

# AMAZING STORIES

## *Science Fiction*

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#### Our Cover

depicts a scene from the story entitled "Men Without Shadows,"  
by Stanton A. Coblentz, drawn by Morey.

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# *Into the Hydrosphere*

By NEIL R. JONES

*This is another of the Jameson series; in it we are introduced to a strange conception of a world, something hitherto undescribed by any or possibly by very few. Our etymologically disposed readers may be referred to the title, which we think will tell them just enough to start them to surmising what this story may be about, for it is a very novel conception and different from anything which we have given in the past, if we take it in its entirety.*

Illustrated by MOREY

## Introduction

LONG before he knew he was to die, Professor Jameson, a scholar of meteorology and an experimenter in rockets, built himself a funeral rocket. His belief sustained the theory that organic material isolated in the vacuum of space between worlds remains unchangeable. In accordance with the terms of his will, his nephew secretly followed the professor's instructions. As the professor had foreseen, his rocket became a satellite of the earth.

Forty million years after, life having disappeared from the earth's surface, an interstellar ship from Zor, a far off world of the universe, blundered upon Professor Jameson's cosmic mausoleum. Inspection by the inquisitive machine men of Zor revealed to them the professor's body, perfectly preserved, even as on the day of his death.

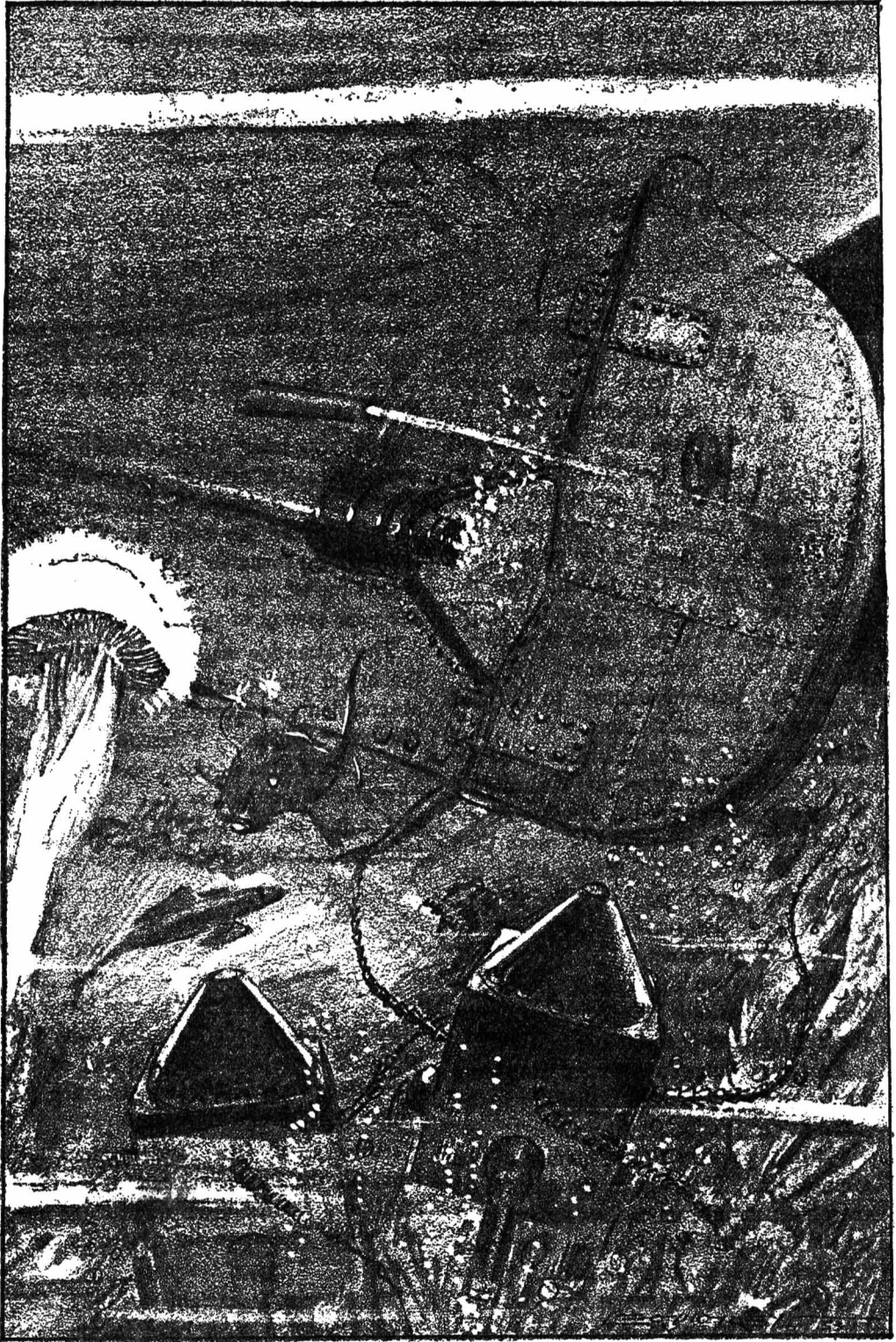
The machine men from Zor are creatures who attained immortality ages ago through transportation of their brains from flesh and blood bodies to the conical heads of metal. All of metal, their bodies are cubed, upheld by four jointed legs, the upper appendages consisting of metal tentacles. Surmounting the cubed bodies are the metal brain cases, possessing a complete circle of shuttered eyes. In ad-

dition, an eye is -conveniently placed in the apex of the head to allow a vertical view. Mental telepathy is their mode of communication.

The professor's brain was removed from his corpse and stimulated into activity once more, being placed in one of the machines. In this manner, Professor Jameson awoke from his death of forty million years to discover himself a machine man. With the Zoromes, he embarked upon a life of perpetual adventure and exploration among the countless stars and their myriads of planets.

The devious route of these cosmic wanderers brought them to the planet of the double sun where weird, winged phantoms from another dimension wiped out many of the machine men, bringing destruction to the metal heads, the only death blow to a Zorome. With the help of a race of Tripeds from a neighboring planet, Professor Jameson waged war on the winged demons, entering their own dimension to destroy them. Many of the lost machine men were rescued from a living death, and plans were made to leave the planet of the double sun.

While the space ship was being repaired, several of the Tripeds signified their desire to become machine men. The brains of Grg, Ravlt, Brlx and Jbf were removed from their bodies and placed in



*They watched with rising interest the vessel's slow movement towards the farther wall.  
The wall sank slowly inward and the submarine entered.*

four metal heads of the mechanical bodies. In this manner, the ranks of the Zoromes were augmented to twenty. Manned by the twenty machine men, the space ship left the solar system of the double sun, speeding rapidly toward the distant stars and new adventures.

## CHAPTER I

**L**IKE a ghost of the cosmos, the space ship of the Zoromes flitted silently into the rapid growing sunlight of a star. To one side lay the crescent of a large planet, rough, jagged mountain peaks presenting a serrated embroidery for the surrounding twinkle of the far-off stars. Ahead, in the path of the space ship, yet farther distant than the planet they were passing, a smaller world gleamed like a bright jewel, shedding a dazzling lustre incomparable. Its brilliance was quite in contrast to the dull crescent of the outer planet.

From afar, the greater brilliance of the small world had aroused the curiosity of the twenty machine men. Always on the outlook for the unusual, and more than willing to digress from the general route they were pursuing in the direction of distant Zor, the travelers sped on toward the bright comet.

"Why do you suppose it gleams so brightly?" queried 88ZQ4, who among the Tripeds had been known as Brlx.

Professor Jameson regarded the planet they were approaching rather critically. Then he gave reply.

"It may possibly be the quality of the atmosphere. Then again, the surface of the planet may be an endless sea, at least on the hemisphere facing us. The latter supposition seems more probable."

6W-438 left his place at the telescope. "It is no use, trying to see anything there until we are in a position where the sun will be directly behind us."

Grouped about the professor stood his metal companions, nineteen in number, all tried and true. Four of them, 88ZQ4, 92ZQ153, 5ZQ35 and 45ZQ42 were as yet a bit unexperienced, being the recent converts from the planet of the double sun, yet they had proved themselves on several planets since leaving their own world. Brlx, Ravlt, Glrg and Jbf were no longer known by their unclassified names but, like Professor Jameson, 21MM392, possessed numeric classification in the exacting category of the Zoromes.

The remaining fifteen machine men were from the original stock who had found the professor's rocket satellite in the shadow of the dying world. These fifteen were fortunate to have escaped the deaths meted out to their companions in the solar system of the Tripeds.

Their attention was now centered upon the bright planet ahead of them. Little observation was accorded the large world they were passing. Telescopic observation had revealed a rough, sterile surface of upflung mountains, rare atmosphere, and meteoric craters. The world beyond interested them more.

Had they observed the larger world more closely, they might have seen dark, lurking shapes which hung upon their path, approaching them cautiously from behind. Several of them crept closer to flank the craft of the Zoromes. The first intimations the machine men had of the mysterious followers was a sickening jar which ran through the ship.

Instantly, all was pandemonium, yet from all the immediate confusion there resolved a definite order as machine men ran helter skelter to their various positions.

"A meteor," exclaimed 38RU-497, "Our repulsion rays have become imperfect!"

"Meteor nothin!" was 29G-75's start-

ling announcement. "Space ships—out there!"

He waved a tentacle towards several dark shapes which hung close to them on three sides. The grim, silent followers were visible where the sunlight from the nearby star struck against their sides. While the machine men watched, an iridescent flash spouted menacingly from one of the dark ships. Again came the jarring crash as the space ship of Zor listed to one side.

"They're attacking!" exclaimed Professor Jameson. "Man the destroyers!"

With alacrity, several of the machine men leaped to the weapons of offense. A glare of light stabbed the vacuum, flashing against the nearest ship from which had come the power beam. For a split second, the intense light supplanted the position of the lurking craft. When it disappeared, the space ship was gone. 56F-450 trained his piece on another of the mysterious ships. With its companions, the shadowy craft turned tail and fled, but not before the machine man's ray split the darkness once more. The second ship suffered the fate of the first. The others retreated from sight, proving the adage of discretion *versus* valor.

"What were they?"

"And from where did they come?"

These were the questions the machine men flung at one another, yet there were none among them who really knew. 41C-98 ventured the obvious solution.

"They probably came from that world." He designated the mountainous surface of the crescent which stood out so sharply against the star sprinkled background.

"We can investigate later," said 44U-21. "Right now, the little world is more important."

"But what if they attack us again?" asked 5ZQ35.

"They won't," 56F-540 replied. "Not after the way I blew those two ships of theirs into nothingness. We proved

rather conclusively that we are their masters in regard to weapons."

The ships of the machine men sped on in the direction of their main objective. By approaching the little world at right angles to their previous course, they were enabled to view it to better advantage. During the maneuvering, a sharp watch was kept for the ships which had displayed their animosity so recently, but nothing more was seen of them.

6W-438 at his position near one of the farther range telescopes of the ship did state, however, that he was pretty sure he had seen several small dots descend into the far-off mountain passes of the larger world. This rather corroborated the assertion of 41C-98.

"We'll go back that way after we explore this other planet," said the professor.

Little did they realize the startling events to befall them ere they reached the larger world, nor did they reckon on the time to be spent on the smaller world which now grew larger before them.

**T**HOUGHTS of the fight in space were speedily forgotten for the time being, as the machine man at the telescope made a surprising announcement.

"Why, I can see no land at all! Only water, water and more water! It seems but a vista of endless ocean!"

"You're looking at only half the globe, remember," 744U-21 reminded him. "There may be land on the opposite hemisphere."

"Perhaps," was 6W-438's partial admission, "but the globe is rotating rather slowly, and no land has turned into sight yet."

And as the ship of Zor raced closer the bright sphere at a greatly reduced speed, the expressed doubt of 6W-438 appeared to be borne out. The planet made a complete rotation, yet no land was visible anywhere. Only an unending expanse

of water circled the equator, and this was continuous from pole to pole. Measurements were carefully taken and recorded. The diameter was estimated to be three thousand miles. The gravitational attraction and density were about to be computed when the machine men hit a snag. The difficulty led to an amazing discovery.

"To find the mass attraction, we must find the dimensions of the lithosphere, the land surface beneath the ocean," stated 744U-21, "or at least gain a workable average of the ocean's depth."

A specialised telescope used to probe ocean depths at a great distance from any planet was trained upon the watery world. A halt was ordered, and the space ship came to rest, hanging free in space. At this required distance, only topographical features were distinguishable. All details were lost."

"That ocean is deep," marvelled 20R-654, turning the wheel of the telescope slowly to gain deeper penetration.

He adjusted the instrument to detect solidity at a great depth. Only unfathomable water lay below them. At five hundred miles depth the search for solid land still mocked the efforts of the Zoromes. At seven hundred miles deep, the maximum properties of the telescope were reached. The machine men could penetrate no farther. In turn, each of the machine men took a look into the immense depth of water.

21MM392, it is my opinion that there is no land at all below that ocean," was 744U-21's opinion. "If it has no bottom at all, then the water extends unbroken clear through to the other side of the planet."

"You mean that it is a perfect hydrosphere?"

"Yes, a ball of water. An undersea ship might follow the diameter of the planet with unerring accuracy."

"We possess no certainty that the hy-

droisphere is a perfect one, however," said the professor, "but we can find out."

The planet of water grew on their vision at the machine men edged their space ship nearer. Upon the ocean, bright, yellow spots soon became visible. The machine men regarded them critically through the great telescopes. The spots were scattered far and wide, the closest ones more than a hundred miles apart.

"What are they?" Professor Jameson asked.

"It is hard to tell," replied 6W438, "until we obtain better vision. The sun is so bright on the water around them that——"

The machine man's mental utterance was cut short by a discovery of 744Z-21. The latter had been closely examining one of the yellow patches as it neared the horizon away from the direct glare of the sun.

"A city!"

The announcement was electrifying. Evidently, some form of intelligence resided on the watery world.

"But there is no land on which to build," 5ZQ35 expostulated.

"Nevertheless," 744U-21 reiterated, "I can see a city."

"Then every one of those yellow spots must be a city."

The machine men of Zor were anxious to learn more of the strange world. Once more the space ship was set into motion. Professor Jameson now assumed a position at one of the telescopes, gazing down at one of the yellow spots they were approaching, which 744U-21 had said were cities. The glare of reflected sunlight on the water was indeed troublesome, but with the aid of a colored lens slid into place the professor was able to view the details of the yellow city.

**T**HE city, surrounded entirely by water, he estimated to be probably a

mile or more across. It consisted of a thousand or more buildings, low to the "ground." The highest building did not exceed forty feet, the architecture being of rambling and haphazard design. Most of the structures were either dome shaped or else roughly square. Many of them, however, rose to pyramids of unequal sides, while others were rectangular. Professor Jameson saw the inhabitants moving about along the avenues separating the buildings, but from his vertical view he found it difficult to make them out clearly, seeing only the tops of their heads. Increased speed of the ship also made vision difficult. Gravity of the planet was commencing to evidence itself, and this made the flight of the ship a bit erratic rather than smooth.

The space ship landed on the water not far from one of the yellow cities. Instantly several boats shot towards the cosmic traveler. The professor marvelled at the skill and speed with which the skiffs were handled. At a distance of several hundred feet, the boats stood off from the floating space-ship, waiting.

Several of the creatures stood up while the others sat in the boat wielding oddly designed paddles. The machine men obtained their first good look at the residents of the yellow city. They were between five and six feet in height and wore no clothing over their green, mottled bodies. The professor's first impression was of frogs, walking straight and erect. Bearing out this resemblance still further were the webbed digits which terminated both upper and lower appendages. The heads of these four-limbed creatures destroyed the illusion. They were quite round and would have been nearly spherical if the faces had not been flat. Sunken eyes gave the creatures a pathetic appearance, while an angular snout and a circular, gaping mouth completed the physiognomy. If they possessed ears, these organs were internal rather than ex-

ternal, the professor surmised to himself.

They were debating with one another excitedly, their boats clustered closer. Their voices, like the garrulous chattering of wild parrots, came clearly across the water. Finally, one of the boats drew away from the rest and came near to the space-ship. 88ZQ4 poked his head out of the space-ship. Instantly, several lances were hurled at him by those in the nearest boat. A concerted wailing arose from the other boats, as if in protest against this act of hostility.

Most of the lances glanced harmlessly off the side of the space ship. Two of them, however, struck 88ZQ4 quite squarely but with the same result of the other lances. They glanced off the metal man without leaving so much as a scratch. Swiftly, the attacking boat shot away toward the city. The other skiffs approached slowly. In the demeanor of the latter boatmen, Professor Jameson saw no warlike signs. They came rather fearfully. As they coasted alongside the ship, he saw in their minds a supplication of mercy. A weird, incomprehensible chatter arose from their throats, and the professor saw plainly that they were asking a forgiveness of the rash act of their brother.

The contrasted actions of the strange creatures puzzled the professor greatly. The first boatmen had displayed a desperate sort of defiance. In the minds of these others, the machine man discerned subjection to a nameless terror. Behind that terror lurked hate. That, the professor saw plainly. Here was a mystery which required solution.

THE professor climbed out the entrance of the ship which 88ZQ4 had thrown open just before the futile attack had come. Followed by several more of the machine men, he climbed out upon the hull of the space ship. The entreating chatter of the boatmen ceased. They

were evidently struck dumb in surprise. But, unfortunately for several of their number standing up in the boats, they were not stricken with inaction by the strange sight the machine men presented. Several of them bent to their oars in sudden alarm. This act produced a comical effect. Those standing were taken off guard by the sudden paddle thrusts and sent sprawling into the water.

The victims of the ducking showed remarkable agility in the water and appeared to handle themselves in this element equally as easily as on kelp land. They were back in the skiffs in the twinkling of an eye, continuing their surprised gaping at the Zoromes. Recovering their voices, they broke into a jabbering din. The paddlers kept the boats at a respectful distance, ready to shoot away towards the nearby city at the first alarm. The machine men waited for them to return to the edge of the space ship, but they showed no signs of returning.

It was in the power of the Zoromes to implant thought impressions on the minds of any intelligent creatures equally as easy as it was for them to divine the thoughts of others by mind reading. Professor Jameson now sought to allay the fears of the hydrosphere inhabitants and gain communication with them.

"We shall not harm you," he radiated. "We are friends."

The jabbering ceased. The boatmen looked at each other wonderingly. Again the professor sent out his mental call. The creatures muttered among themselves and stared at the Zoromes, mystified yet trustingly. Timidly, they came up closer. Their leader chattered interrogations. From the other's mind, the machine men caught ragged pieces of what he was saying.

"We do not know your language," was the professor's reply. "Think well what you would say, and we can understand you even as you have understood us."

"Who are you?" asked one of the boatmen.

"Adventurers of the cosmos," was the machine man's reply. "We come from a world far out in the universe, countless light years distant from your system of worlds."

Most of this was lost among the green mottled creatures, the professor readily saw. Their intelligence was not sufficiently developed for them to conceive of worlds other than their own. In this, they were not far removed from many people the professor had known during his earthly life forty million years ago. These denizens of the hydrosphere did realize, however, that the machine men were strangers they had never seen before.

"Why did you attack us?" 88ZQ4 queried.

"It was Ogweg who led the attack," spoke the leader, giving voice momentarily to the name of his companion. "He thought you were enemies from the depths." The boatman pointed down into the ocean.

"And who did you think we were?" the professor asked. "Why did you not join Ogweg in the attack?"

"Because I knew it to be hopeless. Such attacks have brought down upon us only more oppression. We are powerless in the hands of the Uchke."

"Who are the Uchke?"

"Our oppressors — Our conquerors. Every one of our floating cities feels their iron hand. As far back as our ancestors can remember, it has been so."

"Why don't you fight them?" 744U-21 demanded.

"AS I have said before," stated the leader of the boatmen, whose name the machine men later learned was Chopoc, "we are powerless in their hands. They live where we cannot reach them, far below us, and they possess ter-



rible powers to destroy. From time to time, they come up through the water in ships not unlike yours to take slaves. No slave has ever returned to tell what happened to him."

The machine men maneuvered their space ship into the city of the Plekne, as the creatures called themselves. Here, the machine men made many amazing discoveries. The first thing to startle them was its uniqueness—was the city itself. It was a floating mass of kelp, heavy seaweed, a veritable Sargasso. The kelp grew far above the water and was woody in texture. The houses were built of the tough weed, the growing strands having been artfully interlaced and woven to make the various walls, partitions and ceilings. All the streets were made of the twined weed which grew to a certain length and then hardened above water level.

The Plekne, Professor Jameson learned, also used the tender young sprouts as edible, the rest of their fare consisting of fish and other sea foods. From time to time, the Zoromes perceived strange, swimming creatures that resembled the Plekne. Their upper appendages were like those of the Plekne, with the exceptions of the long, wavy fins which ran their length. In place of lower limbs, however, they possessed tails like a fish. These marine counterparts of the Plekne, who breathed through their skins, seemed to stay in the vicinity of the kelp city, often surprising the machine men by wriggling their way up through the kelp and into one of the municipal pools where the sea weed had been cut away.

Chopoc explained to the professor that these mermen were the Nacac, a species closely related to the Plekne. It was a common belief, Chopoc stated, that the Plekne had descended from this race of water dwellers, having evolutionized through succeeding aquatic and amphi-

bious stages before becoming surface dwellers. Professor Jameson was rather inclined to accept the theory himself, especially in view of the Plekne's webbed hands and feet, their agility in the water and Chopoc's revelation that Plekne, whose boats had sunk far out at sea, had swum a hundred miles or better to reach one of the kelp cities.

The professor marvelled at the lack of ego on the part of the Plekne, who, rather than maintain the idea that they were descendants of god-like individuals far above the status of the Nacac, honestly accepted the conclusive proofs of their evolutionary transcendancy. This was surprising in view of their undeveloped state of progress and crude, simple routine of life. They were happily unburdened with the theological superstitions and weird practices which the professor had found were all too common among the less intelligent order of creatures to be found among the worlds of the universe.

The professor met Ogweg, he who had ordered the attack on the space ship. The truculent Pleknan admitted his mistake in thinking the Zoromes to be a party of the raiding Uchke. Professor Jameson could not help but admire Ogweg's pluck in deliberately attacking a superior power. Chopoc had spoken uneasily of the Uchke's terrible weapons which were unloosed among them at the first signs of disobedience or aggression. Ogweg's act had been a brave, yet futile, gesture. Rather than submit peacefully to the raiders, he preferred combat. This attitude contrasted sharply with the fatalistic resignation of the other Plekne who admired, yet deplored, Ogweg's fatal resolve.

The machine men found much to interest them in the kelp city. They made friends with the Nacac who were dumb and could not speak, but whose simple thoughts were plain to the consciousness

of the Zoromes. Much to the surprise of the Plekne, the machine men were able to direct the actions of the mermen to a considerable extent by mental suggestion.

Lingering in the vicinity of the kelp city, the machine men hoped for a sight of the deep water dwellers who were wont to raid the kelp cities for slaves. The Uchke were evidently a superior, though cruel, race, and the machine men desired to learn more about them. If possible, the Zoromes hoped to arrange for the security of the Plekne before they left. Sympathetic sentiment had been aroused for the honest and simple creatures.

## CHAPTER II

SEVERAL rotations of the hydrosphere brought successive periods of daylight and darkness upon the kelp city. Professor Jameson and a number of the machine men had gone with Chopoc to the treasure room of the city. The machine men could scarcely believe their eyes when they found the treasure of the Pelkne to consist merely of stones, varying in shape and size from pebbles to rocks half as large as the machine men's heads. They were certainly rarities to the Pelkne, though they were the same as those rocks which might have been found in endless quantities on any world other than the hydrosphere.

"Chopoc, where did all these come from?" asked the professor.

"From the stomachs of fish which are found from time to time floating dead on the water. Their bodies are generally burst open."

"Because of a lack of sufficient pressure after they leave the lower levels," mused the machine man, more to himself than to the rest.

He said no more on the subject, but on the way back to the space ship, which had been left in charge of the fourteen

remaining Zoromes, he thought much about the fish with the stones inside them. The ship of Zor rested quietly on the tranquil water several hundred feet offshore. After the first landing in the city, the machine men had kept the space ship out on the ocean. The immense weight of the stellar flyer had wreaked havoc with the kelp laced avenue upon which it had first come to rest.

Professor Jameson with 744U-21, 6W-438, 88ZQ4, 6N-24 and 56F-450, was not far from the boats of the Plekne, which waited to take them to the space ship, when a sudden geyser of water shot skyward out of the ocean a short distance away. A large object spewed out of the fountain and plunged back into the water where it bobbed up and down on the surface. Instantly a wail and cry ran through the ranks of the Plekne, as the fountain subsided and the long, ominous hulk headed slowly for the kelp city.

"The Uchke! The raiders!"

Younger Plekne were hustled into the houses where they skulked furtively, knowing what little chances there were of escaping the hawk eyes of the brutal invaders of the peace and happiness of the kelp city. Uneasiness, hate and intense fear throbbled in the excited conversations of the Plekne.

Professor Jameson and his metal companions stopped short near the water's edge on the close-woven kelp. Zoromes on the space ship waited for the initiative of the grim raider from down under. Deadly, destroying apparatus was trained upon it, while an invisible screen of repulsion force lay protectively about the space ship. They had not long to wait before the Uchke showed their hand.

A brilliant ray shot out toward the six machine men and they felt themselves hurled into the air. Beneath them, the kelp had received most of the power. A deep hole had been blasted completely

through the city's edge, and down towards this yawning cavity tumbled the six Zoromes. In his hurtling fall, Professor Jameson caught a fleeting glimpse of the Uchke vessel which had fired upon them. A bright glare of light enfolded it, and the submarine invader disappeared before the unleashed destruction from the space ship of Zor.

Yellow green water engulfed the professor. Down into the depths his metal weight dragged him in spite of his desperate efforts to seize broken strands of kelp. A short distance to one side, he saw the struggling form of 88ZQ4. The other machine men were nowhere in sight.

"88ZQ4!" he called. "Join tentacles with me! Let us keep together!"

**B**Y turning his body slightly sideways, 88ZQ4's descent became merged with that of the professor, who was slightly below him. Frantically, Professor Jameson thrashed his metal limbs, checking his drop sufficiently for 88ZQ4's metal legs to come within reach of an up-flung tentacle. The two machine men sank deeper into the hydrosphere's watery grave, their bodies joined by two tightly wound tentacles.

The professor knew that if he and Brix, now known as 88ZQ4, could remain together, they would be of more help to each other than if they were separated. He searched with straining eyes through the darkening, murky depths for their four companions, but he saw none of them. Had the ray of the Uchke destroyed them? He wondered. Perhaps they had been fortunate enough to have fallen back upon solid kelp.

A shadowy form flitted past them in the yellow semi-gloom. It turned, circled them in a downward spiral, following their descent into the watery depths. Then it came close, and in the deepening shadows Professor Jameson made it out for what it truly was.

"One of the Nacac!" he exclaimed, radiating rapid instructions to the curious fish.

Recognizing the machine men, and obeying the telepathic suggestion forced so strongly upon its mind, the merman came close and allowed the two machine men to fasten their tentacles to him. He swished his strong, jointed upper fins and vibrated his tail in an upward movement, but his best efforts only accomplished a slower descent of the Zoromes into the bowels of the hydrosphere.

Two more of the Nacac appeared out of the surrounding sea and lent their aid. The machine men commenced a slow rise, but Professor Jameson realized that they had already sunk miles through the clear water. He knew that the three Nacac would tire of the difficult task long ere they reached the surface, so he detailed one of them to swim away for more help. He also advised the two remaining mermen to conserve their efforts until help arrived, keeping the two machine men from sinking deeper. Since his reception into the ranks of the machine men of Zor, Professor Jameson could not recollect having been in a more helpless position.

With a great deal of relief, he saw a cloud appear far above them, grow and resolve itself into the semblance of small, separate clouds which were the Nacac composing the rescue party. They were none too soon in their coming, for the two mermen supporting the Zoromes were rapidly tiring of their exertions at this depth which was far deeper than they ordinarily swam.

While the rescue party was still some fifty feet above the two machine men and their two supporters, a dark shape of gigantic proportions swam up from below them. Large, baleful eyes regarded them hungrily, while the cavernous mouth opened and rushed at them, frightful jaws gleaming. A shroud of darkness leaped over the professor's vision, and he

felt himself squeezed between cold, clammy walls. A clashing and grating of strong jaws severed a tentacle and threatened to crush his cubed body, but the strong metal resisted the terrific leverage.

From above, the Nacac froze in sudden horror, as they saw two of their companions and the two machine men swallowed by the voracious fish. In terror they sped for the upper levels away from the frightful monster of the dark, deep strata, shooting towards the surface with the speed of arrows. With them, they bore a horrid tale to the machine men in the space ship far above.

The professor was aware of a rippling vibration which squeezed him between cold, soft walls. Something clanked against him with a dull sound. It was the metal body of 88ZQ4. Professor Jameson called out to find how his companion had fared.

"Are you all right?"

"Two of my tentacles are gone," came the quick reply, "but aside from that I seem to be still intact."

**T**HE machine men presently felt themselves toppled into an abyss, but the sensation was short, for they landed softly into a pulp mass from which they staggered to a standing position. Beneath them, the cold, rough wall shuddered at the contact of their metal feet.

"We're in the fish's stomach!" the professor exclaimed.

He flashed on several bright lights set deep in his cubed body. 88ZQ4 followed suit. They examined their living dungeon, awed and mystified for a moment by the sudden, eerie experience of being eaten alive. The pulpy mass which rose high about them bubbled and surged past them slowly like a subterranean river of mud. The machine men recognized it as bits of partly digested fish. Several sections of the two ill-fated Nacas revealed

quite significantly the fate which had claimed them. The living ceiling above the heads of the two Zoromes rose and fell, touching the tips of their heads, then revolting as if in protest.

"This fish is going to find us pretty hard to digest," the professor quipped. "We'll be one stomachache he won't forget."

Calm and sober, 88ZQ4 remained unmoved by the professor's touch of earthly humor. 88ZQ4 had been a Triped, one of a race of serious-minded creatures who were practical and calculating to an extreme. The brain transposition had left Brix's grave disposition unchanged, just as Professor Jameson's conversion had failed to remove his humor.

"What are we to do?" 88ZQ4 asked.

"That is open to question."

Their prison slanted quite suddenly and stood on end. The machine men hurtled together as the walls of the monster's stomach suddenly clamped tight.

"He is heading for deeper water!"

By the change in the direction of gravity, the machine men were aware that the fish was whirling and changing directions rapidly, yet always seeking lower levels.

"We're in deeper water now," observed the professor, noting the constricting walls of the sea monster's stomach. "The greater pressure evidently aids the digestion of this fish, and he instinctively goes to deeper levels when troubled in this manner."

"Let us escape from here," 8ZQ48 suggested. "If we fall to the center of the hydrosphere, we may stand a better chance of rescue than if we let this fish carry us all over the globe."

"The only escape I can see is to cut our way out."

"You mean that heat ray you carry in your fore tentacle?" queried 88ZQ4.

"Exactly."

"The tail spin we just went through

won't be anything at all to what will come when you start burning a hole through this fish."

"True enough," Professor Jameson agreed. "We must kill him first."

The machine man carefully estimated the direction in which he expected the sea monster's heart to be and then levelled the attached cylinder of the heat ray against the gleaming wall. The cylinder was a weapon he had fashioned especially for himself after the battle with the Emkls in the blue dimension when the close fighting had deprived him of the clumsy ray-gun.

The cylinder glowed as an intense white light became focussed. Professor Jameson braced himself tightly against the constricting walls as the agonized fish gave a furious lunge, clipping the water at berserk speed, seeking to escape the terrible gnawing deep in its vitals. Soon the frantic efforts became weaker. Professor Jameson noted with satisfaction that the walls of the sea monster's stomach were relaxing their vicious clutch, though they still sagged inward from the pressure of the depths.

**T**HE floor of the stomach became the ceiling as the machine men were once more tumbled about. The dead fish had keeled over on its back. Patiently, the machine men waited for the fish to become settled before they tried to tunnel their way free of the great body. Professor Jameson gloomily contemplated the partially digested remains of his late friends, the faithful Nacac, who had died in a vain effort to aid them.

"If they didn't survive, then what chance did Jonah have?" the professor mused.

"Who is this Jonah?" queried 88ZQ4. "Was he a Zorome?"

"No," replied the professor, and he related to 88ZQ4 the earthly tale which many of his people had actually believed

over some forty million long years ago.

"Impossible for him to have lived," was 88ZQ4's comment. "Jonah was no machine man."

"Do you suppose there is any chance of this fish floating to the top of the water now that he is dead?" 88ZQ4 asked.

Professor Jameson pointed to the trickle of water which was issuing from the creature's gullet, slowly filling the stomach. "If there was a chance of it once, there is none now. We're going down."

The machine men set to work burning a passage out of the giant fish they had killed. They took what the professor believed to be the shortest route, which was upward now that the fish lay on its back. From outside there came a sudden bump which jarred the entire fish.

"What was that?"

The body of the fish rolled slowly to one side. Professor Jameson finished the black circle he had been cutting. A final rush of water from outside burst into the fish's stomach, forcing out the half charred residue left by the heat cylinder. The dead body was at rest. Followed by 88ZQ4, Professor Jameson climbed out the opening he had made and slid down the belly of the giant fish.

All about them lay the vast darkness of the deep sea, punctuated here and there by the ghostly lights of marine creatures. Professor Jameson's feet struck something solid. Once more the two Zoromes flashed their body lights to lessen the intensity of the darkness about them.

Small, silvery fish with long, silky trailers scattered from the path of the light beams in myriad waves. Weird, deep sea denizens with frightful faces ogled at the machine men in surprise and contemplation. The two Zoromes found themselves standing in several feet of light ooze. At a distance the multitude of silvery fish were busy feeding off the

ooze like real grazing animals of the deep.

"We're on the bottom, all right," was the professor's comment. "There is no telling how many hundreds of miles of water there are above us."

"But 744U-21 told us this was a perfect hydrosphere," reminded 88ZQ4.

"That was just his opinion," said the professor. "I was inclined to believe it myself until I saw the treasure of the Plekne."

"The stones?"

"Yes. It suggested pretty strongly that this planet possessed a rocky core. Just how big this core is we have yet to discover."

The two machine men waded through the ooze, lost on the hydrosphere's sea bottom. All kinds of strange fish swam and crawled about them, some scurrying from the light, others staring at the two Zoromes stupidly. Many of the fish were equipped with natural lights of their own which they flashed on and off at will.

A sudden warning from 88ZQ4 made the professor glance up just in time to see semi-transparent jaws close upon him. Unconsciously, he had walked into the cavernous jaws laid in waiting for unwary creatures of the deep sea. The professor found himself enclosed by a bulbous, transparent body. He saw 88ZQ4 quite plainly a short distance away, yet his tentacles encountered a scarcely visible wall which prevented his escape. In desperation, the professor turned on his heat ray. It did not function. Not until then did the machine man realize that he had exhausted the charges of the weapon in escape from the fish which had swallowed 88ZQ4 and himself.

HE threshed about wildly with his tentacles, fearing any moment that the ocean denizen would swim away with him, separating him from his fellow Zorome. But the fish did nothing of

the kind, and it suddenly occurred to Professor Jameson that, unlike the ocean rover into whose capacious jaws they had recently fallen, this creature waited for his meals to come to him rather than go in search for them. Because of such a lazy habit, evolutionary tendencies had long ago deprived this species of mobile parts and had bequeathed instead the faculty of partial invisibility.

One of the professor's threshing tentacles suddenly broke through the tough texture of the fish's body, and with a mighty effort the machine-man ripped the tiny tear into a gaping rent through which he stepped and joined 88ZQ4.

"They all think we are something good to eat," was his sally. "That's the only diversion down here, the one great law of the sea, hunting, killing and eating—then to be eaten. It represents an endless cycle. Larger fish eat the smaller fish and are in turn eaten by still bigger fish, and so on up. The biggest fish eventually have their day and are devoured by minute organisms of the sea which in turn die and fall to the bottom of the sea as ooze which is eaten by the smaller fishes."

The machine men toiled onward through the ooze which sometimes rose above their heads, making for difficult progress, and then again disappearing entirely from the ocean floor. Professor Jameson was amazed at the clarity of the water at this unheard of depth. Their lights shone far ahead of them, and, when they were turned off, luminescent fishes were visible for quite a distance.

During one of these latter periods, the machine men saw far ahead of them a great light which glowed from below the horizon. Rapidly they turned their steps that way, for it did not appear to be the emanations of a fish, but rather of a mechanical means like the lights of the machine men.

"Perhaps it is light from our four com-

rades who were caught with us in the explosion," 88ZQ4 suggested.

"I doubt it very much," was the professor's reply. "This light is far away and is too great for even that, which four machine men might merge into a single brilliance."

The two Zoromes plodded onward through the sucking ooze toward the light which spread far upward into the murky waters. Quite suddenly the light disappeared, to be replaced once more by the melancholy darkness of the great, silent depths. But the machine men had the general direction and kept onward. At the professor's suggestion, they showed no more lights. The dawn of comprehension was striking his mind, and his suspicions were brightening into certainty.

They had come a long way over the curved, ocean floor when unexpectedly the great light shot up just a short distance ahead of them, dazzling and intense. Professor Jameson drew his companion down into the ooze so that only the apex of their metal heads were left in sight. From this position, the two single eyes stared at the scene before them. A square, flat surface of sea bottom lay clear of the ooze, and the two Zoromes recognized it as a metal platform. From above, a huge, elongated vessel sank slowly downward into the bright glow of the light.

"The Uchke!" 88ZQ4 exclaimed.

"As I suspected!" said the professor. "Here is where they stay!"

AS the machine men watched from their places of concealment, they saw the metal platform divide in two and slide back from the center. Into the cavity beneath slowly sank the submarine of the dominant Uchke. Returned from a raid on one of the numerous kelp cities, their ship probably contained many slaves from the ranks of the

Plekne. When the top of the vessel had disappeared beneath the level of the ocean floor, the two parts of the metal platform rolled together once more.

"There's an air-lock in under that!" was the professor's emphatic announcement. "Those Uchke are an air breathing race, and somewhere in this rock core they have a hide-out!"

"It doesn't seem reasonable," was 88ZQ4's opinion. "They are air breathers, yet they choose to live under artificial conditions rather than live on the surface."

"It is unnatural," the professor agreed. "We may find out why they do this."

"How?"

"We're entering the air lock."

"But it is clamped shut," protested 88ZQ4.

"Wait until another submarine comes in or goes out," promised the resourceful professor. "Then we may get our chance."

In the meantime, the light had disappeared, and they were in darkness once more. Patiently they waited. It was not long before the great light sprang into dazzling brilliance once more. Far above them, the machine men saw two of the Uchke raiders slowly descending. While they watched, the metal parts of the air-lock entrance slid aside, and a vessel bobbed up out of the air lock. It swung sideways over the spot where Professor Jameson and 88ZQ4 knelt in the concealing ooze. It was evident that the air lock saw a great deal of traffic.

"Now's our chance!" the professor cried. "Run along under the vessel and duck down inside!"

88Z&4 executed the move with alacrity, closely followed by 21MM392. They bumped against the bottom of a water filled chamber.

"Into a corner!" the professor urged, remembering that the vessels of the Uchke were rounded.

Professor Jameson fully realized the perils of discovery, but that was a gamble they must take. In his own mind, he cherished the idea of stealing one of the submersible crafts and executing a return to the surface. The two machine men drew back into the darkness of a corner as the first vessel slowly sank to rest on the bottom of the chamber with a dull thud. They watched with rising interest the vessel's slow movement towards the farther wall. The wall sank slowly inward and the submarine entered. Immediately after, the wall rose back into place.

While the second vessel dropped into the entrance, a fountain of bubbles gushed from valve openings around the wall opposite the machine men. Water was being forced out under heavy pressure.

"Come," said the professor as he walked up behind the second craft and clung to the exterior apparatus of the submarine.

88ZQ4 took his position beside 21M-M392. Quite suddenly a strong current of water exerted itself upon their metal bodies with a pulling tendency. They clung tighter with their tentacles against the inrush of water into the air-lock. The vessel moved forward, and they were aware that the wall had once more lowered.

The water in the air-lock frothed and bubbled in an ever decreasing level as the air forced it out upon the ocean bed. The two machine men gradually lost the slight buoyancy the water had given them and became heavier. Jumping off the side of the submersible vessel they scuttled into the darkness of a niche. Their action came none too soon. A metal doorway opened in the craft and several of the Uchke filed out. It was the machine men's first view of the cruel dwellers of the deep who preyed so constantly upon the helpless Plekne.

THEY were like figments of an evil dream, their ruthlessness and brutal character plainly stamped on beetling visages. Professor Jameson was strongly reminded of the snarling face of a gorilla he had once seen long ago, during his earthly life. But there was no hair on the faces of the Uchke, and their foreheads were prominent instead of sloping, revealing that they were advanced thinkers. Their bodies, however, were small and out of proportion to the size of their heads. Four upper appendages branched forth, terminating in clawed digits. Two stumpy legs afforded the creatures movement.

From out of the submarine, more than a dozen unfortunate Plekne were roughly hustled and joined with a group emerging from the first craft farther down the chamber. Dejected and helpless, the Plekne represented the extreme state of oppression they had ultimately reached. Professor Jameson marveled to himself that individuals like Ogeweg ever were born among the subjected Plekne.

"Wait until they all leave," the professor told 88ZQ4, "and then we shall see what can be done about stealing one of these vessels."

"But what about the wall?" asked 88ZQ4. "We cannot lower that."

"Perhaps it is operated by remote control from inside the vessel," the professor suggested hopefully. "Anyways, we must avoid detection until they all go."

When the Uchke had all disappeared, the professor and his companion emerged from their concealment and stole noiselessly down the long hall of assembled undersea prowlers. They were nearly at the termination of the submarine port. The professor was examining the last ship in line, when the unexpected happened. A blaze of light shot suddenly from the floor ahead of them, and up through a wide, cylindrical shaft, which the machine men had failed to see in the



gloom, shot a car laden with the Uchke.

It was dismay rather than fear which prompted the two Zoromes to drop back out of sight. But already several of the undersea dwellers had caught the gleam of light upon moving metal, and they were out of the car in pursuit of the shadowy forms just beyond the *aura* of their light.

Professor Jameson uttered a few mental suggestions, and the two machine men took their stand. The first Uchke to approach was surprised when a curling tentacle lashed out and applied a mighty contraction about his neck. His surprise lasted less than a minute. The others, seven in number, leaped into the fray, and for a moment all was a mixed confusion of tentacles, grappling arms, cubed bodies and kicking legs, both flesh and metal.

Anguished cries rang out as the machine men in their cold, calculating manner found vital portions of the Uchke anatomies. The latter were no match for their two metal adversaries and would have been no serious menace to even one of them in hand-to-hand combat.

The result of the conflict was already a foregone conclusion when one of the Uchke, jumping free for a moment, pulled an object from his belt. A white ray of light leaped forward full upon the professor who had already accounted for two of the Uchke and was looking for a third victim. The power hurtled him over and over as if a terrible windstorm of unbelievable velocity had quickly arisen in the undersea chamber. His brain leaped into oblivion.

### CHAPTER III

**W**HEN Professor Jameson recovered his senses, he felt soft, nimble fingers working upon his metal body, and a strange metal rasped and clattered against his legs. As his brain cleared, he saw that he was still in the chamber of the undersea craft. Two

of the Uchke were busy removing his metal legs. Like a shot, he lashed out with his tentacles and caught the raiders of the hydrosphere in a tight grip. Swinging them over his reclining body, he squeezed the life out of them and then flung their dead bodies against the nearest wall. A mental supplication of help broke in upon his brain.

"21MM392!"

The professor essayed to rise, but discovered that while he had been unconscious from the blast of the power gun, which would easily have killed a flesh and blood creature, the devilish Uchke had succeeded in removing three of his four metal legs. They had been busy with their implements on the remaining leg, when the professor had surprised them with his recovery.

"21MM392! Come!"

The cry permeated Professor Jameson's brain once more with its morbid suggestion of dire disaster. The machine-man turned to look upon a nerve jolting scene. 88ZQ4, stripped of his metal legs and tentacles, was being dragged over the floor by the remaining Uchkek. The creature's face darkened into a set snarl of derisive hate, as he saw the professor's instinctive effort to rise. The Uchkek, seizing the metal head of 88ZQ4 in a strong grip, slowly dragged the metal torso of the machine man toward the shaft where the elevator car stood.

Professor Jameson made another effort to rise, steadying himself with his tentacles, but, realizing the futility of it, he started crawling to intercept the Uchkek before the latter reached the shaft with his inert burden. Using the one leg to shove and the tentacles to pull, he edged slowly in the direction of the shaft. The progress of the Uchkek was handicapped by the heavy weight of the machine-man's head and body which he was endeavoring to drag to the elevator car. Had he dared, the Uchke would have returned

to the side of one of his fallen companions for a power gun, with which to dispatch the menacing monstrosity of metal which crawled so slowly yet surely to head him off. But he dared not pass by those horrible tentacles which waved at him so threateningly.

88ZQ4, without workable appendages, was helpless. The professor increased his pace. The Uchke sweated and pulled the harder, measuring the distance to the shaft with alarmed eye. The professor was farther away, yet he was increasing his speed. It was a grim race, and the raider of the inner world was of no mind to give up his metal prize. The professor feared most of all, that the Uchke would escape and sound an alarm.

Eager to return to his comrades with the trophy of 88ZQ4's head and body, the Uchke taxed his wits to best the oncoming machine man. Setting the extremity of 88ZQ4's cubed body in a rolling motion, he skillfully rolled the conical head in his four arms, guiding the helpless machine man towards the car. He reached it first, only a short distance ahead of the professor.

Once inside the car, the Uchke slammed shut the door against which the professor gave a terrific lunge a split second later. Simultaneously, the car shot downward, rasping against Professor Jameson's metal body with such a rapid speed that gave him no chance to regain his equilibrium. Clutching wildly at the lip of the broad shaft, the machine man toppled into the black depths below him. He expected to crash upon the top of the descending car at any moment, smashing flat his head and scattering the all important brains, the only death blow ever suffered by a machine man.

**B**UT still he hurtled downward, and to his bewilderment and increased horror there was no cessation of his accelerating fall. The velocity of his drop

rapidly increased, so that the air in the shaft fairly shrieked past him. He wondered vaguely where the elevator had gone—and how soon he would smash himself into a pile of lifeless, inert junk.

Sheer amazement smote the professor as he fell lightly upon the top of what he readily assumed to be the elevator car of the fleeing Uchke, yet his sensations of dropping rapidly were but slightly diminished. Truth flooded in upon his brain, washing away the flotsam of doubt, wonder and incredulity. The downward flight of the elevator was so fast that it had been with difficulty that his rapidly accelerated fall had finally caused him to overtake it.

With clutching tentacles, the professor gripped the roof of the speeding car firmly. Beneath him lay the helpless metal body of 88ZQ4, formerly Brix the Triped, being taken to the recluse of the Uchke. Where was this habitation of the deep sea raiders? The machine man pondered the probabilities. They had already fallen many miles. Previously, Professor Jameson had estimated the diameter of the hydrosphere's core to be no greater than a hundred miles, basing his figures upon the sea bottom's curvature. The rendezvous of the Uchke must be at the center of the core.

While the professor was engaged with these thoughts, the elevator's wild speed became braked and the mad momentum checked. Gradual light replaced the darkness as the car slowed to a stop. It was well for the machine man that he clung tightly with his tentacles, for a sudden tendency to fall upward was exerted upon his body, lifting him away from the car. He realized a confusion of directions. Which way was down, and which way was up? Gravity had seemingly reversed itself. He was no longer on the top of the elevator car. He now clung to the bottom. Professor Jameson knew that he had reached the

world of the Uchke, directly in the center of the rocky core. Letting go his hold upon the car, he dropped upon a small platform below him and found concealment in the gloom of a flight of steps.

He saw the Uchke open the door of the car, heard him yell to his companions who appeared and helped him remove the cumbersome body of the machine man, 88ZQ4. Impulsively, the professor sent out a mental call to the helpless Zorome, telling him of his presence. Unknown to the Uchke, the two machine men held a mental conversation. The brain emanations were too high to be caught by the dwellers of the rock-core. In fact, had the Zoromes wished to communicate with them, a concentration of thought projection would have been necessary.

From his spot of concealment, Professor Jameson saw the blustering and grinning creatures of the inner world carry his helpless comrade out of sight through a wide doorway. The captive machine man, according to the professor's instructions, kept him posted so that the latter might follow and await a favorable opportunity.

"They are carrying me upward," 88ZQ4 radiated to the professor who skulked unseen in the rear of the stairway. "We are entering an airship. There are many ships here. We are sliding off a platform."

"Are the ships being guarded?" the professor queried.

"Several of the Uchke are about. If you come this way, go careful. 21MM-392! You should see where I am now! It is like a world turned inside out! The land slopes up to meet the horizon which is really a muddled haze of the inner surface of the rock core! It is the world of the Uchke!"

"How far across is it?" asked the professor, forgetting the immediate peril for the moment.

"Twenty miles easily, probably more.

The airship is rising into this vast immensity of the sphere's center. We are heading for a huge ball, a floating island of dazzling light which seems to be sending synthetic daylight to the surrounding world. It is nearly a mile through, I should judge, and there are many buildings on it."

THE emanations of 88ZQ4's brain grew fainter as the airship which was bearing him away flew farther from the mainland.

"What holds the island in place?" asked the professor.

"A mutual attraction in all directions of the surrounding globe," was 88ZQ4's faint reply. "There are no visible means of support."

"I must follow you!"

"We are shooting straight for the island. That is where they seem to be taking——"

The brain impulses of 88ZQ4 died away in flickering waves of unintelligible thoughts. The ship bearing the prisoner had passed beyond the faculties of the machine men for communication. Professor Jameson, a crippled machine man, saw no one in sight. The Uchke summoned by 88ZQ4's captor had all gone. Slowly, partly to avoid making more noise than could be helped, and mainly because with only one leg he could make no better progress, the professor crept up the stairway and through the entrance to the airship hangar. A surprised Uchke stared him in the face. With the speed of thought, the professor flung a tentacle around his neck, strangled him and threw the inert body into the chamber below. The Uchke had been just about ready to enter a nearby airship. From beyond, the professor heard the mingled voices of more of the Uchke clustered about their various ships. Professor Jameson lost no time in entering the airship.

Peeping from the windows, he saw many other ships scattered about, the Uchke going in and out of them. Many of the enslaved Plekne were also in sight, engaged in menial tasks for the most part. Aside from a careful notation of the direction, in which the airships came and went, the professor paid no more attention to outside interests. The controls of the craft had him puzzled for a moment, and he was busy deciphering their various uses, when a startled cry broke forth from behind him.

The metal eyeshutters on that side of his head lifted inquiringly, and he saw a frightened Pleknan regarding him with wide, frightened eyes.

"Do not cry out!" the professor warned him.

The man from the kelp city stood dumb in surprise. No sound had issued from this metal monstrosity which he had caught moving about inside the ship, yet a silent command had been given him. Accustomed to obeying orders, the Pleknan remained immovable, his thoughts a bewildered chaos of fear, wonder and perplexity. The machine man immediately followed up his advantage.

"I am a friend of the Plekne from the upper world," the professor informed him. "Tell me how this airship is operated and we may escape."

"Escape!" the Pleknan uttered this one word aloud.

"Yes. Do as I tell you. I have a comrade who must be rescued."

**T**HE Pleknan recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to come to the aid of the machine man, and rapidly he explained the uses of the various controls.

"You know much about these ships," the professor told him. "Will you pilot for me?"

"Where—where shall we go?"

"To the very center of this inner world—that bright island of the air."

"You mean the island of light," was the Pleknan's reply, fashioning his thoughts after the mental suggestions of the Zorome.

"It is where 88ZQ4 was taken."

"Tell me, are there many of your kind?" the Pleknan inquired, gaining confidence from the kindly manner of the machine man.

As the Pleknan guided the ship along the low ceiled hangar towards the entrance, Professor Jameson told him briefly how the space ship of the Zoromes had come to the world of water. Much to the impatience of the professor, a halt was necessary while several ships landed and entered the Uchke hangar.

"Are you from the world of the Uchke?"

"From the world of the Uchke?" the professor echoed. "Is this not the world of the Uchke?"

"Only a colony where all the slaves from the surface are first brought. I am Bwengik. We captive Plekne know a great deal more of our enemies than those upon the surface. Once taken here, we never see our cities again."

"Who are these Uchke?" the professor asked. "What world are you talking about?"

"I myself do not quite understand what the Uchke mean. To us Plekne who are captives here, there are only two worlds, the outer world of water and this strange inner world of solidity. Yet, from time to time, many of us are taken away from here and up through the water to a great world which the Uchke talk about as home. We Plekne are constantly being taken from the kelp cities, trained here for a definite period of time and then rushed off to this fabled world which we have never seen. It is said that the Plekne do not live long in this other world, and that is why the Uchke

keep themselves supplied with slaves from the kelp cities."

The professor had made so many astounding discoveries since coming to this weird planet that this new surprise came at a time when the affairs of the hydrosphere were still in a rather disorganized state of comprehension. But at last the professor believed that he perceived a glimmering of the real truth.

They were off the platform, shooting into the air. A strange sight lay spread in panoramic perspective before the machine man. The inner world lay below him like a curved bowl, a continuous city rising upward and away into the horizon. The island of light represented a glorious spectacle. Like a great dazzling gem, it floated midway in the center of the atmosphere globe. Huge, artificial sunlamps threw their illuminating beams in every direction. Situated between these gigantic lamps were visible the spires and other architectural features of many buildings.

"What are those buildings for?"

"They are the prisons, mostly. The storerooms are also located here."

"The prisons—drive past them," the professor ordered. "Circle high."

The Pleknan did as he was directed. Professor Jameson sent out a call to his fellow machine man who, the last he had heard, was being taken here.

"88ZQ4! I have come! Do you hear me?"

"We hear you, 21MM392!" came the startling reply. "But 88ZQ4 does not hear!"

**F**EAR struck simultaneously with stark amazement. Did the ingenuity of the Uchke possess a machine for revelation of projected thoughts? Was 88ZQ4 dead, that he did not hear? Were the Uchke mocking his futile efforts? For a moment, the professor's mind was crowded with terrible thoughts which left

him baffled and unnerved. But the next transference to reach him relieved his apprehension considerably.

"Quiet your fears, 21MM392. It is I, 744U-21, your very good friend."

"Where are you?"

"In company with 6W-438, 6N-24 and 56F-450 in the prison of the Uchke on their island of light."

"How did you get there?"

"When the explosion came, we sank directly to the sea bottom. I believed we would come to rest at a common level in the center of the hydrosphere. Imagine my surprise to discover a rocky core to this world of water."

"I know," said the professor. "Your previous opinion visualized a perfect hydrosphere. I had my doubts after leaving the treasure-house of the Plekne."

"Yes—it seems this world either possessed a rock core in the first place or else meteoric showers throughout the ages have built one, and if this is——"

"But the Uchke!" exclaimed the professor, cutting short the scientific theorizing of his fellow Zorome. "How did you fall into their hands?"

"One of their submarine prowlers found us on the sea bottom. They knocked us over with a power-release which did not kill us. The next thing we knew, we were entering an air lock of this world within a world."

"Without tentacles or legs," supplemented 6W-438. "We are still that way—helpless to move about."

"88ZQ4 told us your story," said 56F-450. "He is here with us."

"You suggested something wrong with him. What is it?"

"88ZQ4 is senseless from a power shot of the Uchke. It seems he clamped one of his eye shutters down on the finger of a too inquisitive Uchkek."

"They have removed our limbs," 744U-21 lamented. "Soon, they expected to operate on our heads. It will be fare-

well for us when that time comes. At this moment they are preparing for it."

"All they have of me are three legs!" Professor Jameson swore vehemently. "If I could only get a message out to the space ship!"

"Not much chance of that unless you go to it direct through one of the airlocks. Then you would need a submarine."

"You might be able to make it," was 56F-450's optimistic suggestion.

"And leave you five here to have your heads split open?" Professor Jameson protested. "Not much!"

"But what can you do alone against an entire city?" 744U-21 challenged. "You are unarmed and have scarcely more than half your appendages."

"They have not caught me yet," replied the intrepid machine man, "and until they do the battle is not lost."

As if to threaten this statement, several airships of the Uchke bore down on the professor's circling ship suggestively.

"They have discovered the Uchke you killed!" cried Bwengik. "They know that this is his ship!"

"Put on speed!" the professor ordered. "Elude them! But do not go far away from the island of light!"

Professor Jameson was doing some desperate thinking. Trouble dogged their heels, and the situation called for action. The Pleknan displayed skillful control of the ship as it accelerated around the island of light like a tiny satellite, momentarily throwing the pursuers off the track. The professor was still in a state of indecision when a call came from the captive machine men.

"21MM392! The Uchke are coming with their tools! They are about to take our heads apart!"

**M**AD inspiration struck the professor. The decision had been forced upon him. There was no longer an alternative

to consider. He stared down at the vast network of window designs in the prison buildings.

"Shine your lights!" Professor Jameson told his metal companions, hoping against hope that the rascally Uchke had not tampered with the body illuminators.

Almost immediately, one of the thousands of windows below the circling ship became suffused with a subdued glow. The professor marked it carefully.

The airships!" exclaimed Bwengik. "They have us cornered! We're lost!"

The terrorized Pleknan pointed to the many ships of the Uchke, which were closing in from all sides. They were trapped. A general alarm had been issued, and the stolen craft was fast becoming the concentration point for all aircraft in the sky. Like destroying ants, they closed in viciously upon their circling prey. Bwengik, confused, seeing no avenue of escape, became frozen at the control board, stupified. The machine man pushed the Pleknan out of the way and seized the direction lever himself. A cry from below hastened his action.

"They have removed my head!" wailed 6W-438. "They are trying to pry it apart!"

As the cortege of circling ships drew in close, the professor, having previously watched Bwengik at the controls, looped the ship in an incomplete circle. The craft never righted itself, shooting like a plummet for the prison buildings of the inner world. Bwengik gave voice to a cry of mortal terror as the island of light rushed swiftly at them.

With a terrific smash, they struck the building close to the glowing window. The professor dared come no closer. Both Zorome and Pleknan were hurled from their positions and battered about inside the craft as it tore through the side of the prison.

Professor Jameson arose from the mass of wreckage little the worse for the

terrific crash. He and Bwengik had been in the rear of the ship when it struck. The front portion was crushed, a jumbled mass of ragged metal. Professor Jameson moved a bit uncertainly towards the inert body of the Pleknan. Blood flowed sluggishly from several wounds. Forcing himself along by shoving his one leg, the machine man lifted the limp form in his tentacles.

Bwengik was dead. His flesh and blood body had been unable to withstand the tremendous shock of the impact. Though ground beneath the heel of the Uchke for the greater share of his life, the Pleknan had died a heroic death. Then and there, Professor Jameson swore fervently that, if he won out against the Uchke, and were it within his power to do so, he would free the unfortunate Plekne from the cruel bondage they suffered.

Ripping away the debris from a gaping tear in the ship, Professor Jameson crawled forth into the evil-smelling prison on the island of light. Several Uchke lay dead on the floor, partially buried beneath the bulk of the wedged airship. The machine man had struck his first blow in the cause of his comrades, having unwittingly snuffed out the lives of several enemies in the fall of the vessel.

The professor recollected that it had been, to the right of the spot where the ship had crashed, where he had seen the glow from the cell window. He made his way in this direction, crawling out from under a sudden fall of debris loosened by the crash. The machine man emerged into a corridor just in time to run into three startled Uchke come to investigate the fallen ship. Taking advantage of their mute surprise, the professor lashed out with three tentacles, catching three soft throats in contracting, metal loops. He choked the life from them rapidly, and then pilfered the dead

bodies for the power guns they carried. With the three weapons, Professor Jameson crawled into the cell from which the three Uchke had just come.

THESE before him, resting on their square metal bases, stood his five companions, immovable except for the metal eye shutters. Without legs, without tentacles, they were helpless indeed. The head of 6N-24 hung loosely to the metal body, while the head of 6W-438 lay sideways on the floor. Professor Jameson's collision with the building had been timed none too soon, interrupting the grim work of the Uchke.

"How much better off are we now?" suggested 744U-21. "It is only a respite. Soon, the Uchke will be down upon us in a swarming, overwhelming horde."

"I have weapons!" exclaimed the professor. "We can make a stand of some kind!"

"You will make the stand, 21MM392," spoke the head of 6W-438 from its position on the floor. "We are helpless."

The pattering of many feet, on the floor of the corridor outside, precluded further communication. Professor Jameson waited, power guns held tense. Into the room burst a horde of the Uchke, their weapons ready. But they were unprepared for the sight which met their eyes. There in front of their five metal captives stood the crippled machine-man, defiant and purposeful. The scene flitted across their vision for a split second to be replaced by a blinding glare which hurled them backward into the corridor, their power guns firing wildly.

Dead, mangled and dying, the party of Uchke were no longer a menace. Professor Jameson had gained the respite which 744U-21 had foretold. The remainder of the Zorome's fatalistic expectations seemed likely to be borne out, for the sounds of an organized attack

were heard far down the corridor, becoming louder as the enemy approached. The professor now took advantage of the turmoil's cessation to refasten the loosened head of 6N-24 and to replace the decapitated brain-case of 6W-438.

Several Plekne, slaves of the Uchke, burst into view, power guns held firmly, yet uncertainly. Fright lay mirrored on their countenances. Bawled threats from down the corridor urged more of the Plekne to crowd up to the doorway and attack. The professor could easily have killed a dozen, so awkward and backward were the Plekne in their handling of the weapons. It was clear to the mind of the professor that these slaves had been urged on by their masters with the threat of death hanging in the balance.

Fear makes poor soldiers, and the Plekne were no exception to this universal rule. As the machine-man raised his three weapons menacingly, the Plekne darted aside and out of sight. Only one did not retreat. With a resigned expression of hopelessness, as if his act made little difference to him, he stood his ground and prepared to fire.

It was evident to the professor that, through fear of an uprising, the Uchke had neglected to teach their slaves the proficient use of the power guns. The slow and awkward manner, in which these reluctant minions of the Uchke handled the weapons, spoke much to the practiced eye of the machine man.

The power charge intended for the professor went wide of its mark, striking down the metal head and torso of 56F-450. Over he fell like a spinning nine pin, stunned and unconscious. The Pleknan prepared to unloose another charge at the machine man.

"Stop!" Professor Jameson commanded. "Do not fire!"

The mental order was given with such force and startling directness that the Pleknan became confused and inactive,

the force of the concentrated thought temporarily halting his intent. Growls and grumbled threats broke forth from the cowardly Uchke farther down the corridor as they urged back those of the Plekne who had retreated so discreetly. Professor Jameson seized the temporary advantage offered him. "We men of metal are friends from your kelp cities! We shall help you escape if you will join us!"

#### CHAPTER IV

PLAINLY, in clear mental pictures, Professor Jameson impressed upon their minds the relationship which had grown up between Zorome and Plekne. The slaves in the corridor gathered silently around their companion who had knocked over one of the metal men, yet had not been fired upon in return. They stared at the triple armed machine man, assimilating his ideas, both surprised and impressed.

Screams of rage and shrieked orders were hurled by the Uchke from their places of protection at their slaves who had been sent to overwhelm the machine men or else die.

"Join us," the professor suggested, having waited for his first impressions to clarify themselves, "and if we escape the Uchke, we shall return to your kelp cities."

A flash of power hurled itself from the obscurity of the corridor beyond the Plekne. Three of the slaves were whisked out of sight, others bowled over and injured. It was an ominous warning. The Plekne must fight for their masters or else die. This was the issue which forced conviction upon the slaves of the inner world. To the surprise of the Uchke, who had not been the recipients of Professor Jameson's telepathic communication, their armed slaves hurried into the cell of the six machine men.



Certain that the machine men had been overcome, though in what manner the Uchke failed to stop and reason why, they fairly fell over one another in their haste to reach the prison cell and reclaim the thinking machines which they had found only stunned for a short length of time by the power guns. They hastened, lest the machine men recover too soon. At the doorway, an intense wave of destruction met them full in the face, pouring itself into their ranks, and they never knew what hit them. Under Professor Jameson's leadership, the Plekne had at last turned upon their oppressors.

"Let us get out of here!" one of the Plekne cried. "When they discover what has happened, they will blow us out of here at once!"

"But my comrades — they cannot move!" the professor deplored. "They have been deprived of their mobile parts!"

"Wait!" exclaimed another of the slaves. "I know where the metal legs and arms are stored! It is not far!"

"Can we win through to them?" the professor asked.

"Yes, but it will not be safe to leave your companions here alone. Part of us must remain."

"It's certain death!" argued another of the Plekne.

"Why can't we carry your companions, if they are not overly heavy?" suggested Klegmo, the Pleknan whom Professor Jameson had previously refused to shoot. "The Uchke possesses more terrible weapons than those which you have seen demonstrated. They will train them on this quarter of the building."

This was agreed upon, and wasting no further time four Plekne lifted 56F-450 and staggered down the corridor with him. Other Plekne brought the remaining machine men, and Professor Jameson crawled along with the rear guard. They hurried to an elevator which

Klegmo stated would bring them to the storeroom where the appendages of the Zoromes had been taken. As the elevator dropped downward rapidly, a shudder ran through the building. To their ears came a dull, muffled roar. It was all too significant of what might have happened to them had they remained in the cell near to the spot where Professor Jameson had crashed with the stolen airship.

The Uchke had yet to realize, however, that their troublesome prisoners were still a deeper menace than they had anticipated. When the elevator stopped, there were Uchke to meet it with power guns. These blazed forth silently, taking their toll of Plekne, but the odds were too great, despite the latter's lack of skill in handling the weapons. The three guns of Professor Jameson were largely a deciding factor, and the fight was soon over. A dozen of the Plekne were dead, and it was impossible to move all five machine men.

"Bring the metal legs and arms with all speed that you can muster!" the professor told his allies. "I shall stand guard over my friends."

The Plekne acted with alacrity. The machine men waited nervously as the professor was ready to repel any attacks with the all important first blow. It was at 6W-438's cunning suggestion that he took refuge behind his companions.

"If we are struck, you are still left to fight," counselled 6W-438, "but if you are struck, what can we do?"

THE precaution, though a wise one, was unnecessary, for the Plekne soon burst into view, carrying the metal legs and dragging the tentacles.

"Hurry!" was Klegmo's panted admonition. "We got them without a fight, but we have been discovered by a general alarm, and there's a large force of the Uchke in pursuit of us even now!"

In mingled fear and elation, Professor

Jameson hurriedly equipped 744U-21 with appendages, while the Plekne stood ready to repel the oncoming Uchke, if the chase grew hot. In return, 744U-21 fitted the professor's body with two more legs, so that the machine man now lacked but a single leg and a tentacle. Before they finished the job, it was found that all except 744U-21 were insufficiently equipped, for the appendages of 88ZQ4 lay in the chambers of the air-lock beneath the sea bottom. 88ZQ4 was equipped with two metal legs, while the rest had three each.

The machine men were not quite finished when the Uchke burst into view—not a few of them, but a rapidly gathered multitude. The first thing of which Professor Jameson was aware, was a convulsive shock hurling him back against 6W-438. A dizziness assailed him, and he knew that a chance shot of the enemy had struck him. It had not been a direct hit, and dazedly he felt himself hustled into the elevator by which they had descended to this lower level. As they shot rapidly upward, he collected his senses once more.

"We must spread a general uprising among the Plekne," he heard Klegmo say. "It is our only chance—and theirs, too."

744U-21 consulted with the Plekne, and they discussed the advisabilities of their next move. The machine men listened eagerly to the bits of information, learning much of the inner world and especially of the island of light.

"We can make our best stand right here on the island," Klegmo told him. "There is an arsenal here and a broadcasting system to the mainland. Most important of all is the fact that this island is of great importance to the inner world, and the Uchke will forbear using their most destructive weapons on us to avoid ruin."

"This is a strategic position," was

744U-21's opinion. "First of all, we must take over the arsenal before the Uchke become aware of our plans or have an opportunity to forestall us. Then you can broadcast to the mainland, urging the Plekne to revolt and help us."

"We must kill off those of the Uchke who are on the island," said Klegmo, as emotionless as if he had been one of the metal men himself, "and liberate the Plekne from the prisons here on the island."

Having laid the plans of their defense, the machine men and Plekne hurried to the arsenal. Those of the machine men, who were without their full number of metal legs, locked tentacles for better balance. Few of the enemy were encountered, and these were shot down unceremoniously before they could lift a weapon in defense of themselves.

At the arsenal, Klegmo showed them the long range guns which could be wheeled about from place to place and were light enough for two or three Plekne to carry.

"Why do they have so much armament here in the inner world?" Professor Jameson inquired. "They have no enemies to fight, and the Plekne are kept in subjection."

"Most of this armament is made here and taken to the world of the Uchke, wherever that is," replied Klegmo. "For what reason, we never have known."

"And these guns with the light carriage——"

"They are finely sighted with telescopes and have a power range which will reach to the mainland twelve miles away."

**S**MALL power guns were discovered in Sendless quantities, but the Zoromes were especially pleased with the larger weapons of defense, for which as formidable sharpshooters they could count on holding off the circling airships,

keeping them at a fairly safe and respectful distance. The atmosphere between the island of light and the mainland swarmed with these ships of the Uchke. It was plain to the Uchke that all was not well on the island of light, and they were soon to become aware of a rebellion among the slaves instigated by the infernal metal monstrosities they had captured on the sea bottom of the hydrosphere. The airships waited for orders, ready to intercept any ships which left the gleaming island of the air.

But the Zoromes and Plekne were attempting no mad scheme such as that anticipated by the Uchke—at least not while the latter were so firmly and smoothly organized for trouble. Under the direction of Klegmo and 744U-21, the Plekne armed themselves to the teeth and hurried throughout the island of light, taking command of all important points, killing their hated masters by force of numbers, what few of them were left on the island, and releasing a horde of imprisoned Plekne.

Among the cells were found several Uchke who were serving sentences. These were promptly put out of the way or else left in their cells, according to the mood of whichever Pleknan discovered them. Ages of oppression was partially avenged in the space of a short time.

Six machine men and nearly five hundred Plekne soon found themselves in sole possession of the island of light, and the effects of this temporary freedom and power on the Plekne were truly revelational. Confidence and a fighting spirit replaced their previous fatalistic hopelessness and resigned fear. To the last Pleknan, they were ready to fight it out for freedom and escape, though it was apparent that freedom might end in death, while escape represented only a symbol for which to wage their battle.

Under direction of the machine men,

the long range guns were hurriedly stationed by eager Plekne at all parts of the island looking down on the surrounding mainland twelve miles away. The island was now a veritable fortress, bristling with armament, yet Klegmo shook his head with a melancholy smile.

"A magnificent effort worth dying for, the greater the Plekne have ever accomplished, yet futile. You do not realize the terrible weapons which are stationed on the mainland and which will be used against us if all else fails to root us from our position.

It was a grim prophecy, a forecast of death's grim sceptre which was to fall wantonly and wastefully. Yet Klegmo was among the most enthusiastic and energetic of the Plekne despite his gloomy outlook. It was Klegmo himself who took charge of the broadcasting. His message was heard by Plekne in all sections of the inner world, bringing hope and desperate resolve to the slaves of the Uchke, and chagrin to the Uchke themselves. As Klegmo had expected, it was the spark needed to ignite revolt into a billowing flame all over the inner world. The message also revealed the situation to the bewildered Uchke and paved the way for an attack.

The Uchke realized that the island must be captured if the revolt was to end. They concentrated their efforts in this direction, giving little attention to the Plekne rioting all about them on the mainland. The masters had held their slaves in contempt so long that they could not recognize them as fearsome antagonists. But the machine men—that was a different matter, and under the machine men on the island the directed attack of the Plekne could be reckoned as a serious hazard. The Uchke meant to strike swiftly at the crux of the situation.

**T**HEIR neglect of the trouble on the mainland, however, was a mistake

which they realized only too late. While they were engaged in concentrating an air attack on the island of light, the Plekne were carrying on a war of assassination, pillage and destruction. Fired by years of oppression and enervation and the inspiration of Klegmo's urging voice, they were in and out of the buildings of the inner world, sulking, striking down and hampering the Uchke who were organizing for a massed attack upon those who held their island of the air. Carnage and death strode hand in hand, as many Plekne dying as Uchke, for the latter were trained, while the efforts of the Plekne were more crude and awkward, yet effective.

On the island of light, the defenders waited grimly. Klegmo continued his encouragement to the unorganized mobs of slaves on the mainland, unaware that the Uchke had at last realized the effects of his words on the slaves, and had set up a stabbing roar of static to drown out his instigation. This din of the loud speakers only added to the chaos and confusion on the mainland. To those on the island, bright spurts of fire, which grew and swelled into billowing flames down on the mainland, offered mute evidence that the Plekne were firing the inflammable portions of the Uchke cities.

To the eyes of Professor Jameson, these distant conflagrations appeared as brilliant stars in the gray dusk of an early morning. Dark specks approached from the mainland, ominous and threatening, to join those airships already waiting for the moment of attack. They eventually formed in a great ring, encircling the island of light, looking for an opening. A tumultuous bombardment destroyed the island's arsenal, but the action was much too late. The foresight of the Zoromes had occasioned all arms to be removed from this vulnerable spot so familiar to the enemy.

At a mental command from the ma-

chine men, who were stationed at various points of observation on different sides of the island, the long range guns sprang into furious action, blowing to pieces the ships of the Uchke one after another. Coordination of thought, the complete mental accord between Plekne and Zorome and unity of purpose were all responsible for the terrible price the uncalculating Uchke paid. More than half the attacking fleet was snuffed into wreckage before the rest could escape from the vicinity of the island. Back to the mainland the remaining ships zigzagged, presenting difficult targets to the inefficiency of the unpracticed Plekne, despite the marvellous accuracy of the mechanism guided by the telescopic sights.

Up from the mainland sprang several tiny dots, speeding towards the island of light at so terrific a speed as to appear only in very indistinct details, so blurred was their rapid passing.

"What are they?" Professor Jameson inquired wonderingly.

"Small fliers whose speed is so great that they are very hard to hit," one of the Plekne explained. "There are not many of these, but they are very quick."

"If they come close enough, we can bring them down."

The speed fliers of the Uchke indeed represented elusive targets as they sped like malignant demons about the island of light. They were very small, probably holding no more than two Uchke, and it was the professor's opinion they travelled at a speed better than a thousand miles an hour. They came very close to the island, yet they unloosed no attack. Many shots were taken at them, and finally one of them, less careful to fly in a wavy line, was blasted out of the air.

"What are they up to?" queried 744U-21.

"It is hard to tell," said the professor.

**K**LEGMO, too, admitted his ignorance of this maneuver, but the question was soon answered by the Uchke themselves. A blue effulgence sprang forth quite suddenly from the rear of one of the speeding fliers. The indigo cloud spread rapidly, yet seemed to lose none of its intensity, unfathomable and seemingly opaque. Similar sprouts of azure mist sprang from the tails of the other fliers as they hurtled past the island, and soon the blue clouds merged, the distant landscape of the surrounding mainland disappearing from sight. To Professor Jameson, it seemed like staring upward into the deep vault of a clear October sky, such as he had once known on earth. In this case, however, the sky seemed to have been thrust alarmingly close.

"It's a screen!" 744U-21 exclaimed. "Their ships will be invisible behind it!"

Though the situation was indeed menacing, Professor Jameson felt rather a contempt for the weapons of the Uchke, so antiquated and inferior were they to the ones used by the machine men. To himself, he visualized what quick work the space ship from Zor might make of this inner world were it there. But it was not, and the six machine men and their allies from the kelp cities were in a desperate position.

"Each one ready at his gun!" warned 6W-438 from the other side of the island. "The Uchke will have difficulty penetrating this veil and must reduce their speed! Get them before they land!"

But one and all of the defenders knew that the enemy had scored a decisive advantage, and that bringing down the ships before they landed would be difficult indeed.

"Keep your side-arms ready," was Professor Jameson's ominous reminder. "If we fail to bring down the ships before they land, we shall have hand-to-hand fighting."

"They're more than our equal at that,"

deplored Klegmo. "The Uchke, as many a disobedient Kleknan has learned but once, are proficient with their power guns."

Zoromes and Plekne settled down for a grim, nervous wait, staring watchfully into the blue translucence, ready for the first fighting ships of the Uchke. Professor Jameson found this monotonous, for several times his imagination caused him to visualize from the corners of his eyes a descending ship of the Uchke, which on closer scrutiny proved to be only one of the taller towers of the island, silent and unmoving.

And then came the mental alarm of 56F-450 who was stationed on the other side of the island. One of the raiding ships had come though the misty veil before the guns could be brought into action. Its occupants were already pouring out of the ship ready for battle. The professor listened to the grim recital, heard of the valiant stand. Plekne were being mowed down by the power guns.

A blurred shape, becoming, more distinct, appeared through the cloud and was followed by a companion. Professor Jameson saw the ships coming, and his attention diverted itself from the encounter on the island's antipode to the situation at hand. He swung the large gun up on the farther ship and released the power charge. With satisfaction, he saw the ship explode and the remnants of craft and inmates shower upon the island.

Meanwhile, the first ship had landed, and now a yelling, growling horde of the inner world dwellers came running over the rooftops, power guns held ready. Leaving one of the Plekne in charge of the long range gun, Professor Jameson selected the rest of his gun crew and stole softly into the shadow of a nearby dome. On came the Uchke, a bit uncertainly, yet none the less resolved to wipe out all Plekne and machine men who came their way.

Professor Jameson crept around the dome to come up behind them when they passed by, warning his faithful Plekne to hold their fire until the enemy passed the dome. Noiselessly, he crept around the super-structure, catching a fleeting glimpse of the last Uchke. And then the waiting Plekne let go a withering fire which at such close range required no marksmanship. Few of the Uchke guns were fired, so surprising had been the attack. But the surprise was short lived.

From behind the Uchke there leaped into the midst of the enemy a terrifying creation of metal, tentacles swinging, crushing and choking. Rapidly, the professor finished the work which the Plekne had begun. The cruel Uchke soon lay exterminated, strung in bloody, riotous confusion upon the roof.

"There—that is done!" the professor exclaimed, finding on account that he had lost but two of his allies in the bitter assault. "Now—back to the gun!"

At that moment, a dazzling streak leaped upward from the gun position where the lone Pleknan held forth. A crashing explosion in the blue mist announced the destruction of another prowler. The survivors of the recent fray hurried to escape the shower of wreckage which followed. Another glaring white streak brought forth no sound, and the professor realized that an Uchke ship had figured discretion the better part of valor and had beaten a hasty retreat on witnessing the vicious cannonading of its sister ship.

Into the gun room bounded the machine man on his three metal legs and an improvised cane he had seized from the strewn wreckage of an airship and which he gripped securely in a tentacle. He was followed by his flesh-and-blood cohorts, recently the enslaved victims of the heartless creatures they were now combatting. At the hands of the Plekne, death had just reaped a plentiful harvest, but the

grim reaper was no player of favorites, the professor knew well, and he recollected the prophecy of Klegmo.

The Uchke, eager to save their island from needless destruction, were keeping their most potent weapons in check. There was but one outcome to which Plekne and machine men might look forward. The Uchke would wipe them out by slow and steady extermination, even at a terrific cost to their own numbers. They might even cast caution to the winds and in desperation become regardless of the consequences to their island of light. Then would be loosed down upon the heads of the defenders the terrible weapons of which Klegmo had spoken.

"The blue mist is lifting," said a Pleknan. "That is why those last airships were seen so easily."

"It seems to be slowly disappearing," the professor observed.

**T**HIS was true. The azure veil spread by the hurtling speed fliers of the inner world was dissipating itself. Soon, parts of the distant mainland became visible. Reports coming from the other machine men informed the professor that the loss of their own numbers had been comparatively small, while the recent effort of the enemy had cost them many ships. Several had landed, but the entrenched defenders had held the advantage, and under the able direction of their metal allies, they had wielded it for the best results obtainable.

No more attacks were reported during the time the blue mist was in the process of dissolution, and it was evident that the Uchke were waiting—preparing a new type of offensive. The more was soon apparent.

As the last of the azure fog dimmed away into the atmosphere, a terrific shock rumbled through the island. There followed a dull rumble like thunder. Immediately afterward, a jarring concussion

blew into fragments a building a short distance from the position which the professor and his Plekne had taken. A rapid exchange of the telepathic opinions soon convinced the six Zoromes that the Uchke on the mainland now had their various positions pretty well charted, and were sacrificing a small part of the island's architecture in order to blast them out.

"The best thing we can do," Professor Jameson suggested, "is to move our armament to safer positions, leave a few guards to watch for attacking airships, and get as near the center of this island as possible until the Uchke think they have the upper hand. When they quit firing, we can come out, man the guns and blow them out of the sky again."

"Revenge is sweet," Klegmo told them, "but it means only a postponement of our rendezvous with death. Our numbers are dwindling—the Uchke are many—and, eventually, even the metal men must suffer destruction."

It was a potent prophecy, and all well realized the validity of its foundation. The Plekne were ready to sell their lives only at the most expensive price they could exact from their conquerors, while the machine-men never gave up as long as the brain continued functioning in its metallic protecting case.

The warning of Klegmo was well borne out to the effect that the machine-men were not entirely invincible by the weapons of the Uchke. The disheartening report that the machine-men now numbered but five reached the professor from 744U-21. In one of the explosions which had scored a direct hit, 88ZQ4 had met his death. The entire gun-nest had been blown to oblivion. The only traces left were a few scattered metal parts of the Zorome. Formerly Brlx the Triped, 88ZQ4 had known but a comparatively short career as a machine-man.

Leaving but a few Plekne at various

points ready to warn of an air attack from the mainland, the remaining Plekne and the machine-men burrowed deep into the central chambers of the island's interior. Outside, building after building, in which the defenders had recently held forth, was demolished as the Uchke set to work, blasting out their troublesome prisoners. The jarring shocks were felt to the very center of the island, yet the machine-men and Plekne were temporarily safe from the bombardment. As Klegmo had assured them, the Uchke would spare their precious island of light as much as possible.

From intermittent reports of the Plekne guards situated in the comparatively safe and obscure observation points of the island's surface, the defenders learned that many of the great sun-lamps had been shot out and that half the mainland now lay in darkness. It was also reported that the rioting Plekne on the mainland had been subdued, having been slaughtered or else chased into hiding. Their hampering influence had previously been a great help to those on the island. Now, however, the Uchke were free to concentrate their efforts on the island itself. Zoromes and Plekne enjoyed a respite during the bombardment. Though the machine men were tireless, the Plekne were not, and they sadly needed the rest which they now obtained for the first time since hostilities had commenced.

The periodic shaking of the island under the bombardment of the Uchke became lessened, and word from the surface notified those in the island's center that the firing was now becoming limited and airships were seen taking off from the mainland. During the intense firing, it had been impossible for ships to approach the island and land safely, and this fact had been appreciated by machine-men and Plekne.

As they hurried to the surface of the

island once again, a strange sight lay revealed before their eyes. Gloom rested over fully half the mainland like grim, black pits of darkness, where the dead sun-lamps had once made the inner world light as day. There had been a method, however, in the gunnery of the Uchke. The brilliant sun-lamps had not been extinguished through inaccurate sighting, but to reduce the glare from the island and make far clearer observation of the defenders' positions.

The machine-men and their allies found that the island, through the extreme care of the Uchke to blow up only their recent strongholds, had really suffered but little damage. The idea of the professor, to remove their armament to new spots, had been a prudent one. Airships were on their way, but this time they were cautious—the main contingent hung well beyond effective firing range, while only a few ships circled warily in toward the island. The Uchke believed they had practically annihilated their enemies, yet none were too eager to assume the risk of finding it out.

And it was well for them that they exercised such caution. Seeing they could not inveigle the ships to come close by holding their fire, the defenders let loose at the scout ships which drifted a bit hesitantly in the direction of the island for a safety inspection. A few scout ships were blown to pieces, the remainder of the fleet which had waited patiently scattering in all directions to the mainland.

It was Professor Jameson's opinion that the concentrated destruction, which was hurled simultaneously from every gun on the island after the fleeting airships must surely have dismayed the hopeful Uchke. He looked for a new maneuver on the part of the dwellers of the inner world.

"Hell will break loose now!" was the equivalent of Klegmo's statement.

And hell did break loose, though in no bombastic manner such as the machine-men had been expecting, not as a terrific display of power sufficient to rend the island into several separate chunks. Quite to the contrary, death made its advent in a silent, sure, sinister manner.

## CHAPTER V

**P**ALE, yellow rays stabbed upward from the mainland in thin pencils of light, clearly distinguishable in those portions of the inner world which were plunged into darkness. Like phantoms, the yellow light flickered slowly, searchingly, about the island, as if feeling for something that was hidden. Several of these lights were being employed by the Uchke from various sections of the mainland.

"What are they?" queried Professor Jameson to Klegmo who was not far distant.

"Death rays!"

"Do they burn?"

"No—they disintegrate!"

Across twelve miles of atmosphere, the thin pencils of light pierced their way, wandering and exploring for the defenders of the island stronghold. Klegmo, having appraised the machine men as to the rays' terrible qualities, urged them to radiate orders for a general scattering of the Plekne all over the island.

"It is the end!" he lamented. "Yet we must not die like the low creatures which the Uchke believe us to be!"

"The ray ejectors can be blasted out with the long range power guns," 744U-21 suggested. "Up until now, we have not fired at the mainland."

"It is too far," replied Klegmo, "but we can try."

"The targets are stationary, quite unlike the air ships," was Professor Jameson's contribution to the council of war.



"Careful sighting and continual firing may bring results."

"That will reveal our positions," countered another Plekman, "and our only chances are evasion of the ray."

"Why not hide in the center of the island again?"

"The rays penetrate clear through the island," was the despairing cry. "The range has been set for that."

One of the gun nests, acting on previous suggestions to pick off the ray ejectors, shot streak after streak silently down upon the mainland. The reports reached the island faintly. Almost immediately, the nearest ray swerved in the direction of the offending weapon. Out of the place hurried the Plekne, fleeing in terror from the grim, inexorable ray. Several escaped, yet the ray overtook three of them. Professor Jameson looked on in mystification as he saw parts of the terrified Plekne disappear, saw them fall and completely vanish. Having finished its terrible work, the yellow ray wandered away in search of more victims.

"Why did the Uchke fail to use these rays before this?" 6W-438 queried from his outpost on the antipode of the island. "It is their least destructive and most effective weapon."

"Wait—and you will see what it does to the island of light," promised Klegmo. "Watch the buildings. The effects on them are much slower. Soon, where the yellow ray has touched them, they will crumble to ruin. I once saw the ray demonstrated."

"So that is why they kept this in reserve."

General orders were given to scatter and watch for the rays to come. When they came, they must be eluded. Sustained life belonged to the fleetest and most observant. The long-range guns were to be sighted and fired from time to time and then abandoned when the ray came to search them out and destroy.

Professor Jameson's opinions came to reflect the fatalistic attitude of Klegmo. Plekne and Zoromes, they were all marked by the stigma of death. The cruel ray would eventually discover them all, or enough of them to render defense of the island an impossibility. Once more the professor saw the yellow ray sweep unwittingly over the hidden retreat of several Plekne. Their dying screams rang dismally upon the air as they stumbled forth, one of them with an arm cut away neatly by the devastating ray. The ray flitted after the armless one who ran, overtaking and finishing the work which his flight had interrupted. The ray then returned to complete its gruesome work on the struggling remains of those who had been unable to run. It reminded the professor quite forcibly of an ant-hill and a small boy with a burning glass. The scene was grim with evil forebodings.

And now Professor Jameson saw why the Uchke had reserved this ghastly weapon until after other means of subjection had failed. With a dull roar and crumbling of dust, several of the nearby buildings sank into ruin. All over the island, similar scenes were being enacted. Those of the Plekne, who had yet eluded the yellow ray, were endangered by the slow destruction of the buildings in which they hid. Upon the professor's mind suddenly rang a cry of distress. It was 56F-450, nearest of Professor Jameson's mental companions.

"21MM392—I am pinned beneath the ruins!"

"Are you damaged badly?" the professor asked in apprehension.

"I believe not—fortunately. But my poor Plekne friends are beyond all help, I fear."

Without further query, Professor Jameson acted on a bold, impulsive gesture. Across from him, quite a distance away over the smooth roof lay the ruined

spire in which the machine men were imprisoned. The professor abandoned caution. Why gamble with the fates any longer? If their doom was irrevocably sealed, would furtive dalliance avail them anything?

Rapidly he bounded over the roof, making good use of the metal stanchion he used as a crutch. A yellow ray flickered eagerly to meet him. Back on the mainland, an evil face lit with cruel glee and anticipation, as a watchful eye glued to a telescope saw what it had hoped to find—one of the machine men. Professor Jameson saw the dread light approach him, yet he made no effort to dodge out of sight. In fact, such an attempt would have been too late. The yellow light raced quickly for him, then slowed up as its watching controller saw that the metal man was making no vain effort to escape. The yellow light engulfed the professor quite suddenly, following him in his rapid flight.

**M**UCH to his surprise, the machine man felt no visible change. Was he immune? Then an idea struck him. Like the buildings about him, a longer time was required to effect the change. Into the ruins the doomed machine man raced, the yellow light hanging grimly on his trail, like the ghastly beam of perdition. 56F-450 was securely pinioned beneath two metal beams. With a mighty effort of combined strength the two machine men lifted the encumbering obstacles, and 56F-450 climbed to freedom.

"The ray!" he exclaimed. "It has us!"

Professor Jameson nodded, a habit of assent or agreement which the Zoromes had noted was peculiar to him.

"We are not dead!" was 56F-450's surprised ejaculation.

"No," said the professor, "it seems to be only a question of time."

"You mean we have but a short time in which to live?"

"That is just what I mean."

"What of our brains?" queried 56F-450. "Why is it they do not disintegrate like those of our friends the Plekne?"

"For the same reason, 56F-450, my own brain did not depart from its metal body in the transition cube of the Tri-peds. Our metal brain cases appear to be immune to penetration."

"Then, like the surrounding buildings," mused 56F-450, "we can only wait for our heads and bodies to disintegrate."

"If we are to die, we'll die fighting!" the professor swore vehemently. "We may, in a measure, wreak vengeance on these Uchke! Yonder is an empty airship! Let's be off!"

They ran to the ship as fast as their inadequate number of metal legs would permit, the yellow ray tagging them persistently. It settled down over the airship, and then they were off into the air, Professor Jameson at the controls.

"Now that the ray has played upon the airship, that, too, will soon fall apart," opined 56F-540.

"We shall probably be dead before that," was the professor's practical, yet cheerless, answer.

Like a veritable demon, the ship sprang screaming for the mainland at a terrific pace. A loud explosion behind them rocked the craft. The professor turned from the controls. A ragged tear had been inflicted in the rear of the ship.

"The power guns! They're trying to get us before we can accomplish anything!"

Professor Jameson veered upward once again to be halfway between the island of light and the mainland. Sweeping around the island in a wide circle at the fastest speed the craft could maintain, the machine man raced against his worst enemies, time and death. The weapons of the ship were directed at the main-

land, and the professor barraged the inner world with all the destructive forces and power projectiles the ship possessed, 56F-450 assured him that his efforts bore fruit, watching the distant terrain six miles below them for the effects of the destructive explosions. The ship's offensive charges soon became exhausted and useless.

"What now?" asked 56F-450. "Death still awaits us!"

"Do you feel any difference in yourself yet?" queried Professor Jameson.

"No!"

"We have time then to take up another ship," said the professor, heading for the island once more.

On the island of light, fully one-quarter of the buildings were laid in ruins from the effects of the terrible yellow ray, and more of the sun-lamps of the inner world were extinguished. Professor Jameson landed close by another deserted ship which had been left upon the island during the hand-to-hand fighting under the azure mist.

"What are you doing, 21MM392?" came the silent voice of 6W-438 from near by.

"Doing all we can before we die," was the professor's desperate reply. "The yellow ray has marked us."

"Do not fear it," came 6W-438's startling announcement. "We are invincible against its powers—that I have recently discovered, as have 744U-21 and 6N-24."

"But the buildings here even crumble beneath it," the professor pointed out.

"Only those parts of the building which are made of rocky substance," corrected 6W-438. "See the metal parts strewn all about. They are entirely intact, though they collapsed with the rest of the building."

With intense relief, the two machine men heard the evidence of their salvation, but contemplation of it was short lived. A terrific explosion blew the air-

ship before them into ragged wreckage, hurling them backward.

"We're not invincible against that, if it hits us!" the professor exclaimed, as the two machine men picked themselves up and ran to join 6W-438.

"Nor against those, either, if they get close enough," said 6W-438 waving a tentacle skyward to the swarm of airships which were heading for the island.

"Where is our defense?" cried 56F-450. "Why don't they fire?"

As if in answer, a few scattered bursts issued from the island.

"We are practically wiped out," was 6W-438's reply. "There are five of us left and no more than a dozen of the Plekne."

In the obscurely lit sky, the horde of angry ships grew from tiny pin points to large dots. Their coming was only too significant. The Uchke had all but wrecked their precious island of light in order to conquer the rebellious slaves and the formidable machine men who represented the nucleus of the trouble.

"What is that?" queried 6W-438 suddenly, pointing off toward the main land.

The three Zoromes stared at a thin shaft of silver, that shot upward from the mainland for nearly a mile or more. A cascade of tiny points were being ejected at the termination of the shaft, falling back and disappearing on the mainland.

"Another weapon of the Uchke," ventured 56F-450.

"If that is so, we are safely beyond its reach," said the professor. It barely leaves the mainland."

"But it is growing larger," said 6W-438. See how it is reaching out for us. The shaft is growing thicker, too."

In truth, the curious silvery stream had really assumed larger proportions, yet its termination was less than a quarter of the distance from the mainland.

"That is no weapon!" Professor Jame-

son exclaimed with sudden realization. "It is water!"

"Water?"

"From the surrounding hydrosphere!"

"Do you suppose it is another trick of the Uchke?"

"I do not understand it," came the mental call of 744U-21. "From my position, three water spots are visible."

"That makes four!"

"Look—the airships!"

6W-438 pointed skyward. The oncoming airships had slowed their speed and had momentarily wavered from their deadly intent. Several of them wheeled and headed for various sections of the mainland. The rest of them hesitated several minutes while the machine men and handful of Plekne waited nervously for the next move.

"The Uchke are not responsible for this," stated Professor Jameson. "The ocean has broken its bonds and has spread fear among them."

"If the sea had only interfered earlier," 744U-21 lamented from the opposite end of the island. "It might have saved us."

"Where is Klegmo?"

"Dead!" came the gloomy announcement of 6N-24. "The last explosion got him!"

The armada of Uchke aircraft once more turned to its grimly appointed task despite the fact that the mighty hydrosphere was pouring millions of tons of water into the inner world of the planet's core. Far away in the distance, just above the mainland, came dazzling bright flashes which puzzled the machine men. A good share of the ships had been turned back in that direction. The remainder of the fleet rapidly neared the island.

It was the professor's belief that the ships returning to the mainland had been called back in a desperate attempt to repair the leaks. How had four different leaks occurred almost simultaneously?

The bright flashes which the machine men had seen down over the mainland were growing larger and coming nearer. They were unlike the power discharges of the Uchke weapons. Professor Jameson realized, however, that there was little time to ponder the strange occurrences, and the urgent admonition of 744U-21 was superfluous.

"Find cover! It is our last chance! If we can hold them off until the water rises——"

The vengeful ships of the Uchke, meeting with feeble opposition, were now so close that Professor Jameson knew 744U-21's advice to be little more than a desperate gesture. With 56F-450 and 6W-438, he found concealment, yet from a position where they all might watch.

Then came the bombardment. The air roared and trembled around them. The entire island quivered and bellowed to the terrible concussions which shook it. For a time, the professor wondered vaguely if the staggering blasts might not throw the island of light out of balance of attraction and send it hurtling like a moon of doom down upon the mainland. Like angry wasps, the ships of the Uchke raced madly over the island, circling it constantly, letting their terrific barrages of concentrated destruction fall haphazardly. Whole buildings were cast high into the air, then rent to infinitesimal debris by the Uchke destroyers. No longer were the Uchke working to save the island of light. Their entire colony of the inner world was doomed.

Frantically, they sought to wipe out the metal men ere they must flee the churning waters which roared through the ruptured air-locks.

Since his escape from the raging volcano on the planet of the double sun, Professor Jameson had never known such chaos, such din. The island rocked, staggered and swayed, threatening to lose its balance of suspended equilibrium. Sev-

eral terrible concussions threw the machine men from their feet, so close had death swung its gleaming sickle.

They were doomed. Each and every machine man was aware of this, yet they clung tenaciously to life, clung firmly to the vain possibility that the explosions would miss them, conscious that while their metal heads still existed there remained a spark of hope. But the wrath of the Uchke knew no limitations. They slowed their mad speed for a final salvo to comb the regions of the island yet untouched. Their extermination of the island's defenders was about to be completed. Professor Jameson realized this quite significantly.

No use was there of fleeing to the island's center. The inner chambers were buried beneath tons of exploded debris, choked up and partially filled. The surviving Plekne, who had fled there in terror from the unloosed hell of the Uchke, now lay crushed beneath the ruins or else trapped in a living death, buried alive. Miraculously, all five Zoromes had survived the sweeping fire of the Uchke, but now, as the ships circled lower, Professor Jameson knew that the hour of the machine men was nigh.

He stared beyond the flickering shadows of death's grim harbingers preparing for their last attack before quitting their doomed inner world. The silver shafts of water now reached not so far into the air but were broader. Lakes were forming on the mainland from the rushing, gushing, tumbling rivers of sea water which grew in volume by the minute. Soon, the professor knew, these lakes would merge, and there would be an endless, inland, upcurved sea, rising ever higher until the inner world represented a globe of water surrounded by its thick shell, the hydrosphere's sea bottom.

A roaring filled the professor's auditory senses, and he felt himself cast on high.

Thick was the dust about him. He crashed downward, still sensible, and, as the dust cleared, he saw that the concealing roof above him had been blown completely away with half the building. Not far from the professor, partially covered by wreckage, lay 56F-450 and 6W-438. Darkness, except for the lights on the mainland and those directed from the aircraft, reigned in the inner world. The remaining sun-lamps had been shot to pieces.

The light from a ship soaring into view above them flickered forward toward the three metal bodies—Professor Jameson groaned inwardly, knowing what it portended. A dazzling flash, dimming into insignificance the glow from the Uchke airship, suddenly revealed to the professor the forms of his metal companions digging deeper in under the debris to be out of sight. They still lived. He was glad.

Again came a silent, dazzling flash high above them, and the marauding ship of the Uchke disappeared. Realization suddenly came to the professor, and the sudden knowledge overwhelmed him with intoxicating joy. And if the bright flashes, now occurring everywhere, were not sufficiently significant of the state of affairs, a telegraphic cry came down which certainly credited Professor Jameson's senses with having guessed rightly.

"Zoromes—do you still live?"

Five hearty responses assured 38R-497 that his call had not been a vain summons to the dead, which he had more than half expected and had feared.

"Lay low until danger has been cleared."

The machine men of Zor had come through the hydrosphere to the rescue of their lost companions. But of the details, and by what manner the machine men had learned of the inner world and had known that the lost Zoromes were there, the professor knew he must learn

later. In the bright, flaring flashes which lit the sky from time to time, Professor Jameson saw that the machine men had set up and utilized the little scout cruisers of space. How they had been brought into the inner world he could only conjecture.

The Uchke were being shot from the sky rapidly by the invincible ships of Zor, and the five Zoromes on the island of light knew that it was only a question of time when the menace of the Uchke would be removed. No more shots were fired at the island. The dwellers of the inner world were having their hands full in a futile effort at defense against the machine men.

**T**HE death of 88ZQ4 was avenged a thousand-fold many times over. The intermittent flashes of the Uchke ships as they were sent to oblivion revealed from time to time the contours of the mainland. First, the professor saw that the water had submerged all but the higher promontories; later, only a few of the tallest buildings thrust their tops above the churning, tumbling waters; then, they were finally gone beneath the surface. Only a vast, restless expanse of water lay on every side, and slowly it diminished the distance of the island.

Scout ships from Zor came and rescued the five survivors. From the ruins of a building there issued a limping figure supporting another in his arms. A Pleknan with a wounded comrade, the sole survivors of more than five hundred slaves who had battled side by side with their six metal allies, had lived through the final and most terrible attack. The two Plekne were taken aboard one of the little ships. To the surprise of Professor Jameson, he found it piloted by Ogweg, the truculent Pleknan who had dared cast a futile attack at the might of the Uchke.

The Uchke had all disappeared, as the machine men discovered on searching

about with their giant lights. Floating on bits of wreckage, some of them swimming in the calmer waters far from the bubbling undercurrents marking the hydrosphere's ingress, were many of the Plekne who had rioted on the mainland. Excellent swimmers, they were rescued by the machine men from the watery graves they were so desperately battling.

The irresistible waters were pouring in faster, having dug deeper channels by the force of outer pressure. Soon, only a thin layer of air insulated the island of light from the waters of the conquering hydrosphere. Professor Jameson watched in the brilliance of the ship's glow as the air surrounding the island suddenly clustered into several gigantic bubbles and sped for one of the openings leading from the core of the hydrosphere. Where once there had been a colony of the Uchke, there was now only a mammoth cavern of the hydrosphere's center into which the sea rolled unobstructed. The ruined island of ight now lay in a watery grave.

No longer would the Plekne have cause to fear the menace from down under the kelp cities. It was in the professor's mind to see that the Plekne of the hydrosphere no longer had to fear the cruel Uchke at all.

The scout ships of Zor, built strong to resist the undersea pressure, filed out through one of the great channels of the hydrosphere's core. On the way to the surface, Professor Jameson learned from 29G-75 how the machine men of Zor had come into the hydrosphere in search of the six lost machine men.

"When the Uchke raider fired on you, as you returned from the kelp city, we thought you were dead. Then came the story of the Nacac and of the futile attempt to rescue you—how a great fish had swallowed you and 88ZQ4.

"We made plans to search the center of the hydrosphere. The scout ships were

taken from the mother ship and assembled for undersea penetration. We searched far and wide on the bottom of the sea, realizing that if two of you had survived the Uchke shot, the other four possessed equal chances. By all means, even had the Nacac not brought us the story they did, we should have searched for our six lost companions to discover their fate. Several of the Uchke craft attacked us, and in this way we discovered one of their air-locks, destroying all but one of their submarines which we pursued to its lair."

"Who unloosed the waters into the inner world?" asked the professor.

"We did," was 29G75's prompt reply. "The air-lock was guarded against our entrance, and depth charges were released in an effort to drive us off or destroy us. Before anything definite could be decided upon, Ogweg took matters into his own hands. He blew the air-lock to bits, realizing that inside the core of the planet were the Plekne's hated oppressors. While we entered, he searched the ocean bottom for more of the smooth platforms marking entrance to the inner world. He found and destroyed three more before tiring of the sport. Then he joined us. The currents of water were fast and strong, dragging us through the channel at a rapid pace, hurling us far out into the atmosphere of the inner world. We were immensely surprised, not having looked for a rendezvous beneath the sea to be constructed of such a large order.

"We were confused as to the situation. Though we believed you to be inside the core somewhere, not having found you on the carefully scoured sea bottom by telephatic call, we landed and captured several Uchke, forcing them to

tell us where you were and why so much fighting was being carried on. It was easy. We read their thoughts before they even guessed our intent. Among other facts, we discovered that this planet's core is not their home. 21MM392, do you know whence they come?"

I do not know for certain," was the professor's reply, "but I can guess pretty well."

"And what is your guess?"

"The planet we passed on our way to the hydrosphere. Remember the strange ships that attacked us?"

"Your guess is correct," said 29G-75. "The Uchke used this inner world only as a slave-base and manufacturing plant. It seems that long ago they hollowed out this world by disintegrating the rock."

"29G-75, we must see that the Uchke never menace the Plekne again. Some day, the Uchke may return. We must go to this planet of the Uchke and render them harmless. Then only can we leave this planetary system and head back in the direction of Zor."

"21MM392, are you aware of what system of worlds we shall pass in this direction?"

"I have not consulted the charts lately," said the professor. "Why do you ask?"

"Because you may be interested to know that our route back to Zor will take us close to your planet Earth, where we found your dead body encased in its rocket satellite."

As Professor Jameson pondered this revelation, the little scout ship bobbed into the light of day, gently riding the surface of the hydrosphere. Upon the horizon lay the faint outlines of a distant kelp city, lined resplendently against the red sunlight of the dying day.