle to full speed, which was round the fifteen hundred miles per hour mark on this multi-purpose machine. Then, with fingers that trembled, Audez reached back, switched on the infra-red viewers which scanned the skies around the catapulting machine. On the screen was flashed an enlarged image of the thing. Every deadly outline of its shape was engraved on his memory and he plunged his machine down from eighty thousand feet into a spiralling dive from which he pulled his rocket-car when only fifteen thousand feet from the ground.

The merciless thing that followed him dived more steeply than his car, but within a couple of minutes or so it was back on his trail like the tail of a comet which could never be lost. Already he was two hours closer to his doom—ten hours remained. He plunged and roared his rocket-car through every manoeuvre the atomic-powered motors could take, but that thing stayed with him.

Great beads of cold sweat gathered on his brow and he turned, and began to flash

toward the object, the silent, rocket-controlled mechanism which pursued him, waiting dutifully for the correct time to strike. But as he flashed toward the thing it fled him and he could not get it within the range of his deadly atom-shells.

Three or four times he fired from the stern atom-shell tubes, but the shells always exploded before they reached the thing. Then with a wild curse he remembered that the thing was protected by its own deflector device which exploded any shells before they could come within harm's range.

"A mine!" yelled Emile suddenly. "That's the answer. I've got to go down, deep under the earth, down where it can't follow me, where I can shut myself in."

Laughing hilariously now in the sudden relief as he believed he had the explanation, the thought thief dived his rocket-car down from a hundred thousand feet to ten thousand feet and then straightened out and headed for the nearest mining district he knew in the area.

Once he was grounded he ran to the manager's office and explained his predicament. Then, flashing his authority, he demanded to be locked down a shaft of the mine—deep down.

"And under no circumstances must you open the mine—not even should you believe it is I who call you," snapped Audez.

"As you say, Herr Audez," snapped the manager.

Quickly he conducted the man to the top of a mine shaft and directed him into a small elevator car. Then, with shouted directions to his operators, he watched the elevator sink and the door slowly close over behind it. In that instant just before the door closed he had a sudden feeling that something had flashed before his eyes, he could not be sure.

Below, deep under the earth, Emile Audez was sitting still, silent, staring at the thing which hovered in the air in the centre of the mine shaft, a tiny flame of the jet which kept it air-borne. Through the sweat that rolled unheeded over Audez's eyes, he stared fixedly, unblinking at the thing. Time passed and he moved not till there remained but three minutes to the set time.

Only then, with horrible screams rising from his throat, did Emile Audez, Thought Thief, run panic-stricken from the thing. Three minutes passed in an eternity of horror as the thing hovered always just by him and then—the end.



Millions of simple-minded Venusians await the spark that will spread revolt through the planet . . . and it rests with one man to try to turn the tide of unrest.



In one bound Bright reached the door and with his back to it faced the villainous old Venusian. . . . "If you try to get past me you will be blasted with a raygun," he menaced.

Revolt on Venus

by Ace Carter

THE door of Welfare Officer Streeter's office slid open and a sodden wave of the fierce Venusian heat flowed into the air-conditioned room, its impact almost a tangible thing, and causing the two Earthmen to gasp.

Dr. Creel entered, loosened his heat resisting suit and gratefully took the ice-cold drink proffered by young Bright, the Assistant Welfare Officer, before attempting to speak.

"Things haven't improved in the laboratories, Streeter," said Dr. Creel, setting down his glass. "There's something in the air there, and I don't like it."

"No complaints from the Venusian workers, Doctor?" asked Streeter, frowning.

"None whatever. That's the whole trouble. The conditions in my laboratories,

making synthetic chlorophyll, are better than on the plantations and in the extraction factory, but in spite of that the Venusians aren't happy with me. They say nothing to me or to my overseer, but they gather in groups and mutter to one another, and there have been a few cases of sabotage, which have interfered with production. I can't understand it. But I'm quite sure that the Venusian Extraction Corporation is behind it."

"I thought we'd smashed that crowd when we had Ludd deported to Earth," said Streeter irritably. "It seems that Ludd's partner, Mallar, is just as big a scoundrel."

"They have a lot to lose," pointed out Dr. Creel. "Before I began making synthetic chlorophyll they had a monopoly; they owned the best land for growing the green leaves from which the chlorophyll was extracted, and they have a first-class factory for extraction purposes. There's an enormous amount of money tied up in the enterprise and they're not going to lose it all without a fight. And somehow they've managed to get the Venusians on their side. The Venusians are your responsibility, Streeter, so it's up to you to find out what's brewing."

Streeter eyed the scientist for a few moments. "I suppose so," he admitted at length. "Send Sog over here, Doctor. He's regarded as the leader of the Venusians."

"You'll get nothing out of him," objected Dr. Creel. "He's like all the rest of them—dumb!"

"I think I may," said Streeter slowly. "Just send him over, anyway. By the way," he added, as the Doctor rose, grunting irritably. "Would it be possible to shift your laboratories to Earth?"

"Of course not!" snorted Dr. Creel. "To do that I'd have to reproduce the atmospheric conditions of Venus, and even then I'd have to employ Venusians. Earthmen couldn't stand it."

"Well, if you hear a rumor that you are going to shift your laboratories to Earth please don't deny it."

"But—"

"That's all you have to do," cut in Streeter. "Keep quiet. Don't deny it and don't confirm it. Now send Sog over."

"Unreasonable old devil," said young Bright, as Dr. Creel left.

"He's correct, just the same," said Streeter. "It's our job to see that the natives are contented. If there's trouble and Creel reports it to the Venus Colonial Office on Earth, it might mean my recall. And I've spent too many years on this green hothouse of a planet to go back to Earth in a subordinate job. I'm going to get to the bottom of this before it breaks. And old Sog is going to help me."

Streeter lapsed into thoughtful silence. Ever since the Atomic War on Earth, which had rendered sterile vast areas of food-producing country, it had been of vital importance to obtain supplies of the essential green chlorophyll to infuse into artificial food tablets, and the planet Venus was rich

in that commodity. The fast growing vivid green vegetation yielded enormous quantities of the chemical, which was extracted from the leaves harvested by the Venusians, and as a result the Venusian Extraction Corporation had grown in wealth and power. But now, thanks to Dr. Creel's successful work, it had been made possible to reproduce artificially the chlorophyll from a few simple chemicals peculiar to Venus. There had been an attempt by the ex-Chairman of the company, Ludd, to prevent the Doctor from setting up the laboratory, but Streeter had outwitted the villainous plantation owner. Now, it seemed, Ludd's associates were engaged on some fresh villainy.

The door of the office slid open again and Sog, the elderly Venusian, thudded in on great splayed feet, and waved a scaly, many-jointed arm in the traditional greeting.

"Sit, Sog," invited Streeter. "Are there any complaints from your fellows in Dr. Creel's laboratories?"

"None, Officer," replied Sog, in the dialect. His lidless eyes under his flat reptilian skull were narrowed as they gazed at the Welfare Officer. The old Venusian possessed more than the normal share of craftiness which is often inherent in primitive and simple peoples.

"That is good, Sog," murmured Streeter. "Work there is better than work on the plantations. You know, Sog," he went on, "we have brought you many things from Earth. You have bright lights in your homes you have telephoto entertainment, and you have music. You will lose these things if your people do not work fairly."

"We know that, Officer," assented Sog.

"And if your people do not want to work for us they need not do so," pursued Streeter. "Dr. Creel thinks your fellows are not happy in the laboratories, so he has decided that soon he will not have a laboratory on this planet. He has found a means of doing the work on Earth."

Old Sog half rose from his seat, and for a brief instant his eyes gleamed redly. Then he was calm again, at least outwardly.

"If Dr. Creel does that, Sog," said Streeter. "There will be no work for your people on the plantations either. You do not want to go back to the wretched conditions in which we from the Earth first found you?" The Venusian was silent, and Streeter went on, "You will tell your people

this thing, Sog. And now you may go."

No sooner had the Venusian thudded from the office than Streeter tossed a pair of electroculars to his assistant. "Watch which way he goes, Bright," he snapped. "I may be following him." He got into his heat-resisting suit as he spoke. Young Bright focused the electroculars through the window, switched them on and pierced the mists that continually blotted out the Venusian landscape; and after watching old Sog for some moments turned quickly to Streeter.

"He's not going direct to the laboratories," he said. "He's making for Venburg City."

"Just as I expected," commented Streeter. "That bit of false information I've just given him has shocked him profoundly, and unless I'm mistaken he'll make straight for Mallar and blurt it out to him." He fastened on his suit. "I'll take a pair of electroculars to keep him in sight, and also one of those button-microphones."

He stepped out on to the soft yielding ground, making for the upper ground where the Earthmen had built the only city on Venus. He had no difficulty in keeping old Sog in sight through the mist-piercing electroculars; and when the Venusian reached the wide street which contained the row of cylindrical office buildings, the commercial centre of the little city, he nodded with satisfaction.

Sog entered the Venusian Extraction Company's building, and Streeter followed, avoiding the main office and stepping on to the slowly moving spiralway which took him to the top floor where Mallar's private office was situated. The circular corridor was temporarily deserted, and Streeter, after a quick look around pressed the suction cap of the tiny microphone against the plastic door of Mallar's office, inserted the button receiver into his ear and switched on. And immediately the voice of Mallar, raised in fury, reached him.

"You've got it wrong, Sog," said Mallar's voice. "He can't make the stuff on Earth."

"I have said what he said," came the slow thick tones of the Venusian.

"If that's true," said Mallar fiercely, "it means the end for us. And it means the end of your chance of becoming the Lord of your people, Sog."

Streeter gasped. Those few words explained a lot. Sog was the tool that Mallar

was using. He had promised the old Venusian the equivalent of a kingdom, backed by Earthmen, and no doubt a mass of luxuries; and Sog had influenced his people in some way to support him.

"There is nothing to be done," said Sog bitterly.

"There's a lot to be done, and done quickly," rasped Mallar. "The revolution will occur now—this day! And the first thing to be done is to destroy those laboratories completely. Your fellows will cease work within an hour, Sog. You will return now, taking the ray-bomb with you, and conceal it in the laboratories. It will be set for one hour and ten minutes. The explosion will be the signal for your people to rise against the other Earthmen, Dr. Creel and his staff and the Security Officers, and above all, the two Welfare Officers. But be sure that Dr. Creel does not escape. He alone can make the synthetic green liquid, and with him out of the way it will take a long time for another to discover his process—if it is ever discovered. Then there will be prosperity for all on this planet, and you will be the ruler of a prosperous world."

"It is good," said Sog. "My people—"

Streeter whipped the suction cap from the door and turned quickly as soft footsteps sounded from the direction of the spiralway. Approaching him was a big florid faced man, Yeats, who was Mallar's co-director of the Venusian Extraction Corporation.

"Mr. Streeter." The plump face widened into a ready smile. Yeats's habitual pose was that of the breezy, hail-fellow-well-met business man, and it was a pose that paid dividends. Streeter, however, had never been deceived by the veneer of good fellowship, and had no doubt that Yeats was every bit as ruthless and cunning as the other director of the Corporation. "I hope you haven't come to us with complaints from the Venusian workers?"

"No," Streeter reassured him, eyeing the fat man closely, and wondering whether that button-microphone had been observed. "Just a routine conference about conditions generally, Mr. Yeats. I was about to tap on the door when you came along." As he spoke he rapped on Mallar's door; and a moment later it opened, and Mallar appeared.

"Mr. Streeter for a conference on the Venusian workers," announced Yeats, following the Welfare Officer inside. There

was no sign of Sog, but a communicating door to the next office explained the exit of the old Venusian.

Mallar seated himself at the desk and motioned to a chair opposite, in which Streeter seated himself. Yeats, however, walked straight to a cupboard, opened the door, and when he turned he held in his hand a ray pistol.

"And now, Mr. Streeter," he said, still smiling blandly, "perhaps you will tell us without waste of time just why you were so interested in my colleague's conversation as to listen in on a button microphone?"

"What's that?" Mallar rose from his chair. He was tall dark and hatchet-faced, and his dark deep-set eyes glared down at the Welfare Officer. "So you've been doing some prying, eh?"

Streeter, acutely aware of the menace of the ray gun, which could silently blast him to Eternity, did not move a muscle.

"In my job it is sometimes necessary to use unpleasant methods," he replied. "I have had complaints from some of your plantation workers, Mallar. I came to discuss the trouble with you, and I thought I might pick up some indication of your policy by listening—"

"Don't bother with any more lies, Streeter," cut in Mallar harshly. "You followed Sog. I hope you've learnt enough to know that you're finished on this planet, and so is Creel and his precious synthetic process."

"You won't get away with it, Mallar," said Streeter quietly. "You can finish me off, and Creel too, but the Venus Colonial Office on Earth will finish you and your corporation."

"On the contrary," smiled Yeats, with a meaning glance at his co-director. "Tell him, Mallar."

"The Colonial Office," said Mallar, resuming his seat, "will be with us, one hundred per cent. We haven't gone into this thing blindly, Streeter. We're going to stage a popular revolution. The Colonial Officials will believe that the Venusians working for Dr. Creel have been discontented with their conditions, and that they have turned at last, goaded beyond endurance."

"That is not true. Creel offers conditions superior—"

"What does that matter, so long as the Colonial Officers believe it to be true?" said Mallar. "We have convinced the simple

Venusians that once the Venusian Extraction Corporation has a monopoly the Golden Age will begin for them. They will govern themselves under a benevolent king who will be installed in a palace. The idea of a Venusian King has excited their simple imaginations, given them a mental lift that nothing else could do. They will have their own Welfare Officers and Security Officers; Venusians, trained by our Corporation." Mallar smiled thinly. "They may have to work a little harder, later on, but by that time there will be two distinct classes of Venusians—those that work for us, and those that work WITH us. The conscience of King Sog the First will be kept in control by the luxuries and the apparent power he will possess."

Streeter's lips closed tightly. The devilish ingenuity of the plan was clear to him—terribly clear. It was the old diplomacy that existed on Earth in the twentieth century; puppet rulers who fired the bullets prepared by the real rulers. And the result would be little better than abject slavery for the great majority of the ignorant Venusians. The worst feature of the whole thing was that the Venus Colonial Office, whose chief job was to maintain supplies of the precious chlorophyll, would, in the extremity of the situation, assent to the plan once Dr. Creel's laboratories were devastated and the Doctor murdered.

Mallar pressed a button on his desk, and in response the communicating door opened and Sog re-entered the room. Mallar opened a drawer and brought out a thin plastic cylinder one end of which was a dial.

"The ray bomb, Sog," he said handing it to the Venusian, who dropped it into the tool wallet strapped around his waist. "You know what to do with it. Don't allow anyone else in the laboratory to set eyes on it. Dr. Creel does not suspect anything, but be very careful. None of the overseers must see it or have any idea where you conceal it in the laboratories. You understand?"

"None will see it," replied the Venusian positively.

"Very well. You will now return to the laboratories." As the Venusian thudded softly from the room, Mallar gestured to Streeter. "You're coming with us."

The Welfare Officer rose and was escorted to the rising spiralway up on to the roof where several aircars were parked.

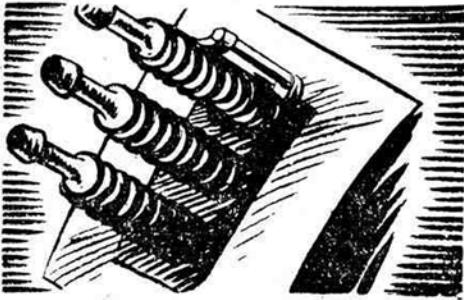
"In you get," commanded Mallar, open-

ing the door of one of the cars.

"What's the idea?" demanded Streeter coldly.

"Get in while you're alive," snapped Mallar. "You're going for a little ride, that's all." The man's tone, and the soft fat laugh from Yeats, revealed more than his actual words. Streeter, with a thrill of horror, realised just how the ride would end—his body, blasted by the ray gun, dumped into one of the myriad, mist covered swamps that covered the Green Planet.

He tensed his muscles. To attempt anything like an attack just then, with Yeats holding the ray gun in readiness would be tantamount to quick suicide; the other alternative would be little better. But it would be a chance, a faint chance, a million-to-one chance perhaps—but worth taking.



He shrugged in apparent resignation and bent to enter the aircar. His eyes were on the control board of the craft; he gauged the distance to the main releasing lever, and then with a suddenness which completely staggered the two men, he dived headfirst into the craft, and pulled down hard on the control lever.

The craft shot upwards, but before it had lifted twenty feet its interior was filled with a searing bluish flame as Yeats discharged his ray gun. A circular hole appeared in the metal body, and the machine lurched wildly.

He turned to the visiphone, pressed the code for the Welfare Office, and to his unutterable relief the screen glowed. At least that was in order, and if young Bright was still in the office . . . And he was! The face of his young assistant appeared on the screen.

"Sog!" shouted Streeter. "Catch him, Bright. He's gone back with a ray bomb to plant in the laboratories!"

As he spoke he felt a violent movement of the craft, and through the window he

could see the misty clouds apparently rising, and that meant that the crippled craft was rushing to the ground. He groped for the repulsion control and pulled it hard over, and there seemed to be a slight diminution in his downward rush. He could hear young Bright's voice, but the image had faded on the screen, and the sharp crackle of fire under the control panel told him why. Sweat poured from Streeter's face as he tugged madly at the repulsion control as he endeavoured desperately to lessen the impact of the inevitable crash. His last thought, as the machine hurtled towards the ground, was a wild speculation as to whether his message had got over to young Bright . . .

From the roof Mallar and Yeats had a glimpse of the lurching aircar and saw the sheet of flame from the blasted jet, and then the fog intervened.

"He won't get far," said Yeats. "That's the finish of him."

Mallar, who had been staring in the direction taken by the aircar, suddenly swung round with a curse. "The visiphone," he said. "He could have contacted his assistant, or the Security Office!"

"He wouldn't have time," began Yeats.

"What do we do?" snarled Mallar. "Stand here and hope he didn't have time? We can't take a risk on this." He ran across the roof to one of the other aircars. "We're going to Dr. Creel's laboratories. If Sog is intercepted by Bright or a Security Officer we'll come out in the open. You've got your raygun. If you use it properly there'll be no witnesses when you blast the Security Officer or Bright into flame!"



Streeter's doubts as to whether young Bright had received his frantic message were ill-founded; for not only had the young officer received the message, but had acted swiftly. Dr. Creel's laboratories were only a few hundred yards from the Welfare Office, and without waiting even to don his heat-resisting suit Bright dashed from the office and ran over the spongy ground towards the big building which shortly loomed up through the mists. As he struggled with lessening energy towards the entrance a figure appeared dimly, moving with the characteristic thudding speed of a Venusian and made for the door.

"Sog!" Bright's voice roared at the Venusian, who immediately stopped, in-

stinctively obeying the voice of an Earthman. The old Venusian's eyes were narrowed in surprise as Bright reached him. "You will come with me, Sog," panted Bright.

"I return to my work," replied Sog, moving to the door.

With one bound Bright reached the door and stood, his back to it, facing the villainous old Venusian. "You will not enter until I know what is in your wallet. If you try to get past me I shall call the overseer and you will be blasted with a raygun."

"I have nothing in my wallet, Officer," protested Sog, his reptilian eyes glaring redly at the Earthman.

"You will be searched, Sog," said Bright. "I know you have a raybomb, but if you hand it to me you will not be punished. Only the Earthmen you are working for will suffer."

Sog made no reply. Instead he backed away and was lost to view, leaving Bright racked by indecision. If he followed the Venusian he could not warn Dr. Creel; if he went inside and lost touch with Sog the old Venusian could conceal the ray bomb somewhere in the vicinity, and even if the explosion occurred outside the laboratories sufficient damage would be done to cripple the activities of the plant. And that would mean swift retaliatory action from the Venus Colonial Office against Streeter and himself.

Young Bright made his decision. He would keep the Venusian in sight, if possible, and try to reason with him or to get that fatal raybomb from him. He plunged forward into the shifting mists and was rewarded by the sight of Sog's dim figure making for the rear of the building. Again he roared after the Venusian, and Sog swerved away from the building.

It was then that Bright heard the hissing of an aircar, and a moment later the car landed. He ran forward. At least the occupants would be Earthmen and they would join in the chase of the Venusian. But as he came close to the aircar the door opened and Mallar emerged!

"It's Bright!" shouted Mallar. "Quick, Yeats—the raygun."

It was sufficient warning for the young Welfare Officer. He turned and ran back to the building. There was nothing else for it now but to get help from inside, and

hope that Sog could be caught later. A sheet of flame dispelled the mists to his right, and the reflected heat from the blast from the raygun scorched his cheek. He could hear the pursuing footsteps of the two men, and another blast directly over his head almost blinded him and caused him to drop to the spongy ground. He was up again in an instant and reached and fell through the doorway.

"Doctor!" he roared frantically, stumbling towards the gasket fitted door of the office. He reached the door and cannoned into it, but before he could grasp the handle Mallar had pounced on him, and he was borne to the floor.

"Quick, Yeats," snarled Mallar. "Finish him off. There's no one else here by the look of it. Streeter told only him."

"Get him outside first," said Yeats. "I can't get him without burning you. Drag him out."

Bright, his body almost drained of energy through exposure to the Venusian atmosphere without a heat-resisting suit, struggled feebly as he felt himself being dragged across the smooth floor by the wiry Mallar; and then through the pounding in his eardrums he heard the welcome voice of Dr. Creel, who had opened the office door in response to the thud of his body against it.

"What the—" began Dr. Creel. "Mallar!" The Doctor's voice rose to a shout; and instantly a blast from Yeat's raygun sent a bolt of fire towards the doorway.

"Missed!" growled Yeats, as the sheet of flame spread and flattened across the wall, scorching deeply into the tough material. "But he won't come out again in a hurry."

"Go after him—finish him!" snarled Mallar. "He'll give the alarm."

Yeats moved towards the office—and it was the last move he ever made. Before the shocked eyes of Bright and Mallar the muzzle of a ray gun sneaked out from the office, and the next instant Yeats, without so much as a moan, was enveloped in a burst of white-hot fire and reduced to a hot liquid mass of red pulp and blackened rags. Mallar uttered a gasp and, releasing the young Officer, raced from the building.

"All right, Doctor!" Bright struggled to his feet, and Dr. Creel cautiously emerged from the office still holding the smoking ray gun. "Mallar's gone. We've got to catch

him, to find out when the ray bomb is timed to explode."

"Ray bomb!" Dr. Creel's face paled.

"Sog has it. He is to plant it in the laboratories."

Dr. Creel uttered a cry of alarm, raced to the door. Bright, moving more slowly, reached the open door and stood there panting and peering through the mists; and presently Dr. Creel's shadowy figure came into view. "He's gone," he said. "Got away in his aircar."

As he spoke the speaking-clock in the office called the time, "Fourteen hours," which was the hour for the Venusian workers to cease duty. Bright gasped the Doctor's arm. "Quick. Get into the office, call the overseers and tell them not to allow any of the Venusians to leave. Once they start to come out we'll never find Sog. He'll mingle with them and perhaps sneak inside with the bomb."

Dr. Creel nodded and ran into the office. Bright heard him rapping out orders, and then a figure appeared in the front doorway which made him stare.

"Sog!" he gasped.

The old Venusian calmly thudded through the doorway, his reptilian eyes glittering in apparent triumph.

"Where is that ray bomb?" demanded Bright.

"There is nothing in my wallet, Officer," said the Venusian. "I know nothing of bombs." He opened his wallet and revealed its emptiness.

"In here," commanded Bright, escorting the Venusian into the office. "Now," he said, inside, "Dr. Creel and I know that you had instructions to conceal it in the building. If you tell us the truth you have nothing to fear. Mallar can do nothing for you now, for soon the Security Officers will take him back to Earth."

The old Venusian glared at the Earthman, then he bent his head. "If that is so I have failed," he muttered abjectly. "He was to make me King of my people."

"So that's it!" said Dr. Creel. "Well, if your people want a king they can have one. There won't be any difficulty about that, Sog. Now, where is the ray bomb?"

"I was instructed to allow no eyes to see it," muttered Sog. "I was to hide it in here where it would explode ten minutes after my people left. The blasting of the build-

ing would be the sign for my people to revolt."

"Ten minutes!" cried Bright. "It's almost that now—and your people are still in the building! Where is it?"

"Knowing I would be searched I concealed it outside," replied the Venusian. "Then while my people were all leaving the building I hoped to bring it back inside, concealing myself among them as they all come out together. It was my own plan," added the simple minded Venusian with naive pride.

Bright fought for self-control. "Don't you realise that if it explodes in the vicinity at all it will do great damage? Where is it now—quickly!"

"That is so," admitted the Venusian, after pondering a moment. "I will take you to it. But," he stipulated, his lidless eyes gleaming, "I shall still be King of my people."

"You will!" shouted Bright. "If we're still alive in the next few minutes."

Sog turned quickly and thudded outside followed by the two Earthmen. The Venusian ran into the mists, stopped uncertainly, and began moving in apparently aimless circles. And at last he stopped, his scaly face wrinkled in perplexity.

"It—it is gone, Officer," he said.

"Gone! But where—who—?"

Bright stopped and turned as, from the direction of the city a white glow cut through the mists, followed by a devastating explosion. "Great heavens!" he gasped.

"I concealed it in your aircar," began Sog, to the Doctor.

"My aircar!" repeated Dr. Creel. "It was Mallar's aircar, and he's taken it away, saved my laboratories, and blasted himself, and his own aircar into nothingness!"



"I'll never curse these Venusian swamps again." It was Welfare Officer Streeter who spoke, addressing his assistant. "The aircar I was in was crippled with only one repulsion jet functioning. I thought it was all up with me, but the swamp acted as a cushion. It sucked the machine down, but I managed to clamber out on top and leap to solid ground. So it was a happy landing for me after all, if a messy one."

"And a happy ending," said Bright, "to the first threatened revolt on Venus."



For some time now I have been spiralling through the skies over your earth . . . from the probings of my idea-transference apparatus I have heard my ship called a Flying Saucer.



Rick Harte's Futuristic Story

REPORT to General Werner on guided projectile discovered at North Latitude 34 degrees 21 minutes—Longitude West 92 degrees

"I can't think straight. These ideas that keep coming . . . they're fantastic! Unbelievable. I can't resist them. It's like trying to escape from something when I try and fight them. It's hopeless Nothing I can do but write them down."

"They're beginning again—from the beginning—all impelling, beyond resistance.

TIME'S

I'll let my mind follow where they lead. The struggle to resist them in the pretence of this small missile is too great. I'll write them down as they come—they seem to transpose themselves into words as they flash through my mind."

Space Station Spertiz was quiet the morning we walked out to the rocket take-off platforms. The flight of nine ships was ready for the commencement of the journey. Nine carefully trained pilots were ready at the assembly line. I am Flight Com-

When Flight Commander Michael Forbes boosted his rockets to travel faster than light, he found that time too had a speed . . . and that he had placed himself beyond its barrier—into its power!!

mander and I issued final instruction to my men.

"You all have your orders. Keep in constant contact with me. Remember! We're not yet sure what will happen us as we approach the speed of light. Theory is sometimes a long way from practice. All right boys! Into your ships and we'll take off. Zero hour plus five minutes! Time now—5.4522! Check!"

"Check!" they replied, one after another as they set their watches.

Nine gleaming shapes set there for the most dramatic flight in the history of interstellar achievement. The attempt to reach Hecton—the recently discovered Planet beyond the orbit of Pluto.

"ACCELERATE!" I ordered my Flight. Helium-decomposition tubes roared in the soundless void of space as we moved out. Up and up crept the speed toward the dangerous level—toward the point where none knew what would be the result. None knew whether we would be able to assault that last great bastion of speed—the barrier flung up as we approached the speed of light.

You will understand when I say it was for us like your own assault on the barrier—the speed of sound. Not long before this time—far back in the ancient historical

ing but the blackness of an impenetrable night.

Imagine! Night in space where there should be neither day nor night. A force greater than that of my helium-decomposition tubes in free space where there should be no force, no power other than the accelerating might of the mighty tubes blazing behind the ship.

Every effort I made to gain control of the ship failed. I was fatigued. Weary almost to the point of unconsciousness. My stomach revolted horribly as if I were caught in some swirling current of nothingness. As if I were caught in a Maelstrom—a vortex of whirling nothingness.

For what seemed hours then, but which I now know were but minutes I seemed to be swirling through that void. Twisting and whirling within my great ship. Spinning and circling through the spirals of blackness. Circling like a cork caught in the central spiral of space where water spins and spirals its way down a drain—a plug-hole.

I KNEW of nothing which could explain this thing. In all the scientific knowledge I had accumulated through years of constant learning under the methods of the knowledge rays I could recall no single fact which would hint at the explanation of what I was experiencing. My mind reeled under the impact of this new series of events. Only

MAELSTROM

past of my day—you solved that problem and we faced an even greater unknown. That last barrier to all the hopes of the scientific world!

Then! It happened. I felt my ship suddenly caught—gripped as if by some giant hand—some strange force that was beyond the power of the rocket tubes to defeat. I tried to flash a message to my flight, but there was no communication. I tried to see beyond the sight viewers in the wall of my cabin, but there was nothing but void. Noth-

too well did I realise that this must be the answer to the problem of approaching the speed of light.

But no solution could be coming from the void without. Then, slowly, it seemed that my ship was moving less quickly. It seemed that all was becoming calmer. My thoughts became calmer. My mind more alert to what was happening. It was even as a cork slowly coming to a stop—a pause in its swirling through the fury of a maelstrom.

Down below, through the telescopic

viewer, I could see the outlines of a continent and I was spiralling down slowly toward it. Though the rocket tubes roared still their power was as nothing against that which swirled me relentlessly downward.

Fear caught at me and I knew that I must crash. Death waited on me down there. With every piece of skill I had acquired I fought to keep my ship from coming lower. Nothing I did seemed to change my course at all. My ship was completely out of my control.

Not till then did I realise. Know for the first time that I was trapped in the maelstrom of time itself. In what had been but minutes according to the clock on the dial before me I knew I had been flung back through a period in time longer than the history of my age could remember. A time when men moved about the earth on the backs of strange animals called horses. Weird creatures that must have become extinct long before my time.

Using the idea-transference prober I focused on the mind of such a human and learned that he called his time the year eleven hundred and sixty-five. The island on which he moved he called Britain. Men fought with knives longer than their arms and fired shafts of wood from primitive things called bows and it took a whole day for a thousand men to kill five hundred others. In my age a million men could be wiped out in a second with a single blast from a helium-decomposer unit.

THEN, even as a cork moves in a vortex of water, I was suddenly swept on again, whisked away through time in that horrifying void through which even consciousness failed as the swirling motion of the ship brought hammering pain to my ears and then the blessing of unconsciousness. Through what spirals and anti-spirals of time I passed during that period I have no knowledge. There is no record to tell me where—or at least when I had been.

Only when I slowed again could I know that I was in another age, another place, and immediately I knew I was looking down on my own land—Ameriski. The time was much closer to my own age and by focusing my idea-transference prober I could realise consternation caused to those on the ground by the strange appearance of my ship in the heavens above the land. Scout planes came up and circled my craft as it rushed across the sky, rocket-tubes still blazing uselessly

as the force of time had its own way with my ship.

An eerie feeling of hopelessness came over me as I contacted the thoughts of these fighting men. They thought me some invader from another planet and I could have told them that the peoples of Mars and Venus—the only two planets with life—were far backward of their age and nowhere near the stage of scientific achievement when they could have sent rocket ships to earth.

I pressed that button and one after another the decomposer jets blasted from their port-holes in the wings of my ships and one after another, too, the raiders suddenly shattered in thousands of pieces and then vanished in to the air as the decomposer blast disintegrated them. One after another they vanished into nothingness. Other ships came up and suffered a like fate. There was nothing I could do but defend my ship. I had to make every effort to return to my base and report this experience to my superiors. The knowledge gained would be invaluable in the planning of future speed flights aiming for Hecton.

Again came the sickening shock as the might of the maelstrom swept me through its giddy twirling and consciousness again left me. I was hurtled off through time again—flashing through eons of time in seconds. Spinning and twisting my way round that inescapable pattern of ages made by the time maelstrom in which I had been trapped by accelerating too quickly as I approached the speed of light.

HOW I wish I could end it all. This fearful nightmare journey on which I am bound. Rushing up and down through time without the power to stay or depart, depending on the whimsy of this force which controls the movement of the ship. No pattern of reason is involved in the wild gyrations through which I move. No sane mind can follow the sweep of times through which I pass.

And only when I reach a point where the speed of the flight is slowed down to sane limits do I know where I am. For some time now I have been spiralling through the skies over your earth at a year you call nineteen hundred and fifty. From the probings of my idea-transference apparatus I have heard my ship called a Flying Saucer. Too, I have heard men, in their minds, deny the existence of my ship

and smile to myself when I know how near the truth they are. But which of them would believe me if they knew the truth?

Who would admit, in a time so primitive as yours, that a man could travel through eons of time in a few hours? Who among you will admit that I am come out of your remote future and am staring down on you through instruments your greatest brains would find too complex of concept to understand? There are none.

At last, however, I see a possibility of getting some message of my plight through this barrier of time which separates us. From the side of my ship I am blasting out a shell which will contain an automatic idea-transference apparatus of the portable type. It will have a complete record of my flight from the time I took the air heading for Hecton at the lead of a flight of space ships. If it should land safely in your time it will commence sending out the idea patterns when approached by a human. It will continue to do so for four weeks. If it escapes out of this maelstrom in which I and my ship are caught.

Only the thought that this is possible gives me interest—hope. I reason that the initial blast force shooting the missile out from the ship will have to exceed the speed of light otherwise there will be no escape for it. Otherwise it would be trapped, even as I and my ship are trapped.

At such a speed it will circle the earth many times before it eventually slows sufficiently to make a landing. If my calculations are correct it will land exactly on the spot over which I release it if I give it an initial velocity 1.3458 times the speed of light.

THERE is nothing more I can add now to this. Already I can feel the power of the time-maelstrom snatching off my ship and soon I will be heading into what future or past times I cannot know. The choice is not mine—but the maelstrom which has trapped me. There is nothing I can do but wait and watch. At some time I may be flung back into my own age, or I may be carried back through time to the beginnings of all when the earth was nothing more than a molten mass flung off from the sun.

Already I have been trapped for two weeks, my supplies are running low and my body and mind fatigued to the point of breakdown. There is no time left. I must release this shell. Release point will be . . .

"That's all. My mind is clear and free again. Lord! What have I been writing here? Something about a space ship caught in a maelstrom of time. It's impossible! Fantastic! I've got to write a report, but how can I? I know nothing about this shell? I can find nothing about it except that it is of a strange hard mineral unknown to us.

"It appears to be solid and yet is light, as if the inside were hollowed out, for the extreme density of the material suggests a great mass. Wonder is there anything to that story? Can't explain how I came to write it out otherwise. I'm not gifted at imagining such nonsense.

"But now I can't think straight again. Those ideas that keep coming . . . I've got to get out of here—away from that fool contraption they've brought me. It, too is involving me in a repeating cycle of its ideas. I can't seem to escape them. . . . But now I can't think straight again those ideas keep coming . . . I've got to get out of here—away from that fool contraption they've brought me . . . it, too, seems to be involving me in a repeating cycle of ideas. I can't escape them . . .

"Station Spertiz was quiet the morning we walked out to the take-off platforms —" It's starting again; I can't stop it —"The flight of nine ships were ready for the commencement of the journey . . ." I must stop it or I, too, will be like him—spinning through time somewhere right now. Swirling in and out of those voids. Pausing like a cork in a whirlpool, looking out from his ship on an alien time and then being whisked away again only to be flung up into an eddy and left to gaze out again for a short while. It's horrible! Trapped in time itself."

REPORT to General Werner on investigation of research worker set to check guided missile found at North Latitude 34 degrees 21 minutes—West Longitude 92 degrees, sixteen minutes.

Michael Forbes was found dead when his laboratory was broken open. The medical officer issued a certificate naming heart collapse as the cause of death. The enclosed document was found on his desk. I believe this will give you its own answer.

Yours faithfully,

T. L. Lane.

Special Force Investigator.



Our Full-Length

At last they had achieved their dream — they had made the Perfect Man — but they forgot to give him a mind to match his perfect body!!

PROFESSOR LINITZ walked to the windowed wall of the huge room and gazed out over the city of more than one million people. His short stature was not unusual for his time, nor his large head which was completely devoid of hair. Behind thick-lensed glasses his eyes glinted happily. Long fingers on his hands twined into each other as he looked out over the sign of peace and completion. For many generations Aztecasia, centre of the earth's civilization, had led the world in the peaceful way taught by the Great One long ago after the devastating wars.

Empadre—Father of Peace—had given his doctrines to the peoples of the world and Linitz sighed with contentment as he looked on his happy city, a place of magnificent buildings towering into the air, many-tiered streets carrying their happy throngs

A Ron Conway Inter-planetary novel.

about their business with the street cars, radio-electrically driven, gliding their leisurely way along their routes of progress.

But there was more than this vista of a Crimeless Land to please the Professor this day. To-day was to mark the final achievement of a venture commenced more than six generations before when a small group of peaceful Aztecasian scientists had gathered together to discuss man's evolutionary trend toward physical weakness.

From the remote past there were records of men vastly different from the short, bald-headed, big craniumed males of the age. There was evidence showing that man had once been very similar to woman—even taller than her on the average. Now, women were much as ever, slightly taller and broader of hip making the bearing of the big-headed male children possible. But beyond that they had changed little through the ages from the remote times when the world was first split asunder by global wars.

Meanwhile the men, devoting themselves more and more to intellectual activities and performing less and less physically arduous labor as automatic machinery took over almost the whole of the necessary productive functions, men had become shorter, bigger-headed, larger eyed and more unbecomingly unlike their women than ever.

Now, this day, the final fruits of a plan made more than six generations ago was to be released to the world. Alcan Lawrence, a magnificent achievement of back-breeding to an original type, was trained and ready for his part in the future of the land. To Linitz it was a tremendous thrill to know that for twenty years he had aided and planned for this day. A man very like those of the first global wars period had been bred after six generations of careful scientific

Crimeless

selection of partners for the all-important task.

Alcan Lawrence was to restore to the future males born in Aztecasia the beauty and symmetry of form he now possessed. New possibilities of physical achievement in dancing and singing seemed certain and even the Utopian future of the land looked forward to a time when it would be even brighter, happier. Alcan Lawrence had been bred and trained for his place in the life and destiny of the city and the people of Aztecasia; but Destiny sometimes errs.

Linitz moved over to the wall and pressed a button and relaxed on a sumptuous divan which was but one of many around the heavily carpeted and simply but luxuriously furnished room. From the walls and the ceiling glowed the pleasantly soft lighting which seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. Inside the temperature was pleasantly cool and the heat of the tropical sun failed to penetrate the windows of the

Futuristic Cover-Story



They were more than 30 feet up the terrace and still nothing had happened to prevent the stranger from accomplishing his purpose. . . .

Land

room which was more than twenty floors above the ground below.

After a couple of minutes another man entered the room. He was slightly taller than Linitz and with a fringe of hair around the bald dome of his head. He was younger—perhaps forty—and while his body and head followed the same lines as those of Linitz they were not as exaggerated. He seemed more normal as compared with the man who stepped through the door behind him.

“Come in Professor Empeer!” called Linitz jovially, in high good spirits. “And you Lawrence! Come in.”

These last words were addressed to Alcan Lawrence, the product of more than six generations of careful scientific back-breeding to obtain an original type comparing with the men of the first global wars era. Linitz was well pleased with the five-foot-ten of corded muscle and well-balanced

body he saw. The heavy-browed primitive face and the great mop of dark hair covering his head were all signs of the type they had planned for so carefully. Scientific upbringing had seen to it that the man would be in perfect physical condition. Not an hour of sickness had ever plagued Alcan in his twenty-three years.

“Why am I brought here?” Alcan asked quietly. “I prefer to remain out of doors and to read in my private garden.”

“Alcan, my boy!” Linitz said softly, his voice husky with emotion. “You have long known why we have not allowed you abroad in the world. You have long known your destiny. To-day is the climax of all that was planned. You are free to go out into the city and live as others do. Your present quarters and garden are yours by right but the gates will no longer be locked and guarded. Nor will I have any further control over your destiny. It now remains to you to follow the paths your life must lead and the benefit to the people of Aztecasia will come through many generations to bless you.”

When he had finished this long speech

the man Alcan Lawrence smiled a slow smile of satisfaction.

"Freedom," he murmured softly to himself. "The dream I have lived all my life. To go out into the city and to live as others do. To meet and laugh with them as I have read of them, and seen them on the video screens. Freedom!"

"A great day for Aztecasia!" chimed in Professor Empeer slowly. "All these generations of secret work by many men and now, into the happiness of the people will come another joy. The hope and knowledge that men can return to the form and stature enjoyed by their women. The curse of intellectual evolution will fade out."

"Free! May I leave immediately?" queried Alcan, unused to the thought of being able to do as he wished.

"Immediately!" nodded Linitz, stepping across to shake the hand of the man who stood more than head and shoulders above him and whose head seemed ridiculously small by comparison with his own—much like a woman's. "Good-luck!"

"Thanks." Alcan replied simply.

He turned immediately to Empeer and shook his hand. Then, face eager, he wheeled from the room and stood impatiently before the lift entrance. The door opened and he stepped into the lift and was whisked down smoothly to the ground floor.

Every nerve in his body tensed as he stepped from the lift and into the lobby which opened through doors into the street. Once out into the thoroughfare he moved toward a stationary street-car and boarded it. His face was beaming with a smile that was persuasive, eagerly inviting others to greet and congratulate him on the fact that he was finally through his schooling for his destiny in Aztecasia.

But, slowly, as he looked around him the smile faded from his face and his eyes narrowed angrily as he saw the curious, open-eyed disbelief with which the men stared at him. They couldn't believe their eyes. They didn't believe that such a freakish male could exist. Surely they would have heard about it before! All this and more was written deeply in their eyes and on their faces as they stared at Alcan.

"What's wrong with me?" he asked fiercely.

Not a man spoke. The street-car pulled smoothly to a halt and several of the men nearest to Alcan Lawrence got up and left the car. Alcan rose and made toward the door, his face wrinkled in fierce lines of misunderstanding. A little, big-headed man cowered back away from him as he stepped from the car.

"Come here," pleaded the bewildered Lawrence slowly. "What have I done that you slink away?"

The little fellow stuttered out the one word—"Freak!"—and then hurried away in consternated horror. Alcan stood and watched him go with a hopeless expression of something akin to fear showing in his brown eyes. For a long while he stood there, seeing nothing, and then slowly he began to wander toward the park he could see less than a block away down the thoroughfare. There, at least, among the trees and rich tropical flowers he felt he would be at home. There he would find friends, find peace and happiness; and then, very soon he would know all the joys of the laughing, dancing festivals which were held in the open-air temples of Empadre, Father of Peace.

Thoughts such as these raced through his mind as he moved toward the park. No sign of police, or any official agent could be seen for Aztecasia, along with all other lands of the world where the doctrines of Empadre were followed, did not need any police, or law enforcing agencies, or an army. All these things were of the remote historical past. This was a Crimeless Land.

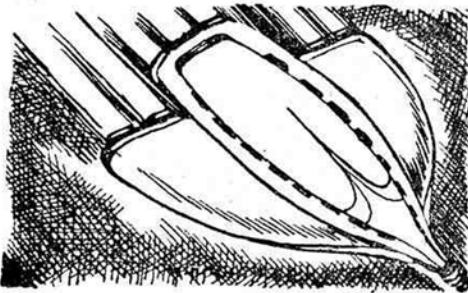
Into the park with its magnificent rows of gardens flowering into tropical splendour the young man moved.

Immediately after Alcan had left the Professor's room Linitz had reached across and pressed a button on the wall and a few seconds after a little bow-legged man had entered the room. He was even shorter than Linitz and somewhat fatter. Big-headed, bald, black staring eyes and a wide twisted mouth, there was something sly about the way he moved across the room to Linitz.

"Sinlet!" snapped Linitz swiftly. "Follow Alcan Lawrence and note all his movements and his contacts with people. Never let him from your sight. He mustn't know you follow."

SO for days after that Sinlet Fontaine, obedient servant of Professor Linitz, trailed the man Alcan Lawrence on his every venture from the garden and apartments where he lived. On all these ventures Alcan had more than a suspicion that he was being followed. It was almost as if his shadow itself had detached itself from him and was flitting along his path in the rear.

So a nervous tension began working up in Lawrence. A dull suspicion that all was not as it should be. This brought a nervous tenseness to his movements and a furtive checking of his rear every once in a while. And though he appeared in public many times it seemed that there was none who could resist staring at him.



Meanwhile, solitary, Alcan Lawrence sat on a quiet seat in the park close by his quarters and his eyes were wistful as he thought of the destiny he had been taught from his youngest days was to be his when he went out into the world. He dreamed of this time and now, with his freedom hanging like a great weight over his mind Alcan glowered into the stillness of the coming evening.

"They've had time!" he growled angrily. "Plenty of time! Why can't they accept me as one of them. I'm not so different. Their ancestors were like me—a long while ago. Why have I to wait. With the coming festival season several females should be choosing me for their mate. Instead—I sit here. The children run and scream. Men stare and shrink away when I approach. No man or woman touches me—even in the crowds."

"Hello!" a voice said quietly close by his side.

The shock of hearing someone address him spun him around suddenly and the girl gave a start, jumping to her feet from where she had sat on the seat at his side—less than a foot from him.

"Don't be afraid," he pleaded desperately. "Fear nothing. Sit down again. I must talk with you."

Quietly the girl sat down. She edged gingerly a little closer to him, every nerve in her body tensed for instant flight. He spoke softly to her and asked quietly:

"Why do the people fear me? Why do they not talk to me?"

"You are a freak," she whispered softly, her voice awed. "No other man we have known has been like you. You have the stature of a woman with the powers of a man. Such strangeness is frightening."

"There's nothing to fear," whispered Alcan quietly. "What's your name, girl?"

"Gwenez Aldoon," came the soft reply.

As tall as Alcan, blonde, smiling slightly now, the girl looked into the man's face for the first time and he knew the strange attraction of her large grey eyes. Her broad hips held a special charm for him beneath their short tunic of clinging material of a lustrous color.

"I am Alcan Lawrence," he replied quietly. "I think much about the coming festival."

"I also," replied the girl quietly.

"Many times have I seen the gaiety, singing and dancing of the Festival on the video screens when all Aztecasia gathers at the great outdoor temple of Empadre. Since I was but a boy I have yearned to be among those chosen by the women of the city as a mate for the following months. Many times have I dreamed of walking the long arched terrace with its marble pillars and its inlay of gold and precious stones. The triumphant march of mateship is still but a dream to me," whispered Alcan passionately, all his years of solitude falling away now as his mind reached out toward the seeming friendship offered.

The girl shivered at the thought of walking with this queer freak—her mind shrunk away from it and turned quickly to grasp at the assurance that she would walk down the terrace with Professor Empeer at her side. The shiver didn't escape the alert senses of the man and he interpreted them aright.

"You tremble!" he snapped angrily. "If you fear me like the others, why did you come here? Why did you talk to me?"

"No! No!" Gwenez mumbled quickly

"It's not that. It's the sudden coolness of the evening air," she lied clumsily.

How could she tell him of her promise to Empeer to try and introduce this strange male to her friends—to get to know him and to try and help him set foot in the paths of his planned future? She knew immediately that she could not. She knew too that her lie had not convinced him. She determined not to fail Empeer, so she reached out a hand slowly and laid it on his arm and a tremble of emotion flooded through her. At first it was not unlike fear but then she knew that it was more—much more.

"See!" she trembled the word out. "I do not fear you."

A twig snapped in the bushes just back of them and Alcan Lawrence whirled round suspiciously. His nerves were drawn tight to breaking point by the continual feeling of ever-watching eyes, and now he startled to his feet and ran to investigate, calling:

"Stay there! Don't leave. Wait for me."

Then he was leaping across a narrow border of flowers and racing from the shrubs toward the spot where he could hear the sounds of someone retreating hastily through the jungle growth past the sign which plainly warned: "It is dangerous for Aztecasians to enter this Botanical Jungle."

Like the man he pursued, Alcan took no heed of the sign and crashed his way from the garden parts of the park into the dense jungle growths. His heavy-browed, primitive face was twisted in determination and the great muscles along his shoulders were corded with exertion as he forced his way deeper into the jungle area from whence he could hear the man still fleeing.

Five minutes and his prey was only just ahead of him. A terrified scream shrilled through the jungle from just ahead, the sound, high-pitched and hysterical, pierced through Alcan's brain like the wound of a knife.

"Help!" came a more normal voice a moment later. "The Tiger Tree has caught me."

The man was trapped and thinking of nothing but his life as he called on the man who followed him. In that desperate moment he forgot all his fear and hatred of the freak, Alcan, whom he was paid to watch. Only the desire to go on living reigned in his mind. Aztecasian men, un-

used to great physical exertion or violence of any sort, lived a peaceful life and died of old age when well beyond the age of a hundred and twenty years. There was no need in their lives to cultivate bravery and this man revealed none now.

When Lawrence had finally forced his way into the clearance where the Tiger Tree reigned supreme, the black eyes of the man were staring wildly and his wide twisted mouth was hanging open loosely, his teeth chattering together in his fear. He was trapped by the tough curling tentacle which had whipped out from one of the huge red flowers and snared him.

"Stop still!" commanded Lawrence, issuing the first command he had ever made as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

He had studied Tiger Trees in his botany course and knew that the predatory plant needed a great traffic of ants through the huge scentless flowers to transfer the pollen and fertilize the seeds. Nature, by fitting the flowers with their own snares for trapping animals, birds and any other close venturer, had ensured that the fertilization would take place when the ants swarmed over the flowers to reach the trapped haul of meat.

"Get me loose!" cried Sinlet Fontaine bleatingly. "Get me free before the ants come."

From that moment there was no thought of his original purpose but only of rescuing the big-headed, bow-legged male from the clutching tentacle of the Tiger Tree. He moved in cautiously, watching the swinging tentacle from the only other huge red flower. When it lashed out to snare him as he came within range Alcan Lawrence hurled himself down suddenly, hitting the moist earth hard and then flashing a hand up to catch the trailing end of the tentacle as it curled back toward the flower for another strike.

His hand caught a hold on the sinuous end of the tentacle and he was immediately involved in a weird struggle with the lashing, twisting thing that struggled to free itself and ensnare the man. With breath panting from his lungs, Alcan hung on grimly as he was thrown bodily from side to side by the lashing strength of the Tiger Tree.

BACK on the seat where Alcan had left her, Gwenetz Aldoon sat still for a moment trying to analyse the sudden sweeps of emotion that had raced through her when she touched the strange male. She could think of nothing before that had come close to being as this. Nor could she be sure whether it was pleasant or not.

Fearing his return within seconds, the girl got up and ran down the long path that led her toward the street and the sanity of the mingling groups of her fellow Aztecsians. There she saw the normal men—the short, huge-headed males who were mostly bald and who showed no sign of hair on their faces. These weak, dark-skinned men made her feel relaxed and comfortable and a faint shudder ran through her as she thought again of the strange one. Alcan Lawrence.

Lashing and switching furiously, the Tiger Tree's tentacle fought to free itself from the thing that clung tenaciously to its end. But, with minutes slowly creeping by, Lawrence hung grimly to it knowing that the stores of energy that could be supplied to the tentacle quickly would soon be exhausted and then the vicious snare of the tree would be useless for a time—enough time for him to find a way of freeing Sinlet Fontaine.

That man was cringing and crying in the snare of supple plant-life as he rocked back and forth near the great red flower of the tree. Already, down below near the base of the tree, Sinlet could see the ants forming ranks to move up the trunk toward the prize they somehow knew awaited them. The fat little man stared with a growing horror at the forming ranks.

"How do they know?" he bleated wonderingly to himself.

"The bark exudes a resin that attracts them once the snare had trapped a prey," explained Alcan with a shout as the lashing tentacle of the other flower slowly stilled its movements and after a few twisting efforts to coil about his body, lay still.

"They're coming," cried the terrified prisoner. "Get me free!"

"I'll try," Alcan assured him gruffly, his breathing still coming hard and irregular from his fight with the thing that had attempted to trap him.

Catching up a long piece of a fallen limb from a nearby tree, Lawrence began to

batter at the tentacle holding Sinlet. Each blow he aimed at the base of the thing, close to where it grew from the limb of the tree by the flower. Slowly his blows began to make an impression and the tough outer-bark was bruised and bleeding away its life-giving supply of sap.

"In the name of Empadre!" cried Sinlet desperately. "Get me loose. They're almost here."

When Alcan saw how true this was he redoubled his efforts and began smashing at the tentacle with all his might, the whip-lash tendons straining to give extra strength and fury to his blows. Crash! The piece of limb he was using shattered into glancing fragments of flying chips as he smashed home another blow.

From his hand the useless end of the limb was dropped and Lawrence attacked the tentacle itself, with bare hands. He got a grip on the thing and strained with all his might to force the coils to loosen. For a few seconds it seemed that the thing was still strong enough to resist this assault but then, slowly, the folds of the thing uncoiled and Sinlet Fontaine was dropped from it to the ground where he lay with hands thrashing wildly at the swarm of ants that had managed to reach him before his release.

"Stop still!" snapped the command from Alcan as he went to work cleaning the bared arms of the man of ants.

Within seconds the spy was free of the hungry little brutes and was being helped away from their mad swarming paths by the stranger he was paid to watch. But this did not register on his mind for some moments, his mind was too shocked by his narrow escape.

The moment he was fully aware of the situation he tried to shrink back away from Lawrence but he was held tightly by the arm, so tightly in fact that he could feel the pain of it stabbing up through his nerves toward his shoulder.

"Let me loose," he demanded in a shrill frightened voice.

"Not yet!" grated Lawrence fiercely as he forced his way back through the jungle growths toward the point where he had entered the jungle area in pursuit of this man.

By the time he was back on the clipped lawns it was dark, with the tropical stars

glinting brilliantly in a sky that almost seemed blue in the night. Swiftly he dragged his luckless captive toward the seat where he had left Gwenetz. He stopped abruptly. She was gone.

"Gone!" he said wonderingly, his face suddenly losing all the eager expression he had known. "Where will I ever find her again?"

"Turn me loose," whispered Sinlet anxiously, his voice a pleading whine and his arm throbbing with pain now as he knew the full strength of the man's hand—a force against which his puny strength was as nothing.

"First I want to know why you've followed me ever since Professor Linitz gave me my freedom?" queried the tall, dark-headed Alcan.

"I cannot tell you," Sinlet replied, for he feared nothing now except that fierce pressure on his arm. He knew nothing of crime, having lived his life through in the crimeless land of Aztecasia.

"Speak!" barked Lawrence, his voice rising to a roar as some wild instincts were awakened from the dark recesses of his mind. "Speak or I'll break your arm."

A horrible look of terror flashed to the face of Sinlet for, though a broken arm was a minor trouble requiring only an hour under the Growth Rays following a Hormone M injection, the mere thought of violence was so foreign to his nature and his way of thinking that he shuddered when forced to think of it.

"Empadre taught us the ways of peace," he said quickly.

"Then why do you disturb my peace by following me everywhere?" demanded the enraged Lawrence. "Why?"

"I was curious," jerked out Sinlet in his shrill voice. "I wanted to know all about the stranger to arrive in Aztecasia."

A dulled feeling of being tricked came to Alcan as he stood there, still holding his prisoner. These were new feelings, new emotions, things awakened from the dark heredity of his forebears. Things long dormant and unused in his make-up. A feeling of greater living possessed him and he knew the first wild thrill of power, the first elated satisfaction of frustration as he took his revenge in pain on this man who symbolised all those who had rejected him and fled from him as if he were an evil come among them.

"That is no truth you speak," he snarled viciously. "Speak swiftly or else I'll show you the strength of my hand."

"I cannot speak," cried Sinlet, still unaware of his danger, still resting in a long knowledge that none broke the doctrines of Empadre.

Then, it was too late. An angry snarl escaping his lips, Alcan swung his right fist over and smashed it into the side of the little man's huge cranium. A horrible crunching sound was heard with the thud of the blow landing. Sinlet went limp in Alcan's grip and he slumped to the ground, the side of his thin-boned skull crushed from that single blow.

Anxiously, Lawrence stooped down over the fallen man and tried to rouse him but when he searched for the heart there was no beat. Dully, with a slow dawning of a near vision, Alcan realised that he was looking on death for the first time. Death he had caused by a single blow in a land where death came only from accident and old age.

"Empadre!" he gasped softly. "I have broken the great rule and am no longer one of your people."

This thought shocked him to stillness, to silence for a long time as he stood staring down at the dead man at his feet. First he felt nothing but shocked horror at what he had done but slowly, welling up into consciousness from the inner depths of his mind, came a realization of satisfaction.

He felt it as a vague feeling of pleasure at first and then as a wild exultant thrill of achievement as he sensed that in some way he was hitting back at the people who had shunned him, called him a freak, and shut him out from the road that he must follow to his destiny.

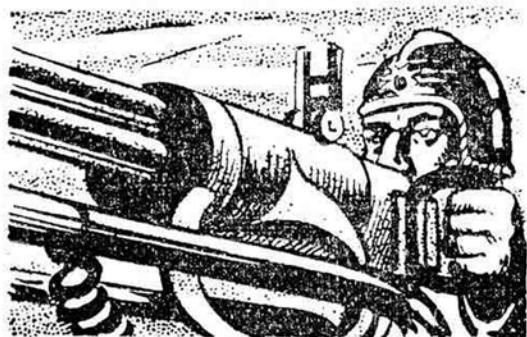
No thought of concealing the body occurred to him. He could think of no reason why he should. There was no punishment for murder in Aztecasia! There were no police, no officials, no-one who could protest against what he had done, or molest him for it. Only Empadre, Father of Peace, could condemn his action and with a reckless toss of his head Alcan invited him to do his worst.

All his knowledge of the Doctrine had come from books and the video screen and so it was impersonal and now, thinking about it for the first time with any seriousness, Lawrence admitted to himself that

Empadre was no more than a word to him. Nothing more than a sound that represented mainly the great festival when the women chose their mates and danced and sang in the giant outdoor temple. For this reason it was a proud and haughty Alcan Lawrence who stalked into the street and looked about him, a strong feeling of power coming to him every time he clenched that fist.



A GREAT feeling of satisfaction rode high like the sparkling bubbles of sematol liquor through the man as he strutted down the street. Each male he saw, with his thin-boned huge cranium, he



chuckled to himself and looked at his fist. In a single blow he now knew he could crush the life from any of them. Any single one of these men was at his mercy if he chose. These men who despised him were nothing to him now.

Power! The idea was a heady fever to Alcan. All his life he had been taught his destiny and now, when the time had come for him to serve his purpose among the peoples of Aztecasia, they had been re-versed by his strangeness, frightened by his difference from all other males. But that didn't matter now. He knew that he could go forward and fulfill his destiny whether there was fear and hatred of him or not. He had power!

Back in his apartments he ate ravenously of the fruits and nuts that had been prepared for him and then he drank many long draughts of the sparkling sematol liquor before he retired to his divan for rest. Even then he found he could not sleep and so went to his huge library and busied himself with a careful rereading of a record of a part of the era when the first global wars occurred and for the first time he understood fully many of the statements made.

Statements about the might and power of individual men and nations of that time.

"Power!" he murmured to himself. "That's what I have been bred to give these people. They lack everything when they have no powerful leader. They shrink away from me because they do not understand what I am. But I will tell them. I will teach them much."

And so far into the night he read on and when at last he went to his divan he found sleep elusive and he drank much more sematol before he finally drifted into a deep, drugged sleep.

Morning was far advanced before Alcan Lawrence was about the following morning and his mind was already made up on his course of action. It was as if he had planned and plotted through his sleeping hours.

Dressed in a clean outfit of tight-fitting shorts and tunic-shirt, he went to the apartments of Professor Linitz and demanded to see him. After a time, in response to his urgent signalling on the video warner, Linitz came from his laboratory and led the way into the big room overlooking the city. The Professor's face was solemn as he turned to the man he had helped to raise.

"What is it you want of me" he asked quietly, his high-pitched voice toned down to softness. "Are not your apartments cared for well? Have you some complaint?"

"None!" growled Alcan quickly. "That is no reason for me to come to you. I come because of the destiny that is my lot."

He paused and waited for the Professor to make some sign that he understood. For a long while Linitz sat still, as if he had heard nothing, as if thinking of something far removed from this interview. At last he said:

"You have not made contact with any of the people of the city. They fear you for your difference from the males they know—such men as I am. That is bad. Too long we planned on other things so that we forgot that such a thing might come about. I am working on an idea to change all this. Soon, over the whole video network I will make you the most sought-after man in all Aztecasia."

All this was said with a quiet assurance of a man who knows that success is cer-

tain. And when he had finished he looked up and smiled at Alcan.

"I have had you watched so that I could know of every possibility."

An angry flush spread through Lawrence's face and he took a step closer to the little bald-headed professor. His fist clenched and the muscles tightened all along his arm as he glared down at the man where he sat relaxed on a divan.

"Then it was you?" snarled Alcan angrily. "You who saw that I was never left alone for a single minute? Saw that I was followed and hunted like the wild things in the jungle?"

"Yes!" nodded the Professor quietly. "It was necessary. I had to be certain that you were not failing to achieve a meeting with the people. You did fail! . . ."

"So did your spy," broke in Lawrence angrily. "I killed him," he added proudly, lifting up the fist that had done it.

A deathly pale came over the face of Linitz and he leaned forward from his position and all his face was tense as he stared at Alcan with solemn condemnation.

"Then it was no accident?" he whispered softly. "You! You who have been taught and reared till this time for the good of Aztecasia! You have broken the great rule of Empadre. You have brought death—murder it was called once—to this land. You have brought crime where there was no wrong done."

"I have brought power!" snapped back Alcan angrily. "If I broke the law of Empadre I have not suffered for it. I am still living. Your spy is dead."

"Great trouble will come over the city for this. Empadre will not forget, or forgive such a transgression. Never in living memory of man has such a thing occurred before. Now! You, Alcan Lawrence, the dream of a line of scientists for generations, you kill and break the great rule of Empadre."

"It was nothing!" snapped Alcan fiercely, smarting under this lashing from the tongue of the man who had been father and mother to him through all the years he had been shut away from the world preparing himself for his future.

"Nothing!" scoffed Linitz fiercely. "Nothing is worse."

"I haven't come about this," interjected Lawrence quickly. "I come because I want

to take to mate a girl called Gwenetz Al-
doon and I have no way of knowing in
which part of the city she lies. I come to
ask you where she lives."

"Gwenetz!" ejaculated Linitz suddenly. "You have met her?"

"Yes! We talked for a time. I will mate with her."

"But such saying is not according to custom. At the coming festival the women will choose their mates for the many months that follow, you are a male and cannot choose for yourself," snapped the Professor.

"Such is the way of the weakling men of this city," growled Alcan fiercely. "I am not as they and will not be bound as they. I have Power! With a single blow I killed your spy; I could kill others. That is power. I have chosen this girl for mate and I will have my way. Where does she live?"

When Linitz stared at him silently for a full minute Alcan slowly raised his clenched fist up and the huge-craniumed man of science shrank back in fear. He had been examining the body of Sinlet when Alcan had demanded to see him and he knew the fearful damage this man could do to one of the males, such as himself, who had a thin-boned skull covering the great brain.

He reached a paper from his tunic pocket and wrote an address on it, handing it to Alcan slowly. The tall fierce-eyed man snatched it from him, glanced at it briefly and poked it into the pocket of his tunic.

"To-day I will walk the terrace at the temple and by my side will be the girl, Gwenetz," he rapped out as he turned to leave the room.

Behind him Linitz stared after him and his eyes were crinkled with worry as he tried to work out what he should do. Had it not been that he knew of the intended arrangement between Empeer and Gwenetz he would have delighted in the knowledge that Alcan had a mate but somewhere his personal feelings for his assistant got in the way of his belief in the future good of the city and he wished that it were any other girl Lawrence had determined to mate.

He reached across and pressed a button. A moment later a voice came through the speaker as the video screen flickered into life in the shape of a girl's head.

"Professor Empeer is not available at the moment," she said.

"Ask him to come to me immediately he is," Linitz snapped back quickly. "The message is most urgent. See that he reports to me without fail."

And as the screen went dead Linitz whispered to himself.

"I've got to warn Empeer. Perhaps he'll be able to do something."

But though he gave the matter a considerable amount of thought he could not think of anything, short of complete destruction, and that was forbidden, that would stop the powerful man, Alcan.



EVEN though Linitz realised what the possible outcomes of it might be, he knew that he had to warn the people of Aztecasia. Knew that they must be warned against the power he had loosed among them. So, reluctantly, sensing that a lifetime's work was being destroyed, he contacted the central video transcriber and gave his brief message.

Soon, throughout the length and breath of the city the dread word was being whispered:

"Murder!"

"Murder has been done!"

"The great rule of Empadre, Father of Peace, has been broken."

"Crime has come where there was none. Great trouble must follow."

Scarcely a tongue in the city didn't phrase some warning such as this. Barely a man who didn't glance round carefully before he left a street car or moved into a new turn of a street. And from the great inter-planetary communication station the news was flashed to the workers on Mars—Venus—and the Moon.

In the temple of Empadre the High Priestess, Delma, prepared for the rituals and ceremonies which she knew would be demanded by the people once they had overcome the first shock of the terrifying news. Murder had been done and none could remedy this save Empadre himself. So to the temple the people would flock and dance their rituals and be gay and exhilarated though they moved in fear, for such happiness and contentment was the demand made by the doctrine of Empadre.

And from a deserted street car a lone figure stepped as the automatic, radio-

electric car came to a stop. A first glimpse of this lone figure and a bunch of children ran scuttling for the shelter of their homes, for this was a district of small houses set in park-like gardens and without walls or fences between them.

To one of these Alcan Lawrence moved slowly, each step made firmly and his head held high. He was a proud lone man now. No longer did he fear for the rebuffs of the Aztecasians. He had power!

Since no door had a lock in the hitherto crimeless city, Alcan did not have to knock but simply opened the door and strode into the dwelling. It was furnished much as all the city was, with deep carpeting on the floors, simple comfortable furniture where necessary and with the concealed, indirect lighting that seemed to glow from the walls of the rooms themselves.

Through the first two rooms he passed without seeing a sign of life. Into the third he strode and jerked to a stop as a terrified shriek came from a cowering little figure of a child in the far corner. With a contemptuous glance around the room, Alcan turned and strode out into a passageway leading along to a further cluster of rooms.

There he was suddenly confronted by Gwenetz. There was a slow tantalizing smile on her face and she stood before him waiting.

"I've come for you," he told her tersely. "You and I will walk the terrace together this day."

"Is it not the custom of Aztecasia for the women to choose the man with whom they will mate?" she asked dryly.

"I am not as these men and will not be bound by the customs that bind them," he rapped out quickly. "I have power, strength—things that these men know nothing of. With one stroke of my hand I can smash their thin-boned bald domes. This makes matters different for me."

The girl was caught in the new power that radiated from the man. Never had she known a man to talk this way; and to her surprise she found that a deep thrill of delight came up from some hidden depths of her being—something akin to the feeling she had known that first time she had reached a hand to touch the stranger.

"Why then do you walk the terrace of the temple of Empadre?" she queried. "Why bow down to the doctrine you have already broken?"

"It is not for me, but you, that I do this," he told her calmly. "There must be no slur upon the children I father for they are to be the future men of this land. All Aztecasia must accept them. That is important and the answer to your question."

"And if I will not agree to this?" she demanded pertly.

"Then I will use the new-found power I have. I will compel you," he growled slowly.

"The skulls of we women are not thin like the men's but thick and strong like your own. I am of your size and am no weakling. It is only the male children who are born with large heads and small bodies—weaklings physically and of tremendous power mentally. Perhaps I can not be compelled to do that I choose not to do," she replied softly, an exciting ripple of blood pulsing through her arteries as she played with the stranger, testing his strength and determination.

For some reason she could not know, some reason lost to consciousness in the dim past of her kind, Gwenetz felt the desire to be mastered. For the first time in her life she wanted to feel inferior to a male. For the first time she realised that there were depths to her own nature she had never known before—never known because there had never been the strength to awaken them.

"I have no wish to harm you," Alcan told her quietly, his voice deep and resounding like that of a large woman. "But you will walk the terrace with me before the gathered peoples of the city. You have no choice. Nor have I. From the birth of my grand-sire's great grand-sire my destiny was chosen by the wise men of that time. That destiny must be fulfilled and you are a part of it. Neither of us has a choice in this matter."

This did not seem to please the girl, for her taunting smile vanished and a frown crossed her dark, handsome features. She looked up at Alcan and snapped:

"I'll not be a part of a scientific plan—a mere experiment. Until you came this city was content, happy and followed the doctrines of Empadre without question for the way had brought abundance for all and a crimeless land. Now! Murder! Death striking down for the first time a man in this city which was neither accident nor old age."

With a smile suddenly flashing across his face, Alcan flashed a hand out and caught the girl by an arm and held her firmly though she struggled against him.

"I have power," Lawrence told her proudly. "I am not as these weakling men of Aztecasia. You struggle vainly for no single woman is my equal in strength. You will do as I say."

Seeing that any further struggle against him was useless, Gwenetz relaxed and a slow smile of satisfaction came to her lips again. This was the surrender she desired, the surrender to a greater strength than her own. Never before had she felt so content within herself though for the past three festivals she had walked the temple terrace with a chosen man.

Too, looking on Alcan Lawrence now she found there was none of her old revulsion toward him. He did not seem wrong to her. Almost it seemed that the short, large-headed weakling men of the city were wrong. Women had not changed much through the ages—only the men, and the girl looked now on Alcan as if she had discovered her own kin for the first time. She smiled.

"I will walk the terrace with you," she submitted softly.

"Good! Then it's decided," he announced gruffly. "Where is your video-radio-phonograph? I must announce this to the city. All the people must come in festival to see us walk together down the long terrace. How I have longed to tread that path where the precious stones and gold inlay make their glitter in the sun."

"In the next room," she told him quietly.

He disappeared for a couple of minutes and then returned.

"Soon all the city will know," he said quietly. "We will go now."

She nodded, disappeared for a few moments into a third room of the group and when she reappeared she was clad in a tunic of flashing magic made by precious stones set in it and a gold thread of pure metal woven into the cloth. Lawrence nodded his approval of the garment.

"It becomes the occasion," he told her quietly.

Then they went out from the dwelling together and peering from behind the front window the child who had been so terrified a few moments earlier was now press-

ing his nose tight against the pane of the window, an expression of awed wonder on his face.

Gwenez led Alcan to a small rocket-car which was parked by the front of the dwelling and smiled.

"We'll take my car," she said. "The street-cars will be too crowded at this time as the people flock toward the temple."

"Excellent!" he nodded quietly. "I have never driven a car but in my studies I learned all that there was to be known of them. I will take the controls."

"But . . . but if you've never driven before?" she began to protest.

"I will take the controls," he snapped at her coldly.

"Yes, Alcan," she surrendered, marvelling at herself for the way she submitted to this man when never before had any



male been capable of gaining his own way. Her beauty was great and with it she had wielded her power. Now, with this stranger, she found the desire to do so no longer existed. She threw back her head and laughed, her blonde hair catching the fire from the tropical sunlight.

"We'll drive around for a time till all have had time to assemble," he announced when he had swung the car into a low speed tier of a roadway heading away from the temple.

The girl said nothing but sank back contentedly into the cushions of the seat. When they were clear of the city Alcan swung the car over to a take-off deck by the side of the roadway and switched the power controls to "air-power." Then, slipping a small lever into position he gently pressed home the throttle and gave the rocket tubes the gun. With a screaming lurch the car shot from the deck and slammed the pair of them hard back into the deeply cushioned seat. They were air-borne.

"Not so much power," she gasped her advice quickly when she had caught her breath again. "That take-off was too sudden."

He cut back the throttle control without answering her and they circled up and over the city in a great swooping spiral. Other cars were also aloft and all were heading in the one direction, over a certain spot they were forming up and awaiting their turns to spiral down toward the temple where it stood like a bizzarre tower in the midst of its parklands.

The temple building itself was a great tower reaching high—a hundred and fifty feet into the air. About its outer wall curled the gem-studded and arched ramp which was known as the terrace. Couples who made the climb together made their vows as they looked out over the peaceful city. This was Aztecasia's place for the public acknowledgement of the choice a woman had made.

When the air was cleared of cars making their way to the temple and the great parklands about it were filled with waiting people, Alcan Lawrence swept his car down in tight spirals, set the under-jets in action and settled neatly to the ground before the main entrance to the temple itself. The High Priestess moved forward to the car.



GWENETZ and Alcan stepped from the car and the High Priestess moved slowly toward them. Lawrence stood and stared at her in amazement. She showed no fear of him as she stood straight and true before them. Tall and lithe with large blue eyes setting off the blue-black colouring of her hair, she was a beauty. Chosen from all the peaceful lands of Aztecasia for her beauty she now reigned as High Priestess of the temple of Empadre, Father of Peace.

"Why do you come here?" she demanded. "You who have broken the great rule of Empadre."

Her voice was deep and clear and the tiny instrument pinned to the front of her elaborate ritual robes picked up the voice and relayed it through speakers so that every citizen in the enormous gathering could hear what was going on. All could see for the parklands were sloping up on all sides from the temple.

"I come to walk the terrace with this

woman," Lawrence replied calmly. "And by thus doing to make my peace with Empadre from the topmost part of his temple."

"There can be no peace with Empadre for breakers of the great rule," she snapped back viciously. "You, a stranger among us, have brought crime where none was before your coming. Men die of accident and old age but none must die by the hand of another. Thus it was that the Father of Peace ordained."

Quickly then, she snapped off her instrument and whispered swiftly as she stepped closer to them.

"I know of your destiny and I accept the wisdom of the great men of many generations ago. Truly, Aztecian men are weaklings and since there is no longer need for their great mentalities it is wisdom that restores strength and a fine body to our men."

"Then why do you deny me the right to walk the terrace?" demanded Lawrence fiercely. "Why try and prevent the inevitable—block the path of my destiny?"

"This great gathering does not know or understand. It must be so happening that they will not follow your unwise example and sin against the doctrine. I must challenge you."

"I walk the terrace and none will stop me," growled Alcan. "I have chosen this woman for mate and we will walk together."

The instrument clicked on again as a roar of disapproval rose from the crowd when they realised that something was being said that they were not being allowed to hear.

"Only Empadre himself can grant you the right to walk—now that you have transgressed his law," cried the High Priestess fiercely. "Let him show some sign and you may walk."

"I must climb to the tower and make my peace with the Father of Peace," growled Lawrence stubbornly.

Just then a tremendous, awed gasp came from the gathered multitude and from the topmost point of the tower a great sheet of flame leapt high into the air and vanished, leaving only a thin wisp of black smoke hovering over the tower. With a movement as of one man the crowd shrank back before this evidence of supreme acceptance of the desire of the stranger. Again the High Priestess had her instrument clicked off.

"Empadre works in many ways and after all fashions," she whispered swiftly. "Move

swiftly and tread the path of your destiny."

"He is wise above all things!" mouthed Lawrence as he saw the instrument clicked on again. "There is the sign! Stand aside that I may walk the terrace with this woman."

"Truly the sign is given," cried the High Priestess, Delma, loudly. "Tread the terrace in peace with this one who has chosen you for mate."

"I did the choosing," snapped Alcan. "I am not as other men, and am not bound by the rule which allows women the choice of mate. This woman is my choice."

"And he mine," added Gwenetz swiftly but the words were drowned in a tumultuous roar of anger from the crowd.

Here, in the very face of Empadre, on temple ground, this stranger was defying the right of women to have the choice. Even the weakling men of the gathered citizens were incensed at this for they saw that they had not the strength to claim the right and they therefore resented it when another claimed it for himself.

"Fool!" snapped Delma angrily. "Why must you flout your strength in their faces?"

"I have power!" cried Alcan, an exultant thrill of pleasure running through him as he turned and swung a mighty arm in a sharp arc. The men shrank back instinctively as if his arm could reach them in their distant places on the slopes of the parklands about the temple of gleaming marble.

Again there was an angry uproar and the mob began to move forward as if by some concerted effort they planned to overwhelm the stranger. Swiftly, realising the danger to the plans she had, Delma cried out loudly.

"Walk the terrace of Empadre with your woman."

And Lawrence and Gwenetz moved forward toward the commencement of the spiralling ramp that wound its way about the circular tower till it reached the top where all was a blaze of gold and inlay of precious stones.

Suddenly, among the crowd, there was a stir quite close to the temple court and then a silence more ominous than the initial stir.

"Go quickly!" whispered the Priestess of the temple.

So Alcan and the girl stepped forward with long confident strides and the girl thrilled as she realised that all eyes were focused on her. She knew for the first

time the joy of fame and she determined to know more of it.

They were no more than five yards up the first section of the terrace than a Aztec-Asian man burst from the foremost ranks of the crowd and ran forward as fast as his short legs would carry him. In his hand he brandished a knife commonly used in the city for the carving of wood figures which was one of the artistic pursuits avidly followed by the citizens in their Utopian peace.

He was more like Alcan Lawrence than many of the men of the city and taller than most. About his head was a fringe of hair circling the bald clear space on top. Though large of head and with the characteristic small ears he was nevertheless much like Alcan—certainly more like him than the average Aztec-Asian man.

When he was close up to the High Priestess he paused for a moment long enough to call.

"I am Empeer, Professor of the biological sciences. I am the sire of this stranger. Even as he was bred for a destiny, so was I. He is more unlike you than I but I am enough like to him to know the desire for the things he wants. This woman is promised to me for mate and I'll not see her stolen from me by this transgressor of the doctrine. In the name of Empadre I will destroy this soiler of the temple of the Father of Peace."

His voice was almost hysterical as he shrilled out the information. Even to Alcan Lawrence it was news for he had never been told of the whereabouts of either father or mother and he had assumed they no longer lived. Certainly he did not think, ever, that Empeer was the sire—the link in the chain leading back through six generations to the time when it was first decided that there must be men who were strong in body as well as mind.

"So he's my father," Alcan mused as he and the girl paused to look back and observe the scene.

"Then now I understand many things," smiled the girl quietly. "I thought that he had more than the welfare of the people at heart when he bade me promise to befriend you."

There was no further time now for talk for Empeer was rushing toward them, brandishing the carving knife and shouting shrilly.

"You Alcan, you have destroyed the worth of all our work. Transgressed the doctrine and killed. Now! It is your turn to die. Long ago men used such weapons as this and effectively. Since peace has come we have lost the art of fighting but I will be your equal with this tool of artistry."

The light burning deep in Empeer's eyes bore a strong glint of anger and of hatred. For twenty-three years he had worked to see that at last, after so long, there would be a return to strength among the future men of Aztecasia. Now! Before him he could see only the man who threatened to rob him of his mate—his promised companion for the months that followed the festival.

To Empeer, a bred-back type closely allied with Alcan himself, the emotions of hate and the desire for power came readily and he could not bear the thought of defeat by his own off-spring.

"Stay back, fool!" cried Lawrence in warning. "Stay back or you will follow Sinlet to doom."

But these words, useless as they were, never reached the man's mind for they were drowned out by the mighty roar of anger that was swelling up from the vast crowd. This stranger was more than a murderer—he was also a stealer of women and a traitor to the ways Aztecasians had been taught to follow. Furiously they surged forward as if they would tear the stranger limb from limb.

But Alcan had no chance to observe this for his attention all was needed to watch the savage rush of Empeer who was running up the ramped terrace toward him, the evil glint of diamondized steel glinting in the sunlight. The point of that tool was sharp as steel could be and the diamondizing process had fixed that vicious sharpness for all time. Nothing but time itself could wear away the edge of the tool.

On Empeer's face was a diabolical look of satisfaction as he asserted himself for the first time after all the years of living a masked existence as a normal Aztec-Asian. They clashed together and the first wild thrust he made with the wicked tool was a complete miss as Alcan ducked low under it. Then, sweeping it back again the sharp edge slashed a thin wound along Alcan's arm and blood flowed.

Pain stabbed from the wound and jolted Lawrence's nerves and he suddenly snapped

into a fury of activity as he fought to get a position where he could swing in a murderous blow to Empeer's head. For a minute they parried each other off with one movement after another, each man moving instinctively away as danger flashed toward him in the shape of either fist or carving tool.

"Power!" grated Alcan under his breath. "That's what I need. He's no thin-boned Aztecasian I can kill with a blow. There must be some other way. I'll get the carving tool!"

Once that decision had occurred to him Alcan dodged sideways, ducked a thrust from the flashing instrument already dripping in blood and then he whipped a hand out and caught at the wrist of Empeer. With the grip firmly caught with his left hand, Alcan swung a wild hay-making right that crashed onto the side of Empeer's head. There was a jarring of bone on bone and Empeer swayed under the impact of the blow but he did not go down.

Then, Lawrence concentrated all his attention on the wrist he still held trapped and he applied all the pressure he could and a squeal of pain ripped from the shrill-voiced Professor. But immediately Empeer swung up a foot, carefully laced in leather, and then slammed it into Alcan's shins. Yelping his anger, Lawrence released his grip for long enough to allow the older man to escape.

Again they clashed and this time it was Alcan who was first to learn from experience; and he kicked up high from the inlaid terrace floor and his leathered foot sank deep into the stomach of his opponent. Empeer went down and the carving tool clattered away from his hand.

Before the fallen man could recover from the treacherous blow, Alcan Lawrence had caught him up and raised him high up above his head as he wheeled and walked toward the edge of the terrace. For a brief moment he poised himself, and then, shouting angrily, he hurled Empeer over and down through forty feet of nothingness to the paved court below. A gasp of horror, of fear, rose up from the watching mass.

Their first movement toward the terrace had been checked by Delma loosing another fiery blast of flame from the peak of the temple tower and then, they stood and

watched the fight with a fascination only registered on the faces of those who see things for the first time. No man living in that age had ever seen a fight before and the sight of it thrilled, yet shocked them into silence.

But close on the heels of that first gasp of horror that escaped when Empeer crashed down to his death there rose up a mumbling and angry roar from the mob.

"The stranger had polluted the court of the temple with death," rose the cry and Delma, sensing that any further protection of Alcan would be useless, switched on her instrument and called:

"Empadre demands that this non-believer be no more. This killer in the Court of the Father of Peace must be himself killed. Through his veins runs the wild blood of our distant ancestors who fought through the great global wars and then continued through the dark ages to fight still. He is not as we are but of a vicious mind like the leopard of the jungle."

Her voice was rhythmic and wild as she called this to her people.

"Men can not stand against this stranger who has great strength but we women are not weaklings as our men. Come forward all you women who are true followers of the doctrine of Empadre and aid the Father of Peace to bring peace once more to Aztecasia."

"We've got to get out of here," barked Lawrence fiercely, turning to where Gwenetz had been standing.

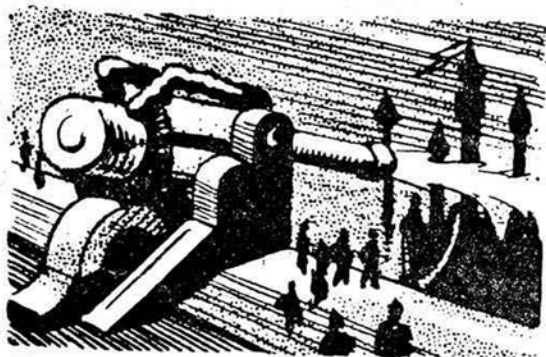
She was no longer there and he spun round toward the slope leading to the court below and he saw that the girl had fled from him. Growling his disgust, Alcan gathered up the fierce carving tool and glared down towards the gathering mob of women below.

"I can't fight them all," he snarled to himself. "Their weight would force me down."

For a moment he stood still, alone, deserted by the girl who had been so drawn to him. From his position he could see and hear what was happening below and he knew what the High Priestess planned for him. He glanced up to the top of the tower high above him and then back to the ground. No man could withstand a fall like that.

WHILE Delma, High Priestess of Aztecasia, was gathering her forces for an attack on the man who had awakened the hatred and anger of the people by his deliberate disobedience of the doctrine of Empadre, Alcan himself was planning too. He could see but one hope for himself—one chance to save his life; and he was determined that he would not die. Determined that he would live to have power and recognition among these people that he might fulfill the destiny mapped out for him so long ago.

Twenty-three years of careful and skilled teaching had left him with the dominating thought that he must fulfill the task for



which those six generations of careful planning had been carried out. It was not that he thought of these people, or any duty he had to them. It was simply that deep in the deepest recesses of his mind and on upward through all his levels of consciousness there had been planted the idea of his destiny and that alone acted as a motivating force to guide his actions now.

It was the irrational, unthinking action of a man acting under compulsion; the compulsion of his destiny as it had been taught him. He had to lie and mate according to the customs of the city for he was brought to being for the sole purpose that future men in Aztecasia would be strong of body and without the huge, distorting heads and thin-boned craniums. He was to restore to men a pride in their manhood and wipe away the weakling strain of physical types who had served their purpose in the ages gone when tremendous feats of intellectual activity had been necessary.

So now, believing that to attack would be his best form of defence, he charged suddenly down the terrace ramp toward the confused milling bunch of women who had

volunteered to carry out his destruction under the leadership of Delma, High Priestess of the temple of Empadre.

Screaming great shouts of defiance, and brandishing the carving tool, Alcan swept down at the force assembling on the court. Shrill cries from the men were the first warning the women received and as they wheeled they came face to face almost immediately with the charging man who held the vicious edge of the tool out before him in such a way that any who got in the way of it would be cut down.

"Stop him!" cried Delma angrily. "He must not escape."

But the first line of women broke and fled before his assault for they were none of them used to fighting—not even to hear of it until that day when Alcan and his father fought on the terrace of the temple before the assembled masses of the people of the city.

Swiftly too, the second group scattered as he swooped across toward them. Then, Delma and four others stood their ground and waited for him. Quickly, he checked his pace and eyed the route he wanted to take. From the corner of his eye he could see the rocket-car and the cluster of men around it.

"Out of my way," he growled at Delma.

"I accepted the decisions of the wise men of the past," she said slowly. "But now I see that it is better to have men who are weaklings yet live in peace than men who are strong yet defy custom and bring crime trampling horribly through a crimeless land. Aztecasia is well content to stay in peace and there is no peace where men such as you are born. Power brings greed and envy and with these things comes trouble. Fighting is something our peoples forgot many ages ago and now you have recalled it all. With men such as you there would be a rebirth of the wars that came close to destroying all human life on the earth. Earthmen are heirs to all the planets for no life is there though conditions are suitable on many of them."

"Out of my way!" he barked viciously, moving closer and his lips drawn back in a primitive snarl of anger.

"I'll not move. Without such men as you there will always be peace, even after all the lands of the earth are repopled again the surplus peoples will colonize the planets and there will be no need for war

because of want of land and space to live. Death for you is the answer and Empadre and his doctrine will be safe once more. If there is no physical strength without desire for power then we'll have none of it. Death is the order of Empadre!"

This last sentence was directed toward the four women grouped around her and a little behind. The tense tones of the Priestess of the temple seemed to give them new courage and they backed away no further.

"I'll not die till my destiny had been accomplished." Alcan growled with the fierceness of the fanatic. "There's no death can come before I reach the goal of my destiny."

With these words he leapt aside suddenly, moving away from the rocket car and toward a regathered group of the women who had scattered before his assault from the terrace ramp. Delma shouted to her supporters and the four women leapt to follow with her as she moved after Alcan.

As they came the man suddenly checked himself, pivoted, dived low using all the power of the corded muscles of his legs to hurl himself straight for the legs of Delma herself. He crashed into her and spilled her to the ground and over them toppled the four women rushing up from behind to give her aid.

From that screaming jumble of arms and legs Lawrence fought his way up and leapt to his feet. Still he had the carving tool in his hand and he charged madly for the rocket-car. A man got in his way and a savage swing of his fist dropped the fellow to the ground with his thin-walled skull shattered. From about the car the other men, lured there by their curiosity, scrambled to escape. Two more fell with fatal wounds as Alcan cleared himself a path to the car.

Once there he leapt inside and slammed the door and sealing it so that it could not be opened from without. Swiftly his hands worked on the controls and within a space of half a minute the rocket tubes of the car were roaring into life as the angry mobs of Aztecasians charged forward when they saw the man was escaping.

"Stop him!" Delma was crying the order shrilly as she came up from the floor of the court, having finally struggled free of the heap of twisting, frightened women.

But even before the sentence was finished

the rocket car rose up from the court with a mighty roar of rocket tubes and the flaming exhaust cut a swathe of death through the front ranks of the crowd who raced forward to try and prevent the escape. Higher and higher, climbing in tight spirals that zoomed him into the sky above the temple, Alcan looked back and growled to himself.

"I'll be back! There's no way you fools can defeat me. No way to prevent me controlling the city and all of you."

But screaming up from the court below him came a flight of ten rocket-cars, all with flaring rocket tubes telling of the mighty power they were using to thrust the craft upward as women held their hands tight on wide-open throttles.

"There's nothing they can do to me," Alcan growled to himself but the assurance lacked conviction for he was certain that these women would not have wasted time coming after him in their craft if they had not believed they could do something about him.

At fifteen thousand feet he levelled out and headed away from the city. He was not worried about fuel for the rocket-car for he knew that when a car was built it was stocked with sufficient atom-decomposition fuel to last the ship all the time it was allowed in use. When time for recall came the craft was returned to the giant automatic factory and another new car issued.

Before he had cleared the limits of the city he knew that the ten rocket cars were right behind him and slightly above, for he could view them clearly in the video screen set in the panel in front of him. This screen could be switched to view the air from any direction of the compass for the permanent eyes of the screen were located in the outer shell of the craft and could be called on to report at will.

A distance of fifty, perhaps sixty miles from the city Alcan was suddenly having trouble in guiding his car and he switched on the rear viewer to find where the other cars were. Nine of them were still in formation behind, the tenth could not be seen anywhere.

Rapidly he juggled the controls in an effort to pick up sight of the tenth craft. When he switched to the eye in the top of the craft he got nothing but a dull screen. And all the while he found, despite every

effort he made to keep his car aloft, he was gradually losing altitude and being forced slowly toward the earth beneath.

On to the video screen flashed the image of Delma, High Priestess of the temple of Empadre, and she was solemn and determined as she announced calmly.

"There's nothing you can do, Alcan. My craft is more powerful than yours and I am clamped to the top of your ship by the special anchor-magnetism mechanism. Whether you like it or not you're going to land."

Shrugging his shoulders disgustedly, Lawrence gave up fighting that ship that was stuck to his back and from then on the two ships dropped down much more rapidly and when approaching the ground Alcan turned on his under-jets and settled his car down gently. There was a deal of swaying of the car for the other car clamped by magnetism to the top of his ship made the whole unstable when they were not under power and airborne.

Knowing that whatever it was that had to be faced would come eventually no matter what he did, Alcan Lawrence climbed from his car in time to see the ten ships settling down gently, for immediately she was sure he was out of the craft, Delma had released her magnetism clamp and then settled her ship down beside his.

Quickly she got from the car and came toward the man but he held the knife in his hand now and it was forbidding as he waited.

"What now?" he demanded fiercely. "That was a clever trick. But what did it gain you? I warned you I wasn't dying till I had fulfilled my destiny."

"Empadre looks after his own," she quoted softly. "We intend to take you back to the temple to be hurled from the top-most point of the tower so that peace may once more live in the land."

"We waste much time," complained another of the women nervously.

They were all at least as tall as Alcan's five-foot-ten and some were broad of shoulder and determined looking. In all that ten Lawrence could not see a single face that was not intent on watching his every move lest he try to make another escape.

"Now!" cried Delma suddenly.

As she gave the signal all ten of the unarmed women leapt in to the attack. From some mysterious concealment each pro-

duced a short bar of metal spanner and with these held ready they converged rapidly on to Alcan. He backed up till he was hard against the shell of Delma's rocket-car and there he determined to make his stand.

Once he was established there he waited and his carving tool was held ready now. Before now, some inner sense had found him reluctant to harm a woman but now, only the most basic law of all prevailed—self-preservation. He gritted his teeth and set himself for the assault which he expected would be a fierce attack from all ten women.

This prediction proved right and before ten seconds had passed Delma raised her arm suddenly and the women leapt in swiftly. Alcan plied the vicious tool and cut one down with a wounded shoulder and then warded off a smash from a spanner before he could strike again. Several smashing blows hit his body and he winced with pain as one crashed just under his heart. Ripping the tool up angrily he sank it deep into flesh and dragged it free as another wounded woman fell.

But from that point Alcan knew it was hopeless. They were too many and with the spanners for arms they could batter his knife thrusts aside and so protect themselves fairly well. In the wild melee that followed Lawrence saw a slender chance and he dropped the carving tool, leapt with all his power and twisted his arms about the body of Delma, High Priestess of the temple.

Roughly, he got his arms about her throat in a strangle hold and the spanner relaxed from her fingers as he dragged her back toward the shell of her car. For a second the other women were taken by surprise but then they began to close again with even greater fury than ever before for now they fought to release Delma, who was virtual Queen of Aztecasia on account of her position as High Priestess.

"Stop!" snarled Alcan fiercely. "Come closer and I'll kill this Priestess of yours."

The women stopped suddenly as they saw the pallor of Delma's skin and their arms dropped to their sides as they waited to see what would follow.

"All of you!" he commanded them fiercely. "Get those two wounded women and all of you head back to the city. Tell the people that I plan another walk on the terrace. This time there will be no mistakes for I'll walk with the High Priestess

herself by my side. Tell them I mean them no harm and want only to fulfill my destiny among them—my people.”

“The High Priestess never mates for if she does then the doctrine says that her mate becomes High Priest of the temple and assumes her position and her authority,” snapped one woman.

“Exactly!” purred Alcan with a twisted smile. “And who among you would attempt harm to the Priest of Empadre, Father of Peace? This is the way in which my destiny will be fulfilled.”

“I’ll not leave her,” cried one of the women angrily.

“If you stay she’ll die and Empadre will suffer badly with no priest in his temple to perform his rituals and Aztecasia will find that trouble will come in great waves over the land,” he snapped back at them sarcastically.

“Come!” one said. “Let us do as he says. Empadre must not be without a Priest in his temple.”

The two wounded women were picked up and taken to different rocket-cars and within a few minutes seven of the cars quit the spot and blasted their way into the heavens and then wheeled round to head for the city with the news of their defeat and the plan of Alcan, the stranger of power in their midst.



DRAGGING Delma into her powerful rocket-car, Alcan tore his tunic into long strips and with these bound the girl’s hands behind her back and then tied to the seat support her legs.

“That’ll keep you quiet and out of my way till I need you,” he growled sombrely, a cruel twisted smile showing on his lips.

“I wanted to live as it was ordained but you and your people thought me a freak, hated and feared me. Now! Now I’ll live as I please for in all Aztecasia there is none who would dare to harm the High Priest of the temple of Empadre. Then, my destiny will live and be fulfilled a hundred fold. From all the most beautiful women in the land will be born sons like unto myself. The weakling men of Aztecasia will be as nothing beside these men of strength and power. My destiny will flower like the great red blooms of the Tiger Tree and the tentacles of it will reach out and probe the future through the power and strength of

my children. Not for nothing did wise men plan in distant times.”

There was a note of exultant certainty to his voice now for he could see no way in which his plan could be stopped. All he could know and feel was the tremendous satisfaction that stemmed from the knowledge that his purpose would be accomplished. Linitz had worked well with Alcan and his teachings were now flowering in the fearful will to power shown by this strange man among the peace-loving dwellers of the city.

“You’ll not accomplish what you plan,” snapped Delma tartly.

“And who is there to stop me?” he demanded fiercely. “I have the power and the way to accomplish all. None can stay my hand for they are bound by the doctrine of Empadre, Father of Peace, and there are none among them who has the courage to flout his decrees.”

“Empadre will not see his children burdened with the vicious children of your loins,” she replied with certainty.

Alcan laughed. He had flouted the doctrine of Empadre since that night when Sinlet Fontaine had died and he was none the worse for it. Great peals of laughter broke from his lips and he ran strong fingers through his hair to get it from his eyes as he roared with laughter.

“Empadre!” he guffawed. “What has he done to prevent me from breaking the great rule? Many men are dead and I live. Many are wounded and I have but a scratch upon my arm.”

The girl was silent and after a couple of minutes, Alcan, bare to the waist now, checked the controls of the craft and set them for take-off.

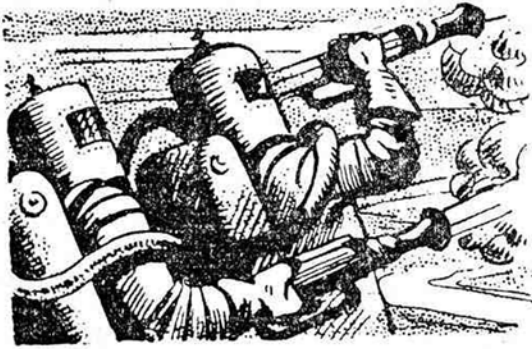
With a mighty roaring blast of rocket tubes he hurtled the ship into the sky and levelled her out at thirty thousand feet and then, with reduced throttle swung the craft round lazily to head back in the direction of the city. He was in no hurry now for he wanted to give them plenty of time to realize that there was absolutely nothing they could do to prevent him going through with his plans.

Afternoon was long advanced by now and the dark shadows of the sun were flung in endless changes of pattern over the earth below. They cruised over jungle and desert in that leisurely speed of a thousand miles per hour. Then, suddenly making

up his mind, Lawrence set the throttle wide and swooped down out of the heavens toward the city and when within range of the spot he cut his throttle back till there was scarcely a show of flame from the rocket exhausts, and gently spiralled the craft down toward the temple where he saw that the parklands were still packed with people waiting anxiously for his return.

"Patient, aren't they?" he grinned with satisfaction as he noted the girl looking over the port side down toward the temple.

"You'll never achieve your aim," she snapped back fiercely. "Aztecasia will never be dominated by men who kill and steal.



The days of peace came with the doctrine of Empadre. Those days will never be lost again."

With a deft swing of the controls Alcan got his craft out of the flight lane in which he saw a pilotless space ship coming in to a perfect landing at the field where such ships delivered their precious burdens of minerals from Mars, Venus and the Moon.

Then, under-jets blazing, Alcan set the rocket-car down to rest in the court close up to the terrace ramp leading up to the top of the temple tower. He smiled. Once he had walked the length of that winding, gem-studded terrace to the very top, with Delma at his side he would automatically become her mate and so assume her position, becoming the High Priest of the temple and a man beyond the power and courage of the Aztecasians to harm.

It took but a flick of the carving tool to cut the strips of material free from the girl's legs and then, reaching across, he pushed open the door and thrust her out in front of him with the carving tool held close to her back.

There was an awed silence as the faithful saw their High Priestless captive to the stranger who had broken the codes of

Empadre. Scarcely a sound was heard as they watched the two move to the centre of the court. Gwenetz Aldoon moved up close and Alcan called a warning to her.

"Stay well clear of me," he shouted. "Come too close and I'll finish her off for good. Death of Delma will bring much trouble to this land."

"I'll not come closer," Gwenetz said fiercely. "But you'll not achieve your ends. Empadre will see to that."

Alcan smirked at this and turned to lead his captive toward the ramp of the terrace that would itself round and round the tower through the hundred and fifty feet or more to where the top of the tower showed in the late afternoon light.

"Alcan!" a shrill voice called fiercely. "Wait! I must talk with you."

Lawrence recognised the voice of Linitz and he turned to face the Professor but he still kept his eye on the girl he had prisoner and also on the nearest of the massed citizens of the city.

"Speak!" he commanded swiftly. "I have little time for the light is failing."

"You must not do this," protested Linitz fiercely. "It was no part of the plan that you should steal the right to the High Priesthood of the temple."

"It was no part of the plan either that these fools should scorn and scoff at me," barked Alcan angrily. "They treated me as if I were lower than their weakling, giant-headed men. Now it will be different for they will be compelled to respect and look with awe on me. They will know then what it is like to be outcast from society."

"But Lawrence!" protested Linitz, trying to reason with Alcan. "Your destiny! What of the purpose for your being? What of the future?"

A great burst of laughter rocked from the throat of the man then and it took him some time before he could speak.

"My destiny! That will be fulfilled a hundred-fold. From all the most beautiful women in the city will come sons to fulfill the destiny time has allotted to me. Once I am High Priest the rest will come for my commands must be followed."

A shocked look of horror crept over the face of the old scientist as he stared at this man, this product of many lifetimes of work and study. He could not believe that men

were once like that—arrogant, spiteful, greedy, jealous, eager for power and proud only of their strength. He shook his head and stared at the young man. He was fine to look on but there was something wrong inside—a normal person couldn't live with such ideas, of that the old Professor was certain. But the thing that grieved him most was the secret that he alone knew. He was blood of blood with this outlaw man who was stealing the power in Aztecasia.

Two generations ago Linitz had been trained for his job and his son was likewise trained and so too was his son's son, Alcan Lawrence. Trained carefully for his destiny but somewhere along it had become twisted and was no longer the same. Linitz turned away for he saw that the end was soon coming. There was nothing anyone could do now.

"Blood of my blood!" he kept mumbling to himself as he moved away slowly.

"Let's go now," snapped Alcan as he prodded Delma gently with the point of the carving tool.

She said nothing, but turned to walk slowly toward the ramp that led the terrace up through the semi-twilight of the late afternoon. Around her shoulders hung the ceremonial robes of her position as High Priestess of the temple. Once they had reached the top she knew that the stranger would remove them from her shoulders and place them around his own. Then, the city and the peaceful way of life it followed would be lost for ever. The doctrine of Empadre would die and there would be nothing to live in its place.

"Hurry!" he snapped at her fiercely. "We must reach the top before darkness falls that all those gathered will see me don the robes of the High Priesthood."

"Empadre will not allow it," she retorted spiritedly.

But they were more than thirty feet up the terrace and still nothing had happened to prevent the stranger from accomplishing his purpose. All around the temple the people stood with tense, silent faces as they waited and watched. Many were already resigned to the inevitable but the most devout among them still believed that something would come about that would prevent the murdering stranger from achieving his end.

At forty feet Delma stumbled wearily

forward and grinned to herself grimly as she heard the muttered curse from Alcan. Then, from that stumbling movement she flung herself flat onto the inlaid floor of the terrace and the marble arches curved and rolled above her as she spun round so that she could face up toward Alcan.

There was an intense excited expression on her face now as she reared up her legs swiftly and jack-knifed them forward and up. Taken completely by surprise, Lawrence was bending forward to lift the bound girl to her feet and he collected the flats of both her leathered feet in the chin and was sent sprawling back with a foggy dazed expression clouding his eyes.

He fell down the slope and staggered to his feet almost as quickly as did Delma. A worried frown came to her face as she saw her way of escape cut off.

Swiftly she turned to the low wall beside the terrace and by it she shrugged her ceremonial robes from her shoulders and then pushed them over the wall with her foot. They went fluttering down toward the court below. At full voice she cried:

"Gwenetz Aldoon will assume the robes when I no longer have a right or claim to them."

All those below heard this and the angry snarling from the man on the terrace.

"That makes no difference. So long as you're still alive when we get to the top the robes are mine," he yelled out at her. "You'll pay for that kick when we reach the top."

"You'll never achieve your aim," she taunted him fiercely. "Empadre will see to that."



AS Delma turned back toward the wall Alcan sensed her intention and he leapt across the short space that separated them and then grabbed her roughly by an arm and shook her fiercely.

"You'll not do that," he growled at her fiercely. "I'll not be cheated now. Destiny is an endless chain and you are but a part in mine—a link. There'll be no broken links."

Struggling furiously, the beautiful, dark-headed girl fought to get clear of that clutching grasp. Her arms were bound and there was little that she seemed to be able to do. Then, as in a last resort, she tried with her feet. It was the natural outcome

of the situation and since she was held close to him and facing him she could do nothing but kick at his shins and that seemed futile.

To stop her doing this he stamped on her foot and a cry of pain ripped from her lips as she jerked the leg up to reach for the injured part. All this happened in a flash and her knee was smashed into his groin and he cried out one terrible groan as he doubled down, releasing her, but still keeping her on the top side of him.

He lay groaning for a moment or two and then forced himself to his feet and moved slowly toward the girl. Her last desperate move cheated Alcan. She ran to the low wall and jumped over it through a marble arch and her body went hurtling down through forty feet to crash into the court. For a long time there was a horrible stunned silence below, then a terrific angry scream from the women.

Gwenez took up the robes of the High Priestess' position and placed them about her shoulders for she now understood what Delma had meant when she had let the robes fall over the wall. So that the temple of Empadre was not without a Priestess and Alcan was cursing in red-faced rage as he stood looking down toward the girl who had cheated him. Then, something else made him look elsewhere for he caught the sound of snapped commands and he knew the voice.

Down below he saw that all rocket-cars were being removed from the court while Gwenez was swiftly marshalling a bunch of nearly fifty eager women, who were determined to ascend the ramp to see that Alcan paid for his crime in the way that Delma had decreed.

"I've got to beat them down again," he cried fiercely to himself.

But he was still twenty feet from the bottom of the terrace when he saw the entrance close with a solid mass of women coming slowly up to meet him. He was trapped. He looked over the side and thought of jumping down there but the court was now filled with angrily screaming women and they were so tight packed that there was no chance of him escaping that way.

"Don't injure him unless necessary," ordered Gwenez quickly. "We want him to know what's happening to him."

"Death to the murderer!" came the chant from the court.

Desperately, glancing first one way and then another, Alcan backed slowly up the ramp away from the grim bunch of women who were armed with spanners taken from the rocket-cars. Thirty of them moving up toward him. All Alcan's thoughts were occupied with a desperate search for some method of escape. Gone now was every vaunted desire for power and revenge on these people who had treated him as an out-cast. Only escape—that was the only word that played constantly through his mind as the women closed the gap between themselves and Alcan.

Dusk was already over the temple bringing with it an unreal half-light that was eerie in its murkiness. Through this the grim, shouting band of women came up. Nearly sixty feet from the court below Alcan stood his ground and waited for them. When they charged he stood for a moment and then leapt back so that two or three overran themselves and before they knew it they were tasting the cold steel of the carving tool.

This vicious counter-attack provoked a tremendous howl of anger from the other women and they rushed again and this time they kept coming and flying spanners and flashing blade worked fiercely as they fought him back up to eighty feet from the court. His left arm was hanging limp where a woman swinging a heavy spanner had crushed his arm and shattered the bone.

"This is your destiny, Alcan!" taunted Gwenez as she wielded a spanner at him. "Death! Death is a friend of yours. The sort of death you'll be meeting—violent and awful. Just like the men you've sent to their doom."

"Destiny!" cried Alcan, his voice terrible in the sudden broken horror of his recognition of defeat.

All his power was being stripped from him now and he was weakening fast under this relentless attack from the women who kept pressing up, leaving their wounded behind to be taken care of by others coming up through the shadows from below.

One hundred feet up and Alcan Lawrence, product of more than six generations of scientific care and effort, turned and fled the twenty women who were still pressing him. His left arm was useless and two savage gashes were along his head where

spanners had connected and broken the skin wide.

"Destiny!" he was calling shrilly to himself as he fled. "Surely Destiny didn't ordain that six generations of effort should end like this, six generations during which time all that was to come was this. Failure! Nothing! Defeat."

And then he was fighting on the very top of the tower and though his carving tool drank blood many times as he forced his weary arm to flash it out in defence, there was nothing he could do to stop the slowly closing arc of women who were grimly forcing him back toward the surrounding wall.

Then, swinging her spanner savagely, Gwenetz crashed the carving tool from Alcan's hand and the women dropped their spanners swiftly as they rushed forward. Ten pairs of hands had him before he could do anything to defend himself. His arms were pinned to his sides and he stood glaring desperately into the face of the new High Priestess of the temple.

"Carry out the order of Delma," she said tersely.

As the women picked him up she turned away swiftly and didn't look as eager hands flung him from the topmost point of the temple tower. Rising like a cry from hell itself, Alcan's death scream floated up through the night and cutting it off short just before he crashed to the ground came a long defiant shout of:

"Destiny!"

There was joy and relaxation written on the faces of the men when they saw the body and the following day was appointed as the beginning of the festival when dancing, singing and the ritual ceremonies would be carried out and the women would choose their mates and walk the sloping terrace to the top of the tower.

Then, when all the crowds had finally gone Gwenetz went into the temple and slumped down in her special room. In a little while a knock sounded on the door and she called for the person to enter. Professor Lintz came slowly into the room. He looked old, weary and about ready to sleep one night for the last time.

"It's over now," he said softly. "All finished! My lifetime and the lifetime of many others all wasted now. Finished. The wise men of the past were apparently mis-

taken when they decided to breed back to an original type and so improve the men of the future in Aztecasia."

His voice was slow, soft and defeated. There was nothing more now for him to live for. He was through with his part in the venture and Gwenetz looked across slowly and smiled.

"Perhaps it's not yet finished," she ventured slowly. "Perhaps a son may yet be born to Alcan Lawrence."

"I don't understand," stammered the old man quietly. "How!"

"Rocket-cars are most comfortable," she laughed at him, enjoying his embarrassment. "But only time can tell whether it will be a boy or a girl."

The old man brightened and his eyes lighted as he seemed to look into the future.

"Perhaps there is still some hope," he mused quietly. "We would never make the mistakes again. No other Alcan Lawrence would be thrust on the city. Do you think it might be a boy?"

There was a note of pleading in the voice of the large-headed bald little man as he looked at the girl. She smiled mysteriously in a way that only women can.

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