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CONTENTS FOR MARCH, 1939

Number 3

Cover Design	Virgil Finlay	
<i>Illustrating "The Swine of Ææa"</i>		
The Metal Chamber	Duane W. Rimel	7
<i>A curious tale about a scientist who contacted another planet telepathically</i>		
The Swine of Ææa	Clifford Ball	13
<i>A bizarre and fantastic sea-tale about an island not charted on any map</i>		
The House Where Time Stood Still	Seabury Quinn	39
<i>A tale of Jules de Grandin, and a brilliant scientist touched with madness</i>		
The Return of Hastur	August W. Derleth	66
<i>An eldritch story of the incredible horror that terrified a quiet countryside</i>		
Fearful Rock (Part 2)	Manly Wade Wellman	85
<i>An eerie novel of the American Civil War, and dark powers</i>		
Desert Dawn	Robert E. Howard	100
<i>Versé</i>		
"Satan, Yawning on His Brazen Seat"	Virgil Finlay	101
<i>Pictorial interpretation of a passage from George Sterling's "A Wine of Wizardry"</i>		
Comrades of Time	Edmond Hamilton	102
<i>A thrill-tale of the far future, and the aged Wise One who craved death</i>		
Introduction to a Stranger	David Wright O'Brien	124
<i>Versé</i>		
The Quest of Iranon	H. P. Lovecraft	125
<i>A fascinatingly beautiful early story by a late master of weird fiction</i>		
The Stratosphere Menace	Ralph Milne Farley	130
<i>A brief science-story of a terrible doom that menaced mankind</i>		
Smoke Fantasy	Thomas R. Jordan	137
<i>What was that grisly creature seen in the swirling cigarette smoke?</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Devils of Po Sung	Bassett Morgan	139
<i>An Amazing story of brain surgery</i>		
The Eyrie		154
<i>A department in which the readers express their opinions</i>		

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 172

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Comrades of Time

By EDMOND HAMILTON

*A thrill-tale of our world a million years from now, and of the aged
Wise One who craved the boon of death*

1. Men from the Past

ETHAN DREW'S rifle was hot in his hand, and not from the scorching desert sun but from desperate firing. There were just two of them left, just two of this patrol of the Foreign Legion that had been ambushed here deep in the Sahara.

As he crouched in the scant shelter of the sandy gully, firing at the whiteburnoosed riders out there in front of him, he laughed harshly. His browned, aquiline young face was taut, his nostrils flaring, gray eyes icy, as he called to his single companion.

"They're going to charge, Emil! Looks as if we won't be seeing the cafés at Sidi again."

"We're going to die!" wailed the other legionnaire, a swarthy, stocky Swiss, terror on his features. "We're going to——"

Thuck! The Swiss tumbled sidewise with a hole in his face, and lay sprawled half across the bodies of the other dead men. And the Tuaregs were now riding forward in their charge, whitegarbed, veiled demons, flourishing their rifles and sabers and yelling like fiends as they came on.

Ethan Drew savagely aimed and pulled trigger. At the first shot, a horse and rider crashed. The second time he squeezed the trigger, there was only a click. The Lebel was empty. He grabbed a sword from a dead officer and stood up, his blond head bare in the blazing sunlight as he yelled recklessly.

"Come on, damn you!"

"*Muhammad rasul Allah!*" screamed the Tuaregs, racing each other for the honor of cutting down this last survivor.

Ethan Drew had a momentary vision of them thundering down on him, horses' eyes rolling wildly, upraised sabers glinting, veiled riders leaning forward. Then the whole world seemed suddenly to explode in blinding light, and he knew nothing more.

HE AWOKE to dim consciousness that he was lying on a cold, hard surface. The air was chill, with a pungent, unfamiliar quality. Now this was a strange thing, Ethan thought dully, to awake from death. For he knew the Tuaregs must have killed him in that charge—indeed, he had wanted to be killed rather than to be captured and tortured.

Yet he did not feel dead, at all. He could feel the cold floor under him distinctly, and was also aware that his head was aching badly. Also he could hear the voices of men close beside him.

He lay, feeling too dazed to open his eyes, and listened.

"No use buttin' your horns against a tree, Pedro," a dry, nasal voice was drawling. "This Injun don't like bein' cooped up here no more than you do, but thar ain't anything we can do about it."

"But, *Dios*, I shall go mad in this cursed cell!" swore another, angry voice with a strong Spanish accent. "It's

no place for a *conquistador*. I'd welcome the devil himself if he got me out of here."

"Cease blaspheming, man," commanded a harsh, deep voice. "If it is the Lord's will that we escape from here, we shall do so."

Ethan Drew listened with gathering amazement. Then he stirred, struggling to sit up.

"The new one is awakening!" someone called. There was a rush of feet toward the young American as he sat

up and looked around. He found that he still held the officer's sword clutched in his hand.

He was sitting on the floor of a large room of black stone. There was but one window, a tiny, heavily barred one through which came an oblique shaft of dusky *red* sunlight. The only door was a small metal trap-door in the ceiling, sixteen feet overhead.

The men in the room were crowding cagerly around Ethan Drew. The dazed young American looked bewild-



"The rough stone walls were grown with evil-looking fungi and mosses."

eringly at the foremost of them, who was bending keenly forward.

He was a tall, lank man of forty, dressed in greasy buckskin shirt, trousers and moccasins, and a shabby coonskin cap. A big hunting-knife was stuck in his belt, and he held a long, old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifle in the hollow of his arm. He had a weathered, saturnine face with jutting jaw and cool, wise blue eyes.

"Feelin' all right?" he asked Ethan. "It shore takes the tucker out of you when you first get here. This child knows."

"Who—who are you?" Ethan asked haltingly.

"Me, I'm Hank Martin, the best trapper an' scout in the Rockies, barrin' my friend, Kit Carson," drawled the tall figure.

"A mountain-man of Kit Carson's time?" gasped Ethan Drew. "Why, you're crazy! That was a hundred years ago!"

"That's what *you* think," drawled Hank Martin dryly. "You've got a lot to learn, young feller. Why, just a week ago, it seems, I was trappin' up in the Utes with Kit and ol' Bill Williams and the rest."

Ethan stared at the man unbelievably. His stare became more incredulous as he saw the man standing beside the trapper. This was a stalwart, broad-shouldered figure with a stern, somber, massive face, dressed in drab homespun uniform, high leather boots and a plain black hat. A huge broadsword swung at his wide belt.

"I am John Crewe, formerly corporal in the Ironsides of that man of God, Oliver Cromwell," he said in his deep, harsh voice. "Say, do you know anything of how we were brought here, or for what reason?"

"Aye, if you know who has done this,

just tell me his name!" roared another voice before Ethan could answer. "*Por Dios*, I'll gut him like a rat, whoever he is! I'll teach him what it means to play his enchanter's tricks upon Pedro Lopez!"

Lopez was a fierce-mustached, eagle-eyed, swearing Spaniard who wore the iron helmet and breastplate and baggy boots and long sword of a Sixteenth Century *conquistador*.

"I'll make the wizard who played this trick on me wish he'd never been born!" he roared. "Am I, one of the valiant followers of the peerless Don Hernando Cortez, to be snatched out of my own time by black magic, without slitting a few throats in return?"

"Aw, cool down, Pedro," drawled Hank Martin. "Can't you see I want to interduce the rest of the boys to this tenderfoot?"

"This *must* be a crazy joke of some kind!" Ethan exclaimed hoarsely. "You men—from times centuries apart—it's impossible!"

"Shore, mebbe it's impossible, but it's true," Hank Martin drawled coolly. "We've been in here for days together, most of us, and we've got pretty well acquainted, and Crewe and I hev larned the others some English. Speak up, boys, and tell our new pardner who you are."

A small, wiry man with a dark face and cunning eyes, wearing the bronze armor and short sword of a soldier of ancient Egypt, stepped forward and spoke calmly to the dazed Ethan in halting English.

"I am Ptah, soldier of the great Thothmes the Third," he said proudly. "I followed him to the conquest of Syria."

"And I," added a heavy, rumbling voice, "am Swain Njallson, seafarer and raider, whose beaked ships have

been feared from my own Northland south even to Mikligard."

Swain was a huge giant of a man, a Tenth Century viking whose blond hair flowed from under his horned helmet, whose blue eyes were icy cold as his native seas. An enormous axe was gripped in his hand.

ETHAN DREW's eyes roamed dazedly over the weirdly assorted five men. He still felt that all of this was utterly unreal, yet the men before him were no hallucination. Ancient Egyptian and viking and Spanish *conquistador*, Rocky Mountain trapper and Puritan trooper, they stood before him as real as himself.

"I'm Ethan Drew, and I'm from a later time than any of you," he said unsteadily. "From the year 1938. I was fighting off enemies, about to be killed, when there was a blaze of light; then I awoke here."

"Same thing happened to all of us," Hank Martin told him. "Me, I was heelin' it out of Ute Pass with a bunch of redskins after me when somethin' hit me and I woke up here. I was alone at first—later on, the trap-door in the ceilin' opened, and they let down this little fellow Ptah, from Egypt. The others here came the same way, one after another, through the trap-door. And now you, too."

"Then you've never seen the person or persons who brought us here?" Ethan cried bewilderingly.

Hank Martin shook his head. "Nary once. The trap-door is opened and grub and water are let down to us once a day, but that's all."

"Isn't there any way to escape from here?" Ethan exclaimed. "What about that window?"

"Look for yourself," Hank drawled.

Ethan went to the little window. He

saw at once that escape by it was impossible. It was only a foot square and barred with heavy rods of metal. But he was stricken with awe and wonder by the weird vista outside.

Before him, black rock cliffs sloped down steeply toward a vast expanse of flat country thickly blanketed by dense green jungle. As far as the eye could reach stretched that silent, mighty wilderness, unearthly and forbidding.

Across the limitless jungle struck the level crimson rays of the descending sun. Huge and blood-red and weirdly glowing, it was sinking toward the horizon. It might have been a different sun entirely, setting upon a wild and unknown planet.

"This isn't my own time—this isn't 1938," Ethan Drew muttered in awe. "We've all been drawn somehow into the far future."

"The future?" repeated John Crewe, frowning. "What makes you think that?"

"Look at the sun," Ethan said quickly. "It is far redder, which means it is older—millions of years older."

"How in the devil's name *could* we be dragged across millions of years?" Pedro Lopez demanded loudly. "It is impossible."

"It is the work of Loki, the demon god," rumbled Swain Njallson with conviction. "Only he could do this to us."

John Crewe, the big Puritan, cast a gloomy glance at the huge viking.

"Talk not of your heathen gods doing this," he said harshly. "No vain idols brought us here but Satan, the Evil One, himself."

"Wal, how we got here don't bother me much," drawled Hank Martin. "What bothers me is how we're going to get back to our own times. Me, I don't cotton to the looks of this world

much—I'd ruther be back in the Rockies, trappin' beaver and dodgin' Injuns."

Ethan Drew looked up keenly at the little metal trap-door in the high stone ceiling.

"Have you tried to reach that door, by standing on each other's shoulders?" he asked.

"Yes, but we could never reach it," Pedro Lopez told him. "*Sangre de Dios*, I'm still sore all over from the falls I had on this cursed stone floor."

"But now there is another of us to help!" Ptah, the Egyptian, exclaimed, pointing at Ethan. "We might be able to make it now!"

"Let us make the attempt, then," rumbled Swain. "Anything is better than rotting away to a cow's death in this cell."

The six men began to form a human pyramid beneath the trap-door. Swain, John Crewe and Hank Martin, as the three biggest of them, formed the base. Pedro Lopez and Ethan climbed onto their shoulders. And then Ptah, the smallest and wiriest of them, mounted precariously upon the shoulders of Ethan and the *conquistador*.

The whole pyramid swayed hazardingly as the little Egyptian attacked the trap-door with his bronze shortsword. But the huge shoulders of the viking, down at the heart of the human tower's base, steadied them. And presently they heard a clang from above, and an exultant cry from Ptah.

"I have it open!" he cried to them.

They felt the little Egyptian scramble up through the opening. Then he unfastened and let down his leather belt, and hauled Ethan and the Spaniard up.

By fastening together all their belts, they were able to pull up Hank Martin and John Crewe and Swain, though the

huge weight of the viking almost snapped the improvised leather rope. Then, panting from their efforts, they stared excitedly around them.

They stood in a narrow, dusky stone corridor.

It turned in a sharp angle a few yards away, preventing them from seeing any distance along it.

But as they stood panting, there came dimly to them down this corridor a sound familiar to all these men—one that made them stiffen—the clash of steel against steel, of sword against sword!

"Fightin' goin' on!" exclaimed Hank Martin, the trapper's leathery face tightening.

They heard a bull voice in the distance shouting orders, then a woman's sharp scream.

"Odin, at least there is battle in this world!" exclaimed Swain, blue eyes gleaming. "Let us go to it, comrades!"

"Aye, for I still crave the blood of the wizard who brought us here," cried Pedro Lopez fiercely.

The viking's great axe raised Hank Martin's long rifle under his arm, the swords of the others gleaming in the dusk, they started along the corridor.

2. Rumble of Doom

THE clash of swords had ceased, but the feminine scream was repeated as the six fighting-men advanced. Then as they rounded the turn in the corridor, they beheld the source of those screams.

Two black-bearded, black-armored men with wolfish faces held a white-faced girl. Laughing at her wild struggles, one of them tore away the neck of her short white robe, exposing an ivory shoulder and breast. The girl, her dark eyes blazing and her black hair

wildly disheveled, struck in vain with tiny fists.

Ethan Drew's blood heated in swift anger at the sight. He started ahead, sword raised.

"We can't let *that* go on!" he rasped.

"They are godless men—sons of Belial," said John Crewe harshly. "Forward!"

The two black-bearded soldiers looked up and saw that grim, weirdly assorted little company of six men coming down the corridor toward them. They released the girl and yelled in alarm, at the same time drawing their swords.

Other black-armored soldiers came hurrying into the farther cell of the corridor in answer to the call.

Then Ethan Drew's sword clashed the blade of one of the two warriors. The swift anger that boiled in the young American brought all his remembered fencing skill into his muscles as he parried a vicious blow and then stabbed fiercely.

His opponent went down, his throat transfixing by Ethan's blade. At the same moment the other of the two who had held the girl sank in a lifeless heap, his neck half severed by John Crewe's broad blade.

"Thus die all followers of Satan!" shouted the big Puritan with fanatic fervor.

"Here come the others!" yelled Ptah.

The girl had sunk fainting to the floor. Ethan hastily swept her behind them, then faced with his comrades the dozen warriors racing down the corridor. They were bellowing with rage, those fierce-faced men in black armor. Their swords gleamed in the dusky light, lust to kill written on their faces.

Crack! One of them fell with a neat little hole drilled between his eyes.

"Easy shootin'," drawled Hank Martin. "I wish Kit and ol' Bill was here."

Then the charging warriors met the line of six men. Sparks flew through the dusk as sword clashed fiercely against sword.

Ethan Drew fought with forced coolness, his brown, lean face set in a mirthless grin as he stabbed and fainted. The first man to oppose him reeled back with his shoulder impaled, howling.

Another raised his blade to slash sidewise at the American. Before the man could complete the stroke, Ptah's bronze shortsword bit into his vitals. The swarthy little Egyptian calmly attacked another man.

A hell of battle raged in that dusky hallway for minutes. Hank Martin had clubbed his long rifle and was smashing faces into red pulp with its butt. John Crewe's somber, massive face held a stern light of battle as he struck with his big broadsword.

"Spawn of Beelzebub!" muttered the big Puritan as he fought. "Men without righteousness!"

"Come on, dogs!" Lopez was roaring. The *conquistador* cursed as he hacked. "I'll make you sorry your mothers ever bore you!"

But it was Swain Njallson who was doing most execution in that cramped, terrific fight. The huge viking's axe whirled in circles of blinding death, smashing helmet after helmet, his blue eyes blazing.

It was too much for the black-armored attackers. They recoiled, leaving more than half their number dead, then turned and ran down the corridor.

"Flee, vermin!" Lopez shouted

after them. "Now you know what it means to meet a cavalier of Spain."

"Haw! haw!" chuckled Hank Martin, reloading his rifle. "They sure bit off more'n they could chew."

Ethan Drew, while the others stood panting, was bending over the unconscious girl, seeking to revive her. The ripe curves of her body were hardly concealed by the short, torn white robe. There were still red marks of rude fingers on her creamy shoulders.

She opened great, dark eyes, gazed bewilderedly up into Ethan's lean face, Her eyes widened in wonder, her soft red lips parted. Then as memory came back, she sprang erect.

"My father!" she cried. "Thorold and his soldiers have captured him!"

ETHEN was amazed to find that he could understand her words. For she spoke in a language that seemed descended from English, though it was changed in inflection and accent and in many word-meanings.

"Who are you?" Ethan demanded. "And who are the men who were attacking you?"

"They were some of Thorold's soldiers!" she cried. "I am Chiri, and my father, Kim Idim, is the man who brought you all into this time out of your own past ages."

"Ha, so your father did that!" exclaimed Pedro Lopez, scowling fiercely. "Then I will see this father of yours. He'll eat six inches of steel if he doesn't——"

"Shut up, Pedro," drawled Hank Martin. "Let the little lady tell us what she's drivin' at."

"You must save Kim Idim, my father!" Chiri was crying desperately to Ethan.

"Come on, boys," the American rasped to his comrades. "I don't know

yet what this is all about, but we're going to find out."

They started on a run along the corridor, Chiri frantically leading the way. The corridor soon debouched into a high, domed hall. Gleaming, grotesque machines about it made it look like a laboratory.

Three men who appeared to have been servants lay dead here, swords still clutched in their hands. Chiri ran around them and through a door into the open air. Ethan and his comrades followed her closely.

They emerged into the dusky red sunset, on a paved terrace. Behind them loomed the building in which they had been confined, a domed structure of black stone, immeasurably ancient-looking.

In front of them, the steep black cliff slanted down to the green sea of jungle. A precarious pathway angled down the cliff.

Chiri cried out and pointed down to the bottom of the cliff, hundreds of feet below.

"See, there are Thorold and his soldiers! And my father!"

Ethan peered down and saw a score of men in black armor at the foot of the cliff, hastily mounting horses which had been tethered there.

One of these men, apparently the leader Thorold, was a huge-framed, dark-faced giant who was shouting orders in a bull voice as he mounted.

A thin, white-haired old man with blood flowing from his temple had been thrust in front of one of the mounted warriors. His hands were bound. And a squat, heavy-looking machine had been hastily loaded into a litter swung between two of the horses.

"Thorold is taking my father and the time-ray projector to Tzar!" Chiri cried. "Stop them!"

"Hank, try to drop the big fellow," Ethan said hastily.

Hank Martin quickly raised his long rifle. But as the trapper did so, the giant Thorold shouted an order and the whole troop below spurred forward into the jungle and were instantly hidden under the trees.

"Dang it, I was a mite too slow!" the buckskin-clad trapper exclaimed in vexation.

"We can follow them, and my sword will not be too slow!" exclaimed Pedro Lopez, starting toward the path down the cliff.

"Aye, let us follow," rumbled Swain, the viking's blue eyes still burning with the battle light.

"Wait!" Ethan commanded. "We can't overtake them now, mounted as they are. And we need to know where we stand before we go very far in this world."

"That's right," Hank Martin approved. "Unless we scout the land before we move, we'll run into an ambush and lose our scalps sure."

PTAH and John Crewe nodded agreement, and the viking and the *conquistador* came back.

Chiri grasped Ethan's arm anxiously, her dark eyes looking pleadingly up at him.

"You will follow and save my father from Thorold?" she cried urgently.

"Why should we?" Ethan demanded sternly. "You admit it was some hellish experiment of your father's that drew us out of our own times into this future age. We owe nothing to him, who played that trick upon us."

"It is true," said John Crewe somberly. "And yon old man whom they captured cannot be a godly man, or he would not juggle with time against the will of heaven, as he did."

Chiri's eyes flashed sudden defiance, and she stamped her little foot.

"If you refuse to rescue my father, you will stay in this time forever!" she told them; "for only he can send you back to your own ages. And now Thorold has him and his time-ray projector."

"That kinder changes things," muttered Hank Martin thoughtfully. "Me, I don't want to stay in this queer layout forever."

"Nor I either!" Pedro Lopez declared. "I was assisting the valiant Don Hernando Cortez in the conquest of those dogs, the Aztecs, when I was drawn into this age. I must get back to my own time—the peerless Don Hernando will miss my help sorely."

"Where has this fellow Thorold taken your father and the machine?" Ethan asked Chiri.

"To the city of Tzar," she said.

"And where is that?" he demanded.

"It lies thirty miles from here, upon the coast of this land," she told him. "Thorold is the king of Tzar, under the Wise One."

She saw that they did not understand her references.

"I forgot that you know nothing of this time!" she exclaimed. "I will explain. You are now, by your reckoning, in the year 1,243,665."

"Over a million years in the future?" gasped Ethan. "I suspected it, yet——"

"Witchcraft, an unholy business," muttered John Crewe, looking sternly at the girl.

"Aye, black magic of Set," whispered Ptah.

CHIRI continued tensely, her dark eyes clinging to Ethan's lean face.

"The name of this continent is Tzar. It is the last continent left upon earth, for all other continents have sunk beneath the oceans because of great shifts

inside the earth. There are islands, but they are uninhabitable because of fierce beasts and fiercer savages.

"And this land of Tzar is doomed like the other continents. Its rock foundations have been crumbling for ages, with many earth-shocks, and many fear the day close at hand when this last continent will sink also into the sea.

"Once the people of Tzar were a mighty race, strong in wisdom. But with doom staring them in the face, they have neglected their science until most of their wisdom is forgotten, and they now use the weapons and ways that are simplest, thinking it folly to seek knowledge when death is approaching. Only a few scientists still keep the ancient learning alive.

"My father, Kim Idim, is one of those scientists. We dwelt in the capital city, Tzar. There reigns Thorold, the king, and there broods the mysterious Wise One, the immortal creature or being who has lived for ages and is almost the deity of our race. None but the king ever sees the Wise One, who remains always in his secret chamber, and only the king even knows what the Wise One looks like, but all Tzar reveres its enigmatic deity.

"My father, Kim Idim, in the course of his secret scientific studies, discovered recently a miraculous power. He had been investigating time. He believed that time is only a dimension and that with the proper force, he could reach into past or future and draw people or objects into this time. And he finally found a force that could do that, an energy he called the time-ray.

"Father tried to keep his tremendous achievement secret. But Thorold, our king, heard of it. He demanded the secret of the time-ray from Father. He wanted to use it so that he could es-

cape with the Wise One from our doomed land into future ages, before Tzar sinks into the sea.

"Father refused Thorold's demand. He knew him to be an evil and ruthless despot, and would not loose such a tyrant upon future ages. Thorold threatened Father with death if he continued to refuse the secret. So my father and I escaped secretly from the city Tzar into this wilderness, with a few servants, taking refuge in this ancient and long-abandoned watch-tower.

"Here my father proposed to complete his great experiment of drawing men out of the past, for nothing could dim his passion of scientific curiosity. He built a projector for the time-ray, and turned the ray back into the past. Seeing along the ray, he drew you six men out of past ages, one by one. He meant only to learn from you the secrets of the past, and then to send you back to your own times.

"But Thorold must have tracked us to our refuge! For he came today and seized my father and the time-ray projector, as you saw. He has taken them to Tzar. And there he will torture my father until he consents to demonstrate the use of the projector, so that by means of it, Thorold and the Wise One can escape into future ages. And that means a menacing wolf, armed by the immense wisdom of the Wise One, let loose upon the unguessable future!"

Chiri's dark eyes were wide with dread as she finished, her voice sinking almost to a whisper.

Ethan had listened with increasing amazement, as had his five comrades.

"And you want us to follow to the city of Tzar and rescue your father and the machine?" Ethan muttered thoughtfully. "That's a tall order."

Hank Martin shrugged his buckskin shoulders. "It shore is," he drawled,

"but we got to do it, if we hanker to get back to our own times."

"Of course!" bellowed Pedro Lopez. "We simply break into this cursed city and take the old man and his devilish contrivance, and that'll be all."

Swain Njallson nodded in cold agreement. But Ptah shook his head, his subtle face frowning.

"It will take stealth and cunning," the little Egyptian said, "but we must try it."

"Aye, it is our duty," said John Crewe harshly. "This Thorold seems an evil tyrant, an Ahab like that Charles Stuart whom I helped pluck from his throne. It is God's work to pull down such a despot."

Ethan nodded, his lean brown face tight and hard as he turned back to the anxious girl.

"We'll do our best to rescue your father, Chiri," he told her. "But you've got to promise that if we succeed, he'll return us to our own times."

"I promise!" she said eagerly. "And I will guide you to Tzar and into it—I know a secret way."

"Good!" cried Pedro Lopez impatiently. "Then let us be off at once. Strike quickly!—that was always the watchword of the incomparable Don Hernando."

ETHAN led the way toward the path that angled down the cliff, the girl clinging to his arm, the other fighting-men following. The sun, huge and red, was poised now above the distant horizon, sinking slowly behind the rim of the jungle.

They moved carefully down the risky path. It was dusk when they reached the base of the cliff. Before them yawned the jungle, already dark and mysterious, giant monarchs of the forest rearing two hundred feet into the

twilight, shadowy things moving amid the vines that trailed from the trees.

The ground suddenly quivered violently under them. The whole towering cliff and dark jungle rocked like a boat in a storm. They were flung from their feet. And Ethan Drew, as he was sickeningly aware of the rolling and shaking of the rock under him, heard a dim, distant, terrible grinding from far beneath.

The convulsion passed off quickly. They staggered up unsteadily, feeling the ground still trembling under them, and saw that the towering monarchs of the jungle still waved branches wildly in the dusk.

"What in the name of Osiris was *that*?" Ptah gasped.

"'Twas an earth temblor," Pedro Lopez announced. "We felt more than that as we followed Don Hernando up to Tenochtitlan."

"Yes," whispered Chiri. A strange dread, fateful and brooding, was in her dark eyes. "It was another omen that the end of the land of Tzar is near. They come ever more often, these rockings of the continent under us——"

Then she recovered herself, and moved toward a dim trail opening into the shadowy jungle.

"We must hurry!" she declared "This new shaking of the earth will reinforce Thorold's determination to escape from this time. Unless we rescue my father tonight, we will be too late."

3. In the City of Tzar

THE moon had risen soon after midnight, and its brilliant, silvery light penetrated through crevices in the roof of foliage, into the dark jungle in which the six men and the girl pressed forward. The wilderness through

which they had been moving for hours was made a weird, unreal fairyland by the broken bars of silver light that slanted between the huge, towering black trees.

Ethan glanced up through the thick foliage as he and his comrades followed Chiri through the forest. He saw that the moon's orb was half again as large as he had ever seen it, and he realized that the long ages that had passed had brought the dead satellite far closer to its parent planet. He could clearly discern the great craters and mountains on its barren face.

Chiri, moving beside him along the vague trail, pressed his hand with her soft fingers.

"We are nearing the city of Tzar, Ethan," she whispered.

He felt her fingers trembling, and quick sympathy for her dread and bravery filled him.

"Keep your chin up, Chiri," he told her encouragingly. "We'll get your father out all right. Good Lord! this outfit is tough enough to lick an army."

"I know," the Tzaran girl whispered fearfully, "yet I am afraid, not alone of Thorold but of the Wise One, the undying one whom no one knows."

Ethan put his arm protectively around her shoulders as they moved on. Briars whipped their faces, creeping vines and roots tripped them. The breath of the jungle was a damp, steamy exhalation about them, laden with strange scents, alien and sinister.

More than once he heard the crash of great bodies moving in the wilderness, and once the flapping of enormous wings reached his ears and he glimpsed a huge shadow flying over the jungle roof.

He could only guess as to what weird forms of life earth might have produced during the vast period of time

across which he and his companions had been drawn.

Ethan could hardly realize that it was all real, that he actually marched through the moonlit jungle of a million years in the future, with a girl of this future day and five hardy fighting-men from past ages. Yet the feel of Chiri's trusting hand in his, the sound of Pedro Lopez cursing in voluble Spanish as he tripped, the heavy tread of the viking and the occasional monosyllables of Ptah and John Crewe and the trapper, reminded the young American that it was all actually happening.

And he and his comrades were in this doomed land of Tzar to stay, unless they could rescue old Kim Idim and his miraculous mechanism. Determination to achieve that hardened in him. He didn't want to stay in this future time, exiled from his own age.

CHIRI suddenly came to a halt in the shadows, her fingers tightening again on his hand.

"Yonder lies Tzar," she whispered tensely.

Ethan and his comrades peered eagerly through the foliage. A quarter mile ahead there loomed out of the moonlit jungle an enormous black wall. Inside that titan barrier of ebon stone reared colossal masses of pyramidal structures, some of them rising many hundreds of feet. Monstrous, barbaric-looking city of the far future, looming up into the silver moonlight out of the jungle that hemmed it in! Ruddy lights in the buildings bit holes through the moonlight, and there was a dim, pulsing murmur of life.

"It looks like Babylon," Ptah whispered in awe. "But great as Babylon was when I beheld it, this city is even greater."

"It is true, this place is larger even than Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs," muttered Pedro Lopez.

Swain Njallson had raised his great head, and Ethan saw the viking stiffen suddenly.

"I smell the sea," Swain said, sniffing like a bloodhound suddenly aroused.

"Yes, the ocean laps against the farther side of the city Tzar," Chiri informed him.

"How are we going to get into the place?" Ethan asked her tautly. "I see no gate."

"There is a gate, but it is locked against the beasts of the jungle," Chiri answered. Her face was pale in the white moonlight as she added, "But I know a way inside—the same secret way by which my father and I escaped with our servants. It will take us even to the Citadel of the Wise One, where the king Thorold dwells and where he will have taken my father."

As she spoke, she pointed to one enormous pyramid, far inside the wall of the city, whose truncated summit loomed far above the other buildings into the brilliant moonlight.

"Follow me," she whispered.

Ethan and his comrades slipped after her through the tangled vegetation, toward the looming wall of Tzar. The jungle grew right up to the wall, and clawed with vines and creepers at the giant barrier.

They soon stood in the shadows at the base of the wall. Chiri led the way along it until they came to an opening in the wall, a round, dark tunnel-mouth six feet in diameter. It was dark as the pit, and a thin trickle of water ran out of it.

"This is one of the drains of the city," Chiri whispered. "Once there was a grating across it, but it has rusted

away and the people of Tzar, who think of naught but pleasure in the face of the coming doom, have not bothered to replace it. This is our way inside the city."

"I ain't exactly pinin' away to go crawlin' up a danged rabbit-hole," muttered Hank Martin.

"Nor I," said Ptah. "One could easily be trapped in such tunnels."

"It is the only way inside," Chiri said anxiously.

"And we're taking it," Ethan declared decisively. "Come on, boys."

They followed without further dissent as he led the way with Chiri into the dark stone tunnel. Their feet splashed in the water as they advanced into the gloomy, lightless passage. After they had gone a few paces, Chiri drew from her robe a tiny tube which shot forth a thin ray of light that partly showed the way.

Ethan saw that the rough stone walls of the great drain were grown with evil-looking white fungi and mosses. White snakes whipped away in front of them, and large white rat-like rodents scuttled ahead. The air here was dank and heavy.

The tunnel forked, dividing into two separate drains. Without hesitation, Chiri led into the left one. They had gone but a short way along this, when Chiri turned and motioned them to observe caution.

They soon saw the reason. Close ahead was a place where the drain protruded up into one of the streets of Tzar, covered by a stone grating. They reached this spot and cautiously raised their heads so that they could look out into the city street.

Tzar was weirdly beautiful under the huge moon. The vast, somber pyramidal buildings towered out of shadowy gardens and smoothly paved

streets, ruddy light blinking from a myriad windows. And in streets and buildings, the people of Tzar were engaged in a mad revelry, a saturnalia of frenzied merry-making, throbbing through the whole city! Music, wild and gay, was pulsing everywhere. There were dancers inside the great buildings, their shadowy forms racing across the windows. And there were music and dancing and drunken laughter in the street into which Ethan and his companions looked.

They saw wantonly laughing girls and women pursued by intoxicated men. Youthful figures stumbled unsteadily past, with wine spilled upon their white robes.

A carnival of utter license seemed unloosed here in the black city beneath the brilliant moon.

"A city of luxury and sin!" muttered John Crewe harshly, the Puritan's somber face stern and condemnatory in the dim light. "Yes, a city of Belial, its wicked people flown with insolence and wine."

"Hell, I wish I was out there with them," swore Pedro Lopez. "I could enjoy myself out there."

SWAIN NJALLSON spat in contempt. "These are a soft, weak race," the viking rumbled scornfully.

"They hold revelry," whispered Chiri, "but it is because they know that this land and city are nearing their doom. It is only in wine and pleasure that my people can forget the dread shadow deepening over them."

And almost as she spoke, there came with startling coincidence an omen of that which she mentioned. A slow, grinding drum-roll sounded from deep within the earth, gathering in volume like a rolling snowball until it broke and crashed in a dull detonation like

thunder underground. At the same moment, the whole city shook violently, the great pyramids swaying visibly in the moonlight, rocking Ethan and his comrades from side to side in the tunnel. Then the grinding roll beneath diminished to a dim muttering that died away.

"A sign of God's wrath at this wicked city!" exclaimed John Crewe, his eyes fanatical. "A warning of Jehovah's vengeance!"

"Yes, a warning," whispered Chiri, dread again widening her eyes. "A warning that the doom of Tzar is close—close."

Out in the streets, the carnival of revelry had come to an abrupt halt with the earth-shock. There had been a few screams of terror, followed by an utter silence.

That dead, unnatural silence endured for minutes. The people in the streets seemed stricken to stone. Then suddenly the laughter and music burst forth wilder than before, as though to drown the memory of that ominous shock.

"Fear not, friends—the doom of Tzar has not come yet!" called a drunken voice.

"Aye, it will never come—the Wise One will find a way to save our land," cried another.

"Drink to the Wise One!" yelled an intoxicated soldier in black armor, waving an amphora aloft. "To the Wise One, who will save us!"

The toast was drunk almost frantically, and the wild saturnalia went on at heightened pace.

Ethan and his companions lowered their heads and started forward again in the tunnel.

"They do not really believe that even the Wise One can save them," Chiri murmured as she led the way.

"But they clutch at that last straw of hope."

Lighted by her little torch, the six men pressed on through divergent drains, passing cautiously under other gratings open to the streets. Finally the girl halted, her face pale and tense in the little ray of light.

She pointed to a square stone trap-door in the roof of the drain, just over their heads.

"That opens into the cellars in the lowest levels of the Citadel of the Wise One," she whispered. "And now we have come to the most hazardous part. For there are always many people in the Citadel, except in the uppermost level where Thorold and the Wise One dwell."

"We'll have to take our chance of stealing up through the building unobserved," Ethan said, his lean face tight with desperate resolution. "Keep behind me, Chiri."

Swain reached up, and softly the viking's great arms lifted up the stone trap-door and set it aside. Silently they clambered up through the opening and then looked around.

They stood in dark, gloomy stone cellars, their walls dripping with condensation. From the upper levels of the vast pile, voices and the occasional tread of feet reached them. Through slit-like windows, bright bars of moonlight entered.

"This way to the stair that leads upward," Chiri murmured, starting through the dark crypts. "But I fear now it is madness of us even to attempt to reach the forbidden uppermost level."

Ethan had begun to think so too, but he did not voice his opinion.

"Courage, Chiri," he whispered.

They passed through several of the gloomy and apparently unused stone

cellars, into one from which a narrow stairway led upward. Ethan was leading toward this when the unexpected happened.

Two soldiers in black armor, warriors of Tzar, emerged suddenly from that stairway. They had evidently been drawn to investigate by some slight sound, for their swords were in their hands and they peered quickly around the dusky crypt as they entered.

One of them saw Ethan and his group, ten feet away. He uttered a cry of alarm.

"Strangers with swords! Warn the guards!"

Before the last words left his lips, the man was tumbling to the floor. Ethan had leaped forward with leopard swiftness, and his sword-point had ripped through the armor joints of the Tzaran warrior and into his heart.

The other man, a little up the steps, turned and started to flee wildly up the stair. Something flashed like a gleaming snake across the moonshot darkness of the chamber, toward him.

He crashed dead upon the stairs. Swain had hurled his axe with unerring aim, and the viking's heavy weapon had broken the fleeing man's neck.

"A good cast," grunted the Northman.

4. Citadel of the Wise One

THEY waited tensely for a moment, swords ready. There was no alarm from above.

"His cry wasn't heard," Ethan rasped. Then as an idea came to him, his eyes lit with excitement, surveying the two dead armored men.

"This gives us a better chance to get to the topmost level!" the young American exclaimed. "Two of us will

put on the armor of these men, and go up with Chiri. We can pass as Tzaran guards, that way. Pedro, you and I will do it—we look more like Tzarans than the rest of you.”

“Good!” approved the *conquistador*. “Our two blades will be enough for the job.”

“What do you figger the rest of us are going to do?” Hank Martin demanded aggrievedly.

“You’ll wait down here for us,” Ethan told the tall trapper. “If we can get Kim Idim and his machine, we’ll bring them down and we’ll all escape back out of the city by the drains.”

“Am I to cower here in darkness while others have the fighting?” Swain rumbled rebelliously.

“Aye,” said John Crewe harshly, “we should all go together. God will arm our cause.”

Ptah disagreed, the little Egyptian’s crafty face earnest. “The plan is a good one,” he declared. “Cunning may win where brute force would fail.”

But the viking and the trapper were still grumbling as Ethan and Pedro hastily donned the black helmets and armor of the two dead men.

“We should be back soon if we succeed,” Ethan told them, pausing on the steps with the Spaniard and Chiri. “If we fail, then you must do as you think best.”

“If they count coup over you, we’ll take plenty scalps to even the score,” Hank Martin promised him grimly.

Then Ethan and Pedro started up the stair, with Chiri’s slim white figure between them.

The stairway was a dark, spiral one. Five minutes of climbing brought them suddenly into the main ground level of the Citadel of the Wise One.

Here was a huge labyrinth of dusky halls and corridors, partly illuminated

by glowing red torches on the walls. And here, as in the streets outside, were laughter and shouting and drunken calls of intoxicated soldiers and women. It was evident that the discipline of Thorold’s soldiery, like everything else, was crumbling as the doom of Tzar neared it.

Chiri led the way toward a great stair. As they passed the revellers at its bottom, Ethan pretended tipsiness himself, stumbled unsteadily with his arm around the girl’s slender waist, laughing thickly.

“Stay and drink with us, comrades!” exclaimed a group of armored soldiers and women at the foot of the great stair.

Ethan shook his head drunkenly. One of the men grasped Chiri’s arm. The American pushed the fellow away with an unsteady gesture. He fell sprawling and the others laughed loudly.

A supple girl had pressed against Pedro’s side and was whispering amorously to him. Ethan gave the Spaniard a warning nudge, and he thrust the girl away. But as they started up the stair, Pedro’s voice was rueful.

“Curse it, that wench was a sweet armful! If we only had a little more time——”

“Don’t be a fool!” Ethan muttered savagely to the *conquistador*. “We’ve got to hurry.”

As Chiri led the way tensely up the broad, winding stairway, they passed other soldiers lying in drunken sleep on the steps. They climbed through level after level of the vast, shadowy Citadel. Through windows along the way they could look down on the wild carnival of revelry still throbbing in the streets of Tzar—desperate merrymaking of a city doomed to destruction.

And as they mounted higher in the

dusky pile, they could look out beyond the city at the moonlit jungle, and on the opposite side, the silvery, heaving ocean, washing against the wall of Tzar as though eager to claw the doomed city down into the deep.

"This temple is like the great teocalli of Huitzilpochtli of the Aztecs," Pedro muttered as they climbed. "*Dios* it seems but yesterday that I and my fellow cavaliers hacked our way to the top of that temple and cast down its evil idols."

"We are nearing the tenth level, the highest," Chiri whispered tensely. "On that level are Thorold's apartments and also the chamber of the Wise One."

In a few moments they stood amid the dusky network of passages on the topmost story of the great truncated pyramid. A few torches cast ruddy light along the enigmatic passages, but no one was to be seen.

"Where would Thorold have your father?" Ethan demanded in a low voice of the girl.

She shook her head, her face pale. "I do not know. I have never been here before—this level is forbidden to all but the king and his personal guards, because here dwells the Wise One whom none but the king may see."

"We'll have to look for Kim Idim until we find him, then," Ethan rasped. "Come on, Pedro."

He and Pedro had their swords out as they moved blindly through the corridors.

Ethan tried door after door, but behind them were only dark and unoccupied chambers.

Then a distant scream of agony in a high, shrill voice echoed through the corridors, sinking into a long, low wail that died away.

"My father!" cried Chiri wildly.

"Thorold's torturers must be at work on him!"

"That scream came from this direction, I thought," Ethan grated, turning and hurrying down a cross corridor, with Pedro and the girl after him.

THE scream had not been repeated. Ethan reached the end of the corridor, and found himself confronted by a blank silver door in a high, massive frame.

Sword gleaming in the dusk, he pushed the door softly open. Inside was a small antechamber. He and the *conquistador* and Chiri crossed this silently, and stepped into a dim, high, round room.

It had broad windows that looked across the streets of Tzar, seething with saturnalia far below, and across the moonlit ocean beyond. And in the shafts of moonlight from the windows, there sat alone in this silent room a creature of incredible, unearthly appearance, a creature that riveted their horrified gaze.

"The Wise One!" gasped Chiri in utter horror. "We have blundered into the chamber of the undying one!"

Ethan felt his brain reel at sight of the ghastly creature before them. He heard Lopez gasp and cross himself.

The Wise One, staring at them, spoke in a low, flat, strange voice.

"You are not men of Tzar!" the creature whispered. "You must be some of the strangers whom the scientist Kim Idim drew out of the past.

"Look at me, then, strangers!" the thing commanded, its voice rising weirdly. "I am the Wise One, he who does not die, who holds the wisdom of ages. Look at me, and envy me!"

And appallingly, a burst of high, insane laughter shrilled from the crea-

ture, a bitter, maniacal mirth that made the hair bristle on Ethan's neck.

The Wise One was—a human head! a *living* head, great and hairless, whose bald skull bulged in a great dome, whose face was white and plump, whose eyes were enormous, dark orbs staring hypnotically from beneath lashless lids.

This head was without human body. It rested upon a square machine, inside which its neck disappeared from view. And from inside that machine came a faint, ceaseless humming and throbbing.

"A human head!" muttered Ethan in repulsion of horror. "Kept alive for ages, by means of a mechanical heart and body!"

"You have guessed it, stranger," said the Wise One, its insane laughter breaking off, its hypnotic eyes searching the young American's face.

Its haunted voice held the three spellbound in the moonlit chamber.

"Yes, many, many ages ago I was a man like you, stranger," said the Wise One. There was a queer sob of heart-break in its flat voice. "I walked in the sun and made love beneath the moon, I worked and slept and ate as other people did. Yes, I was human—once.

"But a vaulting, unholy ambition brought this terrible doom upon me. I was a scientist and I had found ways to keep the heads of animals alive, separate from their bodies, by means of mechanical hearts which pumped a synthetic blood-stream through the veins. I wanted to prove that a human head could be kept alive indefinitely in the same way. And so in mad rashness and pride of achievement, I volunteered to submit myself to the experiment.

"The thing was done. My head was severed from my body and attached to this mechanical trunk. I awoke from

the operation, no longer a man, but merely a head, a living brain. And I have remained like this ever since, for I cannot die as long as my mechanical heart is kept functioning and my synthetic blood renewed.

"I have seen the generations of man be born and die, for thousands upon thousands of years. I have seen empires and civilizations rise to glory and sink in long decline. And with each year that passed, my wisdom and knowledge grew greater, for while other men had time only to learn the elements of knowledge before they died, I who was immortal could increase my wisdom endlessly.

"But I longed for death, stranger. For thousands on thousands of years I have longed to be free of this wretched mockery of existence and to sink into the blessed peace of death. I have prayed those around me for generations to give me death, but always they have refused.

"They would not kill me, because they wished to profit by my superhuman store of knowledge. They called me the Wise One. And the people who never saw me but worshipped me in awe, also called me the Wise One—me, the half-human thing praying for the release of death!"

A bitterness more than human throbbed in the Wise One's voice, chilled Ethan's brain.

"At last," continued the creature's haunted voice, "I saw a chance of death. This land of Tzar, as I have long known, is destined soon to sink beneath the sea, for its foundations have long been crumbling. Indeed, I think that end is very close at hand, now. I was happy when I learned that, for in that cataclysm I would find death.

"But now the horror of continued

life threatens me. Thorold, the king, seeks the secret of time-projection from the scientist Kim Idim, which will enable him to flee into future ages. And Thorold will take me with him, so that he may continue to profit by my wisdom. The blessed cup of death will be snatched from my thirsty lips!"

THE voice of the Wise One was rising wildly, the enormous eyes of the creature terribly distended.

"I knew the secret of the time-ray long before Kim Idim discovered it," the creature raged, "but I disclosed it to no one. But if Thorold gains that secret, my silence will be in vain. Even now Thorold is torturing Kim Idim to make him give up the secret, and show him how to operate the projector."

"My father!" cried Chiri, anguish breaking the spell of horror on her face. "Ethan, you must save him from Thorold's tortures!"

Ethan Drew, heart pounding, stepped closer to the monstrous figure of the Wise One.

"I will stop Thorold from obtaining that secret, if I can," he told the creature hoarsely. "Tell us where amid these halls we can find Thorold and Kim Idim, and I swear that I will kill Thorold."

The Wise One's enormous eyes considered the young American. Then those dark orbs flashed strangely.

"I will tell you where you can find them," said the monstrous thing, "but on one condition only."

"And what is that?" Ethan cried.

"On condition that as soon as I have told you, you kill me!" exclaimed the Wise One. "One stroke of your sword, and I shall be free forever of this travesty of life, safe forever in the arms of death."

Ethan recoiled. "God, I couldn't!"

"You must!" cried the Wise One. "Only if you agree will I tell you what you ask."

And suddenly, grotesquely, there were tears gleaming in the great eyes.

"Do not deny me death!" it whispered. "Do not deny me that for which I have prayed and hoped these thousands on thousands of years."

Ethan shuddered, but he forced himself to speak.

"I'll—I'll do it. Where are Thorold and Kim Idim?"

"In Thorold's torture-chamber, the fourth door along the third corridor," answered the Wise One swiftly. "At least three of Thorold's torturers will be with him, so you must strike quickly, stranger."

"And now—the death you promised me!" the creature cried.

Ethan advanced sickly, raising his sword. The great head looked up at the blade, eyes gleaming in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"I can't do it," Ethan said thickly.

"You promised!" cried the Wise One. "It will be an act of infinite mercy to me. Strike!"

Chiri and Pedro were watching in a trance of horror. Ethan raised his blade higher, and in the moment before he struck, involuntarily closed his eyes.

"Death!" he heard the Wise One whispering exultantly. "Death, at last——"

Ethan struck. He felt the blade crunch down through bone and flesh and clang against metal.

He opened his eyes, shuddering. He had cloven away the whole rear half of the hideous skull. But upon the dead white face of the Wise One was now a strange expression of peace.

"*Dios*, let us get out of here!" gasped the Spaniard. "This land—it is one of devils!"

Ethan was trembling violently as he stumbled with Chiri and the *conquistador* back out into the dusky corridors.

They hurried toward the third corridor away, then down along it until they came to the fourth door. The trio paused outside that closed door. A voice reached them from within—Thorold's bull voice.

"Will you tell now how the machine is operated?" demanded that voice.

"I—I will never tell you," quavered another, shaking voice. "You shall never escape with the Wise One into future times to work evil there."

"Give him another turn," they heard Thorold order. Then there was a sobbing cry from the tortured man.

Softly, soundlessly, Ethan Drew pushed open the door and stepped into the torture chamber.

5. *The Hour of Destruction*

IT WAS a dusky, red-lit room with a low stone ceiling. Weird, blood-chilling contrivances of torture stood about it, and three wolf-faced men—the torturers employed by the king of Tzar.

Thorold himself stood at the center of the chamber. His giant frame was bent eagerly forward, his dark, ruthless face and black eyes blazing as he watched his torturers at their gruesome work.

They had Kim Idim stretched upon a rack, his toes gripped by the rolls of a contrivance like a great wringer. The old man's white hair was disheveled, his thin face deathly white; his eyes seemed bulging from his sockets as the torturers slowly turned the rolls that gripped and crushed his feet.

"Now will you demonstrate the use of the projector?" Thorold demanded remorselessly.

He pointed as he spoke at a squat mechanism that stood at the side of the room, near a broad window overlooking the moonlit sea.

It was the time-ray projector that had snatched Ethan Drew and his five comrades out of their own ages. The mechanism was a squat complexity of deflection coils and tubes, upon which was mounted a world-globe graven with fine lines. There were vernier controls, and a big copper ring jutted from the bottom of the machine.

"No—not now or ever!" gasped Kim Idim.

The grinning torturers obeyed. Ethan saw the old Tzaran scientist's body arch up to his bonds convulsively from agony, as he and Lopez softly entered.

Chiri screamed. Thorold and the torturers whirled, drawing their swords.

Ethan rushed, red fury lighting his brain, straight at the Tzaran king. One of the torturers stepped between the two—and took the American's blade through his ribs before he could make a thrust.

As Ethan tore out the sword, Pedro was cutting down another of the startled torturers and then rushing upon the third.

"Guards!" yelled Thorold at the top of his voice as his sword clashed with Ethan's.

"They can't hear you," rasped the American. "This is just between us two."

With fierce, resistless attack, he forced Thorold back against the wall. A savage thrust and twist—and Thorold's blade flew from his hand.

Ethan tensed to lunge in the death stab. But at that moment the room, the whole vast building, rocked wildly about them.

He was flung from his feet. He heard Chiri cry out, and Pedro yell a startled curse. The terrible drum-roll of shifting rock was sounding again deep beneath the city, and the great pile of the Citadel was waving wildly beneath one earth-shock after another.

Ethan staggered to his feet on the quivering floor, and saw Thorold racing out the door.

"Guards!" the Tzaran tyrant was shouting in his bull voice as he ran down the corridors.

"After him!" Pedro cried fiercely, but Ethan held the *conquistador* back.

"No—no time now! We've got to get Kim Idim out before Thorold gets back with soldiers."

They could hear Thorold's great voice shouting for his warriors as he raced down into the lower levels.

Ethan whirled toward the old scientist. Chiri had slashed her father's bonds and was helping him to stand erect on his crushed feet.

"The men from the past!" exclaimed the old man, staring at Ethan and the Spaniard.

Every few moments, now, a new earth-shock was vibrating through the Citadel.

There were distant screams from the people who had been holding carnival in the streets far below. And the fearful grinding from deep in the earth was swelling louder and louder.

"Can you help your father to walk?" Ethan cried to the girl. "Lopez and I can carry the machine and there's still a chance we can get down through the Citadel."

"No—no chance now!" shouted the Spaniard from the door. "Here come the guards!"

Ethan raced to the door. A group of men were running down the dusky corridor toward them. The American

and Pedro awaited them desperately with swords raised.

Then one of the men running toward them turned, leveled something. A ringing shot echoed in the shadowy hallway.

"Got that Injun!" yelled a familiar, nasal voice.

"Hank Martin!" Ethan cried. "And the others——"

It was the four they had left in the cellars of the Citadel. Swain's great axe was bloody now, and red-smeared too were the swords of Ptah and John Crewe.

"We heard Thorold a-yelling for his guards, so we figgered you were in trouble and came bustin' up here!" panted the trapper. "But they're after us—a hull tribe of them."

"They've got us trapped up here now—we can't get away," rasped Ptah calmly.

"Odin! what of that when there is good fighting ahead?" shouted Swain, his blue eyes blazing.

A MASS of armored men appeared in the farther end of the corridor, and Thorold's bull voice could be heard rallying them forward.

Another tremendous earth-shock rocked the building about them. The ominous grind of rock underground had now become a loud roar.

"The doom of Tzar is at hand!" cried Kim Idim. "Men from the past, I can send you back to your own times with this projector, if you can hold out Thorold and his men until I get it into operation."

"We'll try!" Ethan cried. "But hurry."

"Here they come!" yelled Hank Martin to Ethan, from out in the corridor.

His rifle cracked at the same mo-

ment. Then he clubbed the heavy weapon."

"Form a line across the corridor!" Ethan shouted as he joined them. "We must hold them back until Kim Idim gets the machine started."

Thorold was hurrying down the hallway at the head of a solid mass of guards. The soldiers were crazed with fear by the awful earth-shocks that each few moments were shaking the city, and Thorold was playing upon their panic.

"On, men!" the giant king was shouting. "Inside that room is the machine which will enable us to escape from doomed Tzar. Cut down these men who would keep us from it!"

The armored soldiers poured down the hall in a solid living wave—and then stopped.

In a line across that hallway, Ethan Drew and his five comrades were awaiting them. Four swords flashed like bolts of steel lightning. Hank Martin's rifle-butt crashed down, and Swain's great axe clove in red destruction.

Ethan, thrusting and stabbing like a madman, sought to reach Thorold with his sword, but the giant king was out of his reach. Howling, fear-mad warriors who saw their one chance of escape inside the room, kept coming forward, a delirium of wild faces in front of the battling American.

Hank Martin was crushing in skulls and faces like egg-shells with the butt of his heavy rifle, uttering a whooping Indian yell each time his iron-shop weapon smashed down.

"*Dios!*" Pedro swore as he hacked furiously. "Even Don Hernando never led us into a fight like this——"

John Crewe's massive face was flaming crimson as his broadsword flashed in great circles.

"Children of sin!" he was shouting.

"Your cup of wickedness has run over—God's wrath is upon you!"

Ptah fought in vicious silence, his swarthy face immobile as a mask as he stabbed and smote with his heavy short-sword. But ever and again a weird, piercing cry arose from the huge viking.

"*Aha!*" his great voice yelled as his terrible axe smashed down amid the attackers. "*Aha!*"

The Tzaran warriors recoiled from that terrific defense. Bleeding from a dozen cuts, panting and covered with sweat, Ethan glanced around.

Kim Idim was toiling with the projector, fumbling with broken hands, held upright by the bravely encircling arms of Chiri.

"One minute more!" cried the old scientist hoarsely.

Thorold was yelling wildly to his men as new earth-shocks rocked the vast building. "On—they are but six! Cut them down or we sink to doom with Tzar!"

The solid wave of attack smashed back into the thin defending line. And again that line held—six weapons weaving an impassable barrier of death.

Maddened, foaming, Thorold forced forward. His heavy blade clashed that of Ethan, struck past it and pierced the American's left arm.

Heedless of the wound, Ethan stabbed with a low snarl. And his sword drove right through the armor over Thorold's heart. The Tzaran king staggered back, fell sprawling across the pile of bodies.

"You got him, pardner!" yelled Hank Martin exultantly.

"*The land is sinking!*" screamed a wild voice up through the Citadel.

For now the earth-shocks had become one continuous convulsion, and the great building, rocking like a leaf

in a wind, was slowly settling downward.

THE attackers in the corridor turned and fled in mad panic, seeking a way out of the building. Ethan spun around—and through the window saw the raging, maddened ocean running in mountainous waves that already were washing through the streets of the sinking, moonlit city.

"Doomsday—Jehovah's wrath descends on this accursed land!" yelled Crewe.

"It is Ragnarok!" shouted Swain. "The twilight of the gods!"

Kim Idim cried to them. "The projector is ready. Be quick! Step into the copper ring, one of you!"

"You first, Ptah!" cried Ethan.

The panting little Egyptian made as though to refuse to go first, then stepped into the low copper ring jutting from the bottom of the machine.

"Farewell, comrades!" he shouted.

Kim Idim swiftly moved the stylus touching the world-globe atop the machine, then touched a vernier, threw a switch. A flash of light inside the ring—and Ptah was gone. Then Swain went, waving his red axe in farewell.

Pedro was next. Ethan had to push the *conquistador* into the copper circle.

"*Sangre de Cristo!*" the Spaniard was exclaiming. "I wish——"

He was gone, before he could finish. As Kim Idim swiftly changed his controls, Ethan thrust John Crewe toward the machine. But the great Puritan resisted.

"It is not God's will that men should juggle with time," he cried. "I cannot——"

But by main force Ethan shoved him into the copper circle. Kim Idim had already made his adjustments for time and location. The Puritan, still pro-

testing, vanished in the flash of light inside the ring.

"Quickly! Quickly!" cried Kim Idim, his voice almost inaudible amid the thunderous din.

For now, as with long, grinding roll of riven rock, the land of Tzar sank downward, the sea was raging in over the city. There was a crashing of falling walls.

Hank Martin, still gripping his long rifle, had stepped inside the ring.

"Good-bye, pardner!" he called to Ethan, a grin on his lanky, blood-smearred face.

Flash! And he was gone. And Kim Idim motioned Ethan wildly to enter the circle.

"What about you and Chiri?" Ethan demanded hoarsely, grasping the pale girl's arm. "I can't leave you here to die."

"We shall not die—I shall set the machine to hurl Chiri and me into a time a little farther ahead, when I have calculated that new lands will have arisen here!" Kim Idim shouted.

"If ever you need me, you'll know how to call me across time again!" Ethan cried. "Chiri, good-bye!"

A nearer, more ominous crashing sounded.

"The Citadel is beginning to collapse!" Kim Idim yelled.

Ethan loosed the girl, and leaped into the copper circle. The old man flung the switch.

There was a roar as the lower walls of the Citadel began to collapse. But even as that roar struck Ethan's ears, everything exploded in light and he was hurled into unconsciousness.

Epilog

HE AWOKE with hot sunlight beating upon his face. He lay upon burning sands, beneath the glare of a mid-

day silence. He could hear a chorus of receding, wild yells.

Ethan staggered up and looked dazedly around. He stood in the desert, the burning Sahara, at the very spot where he had been waiting for the Tuareg charge when he had been snatched into the future. Beside him lay the dead bodies of the other ambushed soldiers of the Foreign Legion patrol.

And a quarter-mile away, a horde of Arabs were riding off with wild yells of terror.

"By heaven, I understand now!" Ethan cried to himself. "Kim Idim sent me back to the identical place and almost the identical time from which he had drawn me. And that's what terrorized those Tuaregs who were charging me—to them, it was as though I vanished from sight for a moment, and then reappeared!"

He looked down wildly at himself. He was still covered with the blood and sweat of that terrific battle in the corridor.

"It was ten minutes ago—and yet it was a million years in the future!" he muttered numbly.

Ethan caught a wandering horse that had belonged to one of the Tuaregs

slain in the fight. And soon he was riding across the burning sands, heading toward the French army post a score of miles away.

He would tell them only that his patrol had been ambushed, and all wiped out but himself. There was no use of trying to tell them what had really happened to him. No one would ever believe his story.

And in just the same way, he thought suddenly, Pedro and Swain, and Ptah and John Crewe and Hank Martin, must have got back to their own times, and been forced to keep silent about their incredible experience.

"The best comrades a man ever had," Ethan whispered as he rode. "And now they're all dead and gone, for centuries, even for thousands of years.

"No, it's not true! They're only separated from me by time. And Chiri and Kim Idim, in whatever far future age they fled to, they too are only separated from me by time."

Ethan's head straightened, and a worn smile came for the first time onto his haggard face.

"They're as real and living as I am, all of them. And maybe some day—some day——"