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### Table of Contents—June

<b>A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE</b> (A Story in Three Parts) (Part 1) By George Paul Bauer .....	6
<i>They tried to bore a tunnel through the earth . . . but in that underground cavern they fell into the hands of the Inner Ones . . .</i>	
<b>THE INCREDIBLE MONSTROSITY</b> By Walter Kateley .....	24
<i>Across the continent swept that terrible juggernaut to extinguish an army . . .</i>	
<b>TRAPPED IN THE DEPTHS</b> By Capt. S. P. Meek, U.S.A. ....	38
<i>Slow suffocation faced them in the ocean's depths . . . until by a flashing idea there came a saving plan . . .</i>	
<b>THE TIME RAY OF JANDRA</b> By Raymond A. Palmer .....	46
<i>Backward he flew in time . . . until he stood at the pit of a great catastrophe to an unknown nation . . .</i>	
<b>WAVES OF DEATH</b> By Wesley Arnold .....	58
<i>Who killed that brave aviator, Lieutenant Wallace, and exploded his plane? Men were arrested . . . war threatened . . . until the truth came out . . . A Real Air Wonder Story.</i>	
<b>THE BAT-MEN OF MARS</b> (A Story in Three Parts) (Part 2) By Wood Jackson .....	66
<i>Continued from AIR WONDER STORIES . . . our brave explorers come to grips with the Martians . . . Can they overcome the force of the superstitions that dominate the Martians; and escape?</i>	
<b>QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS</b> .....	77
<b>THE READER SPEAKS—LETTERS FROM READERS</b> .....	78
<b>NEWS OF THE MONTH</b> .....	89

### ON THE COVER

this month, taken from "Trapped in the Depths," we see our undersea voyagers faced with a new danger, from the great sea beast. But the beast is due for a great surprise, for the "ticklers" that extend around the submarine have been provided for just such moments as these.

### NEXT MONTH

**THE TIME VALVE**, by Miles J. Breuer, M.D. We offer now to our readers the marvelous sequel to Dr. Breuer's "Fitzgerald Contraction." A flight of 200,000 years into the future may seem to us unimaginable, but our author accomplishes it in a vivid and realistic manner. And although he is not a pessimist, Dr. Breuer foresees a human race which is a sad degeneration from our present state of civilization. This is a most thrilling story and one of our well-known author's best.

**THE WAR OF THE GREAT ANTS**, by Jim Vanny. We humans give our small neighbors, the ants, credit for too little intelligence. Ants are really very clever creatures, and it is possible that they might, as our author pictures, be able to build up great cities, and make slaves of animals that at the present time despise them. Suppose ants could make slaves of us, and have us do their work? As our readers can realize, this is a most intriguing idea and Jim Vanny works it out in a corking adventure story.

**A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE**, by George Paul Bauer. This story is approaching its most thrilling phases. Our author has an astounding imagination in his ability to picture totally strange worlds beneath the earth's surface. And in the incidents of this story there is both humor and tragedy in the attempts of our poor explorers to get out of the clutches of the Inner People. Don't miss this installment.

**THE BAT-MEN OF MARS**, by Wood Jackson. This aviation-interplanetary story comes now to its startling and dramatic climax. Overhanging our interplanetary travelers is the superstition of the Martians regarding a strange prophecy. But in the crater of Dir, where the Bat-Men live, lies the basis for sudden and overwhelming disaster. Can it be avoided; will the earthlings help the Martians? Be sure to finish this stirring story of two worlds.

### AND OTHERS.

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# A Subterranean Adventure

by  
George Paul Bauer



(Illustration by Paul)

Then something icy cold touched the back of my neck; and suddenly every vestige of strength seemed to be withdrawn from my body, leaving it numb and lifeless.

## A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE



TOP, Denniston!—For heaven's sake, stop! There's somebody lying on the road ahead—just where it turns!"

With a screeching of protesting brakes, and the dull grinding of rubber against stone, the large touring-car came to a sudden, sliding halt, in perilous proximity to the outer edge of the narrow mountain road; and its occupants, a party of four young men in hunting togs, piled out hurriedly. By the light of dawn they gathered about the still figure of a man, lying on his face in the dust.

Evidently the unfortunate fellow had been the victim of an atrocious assault, for the uncovered part of his strong body was a mass of bruises, half-healed welts and criss-cross cuts such as viciously applied whip-lashes would leave; the ends of his fingers were raw and covered with congealed blood, the nails of several being completely torn off.

He appeared to be dead; for his body was quite cold to the touch. But the coldness might have been due in part to the icy mountain air, against which his meager costume furnished inadequate protection. He was dressed in nothing but two wide belts of violet-colored leather, laced in front, one about his chest and one about his loins, to the latter of which a pair of very short pants, like athletic trunks, was attached. There were very heavy metallic clasps riveted into the back of each belt, the purpose of which was not apparent.

"Poor devil!" one of the hunters commented, pityingly. "I wonder what, in the name of wonders, he was doing in this icy, uninhabited wilderness, dressed like that? And look at those queer, laced boots he is wearing: The way they're cut up, he must have been traveling many miles over sharp rocks."

"Looks to me like some kind of circus performer in that rig," another of the party remarked thoughtfully. "Chances are somebody had it in for him, kidnapped him from the show, brought him out here somewhere, beat him up and dumped him. The work of a gang, I'd say. What do you think, Denniston?"

Frederick Denniston, a journalist, the owner of the automobile, was down on his knees, carefully examining the unconscious man in his quick and efficient manner. He gave a sudden exclamation. "Why, he's still

alive! Here, give me a hand, some of you fellows! There's only one thing to do, take him back to Denver to a hospital as quick as we can. I know none of you will mind if we postpone our trip until tomorrow."

There was an instant and unanimous assent to this. And a few minutes later they had wrapped the unfortunate man in blankets and coats, and were traveling back to the capital city of Colorado in all haste.

\* \* \* \* \*

"He's been badly manhandled, and has been through an extraordinary amount of over-exertion and exposure," the hospital surgeon diagnosed. "But with his build and constitution he'll be O.K. inside of ten days."

This was good news to the hunters, and before they left the hospital they had jointly arranged that their unknown charge was to have the best care that money could buy.

It was quite natural, of course, that when, about a week later, the four men returned from their successful hunting trip, they should motor at once to the hospital.

"He's almost as good as new," the doctor answered to their eager inquiries. "All he needs now is plenty

of good food, and air and sunshine somewhere out in the country."

Denniston beamed delightedly.

"And I've got the very place for him—my bachelor home, three miles out of town. He can get all the fresh air and sunshine he wants, and Mrs. Hall, my housekeeper, is the best cook in Denver."

The surgeon nodded approvingly.

"Fine! And perhaps you'll have better luck than any of us at the hospital in finding out his identity, and just what had been happening to him previous to your discovery of him. Beyond

stating that he is an American, and that his name is Ned Gothram, he has been about as communicative as my pet skeleton. The fellow is a mystery, if ever there was one. I'd give a lot to hear his story."

### An Unparalleled Undertaking

THE stag dinner at Frederick Denniston's bachelor home in honor of his convalescent guest, Ned Gothram, was a perfect success. Besides the host and Gothram only three others, the hunting companions of Denniston, had been invited, and all of them



GEORGE PAUL BAUER

OUR readers are probably all acquainted with that masterpiece of science fiction "Below the Infra-Red." Now we offer our readers a further delight from this author, in the present story.

Mr. Bauer himself calls the present story his best work, and the editors after reading the story can heartily agree with him.

Here we have a swiftly moving tale of the adventures of two intrepid explorers into the unknown dangers of the earth's interior. They had hoped to drive a tunnel clear through the earth, but instead they came upon something so remarkable and experienced such mysterious things that even to the teller of the story, they escape belief.

Mr. Bauer as the narrator of tales of strange places and strange events has few equals. And though, to the unthinking person, the present story may be unbelievable, yet by the magic of words, Mr. Bauer convinces us against our own will.

had thoroughly enjoyed the excellent viands provided by Mrs. Hall, the journalist's treasured housekeeper and cook. At the end of the meal the host rose to his feet, and proposed a toast to the health of his convalescent guest, which his three friends enthusiastically seconded.

In answer to the toast, and amidst expectant silence, Ned Gothram rose to his full height of six feet and five inches, and faced them gravely. His sonorous voice was vibrant with feeling when he spoke.

"Gentlemen—friends," he began slowly, "I feel that any words of mine would be quite inadequate to express my appreciation of what you have done for me. I only hope that sometime in the future I shall be able to reciprocate, in a small measure at least, your wonderful help and kindness to me."

Denniston raised his hand in a deprecatory gesture.

"My dear fellow, what my friends here and I were privileged to do for you, you would have equally done in our place, I'm sure of that. So please don't mention it. And we don't want you to feel under the slightest obligation to us. We did only what was our plain duty."

There was a unanimous and emphatic assent from the others.

Gothram nodded, and his deep-lying, dark gray eyes shone out at them in warm friendliness and gratitude.

"That's the true Christian way of looking at it," he agreed. "But there's one thing which, I hope, you'll allow me to do—for I feel that it's your right to know—and that is, to tell you my story. It is, however, so utterly incredible and fantastic, that I doubt if any of you will believe a word of it!"

His glance passed from one to another, and he smiled sadly. In that moment it seemed to the others that the deep lines of suffering in his intellectual face were suddenly accentuated, and his strong mouth compressed, as if to prevent a sob from escaping.

"But, my dear fellow—" Denniston protested, "you are under no obligation to tell your story, you know, unless you especially want to. As a journalist and writer, I confess I'm intensely interested, and so are my friends here. But I'm also sure that none of us would think for a moment of prying into your private affairs."

Again there was a unanimous assent from Denniston's three friends.

Gothram's eyes thanked them. "I shall be only too glad to tell you my story," he said simply.

"In that case let's go to the den, and make ourselves comfortable," Denniston invited, and led the way.

When they were all established in various easy chairs, equipped with smoking material, and when the fire in the spacious fire-place began to crackle pleasantly with the addition of a new log, all eyes turned expectantly to Gothram. He sat hunched forward in his chair, staring at the fire, and his wide, bulging brow was corrugated with concentrated thought as he evidently arranged the details of his story in his mind. Then, without preamble, he began:

**S**OME time ago I conceived a wonderful idea! Listen, and learn into what utterly strange situations, fantastic adventures, and terrible misfortunes an idea may

lead one!

To be brief, my unprecedented idea was the complete piercing of the Earth, a matter of some 7,925 miles, by means of a vertical shaft; thereby connecting the approximate geographical center of the United States with a point near its antipodes\* in Asia, providing the most direct route of communication between the two continents.

It is scarcely necessary to point out what immense advantages such an intercontinental route would have over all surface routes, whether on the sea, or the land, or by air, if it could be made a reality. And it was this very thing that I proposed to do.

My idea was the result of an accidental discovery.

Ever since my college days I have been a dabbler in the sciences, especially in chemistry and electricity, and, being a man of independent means and a bachelor, I indulged in my hobby to the full. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that I followed the lead of many eminent scientists, and tried to find a means of disrupting the atom and liberating its immense energy.

I did not succeed in disrupting the atom. But one day I did make a monumental discovery.

To ease my mind from too much concentrated application to my atomic researches, I decided one day to play at haphazard experimenting, as I frequently did. There was a large block of granite in my laboratory, and I idly amused myself by alternately spraying this with various chemical mixtures and then concentrating upon the sprayed area a reflected stream of electric waves of a very high frequency.

Imagine my surprise, when suddenly the entire sprayed area, about six inches square, dissolved into a gray-colored gas, and rose to the very ceiling of the room!

The chemicals had soaked into the granite to a depth of a quarter of an inch, and every bit of the treated rock had disappeared cleanly, as if it had been chiselled out. Through mere chance I had stumbled upon a most remarkable discovery! I bored clean through the great block of granite in my laboratory inside of a few minutes, and vaporized pieces of flint and of quartzite, and other minerals I had found.

That night I was unable to go to sleep. I tried to realize just what my discovery was worth. I visualized the entire mining industry revolutionized. Tunneling would become mere child's play, without drilling and without dynamite. The hardest rocks could be evaporated with ease.

And then, from somewhere in the outer void, the idea came into my mind—an idea so gigantic that its possibilities staggered me.

At first I rejected it as a mere fantastic dream. But as time went on the thought gradually fascinated me more and more. I decided to keep my discovery of rock dissolution a secret, and to carry out my immense, unparalleled project.

Just about this time my orphan nephew, Teddy Cranstons, came back from college. He was the son of one of my sisters, and since her death I had been his guardian. He had just obtained his diploma as mechanical en-

\* On the directly opposite side of the earth.

gineer, and I knew that he would be an invaluable aid to me in building the machine I had in mind.

When I confided my idea and plans to him, he thought at first that I was joking. But when I finally convinced him that I was serious, he was wildly enthusiastic.

"Great Jupiter—what a whale of a project!" he exulted. "Let's get started right away, Uncle Ned." That was Teddy all over. Full to the tips with youthful strength and energy, and ready to go at a word.

Of course, we both realized fully that for such a prodigious undertaking it would be absolutely necessary for me to interest some of the most prominent capitalists in the country. And we likewise knew that, in order to interest capital, we had to show them something concrete and practical, or they would not consider the proposition for a moment. Therefore we proceeded to "show" them.

No sooner had we finished our drawings and blue prints, than I ordered material for the construction of the machine we had designed. When this arrived, I engaged a number of skilled and discreet machinists, and hired Teddy to boss them. Naturally we did not take the workmen into our confidence, but since I paid them exceptionally well, they did not seem to mind the secrecy, thinking, no doubt, that Teddy and I were two invention cranks who must be humored.

The work progressed rapidly, and in a little over six months of intense labor the great machine was standing completed upon the very spot at which it was to descend into the mysterious interior of the Earth.

## CHAPTER II

### Into the Unknown

THE workmen had all departed, and Teddy and I stood before the huge machine we had built, viewing our handiwork with intense pride. I will not tire you with a description of mechanical details. Suffice it to say that the *Penetrator*—we had named it that—was formed like a great projectile. It was standing upright upon the heavy concrete floor where it had been built, and its height, from its flaring base to the tip of its oval-shaped head, was forty-five feet, its diameter being one-third of that.

In the massive base of the *Penetrator* the disintegrating apparatus was located, and its extreme upper point terminated in a short shaft, to which a large, three-bladed propeller was attached. This was driven by a high-speed electric motor, and was designed, during the process of penetration, to hurl to the surface the vaporized rock which escaped upward through perforations in the flared base. But the most peculiar part of the *Penetrator* was its climbing mechanism: a massive, square-sided ring of steel plate, surrounding the machine at about three-quarters of its height, and divided into four sectors by four gaps at right angles to each other, in each of which a great cog-wheel with eight massive teeth was located. As the *Penetrator* descended into the earth, four special disintegrating nozzles automatically formed holes in the sides of the shaft into which the teeth of the cog-wheels engaged.

Thus, by means of its eight electric motors, the climbing apparatus could raise the machine up or lower it,

either automatically or by direct control. Of course, during penetration it worked automatically, lowering the *Penetrator* as fast as the rock at its base was disintegrated and vaporized.

Our great adventure was at hand!

"Do you realize that this is apt to be a dangerous, and even fatal venture?" I said to my nephew seriously.

He nodded indifferently, keeping his admiring gaze fixed on the *Penetrator*. "Of course I do, Uncle Ned. But that makes it all the more fascinating! Question before the house is: when do we start? I'm anxious to go."

It was the true pioneer spirit, and my heart warmed to him as never before. I knew right then and there that I could never have picked a better traveling companion. He would be absolutely dependable under any conditions and in any emergency; of that I felt sure.

"Well, you're not any more anxious to go than I am," I told him laughingly. "All we need is to take aboard some water and provisions against any possible emergency. Let's start right now."

He gave an enthusiastic college yell, and then ran towards the house at full speed, in search of old Stubbs, my man of all work. In less than half an hour we were ready to start. An amusing incident happened then. Old Stubbs, on the point of stepping out of the control room, which was situated just under the dome, stopped to stare suspiciously at the complicated apparatus on the walls and ceiling, and at the intricacies of the control board and the control table in front of it.

He frowned heavily, and scratched his gray head.

"Mebbe you know what you're doin', Mr. Ned," he said dubiously. "But—I dunno. Somethin' tells me there's goin' to be trouble with all that there new-fangled contraption. Yessir—there's sure goin' to be trouble."

Both Teddy and I laughed heartily because of the doleful expression on the old man's wrinkled, kindly face.

"Rubbish!" I declared confidently. "I don't expect the slightest trouble, Stubbs. So, don't worry. At any rate, we'll let you know by radio in case anything should happen to go wrong."

But Stubbs was not at all convinced by my confidence, and after we had shaken his hand in good-by, and I had given him his final instructions, he passed out to the elevator in the construction frame still shaking his head and muttering to himself.

Teddy and I looked at each other and grinned amusedly. But if in that moment I could have seen into the future—

(At this point an expression of intense pain passed over the face of the narrator, and he put one hand over his eyes as if to shut out some awful sight. But after a few moments he managed to control his emotions, and continued).

I started the synthetic generator, tested it to my satisfaction, and told Teddy to clamp down the manhole door. My hand trembled as I pressed down the lever that controlled one of the large switches in the compartment immediately beneath the control room. Then, while Teddy watched me fascinatedly, I pressed home three other levers in rapid succession.

## Down! Down! Down!

A TREMOR passed through the *Penetrator*—we felt it sinking—

"It works! It works!" yelled Teddy delightedly, and in his exuberant joy began to dance a jig.

For a few minutes both of us were kept busy; I at the control board and table, and Teddy at various mechanisms about the room. But when presently I glanced at the dials of the two recording depth meters, I literally gaped with amazement. Unless both instruments were inaccurate, the *Penetrator* had descended to a depth of six hundred feet in four minutes!

Teddy, who was as much astonished as I, made a quick computation on a handy pad. "Great Jupiter! That means that we are traveling into the earth at the rate of almost forty-two miles a day!" he cried exultantly.

This speed, of course, exceeded our most sanguine expectations. Further calculation on Teddy's part revealed the fact that at this rate it would take approximately six and one-half months to complete the 7,925 mile long shaft.

Down! down! down!

"How far down do you intend to go this trip, Uncle Ned?" Teddy inquired, when, after the first hour, we had reached a depth of nine thousand feet.

I pointed to the dials of the two thermostats on the control board, which were registering an outside temperature of 122 degrees.

"As soon as I have found out with absolute certainty whether or not the temperature increases beyond a certain depth," I replied.

"Hm! doesn't look to me as if that temperature increase theory of about one degree for every sixty feet of depth holds good in this particular neighborhood," Teddy commented sceptically, gazing at the thermostat dials. "According to the scientists the outside temperature should now be 222 degrees instead of 122."

I glanced at the depth meters, which now recorded 10,000 feet.

"Yes, but even at that, the actual outside temperature must be several degrees less than indicated," I reminded him, "because the disintegrating process itself generates quite a little heat. But let's wait and see."

I looked at the thermometer, and found that it registered an inner temperature of 105 degrees. "Turn on the cooling plant, will you, Teddy?" I suggested. "It's getting rather stuffy in here."

"I thought you'd soon get hot under the collar, uncle o' mine," he said laughingly, as he threw the switch of the small motor pump, which quickly sent a refrigerating mixture through several copper coils about the room. In a very few minutes the temperature of the control room was down to 85 degrees, and the thermostat control cut out the motor.

Down! down! down! Hour after hour; mile after mile!

Teddy and I, lurching at the edge of the control table, glanced at the instruments on the control board behind it, found that we were almost three and one-half miles down, and that the outside temperature was now 125 degrees. For the preceding quarter of an hour

this had been maintained steadily.

"How about it now, Uncle Ned?" my nephew asked, chewing busily.

"I think we'll keep on just a little longer," I replied thoughtfully. "I have to be quite sure about that temperature proposition, you know, or I'll never be able to interest capital in my scheme."

"Well, there's one thing they can never kick about," he commented. "They'll save billions by not having to timber or concrete the shaft."

"That is a most important item," I agreed smilingly. "It's a happy coincidence that the disintegrating process changes the rock at the edges to a glass-like hardness. And, besides, the process does not crack nor disturb the rock in the least. That's another immense advantage over the mining method of drilling and blasting."

"It's that all right," Teddy agreed. "But say—hadn't we better radio a message of good cheer to old Stubbs? He might already be thinking of notifying our sorrowing relatives."

"By all means, cheer him up," I agreed laughingly.

Whistling happily, he cut in the radio set, while I turned back to my business of controlling the *Penetrator*.

## The Catastrophe

TEDDY had just passed into the tiny pantry which immediately adjoined the control room, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, the floor of the room seemed literally to drop away from my feet. All the blood from my body seemed to rush up into my brain with a terrific resistless force. There was a frightful roaring in my ears, and a pressure in my head as though it would burst asunder. My legs and lower body felt cold and dead. I had a blurred vision of Teddy staggering in from the pantry—heard his voice as if from an immense distance—

With all the power of my will I struggled to my feet. Then a tremendous jar—a crushing of my body under an awful weight—and then an all-obliterating blackness overwhelmed my mind. . . .

By slow degrees a humming sound penetrated to my consciousness. For a long time I lay prostrate and dazed, listening to it, and wondering where I was and why my head felt so dull and my body so leaden. Gradually, very gradually, gleams of memory began to flicker into the dark recesses of my mind. And then suddenly, with a sort of painful stab, my mind leaped back to that awful drop through space—

By an intense effort of my will, I forced my bruised, protesting body to my knees and looked anxiously around for my nephew. He lay in a huddled heap in the shadow of the control table, and a sob rose to my lips at the thought that he was dead. I forced my pain-racked limbs to drag me to his side, and managed to turn him onto his back, so that the light of the single remaining electric globe shone on him.

Blood was flowing from a deep scalp wound, where his head had evidently struck the sharp edge of a steel table leg. Trembling with anxiety I pressed my ear to his heart and sobbed for joy when I found that it was still beating. By means of the rigid chair and the table, I managed to pull myself to my feet, and staggered into

the kitchenette for the emergency kit. As I was finishing the dressing of his wound, Teddy regained consciousness. With my aid he managed to sit up.

"What in Jupiter happened, Uncle Ned?" he asked dazedly, putting a hand to the bandage on his head. "I felt the floor dropping away from under my feet, and was coming in to see what was the matter—and then something, some great force, seemed to land squarely on top of me, and smashed me to the floor. That's all I remember."

I told him that my experience had been similar to his, and helped him to his feet. By common impulse our gaze went to the depth meters, and what we saw there rooted us to the spot as if we were paralyzed.

Both depth meters indicated a depth of sixty-five miles!

"Great Jupiter—what a drop!" Teddy breathed in awe.

"It's impossible! It can't be true!" I said dazedly. "There must be some mistake. We just dropped into some sort of cavity in the earth, and when we struck, the instruments were jarred out of order."

"But you're all wrong, Uncle Ned," Teddy disagreed. "I recollect the speed of that drop. If we had hit anything hard at that velocity, the *Penetrator* would have been a mass of splinters, and neither one of us would be here to tell the tale." He put a hand to his head and grimaced with pain.

"We *did* strike something, though," I persisted. "That was what knocked both of us unconscious. And that's the very reason why I think that the depth meters are wrong. It seemed hardly more than a couple of minutes from the time when I felt the floor of the control room dropping away from my feet, until I was hurled to the floor by some great weight—the power of momentum no doubt, due to the fact that the *Penetrator* had struck something. The *Penetrator* could not have dropped over sixty miles in that short space of time."

Teddy made a quick calculation upon the pad on the control table, and presently turned to me. "I remember the formula, and here is the result: It took us very nearly two minutes and twenty-two seconds to drop the sixty miles," he announced triumphantly. "The average speed must have been terrific. No doubt the outside wall of the *Penetrator* was fairly sizzling from the friction of the increasingly heavy air. If it hadn't been for that insulation between the two walls we would have been fried alive, I guess."

"All that may be quite true," I admitted thoughtfully. "But don't forget that your formula doesn't take into consideration the retarding effect of the increasingly dense air, to say nothing of the cuplike base of the *Penetrator*, which must have acted like a sort of parachute. If we did drop sixty miles, you may be sure that it took a bit longer than two minutes and twenty odd seconds. But there is one thing certain—we did strike something; because the *Penetrator* is at rest."

Despite his pain Teddy grinned at me.

"Good logic, Uncle Ned," he admitted. "But I bet a dozen new socks we struck something very, very soft, or we would be angels by now."

Again I became aware of the humming sound above, and realized that it was the great exhaust fan. I shut

it off, and with sudden thought tried the disintegrating apparatus, listening through the acoustic tube. After a minute or so I disconnected the switch of the disintegrator and turned to Teddy.

"Whatever we struck has absolutely ruined the disintegrating apparatus." I announced. "No doubt the base has been completely smashed."

After a short consultation we decided to open the manhole and find out where we had landed.

### CHAPTER III

#### Trapped in the Depths

VERY, very carefully we loosened the clamps of the manhole door. And presently a peculiar odor, hauntingly familiar somehow, penetrated to us. However, the odor appeared not to interfere with our breathing, and we loosened the clamps still more, expecting every moment an avalanche of water, or possibly mud, to enter.

The manhole was open at last, and we stared out into a region of impenetrable blackness. But there was an atmosphere. And while it was peculiarly heavy, it did not materially interfere with our breathing.

"By Jonah!" I cried, as sudden realization came to me. "That smell—I believe—quick! Teddy, get me that long extension light, will you?"

With willing alacrity my nephew wonderingly brought the light, and I lowered it quickly over the edge of the manhole, illuminating a wide, dully gleaming surface.

"Great Jupiter—we're afloat on a subterranean sea!" Teddy cried.

I said nothing; but quickly passed my index finger over the near surface of the machine and smelled of it. Without a word I held my finger under Teddy's nose. Then we stared at each other in amazement.

The *Penetrator* was floating vertically upon an ocean of crude oil!

A thought struck Teddy and he laughed.

"Let's incorporate right now, Uncle Ned, and form a rival company to Universal Oil," he suggested. "All we have to do is to drop down pumps and a pipe line of sixty-five miles, and we'll be ready to supply the world. How does that strike you?"

"Fine!" I said ironically. "It ought to be easy. But supposing we shelve the oil business for the present, and think about getting back to the surface. How does that strike you?"

"Great!" he laughed. "I'd almost forgotten about that little matter. But—by the way—how do you account for all this oil way down here below the surface, Uncle Ned?"

"That's a matter of conjecture, of course." I replied thoughtfully. "However, the theory is that crude oil is due to the residue of fishes and other inhabitants of oceans during pre-human ages of the world. It is conceivable that, as the result of some great volcanic upheaval, a deep crevice was opened in the earth at the bottom of some great body of water, precipitating its contents—water, fishes and all—into this place, which appears to be some sort of immense cavern. Here the creatures died, and from their decaying bodies this oil



was gradually formed."

"Sounds logical," Teddy agreed. "But what do you suppose became of all the water?"

"I have an idea that most of it is right below this oil," I replied. "That is, of course, if my theory is right. At any rate we'll find out about the water right away."

In brief order, by means of a short length of three-inch pipe, and some wood, leather, and wire, I had fashioned a depth bucket, such as well-drillers use, and we lowered quickly to a depth of fifty feet. I pulled the spring of the trap, and a lot of air bubbles rose sluggishly to the surface, indicating that the bucket was filling.

We soon had it up, and to my disgust it was filled to the top with the heavy, smelly oil.

"Never mind," I answered Teddy's laugh of amusement. "We'll see the next time."

The next laugh was mine though, for from a depth of one hundred feet the bucket came up filled with fresh water.

"We now have plenty of water and oil for our generator, and can charge our batteries to our heart's content," I commented. "The next thing is to travel until we find the shore of this lake or sea, or whatever it is, and try to discover some way back to the surface. At any rate, we can't very well afford to stay here and twiddle our thumbs."

"But how, in the name of Jupiter, are we going to travel—build a boat or something?" Teddy asked curiously. "We haven't any material."

"Let's rest and recuperate for a while," I suggested. "And while we do, I'll tell you my scheme."

\* \* \* \* \*

Five hours later we were under way. Our manner of locomotion was unique, to say the very least. It will be remembered that the *Penetrator* had four great climbing cog-wheels of eight huge teeth each, and it was these wheels which we utilized for the purpose of propelling the great, clumsy machine over the strange sea of crude oil.

During our terrific fall one of the great cog-wheels had become completely smashed, and in consequence the main fuse of the climbing apparatus had blown, fortunately stopping it, and thus saving the rest from damage. The broken wheel was almost in line with the manhole, which was again lucky for us. We disconnected it and the one next to it from the circuit, and connected the two on the opposite side in such manner that they could act on the heavy oil, and propel the *Penetrator* forward, acting similarly to the paddles of a river steamer, while a slight change in the adjustment of the wheels enabled us to steer our craft.

While I managed our clumsy craft, Teddy took his station at the open manhole, to the side of which we had clamped an improvised search light of a cluster of high-power nitrogen lamps and a large silvered lamp shade. He was the captain, so to speak, and I was chief engineer.

By means of a small compass, I steered in a general westerly direction. This might appear ridiculous at that depth in the earth. But it was really the only way of getting somewhere, and prevented us from running in circles. Meanwhile both of us amused ourselves with guessing what we would find at the end of our voyage.

### The Flying Mystery

WE had been traveling thus for a number of hours, when a sudden shout from my nephew called me quickly to his side. He was staring intently at something high up, far ahead of us.

"What's the matter? What are you looking at?" I inquired, curiously.

He shook his head and frowned perplexedly.

"I don't exactly know, Uncle Ned," he said, "but I could almost swear that just a moment ago I saw something move, way up there—something like a large white bat—just beyond the ray of the searchlight."

I leaned back and laughed uproariously.

"A bat! And at this depth in the earth. That's the best joke I've heard for a long time, Teddy!"

He grinned somewhat sheepishly, but kept on staring into the mysterious shadows far ahead of us.

"It does sound rather ridiculous," he admitted. "But at the same time—There! there!—don't you see it?" he interrupted himself excitedly, "—about forty-five degrees up and straight ahead of us?"

With both hands I shaded my eyes from the glare of the searchlight, and gazed intently to where he pointed. For a few moments I could discern nothing. Then I saw it—a whitish, fluttering object, which the reflection from our searchlight's beam revealed indistinctly in the surrounding gloom.

To say that I was amazed would be putting it mildly. For some minutes I was unable to do anything but peer silently at that inexplicable phenomenon. A bat or bird down here? It was utterly beyond reason. Undoubtedly it was some sort of flying creature, for as my sight became better adjusted, I could distinctly see the slow beat of its white wings. But the peculiar thing about it was the fact that, with relation to the *Penetrator*, it appeared to be stationary. Quite obviously it was going in the same direction as we, and at exactly the same speed.

"Why, it's impossible!" I said, when my astonishment finally allowed me to speak. "There can't possibly exist any living creature at this depth!"

It was Teddy's turn now to laugh.

"Quite true, uncle o' mine," he chaffed. "True theoretically, I admit. But there it is just the same, all argument and theory to the contrary. Question before the house is: What is it? And why is it?"

I shook my head in bewilderment. "I haven't the least idea. What do you think?"

"How about a pterodactyl, or some other one of those pre-historic fowls?" he hazarded . . . "Couldn't it be one of those?"

"Rubbish!" I snorted in disgust. "Just remember that those 'pre-historic fowls,' as you call them, were carnivora.\* What possible animal food could they find to live on down here, sixty-five miles below the surface of earth? Try again."

Teddy frowned thoughtfully, peering ahead at the object under discussion. He threw out his hands in a giving gesture.

"I don't know, of course," he admitted, "and one

\* They lived on animal food.



guess is as good as another; but isn't it possible there might be other animals down here on which they feed?"

"Sure, why not?" I mocked. "Soon we'll come to a cabbage patch, with rabbits and things in it, and there'll be a house or two, and some hearty farmer and his buxom wife will be calling to us to stay and have lunch with them."

With that I left Teddy to his speculations, and went back to my difficult task of running and directing my awkward vessel on its uncertain course, wondering meanwhile what and where our destination would be, and if we would ever be able to return again to our own world. Or would we, I thought, die a miserable death down there in that subterranean world of unknown dangers?

An hour or so later Teddy called to me again.

"A strange thing happened just now," he announced, animatedly. "I was watching that thing ahead, when suddenly a long, thin ray of greenish-white light flashed from it four or five times in rapid succession. And almost immediately afterwards there was a similar flashing somewhere far ahead, as if there was another one of them, and they were signalling to each other."

"Signalling!" I snorted incredulously. "Maybe it's an underground mail-plane," I added, sarcastically, "signalling to the aerodrome that it's going to land."

"Great Jupiter!" cried Teddy, suddenly, gazing at me in strange excitement, "I believe—" Then, evidently anticipating further ridicule on my part, he caught himself, and went back to his business of looking ahead for land.

I wondered in amusement what new idea had come into his fertile mind. Then I resumed my fruitless speculation about how we were going to get back to the surface. Impatiently I wished that we might land somewhere, and find out the why and the how of things.

## CHAPTER IV

### An Incredible Discovery

"LAND ahead!"

At Teddy's long-awaited, welcome call I rushed to his side, and together we viewed the strange shore ahead, which, in a startlingly vivid white cliff formation, rose from that black ocean of oil like a world of spirits from the darkness of night. Its lofty walls reached to unfathomable heights, and on either side it stretched its ghostly arms until it shaded into impenetrable gloom beyond the range of our searchlight.

As we drew nearer, it was plainly evident that there was no beach, such as the waves of water on the surface form, simply because down here there was no wind, and consequently no motion existed in this strange sea of oil and water.

"It'll be difficult to find a landing, I suppose," I said to Teddy. "We'll have to nose in very carefully and see what we can discover."

Very slowly we worked the *Penetrator* around a low peninsula which jutted out like a long, white and curved arm, into the tiny bay which it partly enclosed. Foot by foot we eased the great machine into the innermost curve of the peninsula, where there was a rocky shelf which, in my opinion, would make an ideal landing

place; provided, of course, the deep draft of the *Penetrator* allowed it to approach closely enough. But apparently at that point the white cliff dropped straight down into the depths, for, with the motors completely stopped, our clumsy vessel finally bumped gently against the rock shelf without having touched bottom once.

By means of a small extension ladder, which we laid from the lip of the manhole to the shore, we landed quickly, fastening the *Penetrator* to projections in the rock. And now that the motors and the climber machine were stopped, we perceived that the silence was profound—a tomb-like silence, which, in some indefinable manner which neither of us could explain, seemed menacing.

"I wonder what became of our friend, the bat?" Teddy said, musingly, staring into the deep shadows overhead. "Do you know, Uncle Ned, I think we were very foolish to come without weapons. I have a queer feeling that from somewhere in that darkness about us something is watching us with hostile intentions."

"Rubbish!" I answered. "What, in Jonah's name, would we do with any weapons down here where there isn't anything to shoot at? You're letting your imagination run away with you again, Teddy. Whatever it was has no doubt been scared away by our coming, and chances are we'll never see it again."

After eating a substantial lunch, we equipped ourselves with a canteen full of water and our powerful flashlights, together with some extra batteries, and started out on an exploring trip. We left the searchlight turned on and struck inland along the avenue of its powerful beam, which we had directed straight towards the great cliff walls beyond the strip of plateau on which we were standing.

It was rather rough going, for the rock was very uneven, and as sharp and hard as glass. Apart from its color it reminded me of obsidian and of lava. Small pieces of it which our feet happened to strike gave off clear musical sounds.

"These rocks would be great for a xylophone." Teddy commented jokingly. "When we have settled down for good down here, and I have a lot of spare time, I'll build one and start a jazz band."

"Yes." I said, falling in with his mood. "And you might be able to get your friend, Mr. Bat, to beat the drums for you."

We had traveled about a hundred yards or so, heading for a gap in the cliff, when suddenly a peculiar sound broke the sepulchral silence, and brought us to an abrupt halt.

It was as if somewhere, a long distance away, in the direction of the cliff, an immense bell or gong had been struck, the unutterably deep tone of which trembled through the vastness of the cavern in a manner which was indescribably weird and awesome.

"What in Jupiter's name is that, Uncle Ned?" Teddy's voice was tense with excitement, and his eyes shone eagerly as he stared in the direction of the strange sound.

I shook my head bewilderedly. "You've got me. I haven't the least idea what it can possibly be," I confessed. "But undoubtedly it was due to some natural cause."

We were at the black gap in the cliff now, and discovered that it was not a gap at all, but the mouth of some other cavern or some passage piercing the vast white wall of stone.

"It seems to me the sound we heard must have come from that opening," I suggested. "It probably leads to another cave."

"Very likely," Teddy agreed, "and maybe there we'll also find the explanation for that flying mystery."

"Teddy, I've just about come to the conclusion that your white bat was merely an optical illusion on the part of both of us," I said, thoughtfully. "It was probably due to some defect or speck in one of the light globes, greatly magnified by the curved reflector."

"But you are evidently forgetting the flashes of green light, Uncle Ned," said Teddy, grinningly. "Do specks generally signal to each other."

"You never can tell!" I answered, grinning back at him. "They might, at that!"

### A Vast City!

**W**E switched on our flashlights and entered the black opening in the cliff. A current of fresh air met us, indicating that there was a space or passage somewhere beyond, which might possibly connect with the surface. Otherwise, how could this current of fresh air be explained?

It was an irregular, zig-zagging passage in which we found ourselves, evidently following a natural cleavage between two rock formations, and the floor of it dipped and rose continually. The height too varied anywhere from twenty to fifty feet or so.

We must have been traveling through the passage for a mile or more, when suddenly it took a sharp turn to our right, and about one hundred feet ahead of us we saw its end, outlined sharply with bright orange-colored light!

This totally unexpected phenomenon brought us to an abrupt stop.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Teddy, in astonishment. "If I didn't know better, I'd say that we have arrived at the surface, and that there is old Sol himself shining in and welcoming us back."

"That light is probably the reflection of volcanic fires," I suggested. "And quite likely we shall find that the peculiar booming sound we heard a while back was due to the explosion of volcanic gases."

But my nephew scarcely stopped to listen. With an impetuous dash he covered the remaining yards to the mouth of the passage, and a few moments later I heard his cry of utter amazement. I joined him quickly then, and together we gazed in wordless awe at the incredible spectacle before us.

Several hundred feet below the mouth of the passage there opened a wide valley—of blue-green meadows, and of vast fields of green and gold and purple, and of strange, immense trees of brilliant coloring, extending into the far distance beyond the reach of our vision.

At first, coming out of the darkness of the passage, our eyes were rather blinded by the strong, golden light which poured down over all that strange land from what appeared to be a great number of miniature suns, high up in the unfathomable heights above.

Gradually, as our eyes became accustomed to the glare, our vision extended, so that presently, far in the distance, we saw the glistening waters of a great river, which appeared to traverse the valley in a diagonal direction. And upon the far bank of the river, shining like a multitude of glistening white monuments, we saw a vast city!

As if drawn by a magnet, we stepped forth from the mouth of the passage, keeping our fascinated gaze riveted upon that marvellous sight. A subterranean city! It passed my comprehension.

Suddenly, without the least warning, we heard the rapid beating of many wings about us, and the next moment an avalanche of winged creatures hurled themselves upon us from the air. I began to struggle violently, knocking my assailants to right and left. A quick anxious glance showed me that with his great strength and boxing prowess my nephew had downed three or four of them. Then something icy cold touched the back of my neck, and suddenly every vestige of strength seemed to be withdrawn from my body, leaving it numb and lifeless.

But—strange circumstance—although my entire body was now in a sort of cataleptic state, yet my senses of sight and hearing remained unimpaired, and I could note quite clearly everything that was going on.

Evidently Teddy had met the same fate at almost the same time, for out of the corner of one eye I perceived his still, rigid form lying nearby. I tried to call out to him, but found that my vocal chords were likewise paralyzed. Then I turned my attention to our strange captors, so far as I could, with a rigid head and neck, and closely observed those within my range of vision.

Undoubtedly they were human beings. Their bodies were well developed, and they seemed of average human height. But their shoulders and necks were extraordinarily massive, and I immediately perceived the reason for this: The head of each was almost double the size of either Teddy's or mine!

But there was another thing about these strange people which astonished me—their extraordinary fairness, and the vivid coloring of their intelligent, mobile features.

### The Winged People

**H**OWEVER, there was not the least doubt in my mind of their sex, for they were all of strong, masculine type. One of them stood at my feet with his back turned to me, and I had an excellent chance to study his flying apparatus. It was of apparently simple mechanical construction, and there was none of the complicated machinery with which we of the surface world are familiar. With deep interest I observed the simple and effective way in which they had folded back the large, bat-like wings of a peculiar, almost transparent fabric, and I wondered what their driving power might be.

The powerful wings were attached to a sort of metallic shield on the back, resembling the cellular structure of a honey-comb, which in its turn seemed to be strongly fastened to two wide belts of heavy, shining fabric, colored with alternate vertical, purple and yellow stripes. To the loins was fastened a pair of very short pants,

almost like athletic trunks, and another belt was passed about the chest, tightly laced, and held up by broad straps passing over the shoulders. They wore no head-covering over their long, black hair, but their feet were encased in laced boots, to the back of which the lower ends of the wings were attached.

However, I had only a few moments in which to observe all this, for almost immediately four men, each grasping one of my limbs, placed me upon my back in a sort of net. Before I had time to wonder about the meaning of this, they unfolded their wings in a way I could not discern, and each of them clutched a corner of the net on which I lay. The next moment they rose high into the air with me, and the yellow glare of the many little suns, far, far above us, beat unmercifully down into my face, so that I had to shut my eyes tightly. With an ever growing wonder I speculated as to what those strange lights might be, and who or what these remarkable subterranean people were.

Then, too, I worried about my nephew, and hoped nothing worse had happened to him than to me. What an extraordinary situation ours was, to be sure—to be carried through the air at a great height in a net, as a fish is carried to the shore in a seine, and towards a fate which, like that of a fish, might well end in death!

How long I was thus carried through the surprisingly fresh and sweet-smelling atmosphere of this amazing subterranean world I could not guess. But presently, from some distance ahead, came again that ominous booming sound which Teddy and I had heard in the other cavern. The sound was now much stronger, its deep reverberations awakening thunderous echoes far, far above us.

The booming had scarcely ceased, however, when there was the rushing sound of thousands of wings—above us, below, and on every side of us. And in addition to this a great murmuring noise rose from somewhere far below—the combined voice of a vast multitude of people.

I opened my eyes, and saw hundreds of flyers circulating in close proximity above us, some of whom I judged to be women, because their garb was less revealing and of a gayer color. There were also smaller forms—children. I thought about our children on the surface, and could imagine the immense fun some of our boys, and even girls, would have with such wings. But there was one thing which made these strange people kin to me—their unmistakable curiosity, and their comments in a peculiarly pleasant sounding language.

We descended rapidly now, and presently another sound insinuated itself into my consciousness. It was the rush and roar of rapidly flowing waters.

Then I thought of the large river that Teddy and I had seen, and the great city at its far bank. No doubt we had arrived at our destination. Gently, as if on springs, my four carriers landed with me upon an immense lawn of blue-green grass, and placed me on the feathery softness of it. Again I felt a metallic object pressed against the base of my neck; not icy cold this time, however, but of a pleasant warmth, accompanied by a delicious tingling sensation all over my body. With a rush, energy and life seemed to flow into my limbs again, and a few moments later I was able to rise and

gaze about me.

Three or four of our score of captors were watching me closely, probably remembering the weight of my fists against their anatomy, while others were holding back an immense crowd of curious people—some with wings, and some without—who were staring at me exactly as a similar crowd of my own people on the surface would have done under like circumstances. I guessed that our late captors were some sort of policemen, which supposition seemed to be borne out by the fact that each of them carried a sort of short club, a dark-colored stick with a gleaming metal ball on the end of it, which appeared to command considerable respect from the mob.

### A Serious Blunder

BY reason of my height of six feet and five inches I could easily look over the crowd at the great trees beyond them which surrounded the vast square—trees of exotic form and covered with immense flowers of brilliant hues, which filled the mild air with a most pleasant, spicy perfume.

But almost immediately my attention was drawn to the gigantic and lofty buildings—if one could call them such—beyond the trees, fantastic and unreal, rising to immense heights—

“Well, what do you make of it all, Uncle Ned?”

It was Teddy, of course, who rather startled me with the sudden question. He had approached me unheard on the soft grass, and now as I looked at him, glad that he was with me again, I noticed that his steel-blue eyes shone with eager pleasure as he gazed about him.

“Great Jupiter—what an adventure!” he said in a voice vibrating with joyous excitement. “I can’t help thinking that it’s all a dream, and that pretty soon I’ll wake up at home and in bed, wondering what I had eaten the evening before.”

His drollery tickled my sense of humor, and to the evident astonishment and entertainment of our guards and the spectators I broke into hearty laughter. “By the way, Teddy, how do you like a close-up of your white bats?” I queried.

He laughed merrily, and gazed with interest at a pretty girl nearby.

“Great!” he decided with conviction. “And what do you think of your signalling specks now, Uncle Ned?” he countered.

We had no time for further speech, however, for our guards now ranged themselves about us. Passing the gauntlet through the dense mass of staring and talking people, we were marched towards an immense, pyramid-like building of snowy whiteness looming nearby. A glance over my shoulder informed me that the mass of people were following us, some of them in the air, and some on foot, the latter not having donned their wings.

“For once in our sweet young life we are being escorted in proper style and with fitting ceremony,” I remarked facetiously to Teddy.

“We most certainly are,” he agreed grinningly. “All I miss is the confetti and ticker tape; the cheering and the brass bands; and the movie cameras and the reporters. But maybe they only have a monthly paper down here, and they’ll interview us later.”

There was a spacious court surrounding the great white pyramid, formed by a moderately high wall of ornamental pink stone. We passed through the wide-open portal in the wall, and headed straight for the entrance of the building. Behind us the mob of curious people streamed into the court, and continued to escort us to the very door.

And now our attention was attracted to two men, who apparently were awaiting us upon the topmost of the three wide steps that led to the deeply-vaulted entrance.

It was evident at a glance that these two were not ordinary men. Simple, toga-like garments of shining cloth-of-gold covered their bodies almost to the ankles, held together at the waist by loose belts of reddish metallic discs, and their feet were encased in slippers of an orange hue. Upon the bosom of his robe each wore a triangle formed of glittering amethysts.

But I immediately forgot everything else about them in amazed contemplation of their extraordinarily large craniums, far exceeding in size those of the other people about me. Their serene faces bore the impress of great wisdom, and from beneath their enormously bulging brows large, piercing eyes keenly regarded Teddy and me. Long wavy hair of snowy whiteness and silken texture framed their strong, virile, beardless faces, and fell down to their massive shoulders, greatly augmenting their compelling, venerable aspect. Somehow I received the impression of great age.

Involuntarily I found myself bowing deeply before them, and noted that Teddy followed my example.

They held out their hands to us in a grave gesture of welcome, and before our guards could prevent us, Teddy and I passed quickly up the steps and shook their hands in hearty United States fashion.

But it was immediately apparent that in doing this we had committed a serious blunder of etiquette. For the two venerable men drew back with a suddenness as if we had struck them in the face, and glared at us sternly; our guards clutched us and threw us violently to our knees; and behind us an angry, menacing roar went up from the assembled people.

However, it seemed that the two old men realized almost at once that our blunder had been due to ignorance only, for with a few sonorous words they quickly quieted the angry mob, and then motioned to our guards to release us. Giving us to understand by gestures that we were to follow them, they entered the building.

"It's plain that those two old fellows are labelled 'hands off,'" Teddy whispered to me as we were passing through the triangular portal. "Something like a high-caste Brahmin of India with relation to a Pariah, I guess. Contamination and all that sort of bunk."

"Yes; it appears that we got in bad right from the start," I admitted. "We'll have to be more careful in the future, it seems, or we'll be 'labelled' for an early funeral."

#### CHAPTER V

##### Taman, the Thrice Wise

**W**E found ourselves in a kind of antechamber, the walls of which were beautifully panelled in carved stone of alternate rose and softest green, polished brightly like marble. In the middle of each

one of these panels, amidst marvellously sculptured, intricate patterns of geometric design, a large triangle had been fashioned, within which were rows of peculiar characters, which I took to be hieroglyphic inscriptions. These panels, together with the alternate gold and black right-angled triangles of the highly polished, tessellated floor, gave to the whole a most artistic and stately effect.

Directly opposite the outer portal, in the far wall of the chamber, was a second doorway, shaped like a capital A with the top cut off, and closed with what appeared to be a single immense slab of black, polished stone. With slow, measured steps our two venerable guides approached this door, and stopped immediately before it. The one in front of me intoned, in a rising musical scale, three words of seemingly two syllables each. No sooner had he finished, than that which had appeared one solid slab of stone parted exactly in its middle, and its two parts slid noiselessly into the wall at either side, closing again behind us after we had passed through the door.

We traversed a short passage, and entered a vast chamber. Involuntarily Teddy and I stopped just within the threshold, and gazed about us in silent wonder. So immense and lofty was the place, and so brightly illuminated by four of the strange miniature suns high above us, that it almost seemed as if we had passed into the open again. But it was not this immense extent of the chamber which impressed us most—it was the bewildering array of a multitude of shining and glittering apparatus all over its vast, polished floor.

Without doubt this was a great scientific laboratory. A number of yellow-clad men, similar in appearance to our two guides, were serenely and quietly busy at various mysterious tasks about the laboratory. Some were operating huge apparatus of strange shapes, while others were apparently merely observing the action of other apparatus and taking notes upon metallic tablets with a sort of stylus, the points of which appeared to be illuminated with intense, bluish-white light.

With the analytic gaze of an entomologist studying a new insect, our two guides observed the reactions of Teddy and myself to our surroundings, and then motioned for us to continue following them. Some of the scientists glanced at us keenly as we passed them, and one or two smiled gravely, but none of them spoke.

But almost immediately the object which we were approaching claimed our entire attention. From a massive frame of transparent crystalline material were suspended the two horizontally cleft halves of an immense sphere of white metal, highly polished, one below the other, their greatest diameter being possibly twenty feet. Sandwiched between these two hemispheres, and apparently joining their surfaces together, was a great ball of what seemed polished jet, its diameter several feet less. Long rods of yellow-colored material, tapering to needle points, radiated from the huge hemispheres in all directions.

In close proximity to this strange apparatus was a large, oblong structure of yellowish, semi-transparent material, whose flat top was surrounded by a glistening railing. From this top a tongue-like platform jutted over towards the sphere of polished jet.

We entered this structure and found ourselves in an

oval room. And then, at the far end of the room, seated in a chair of crystal, *we saw the Presence*.

At first I was conscious only of a pair of large brilliant eyes, which seemed to penetrate to the innermost recesses of my being. Then, gradually, the other features of that tremendous personality entered into the field of my perception: the strong aquiline nose, the severe thin-lipped mouth, the wide, aggressive jaw, and the enormous, hairless dome of his head, upon which my gaze concentrated in awed fascination. His head was really as much larger than those of our two scientist guides as theirs were larger than ours. A short columnar neck upon extraordinarily massive shoulders supported his great head easily, however, holding it proudly erect. A majesty and power indescribable radiated from him, and there was the impress of awful wisdom in his serene, yet vivid, face.

Something flaming and glittering drew my gaze to the breast of his flowing robe of shining, snow-white cloth, and I perceived that it came from three right-angled triangles, arranged within one another, fashioned from finely-cut jewels. Below this symbol, a wide girdle of white, shining, metallic scales at the waist held together the loose folds of his dress, beneath the hem of which white, pointed slippers were visible.

With one accord we two adventurers bowed deeply before that awful presence, and with a medley of emotions not unmixed with fear awaited our fate.

The man in white spoke a few words to our two guides; his tone resembled the deeper flute notes of a pipe organ. From recesses in the wall the two scientists produced five pairs of small cones; five of the cones were of yellow metal, and the other, and larger, five were of white metal. By means of light straps they fastened one of the yellow cones to their superior's great forehead, and a white one to his solar plexus.

Quickly they equipped Teddy and me and also themselves with the peculiar cones. And then a remarkable phenomenon happened.

The man in white began to speak sonorously, and, to my utter amazement, I understood his every word as if he had spoken in plain English. A glance at Teddy apprised me that he too was experiencing the magic of the thing.

"Strangers of the outer world," came the deep voice, "I, Taman, called the Thrice Wise, governor of the Inner People, demand to know why you have entered this, our land?" It was a peremptory command, and behind the words lay a subtle, but unmistakable, menace.

In a few words I explained my great idea of the intercontinental shaft, and all subsequent happenings, up to the time when we were taken prisoners. Taman listened with concentrated interest, and when I had finished he smiled tolerantly.

"Your idea of thus piercing the earth is good," he said, in the manner of a grown person complimenting a child. "But I happen to know that it is impossible of execution."

"But—why?" I was deeply disappointed and no doubt showed it.

Taman rose from the crystal chair—a giant of a man.

"Come!" he said, curtly. "I shall answer your question in a practical manner."

## The Great Ocean!

WITH kingly dignity he led the way to the extreme other end of the chamber, where a very thick metallic cylinder rose upwards from the floor. Within this was a sort of elevator, by means of which the five of us rose quickly to the platform above. Near the edge of the tongue-like projection which I had already noticed from below was a short, heavy pedestal of white, semi-transparent stone, and on top of this was placed a large geographical globe of the Earth, perfect in every detail.

The globe, about three feet in diameter, was attached to a movable axis, and surrounding it vertically from pole to pole was a heavy, square-sided ring of white metal, from which radiated hundreds upon hundreds of needle-like rods in a halo-like manner.

Taman, the Thrice Wise, seated himself in the chair before the globe pedestal. Then by compressing a small lever in the pedestal he caused the globe to rotate slowly about its axis, until the American continent appeared opposite to him. He now stopped the globe and pointed to a certain spot that was designated by a peculiar symbol.

"Can you identify that spot?" he inquired of me.

"Certainly," I answered readily. "That is the location of our largest city, New York."

He nodded. "Watch closely now," he prompted, as with a long white index finger he pressed upon one of the hundreds of tiny yellow buttons ranged in circular rows upon the top of the pedestal. Instantly a slender stream of brightest violet fire flashed from one of the needle points in the vertical ring.

A quick motion of Taman's right hand directed my attention to the great ball of jet in the machine opposite us. About one of the long radial rods of the upper hemisphere played a beautiful, corona-like phenomenon of intense violet light, and simultaneously the sphere of jet appeared to become alive. A sort of maelstrom-like swirling effect of light and shade played within it for a few moments, and then both Teddy and I cried out in utter amazement.

For within the largest vertical plane of the great ball of jet had appeared a picture—a scene of color and intense animation as if we were gazing through a great round window, twelve feet or so in diameter, at the busy street of a great American city from quite close range.

Neither Teddy, nor myself was for a single moment puzzled about the identity of the street vision. For both of us had often visited the "Great White Way" of New York City. But the vision was there for scarcely a minute. Then the view shifted in rapid succession to Central Park, to Wall Street and its Stock Exchange, and finally to Brooklyn Bridge and a part of the busy harbor. Just the merest glimpse of each! Then in a flash everything went dark again within the mysterious sphere of jet, leaving my heart sore with a sudden and violent homesickness.

"That exhibition was not for your entertainment," Taman's sonorous voice announced. "It was to demonstrate two things: first, what this apparatus, which we call Zanoon, is capable of, and, secondly, that we, the

Inner People, know all about your world and the people living in it. You are now in a condition of mind to credit what I am about to show you next. Attend closely!"

He pressed another button—this time one of a semi-circle of black ones. Again the maelstrom effect of light and shade appeared within the great black ball, and when it cleared I perceived with a nervous jolt that it held the picture of the *Penetrator* at its moorings. The searchlight was still burning brightly, and within its radiance a great number of the Inner People were moving about, and were passing in and out of the man-hole continually. Quite evidently my machine was being thoroughly inspected inside and out.

For a few moments the vision held there. Then it was as if we were passing with great speed over the surface of the motionless sea of oil. We stopped. Then we were passing swiftly upwards. A great cone-like opening appeared diagonally above us. Again we stopped, and seemed to hover there motionless.

Suddenly I understood. The opening was undoubtedly the mouth of the fissure or volcanic duct through which the *Penetrator* had catapulted down. We now seemed to be directly over the spot on the strange sea below, from which a short time ago Teddy and I had started on our voyage of discovery. Truly, many things had happened since!

The vision moved downward—reached the surface of oil—and passed through it! Down—down—down! A few moments of indistinct blurred motion at inconceivable speed— Then the vision cleared again and we perceived a region of green light, within which moved, and floated, and crawled strange, grotesque, and terrible shapes. We saw among these subsea creatures a scene of sudden death, and carnage, and horrors unspeakable.

"Behold the reason why it is impossible to carry out your idea!" Taman spoke sententiously. "The great central ocean of the Earth!"

I was stunned. I could do nothing but stare dumbly at that stupendous spectacle of horrors in the infinitude of green water. Until now there had ever been in the back of my mind the idea of getting back to the surface somehow, building a new *Penetrator*, and starting down again in some other place. But this totally unexpected condition, this tremendous primal ocean at the very core of the Earth, had now absolutely crushed all my hopes!

"You are disappointed," said Taman, ironically. "But there is a still greater disappointment in store for you: Neither you nor your companion shall be permitted to return to your own world!" Saying which, he restored the Zanoon to normal condition and arose.

I stared at him aghast. "But—why—not?" I stammered. "Why are we not permitted to return to the surface?"

His great, intense eyes seemed suddenly pools of devouring fire, and his immense, bulging brow was deeply corrugated with awful wrath. "Because it is my sovereign will!" he thundered vehemently.

He waved his right hand toward the Zanoon.

"There is the answer! It is because for thousands of years we of the elect and our predecessors have studied and watched you people on the surface, and have found

without a doubt that you—those of your own color, especially—are an accursed, greedy and warlike race, who, if you learned of this subterranean land, would immediately try to wrest it from us who have lived here in peace ever since the days of the great cataclysm! Now do you understand?"

"But if we would take an oath that we will never divulge—" I began.

He interrupted me with a haughty gesture.

"The oath of a surface man is not worth the breath he uses to express it!" he said contemptuously. "Those who are your leaders make treaties, and pacts, and international laws and agreements continually, and continually break them when it is to their profit to do so. The proof of this is the almost continuous warfare between your white races. Do you dare to deny this?"

"I cannot deny that part of it," I said desperately. "But there are even among our white races plenty of honorable individuals who, when they once give their word of honor, never break it."

"Then why are not such men at the heads of your governments?" Taman asked, skeptically. "Why have not the people sufficient intelligence to elect those whom they know to be wise and honorable instead of those whom they cannot trust? But enough!"

He made an imperious sign of dismissal, and turned to our two guides.

"Have them housed in the topmost apartment of the tower, and see that no one communicates with them. The council will decide their fate."

## CHAPTER VI

### The Mysterious Woman

AS we were traversing the antechamber on our way out, a most remarkable young woman entered it from the court, followed by two others. All three of them were without wings, and were dressed in the usual feminine flying-garb of wider belts and of longer leg coverings than those of the men. But it was immediately apparent that the first young woman was of a higher type than any of those we had seen until now. Not only was this impression due to the more delicate coloring and artistic adornment of her dress, nor entirely to the proud and graceful carriage of her superb body; but there was that in her delicate, yet firmly molded, features, and in her large, dark, and heavily fringed eyes which proclaimed an unmistakable superiority of mind and character.

Royal! That was the thought which occurred to me as soon as I saw her. And that I was not mistaken was evidenced by the fact that, upon a word or two from her, our two distinguished, venerable scientist guides stopped and answered her quick questions with every manifestation of respectful courtesy. It was also quite clear to me that her questions related to Teddy and me, especially to my nephew, for, after a most cursory glance at me, she proceeded to concentrate all of her attention upon him. And it was likewise evident that Teddy's interest was fully equal to her own, for he gazed at her in breathless wonder.

Under his unconsciously rude stare, rich color quickly flooded her alabaster-like face, and her perfectly

formed, coral-red lips curved in a half-amused and half-embarrassed smile, which revealed her fine teeth of snowy whiteness. Her voice, a rich contralto of marvellous range, echoed through the chamber like a perfect musical tone when she spoke.

But evidently the answer of the two venerable men did not please her; for her broad, milk-white brow drew into a frown of displeasure, and in the manner of an impatient, spirited horse, she tossed her regal head, shaking back her black, silken tresses of long wavy hair. But quickly her frown gave place to a dazzling smile, which she directed exclusively at Teddy. After which she evidently thanked our guides for their information, answered their slow bow with one of her own, and, followed by her two pretty companions, continued on to the inner door whence we had just emerged.

Arrived outside of the portal, our venerable companions returned us into the keeping of our late captors, evidently transmitted to them the order of Taman, their chief, and reentered the building. I was seized with a desire to learn the language of these strange people and to discover their history. I wondered too what the conversation between the remarkable young lady and the two scientists had been. Truly it is a very great handicap to be ignorant of the language of a country in which one has to live, even transiently! Never until now had I been able to sympathize with the immigrants whom I had often seen entering the United States for the first time by way of Ellis Island, at New York City.

The great court surrounding the immense white pyramid was still crowded with curious people who, like similar crowds in our own land, were anxious to find out what the fate of the two venturesome strangers would be. Despite the exertions of our police guards they crowded ever closer to us in order to inspect us thoroughly; and especially Teddy's flaming red hair, and my uncommon height seemed to excite their admiration.

Having received their orders regarding us, the guards marched us out through the portal of the wall to the wide, tree-lined avenue which fronted upon the immense square where we had first landed. Then, followed by a concourse of thousands of curious people, we proceeded to our unknown destination—"the tower."

Teddy who, since our meeting with the fascinating young lady, had acted like a man in a dream, turned to me suddenly.

"Great Jupiter, Uncle Ned!" he burst out. "Did you ever in your life see anyone like her? Why—why—I find it hard to believe that she's real! I didn't think nature created anything so marvellously perfect and—and beautiful!"

Although I was occupied with sad and serious thoughts and by the realization that Teddy and I might never be able to return to the surface, my nephew's eager manner amused me.

"Got a bad case, haven't you, Teddy?" I remarked smilingly. "But, of course, I don't in the least blame you. I myself—"

"Great Jupiter, Uncle Ned—" he interrupted me, "you don't think—" And then he stopped in confusion and blushed all over his face and his neck.

"No, I don't think anything," I said laughingly. "But my eyes are as yet pretty good. However, let me give you a piece of fatherly advice, young man: If I am any judge of conditions, that fascinating young lady is labelled 'hands off,' as you would put it, in capital letters. Better be guided by that."

### In Jail!

AT the end of a few minutes of travel we arrived at the great portal of an immense building shaped like the frustum of a cone as I had noted from the distance. It was built of huge square stones, perfectly cut and fitted, like all the buildings I had so far observed, and its height must have been at least that of New York's tallest skyscraper. Small, round windows, something like the port-holes of a ship, dotted it all over, and I noted that those near at hand had crossed, metallic bars in front of them, fitted into the stone below the outer surface.

A massive, double door of metal admitted us to a great circular chamber or hall, from which many doors led to parts unknown. At two large stone tables about a dozen men were occupied with writing, using the same sort of metal tablets and light-tipped stylus that I had seen at the laboratory.

Four grim-faced men, under the command of a fifth still more grim, relieved our guards of their charge; orders were interchanged apparently; then we were marched to a huge tube, rising vertically from the center of the hall. By means of the elevator within this tube we were whisked upwards at high speed, and a few moments later stepped out into a hall similar to the one we had just left, but much smaller. Four doors, at right angles to each other, opened off from it, and through an aperture in the glass-like roof, to which a comfortable stair of metal led, I glimpsed the golden light of the outer space. Doubtless we had arrived at the topmost apartment which the order of Taman had called for. Furthermore, I had by this time no doubts whatever about the identity of the building. There could be no mistake: Teddy and I were in jail!

He whom I rightly took to be the head jailer led us to one of the doors, flung it open, and disclosed what was evidently a bathroom, divided into two parts by means of a painted or glazed metallic wall—I could not determine which—that came halfway across the room towards the door. In each compartment there was a sort of tabouret on which a set of loin and breast belts had been laid out and under each was a pair of the soft, native, laced boots.

With easily understandable pantomime and grimaces, the head jailer conveyed to Teddy and me his wish that we discard our own clothing, take a bath in the sunken, glassy bathtubs, and then array ourselves in the native dress laid out for us. His heavy, scowling face seemed to intimate that unless we obeyed the order promptly we would be quartered, or boiled in oil, or some such other pleasant prospect. Then, having completed his pantomime to his personal satisfaction, and to the evident secret amusement of his grinning underlings, the head jailer and his men made their exit by way of the elevator, and we were left to our own devices.

Teddy, always a fastidious dresser, viewed with dis-



may the scanty native dress provided. "Great Jupiter!" he cried in disgust. "Are we really expected to wear these abbreviated two-piece bathing-suits?"

"Do as you like," I commented, getting ready for my bath. "But as far as I can see, we have to obey orders, or suffer the consequences. Our friend, old bear-face, the head jailer, looked as if he would rather enjoy a quick lunch out of my leg at the slightest provocation."

Teddy laughed.

"He did look rather tough," he admitted. "Reminded me of an old ex-pug whom I often boxed with. Well, I guess I'll have to get used to the change in fashion."

"Say, Uncle Ned!" Teddy thoughtfully called over the partition a few moments later. "That girl—I wonder who she is? Did you ever see such eyes—such a mouth—such a—"

With a snort of disgust I dove into the bath and let him rave on. The water was not only of an invigorating temperature, but there was a surprising quality in it—an energizing, tingling something—that was positively delightful. Never in my life had I taken a more enjoyable bath. There was a crystalline container with some sort of liquid and deliciously aromatic soap which furnished a most amazing lather, and on the wall were several knobs by the manipulation of which I was able to control both the temperature of the water and its peculiar energizing and tingling effect, which I suspected to be due to some electrical quality in it.

"Isn't there a towel on your side of the fence, Uncle Ned?" Teddy asked grumblingly. "I've looked everywhere and can't find one. I'll bet a dozen new socks the laundry-man is out on a spree and forgot to leave any."

### Contented Jail-Birds

I HAD not thought about a towel. My searching gaze revealed not a towel, but a deep niche in the wall, a trifle higher than a tall man, to which a narrow grating led from my bath. The back of the niche was formed by a sort of perforated screen of metal.

"Just a minute, Teddy!" I called with sudden understanding. The next minute I had stepped into the niche. And no sooner had my feet touched the grating on its floor than a warm blast of air played all over my body, coming from the perforated screen.

"I've found the towel, Teddy!" I announced with the pride of the discoverer, and explained it to him.

"It's a great scheme," he called back a moment later. "It ought to sell easily back home. Let's incorporate!" he added with a laugh.

"What—again?" I cried in simulated alarm, humoring him. "Why not wait until we've put that oil deal over, Teddy! Let's not bite off more than we can comfortably chew."

"Chew!" he cried animatedly, and smacked his lips. "That reminds me: I'm as hungry as a healthy bear just back from hibernating. When and where do you suppose we eat, Uncle Ned?"

"Ask me another," I said peevishly, struggling into the breast belt which our amiable jailer had provided. "As soon as I can manage to wiggle myself into this corset thing here, we'll go on a foraging expedition."

In front of the door we met, looked each other over,

and simultaneously roared with spontaneous laughter.

"Great Jupiter, Uncle Ned!" exclaimed Teddy, weak with laughter, "you look exactly like Knute Larsen, the terrible Swede."

"And you, with your sunburn and burning hair, look like Umpum-wumpum-wuff, chief of the head-hunter islands," I came back at him.

The foraging expedition proved highly successful, for in the adjoining room we found a cold lunch laid out, consisting of an amazing variety of strange fruits, mysterious salad-like dishes, several different kinds of meat and fish, and a sort of spongy, salted cake which made an excellent substitute for bread. There was also milk to drink, which reminded me of goat's milk, and in addition a sort of mildly effervescent beverage, evidently of fruit juices, that aroused our whole-hearted enthusiasm. All in all it was an exceedingly satisfying meal.

"If that's the way they feed jail-birds here, I'd rather be in jail than out," said Teddy with a grin, leaning back contentedly.

"Maybe," I said skeptically. "But I have an idea that this is not the regular prison fare. Ask Taman, the Thrice Wise."

"What a tremendous personality!" Teddy said, musingly. "Wonder what he meant by saying that the 'Inner People,' as he calls his race, have lived here ever since the 'great cataclysm'?"

"I've been thinking about that," I answered thoughtfully. "And it has occurred to me that, at one time, these people, or rather their ancestors, might have lived on the surface, and that, owing to some great natural convulsion, or possibly some sudden climatic change like a glacial period, they were compelled to immigrate into this subterranean land."

"Sounds reasonable," Teddy agreed. "They must have been living here for ages, though; because at college we went into the ancient histories pretty thoroughly, and in none of them was there ever a word mentioned about any subterranean people."

"Don't worry," I said ironically. "You'll have plenty of time to get acquainted with their history if, as our friend Taman pointed out quite emphatically, we have to spend the rest of our life down here."

"That's right, too," he said frowningly, "I'd forgotten about that little thing." Then, as a quick, dreamy smile replaced his frown: "But there might be agreeable compensation. That girl—"

I rose hastily. "Come on, let's explore the rest of our jail," I suggested, and passed quickly out into the hall.

The metallic stairway attracted me. I ascended it rapidly, and found myself on a flat circular roof, which was entirely surrounded by a stone parapet, some three feet or so high. Teddy joined me, and together we leaned our elbows on the parapet and gazed upon the strangest city anyone could ever hope to see.

## CHAPTER VII

### Another Meeting

I N a direction away from the near-by great river, and toward either hand as far as our vision could reach, extended a vast multitude of strange pyramidal and

conical structures. A geometric city!

It was a fantastic array of pyramids and frustums of pyramids—triangular and square—hexagonal and octagonal and others. And cones, and frustums of cones, there were—tall and squat, and thick and slender; and like the pyramidal varieties in many colors, among which white and rose predominated. But if the shape and sizes of the buildings differed, their arrangement in relation to one another was of the most perfect geometrical harmony. The beautiful, artistic gardens with which nearly every house was surrounded, and the stately, flower-bedecked trees that lined both sides of every avenue and street and encircled all the squares, vastly augmented the collective harmonic effect, and rendered the whole strangely beautiful and exotically fascinating.

There was, however, one building in the distance, apparently near the edge of the city, which seemed to differ from all the others—a great hemispherical structure of a flaming crimson color. We wondered idly what sort of place it could possibly be—little dreaming of the terrible significance it was soon to have for us.

If the city itself was greatly interesting to us, its inhabitants were even more so. A vast multitude of them animated the broad avenues and streets, busily hurrying to and fro, like the people in any American city, while other thousands flew and fluttered and glided at different speeds in the bluish-colored air above the city; their colored loin and breast belts, together with their flashing, semi-transparent wings, reminding me of flocks of gamboling tropical birds. Idly we commented upon their probable mode of life, and wondered whether among them there was as much poverty and misery and discontent as among our own people.

Suddenly a great rushing noise sounded from the direction of the river, and a minute later a huge bird passed by far overhead at a speed which could not have been less than a mile a minute.

"By Jonah!" I cried in amazement. "Do you see what I see, Teddy? Or am I dreaming? That bird seemed to be as big as any airplane I ever saw."

Teddy, who was as astonished as I was, turned to me and grinned.

"I saw it all right, all right," he admitted. "Never again will I doubt the story of Sinbad the sailor after this. But Sinbad's bird must have been a mere chick compared to that monster there. Tell you what, though, Uncle Ned, I'll bet anybody a dozen brand-new socks that what we saw wasn't a bird at all."

For a moment I stared at him, and then realization came to me. "And I bet you'd win, Teddy!" I cried animatedly. "I remember now—the bird had neither feathers nor legs. It was simply a marvellous flying machine, using wing power like a bird."

We had watched the swift flight of the great, bird-like flying machine, and now perceived others of its kind, passing rapidly back and forth far above the level of the individual flyers. We concluded that they were probably freight carriers between the different parts of this strange land, and our respect for the ingenuity of its inhabitants grew.

"Of course, I doubt whether those machines would fly at the surface," I commented. "We must always

remember that the density of the air down here is very much greater than in our own world, which in regard to machine flying is bound to make an immense difference."

Teddy nodded. "I wish I had a pair of those wings, though," he said longingly. "It must be a lot of fun to fly around like that."

"I don't know about that," I said dubiously. "Personally I prefer the solid ground for traveling. But on the other hand, if we don't care to spend the rest of our life down here, it might come in handy to know how to fly one of those things. If the ancestors of this race of people ever lived on the surface of the earth, then they must have come down somewhere. It's up to us to discover where, and then watch our chance to escape."

Teddy was just going to answer me, when there was the quick beat of wings behind us, and we turned just in time to witness the graceful landing upon the roof of the fascinating young lady who had been in my nephew's mind since our meeting in the antechamber of the great pyramid.

With a peculiar motion of her elbows she caused her wings to fold neatly out of the way, and then, with the effortless graceful movements of perfect bodily co-ordination, she tripped rapidly over to where we stood. I immediately noticed that she was equipped with a set of the marvellous "communication-cones"—that is what I had named them—and that she had brought two other sets with her. She gave me a glance and smile of recognition, and then proceeded to devote her entire attention to my nephew.

I smiled to myself. Quite evidently it was a double case of love at first sight. I could not blame either of them, however. For while the girl was of a most extraordinary beauty and charm, Teddy looked like a young Greek god. The scanty native costume of green and gold exhibited to the fullest advantage the most unusual physique which his athletic college training had given him, and this, together with his strongly masculine, finely chiselled features, clear steel-blue eyes, and remarkable wavy hair of ruddy-gold, made a fascinating combination for any girl.

### A Dangerous Encounter

FOR a few moments they just stood and gazed at each other. Then, just as she was about to hand Teddy a set of communication-cones, a swift shadow passed over the roof, and the next instant a large darkly handsome native in crimson and gold landed by the girl's side. Not taking time even to close his wings, the man grasped her roughly by the arm, and jerked her away from my nephew's side. He addressed her in quick short sentences, and from the vicious frown on his great, bulging forehead, and the glitter in his large, dark eyes, it was easily evident that he was intensely angry.

However, it became at once apparent that the girl had a temper of her own. With a quick motion of her marvellously modeled arms she shook off the grasp of her countryman, and her queenly head snapped proudly erect. Her eyes were blazing with cold anger, and when she spoke to him, her words sounded haughtily icy.

But it seemed that the big man in crimson was not easily abashed, for he gripped the girl's arm again and spoke to her in a threatening, exasperated manner. But at this moment Teddy stepped up to the man and from the set of his jaw I knew that some decisive action was imminent, and I thrilled with pleasurable anticipation. His left hand clamped down upon the fellow's wrist, and his right on the elbow. A quick pressure upon a certain nerve, and with a cry of pain and fury the girl's aggressor released her arm precipitately and turned against her self-appointed protector.

The man in crimson was a trifle taller than my nephew, and also quite a bit heavier, and it was evident that he expected an easy victory. But a quick glance assured me that the girl's eyes were fixed upon Teddy with an expression of utter confidence in his prowess. It warmed my heart towards her.

The big native made a vicious pass at my nephew's head, which, if it had landed, would perhaps have terminated matters right then and there. Not without reason, however, had Teddy been the boxing champion of his college. He merely rolled his head aside, and as the man's own momentum jerked him forward, sent a stiff uppercut to his jaw which caused him to stagger several paces backwards. But the blow merely served to increase his fury, and he came on again, charging like a raging bull and swinging his powerful arms like flails. Teddy coolly watched him advance, and then, side-stepping neatly, floored him with a solar plexus blow.

But evidently the man in crimson was tough, for in a few moments he had caught his breath again and returned to the attack. However, he appeared more cautious this time, and I thought that I detected cunning in his eyes.

"Look out, Teddy—he's up to some trick!" I warned.

Suddenly the man whipped from his loin-belt one of the peculiar clubs we had seen the police use. I happened to glance at the girl, and saw her blanch, while an expression of fear leaped to her eyes. I wondered amazedly why the sight of a mere club should induce such an emotion in her. Clearly she was afraid for my nephew, terribly afraid.

The native gave a quick leap forward, and at the same time lunged against Teddy with the club as if it had been a sword. But with his trained quickness of eye my nephew had seen it coming. He side-stepped, bent down, and with the same motion brought up his left arm in an upward sweep, striking his knuckles sharply against his aggressor's wrist. With a cry of rage the latter dropped the club and nursed his wrist; the next moment he had leaped on top of the parapet, started his wings, and rose into the air. A score of feet above us he circled, and I could see that his face was black with rage. He called to Teddy sharply in the native tongue, and, although I could not of course understand what he was saying, there was such utter menace expressed in his tone that I shuddered involuntarily. I glanced at the girl and knew from the expression on her face that the man in crimson had uttered some terrible threat. Twice he circled the roof and then flew rapidly away.

I turned to my nephew.

"Teddy, boy, I am very much afraid you've put your foot into a considerable jam," I said anxiously. "I have an idea that this fellow was a person of considerable importance, and whatever he said when he was leaving, I don't think it sounded like a blessing, nor an invitation for dinner."

He laughed unconcernedly. "I should worry what he said. Anyway, I think he has learned that it's not good for his general health to get rough with this young lady when little Teddy is around."

The young lady in question had watched him with intense admiration, and now when he turned to her again, rich color flooded her delicately rounded cheeks. She offered both of us the communication-sets she had brought, and when we had adjusted them to our heads and solar plexuses, she spoke to Teddy immediately.

"Dear friend, do you know what you have done for yourself by protecting me in such knightly manner?" she began gravely. "You have made a very powerful enemy. The man whom you so bravely defeated is named Sarro. He is the eldest son of the former governor of Raa, this city, and holds the very important position of Minister of Police."

I tried to flash Teddy an I-told-you-so glance. But he did not pay any heed to me. His entire attention was fixed upon the girl.

"But why did he treat you so brutally?" he demanded. "What did he want of you? He certainly didn't act like a gentleman."

"Sarro desires me in marriage," she explained simply. "Therefore he is extremely jealous, and annoys me very much. He is also very proud, and I know he will never rest until he has finally revenged himself for the insult to his pride which you have inflicted on him. He is absolutely remorseless, and I am very much afraid for your safety." Her expressive eyes, large and velvety, appeared deeply troubled.

Teddy surprised me by taking one of her slender, white hands tenderly between both his own, and then further astonished me by raising it to his lips in the most approved movie hero fashion. But apparently he did it almost unconsciously, and his face was quite grave as he looked into the lovely eyes of the girl. He seemed to have something weighty on his mind, and I wondered what it was.

"I am not the least bit afraid of Sarro, even if he is the Minister of Police," he said simply, as if that matter were of the least possible consequence. "But please answer me one question: Do you—er—care for him?"

Her head snapped proudly erect, and her eyes blazed suddenly.

"I hate him!" she cried vehemently. "I will never marry him, although Taman, the Governor, desires it. I am Noama, the granddaughter of Taman, the Thrice Wise, you see," she explained.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A Fatal Weapon

**E**VIDENTLY her words had removed completely whatever secret anxiety my nephew had harbored; for now he suddenly smiled at her in his

old, care-free manner. His eyes shone with a warm light as he bowed in acknowledgement of her informal introduction, without, however, releasing her hand—a fact which neither of them seemed to notice.

"Noama—Noama," he said, experimentally, his voice caressing the words. "I have never before heard such a beautiful name!"

Noama blushed deeply, but made no attempt to withdraw her hand from his grasp. Her great dark eyes glowed with a wonderful light.

"But you have not yet told me your own name, my friend," she reminded him gently. And then, when my nephew had complied: "Tedde-e—Tedde-e," she enunciated softly. "Why, I think that Tedde-e is so much more beautiful a name than my own, my friend."

Things were getting decidedly too uncomfortable for me as the third of the party, and I determined to butt in then. I had meanwhile carefully picked up by its handle the peculiar club that Sarro had dropped so precipitately, and now held it out to Noama.

"Will you kindly inform me what sort of weapon this is?" I asked courteously. "Is it a club to strike with?"

She shook her head and smiled dreamily. Then, with evident reluctance, she disengaged her hand from Teddy's grasp, and took the object under discussion from me.

"No, it is not a weapon to strike with," she explained. "This metal ball contains a great number of tiny chemical globules, which, when the liquid from this handle is sprayed onto them by means of pressing down this small lever with the thumb, can temporarily draw from the atmosphere an enormous amount of positive electricity. When the ball is thus charged and is touched to any body or thing of conductive material the result is quite destructive, because then the high pressure electricity is instantly released. We call this weapon Kra, which in our language means destroyer. Come, I will demonstrate its power."

Taking Teddy by the hand she led him to the stairway and down to one of the two rooms which as yet we had not explored. It was brightly illuminated by the golden outside light which came in through the round windows, and contained several peculiar forms of apparatus along its walls which at once excited my liveliest curiosity. There were also several shelves like bookcases in one corner, crammed with the remarkable metallic tablets which I had seen in use at the great laboratory, as well as in the receiving hall of the prison.

"This is the entertainment and study room," Noama explained. "You see, this part of the prison is reserved for prisoners of high rank, and for that reason special arrangements are made for their comfort."

She walked towards the massive stone table which stood near the outer side of the room, and behind her back Teddy and I grinned at each other.

"Did you get that—'prisoners of high rank?'" he whispered. "There's no use talking; blue blood, like murder, will out!" Whereat I gave him a hard dig in the ribs and told him to shut up.

Noama picked up one of several thick metallic books that lay on the table. She rapidly turned its thin pages of flexible metal to make sure that there was no writing

in it, and then told us to watch. We saw her press her thumb on a small lever in the lower part of the Kra's handle, and a moment later she lightly touched with the glittering ball of the weapon the heavy metal cover of the book she had examined. There was a vivid, blue-white flash of fire, accompanied by a sound like the ripping of cloth. Teddy and I then stared in utter astonishment at a hole, fully one inch in diameter, which the electric charge had burned clear through the entire thickness of the book to the stone table on which it lay.

Teddy emitted a long whistle of astonishment. "Some little club, isn't it, Uncle Ned? Luckily I am fast with my fists, or you would be attending little Teddy's funeral by now."

Our astonishment and Teddy's comment amused Noama, and her musical laugh delighted us both.

"Of course, the handle of the Kra is of almost absolute insulating quality," she continued her explanation. "And another feature of the weapon is that the quantity of energizing liquid which is sprayed onto the chemical pellets can be regulated, so that a touch of the Kra may induce merely temporary paralysis of the muscles."

"All of which explains fully our experience when we were taken prisoners," I observed to Teddy.

"Yes, that was what they did to you," Noama concurred. "And later your guards merely restored you to normalcy by means of a Loo, an instrument shaped similarly to a Kra, but which absorbs negative electricity only, and is used for resuscitation, as well as for the quick healing of wounds and broken bones."

Teddy gazed at her wonderingly.

"I am beginning to think that, so far as scientific knowledge is concerned, and probably other things too, we surface people are in an elementary stage compared to you marvelous Inner People. Take for instance these wonderful communication-cones here, by means of which we are able to converse easily, without ever having learned each other's language. It seems pure magic. I can't understand it."

Noama smiled at him tolerantly.

"But it's not so wonderful after all, Tedde-e. It means merely the utilization of another one of nature's laws. As you know, when we desire to communicate our thoughts to others, certain images form in our minds, which in a passive mental state radiate in all directions like invisible waves. But by our volition we are able to radiate these thought waves strongly in one direction, or to one person only in a given case, one way of expressing our thought being in the form of audible language. Is that clear to you?"

"Perfectly, so far. I am deeply interested."

#### Noama Is Curious

**W**ELL then, those cones—we call them Sonaa, thought transformers—are for the purpose of conveying thought directly from one person to another, or others, without the use of audible language. For instance, when we are listening to a musical symphony concert, or when we are watching a theatrical performance, and desire to address a few words of appreciation or criticism to a friend, we have no need to do so audibly; we use the Sonaa, which at such times nearly everyone brings along. Thus no one is disturbed by

(Continued on page 75)

## A Subterranean Adventure

*(Continued from page 23)*

whispering or murmuring, and each can enjoy the occasion to the fullest.

"But the most important use of the Sonaa in this city of Raa, and in its eleven sister cities, is for the deaf and the dumb, as well as for the blind. Thus, for an instance, a dumb reader by means of a set of Sonaa is able to entertain, through reading, one or any number of deaf-and-blind unfortunates. From this you will understand that when I am now speaking to you, my audible words convey no meaning to your consciousness at all. What really happens is that by means of the Sonaa your mind receives the thought waves of my mind and thus makes direct contact with your consciousness.

"In other words, the Sonaa transforms thought vibration into another form of vibration during the process of transmission, and does the reverse during the course of receiving. The cone on your forehead is the transmitter, and that over your solar plexus the receiver. Moreover the instruments are so adjusted that merely through your individual volition you can render it either selective or general during transmission."

"It is certainly a most wonderful invention," I said

enthusiastically. "In our surface world we have something like 2750 different languages and dialects—a fact constituting one of the principal obstacles to international understanding and cooperation. Now, if I have understood you correctly, the Sonaa would immediately eliminate those 2750 international barriers, and our races could enter at once into an epoch of universal cooperation and understanding. I haven't the least doubt that as a result the greatest enemy of mankind, war, would soon be forgotten. It would mean at last universal brotherhood and peace."

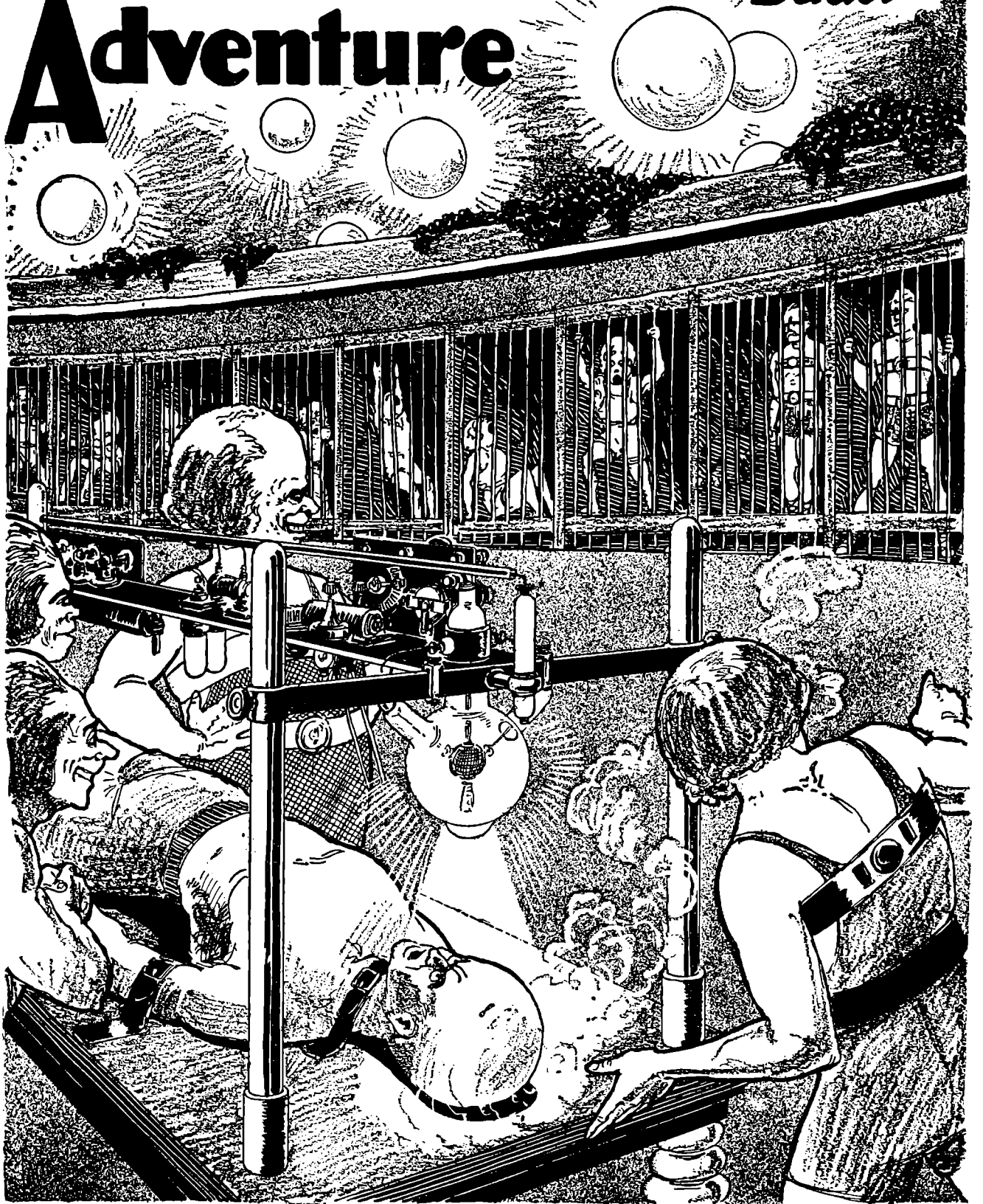
"It certainly would," Teddy agreed. "But tell me, Noama, just how is the Sonaa constructed, and by what force does it operate? If we ever get back to our own world we would like to manufacture some, for the good of world peace and progress."

Noama looked at him gravely, and slowly and regretfully shook her head. "That I cannot divulge, Tedde-e. It is a secret of the elect, and we who belong to the elect are bound to secrecy by oath. All I can say is that the motive power of the Sonaa is a synthetic substance which radiates a force of extremely high vibration, and it is this force which does the work."

*(To be continued)*

# A Subterranean Adventure

By George Paul  
Bauer



(Illustration by Paul)

Again Sarro laughed in our direction. Utterly appalled we watched, hoping that death had come to end the condemned man's tortures.

## A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE

### What Has Gone Before

Several young men driving along a mountain road near Denver, Colorado, come upon a strangely dressed man lying unconscious on the road. They take him to a hospital and on his recovery he tells the story of his disaster. He is an inventor, named Ned Gothram, and together with his nephew Ted Cranston, attempted to bore a tunnel clear through the earth with a machine they called the Penetrator. After going down a number of miles the machine took a sharp fall and landed into a great sea of oil which formed part of a gigantic subterranean cavern. They reach the shore and finally find a great city in a valley below them. They are attacked by winged human-like creatures and

taken to the city where they are brought before the governor called Taman the Thrice Wise. By means of a Sonaa, an instrument put on their heads, they are able to converse telepathically. Taman tells them that they can never return to the surface world. They are taken to a house of confinement. On the way they pass a beautiful young woman whom Teddy falls in love with. The mysterious girl comes to visit them but a winged man tries to force her to leave. Teddy vanquishes him and he leaves after making a threat against Teddy. The girl reveals herself as Noama, granddaughter of Taman, and the man as Sarro, Minister of Police, whom she has refused to marry.

**B**OTH Teddy and I were very much disappointed by Noama's announcement, and for several moments we were silent.

"But I am quite forgetting the object of my impromptu visit." Our guest interrupted the silence laughingly. "I am very curious to learn how you people came into our land, and what your intentions are. I questioned my grandfather about you; but, beyond stating that both of you are from the surface world, he declined to give me any further information. I have broken the prison rules by coming here, but I just could not resist the temptation."

Aided by occasional promptings from me Teddy eagerly undertook the task of acquainting Noama with the story of our adventure up to the time when we had first met her at the great white pyramid. With deepest interest and eager, shining eyes she listened intently, and when my nephew had finished, she applauded both of us cordially.

"What an extraordinary, wonderful idea it was!" she complimented me sincerely. Then her face saddened. "Too bad that you will not be able to carry it out now, even if it were not for the central ocean."

"But say, Noama, is that central ocean in any way connected with the oceans on the surface?" Teddy inquired. "And how big is it anyway?"

#### The Walls Have Ears!

**H**IS eagerness to learn seemed to please the girl. She smiled.

"The central ocean is about two thousand of your miles across, and it has a surface too. But as to your first question—the central ocean is not now connected in any way with the oceans on the surface. But there was a time when it was indeed joined to the waters of the surface, so the records say. This was during the first earth, and the two moons, when our ancient ances-

tors, the Primarians, were still living upon the surface. Then came the great cataclysm, foretold by their council of wise men; and the people, at least part of them, emigrated down here to this land which their scientists had prepared for them. This happened about two millions of your years ago. It was during the great cata-

clysm then that the connections of the central ocean with the surface were sealed up forever."

"The first earth and the two moons—the great cataclysm—two millions of years ago—" Teddy mouthed rather idiotically. "Why, what do you mean, Noama? You are not joking?"

"Joking!" For just a moment Noama drew herself haughtily erect, and a quick gleam of anger shot from her eyes. Then, perceiving the amazement in Teddy's face, and no doubt in mine also, she realized her mistake, and relaxed. She laughed softly.

"No, Tedde-e, I was not joking," she explained. "By 'first earth' I meant, of course, this same earth, as it was before the explosion of the sun

burnt up about half of its diameter. That was the great cataclysm. The earth had two moons then, a larger and a smaller one. The present moon is the remains of the larger one—the smaller one was completely destroyed."

She pointed to a peculiar apparatus at the far side of the room.

"But you can get all that and more, visibly, from that electronic recording machine there. It will show you the high-points of the Primarian history."

"Yes—yes, Noama. But you mentioned something about two millions of years ago, when your ancestors came into this land," Teddy reminded her. "Two millions of years seems a good long time."

"Perhaps it seems a long time to you surface people," she said thoughtfully. "But we Inner People often forget that there is such a thing as time. We have in fact



GEORGE PAUL BAUER

***T**HIS story is now approaching its most thrilling phases. Our two adventurous explorers into the earth's interior are due for some astounding experiences, such as few men have had. The story is gripping, because our author has such a vivid imagination, which he displays in his ability to picture strange worlds beneath the earth's surface.*

*But there is both humor and tragedy in the situation of our surface men and their attempts to get out of the clutches of the Inner People. What is particularly interesting is the attitude of these sub-surface men to our own race. Whereas we pride ourselves on our achievements, on our civilization and believe ourselves to be the cream of the universe, the people of the Inner World see us as half civilized savages. A reading of this story then, might provoke a new point of view on ourselves.*



no instruments for time-recording such as you people use to regulate your life by. We don't need such things. As you have seen, with us it is always day. We eat when we are hungry, we sleep when we are tired, and we work when there is work to do. But, to return to your question—it was, as I said, about two millions of your years ago when, in order to escape complete annihilation, the Primarians descended from the surface to this land; and have lived here ever since."

"Then there must be a way, a shaft or something like that, which leads to the surface," I said eagerly. "Do you know where it is, Noama?"

She gazed at me with sudden hostility, and I knew that she read the thought in my mind.

"Yes—I know where it is," she said slowly and reluctantly. "It is called 'the forbidden gate.' And the penalty for entering it is death!"

"Noama! Noama!" a great voice boomed suddenly through the room, causing the three of us to jump precipitately to our feet. I whirled about. There, from a large sphere of jet-like substance which stood upon a stone pedestal near the middle of the room, the awful visage of the governor of Raa, Taman the Thrice-Wise, stared out at us. But his angry, flaming eyes seemed directed to Noama only.

"Return to your quarters immediately!" he commanded harshly. "And remain there until I have word with you. Go!"

Almost immediately the vision disappeared. I was still staring in fascination at that magic black ball, when I heard Teddy's voice out in the hall. I swung about then and discovered that I was alone. A few moments later Teddy returned.

"She's gone," he announced with a doleful face. "Darn that old—!"

"Stop, Teddy!" I interrupted him sternly. "Remember that this room might have not only eyes, but ears as well."

## CHAPTER IX

### Two Million Years Ago

"**W**HAT do you say to experimenting with that 'electronic recording machine' as Noama called it, Uncle Ned?"

It was many hours later. We had taken a nap in the adjoining sleeping chamber, had eaten another lunch, and were now resting at our ease in the entertainment and study room. I was amusing myself with studying the hieroglyphic characters in one of the peculiar books of flexible metal, and Teddy was shadow boxing.

"Suits me." I agreed. "Maybe we can figure out how to run the thing."

Seen from the side, the apparatus in question was shaped like a capital P, with a very heavy leg. But from the front it resembled an upright piano, only that it was wider, higher, and more bulky. Two upholstered comfortable-looking chairs were placed immovably in front of it, above each of which, in the extreme outer curve of the upper part, two vertical, oval openings appeared, each of them framed by a raised and padded collar of metal. From each side of these collars a short, flexible arm jutted out, to the curved end of which a

cone, similar to those of the *sonaa*, was attached. A single, somewhat larger, cone on a longer arm protruded about twelve inches below the lower edge of each collar.

About midway between the two oval openings was a dial the size of a dessert plate, which was divided into twelve sectors, and was surmounted by a movable hand, or indicator, attached to a round knob. Below this dial, in an easily accessible position from either side, were two large buttons, a black one and a white one.

We seated ourselves in the chairs, and immediately discovered that our faces fitted nicely into the raised and padded collars of the oval openings. We likewise found that the two upper cones fitted completely over our ears, and that the lower one was just right to fit snugly over our solar plexuses. The inference was quite plain.

"Do you remember what Noama said about this machine showing the high-points of Primarian history?" I said to Teddy. "Well, I have an idea that their history is divided into twelve parts, and that by setting the indicator hand on this dial we can get any part we want. Let's set it on the first sector, and see what happens."

"Fine!" Teddy agreed. "And the two buttons below the dial are the controls, I guess; the white one naturally for starting."

I quickly set the dial, and then he pressed down upon the white button.

\* \* \* \* \*

Almost immediately a peculiar, greenish-golden luminosity began to grow before my eyes, and within this phenomenon of light, seemingly many miles away, I saw a small disc of greenish-white radiance. However, the luminous disc was obscured and rendered indistinct by a fog-like phenomenon, and I was speculating interestedly what it could possibly be, when the obscuring curtain of haze suddenly disappeared.

My first thought was that I was gazing at the moon during its maximum fullness. But quickly I realized that the luminous disc was not only much larger, but also brighter. But the most peculiar thing was that I seemed to be suspended somewhere in interplanetary space, and was gazing down at it from an immense distance.

Suddenly I seemed to be hurtling downwards at frightful speed. The luminous disc below me became rapidly larger and larger—resolved itself into a world of water, in the middle of which lay a great continent—And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the downward motion ceased, and to my amazement I found myself suspended above a vast, primal forest of gigantic, fantastically shaped trees.

But it was not a silent world this. For almost immediately my ears were filled with a medley of hideous sounds; an utterly ferocious and blood-curdling roaring and bellowing and screaming, which struck against my nerves like a searing pain. Far, far down in the dark abysses beneath the vast trees I could discern indistinct, moving shapes—

Then I seemed to be passing over the forest in a lateral direction and at very moderate speed, which enabled me to see everything quite clearly. Presently a large, swampy meadow appeared, at the edge of which I saw a horde of gigantic animals feeding peacefully

upon the luscious grasses and weeds.

The motion stopped, and my vision remained suspended just above the feeding monsters. With keen interest I noted that the flat, massive snout of each was armed with four slightly backwards curving horns, two large ones in front and two smaller ones back of them. Their heavy legs immediately reminded me of a rhinoceros, but their huge bodies were covered with long, and very coarse-appearing blackish hair. Suddenly the largest of their number elevated his enormous head high into the air, opened his great mouth, and sent forth a bellow like that of ten angry bulls in unison.

It was a challenge. And I was not long left in doubt as for whom it was intended. For almost instantly the gigantic challenger's furious bellow was answered by a not less vicious, defiant roar from the far side of the meadow. This vision shifted so that I could now perceive a second group of huge herbivora,\* feeding at the opposite edge of the wide grassy space. The largest one stood a short distance apart, with his great head held proudly erect as he voiced the acceptance to the challenge—an immense elephantine creature with massive columnar legs, whose gigantic body was covered thickly with short, reddish-colored curly hair, and from whose lower jaw two ponderous inward-curving tusks protruded, the sharp points of which made them formidable weapons.

Several more times the two champions of the opposing herds exchanged thunderous bellows and roars of challenge and defiance. Then suddenly, as if at a given signal, they rushed towards each other with a speed that was positively amazing in creatures of their bulk; their ponderous bodies cutting through the deep grasses and weeds like the bows of battleships through the waves of the sea.

### The End of the Battle

THEY met in the center of the meadow; and the crashing impact of their monstrous bodies sounded like the smashing to earth of a great tree. A battle of unspeakable ferocity followed. While the four-horned titan was endeavoring to rip open his adversary's belly with the sharp points of his horns, the other one was intent to drive his tusks into his enemy's neck and thus reach his heart.

They circled about each other, retreated, advanced and charged in never ending succession, and with ever-increasing fury, while their roars and bellowing caused the trees to tremble, and sounded in my ears like the rolling of near thunder. Blackish, thick blood soon spattered the grass all about them, and formed in ever-enlarging pools on the trampled, moist ground and crushed herbs. From both sides the two opposing herds now urged on their respective champions with a bedlam of roars and bellowings that was almost unbearable.

But presently I became aware of a new movement in the meadow, and soon perceived four or five immense shapes creeping up on the two fighters from as many directions. Frightful monsters they were, resembling lizards of gigantic size, their dark-green scales and

beady eyes gleaming and glittering in the ruddy light of the sun. I recognized them immediately for what they were; carnivorous saurians,\* armed with razor-like claws in their arm-like fore limbs and with dagger-like teeth in their heavy, cruel jaws.

Upon the approach of the gigantic saurians the two herds of herbivora had fled precipitately. But the two fighters, blind with battle and blood lust knew nothing of the dread presences until the sharp, cruel fangs of the saurians crushed down into their spines. But, spent from their battle and loss of blood as they were, their frantic resistance was unavailing, and with demoniac, throaty laughter, the saurians devoured them while they were still half alive.

I was greatly relieved indeed when the vision moved away from that scene of carnage and death. A large inland sea appeared now, at the swampy shores of which a number of great reptiles were visible. They were even larger than the carnivorous saurians of before. But evidently they were of the plant-eating kind, for they were peacefully feeding on the leaves of trees, and on the succulent grasses and weeds near the water's edge. Smaller saurians, apparently the young offspring of the larger ones, were feeding and gamboling half submerged at the shore.

It was while I was watching the antics of them that suddenly a pair of immense jaws shot out of the water close to them, caught one of the young saurians by the neck, and despite its frantic struggles pulled it out of sight beneath the water. For a few minutes the sea boiled and foamed as the battle continued beneath its surface. But quickly everything was quiet again; and the feeding and playing went on as if nothing had happened.

Presently I seemed to float over the tops of gigantic trees again, the upper terraces of which were alive with a multitude of smaller creatures, that climbed and crawled and flew, and filled the air with a thousand discordant cries and noises. The vision passed on, and a wide, grassy space came into view. The place was an almost circular valley; and as the view extended, I saw that in the distance it was surrounded by a system of peculiar, jagged mountains.

But quickly my attention was drawn to a number of immense creatures, whose bodies appeared a solid mass of great, bony shields, and whose backbone was a continuous chain of short, sharp horns, the size of which diminished gradually towards the ends of their long, flexible tails.

Skeletons and carcasses of many animals were scattered all over the valley, about the latter of which large swarms of great, bat-like creatures fluttered and flew, and fought viciously; their harsh, discordant cries filling the air with a frightful din, and their sharp-toothed jaws tearing huge chunks of putrid meat from the carcasses. Undoubtedly they were flying reptiles, of the order of pterodactyls, and I suddenly smiled to myself as I remembered Teddy's designation of them as "pre-historic fowls" during our travel on the *Penetrator*.

The vision remained stationary above this valley; and even while I was disgustedly watching the feeding of

\* Animals that live on vegetation as contrasted with carnivorous or flesh-eating animals.

\* A division of the reptile family referring to lizards, etc.

the noisy, bat-like saurians a peculiar haze was beginning to form itself before me, which quickly blotted out the scene below me. And with the disappearing of the vision, all noise pertaining to it ceased also.

## CHAPTER X

### The Grim Warning

I HAD a feeling that an immense period of time passed. Then presently the luminous haze began to thin again. It disappeared— And then I stared in utter, incredulous amazement at the magic change which had taken place in the valley below me.

There was not the least doubt that it was the same valley upon which I had gazed before the haze had blotted it from my view; a glance at the surrounding, peculiarly shaped jagged mountains assured me of that. But where before I had viewed a most primitive, grass-covered plain, peopled by prehistoric, nightmarish monsters, there appeared now before my incredulous gaze a great city of magnificent buildings, peopled by a multitude of busy humans!

Directly beneath me appeared a most beautifully arranged, circular park of magnificent trees, emerald-hued lawns, and marvelous flower beds of a thousand brilliant colors and shades. But almost immediately my attention was drawn magnet-like to an object in what I judged to be the exact center of the park. From my position it appeared to be a perfectly circular building of glistening white stone, or similar material, topped by a vast hemispherical dome of shining ruddy-golden metal, and encircled by a colonnade of graceful, close-set columns, to which a circular set of nine low and broad steps led.

Like spokes from the hub of a titanic wheel, sixteen wide, tree-lined avenues radiated from the park, being interconnected at regular intervals by concentric boulevards, which ranged outwards from the park in ever widening rings as far as the eye could reach. I counted twenty of these ring boulevards altogether, and found that they divided the strange city into twenty-one distinct circles of city blocks. But the most remarkable feature of the city was the fact that each one of these rings of city blocks was of a different color. Beginning with the deep red of the outermost, and finishing with the brightest violet of the innermost ring of buildings, all the colors of the rainbow were represented, each of three shades, which blended perfectly into each other. Never had I seen a more wonderful color scheme.

But my interest strayed quickly from the buildings to the inhabitants themselves—thousands upon thousands of tiny, colored mites, of whom as many appeared to be in the air as upon the ground. I seemed to descend again now—caught glimpses of happy people and children in the air and upon the grassy spaces of the park—and then I seemed to be standing upon the bottom step of a great white circular palace.

The vision carried me up this stair of nine steps and through the colonnade into a vast and lofty chamber, a place of purplish twilight and shadows—silent and mysterious like the interior of a great cathedral. In awed wonder I glanced about me, and my gaze came to rest upon a silent group of twelve men, seated in a circle

upon what appeared to be low cushioned stools.

The vision passed across the vast, tessellated floor of polished stone, and came to rest quite close to the twelve. They were all dressed in long gown-like garments of bright violet color, held together at the waist by a sort of thick cord. The faces of some of them were hairless, and some wore long white beards; but there was a something, an indefinable air about them, which proclaimed them of vast age; and the impress of great wisdom was in the face of each.

The sat absolutely motionless, with crossed legs and folded hands, and their eyes were half closed as if they were meditating deeply. But presently he who appeared to be the oldest and most venerable in the group, raised his head and began to speak sonorously. Meanwhile with a long, thin rod of silvery metal he pointed to the floor within the circle of chairs, where, in some miraculous manner, the starry heavens seemed to be reflected, being quite plainly visible in the dim light of the chamber.

"No doubt remains, councillors," the solemn, deep voice began. "Our planet, and probably most members of our solar system, are doomed to either partial or complete annihilation!"

He ceased for a moment as if to let the awful import of his words sink into the minds of his companions, and his penetrating gaze passed slowly from one to another. He resumed:

"I have again gone over my calculations with the utmost care, hoping to the last that possibly I had been mistaken, and that our solar system would be saved from a tremendous, unthinkable calamity. But my sums checked perfectly, and the result remains the same: An immense swarm of meteors will strike the sun at the precise time which I have foretold, and the resultant explosion with its incalculable heat and burning gases will doubtlessly destroy partially or wholly our entire solar system of thirteen planets and twenty-nine satellites."

The speaker ceased and leaned back in his chair, calmly waiting for the others to speak, while again his analytic gaze observed the grave faces of his fellow councillors. There was a deep silence for several moments.

"It will be an awful calamity for all the people of the inhabited planets," one of the twelve said with utmost gravity. "Is there then no hope for our people, venerable master?"

The patriarch inclined his regal head, and spoke slowly:

"Ever since my calculations have revealed to me the coming catastrophe I have been secretly endeavoring to find a way to save our people; and I have been successful." He noted the intent and expectant faces of the eleven, and continued:

"In a manner which some of you will understand I have succeeded in discovering, deep down in the interior of the earth, a chain of immense, interconnected caverns, several of them with rivers. It is that subterranean region which will be the new home of our people. If the earth is completely destroyed, then of course everything will be for naught, and we will all be destroyed with it. On the other hand, if our planet

is not wholly annihilated, there is a chance for us to survive."

Again the patriarch waited for one of the others to speak.

"But is there light to see by, air to breathe, and soil to grow food in, in that subterranean land, venerable master?" one of them inquired deferentially.

"Neither of those elements exists there now, with the exception of a little oxygen from the water in the rivers," was the quiet reply. "But we shall create them. We must create these necessary elements, because our millions of people must be saved; else what use would our science be. Let us therefore begin the task immediately. What says the council?"

Immediately eleven pairs of hands, with the index fingers fully extended, rose into the air.

The patriarch nodded gravely. "It is well. So shall it be!"

### Into the Earth

THE vision faded—disappeared. Again a period of time seemed to pass. Then there was a new scene.

I seemed to hover over an immense plain, near a cluster of extensive, flat buildings, through the many doors of which a multitude of busy, half-clad men passed continually in and out. Great piles of building material of all sorts were arranged in an orderly array about the buildings, and these materials the workers conveyed into the buildings by means of various kinds of self-moving vehicles.

The vision passed into the largest of these buildings, and immediately I viewed an extremely busy scene: An innumerable multitude of the half-clad, brawny workmen were putting the finishing touches to the thousands upon thousands of strange vehicles with which the place was crowded. Each of these vehicles consisted of a long metal cylinder, curved laterally like the segment of a spiral, and ending at each extremity in a head resembling that of a huge cannon projectile. Along each side and its bottom ran a line of massive castings, into each of which a solid wheel had been fitted. That was all which one could see from the outside. But I did notice that the periphery of each wheel was rounded, like an automobile tire, and that only a small sector of the bottom wheels was visible. Here, somewhere on the inside, where the bottom wheels emerged, was the driving mechanism I judged. The head of one of them—or it might have been the rear end—was swung open on great hinges, like a door, and I glimpsed the electrically lighted interior. I said electrically lighted, because that was what the luminous semi-globes in the ceiling of the vehicle appeared to be. And by their bright light I saw a long row of comfortable seats, racks for baggage against the walls, and at the far end, which I now positively identified as the front end, I glimpsed a well-lighted panel mounted with a number of switches, levers and knobs, and before this a single seat; the station of the operator without a doubt.

Suddenly a movement went through the mass of workers, and their eyes focussed upon a certain point. The vision shifted and I saw the reason: through the main portal of the building a striking group of men had

entered, and I immediately identified them as the twelve members of the council whom I had seen in the white palace, or temple, of the city of the Primarians. With the patriarch leading, they made their way in a leisurely and dignified manner to a place near the entrance, where a great metallic tube, like a section of a subway, rose out of the ground laterally, at an angle of about fifteen or twenty degrees. Quite close to this one of the queer, completed vehicles had been placed, through the open rear of which the council of twelve entered it and seated themselves.

During all this time I had been wondering how it was possible for the huge vehicle to maintain its equilibrium; for, unlike the others which were not yet in use, it was not supported with props, but was standing free upon the single row of wheels on its bottom. But suddenly I perceived the reason: the heavy, laterally placed wheels, or rather solid discs, at the sides of the huge cylinder were revolving at such high speed, that until now I had been sure that they were stationary. It was, of course, quite plain to me now that the gyroscopic action of the massive wheels—there were six on each side—held the vehicle in an upright position.

The vision passed into the interior of the vehicle now, just as if I were actually entering it. A narrow aisle ran the entire length of the car, and on each side of this were ranged the seats, with room for three grown persons in each. I counted thirty of these seats on each side; which meant a capacity for one hundred and eighty passengers. The council of twelve had occupied the first two rows of seats. Beyond and ahead of them, in the very nose of the vehicle, was the control compartment; consisting of a slanting table, upon which a number of shining levers, knobs, and peculiar indicating instruments were mounted. Two operators, clad in the ordinary simple tunics of the people, were seated in front of the controls.

And even as I watched them curiously one of them threw a lever, which caused the rear end to close with a gentle slam, while the other manipulated several knobs and levers, setting the vehicle in motion. It is evident, of course, that I could not feel the motion of the car, due to the fact that only two of my senses, that of sight and of hearing, were represented. But in front of the two operators was an upright screen, similar to the reflecting screen of a periscope, by means of which it was easy to perceive everything that was going on outside.

We were slowly and smoothly entering the great, inclined tube which led into the depths of the earth. The vehicle tipped forward as we made contact with the inclined plane. But one of the operators shifted a lever, and immediately we were level again. With ever increasing velocity we were descending into the bowels of the earth.

The observation screen showed a vista of brightly lighted, curved walls ahead, and I realized in amazement that we were traveling down a shaft, a continuously winding shaft, formed like the threads of a screw! The bottom of this winding shaft was shaped like a very shallow capital V with a blunt apex, and it was this apex which formed the track for the bottom wheels of the curved vehicle, whose curve, by the way, fitted the curvatures of the shaft perfectly.

## Arrived!

AS soon as the car had gathered momentum, the operators shut off the driving power, and henceforth we were hurling onward into the depths by gravity alone.

Down! down! down! with a speed which was becoming moment by moment ever greater. I wondered what would happen if something should go wrong or break. But one fact struck me as very significant: despite the tremendous speed at which the vehicle was now shooting downwards, there was no noise beyond a soft humming. It was an eloquent testimony of super excellence in designing and construction on the part of the Primarian engineers.

We must have traveled thousands of miles, when finally the two operators began to check the frightful speed of the machine. And then presently after a long interval during which the vehicle attained normal speed, we shot out of the shaft into an immense, brightly lighted space.

We had arrived!

The rear of the vehicle was open, and the vision passed outside with the venerable council of wise men. Immediately I realized that we were in the great cavern where the city of Raa was situated, or at least one similar to it; for high overhead shone the multitude of miniature suns, pouring their golden light over everything.

It was very puzzling, this mingling of the dim past and the present, and it was quite impossible for me to realize that I was witnessing events which had happened during a highly civilized era in the world's history, two millions of years ago.

Near the entrance to the shaft hundreds of workmen were busy at a series of great ovals of metal, to the sides of which sets of gigantic wings were attached. The council of twelve entered the nearest one of these, and by means of the magic vision I entered with them. The two operators of the airship started the invisible machinery, and to the rapid, droning motion of the four sets of great wings it rose majestically into the air at a slight incline, righted itself, and shot away at an even keel at prodigious speed. And now, gazing backwards, I noticed that there was a second shaft entrance visible, several hundreds of feet farther on in the great rock wall of the cavern. No doubt it was the return shaft by which, during the coming emigration of the Primarian people, the empty vehicles were to rise to the surface after having discharged their human freight. And upon contemplating this, I marveled again at the wonderful sagacity of their scientists, and wondered too how and by what magic means they had been able to drive a shaft of such shape and length through the thousands of miles from the surface of the earth. Truly they must have used a far superior system to mine.

At the bank of a great river the huge airship landed gently, and the twelve wise men stepped to the ground. With his back to the river, the patriarch allowed his gaze to travel over the large stretch of level ground, and then waved his right hand towards it.

"Here the capital of our new land shall be built," he announced gravely. "And it shall be called Raa, seat of wisdom."

## CHAPTER XI

### In the Grip of Sarro

SUDDENLY an icy touch against the base of my brain brought me back to reality. Like once before, when first entering this strange land, my body was instantly paralyzed, and every vestige of strength seemed to have left it. The next moment I was jerked roughly from my seat, and found myself in the grasp of four husky Raanians.

I happened to be facing in the direction of my nephew, and saw that he too had succumbed to the touch of a Kra. But it was not that which sent a sudden stab of fear through me, it was the fact that above Teddy's prostrate body hovered a figure that I recognized as that of Sarro, the man whom he had defeated, the powerful minister of the Raanian police. And there was a sardonic smile on the man's face which gave him a touch that was truly satanic. At that moment the words of Noama flashed into my mind, "he will never rest until he has fully revenged himself for the insult to his pride which you have inflicted on him." What possible chance had we against such a powerful enemy? How could I possibly aid my dear nephew against Sarro, helpless as I was myself?

In response to Sarro's imperious order, four men placed Teddy onto a carrying net, while four others attended to me in like manner. A few moments later they had carried us to the roof, and rose with us into the air; each beat of their powerful wings carrying us perhaps toward death.

In what seemed a very short time we had arrived at our unknown destination. I recognized the place instantly: It was the great semi-spherical building of flaming crimson about which Teddy and I had speculated when we had first viewed the city!

We landed just in front of the massive double portal: and without delay Sarro drew from his belt an instrument like a small flute, and sounded four sharp descending notes, followed immediately by four ascending ones. No sooner had the sound of the last note died away, than the ponderous wings of the wide portal swung silently open, and we were swiftly carried inside.

A wild chorus of bestial roars and screams greeted us as we emerged out of the gloomy passage into a vast circular court, and for a moment I thought that the place was on fire. I immediately perceived that the flaming ruddy radiance with which the great court was filled was due to the outer light passing through the roof of crimson-colored glass overhead.

My first impression was that we had entered a zoological garden, for the entire court was surrounded by three tiers of strongly barred cages, the upper tiers receding backwards from the lower, like steps. But with a shock of utter horror I quickly realized that the frightfully distorted visages staring out at us through the thick metal bars were human—their big, wild eyes, saliva-dripping and snarling mouths, and hairy features causing them to appear like so many demons from hell itself. The explanation shot into my mind like a white-hot bullet into the brain. There could be no mistaking the situation: This was the madhouse of Raa, and Teddy and I had become inmates of it!

## The Torture

We were in the merciless grip of Sarro, and this was his revenge.

They hurled us brutally into two empty, adjoining cells of the lowest tier, and resuscitated us with a Loo. But before we had regained enough strength to make a break for liberty—almost hopeless as it was under the conditions—they had slammed our doors, and from the outside stared in at us mockingly.

In the crimson light from above, Sarro's face was more satanic than ever. He shouted a few words through the din of the madmen at Teddy, and although I could not, of course, understand what he said, the malignant smile which accompanied them was sufficiently eloquent to make me shudder for the safety of my nephew. But Teddy merely laughed at the big Raanian contemptuously, which appeared to infuriate the latter intensely. Realizing that neither of us could understand him, he gestured significantly toward a sinister object which stood in the center of the court, and then he and his men quickly left the court.

"Great Jupiter—what a place!" Teddy shouted through the infernal din of the madmen, the nearest of whom were crowding against the bars of their cages with the evident intention of viewing us. "What deviltry do you suppose Sarro is up to?"

We were both standing close against the heavy metal bars which separated our cages, but even by means of shouting it was almost impossible to carry on a coherent conversation, so great was the noise due to the roaring and screaming of the madmen.

"I don't know, Teddy," I replied. "But I didn't like his face when he pointed out that thing there, in the center of the court."

The object in question was a sort of high, metallic table, resembling an operating table, from the sides of which broad, heavy straps dangled down. Four heavy columns of metal rose from the corners of the apparatus to a height of about three feet above its somewhat slanting top, and on their flat upper ends a thick panel of dark gray material was placed. To the underneath side of this panel a number of curious tubes and rods and balls of crystalline substance were attached.

"Tell you what, uncle Ned," Teddy said grimly. "I bet a dozen pairs of new socks that it's some sort of torture machine, and that Sarro intends to give me a taste of it."

"Heaven forbid!" I cried horrified. "That would be terrible. Better be dead than anything like that."

Suddenly the noise of the madmen rose to such a pitch that further conversation became quite impossible. We were not long left in doubt as to the cause for this. A party of six men, under the supervision of a seventh, entered the court, bearing large baskets filled with raw bloody meat, which they at once proceeded to fling through the bars into the cages of the unfortunate madmen, like one feeds captive, wild animals. And even like wild animals the dehumanized prisoners pounced upon the bloody chunks of meat, and amidst snarlings and growlings began to devour it ravenously. It was a most abominable, nauseating sight, and I was devoutly thankful that no food had been provided for Teddy and me. I am sure it would have been impossible for either of us to eat a single bite.

SEVERAL hours later Sarro returned with four of his strongest men. The vast, arena-like place was unusually quiet, because most of the unfortunate prisoners were lying on the bare stone floor of their cells in a sort of dazed condition after their horrible meal.

Following their master's sharp order, Sarro's men opened one of the cages, and dragged forth the struggling and screaming inmate, whom they immediately strapped to the sinister apparatus in the center of the court. When they had completed their task, Sarro strode to the front of Teddy's cage. For a few moments the two men gazed at each other; my nephew coolly and unafraid, and the big Raanian malignantly. Presently a sardonic smile contorted the latter's face, and his gesture quite plainly invited Teddy to watch the screaming victim upon the table in the center. Then, without having spoken a word, he turned his back and walked over to the apparatus.

The screaming of the unfortunate madman had aroused all the others, and the place was now in a hellish uproar. Everywhere we could see fear and hate-distorted faces pressed against the metal bars of the cages, all eyes concentrated upon that nameless scene in the center.

Sarro was standing at the head of the strapped man, gazing down at him with a vicious scowl. He raised his right hand and manipulated some mechanism at the edge of the panel above the victim, and immediately one of the crystal balls flashed into life. A white-blue ray shot down from it to the wide-open mouth of the man, and his screaming ceased abruptly. His face contorted with unutterable pain, and a stream of black, smoking blood issued from his nearly closed mouth.

I heard Teddy nearby cry out in horror. He grasped and shook the bars of his cage in a sudden frenzy of anger. "You damnable fiend of hell!" he yelled at Sarro above the clamor of the madmen. "Some day I'll make you suffer for that!"

Even if the pitiless, torturing arch fiend did not understand my nephew's words, he seemed to guess their import from the expression on Teddy's face. But this did not seem to anger him. Instead it appeared to please him.

He leaned back and roared with ugly laughter, in which his four henchmen joined him with gusto, as if the whole matter were some delightful joke. Quickly he manipulated another mechanism, and at the same time shut off the power from the crystal ball. A tube just above the tortured man's head glowed suddenly. No visible ray descended from the tube; but we watched in horrible fascination as the black, coarse hair of the unfortunate turned rapidly white, shriveled up, and then disappeared entirely. But still that monster in human flesh did not turn off the terrible invisible power. And presently we were further horrified to see the bare scalp turn to a dark red color and bluish smoke begin to ascend from it.

Again Sarro laughed in our direction as if our attitude, and especially that of my nephew gave him pleasure. I hoped that perhaps the frightful ordeal had

reached its end. But not so. For the big Raanian had no sooner turned off the power of the glowing tube, when two thin pendant rods, a couple of inches apart, burst into radiance, each sending a thin purple ray to one of the suffering madman's eyes. Utterly appalled, Teddy and I watched the quick swelling of the eyeballs, until they protruded entirely out of their sockets. Rapidly they increased to enormous proportions. The man did not move, and I hoped that death had mercifully come to end his tortures.

But it was the end of Sarro's hellish performance. Quickly his men unstrapped the motionless body, and hurled it to one side on the floor. And then utter fear gripped me when I saw Sarro and his men approaching Teddy's cage.

But only for a moment or two fear held me. Then a terrible anger replaced it. In that moment I realized what murder lust meant, and knew that temporarily I had become a throw-back to a primitive age.

"Fight to kill, Teddy!" I roared fiercely. "Drive them over here to me so I can grab them from behind!"

### A Dash for Freedom

HE signified that he understood, and then faced his oncoming enemies with a savage grimness that thrilled me strangely. Suddenly the door of his cage was flung open, and the five Raanians were upon him.

Crack! crack! crack!

Teddy's powerful fists shot out with the lightning speed and deadly accuracy of the trained fighter. He was battling for his life and more, and he knew it. He killed the first man who reached him with a single snapping blow against the fellow's windpipe, broke the jaw of the second one, and rammed the third in the solar plexus with a force that flung him half a dozen feet away. His head struck the stone floor, and he lay still.

"Look out behind you, Teddy!" I cried in warning.

Instinctively he ducked, and avoided Sarro's Kra by the merest fraction of an inch. Yet so eager had the big Raanian been in trying to jab the dangerous weapon against Teddy's neck, that the latter's ducking threw him forward, off his balance, and the loaded Kra touched the man whose jaw Teddy had broken, and who had valiantly returned to the fray. The terrible electrical charge of the weapon killed the man instantly, and before Sarro could charge it again, Teddy's fist crashed against his temple, rendering him unconscious.

But in that moment the most powerful of Sarro's men, the only remaining one, tackled my nephew from behind, and encircled him with his long, powerful arms.

Teddy was completely helpless in the big man's grip, and things began to look bad; for at any time Sarro might regain consciousness, or some others of his men might enter the place.

"Try to roll over here to me, Teddy!" I shouted above the bedlam of the excited madmen, who seemed to realize what was going on.

Teddy understood. With a sudden, unexpected motion he hurled his body sideways, so that the huge Raanian's back almost touched the metal bars where I waited with fierce eagerness. The next moment my arms had shot out between the bars, and I encircled

the man's neck in an unbreakable strangle hold. With savage exultation I flexed my muscles to their uttermost. His big body gave a few convulsive jerks and then he lay quite still. I had broken his neck.

In the meantime Teddy had caught up Sarro's Kra, had slipped out into the court, and now slammed the door of the cage on the dead and unconscious Raanians. In a moment he had loaded the Kra, and was at my cage door, demolishing the lock. I pushed open the door and leaped to his side.

"Come on, let's get out of this while we can," I shouted.

"I wish I had it in me to kill that arch demon," Teddy said as we ran toward the portal. "But I can't very well kill an unconscious man. That's the main trouble about being civilized."

"He deserves being killed half a dozen times," I admitted vengefully. "Because he is bound to make us no end of trouble in the future."

## CHAPTER XII

### The Escape

JUST inside the portal, on special holders, we found the flying apparatuses of Sarro and his subordinates. Without delay we helped each other into two of them, glad that our loin and breast belts had receptacles for them.

"Chances are we'll break our necks with these things the first time we try to fly with them," I said dubiously. "Personally I know about as much about running one of them as a Chinese laundry man knows about running the United States mint."

In spite of our dangerous situation, Teddy laughed heartily.

"Don't forget that we may soon be angels, uncle Ned," he joked. "And in that case a little preliminary wing practice would help a whole lot."

With admirable forethought he had taken from Sarro's belt the small flute with which, in an apparently magical manner, the latter had opened the great portal when they had first entered that awful place. Teddy's sharp ears and keen memory for music served him well now. For he imitated with utmost precision the brief tune of descending and ascending notes that Sarro had sounded, and with the last note the ponderous wings of the portal swung silently open.

"How do you suppose that opening and closing mechanism works?" Teddy inquired as we passed out. "By radio control?"

"Must be something on that order," I agreed. "The particular sound impulses from the flute probably act upon some sensitive diaphragms which change sound vibrations into electrical impulses."

I sighed with relief as the closing portal shut in the awful screaming and roaring of the excited madmen, frenzied by what they had witnessed. Death would be a hundred times preferable to returning to that place of horrors.

Luckily for us the grounds about the madhouse were deserted. We lost no time in hurrying into the dense shrubbery which surrounded the open space about it, on the side away from the town, and did not stop until



we reached a little glade. Here we decided to try our wings; for we realized that we had but very little time to spare before some one, probably the food carriers, would enter and our escape would be discovered. We knew too that Sarro in his rage would not lose a moment in pursuing us. And we further knew that being caught would mean something far worse than death; Sarro would see to that.

It did not take Teddy long to catch on to the operation of the flying apparatus, and he seemed to enjoy the experiment immensely.

"It's not a bit difficult, and it's bushels of fun," he announced jubilantly when he had landed nicely at my side. "Here, let me explain."

In a far shorter space of time than I had dreamed possible I too had caught on to the amazingly simple operation of my flying machine, and we started on our predetermined trip without further delay.

Based upon what we had learned from the marvelous electronic recording machine, we soon oriented ourselves; and using the great river for a guide we flew along its course until we should come to a peculiar bend in it, which we remembered as the first contact that the Primarian council of twelve had made with the river when coming from the entrance of the shaft. We were confident that thus we would be able to get the approximate course to what Noama had called "the forbidden gate."

"I wish we had some food to take along, though," Teddy complained. "I feel half starved already. How about foraging for something in one of those orchards below?"

"All right," I agreed readily. "But we've got to make it snappy. We can't afford to waste much time, you know."

We had been flying high, dizzily high for me, so as to keep out of sight of occasional flyers and the rare, huge, bird-like airships which we glimpsed now and then in the distance. But now we dropped sharply downwards on a steep incline, steering ourselves with our feet. For it will be remembered that the lower tips of the wings were fastened to the foot coverings. All my life I had been subject more or less to vertigo, and now I was completely amazed to find that the flying itself made me scarcely dizzy, and moreover that I enjoyed the experience almost as much as my youthful nephew. It is marvelous how adaptable the human organism is; especially under stress of circumstances.

There were no workers visible in the orchard where we descended, for which we felt grateful. It was evident that the less we were seen the better for us in the event of pursuit. It did not take us long to fill the capacious pockets in our belts with various kinds of fruit. And after a hearty drink of water from a spring, we took to the air again, eating as we flew, for all the world like a couple of birds.

An hour or so passed, and then suddenly the dense atmosphere reverberated once again to the awe-inspiring sound of the great bell which as yet we had never seen. The same thought struck Teddy and me at the same time, and we looked at each other significantly.

"I bet a dozen pairs of new socks that our particular friend, Mr. Sarro, esquire, is ringing that big dinner

bell for our special benefit," Teddy commented. "He is no doubt even now collecting a posse and smelling out our trail."

"Yes, I'm inclined to believe you're right," I agreed. "The ringing of that bell might well be the alarm that we have escaped. Of course we might be wrong at that. Let's hope so."

### At the Gate

OUR immediate goal, the peculiar bend of the river, was just ahead. We passed over it, flying now very high, and struck out for that vast dimness in the distance where we knew the great walls of the immense cavern formed the limits to this subterranean empire.

At the river the fertile lands terminated abruptly. From then on we traveled over a vast, arid and stony region, which, unlike the region of farm lands, was only dimly lighted by scattering miniature suns. Again, like many time previously, I wondered interestedly what the mysterious source of their radiance, and what the power of their rays might be. That their light and energy rays were almost, if not exactly, identical with that of the real sun was attested by the extraordinary luxuriance and productiveness of plant life about Raa, and their heat-giving property. But I doubted if the little suns generated any ultra-violet rays, because I had never seen the least sign of tan in the complexion of any of the inhabitants. I wished that I had time to fly up to one of them and investigate. But that, of course, was now out of the question. The main thing was to escape back to our own world as speedily as possible.

For quite a while Teddy had been almost morosely silent; and I guessed that he was thinking of the fascinating Noama, and that the realization that he was never going to see her robbed the prospect of going back to our own world of nearly all its attraction.

Presently the vast forbidding walls of the cavern loomed ahead of us, and at their foot we glimpsed the entrance to one of the ancient shafts, surrounded by a high wall of stone. The sight brought Teddy out of his reverie, and he became almost his old, cheerful self.

"What ho!" he cried grinningly. "The gate to liberty in sight, and still the villain doth not pursue. It doth not seem right."

"Which is exactly my opinion," I answered seriously. "In all likelihood Taman has advised Sarro that it is our intention to escape, and that we are to be watched closely. Those two shafts ahead there being the only possible avenue of escape, there would be no need for him to look anywhere else for us. Of course, we might have been mistaken about the ringing of that bell, and our flight might not have been discovered yet."

We had been flying downwards at a sharp angle, like a descending hawk, with our wings stopped, and now slowed down gradually by spiralling; a trick which Teddy had learned from an aviator friend and his plane.

There! Was it merely my overwrought nerves playing tricks with my vision? But I could almost have sworn that just a moment before we landed in front of the massive gate of the enclosure, I had glimpsed the stealthy movement of several sinister shadows within its thick stone walls.

I mentioned the matter to Teddy, but he merely

laughed at my fancy. Then, gazing at me quizzically, and imitating my voice to perfection:

"I am afraid you're letting your imagination run away with you. Do you, perchance, remember a certain white bat? Well—"

With one accord we broke into hearty laughter.

"Nevertheless, I believe in preparedness at all times," I persisted.

A short search round about revealed a long sliver of tough, flint-like stone. It was about three feet long and three cornered, and one end of it terminated in a jagged point. With this in hand I felt better.

### The Guardians of the Portal

"SINCE for some reason we have forgotten to bring the key, I'll simply have to ruin this nice lock with Mr. Sarro's Kra, I guess."

We were standing before the great double gate in the high stone wall, gazing with interest at the huge lock set into the middle of the perfectly wrought joint between the two wings. There were two oval-shaped holes in the lock, which might or might not have been keyholes. However, Teddy made short work of the lock with the Kra.

This done, we placed our shoulders against one of the portal wings and pushed with all our might. Slowly the ponderous metal panel swung inwards. With the Kra held ready in his right hand, Teddy leaped eagerly through the narrow opening into the small court. There was a sudden harsh roar, and I followed just in time to see him go down under the impact of a huge, tawny-colored animal.

I had not been mistaken after all!

With all my strength I crashed down my stone club onto the creature's great head. Apparently dazed it rolled to one side, and to my infinite relief Teddy scrambled quickly to his feet, and touched the animal with the charged Kra, killing it instantly.

Nevertheless, he was not a moment too soon. Because now, from the shadows of the walls, two more of the tiger-like beasts were creeping quickly towards us, beating the floor of the little court viciously with their tails, and growling ominously. The one confronting Teddy jumped first. But with his trained quickness of eye my nephew had timed the great cat's motion accurately, and evaded its attack by a lightning leap aside. The animal hurtled harmlessly past him, and before it had recovered from its missed jump, he had touched its spine with the Kra and killed it.

I found out about all this afterwards though. Because, while my nephew was busy, my own attention was entirely required in my own defense. With a shock of incredulous amazement I realized for the first time the nature of the beast confronting me. Often enough I had seen pictures, and had read paleontological descriptions of it. Without a doubt it was the direct descendant of a sabre-toothed tiger, although perhaps smaller in size than its progenitor.

For a moment or two the beast and I were watching each other. I gripped the stone club with both hands like a short lance, and raised it above my right shoulder. He leaped; and with all my strength I drove the point

of my primitive weapon straight in between his terrible, slavering jaws.

I sensed the terrific impact of the tiger's body—was conscious of a searing and burning pain in my right side—had the awful feeling that the breath and life was being crushed out of me under a great weight— And then I suddenly realized that the crushing weight was gone, and that Teddy was speaking to me anxiously.

"Great Jupiter! You gave me quite a scare for a few moments," he was saying. "I thought that hell cat had killed you."

With the Kra, Teddy had killed the three formidable guardians of the shaft portal, and the way to the surface lay open. I was glad to learn that he had come out of the short battle without a scratch; for the folded wings on his back, and the base of his flying machine had protected him from injury when the first tiger had attacked him. But I, having had my front toward the beast which attacked me, had not been so lucky. One of the tiger's razor-like claws had made contact with my right side, and had laid open the ribs for a distance fully six inches long. The wound was bleeding profusely, and from it the torn flesh hung down like a wide, bloody ribbon.

The worst about the matter was that we had no ointment, not a scrap of bandage, and not even a knife. I pointed to the great circular door of reddish metal which concealed the mouth of the shaft.

"Open that door with the Kra, and make a break for liberty, Teddy." I pleaded. "I'm done for with this wound. Leave me the weapon, and I'll use it in case Sarro and his bunch comes. They'll not take me alive. It doesn't matter about me anyway; I am old. But you've got all of your life before you yet."

But instead of doing what I requested, Teddy gazed at me in deep reproach.

"I didn't think you would consider me capable of such an inhuman and cowardly act, Uncle Ned," he said. "If you can't go, I'll stay with you, and that's all there is to be said. Now just lie still and hold that torn flesh in with your hand, while I fix some bandages."

### Pursuit!

HE caught up a loose stone and with this broke off one of the sharp tusks of the nearest tiger. Using this for a knife, he quickly proceeded to slit open the skin of the animal at the belly, until he had several long strips ready. As gently as possible he removed the flying apparatus from my back, and wound the improvised bandages about my body, pressing the strip of flesh in place over my ribs. The ends of the still warm strips of hide he fastened together by means of lacing them with narrow strips. It made a most wonderful difference in my feeling, easing the pain greatly.

"You are a most noble boy, Teddy," I said gratefully. "I'll try to stick it out. Now let's move as quickly as we can. I have a feeling that Sarro is on our trail."

During our trip we had decided that, since beyond the little fruit we had gotten in the orchard we had no provisions of any kind, nor water, it would be physically impossible for us to climb the many miles to the surface on foot. It would have taken us probably more than a week even with a supply of food and water. There re-

mained only one possible, but uncertain, means of reaching our goal—we would try to make the trip by means of our wings.

"I wish we had one of those queer passenger vehicles that the Primarians used?" Teddy said longingly, as he carefully replaced the flying apparatus onto my back. "With one of them we could be on the surface in a jiffy. I wonder what became of all those thousands that escaped being destroyed by the cataclysm?"

"They were probably destroyed, or scrapped, and the metal used for some other purposes," I suggested. "Even if some of them had been saved and were in working order, say for museum purposes, you may be sure that Taman and his council would not leave them in any accessible place, or anywhere near these shafts. They would no doubt be too great a temptation for some of the more venturesome among the younger Raanians."

Teddy supported me to a water trough of stone he had discovered, the drinking place for the tigers, no doubt, and both of us took a long drink from the fairly fresh water it contained. Then we made our way to the portal of the shaft. Teddy quickly opened it with the Kra, and as he swung back the massive disc of metal on its great hinges, a musty odor streamed from the dark space beyond it. We were just about to start into it, when a sudden intuitional impulse caused me to glance upwards. Like vultures a swarm of Raanian flyers were gliding swiftly and noiselessly towards us. Teddy saw them at almost the same moment.

In less time than it takes to tell he had swept me into the shaft, and then swung himself about and grimly waited for them, gripping the Kra in his right hand. Beyond him I saw the enclosure fill rapidly with silent men in yellow and purple uniforms, and knew that Sarro had found us after all. And presently I saw him, staring at Teddy mockingly from a short distance away.

A faintness, doubtless caused by the considerable loss of blood from my wound, came over me gradually, and I sank slowly to the stone floor of the shaft. With all my might I struggled against the condition which threatened to overcome me—but suddenly an abysmal blackness seemed to engulf me, and swept all consciousness from my mind.

## CHAPTER XIII

### In Prison Again

I OPENED my eyes to find Teddy bending over me in deep anxiety. His forehead was heavily bandaged to the top, one of his eyes had a pronounced "shiner" and his nose was quite a bit swollen and discolored. A smile of relief quickly replaced the anxiety on his face when he noted that I was conscious.

"Glad to see you back on earth, Uncle Ned," he welcomed me cheerfully. "You certainly missed a bear of a fight out there at the forbidden portal. I had a wonderful time while it lasted; but it wasn't any use. They finally downed me, and brought us back to Raa."

I turned on my bed, and glanced at the couch opposite, and at the table and chair between the two. Somehow the color and shape of the furniture was familiar, and so was the pattern and color of the wall decorations. Wonderingly I glanced at Teddy. He nodded grin-

ningly.

"Yes, it's the same place all right. They've brought us back home to jail. We arrived only about an hour ago. An old doctor, with whiskers a yard long was here just now, and fixed your side with some liquids and one of those Loo things. How does it feel now?"

"Seems to feel surprisingly good." I answered. "How about your head? Did they open up your old wound, or is it a new one?"

"It's a new one," he said with a wry grin. "One of those flying cops struck me with something and knocked me dizzy; and then somebody else, our friend Sarro I guess, touched me with a Kra and put me out of the game. But I enjoyed myself thoroughly while the fun lasted. You ought to have seen the faces of some of the others. The old doc fixed me up too."

I gazed affectionately up into his sparkling eyes.

"Good boy!" I commended heartily. "I hope you landed a few good ones on Sarro. By the way, did you happen to learn what they intend doing to us?"

He smiled grimly and nodded.

"As soon as we are out of the old doc's hands, we are going to be tried before the supreme council of Raa, with Taman, the governor, presiding. I guess you know what that means."

"And another thing—" he added, "they've put a couple of jail guards up on the roof, so that we're pretty well bottled up. I wonder if Noama—"

He turned suddenly toward the door, and there she was, just as if the thought of her on his part had magically produced her. She smiled at me in quite a friendly way, but did not enter the room. Instead she beckoned to Teddy, and they went off together; to the entertainment room I guess. Noama had appeared in a hurry, and I wondered what was up. About half an hour later Teddy returned alone. He seemed to be greatly elated.

"She's a wonderful girl!" he cried enthusiastically. "She came here against her grandfather's solemn command, in order to tell us that she would do everything in her power to help us."

"But how about the two guards on the roof?" I inquired. "Didn't they try to stop her?"

He chuckled delightedly.

"I asked her that too; and she told me that before she landed on the roof she ordered the two men to stand at the parapet with their backs turned to the entrance, and not dare move from the spot until she told them to. She's a real girl, Noama is!"

"She'd better watch out for Sarro." I said dubiously. "If he ever finds out about this visit, he'll take the news straight to Taman, you may be sure of that. Besides, he'll watch her so closely that she will never get a chance to help us."

Teddy was silent and thoughtful for a long time.

"Do you know, Uncle Ned," he confided at last, "I never used to think much about girls. But I've come to the conclusion that life with a girl like Noama would be a wonderful experience."

\* \* \* \* \*

A great crowd of curious people awaited our coming, as, between our guards, we entered the spacious courtyard of the great white pyramid, and were marched

through a side entrance into another ante-chamber, not as spacious as the one inside of the main entrance, where Sarro and several of his lieutenants awaited us.

There was a smile of malicious satisfaction on his satanic face as he personally examined the heavy chain manacles on our wrists, which held our hands close together before us, and I knew that as far as he was concerned we were already condemned before we were judged.

A door opened, and, with Sarro leading and two of his lieutenants bringing up the rear behind us, we passed into the great chamber beyond.

The vast apartment had the form of a perfect right-angled triangle, and was done almost entirely in a funereal black. Black stone of marble-like sheen formed the high, vaulted ceiling, and panels of the same material and sombre color constituted the three walls, each panel separated from the next by graceful half-columns and arches of startling violet color. The tessellated floor was almost entirely of triangular, polished slabs of ebon, with the sole exception of the apex of the great chamber, directly in line with the door whence we had entered, which, in violent contrast, was of snow-white stone in the form of a large sector of a circle.

### Condemned!

**A** MASSIVE, throne-like chair of crystal had been placed onto a sort of dais in the very apex of the white sector, and from this elevated position the tremendous figure and awful personality of Taman, the Thrice-Wise, dominated the strange, forbidding scene. His large, luminous and penetrating eyes were regarding Teddy and me like the devastating orbs of an avenging god.

Below the dais, at his right, three solemn-faced councillors were seated, while an equal number occupied the space at his left. I recognized the two councillors nearest to Taman as the two venerable guides who had first conducted us two adventurers into the awful presence of their chief. A few yards to the front of either trio of councillors stood a large table, also of black, polished stone, at each of which two men, evidently court clerks, were waiting with ready electric stylus and recording tablets. One young man stood at each of these tables—junior scientists, if one judged from their unadorned, gown-like garb of yellow cloth—holding several sets of Sonaa.

A large, half-globe of crystal in the ceiling flooded the room with a strange, unearthly radiance, which somehow appeared to accentuate the harshness in the faces of the councillors and their chief, rendering their features inexpressibly severe and pitiless.

Everybody in the room, with the exception of us five newcomers, had already been supplied with a set of Sonaa; and now the two young scientists at the tables approached us, and quickly equipped us likewise. As if at a signal, each one of the four clerks raised his stylus in readiness, and the court proceedings began.

Taman fixed me with a piercing gaze, and addressed me.

"You and your companion have been accused by the minister of police of opening and entering the forbid-

den gate, and attempting to escape to the surface," he said sonorously and ominously. "Do you admit the charge?—or do you deny it?"

I figuratively gripped my courage with both hands, and forced myself to meet his intense, accusing gaze with a bold one of my own.

"The charge is true!" I stated coldly. "Neither my nephew nor I care to deny it. It was the natural thing for us to do. And furthermore, I know I can speak for both of us when I say that I deny you or anyone else the right to prevent free-born, American citizens from returning to their own land!" The last few words I had spoken sharply and incisively.

Taman's great eyes burned with a terrible anger.

"Spawn of an accursed race, do you dare to defy the supreme council?" he thundered in an awful voice.

But my own temper was up now. Slow to arouse, I am like an erupting volcano when I get started, and Taman's insulting epithet anent our origin had made me furious. Before Sarro guessed my intention I swept him out of my way with my manacled hands, leaped to the foot of the dais and faced Taman.

"Yes, I do defy you and your council!" I shouted. "And if it were not for your age, I would drag you down from that chair, and thrash you within an inch of your life for your insulting remark!"

"Bully for you, uncle Ned!" Teddy cried enthusiastically. "That's the way to talk to these big-heads."

For a moment or two our, no doubt unprecedented, defiant action appeared to paralyze everybody in the room. Then Sarro and his two aides grasped us and dragged us forcibly away from the dais. Manacled as we were we could not offer much resistance, even if it had not been for the Kras of our three guards.

Taman's face was awful to behold in his wrath.

"Never in the history of our race has this sacred council chamber been so defiled!" he thundered. "You have not only defied the supreme council of Raa, but you have also threatened with violence the sacred person of the governor. That, and your attempt to escape to the surface has earned you the double death, to which I now condemn you!"

He swept his flaming gaze over the members of the council on both sides of him. "What says the council—does the sentence of the governor fall or stand?"

There was a very brief interchange of words between the two groups of councillors: Then the nearest one at Taman's right rose and bowed to him reverently.

"The judgment of the governor stands forever!" he announced solemnly.

When the leader at the left had gone through the identical ceremony, Taman turned to us once more.

"You two felons have heard the august decision of the supreme council," he said harshly. "Have you anything to say?"

I drew myself up to my full height of six feet and five inches, and faced him intrepidly.

"Yes, most assuredly I have something to say," I replied loudly. "I utterly condemn the sentence as absolutely unjust and cruel! A cowardly injustice exercised upon two helpless strangers in an alien land, where no redress for them is possible!"

"And that expresses my views exactly!" Teddy

shouted aggressively.

"Enough! enough!" thundered the governor in awful wrath. "Take them to the worst part of the mines, and let them suffer the double death!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### Few Regrets

WITHOUT the least ceremony Teddy and I were roughly hustled out of the council chamber into the courtyard, where a surprise awaited us. Amidst the large throng of expectantly watching people one of the large, bird-like flying machines had been landed, towards which our energetic guards propelled us quickly.

So far, Teddy and I had seen these curious vessels of the air only at a distance, and naturally, despite our unenviable state of condemned prisoners, we were both very interested upon perceiving that we were to travel in one of them. Unlike our airplanes at the surface, this vessel of the air was equipped with movable wings, four of them, of indefinable material, and evidently collapsible. Its crimson-colored, long-stretched body reminded me of a swallow, and was indicative of considerable speed, while at the extreme front just below its neck were two large round lenses of crystal, evidently observation windows.

But I had not the time to observe more, for we were now urged up a narrow outer stair, built neatly into the side of the graceful vessel, and stepped onto its topless upper deck, where our guards immediately ushered us into one of the long, bench-like seats which ran athwart its almost entire length. But before we seated ourselves I observed, far forward, the rail-encircled opening of an inner stairway, and rightly judged that it led into the machinery and control department below.

Two of Sarro's men seated themselves in front of us, and two behind, each of them suggestively armed with a Kra. But I was secretly deeply thankful that the arch fiend himself was not to go along. Because, somehow, the very presence of the man irritated me, and I had reason to believe that he affected Teddy even more so.

We had barely seated ourselves, when a gentle trembling went through the airship, and we heard the rapid beating of its great wings. The next moment, without the least jar, the great mechanical bird rose quickly from the ground and ascended into the air at a steep angle. And with equal rapidity the great white pyramid and the other immense buildings surrounding it sank downwards out of sight, until nothing remained visible but the ever fascinating, many little suns, in the hazy blue abysses far far above us.

"Well, it seems we're in for it now, Teddy," I commented ruefully. "I don't mind so much about myself. But when I think that but for my wild scheme of penetrating the earth you would now be enjoying yourself back home, instead of losing your young, promising life by some unknown, horrible death—well, it makes me feel like a murderer, that's all."

With a clinking of his chains Teddy swung around to me, and I was amazed because of his cheerful, almost careless smile. Of necessity, on account of the man-

acled chain at his wrists, he placed both hands affectionately upon my arm.

"Cheer up, uncle Ned!" he said consolingly. "We're not dead yet by a whole lot. Many things are liable to happen between now and our last breath you know. Besides, I never would have forgiven you if you hadn't let me in on this adventure. So let's forget all about death, and enjoy our trip. Do you notice how silent this airship operates? Quite a difference between it and our noisy airplanes, isn't it? I am determined to find out how it works, and if we ever get back to the surface, I am going to build one."

"Which might not at all be a successful venture," I said dubiously. "Do not for a moment forget the great difference in air density between here and the surface. And then there is the question of driving power. These people probably have something along that line which might not be at all obtainable on the surface."

Teddy was thoughtfully silent for a few minutes. Then his face brightened, and he spoke triumphantly:

"But say, uncle Ned—you have apparently entirely forgotten the significant fact that, according to the electronic records, the Primarians were using similar vessels to these on the surface, two millions of years ago, before they ever emigrated to this land. Why, in the name of Jupiter, couldn't I do what they did?"

"You've got me there," I admitted smilingly. "However, it's just possible that two millions of years ago the atmospherical conditions on top were somewhat different from today."

With that both of us relapsed into reflective silence; Teddy no doubt dreaming about the fascinating Noama, and I listening to the resonant voices of our conversing guards, and to the droning of the great wings that carried my nephew and me to our doom.

Presently I was conscious of the fact that the conversation of our rear guards had stopped abruptly, and a peculiar sound, like a deep, shuddering sigh caused me to turn my head and glance at them. Certain that I was suffering from temporary delusion, I stared incredulously, and then nudged Teddy. Those glassy eyes and rigid bodies—no, there could be no mistake—in some inexplicable manner the two guards had been paralyzed by a Kra!

### Rescued!

HOW, in the name of wonders, had this amazing thing happened?

But even while Teddy and I were yet staring at the two paralyzed men, there arose from somewhere behind them a head, entirely covered by a sack-like mask of crimson with slits for eyes, followed by a gloved hand. The hand made a quick Raanian sign of silence to us, and then it and the masked head sank out of sight as mysteriously as they had come.

That sign of silence! Could it be possible?—

Tremendous excitement gripped me as we turned our faces to the front again and waited tensely. It had all been a matter of seconds, and the two guards ahead were still conversing animatedly, not having noticed anything amiss; their own voices, the noise of the wings, and the rushing of the heavy subterranean air past the speeding vessel destroying all minor sounds.

A few moments passed. Presently, with the silence of shadows, two masked and winged figures of men on hands and knees crawled into the comfortable space between our seat and the one in front, and advanced towards us, one from each side. From one hand of each the cold glitter of a Kra flashed its ominous message.

The masked intruder on Teddy's end reached his objective point first. Inch by inch the deadly Kra in his gloved hand rose towards the neck of the nearest guard. But just as the weapon was about to leap the short remaining distance, the comrade of the threatened man saw it out of the corner of his eye, and shouted a strident warning, leaping to his feet at the same time. But he was too late. The Kra had found its mark, and the touched man stiffened into helplessness. Turning at bay, and with his own Kra ready, the sole remaining guard made ready for battle. But at that instant a heavy net dropped over him from the air above, enmeshing him helplessly, and a touch from the weapon of one of the marked men rendered him inert.

I glanced upwards, and to my astonishment perceived that directly above us hovered a small, slender airship, evidently traveling at the identical speed of the huge prison ship. A comfortable-looking ladder of metal dangled down from it, and up this our two masked rescuers urged Teddy and me, following immediately after us.

The instant we were aboard, the small vessel dropped behind the prison ship, turning in a sharp bank, and sped back towards Raa, which was already barely visible in the distance.

The airship which had so opportunely rescued us was evidently a private vessel, an air yacht; its graceful lines and luxurious deck arrangement attested to that. But our two masked friends immediately hustled us below by silent gestures, where another surprise awaited us:

In a small, ovoid-shaped room in the nose of the yacht—the control room—two other masked and winged men were menacing the two operators, and were evidently controlling the vessel through them.

By means of an amber-colored liquid, which dissolved the metal like hot coffee dissolves sugar, our two rescuers removed our manacles, and then helped us into wings, possibly those of the two operators of the airship. It reminded me of a pantomime, and I had a curious sense of unreality. Who were these men? I wondered. And why were they rescuing us?

But I had not time for speculation. Because no sooner were we equipped with the wings, than we were again led to the deck, and our two mysterious friends conducted us immediately to the flattened tail of the vessel. Without an instant's delay they started their wing mechanism, motioned for us to do the same, and without further ado hopped off into the void, signaling us to follow them.

Teddy did so with evident zest; but I had a peculiar, unpleasant feeling at the pit of my stomach as the force of my wings carried me smoothly off the tail of the airship, on the trail of my three companions. As I passed on I glanced behind me, and saw the other two masqueraders rise from the deck of the vessel, and fly

in our direction. Then, accelerating my speed by a twist of the control knob on my chest, I caught up with Teddy, and we flew on abreast, following our two unknown leaders over the scattered houses and wide gardens and orchards of the outskirts of Raa, where a multitude of workers were busy among the plants and flowers, paying not the slightest attention to us.

But now the two masked flyers ahead of us began to rise upwards at a steep angle, until we had reached an air level far above that of ordinary wing travel, and much higher even than that used by the great airships. Evidently our two leaders believed in "safety first."

"Quite a lark, isn't it, Uncle Ned?" Teddy remarked, as we were flying level again. "But I wonder what became of our other two friends? I don't see them anywhere."

I glanced back. He was right, the other two masked flyers had disappeared.

"This flying might be a lark to you," I said, answering his first remark. "But it's a confounded nuisance to me. Give me the ground for comfortable traveling every time. And as for our two vanished friends: I think that the general idea is to scatter as much as possible. After all, I have an idea that a bold rescue like ours is not a matter of everyday occurrence. No doubt there will be an awful hullabaloo about it, especially when our particular friend, the high and mighty minister of police, Mr. Sarro learns of it."

"Great Jupiter's whiskers! I'd like to see Sarro's face when he hears the news," Teddy cried in malicious glee. "I bet he'll spit a ring around himself."

When we had arrived above the center part of the great city, our two silent guides dived downward again, at an acute angle, and it quickly became evident that their objective was an immense frustum of an octagonal pyramid, which reared its colossal bulk in the middle of an exceptionally spacious and luxuriant garden of magical beauty. A few minutes after our toboggan-like descent, we landed on the spacious roof of the rose-colored pyramid.

We did not tarry on the roof, however. For without a moment's delay our two guides, whose comparatively small stature I now noticed for the first time, hurried us down a broad stair to a large, octagon-shaped hall. One of them immediately disappeared through one of the seven or eight doors; but the other, who had been the real leader through it all, pulled off his sack-like mask, and turned to us smilingly.

For a few moments both of us stared at that smiling face utterly dumbfounded. Teddy was the first to find his voice.

"Great Jupiter—it's Noama!" he cried almost breathlessly.

With an even greater delight than his amazement had been, he caught one of the blushing girl's hands in his own, and pressed it fervently to his lips. "You wonderful, spunky little girl!" he said with deep feeling. He had both of her hands now, and even if she did not understand the words themselves, she could not very well misunderstand the sound of fond endearment in his voice as he said them, nor the tender light in his shining and admiring eyes.

But if my nephew's eyes expressed his tender senti-

ments, those of the girl fully reciprocated. "Tedde-da-a-r-ling, I love you," she crooned in English.

Naturally, this amazing, open and unmistakable declaration on Noama's part in our own language dumfounded me momentarily. Until I remembered that during Teddy's and my convalescence at the jail, the girl had secretly defied her grandfather's commands, and had visited with my nephew every day. It was now quite evident that my energetic young relative had utilized his opportunities fully, and had not lost any time in teaching his beautiful visitor the American way of making love in the modern and approved whirlwind fashion, with the appropriate words and gestures. It was likewise obvious that Noama had proved an apt and willing pupil.

Nevertheless, the granddaughter of the ruler of the land was anything but giddy-headed, and did not for a moment forget the danger of our precarious situation. Taking Teddy by the hand, she quickly led us to a door situated just behind the stairway, glancing once or twice apprehensively towards the elevator shaft in the center of the hall as she did so. Only when the door had closed behind us did she seem to breathe easier.

## CHAPTER XV

### Noama Confesses

"HOW, in the name of wonders, did you do it, Noama?" Teddy asked with keen interest, when we were comfortably seated, and equipped with sets of Sonaa. "You must have anticipated the sentence that your grandfather gave us."

"I did," she admitted. "And then too, Sarro, guessing my love for you, I suppose, allowed no occasion to pass without trying to torment me by telling me what he intended doing to you when he got the chance. Unwittingly in his passionate jealousy he told me just what I wanted to know, and accordingly I laid my plans."

"With three devoted friends, who owe their lives to me, I commandeered the vessel you saw, waited beyond the city, high up, for the coming of the prison ship, and then two of us landed on it. You know the rest."

"You are wonderful!" Teddy praised enthusiastically, and possessed himself of her unresisting right hand, which she blushing allowed him to kiss and fondle. "But if you had failed? Or, worse yet, if your grandfather should find out what you have done—what then?"

Noama's beautiful face appeared to become momentarily strangely harsh when she answered:

"In the first case I would have followed you to the mines, and would have awaited my chance to rescue you from there. But as far as my grandfather, the governor, is concerned—if he should find out what I have done, it would mean death! No citizen of our land, no matter how exalted his or her station may be, can interfere with the august decisions of the supreme council and live. It is the law!"

Teddy gazed at her in an attitude of reverent worship.

"And yet, knowing all this, you took that awful chance, darling," he said in a tone of mingled love and reproach. "Why—why, I would rather die a dozen

deaths, if that were possible, than to have harm come to you through me."

Noama smiled at him lovingly, and patted his cheek affectionately.

"Then, if you feel that way about me, Tedde-e da-a-r-ling," she said softly, "do you not understand that it is but natural that I should feel the same way about you, and that I should be cheerfully willing to risk my life when yours is in jeopardy?"

They were splendid, those two fine young lovers, in their simple readiness of self-sacrifice for each other, and I endured as much as I could of their utterly cleansouled, frank, and unconventional love making; but finally, in sheer self-defence, I felt it incumbent upon me to remind them that I was still present—a fact which both of them seemed to have utterly forgotten.

"Just what are your plans regarding Teddy and me, Noama?" I inquired rather diffidently. "Pardon me for asking; but naturally I am rather anxious to know."

She turned to me then, and gazed at me as if she was just awakening from some beautiful dream. She smiled happily.

"Oh—yes—of course," she agreed, drifting back again to reality. "You see—" turning to Teddy again, "I judged that the best thing to do under the circumstances would be for you two to stay right here, until the governor and Sarro come to the conclusion that you have escaped to one of the other eleven cities. After that we will watch our chance and escape to the upper world by the secret way which, long ago, I discovered by chance, and of which I alone hold the secret."

"We—?" Teddy asked incredulously, as if not daring to hope that he had heard aright. "Do you really mean that you—" he ceased as if unable to go on, and waited breathlessly.

She smiled, blushing, and her beautiful, large eyes were like pools of clear, sacred fire as she gazed at him with all her love revealed in them.

"Of course, Tedde-e da-a-r-ling," she said softly, looking radiantly beautiful in that moment. "Of course I am going with you to your land. Is not the place of a bride with her lover?"

Without a word the utterly happy husband-to-be drew the marvelous girl into his arms then, and I escaped precipitately into the adjoining dining room, where I began to satisfy the insistent demands of my stomach with the plentiful and select viands provided.

### Great Plans

I HAD finished my leisurely meal, and was just contemplating whether or not I should begin all over again, when Teddy entered the dining room. His face was all aglow with great happiness, and he slapped me affectionately on the back, so that I almost swallowed a new kind of fruit I was trying tentatively.

"Great Jupiter!" he cried in an exuberance of joy. "I feel so happy, I could embrace a four hundred pound nigger mammy!"

"No need of trying to kill a fellow about it, is there?" I grumbled peevishly. "And I'd rather have you do that hugging stunt than me. Seems to me you're getting rather expert along that line."



He colored right up to the roots of his copper-colored hair at that, and slapped my back again. "Be nice unkie, and don't grouch," he begged grinningly. "How's lunch? I'm as hungry as an eskimo."

"Oh, is that a fact?" I said with mock sarcasm. "Well, well, that is most surprising indeed. Seems to me I've read somewhere, or heard, that a soul in love nourishes itself on love alone. At any rate, all poets say so, they tell me, so it must be so. That being the case, I can't understand why—"

"But it's the soul—the soul only—that feeds on love, remember that little fact, uncle o' mine," Teddy interrupted me laughingly. "But the poor, mortal body requires more substantial food. For instance, a nice porterhouse steak, done just right, with plenty of smothered onions on top and—"

"You go to thunder!" I growled outragedly, and viciously attacked my seventh plate full of odds and ends.

Presently Teddy stopped with a fork-full of salad halfway to his mouth, and grinned at me mysteriously.

"By the way, Uncle Ned—I'll bet you a dozen pairs of new socks, you can't guess whose house this pyramid is."

For a few moments I stared at him wonderingly. Finally I shook my head. "No, I haven't an idea. Why? Whose is it?"

"Listen then," Teddy began with mock grandiloquence, "and I'll tell you the secret: We happen to be the house guests of Taman, the Thrice-Wise, governor of Raa, and chief justice of the supreme court! Now what do you think of that little piece of news?"

"Go on—tell me another one," I said sarcastically. "That one is too big to swallow. Give me something easier."

"Sounds like bunk, doesn't it?" he said with sudden gravity. "But it's true as the gospel, nevertheless. Noama told me just before she left. And she also explained why she brought us here—it's logically the only place in Raa that would not be suspected to harbor us. Furthermore, this part of the palace is never used now, and there is no possibility of our being discovered by any of the servants. One only besides Noama knows about our presence in the palace—one of her ladies-in-waiting, her personal, intimate friend; the unknown who was with her during our rescue."

"Well, by Jonah!" I said dazedly. "I feel like Daniel in the lions' den; but without his faith of invulnerability." Then, after a few moments of thought; "But that astonishing girl is right. They would never dream of looking for us here. I am forced to admire your taste, Teddy. There is more in that young woman's head than feminine nonsense."

"She is wonderful!" he said enthusiastically. "And that isn't all: She is going to bring us wigs which will not only camouflage our hair, but make our heads look bigger, and she will give us a sort of make-up cream that will disguise the color of our bodies, and make us look like natives. She said these things would be necessary in case we had to make a quick getaway."

"She is quite right," I agreed. "But how about the language? We would have to play dumb and deaf, I suppose."

"I don't think so, Uncle Ned. Because, when we

were still convalescing at the jail, Noama and I got to talking about language, and she said that the Raanians had an arrangement whereby their children learn things while they are asleep. It's a process of absorption of knowledge by the subconscious mind, if I understood her right, and she intimated that at the first favorable opportunity she would get a set of the instruments and teach us the Raanian language in a few days. I'll ask her about it when she comes again."

## CHAPTER XVI

### More History

**S**OFTLY, so as not to awaken Teddy, I rose from my couch, tightened the sash of my sleeveless, kimono-like house dress, and passed from the darkened sleeping chamber to the front room. The long sleep had refreshed me, and I felt the need of food and entertainment. In the pretty little dining room, with its brightly tinted walls, I found a substantial and satisfying lunch, which our good fairy had provided while we were asleep, and then amused myself in the front room by examining the fixtures and the furniture.

One curious apparatus intrigued me almost immediately. It was a large and substantially built easy-chair, from the high back of which hung a large, and evidently adjustable ovoid of shining metal. On each arm of the chair were several knurled knobs. Full of curiosity I seated myself in the chair, pulled the ovoid down over my head like a diver his helmet, and waited. Nothing happened. My right hand touched one of the knobs on the chair arm, and I gave it an experimental twist.

Immediately the soft strains of string music, unlike any I had ever heard, sounded most pleasantly in my ears, and at the same time a picture took form before my eyes—the life-like, moving picture of a young and beautiful girl, unmistakably a Raanian, who appeared to be standing upon a sort of pedestal, playing with nimble fingers on the strings of a harp-like instrument. Presently she began to sing in a marvelous contralto voice, and I realized that in some magical manner I was actually witnessing a theatrical performance, which was happening somewhere in the great city.

A touch of a hand on my arm startled me. I quickly shut off the music and vision and pushed up the big metal cap.

Teddy was standing by the side of the chair, gazing down at me anxiously.

"Do you know you gave me quite a jolt, Uncle Ned," he said. "When I was coming out of the bedroom and saw you sitting here so still, and with that big diver's cap over your head, the thought flashed into my mind that it might be a sort of electric chair, and that you were dead."

"Wrong, Teddy, my boy," I said laughingly. "Your old Uncle Ned is still alive and able to kick like a healthy steer."

When I had explained the machine to him, he naturally had a try at it, and was as enthusiastic as I was. Through experimenting we discovered that we could get almost any kind of music or vocal rendition, and decided that it was a sort of super-radio and television

machine. In each case the naturalness and reality of voice or sound, and of vision was so perfect that we appeared to be right on the spot where it was produced. But after an hour or so of musical entertainment we began to tire of it.

There was an electronic recording machine in the room, quite similar in appearance to the one we had used at the jail, but profusely ornamented, and of evidently finer material.

"What say we try that recording machine, Uncle Ned, and find out what happened to those interesting Primarians," Teddy suggested.

"Now let's see—" I mused as we were seated in front of the apparatus. "We have already seen three epochs of Primarian history; and therefore, if I set this dial to the fourth division, we should get the consecutive period. Well, here goes."

Teddy pressed the white starter button, and then both of us placed our faces to the padded, oval openings and stared into the black interior.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once again we viewed that peculiar, golden-green phenomenon of luminosity which had accompanied our other three visions of Primarian history—

The luminous haze thinned. And then gradually a great disc of brilliant radiance pierced it, its light so bright that it taxed my eyes to their uttermost. I had the sensation of gazing upwards at it. And suddenly I understood: That great disc of white fire was the sun!

But it seemed an alien sun—somehow, in some indefinable manner, menacing. It was at its zenith apparently, but it bulked as large as one ordinarily sees the evening sun, when it is about to sink below the horizon.

Suddenly I experienced a strange sensation. I seemed to be turning a slow somersault in the air, and as the brilliant disc of the alien sun disappeared upwards, a great grassy plain appeared below me. There was something familiar about the place, and the view of a group of flat, extensive buildings obliquely down from my point of vision immediately reminded me that I was gazing at the great terminal of the marvelous twin shafts which led down to the new, subterranean home of the Primarian race.

However, there was now a new factor in the scene which it had lacked when I had last viewed it: A perfectly circular border had been formed about the great plot of ground occupied by the buildings, and from this radiated in perfect symmetrical order row upon row of countless thousands of ovoidal huts, or tents. They were of all colors of the rainbow, and, like the houses in the great city which I had seen, the colors and shades were all grouped apart. And through the streets and avenues thus formed, and in the air above them, I saw the ceaseless motion of myriads of people in many-colored garb.

### The Great Cataclysm!

OTHER thousands and tens of thousands were arriving constantly through the air from all directions, like great swarms of migratory birds, carrying bundles that were doubtlessly personal belongings; and the varied coloring of wings and clothes, together with

their constant and variable motion, made a wondrous and bewildering spectacle. It was doubtlessly the momentous time of their emigration from their old home; for on the ground an infinitely long line of people, four abreast, were passing slowly and orderly into the vast terminal building, through the side entrances of which a likewise constant string of the strange, curved passenger vehicles entered, being transported from the surrounding buildings on specially constructed carriers.

The vision passed into the great building. A scene of intense activity was revealed. Gone were the thousands of vehicles which the former period had shown, they being no doubt already dispatched on their long voyage to the new, subterranean land with loads of emigrants. Instead, the immense building was now literally crowded with a multitude of people of all ages, who were moving in an endless stream towards the shaft of departure. There, under the supervision of a corps of police guards they boarded the continually incoming passenger conveyers, and were immediately whisked out of sight into the yawning entrance of the great, winding shaft.

And presently too I noticed with great interest that from the shaft of return at the other end of the terminal occasional empty conveyers began to emerge, back from their trip into the bowels of the earth, indicating that the stupendous transportation chain was about completed, and that now a continuous line of moving passenger vehicles spanned the more than fifty thousand miles composed of the two tremendous shafts.

I began to study the people then—a robust, muscular, and healthy-appearing race, on the average larger and stronger than people in our world—and found that they behaved very much like modern people would have acted under like circumstances. The majority of the older ones were sad and thoughtful, no doubt realizing that, even if the earth were not destroyed, they would never again see the light of the golden sun, nor the blue sky above them, nor the flashing of the sunlight upon the emerald waters of the sea. But the younger people and the children evinced no sign of sadness or regret. Instead there was the joyous spirit of adventure and the eager anticipation of unknown experiences manifest in their flushed faces, and expressed in the impatient haste with which they flung themselves into the vehicles when their turn came.

But suddenly, through the tumult of embarkation and uproar of countless voices, I became conscious of a more strident clamor outside. A group of wild-eyed, pallid young men rushed in through the main portal, hurling people and children to left and right, and making their impetuous way to the mouth of the embarkation station.

"The sun has exploded!" they yelled shrilly. "The sun had exploded! Save himself who can!"

A scene of indescribable violence and ferocity ensued, as with one accord the thousands surged towards the mouth of the entrance shaft, and other frantic thousands were endeavoring to get in from the outside. In a moment, as it were, an orderly people had become wild, raging beasts, urged on by insensate fear and the primal law of self-preservation. They surged over the armed guards as if the latter had never existed, children were crushed to death, women were trampled under-

foot, men tore each other's flesh with their bare hands, and above all sounded the soul-sickening anguished screams of the maimed and dying.

Presently the vision passed from that scene of frightful savagery and death to the open again. Once more I seemed to look up into the heavens and beheld the strange, alien sun. But now its appearance had changed utterly. Its size had increased to enormous proportions, and it shone with unendurable brilliance. But the most striking feature about it was the radiations from its entire periphery—stupendous jets of blue-white fire that seemed to reach out to infinity. And even as I watched the tremendous celestial display in utter awe, the sun's disc was blotted out, and its dagger-like radiations merged into a cloud-like phenomenon of blinding light, which rapidly covered the entire heavens.

I guessed what was happening. Despite the precise calculations of the wisest of the Primarian wise men, and his prediction based upon this, something had gone wrong, and the explosion of the sun had happened prematurely, and was now hurling from its vast surface in all directions an immense mass of white-hot gases, traveling at a speed of many thousands of miles per second.

An unspeakable terror gripped me as I visualized what would happen when that awful cloud of destruction would engulf the earth. Presently I became conscious of an utterly dreadful, blood-chilling sound, coming from below.

The vision changed again to the great plain. A frightful change had taken place in its appearance. For, where before had been green grass and flowering bushes, there was now nothing but brown and black spots and blotches horribly suggestive of annihilation and death. And as I stared appalled, I perceived in utter horror countless thousands of indistinct, human shapes, crawling—crawling—crawling—

And then suddenly everything disappeared in a hell of blinding, stabbing flame!

## CHAPTER XVII

### A Horrible Calamity

**H**OURS later, when Teddy and I were still discussing the awful cataclysm we had witnessed, Noama paid us another visit.

She had made herself amazingly, wondrously beautiful.

A most artistically embroidered, short-sleeved house dress, rose-colored and satiny, and of many folds, enveloped her perfectly modelled figure almost to her graceful ankles; while embroidered slippers, of the same color and sheen as the dress, adorned her small, arched feet. A narrow belt, formed entirely of diamond-like jewels, drew the folds of the gown closely to her slender and supple waist; while a small round cap, fashioned from the same kind of scintillating gems, crowned the long, wavy tresses of her silken, dark hair, and completed the frame to a picture of feminine loveliness about which poets might well go into ecstasy.

Her large, starry eyes passed lightly over me, and their tender, warm gaze fastened itself upon my favored nephew.

"How do you like me in this dress, Tedde-e da-a-ling?" she fluted coquettishly.

"Like you—!" Further words evidently failed him; for he sprang up and pressed his lips to her right hand in silent, fervent adoration.

But suddenly he stared in turn at Noama and at me, with astonishment written large in his face. "Great Jupiter! Don't you notice something very strange, uncle Ned?" he questioned almost breathlessly.

For a moment or two I stared back at him puzzledly. Then his meaning struck me, and I realized a marvelous, inexplicable fact: Noama had spoken to us in her native tongue, and without a set of Sonaa, and we had understood her every word!

I answered Teddy's question with a silent nod; for I was quite a bit dazed, and then both of us turned questioningly to our beautiful young hostess, who seemed to be hugely enjoying our amazement. Her musical laughter rang through the room like a perfect chord.

"I think, Tedde-e, that both you and your uncle are doing quite well after but one language lesson," she said laughingly. "Your mental capacity of absorption, and your power of recollection appear to be very superior."

"Language lesson?" Teddy showed his utter astonishment. "But I don't remember taking any lessons. What do you mean, Noama?"

Whereupon that amazing girl explained that, by means of the teaching machine of which she had already spoken to Teddy she had given us our first language lesson while we had been asleep, and evidently our subconscious mind had absorbed her teaching perfectly.

But, wonderful as the process was, we had yet merely acquired the most rudimentary knowledge of the simple Raaian language, and needed a number of additional lessons. Therefore, in order to carry on intelligent conversation, we had to resort to the helpful Sonaa again. We told Noama that through the record machine we had witnessed the awful catastrophe which had overtaken the luckless Primarians in that long-past age of the earth, and desired further information on several points regarding that terrible event.

Noama's beautiful face had become very sad.

"It was indeed a most horrible calamity for my unfortunate progenitors," she said in a low voice. "I have often witnessed those last awful moments in the record, and it always shocks me dreadfully. The writings, and also the vocal records which have come down to us teach that fully seven-tenths of those poor people were in a few minutes completely annihilated on that terrible day."

"But, Noama, how was that record taken, dearest?" Teddy asked with deep interest. "Surely no sort of apparatus could possibly have endured in that solar furnace."

"That was not so difficult, Tedde-e, when you know that the chief of the Primarian wise men was the inventor of the wonderful Zanoon, as he himself indicated verbally in the earlier record, if you remember. All these records have been taken by means of the Zanoon, in combination with an electronic absorption machine. You must understand that long before the date set for the immigration of the Primarians into this

their new land, all the scientific instruments had already been transported down here, and set up in the great white pyramid, where you saw them, the temple of knowledge, as the Primarians called it. And many of the scientists were also already down here when the premature explosion of the sun occurred. Of course there have been many improvements added to the Zanoon since then; but the principle is the same. The inventor of it, the greatest of the Primarian wise men, also perished on that awful day."

"But there seems to be an inconsistency somewhere, Noama," Teddy said thoughtfully. "Because, how, in the name of wonders, could it have been possible to take the records of primal life long before the appearance of man on the earth, as my uncle and I saw it in the record machine?"

### Noama's Story

NOAMA smiled at him tolerantly. "That is a bit of trickery, in a way," she explained. "You see—after the cataclysm with its annihilating fiery gases, which burned up about half of its original diameter, the earth, at least its surface, was practically in the same condition as when it was first formed. But, of course, the cooling, and the consequent forming of water and land was infinitely more rapid.

"From generation to generation then, through the thousands and tens of thousands of years, the wise men of our land watched through the Zanoon the gradual cooling of the surface, the forming of the water and the new land, and the appearance of plant life and animal life in their order. Thus, the record of primitive animal life which you saw ahead of the record of Primarian life, was taken during the formation of the second earth. Quite logically the wise men calculated that the primal conditions of the first earth must have been about the same."

"That was indeed a most logical conclusion," I agreed readily. "What a wonderful ancestry you have, Noama—what wise men and sages. It's a pity though that the wisest of the Primarian wise men made such a grave miscalculation, with such awful consequences."

"But that terrible cataclysm was not due to a miscalculation, my friend," Noama corrected me gravely. "It was caused by some strange interplanetary force which suddenly greatly accelerated the speed of the oncoming swarm of meteors to such a degree, that it struck the sun very much sooner than expected."

"Tell me, Noama—" Teddy began gently, "did any of your people ever try to get back to the surface?"

"Yes, twice. When the second earth had fully formed and the era of reptiles, together with adverse atmospheric conditions had passed away, the council of wise men decided that the time was ripe for a pioneering attempt to repeople the surface. By means of simple calculations they had long before discovered that the thickness of the earth's new crust intervening between this land and the surface was only about one sixty-

second part of the original thickness. Therefore the upward trip, which was to be made on foot, would not be at all difficult.

"In a very short time a corps of engineers had placed the air-ducts and lights of the remaining lengths of shaft in order, and had ascended to the top of it, to remove the molten rock masses which sealed its entrance. Only one of the shafts could be used; because by means of the Zanoon it was found that the mouth of the second one was under water.

"When everything was in readiness, the supreme council selected five hundred thousand young and hardy people of both sexes, among whom were all trades and professions, to form the pioneers of the new race which was to be established on the surface. As leaders they were given one hundred eminent scientists and wise men, and one governor, a member of the supreme council, to guide them all.

"Equipped with merely the most necessary utensils, the great army of pioneers ascended to the rocky and barren island on which the shaft terminated, and made ready for their long and perilous journey. Far, far in the direction of the setting sun from the island, the wise men had discovered an immense continent, rich in vegetation and animal life, and this was the object of the journey. But between stretched a great ocean, whose storm-whipped waves hurled themselves thunderingly against the cliffs of the island, while above them vast and black cloud masses lowered threateningly, as if about to pounce down upon those venturesome children from the subterranean world.

"Many there were among the pioneers, especially the women, who were secretly terrified by this noisy and hostile new world, and who longed to get back to the silence and tranquility of their subterranean home. But they were of a brave race, and kept their thoughts to themselves. Specially large and powerful wings had been made for each of the pioneers, and at a given signal they rose into the air like an immense swarm of birds, one hundred thousand of them at a time, and followed their leaders in that long trans-oceanic flight, to a new life and to the many unknown dangers of a new and wild land.

"The remaining millions of people kept themselves informed of the progress of the pioneers, of course, by means of the Zanoon. Suffice it to say that, with the exception of several hundreds of unfortunates who, for one reason or another, fell into the ocean and drowned, the great army of adventurers arrived at their new home-land in good condition, and began their new life with zest and vigor.

"At first, under the fatherly guidance of the governor and their wise men, the pioneers jointly overcame all the thousands of difficulties and dangers confronting them, and formed one united and happy people. And so promising did conditions seem, that another five hundred thousand immigrants from here joined them during the first hundred years."

*(To be Continued)*



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### Table of Contents—August

<b>THE MARTIAN REVENGE</b> By Henrik Dahl Juve .....	198
<i>Suddenly the Martians' friendliness vanished and they became merciless killers . . .</i>	
<b>THE ANNIHILATOR COMES</b> By Ed Earl Repp .....	212
<i>An Air Wonder story of the great north wastes with a surprise and a startling conclusion . . .</i>	
<b>WHEN THE MOONS MET!</b> By Clyde F. Beck .....	236
<i>Second Prize Winner AIR WONDER STORIES Cover Contest.</i>	
<b>THE RADIUM MASTER</b> By Jim Vanny .....	240
<i>Before them lay Urania, strange city of power . . . then a force gripped their plane . . .</i>	
<b>A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE</b> By George Paul Bauer (Conclusion).....	252
<i>Above the abyss they fought . . . the desperate gamble for freedom . . . then a terrific plunge into the depths . . .</i>	
<b>WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE?</b> .....	271
<b>SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS</b> .....	275
<b>THE READER SPEAKS</b> Letters From Readers .....	276

#### ON THE COVER

this month from "The Radium Master" by Jim Vanny, our young explorers are held in the iron grip of the merciless wheeled-robot, while the masked Emperor of Urania transmits through his strange equipment the orders that will seal their doom.

### NEXT MONTH

**IN 20,000 A.D.!**, by Nathan Schachner and Arthur L. Zagat. The mere mention of words cannot convey truly the thrill that the editors received when they read this marvelous time-traveling story. Imagine yourself suddenly rushed through time and finding yourself thrown into the year 20,000 A.D. Into a world of which you knew nothing, and one that even your most fantastic dreams cannot picture? Here is a startling story; the adventures of a country boy in the stirring events of a great civilization.

**THE WAR LORD OF VENUS**, by Frank Bridge. It has been said that Venus is probably in the same stage of its evolution as the earth was fifty million years ago. What a fascinating subject for a story is the experiences of interplanetary explorers on such a strange, young world! The possibilities for adventures are endless, and our author makes use of them to construct a fast-moving, breath-taking mystery story—a full length novel!

**THE TORPEDO TERROR**, by Edsel Newton. It has already been acknowledged that it is possible to send an airplane into the air and guide it by radio controls without the need of a pilot. The immense importance of this in a war in the air cannot be overestimated. For by means of radio controls it will be possible for a nation to send thousands upon thousands of planes laden with high explosives over the enemy lines. But "The Torpedo Terror" is not a war story, in fact it is the working out of a great mystery and the saving of the world from a terrible disaster.

**A RESCUE IN SPACE**, by Lowell Howard Morrow. This story is the third prize winner of the AIR WONDER Cover Contest. A desperate drama is going on in the vast reaches of interplanetary space! A fierce battle and then a chase across millions of miles!

#### AND OTHERS

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# A Subterranean Adventure

By George Paul Bauer



(Illustration by Miller)

Like lightning Teddy's long arms shot over the head of the gorilla man and his right knee was rammed into the man's back.

## A SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE

### What Has Gone Before

Several young men driving along a mountain road near Denver, Colorado, come upon a strangely dressed man lying unconscious on the road. They take him to a hospital and on his recovery he tells the story of his disaster. He is an inventor, named Ned Gothram, and together with his nephew Ted Cranston, attempted to bore a tunnel clear through the earth with a machine they called the Penetrator. After going down a number of miles the machine took a sharp fall and landed into a great sea of oil which formed part of a gigantic subterranean cavern. They reach the shore and finally find a great city in a valley below them. They are attacked by winged human-like creatures and taken to the city where they are brought before the governor called Taman the Thrice Wise. By means of a Sonaa, an instrument put on their heads, they are able to converse telepathically. Taman tells them that they can never return to the surface world. They are taken to a house of confinement. On the way they pass a beautiful young woman whom Teddy falls in love with. The mysterious girl comes to visit them but a winged man tries to force her to leave. Teddy vanquishes him and he leaves after making a threat against Teddy. The girl reveals herself as Noama, granddaughter of Taman, and the man as Sarro, Minister of Police, whom she has refused to marry.

After Noama leaves, by a recording device the men learn the history of the Raanians; how in order to avoid a catastrophe on the earth's surface, millenniums ago, the people dug their caverns and took up their residence sixty miles within the earth's interior. As they are looking at the history records, they are seized by Sarro and his men and taken to the madhouse where they witness the tortures of criminals. When the men of Sarro come to take them to the torture bench, they manage to escape and, obtaining flying belts, fly to the gate that might lead to the shaft to the surface. Sarro pursues them, there is a battle and they are recaptured. At a trial before the governor, Noama's grandfather, they are condemned to death. But the ship that is to take them to the place of death is attacked by Noama's friends and they are rescued and taken to the very house of Taman, the governor, where Noama secretes them. They again have a chance to see the Primarian history and witness the catastrophe that had driven the Raanians underground. and witness the catastrophe that had driven the Raanians underground. Noama fills in some of the gaps of the history and is telling the men how the earth became liquid again after the catastrophe. A little corps of men and women were chosen to reestablish the race on the surface, the others to stay underground.

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### A Dangerous Venture

THERE was a silence after Noama had finished.

"So those people who went to the surface are our ancestors?" Teddy asked.

Noama nodded her head. "Yes. But as time went on and we observed how they had changed, how they warred and killed each other, we decided they had become an alien race, and we wanted nothing to do with them. And then it was that the supreme council of Raa sealed the doors of the two communicating shafts forever, and passed a law that, whoever should henceforth attempt to open either and pass to the surface, would be punished with instant death."

Noama ceased, and rose from her seat. She smiled at Teddy.

"I must leave you now, because I must dress for worship in the temple. I am the high priestess of Raa, you see; like my mother was before me."

"You — a priestess?" Teddy said incredulously. "Then you people do have a religion?"

"Naturally we have a religion, Tedde-e da-a-rling. Why are you so astonished? Do not your people too worship the Supreme Creator of all the universes?"

She raised her superb arms and spread her hands over us.

"May the Great Spirit be with you, and guide you!" she intoned solemnly.

Involuntarily Teddy and I had bowed our heads reverently. And when we looked up again, Noama, the wonderful high priestess of Raa, had disappeared.

"I'm tired to death of being cooped up here, Uncle Ned," Teddy turned to me complaining. "I didn't want to say anything to Noama, because it might hurt her feelings; but we've been here about ten days as far as I am able to judge without a watch, and I'm just wild to go somewhere outside and stretch my legs. I can slip out alone, so you needn't come."

"Nothing doing!" I objected emphatically. "If you're going, I am going with you. There's no telling what you might run up against, and I want to be there."

"Good old Uncle Ned!" Teddy approved heartily. "I knew you would. Thanks to Noama we know the language, and that, together with the skin coloring and the wigs ought to

get us by easily. Besides, there's that festival beginning now, and the city is crowded with people. That ought to make it still easier for us to keep from being spotted by Sarro, or one of his cops."

"We'll risk it anyway." I decided. "For, to tell the truth, I'm just as eager to get out and stretch my legs as you are. Let's get busy with the camouflage."

The result of our make-up was quite astonishing. Our skin was now as startlingly white as that of any Raanian, and the skillful stuffed wigs which Noama had pro-



GEORGE PAUL BAUER

*IN this issue, this stupendous story comes to its dramatic climax. Our two explorers from the surface are at grips with their captors; and we see through these pages the tremendous adventures that come when two men and a girl try to pit their strength against a powerful and hostile nation.*

*As we stated in a previous issue, the awfulness of the experiences that our explorers from the surface are forced to go through are almost unbelievable. But with the clarity of our author's writing and his vividness in describing the scenes of that far underground world, they become real and convincing.*

*The note of tragedy at the end our author cannot help. But he does offer some hope. Perhaps, as Mr. Bauer intimates, a new expedition can be sent to the underground world, and in a sequel we can follow again the adventures of Ned Gothram, Teddy and Noama, who have made such an impression on our readers.*



vided caused our heads to appear of native size. We had also been compelled to color our lips and cheeks.

"By Jonah; you look so much like a Raanian that I am half ashamed to talk to you in English," I told Teddy laughingly. "If our mutual friend, Sarro recognizes you in that rig, he must be a mind reader."

The problem of how to get out of the palace unobserved now confronted us. Clearly we could not risk the elevator, by means of which discovery by one of the household would be inevitable, and there were no stairs. It was likewise obvious that if our presence in the palace was once known, it would immediately cease to be a haven of refuge, and would become a death trap instead.

"I am going to scout around out in the hall, and see what I can find out," Teddy announced, pushing back the heavy inner latch of the door.

A time later he returned, lugging a large bundle of heavy cord, similar to that of which the carrying nets were made, and a bunch of cloth.

"Found it among a lot of old junk in one of the other apartments," he explained triumphantly, "I can twist a rope out of the cord, and we can hang it out of one of the windows and slide down to the ground. We can wrap some of this cloth around our hands to protect them."

"That scheme for getting down might be all right, provided nobody catches us at it in this everlasting daylight," I said skeptically. "But how, in the name of Jonah, are we going to get back up? I doubt if we can make it climbing. The pyramid must be every bit of five hundred feet high."

But with the optimism of youth, Teddy was ready for me.

"All we have to do, is to borrow a set of wings each when no one is looking, and fly back," he suggested grinning.

Try as I would, I could invent no better scheme, and was compelled to adopt his. At the end of two or three hours Teddy had his rope finished, and we were ready for our adventure. Teddy's estimate of the height of the building had been correct, for when we hung the rope out of one of the bedroom windows, it lacked only a couple of feet in touching the ground. Upon my suggestion we arranged an equal length of cord in such manner that by pulling on it from the ground, we could open the knot in the rope and allow it to drop to the ground; thus eliminating the chance of its being seen.

Teddy slid down first, and both of us reached the ground without mishap or discovery. There was, of course, the chance that we had been observed from one of the neighboring buildings, or by some flyer; but we had to risk that.

As soon as we had landed in the garden and had succeeded in dropping the rope, we hastened into the dense, nearby shrubbery, and after concealing it quickly made our way to the adjoining avenue. Feeling quite secure in our disguise, we mingled inconspicuously with the thousands of pedestrians who crowded the great thoroughfare from end to end, and allowed ourselves to be carried slowly along by the stream of laughing and talking humanity, that seemed to flow into one

general direction.

We soon discovered the reason: A vast square appeared, and it was into this spot that the multitude of people, streaming from a dozen or more avenues, converged like rivers into an ocean. A double row of magnificent trees, covered with huge, fragrant flowers of many colors, lined the immense area, and through this we passed with the crowd.

"Great Jupiter!—what a whale of a bell!" Teddy exclaimed below his breath, pointing with his eyes. "I'll bet a dozen new socks it's the one we've been hearing and wondering about."

It was "a whale of a bell" that loomed before us near the opposite side of the square. I have seen the largest bell in our own world, the one at Moscow, Russia, which weighs around 180 tons; but even that was as the egg of a pigeon to that of an ostrich compared to the gigantic bell of Ra.

Imagine, if you can, a perfectly circular block of masonry, fifty feet high and three times that in diameter, and on this, placed upside down, the frustum of an immense cone of metal with slightly concave sides, rising from the top of the base to the height of about two hundred and fifty feet, and two hundred from lip to lip, flanked at two exactly opposite points by slender twin towers which rose beside it. A heavy metal shaft connected each pair of towers at their upper extremity, and from the exact middle of this movable shaft a long metal rod rose upwards, which terminated in a huge ball. A massive counterweight maintained this bell hammer in an exactly upright position when not in use. Words fail me to adequately describe the massiveness and the vastness of that cyclopean bell—if such it could be called.

### The Ceremony

**B**Y pushing and wriggling through the dense crowd of people, Teddy and I finally contrived to work ourselves closer to the base of the great bell, and now another object claimed our attention: In the very shadow of the massive bell base a large altar of rose-colored stone had been built in the form of a horizontal triangle, with the apex pointing outwards, to the platform of which twelve wide steps led from all three sides. Many beautiful flowers, in magnificently sculptured containers of polished stone, adorned the platform and the altar itself, which latter was merely a massive, low column of white, semi-transparent stone.

But it was the object which crowned the flat capital of the altar column that drew the attention like a magnet—a great hollow globe of crystal, filled with a peculiar bluish, but perfectly transparent, liquid or gas. Within the upper part of this globe a brilliantly luminous body of round form had been suspended in some invisible, magic manner; and about this bright source of light, in a horizontal plane just below it, floated thirteen lesser round bodies, of various sizes, and of differing degrees of luminosity, a number of them in turn surrounded by still smaller globules.

However, neither the thirteen larger bodies, nor their tiny satellites were at rest. Instead, the latter traveled about their parent globes at considerable speed, while these again moved in concentric, never-ceasing circular

paths about the brilliant central body.

The arrangement was, of course, perfectly understandable. It was a most wonderful, working model of the solar system as it had been before the great cataclysm. And by watching closely we were able to identify our earth, as it had been, with its two original moons, swinging about an orbit in the fifth place from the sun. This meant that two of the original five inner planets had been completely annihilated during the cataclysm.

"If we had that arrangement back home, we could make a fortune by exhibiting it," Teddy whispered to me.

"Yes, I think we could," I agreed. "And the more I see of this people's science, the less I am inclined to be proud of our own achievements."

At this moment an expectant murmuring, like the first blast of a storm, rose about us. "They are coming! they are coming!" we heard the people exclaim on all sides of us.

With great interest we followed the gaze of the multitude to the blue haze above us, and saw one of the great airships spiralling down. Larger than any we had yet seen, more gracefully built, and of a shining white color, it had the stamp of royalty all over it.

No sooner had it landed in a clear space a hundred feet or more distant from the altar, when a narrow, vertical section of its body opened downward and formed a comfortable stairway, down which Taman, the governor, with exquisite courtesy conducted his granddaughter, Noama, high priestess of Raa.

At sight of Noama, I heard Teddy gasp in admiration.

And no wonder. For in her long, flowing, diaphanous robes of priesthood, which revealed more than concealed the magnificent contours of her body, her beauty was almost overwhelming. A triple triangle on the breast of the robe flashed a thousand colors with each undulation of her perfectly formed bosom, and a delicately fashioned crown of jewels, topped by a self-luminous, miniature sun, made a fitting adornment for her queenly head.

A line of six of his principal counsellors followed Taman, and Noama was followed by six beautiful sub-priestesses. Arrayed in splendid robes of state, and the great dome of his head covered by a jeweled, pyramidal hat of twelve sides, the Thrice-Wise ruler of Raa made a most fitting consort for the wondrously beautiful high priestess. These two principals, with their likewise splendidly robed followers, made a most imposing ceremonious train.

As the procession ascended the twelve broad steps of the altar, the six counsellors of Taman and the six sub-priestesses stopped when the top step was reached, and, parting from each other, they arranged themselves so that upon each of the six upper steps on Taman's side stood one counsellor, and upon Noama's side one of the young sub-priestesses, each of the twelve half turned and facing the altar platform.

At the same time Taman led Noama to the left side of the altar column, while he occupied the right. He raised his hand, and immediate silence ensued. And in that moment the immense bell back of the altar awoke

to life. Fascinated, I watched as the two great hammers from the twin towers swung against the colossal rim alternately, striking it twelve times. The huge balls of the bell hammers—they were of a hard wood—merely tapped the bell, but the tonal effect was indescribably, awfully grand—a deep, mellow roar which appeared to come from the center of the earth.

As long as the voice of the great bell vibrated through the atmosphere, everybody stood at silent, reverent attention. But as soon as its ultimate tone had whispered into silence, Taman began to speak. In a deep, earnest, and sonorous voice he briefly reviewed the life of their ancient ancestors, the Primarians, the details of which each child in Raa knew, praised the great wisdom of the Primarian wise men, who through their wonderful knowledge of the forces of nature had been enabled to create this subterranean empire, and gave thanks to their memory.

When the governor had ceased, the great bell again sounded twelve solemn strokes, one for each member of the Primarian grand council.

Noama now walked forward to the very apex of the altar platform, and raised her perfect arms and beautiful face upwards in a gesture of adoration.

"Praise be to the Eternal Creator of the Universes!" she chanted in her marvelous contralto voice. "Praise be to him forever!"

"Praise be to him forever!" the six sub-priestesses answered her.

"Praise be to him forever!" all the people answered in unison. And at the same time a grand chord of music sounded from far above, where a host of flying musicians circled, a sound as of great trumpets, but of much softer timbre.

Three times this ceremony was repeated. And then Teddy and I were treated to a vocal performance which held us spell-bound to the very last note. Noama and her six acolytes sang a prayer—a septette—compared to which the finest operatic rendition I had ever heard in our own world would have sounded like the merest toneless croaking.

But at the end of the song I came back to reality just in time to grasp my nephew forcibly by the arm, and prevent him from bursting into an orgy of violent, enthusiastic handclapping. For a moment or two he stared at me absentmindedly. Then he began to chuckle silently.

"Great Jupiter! I almost did it that time, didn't I, Uncle Ned?" he whispered. "But did you ever dream that such marvelous singing was possible?"

### Detected!

I WAS just about to answer him, when suddenly a shock of apprehension went through me. Not more than about thirty or forty feet away, near the bottom step of the altar, stood that arch fiend Sarro, and his big black eyes stared at me malignantly!

In an instant I realized that he knew me, and almost simultaneously I knew why. My extraordinary height had given me away! Fools that we had been not to have thought of that.

"Let's get away from here as fast as we can, Teddy." I said through the side of my mouth. "Sarro is stand-

ing near the altar, and he has spotted us."

Noama and the six sub-priestesses had just begun a wonderful dance upon the steps of the altar, and the attention of the people was fixed upon them. As quickly as possible without giving offence, we began to edge our way through the crowd, I walking with bent knees so as to diminish my height as much as possible, and to keep Sarro or his men from seeing me over the heads of the people.

We reached the outer edge of the crowd at last. But before we stepped clear, we reconnoitered the broad avenue before us carefully. Everything seemed clear. Quickly we slipped to the avenue, and started to hurry away in the general direction of the governor's palace.

But we had not taken a dozen steps, when from behind an immense tree Sarro and two of his lieutenants stepped into our path. All three of them were armed with Kras, and things looked bad for us. The sombre face of the police chief was twisted by a sardonic smile.

"So, my evasive friends, you thought you could evade me again, did you not? Fools that you are! Well, I shall take good care that you do not escape again."

Grimly and menacing the three men crept slowly toward us, holding their weapons ready for instant action. Unarmed as Teddy and I were we seemed to be as good as captured.

"Watch! I'm going to bluff them," Teddy murmured quickly.

He stopped the advance of the trio with a motion of his hand, and returned Sarro's malignant gaze with a cool one of his own.

"You may be the all-powerful minister of police or not," he said quietly in Raanian, "but if you do not instantly stand aside and let us pass, our two friends in the tree above you will drop their charged Kras on top of you."

No doubt the ancient American bluff was entirely new to the Raanians, for they swallowed it in its entirety. Involuntarily the three of them glanced upwards and recoiled. But that momentary shifting of attention was their undoing. The next instant Teddy had hurled himself headlong at Sarro's legs, and tripped him with an irresistible football tackle.

Taken completely by surprise, the big Raanian police chief tumbled against his nearest lieutenant with considerable force, and both of them crashed heavily to the ground. Simultaneously the charged Kra slipped out of Sarro's hand, touched his subordinate's neck, and killed him. In another instant Teddy had caught Sarro in a deadly wrestling hold.

Meanwhile I was not at all idle. For even as Teddy's body hurled through the air at Sarro, I leaped forward at the third member of his party, a huge, burly ruffian. With my left hand I managed to grip the wrist of his right, which held the Kra, while my right arm curled about his heavy neck, crushing his face against my chest. But, as I said, he was a husky customer and struggled mightily, so that I had to exert all my strength against him.

The object of both of us was, of course, the Kra. With a quick leg twist I brought him to a fall in such a way that his right hand struck the ground first, breaking the wrist and dislodging the weapon. With a hard

blow against his temple I rendered him unconscious, caught up the Kra, and sprang to my feet.

It had all been a matter of seconds. But to my dismay I immediately realized that even that short time had sufficed to turn the tide of battle against Teddy. I had never doubted the fact that Sarro was possessed of great strength; but now I was forced to the conclusion that in a wrestling bout he was unquestionably Teddy's master. In some way the big Raanian had shaken off my nephew's hold, and had substituted one of his own which could result in only one thing—the breaking of Teddy's neck.

But I saw something more: About a score of Sarro's men were rushing towards us along the avenue. I hesitated only the merest instant, however. Then I leaped forward, and, using the discharged Kra as a club, brought it down on Sarro's head with all my strength. The next moment I had dragged Teddy to his feet, and ran down the avenue in the opposite direction, impelling him along. He was considerably dazed, of course, but picked up quickly, running strongly after a few yards.

A glance over my shoulder showed me not only that our pursuers were gaining on us, but that they had been joined in the chase by a new element—flyers. The partly open portal of a huge white pyramidal building in a garden immediately ahead of us caught my eyes.

"Quick, Teddy—in here!" I cried, and in another moment we were leaping up the few steps to the portal. An angry, menacing roar went up behind us. Then we were in the dim interior, and had slammed shut the massive metal door. Breathing heavily, we stared at each other, and then broke into a simultaneous giggle.

"We—got—what we—were after—excitement—didn't we?" I panted.

"I'll say—we did!" Teddy chuckled. "And now we—"

I grasped him by the arm and drew him towards the more brightly lighted interior beyond the dim entrance passage. "Come on—we've got to find a hiding place, or a back entrance," I whispered grimly. "Those cops out there won't let a closed door stop them."

And even as we crept quickly away from the great portal, we heard the muffled clamor of our pursuers on the outside.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A Sudden Inspiration

**A** DEEP silence surrounded us. It seemed almost a tangible thing, this silence, an invisible wall of mystery, a void that yet appeared filled with nameless whisperings and rustlings—

We passed under an arcade of slender columns, and emerged into a vast, square chamber, which immediately reminded me of the great laboratory in the temple of wisdom. The arcade ran completely around three walls of the immense room, and partly around the fourth, opposite to where we had entered.

An artistically wrought balustrade formed a sort of continuous balcony on top of the arcade, and behind this balustrade we glimpsed a row of mysterious cones, each of them standing upside down, and ranging in size from the towering height of twenty feet, to the

diminutiveness of a wine glass.

But almost immediately our attention was drawn to an object directly opposite to the entrance, in the middle of the far wall.

A semi-circle formed of steps of milk-white stone led to a platform of the same shape and material, at the rear of which rose an immense block of rose-colored, polished stone. On its top were flowers in exquisitely fashioned vases of crystal and of glittering, reddish-yellow metal.

The altar—it could not be mistaken for anything else—was shaped like the half of a cyclopean millstone, its extreme outer curve adorned by a triplet of triangles, one within the other, formed of precious gems. Hieroglyphics formed of thousands of tiny gems, a marvel of jeweler's art, occupied the space within the inner triangle.

With a sudden flash of inspiration I leaped up the altar steps, ran to the back of the altar, and leaned far over towards the middle of it, feeling back of the flower vases with my outstretched hand. My fingers came in contact with the edge of an opening in the stone. The next moment, to Teddy's evident astonishment, I had swung myself up on the altar, and stepped carefully among the flower vases.

"Quick, Teddy—I've found the right place!" I called triumphantly.

It was an oval opening, hidden behind the flowers, and the luminosity of the room shone into the recess beneath, showing a hollow space within the altar.

"But how, in Jupiter, did you guess that the altar would be hollow?" Teddy whispered in amazement, when we had scrambled into the cavity, making sure that the floral decorations camouflaged its opening perfectly.

"I don't exactly know," I whispered back. "Maybe it is because somewhere, or some time in the past I have read about hollow altars in the ancient Egyptian or Assyrian temples. I've forgotten. Anyway, this might turn out to be a trap instead of a hiding place. We'll soon see."

Grimly I grasped the Kra that I had brought along. I didn't of course know whether the weapon was in working order or not, after the blow I had given Sarro with it, but the feel of it in my hand made me more confident. Not daring to speak even in whispers, we waited silently. The pile of dead, dry flowers within the hollow made us fairly good seats, so that we did not suffer the discomfort of the bare, cold stone.

Slowly, interminably the minutes dragged on and on and on. A stillness as of a tomb brooded over the temple, pregnant somehow with menace and heavy with the tenseness of lurking danger and death. And too with each moment the atmosphere within the altar became more and more oppressive, and soon sweat was running down my body and face in great globules, splashing onto my hands. I wondered whether Teddy felt like I did, but dared not speak. The merest whisper in that tense stillness would have sounded like the loud hissing of a great snake, and would have penetrated to every corner of the vast place. And perhaps even now our relentless enemies might be creeping towards our hiding place—

I set my jaws desperately, and gripped the Kra until my fingers cracked.

### The Stream of the Dead!

A SUDDEN sound somewhere in the temple struck against my taut nerves like an electric shock; and a rustling noise nearby advised me that Teddy too was on the alert. Presently the murmur of voices became audible, coming gradually nearer, and I could distinguish them soon as that of a man and of a woman.

The two voices advanced to where I judged the bottom of the altar steps to be and stopped there. And now, with suddenly intensely sharpened interest, I recognized them. The male voice was that of our arch enemy, Sarro; there was no mistaking its harsh, domineering quality; and that flute-like, musical feminine voice could belong to one woman only—Noama.

Noama was the high priestess of Raa, and this was her temple! It was strange that neither Teddy nor I had thought of that possibility.

"But I tell you that my men saw the two of them come into the temple," Sarro was arguing angrily. "And I insist that you permit me to search for them!"

"And I tell you that it would be profaning the temple!" Noama's cool voice answered. "As high priestess I shall never permit such profanation! Besides, common reason would tell you that there is no place within the temple where anyone could possibly hide."

"Very well," Sarro said angrily. "I shall go to the supreme council for permission to search the temple. And in the mean time my men shall keep the place surrounded. I might as well tell you, Noama, that I do not at all trust you where those two men are concerned! And as far as their escape from the prison ship goes—I have always had a suspicion that—"

"Be very careful what you say, Sarro!" Noama's voice, cold and sharp like an icicle now, interrupted him. "Remember that Taman, the governor, is my grandfather. And now—the quicker you leave the temple the better."

For several moments there was no sound, and I could visualize the arrogant minister of police, and the haughty high priestess facing each other aggressively at the steps of the altar. Then came the rapid, resentful clatter of Sarro's footsteps across the tessellated floor—the booming slam of the great portal—and then once more silence brooded heavily over the great temple.

Presently I could sense rather than hear light footsteps ascending the altar steps. And then, softly like the whispering of a spring zephyr through the leaves of a tree, came Noama's voice.

"Tedde-e! Tedde-e!" she breathed.

There was a quick rustling of dried flowers near me, and then by the light falling down through the oval opening I could see Teddy's figure loom up, closing the opening solidly. A low, barely perceptible murmuring came to me as the two lovers exchanged a few rapid words. And then my nephew joined me again.

"Watch out, Uncle Ned! She's going to drop us," he warned.

And then, even before I could ask him what he meant,

the bottom of the altar suddenly dropped away from under us, and together with the dried flowers we were precipitated into the black, unknown depths beneath. Splash! Splash!

Like two heavy sacks of meal Teddy and I plunged into an invisible stream of ill-smelling water. Immediately its swift current gripped us as with a thousand clutching, greedy fingers, endeavoring to drag us to destruction into its black, swirling depths. Instinctively I levelled my body into swimming position, and stretched my hands in front of me, allowing the water to hurl me forward in the impenetrable darkness.

"Teddy—Teddy—are you all right?" I called anxiously.

"Right as rain—right side up—and all together," he sang out cheerfully through the swishing and gurgling of the rushing water. "But, oh! what a stink! I got some of that stuff into my mouth when we fell in, and I've been spitting ever since."

"So have I tasted some of it," I admitted ruefully, swimming along close beside him. "It has what is known as 'a dark-brown taste' and there isn't a doubt in my mind now as to where we are. This is the sewer of Raa."

"I know it is," he said. "Noama told me. But it was the only way out of Sarro's clutches. She was very sorry that we slipped away from the palace; it upset all her plans. But she's a wonderful sport, and told me what we are to do."

At this moment, somewhere ahead of us, a sudden flood of light shot down into the sewer as if a trap door had been opened, and a human body catapulted from above, landing with a splash in the foul flood. Then in a flash the light disappeared again, and once more the stygian gloom pressed down upon us like a suffocating pall.

An involuntary shudder passed through me. In that momentary glimpse I had perceived that the body was that of a woman, and also that it was completely nude. But it was not that which agitated me; it was something very peculiar about it—something nameless which I had not seen, but had rather felt, with that indescribable sixth sense which at times seems to act in us—that yet filled me with a strange and shuddering dread—

I wondered if Teddy knew.

Suddenly a feeling of horror clutched me. One of my groping hands had touched something icy and rigid—the rounded breast of a dead woman!

A swirl of the water caused the corpse to move under my touch, so that my hand slipped over to its neck. With a cry of horror I snatched my hand away as if it had been burned. I understood now my previous, instinctive feeling of dread—the dead body was headless!

Utterly nauseated I pushed the awful thing aside, and swam on as if all the furies of hades were pursuing me.

"Come on, Teddy, let's get out of this hell hole as fast as we can," I shouted back over my shoulder. And then when he had caught up with me I explained.

"I had an idea it might be something like that," he said. "It just goes to show that humanity is about the same everywhere. These Raanians don't seem to be

above murder."

\* \* \* \* \*

Far ahead of us a dim light appeared, becoming brighter every moment, and forming into a semi-circle of luminosity. It was the mouth of the sewer.

According to a prearranged plan, paralleling that of Noama, we waited until we were about a dozen yards from the opening, then we took a deep breath and dove almost to the bottom of the great stone pipe. Like out of a huge cannon we shot into the cold, clear waters of the great river beyond, and swam under the surface until I thought my lungs would burst from the pressure of my held breath.

Amidst the dense bushes of the opposite shore we waded cautiously to solid ground, and stopped under a great tree with thick, overhanging branches to reconnoitre. A sudden low exclamation of my nephew drew my attention to the mouth of the sewer we had just left: Circulating low above it, and evidently watching the opening with close attention, were two of Sarro's flying policemen!

"They might or might not be looking for us," I said reflectively. "But whatever their business is, it's clear they mustn't see us."

We watched the two flyers attentively, and presently saw them dive towards a certain spot near the middle of the river, some distance below the sewer, and circle around the place, flying only three or four feet above the surface.

"I'll bet a dozen new socks they've found your headless corpse," Teddy suggested with conviction. And with a reminiscent shudder I agreed with him.

The diverted attention of the policemen gave us our chance, however. Quickly we ducked from under the tree, and bent double dove across an open space of ground into a field of tall plants beyond. A couple of hundred yards at right angles from the river we came upon the path which Noama had mentioned to Teddy, and after following this for about ten or fifteen minutes we reached an open space within the tall, maize-like plants, in the middle of which stood a small, cone-shaped building.

"That must be the place where we are to wait until Noama sends us word," Teddy said. "I hope we'll find something to eat though. I'm hungry enough to chew the ears off a healthy lion."

We passed into the house then, and began our search for food. The ground floor of the little building was evidently a pumping plant, by means of which water was raised from the river to irrigate the field. But a narrow winding stairway of metal led to the upper floor, and I ascended it.

A simple cot, a small table, and one chair comprised the entire furniture of the small upper room, and there was a closed set of shelves against the wall, conforming to its curving. But near the shelves was a box-like affair of metal, set on four tubular legs, that immediately engaged my attention. I opened its door, and disclosed two shelves of thin, perforated metal, on each of which rested some flat pans holding as for our special provision a full meal of delicious foods.

Perhaps we ate too much, for after awhile both of us felt the need of sleep. Teddy insisted that I lie

upon the cot, while he stretched himself out on the floor on a pallet made of a bundle of bedding.

Teddy fell asleep almost at once, but I lay awake for some time. For some indefinable reason I felt vaguely uneasy. Finally I got up softly, and reconnoitered the surrounding field of tall plants from each of the four windows in turn. But not the least suspicious sign appeared anywhere.

Satisfied that everything was all right as far as our immediate safety was concerned, I returned to the cot, and before I realized it sleep claimed me for its own. Such a fool is a man with a full stomach. He ignorantly goes to sleep, and the trap is sprung.

## CHAPTER XX

### Nemesis Strikes Hard

I DREAMT that I was attacked by a pack of hungry wolves and, fighting fiercely for my life, came back to reality to find myself in the clutches of a half dozen of Sarro's men, who were holding me down to the cot by sheer numbers. Beyond them, on the floor, I saw another knot of struggling men, and knew that Teddy formed the center of it. But between us, directing the unequal battle with short, harsh commands, the dominating figure of Sarro himself loomed like a malignant demon prince from the realms of Satan.

"Fight your hardest, Teddy!" I shouted encouragingly, panting from my own exertions as I struck out vigorously with fists and feet.

"I'm doing it!" he shouted back, with the joy of battle in his voice.

But the odds against us were too great. In a couple of minutes we were overpowered, and a touch of a Kra fettered us with that strange catalepsy which is more powerful than a hundred chain manacles could be.

There was no prison ship to take us this time, however. Grim and malignant of face Sarro himself supervised the placing of both of us into carrying nets, and without delay our eight carriers rose directly to the upper air lanes with us. More than a score of armed men surrounded the carriers, and behind them came the cruel minister of police, flying slightly higher so as to have a clear view over the entire procession, I suppose. Sarro was evidently not taking any chances of our slipping out of his hands again.

How he had discovered our whereabouts within such a short time was a mystery to me. It was uncanny. The only satisfactory solution I could arrive at was that someone, probably from the air, had glimpsed us, and had reported us. I remembered the two flying police scouts about the sewer. It was just possible that one or both of them while scouting over the vicinity had seen us entering our refuge and thus we had been discovered.

At full speed we were carried on to our unknown destination, which however I guessed to be the mines where our term of punishment was to begin, as the supreme council had decided. I wondered what sort of mines they would be—

Hour after hour—mile after mile—on and on—with the rushing of the air in my ears, and the glare of the

little suns in my eyes—



Long ago I had closed my eyes against the insufferable glare, and had sunk into a sort of stupor, from which I presently awakened to the realization that my head was several degrees lower than my feet and the rest of my body. Evidently we were descending. That, of course, meant that we were close to our destination. The low position of my head enabled me to see that we were rapidly approaching an immense vertical blackness ahead—

Then, without a jar, we had landed amidst a cluster of huge buildings. Immediately Teddy and I were carried in through a door of the nearest one, and entered what appeared a vast machine shop. The humming of swiftly running machinery, and the clattering of tools in the hands of hundreds of half-nude workmen was all about us.

At a few sharp commands from Sarro, a number of workmen—darker skinned and possessed of smaller heads than the Raanians—hurried up to us, and began quickly to manacle our arms and legs with lengths of strong chain, fastened to heavy wristlets and anklets of metal.

Only when this was accomplished to the entire satisfaction of the ominously watching minister of police, and we were rendered helpless, were we at last touched with a Loo and the cataleptic condition of our bodies removed.

"Get up!" Sarro commanded us harshly.

From somewhere the big Raanian had obtained a sort of whip—something between a heavy riding quirt and a bull whip—which he held in his right hand suggestively, while he watched us malevolently.

Both my nephew and I were naturally very sore and stiff of body from what we had gone through, and that, together with the unaccustomed encumbrance of the chain manacles on hands and feet caused us to be somewhat slow in complying with the order to rise from the floor.

But, instead of realizing this fact, our apparent deliberateness infuriated Sarro. With the speed of a striking cobra he lashed out with the heavy whip, and brutally struck Teddy across the back of the head several times in rapid succession.

"Move quickly when I command!—you worm of filth!" he roared angrily. "You who tried to outwit me, and who dared to lift your filthy hands against me, the minister of police. I shall teach you what it means to anger me!"

Teddy had gained his feet by now, and with the last words Sarro lashed him a number of times into the face with such viciousness that the skin was deeply cut in more than a dozen places, and the blood streamed down over his cheeks and dripped onto his breast belt. But in spite of the terrible punishment Teddy faced the brutal Raanian unflinchingly.

"I always thought you were a coward, Sarro," he said with utter contempt. "And this act of yours proves it!"

**Condemned!**

**T**HIS defiance and denunciation before his score and half of subordinates, appeared to turn Sarro berserk. With a roar of fury he swung the cruel whip again and again, smiting my unfortunate nephew's face and body, so that the blood ran in streams.

The sight maddened me. With a bound I broke away from my two guards, and despite my chains flung myself at the brute and managed to clutch his throat, crashing to the floor with him.

"You devil, I am going to kill you for that!" I shouted, and exerted all my strength in the attempt.

But almost immediately some one struck me with something over the head from behind; and although the blow did not render me unconscious, on account of the disguising wig I still wore, yet it caused me to release my strangling grip, and instantly a dozen hands dragged me away from Sarro.

Gasping for breath he rose to his feet with the help of two of his subordinates, and glared at me murderously. He had dropped the whip, and now both of his hands nursed his aching throat.

"I shall pay you for this—a hundred times!" he croaked hoarsely. "Both of you shall suffer the tortures of the damned, tenfold."

The tortures of the damned! I remembered those dehumanized unfortunates of the crimson madhouse, and shuddered inwardly. Was that to be the ultimate fate of Teddy and me? A grim resolve took possession of me. Before I allowed that to happen—!

I heard Sarro give an order, to the effect that we were to be taken to the mine foreman and that we were to be put to work in the worst place in the mine. Then, between four guards, Teddy and I were hustled out of the machine shop into the open.

This part of the vast cavern, like the territory near the forbidden shaft portals, was dimly lighted; with the exception, however, of the plot of ground where the group of extensive mine buildings was situated, which one of the miniature suns illuminated with the brightness of day.

About two hundred yards away from the huge building whence we had emerged, loomed the immense wall of the cavern, rising to dim impenetrable heights miles above us. Evidently this part of the wall was composed of a different kind of rock, for its color was almost of coal blackness.

We passed around one corner of a huge building and now perceived to our astonishment that the foot of the wall was pierced by the perfectly round openings of two tunnels, about one hundred feet apart. They were brilliantly illuminated inside, which, in that black rock, gave them the uncanny resemblance to two enormous, unwinking, and malevolently watching eyes.

A narrow and perfectly smooth stone roadway, with a deep groove in the exact middle of it, ran from each tunnel mouth to the great pyramidal building, each of them entering an open portal at opposite ends of the place.

But what excited our immediate, deep interest were the strange vehicles which at great speed shot out of one tunnel entrance and into the other in a never ceasing, endless procession—vehicles like immense, ver-

tically moving cannon projectiles, each about thirty feet long, and traveling in almost absolute silence.

Without delay our guards hurried us into the building, and immediately the deep roar of great machines burst upon us. An immense wheel, one-half of which was visible above the ground at the far end of the vast hall, revolved and stopped and revolved again unceasingly, and as unceasingly spewed forth from the tube-like cells at its periphery as it stopped at the level of the floor, a never-ending stream of the peculiar cylindrical mine vehicles, some of which we had glimpsed outside. The tube-like conveyor cells in the great elevator wheel seemed each to move independently, probably by means of roller or ball bearings, because during the peripheral motion of the latter they maintained the vehicles they contained upon an even keel.

Most of the vehicles, upon emerging from the elevator wheel shot immediately past us, and continued at considerable initial speed to the outside, to be quickly swallowed up by the tunnel entrance beyond. But a number of them, probably in need of repair or inspection, were switched aside by horizontal conveyors towards the side of the building, where a long row of them stood, miraculously balanced upon their single row of bottom wheels, attended to by large numbers of half-clad, sad-faced mechanics, who were kept busy by bosses armed with the same sort of whips which Sarro had used on Teddy and me.

All together, if one excepted certain grim details, it was such a scene of intense activity which one might find in any of our American industrial establishments of a similar nature. But those strange torpedo-like conveyor vehicles—I was sure that somewhere I had seen their like—

**To the Mine!**

**O**UR party of six had stopped just within the wide main entrance portal, and now one of the guards moved a red-colored lever upon the wall nearby. Immediately, directly above the portal on the inner side, an intensely bright light of crimson color flashed into being. Evidently it was a signal; for the very next outgoing conveyor vehicle stopped opposite us, and I caught a glimpse of its single operator through one of the observation windows.

Along a series of shallow, built-in steps Teddy and I were forcibly hustled upwards to the top of the machine where we tumbled into a longitudinal opening, and fell heavily into the dim interior, bruising our already aching bodies against the considerably warm bottom of roughened metal.

But we had scarcely gained our feet, when the quick start of the vehicle tumbled us to the floor again, to the intense amusement of our guards, only two of whom had entered with us. This time, instead of trying to get up again, we decided to remain seated.

"The damnable brutes could at least have doctored you up before putting us to work." I said angrily, gazing compassionately into Teddy's bruised and bleeding face. "It's a shame that I didn't have time enough to finish that arch demon. I could have died gladly then with the satisfaction of having ridden the world of a human viper."



"My face feels like a lot of mincemeat," Teddy said, smiling painfully through bruised and bleeding lips. "But when I think about what I am going to do to Sarro if I ever get another chance, it makes me feel considerably better."

I had noticed that one of the two guards appeared to have a more friendly-looking face than the others I had seen, and decided to try my newly acquired Raanian on him.

"Say, brother—" I addressed him pleasantly, "do you know if there is any medicine in the mine so that my nephew's wounds can be attended to! Otherwise blood-poisoning is liable to set in, and he will not be able to work."

The guard addressed gazed at me quizzically for a long moment. Then he spread out the fingers of his left, unoccupied, hand with the palm downward in the Raanian gesture of negation, and smiled a trifle mockingly.

"Even if there were medicine, what good would it do? Haven't you heard that you are to work in the worst part of the mine?"

"Yes, I heard Sarro give that order," I admitted. "But what has that to do with healing my nephew's wounds?"

The pleasant-faced guard glanced at his companion, and both of them laughed amusedly.

"I will tell you," the former said finally. "Traz, the head boss of that part of the mine, is going to attend to you personally, according to Sarro's orders, and Traz takes more pleasure in using the whip on his convicts than in eating! Now do you understand?"

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Gorilla Men

FOR perhaps ten minutes or so we watched through the wide longitudinal opening in the top of the ore conveyor, the whizzing by at high speed of the brightly illuminated ceiling of the tunnel. Then, without the least grinding noise, the vehicle came to a smooth stop, and the guards hurried us to get out.

We were in an immense circular chamber hewn into the natural rock, whence many secondary tunnels radiated in fan-like formation. A set of ever-changing colored lights depending from a framework in the center of the ceiling evidently directed the constant stream of entering and departing vehicles, and everything worked like clockwork.

There was not the least fuss or hurry, or shouting of orders as I had seen in some of our largest mines on the surface. Indeed, the absence of noise in view of the constant and high speed traffic was uncanny. And it was also with particular interest that I noted that although in the tunnels the almost invisible, covered wheels of the ore conveyors moved along continuous V-shaped grooves, they were steered across the perfectly smooth and hard floor of the great terminal to their various destinations without any mechanical guides, and thus all time-wasting switching was eliminated.

But we had only a mere glimpse of all this; for almost immediately we had to scramble aboard another

conveyor, exactly like the previous one, which without delay hurled itself into the maw of one of the inner tunnels, and we were on our way again, traveling with even greater speed than before.

Like white-hot cannon balls the lights of the tunnel flashed by us overhead. The two guards leaned against the dividing wall between the ore tank where we were and the control compartment beyond, and carried on a low voiced and apparently desultory conversation, often laughing, and then again looking grimly in our direction.

"It seems to be just our luck to spoil all of Noama's plans in our behalf," Teddy said sadly, after a long silence. "And it's all my own fault too. If I hadn't been so impatient to get away from Taman's palace—"

"No you don't!" I interrupted him emphatically. "It's just as much my fault as yours. Anyway, I credit Noama with enough common sense to understand the situation."

He threw me a warm and grateful glance.

"You're right, Uncle Ned. She's the wisest and most marvelous girl I ever knew," he said with earnest enthusiasm. "If we ever do get the chance to return to the surface and she comes with us as we have planned, she'll make me the most wonderful wife in the world."

"And I'll say 'Amen' to that." I agreed earnestly.

The speed of the conveyor slackened, and presently it drew to a smooth stop beneath a wide-mouthed ore chute. We had barely time to scramble out of it, when the extensive metallic lip of the chute automatically lowered itself, made contact with the opening on top of the car, and a thick stream of dark-colored ore shot out of it into the capacious belly of the conveyor.

But our guards did not give us any time to watch the loading. They hustled us quickly into an opening in the tunnel wall which proved to be an elevator entrance, and with a clanking of chains we took our places in the spacious elevator. The pleasant-faced guard shifted a lever on the wall of the cage, and we rose upwards with considerable velocity. There was a circle of twelve crystalline indicator bulbs a couple of feet above the control lever, and as we ascended, one after another of them burst into radiance, two white ones and one of red color alternating. Evidently we rose to the very top of the elevator shaft, for when we stopped all twelve bulbs were lighted. From the maintained speed of the elevator I calculated that we had ascended to a height equivalent to about five hundred feet.

A door in the wall parted before us, its two wings sliding noiselessly out of the way at either side, and we stepped into a brightly illuminated room some twenty feet square hewn into the living rock.

A large rectangular table of metal occupied the middle of the chamber, flanked by two long benches of the same material, and on these a half-dozen men were seated. They were dressed in peculiar, coverall-like suits of white cloth, and were occupied with eating out of large stone bowls what appeared to be a coarse meat stew, augmented by great chunks of Raanian bread. I said "eating" but feeding would be a more appropriate term; because their table manners were those of swine.

But it was upon the faces of the men that my attention centered immediately—faces of cave men—not

only utterly brutish, but expressing in every lineament an appalling viciousness and mercilessness, and one sought in vain for a spark of humaneness in their cold, stony eyes.

As a type they were different from the average Raanian as an Australian bushman is from the average white settler, and it seemed incredible that there should be such people among the descendants of a very highly civilized and advanced race like the Primarians had been. But I reflected that there have always existed degenerate types, and that undoubtedly the men before us were of that kind.

Our pleasant-faced guard approached the largest one of the men, a veritable gorilla, saluted him in the Raanian manner of extending both hands palm upward, and addressed him pleasantly, the way a white man would speak to a chief of savages.

"Traz, these are the two foreign prisoners," he announced. "No doubt you have already been notified regarding them, and that they are quite rebellious."

### The Place of Dread

**A** FRIGHTFUL, utterly repulsive grimace, which was evidently meant for a smile, distorted the visage of the gorilla man, and he made a sign of assent.

"Yes," he rumbled deep down in his vast, barrel-like chest, meanwhile observing Teddy and me with his cold, stony eyes. "They shall be most tenderly cared for!"

His thick, blunt fingers caressingly fondled the handle of the heavy whip which hung from his right wrist, and the deadly menace in his tone chilled me to the bone. I remembered what our pleasant-faced guard had said about Traz' fondness for using the whip, and, observing the brutishness of the gorilla man, I could well believe it.

But evidently his utterances struck some chord of abysmal humor in his five subordinate foremen at the table, for they broke into uproarious, coarse laughter, the harsh quality of which grated most painfully against my taut nerves.

"This seems like a very pleasant prospect." I murmured to Teddy.

But low as I had spoken, Traz had heard it.

"Silence!—you worm!" he growled at me with the deadly viciousness of a bulldog, at the same time striking at me with the heavy whip. Like a keen knife the cruel lash bit into my left cheek, and laid the flesh open to the bone, so that the warm blood streamed from it and ran down into my neck. It was all I could do to keep myself from leaping at the monster; but both Teddy and I profited from the lesson, and henceforth guided ourselves accordingly.

After a few more desultory remarks our two guards left, and we were alone with our future masters.

When Traz had finished with his swinish feeding, he lumbered heavily to his feet. From a rack against the wall he took down a sort of helmet, with a metallic top of dark metal, which he slipped over his thick head. For vision a pair of thick-lensed goggles were provided, and for speech and breathing a sort of megaphone, short and squat, protruded.

The helmet adjusted to his satisfaction, Traz put on a pair of heavy gloves of the same white cloth, and over

the regular laced boots of leather he slipped on a pair of thick-soled slippers, which appeared to be fashioned out of some wood-like material, blood-red in color.

A vague dread began to form in my mind. What sort of mine could this be, if the foreman required such elaborate precautionary measures for his bodily safety? And where was Teddy's protection and mine?

With a few preliminary flicks from his whip Traz urged us to a tightly closed inner door, and we emerged out into a rather dimly-lit, long tunnel—a drift, in mining parlance—and began to walk along this rapidly, driven by frequent whippings from the gorilla man, who walked behind us.

Smaller passages branched off from the main drift at intervals of a hundred feet or so, side drifts, and as we passed their narrow mouths silent, human-like figures emerged from them, with clanking chains on arms and legs like us, their frightfully emaciated bodies bent nearly double under the heavy baskets filled with ore on their backs. Staggeringly they carried their loads to openings in the floor of the main drift, and dumped them. Then, their heads drooping in utter weariness and their thin arms dangling lifelessly at their sides, they returned whence they had come, with dragging feet and sagging knees; the clanking of their manacle chains forming a sort of terrible, dismal accompaniment to their stumbling steps.

Not one of these unfortunates looked up or took any notice of us as we passed them; as if they were not conscious of our presence, and as if they were indeed what they appeared to be, shadows of what had once been men—human shadows without a soul!

The dread within me deepened. Was this what Teddy and I were to become—wretched specters of men with clanking chains rattling against the bones of their already half dead bodies? Was this what Taman in his awful wisdom and merciless justice had called the "double death"?

I dared not look at Teddy, who strode at my side in grim silence, with his eyes fixed upon the rock-strewn floor of the drift. Was he too thinking about these horrible possibilities?

A vicious cut from the gorilla man's whip burned suddenly across my shoulders, and I stumbled and shuffled onwards more quickly.

On—and on—and on—drift after drift—at hurried pace—was there no end?

"In here, you worms!" Traz bellowed suddenly, unnecessarily emphasizing his command with a few quick blows of his whip that felt like white-hot knives on my already torn and bleeding back.

It was the very last drift into which we stumbled half blindly. The air in the main drift had been heavy and oppressively warm, filled with stifling smells, which had steadily increased in foulness as we penetrated farther in. But now as we entered the still more dimly lighted side drift, a wave of air, ten-fold more fetid and hot, surged against us—a nameless, horrible stench of unclean, sweaty bodies, and of corruption and decay that was utterly nauseating, so that I involuntarily recoiled from it. But the merciless whip from that monster in human form behind us steadied me, and with gritting teeth I stumbled on after Teddy, who was si-

leantly and doggedly forging ahead a pace or two in the lead.

### Sudden Action!

A PECULIAR greenish luminescence began to grow gradually ahead of us, increasing in brightness as we advanced. And then, abruptly, we emerged from the drift into a long rectangular hollow in the rock, at right angles to it, filled with an unearthly green light, and peopled by nameless, horrible shapes in human form. A corner of hell!

The thought leaped to my mind with the force of a blow as I stared about me in a sort of hypnotic fascination. About thirty feet in from the mouth of the drift was the far wall of the large mining chamber, or stope, extending more than a hundred feet each way, and perhaps twenty feet in height, and the entire wall glowed with green, flameless fire!

Evidently that glowing mass was ore. But what kind of ore? Could it be radium? Or was it perhaps a still more powerful, radioactive mineral, unknown to us surface people?

All this went through my mind in the space of a few seconds while Traz herded Teddy and me towards a place in the wall where a ladder led up to the first of the two terraces into which the wall was lengthwise divided. Perhaps half a hundred human skeletons worked on the two terraces and on the floor below, amidst an infernal, incessant jangling and clanking of chains, digging out the soft-appearing ore with sharp-pointed picks and throwing from the terraces to those below, who filled it into carrying baskets, two men helping to load the filled basket onto the back of a third, who staggered out with it to the dumping chute. It was an astounding primitive method of mining in such a progressive land as this, and was undoubtedly designed to furnish hard labor for criminals.

But amidst the clanking of chains, the noise of picks and shovels, and the groans of heavily-laden workers another sound arose suddenly, a dismal, sobbing wail, coming from an unfortunate convict who had collapsed near the foot of the ladder, lying beside the overturned basket of ore he had evidently carried.

"Up—you son of filth!" Traz roared furiously, and swung the terrible whip with all his might.

Never had I seen any person so emaciated as that unfortunate worker. His ribs were high ridges, over which the brownish, leathery skin seemed drawn to extreme thinness, and the softer parts of his torso, under the ribs, appeared to have receded to the very backbone. His limbs were merely bones held together by wire-like sinews and ribbon-like tendons by means of which the stringy, rubber-like muscles seemed insecurely tied to them. He had held his face covered by his crossed arms; but now as the cruel whip cut across his ribs he writhed horribly, and lowering his arms emitted an appalling scream of utter anguish and fear. But it was the face of the sufferer which held me spell-bound with horror—a hairless, fleshless area without nose or lips, and a perpetual, horrible mirthless grin of decaying and broken teeth, from the lidless eye-sockets of which two large, terror-filled eyes glowed with the green light of the ore above him!

Again and again the furious gorilla man swung the heavy whip pitilessly, and when in his anguish the unfortunate victim of the terrible punishment turned over on his knees in a desperate endeavor to rise, we had the ghastly view of his back, covered with a dense mass of frightful ulcers, running over with thick streams of corruption.

But still the merciless flaying continued.

It was more than red-blooded men could endure. A terrible anger against that beast in human form surged suddenly over me. For the moment Traz had his back turned to me. I flashed a signal to Teddy with my eyes, Like lightning my long arms shot out over the head of the gorilla man, while at the same time I rammed my right knee into his back, and the next instant I had drawn my wrist chain against his windpipe with a force that cut off his breath. He dropped the whip and clutched at his throat with both hands, gasping for air. But at this moment Teddy's chain-wrapped fists crashed against the monster's temple, dropping him to the ground, where he lay motionless; whether dead or merely unconscious we did not know nor care.

I bent over the gorilla man's unfortunate victim, and to my great relief found that he was dead, and thereby out of his misery. Subconsciously I was aware that work had ceased all over the slope, and that the convicts were staring at us two newcomers in silent awe. But I paid no attention to them; for a plan of escape had suddenly formed in my mind.

"Quick, Teddy!—help me undress this devil," I cried. And while we were hastily divesting Traz of his clothes, I hurriedly explained my plan, which Teddy heartily endorsed.

To our great joy we found a Kra in the gorilla man's belt, beneath his outer clothes, and with this we were soon rid of our manacles; but could not, of course, remove the metal wristlets and anklets.

We passed quickly out of that hell of green fire, and crept carefully down the side drift to the main drift. Teddy, arrayed in the gorilla man's clothes and helmet, even to the shoes and whip, walked ahead, his eagerness to carry out the second and infinitely more dangerous part of our plan evidently causing him temporarily to forget the pains that were racking his body.

From the mouth of the side drift we carefully reconnoitered the semi-illuminated length of the main drift. From the mouth of the next drift, about one hundred feet away, one of the sub-foremen emerged, unmercifully driving on a carrier convict before him with his whip. Imitating the deep bellow of Traz' voice, Teddy halloed to the foreman, beckoning to him in the arm-flapping fashion of Raa.

With tensed nerves we watched the man's unsuspecting approach; Teddy just outside of the mouth of the side drift, and I within, ready to leap out at a moment's notice.

"Here I am, Traz, what is your pleasure?" the man asked when he was within a few feet of Teddy, and from his voice it was evident that his mood was surly.

Without a word Teddy motioned for him to follow, as I had seen Traz do, and turned to re-enter the drift, endeavoring to cover me with his body as he did so. But evidently the foreman's eyes were sharp, and he

stopped just within the entrance.

"Who is that behind you?" he asked sharply, with quick suspicion in his tone, and raised his whip.

But in that instant Teddy leaped and felled him with a blow to the jaw. But the fellow was built like a hercules, and the blow did not even stun him. In another moment he was up again, full of ferocious fight. I was ready for him, however, and paralyzed him with a touch of the Kra, which I had charged for just such an emergency.

A few minutes later I had put on the unconscious man's clothes, and we dragged him out of sight behind a pillar of rock. Without further delay we walked along the main drift in the direction of the foreman's rest room as fast as our clumsy blood-red overshoes would permit, grimly ready to fight to the death if need be.

So far our plan had worked out all right. But our greatest obstacles were still before us. However, it was either win or die.

"Let's use the heavy ends of our whips for clubs, Teddy," I whispered as we came within sight of the door of the rest room.

Three men were seated at the table as we entered. They had taken off their helmets and were playing a sort of game with round and square pieces of stone. We walked up to them as if we too were going to sit down. Almost simultaneously the handles of our whips crashed down onto the heads of two of them, and they sank to the floor without a sound. But the third one sprang up and showed fight. However, Teddy knocked him over with a blow against the neck, and I finished the good work with a paralyzing touch of the Kra.

Without delay we leaped to the door of the elevator which luckily was up, and ramméd the control lever down to the limit, dropping into the depths with frightful speed. But the automatic control of the elevator checked it in time, and we came to a gentle stop.

We peered out into the traffic tunnel. One of the ore conveyors was just finishing loading. Without a moment's delay we swung to the top of it and flattened out on the soft ore. We didn't know whether the operator had seen us or not. But we were in a devil-may-care mood, and it did not bother us. And besides, the insulating clothes we wore were a most effective disguise. But for how long? Just as the conveyor started away, we saw the elevator move upwards again. Was it called to one of the other levels?—or was our flight already discovered?

## CHAPTER XXII

### Running the Gauntlet

It seemed hours until our conveyor arrived in the great terminal chamber. Signals flashed—red—violet—green—yellow—in rapid succession. Had our escape yet been discovered, and were some of those signals perhaps commanding our car to stop? The vehicle slowed down. We flattened ourselves still more against the dangerous ore, sliding in farther between it and the lip of the opening, and, with all our nerves tensed to the limit waited grimly. Were they about to rush us?

The conveyor had slowed down to quarter speed now

and was passing across the glass-like floor of the terminal. Then it had reached the mouth of the exit tunnel and plunged into it, on the last lap of its journey. I drew a deep breath of relief, and relaxed. It was possible that our escape had not been discovered after all. Teddy too had relaxed I noted, and I would have liked to speak to him; but I dared not, fearing that the operator might hear me.

Once again the tunnel lights above us flashed by in a continuous ribbon of bright fire as the car hurtled along at top speed—

Suddenly we were out of the tunnel, crossed the wide intervening space, and slid smoothly into the portal of the end terminal—the great double pyramid—whence we had but recently started into the mine.

We were now in the opposite wing of the immense building, however, and by raising my head cautiously a merest trifle I perceived that we were moving at slow speed towards a gigantic elevator wheel, exactly identical in appearance to the one we had seen in the wing of departure. I also noted that there were now two cars ahead of us and three behind us, and that a considerable number of workers and bosses were about.

"Let's wait until we get upstairs before we try to get out," I murmured with my mouth close to Teddy's ear. "Chances are there won't be so many eyes up there."

He nodded assentingly.

"I'll bet a dozen pairs of new socks Sarro is still here," he murmured back. "I saw one of his men just before we entered the building."

This was bad news. Because, with the satanic minister of police at hand, our chances of ultimate escape would be slim indeed. It would be a fight to the death between him and us.

Our conveyor slipped noiselessly into one of the elevator cylinders, and in a series of stops and starts we rose steadily above the ground floor. Once more we were tensely alert. It seemed reasonable to assume that by this time our escape would have been discovered, and that everybody would be on the lookout for us, especially Sarro and his men, if he was indeed still here.

My wounds, due to Traz's merciless whip, were now beginning to pain and burn terribly, so that I had to bite my teeth together to keep from groaning aloud, and a glance at my nephew's almost unrecognizably bruised and blood-covered face indicated to me that he also was suffering. I realized, of course, and no doubt Teddy did too, that our agony was in a great measure caused by the deadly radiations of the ore on which we lay, but we were helpless to prevent this in our predicament. It was a case of suffering silently, and sensing the tortures of the damned.

In my pain and impatience it seemed an eternity until we finally reached the upper floor, our elevator cylinder having now attained to the highest point in the immense wheel. The instant it stopped, the unseen operator of our ore car ran it out of the cylinder onto a gigantic conveyor belt of metal, which evidently worked in exact synchronism with the elevator wheel, traveling and stopping at the same moment. This great conveyor belt carried the ore cars in a continuous lateral row towards the middle part of the vast building, where the ore from

them was dumped from trap doors at each side of their bottom into an immense container below.

A narrow walking platform ran along the far side of the conveyor belt, and it was upon this that our attention immediately centered. No sooner had our ore car come to a stop on the belt, than Teddy and I slipped out of it, gained the walking platform, and started away in a direction opposite to that in which the conveyor belt moved. We had removed the insulating slippers from our boots in the car, and now walked with more freedom and less noise.

A stairway appeared near the far end, leading downwards, and this we descended warily. Halfway down we suddenly stopped dead still. At the bottom of the stairway six grim men had appeared from nowhere, and it did not require the glittering Kras in their hands to inform us who they were. Their peculiarly marked, yellow and purple police uniforms could not be mistaken. Impulsively we turned to retrace our steps and saw five others gazing down at us from above. One of them was a few steps below the others, moving steadily down toward us, and I recognized the evil features of Sarro.

Simultaneously almost we pulled off the now useless helmets, and hurled them at the men below. Our eyes met and we gripped hands hard.

"Let's remember Custer's stand, Teddy," I said huskily. "And let's show these devils how two red-blooded Americans can die!"

Grasping our whips like clubs, we turned to meet the advance of the five men from above, when a glance over the banister sent a sudden ray of hope into my heart. A long metal tube, three or four inches thick, ran freely from the top of the building to the bottom, coming within about five feet of the stairway.

"We've still got a chance, Teddy—follow me!" I shouted.

### The Last Stand

THE next moment I had swung myself over the banister, and leaped for the tube. Throwing my arms and legs about it, I slid down its length to the bottom, like our American fire-fighters answering a hurry call. I had hardly landed, however, when Teddy was already at my side.

"Great stuff!" he cried exultantly. "This'll keep them guessing for a minute or two."

A lightning glance about revealed a large door nearby, partly open, and we leaped towards it. Behind us, through the deep roar of machinery, we could hear the angry shouting of the baffled policemen, and from above came the sharp, clarion-like voice of Sarro. Then we were through the door and slammed it shut, ramming its heavy latch into place.

Before us stretched a long, empty corridor with many doors. Teddy was about to hurry on down its length, when I caught him by the arm.

"Wait!" I whispered. "Beyond there lies unknown territory, and like as not we'll trap ourselves. Listen!" In a few quick words I explained the new scheme that had leaped to my mind.

We heard Sarro and his gang at the door now, and their Kras made short work of the latch. They flung it open and rushed through it into the corridor with

Sarro in the lead like a pack of wolves on a blood scent; and in their haste they little dreamed that Teddy and I stood flat against the wall behind the open door, listening to the turmoil of pursuit in the corridor and the opening and slamming shut of numerous doors as they searched for us madly.

The noise of the searchers receded quickly, and presently Teddy squatted down and peered through the hole in the heavy metal door where a Kra had burned its way to the latch. He glanced up at me and nodded.

"Coast is clear," he whispered.

Without further delay we slipped forth, passed quickly through the door opening back into the hall with the staircase—and ran squarely into the path of one of Sarro's men, who had evidently been left there on guard by the crafty police chief.

Evidently the fellow was even more surprised than we were; but his thinking processes were much slower. For while he was still making up his mind what to do about the matter, Teddy snatched the Kra from the fellow's hand with a lightning flick of his whip, and I landed on his head with the handle of mine. Over his prostrate body we bounded to the open door beyond the foot of the staircase, and in an instant were out in the open.

"Question before the house is: What now?" Teddy asked with grim humor, as we hovered for a moment or two just outside of the door.

Suddenly we heard shouts within the building approaching. Quite evidently the wolf pack had discovered the false scent, and was coming back to investigate. That decided us. Quickly and noiselessly we slipped around the nearest corner of the building, and with all speed began to run towards a tower-like structure a hundred yards or so away, the appearance of which somehow seemed to promise at least temporary safety, Teddy's long, ruddy hair as we ran streaming out behind him like a flame.

But we could not have traveled more than twenty or thirty yards, when there was a great shouting and yelling behind us, and over my shoulder I glimpsed Sarro and his band hot on our trail.

We ran desperately then, but the heavy mine-foreman's clothes encumbered our movements badly, and what we had gone through had severely sapped our vitality, especially my own. Noticing me lagging behind him, Teddy immediately slackened his own pace, dropped to my side, and grasped my arm strongly to help me along. But the pack behind us were now gaining rapidly, and I realized that I could not hold out any longer. I was at the end of my strength.

"I'm — afraid — I'm — done," I managed to gasp. "Let's — stop — and — die — fighting."

But even as we slowed down to face our relentless pursuers for our last stand, there came the rapid beating of great wings above us, and the next moment both of us were caught up into a sort of dragnet which carried us upwards with great speed in the direction where we had been running. I heard the chorus of furious yells from the wolf pack below—becoming rapidly fainter—was conscious that Teddy was speaking to me excited unintelligible words—and then everything became a blank.

### Noama's Story

THE rhythmic beat of wings, the rushing of warm, aromatic air about me, and the gentle murmuring of voices in the near distance gradually filtered into my consciousness, and, somehow, there was a soothing quality about these sounds that caused me to lie where I was in quiet content, and for a long time do nothing but listen, too indolent even to open my eyes.

And presently another fact obtruded itself into my passive mind: In some inexplicable manner all burning and pain appeared to have passed from the whip wounds on my back and in my face, which gave me a most pleasant feeling of well-being. How had all this come about?

I opened my eyes and passed a slow gaze of sleepy curiosity over my immediate surroundings.

I lay on my right side, in a sort of hammock which was very soft and comfortable, and above me an awning of dark cloth was stretched. Beyond this awning I perceived a kind of low wall of emerald green color, and beyond that again extended empty space, lit up by the golden glow of miniature suns from above. My wandering mind finally concentrated upon the sound of great moving wings, and I understood: Once again I was a passenger on one of the bird-like flying ships of Raa.

But whose ship?

The sheer magical manner in which Teddy and I had been snatched away from the very teeth of Sarro and his wolf pack flashed into my mind, and I sat up quickly, suddenly wide-awake.

At the bulwark in the fore part of the airship, on the opposite side from me, I saw two figures standing quite close together, with arms about one another and heads touching—a man and a woman. And there was no mistaking the ruddy hair of the man, nor that of the woman, whose long and black wavy tresses shone like silk in the bright light from above.

A wave of gladness passed over me. So Noama, daughter of wisdom, had outwitted Sarro again, and had wrested Teddy and me out of his cruel and greedy claws in the nick of time.

I called out to the two lovers then, and they immediately turned and came towards me, with arms still about each other. In surprise I noted that Teddy had on a new and splendid set of flying belts and boots. But when they came nearer I was utterly astonished to see that his face was not only quite free from blood, but, that in some miraculous manner the cuts and bruises on it were nearly healed.

Smiling and radiant with happiness the two splendid young beings stopped by the side of my hammock, and Noama placed her hands on my shoulders in the Raanian custom of salutation.

"Greetings, Uncle Ned," she said gently, and there was genuine sympathy and affection in her beautiful, shining eyes. "I hope you feel better now."

"Greetings, Noama—hello, Teddy," I said. "Yes, I do feel better—surprisingly so, in fact. But my head seems to be filled to the top with question marks. To start with: how, in the name of wonders, did you happen along so opportunely?"

"It was quite simple," she said, smilingly. "Through

one of my workers in a field near the pump station where you were hiding, I learned that Sarro had captured you two again. So I obtained the service of the owners of this vessel, two devoted friends of mine, and traveled with them to the mine only a very short time behind Sarro.

"We floated above the mine buildings, out of possible sight, and took turns at watching things below through a Cee, an optical instrument similar to the binoculars in your world, but much more efficient. It seemed a long wait to me, and I was just about to do something desperate, when through the Cee I saw the two of you ride out of the mine on top of the ore carrier. You were disguised by the mine clothes, of course, but I immediately guessed your identity; for I knew that as a regular rule all foremen upon leaving the mine rode in the control cabs of the ore carriers.

"I quickly conferred with my friends, and we dropped the airship to a lower level. Then when I saw Sarro and his men rushing hastily into the mill building just a fraction of time later, I knew that very soon something vital was going to happen.

"But when finally you ran out of the mill building, and I recognized my beloved Tedde-e by his lovely fiery hair, we sent the airship down like a flash, with the net ready, and caught you just in time."

She stopped and broke into quick musical laughter.

"One of the most satisfying sounds I have ever heard in my life was Sarro's bellow of rage, when he saw his prey whisked away right from in front of his spying nose," she explained with vindictive gratification. "He is an inhuman monster."

"You saved our lives," I acknowledged with earnest gratefulness. "I shall never forget that. But tell me, where are we bound to now?"

"We are on the way to Noo, city of content, the home of my two friends," she explained. "Just this side of Noo we three are going to leave them, and continue on our way to the forbidden portals with the three sets of wings I brought along for the purpose."

This was wonderful news, of course. Teddy led me down below decks, where I was introduced to Noama's friends, two quiet and courteous young men, sons of the governor of Noo. And then my nephew led me to a room where a new set of flying belts and boots awaited me, and also a soul-satisfying meal which I needed badly. And while I was eating Teddy told me that by means of ointments and a Loo, Noama had accomplished the almost miraculous healing of our wounds.

"She's the only girl of her kind in the world!" he said enthusiastically; and I heartily agreed with him.

### The Secret Passage

WHEN we drew near to the place of parting, we took our leave of Noama's two friends, and with our wings strapped on securely and our belt pockets crammed with the things needed for the voyage, filed out onto the tail of the gigantic bird ship and took off easily.

Turning on the maximum speed of which our wing machines were capable, we split the heavy air like a trio of migrating swallows, flying so high that the sev-

eral cities which we passed appeared like tiny toy towns, and so much nearer to the miniature suns above us that their heat was rather unpleasant, and their light dazzling to the eyes.

I flew immediately behind Noama and Teddy, and overheard him ask her what the little suns were, and how their light and energy was maintained through so many ages since their establishment.

"It is a secret of the supreme council," she answered. "I only know that certain chemicals and properties are extracted from that very radio-active ore which you saw in that terrible mine, and that at certain regular periods some of the wise men ascend to the suns in a specially constructed and insulated airship, and replenish their used-up substance."

\* \* \* \* \*

We had nearly reached the border of the arid, semi-lighted region, when Noama bade us lower our speed and wait for her, while she described a U curve in the air, and by means of her Cee observed the air levels far in our rear with concentrated attention. A few minutes later she caught up with us again, and I noted that her face was grave.

"Sarro and his creatures are following us!" she announced. "They are traveling in one of the large government airships, any of which can easily double the speed of our wings. It means a race against death for us now!"

"But how do you suppose he caught on to our trail so quickly?" I heard Teddy ask her, when we were under full speed again.

"His spies are everywhere in the land," she explained in a tone of contempt. "He probably radiated the news of your escape to all his agents, and it is just possible that one of them saw us in the air through a Cee. But no matter—they have not caught us yet!"

How could one but admire a girl with a spirit like that.

We rushed onward. And from time to time I glanced back over my shoulder, searching with my eyes for a glimpse of the pursuing vessel. However, it was quite a while before I at last saw it—a shimmering dot far, far in the rear, gleaming through the bluish-golden haze like an evil, demonic eye, which with each passing moment grew ever larger.

The region below us was now the arid, and boulder-strewn desert region with which Teddy and I were already familiar. And far in the distance ahead of us, indistinct because of the scant light over the desert, the immense wall of the cavern beckoned to us, rising into the vast, unknown heights like gigantic cliffs of white ice.

Would we be able to reach our destination before Sarro overtook us?

A region of peculiar, low and sharp ridges lay ahead of us on the great plain, and, with Noama in the lead, we gradually angled down towards this.

Another glance backwards revealed Sarro's pursuing vessel quite plainly now: an immense bird-shape of gleaming metal, whose gigantic wings flashed like swift red lightnings, rushing menacingly towards us with frightful velocity.

It seemed only about one hundred yards from us,

when Noama cried a quick warning to us, banked sharply to the right at right-angles to our late line of travel, and dipped down at a steep incline. Teddy followed her easily, but it required all of my nerve and presence of mind to execute the movement without turning a somersault in mid-air.

So sudden and unexpected had been our move that quite evidently the operators of the great airship were taken completely by surprise; for it shot swiftly past the spot where we had turned, and continued on for quite a distance before it began to turn in a long arc.

In the meantime we three fugitives had shot downwards with the speed of attacking eagles, and even before the huge mechanical bird had managed to turn we had attained our objective: a wilderness of sharp, criss-crossing low ridges, and were landing in a sort of deep cleft between two of them. It was a difficult landing, and I almost broke my neck, tumbling over and over at least twice.

"Quick!—in here!" Noama cried sharply, and we sprang beneath the overhanging lip of a cliff, with both of them helping me into the dim recess. And we had barely managed to get out of sight, when the great vessel passed by overhead, so low that the strong back wash of its gigantic wings whirled up the age-old dust from the bottom of the cleft where we had landed.

With the rapidity of a conjurer, Noama produced from her belt a narrow tube with a cone-like head, such as she had provided for each of us, and manipulated a tiny lever in its side. Instantly a sharp ray of greenish-white light leaped from the tube, lighting up a dark hole in the farthest corner of the recess, down which we scrambled as fast as our wings would permit.

A sudden joy pervaded me as I realized that this must be the entrance to the secret way to freedom of which Noama had spoken to Teddy and me.

We climbed down a very rough, natural shaft in the hard rock for about thirty feet or so, passed through several small caves in rapid succession, and finally arrived at the very narrow and steep bank of a small subterranean river, the waters of which rushing along invisibly far below us, had eaten their way so deeply into the rock that the river bed itself appeared like a narrow, black cleft.

At the bank of the river Noama stopped and faced us.

"We will have to remove our wings now," she murmured cautiously. "Because henceforth we will have no use for them, and they will only hinder our traveling."

"But I thought that we would be able to use them in ascending to the surface," I whispered protestingly.

"No, no—it would be impossible to fly in the shaft. There is not sufficient room with the continuous turning of it," she explained.

Rapidly we helped each other to remove the wings, and upon Noama's suggestion hurled them down into the invisible river. In single file, with Noama lighting the way ahead, and with me bringing up the rear, we passed along the treacherous, narrow and precipitous bank of the river, whose rushing noise awakened ghostly echoes all about us.

At intervals we stopped, and with the light turned out searched the impenetrable darkness behind us with



our eyes and ears for signs of pursuit. But there was never a glimpse of light, nor a sound in our rear to indicate that we were followed.

"Maybe they have given up the search," I said hopefully on one such occasion.

"You do not know Sarro, if you think so," Noama said grimly. "He is a demon. It is his boast that never yet has anyone evaded his clutches, and that he never gives up the chase after a transgressor of the law."

We continued on; walking as fast on the precarious path as was consistent with our safety, and presently, seemingly in the near distance ahead of us, a patch of luminosity became visible.

"What is that light ahead, Noama?" Teddy asked tensely.

"Nothing to worry about, beloved Tedde-e," she answered gently. "It merely means that we are nearing our goal, the secret entrance to the second shaft, just beneath the foot of the great wall."

### CHAPTER XXIII

#### The Battle Over the Abyss

WITH breath-taking abruptness the river bank terminated at the sharp edge of a great chasm of irregular outlines, the almost smooth, perpendicular walls of which fell sheer into unknown, awful depths. About one hundred feet below where we stood, the hitherto invisible river shot forth in a solid column of foaming white waters, and hurled itself with reckless abandon into the black maw of the abyss; its impact as it struck, far, far down, sounding like the continuous rolling of distant thunder, and filling the entire place with a ceaseless, droning roar.

However, none of these things held my attention for more than a moment. For, like a magnet draws iron, so my eyes were drawn to the marvelous natural bridge which, like a great, flattened bow, spanned the abyss from lip to lip—a curved ribbon of milk-white stone—the remains, evidently, of an ancient ledge.

There was an opening somewhere in the rocky roof above the abyss which must have been located almost directly beneath one of the rare suns of the upper region, for a strong light fell down through it that illuminated the entire middle section of the bridge, and endowed its marble whiteness with a strange, magic beauty.

"Great Jupiter!—what a beauty!" Teddy exclaimed through the droning roar of the falling waters.

But we had no time for further admiration of the bridge, for, by way of a narrow lip of rock that jutted out from the wall, Noama led our march to the foot of it. But short as the distance was, my heart was in my mouth all the way, the while I clutched desperately at each bit of outcrop in the wall to steady me. However, if it had not been for the training due to my wing flying, I doubt whether I could have made it at all. Teddy, of course, knew about my natural tendency to vertigo, and several times turned his head to glance at me with affectionate solicitude. But each time he did so I managed to grin at him cheerfully, to his evident relief.

But that bridge!

As I have said, it was a mere ribbon of stone; and now, looking from the foot of it, I saw that its width was scarcely more than three feet, and on both sides of it that awful, black gulf of nothingness—Shudderingly I heartened myself for the dizzy journey across.

"Think you can make it, Uncle Ned?" Teddy asked anxiously, with one foot already on the rough surface of the bridge.

"You can bet your dozen of new socks I can!" I answered stoutly, hoping that my legs wouldn't begin to shake and betray my quaking soul.

Teddy laughed delightedly, and proceeded to follow Noama, who during our little dialogue had been smilingly watching us, but who was evidently in a hurry to cross the bridge. The two of them began to walk along that narrow ribbon of stone as unconcernedly as if it had been a wide sidewalk on any city street, and for a few moments I could do nothing but watch them fascinatedly.

They had almost reached the middle of the bridge, when at last I was able to make up my mind to follow them. But I had taken only a few steps, when I felt an attack of vertigo coming on, and immediately got down on hands and knees. It made me feel very foolish, and embarrassedly I glanced ahead to see if perhaps Teddy or Noama had noticed my awkward predicament. They had not. But I saw something else, beyond them, which filled me with utter consternation:

From the deep shadows at the opposite end of the bridge a demoniac figure stepped out into the light, and came slowly and menacingly towards Teddy and Noama. Sarro had outguessed us again!

The satanic Raanian's face was distorted by a mocking smile, and in his right hand, ready for instant action, he held a Kra. Spellbound I watched Teddy quickly twist himself and Noama about on that dizzy, narrow spot over the frightful abyss, so that it was now he who confronted our relentless enemy, and I saw the tensing of his great back muscles as he waited for Sarro's approach.

Presently, when the latter was only a few feet from Teddy, I saw the moving of his sneering lips, and knew that he was speaking. What happened next was almost too fast for my eyes to follow:

I saw Teddy launch himself suddenly forwards, and lead a lightning blow to Sarro's jaw. However, having evidently learned from past experience, the wily police chief evaded the blow by a quick motion of his head, and Teddy just saved himself from toppling forward by delivering a choppy solar plexus punch. At the same instant Sarro slipped his right arm under Teddy's left armpit, and touched the back of my nephew's head with the deadly Kra.

But even as the resistless paralyzing force swept through him, Teddy wrapped both arms about the big Raanian's neck in a deadly strangle hold. For one awful moment they hovered at the edge of the bridge—then together they shot over the brink into the black maw of the abyss.

#### The Passage!

AS if turned to stone, Noama stood there at the edge of the bridge rigidly motionless, and stared down

into that awful void which had devoured her beloved. Then, with a wailing scream of utter despair that will forever echo in my soul, she suddenly flung both arms above her head, and threw herself into the boiling and thundering pit.

So quickly had it all happened—within a few moments only—that my dazed mind could not grasp the terrible reality—could not realize that the awful catastrophe had actually happened before my own eyes, and within a few yards of me: two splendid young lives, all that I had held dear in the world, had been extinguished in one short moment, like two tiny flames snuffed out by a breath of air!

Sick at heart and soul, and shaken to the very foundations of my being by the horror of it all, I crawled out over that dreadful abyss to the center of the bridge, and called their names—screamed them—for hours—until I was upon the brink of madness.

It's probable that I fainted then; for presently clarity of mind returned to me, and I was conscious of having lain there on the bridge for a long time, as my cold and numb limbs attested. Nauseated, and with my body trembling in every fibre I crawled on to the shadows at the far side of the pit, hardly knowing what I was doing.

That end of the natural bridge terminated in a fairly spacious platform of more or less even stone, and there, a few feet away from the edge of the chasm, I dropped in a heap from sheer nervous exhaustion, and lay there weeping and sobbing like a child.

But suddenly I sat up, electrified by what I saw: I was facing the end of the river bank on the far side of the abyss, along which, but so recently, my loved ones and I had traveled, and now, in the far distant darkness along its course, I perceived the winking and flashing of many lights.

Sarro's men were coming in search of their chief, probably alarmed by his long absence. It seemed reasonable to assume, in view of what had happened, that the constantly spying police chief had somehow discovered Noama's secret anent the secret entrance, at least partly, and in a spirit of bravado, or more likely to regain lost prestige in the eyes of the supreme council and his subordinates for past failures, had decided to capture us single handed; having probably discovered by means of watching us through a Cee that none of us were armed. But now his men were coming to find out what had happened.

Well, they should *not* catch *me*—I would die first!

I tried to remember all that Noama had told Teddy and me about the secret opening leading to the ancient immigration shaft—the road to freedom.

Freedom!—Home!

The thought steadied my nerves, and caused new strength to flow back into my limbs. A quick search revealed a narrow, irregular opening in an almost invisible nook back of the platform, and through this I managed to squeeze myself without delay. With the light tube from my belt I found that I was in a very narrow cleft, which appeared to widen towards the top.

Jamming the lighted tube into my belt so as to leave my hands free, I began with all haste to work myself upwards between the two walls, using the uneven places

on them for hand and footholds.

The cleft terminated in another but smaller level, whence three further clefts, or rather cracks in the rock led in three different directions. A quick calculation as to the location of the shaft from where I was induced me to choose the opening to my left. I followed it eagerly—and brought up against a blank wall. No opening of any kind anywhere. My heart sank in dismay. Had I taken the wrong turn after all?

From somewhere below I heard the murmuring echo of voices, and knew that Sarro's men were nearing the abyss. Frantically I searched the wall again, even getting down on hands and knees. And then, when I had almost given up in despair, I found it—a small, irregular hole almost level with the floor, and hidden beneath an eyebrow-like rocky protuberance. Eagerly I pushed my hand with the light tube through it, following me with my head. I almost shouted for joy—just below me a smooth-walled, gently curving passage stretched upwards.

The road to liberty lay at last before me!

With some difficulty I hastily worked my body feet first through the narrow opening, and allowed myself to drop the few feet to the smooth, rocky floor of the age-old shaft. Then, taking a deep breath of the somewhat musty, but fairly breathable air, I started on my long climb to the surface. Would I be followed?

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Struggle to Freedom

**O**NWARDS and on—upwards and up, stopping merely for brief rests, and to partake of the concentrated food essences and the cooling fruit juices in flat metallic containers which in her wisdom Noama had provided—thus I struggled with all my might to attain my goal.

On—on—on, in solitary, awful monotony; my only companions my light, my ever changing shadow behind me, and the hollow echo of my footsteps. Often I stopped to listen intently for sounds of possible pursuit, but heard nothing more than the pounding of the blood in my ears, and the wheezing of my lungs, protesting against the impure, dead air.

Round and round—up and up, led the marvelous shaft, the sameness of its smooth stone walls broken only by the occasional empty light receptacles in its ceiling, and the round openings of air ducts at the extreme upper edge of the outer wall, most of which, if one judged by the condition of the air, were not in working order.

I continued to mount; now walking in the groove at the center, along which in the far past age of the Primarians, their great transport vehicles had whizzed by, and again on one or the other side of it, by preference choosing the inner, shorter route. And as I trudged on I calculated that, according to the screw-like shape of the immense shaft, I had to travel approximately seven miles in length to attain one in height. Seven times sixty-five miles. Think of it!

Onward—onward—onward.

Time had ceased to be, and everything in creation, except that interminable winding passage and the mite

that was I, creeping, creeping along its endless miles, my mind benumbed from the constant strain—

Hour after hour—day after day—tramp, tramp, tramp—swallowing a little nourishment—sipping a bit of moisture—dropping in a heap from sheer exhaustion—dozing in a torpor—onward again—on—on—

And then came the day when I heard them!

It was scarcely a sound that drifted to me from somewhere far below—hardly a whisper. Yet that strange faculty for perceiving the otherwise unheard and unseen carried the message to my consciousness, and I *knew*.

They should *not* capture me again!

I became like a madman then, with a madman's strength. Forgotten was the leaden heaviness of my suffering, wounded feet. I did not walk now—I ran. Up—up—along that endless, pitiless incline; away from that menace which was creeping, creeping nearer. . . .

My brain was on fire, my breath came in painful gasps, my burning eyes seemed about to leap from their sockets, and my throat felt as if molten lead were pouring into it. I stopped for an instant to relieve the burning pain of it with the last precious drops of cooling fruit juice. On again in the mad rush to freedom.

And then—checkmate!

An impenetrable wall rose suddenly in my path: a wall of great round boulders jammed tightly together!

A wave of absolute despair came over me then. Like a caged wild beast I clawed at the wall that seemed to mock me, and raved and cursed like a maniac. But suddenly, with a complete reversal of feeling, I threw myself onto my knees and prayed for deliverance.

The echo of my pursuers' voices sounded nearer now.

Quickly I arose from my knees, and with my light examined the wall of boulders with keen attention. One of the great rounded stones appeared to be the key to the jam, and, placing my light tube on the floor so as to have both hands free, I began with all my strength and speed to work the boulder loose. That I had nothing to pry with handicapped me greatly, and if it had not been for the fact that the key boulder was wedged by several small, sharp-cornered pieces of rock, my task would have been hopeless.

Grimly determined I tore at one of the wedges until my hands bled, and at last got it out. If I could get out one more—

The voices were approaching me rapidly now. Using the removed piece of rock as a lever, I put all my remaining strength into one supreme effort and hove mightily. The key boulder began to slip with ponderous slowness—

Just in time I leaped back to safety. The next moment the jam broke. With a thunderous, earth-shaking roar the avalanche rushed into the depths, sweeping my light tube out of existence, and leaving me there in that terrifying darkness, cowering tremblingly behind a great piece of angular rock which, in its descent, had partly penetrated the wall of the shaft, and expecting each succeeding moment to be my last.

It seemed to me that I heard muffled screams—and then all sound merged into one deafening, grinding roar as the avalanche thundered past me.

How long the terrifying ordeal lasted I have no means of knowing. But suddenly the avalanche stopped, and a tomb-like silence followed.

With utmost caution I crept forth from behind the rock that had so miraculously protected me, and viewed a wondrous sight: Beyond where the wall of boulders had been no sign of the winding shaft remained, but only a hundred feet or so upwards, at a slanting angle from where I stood, the blue, sun-lit sky of my homeland beckoned to me!

With a prayer of thankfulness upon my lips and in my heart, I gradually worked my way upwards through the funnel-like opening, and soon breathed the crisp, pine-scented air of the mountains. I did not know just where I was, but never had the world seemed so beautiful, nor life so delightful as in that moment. But quickly a bitter pain gripped my soul as I thought of Teddy and Noama, entombed in that awful pit.

The position of the sun indicated that the time was late afternoon, and I lost no time in searching for a likely place to scale the smooth, precipitous cliff walls that surrounded the place on all sides. At last I found one, a mere raffle against the frowning rock wall, but it was nearly dark when, almost exhausted from the difficult, dangerous climb, I reached the plateau above.

But soon I pushed on through the wild and rough country; for with the coming of darkness the air had turned bitterly cold and I sensed great discomfort in my scanty clothing. Stopping only for occasional droughts of water at springs, I traveled on through the night, compelled to do so to keep myself from freezing, and hoping that soon I would strike a trail which would lead me to some habitation. Suddenly, through some optical illusion, I stepped over the brink of a cliff and dropped into space—And that is all of my story. You know the rest.

\* \* \* \*

There was a silence, a long, pregnant terrifying silence after Gothram had finished. So enthralled were his listeners that they sat motionless, for hours it seems, after his voice had ceased. A weight of nameless sorrow seemed to hang over them, the sorrow that comes from a realization of experiences that few men had known.

Denniston was the first to speak. With almost an apology in his voice he spoke. "And your nephew and Noama? They are dead?"

Gothram brushed a hand wearily across his forehead. "I don't know," he said, slowly. "In all reason they must be. You may think that I am becoming insane; but somehow of late I have become more and more possessed of the curious impression that my beloved nephew is not dead, but lives. It might, of course, be merely a psychological outgrowth of my grief about him—I do not know. But always now—every hour—something within me is waiting—waiting.

"But if I thought that it might be true—that Teddy still lives—I know that God would show me a way to get to him somehow, and would give me the strength of mind and body to rescue him from the clutches of those super-men of Raa. But I don't know. I don't know—"

THE END.