

PLANET STORIES



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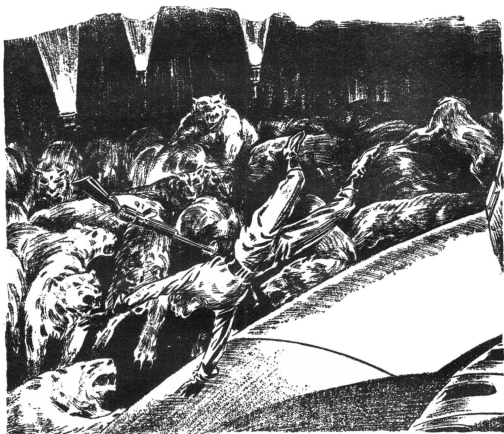
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Illustrated by SHARP



THE SEARCHLIGHTS PLAYING across the building's dark windows, the police cordon holding back the crowd—the telenews cameras ate it up.

The telenews men never seemed to care whether they got in the way of a stray shot or not. They had the video cameras set up right out in the middle of the icy street. The announcer was talking rapidly into his portable mike.

"They've got the building surrounded now, folks! For those who faded in late, this is your teletabloid reporter bringing you an on-the-spot picture. . . ."

The picture was being reproduced on television screens throughout the ice-bound

world, in London, Moscow, Singapore, New York—in New York's buried city in particular. It was happening there. New Yorkers crowded around their screens in the bright plastic salons deep in the vital-lamped society levels, in the tidy middle-class apartments several miles nearer the surface, even in a dingy hovel just under the earth's frozen crust, a few blocks from where the scene was being enacted, a sallow-faced tenement family was gathered around an ancient Eightieth Century television set.

"It's one of The Bear's gang, folks! Although the rest of the gang got away after this morning's Radium Bank stick-up, the

By **CARL**
SELWYN

"I'll get him! I'll get him!"
screamed Lois.



police wounded one of them. They've trailed him to this vacant building high in the upper levels and—Wait! What's this! A plainclothes man just went in the building! He went in there *alone*. . . ."

* * * * *

. . . It was dark inside.

Johnny Steel flashed his light on the stairs. There was the same red trail that had brought them here—blood, frozen as it fell. He cut the light off again instantly, pausing till his eyes got used to the dark-

ness again. The heavy pistol was cold in his hand.

Perhaps he *was* crazy, coming in here alone! The Homicide Squad had certainly thought so when he'd ordered them to wait outside.

The stairs were a vague outline slanting up into the deserted building's gloom. At the top, a corridor cut off to the right.

"Floyd . . ." Steel called softly. He'd told no one that he knew the man they were hunting down. "Floyd, this is Johnny Steel. I'm coming up alone. . . ."

His voice echoed through the chill corridor above. There was no answer.

He moved slowly up the stairs. He was a big man, tall and heavy with most of the weight in his arms and shoulders. Near the corner at the top, he paused, listening in the darkness.

"Afraid to come up, Johnny?"

Steel jumped. He flattened against the wall. The hoarse voice wasn't three feet from his ear. His finger took up the slack in his pistol's trigger.

"Your boys got in some pretty good target practice on me this afternoon, didn't they, Johnny?" The voice came from just around the corner. Steel felt the sweat trickling down his neck despite the cold. "You wouldn't tell 'em to take it easy, huh—that I was an old chum of yours?"

Steel finally found his voice. "Floyd, you killed two guards in that Radium Bank. I came up here to try to reason with you—because you used to be my best friend. Tell me who The Bear is—and I'll do my best to help you at the trial."

A husky laugh echoed in the dark corridor. "You know I'm no squealer, Johnny." But now there was a faintly preoccupied tone in the voice. Then Steel heard the faintest scrape of a foot on the corridor floor.

"Floyd!" Steel pled. "Listen to reason!" He paused a moment, listening. But only a moment. Then he backed quickly and silently several steps down stairs. He left the right wall and quickly crouched over against the left. The next instant, he saw a hand flick around the corner at the head of the stairs. A volt pistol roared, blasting the spot where he had been standing.

As the building trembled with the explosion, a figure appeared around the corner, looking down the stairs.

"Floyd! For God's sake—!" Steel cried.

Instantly, the pistol in the figure's hand whipped toward Steel's voice. And Steel couldn't take another chance.

He fired.

The figure hung there a moment like a clubbed ox. Then it crumpled to the floor.

STEEL lowered his pistol slowly. Big shoulders sagging, he walked slowly up the steps. There were tears in his eyes as he stood there looking down at the shadowed form on the floor. Around him he

felt the familiar walls of the old deserted building in which as small boys they'd played cops and robbers together. They had played together in that very street outside, grown up together in that cold miserable place of eternal twilight that was the slums of New York City in 8646 A. D. What chance did a kid have in that environment! Only by sheer luck had he himself been sent to an orphanage in the warm lower levels instead of to a reformatory. It wasn't Floyd's fault that he lay here dead by a policeman's gun. It was the fault of Nineth Century civilization.

Looking down at the friend he'd been forced to kill, Steel knew that somehow, if it took him the rest of his life, he had to brighten that shadowed world in the street outside—and he declared a private war against the gangsters who led its kids astray. . . .

He walked down the steps and called to his men. "Come on up. It's all over."

But he knew it wasn't all over. For Johnny Steel, it had just started.

The morgue men bringing the body out, the District Attorney slapping Detective John Steel on the back—the telenevs rehashed the story every hour on the hour. "Definitely slated for the Police Medal, the husky young cop who this afternoon brought down with one shot . . ."

The leather-faced old man sitting across the desk twirled a knob on the office video screen, turning the announcer's voice down. "Johnny"—his hawk face beamed around his pipe—"with all this publicity you're going to be Commissioner when I retire."

Steel shook his head patiently. "Quit trying to change the subject, Chief," he said. He uncrossed his long legs and leaned forward in his chair. "Listen—you say you'll give me a Patrol. But you've sent Patrols up on the ice before. When they get there they can't find a soul. The Bear's got scouts out. They can spot a large group too easy. I tell you it's a one-man job."

Commissioner Brandt sighed. "Johnny," he said and his eyes stopped smiling. "I tell you I don't intend to lose another one of my best blood-hounds." He took his pipe out of his mouth to point it at the gold-starred plaque on the office wall. "In the last two years I've sent five good men up on the ice after The Bear. None have come back"

It was true. Steel eyed him a moment. Then he got up and paced the length of the office, hands deep in his pockets. Finally, he walked over to the inter-office video and cut it on. A police sergeant's face faded in on the screen. "Put The Bear file on," Steel told him.

"Yes, sir." The sergeant pressed a button and his face faded with his words. It was replaced by a title card, then the complete sound-picture reel of everything police records had on The Bear.

"Go on," Commissioner Brandt said, watching from his desk. "After you find out more about him, maybe you'll forget this damn fool idea of yours."

Steel ignored him, stared thoughtfully at the screen. What he saw was not pretty.

The Consolidated Tungsten Plant, a \$500,000 haul. Central Electric, bankrupt after one robbery. Uranium, Inc. had lost a cool million and its vice president. But the victim topping the list was Vita-Heat. The Bear had pulled five separate jobs there in the last two years. Not only had Vita-Heat lost a fortune in irreplaceable equipment but six faithful employees had disappeared without a trace—no trace except that symbol that struck terror in every insurance executive's heart: An ice-bear's claw, left sticking in the wall like a dagger.

That wasn't all.

Not only had five of Brandt's special investigators vanished when they went after The Bear but sometimes their wives, children, and close friends, too. Often, when The Bear's revenge was through, there was nobody left to receive a police pension. Such was The Bear's long reign of horror—robbery, kidnapping, murder. Worst perhaps was the fact that the body of none of his victims was ever found. But, of course, the endless ice moor up on the earth's desolate crust was a mute and careful sexton. . . .

Steel cut the video off. Commissioner Brandt came around the desk and put a hand on his shoulder. "Johnny," he said, "We've proved there's no sense trying to find The Bear's hideout in empty billion ice caves on the surface. The only thing we can do is keep on setting traps for him—try to figure out where he's going to strike next. We did it today and we got one of them. Next time maybe we'll get The Bear himself."

"Next time!" Steel turned away disgustedly. "While we're waiting, The Bear's recruiting more kids in the upper levels to do his dirty work. We won't get The Bear. We'll keep on killing these poor kids he gets to work for him." He walked over to the glass case standing in the corner, stared down at the ivory saber-like ice-bear's claw inside, a sample of The Bear's visiting card. Then suddenly he turned back to the Commissioner. "Chief," he said, "will you let me go after him alone or won't you?"

"Johnny, I just can't let you risk—"

"Okay," Steel said. His hand slipped inside his coat, came out with his little silver detective shield. He laid it on the Commissioner's desk. "Vita-Heat, Inc. is offering \$100,000 reward for The Bear. It looks like I'm going into the private detective business."

THE DOME of vita-lamps high above the glistening canyons of the lower level bathed the creamy streets in a golden shower as Steel's tunnel car shot out of the midtown exit. He swerved through the traffic on the mirrored boulevard and drew up before a smooth plastic structure that soared above the other buildings on the level. Letters six feet high on the building's face read VITA-HEAT, INC. He got out, strode into the building and took the express chute up.

When the chute door opened, he stepped out into the luminous paneled reception room and went over to the blonde receptionist. "John Steel," he said, "I called Mr. Stahl. He's expecting me."

The blonde charged up a smile for him; then she realized he wasn't staring at her well-filled tunic but at his own thoughts. She repeated his words into her desk microphone, a green light flashed, and she said coldly, "All right. Go on in." Across the room, a panel in the wall slid back.

Steel walked in. The panel closed again quickly behind him.

A fluorescent ceiling's blue-white glow burnished the carved cave-tree wood of an office befitting Vita-Heat's President. Behind a gleaming desk, Hampton Stahl's great bulk rose, pink cheeks smiling. Then Steel saw with some surprise the young woman who reclined in a pillow chair beside the desk. With more surprise, he recognized her from telenevs glimpses of so-

ciety. It was Miss Lois Harmon, emerald-eyed queen of last season's debutantes, and Steel frowned slightly; he had come here strictly on business. Then Stahl was shaking his hand, introducing him.

Stahl was a big man, tall as well as fat, but his bulk wasn't that with which middle age often covers a big man. His weight was that of a blue ribbon pig, a great white pig swilled on the 90th Century's greatest private fortune. And, Steel thought, the girl was also an expensive looking animal, lean, golden tan, smooth. Her hair was the same golden hue of her cheeks.

"Miss Harmon, you know, is the daughter of my late partner," Stahl said when his visitor was seated. "I'm trying to persuade her to sell me her stock in the company."

"It's because I always argue with him at directors' meetings," the girl laughed. She was as smooth all over as a pedigreed cat. She'd inherited a fortune when her father, one of Vita-Heat's founders, had been killed in a laboratory explosion many years ago. "Now go right ahead with your business," she said, rising. "I've got to go downstairs to the Bank. When you're through," she told Stahl, "you can pick me up there for cocktails." She smiled at Steel, gave him her exquisitely manicured hand and departed. Twenty-four karat, Steel thought. He wondered if she'd have turned out as well however if she'd been brought up in a tenement in the upper levels. . . .

When the panel closed behind her, Stahl turned back to his visitor. "So," he said, "we have another who thinks the risk worth the reward?"

"That," Steel said, "is what I came here to talk about. Mr. Stahl, your corporation has a standing offer of \$100,000 for anybody who gets The Bear. I want a million."

The brows shot up over Stahl's piggy eyes. "What!"

"Here's my proposition," Steel said, smiling. "Instead of rewarding me—if I get The Bear—I want Vita-Heat to go into partnership with me. A sort of partnership in philanthropy. As my reward, I want Vita-Heat to go to work in the upper levels"

Hampton Stahl adjusted a long cigarette into a silver holder. "I must say, this is—"

"It shouldn't run into much," Steel continued. "You'd be using your own material

and labor at cost prices. It would just be a matter of installing enough vita-lamps up there for people to live by—there's only one to a street corner up there now."

"But—a million dollars!"

"Mr. Stahl," Steel said, "your company's already lost five million and, the way I see it, you're going to lose a lot more if The Bear isn't stopped. I think this partnership business of mine is pretty sound. We both have good reason to want The Bear brought to justice."

Suddenly a cunning look came into Stahl's eyes. "Just what makes you so anxious to get The Bear, Mr. Steel?"

For a moment, Steel hesitated. But he couldn't forget that picture in his mind—Floyd, lying in that deserted building, cornered, hunted down like a mad dog. Sure it was justice—but what had made him a mad dog! His smile faded. "All right," he said quietly, "I'll tell you why I want to get The Bear. It's the same reason I want to get you, Mr. Stahl—or your money rather. Those poor souls in the upper levels have two enemies—the gangsters and the big corporations. The gangsters find a young kid up there, give him a gun and make a criminal out of him. And your corporations force him into a career of crime just as much as the gangsters do. You own the tenements. You make those people live in conditions that are so bad you won't even go up there and look at them. You pay \$2.00 a day in your mercury mines while you get \$4.00 a day rent for your vita-lamps." Steel had to hang on to his temper. "If the upper levels are given a chance to live decently, they will live decently!"

Stahl's thick lips curled in amusement. "A pretty speech, Mr. Steel. I admire your philosophy." He sank back in his chair, toying with his silver cigarette holder. "But business, you know, is business. . . ."

Steel stared at him, wondering what was holding him back. He wasn't a member of the Force anymore. Reach across that desk and push his fat face in! Instead, he said, "Okay, I guess that's all then. I'll have to do what I can with just the reward money."

As he stood up an intercom box on Stahl's desk buzzed urgently. Stahl's plump finger touched a button.

"Mr. Stahl!" a voice shrieked from the

box. "A gang of masked men—they just held up the radium vault in the bank downstairs again!"

The pink color drained from Stahl's fat cheeks. His thick lips fell open.

Steel's hand darted into his coat pocket and came out with his gun. He started for the door. "Come on!" he said. "If that's The Bear it's the second time he's struck today!"

IT WAS. Sticking in the vaults lead wall was a gleaming white ice bear's claw. That was all—except the chattering crowd, a small army of Stahl's embarrassed guards, and Miss Lois Harmon who had seen the whole thing.

A masked gloved man had suddenly appeared at the teller's cage and at each alarm button—they'd seemed to know the layout perfectly, she told Steel. There were seven of them; four held pistols on the crowd while the other three emptied the contents of the vault into leadex bags. Then they'd marched out, stepped into a waiting tunnel car and streaked into the upper level tunnel. The girl's green eyes were bright with excitement. She seemed to be enjoying this like a telemovie.

"It was wonderful! I only wish they'd kidnapped me and taken me with them."

Steel looked at her with open disgust. Poor bored little rich girl—he felt like turning her across his knee and spanking that \$200 girdle. "It was just sheer luck somebody wasn't killed here," he said. "Now you stick around. I hope the police lock you up as a material witness."

The cop on the corner had called the station and the squad was on the way. The gun in Steel's hand was all the authority he needed however. He cleared the crowd away from the vault and walked in. Hampton Stahl followed him, wringing his pudgy hands. "The second time today!" he moaned. "They're trying to ruin me!"

The vault was perfectly safe from radiation now. It was empty, every drawer cleaned out. Steel braced his knee against the wall and pulled out the claw. "We've never found fingerprints on one of these yet." The claw was about eight inches long, white with a faint tinge of pink. He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment. Suddenly he held it up to the light and examined it carefully. He glanced from the

claw to Stahl. Then he reached out, dropped the claw in the fat man's vest pocket. "Well," he said, "have you changed your mind about my proposition now?"

Stahl lifted the thing from his pocket as if it were a spider and threw it on a table. "Anything," he murmured, "They may try to kill me next!"

"Fine!" Steel grinned at him. "But since you were so slow making up your mind, I want an additional clause in my contract now—a little life insurance policy with the upper levels as the beneficiary. You pay off if I get The Bear or if The Bear gets me."

Stahl looked at him in silence. It was hard to tell whom he was cursing, The Bear or Steel. "What makes you think you can even find The Bear's hideout?"

Steel picked up the claw again. "I just noticed there is a tinge of pink in this thing," he said, "and it's only eight inches long. This claw came from an ice-bear cub that was born only a few months ago and the only place they're born this time of the year is near that warm comet crater up on the surface near the Jersey Ruins." He dropped the claw back on the table. "Now, if you won't let anyone know I'm working for you," he said, "I'm going up there on a little hunting trip. . . ."

II

THE INTERLEVEL LIMITED left the lower warmth and streaked up the great winding tunnel through the neat residential suburbs, through the squalid upper levels, through the ice-locked roots of ancient Manhattan. But Steel barely noticed when the windows in his compartment frosted over. He was studying his glacier maps.

The comet crater was located near the frozen ruins of what was once a surface city named Jersey. He'd been on a snow-deer hunt up there once; an old guide had told him about the ice-bear cubs.

Steel plotted his course from the Surface Terminal to the Ruins, then checked his equipment list—electrosuit, oxygen helmet, volt rifle, rations. He'd charter a little ski plane at the Terminal.

When he finished, he leaned back in his seat and glanced at his watch. Almost there. Had he forgotten anything? Fitted into the oxygen helmet was a little radio unit so he

could keep in touch with Stahl. He'd set up a receiver in a vacant room in the Vita-Heat Building and arranged for one of Stahl's guards to be there at all times. He'd also arranged for Stahl to send a copy of their contract—reward or insurance—to Commissioner Brandt. Not that he didn't trust Stahl. . . . Well, it looked as if he was all set. He'd buy a hunting license to put on the ski plane—for all anybody'd know he was out for snow-clear. He'd spend the night at the Terminal Hotel, leave first thing in the morning. . . .

When the Limited's whirring ceased, he put away the maps and picked up his bag. As the outer door slid open, he stepped out into the vast Terminal and headed for the viewway that would take him to the hotel.

The Terminal was a heavily insulated cavern in the ice crust. The landing and departure stalls encircled the huge room where the motley thousands of hurrying travelers bought tickets, waved goodbyes or greetings, or waited sleepily around Dr. Albert Harmon's chrome statue. As Steel passed the statue of the shaggy-haired bespectacled old man, he eyed it thoughtfully. Dr. Harmon's experiments with household and jet propulsion heat had done a lot of good but it looked as if his green-eyed daughter wasn't good for anything but a cocktail party. . . . Then he was on the viewway. His spine tingled at the sight outside.

Standing on the crowded belt as it slid past the Terminal's long window, he had a perfect view of the glacier. Glistening in the starlight, the great ice waste stretched to the horizon like a sheet of silver. Tiny varicolored lights swept across the jet backdrop of outer space—freight planes bound for Earth's other buried city-states, for the frozen mines of Neptune, Venus, Mars, or for the nebulous worlds of other suns. Those other suns, pinpoints of light in infinity—when the Solar System had cooled, they had been a beckoning hope. Then their planets had been found even less inhabitable than Earth. Poisoned atmospheres, molten lands, boiling seas—habitation was impossible. It was undoubtedly mankind's greatest tragedy, Steel thought, that it was doomed to call a frozen Earth home forever.

"Look! A liner's coming in!"

A group of tourists ahead of Steel stepped off the belt to the walkway alongside and stared through the plexiglass window at a fish-like space ship that was drifting down to a landing stall nearby. Steel also stepped off to watch.

"It's all automatic," one of the tourists explained to his wife. "A radio beam brings 'em here and lands 'em. The pilots don't have much to do."

Steel watched the great ship settle to the stall's roof, the roof slid open, the ship sank in out of sight, the roof slide closed again.

"Let's go down and watch 'em unload." The tourists moved to a belt nearby that led to the landing stall. And, because he had nothing better to do till morning—Steel followed them.

The moment he got there he knew something was wrong.

"Get back!" A Terminal guard stepped in front of the group of onlookers. "Nobody's allowed near the ship!"

Beyond the quickly formed line of guards, Steel saw an excited group of Terminal executives gathered at the ship's open door. What was up? The ship appeared to be okay. It had come in all right.

"What's the trouble?" somebody asked.

The guard was staring anxiously at the ship himself. "Don't know," he said. "When that ship came in, *there wasn't nobody on it.*"

Steel shouldered his way to the front of the crowd to stare across at the ship's open door. Around him, the crowd buzzed with the news. A woman who had been waiting to meet somebody on the ship started screaming. The ship had come in on the radar beam, on time, but with pilots, stewardesses, twenty passengers, and cargo—missing!

"Pirates!" The word swept through the crowd. The ship had come from Venus. And not five minutes ago the pilot had reported he was arriving on schedule, the trip uneventful. Then the crowd quickly discovered what had happened. A Terminal cop appeared at the ship's door. A hush went over the crowd. In the cop's hand was an ice-bear's claw.

There was a hush, then one whisper in a thousand throats. "*The Bear!*"

Steel turned to a man beside him. "What was the cargo?"

"That—that's what so awful," the fellow said. "It was carrying a load of Venusian tungsoid. And there ain't but two things you can make with tungsoid—electrotubes or *suffo-gas!*"

Suffo-gas! A deadly vapor, its production had been banned on Earth ever since mankind moved underground. One whiff of suffo-gas in New York's ventilation pipes. . . . Steel turned back through the crowd.

He didn't take the belt to the hotel. He walked, big hands deep in his pockets, thinking, thinking things he hardly dared think of.

That ship had been pirated close by. Its route in from Venus was from the south-east. That cargo of tungsoid had been pirated over the Jersey Ruins. He was on the right track and it was a hurry-up job. There was little reason to believe The Bear had gotten interested in electrotubes. . . .

NEXT MORNING when the first yellow rays of the sun's dying ember slanted across the ice, Steel's ski plane circled up from the Terminal and headed south-east.

Crossing the sub-zero ice crevices on foot would have taken months but it was just a short hop by plane. It was a hop, however, that few planes took. Freight and liner traffic from the Terminal immediately headed for the stratosphere. Near the surface, the glacier's fangs probed every cloud and blizzards of liquid air roamed the uncharted chasms. Only an occasional prospector or hunter attempted low-altitude flying here and often these never returned.

This morning, however, Steel was lucky. The weather was clear and ceiling unusually high, the peaks rearing from the shadow-filled valleys like glittering icicles in the pale yellow light. When he checked his instruments by the chart and headed the plane down over the ice field that choked the Jersey Ruins, he grinned silently behind the control lever. Now, if the blizzard would only hold off for an hour or so. . . .

The crumbling ruins of ancient buildings jutted up from the snow, monuments of a long-departed civilization. Although never actually explored, the Ruins were

thought to extend for miles south of the comet crater. More was known about the crater itself since it was only a few centuries old. Its gigantic explosion had knifed a deep valley in the ice mountains that was still relatively warm. Lichen grew on the snow here, bats hung in the caves, and ice-bears had a shorter hibernation. And *The Bear*? Any crevice, any ruined building here might be his lair.

Scanning the drifts below through his windows, Steel looked for tracks, melting snow or rocket stains. As he looked, he kept an eye on his auto-sextant. As it clicked off the changing coordinates of his location, he marked his position on the chart. Vanish he might like those other five cops who'd gone after *The Bear*, Steel thought, but not without a trace—not as long as the little microphone in his helmet was ready for an instant S.O.S. He'd tested it at the Terminal; Stahl's man was on the job.

On a little plateau below, he saw a herd of bluish white snow-deer. They looked up and then stampeded in all directions as he passed over. Odd he hadn't seen any bears yet.

He was banking low over the half-buried top of a building, squinting down at the white drifts, when he saw the ball.

"Now how the hell did that happen . . ."

He circled lower. It was a ball of solid ice. He could see all the way through it. It was about six feet in diameter, smooth as glass. It was perfectly round, like a huge green bubble. It lay there on the snow, sparkling in the dull light. "Funny ice formation—"

Then the ball *moved*.

Watching, Steel almost rammed a building. He pulled up, staring at the thing. The ball rose slowly, ten feet above the snow. Suspended by nothing. Then it drifted slowly over the wastes, aimlessly, like a bubble in the breeze.

Steel followed it, amazed. A strong air current? But it wasn't affecting the plane. Besides, that chunk of ice probably weighed half a ton!

The thing finally came to rest against an ice crag near one of the wrecked buildings. Steel went in close and hovered, examining it with bewildered eyes. And it was just a ball of ice. That's all it *was*.

Well, lots of queer things happened on

the glacier . . . Shaking his head, he started to zoom away.

Then it happened.

More of the ice balls! Hundreds of them! Curving down upon him from above!

Colorless, unseen until they were upon him, they blocked the plane on every side.

"What in the—!" Steel banked, twisted the plane into every contortion. But at every turn the glistening spheres stood before him, closing in like a net, relentlessly forcing his down.

Fifty feet above the snow, he realized he'd have to ram them. The plane was strong—maybe he could crash through.

Then, as if anticipating this very thought, the spheres moved in suddenly against the plane, pressed upon it from above, forced it down. It was pressed quickly down to the snow.

As it settled into the snow level with the cabin windows, the spheres slowly melted together to form a rough-hewn roof and walls. The plane was enclosed completely.

Steel's heart hammered. His breath fogged his helmet. He stared at the encircling wall, jerked the control lever helplessly. It was only then he remembered his microphone.

"Six-foot balls of ice!" he cried hoarsely. "Some kind of remote control! X-26.9-18.7!" He started giving the coordinates of his location.

"That's hardly worth while now. . ."

Steel shivered even in the electro-suit's warmth. Slowly, he turned around.

The walls and roof that imprisoned him joined, behind him, the side of one of the ruined buildings, a crumbling structure of weathered concrete. The ruin had a door. In the door, an oxygen helmet topped a snow-white electro-suit, stood a tall thin man. One gloved hand rested lightly upon the butt of a volt pistol holstered at his hip.

"Our little Trojan Horse—those balls of ice," the man continued, "have several interesting properties. They're also a very effective barrier against radio transmission." His voice was coming into the plane on the same radio frequency Steel had been trying to send on.

Behind his helmet, the man's face was lean, thin-lipped, deeply tanned—a tan that wasn't of Earth. That tan had come through a space-ship's viewplate, close in

the heat of some foreign sun. He strode over to the plane and took out his pistol to rap impatiently on the cabin window.

"Get out of there! That hunting license on your ship doesn't fool me. A few minutes ago you passed over a herd of snow-deer without firing a shot. The Bear will be mighty interested in why you're up here snooping around. . ."

THE BEAR—the word hit Steel like an electric shock. He'd thought he was on the right track, he'd hoped, but now that it was proved it was something to think about. He'd found The Bear's hideout and what could he do about it?

He didn't move at first. He sat there looking at the man through the window, his mind running hot trying to figure out what to do. In the middle of the glacier, a six-foot-thick wall in front of him, the man with the gun outside. And his radio useless—his ace card trumped with the game just started. It looked like that insurance policy hadn't been a bad idea. . . .

The fellow banged on the plane with his pistol again. *"Come on! Open up!"*

Steel opened up. At a wave of the pistol, he stepped out to the frozen snow. At another wave, he raised his hands. The man stepped around him, jabbed the gun in his spine and went over him expertly. He found Steel's pistol and dropped it in the snow. *"Now start walking ahead of me. And no foolishness."* The pistol shoved Steel ahead through the ruin's door.

Inside it was just like ten million other surface ruins. You walked into what had been about the thirtieth floor above the street and found only drifted snow, shattered walls, a bleached skeleton perhaps. Now, however, Steel had time for only a glance at the familiar scene when the pistol moved him on through another door, then another, and this one, he saw, only faked its weathered appearance. As he went through, a metal panel slid silently shut behind them and he had his first look at the tremendous organization he'd been fool enough to tackle single-handed.

A bright warming glow drifted down from the luminous ceiling. Vent slits in the floor whispered softly, oxygen pouring in. At the other end of the room, a split traveling walk slid noiselessly up and down a shaft past hundreds of offices, workshops,

barracks. The place was as big as the Terminal, as lavishly furnished as Stahl's Vita-Heat Building. This place explained why The Bear had stolen as much equipment as money.

He was given little time to marvel here however.

"Take off your helmet," the radioed voice behind him ordered. Steel took it off. When he turned, facing the man and the gun, the man had removed his own helmet. He was smiling, a thin tight-lipped smile with no humor in his eyes. "You seem surprised," he said. "You really didn't expect a bear's den, did you?"

"This is your show," Steel said quietly. "What comes next?" The man held his helmet in one hand, his pistol in the other—both hands full. Steel thought of his own helmet, a mighty handy weapon. If he got a chance—Then suddenly he noticed something else, something that gave him a chance cops dreamed about. The guy's pistol—the safety was on!

"Okay," the man said, "if this deer hunting trip of yours turns out to be faked, you'll soon learn what's next." A quick motion of the pistol ordered Steel around on the belt that led down the shaft.

Steel went. As he went, he shot quick glances into the rooms they passed, waiting for the right moment to whirl around and knock that pistol away.

The rooms they passed were filled with workers. There were drafting stalls where scores of men—and women—bent over blueprint tables and charts. There were plastic workshops where people operated compression molds and lathes. Where did The Bear get all these workers! They all couldn't have come from the upper levels! There were glittering laboratories where white-aproned technicians huddled around distillation vats and rows of test tubes. Steel thought of that stolen cargo of tung-soid. Suffo-gas . . . ?

A few yards ahead, on the left, he saw they were approaching an empty room. On the right, a deserted tunnel branched off into whatever labyrinth the place possessed. Okay, this was as good as anywhere else! Wherever he was being taken, they'd be there shortly. Then it might be too late.

Steel crouched slightly, ready to whirl on the fellow behind him.

Then—

"Step off!"

Behind him, the man's hand suddenly grabbed his shoulder and shoved him off the belt into the tunnel.

Steel clenched his teeth. He glanced up the empty, tapestry-walled tunnel ahead. All right then, this was an even better place for it.

But again the man behind him had other plans. "Stop here."

Steel halted, puzzled this time. The tunnel curved on off ahead but here there was only the red tapestry walls. He felt the pistol again on his backbone. Then he saw the man's hand reaching out beside him, lifting the corner of one of the tapestries.

The cloth had covered a window. It looked down into a tremendous auditorium where hundreds of teen-age boys and girls sat in curved rows of seats facing a wide curtained stage.

The scene might have been that of any world-wide juvenile delinquency court. Steel frowned. Dressed in rags, their pinched faces unwashed, the crowd was a cross-section of undernourished kids from the slum levels of every underground city on Earth. They were all sizes and colors and there was excitement in every eye. Steel could hardly believe it. A prep school for crime . . . Steel felt hot rage creeping over him.

Then on the auditorium's stage, the curtain went up and what he saw there hit him like a bucket of ice water.

Ten feet high, its shaggy white hair stark against the stage's black backdrop, Earth's most terrifying creature stood there—an ice-bear.

The man behind him dropped the tapestry.

"New recruits." Steel heard him, dazedly. "The Bear's busy now. I hope you don't mind waiting." The fellow laughed. "Okay, get moving."

STEEL turned from the covered window as if waking from a nightmare. He retraced his steps back through the tunnel to the belt as the man behind him directed. He got on the belt again, the man behind him.

But it didn't make sense! It couldn't be! There was some trick to it! But, the proof of his own eyes argued, it must have been an ice-bear. It had been the whole works—

red eyes, saber fangs, razor claws. Rearing up on its hind legs . . .

Steel shook his head. He couldn't figure this out any more than he'd been able to figure out the balls of ice that captured him. Then, suddenly, he remembered something he had been about to do.

He looked ahead down the belt. Nobody there. They had just passed the last of the rooms alongside. Do it now! If he could get back to that auditorium—get within gunshot of that bear—

Suddenly he shifted one foot to the belt beside them that was traveling in the opposite direction. Touching it, his foot stopped him like a brake and whirled him around rapidly.

The fellow didn't even have time to be surprised. Steel's helmet caught him in the face. He went down without a sound.

Quickly, Steel snatched up his pistol. Crouching over the man, he glanced back up the belt. Still nobody in sight. In the other direction, he saw the belt was carrying them down into some dim-lit place, a dungeon, perhaps, where the fellow had been taking him. Nobody in sight there, either. Steel grabbed the man's collar and dragged him—unconscious or corpse, he neither knew nor cared which—down the belt into the shadows.

The floor was level here, undoubtedly the very bottom of The Bear's vast retreat. In the dim light, he saw packing cases stacked along the wall, a heavy freight belt creaking laboriously down the middle of the floor. He dragged his ex-guard behind a packing case and then stepped on the belt that slid back up the shaft. His hand closed fondly upon the pistol in his pocket. He snapped the safety off.

Now, if he could get to that auditorium, get to The Bear . . .

He didn't run. He forced himself to stand on the belt and let it carry him up past the crowded workshops and laboratories. He didn't turn his head. He only glanced into the rooms out of the corner of his eye as he passed. It was the worst ordeal he could remember in ten years of detective work. Standing there. Alone. Thousands all around him. His hand grew sweaty on the pistol in his pocket. Then he was at the tunnel and nobody had noticed him.

He stepped in with a gasp of relief. The

tunnel was also still deserted. He jumped to the tapestry.

For a moment, he couldn't find the one that hid the window. Then he found it, lifted it with nervous fingers, and stared once more down into the auditorium. The kids were just leaving the auditorium, filing out a door at the rear. The Bear was just leaving the stage.

How was he to get down there? He eyed the wall encircling the auditorium. It curved, just as the tunnel curved. The tunnel seemed to be a closed balcony surrounding the place. Somewhere ahead there must be an exit leading down to the stage. Steel dropped the tapestry and went down the tunnel, running now.

Sure it was quick! Much quicker than he'd ever hoped! Three hours since he'd left the Terminal and he'd found The Bear! His fingers curled around the pistol like a caress.

When he judged he'd half-circled the hall, he slowed down, moving swiftly but cautiously. Then he came to a belt that cut down to the left. It must lead to the stage. He stepped on it.

It did. It carried him swiftly to the wings and peering out across the stage, he saw it standing there in the opposite wings. Still reared ten feet high on its hind legs, eyes like red-filmed lights. And with The Bear now was a bull-necked giant whom Steel remembered from police photographs, a boxer of "fixed match" notoriety—Mike Doyle.

The kids were still straggling from the hall. Steel waited behind the curtain till the last one left. Then he stepped out and strode quickly across the stage.

"Don't move, Mike," he ordered the boxer.

The big fellow whirled. The Bear turned. Steel stopped six feet from them, pistol leveled. "I don't know whether you're real or not," he said, eyeing the huge animal, "but there's a good way to find out. If that's just some kind of trick get-up, whoever's in it better get out fast. I'm going to blast a hole through it."

"It's Johnny Steel!" The fighter's battered face sagged in astonishment. "It's the cops!"

The Bear's neon eyes blazed down at Steel, its huge chest rising and falling slowly, breath hissing in its black nostrils.

It was a sight that few people lived long enough to see close up. An ice-bear could take a man's head off with one claw. If this one was a fake, Steel thought, it was a whopping good one. Its dark lips curled back from a jagged row of yellowed six-inch fangs. From each hairy paw, a rake of white claws slowly unsheathed. Then something happened that almost made Steel drop his gun.

"Yes, I know Mr. Steel," The Bear said.

It was a terrifying sound, guttural, deep in the great animal's throat—but it proved something to Steel after its first shock. He'd heard sound-blending devices before. That was a human voice set in the growl of a bear. The disguise was perfect but it was a disguise.

This however did nothing to answer the two big questions. How did The Bear know him? And who was in that disguise? Well, he wasn't going to be long finding out. "Whoever you are," Steel said, "I'm giving you five seconds to get out of there." He raised the pistol a fraction of an inch, years of police training, perfect aim from the hip.

Then suddenly—insanely—the powerful Mike Doyle was diving toward him.

Two thoughts flashed in Steel's head as he saw him coming—Mike had picked up a mighty strange loyalty lately to risk his life for his boss—and, Steel knew he couldn't shoot. It would bring the whole gang here instantly.

He jumped aside. He smashed Mike across the head with his pistol. Mike sprawled and slid across the stage, to lay still.

Steel whirled back to The Bear. "Are you getting out of there or not?"

There was no answer for a moment. Then The Bear's voice was a deep whisper. "When I do, Mr. Steel, you're going to be in for a mighty big surprise. . . ."

"Get out of there!" Steel was in no mood for games.

Deep in the matted hair of The Bear's chest, a small door started opening, slowly, mechanically. The whole thing was mechanical, arms, legs, head, everything operated electrically. The door—

The door was the last thing Steel remembered.

A slamming blow. The back of his head. Then blackness . . .

III

WHEN THE BLACKNESS VANISHED, as suddenly as it had come, Steel didn't open his eyes at first, figuring out what had happened. Mike had obviously come to and crept up behind him. Rabbit punch—Mike was a master at that.

When he got this figured out, he started to work on what to do about it. He lay there motionless, listening. Then he realized he wasn't lying on the stage floor. He was lying on a bed of some kind. Somewhere in the distance, he heard the muffled crackling of a video transmitter. They'd moved him! How long had he been out! His eyes snapped open.

"Well!" a familiar voice said. "Sleeping beauty awakes!" It was the tall thin-lipped fellow, his original captor. He stood beside the bunk on which Steel found himself lying. Across the fellow's thin cheek now was a taped bandage, the result of Steel's helmet-wielding. "I guess its time you knew my name," he said. "It's Dirk." And as he introduced himself, his right fist arced across the bunk, contacted Steel's jaw like a spark-gap and Steel's blackness returned once more . . .

This time however the blackness vanished in a deluge of ice water. Steel sat up on the bunk sputtering, shaking his head dazedly.

Dirk threw the empty bucket in the corner and stood before him, hands on his narrow hips. "If I didn't have orders to take it easy, I'd drown you."

Steel glared up at him. He had to get a few things straight before he stuck his neck out again. He turned from the guy in disgust and glanced about the room.

He was in a small, high-ceilinged place with one door, barred like a cell. The room seemed to be located deep in the cellar region of The Bear's fortress. Across the dim corridor outside, he saw huge boxes and bales stacked against the wall. On the corridor floor, a heavy freight belt creaked sluggishly past the door. Why, this was the same place where he'd been before, at the bottom of the main shaft where he'd left Dirk behind a packing case.

The video transmitter's crackling came from one of the lower rooms on the shaft. It sounded like a long distance set, one used for interplanetary work. It hadn't

been operating when he'd passed before. If he'd only known it was there then! A message to Stahl, the coordinates of this place. . . . He looked back to Dirk. "And what happens next?"

"That's for The Bear to decide. When they found me and brought me to, I just came back to even the score." His thin lips grinned.

Steel looked away again. Who was The Bear? Who was The Bear? The question started beating in his head like a drum. His fingers tightened on the metal frame of the bunk. Just when he had him, just when he was about to find out! He swore to himself that if he got another chance, he certainly wouldn't waste time talking.

Then, suddenly, the chance was there.

The Bear stood at the door, horrid face bent down, eyes glowing through the bars. The mechanical voice rumbled, "What does he have to say, Dirk?"

Dirk eyed Steel with evident anticipation. "Want me to go to work on him?" He took out his pistol—the one Steel had taken away from him before, but with the safety off now. He walked over and leveled it in Steel's face. "Okay," he said, "we know you're working for Hampton Stahl. Does Stahl suspect this place is near the Jersey Ruins?"

"Certainly," Steel said, ignoring the gun in his face, but meeting Dirk's eyes. "And Stahl's going to have the police around here combing every ruin if I'm not back before sundown." If it were only true. . . .

The Bear told Dirk to unlock the door. Dirk unlocked it and the creature ambled in, stooping under the ceiling. Dirk locked the door again.

"And what made you think this was the place to look?" The Bear rumbled.

Okay, get ready. Anytime now. The old business. . . . "Well," Steel said, bringing his legs in under him, leaning forward slightly on the bunk, "you ought to know a lot about those little visiting cards of yours." He pointed toward The Bear's own claws. "Take a look at those fake claws of yours there. . . ."

The Bear glanced down. Dirk also glanced at The Bear's paws.

Steel sprang at Dirk.

He got his hand on the pistol. At the same time, his knee got in Dirk's belly. His other hand slammed Dirk back against the

wall. Good, old-fashioned police work. He snatched the pistol from Dirk's hand and brought it up into Dirk's jaw like a set of brass knuckles.

Then Steel didn't even wait to watch Dirk fall. As he turned from him, he got the pistol right in his hand and fired.

His first shot blasted The Bear's mechanical right arm off. The next one got a leg. The next one got the other leg as the thing toppled over.

As it crashed to the floor, Steel jumped back into a corner of the room, gun on the weird scene on the floor.

Dirk was out cold again. The Bear was a mess. Springs, wires, stuffing, braces, it floundered there a moment till its motors short-circuited. Then inside the great mass of white hair there was a frantic scratching sound.

"Come out of there," Steel said between his teeth.

THE DOOR in the bear chest was pushed open. There was coughing like somebody coming out of a stifling closet.

Then Steel's hand went limp on the pistol.

A cascade of golden hair tumbled out upon the shaggy bear skin. Steel stared into the furious green eyes of *Lois Harmon*.

Steel couldn't have been more astonished if his own grandmother had crawled out of the bear skin.

He couldn't believe it at first. He shook his head savagely. Then the girl got to her feet, shook her bright hair out of her eyes and stood there with her hands on her trim hips, glaring at him. Smooth as a pedigreed cat, even in a pair of dingy coveralls.

"It took us six months to build that electric bear!" Her eyes sparked green fire. "You—you—" Words seemed inadequate. She stepped over and swung at Steel a baby haymaker.

Steel ducked and caught her hand. And the exertion jarred his brain back to work like a stopped watch. "Listen, you lynx-eyed hussy!" He twisted her arm behind her back and drew her to him, twisting till her struggling stopped. "If I hadn't seen you get out of that bear-skin, I wouldn't have believed it. But, if you're The Bear, you're a cold-blooded murderer! I'd just

as soon shoot you down as not. In fact I'd rather. I—" Then he heard the racket behind him. He whirled around, jerking the girl around between him and the door.

Over her shoulder, he saw a score of men run up and halt at the cell door. They'd heard the shots of course. They took in the situation instantly. Rifles and pistols leveled on him like a firing squad.

Steel, however, had the girl between him and the guns. He put his own pistol against the girl's back. "Careful," he said, eyes on the men outside, "I can get her before you can get me." He'd never used a woman as a shield before, but to him this yellow-haired witch wasn't even a woman. She was a killer. He was a cop. If he could hold this advantage, force his way out of here with her . . .

The girl held perfectly still, facing her gang. "Range about ten feet," she said quietly. And there was something in her almost bored tone, Steel didn't like.

"No tricks," he said, eyes fixed on the trigger fingers outside. He tried to get as much of himself behind her as possible, a difficult thing, however, hiding his shoulders behind not too much woman. "I mean business."

"So do we," the girl said to him over her shoulder.

As she spoke, Steel heard an angry buzzing sound, like a rattlesnake's warning. But there was nothing he could do about such a warning. Instantly, the pistol he was pressing against the girl's back was snatched from his hand.

Steel was too astonished to move. The pistol flew up toward the ceiling, halted, and then moved across the room through the bars of the door. There was nothing holding it up. It moved the way the ice balls had moved outside. Standing there with his empty hand at the girl's back, Steel stared at the gun till it was grabbed from the air by one of the men outside. Then the gang was swarming through the door.

Steel shook his head like a fighter struggling up after the ninth count. The things that happened in this place were beyond reason. How could you fight anything in a place like this! Then the girl had jerked away from him, the mob was upon him, and he was lying on the floor fighting blindly.

In a moment however it was all over. There were too many of them.

"That's enough! Get him on his feet!"

It was the girl's voice. Dazed and beaten, Steel was yanked up, somebody holding both arms and an elbow hooked around his neck.

"We've wasted enough time on you now," Lois Harmon said. She stood in front of him, eyes blazing. "But—it might interest you to know that everything you've tried to do here hasn't amounted to a damn thing! You'll have company here shortly. We're kidnapping your fat boss tonight. We're going to bring Hampton Stahl here and hold him for a cool million ransom—enough to bankrupt Vita-Heat completely . . ."

She turned and stalked from the room, leaving Steel staring after her, the full meaning of her words creeping over him like a chill.

Stahl's ransom—Vita-Heat's bankruptcy! If that happened, the upper levels wouldn't even benefit by that insurance policy . . .

THEY gathered up the wrecked mechanical bear. They carried out Dirk who again had slept through the whole proceedings. They left, locking the cell door behind them. Steel sat on the bunk, watched them step on the belt and disappear up the shaft.

Lois Harmon. Why, she'd been a plant right under his nose when that Radium Bank was held up while he was in the building! For years, she'd been using her innocent-looking beauty and social position to discover the choicest jobs for her gang.

It all boiled down to this—she was The Bear. The Bear had the most terrible record in police annals. And with the unbelievable equipment and advanced science she had amassed here, not only New York but the whole world was threatened. Those inexplicable balls of ice, the mechanical bear, the magic that had snatched that pistol out of his hand—those laboratories and workshops along the shaft seemed capable of anything. Producing suffo-gas was probably a minor task to them.

And—his own motive for coming here, the reward for the upper levels, that would be canceled entirely by Stahl's kidnapping tonight. The pledge he'd made over his dead friend's body couldn't be kept . . .

Up the shaft, Steel heard the video transmitter start crackling again. If he could only get to that thing! Stahl's man was still waiting; if he could only get a message to him!

Steel got up, slamming a heavy fist into his hand. He went over to the door and grasped the bars, testing their strength. They were solid, thick as his wrist. The door wouldn't even rattle. He surveyed the room again. Collapsible bunk, empty bucket, bare walls.

Since The Bear had run riot during the last few years, how many men had he killed? Bank guards, watchmen, company executives, and Jim, Dick, Harlan, Bill—he'd known those cops well. And the reprisals against their families—not one body ever found. It was inconceivable that such horror had stained Lois Harmon's hands. He thought of those hands—strong, artistic, neatly manicured. But it wasn't nail polish that tipped those pretty fingers. It was blood.

Steel sat down heavily on the bunk again. It swayed and threatened to fold up under him and he got up again to kick its slab-metal headboard back into place. Even the State Prison gave its condemned men a decent bunk! He sat down, staring through the barred door at the freight belt that slid slowly, monotonously along the corridor outside. Probably stolen from some warehouse, it was a yard-wide belt of heavy plates none too closely joined together. It creaked mournfully, incessantly. How could he think with that racket going on! He wondered if he could stop it—poke something through the door—wedge it between the plates . . .

Suddenly this idle thought was a spark that touched off a TNT idea.

He sprang to the door and looked out. As far as he could see up the shaft, nobody was in sight. There was no sound but the belt's creaking.

He ran back to the bed. Quickly, he yanked the removable headboard off the frame and then took the footboard off. He lugged the bed frame over to the door.

Still nobody was in sight. He stared at the belt outside, excitement burning in his eyes. If it only worked! He lifted the bed frame, stuck it through the door's bars and held it poised a moment over the moving freight belt. Then, just at the right mo-

ment, as a space between two of the plates passed, he shoved it home.

He jumped back. Something had to give—belt, bed or door. He barely breathed. The belt slowed. What if it stopped? But it didn't stop. It slowed, but still moved inexorably on. What if the frame bent? But it didn't bend. Its tough metal twisted between the bars, wedging itself more tightly. Then inch by screeching inch, the bars in the door bent.

With a sound like a pistol shot, one snapped.

Steel shot toward the door like a loosened spring. He squeezed between the bars and jumped out on the belt. Then he was running up the belt, ignoring its snail's pace, racing up the shaft toward that video room.

In seconds, he was at the door. He halted, paused there, listening.

"Any contact yet?"

"Not yet . . ."

Two different voices—there were at least two men in the room. How many more? But he couldn't risk waiting to find out. Any moment somebody might appear on the shaft. He threw open the door and stepped in quickly, ready to tear his way to that video transmitter.

The room was dark, with only a small light in one corner, the glow of a video screen. In front of it were silhouetted two heads. One had close-cropped hair; the other wore a skull cap. Chairs pulled up close to the video, they were so engrossed in their work they didn't even turn around.

"Shhh!" said the black skull cap.

"We're about to make contact, Mike," said the short haircut.

Steel stood motionless in the darkness. They thought he was Mike, the boxer! And there were only two men in the room. Marvelous! Just walk up behind them and bang their heads together. He stepped silently forward.

He was within arm's reach of the two shadowed figures when the video screen's light suddenly flared. He halted.

"Here she is!" The skull cap bent low over the panel under the screen. Dim-lit hands played the video's controls like a piano.

Slowly fading in on the screen, Steel saw the familiar green sphere that was Venus. The picture was swelling in from

a video camera on a space ship somewhere close in the Venusian sector. The picture was closing up, each ice peak gleaming. Behind the planet was a blurred background of white lines—he couldn't figure out what they were. And they certainly didn't matter now. His hands started out for those two necks in front of him.

Then the video screen stopped him again. Stopped him cold this time. He stared at the screen incredulously.

The distant camera had turned from the green planet, turning in from the space ship's window through which it had been shooting, and had focussed upon the cameraman. It was Dirk, Dirk—tall and thin-lipped, with bandages on his face—Dirk, that far out in space when not twenty minutes ago he'd been with Steel in that cell below.

How had he gotten out there? How could any space ship have gotten him to Venus that fast?

The other watchers in the room seemed to take it for granted, however. "How'd it go?" the fellow with the skull cap asked.

"No trouble at all," Dirk said from the screen. "Having trouble with this headache of mine though." He grinned faintly through his bandages. "Second one that guy's given me today. I must be slipping."

"Well, come on in and have a drink," the short-haired one said. "Looks like you did a good job on Venus anyhow."

Steel was so bewildered he completely forgot that video worked both ways. If he could see Dirk, Dirk could see him. This didn't occur to him till Dirk's grin faded abruptly and he squinted into the room's darkness from the screen.

"Hey!" Dirk yelled. "Who's that behind you—!" Then, as the two heads before Steel twisted around, "Look out! It's Steel! He's loose again!"

Steel went into action. His fist drove into the face nearest him—the short-haired one's. He knocked him over into the video with a punch that would have knocked out a horse. His left hand caught the other man's collar. His fist started in again.

But this was a blow that never landed.

STEEL'S arm froze in mid-swing. He stared at the face above the collar he was holding as if he'd caught a ghost.

He had.

He was staring into the bespectacled eyes of a man who was supposed to have been dead fifteen long years—Hampton Stahl's dead partner, Lois Harmon's dead father—*Dr. Albert Harmon* . . .

Steel stood there holding Dr. Harmon's collar, fist poised, for a long crazy moment. The skull cap had fallen off, revealing the scientist's shaggy white hair. From his lined face, his gray eyes looked up at Steel, troubled but without fear.

"Well?" he said, as if the next move were entirely up to Steel. His voice was remarkably clear for a man of his age.

"Dr. Harmon . . ." Steel turned him loose and lowered his hand. "Maybe you'd better explain a few things, Doctor," he said shakily.

Instead of explaining, however, the old man shot a hand toward the video table—toward an alarm button.

Steel saw it just in time. He caught the hand and shoved the old man back into his chair. Then he scooped the volt gun from the other man's holster. "Dr. Harmon," he said, "finding you here when you're supposed to have been dead fifteen years explains a lot about this place. The police are going to be mighty interested." Moving around where he could keep his eye on the door as well as on the old man, he reached out and switched the video into the Earth frequency band. Dirk's face had already disappeared. "The police'll be here in about one hour," Steel said.

He twirled a dial to the frequency he'd arranged with Stahl's listener at the Vita-Heat Building. It was hard to believe that a man who had been so well loved as Dr. Harmon could have traded his reputation for a criminal career—but here he was. Obviously, he'd faked his own death and hidden here ever since—another brilliant mind that had followed pure science too far.

A sleepy-eyed guard's face appeared on the video screen. "Get this message to Stahl quick!" Steel told him. "Tell him The Bear is his chum Lois Harmon. Tell him her old man, Dr. Harmon, isn't dead—he's *here!*"

"Wait!" Dr. Harmon jumped up. There was real fear in his eyes now. "You mustn't do that!"

"Hate your ex-partner to be the first to know?" Steel shoved him back in his

seat. "And write this down," he told the guard. "Coordinates X-26.9-18.7!" He repeated them as the guard, excited now, raced with his pencil. "Tell Stahl to get the police up here quick!"

On the screen, the guard's eyes were popping. Steel switched the video off. The face faded away. "Now," he told the old man, "I guess that not only gums up your plans to kidnap Hampton Stahl tonight but gums up all of your plans for a long time to come."

"I'm not so sure about that, Mr. Steel."

At the same instant Steel heard these words, he heard an angry buzzing noise. The pistol in his hand was snatched away.

He whirled to see a hidden panel open in the wall opposite. In the door stood Lois Harmon. In her hand was the same queer kind of gun that had taken the pistol away from him in the cell. An ordinary volt rifle with tiny electrotubes lining the barrel. Behind the girl, a small army of men filled the passage.

"You're a very bothersome person, Mr. Steel," she said. "We should quit using a magnoray on you—a volt gun would be better."

Steel stood there holding his numb hand with ice in his heart. The girl stepped into the room, the men moving in behind her. Then to Steel's stark staring confusion, he saw that the thin-faced Dirk led them. Somehow, Dirk had come back from Venus—in *four minutes*.

"Surprised to see me back so soon?" Dirk caught the look on his face. He laughed. "You didn't know I could get back from Venus even faster than I could radio a warning back, did you? That's why nobody ever sees us come and go from here, Flatfoot. We come and go too fast for anybody to see us. Maybe when you learn more about this outfit, you'll quit trying to buck it. Let me take care of him," he told the girl. "Our score's gotten a little uneven again."

"No," she said. "You better take a group up to hold off the police, Dirk. Just in case they get here before we can get underway."

Dirk frowned and then said, "Okay." Glumly, he led some of the men toward the shaft.

The girl motioned for one of the others to take Steel. "Bring him along with us. Come on, Dad." She took her father's arm.

"We've got one hour to make our getaway."

Steel's appointed guardian, built like a bear with the hair shaved off, took his arm, twisted it behind him and dug a thumb into his elbow—torturous stop-and-go button. Another had finally brought the short-haired victim of Steel's punch back on duty. They all followed the Harmon family through the panel and down a long passageway.

IV

STEEL WAS ABOUT READY TO give up. He knew he wouldn't be even faintly surprised at anything else that happened here. He clung to one thought, a praying hope that the police could get here before whatever getaway the gang planned. But, with the crushing ice balls and those weapon-snatchers, Dirk could hold the police off indefinitely, and with this super-speed the gang apparently had at their disposal—the speed that could get Dirk back and forth from Venus in a matter of seconds—they'd be gone long before the police got started.

Steel was so deep in these thoughts, he barely considered what his own fate might be . . .

The passage ended in a place that made New York's central power plant look like a child's play room. Fifty-foot generators towered in the center of the huge room and along the walls were banks of vacuum tubes flashing like fireworks. The group halted before a master switch panel that equalled the Terminal's dispatch board.

"Check the coils, Tom. Get at those insulator switches, Joe." Dr. Harmon quickly assumed command here. "Lois and I'll finish keying in the main control group." Along the rows of tubes and moving in and out of the generator housings, Steel saw other scores of workers, busy as ants at whatever devil's work this was.

The heavy-muscled guard delegated to remain with Steel took it all with a yawn, however, leaning against a battery case and eyeing Steel sleepily. And this was what made Steel want to tear his hair—the utter confidence of everyone here. The fact that the police were on the way seemed to bother them only slightly. They seemed quite convinced they had here the power of

a science that need fear nothing the whole world might send against them.

"I suppose you're making your getaway with some sort of electric expulsion system," Steel said finally. From combustion power to jet propulsion—it was just one step further to the ultimate speeds of some expulsion system. There had always been a basic flaw in vehicles having to carry their own means of power. "What bothers me though is where the hell you think you're going." To leave the earth was simple. To have to stay away, forever, in the molten cold or venomous atmosphere of one of the other planets—that should be no happy prospect for any fugitive.

"Where we're going?" Steel's guard laughed quickly. "Buddy, that's something you'll be mighty interested in if Miss Harmon has a mind to tell you about it." And Steel saw the girl walking toward them, wiping a smudge of grease from her cheek. "He wants to know where we're going," the guard grinned as she came up.

She also laughed, a tinkling laugh that Steel hated more because he would have liked it if she hadn't been who and what she was. "Bring him along," she told the guard. "Everything seems to be running smoothly. We'll take a moment off to show him around."

The big fellow gave Steel a shove and followed him and the girl past the generators toward the far end of the room. When they got there, Steel saw there wasn't any wall at the room's end. The room ended abruptly at a two hundred foot drop.

The exit here was only a hole in the wall of a vast cavern, big as a city block. The place had been hollowed out of the earth's ice crust. Its slick green walls glistened brightly under thousands of heat arcs that melted, dried, held back the constantly encroaching cold. On the floor of the cavern, Steel saw what appeared to be a monster space ship, a smooth egg-like thing with a small platform on top. So this was what they planned to escape in! Pile in, melt the ice lid off the cavern, take off! He didn't see *them* at first—they were the same color as the frozen floor. Then he caught sight of the restlessly moving creatures around the ship.

The cavern's floor was alive with ice-bears, thousands of them, gigantic males, grizzly females, pink-clawed cubs, a living

moat around the precious ship. Not only had *The Bear* chained science to her grim purpose. Here were nature's cruellest watchdogs on guard.

"Okay," Steel said at last. "So I'm impressed. Now will you tell me where you plan to go in that ship?"

"Ship?" The girl's smile grew perplexed. "What ship?"

Steel motioned toward the egg-shaped thing below. "That. That's the space ship you plan to get away in, isn't it?"

The girl burst out laughing. Her laughter echoed out across the cavern, tinkling mirth in a place that Hell couldn't have rivaled in Steel's eyes. "Well," she said finally, "you might call it something we plan to escape with. That object is an antivagr projector, Mr. Steel. We'll escape with it all right, but we're going to take the Earth along with us . . ."

During his career as a detective, Steel had heard doomed convicts call the Devil's curse upon mankind; he'd heard doped crones in the upper levels shriek the curse of witches upon their neighbors; he'd heard cornered gangsters swear dark vengeance—but he'd never before heard words of such raw horror. And the girl said them as a simple statement of fact—with a laugh.

"*We're going to take the Earth along with us . . .*" This could have been just an insane threat. Cornered, the gang was trying to destroy the world in its own suicide. But Steel had seen the gang's ultra science here, he'd seen their banks of electrotubes—they weren't up to anything as simple as destroying the world by stoffo-gas. He couldn't miss the real meaning of Lois Harmon's words. Taking the Earth with *them* meant *moving* it.

Which was still madness! Still suicide! But they didn't think so. They were right now making frantic preparations.

"You see," the girl continued, "we've been experimenting exclusively with gravitational force—the forces of attraction and repulsion that not only hold the atom together but hold the planets of the Solar System in balance." Her smile taunted Steel. "Dad finally devised an ultra-wave screen that could be projected. This screen surrounds the object toward which it's projected, shields off all the gravitational forces acting upon it and allows us to play upon

it only those forces we care to use in moving the object from one place to another. You saw how we encircled you with those ice balls when you first came snooping around. You saw how we snatched a pistol out of your hand. In a few minutes, you'll see how we snatch the Earth out of the Solar System."

In a few minutes . . . The girl's face blurred before Steel's eyes. Her words came to him faintly. "But I don't know why I'm telling you all this. You came here, working for Hampton Stahl's filthy money." Then raving fury blinded Steel completely.

He whirled. Ran.

He streaked back into the control room. The first weapon he saw was a wrench. He grabbed it on the run. He sped down the line of electrotubes along the wall, smashing them as fast as he could swing his arm.

Vaguely, he heard the girl's scream behind him. He heard his guard's heavy feet pounding after him. Before him, he saw the horde of workers halt, then swarm toward him. But he kept slashing with his wrench, eyes squinting against the flying glass, smashing his way up the line of tubes toward the main control board. When the wrench was snatched away, he kept tearing at the tubes with his bare hands.

Then he was crushed down by the hundreds of fists and feet that flew at him from every side.

WHEN he was jerked back on his feet, the first thing he saw was Lois Harmon's face. Her face was streaked with tears. Tears of sheer hatred glistened in her green eyes. Her lips parted, trembling, but she couldn't speak. Her tiny fist lashed out, smacking Steel in the face.

She kept pummeling him till somebody pulled her back, fearful apparently that she might hurt her hands on him. Nobody seemed at all concerned whether Steel was hurt or not. Quite on the contrary.

"So you're still after Stahl's reward, huh?" Mike, the ex-boxer, swam toward Steel's blood-filled eyes; he started whipping Steel back and forth across the face with his open hand. A hand as heavy as a sand bag. "When they took me into this crew it was the first decent thing anybody'd ever done for me! They're the first decent folks this damn world's seen in ten thous-

and years! And you try to stop what they're doing!"

"Give him hell, Mike! The voice came to Steel as from a great distance. But there was something about it . . . He recognized it. When Mike's hand paused, he twisted his head around to look at the man who had spoken.

"No!" He tried to blink the blood out of his eyes. The man was Harlan Webb. Harlan Webb, one of those five cops who'd gone after The Bear and never come back! "Harlan!"

"Sure," the man said. "I'm Harlan Webb. We used to be cops together. But we're on different sides now, Steel."

"But I thought The Bear—"

"Sure, that's what we wanted everybody to think about us—Jim, Dick, Bill, the other cops who disappeared, they're up there with Dirk guarding the entrance now. That's what we wanted everybody to think happened to our families when they were brought here too. That's the only way Dr. Harmon could keep what he was doing secret."

"You mean The Bear didn't—"

"Didn't kill them? Is that what you mean!" This was Lois Harmon again. "We didn't kill you, did we—when we certainly should have." She pointed about the room. "There's the vice-president of Uranium, Inc. He's been an engineer with us ever since he 'disappeared'. There's the crew and passengers of that space liner that lost its cargo last night." She shook her head furiously. "Our men have killed only as the last possible resort. That rule has been as important as our secret."

"Hush! Hush!" This was Dr. Harmon, holding up his hands, finally making himself heard. His eyes were grim behind his spectacles. "We haven't time for this now! This man has wrecked our remote control up here but we can still operate from the projector itself." He brushed his shaggy white hair from his eyes. "We must hurry before the police get here."

"But, my long departed friend, the police aren't coming . . ."

Every eye turned from Steel to the door leading in from the passage. Steel craned to stare over the shoulders of the men who held him.

That great shadow in the doorway was the bulk of Hampton Stahl.

"I thought I had finished with your interference for good, Dr. Harmon, when I arranged that little laboratory explosion fifteen years ago," Stahl said. "I see now, however, that I'll have to destroy you and your work all over again."

Swiftly, when the shock of his appearance died, the men around Steel surged toward Stahl in one mass. And, just as swiftly, when they came at him, Stahl stepped aside, into the room, and twenty of his guards pushed through the door.

They carried volt rifles. Stahl waved his fat hand.

The guards fired straight into the unarmed group coming at them, mowing them down like insects. When the rifles lowered again, a full hundred charred forms writhed on the floor, then quickly lay still. Mike, Harlan Webb, the rest . . .

"After they've shown us around," Stahl said when the volt rifle reverberations died, "you can do away with all the rest of them." Then his thick lips twisted into a smile. "Including Mr. Steel there. It will relieve me of an embarrassing contract."

At Stahl's words now, Steel realized he was standing there alone. Most of the men who had surrounded him had left to go for Stahl. Most of these were now lying in black heaps on the floor. The rest stood among the charred bodies, staring helplessly as Stahl's guards advanced across the room, ready for the slightest excuse to use their rifles again. The terrible silence of their advance was broken only when Lois Harmon sobbed, buried her golden head in her father's arms.

STEEL stood there alone, realizing just how much alone he was. He'd thrown a wrench into the Harmon gang's plans, for which they'd been in the act of doing away with him. Then his rescuers—whom he'd called here himself—had turned out to be an equal menace, bringing the same fate that they'd saved him from. He'd jumped out of The Bear's frying pan into the shortly forthcoming fire of Stahl's volt rifles . . .

"When I received your message and learned who The Bear was," the fat man smiled, halting before Steel, "I preferred not to bother the police with what was really a private matter between Dr. Harmon and myself."

"Private matter!" Dr. Harmon's cold eyes were frightening behind his spectacles. One hand soothed his daughter's head but the other was knotted, white-knuckled at his side. "Yes, you always did look upon my experiments as a private matter. You didn't care whether they benefited mankind or not—if they interfered with your vita-lamp profits, you tried to crush them."

"And crush them I shall," Stahl replied easily, turning to the old man. "When we sighted the coordinate location Mr. Steel so kindly sent us, we blasted the whole area immediately. We blasted the entrance to your hideout before your men had time to use any trick weapons you've developed." Which had been the end of Dirk and the men who'd been up there with him, Steel thought. "At this moment," Stahl continued, waving toward the door through which he'd entered, "others of my guards are searing every room in the place. When we leave here there won't be the slightest sign that this place ever existed. The world will continue to think Dr. Harmon died fifteen years ago."

The guards herded the remaining few of Dr. Harmon's men into a corner.

"Now," the fat man told Dr. Harmon, "if you'll kindly lead us on a little tour of your power plant here, you'll have exactly that much longer to live."

The old man hesitated a moment. Then he lifted his white head, took his daughter's hand and moved slowly ahead past the generator houses. One of the guards shoved Steel after them and the procession started down the long room.

"On the way here," Stahl said chattily to the old man and the girl, "we received a telenews report that a freight liner had just discovered something rather startling in the Venusian space sector. Earth scientists are in a dither." He laughed. "The planet Venus seems to have disappeared . . ."

Steel's eyes widened. He recalled Dr. Harmon's and Dirk's mysterious doings in the video room.

"Perhaps you can explain what happened, Doctor," Stahl said.

"If you wish," the old man answered finally. He walked straight ahead, chin high, voice mechanical and cold. "Venus was in the way of Earth's planned trajec-

tory from the Solar System. We simply moved it—as we've been moving smaller asteroids farther out in space for months. Venus was the last object that had to be cleared from Earth's path to Sun K-16."

"So that's where you planned to take it," Stahl said with some surprise. He laughed. "Who was it that said 'Give me a lever and I'll move the Earth'? So you found it! And I'm quite sure you could have accomplished it without mishap too, Doctor. If you remember, I worked out the preliminary planning with you myself."

"Until you realized what would happen to your vita-lamp monopoly if the Earth had a warm sun again!"

Stahl laughed again, agreeably. Steel however could barely keep his mouth from hanging open. He didn't know what to believe any more. Those blurred white lines behind Venus' picture on the video screen—had they been star trails? A background that Venus was moving past so fast even the video camera's ultra speed couldn't catch it? Was it possible Venus *had* been moved and that the Earth could *have* been moved? These men talked about moving planets as if they'd been moving a house on log rollers. Steel was bewildered.

"Well," Stahl said, "now I'll have your formula for the projector and vita-lamps will become only a sideline. I'll move another planet to Sun K-16—Jupiter, perhaps. When I move it to a livable climate its real estate prices will be something unimaginable. I suppose you applied the principle to space ships long ago."

"They were our first experiments," Dr. Harmon told him. "We have a small fleet in stalls near the surface. We found our only problem was keeping their speed down—to keep them from burning by air friction in taking off and landing." For some reason now as they went down the room, Dr. Harmon went into greater detail in explaining whatever questions Stahl put to him. He was fighting for time, Steel decided, hoping that *something* would happen, anything. Steel also decided it was high time he started hoping that too. He was in for the killing now himself.

When explanations had finished they had reached the end of the room and now stopped at the brink of the vast bear-pit.

"And here it is," Dr. Harmon said wearily. "The projector."

THE immensity of the place, the terrible creatures staring up at them, the mysterious machine majestically alone down there—all combined to silence even Stahl a moment. His guards crowded forward, exclaiming to each other and staring into the pit. They did not, however, let their curiosity distract the vigilance of their rifles. The guns remained snug against their prisoners' backs.

"And how did you get the manpower to build all this?" the fat man finally turned back to Dr. Harmon.

"They were easy to find," the old man said simply. He seemed to stare through Stahl—perhaps at the years he had put into this work and its miserable failure. "We found followers everywhere—our workers came from the slums of every city on Earth as well as from the highest society. Most of those we were forced to capture also eventually volunteered to work with us. Those who didn't volunteer we kept in very comfortable quarters, knowing that they—and the world—would be free very soon. We even brought poverty-stricken children here. Helping us gave them their only chance for education." Steel remembered his first sight of The Bear in that auditorium crowded with tenement kids. "The Bear idea was only an advertising trick my daughter thought of," Dr. Harmon said. "It awed the common man and terrified—*you*." His eyes snapped back into focus on Stahl's face.

"And now it's all turned out to my profit," Stahl said. "So suppose we go down and have a look at the projector. You have a way of getting down there, certainly."

Steel found himself also wondering how they *could* get down there. He looked upon it with little surprise however, only one more breath-taking gadget, when Dr. Harmon pressed a button on the nearby wall and a low-railed platform shot up from the top of the machine below. It halted at their feet. Where it had been on the machine below, there was now an open port with a circular stair leading inside, discernable in the distance.

"Very tricky," Stahl said. "But just to make sure this lift doesn't suffer any mishap on the way down, Doctor, I think you better stay up here and operate it while your daughter goes down with me."

Steel's eyes were on the girl's face as she looked at her father. Then she quickly rushed into his arms. The sight made Steel wince. The old man stroked her golden hair and whispered in her ear. Steel started to turn away. Then something flashed, the slightest glint in that icy place where the very walls glinted—he caught a glimpse of what it was, then instantly turned away, afraid somebody else might have seen.

He searched the guards' faces around him and Stahl's face, but they hadn't seen. They hadn't seen Dr. Harmon quickly slip a knife in his daughter's hand.

Steel recognized it for what it was, a thing common in police circles, a tiny knife, small enough to hide in one hand. When a button was pressed on its side a six-inch blade licked out like a watch spring uncoiling.

"The rest of you men stay up here with the good doctor," Stahl said. "Hans, you and Barge come down with me and our lovely guide." The fat man stepped out on the disk-like lift. He caught the girl's arm and jerked her after him.

In the next three seconds, the guards stepped on the lift with them—and Steel remembered the pledge that had brought him here, Floyd lying there dead, the dreary upper levels around that deserted building.

Stahl said, "Okay, let us down, Doctor"—and Steel remembered the confidence that even Dr. Harmon's deadly enemy, Stahl, had had in the Earth-moving venture's safety. Floyd too, working for The Bear, had believed in it enough to die for it. It was the one chance to bring warmth to the Earth again, banish completely such things as the upper levels!

Dr. Harmon pressed the button and the lift started down—and Steel remembered the unwavering courage in Lois Harmon's eyes when her father had slipped her that knife.

In those three seconds, everything that had happened flashed through Steel's mind, and everything that *could* happen. In those three seconds he decided what he *wanted* to happen.

He jumped.

THE LIFT was moving down swiftly. It was going down just a trifle slower than Steel fell. There was little jolt when he landed.

He knocked one of the guards' rifles sailing immediately. The other whirled upon him, rifle raised. But the platform was too small for a rifle. It worked to the guard's disadvantage. Steel grabbed the barrel. A lever. With it, he wrenched the fellow over the side.

He caught of glimpse of Lois Harmon clinging to the hand rail, one hand at her trembling lips, her green eyes huge. Then Stahl's bulk loomed before him and the other guard came in behind him, while from above a volt gun spurted its molten stream past his head.

The guard got his elbow around Steel's neck. Stahl raised both huge hands and brought them down at his face like twin sledge hammers. Steel dropped his weight in the guard's arms, twisted his head, caught Stahl's blow on his shoulder. Then the arm around his neck was blinding him, cutting off his air. A red film swam before his eyes. His ears roared. He felt Stahl's blows numbly against his face. Going down. Going down.

It was more instinct than anything else that made him grip the guard's shirt behind him. It was many a police lesson in roughhouse that doubled Steel forward and arched his back, while he jerked at the guard's shirt with his last strength. He yanked the guard off his feet and flung him up and out over the railing.

When the guard's scream died away, Steel found himself on the floor of the platform, Stahl on top of him, thick fingers grappling for his throat. The platform had stopped falling. It rested at the bottom of the cavern.

"I'll get him! I'll get him!" screamed Lois, leaping toward Stahl, deadly little knife upraised.

Steel fished his legs around and kicked her back against the railing. "No!" he yelled. "Get the projector working!" Dr. Harmon had said: *We can still operate from the projector itself . . .*

The girl turned and fled down the circular stairs, to disappear inside the vast machine.

But Stahl found his opening. He got a grip on Steel's right arm, twisted it behind him and then twisted it back like a bending stick. Steel rolled to keep it from breaking. And found himself staring over the platform's edge into a writhing sea of

shaggy hair, upturned blazing eyes, dripping jaws—the bears—ten feet below.

Stahl strained at his arm, shoving with his knees, breath heavy in Steel's ear. Steel's right leg slid over the edge.

Although they couldn't shoot for fear of hitting Stahl now, the sound of gunfire continued from above. It was the requiem for those who remained of the Harmon gang, Steel thought wildly—and for Dr. Harmon.

Steel tried to get a grip on the railing post. The fat man scraped his fingers away. He clawed at the platform floor. But he couldn't stop his sliding. He cursed and prayed and tried to cling to the floor by the sheer friction of his body. Stahl was shoving too hard. Steel's body slid over the side, one last arm hooked in the railing.

The fat man struggled up and kicked at the arm. Then, more than the kick on his arm, Steel felt a sickening shudder pulse through his body—through the platform—through the world . . .

Stahl felt it, too. His foot hesitated in the next kick. His eyes glaring down at Steel suddenly widened.

The moment was all Steel needed. He jerked himself back up on the platform, rolled and struggled to his knees. Then he saw Stahl wasn't even playing any more. The fat man was staring up at the roof of the cavern as if he was having an apoplectic stroke. It was only then that Steel realized the blinding light in his own eyes.

He squinted up at the strange brightness and saw at the distant top of the cavern, like a huge skylight above them, a great white square, blazing with a light that no artificial fluorescence had ever approached. A light Earth had forgotten.

"The sun . . ."

Stahl's voice was a whisper. Then it sired into a scream. "Sun K-16! They've done it! They've done it!" His eyes shot back to Steel, like a wild beast's. "But you'll never have it!" he shrieked. His hands shot out at Steel like talons.

This time Steel was prepared. His right fist came up and across Stahl's thick chin. The fat man toppled backward, tottered against the railing, and then went over.

At that moment, Lois Harmon ran up the ladder. Steel caught her and pressed her face against his chest. "Don't look."

But he looked. He saw Stahl ride for an instant on the shaggy white sea below, beat with his hands frenziedly against the mass of animals under him, and then slip down into the mass like a pig slipping into a meat grinder.

His scream was an era dying . . .

THE bright sunlight playing across the shimmering ice waste, the young rivers of melting snow—the telenevs cameras ate it up.

The telenevs men didn't seem to care whether they had an audience or not. They had the video cameras set up on the sun-drenched Terminal roofs, sending the picture to receiving sets that probably hadn't a single watcher throughout the world. The population of Earth had swarmed to the surface *en masse* and tears of thanksgiving mingled with the melting snow.

"Nobody seems to care that the lower levels have already filled with water," the announcer chattered hysterically into his portable mike. "Nobody seems to care *how* this thing happened. The only thing that matters is that it *did* happen—the greatest thing that *ever* happened!"

"And they'll never know how it happened," Lois Harmon said. "Dad would have wanted it that way." She and Steel sat in their plane on the Terminal roof, listening to the announcer, watching the joyful mob that stretched across the ice as far as they could see.

"Yeah," Steel said quietly, "every clue to the old world will be washed away clean. Everything will begin new." And, he thought, Floyd would also have wanted it that way. This was what he'd died for. Even the memory of that upper level chill would soon be gone." He watched a group of mothers holding their sickly white babies up to the warmth, a horde of small boys and girls whose cheeks already glowed with the strength of a new race.

"Everything new . . ." the girl repeated. She turned, green eyes meeting Steel's, then dropped her golden head against his shoulder.

Steel grinned as he put his arm around her. "Looks like I'd better hunt another job, too," he said. "I guess I'm a pretty bum detective when the world gets stolen right under my nose."

PS's Feature Flash

CARL SELWYN, author of *Earth Is Missing!*, first appeared in the Fall, 1944, Issue with his *Citadel of Death*, but he may be better known to you-all for his *Space Bat*, in the Winter Issue. That was a job, hey, gang!

This writer has a theory about readers who like to read about writers. They want to be writers themselves. Because this writer tries to give his readers (and editors!) what they want, herewith is offered a complete course in short story writing combined with the biographical sketch our Editor, Dr. Payne, requested.

THERE'S LOTS OF ROOM ON THE MOON OR HOW TO BECOME A WRITER

Selwyn writhed and gasped, the chill gases of this alien world searing his body, seeping into his tortured lungs. Through the red haze about him, he glimpsed a descending shape, a tentacle thing, snaking down upon him. It coiled both his ankles. It jerked him high in the air, upside down, head dangling. In the thundering darkness, he felt a solid jolt, an explosive impact that shot through his whole body, searing his raw lungs and ripping from his brain the last memory of that world of eternal peace he had lost forever. Selwyn screamed. It was December 12, 1917. (Lesson 1. Begin with Action.)

Between the Lost Colony's Virginia Dare and Carl Selwyn, quite a few children were born in America but not many on Roanoke Island, North Carolina, and Selwyn's playmates primarily consisted of one small brother and several thousand slightly smaller gray mullet which Pop's fishing fleet monotonously went out for and came in with. Cape Hatteras hurricanes blew the house down with equally monotonous regularity. Mama wondered why she ever left her trained seal act with Ringling Brothers. (Lesson 2. Work in the Background.)

Twenty years later (transitions are easy), Selwyn sat under an oak tree at the University of North Carolina watching his fellow Kappa Alpha stagger off to jobs in filling stations, and cotton gin and tobacco factories.

"Not for me," Selwyn said. (A little dialogue

breaks it up.) He went to New York and made two great discoveries—that magazines like the old *Ballyhoo* and *College Humor* bought jokes at five dollars a piece and that the longest cigarette butts could be found in the dark doorways along Fifth Avenue at 3:00 A.M. (Hero's ups and downs.)

Number 16 is not a very lucky number to have in the selective service phase of a world war, particularly when the preceding 15 are halt, lame or husbands. It does, however, get one in on the ground floor and Selwyn was a sergeant long before most of the lieutenants were even drafted. He was also a sergeant long after most of the lieutenants were lieutenant colonels. Selwyn was five years in the chairborne infantry. He wrote public relations for Captain Bligh and training films for Major Martinet. He married a Vassar girl who didn't approve of enlisted men and who divorced him when he finished O.C.S. (Love interest, complications.)

Haggard, worn, but with chin held high above the frayed collar of his faded army shirt, Selwyn waited in line for his readjustment allowance check. He took stock of himself. His meager talents. His futile past. His aimless future. (Torture of the soul.) As he signed his name for his twenty-dollar relief-check, he considered his present shameful state. He slammed his fist upon the desk. The interviewer jumped. Selwyn picked up his check and hurried away. (Decision.) He went across 42nd Street to a flower shop. He wired a dozen camellias to a girl in Greenwich Village. He went in a phone booth, called his uncle collect in California and said he'd take that job writing for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. (Happy ending.)

Readers who like to read about writers will note a flaw in this combined biography and short course in short story writing—there is no unity of purpose. You don't need one. Not if you have an uncle at M.G.M.

—CARL SELWYN.