

Strange STORIES

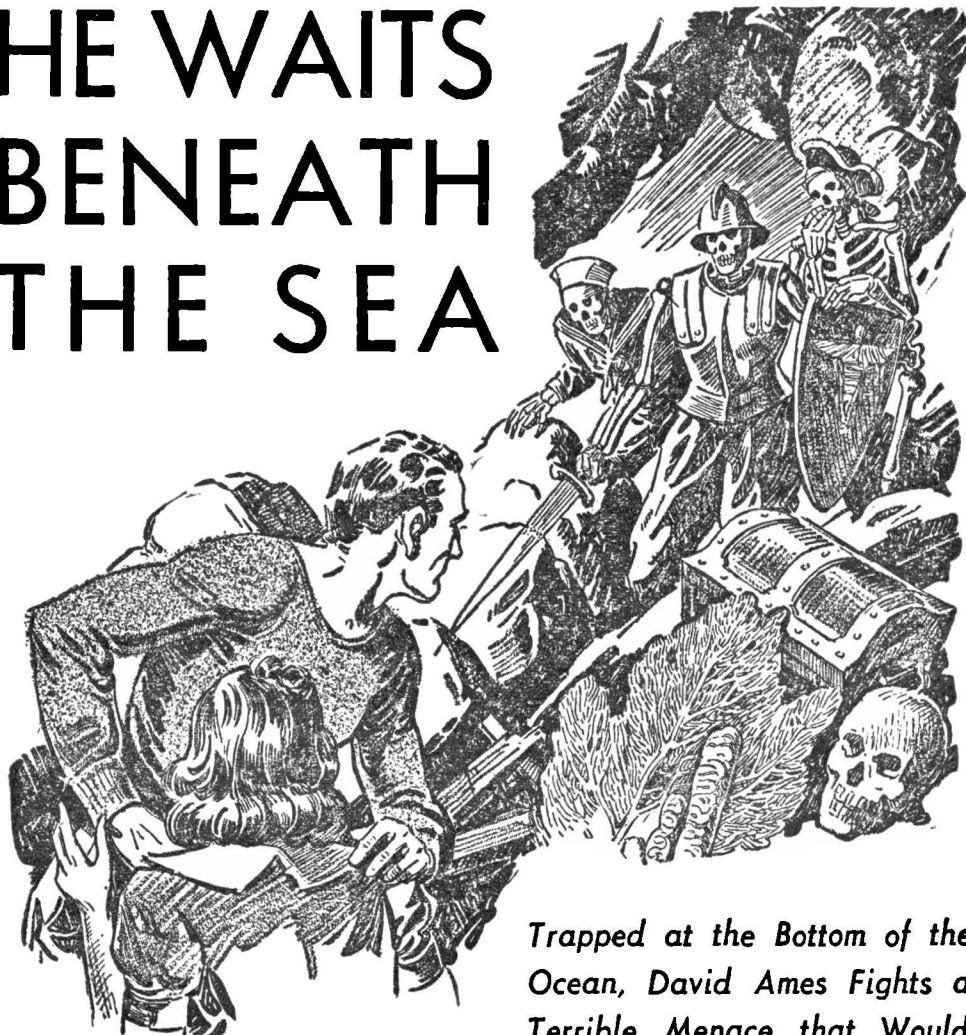
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HE WAITS BENEATH THE SEA



The three figures walked along stiffly, jerkily

Trapped at the Bottom of the Ocean, David Ames Fights a Terrible Menace that Would Rule the World with Cadavers!

By TARLETON FISKE

Author of "The Seal of the Satyr," "Flowers from the Moon," etc.

DAVID AMES took Jean in his arms and kissed her. It was quite characteristic of Ames that he did this efficiently, expertly, and very thoroughly. The result was a scientific kiss, typical of Ames' scientific mind — but it seemed to please the girl. She closed her eyes. So did Ames.

Together the two of them tried to imagine the peaceful waters of the South Atlantic all about them, with a

soft tropic moon silvering the waves. It was not a great stretch of the imagination—merely a matter of focusing their minds three thousand feet above them. For, after all, they were in the South Atlantic, and there definitely seemed to be water all about them. But no moon penetrated these depths. David Ames and Jean Banning kissed in a submarine on the ocean floor.

Somewhere in one of the forward

compartments Jean's uncle, Ronald Banning, was working with the crew. The men were checking figures on the charts, estimating and calculating and theorizing in many technical ways which neither Ames nor Jean cared to think about at the moment. All thoughts of the expedition, even the consciousness of their peculiar situation here on the bottom of the sea, did not seem to matter as they embraced again. In their minds, researches in marine biology held no attractions comparable to the quite human biological research of a kiss.

Then came the shock. For a moment neither of them realized that the submarine was lurching. Abruptly, they stepped apart.

"What's up?" Ames muttered.

The ship was moving forward along the ocean floor; not steadily, as a submarine glides, but with a dragging motion that bumped and scraped the bottom. Ames' blue eyes steeled with sudden apprehension. His long legs quickened in hasty strides as he made for the door.

"Wait here, dear," he cautioned the girl. "I'll see what's happened."

BEFORE he crossed the threshold there was a terrific shuddering in the entire submarine, followed by a series of excited shouts from the forward compartments, the sound of tinkling glass and falling instruments. Ames leaped forward just in time to see the iron hatch above the doorway descend with a brazen clang, barring his exit from the compartment.

"David!" The girl clung to him.

And constantly the submarine was dragging, dragging across the rocky bottom. Then a terrific swoop and the ship tilted upwards. An audible roaring from outside proclaimed that the craft was being drawn downward.

Downward? But there was nowhere to go! They were on the ocean floor, three thousand feet below the surface. The ship had been dragged ahead into what—an ocean fissure? And by what?

There was no time to think. Jean shuddered in his arms as Ames endeavored to keep his footing on the shifting floor. The roaring grew louder. The submarine plunged; down,

down, through inky, chill waters.

"What is it?" Jean whispered.

Ames' lean face darkened, his tall form tensed as he held the girl more closely to protect her loveliness from a danger he could not name; a question he could not answer.

Twisting, turning, a chip in a black maelstrom, the vessel hurtled down.

"Uncle Ronald and the men," Jean murmured. "They're outside. And the oxygen tanks are in here—"

Ames staggered across the slanting floor, beat vainly at the fallen iron door. He could not lift it, nor would the levers raise the barrier. It was as though some gigantic force held it fast; some gigantic force that was sucking the very submarine itself into the depths.

Gasping, Ames crawled back to the girl. They lay on the tilted floor, clinging tightly as the rocking vessel swung up-ended.

"I—can't—breathe," she gasped.

With a hoarse sob, Ames fought his way to the oxygen outlets. He turned the valves. Life-giving air flooded the stuffy compartment. And they gasped, as still the ship plunged down.

"This is the end," whispered Jean.

Her dark eyes rested without fear on Ames' face. "I'm glad we're together."

The supply of oxygen was giving out. And the steel walls were bending like the sides of a paper boat. Ames' temples throbbed as the pressure glued him to the floor. But he smiled as he returned Jean's gaze. They kissed again, and the kiss mingled with the blackness about them.

And then it stopped. With a final tremor the submarine righted itself. The roaring ceased. There was only stillness; deathly stillness all about them. The walls, bent inward, did not collapse. Half-choking, Ames rose to his feet and stumbled to the iron door.

His hand hesitated on the lever. It might not rise. If so, they were trapped in an airless room, countless thousands of feet beneath the sea in some strange fissure in the ocean floor.

Or, then again, it might rise—rise upon a crushed shell beyond, where the submarine had bent inwards due to lack of oxygen to neutralize the tre-

menhous pressure of the depths. In that case, the open door would admit a torrent of flooding waters.

AMES gripped the lever. And then he smelled air. Air seeping through a tiny crevice at the side of the door near the grated hinges on which it lowered. Air from a little crack which during their descent had trickled only water!

But it was incredible—to find air down here. Still, they could not exist much longer in this stifling cell. Ames made his decision. He pulled the lever, breathed a silent prayer as the door rose.

No water entered. But both Ames and the girl uttered a simultaneous gasp.

From the opening, light came. Light on the ocean bottom! Drawing Jean to her feet, Ames moved forward, into shambles.

The rest of the submarine was a wreck. Twisted and battered, the steel sides were bursting in a dozen places. Smashed instruments littered the floor. But there were no bodies. Whether they had floated away or simply had been crushed out of existence, Ames could not say, but he was thankful that the girl had been spared a sight of them.

Only a moment did he glance about, for there was more strangeness ahead.

Through the opened sides Ames saw that the submarine rested in a gigantic cavern, a place totally free of water. From this cave the air blew in, salty and of the sea, but definitely air.

The cavern was lighted; dimly enough, to be sure, yet radiance undeniably poured forth from some unknown source. The light was faintly green, and it cast eery shadows over the rocky walls. There was something ghastly and unnatural about it all, but Ames had no choice. He took Jean's arm, and together they stepped out of the ship.

"Where are we?" the girl whispered.

"In Davy Jones' Locker," Ames answered, and grinned. "But whether it's the Sailor's Snug Harbor or Hell itself, I don't know. I suggest that we investigate."

There was something very strange about all this; the inexplicable wreck, and a descent to a lighted, airy cavern miles below the ocean floor. The sea is large, and water covers three-fourths of the earth's surface. Men have not begun to plumb the secrets of the ocean; science has not fathomed its final mysteries. Ames wondered.

But there was rock beneath their feet, air to breathe, light to guide them. They stepped into the cavern, arm in arm.

It was massive, with high, domed walls which seemed to have no apertures or fissures in the piled rocks. But on all sides, at a distance, stretched little corridors leading off into depths of green twilight. They did not appear to be other than natural formations, yet their design as corridors hinted horridly at the presence of alien life, or intelligent minds which had constructed them.

As Ames and the girl drew near to one cave mouth, Jean drew back, hands brushing her dark curls as she pressed her forehead.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "Let's not go in."

"We can't stay here," Ames answered. "No food. We must explore; see if there's a way out of here; or if not, how we can remain alive if we must stay."

Jean tried to smile, but she clung to his broad shoulder very tightly with one small hand as they entered the long green corridor that led deep under the rocks.

THEY walked forward in utter silence; the silence of the depths; the silence of the dead and the drowned. There was coldness and dampness in the air about them, as if, it too, were dead and drowned. But the green light mocked and beckoned from ahead, and they went deeper into the unnerving stillness.

"What's that?" The girl's brown eyes widened with sudden fear. "I heard something."

Ames halted. Yes, the silence had been broken. From ahead came a sound—a soft, shuffling sound as though something were being dragged over the rocky floor of the cave.

"Here!" Ames whispered. He drew the girl into a niche between the rocks of the wall, then peered out ahead. And suddenly he saw what was coming—saw that which was never meant to be.

"Good God!" he muttered.

"David—what is it? What's coming?"

David Ames stared with wild eyes into the passageway.

"David, tell me. What's coming?"

The man still stared. "I don't know," he whispered hoarsely. "But I think it's—*Death*."

Along the corridor the three dragged their way. One was tall and bony, wearing the uniform of the U. S. Navy. It had no face. The second was dressed in rags and finery commingled, with a buccaneer's cap resting on a head of hair matted with seaweed. The third wore iron over a ghastly frame — ancient Spanish breastplates above white nothingness; for it was truly a skeleton in armor.

The three figures walked along stiffly, jerkily, staring straight ahead; one with dead glazed eyes which did not see, the second with red orbs peering from beneath strings of kelp, and the horrible third leering out of no eyes at all—just two black sockets in a skull.

They passed, marching down the corridor into further gloom. Ames drew the trembling girl out as they hastened up the passageway.

"David, what—" she faltered.

"I don't know, dear."

The horrible memory of the marching dead bit into Ames' brain. "Just a little research expedition in marine biology," old Ronald Banning had promised.

To a young scientist in love with a girl whose uncle was bringing her on an expedition, the trip had sounded quite attractive to David Ames at the time. And now—it had led to this. Banning and all the men were dead, the ship had been dragged into a strange, lighted cavern, and he was alone with Jean in a submarine world where dead men walked.

Yet there was nothing to do but go ahead. Go ahead and—

Ames almost stumbled on what lay

at the side of the passage. Jean drew back with a shudder of terror.

Two bodies rested in the shadows. The first was dressed in a flowing robe with leather harness. On its sagging head rested a helmet—a Roman helmet, unmistakably. Across the chest, which neither rose nor fell with breath, rested a gleaming sword, a sword of the legion.

Ames gazed incredulously. Then he glanced at the second figure. It was blue and bloated, swollen with water so that the purpling face had thickened. He glanced more closely at the features.

"Steve Bascom!" he muttered. "Steve Bascom!"

"What do you mean, darling?"

"Steve Bascom—I knew him. Eight years ago he died; his boat was sunk by a Government ship. He was a rum-runner; smuggled liquor from Havana to Florida. It's Steve all right—but he's dead!"

FOR a moment longer Ames stood there, then stooped and with an impulsive gesture pulled the sword from the chest of the Roman.

"I don't get this," he said. "But something tells me we'll have a better chance of finding out if I hang onto this sword."

The two turned down the path. Suddenly there was a sound from behind. Ames stood still, then hastened back along the path to where the bodies lay.

They were gone!

And in the distance, that ghastly dragging sound. . . .

Suddenly, without warning, a scream sounded from the bend ahead; a horribly familiar woman's scream.

"Jean!" Ames shouted.

Sword in hand, David Ames rounded the corner. Jean was crouching against the wall, and confronting her with outstretched talons, were three new figures from the depths of nightmare.

The first was a gigantic black, nude and gleaming, swinging forward on ape-like arms—for the creature had no legs; merely twitching stumps that hung from his barrel-waist. The second creature wore a yachting costume, green with slime, and its face was

covered with mossy growth on which snails had feasted. The third horror was merely bones—a partially articulated skeleton with remnants of flesh clinging to talonlike hands. They were closing in on the girl as Ames dashed forward, his sword swinging in a silver arc.

The blade swooped and descended, and the skeleton fell. There was a clicking sound as the bones collapsed into a jumbled heap. The corpse in the yachting outfit turned to confront this unexpected opponent, only to meet the point of Ames' weapon as it thrust full into the moldy horror of the rotted face. The sword sliced through to the neck and tore out of the shoulder, and the monster fell. But the legless, gigantic black grasped the girl in mighty arms, and the snarling African face leered upward as Ames confronted it.

The sword slashed out, but the black dropped Jean and dodged.

Then its great arms rose swiftly and it moved forward, swinging the helpless torso from side to side as the sword missed, lunge after lunge. The bestial countenance seemed to watch Ames as he wielded the blade, and the scientist fancied he saw derision in the queerly dead eyes. All at once the mighty arms rose upward.

Ames felt the limbs close about his neck. The hands dug into his throat, and they were cold with the iciness of death. He felt his body crush against the slimy chest, felt the life-blood oozing through his bursting veins. The sword slipped from his fingers, and he went down into buzzing blackness.

Then came release. The grip relaxed. Jean, brave girl, had pierced the black back with the sword. Now it rose again, and the frantic girl brought it down on the ebon giant's neck. It sliced through the throat and cut the head as though it were a black apple on a brittle branch. The head rolled across the floor. There was no blood—not from the dead.

Ames rose. Sobbing, the girl went to his arms. Ames stood there, quieting her panic as best he could. But his eyes were watching the shambles about him. He saw the skeleton bones

still moving on the rocks, saw the green horror in the yachtsman's outfit clawing blindly at its ruined face. He stared at the black, severed head which still leered up at him, just as it had during the silent struggle.

AMES stared at the dead head. And as he did so, black eyelids rolled back, red lips parted, and the head grinned. Then a red mouth opened. A voice came from a throat which should not speak; a deep, blurry voice from far away.

"Go forward, fools. The One Who Waits expects thee."

Blind panic ruled. Turning with insane revulsion, Ames and Jean fled down the corridor while the derisive head grinned after them, its mad, cackling laughter ringing in their ears.

Ames raced through nightmare. Along the twisting emerald-litten corridor he ran; then halted as the girl gasped for lack of breath. They stood huddled together, two tiny figures in the green gloom.

"Oh, David," whimpered Jean.

The tall, blue-eyed man put his arms around the girl, but he maintained a tight grip on the Roman sword. And his mind retained an even tighter grip on reality—if it was reality that he faced here.

"I know," he muttered. "It's awful, but we must face it. Somehow we've landed in a place where dead men walk. All I can piece together seems to hint that these men are—were—sailors of various times. They must have been wrecked and in some way dragged down here throughout the ages. There were skeletons, remember, and a Roman corpse. That means men have been trapped here for thousands of years; are still being trapped, because Steve's body shows it. And someone, or something, animates the bodies; gives them a will to walk and obey commands. *The One Who Waits*. That's all we know."

"It's too awful," Jean whispered faintly. "Let's turn back, David. I can't bear more of this."

"No, dear. We must find out. It's our only hope. I think we had better interview Mr. *One Who Waits*, and if

he proves to be hard to persuade—well, I at least have a chance of putting up a sharp argument." He smiled, fingering the sword, but there was no mirth in his voice.

Together they walked, and now the way widened. The brilliance of the green light blossomed about them, coming from ahead. And together, they emerged from the corridor.

They stood inside a vast bubble in the rock—a great cavern with stone walls egg-slaped on all sides against the sea. At intervals other cave mouths like their own gaped in the rocks. Apparently the caves in the spot where they had landed all led inward to this central chamber.

The vaulted dome was high, and the light seemed to emanate phosphorescently from the murk above. Its actual source was not visible, but it undoubtedly originated in some peculiar gaseous phenomenon actuated by the same freak which had blown this mass of rock into a sealed cavern at the bottom of the sea. For a moment David's scientific soul burned to investigate these submarine marvels, but necessity turned his thoughts elsewhere.

For the cavern was not empty. The vast floor was a charnel-house, littered with bodies. Ames and the girl stared at a world of horror.

VIKINGS in armor, savages in feathers, sailors in dungarees—the whole burial ground of the sea lay exposed to their eyes. Roman galley slaves rested in a final sleep; pirates slumbered after walking the plank of death. There were bodies in the uniforms of Nelson's days; bearded giants from whaling fleets, swarthy corsairs from the Barbary Coast; clean-shaven men of the modern merchant marine.

All were sprawled together in a shambles, rank on rank, in hundreds and thousands they answered the roll-call of the ocean's dead. Here kings and cabin boys, admirals, captains, and common seamen, explorers and pleasure cruisers, cutthroats and missionaries rested in the sea's sleep.

Some of the bodies were skeletonic cadavers; others were blue and bloated with water; some bore wounds and many had given ghastly feast to the

fishes. Piled helter-skelter like broken dolls in a toy factory, they lay unmoving, weapons at their sides. Ames thought of the legends of the Sargasso Sea.

Here was the real Port of Lost Ships; the haven of the *Flying Dutchman*. What stories of wreck and battle and storm these men could tell if only they were living!

But—perhaps they were living. The terrible memory of those encounters in the caves seared into Ames' brain. These men lay still in death, but they could be revived by *The One Who Waits*.

And *He* waited here!

Beyond the pile of bodies stood the black box. In the center of the chamber it stood on end, like a Chinese coffin. It was closed, sealed, but Ames knew instinctively that it contained Life.

Jean lung to him as he faced the center of the chamber, and her grip tightened as a voice came. It was a voice from nowhere, echoing through the great cavern.

"Ye have come at last," the voice whispered. "After ages, ye have come, just as I have dreamed. I have been lonely here, and ye have come."

There was triumph in the whisper, and a hinted dread.

"Approach me, so that I may look upon ye," the voice droned. "Fear not—I shall clear a path."

And as the two hesitated, the path was cleared. The dead rolled back. A long, shuddering groan swept through the cavern, as though the slumber of many dreamers had been disturbed. Rows of bodies turned on their sides, opening a horrid pathway through the sleepers.

"Come on," Ames whispered. "We must."

He drew the girl with him, and together they walked down the terrible aisle. Ames held his sword in readiness. Jean's eyes never left the bloated bodies of the drowned on either side. Then they stood before the black box.

"Ye need not fear," came the whisper, softer this time. "They cannot harm lest I command it."

"Who are you?" Ames demanded. He controlled his voice only by effort,

for his reason tottered. Addressing an empty black box in a hall filled with drowned men was madness, yet it was true. "Who are you?"

The voice came solemnly and softly. "I am The One Who Waits. I am not of your world—the tiny world above the waters. I come from the sea, from the depths below where once all life began. Ye of the animal world rose to walk on land, but life began in the sea and here it has remained. Here it has developed, and evolution has progressed infinitely further than in your world above."

THE voice paused, then continued. "I find it hard to put into words ye can comprehend. But this I can say—after a time, we below evolved so highly that our bodies disappeared. Only Intelligence remained; an Intelligence so great ye could not begin to understand it. And carrying out the full cycle of Evolution, that Intelligence finally began to die. I am the last survivor; The One Who Waits.

"I was the wisest. I knew the fate in store for me, and so in these final years I have planned. During the past few thousand—ye cannot understand, but such passage of time is comparable to a few of earthly days to you—I have thought and planned and worked to find a way of surviving the doom which lies ahead.

"Long ago, in the days when Atlantis still rose above these waters, our people had achieved a science greater than anything ye know. But as we disembodied, such knowledge became worthless. And ambition died. So that all forgot the secrets we once cherished, all but myself. I remembered.

"And I used them in my plans. With their aid I protected myself when Atlantis sank, survived the earthquake which sent a continent crashing. This hollow cavern saved me, though it destroyed our cities here below. Here I have dwelt and worked. For I evolved a plan of survival.

"There were many bodies in the water when Atlantis fell. Some of these, using the science we had long since discarded as worthless, I reanimated. This I achieved by sending a

portion of my intelligence into their dead brains. Once given life again, I set these creatures to work, building this cavern against all future disasters. Then I built the magnet. Ye have not seen that, but ye felt it. It is set above this cavern, directly under the fissure leading to the ocean floor. It drags down every vessel that passes overhead, drags it into the fissure, and to the cavern."

"So that's what pulled our submarine here," Ames muttered. "No wonder the iron door fell and wouldn't raise."

"Precisely," the voice answered, as though reading Ames' thought. "From all these ships I took the bodies of the men. This I have done for centuries. Why, ye ask?"

The voice rose to a passionate crescendo. It was ghastly to hear such emotion rising out of nowhere.

"Because I discovered the way to survive—by putting myself, my intelligence, into a human form! Once that is accomplished, I can rise to the surface of the earth. And then I shall live again—live and rule.

"It will all be so simple. Ye have seen my army here. Stout fighters all; crippled and disabled as they are, they cannot be conquered unless blown to bits, for they are already dead and will not die again. I shall master the tiny upper crust.

"But one thing has halted me. Of all the bodies brought below the surface, none have retained perfection. I shall not enter a drowned or a wounded, or a crippled shell, with my entire intelligence. I waited, knowing sooner or later that a perfect body would be caught. And now—ye have come!"

Unconsciously, Ames raised his sword. A laugh rang out, then silence.

"Strange! I have never laughed before. I know no emotions that ye understand as such. Perhaps it is a symbol of my approaching humanity. Ah, well—I but mean to warn ye that resistance is futile. Ye cannot harm me, for I do not exist in a physical state. Do not trouble to hold the thought any longer. I want one body and I shall take it. Everything is arranged. My army has builded well.

In the cave beyond rest many thousand conveyors—akin to the torpedoes ye use at present, and similar to these—submarines, I believe they are called.

"Ye see, I know thy world. Each of these vessels can hold many men. Once I assume my human guise and send my intelligence forth to animate the others, we shall embark in the vessels and rise to the surface. This world will be destroyed as we pierce the rocky shell and enter the fissure, but no matter. We shall not return. We will conquer the outside earth and resume dominion. I am The One Who Waits—and I need wait no longer. I have chosen my body."

The voice subsided into a dreadful silence.

AND then hideous life rose all about Ames and the girl—life rose from Death.

A dozen bony arms reached out. Corpse-cold fingers clawed. A score of the dead men stiffly hobbled to their feet. Ames was already swinging his blade, and it descended in a pendulum of destruction. As fast as the cadavers approached, his sword sheared out, lopping limbs, slicing throats, ripping bloated bellies. Somewhere behind him Jean fought silently, but Ames was lost in the red fury of this silent, hideous battle with the dead.

And then they were upon him, bearing him down by sheer weight of numbers with their cold, drowned limbs. With a mighty effort he hurled them off, only to go down again. They were all about him now, and he smelled their horrid stench as they gripped his arms and legs, swarmed over him until he was hidden from sight. He would be done for in a moment—

Then the weight relaxed. He was lying only under dead. Dazed, he rose to his feet, comprehending. The Intelligence in the box had thought him finished off, and left, relaxing the will which animated the bodies. Why had it left in such a hurry? Where had it gone, and for what purpose?

Ames whirled.

Jean!

The girl was gone. The cavern was empty, save for the bodies of the dead stretching in waves over the floor.

It had taken Jean away to the chamber where the vessels waited; taken Jean to exchange bodies and summon this horde of drowned to rise upon the earth!

For a moment utter panic swept over the young scientist. This was the end. He turned at a sudden sound.

The dead were rising again.

No; only three had gained their feet. Ames grasped the sword, then watched as the three sightlessly staring figures ignored him and walked across the cavern floor. He understood then, and breathed a blessing.

The One Who Waited was summoning these three to his chamber, wherever that might be. Possibly they were to assist him in whatever final arrangement must be made.

Silently, Ames followed them. He had no idea of the Intelligence's powers; they might be so great that it was watching these dead progress.

Consequently, David Ames walked stiffly, like a resurrected corpse. His face assumed an immobile stare. But he never dropped his sword, and within his brain a small voice called, "Jean—Jean—where are you?"

Down a short corridor he followed the three corpses. One was short and squat like a Frankish galley slave; the second wore the uniform of the French Navy; the third was dressed in modern garb, but the head dangled loosely. The neck was broken and the lolling face swung almost backwards in a ghastly fashion, and there was something evilly familiar about the horrid figure. Ames gasped as he realized.

The once kindly and wrinkled face was now contorted in a grimace of death-agony, and the horrid jaws lolled open—but David Ames realized that the corpse before him was that of Jean's uncle, Ronald Banning marine biologist!

THIS was no time for thinking of such things. The walking dead men were turning the corridor. Swiftly Ames moved forward. The sightless eyes did not even notice him, since the Intelligence behind them was not directing them for that purpose. Ames reached the first man, the

one in the uniform of the French Navy.

He was of Ames' height and general build, though his hair was darker. Ames did not bother to ponder such details. His sword flashed. The figure fell, twitching. The scientist leaped upon it, jerking off the naval coat and the cap. Hastily he donned the disguise, then raced to reach the other two figures just as they entered a rocky cave set back from the walls. The green light burned strongly within. Ames followed the animated body of Ronald Banning into the small cavern.

In the distance, row on row, stood the vessels. They were, to all outward appearances, submarines; yet they were pointed nose upward, straight at the stone ceiling. Ames noticed that they had peculiar torpedo-like attachments at the snout—undoubtedly explosive agents to blast the vessels out of the cavern. The foremost one was open, and a light gleamed within, an electric light!

Ames followed the two figures that moved without hesitation toward the open door in the side of the vessel. Then he stood in the cabin.

The black box lay on a table, and before it stood Jean—Jean, terrified, her black hair hanging in disordered loveliness about her piquant face. A thing without a head was holding her—a thing that was scarred and torn by a dozen gaping wounds, yet it gripped her in a steely grasp.

And from the box a voice spoke.

"So. Now, my child, let us begin. The vessel is ready to start. Within a few moments I can summon the rest and fill the other ships. We shall leave at once—my plans are laid. All that remains lies between myself and you."

The girl sobbed, Ames looked ahead in agony. He dared not betray himself. The voice purred on.

"Do not feel badly. I know how emotion affects human kind, but I assure you, it is nothing. Ye are participating in something far greater than has ever occurred before; ye are lending thy body to the most astounding service ever rendered in the Cosmos. Believe me, it is greater thus to die. In no other way could thy life

be rendered so worthy. But enough of words—I must act now."

There was a moment of silence, and the headless thing held the girl quite tightly. Suddenly Ames, watching, saw the color draining from Jean's face. Her eyes grew glassy, fixed in a blank stare. They were riveted on the black box, and now the room seemed to whirl as it hummed with unseen power.

A terrific force seemed to be rising from the black box, as though *It* were emerging. There was nothing to see or hear, but the feeling grew. And Jean's face faded. *Another* face was peering through.

The One Who Waits was taking Jean's body!

Then came surcease. Life gradually returned to the girl's face. And from the box came a murmur.

"No—I am not strong enough yet. Never have I permitted myself utterly to enter a single body. It is as I feared—the strain is too great. I must make another attempt, work up to the ordeal more gradually. That is why I summoned these three. They are dead, and a portion of Intelligence has animated them. They have no will of their own, and I can enter into such shells more easily. I shall allow myself to enter one of them as an experiment, and thus strengthen my will for a second experiment with ye. And I shall not fail."

JEAN stood half-swooning from her struggle. The voice in the black box paused, then went on.

"I shall choose this one—with the broken neck. He came with ye, and has never known domination before. Therefore he is stronger than my other servants, and will provide a better final test."

The voice ceased, and for the first time Jean recognized her dead uncle with a look of startled horror. The hideous head dangled, grimacing in her face, and then turned on its stalk-like neck.

The force flooded forth, fiercely. For a moment the room was filled with a pulsing that seemed to shake the walls of the submarine. And then—

"I have triumphed!"

The voice came, not from the box, but from the dead lips on the dead face of Ronald Banning. It came, not from a stiff, unseeing corpse, but from an actual living dead man. The deep voice brought life from dead lungs, breathed horridly as it walked across the submarine cabin.

The girl shuddered. Ames still stood silent, but his legs were trembling,



and he felt the sweat of utter dread upon his brow.

The man with the broken neck, the man with Ronald Banning's face, the man who was not a man but One Who Waits, walked and spoke.

"A human body. Remarkable! I feel life once more—form, corporeal existence. I shall like that. Ye are but a woman, but thy body shall suffice. This one is a broken reed. Ye are young, and strong, and healthy. And I have the strength to enter. Why delay?"

A horribly inhuman chuckle burst from the swollen purple lips.

"I shall hold ye in my arms and breathe my soul into thy form. And then—arise to power!"

The corpse advanced. And Ames acted. His sword thrust upward. At the instant, the figure turned.

"An impostor!" The thing that was not Ronald Banning darted to one side. "Kill him!" he shouted.

And the other two corpses acted.

The galley slave rushed in, arms swinging. But Ames was already lunging with deadly precision, and swept his sword through waist and belly alike with ripping thrust. Jean rushed across the cabin and slammed the door fast. The creature in Banning's body vainly clawed at the handle.

Ames went after him, but slipped

and fell. The remaining corpse was on him from the rear, together with the awful headless creature. The three went down together, but Ames held the sword upthrust, and as the headless being fell forward it was pierced. Rolling to one side, Ames again slashed the crippled galley slave. The two bodies lay twitching madly as the scientist rose to his feet and confronted the body of Banning.

"You can't be touched, eh? Disembodied Intelligence?" he grated. "You're alive now, and in a human body! The One Who Waits? Your waiting is—ended."

THE sword came down. There was a shearing sound, as grasped in both hands, the blade cleft through head and neck. Something red and bleeding fell to the floor and lay still. It looked not unlike a human brain.

The pulsing vibrations that had filled the room were ceased. The thing was dead. And Ames turned to look for Jean.

"Jean!" he cried. "What are you doing?"

The girl was fumbling at a panel at the end of the room.

She turned to him with a determined smile.

"We're getting out of here, and right now," she answered.

Her slim hands pulled levers. Suddenly, with a roar and a lurch, the submarine rocketed upward. There was a single grinding shock as the vessel exploded through rocky walls, then merely a steady humming as the righted submarine arose.

From below came a deep, sonorous rumble.

"The cavern is filling in," the girl whispered. "We're going up."

Silently, Ames took her in his arms. Their kiss was long. It was not interrupted until the vessel lurched again. Ames' eyes followed the wall until they reached a periscopic mirror. He nudged the dark-haired girl with a slow grin.

"Look through there," he said. "I can see the stars."

Together, thankfully they gazed on the blue heavens above the South Atlantic.