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"DAY OF JUDGMENT"

by

Edmond Hamilton

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

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Day of Judgment

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

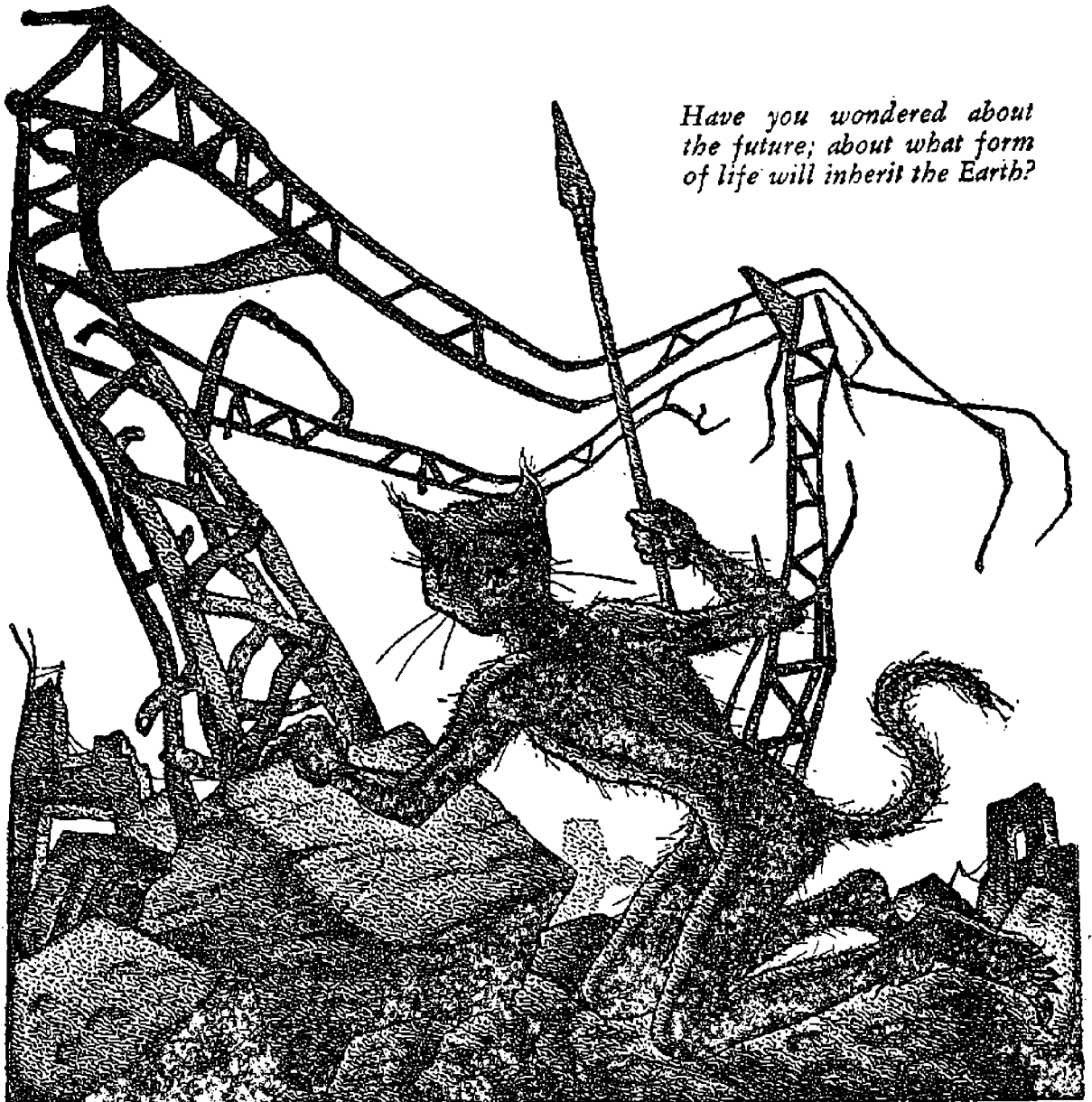
HAHL froze like a living statue in the moonlit forest as he heard a quick stir in the underbrush just ahead.

He raised his short, heavy spear ready for instant use, and listened. The sighing wind lazily stirred branches and made the

dappled moonlight on the ground waver. Then he heard the stir again, this time a little closer.

"One of the Clawed Clan," thought Hahl, wonderingly. "Why is he this far east?"

Hahl looked manlike, but he was not a



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

man. There were no men left on earth to walk these woods.

He was a stocky, erect figure whose body was covered with long brown hair. His head was not anthropoid but was a curiously elongated skull in whose dark muzzle-face his bright eyes gleamed watchfully.

Long white teeth showed as he breathed quickly, his pink tongue flashing. Despite his erect posture, spear and hide girdle, there was something very doglike about him.

Nor was that strange, for Hahl's people, the Hairy Clan, had been true canine quadrupeds not many generations before.

A hissing, whining voice suddenly called to him out of the thick underbrush ahead.

"Who comes? Greeting and peace from S'San of the Clawed Clan!"

Hahl answered. "Hahl of the Hairy Clan! Greeting and peace!"

At the reassuring formula, there emerged quickly from the brush the possessor of that hissing, challenging voice.

S'San of the Clawed Clan was also erect and manlike but he was as obviously of feline ancestry as Hahl was of canine.

His smooth-furred, tawny figure, sharp-pricked ears, luminous green eyes and taloned hands and feet were eloquent of his descent from the great cats of the previous age.

These two spoke quickly together in the meagre tongue used by all the forest clans, though it sounded differently in S'San's hissing voice than in Hahl's short, barking accents.

"You venture far east, brother!" Hahl was saying in surprise. "I expected to meet no one this near the great water."

"I have been far east, indeed!" exclaimed S'San. "I bring news of wonder from the place of Crying Stones!"

Hahl was dumfounded by amazement. If there was one place in all these forests that the Clans never approached, it was the Crying Stones.

That weird place by the sea was haunted—haunted by memory of ancient horror and fear. Even Hahl had only dared look upon it from a great distance.

"You have been to the Crying Stones?" he repeated, staring wonderingly at S'San.

The cat-man's green eyes flashed. "Only to the northern ridges, but from there I could see clearly. It was earlier tonight. The stones were not crying, so I dared approach that close.

"Then, as I watched, I saw a terrible thing happen. A star fell from the sky toward the Crying Stones! It fell quite slowly, flaming very bright, until it rested amid the stones. But resting there, it still shone. I hastened to bring the news to all the Clans!"

Hahl's deep brown eyes were wide with wonder. "A star falling from the sky? What does it mean? Does it mean that the world will burn up again?"

"I do not know," muttered S'San. "But others may know. Trondor of the Hoofed Clan is wisest of us all. Let us take this news to him."

"First, I must see this fallen star for myself!" Hahl declared.

The cat-man showed reluctance. "It is a long way back to the Crying Stones. It would take us hours."

Hahl argued, "Unless another than yourself sees it, the Clans may not believe you."

That argument won over S'San. "I will go back with you. We can follow back my own trail."

Silently as shadows, the two dissimilar figures started in a run through the moonlit forest. The springy bounds of the cat-man and the shorter, loping strides of Hahl carried them forward at an even, easy pace.

THE forest was stirring about them to the rising wind, the patter of checkered shade and moonlight dancing and wavering. From far away to the west, the wind brought them once the faint echoes of a deep-voiced hunting-call.

Hahl's keen senses perceived every sight and sound as they ran, but his thoughts were wrapped in wonder. He had always been deeply, if fearfully, interested in the Crying Stones. And now this marvel—a star falling upon them from the sky!

They changed direction, moving southward now through the forest. Presently they came to an open ridge from which they could look far southward in the moonlight.

S'San halted, pointed with his taloned hand. "Look! The star still shines!"

Hahl peered frozenly. "It is true! A star shining upon the ground!"

They were looking southward along a long, narrow island enclosed by arms of the moonlit sea. The island bore scattered trees and brush, but most of it was heaped with queerly geometrical masses of blackened, blasted stone.

A long way southward there was an oblong open space amid the rectangular masses of blackened stone, and from there shone a brilliant light that was indeed like a bright star fallen from the sky.

As Hahl and S'San peered, the west wind strengthened. And as it blew through those towering masses of shattered black stone, there came through the moonlight the mournful, swelling, wailing sound that had given this place its name.

S'San crouched tensely with hair bristling, and Hahl gripped his spear more tightly as that wailing anthem smote their ears.

"The stones cry out again!" whispered the cat-man. "Let us return!"

But Hahl remained rooted. "I am going down there! I must see that star more closely."

It took all his courage to make and announce the decision. Only his intense interest in the shining wonder down there overcame his instinctive dread of this place.

"Go into the Crying Stones? Are you mad?" demanded S'San. "This place is still cursed with the evil of the Strange Ones!"

Hahl shivered slightly, and almost forsook his intention. But he summoned his courage.

"The Strange Ones have been dead a long time, and cannot harm us now. You can wait here until I return."

Instantly, pride flared into S'San's green eyes. "Shall the Hairy Clan venture where the Clawed Clan dares not? I go with you into this madness."

Madness indeed it seemed to Hahl's whirling mind as he and the cat-man began their tense journey down into the somber place.

The ancient horror of the Strange Ones had risen to grip him. Old, old in all the forest clans, was that deep horror. Even

though the Strange Ones had vanished from Earth in the catastrophe of long ago, the dread of them still haunted the forest folk.

And this weird place of towering, blackened stones that cried to the wind had been the lair of the Strange Ones before they and the old age ended. Tradition of that had kept this spot shunned always.

Yet Hahl went on, driven by his eager interest, and the cat-man's pride kept him with him. They came to the narrow river that bounded the northern end of the island. Hahl plunged in and swam strongly. S'San, with all his Clan's aversion to water, followed gingerly.

THEY clambered ashore and now were among the Crying Stones. Gaunt, mournful in the moonlight, rose the blackened, shattered masses that wailed so heart-breakingly in the wind.

"This trail leads straight south toward the place where the star shines," Hahl murmured. "We can get very close."

The trail was straighter than any forest trail, and was intersected and paralleled by other straight trails through the stones.

Louder, louder, rose the wail of wind among the looming stone masses, deep and solemn as a requiem. Hahl felt the hair on his back lifting to the sound.

They entered the oblong clearing in which were no masses of stone. Through the trees, the star upon the ground shone very brilliantly as they stole toward it. They finally crouched in a thicket only a spear-cast from it.

"It is no star!" whispered S'San, amazedly. "But what is it?"

"I do not know," Hahl murmured, staring. "I have seen nothing like it."

The object at which they stared was clearly visible in the bright moonlight. It glinted metallically, a big thing like an elongated egg whose sides were scarred and battered. It was so large that it bulked as high as the smaller trees.

Hahl perceived that the brilliant, star-like light came from an opening in the side of the metal bulk. Then his keen ears caught a slight sound.

"There is someone inside the thing!" he told S'San in a tense whisper.

"There could not be!" the cat-man pro-

tested. "None in all the Clans would dare enter such a—"

"Listen!" murmured Hahl. "Whoever it is, is coming out!"

They crouched, watching. A figure appeared in the lighted opening, slowly emerging.

It was not one of the forest folk, that erect figure. It was shaped much like Hahl and S'San, but its body was covered by close-fitting garments, its head was different, its face pink, flat and hairless.

"By the Sun!" whispered S'San, quivering wildly. "It is one of the Strange Ones of long ago!"

Hahl felt frozen by horror. "The Strange Ones who burned up the world! They've returned!"

Stupefaction held the two. All their lives, the tradition of the mad Strange Ones of the past who had almost destroyed the world before they destroyed themselves, had been told by the Clans.

It had been a terror of long ago, a dim tale of ancient dread. But now, suddenly, that terror was real.

Hahl watched, shivering. The Strange One there in the moonlight was acting queerly. He stood, looking at the somber black masses of stone that rose in the moonlight, listening to the wailing wind.

Then the Strange One hid his face in hands. A low sound came from him.

"He is weeping," whispered Hahl, incredulously.

"There is another—a she!" hissed S'San.

A second Strange One, a softer female figure, had come out of the big metal object. She put an arm around the weeping man.

"Quick, we must escape from here and warn the Clans!" whispered S'San tautly.

Hahl started to back with him through the thicket. But in his stupefied state of mind, he forgot to place his feet carefully.

A twig snapped. The man out in the moonlight jerked up his head, and swiftly drew a metal tube from his belt.

"Run for it!" cried S'San instantly.

The two plunged out of the thicket. At sight of them, the man and woman in the moonlight cried out in terror and the man levelled his tube.

A flash of light darted from it and struck

both the fleeing two. Hahl felt a violent shock, then darkness.

HAHL awoke with sunlight on his face. He stirred and sat up, then uttered a howling cry of surprise and dismay.

He was in a small room with metal walls, its doorway closed by heavy wire netting. S'San was just awaking also, beside him.

"We are in the big metal thing of the Strange Ones!" cried Hahl. "They stunned us, captured us!"

S'San's feline rage exploded. The cat-man hurled himself at the netting, clawing furiously. Hahl joined him.

In both of them was the violent repulsion of free forest folk who found themselves for the first time trapped and prisoned.

"I knew when we saw the Strange Ones that they had come back to bring more evil to the world!" raged S'San.

He and Hahl suddenly stopped their vain attack on the netting and crouched back. The two Strange Ones had appeared outside the barrier.

The man and woman seemed young. They stood, looking in apparent wonder at the two dissimilar captives, the hairy dog-man and his blazing-eyed companion of the Clawed Clan.

"They will kill us now!" hissed S'San. "They always brought death, wherever they went."

"They do not *look* so cruel," Hahl said uncertainly.

For Hahl, despite his dread, could not feel the hatred and rage toward their captors that the cat-man did. Something deep in Hahl tugged strangely at his spirit as he stared at the Strange Ones.

The man outside the netting spoke to the woman. Hahl could not understand. But the sound of the voice somehow soothed him.

Food was brought and put through a hole in the barrier. S'San furiously refused it at first. But after a time, he too ate of it.

The Strange Ones then began earnestly to speak to the two prisoners. They held up pictures of various objects, and asked questions.

Hahl slowly understood. "They seek to learn our language so they can talk to us."

"Have nothing to do with them!" S'San

warned distrustfully. "They have evil in their minds."

"It can do no harm to teach them how we speak," Hahl defended. "Then maybe they would let us go."

Hi began to answer the questions of the Strange Ones, by naming for them in the language of the forest Clans the simple pictured objects and actions.

SEVERAL days of this imprisonment passed, as Hahl patiently repeated words for the two Strange Ones. By now, he had learned that the names of the man and woman were "Blaine" and "Myra." S'San still remained stubbornly silent, crouching and watching in hate.

Then came an evening on which the Strange Ones had learned the language of the Clans enough to speak it. For the man Blaine spoke to Hahl in his own tongue.

"Who are you two?" he asked the dog-man. "What has happened to Earth?"

"We are of the Clans," Hahl answered hesitantly. "But from where did *you* come? Long ago, all the Strange Ones perished from Earth."

"Strange Ones—you mean men and women?" Blaine said. Then his face paled. "You mean that all mankind is gone from Earth?"

"It happened in the days of my forefathers, many summers ago," Hahl answered. "Then, so the tale runs, the world was different. There were hosts of Strange Ones who dwelt in mighty lairs, who wielded the powers of thunder and lightning, and who ruled the world.

"Our forefathers, the forefathers of our Clans, were not then like us. They ran upon four feet, nor could they speak or do the other things we can do. The Strange Ones killed them, and enslaved them, and even massacred them for sport.

"But finally came the day when the world burned. The tale says that the Strange Ones loosed their lightning powers upon each other! Awful thunder-fires raged across the world! All the Strange Ones and their mighty lairs perished when the world burned thus. Our own forefathers' four-footed races mostly perished also, but a few here and there in deep forests and mountains survived.

"But the thunder-fires had somehow changed these survivors. For when they later gave birth to young, the young were new and different races. They were like us, no longer four-footed, no longer dim of mind, but able to stand erect and to learn speech and skills. And we of the forest Clans have remained thus in the generations since then."

"Good God!" whispered Blaine. "An atomic war—it finally came, and wiped out mankind and its cities!"

His face was dead white as he looked at the girl. "Myra, we two are the last humans left alive."

She pressed his hand. "At least our race is not dead yet! You and I—the race will start from us again!"

S'San, crouched behind Hahl, raised his head, and his flaring green eyes blazed at them.

The girl Myra looked incredulously at Hahl and S'San. "But how could that awful disaster change four-footed animals to manlike, intelligent races?"

"We do not know," answered Hahl. "It was something in the terrible magic of the thunder-fires."

"Sudden mutation," muttered Blaine. "Atomic explosions on that scale of that holocaust, drenching all surviving animal life with hard radiation, so altered the gene-patterns as to cause a sudden evolutionary spurt."

Hahl was looking wonderingly at the man and girl. "But from where did *you* come? We believed all the Strange Ones dead."

Blaine pointed heavily upward. "We came from another world, a world far up in the sky called Venus. Generations ago, some of our human race went there to start a colony.

"But after a little time, no more ships came from Earth. Without supplies, the colony withered. Storms and other disasters had damaged the colony's own few ships beyond use, and vainly it waited for word from Earth that never came.

"Finally, Myra and I were the last born of the dwindling colonists. We grew up, knowing ourselves doomed unless we could repair one of the old ships enough to get back to Earth. And we finally succeeded,

and came back. We came back to find—*this!*"

His voice shook and his hand trembled as he gestured toward the distant masses of blackened stone looming in the sunset outside.

"This, then, is why Earth never sent more ships to its dying colony! Earth's humans had perished, self-slain in atomic war!"

Hahl had only dimly followed what the man Blaine told. But somehow, the emotion of the man and girl troubled Hahl.

Myra was looking at Blaine, her face white but brave.

"It can all start again, from us," she said. "It must, since we are the last."

Hahl asked them, "Are you going to kill S'San and myself?"

"Kill you?" Blaine seemed startled. "No! When we first glimpsed you and stunned you with a force-beam, we thought you prowling wild beasts about to attack. But when we looked at you and saw you must be intelligent creatures, we wanted only to detain and question you."

HE REACHED in his pocket and brought forth a key. "You two are free to go now."

Hahl's heart bounded as the heavy wire door opened. He stepped out, following the man and girl down the narrow corridor to the door opening out into the sunset.

S'San, eyes flaring green fire, whispered swiftly to Hahl as he stalked along the corridor with him.

"Now is our chance, Hahl! We can slay them before he can draw the weapon! Spring with me when they reach the door!"

Hahl felt a wild revulsion. "But we can't do that! We can't slay *them!*"

"They are Strange Ones!" hissed S'San. "They will start once more the evil race that will again bring terror to the world! We can save the Clans from that by slaying. Spring—*now!*"

And with the hissed word, the cat-man launched himself in a lightning leap at the man who had just emerged behind the girl into the open air.

Instincts undreamed of until this moment exploded in Hahl's brain. He did not know why, but he could not let the Strange Ones

be killed. Somehow, they were *his* Strange Ones!

Hahl uttered a yelping cry as he hurled himself only a split-second after the cat-man. Blaine whirled, startled, as Hahl's hairy body hit S'San and sent him rolling over and over outside.

"Myra, get back!" yelled Blaine. "The creatures are—"

He had whipped out his metal weapon but he stood without using it, astounded.

Hahl stood in front of the man and girl, all his rough hair bristling, as he glared at the raging cat-man who had regained his feet with inconceivable swiftness a few yards away.

"Clan-truce is broken if you seek to slay these Strange Ones!" cried Hahl. "You will have to slay me first!"

"You are traitor to the Clans!" hissed S'San. "But the Clans themselves shall swiftly bring death to these evil ones!"

And with a lightning bound, the cat-man was gone into the thickets, racing away northward amid the black Crying Stones.

The man and girl were looking at Hahl in wonder.

"Hahl, you saved us from your comrade. Why did you?" Blaine asked.

Hahl squirmed uncomfortably. "I do not know. I could not let him harm you."

Blaine's face strangely softened, and he put his hand on the dog-man's hairy shoulder.

"Hahl, only one race among the creatures in the old age was man's loyal friend," he said huskily. "The race from which you are descended."

Hahl's heart swelled at the touch of the hand on his shoulder, and he felt a queer, new happiness.

From far out in the darkening twilight came the echoes of a screaming call.

"Send the Clan-call through all the forests!" echoed S'San's distant cry. "Strange Ones have returned! Gather the Clans!"

Hahl whirled to the man and girl. "The Clans will gather here quickly! They will come in hosts, and you must escape or they will kill you lest you burn up the world as the other Strange Ones did long ago."

Blaine shook his head helplessly. "We cannot escape. The power of our ship is

exhausted. And there is not enough power left in my weapon to stand off a horde."

The girl looked at him, white face strained in the gathering darkness. "Then this is the end of us? Of our race?"

FROM far out in the night, S'San's Clan-call was faintly repeated, carried across the dark forests north and south and west.

Hahl's mind was in a fever of torment as helplessly they waited. The man and girl who now stood close together, speaking in low whispers—they were *his*, and he must somehow save them. But how?

The moon rose, a full orb casting a silver effulgence on the somber dead city. And as the night wind wailed mournfully louder through the Crying Stones, Hahl's keen ears caught other sounds, his eyes glimpsed dark shapes surging southward through the ruins.

"They are coming! All the Clans of the forest come to kill you!" he warned agonizedly.

Blaine stood in the moonlight, the girl in the circle of his arm, looking heavily northward.

"You can do nothing more for us, Hahl. Get away from here, and save yourself."

Hahl sensed the gathering of the Clans around the clearing. He knew that only this dire emergency would have brought them into the shunned and accursed place of Crying Stones.

The Clawed Clan of S'San was there, cat-eyes gleaming greenly in the dark. His own Hairy Clan, hosts of dog-men, were staring at him in amazement. The Furred Clan's bear-like horde, the Fox-Folk peering sharply—all the forest folk had come.

Last, came the Hoofed Clan, ponderous, towering, manlike, but their hoofed feet and stiff, horny hands and massive maned heads betraying the equine ancestors of whom they were an evolution.

S'San's hissing voice ripped the tense silence as the cat-man bounded out into the moonlit clearing.

"Did I lie, Clan-brothers? Are they not two Strange Ones such as worked evil long ago?"

The deep, rumbling voice of Trondor, leader of the Hoofed Clan, answered from the darkness.

"You have told truth, S'San. These are indeed two of that terrible race whom we thought dead."

"Then slay them!" raged a feline voice in the shadows. "Kill, before they again burn up the world!"

There was a surging movement of the shadowy hordes out into the moonlight where Blaine stood with Myra clinging to his side.

Hahl uttered a furious howling cry, and flung himself protectively in front of the man and girl. Eyes flaring red, sharp teeth bared, Hahl cried to the advancing horde.

"Forest-folk, is this the justice of the Clans? To condemn these two without even a hearing?"

"They are Strange Ones!" hissed S'San. "They darkened the world for ages and finally almost destroyed it. Let them die!"

"Kill them thus without hearing, and you will need to kill me first!" raged Hahl.

From his own folk, from the masses of the Hairy Clan, there came a low whine of sympathy.

"Perhaps we do not need to kill these Strange Ones when there are only two?" muttered one of the dog-men.

Big Trondor spoke in his deep voice. "You say that because you of the Hairy Clan are still haunted by an old loyalty to the Strange Ones."

The Hoofed One slowly added, "But Hahl is right, when he says that we Clans condemn none without a hearing. Let the Strange One defend himself and his race from death-sentence, if he can!"

Blaine had been listening, and had understood. Now he put the girl behind him and stepped forth in front of Hahl.

IN THE moonlight, the white-faced man faced the crouched masses of the hordes with his head erect and voice steady.

"Clans of the forest, since in us our race is ending, I will speak for all of my race who went before us.

"We men came of the forest-folk long ago, even as you, though our pride grew so great that we forgot that fact. Yes, long and long ago we sprang from soft-skinned, weak, fumbling creatures of the forest

world, creatures that had no claws or strength or swiftness.

"But one thing those creatures had, and that was curiosity. And curiosity was the key that unlocked for them the hidden powers of nature, so that they grew strong. So strong we grew, so great we deemed ourselves, that we thought ourselves a different order of beings and oppressed and tyrannized the other creatures of Earth.

"Yet for all the powers our curiosity had gathered for us, we remained in mind and heart close kin to the simple forest-creatures from which we came. Is it wonderful then that we could not handle those powers wisely? Is it wonderful that when we finally thefted the fires of the sun itself, we misused them and wrecked the world?"

"Yet, forest-races, are you so sure that any of *your* Clans would have handled such powers more wisely?"

Blaine paused for a moment before his heavy voice concluded.

"But I know that that is scant excuse for the evil we did. It is yours to judge. If your judgment be against us, let the stars look down tonight on the ending of our race. Let finis be written to the terrible and wonderful story of the apes who dared lay hands on the sun, and who greatly rose and fell. And let your new forest races learn from our failure and try to do better than we."

There was a long, hushed silence among the moonlit hosts of the Clans, as Blaine's voice ceased.

Then Hahl heard the deep voice of Trondor rumble from the shadows.

"Clan-brothers all, you have heard the Strange One. Now what is your judgment on him and on his race?"

No voice answered for a moment. And then a dark figure among the bearlike Furred Clan spoke.

"Judge you for us, Trondor. You are the wisest of the Clans."

The man and girl, and Hahl who still stood defiantly in front of them in the moonlight, waited tensely.

TRONDOR'S rumbling voice came slowly. "What the Strange One has said is true, that his race were but forest-folk like

ourselves long ago. We had forgotten that, as they forgot it. It may be that with their powers, we would have been no wiser.

"The world has changed now. And it seems that the Strange Ones have changed too, and have learned. If they have, there is room in the world for them and our own new races to live in friendship."

Blaine spoke huskily. "I can promise, for ourselves. The world has changed, as you say. What powers are devised in future must be handled for the good of all our races. I think the world will not burn again."

Trondor flung up his massive maned head, and his voice rang loud.

"Then it is my judgment that we give Clan-brotherhood to the Strange Ones! That an old and blind world be forgotten in new friendship and peace!"

Swiftly, from the eager hosts of the Hairy Clan, came the yelped greetings of Hahl's brothers.

"Clan of the Strange Ones, greeting and peace!"

Clan-greeting from the Furred Ones, from the Fox-Folk, from the Hoofed Ones, echoed deafeningly through the moonlight.

Last of all, a little sulkily but with the blaze of hatred gone from his green eyes, S'San spoke.

"Greeting and peace from the Clawed Clan, Strange Ones!"

"The moon sinks, now let the Clans depart," Trondor rumbled. "But we will return, Strange Ones. This place is no longer cursed."

Blaine and Myra watched as the hosts departed. But when all had gone, Hahl still remained.

"I would like to stay with you," he said slowly. And he added hopefully, "I would be your servant."

Blaine gripped his hairy arm. "No, Hahl—master and servant no longer, but friend and friend now. In this new world where all now are friends, our tie is oldest and deepest."

From far out in the darkness echoed the last Clan-call of the separating hosts. And the wailing of the Crying Stones seemed to die into peace, as the wind sank and dawn glimmered slowly across the world.