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April

# SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

Complete Novels by Top Writers

35¢

**Clansmen of Fear**

by Henry Hasse

**SPAWN of the DEADLY SEA**

by Robert Silverberg

**Gulliver Planet**

by Daniel F. Galouye



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# SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

Vol. 1 No. 3

APRIL, 1957

## 3 Complete New Novels by Top Writers!

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Helpless, Donal watched the embers of Terran civilization grow dim—as one by one the women of the zone changed and became oddly alien. . . .

**GULLIVER PLANET . . . . . Daniel F. Galouye 45**

Mankind was doomed to slavery under microscopic masters, who could live within the bodies of human beings and control their every action!

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# Clansmen of Fear

by Henry Hasse

*Helpless, Donal saw  
the embers of Terran  
civilization grow dim  
—as the Zone's women  
turned oddly alien . . .*

Illustrated by Emsch

# Clansmen of Fear

by Henry Hasse

## CHAPTER I

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON of the second day when Kathri returned to the Village. Donal watched her striding across the south fields, lithe and long-limbed and tan, hair cascading liquidly to strike off coppery glints from the sun. She held her head high, and even from his distance Donal could discern something of stubborn pride and defiance.

He drew in his breath, feeling the quick surge of pulse which had bothered him of late when looking at Kathri; but with an angry shift of the shoulders he put down his emotions. No, he would *not* be lenient! He had been lenient last time. It had been a mistake. As Elder he had his duties, and the Word must be obeyed if his people were to survive for long.

"Gone two days," he muttered, "and without sanction of Council. It's not as if she didn't *know* the danger . . ." Donal frowned, his face like weathered brown stone. *One* day outside the Zone was the usual maximum before cellular dissolution. Could it be that Kathri was becoming—different? Just as Dorthi had become different?

Lips tight with displeasure, Donal strode to the edge of the Village to meet her.

"What am I to do with you, Kathri? Don't look to me for favor this time! You must be punished, you know."

She stood before him, lower lip thrust out a little. Donal sensed defiance there and a hint of something more, some secret beyond his ken.

Her voice came low and sullen. "I know."

"Well then, tell me! Why did you not come to me for permission?"

"'The Zone is our world, and our Law, and our Life,'" she quoted from Coburn's Scripture. "'The Zone is our hope and our salvation. To leave the Zone is the worst blasphemy—'" She halted, looked up suddenly, and her wide gray eyes met Donal's. "I do not believe it! *You* do not believe! And I did

not come for permission because—you would not have granted.”

Strange . . . Only a year ago he would have considered this blasphemy, but now he did not. Donal looked away from her eyes; he stared beyond the low-rolling plains to where the skeletal structures of Chago were just visible. Even in the sunlight the brighter glow of the radiations could be seen, a steady blanketing arc across the dead city.

He faced her angrily. “Whether *I* believe is not important! Coburn’s Scripture is our only guide, and as Elder I shall see that it is obeyed! You cannot deny that you left the Zone, unaccompanied and unsanctioned?”

She was silent.

“Perhaps you felt it necessary to visit the City. You had need of the radiation?” But he knew she had not gone there. She was a member of Group Three, still months away from the Enlivening.

“No,” she answered. “My trek was south, and—you may as well know it. I saw some of the Outlanders.”

Donal was aghast, but he allowed his voice to drip scorn. “So for two days you were in the Outlands! I presume it was Morghan’s Group you saw.”

“Yes!” Defiantly. “And I saw Dorthi!”

Again her thrust told. Donal closed his eyes, remembering that day a year ago when Dorthi had gone. It had taken him a long time to get over the hurt. And it was more than a personal hurt. It had been sacrilege, an affront—and there was something of deeper meaning that he could not fathom. In three generations Dorthi was the first to leave the Zone, the first to have no further need of the life-giving radiations. And now Kathri . . .

He opened his eyes and looked at her, and because of the renewed ache in his heart he tried to speak softly. “Kathri . . .

---

HENRY HASSE is one of the real old-timers in the adventure science-fiction field. This is his first magazine appearance in several years, but he has lost none of his magic touch. Seldom if ever has any writer succeeded in making his extra-terrestrials at once so alien, and so completely understandable, as Hasse has in CLANSMEN OF FEAR!

twice now you have gone to your sister. And you still will not tell me why?"

She shook her head. "I cannot."

"Very well, Kathri. I must prescribe punishment! Or would you prefer that I place the matter before Council?"

Stark alarm leaped to her eyes. "No, Donal! I—I prefer that you prescribe."

It pleased him that she feared the Council. He stood tall and gaunt above her, savoring the pleasure, as his gaze took in her long-limbed contours. She was sixteen now? Seventeen? Again there came the surge of pulse, but he fought against softening. His gaze flicked to the fields where the Villagers moved beneath the harsh sun, laboring against the stubborn soil where things would barely grow.

"You will work in the fields, Kathri. Every day for three months you will work. You are Adult now, and you must learn what the soil means."

"But my duties at the school, Donal—"

"Will continue! You have deciphered the Books—faster than most—and the young ones must learn to decipher. You will work in the fields each day *after* the period of teaching."

She turned and strode away, and Donal watched her go. His shoulders shrugged in remote annoyance: he felt no victory. But overshadowing his thoughts was a feeling of bitterness, a sense of impending loss. *Two days* she had been away from the Zone with no ill effects. There was no denying it—she was becoming different just as her sister, Dorthi, had become different.

He stood there towering and silent and watched Kathri until she entered her father's house. Then frowning, Donal strode back to help the others in the fields.

**I**T WAS MIDWAY of the second year (*Basic Cygni Time*) when they passed through the edge of the galaxy and entered the new sector. V'Naarik hunched forward to watch the huge astra-lens, the monotonous unfolding of stars. He wasn't worried yet. The photon tapes had registered a flow of .921, which meant the drainage was minor; their auxiliaries alone carried sufficient potential for the time-return.

*Still, when repairs were in order it was best not to delay. V'Naarik flicked over to minimum galactic-drive and glanced again at the astra-lens. Surely in all that expanse there must be planet-sustaining systems! Damn these Sector Surveys and damn the quota! In the interests of Empire it was necessary, he supposed, but when he returned this time he was definitely going to press for transfer . . .*

*He sat musing pleasantly on the possibilities of such a prospect, then was startled as the control-room door burst open. He whirled and saw Faantl standing there.*

*"Commander! Commander V'Naarik, sir—"*

*"What is it, Faantl? What's the meaning of this!" His tone lost its sharp edge as he stared at the man. Faantl's face was tight and scared, hands trembling as he gestured. V'Naarik surged to his feet. "Speak up, man! What's wrong?"*

*"Sir, you'd better come at once. Register is dropping! Even auxiliaries! The techs are checking now, and they think"—Faantl gulped—"they think it might be etheric loss!"*

**A**FTER HIS EVENING MEAL, prepared and eaten alone, Donal felt a restless unease. It was partly Kathri—but there were other matters. Crops would not be good this year. The soil seemed more stubborn than ever. And now that Morghan's Group had returned, as they always did at the time of the crops . . .

Donal clenched his fists in helpless rage. Would they never be rid of these Outlanders who periodically came raiding, the nomadic ones who roamed the lands where the Zone dwellers could not follow? Proficient at thievery, they had neither the art nor inclination to till the soil. And he knew that Morghan's Group was only waiting now, as last year, skulking in the outlying forests until the crops were ready.

"By the ancient Coburn," Donal swore devoutly, "I'll see that the taking comes harder this year!"

He surged up from the chair and left his house and strode the streets of the Village. The night was warm and soft, the sky a comforting blanket.

No, not comforting. He looked up at the stars and then quickly away, as the vision of the void leaped down to smash against his eyes. The Books—some of the Books that were

left spoke of the stars, spoke learnedly in terms that Donal could scarcely grasp. He felt inadequate, looking at the stars. Inadequate and athirst and hopelessly alone.

He found himself at the Village outskirts where the tiny river rolled past. Again he gazed toward Chago, and saw the faint blanket-glow athrust against the darkening sky. *That* he understood. Coburn's records were full of it. Even now, so long after the—*Happening*—Donal thrilled to that ancient one's recounting. But often he felt his mind tumultuous with questions.

True, those radiations of the ruins meant life—or rather a renewing life-force for such as *they*, since without it they would die. That gruesome fact had been proved often enough. What made the Outlanders different, shunning the City as a place of death and horror? Donal would never admit it, but often of late he had found himself envying the Outlanders, their random life, their freedom to come and go. Much as he hated Morghan's Group, he envied them. And Dorthi was still with them; what was there about Dorthi which had enabled her—

He must read Coburn's Scripture again! The answer was there in the ancient Book, if only he could understand—

His thoughts were abruptly shattered, as a burst of rifle fire sent echoes crashing. Across the fields men were shouting. There came another staccato volley, and Donal could see flashes of orange over near the storehouses.

"Morghan's early this year," he grated, and was glad he had posted a guard. He hurried in that direction, then stopped as a footstep came in the street behind him.

"Donal!" He turned and saw Ral Phillips approaching. The man seemed in a terrible state of distress.

"Thank heaven I found you, Donal! I went to your house, but—"

"What is it, Phillips? Speak up, man!"

"My wife, Betha. She— I'm afraid it's pretty bad! We should not have delayed! If only she had come with us three weeks ago—"

Donal seized Phillips' arm. "The signs, man! Is it deterioration? She's not—"

"No. It's not too advanced yet, but I can see the signs! She's in pain and I'm afraid the cells, the tissues—"



"She wasn't with Group Three at the last Enlivening? Why, man, why?"

"If you'll remember, Donal, she was then eight months with child and very ill! She could not make the trip. She thought she might wait—"

Donal groaned. "When will you ever learn? The Enlivening is necessary, it cannot be bypassed!" He paused, listening. The sound of rifle fire was spasmodic now. He was sure Tanner and the guard could handle it. He seized Phillips' arm and hurried back through the street.

"Get your wife to the City at once. We'll leave immediately! I'll see to the wagon and horses, meanwhile you get some of the women."

"They're already waiting."

"Good!" Donal paused. "How long would you say . . ."

"The child? That too, Donal—soon, I'm afraid! Surely before the night is over!" Phillips shivered where he stood.

"Stop worrying," said Donal. "The radiations are strong tonight. I'll get you to the City in two hours. Betha'll survive it, the replenishing comes quickly . . ."

## CHAPTER II

**T**HE REPLENISHING WAS IN TIME, but Betha lost her child, after entering the first-stage spasms of cellular dissolution. This was a thing Donal had seen before. He had seen it much worse than first-stages. They waited in agony for the turning, and then barely pulled her through.

Donal was bone tired as they reached the Village well past midnight. He stabled the horses and returned to his house, and found Tanner waiting to report on the raid.

"It was only a scouting party," said Tanner. "They came along the river. We handled them without too much trouble."

"Like thieves in the night," Donal said with heaving anger. "And it'll be worse! Morghan's going to raid in strength this year . . ."

Tanner nodded, plainly worried. "Prepare yourself, Donal. Some of them had rifles— Lord only knows where they got them! I've never seen Outlanders with rifles before!"

Donal stood in shocked silence. "How many?" he said.

"I counted two, possibly three. But who knows how many

more they have?"

Donal was wondering the same thing. He said grimly, "How many rifles in the Village now?"

"Close to thirty. But some of those have ceased to function. It's the ammunition, Donal!"

"I know. We'll have to find more! I'm calling the Council to session tomorrow—our only answer is to forage the City again. Perhaps those places far to the north."

Wearily, he turned away. Few of the weapons they found were workable any longer, even after thorough cleaning. And ammunition was becoming a greater problem! Most of it turned out to be corroded, and it was almost impossible now to find good ammunition in the ruins.

**V**'NAARIK WAS WORRIED NOW, *but he must not let them know. He stood with his technicians gathered around him, the photon tape in his hands. Potential .093! It was worse than bad—it was unbelievable.*

*He turned to the energonics engineer and said in a whisper: "This includes auxiliaries as well as primary-drive! How can it be, Kyaala?"*

*"I wish I knew, sir. Until a short time ago the tapes registered a perpetual .921—and we've made our periodic checks! In all my experience—"*

*"In all your experience, my dear Kyaala, this may well prove to be your last experience unless we can—" Commander V'Naarik caught himself in time, and waved an imperative hand. "We'll run it again. I shall run it."*

*Carefully, V'Naarik touched the de-energizer. Twice as carefully he released the tape into the actinium chamber. He watched anxiously as the beta rays sped unleashed to send the counter dials dancing. One thing he was sure of: that chamber was absolutely infallible, the latest product of the Empire laboratories. The error could not be there!*

*Seconds ticked away. A hush fell as the register dropped steadily. V'Naarik leaned forward to look, and there it was—potential .093.*

*Kyaala was more than miserable. He was frightened. "I've heard of dissipating sub-level energies, sir—but we would have caught that! This has got to be something else. You don't*

suppose," he paused sheepishly, "it could be—etheric loss?"

V'Naarik hit him with a scornful glance. Etheric loss was an old wives' tale! V'Naarik hadn't heard of it since—

Wait. Yes, not too long ago. Dar Turibek had brought a tale back, claiming it had happened to him when he emerged from the galaxy fringe into a sub-sector. The astro-physicists were supposed to be studying it now. Theoretically there could be etheric-stress variables between galaxies . . .

He turned to face the techs and tried to keep his voice under control. "As of this moment we're on manual drive. Yes, I said manual! I know it will be tedious, but we shall have to make planetary testings! Rajjo—shield all generators. You, Kyaala, do everything you can to build up auxiliary potential; we'll need every source of power for the search. Braliik! See that all planetary scanners are made ready and then use them! You know what to look for."

V'Naarik brought himself erect and gave them the final truth. "Well? We have perhaps three days. Get to work, all of you—if you ever want to see Cygni again!"

**D**ONAL WATCHED KATHRI in the fields the following day. She worked hard and uncomplainingly, with a certain stubbornness. Perhaps the punishment was just what she needed.

Later that evening he sat alone in his house and stared at the Books.

Now his mood was shattered, the mood he had felt when he watched the soft surging haze of Chago to the north. He hated Chago! He hated the radiation and all that it meant, their bleak existence and their barren little twelve-mile world.

Trapped! Well, weren't they? Why not admit it? "The Zone is our world and our Law and our Life," as the ancient Coburn put it. Donal laughed harshly as he rose to pace the room.

Captives within the Zone. He knew it too well! And the experience of Phillips' wife last night brought it home to him. It made him remember that day two years ago, when he and a small group of the men had ventured too far beyond the Zone while hunting in the forests, and were delayed in returning. He remembered the half of them who had died. He

remembered their pleadings when the realization came, the swift darkening skin and shredding flesh, their screams of agony as cellular tissues broke down for lack of the livening radiation. There had been nothing to do but leave them there; he and half the others had made it back just in time, to lie ill and weakened for days.

Now more than ever he envied the Outlanders who moved free and unencumbered wherever they wished, without need of the replenishing.

Bitter with his thoughts, he strode to his shelf and pulled out the yellowing three-ringed book. Coburn's Scripture. Donal stared at the faded binding, the patched and tattered leaves, then hurled the book from him in a gust of anger. Scripture! He was sick of it! Truth was there, much of actual record—but much nonsense as well. Too much of speculation, fore-visioning, all mixed up with terminology that Donal could never understand.

But Coburn was right about the Zone. He had foreseen that those few who were born and survived within its boundaries would be forever limited to the radiation, bound to it by need of cellular sustenance—something about essential salts in the blood and "hard impregnation" of the genes. Donal understood it only dimly. As for the rest, Coburn's crabbed writing about future generations and something he called "mutations" who might be born endowed with peculiar talents, physical or mental, beyond any previous knowing—Donal had given up trying to decipher it.

He returned to his chair and sat sprawling sullenly. There was so much beyond his ken! In particular, Coburn's ancient terminology continued to bother him. "Mutations"! It was something strange supposed to happen to them later . . . Why had Coburn been so vague? Donal was the future generation, and his life was no different from his father's or his father's before him. He still grubbed in the soil. He was still bound to the Zone. Of course there was the matter of Dorthi, and apparently Kathri was becoming like her . . .

Donal sat bolt upright. *Different*. Could that be what Coburn meant? Was Dorthi the first? Somehow Donal had assumed that the mysterious thing would effect them all . . . or had Coburn mentioned that it would be discriminate and isolated? He couldn't remember . . .

The rap at the door startled him, and he sank back into his chair. "Enter!" he called.

**T**HE DOOR PUSHED OPEN, and Kathri stood there. She paused for a moment and then stepped hesitantly inside. Tall and slim she looked—but not all slimness either. That was another thing Donal had noticed of late. He turned his head away and grumbled in his throat.

"Girl—if you come to ask that I reconsider the punishment, you're wasting your time. The Council would have been more severe—as I should have been!"

She didn't speak. She turned her head about, examining the room as if seeing it for the first time; as if she hadn't been there many times before, to pore through the books. Donal watched her now and said nothing.

She spied Coburn's Scripture lying in the corner where Donal had hurled it. Softly, she walked over and picked it up. She re-arranged the crumpled pages. She stepped to the shelf and placed the book where it belonged, and without a word moved toward the curtained doorway into the kitchen.

Donal heard her moving around out there, doing something with the pans he'd neglected to put away. Presently she returned, bringing a steaming pot of coffee and a cup.

*Coffee supplies are low*, Donal thought. *We'll be lucky if we find more at the City . . .* But he said nothing.

Turning, Kathri spied his pipe and tobacco-tin on the table. She looked at him questioningly. With an effort of will, Donal shook his head. *Tobacco too*, he thought.

She came and sat on the rug at his feet.

"The punishment was just, Donal. I deserved more! But that's not why I came."

Donal sipped appreciatively at the coffee, and watched her.

"I *had* to leave the Zone, Donal. Don't you see? I find it hard to explain—but I'll try—I know you'll understand."

"I understand, Kathri. You were very close, you and Dorthi. You-felt you had to see your sister again?"

"More than felt. Dorthi *wanted* me to come; she talked to me and asked me to come, because—she had something to tell."

Donal placed his cup on the table, very gently, and leaned

forward to stare at her. "Kathri. I want you to think carefully before you answer. You say Dorthi *asked* you to come? When was this?"

"Three days ago."

"But Dorthi was not here three days ago. She has been gone for a year!"

She looked up at him with anguished pleading. "I said it would not be easy to explain— I have not dared speak of it before! Oh, Donal, I thought *you* would understand!"

"I will, Kathri. I'm trying. Tell me—just how did Dorthi talk with you?"

"Well . . . by words that have no sound. But not words either!" She frowned, then touched her forehead. "I just *feel* the thoughts here, and right away I know what Dorthi—"

Donal felt his mind spinning. He got up from his chair and paced away, not daring to look at her. Telepathy! He had learned that much from Coburn's writing, and he understood essentially how it might be. But faced with it now he couldn't believe it. It was just too fantastic! *Mutant*. Coburn's prediction was happening; this must be the beginning. . . .

"You're not angry with me, Donal?"

"Angry? Of course not! You can't help it if you're—" He caught the words abruptly, aware that anger was in his voice. He paced back and stood looking down at her, as an appalling thought occurred. "You—cannot receive other thoughts? Only Dorthi's?"

"Oh, others too, but only faintly as yet." She smiled up at him and her eyes danced knowingly. "But much better than last year! Sometimes when you look at me—like yesterday in the fields—"

He flushed darkly and quickly changed the subject. "You said Dorthi had something to tell! What was it? Something about the Outlanders?"

"No, not that. Just things. Woman things. She has a husband now, and—" Kathri paused, frowning. "Yes. There was something else."

"Then what, girl? It must have been important!"

She looked at him, lower lip thrust out a little. "You won't believe me. You wouldn't believe me last time."

"I'll believe you, Kathri. I'll believe *anything* you tell me now!"

"Well, it's—Dorthi. These *things* come much stronger to her now. And she has seen the lights again, Donal. This time very strong!"

**T**HE LAST TIME! Donal remembered now. It was over a year ago, just before Dorthi had left the Zone. Dorthi had been strangely silent and moody, but she confided in her younger sister. And Kathri had gone to the Council with some garbled story about Dorthi being able to "see lights" that no one else could see. No one had listened, for Kathri was scarcely more than a child. But a week later came the marauding groups from the west, to pillage and rob the fields—*just as Dorthi had said they would come*. Four Village men had died in that battle.

Donal gestured for his pipe. Kathri tamped the tobacco expertly and handed it to him; her gaze was anxious on his face.

For a long minute he smoked in silence. He was beginning to understand Coburn better now; the "mutations" would come in strange and diverse ways! Dorthi and Kathri—and which family would be next?

He leaned forward, took her shoulders gently and felt her shiver beneath his touch. "I believe you, Kathri. Now you must tell me! Do you also see—the lights?"

She shook her head. "No. Not yet. Dorthi says later perhaps I will."

"But when Dorthi sees—these lights—it's not in the way you or I would see? It's—here?" His fingers brushed his forehead.

She nodded solemnly, aware of his concern.

"Good. Now, what about after she sees the lights?"

"It's not after. It all happens at once. She says that she *knows* things—just for an instant! Things that have not yet happened, but are about to happen . . ."

Donal nodded. Precognition! Again he was remembering Coburn's strange terms, which seemed less strange to him now.

"And this time, Kathri. What has Dorthi seen that—that will happen?"

"Men. Many men will come."

"From the west? The south? More marauding groups?"

She shivered, huddling close to Donal's knees. "No. This time it is different. They will come—from a place that Dorthi doesn't know. Very far! Strange men such as none of us have ever seen! They will come to the City, and they have strange machines, and they use the machines—" Her voice broke and she looked up at him, fright in her eyes. "Something will happen to the City. There is danger, Donal—much danger! For us and all the Groups!"

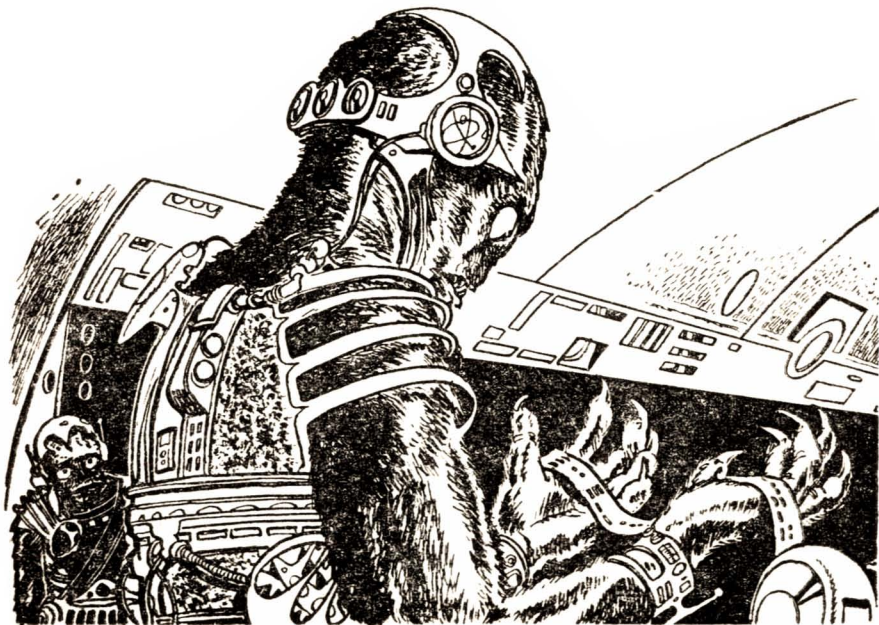
"What else? What else could Dorthi see?"

"I'm not sure. I think there was more, but Dorthi would not tell. She became frightened, and—it made me frightened."

A chill was dragging at Donal's spine, but he must not let Kathri know. He tossed his pipe aside. "Kathri. This thing is important. I must go and talk with your sister! Tomorrow I'll have the wagons made ready, and you must come along to show us where Morghan's encamped. It's not too far?"

"Scarcely half a day. We'll be safe. Morghan bears no enmity, not really, Donal. They are good people."

"Good people! Does Morghan intend to raid our crops again this year? Did you learn that, by any chance?"





Kathri flushed darkly, and for a long moment she was silent.  
“Donal . . .”

“Yes, Kathri?”

“I no longer have need of the radiations. I can go away from the Zone! I could go to stay, as Dorthi has gone. We—we have become different.”

He waited, gazing down at her.

“Dorthi has asked me to come.”

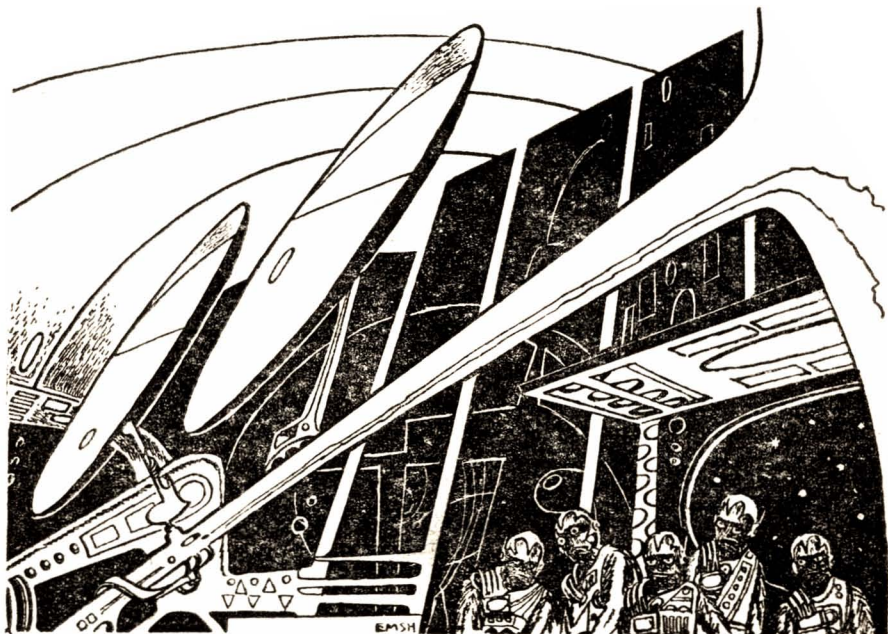
He felt quick panic. A heavy throbbing at his throat. He tried to make his voice calm. “Your father would not like it, Kathri, if you left the Village. He would be sad to lose both daughters—”

She looked up; he was startled to see her eyes moist and glistening. “And you? You, Donal?”

“Yes. I would be very sad. I could not bear it. I— Oh, Kathri, I do not want you to go! Kathri, Kathri . . .”

Suddenly she was weeping, face buried in his knees. “I don’t *wish* to leave the Village, Donal. Not ever, not ever! Not if you . . . if you want me . . .”

He stroked her hair gently, his heart welling with all the



burden of the lonely days. "I do, Kathri. I want you very much. I want you here! Kathri?"

"Yes?"

"I shall speak with your father tomorrow, Kathri."

### CHAPTER III

**T**ANNER WAS READY, and Ashley, and the two Loren boys and half a dozen others. Mears alone refused to come. "I don't like leaving the Zone, Donal. It's dangerous, and what's the sense of it? Sure, I know Council has sanctioned the trip, but I remember that time two years ago—"

Donal remembered too. He was trying not to think of it.

"Look. We'll be back in time! Morghan's Group is close, and I've allowed a margin of safety." He smiled wryly at Mears. "Very well, then. One of the others will use your rifle. We may get some game along the way."

That did it. Mears hurried back to his house for his rifle. Forays beyond the Zone were dangerous, but the men were always willing to risk it for fresh provender.

Ashley grinned, fondling his rifle. "We may find more than game, eh, Donal? Maybe some Outlanders? Lord, it's been a long time since I've used this!"

Donal whirled upon him. "None of that, Ashley! Listen, you men! There'll be no warring on Outlanders! We go in peace. If we encounter game, well and good—but our primary purpose is to contact Morghan's Group! Is that understood?"

There were grumblings of assent.

"Very well. Ten hours at the most is our limit. If anything goes wrong—trouble with the wagons, horses going lame—we turn back at once."

Kathri rode in the lead-wagon with Donal, and soon they were on the crumbling concrete road leading south. Donal gazed about with livening interest. According to the books there had once been machines traveling this road, machines that made a full day's travel in one hour. He had seen many of those machines in the City, shattered and rusting, so it must have been true. And he remembered his very first trip to the City with his father. Donal was then about nine, and his father pointed the machines out to him, with some wistful talk about "fuel" to make them go. But nowhere in the City

had they found the "fuel," only the blackened places where it once had been.

He became aware of Kathri beside him. She sat straight and silent, gaze fixed on the rolling lands ahead, but occasionally she glanced at Donal as though wishing to speak.

"What is it, Kathri?"

"The—the thing you said last night. You meant it, Donal? That you would speak with my father—this morning—"

Donal threw back his head, and laughed, and placed an arm about her. "And so I did, Kathri. *Early* this morning. It will be arranged—when we return."

Swift crimson touched her face, but she nestled close to him. The morning sun was gently warm and never before had the skies seemed so clear, with all about them the tang of green growing things. Presently she became worried, glancing at the men's rifles behind her.

Donal said bluntly: "You fear what may happen when we meet Morghan."

"Yes, Donal. When we come armed in this way—"

"It is necessary! I wish them to see that we're prepared. But I have a plan, Kathri; it may end this hostility between our peoples if only Morghan will listen."

But it was Dorthi who occupied his thoughts, not Morghan. Her vision of strange men who would come, with strange machines, worried him more than he cared to admit.

For a long time they proceeded in silence. No game had been sighted, and Donal could hear the disappointed grumblings of his men. The route was becoming tortuous now; foliage sprang high and thick to encroach upon the road, while the forests lay on every side beyond.

Suddenly a shot rang out from the second wagon. Mears leaped into the undergrowth to pull in the deer which he had brought down. Minutes later came another shot, and then another. The men were exultant now.

Donal glanced anxiously overhead. The sun told him that three hours had passed! Had he allowed enough margin for safety? If they should have trouble with Morghan—

He turned quickly to Kathri. "This is the way? You are sure?"

And then, before she could answer, Donal saw the Outlander. The man stood in a tiny clearing just ahead, a startled

look on his dark face as he caught sight of the wagons. Ashley saw him too; he let out a yell and his rifle came up.

Donal acted barely in time. He sprang backward to the bed of the wagon, throwing up an arm. Ashley's shot went wild, clipping off branches above the Outlander's head. The latter whirled and sped away, soon was lost in the tangling shadows.

"You fool! You utter fool!" Livid with anger, Donal whirled upon Ashley. "Do you realize what that might have done? Loren—take his rifle. Don't let the fool touch it again!"

Ashley was contrite, but the damage had been done. Donal drove on in bitter silence. Kathri was peering ahead, and presently she pointed to a place where the road dipped low to cross a stream near a crumbling culvert.

"This is the place! I found Morghan's Group very close to here."

There was no further doubt. A score of men leaped out from the trees to bar the way. They were a ragged lot, dark-skinned and bearded; two of them carried rifles, Donal noticed, but the rest were equipped with clubs and wicked-looking thongs.

Donal turned quickly to his men. "Be careful," he cautioned. "And don't be surprised at what I do!"

He brought the horses to swift rein, climbed down leisurely and walked forward, cradling his rifle. In the brief silence he noticed the difference. The skins of the Outlanders were dark and leathery, coarse-grained; his own skin, while equally tan from working in the fields, was smooth and faintly shimmering, almost translucent.

Again he surveyed the Outlander throng. Only the two rifles were in evidence.

"I would speak with Morghan!" Donal addressed the nearest man. "At once, fellow! We have little time."

**T**HE MAN DIDN'T ANSWER. He was staring past Donal, gaze fixed greedily upon Kathri. Donal saw it and bristled with quick anger. "Take your eyes away, fellow!" He lifted the rifle and strode forward.

The man crouched back sullenly, but Donal did not seem satisfied. This was the moment he wanted. Tossing his rifle aside, he stepped forward and deliberately back-handed the

Outlander across the mouth. It was a provoked insult—and a challenge.

The man's eyes widened, then became delighted. With a roar he launched himself forward. Donal danced lightly away, parrying. The Outlander was approximately his own height, with possibly an advantage in weight. A clubbing fist took Donal in the side, and the breath left his body. He lost his footing, but recovered and drove two blows into the Outlander's face that left the man spinning.

With mutters of approval the others had fallen back to form a circle. Again the Outlander came boring in. The man had weight and knew how to use it! Donal met his rush, parrying and rolling—but a fist crashed through that brought blood from his mouth and left him dazed. A knee caught Donal in the stomach. Another blow to the groin left him doubled over with a burning sickness. Before he could move, another knee caught him beside the head and he was sprawled face downward upon the ground.

More mutters of approval from the Outlanders. Donal shook his head dazedly. He knew the sort of tactics they liked now! Fighting the pain and nausea, he launched himself upward. The man was boring in again. Donal side-stepped, jabbed to carry his opponent off-balance. The man laughed contemptuously. A lashing fist to the mouth erased it, then Donal feinted the man's guard and crashed a right hand that left the Outlander tottering. The next blow brought him to his knees. Donal leaped in. A back-handed smash across the eyes. Another behind the neck. Viciously, Donal brought his knee up full into the man's throat and the Outlander sprawled backward, limp and gasping.

He came up slowly. Contemptuously, Donal put both hands on his shoulders and sent him sprawling again. The man raised his hands feebly in signal of defeat.

There wasn't a murmur from the circle of Outlanders now. Donal stepped back, wiping blood from his mouth.

"I would speak with Morghan!" he said again.

"I am Morghan." A giant of a man, full bearded and tall, much taller than Donal, pushed his way through the throng. He paused to glance at the battered Outlander. "Take this one away," he said to one of his men. "Put him with the women, since he fights like a woman!"

He turned to Donal. "I am Morghan. I think you remember me—Donal?"

Donal surveyed him coolly for a moment. "I remember. From last year, when you came raiding our crops!"

"And perhaps this year as well—Zone-Dweller!"

"That will be interesting—Outlander!"

"Hairless one! You who are bound to the ruins!"

"Bearded one! You who hunt with spears and clubs!" Donal exchanged epithets, knowing it was expected.

Morghan bowed slightly. Now that the exchange was over, he waited.

Donal glanced at the array of rifles behind him. "You come raiding this year, Morghan, and many of your men will die."

Still the man waited, not answering, a glint of amusement in his eyes. And then Donal knew the reason. "Morghan!" One of the Outlanders had circled wide behind the wagons, and raised the canvas, to discover the deer carcasses.

Morghan went to look, and then came striding back to Donal. Mockery was in his tone. "It seems that *you* are proficient in raiding, hairless one!"

Donal gave a tight smile, lifting his rifle. "It was easy—with these. The forests are free!"

"But the City is not free—to us. You know that the City means death to us because of the radiations!"

Donal pondered. There was truth in Morghan's words. He glanced at Tanner and the others who moved restlessly behind him, not liking any of this.

"And you are aware, Morghan, that to stay for long outside the Zone means death for us. It's rarely that we dare come into the forests for game."

"And yet you come today," replied Morghan, a dangerous smile about his lips. "You come with many rifles—and one of my men was fired upon."

Donal had been expecting that. He felt his men pressing closer, and he caught the sullen looks from the Outlander Group. If it came to a showdown, the rifles would win, but many men would die. He spoke quickly:

"It was a stupid accident, Morghan. And I do not condone such accidents! I assure you the man responsible for it will be punished!" He turned to Loren. "Give me Ashley's rifle."

Loren passed it over, and Donal tossed the rifle to Morghan.

**"It is yours! A gift from me."**

Before Morghan could recover from his surprise, Donal played his ace card. His gaze flicked to the pair of Outlanders who carried rifles. "I see that you already have a few firearms. I seem to recognize them. Perhaps," he added meaningfully, "that is another reason why we prefer to avoid the forests."

Morghan flushed with quick anger. "We do not kill men wantonly, Donal!"

"Did I say it? I merely thought you might care to explain how you came in possession."

"Two months ago we stumbled upon a pair of your men out here. They were already dead, and their flesh—" Morghan's face twisted, he seemed not to want to talk about it. "So we took their rifles," he said sullenly.

Donal remembered. Calkins and Stuart, who had gone off alone and never returned. They hadn't been the first. He dismissed it now, as he looked into Morghan's face and liked what he saw there.

"I believe that you speak truth, Morghan, so I will speak truth. We come here today for two reasons." He paused, aware that every man was intent upon his words. "Morghan, the City is a vast and bewildering place. It is beyond your imagining! I suspect that we still have not scoured it all. There are some great areas outlying to the north, which we have scarcely touched because the passage is so dangerous."

"Keep speaking, Donal," Morghan's voice came in a whisper.

"It is possible that we may find more rifles there, and ammunition. If we provide you with them, will you bring us game? In exchange for that, you may share in our crops without raiding."

Morghan was at once startled and eager. "How many rifles, Donal?"

"Who can say? Whatever we can spare. First you must prove your faith—and if we do provide you, a balance must be maintained!"

Morghan caressed the rifle in his arms, and Donal knew he had won his point. "Come to our camp," said Morghan. "We will talk this matter over."

"No! We'll discuss it another time—perhaps soon. When I have sat with my Council and you have sat with yours. Just

now I must speak with Dorthi! It's very important, Morghan, and we have little time!"

"Dorthi? The strange one who left your Zone?" Morghan nodded. "Come," he said, "I will take you to her."

**T**HEY SAT AT THE EDGE of a stream beyond the camp—Donal and Kathri and Dorthi. From behind them came the shouts and laughter of Donal's and Morghan's men, as they prepared a feast over the fires.

"Dorthi . . . Kathri has told me about your vision of the men who will come. Strange men, she said, such as none of us has ever seen. It's very important that I know! If the City is in danger . . ."

Dorthi was older than Kathri by two years. She took her sister's hand now, with something like motherly affection.

"Can you remember, Dorthi? I believe in your vision! Now I believe! What kind of men are they? And you are sure—they'll come to the Zone?"

"Yes, Donal. I saw them at the City. But that is yet to come!"

Donal said uncertainly, "I think I understand that."

"Men like you, but—but strangely different. Their color—it is like the pans you use for cooking!"

"Silver?"

She nodded.

Donal sat motionless, feeling a cold horror rise in him. "I've never seen Outlanders like that! Where will they come from? The east—the north?"

She leaned forward with hands touching her brow. "I still remember it, Donal. I saw it so clearly! Not east, or north, but—" She straightened and lifted a hand to the sky. "From there! They will come down in machines through the night. Machines that swim in a glow of color. But these are not as frightening as the machines they bring with them—"

Again Donal felt horror. It washed over him in waves, much like that time when he had been far outside the Zone with little time to return. He glanced at Kathri, who huddled close, clinging to her sister. She knew! She knew that her sister spoke the truth—

"Dorthi, listen to me. When? When do they come?"



"I'm not sure. Soon, I think. One day—two. I know it will be at night."

Precognition! Would the ancient Coburn have understood all this, he wondered? And Kathri—would *she* have this frightening talent after a few years?

He thrust the thought away. Again he questioned Dorthi, until she became weary of answering. She could tell him little more. Donal knew he would have to persuade the Council, rouse them to the danger. He called his men and they hurried back to the wagons, where Donal spoke briefly with Morghan.

"I'll return, Morghan. Just as soon as possible. Never fear, our peoples shall have the pact!" But just now Donal felt an urgency and a foreboding, a far greater threat than Outland raiders.

As they pulled out, he saw Dorthi in heated conversation with her husband, a tall youth who had watched suspiciously during their talk. Now he was protesting angrily. He seized her arm, but Dorthi pulled away and came racing after them, to climb into the seat beside Kathri.

Donal hit her with a gauging glance. "You're coming with us? While your husband stays here!"

"I must! I'll return. But now I must come with you. I—I want to be with Kathri."

Her voice was strange, and stranger still was the way she buried her face in Kathri's shoulder. It was almost, Donal thought, as if she *knew* she were going to be with her sister for the last time.

Donal felt a chill at his spine. He wondered—he just wondered if there was something Dorthi hadn't told him?

## CHAPTER IV

"**W**AIT!"

Donal thrust out a hand, and the others hugged the shattered stone of the buildings as they came to a halt behind him.

Cradling his rifle, he peered through the darkening streets ahead. This was their usual route into the City, the rubbled terrain familiar to them all; but Donal's eyes were not upon the streets now. He raised his face to the dark sky and glittering stars.

Was it only imagination—or had one of the stars moved? A dozen times this night he thought he had seen it. He waited, face upturned, feeling the quick pulse of excitement.

It hadn't been easy, convincing the Council. Almost to a man they were skeptical of Dorthi's tale; this girl who had run away to become an Outlander was not to be trusted in any event, and who was to say this was not some scheme of Morghan's? But it was Donal's grim concern, more than his eloquence, that finally swayed them, and it was decided the City should be patrolled. But even so, Donal knew that Tanner and the others didn't quite believe.

Again Donal peered, and suddenly went tense as there came a definite movement across the sky. That was no star! It moved in a distinct arc, blossoming slowly out from a pinpoint of light. Then there were two. Swiftly they came and without a sound, dropping through the night, two squarish fluctuating patches of light.

Meteors? No meteor had ever acted like that! The men crouched and waited for concussion. But there was no concussion or sound; uncannily, the lights seemed to hover for a minute and then disappeared behind the skeletal buildings far ahead.

So now his men believed! Donal heard them jabbering excitedly behind him. Still he peered upward; stars glittered, but no more of the patches came.

"Mears," he called. "Take three men and circle to the right! Tanner, your men will go left. You know the streets. Keep out of sight—remember, this is reconnaissance!"

Tanner answered, and his voice was shaken. "If we should sight these—these men? They'll surely be armed—"

"I said it's reconnaissance! You are not to fire." Donal paused, considering. "Unless," he added grimly, "you hear my shots first. That will be the signal to come on the double."

He strode ahead, keeping close to the buildings. Kathri and Dorthi followed, together with three of the men. The girls had insisted on coming despite his protests; they were both good with the rifles. There had been something strangely urgent in Dorthi's insistence . . .

They pressed forward, clambering across rubble and skirting the weakened structures. Danger was here, and not alone from the men out of the sky! Donal had known some of these struc-

tures to come crashing down. Many of the steel girders were exposed, corroded by time and the elements, while in other places only heaps of powdered masonry and fused metal marked the spots where buildings had stood.

He heard Kathri coming behind him, stumbling, just a little frightened. He remembered then—it was her first trip here at night. At night it was not good. He fell back to walk beside her.

Dorthi came too, strangely silent in step and mood.

The City was softly aglow, not appreciable near at hand, but the merest tinge just discernible in the widening distance. Already Donal could feel the Enlivening! Every cell of his body seemed to flourish in response. "*The Zone is our world, and our Law and our Life—*"

Quickly, he put down the vague unease that rose to disturb his mind. He stared across a barren space toward a building whose walls had toppled inward. He would never forget this place! It was the place where his father had died, trying to find access to some books which he knew to be inside. He had been barely twelve years old at the time.

Donal marched on, thinking of those two descending patches of light. There had been something ominous about their soft soundlessness. Men from the stars? He could scarcely believe it, though some of the books did mention the possibility of such things. . . .

They were nearing the huge barren place at the heart of the City where most of the buildings had toppled outward. Donal turned, cautioned the men to silence. He felt sure that the light-patches had descended somewhere close to here. They slipped on softly, avoiding the debris and hugging the shadows.

And then Donal saw it—saw it for a single petrifying instant. He sprang back swiftly, gathering Kathri in one arm as he scurried to the shelter of a shattered doorway. The others followed suit, falling against the stone behind him.

**R**ESTING IN THE CENTER of the rubble-strewn area, some thirty yards away, was something beyond comprehension. It appeared to be a machine of sorts—a platform, glass-enclosed, with six vanes spaced about its

perimeter. From the vanes came a soft surging violet radiance that rose and fell, rose and fell, as if from some internal heart.

But Donal was watching the men. The silver men! There were six of them. They had come down from the platform and were now engaged in manipulating another machine, a thing of towering tubes and reaching antennae and vast spiraling coils.

Kathri pressed forward, whispering at his ear. "The men of silver. Dorthi was right!" She clutched the rifle as she crept forward. "Donal—what are they doing?"

"Whatever it is, it's not good! Wait—" Donal edged out from the doorway, easing his rifle forward.

Those towering tubes had come alive with a strange brilliance—dimming, then rising, dimming and rising to livid color, with a sort of insatiability that was frightening. Donal heard the singing of coils. He saw the pronged metal fingers turning in every direction. And then with a shock he saw a subtle difference in the soft radiation-glow that overlay the area. That glow was concentrating *inward—inward without cessation from all the distance around, to coalesce about the platform.*

Donal could not have said how it was happening, but in that instant he knew! He knew it would continue. This was but a sample. Other machines would be brought, to suck the radiation into the coils until all the City was left a dark and desolate heap.

For some reason these silver men wanted the radiation.

And if that happened, he—the Villagers, the Zone-Dwellers—

Dorthi had been right. These men brought evil!

He felt a quick upsurge of anger. Suddenly the stock of the rifle was familiar against his shoulder, and he was squeezing the trigger again and again.

One of the silver men—the one nearest the coils—dropped without a sound, rolled over and lay still. Donal exulted! Behind him, Loren's rifle cracked in his ear. Another silver man staggered but failed to go down. And suddenly there were no longer any silver men out there! With a speed that left Donal gaping, they had scattered away from the machine to take shelter behind the debris.

Donal cursed softly. Perhaps he had erred in firing so soon.

Surely invaders such as these would be armed!

He peered across the area, searching out the debris. No movement anywhere. He nodded grimly; at this sort of deployment his men were masters.

"Loren," he called softly. "They may try to reach the building over there. You and Brown cover that space. The rest follow me, and keep to the walls! When we get closer, spread out and find cover; fire a few rounds to keep them pinned down."

They moved forward, crouched low, searching out the ruins and doorways. Kathri was close beside him, rifle held ready; Donal wished he hadn't permitted her to come! He thought he saw a bulk, faintly shimmering. Again he fired, and the bulk dropped quickly out of sight.

Still no movement out there. His eyes searched the surrounding streets . . . Had Mears' and Tanner's groups heard the shots? They ought to be arriving soon.

Donal was puzzled now. Why was there no answering fire from these silver men? Five of them left, he thought grimly; he could still see the one lying at the edge of the platform.

The platform! Perhaps their weapons were there! If so, this would be easier—

Then suddenly Dorthi was crouched beside him, whispering urgently:

"Donal, wait! I—I'm getting their thoughts. They are not concerned with us. They are—in contact with someone else—"

"I can feel it too," Kathri whispered. "Their minds are strong!"

Donal gripped Dorthi's arm. "In contact with who?"

"Talking. Talking with someone overhead. A ship, a great ship! Telling what has happened. Asking for more men to come." She paused. "Yes, many more will come."

"These five! Can you tell if they're armed? Quickly!"

It was Kathri who answered. "Yes! *They have weapons, they can harm us*— Donal, wait! We cannot win—"

But he was on his feet, calling to the men on either side: "Cover me!" Then he was sprinting for the platform, rifle thrust forward, eyes searching as he ran. A shot rang out behind him, and he saw a silver man ploughing for cover. More shots covered him. A silver man sprang up, very close, holding a strangely pronged tube; something thin and pale

lashed out and Donal felt heat at his shoulder. He swung the rifle stock up viciously, caught the man solidly below the chin, and his way was clear.

He reached the platform, sprang through a narrow doorway. He turned, and it was then he saw that Kathri had come behind him, stumbling and gasping—but she still clung to her rifle! Donal pulled her in, glanced quickly around. He thrust hard against a protruding lever, and a glassite sheathe closed swiftly across the opening.

Kathri stumbled to her feet, still gasping. "Donal! What do you hope to gain?"

He didn't answer. He was crossing to the center of the dome-enclosed room where a set of controls thrust upward. No time now for selection! If these men were sending more reinforcements— Grasping the central bar, he tugged, and it came free with a soft clicking movement.

The ascent was so abrupt that Donal staggered, pushed the bar away in panic. Nothing happened! The ground was dropping away at a dizzying rate. Desperately, he fumbled at the control. At last it clicked into place, and their ascent halted gently as though against a cushion of air.

Together, they peered through the transparent floor. The City was an awesome sight far below. Kathri shuddered and turned her eyes away. "Donal—"

"No! We can't return now." Excitement was on him, and the dawning of a plan. He surveyed the interior of the shell. It was bare save for the central control and a four-foot screen of glass with panelling beneath. A soft violet aura sprang from their outer perimeter. "I'll learn to control this thing!"

It was very simple after all, merely movements of the bar in the desired direction. The faintly clicking ratchets and delicacy of touch was the secret. Suddenly they were surging upward.

"Donal, our men are down there!"

"And they'll hold their own," he said grimly. "Those we saw were only the vanguard. They must not send more! If there's a ship overhead we may be able to reach it. I want to talk with these men!"

He saw the doubt in her eyes.

"Kathri, they're only human, the same as us!" He was remembering that rifle stock against the silver man's chin, the

way he had toppled back with pain and surprise on his flat face. "Our only chance is to establish an understanding with these people!"

But what was it Dorthi had tried to tell him? That they couldn't win. She was resigned, she had seemed to know. . . . Donal felt a sudden terrible doubt, a tightness at his throat. Suppose he did find the ship? Could he talk to these alien ones? Was it possible to make them understand about the radiations?

Suddenly he remembered the strange pronged instrument which the silver man had aimed at him.

And he remembered something else. A silver man was dead! The other five might be dead too, if Tanner and the others did their work. If this alien race was the vengeful kind—

"We must make them understand! It's our only chance, Kathri."

She didn't answer, but stood silent and resigned, the color gone from her lips. She seemed to know, as Dorthi had known. . . .

They were very high now, much higher than he dared guess. The City was a dwindling dot of haze. The sky had taken on a terrible blackness, and a chill was creeping in. Perhaps he should return! They could make a stand at the City—

He glanced at Kathri and knew she was thinking the same. He wavered—and suddenly it was decided for him.

Angling swiftly down from the left was a squarish patch of light, another platform. It was still far away, but growing larger. There came a shrill buzzing sound, and Donal whirled to see the panels aglow beneath the screen. They blinked on and off, insistently. He stood hesitant for a moment, then his hand came down on the protruding knob.

The screen leaped alive abruptly. Reflected there was a silver man, huge-visaged, a look of stark surprise on his face as he stared point-blank at Donal. The merest second—then the screen went blank.

Instantly, Donal knew he had erred. His hand came down on the bar, and with a lurch they slid to the right in a long descent.

The other platform was growing and taking shape, as it slid unerringly toward them. Donal tried to ease off. Upward on the bar, left, right—swiftly downward again. It was no

use. The other came faster, twisting and plunging to follow their every move.

Then he saw the second platform. Two more! And still a third! They were closing in, violet auras slicing the night, keeping a pattern above him. Two beams of light lashed out, crossing just above, and that part of the sky seemed to tear asunder. Their shell went buffeting downward. Again the beams came, spraying the shell with heat and blinding brilliance.

"Only one direction now," Donal yelled. "We're going to take it!" His hand came down on the control bar—hard.

They were twisting and plunging earthward. All power seemed to fail. Donal fought to hold the controls, but the bar was torn from his grasp as he struck the opposite wall with a force that exploded all breath from his body.

Slowly, he tried to rise. His vision seemed blurred. Where was Kathri? He caught a glimpse of earth, then it became a twisting kaleidoscope together with sky and stars. *The controls! He must reach the controls—*

Then he saw the controls—overhead, beyond reach. And he saw Kathri, a huddled motionless heap. Fighting against nausea, he gained his feet, braced himself, leaped and caught the control bar and clung precariously. Slowly he gained leverage. The earth was rushing up fast, a whitish haze, the





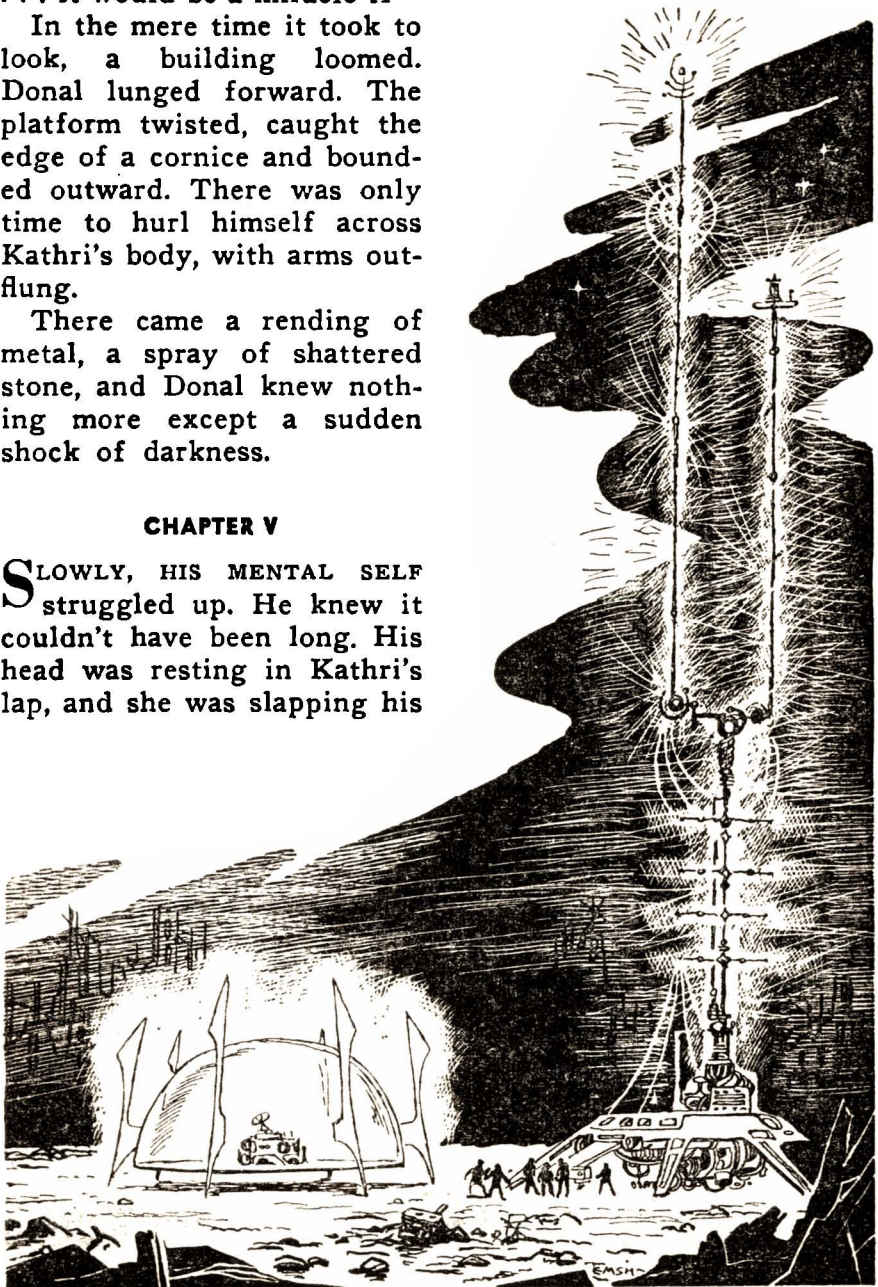
City . . . skeletal buildings  
. . . it would be a miracle if—

In the mere time it took to look, a building loomed. Donal lunged forward. The platform twisted, caught the edge of a cornice and bounded outward. There was only time to hurl himself across Kathri's body, with arms outflung.

There came a rending of metal, a spray of shattered stone, and Donal knew nothing more except a sudden shock of darkness.

#### CHAPTER V

**S**LOWLY, HIS MENTAL SELF struggled up. He knew it couldn't have been long. His head was resting in Kathri's lap, and she was slapping his



face rhythmically—sharp stinging blows.

"That's enough," he gasped. There were no broken bones, just a mass of bruises, and Kathri also carried a large bruise above the temple. "The miracle did happen," he muttered, and glanced quickly overhead. "No sign of the other platforms?"

"No—but they may have landed!" Kathri was climbing back through the tangled wreckage. She emerged again, with both the rifles. They stood looking around, and after a moment Donal recognized the street.

"Listen!"

The sound of rifle fire reached them. Not isolated shots now, but entire volleys. A moment of silence and again the volleys came—just a few streets away, Donal thought.

"They landed all right," he said grimly. "Tanner's in trouble!"

They raced toward the sound of the battle. The firing came louder now, but more sporadic. "This way!" Donal plunged toward a cross-street which led into the area. Every movement of his bruised limbs was an agony. Now the firing had stopped altogether, as an ominous silence settled over the streets. *They're only digging in*, Donal thought. *Tanner knows how to maneuver*— But a terrible doubt settled on him.

Minutes later they were on the scene. Donal came to a halt, stumbling and gasping, as the havoc met his eyes.

Three of the platforms had landed. From each of them, huge lights threw a ghastly glow about the area. And there were silver men, dozens of them, moving forward grimly as they launched beams from their pronged weapons. Already Donal could see bodies of his men lying in the rubble. Fully a dozen lay there, while the few remaining were dug in behind a shallow barricade.

The rifles opened again, but they seemed ineffectual. Donal saw two more of his men go down against the pale rays. One of the two was Tanner. He heard Kathri sobbing beside him, but it was a sob of rage. She threw up her rifle and pumped a fusillade at a group of raiders who came in a flanking wide movement. Donal joined her, as fury rose to choke him. Three times he fired, and he knew he had not missed. But none of the silver men went down!

His mind was a whirling agony. He knew these men could die, but now bullets seemed ineffectual. He stared around

dazedly, suddenly realized that he and Kathri were open targets.

"Take cover!" He sprang toward the nearest building, beyond range of those glaring lights.

But already they had been seen. One of the invaders was racing toward them, weapon levelled. Donal whirled and wilted. His gaze was fixed on that strange weapon, and he knew there was only one chance now. If he could gain that weapon—just one of them—

The beam lashed out. In the same instant Donal went to his knees, took careful aim and fired. This time he *knew* he had not missed. The silver man hung poised in mid-air, arms out-flung, then ploughed forward at Donal's feet.

Donal seized the pronged weapon, flung his rifle aside. More invaders were coming toward them with long leaping strides, strangely cat-like. Donal sobbed air into his lungs.

"Inside!" He shoved Kathri toward the doorway behind them. He had explored many of these buildings, danger was here too, but inside they might have a chance. If they could reach the upper levels, the roof—

**T**OTAL DARKNESS assailed them, together with the smell of dust and ancient death. He could hear Kathri stumbling ahead of him.

"Wait!" He fumbled with the weapon, felt a trigger arrangement not unlike a rifle's. There was a warmth beneath his hand as the beam lashed out. He held it only long enough to see the wide stairway off to one side, crumbled and tottering. They must take the chance; already he could hear footsteps outside, a strange garble of voices.

"Follow me. Stay close!" They mounted upward in darkness and reached the first landing. Trailing fingers across the walls, they turned left and continued the climb.

"Stay close to the wall!" Donal warned.

The silver men had entered from below. Donal could see their beams flashings, searching the lower corridor. Once, a beam sliced tentatively upward.

Kathri's hair was soft against his face, and she trembled, but Donal knew it was more from fear of this place than anything else; there had been many tales of the ghastly things

found in these buildings.

"If we can reach the roof, Donal! We can hide out until they go away!"

He gripped her arm fiercely. "When they go away, they'll take all the radiation of the City with them! You've seen the kind of men they are! Tanner dead—and the others."

He clung fast to the pronged weapon. Again he peered. The men were still moving around down there, as if determined to seek them out. Donal hesitated, then flashed his beam upward through the stair-well. Three more flights—the stairs seemed fairly intact, save for one narrow section where the stone balustrade had fallen away—

Then disaster struck. Kathri screamed!

Staring up, she had looked directly into the face of a grinning skeleton which hung over the railing above. She staggered back, struck the weakened balustrade and sent it crashing downward. Donal pulled her back from the abyss just in time.

"I'm sorry, Donal! I—"

"No time for that now! They'll be up here—"

Already beams were lancing upward, searching the walls and landings. And those were more than search beams! Donal heard the deadly crackling sound as they struck and sprayed outward. He sent his own beam down, saw the lightning leap from wall to stair, saw half a dozen men tumbling back out of range. Then came silence and total darkness.

He pulled Kathri up to the next landing. "Let me have the rifle! They don't know our position now. Lord, if they'll only hold off a few minutes—"

He was groping his way toward the stair-well. His hand touched the heavy stone of the balustrade. Using the rifle, he gained leverage against the floor and pried upward. The section moved. Again he tugged as sweat poured into his eyes. Slowly, the entire section began to give way. There came a rending sound, stone tearing against stone—

And suddenly the entire landing came alive with blinding light. He heard Kathri cry out. He caught a glimpse of her, unleashing the weapon against silvery men who came surging up. With a final desperate heave he sent the balustrade crashing down, and leaped back from the yawning brink. There came a cloud of dust, a roar of plummeting stone, the vision

of men hurtling back—then the entire section of stairs below came tearing away, to disappear in a tangle of dust and debris.

He whirled back to Kathri. She had fallen, the weapon flung from her grasp. Somehow the light was still blinding. In a split second Donal realized what had happened, as he saw—

*Men on the stairway above him.*

They had landed a platform on the roof.

He leaped for the weapon, but never reached it. A beam touched his neck and fastened there and all of him went tight. He felt a moment of horror. He was falling to his knees. He wanted to curse. The beam at his neck held, and tightened, and there was no pain, only a feeling as if he were sinking into waters of a dark sea.

Silvery men were coming forward as the sea engulfed him.

### HOW LONG HAD IT BEEN?

Donal struggled, moved sluggishly—then suddenly he remembered. Terror sliced at his mind. He fought to rise above the terror, and the effort left him weak.

He opened his eyes.

Blinding light. He caught a momentary glimpse of a metal-encased room, oddly shaped, a place where he had never been. He pushed himself to a sitting position and kept his eyes closed until the dizziness went away—then he opened his eyes again.

And immediately wished he hadn't.

Silver men stood about him—crouched, rather, peering close, and he really saw them for the first time. There was something oddly cat-like in their appearance; soft fur covered their heads, strangely blue-white and aglow, seeming little more than a nimbus. The faces were flat and blunt, mouths a thin gash, no noses visible—but the eyes were something else again. Twice the normal size, and lidless, those eyes seemed to encompass half the face, and they reminded Donal of colorless liquid pools.

But expression was there, a look of intense curiosity as they stared at him. "Curiosity killed the cat," Donal remembered an elder expression, but just now it seemed ominously inapropos. He laughed bitterly from deep in his throat.

Hearing the laugh, one of the men stepped forward and

extended a hand. Donal took it gingerly; it was soft but somehow metallic, and he felt a sinuous strength as the man helped him to his feet.

He saw the others then, and had a hard time believing his eyes. Kathri was there, and Dorthi, Tanner and Loren and all the others, huddled against the wall of the oddly curving room. Donal moved quickly over to Kathri and put his arms about her.

"What happened? I was sure our men were dead—I saw it!"

Kathri trembled, and her voice was a whisper. "No, Donal. The weapons only paralyzed—but *they can kill*. We're still in danger, be careful—"

A silver man stepped close, staring at him through lidless eyes. Suddenly Donal came taut and alert. There came a tingling at the nape of his neck. He felt a flow of thought. It lapped gently at first, then penetrated sharply.

"*You are a leader,*" said the thought. "*Admirable, your defense—but doomed to failure from the start. Cunning, your strategy on the stairs—but the type of cunning to be found only in fifth-level races. What in the name of the Unholy Triad*"—the thought sharpened—"did you expect to gain?"

"Our existence!" Donal roared. "That which is the right of all races!"

The silver man smiled mentally. Donal felt his faint amusement.

"*Existence? Fifteen million trans-secs of outer survey have proved that the right to racial existence is a variable, not a universal.*" A pause, to give Donal time to grasp it. He failed. "*You are a Leader,*" came the thought again. "*Though I cannot understand why, when you have two such as these among you.*" He gestured at Dorthi and Kathri.

Donal struggled for words. "These two are different," he blurted. "They are the first! It has something to do with—with—" And he found that the ancient Coburn's terms had escaped him.

"*We understand. Much more than you realize. A few of my men are not too well for wear, but fortunately none of us have died; your weapons have the power to stun us, but they cannot penetrate.*"

Donal's mind was aw whirl. He felt his men stirring restlessly behind him, and he realized they hadn't as yet received the

thoughts. "Didn't have a chance," Loren was muttering. His gaze was fixed on a rack across the room, where a dozen of the pronged weapons nestled. "Lord! If we could only get to those, we might still make a—"

It was Dorthi who whirled upon him. "Be quiet, you fool! Don't you know they can read your minds?"

"She's right," Donal warned sharply. "Don't any of you make a move! I think I can talk with this man." He turned back and noticed a thin smile about the other's lips. "How is it possible that I—that you—"

*"The thoughts? We made a slight adjustment in your thalamic-coördinates. It was not necessary with these two,"* he gestured at Dorthi and Kathri, *"and that amazes me. It also convinces me that with some training in the cerebral sciences, under proper conditions, the rest of you could be brought to their level."* V'Naarik paused, frowning. *"But there is a greater problem! Earthman—we have here a situation in Solarian Ethics which has not been encountered in the Empire in more than twenty thousand years. It must be solved! And I must ask that you help me in the solving!"*

Donal stared at this man. Solarian Ethics . . . Empire . . . the terms were strange to him, and "twenty thousand years" staggered his mind. He knew that Kathri had received the thoughts too, and she was frowning. As for Dorthi, she stood calm and unmoving, as if she knew.

"I do not understand," Donal said.

*"Then understand this, Earthman. We need the radiations! All that we can drain from your planet will be just sufficient for our return to Cygni—our home, which is very far away. We need it, and nothing stands in the way of the Empire's needs."*

Donal understood that, all right. He took an angry step forward. "And we need the City! Without the radiations we die! We are not like the Outlanders. If you come with your machines, we will fight! Many of my people are left—"

**V**'NAARIK GAVE SOMETHING like a sigh. The soft fur atop his head took on a bluish glow. Donal fell back; it was as if a smothering hand had clamped across his thoughts.

*"I have said I need your aid in the solving. Come, Earthman. I wish to show you something."* V'Naarik stepped cat-like across the room, toward a huge glassite screen. Donal watched suspiciously. There came an ascending whine, and the screen swirled alive.

A dark bluish ball lay before Donal, slowly spinning, filling all the heavens. He could see the vast downward curve of its bulk. He could see blackness beyond, tinged with a faint aura of sunlight.

*"It is Earth. Your planet,"* came V'Naarik's thought. *"We lie a thousand miles above. Beautiful? But watch."*

The screen blurred and shifted. Then the vision of the void leaped forward to smash against Donal's eyes, hungry infinity and beseeching stars. There were hundreds of times more stars than he had ever seen on the clearest night!

*"Our home lies out there,"* V'Naarik gestured. *"Much, much farther than you can see. I have said that we have a problem, Earthman. It has become your problem as well, and I must ask that you help!"*

"Help?" Donal muttered. He turned and saw that Dorthi was watching him, silent and uncommunicative. He turned to Kathri, and she pressed her hand tightly into his own. "Help? How can we be of help to such as you?"

*"It is against all principles of Empire to wantonly destroy. Particularly among sub-species which show evidences of latent potential—and we are not at all convinced that your kind should remain at mere fifth-level cultural status. I think I have the solution—but I cannot ethically employ it against your wishes! That is where you must help."*

He paused, to make sure Donal understood. Then he waved at the screen.

*"Out there, near Cygni—in Fourth Sector Temporal as we've charted it—lies a group of planets. It is part of a double sun system. One of those planets is much like Earth in mass and gravity, with mountains and rolling fields. Would you agree to go there, Earthman—you and your kind?"*

Donal stood stunned, staring into the astra-lens. It had frightened him at first, that vast expanse, the stars all glittering and icy. But strangely now he felt a softness and warmth, the spaces closing in, the stars beseeching.

*Beseeching! To go out there . . . it would be like some of*



the stories he had read in the books, those stories which he had thought were for children!

*"It will not be easy, Earthman. It is a raw planet, with much work to do—but it will be your planet! There will be no need of the radiations there. It needs a people of your agrarian-technical complex. In a way it would be an experiment of great interest to us—we want to help you—but you will be strictly on your own, our ships visiting you perhaps once in fifty years."*

Donal turned away, scarcely daring to speak. So little time for decision! His first thought was: but what of our crops this year? It is almost time for the gathering! And he thought: what of my pact with Morghan's Group? I gave my word to Morghan! Then he laughed aloud. Crops? Morghan's Outlanders? What would any of it matter now? The City and all it contained would belong to Morghan once the radiations were gone.

He turned to V'Naarik. "It is not for me to make the decision! I must consult with my men. They have families, children! There are many of us—"

*"We have room for all in your Village. And you shall have the time you need, days if you like, to sit with your Council."*

Donal consulted with his men. They came crowding around the astra-lens, peering with awe into the outer spaces. It would be a momentous turning—and peace! When had they ever known peace, or a planet of their own? For four generations their lives had been synchronized to a slow and ceaseless struggle within the Zone; their thoughts obsessed with secret and futile envy of those Groups without. Coburn's Scripture? It was becoming a mockery to them all, as it had become to Donal.

Donal talked. He explained it all, and his words were urgent, as the men hung on his every word. But already he knew—he knew—and his heart leaped exultantly within him.

**I**T WAS NIGHT, a week later. With Kathri and Dorthi beside him, Donal walked toward the monstrous ship that lay in the fields just outside the Village. All preparations were over. The Villagers were inside, berthed down and waiting. All books had been carried aboard, together

with tools and implements. V'Naarik had aided materially—at Donal's request—selecting and rejecting.

Beyond the rolling plains the City was dark and silent now. It occurred to Donal that soon the Outlanders would be moving in. He and Kathri moved on up the ramp, but Dorthi paused.

“Kathri . . .”

Kathri turned, her face suddenly tragic. She rushed down to clasp her sister in her arms. “No, Dorthi! No . . .”

But she knew. For two days she had known.

“I will not come, Kathri. I prefer to stay. It is best, don't you see? My future is here, with Earth . . . I want my children born—I could never leave! But perhaps someday we—or our children—”

V'Naarik appeared in the doorway above. He watched the scene for a moment. *“I did not advise her, Donal. She told me! She is vastly wise, that one, and she has made a great decision. The future of Earth will need her kind.”*

Minutes later, eyes moist, Kathri was hurrying up the ramp. The great door closed behind them, and Donal took her gently in his arms. “She felt it was best, Kathri. V'Naarik thinks so too. She'll be happy here, and the Outlanders will not always be—Outlanders.”

Kathri thought of her sister and felt that she should cry. But she also thought of the New Earth beyond the stars, and the green of its fields, with Donal at her side, and there was only a vast singing quiet in her soul that was too deep for tears.

