

FUTURE FICTION

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ISLES OF THE BLEST

by FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER Jr.

The "Isles of the Blest," legend called them—and they sank once again, bringing Don Harper to the floor of the sea, where he is brought into the domain of the immortal Atlanteans and their weird sciences! Here he must battle with ancient pirates, an eerie conflict in this forgotten world beneath the sea, that, in a strange way, decides the fate of his native land!



CHAPTER I SHIPWRECK

THE sea was heavy, sluggish, and the S-98 rolled rhythmically as she nosed forward under throttled Diesels. She was not a new craft, having been launched

in 1945, but two double-purpose deck guns, an a. a. pompom battery, made her quite as formidable above water as the latest subs.

Lieutenant Commander Donald Harper, standing in the shadow of the conning tower, scanned the leaden sky a trifle



"Needs must employ more skill than that!"

anxiously. They were less than fifty miles from the Canaries, and the risk of being spotted by enemy planes was great. Still, Harper reflected, the low-hanging clouds were a protection, and he would go "under" in another half-hour. It was best to remain on the surface as long as possible . . . the men would get their fill of submersion from now on.

Harper's gaze shifted from the sky to the horizon. If only he could spot one of those tell-tale wisps of smoke that would indicate a Eurasian war-ship hurrying to the great rendezvous at Teneriffe! The loss of even one battle-wagon might upset their plans, delay the attack upon America. . . .

The clang of cleated shoes upon the steel

deck-plates interrupted Don's reflections. McKane, the S-98's radio operator, was running toward him.

"Message from Chief of Operations, sir," he explained, extending a typed slip. "I've decoded it."

Harper glanced at the radiogram.

"Enemy Asiatic squadron makes presence of fleet in Pacific vital," he read. "Imperative all units in Atlantic act to retard European crossing until coast defenses strengthened. Bloch, Chief of Operations."

Harper crushed the paper into his pocket. The meaning beneath the terse official wording was plain. The main U. S. fleet was having a rough time of it against the

superior Asiatic forces of the enemy, and the subs and light cruisers of the Atlantic squadron were to sacrifice themselves in an attempt to weaken the overwhelming European armada of the Alliance. Don Harper grinned crookedly at McKane.

"Doesn't look so good, does it?" he said. "God knows what a few subs and cruisers can do against the combined fleets of Europe! And if we don't succeed in holding them back, America is . . ."

"Lieutenant!" McKane's fingers dug into his arm. "Listen!"

DON froze. Somewhere above them a dull, ominous drone was audible. An instant later three hawk-like bombers broke through the bank of clouds!

"Planes!" McKane cried. "We'd better submerge . . .!"

"No good!" Harper snapped, whirling about. "They'll be carrying depth charges! Before we could dive deep enough, they'd have us! Man the guns!"

The next half-minute was a mad delirium. McKane's shouts down the hatchway drew a breathless crowd of men from the S-98's interior. Harper had succeeded in ripping the tarpaulin from one of the three-inchers when he was joined by the gun's crew, lean, weatherbeaten men wearing life belts. Vaguely, Harper remembered slipping into a cork jacket, also, as he shouted crisp orders. The deck hatches were open, now, and shells were being brought up in the ammunition hoists.

THE three planes, zooming downward at 600 m. p. h., were already less than two miles away. A burst of machine gun fire from them tore up the water at the right of the S-98. Harper swore with relief as the two deck guns began to roar a staccato chorus. Tiny white clouds, like powder puffs, appeared alongside the diving planes. On the after deck, the pompom began its hollow popping.

The gun crews worked like robots, feeding shells into the hungry chambers, slamming home the breech-locks, yanking the lanyards. Little chance to aim, to set fuses! Speed was the main essential.

"Here!" Harper beckoned to the men who were emerging from the hatch with light machine guns, boxes of ammunition. "Quick!"

Swiftly the two machine guns were set up on the deck, adjusted. Harper knelt beside one and an instant later its chatter was rising in harsh obligato to the thunder of the guns.

The enemy planes were close, now. A hail of bullets from their blunt noses rattled like a pneumatic riveter upon the S-98's deck plates. Two men from the forward gun-crew fell, but others ran to take their places.

Harper, forcing a new belt into his machine gun, looked up as a cheer broke from the men. One of the bombers had disintegrated in midair; from the cloud of black smoke shattered fragments were falling. Then, almost simultaneously, another of the planes spun out of control, fluttered seaward.

"Nice work!" Harper cried. "Now if we just nail the last one . . ."

The third plane had not checked its dive. The sound of its motor rose to a macabre, siren-like whine. Harper had a momentary glimpse of polished metal, of gleaming glass, as the plane swept a scant thousand feet above the submarine. Firing blindly, Don put a burst of machine-gun bullets into the bomber's belly, saw it wobble, out of control. But even as it fell, two black objects dropped from its bomb racks. Quite instinctively, Don ducked, threw up a shielding arm. At that instant the black objects struck abaft the conning tower. A dazzling flash, a deafening roar, and the underseas craft leaped like a harpooned whale. One brief, horrible picture, Don had, of the distorted, bloody face of the man beside him, then it seemed that a cruel

hammer landed upon his temple. Abruptly the world dissolved into darkness.

It was the throbbing, aching pain in his head which at length prodded Don Harper into consciousness. Dazedly, he parted his lips, gasped for air . . . only to receive a mouthful of water. Then, sputtering, he was aware of a hand gripping the strap of his life-belt; turning, he saw McKane floating beside him.

"Mac!" he whispered. "What happened?"

"The S-98 sank, Lieutenant," McKane replied. "Took the rest of the boys down with her. You and I were thrown clear by the explosion, avoided the undertow when she sank. I found you floating, held up by your cork jacket. Been hanging onto you since. Two, three hours at least."

Harper glanced about. Grey sky, grey sea . . . these and no more. The water, in spite of the latitude, was cold. He shivered.

"Looks bad, eh, Mac?" he muttered. "A good fifty miles to the Canaries, and a prison camp if by some miracle we should reach them. Which isn't likely without being able to get our bearings."

McKane, his face drawn, blue, nodded suddenly.

"Maybe the others were the lucky ones, sir," he said. "Drowning's painless, they say. And we're apt to float like corks for days, until thirst and hunger . . ." He broke off as a wave engulfed his head.

"You're right," Don gasped. "Might as well do what we can, though." He slipped off his belt, passed it under the straps of both his and McKane's life preservers, buckled it again. "Now we won't get separated. The Canaries are somewhere east of here. What with current and drift we've practically no chance of reaching them, but it'll ease my conscience to try."

"Right, sir." McKane glanced at the sun, a whitish disk burning through the clouds. Then, turning eastward, "Let's go!"

For hours the two men swam, until, as the sun was dropping to the horizon, exhaustion forced them to cease. Weighed down by soaked uniforms, eyes stinging from the salt water, they surrendered themselves to the mercy of the current. Already their mouths were dry, cottony, their bodies cramped from cold.

"No—no use, Lieutenant," McKane choked. "I'm about done in. Even . . . possibility of being picked up by ships . . . is out. War's cleaned sea of commerce. Better to slip off life-belts, get it over with."

Don made no reply. There was nothing to look forward to other than slow death. They had covered only a fraction of the distance to the Canaries. And there was no other land except the islands . . . Don glanced at his companion. McKane's head had slumped forward, chin resting on the edge of his cork jacket; he seemed all but unconscious.

Harper tried to resume swimming, but his cramped muscles refused to obey. A terrible lethargy was stealing over him; nothing seemed to matter a great deal. Death came sooner or later; perhaps to unfasten the life belt, free his spirit of this aching, tortured body . . .

Suddenly, lifted high by a huge comber, Don gasped. Ahead of him, golden in the light of the sunset, lay a strip of sandy shore, sloping gently upward to dense masses of trees and shrubbery!

"Mac!" he cried, shaking the inert radio operator. "Mac! Land!"

McKane glanced about, dully, then frowned in disbelief.

"Couldn't be Teneriffe," he muttered. "Not . . . not in only couple of hours . . . And maps show no land west of Canaries. Must be . . . mirage . . ."

Don drew a deep breath. Something faint, elusive, was noticeable in the salty tang of the sea air. All at once he recognized it as the perfume of flowers, of fruit, and his heart leaped.

"Mirage, hell!" he cried. "I can *smell* land! Come on!" Revived by hope, he began to swim toward the strange shore, dragging McKane with him. Within a half-hour, he heard the rumble of breakers, saw green palm trees waving against the sky. Then a big wave picked them up, swept them through a welter of foam and spray onto the firm white sand of the beach.

CHAPTER II

THE ISLE SUBMERGES

DON HARPER was not a particularly imaginative sort . . . the submarine service of the United States Navy is no place for starry-eyed dreamers . . . yet his first glimpse of this mysterious coast upon which they had been cast filled him with a species of awe. It was, somehow, unreal. On all sides rose trees, great flowering shrubs . . . none of which seemed in any way to resemble those of the normal everyday world. Orchards of strange golden fruit, weird ferns, as high as a man's head, masses of vari-colored flowers, filling the air with an intoxicating perfume.

McKane also was struck by their bizarre surroundings. Stretched wearily upon the sand, he glanced about, frowning.

"What . . . what d'you make of this place, sir?" he demanded. "It doesn't seem exactly . . . well, you might say, human, to me. You don't suppose we died out there and this is some sort of Hereafter!"

"I don't see any angels," Don chuckled. "And I didn't think spirits had headaches." He touched his blood-caked forehead.

"Guess you're right." The radio operator nodded sombrely. "Still, we didn't swim fifty miles in three hours. I've been to the Canaries before, and they never had trees or bushes like these. And if we're not in the Canaries, where on earth are we?"

Harper stared at the curious vegetation a moment before speaking.

"Search me," he murmured. "I'd say it was a toss-up between heaven and the Isles of the Blest."

"The Isles of the Blest?" McKane repeated. "What're they?"

"A queer old legend." Don peeled off his coat, shirt, pistol-holster, spread them out to dry. "I read a book about 'em, once. This particular stretch of sea, just west of the Canaries, is where the Isles are supposed to be located—beautiful islands that appear and disappear without warning, according to the old navigators. Ptolemy, the mathematician, mentioned them, and Clavijo, too. And sometime in the sixth century a couple of saints, Brandon and Malo, visited the islands. Two highly reputable Portuguese mariners, Vello and later Verde, landed on the Isles. So did a Frenchman, Galindo. All three brought back specimens of vegetation, and tales of great marvels. Each visit ended abruptly when the islands disappeared, sank beneath the waves!"

"Sank!" McKane repeated. "You mean they were forever popping up and down like . . . like a sub?"

"That's the story." There was a curious note of seriousness beneath Harper's light tone. "It's not so queer, after all. Take Falcon Island in the Pacific, for instance. In 1865 it was only a reef. Twenty years later it was an island a mile and a quarter long. By and by it disappeared, only to bob up again in a couple of months twice as big as before. Pretty soon it had sunk to a reef again and by 1921 was gone altogether."

"But that was only a rocky shoal," McKane muttered. "And these isles, you say . . ."

"The Isles were always full of trees and shrubs. Time and again they'd be seen from Teneriffe or Palma." Harper stretched lazily, basking in the rays of the setting sun. "The old dows sent expedition after expedition from the Canaries to find them, without luck. Big parties they were, some

of 'em having three and four ships. An expedition would come back, pronounce the whole thing a fake, and the excitement would die down. Then they'd be seen again, fishermen would be blown upon their shores, and another expedition would set out. So it went for hundreds of years. In 1759 the whole village of Alaxero saw the Isles off their coast, viewed the queer shrubbery through telescopes. The natives still see the islands from time to time, but don't say much for fear of being laughed at. Funny, isn't it?"

McKANE'S eyes flicked apprehensively toward the masses of odd vegetation behind them.

"It . . . it sort of makes you think, doesn't it, sir?" he said. "This place seems to fill the bill exactly. Soon as we've rested up a bit, I'd like to have a look at the interior. Maybe . . ." The radio operator's voice trailed off into a gasp of horror. "God Almighty! Lieutenant Harper! Look! The . . . waves . . ."

"What is it?" Don sprang to his feet, followed McKane's gaze. Suddenly a chill of pure terror swept over him. Something . . . something utterly unbelievable was happening to the great combers that swept in from the sea. Instead of flowing over the beach, they were surging angrily against . . . nothingness! An invisible wall seemed to be checking the foaming breakers, holding them back from the strip of sand! Harper could hear them faintly, crashing against the empty air, could see trickles of up-flung water running down a great breakwater that was not there!

"McKane!" he gasped. "It . . . it's just as though a huge sheet of glass had risen from the beach! Or maybe a dome placed over the island! Only you can see glass . . ." Cautiously Harper advanced toward the raging waves, arms extended. Suddenly he stopped. "I . . . I . . . something is holding me back! Just as the waves are being held back on the other side! You

can't feel anything . . . you just stop!—like a man in armor would stop if he tried to walk toward a repelling magnet!"

McKane did not answer. Face grey, he was staring at the breakers beating against the invisible barrier.

"Then . . . then we're trapped in this crazy place!" he muttered. "It's not real, Lieutenant! It can't be! We must be dreaming all this!"

Harper shook a weary, doubtful head, was about to reply when a tremor shook the beach. Gentle, hardly more than a quiver, it was like an extremely mild earthquake. Then, before his startled gaze, the line of foaming breakers began to rise! Higher and higher they rose, until the green wall of water was like a barricade about the beach.

"Lieutenant!" The radio operator's voice rose to a terrified scream. "The island! It . . . it's sinking!"

Don Harper stared at the ever-rising wall of green. As it increased in height, it curved ever inward. This strange land seemed to be covered by an invisible dome . . . a dome which held back the waters of the Atlantic as the island sank! Now the sky was merely a blue circle, high above, and as they watched this circle shrank, disappeared. Trapped in a gargantuan diving bell, they had descended beneath the surface of the sea!

"Good God!" Don's voice shook in spite of himself. "The Isles of the Blest!"

For a long time neither man spoke. Stunned, they watched the vast pageant of marine life passing outside. Fish of all sorts flashed past the dome . . . fish of every size, shape and color. As they descended, the water took on a deep translucent blue, alive with orange and black bunpheads, spiky giant sun-fish, striped Moorish idols, brilliant butterfly fish. Deeper and deeper the weird island sank, until the last vestige of sunlight was lost. Yet instead of being plunged in darkness, the space beneath the invisible dome was

illuminated by a diffused golden light, a soft and sourceless glow, as though infinitesimal particles of yellow dust hung suspended in the air.

As the dome-shielded island descended, the sea-life beyond changed. Now there were queer luminous fish, all but transparent, curious little sea-devils bearing phosphorescent lanterns at the end of long, rod-like projections between their eyes, baroque creatures with eyes directed upward and bones visible through their bodies. Once an immense black monster, grotesque, terrifying, flashed by the invisible dome, then whirled, disappeared in the darkness.

HOW long the two men stood gazing at this breath-taking parade of marine life, they did not know. At length, however, there was a gentle bump, and Harper could see the ocean's floor, adorned with streamers of sea-weed, revealed in the eerie light from within the dome.

"We've hit bottom!" he announced grimly. "This makes submarines look cheap, eh, Mac?"

Awe-stricken, McKane nodded.

"What . . . what next?" he muttered. "D'you think we dare try that queer fruit on those trees yonder? God only knows what lies inland!" He glanced nervously over his shoulder. "An island at the bottom of the Atlantic! It's mad! And us marooned here with no way of ever reaching the surface!"

Don Harper straightened up, squared his shoulders.

"Mac," he said solemnly, "we've found what the ancient dons spent three hundred years looking for! The Isles of the Blest! From now on anything can . . . and probably will . . . happen! We . . ."

"Lieutenant!" McKane gasped. "Look!"

Don swung about. Emerging from the underbrush, perhaps a hundred yards down the beach, was a man!—a tall, lean man, muffled in a dark cloak of strangely archaic

cut. In spite of himself, Harper felt a cold sweat break out upon his brow.

The tall man, apparently, had not seen the two castaways. From beneath his cloak he drew a queerly shaped tube, pointed it toward the sea. At the end of the tube a red beam of light snapped off and on, in a series of swift flashes!

"Code!" Harper whispered. "He's signalling to someone . . . something . . . out on the ocean's floor!"

"Whatever he's about we know now that there're people here! Living people!" McKane shook an incredulous head. "I'm going to contact him! Hey, you! You with the light! Hey!" The little radio operator ran swiftly toward the cloaked figure.

At the sound of McKane's voice, the tall man swung about, thrust the signal light beneath his mantle. Don could not see his face, for the collar of the cloak rose to his eyes; but something in the man's attitude spoke of anger, of hatred. Swiftly Harper ran to join McKane.

The radio operator was only a few feet from the stranger, now.

"Listen, mister!" he was saying. "We're strangers here! Shipwrecked! Maybe you can tell us where we're at!"

The dark man swore, threw back his cloak. At once a long bright rod, not unlike a sword, glittered in his hand; its hilt, Don could see, was shaped like a silver porpoise.

"Mac!" he cried. "Look out!"

It was too late. Before the stunned McKane could leap back, the stranger's arm had flashed out, the shining rod touched his questioner's forehead. A thin wisp of smoke went up, a sickening smell of charred flesh tainted the air, and McKane slumped limply to the sand.

"Good God!" Don's face went white with rage. McKane, the inoffensive little radio operator, cut down in cold blood! Killed, because he had asked a question!

The man in the cloak, his shining weapon aloft, sprang toward Harper, spitting oaths

in a strange sibilant language. Instinctively, Don reached for his automatic, then realized that he had left it, with his coat and shirt, upon the sand to dry. The sight of McKane's inert body, however, drove all caution from his brain. Fists knotted, face suffused with fury, he plunged toward their unknown assailant.

With a muffled laugh, the cloaked man drew back his weapon, ready for the kill. At that instant, however, there was a sound of voices, a crashing of the underbrush back from the beach. For a split second the murderer hesitated, then, sheathing his silver-hilted rod, plunged into the jungle in the opposite direction from the approaching voices.

Don, paying no heed to the fleeing murderer, fell to his knees beside McKane. The little man lay upon his back; there was a strange, blue-black mark upon his forehead. A touch of his wrist revealed him to be dead; the cloaked man's queer weapon was, apparently, sure, instantaneous. Don clenched his fists. Little Mac, slain without quarter by the inhabitant of this nightmare island! His last link with the world above had been severed, leaving him alone among these merciless killers!

All at once Don was aware of the crashing in the brush, a deep, booming voice behind him.

"By Thor! Strangers, and murderous ones to boot! Look, Master Humphrey!"

Don whirled. Facing him were two figures so incredible as to take his breath away. One of them, a huge, yellow-bearded man, was dressed in the garb of a Viking, with horned helmet, round brazen shield, and great two-handed sword. The other, smaller and more dapper, wore the long hose and slashed doublet of Elizabethan England. A slender rapier hung at his side, a grim note offset by his gay blue eyes, his curly hair, his pleasant, open countenance. At sight of McKane's sprawled body, however, his expression grew stern.

"Faith, Sven!" he broke out. "Murder

most vile! Yonder knave must needs be strung up by the heels!"

Dazed, bewildered, Don shot a glance toward his pistol, lying upon the coat and shirt a hundred paces up the beach. No time to reach them, now; the hulking Norseman was bearing down upon him. With a sudden leap he plunged forward, crashing his fist against the Viking's bearded jaw. Gasping, the big man sat down heavily upon the sand. Quickly Don whirled to face the slim Englishman . . . whirled just in time to see the blunt, rod-like blade of what he had believed to be a rapier, flashing toward his head.

Instinctively Don threw up a guarding arm . . . but it was too late. The point of the queer weapon touched his temple . . . still aching from the explosion of the bombs which sank the S-98 . . . and Harper sank into an abyssmal black void lit by a million dazzling stars.

CHAPTER III KARSIS ATTACKS

THE room in which Don Harper awoke was cool, lit, as all this mysterious land seemed to be lighted, by a soft golden glow. Curiously, Don glanced about. The chamber was richly furnished, with brilliant tapestries, thick rugs, massive oaken furniture. Don stared, puzzled, at the huge blocks of stone that made up the roof, the walls . . . and then recollection flooded through his mind. The cloaked man, McKane's death, the two bizarre figures who had attacked him . . .

A sudden patter of footsteps roused Harper. He sat up on the couch in time to see the curtains at the other end of the room part, revealing a slender, dark-haired girl clad in flowing skirts and high bodice. She smiled, a gay infectious smile that seemed to linger in her eyes after it had faded from her lips.

"So, sir!" she laughed. "Alive and none

the worse for your experience! Good news indeed! Master Humphrey was persuaded that he had slain you!"

"So sorry to have to disappoint Master Humphrey," Don grinned. "But . . . don't you think you might tell me where I am?"

"This is the island of Thyllos," the girl said gravely. "Sometimes called the Land of St. Borondon. It is, as you will find, one of the Isles of the Blest."

"The Isles of the Blest!" Don exclaimed. "Then I was right after all! But . . . but, what holds back the water? And what makes the island rise up and down? And . . . well, who are you?"

"Lud, sir!" The girl threw up her hands. "I vow you'll smother me with questions! First of all, the Atlanteans have for thousands of years known the secret of gravity, by which they both hold back the water and raise the island. And as for me, I am Mistress Anne Ross, late of Philadelphia, who, along with my father Captain John Ross, suffered shipwreck upon this island in the year 1798. We were the sole survivors of those aboard the brig 'Yorktown'!"

"What!" Don exclaimed. "Seventeen-ninety-eight! But . . . Good God! that's over a hundred and fifty years ago! You couldn't have lived . . ."

"'Tis hardly gentlemanly of you, sir," the girl laughed, "to so doubt a lady's word! Yet I forgive you, seeing you are strange to these isles! Know, then, that the same field of force which creates this 'dome' about the island also prevents death by natural means. The human body, so old Ahu relates at great length, is composed of tiny organisms, like the cells of a beehive. These cells, if properly nourished and cleansed, live forever, as therefore does the human body. This field of force, destroying all poisons and germs within our bodies, renders us immortal. For more than this you must seek old Ahu, who likes nothing more than interminable discourses concerning such matters."

ON reflected upon her words. That the cells were immortal was well known. Carrel's celebrated chicken heart had survived for years under proper care. But a field, a ray, that would cleanse human tissue, as the Frenchman cleansed his sliver of chicken heart. . . .

"It's unbelievable!" he muttered. "How . . ."

"Nay, sir!" Anne Ross shook her head. "Enough of questions for one day! Sven and Master Humphrey are waiting even now to tender their apologies!" She left the room to return a moment later followed by the giant Viking, the slim Englishman.

"So, good sir," the latter smiled. "Your pate, it seems, is tougher than honest Sven's jaw. He still suffers an ache where you smote him."

"Aye," the big man rumbled, wagging his yellow beard. "A shrewd blow, lad! This fighting with bared fists is less of child's sport than it seems! Yet the blow was no more than my due. We were wrong to have believed you a murderer!"

"A murderer!" Don exclaimed. "Then you thought . . ."

"Consider," the Englishman cut in. "We step from the gorse, we behold you bending over a dying man. Would we have thought otherwise? Yet after closer inspection, we see that your companion has been slain with a shock-stick, of which you had none. Also, there were other footprints. Therefore we apologize for our unjust violence."

"Right!" Don nodded. "But who do you think killed my friend? If I ever find him . . ." His eyes narrowed.

"As to that," Sven boomed, "'tis hard to say. We here are a peaceful folk, saving perhaps an occasional bit of swordplay with the men of Karsis. Yet even a Karsisian could not have done this, since none may penetrate the shell of force. Perhaps Ahu may find some way of tracking him."

Don struggled upright, with an effort.

"Weak as a kitten," he muttered. "Those

rods you carry pack some wallop!"

"Eh?" Humphrey puzzled a moment over the unfamiliar slang, then smiled. "Ah, yes! The electric rods are an invention of the priests of Atlantis. You are fortunate, sir, that I gave you but a quarter charge. Full force would have slain you, as it did your companion. These shock-sticks we fashion in the form of swords . . . rapiers, cutlasses, broadswords like Sven's . . . whatever weight and length we were accustomed to before being cast upon these shores."

"Then you were shipwrecked upon this island, too?" Don asked.

"Aye." Sven nodded. "In a dragon ship under Olaf Red-beard, I sailed, to harry the Frankish coasts. And the sea-gods drove us upon this coast where all were saved."

"And I," Master Humphrey said, "being a younger son and thus without hope of falling heir to the Falworth estates, took ship with a party of adventurous gentlemen bound for the Spanish Main. Our caravel foundered and I, by God's grace, succeeded in swimming to this wondrous isle."

"So we are all castaways together," Anne Ross laughed, "living in Davy Jones' locker. My father has gone to a meeting of the Council and will inform them of your presence here . . ." She paused as a lean dark man, wearing the leather helmet and goggles of an aviator, entered the room. "Ah! Master Varhely! You will be happy to know this gentleman who has taken your place as our most recent arrival!"

"Delighted!" Varhely grinned. "We should have a lot in common, being of the same era—though I feel like an old inhabitant even if it has been only two months since my plane crashed." He turned to the girl. "The council has met and asks that our young friend appear before them, if he feels strong enough."

Anne glanced questioningly at Don, who nodded.

"Very well," she said. "Your clothes are in this closet, here. Master Varhely and I will meet you outside." With a rustle of silk, a flashing smile, she took the aviator's arm, left the room.

His clothes, Don found, were intact, including the coat, shirt, and pistol-belt he had left upon the sand. Buckling the automatic at his side brought him a new feeling of confidence; shoulders squared, he followed Sven and Humphrey along a wide corridor to the main entrance of the building.

AS DON stepped from the doorway, he gave a cry of amazement. Before them, farther down the long green slopes, lay a city . . . a city that staggered the imagination! Great cyclopean masses of white stone reared upward, ponderous, unyielding, cloaked in hoary age. Wide streets, gardens, broke the rows of huge buildings, while the country surrounding the city was a paradise of flowers, trees, lakes. Towers, pyramids, and temples of behemoth construction rose above the lesser structures; it was like the work of titans, putting the efforts of the Egyptians, the Incas . . . even the modern world, to shame. Designed by master craftsmen of another age, the city of Thyllos seemed, like its inhabitants, to defy time. Don stared at it, fascinated, until Anne touched his arm.

"Come!" she whispered. "The Council waits!"

Awestruck, Don followed her down the winding highway into the city. Here the streets were lined with graceful dwellings, shops, even taverns. Somehow, it reminded Don of Pompeii . . . except that this city was teeming with life and activity. Men and women of every race, every age, thronged its temples, its bazaars, its markets. Predominant among them were tall, white-robed men who had the grave, aloof air of ancient Egyptians; yet though these were in the majority, there were

many others to give the streets brilliant color, Frenchmen, in ruffs and laces, tall knights in clanking armor, swarthy Phoenicians, Moorish warriors in white turbans, sturdy whalers and man-o-war's men, side-whiskered mariners of the nineteenth century. A pageant of the ages surged through this city, a mile beneath the surface of the sea!

At length, after a half-hour's walking, Don and the four oddly assorted people with him found themselves before an immense building of black porphyry, its surface covered with bas-reliefs of strange monsters, curious denizens of the ocean's depths. Brilliantly conceived and executed, these carvings seemed, in the golden half-light, almost alive. Naiads, tritons, mermaids, marched in solemn procession along the walls, seemingly about to step from the gleaming stone.

At the entrance of the temple, Don's companions paused, motioned him forward. Through rows of huge pillars he made his way, dazed by the sheer splendor of the place, until at last he found himself in a great circular chamber ablaze with golden ornaments, jewelled tapestries. A faint odor of perfume lent mystery, while purple shadows lay like crouching monsters at the base of the mighty columns. Tall guardsmen, gorgeously appareled attendants were ranged along the walls.

Upon a richly carved dais of ancient ebony sat seven solemn figures, staid, immobile, partaking of the majestic grandeur of this council hall. Five of the figures were sombre, white-robed men, one wore mediaeval chain mail, and the last was ruddy-faced, grey-haired, clad in blue coat and knee breeches. Bluff, kindly eyed, he seemed at first incongruous beside his grave companions; yet a second glance showed this colonial mariner to be shrewd, tolerant, understanding, and possessed of calm dignity.

"Welcome, sir." The man in the blue coat nodded to Don. "I am Captain Ross,

at whose home you have been recovering. We of this Council have had you brought here to learn what we can concerning the death of your companion. You will tell us all you know."

Don glanced about. Studying the golden statues, the queer hieroglyphics upon the marble walls, he was struck by the unreality of the scene. A dream, he kept repeating to himself, a dream! The great shadowy hall, the bizarre white-robed figures, this fantastic world beneath the sea. . . . Swiftly he told his story. When he had finished, a wrinkled, white-bearded man who sat in the center of the dais, stood up; old, with the wisdom of the ages in his faded eyes, he was somehow godlike.

"The youth speaks the truth," he quavered. "Without a shock-stick, how could he have slain his companion? My heart is heavy that in our peaceful land there is one who has shed blood. We must discuss this thing at length in an attempt to learn who brings death to the isles of the immortals." He turned to Don. "Doubtless you have wondered at all you have seen since fate threw you upon these shores. And since you are now one of us, it may be well for you to learn somewhat of our history. Listen, then!"

Old Ahu paused a moment, then commenced to speak.

"Know you that this, and another small bit of land are all that remain of the once-mighty lands of Atlantis. Great was the country of our forefathers, stretching from the Pillars of Hercules to the lands of the Mayas. And to all parts of the world our ships journeyed, spreading the light of learning to lesser peoples. Yet our greatness was our undoing, since it brought pride, and the envy of the gods. In the reign of mighty Menes the priests and wise men, skilled in science, prophesied the wrath of the gods, the sinking of our homeland. Some heeded this warning, fleeing to Egypt, to the domain of the Incas, to the

distant east. Yet many, swollen with pride, remained in Atlantis, scoffing at the wise men. And these in the end were destroyed."

FOR a space old Ahu remained silent, seemingly lost in memories. When he spoke again his voice trembled.

"Of all the glory of Atlantis, this hilltop, and another nearby, were the most dear, being holy spots, adorned with temples and great works. And one among the priests of Atlantis, Knem of exalted memory, wished to preserve them, for they were sacred to the true believers. Long had the men of Atlantis known the secret of anti-gravity, using it to hoist great blocks of stone, to erect mighty pyramids. This force Knem sought to use in a work vast beyond compare . . . to keep these two hilltops above the level of the flood that was soon to come."

"Twice a hundred thousand slaves labored on that great task, burrowing into the hillsides, cutting the tops of the hills from their bases, building vast machines to be run by tide and wave, which would generate this force of anti-gravity. And as they labored, the sea swept through the lowlands of Atlantis, engulfing cities, farms, villages . . . bringing death and disaster. At length, when the waves lapped the base of the two hills, Knem made offering to the gods, set his engines in operation. Then did the miracle occur. For though the land sank, carrying with it all of Atlantis, these two hilltops, borne up by the great forces Knem had unleashed, remained above the surface of the waves!"

The old man nodded sombrely, fingering the gold bands about his arm.

"And so," he continued, "for century after century the nobility of Atlantis dwelt here, secluded, cut off from the savage outer world. Then, gradually, those on the mainland emerged from savagery once more, recaptured some of the lost arts.

Ships were built, and, as some of these were cast upon our shores, we realized that before many years had passed, these barbarians from the mainland must increase, build greater ships, invade our sanctuary. In fear for our peace, we consulted the gods . . . and a way was revealed to us. The anti-gravity that held us upon the surface of the sea could be lessened to lower us below the waves! And the same force could be used to hold back the waters in a dome above us. Trees, shrubs, would freshen the air, water, filtered of its salt, admitted, and the atmosphere excited to luminosity by the field of force. So, like the rest of Atlantis, we sank beneath the waves!"

"Then came the great change. The forces employed to shield our lands had a strange effect. Destroying all germs and viruses, neutralizing the poisons of the body, they arrested cell decay, rendered us immortal! Yet though we now possessed more than any other mortal had before, the longing for the upper world would come upon us. From time to time we raised the islands to the surface, removed the dome of force, and revelled in clean air, warm sunlight again. It was during these periods on the surface that castaways reached us, were thrown upon our shores. From them we learned many languages, including your ~~English~~. And these castaways we did not permit to depart, fearing their release might bring others, to spoil us of our riches. Nor did they wish to leave, giving up immortality, peace, for the savage world outside."

"What!" Don Harper leaned forward, frowning. "You mean I'm to stay here . . . forever?"

"Would you prefer," Ahu smiled, "the war, the death, of your world?"

"But you don't understand!" Don cried. "My country, America, is in danger! The combined forces of Asia and Europe are attacking it! I . . . I've got to get back, do my part!"

For a moment there was silence in the great hall, then Ahu spoke again.

"These things are soon forgotten in the mists of time," he said gently. "All of those here have seen the struggles of their people, so important at the moment, disappear, give way to new wars. For so long as man exists, there is always strife." His voice grew sad. "Even here . . ."

As though in answer to Ahu's words there came a roar of voices from the entrance of the great building. A clash of steel, hoarse shouts, rose like distant thunder. Suddenly Sven, his yellow hair bristling, ran toward them through the rows of massive pillars.

"Out arms!" he shouted. "Haste! The men of Karsis attack the locks!"

CHAPTER IV THE SISTER ISLE

PANDEMONIUM reigned in the great columned hall. In response to orders from the council, glittering guardsmen, attendants, surged toward the entrance, gripping their electric rods. Bewildered, Don followed them to the street outside. The city resounded to war-cries of every age, every race. Men, hastily buckling on weapons, were assembling in squares, in roadways. Moslem warriors, gripping scimitar-like shock-swords, mailed knights waving spiked maces, bare-legged sailors armed with cutlasses, haughty Spaniards in damascened armor. Don, pushing between a sturdy Roman and a tall Atlantean, found himself facing Humphrey Falworth.

"So, Master Harper!" The Englishman grinned. "You arrive in time for the first squabble these fifty years past! Stick by me and I'll show you sport unequalled!"

Don nodded, clung to Humphrey's side as they wormed their way through the shouting throngs. Along streets packed with polyglot crowds they were swept, arriving at length before a huge circular en-

trance near the edge of the city. Dark, cavernous, walls beaded with sweat, it reminded Don of a New York subway. It seemed, he noticed, to extend beyond the dome of force that shielded the undersea island. Here and there on the floor lay sprawling figures, smeared with blood, though whether men of Thyllos or the mysterious invaders he could not be sure.

The great tunnel was widening, now, into a lofty room. Here white-clad Atlanteans were handing out curious contrivances of metal and glass, not unlike the radio sets of the upper world, which the heterogeneous crowd of fighting men were strapping upon their backs.

"So!" Falworth wriggled the queer pack into place between his shoulders. "This will do for the two of us! Haste, man, else we arrive too late!"

Dazed by the strangeness of it all, Don followed his guide toward a huge brass door set in one side of the room. As they approached, it swung ponderously open, revealing a dark, damp-walled chamber. At once, a score of warriors sprang forward, filling the great lock, among them Don and Humphrey. Hardly had they entered when the door began to close behind them.

"Stay close!" Humphrey warned, adjusting a lever of the pack on his shoulders. Suddenly from the strange device an aura of light burst forth, surrounding them. The other men of Thyllos also touched switches, were surrounded by glowing globes of light.

All at once the outer door of the immense lock swung open. Water, from the sea beyond, spouted through the opening. Instinctively, Don started, but the slender Englishman laughed.

"Have no fear!" he exclaimed. "The water cannot touch us! These packs upon our backs surround us with spheres of force, shield us just as the island itself is shielded!"

Peering through the walls of the strange

sphere, Don watched the water surge about them. A raging torrent, it swept into the lock; yet surrounding him and Humphrey, as surrounded the others, was a glowing globe of force, some ten feet in diameter . . . a bubble of air which remained the same no matter how they moved!

The warriors of Thyllos were crowding through the entrance out onto the ocean's bottom, now. Humphrey Falworth, Don at his side, stepped through to join them. The scene was one which lingered long in Don's memory. The sea-floor, white sand, above which long tendrils of kelp waved . . . the strange luminous fish darting back and forth . . . the great globes of force, glowing gold, through the walls of which were visible huge Vikings, stalwart Grecians, swarthy Incas, ponderous crusaders, their faces lit by the excitement of battle.

Suddenly, as his eyes became accustomed to the queer light, Don could make out other globes, like phosphorescent pearls, shining through the forests of sea-weed.

"The Karsisians!" Humphrey exclaimed, drawing his highly-charged rapier. "Saint George for England!"

Swiftly he plunged toward the nearest of the strange spheres; through its walls Don could see a stocky, black-bearded man, clad in picturesque boots, red sash, ragged breeches and shirt. In his hand he held a heavy cutlass.

AS HUMPHREY moved forward, the man of Karsis did likewise. At once the two globes of force merged, blended into one ovoid bubble, some fifteen feet in length. Sword in hand, Humphrey sprang toward his antagonist.

The man of Karsis spat an oath in sibilant Spanish, aimed a murderous stroke at the Englishman's head.

"Nay, master blackbeard!" Humphrey laughed, deftly turning the blow to the accompaniment of blue electrical sparks. "Needs must employ more skill than that!"

He lunged swiftly, a thrust which his opponent barely parried. A smell of ozone filled the bubble as lightning-like arcs leaped between the two highly-charged blades . . . blades the lightest touch of which meant death.

Suddenly, with a feint that lowered Falworth's guard, the Karsisian stepped in with a swinging stroke, all the force of his knotted muscles behind it. In vain, Humphrey tried to guard himself; steel rang on steel and the light rapier flew from the Englishman's hand. With a shout of triumph the black-bearded man stepped forward to touch and electrify his disarmed adversary.

In that instant Don Harper acted. Snatching his automatic from its holster, he drew a quick bead on the Karsisian's chest, fired.

The roar, in that small space, was like the sound of a cannon. For just a moment the black-bearded man stood erect, shock-sword lifted. Then, eyes glazed, he pitched forward on his face.

"Thanks," Humphrey said coolly, retrieving his rapier. "It has been many years since I smelt gunpowder. Upon these islands, alas, no chemicals are to be found for its manufacture. Yours, indeed, is a strange weapon. I see no flint, no match. You must explain it to me when we have more leisure."

Humphrey turned, headed into the thick of the battle, leaving the dead Karsisian, still surrounded by his bubble of air, lying upon the sand. Keeping always at his companion's side, Don glanced at the strange struggle raging about them. Two of the globes, rushing toward each other, would merge, while the opponents fought, then separate as the victor passed on. Once Don saw an immense bubble in the center of which Sven, a berserk smile on his lips, fought back three of the assailants. More and more men were issuing from the air-lock of the island, and the savage Kar-

sicians were beginning to disappear in flight among the forest of kelp.

"They give way!" Humphrey cried exultantly. "See, they run!"

He raced forward, overtaking a swarthy figure in cuirass and helmet. As their globes blended, the dark man whirled, crossbow in hand. With a twang, the heavy bolt left the bow, shot past Humphrey's head, then abruptly stopped as it encountered the wall of force. Don fumbled for his gun again, but before he could fire, the slim Englishman had slain his opponent with a touch of his deadly, highly-charged weapon.

"So." Falworth watched the enemy globes disappear into the dark stretches of water. "Marry, how they flee! See, already Sven has given the signal for our return to Thyllos!"

Don peered through the golden globe. Triumphant, the strange assortment of warriors were falling back toward the air-lock, bearing their dead and wounded.

"But," he exclaimed, "why retreat now? If you were to follow them, you might be able to wipe out the rest of the raiding party!"

"Nay." Falworth brushed back his curly hair. "We fight in defense only. The law of Atlantis prohibits needless slaughter. Ah, here comes Sven!" He waved, and a moment later another golden bubble blended with theirs. The big Viking, a deep burn across his chest, joined them.

"By Odin!" he boomed. "A fight fit for the gods! Three of them fell upon me, one giving me this scratch ere I cut him down!"

"But" . . . Don demanded . . . "who are these Karsians? Where do they come from?"

"Eh?" Humphrey Falworth broke into a laugh. "Faith, that's droll! Our friend here fights valiantly, saves my life, and all without knowing aught of his foe! Recollect, Master Harper, that there were two islands, two hilltops, saved by the Atlantean

black arts. For years they dwelt happily, visiting, exchanging lore and science. Then one fine day a shipload of freebooters, rovers of the Main, were cast upon the Isle of Karsis. As scurvy a crew of knaves as ever sailed the sea, they repaid their hosts' hospitality by overrunning the island, making the Atlanteans slaves, and mistreating their women-folk. And since the energy shields about the islands are of different frequency from those of these smaller globes, one cannot enter them as we enter each other's globe. Each island is secure behind its invisible walls so that only by raids and skirmishes like this do we meet."

"And you make no attempts to free the Atlanteans in Karsis?" Don asked.

"Nay," Sven growled. "Long have I thought the same, but Ahu and the others are men of peace, opposed to needless fighting. So the matter stands."

The great air-lock loomed before them now, and a moment later they had entered it. Pumps emptied the lock of water, enabling them to snap off the energy packs upon their shoulders as they stepped through. Following the ranks of victorious warriors, they re-entered the city.

Thyllos was a scene of triumph. A babble of voices in a score of languages were lifted in shouts, songs. In the shadow of the cyclopean buildings, the defenders bandaged wounds, reenacted their parts in the struggle. Here a Napoleonic grenadier sheathed his deadly bayonet, here a tattooed sailor downed a mug of ale, here groups of dark Carthaginians made offering before a wayside shrine. A brilliant spectacle, these many fighting men, all decked in the panoply of war!

From the immense temple of Poseidon in the center of the city came a solemn chant as the Atlanteans bewailed those whose immortal lives had been ended in battle. In a little group before one of the massive columns, Don made out Anne, her father, old Ahu, and the aviator, *Varhely*. Sven

and Humphrey at his side, he made his way toward them.

"Ah! Anne ran forward to meet them. "All safe? Nay, but you are wounded, Sven!"

"A scratch." The Norseman shook his head contemptuously. "Ours has been a great victory!"

"A victory, yes." Old Ahu inclined his silver head. "Yet it brings me much unhappiness. Know that before the men of Karsis attacked, someone slew both the guards of the locks! Someone within the city, since the guards were stationed on the inside! Had another minute elapsed before the alarm was spread, this traitor might have opened the locks, admitted the men of Karsis!"

Don's eyes lit up at the old Atlantean's words. The cloaked man, the murderer of McKane, had been signaling to someone beyond the dome when they had interrupted him. Undoubtedly this was the man who had killed the guards of the lock. And that man had murdered the little radio operator with an electric sword, the handle of which was shaped like a silver porpoise. . . .

"Ahu! Captain Ross!" he exclaimed. "I think I can identify the man responsible for all this! He can be recognized by . . ."

"Wait!" Old Ahu glanced warily at the crowds of people nearby. "Your man, or a follower of his, may be within earshot. Go at once to the garden of the gods, wait there until I find the other members of the Council and join you! Let the warrior Sven go, too, to see that no harm befalls you on the way."

CHAPTER V

SEARCH FOR THE TRAITOR

THE garden of the gods, high on the slopes above the city, was as close to paradise, Don thought, as could be attained by man. Flowers of every

description from purple orchids to unknown blossoms of varied hue were banked in rich profusion, filling the air with heady perfume. Queer yellow trees, like growing gold, and a network of rainbow-tinted vines made shady bowers, while baroque statues, graceful marble shrines, singing fountains, gave a man-made touch to this breath-taking wonderland. Stranger than anything else was the sight of the cool green sea, above, and on all sides of the hilltop, illuminated by the soft light from within the vast dome of force.

"Of all Thyllos," Captain Ross' ruddy face broke into a smile, "this place is the most beautiful, the most sacred. Once, at the battle of Saratoga back in America, I was wounded, given up for dead, and, thinking my last hour come, dreamed of a heaven like this. Again, when the 'Yorktown' foundered, I had the same thought."

"And," Anne broke in, laughing, "when we regained consciousness in this garden, we believed it, indeed, Heaven, and the Atlanteans, in their white robes, seraphs!"

Don smiled, glanced about once more. Behind him stood Sven, leaning pensively upon his huge sword. And beside him was Captain Ross, Anne, in colonial garb. . . . In spite of the grim actuality of the recent undersea fight, Don found it hard to shake off the feeling of unreality that gripped him. Atlantis . . . men and women of every age, living, immortal, beneath the sea. . . .

A crackling in the underbrush aroused him. Perhaps Ahu, the other members of the council were arriving. . . . Suddenly the calm of the garden was broken by a queer twanging noise and something dark, slender, shot by him. Then big Sven swayed, his face all at once blank, fell to the ground. A copper arrow, sputtering its lethal blue electrical emanations, projected from his arm!

"Damme!" Captain Ross leaped back, drawing his light sword. "What devil's work is this?"

Before he could reach Sven's side there was a second ominous twang.

"Don!" Anne's voice rose in shrill warning.

Automatically, Don leaped to one side. As he did so, another highly-charged arrow shot by him, stood quivering in the bole of a tree!

"He's here!" Captain Ross shouted, rushing forward. "In these bushes!"

No sooner had he reached the clump of scarlet shrubbery, however, than a tall spare figure, muffled in a dark cloak, sprang from this place of concealment. As the Captain sprang toward him, he drew back the heavy cross-bow he carried, hurled it straight at Ross! In vain, the Captain tried to dodge; the weapon crashed against his temple, sent him, unconscious, to the ground.

In this split second, Don had recognized the cloaked figure . . . recognized it as the same which had killed McKane. A fierce smile on his lean bronzed face, he jerked the heavy automatic from its holster, fired.

A thunderous roar disturbed the peace of the sweet-scented gardens. The masked man did not pause in his plunge toward Don. The American swore; in his haste the shot had gone wide. A sword was glittering in his assailant's hand . . . an electric sword with a silver handle shaped like a porpoise! Just as Don was about to fire a second time, the blade licked out in a deadly thrust. No half charge, this time, he realized. One touch of the sputtering blue piece of steel would bring instant death. Leaping backwards, he squeezed the trigger of the automatic.

Again the bullet missed its mark . . . but by some queer twist of fate it struck the gleaming shock-sword! The length of steel flew into a dozen fragments, blackening the grass as they fell!

With a bellow of rage, the mysterious marauder hurled the heavy silver hilt at Don; then, as the American ducked, dove

into the masses of shrubbery. Gun in hand, Harper plunged after him. Familiar with every path, every clump of bushes, the masked man wove in and out of the maze of undergrowth, disappeared in a grove of gnarled, purple-blossomed trees. In vain Don pursued him; his assailant seemed to have vanished into the earth. For some moments, the American searched for the murderer, then, realizing the futility of his endeavors, headed back to the clearing

HE REACHED the scene of the struggle in time to see Captain Ross, supported by a white-faced, tragic-eyed Anne, lurch to his feet. The Captain's countenance was a blue-black mass of bruises. Sven lay still, a trickle of blood seeping from his arm. One glance told Don that the highly-charged copper arrow had done its grim work . . . the bluff, big-hearted Viking had gone to join his companions in Valhalla.

Suddenly anxious shouts resounded through the garden. Varhely ran toward them.

"What is it?" he cried. "I heard shots . . ."

Before Don could explain, there were more cries of alarm and Humphrey, Ahu, the other members of the Council, burst into the clearing.

Mighty Poseidon!" Old Ahu quavered. "Death . . . in the garden of the gods!"

In tense, emotion-packed words, Captain Ross gasped out the story of the savage attack.

"Again the traitor in our midst!" Humphrey exclaimed. "Twice murder in cold blood . . . and the slaying of the guards of the locks! Poor Sven! For over a hundred years have he and I . . ." The Englishman broke off, his eyes tortured.

"Aye," Captain Ross muttered. "A true and brave friend, for all his barbarous manner!" He turned to Don. "You claimed that you could identify this traitor! How?"

Harper shook a sombre head.

"Before this attack, I had a means of identifying him," he said. "Maybe he overheard me, jumped us in hopes of getting me out of the way. But now, whether he knows it or not, he's safe." Don picked up the silver hilt of their assailant's sword. "I noticed that the shock-stick which killed McKane had a handle of silver in the shape of a porpoise, hoped to find the man who wore it. But now . . ."

Old Ahu studied the curiously-carved handle which concealed the tiny battery giving the sword its lethal charge.

"It is familiar to me," he muttered. "Often have I seen such a sword. But who wore it, I cannot remember." Ahu thrust the hilt into his belt. "Before the gods, I swear the killer shall not escape us! None shall be permitted to pass through the locks until the entire island has been searched! Sooner or later we shall find him! And when that day comes, the traitor shall pay the penalty of the law of Knem!"

CHAPTER VI THE TRAITOR EXPOSED

THE great pyramid-temple of Poseidon rose high above the white marble city below, dominating it like some hoary giant. Don Harper, standing motionless on the summit of the massive structure, gazed with brooding eyes at the crowded colorful streets of the city. Somewhere in those throngs of gayly dressed men and women was the mysterious assailant who had killed McKane, Sven, the guards of the lock . . . and attempted to murder him, Don, fearing discovery. Did the intruder in this submarine paradise know that the means of identification was now all but useless? Or would there be, Don reflected, other attempts upon his life?

"You are thoughtful, sir!" Anne Ross, crossing the marble-paved terrace, laughed. "Does the beauty of our city fail to please you?"

"No." He shook his head. "I've never seen anything quite so lovely." Don's eyes, as he spoke, however, were not upon the panorama beneath them. He was gazing at the girl, slim, vivid, delicate as a bit of old dresden.

"I vow you'll make me vain, sir!" she laughed, coloring. "I had a treat planned for you, Mr. Harper, yet I fear that one so bold . . ."

"Okey," he chuckled. "I'll be good. Remember, I'm not used to eighteenth century manners! What's the treat?"

"This!" She exhibited a bit of papyrus, covered with hieroglyphs. "Although none are permitted to leave the locks until the spy is found, Ahu has given me a pass permitting us to go beyond the dome, visit the marine gardens. Neither you nor I, nor Humphrey, could, of course, be the traitor."

"Humphrey?" Don asked. "Is he included?"

"To be sure!" Anne Ross said. "Twould not be seemly to venture abroad with you alone! He is to meet us at the entrance of the lock. Shall we go?"

At the entrance of the great tunnel-like locks, however, they found instead of Humphrey the lean, dark aviator, Varhely. A large wicker basket hung from his hand.

"Hello!" he grinned. "Falworth sends his regrets. Ahu has made him leader of one of the parties searching for the Karsisian spy. He asked me to take his place. And to show that my heart's in the right place, I brought a basket of lunch." Varhely turned to Don. "All set for a fish's-eye view of the ocean?"

"I had a look at it yesterday, during the battle," Don said shortly.

"Lucky man! By the time I got to this lock it was all over." Smiling, he took Anne's arm, nodding cheerfully at the guards as she exhibited Ahu's slip of papyrus. The two tall Altanteans who stood at either side of the tunnel examined it, waved them through.

DON was silent as they walked along the huge, stone-lined tube. He found it strange that Humphrey had been so suddenly appointed to one of the searching parties. It seemed even more strange that he should have asked Varhely to take his place, since the latter was no more than a nodding acquaintance of the Englishman's. Still, perhaps Humphrey had thought that the aviator, being of the same era as he, Don, might prove a more suitable companion for this undersea excursion . . . Troubled, Harper followed Anne and Varhely into the large room upon which the locks proper opened.

Beside the mass of levers and switches that operated the locks stood the venerable Atlantean attendant. At sight of Anne's pass, he handed them three of the portable energy packs. Varhely slipped one of them upon his own shoulders, turned to Don.

"Here!" He said. "I'll show you how it works! The thing's simplicity itself! You just . . ." The sentence was concluded by a swinging, crashing blow of his knotted fist. Caught completely by surprise, Don swayed, dropping the heavy pack. Dimly he heard Anne scream, saw the old lock tender start up in surprise. Then, as Varhely's fist jolted against his jaw a second time, he crumpled to the floor, unconscious.

Don Harper recovered his senses to find himself lying upon the stone floor of the lock room. His arms and legs were securely bound by strips of cloth torn from his own shirt. Anne, also bound, lay near him, while the old lock-tender sprawled over his desk, blood streaming from an ugly wound in his head. Varhely, his face set in a saturnine smile, bent over the array of levers on the control panel. As Don stirred, he swung around, saluted him mockingly.

"Awake, Mr. Harper?" he murmured. "Excellent! You will be able then to witness my escape, and, more dramatic still, the destruction of Thyllos. Unfortunately, you will miss the greatest triumph of all . . . the

conquest of the upper world by the Eurasian Alliance!"

"The Eurasian Alliance!" Don exclaimed. "Then you . . ."

"I am a commander in its air-force. While on a scouting expedition some months ago, I ran into a bit of anti-aircraft fire from one of the cruisers of your Atlantic squadron. My gas tanks punctured, I seemed doomed to a watery grave when I spotted this strange island. My plane got me to within a half-mile of it and I swam the remaining distance."

"And repay our kindness," Anne cried contemptuously, "by spying for Karsis!"

"Only through necessity," Varhely replied easily, hard at work on the row of levers. "As soon as I learned that these Atlanteans possessed both the secret of immortality, and that of anti-gravity, I realized that we of the Alliance could easily conquer the earth, live as immortals, dominating the common herd. Surely a tremendous reward for any risks I might take!"

"You're mad!" Don grated. "The upper world could not survive if immortality were introduced. Overpopulation, famine, the death of religion, no future . . . it's impossible! And anti-gravity might enable you to conquer the world, but you'd never get the Atlanteans to reveal it!"

"Wishful thinking, Mr. Harper." Varhely went on with his work, chuckling. "The Atlanteans here might not, but you forget Karsis. Its buccaneer rulers have, in their own inimitable fashion, wormed the secret from the Atlanteans whom they made slaves. A week after I had reached Thyllos, I went out in one of these globes of force, headed for Karsis. Upon my promise to see that they entered this island, Gismond, the chief of Karsis, explained to me a portion of the anti-gravity secret. Fascinating, Mr. Harper! Just as cutting an electromagnetic field produces a flow of electrons, or electricity, so the cutting of a gravitational field produces a flow of protons, or electrogravitational force! The mass of sea-

water above us acts as one 'magnet,' the earth below as the other, while the armature which cuts the lines of force between them, instead of being wrapped with copper wire, is circled by tubes of hydrogen! That's just the barest outline, of course. The detailed explanation was to have been mine when the Karsisians entered this lock, captured Thyllos."

"And you failed!" Anne laughed mockingly. "Even by killing the guards you were not able to admit the Karsisians! Is it likely they'll give the secret of gravity generation to you after you have failed?"

"True." Varhely nodded. "Our first attempt was not a success. In a very few minutes, however, Thyllos shall be destroyed! First I pass through the lock, wearing an energy pack, make my way to safety. As I leave, I shall wedge open the outer door, which will leave only this inner door to prevent the water from pouring into the island, under pressure of a ton to the square inch, and destroying all within the dome. The problem of opening this inner door after I have gone is simple. You will, I am sure, appreciate my ingenuity."

EYES wide with horror, Anne and Don watched Varhely open the wicker "lunch-basket," take from it a large clay vessel filled with water. This he hung by a bit of cord from the ceiling. A similar vessel, but empty, he hung from one of the switches on the control panel, immediately below the upper, water-filled jug.

"Observe." The spy rubbed his hands in anticipation. "Immediately before leaving, I remove this plug in the upper container. Water begins to drip into the lower one. When enough water has entered the lower vessel to give it sufficient weight, it pulls the switch down, thus opening the inner door of the lock and admitting the sea. Within a half-hour the entire island of Thyllos will be destroyed! And when Gismond, the other Karsisians, learn that I have brought them victory, they will give

me the secret of anti-gravity, raise Karsis to the surface! A raft will carry me to the Canaries where our fleet assembles. Think, Mr. Harper!—the secret of gravity in the hands of the Eurasian Alliance! America, the whole world shall be ours!"

"No!" Anne whispered. "You can't! Dad . . . Ahu . . . Humphrey . . . you can't drown them! To wipe out the entire island . . . !"

"Not the entire island!" Varhely's black eyes glittered ironically. "You will come with me to the upper world, witness the conquest of our Alliance!" He pulled the switch opening the inner door of the lock, then removed the plug from the vessel of water. Carrying the struggling girl, he moved toward the entrance.

"Anne!" Don, his face white, surged forward, fighting the bonds that held him against the wall.

Varhely had entered the lock, now, and a touch of the lever on his energy pack surrounded both him and the girl with a globe of glowing force. Drawing the huge inner door shut, he smiled mockingly at Don. His lips framed a derisive farewell and an instant later the inner door clicked shut.

Stunned, Don stared at the control panel. The moment the door closed, the switch had snapped shut. Now, drop by drop, water from the upper vessel was dripping into the lower. And as soon as the weight was sufficient, the switch would be dragged down again, opening the door—a deluge, shooting under tremendous pressure through the lock, to destroy the grandeur of Atlantis!

Frantically the American writhed, twisted, exerted every ounce of strength to break his bonds. Lashed against a huge pipe that ran along the wall, there was no chance of even bumping against the jug, upsetting it. Face beaded with sweat, muscles aching, Don struggled against the improvised rope.

Slowly, like poison dropping into a cup, the water trickled through the hole in the upper vessel. Don shouted vainly for help,

but his voice was smothered by the masses of mighty masonry. Long minutes passed and still he could make no impression on the bonds that held him motionless.

The lower jug was half full; the cord by which it was fastened to the release switch grew dangerously taut. The steady drip of the falling water was maddening. To Don, still dazed from Varhely's blows, it seemed that the sound was like the booming of a mighty drum, cruelly unvarying . . . a drum of doom! Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . . Now it was like the pounding of an inexorable heart . . . now it was a merciless hammer thudding against his taut nerves. Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . .

The receiver was three-quarters full! The weight upon the handle of the switch had drawn it a fraction of an inch from the wall! Another drop into the container and another imperceptible movement of the lever. Terrifying pictures flashed through Don's mind. Thyllos engulfed, its heterogeneous population doomed, even as the inhabitants of Atlantis had been doomed! The great buildings, the vast store of knowledge, accumulated over untold centuries, would be lost forever!—the breathtaking beauty of the garden of the gods, the temple of Poseidon, the white marble city . . . all buried beneath mud and sand!

Suddenly, as the switch creaked ominously, Don threw all his remaining strength into one tremendous effort. Something gave and his right hand, numb and blue, slipped loose!

Desperately Don reached around to pick at the knots which held him to the wall . . . then realized that it was too late. Long minutes must pass before he could free himself, cross the room, empty the lower vessel . . . and three more drops would give sufficient weight to pull the switch!

Eyes bleak with despair, Don watched one of the three drops fall. All at once his numb fingers encountered his automatic, overlooked by the spy. Frantically he

snatched it from its holster, just as the second drop fell. Eyes blinded with sweat, hand trembling, Don raised the gun, fired!

The roar in the closed room was terrific. As the puff of smoke cleared away, Don's heart leaped. The jug was shattered into a dozen fragments, its load of water spilled upon the floor! Only a length of limp cord hung from the handle of the switch! Thyllos was saved!

At that moment, as Don sagged panting, exhausted, against his bonds, the lock-tender stirred, aroused by the sound of the shot. His head caked with dried blood the old man dragged himself erect, gazed wild-eyed at the scene before him.

"Help me get loose!" Don exclaimed. "Captain Ross' daughter . . . carried off by that murderer . . .!" While the lock-tender cut his bonds, he snapped out the story of Varhely's attempt to destroy the isle.

"Mighty Poseidon!" The old man glanced in horror at the shattered jug. "Surely the gods have saved us!" He tottered toward the tunnel. "I must tell the guards . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Don seized his arm. "Isn't there some other lock leading to the sea? To open this one is death to us all . . . but unless I can get free at once, overtake Varhely before he reaches Karsis, there's no chance of saving Anne! There must be some other way from this island!"

"Aye." The old man muttered. "There lies the emergency lock, to be used in case of danger to the large one!" He pointed to a small doorway lost in the shadows at the end of the room. "Yet it might be wise for you to wait until the others are notified . . ."

"And let Varhely get an impossible lead on us?" Don slipped into his energy pack, headed for the small lock. "Quick!"

The old tender turned to the control panel; a moment later Don, shielded by his globe of force, had passed through the little emergency lock into the dark, mysterious undersea world beyond.

CHAPTER VII

SAVAGE ASSAILANTS

THE ocean depths were a shimmering cool green in the light from the immense golden dome of Thyllos. Before Don lay great fields of kelp, peopled by darting fish of every size and description, from tiny sea-devils with luminous teeth, to exquisite butterfly-fish. Now and then a great black monster would swirl inquisitively toward the globe of lambent energy about him, then, checked, wheel off and disappear. For some moments after emerging from the lock Don stood still, waiting for his eyes to grow accustomed to the weird light.

The ocean floor, contrary to his expectations, was far from level. A long slope lay before him, its surface cut with sudden hollows, great moss-covered boulders. After ten minutes' walking Thyllos had disappeared behind a series of mounds, with only a vague glow to mark its location. Now Don could see but a few yards on all sides before the illumination from his globe died away in the eternal darkness of the sea bottom. He paid scant heed to his surroundings, however, plunging grimly in the direction of Karsis.

Suddenly from the crest of a small rise Don saw something that made his heart leap. Far ahead a round bubble of light moved along the ocean's floor! Too large to be a luminous fish, it was unquestionably an energy globe! Loosening the pistol in its holster, Don raced toward the sphere of light.

Now the other globe had, apparently, seen him, for its occupant increased his pace. In spite of this, the distance between the two rapidly diminished; burdened by the girl's weight, Varhely could make little speed. Onward across the interminable stretches of sand and slime the globes sped, forcing their way through tangles of seaweed, circling huge rocks, leaping rocky fissures.

Don could make out two figures behind the other energy shield . . . Varhely, red-faced, panting . . . Anne, very pale, stumbling along at his side, casting an anxious glance from time to time over her shoulder. Now only a hundred yards separated the two globes. Exultant, Don increased his speed. Fifty yards . . . twenty-five . . . Varhely was gasping for breath, swaying, as he tried to drag the girl onward. Don grinned, gripping the automatic. In another moment the globes would blend, and then . . .

All at once Don saw an expression of horror pass over Anne's countenance, saw a soundless scream rise to her lips. Varhely paused, grinning, stared at the water above the pursuing sphere. Automatically Don's eyes turned upward . . . and the blood leaped in his veins.

Settling about his globe of force was a nightmare creature, the sight of which brought cold sweat to his brow. Huge python-like tentacles, fully twenty feet long wove a writhing network about the shimmering sphere while a huge shapeless mass, leprous white, sank slowly, relentlessly, downward. Don could make out great bottomless eyes, cold, unblinking, a cruel curved parrot-like beak, flaccid lips working with a nauseous, avid movement. A giant octopus, monstrous apparition of the unknown depths, held the globe of force in its terrible grip!

For a moment sheer terror shook Don, then he realized that the shield of force, able to hold back the tremendous pressure of the water, was proof against any denizens of the deep. Contemptuously he started forward . . . only to find the globe would not move!

FRROWNING, Don glanced at the huge tentacles wrapped about the globe; the octopus was holding him, force screen and all, helpless in its twining arms! As he watched, the immense creature commenced its attack upon the golden globe. Again

and again his curving beak struck at the invisible shield, to no avail. Finding himself thus thwarted, a red haze of rage clouded the monster's eyes; exerting his herculean strength, he shook the globe as though it were a toy balloon. Don, tumbling drunkenly about within it, gasped frantically for breath. There was nothing for him to hold on to; the walls of the globe were somehow intangible.

The water about them was boiling as the huge creature thrashed about in vain assaults at this strange antagonist. Battered, breathless, Don swore in helpless rage. The globe that shielded him also prevented his reaching the raging monster. Curious sputterings were emanating from the energy pack on his shoulders. What if this violent shaking should damage its delicate mechanism?

The globe containing Varhely and Anne had disappeared. Don could see nothing except the cup-studded tentacles, the huge formless face peering down at him. The sputtering of the energy pack had increased, and it seemed that the golden light wavered. The giant octopus, as though aware of this weakness of the shield of force, redoubled his efforts, shaking the globe as a cat shakes a mouse. Desperately, Don attempted to remain on his feet, to save the shoulder pack from further damage. His efforts were to no avail. In another moment . . .

Suddenly Don saw the octopus' great glassy eyes roll upward. Sleek, savage shapes were darting toward the scene of the conflict. Tiger sharks, a dozen of them, each fifteen or more feet long! Whirling, the octopus dropped the glowing sphere, faced these new antagonists. The sharks, their fierce teeth bared, fell like wolves upon the huge monster.

Crouching, out of breath, within the sphere, Don watched this titanic battle of the deep. One of the sharks was in the grip of the tentacles, crushed to a bloody pulp, but the others continued to flash in and out,

lightning fast, their teeth tearing ribbons of white flesh from their monstrous adversary. Blood stained the water, and scores of smaller fish, attracted by it, circled the antagonists like a swarm of vultures. Suddenly a black cloud shot from the octopus, blackening the water, blotting the entire scene from view.

As the sable pall spread through the water, Don shook the cobwebs from his brain, headed away from the furious conflict. At length clear green water greeted his eyes. Nowhere, however, was there any sign of the energy globe containing Varhely and Anne. Taking his bearings from a curiously-shaped rock, he set out once more in the direction of Karsis.

For long hours, Don plodded along the ocean's floor. Great boulders, huge jumbles of carved stone loomed on all sides, grim ruins of some Atlantean city. Don could see the water-worn skeletons of once-mighty buildings, shrouded in funeral palls of sombre sea-weed. Desolate, ghostly, the submerged dwellings were like rows of ancient sepulchres.

Onward past the mouldering ruins Don toiled. The pack on his back was still sputtering ominously and the glowing globe had shrunk until its diameter was hardly six feet. Moreover, the air within it was rapidly growing foul.

A mile past the sunken city, great flats covered with curious growths met Don's gaze. Seaweed, moss, kelp, ranged in rows, separating great masses of brilliant under-sea vegetation, as colorful and ordered as that of some terrestrial hot-house — the marine gardens, Don realized bitterly, that he and Anne had set out so gayly to see hours before. It seemed as though centuries had passed since they left the temple of Poseidon for the locks.

Wearily, his head aching from the foul air, Don staggered on. Long ago his sense of direction had left him; whether he was

heading for Thyllos or Karsis, he could not tell. Driven on by some blind instinct, he forced his leaden legs to move, hoping against hope. Anne . . . Varhely . . . he had to overtake them! Had to! If Varhely reached Karsis, obtained the secret of the gravity machines from its rulers, America was doomed! With anti-gravity, fleets of warships could be wafted through the air as easily as planes, could shell cities from above while laughing at the efforts of American aircraft to penetrate their armored hulls! Weird delirious pictures flickered through Don's brain . . . mad pictures of huge battleships floating serenely above New York, hovering in the air as they dumped loads of bombs onto the helpless city! Feverishly Don plodded onward, half-conscious, a prey to wild fantasies.

All at once, the exhausted American saw lights ahead . . . dozens of lights flickering like a swarm of submarine fireflies. Nearer and nearer they came, from all sides, surrounding him. Were they men of Thyllos, he wondered, or a patrol from Karsis? Gun in hand, he waited as the golden spheres swept through the water toward him.

The strange globes were near, now; staring at them Don's heart sank. The faces behind the shields of force were brutish, savage, the scarred and bearded features of the pirate conquerors of Karsis! Swiftly Don glanced about. No chance of escape . . . he was surrounded! An examination of the automatic revealed four of its eight shells left in the clip. Four shots . . . and more than twenty of the enemy! Hopelessly Don crouched beneath his shrinking sphere of force.

In an instant, the savage assailants were upon him. A dozen globes merged with his own to make a huge irregularly-shaped bubble of air. Twenty of the grim Karsisians, their electric swords spitting blue sparks, plunged toward their prey, shouting exultantly.

Once Don's heavy pistol roared, and the foremost of his attackers crumpled, clawing at his chest. Again and again, he fired, and two more fell. Howling with rage, the others pressed on. Don planted his last bullet in the body of a huge, black-bearded ruffian wearing a rusty hauberk, then hurled the empty gun at a halbardier who lunged at him with a long, heavy axe.

Even as the halbardier toppled forward, another of the Karsisians drew back his arm, clutching a knife. In vain Don ducked; the blade of the dagger grazed his shoulder with a sputter of blue sparks. Electrical current, unbelievably powerful, swept through his body, stiffening him where he stood. Then, as the dagger passed by, the collapsed weakly, paralyzed by the awful flow of energy. Swords raised, the remaining Karsisians sprang forward.

CHAPTER VIII

ELECTRIC SWORDPLAY

LYING there on the ocean floor, Don watched the electric swords, spitting blue sparks, descend. This it seemed, was the end . . . the end not only for himself, but for America as well. Varhely . . . the secret of anti-gravity . . . In an instant the deadly swords would strike . . .

Suddenly the leader of the raiding party roared an order, struck up the descending weapons.

"Wait!" he growled. "The rogue may have information! Varhely claims to have opened the locks of Thyllos, destroyed it. Perhaps by questioning this man we may learn the truth!"

Obediently two of the Karsisians picked up Don and, energy globes merged into one long bubble, set out toward their home-city, followed by the others of the patrol. They had gone only a short distance when the glow of a great dome was visible through

the dark water. Karsis, outwardly a twin to the Isle of Thyllos, lay before them.

Through locks, they passed, emerging in the heart of a huge island city. Don, recovered from the numbing electric shock, was jerked to his feet, bound. Dazedly he glanced about, taking in his surroundings.

Like Thyllos, Karsis was a cyclopean upheaval of stone, a majestic array of great temples, lofty terraces, imposing public buildings, all adorned with magnificent frescoes, brilliant murals, and colossal statues of gods and demi-gods, their expressions grave, their sightless eyes seeming to brood on the mysteries of infinite time and space. Yet while its mighty works remained intact, aloof, the mark of the savage, brutal conquerors of Karsis was everywhere noticeable, desecrating the glory of Atlantis. Temples were being used as taverns, filth and deliberate destruction marred the beauty of the wide streets, gardens and orchards were lost in weeds, the homes of Atlantean nobles robbed of their simple splendor and decked in garish trappings. Yet shocking as this profanation was, it failed to destroy the grandeur of the conquered city. The great shrines, the sublime statues, seemed somehow contemptuous of the efforts of puny man to efface their eternal, ageless majesty.

URGED forward by his captors, Don stumbled along the marble-paved streets. On all sides roaring, drunken throngs met his gaze. Coarse-faced buccaneers, mugs of wine in their hands, roared the ribald choruses of some ancient drinking song; slim, near-nude Atlantean dancing girls waited upon their captors, fierce hatred lurking behind their forced smiles; nobles and haughty priests of Atlantis, emaciated, clad in slaves' rags, toiled in granaries, wine-presses, smithies, enduring the lashes of their overseers with proud stoicism.

All this Don took in as his guards led him along the crowded highways toward a

vast pyramidal building not unlike the temple of Poseidon at Thyllos. A moment later they had passed through its massive portals, were walking along gloomy corridors, on the walls of which were weird bas-reliefs, the figures of long-dead kings of Atlantis. Grey granite ghosts, they marched in endless procession, some all but obliterated by age and neglect, some, better preserved, peering with blind eyes from the dark stone.

At the end of the corridor a truculent sentry halted Don's captors.

"Gismond confers with Varhely, but now arrived from Thyllos," he grunted. "They are not to be disturbed . . ."

"Tell them we bring a prisoner who may supply information," the leader of the patrol snapped. "They'll see us!"

For a moment, the sentinel hesitated. Through the heavy tapestry that blocked the doorway, a dry musty voice was audible.

" . . . if, as you claim, Thyllos is inundated, we have only to raise it, rid it of those drowned, and take possession. By such a stroke you will have earned your price . . . the secret of gravity!"

"You have the formulae, the plans?" It was Varhely, speaking in eager tones. "I've lived up to my end of the bargain, and the sooner I reach the surface the better. The war . . ."

Don heard the sentry interrupting, then the dry voice once more. A moment later the curtain was drawn back and they were waved into the room beyond. Seated at one end of the chamber was a lean vulpine man, his hairless head gleaming like old parchment, his sharp features like those of some bird of prey. The mantle he wore, of black velvet, somehow suggested a shroud. Before him stood Varhely, suave and immaculate. At sight of Don, Varhely's face darkened.

"Didn't I tell you to kill the dog when you found him?" he snapped at the leader of the patrol.

"But I thought he might have information," the man protested. Surely . . ."

Gismond, ruler of Karsis, nodded, smiled sardonically.

"You were right," he said. "A chance to test Varhely's story. He seems in great haste for one who, with immortality, has all eternity ahead." Gismond's yellowish eyes turned to Don, fixed him with an unwavering, hypnotic stare. "It will not be well for you to lie when answering my questions, particularly since all information can be verified. Tell me how, with Thyllos destroyed by the sea, you were able to escape?"

Don shot a quick glance at Varhely. The spy's face was waxy, contorted with suppressed rage. His plans for obtaining the secret of gravity, of world domination by the Eurasian Alliance, hung in the balance.

"Varhely has lied to you!" Don exclaimed. "Thyllos is not destroyed! If you care to send scouts to investigate they'll tell you the same!"

"So?" Gismond's bland gaze swung to the aviator. "What say you this time? Did you indeed believe me fool enough to give you the formulae, return you to the surface, without verifying your story?"

"I . . . there must have been some mistake," Varhely faltered before those yellow, cat-like eyes. "Everything was ready when I left. Someone must have entered the lock-room, freed the controls . . ."

"More lies!" Gismond roared, suddenly ablaze. "Bones of the Saints, fool, I'm sick of your excuses! Your mighty plans for the capture and destruction of Thyllos have cost me the lives of sturdy warriors and availed us nothing! First your bungling attempt to admit us into Thyllos, now the stupid affair of opening its locks! Perhaps a score of years' labor in the foundries will sharpen your wits!" He turned to the troop of guards. "Take this boaster to the slave quarters . . ."

"Wait!" Varhely sprang forward, seized Gismond's arm. "A . . . A minute! I've a plan! One that's sure to work!"

"Another plan?" Gismond growled. "I've enough of your stupidity! What hair-brained scheme is this?"

"I'll show you!" Varhely turned, whispered to one of the guards. The man nodded, left the room. A moment later he returned, a small erect figure at his side. Chin high, dark eyes glowing, Anne Ross stared in cool white scorn at her captors. Suddenly, catching sight of Don, the girl's composure broke.

"Don!" she whispered. "What . . . what happened? Dad . . . Ahu . . . the city . . ."

"All safe," he replied. "I managed to get free, prevent the lock from opening. Don't worry . . ."

"Silence!" Gismond broke in harshly, his cold gaze sweeping the girl's slender form. "You will be good enough to explain, Master Varhely, what this wench has to do with the ultimate capture of Thyllos!"

"Surely." The spy's dark face broke into a smile. "She's the daughter of Captain Ross, a member of Thyllos' council. Now it's hardly likely that he'll let the kidnaping of his daughter pass quietly. Thyllos is already in a fighting mood after the events of the past few days. This should be the excuse needed to bring them to attack us here."

"Ah!" Gismond nodded. "I think I begin to understand. You mean . . ."

"I mean," Varhely repeated, "that all our attacks have failed because the Atlanteans and their followers remained safe behind the energy walls of Thyllos. By this manoeuvre we draw them into the open. An ambush of their forces . . ."

"Excellent!" Gismond cried. "This time you have done well! The submarine gardens lie on their route, and the thick masses of seaweed should well conceal the light of our globes! A thousand men hidden there

could fall upon them, cut them to bits before they recovered from the surprise! I myself shall lead the attack to prevent any of those unfortunate 'mistakes' that seem to attend your efforts. And if we succeed, you may claim your reward, the formulae of our anti-gravity machines!"

He motioned to the leader of the warriors. "Let the American be placed in confinement. He must have contact with no one, in order that our plans remain secret. The girl will be kept here, under guard. She may prove amusing after we have settled with the men of Thyllos."

At Gismond's words, the coarse-faced soldiers laughed, seized Anne. Sight of the girl's pale, horrified face filled Don with sudden fury. Desperately, he tried to break away from his guards, to throw himself upon the mocking Gismond, but a rain of blows battered him into submission. One glance, he had, of Varhely's saturnine countenance, of Gismond's ironic smile, then the Karsisian warriors dragged him from the room.

CHAPTER IX THE FATHER OF EVIL

THE prisons of Karsis, located far below the city, were dank, musty with age. Grasping shadows lurked like sombre spectres through the cells, the damp-walled corridors, and a bitter cold emanated from the mighty blocks of basalt of which the dungeon was constructed.

Don Harper, pacing back and forth in his tiny oublie, was oppressed by the vast antiquity of the place. The ghosts of a hundred long-forgotten civilizations crowded upon his consciousness. Rude hieroglyphs in a score of lost languages covered the walls; the floor was worn to glassy smoothness by a myriad restless feet. In his mind's eye he could see the long procession of weary captives who had cursed these four walls of stone—kings of Mu, perhaps,

their golden robes and turquoise-studded armlets a hollow mockery of their former grandeur . . . lean, ascetic priests of Peru, solemn, majestic men, contemplating the mysteries of the stars, the intricacies of human thought, as they waited in vain for the day when their armies would overthrow the legions of Atlantis, release them . . . great black-bearded warriors of Punt, of Elath, raging in vain against the immutable stone until their mighty thews, their flashing eyes, and fierce spirits had fled, leaving only the grists of men who waited for the inevitable final escape. Rich merchants of Ophir, bedizened courtiers from Knossus, licentious Cimmerian fire-worshipers, barbarians of Thule . . . And now, Don reflected ironically, a lieutenant of the United States Navy, following the same restless pacing footsteps, last in this melancholy procession of the ages!

The jingle of a guard's accoutrements as he made his round of the cells, brought Don back to the present. Frowning, he glanced at the marks he had scratched upon the wall. Two days! More like two centuries! What had occurred during those forty-eight hours? Had the forces of Thyllos fallen into Varhely's trap, been destroyed? Had they decided against an attack on Karsis? Or were they even now marching toward the undersea gardens?

Don shook his head, gripped the bronze bars of the door. If only he could get free, escape Karsis, warn them! More than Thyllos depended upon the outcome of this struggle on the ocean's floor. The success of Varhely's trap meant that he would be given the plans of the great gravity generators, the secret of anti-gravity. And with this ancient lore of Atlantis in the hands of Varhely, America was doomed! Already, with its main fleet engaged in the Pacific, with the huge Eurasian squadron gathering at Teneriffe to attack the helpless eastern seaboard, America seemed faced with in-

evitable defeat. But with the mysterious force of gravity in the possession of the Alliance, there was no hope for the new world. Placed at the disposal of the skilful Eurasian scientists, nothing could stand up against it. Cities uprooted, hurled into the air, planes dragged down, armed forces trapped by invulnerable walls of force like those surrounding the undersea islands. Varhely had said that gravity was a force like magnetism, like electricity, and as easily controlled. In the hands of ruthless aggressors, it would create a holocaust, reduce America to a desert. And unless the men of Thyllos were saved from the ambush . . .

Again the footsteps of guards broke the silence of the prison; this time there were four of them, dragging a slim Atlantean youth whose body showed the marks of cruel blows.

"So, knave!" With a taunting laugh the guards shoved him into a neighboring cell. "Impudence toward Gismond's new favorites goes not unrewarded. Here you will remain until Gismond himself returns from his victory over the forces of Thyllos. He'll decide on a fitting punishment, I'll warrant!"

DON watched the Atlantean slump to the floor of the cell, the guards disappear in the gloom of the massive corridor. Who had they meant by Gismond's new favorite, he wondered? Could it have been Anne? And why would an Atlantean, like herself a captive, offend the girl? For a moment Don stared at the youth, a limp, inert figure upon the floor; then, as he heard very faintly above him the tramp of marching feet, the roar of a buccaneer's chorus, the matter of the young Atlantean was swept from his mind. Were the marching men above returning, victorious, or were they setting out to take their place in the ambuscade? Suddenly, as the tumult died slowly away in the distance, he had his answer. Gismond and his follow-

ers were leaving! Which meant that the battle had yet to occur! If only by some miracle he could escape, warn Ahu, Captain Ross, of the trap . . .

Frantically Don began to examine his cell, but as always, the search proved fruitless. Clammy stone walls, stout bronze bars . . . a pallet of straw, the clay dish which had contained his evening meal . . . these and nothing more. This ancient prison which had resisted all efforts at escape for thousands of years seemed impervious; the great blocks of basalt needed no mortar . . . each one weighed tons . . . and the strange archaic lock was the work of long-dead craftsmen, defying his clumsy efforts at picking it. At length, worn out by worry, Don threw himself upon the heap of straw, fell into a troubled slumber.

It was the clink of metal, the sound of someone calling his name that aroused Don. Drowsily he stirred, then, as the voice called again, sat up. Suddenly he gave a muffled cry of amazement. Before the door of his cell stood the young Atlantean! A slender shadowy figure in the gloom, the youth was bending over the massive bronze lock of the door, his face intent. A curious acrid odor was wafted across the oublie. Sharply awake now, Don sprang toward the entrance.

"Who . . . who are you?" he exclaimed. "How . . ."

"Speak softly," the Atlantean warned. "And beware the acid! Its touch is death!"

"Acid?" Don muttered, bewildered.

The boy nodded, exhibited the tiny golden vial from which he was dropping a greenish liquid into the lock.

"Soon, now, the mechanism will be eaten away, just as it was in my cell. A few drops suffice, for this is the ancient elixir my forefathers called 'the tears of Poseidon.' Only the purest gold can withstand it."

"But . . . I don't understand." Don stared at the fumes rising from the lock. "How did you get the stuff? And why are you freeing me?"

"I came here for that purpose. And the vial I carried in my mouth, since these swaggering fools do not realize that so potent a force can be carried in so small a space." He unscrewed the cap of the vial; it was, Don noticed, not unlike a crude eye-dropper. Thin and sharp as a needle, a globule of the greenish fluid dangled from its point. When the drop had been introduced into the lock, the Atlantean resumed speaking.

"I am Hatan, once a prince of Karsis, now a page of Gismond's household. The girl, Anne Ross, told me of Gismond's plan to ambush the forces of Thyllos, marching here to free us, and of your imprisonment. At my suggestion she made false complaints of 'insolence' against me, which caused me to be brought here. Thus, using the 'tears of Poseidon' I shall be able to free you. Together we will make our escape, warn Ahu and his men."

Harper nodded. Anne's courage and wit, the young Atlantean's bravery in deliberately seeking imprisonment, would be responsible if he escaped. Once free he must not disappoint them . . . must see that the men of Thyllos escaped destruction in the submarine gardens. Squaring his shoulders, he watched Hatan place another drop of the green acid upon the lock.

"Now!" The Atlantean threw his shoulder against the door, pushed. A grinding, rattling of broken corroded bronze followed, and the door swung open.

"Good!" Don stepped softly into the corridor, his eyes exultant. "Which way do we take?"

"Follow me." Hatan turned to the left. "We . . ." The words died on his lips as sharp footsteps echoed along the corridor. A guard, a great burly man clad in ragged finery with scarlet sash and head-cloth, was striding along the passage, humming a ribald drinking song. In his hand glittered a cutlass-like shock-sword.

AT SIGHT of the guard, Hatan gripped Don's arm, dragged him back into the shadows. Nearer and nearer moved the hulking Karsisian, still unconscious of the two men crouching in the darkness. Yet it was only a question of time, Don realized, before he would catch sight of them. And two unarmed men would be helpless before the terrible power of the long weapon. In hopeless desperation, Don tensed his muscles, determined to go down fighting.

The jailor was nearly abreast of them, now, and for a moment Don hoped he might pass them by. Suddenly, however, the drinking song came to a sudden end and a deep-throated oath took its place. Cutlass spitting sparks, the big man sprang toward them.

In that instant, before Don could launch himself forward, Hatan's arm flew forward. Something bright, golden, shot from it . . . the curiously needle-like stopper of the vial of acid. Glistening wetly with the deadly "tears of Poseidon," it struck the guard's bared forearm, traced a tiny red furrow across it. A queer acrid smell filled the corridor and the huge guard stood rooted with horror, his bulging eyes fixed on his blackening flesh. For just so long as is necessary for blood to pass from one's arm to one's heart, he remained erect, then, his skin as dark as that of some long-dead corpse, he toppled to the floor.

"Quick!" Hatan handed Don the cutlass, armed himself with a long dagger from the guard's sash. "This way!"

The American nodded, ran swiftly after his young guide. Past cell after cell, they raced, some empty, some occupied by bearded ragged unfortunates who stared in surprise as the two fugitives passed.

At length, after perhaps fifteen minutes of flight, they reached the end of the corridor. Here a stairway of great stone blocks rose into the shadowy darkness above. Upward the two fugitives climbed, hearts pounding, feet padding softly upon the damp glassy basalt. Suddenly, as the

staircase twisted in a steep spiral, light gleamed ahead and the shadows of three sentries were visible in sharp silhouette against the wall. For just a moment the fleeing prisoners paused, recovering their breaths, crouching for the attack. Don, his teeth bared in a fierce fighting smile, glanced at Hatan. The young Atlantean was stern, frowning grimly as he prepared to strike a blow for the freedom of his people. Gripping the dagger, he gave an imperceptible nod.

Side by side, the two men plunged forward, bounding up the few remaining steps. Shouts of alarm went up from the trio of sentries; whipping swords from their insulated scabbards, they braced themselves to meet this unexpected assault.

Striking with berserk fury Don leaped to the attack, cutlass raised, to be met by a grinning, scarfaced warrior. As their weapons clashed, he saw Hatan hurl his dagger, saw one of the three Karsisians crumple to the floor. Swiftly the Atlantean snatched up his sword, engaged the remaining guard.

No time for Harper to follow his companion's efforts; the scarfaced man was pressing him vigorously. A blue arc of flame leaped between their swords as his bull-like adversary sought to drive him back by sheer strength. Deftly Don turned the other's wild lunges, thankful for his years on the Naval Academy's fencing team. Time after time he parried the Karsisan's whistling strokes, awaiting an opening.

All at once his opponent lashed out in a clumsy feint at his legs, then, as Don's guard dropped, aimed a vicious blow at his head. Not an instant too soon the American side-stepped; the highly charged blade passed within an inch of his shoulders. Before the scarred man could raise his weapon again, Don had straightened out his arm, pressed the point of his sword against his opponent's chest. Gasping, the man went rigid, then slumped limply to the floor.

As the Karsisan fell, Don sprang forward to assist Hatan. The youth, no match for his seasoned antagonist, was retreating desperately toward the stairs, evading by a miracle the touch of the deadly blade. In an instant Don was at his side, pressing the guard from another quarter. Like a bolt of blue lightning, his cutlass licked out and the last of the sentries toppled inertly to the stone flags.

"So!" Hatan panted. "Mighty Poseidon smiles upon us! Make haste, for the sound of the struggle will draw more of their fighting men!"

Again the two fugitives resumed their advance, dodging through narrow passages, turning, twisting through a maze of shadowy corridors. Once a frightened servant appeared before them, but a mere wave of the gleaming swords put him to flight. Suddenly, far behind them, they heard shouts, the clatter of arms.

"The alarm has spread!" Hatan cried. "Hurry!"

REDOUBLING their efforts, they raced onward. Through the gloomy vaults of the ancient fortress they ran, arriving at length in a square, dimly lit room, the walls of which were adorned with weird frescoes. Hatan dashed across the room, tugged at a square bronze door. It swung ponderously open and a moment later they had stepped through into a side street of the city.

"Sheathe your sword," Hatan whispered, "and walk slowly. We must not be known for escaped prisoners!"

Don nodded, followed his guide along the little alley. In the eternal golden twilight that cloaked the undersea islands, he could see signs of revelry as Karsis celebrated the forthcoming victory over their ancient enemies of Thyllos. Those who had been left behind to guard the city seemed to take their charge lightly. Casks of wine stood before the great marble buildings that had been converted into taverns; brawny freebooters, their faces

flushed with drink, applauded the lithe Atlantean dancing girls, while groups of Karsisians crowded the gaming tables—shouting, cursing, laughing. Absorbed in their pursuit of pleasure, the motley throngs paid scant heed to the two passersby.

Don and his companion had reached the outskirts of the city before the clamor arose behind them. From the slopes that rose behind Karsis they could see armed guards dashing through the streets, joined by their followers from the wine-shops, the taverns.

"Now what?" Don muttered, glancing at the hills before them. "No chance of reaching the locks . . . and the island is as much of a prison as the cells we just left."

"There is a way," Hatan exclaimed. "Hurry! The road to the temple of Bel is long!"

Shrugging, Don followed his companion up the wooded hillside. No time to seek explanations, now. To trust blindly in the Atlantean in hopes of escaping Karsis, reaching the army from Thyllos, warning them of the trap . . . that was the only way. The thought of Anne, a prisoner in the hands of Gismond, was terrifying . . . yet if the men of Thyllos were victorious, Karsis taken, she would suffer no harm.

The city below was lost from view, as Hatan led the way through groves of gold and purple trees, orchards that resembled great patches of scarlet flame. In brilliant profusion, the bizarre vegetation of the Isles of the Blest rose on all sides . . . a riot of color, a mingling of a dozen sweet scents. As they ploughed through this living paradise, Don found his thoughts on the world a mile above. Had the fleet of the Eurasian Alliance left its base at Teneriffe to attack America? Whatever the outcome of the struggle, the loss of life, the destruction, in the United States would be tremendous. And if Varhely received the secret of anti-gravity as a price for the success of his ambush, nothing could save America from ruthless conquest. Unless he and Hatan

could win through, warn Ahu, the surface world would be dominated by savage, war-like despots, its inhabitants enslaved just as these trusting Atlanteans had been enslaved by the fierce buccaneers cast upon their shores . . .

"Listen!" Hatan paused, stood motionless. The shouts behind them were growing louder; the Karsisians were overtaking their prey!

"Nearer!" Don muttered, resuming the flight through the dense underbrush. Now they were forced to cut their way, sword in hand, through the tangle of strange vines. Clothes in rags, faces furrowed by low-hanging branches, damp with sweat, they struggled on. A faint crashing of bushes further down the slope warned of their pursuers' approach.

Suddenly, when it seemed to Don that the journey must never end, Hatan gave a gasping cry of joy. Before them was a small clearing, in the center of which lay a simple little woodland temple. Of less massive construction than the other works of the Atlanteans, it was in ruins. Pillars broken, roof fallen in, overrun with vines, the temple seemed like some age-old mausoleum.

"At last!" Hatan sprang through the crumbling entrance, made his way across the moss-grown floor. Following, Don beheld a strange, hideous statue, twice life size, a gross, obese figure, bull-headed, monstrous. Bel, the Father of Evil, sat crouched upon his granite throne defiant of the passing centuries.

Hatan had dropped to his knees, as though in prayer before the image; his fingers were feeling along the base of the statue in search of something. Curious, Don watched him, then, as the sounds of pursuit drew nearer, his doubts found voice.

"What're you looking for?" he demanded. "There's no way of passing the dome of force from here! Unless we reach Ahu . . ."

"Patience!" Hatan muttered. "Here the

six high priests of Bel had a passageway leading to secret locks, by which they might escape in time of peril. Its existence is known only to a few, and it has been long since I was taught the secret. Beneath the base there is a lever . . . Ah!" He tugged at an ornamental projection, stepped back.

AT ONCE a creaking grinding of stone met Don's ears. Slowly, as though unused for milleniums, massive machinery began to clank, and the great bull-faced statue turned on its pedestal, revealing a dark opening.

"Down!" Hatan exclaimed. "Hurry! They come!"

Don flung a glance over his shoulder. Burly bearded figures were running across the clearing, their swords glistening. Hastily he swung himself into the dark opening, touched steps cut in the stone. Behind him Hatan pressed the knob back into place, then, as the statue started to swing once more on its pedestal, leaped through the narrowing entrance. A shower of sputtering arrows rattled against the image, running feet drummed upon the floor of the temple. Desperately one of their pursuers leaped for the opening; his foot slipped through the closing aperture, but the massive machinery ground inexorably on. An agonized scream of pain, a crunching of bone, and the last strip of light above the two fugitives vanished.

Blind in the stygian darkness of the tunnel, Don stumbled down the steps.

"No fear of losing the way," Hatan said, behind him. "There is but one tunnel."

Downward the steps led, ever downward, until it seemed that they had no end. A musty smell of incalculable age hung in the air, and their footsteps were muffled by the dust of time. At last the stairway ended and a dark passageway lay before them. Once Don's groping hands encountered mouldering copper chains that rattled ominously under his touch.

"This passage had other uses than as a

means of escape," Hatan muttered. "Our forefathers did well to turn from bloody Bel to merciful Poseidon!"

Long minutes passed, and still only interminable darkness stretched ahead. Occasionally the tunnel widened into rooms, and here Don's fingers met strange obscene statues, half-human, half-beast, that made him glad of the darkness. At length, after more than an hour of following the corridor, a greenish light gleamed ahead.

"The locks!" Hatan exclaimed. "Look!"

Don gazed along the tunnel; a large room, cut from the living stone, lay before them. A queer phosphorescent material covered the ceiling, filled the room with ghostly illumination. Set in one of the walls was a large bronze door, the entrance to a lock, while beside it hung six energy packs, of a more clumsy archaic design than those which he had previously seen or worn. Hatan took down two of the packs, handed one to Don, slipped the other upon his own shoulders. Hardly had they fastened the energy projectors into place when a storm of angry voices echoed along the corridor.

"The buccaneers!" Hatan exclaimed. "They've discovered how to move the statue, followed us! Into the lock! Quick!"

Desperately, the Atlantean tugged at a lever, and the inner door of the lock swung open. Into the chamber he leaped, followed by Don. A touch of their fingers set the energy packs in operation, surrounding them with globes of glowing force. In an instant the inner door had clanged shut; the outer one commenced to swing open. A torrent of water swept into the lock, and the two fugitives, surrounded by their energy shields, stepped out onto the ocean's floor.

CHAPTER X

INTRIGUE IN THE DEPTHS

DON and Hatan, running side by side, their spheres merged, had taken scarcely a score of steps from the

submerged lock when the Atlantean turned, glanced back. Four balls of light were advancing through the dark water toward them! Don gave an exclamation of dismay. In their haste they had forgotten the other four packs hanging upon the wall! And these, shielding four of their pursuers . . .

"Gods of Atlantis!" Hatan muttered. "Are we to fail now, after so great an effort?" He paused, drew his sword. "I'll stay here, hold them back! Haste!"

"No!" Don cried. "You can't defeat four of them! It's suicide! I'll stick with you! Perhaps the two of us . . ."

The young Atlantean shook his head impatiently.

"Ahu knows and trusts you," he exclaimed. "While I, a captive these three centuries, am unknown to him! More, you who have recently travelled this route, can have little trouble reaching them, where I would be lost! Go!"

Don paused, indecisive. Already the four globes were near, their occupants converging on the two fugitives. Hatan's arguments were forceful, yet it seemed a coward's trick to leave him. . . .

"Mighty Poseidon!" Hatan cried. "You'll send the armies of Thyllos to their doom for fear of being called a coward?" He raised his sword. "Go, or by the gods I'll slay you!"

Don nodded. Better to feel like a yellow dog than run the risk of condemning the Atlantean army to death in Gismond's trap.

"Right!" he said tightly. "Good luck, Hatan! So long!"

A moment later he was heading seaward. On the crest of a small rise he glanced back, saw Hatan's glowing globe merge with those of the four Karsisians; then as he plunged forward once more, the spheres of light faded from view in the dark kelp forests.

NOW he again felt the terrible loneliness of the ocean's floor—swift ghostly fish, the infinite blackness beyond the glow of his globe, the tomb-like silence. Moving at top speed, Don circled about until he was opposite the main locks of Karsis, picked up the vague trail that led to the marine gardens. Onward, forcing his way through tangles of seaweed, skirting huge rocks and crumbling ruins, struggling over ridges, avoiding those strange crevasses which seemed to lead to the earth's core.

As he raced toward the scene of the ambush, a thousand worries crowded his brain. Would he arrive in time? Would Ahu and his followers discover the trap for themselves? Would the fierce corsairs prove the equal of Thyllos' heterogeneous regiments of fighting men?

Suddenly, as Don rounded a rocky shelf, he saw a brilliant spectacle far ahead. Energy globes! More than a thousand of them were moving in ordered ranks!—and behind their golden walls he could make out figures of every sort, from white-robed Atlanteans to armored crusaders, dragging great sledge-like vehicles loaded with supplies, equipment of every sort. The army from Thyllos, moving to attack Karsis!

Shifting his gaze from the long column of spheres, Don's heart sank. Directly in front of it lay the exquisite marine gardens, row upon row of strange sponge-like growths, huge spiked plants resembling desert cacti, clumps of peculiar vines of every hue, their long tendrils waving sinuously in the water. Through this dense screen of undersea vegetation, he could see an occasional glow of light as the movement of the growths revealed spheres of energy hidden beneath the masses of kelp. Gismond and his followers, waiting in ambush!

Frantically, Don began to run toward the marching men . . . but it was too late. Already the head of the column had entered the gardens, was passing through the tall forests of seaweed. Oblivious, exultant,

they swung along, unconscious of the danger that awaited them. Dark Moors, giant Vikings, Spanish grandees . . . all striding into the trap Varhely had laid!

Don redoubled his efforts. He was less than a hundred yards from the rear of the column when the storm broke. With a single movement, the masses of vegetation opened and a torrent of glowing spheres, like huge golden marbles, rushed toward the unsuspecting men of Thyllos. Globes merged, shock-swords spat blue sparks, and score upon score of the surprised warriors fell before they could even draw their weapons. A scene of mad confusion fell over the colorful gardens . . . a pantomime of death, silent, since the spheres prevented the escape of sound waves.

Frozen in his tracks, Don watched. Now the trapped force was rallying, but the losses inflicted upon them in that first bloody moment of surprise had decimated their ranks. Outnumbered, hindered by the heavy sledges laden with equipment, they were retreating doggedly before their savage assailants.

Sword in hand, Don plunged forward to join them, then suddenly halted. To his right, half buried in a thicket of weeds, lay a long slender shape, a dark skeleton of iron and steel, somehow familiar. Staring at it, Don's eyes blazed. The S-98! Wrecked, her decks ripped open by the aerial bombs, a sunken marine ghost! Yet aboard her . . . Swiftly Don turned, raced toward the struggling masses of figures.

As he sprang into the fray, a big Karsilian blocked his way. One desperate lunge of his cutlass sent the buccaneer to the ground; breathless, Don ran on. At length he found himself among the retreating forces. A blackened, dishevelled figure, striving in vain to check the rout, caught his eyes. It was Humphrey Falworth! With one leap Don was at his side. Humphrey whirled about, gasping.

"Harper!" he cried. "You here! Marry, a sad day for Thyllos! We . . ."

"There's a chance!" Don interrupted. "Guns! In the submarine yonder! Greased bullets aren't affected by water! If we could clear the sub . . ."

Before he had finished speaking, Humphrey was motioning to the retreating men. A dozen of his followers broke from the fray, ran toward him.

"Sledges!" Falworth snapped. "We'll need a big dome!"

One of the men, an elegant French musketeer, seized the handle of a heavily laden vehicle; with a swift attack, they cut their way through the ring of Karsians, raced toward the sunken sub. While the main force of Thyllos continued its sullen retreat, they forced their way through the tangle of kelp toward the shattered hulk.

"Here!" Humphrey cried. "By'r lady, Devoreaux, haste!"

The Frenchman nodded, took a bulky object, a larger edition of the energy packs upon their shoulders, from the sledge. With Humphrey's aid, he placed it upon the vessel's hull, touched a lever. At once a bubble of force began to grow, surrounding the wrecked submarine, while hissing oxygen flasks filled it with air. When a large globe enveloped the entire vessel, the men entered it.

"These large domes we planned to use as 'tents' while besieging Karsis," Humphrey explained to Don. "You may turn your own sphere off now."

THE American did so, squeezed through the hole in the vessel's deck. Within, the vessel was wet, its floor a litter of shattered glass, twisted metal. Several skeletons, clad in water-soaked uniforms, were sprawled grotesquely about, while funeral wreaths of seaweed draped the cabin. Crabs and gasping fish flopped among the debris.

No time for close investigation; every moment was precious. Crawling through the wreckage, Don made his way into the

forward compartment. Here, stacked within their lockers, were rows of guns, several pistols, cases of ammunition. Hastily Don began to pass them to the men outside. Fifty-three rifles, six sub machine-guns, half a dozen automatics, and an ample supply of cartridges. When all had been handed up, Don scrambled through the hole in the S-98's hull, joined his companions, who were staring curiously at the weapons.

"How does one fire them?" Humphrey demanded. "I see no powder, no matches . . ."

"Here!" Don motioned the men toward him, demonstrated the Garands' semi-automatic action. "The bullets are placed here, and then you have only to pull the trigger. These . . . he pointed to the sub-machine guns, the pistols . . . are equally simple. The clips are fed here, and here. Got it? Now . . ." He turned as Humphrey touched his arm, pointed. A group of Karsisians were heading toward the sub! "Each of you take three or four rifles! Pass them out to our men with ammunition and instructions as to how they work! Come on!"

Snapping on their shoulder packs, they passed through the shield about the submarine, advanced toward the group of Karsisians. At once the pirates, swords glittering, sprang forward. Globes merged, and rifles spat viciously. Shot down before they could come to close quarters, the men of Karsis were helpless. In less than a minute, the band of warriors under Humphrey and Don were racing to the assistance of their comrades.

The scene in the marine gardens was one of deadly slaughter. Inert bodies, still surrounded by the rays from their shoulder packs, lay in heaps, blackened, burnt by the deadly touch of highly charged swords. Of the thousand men who had marched so unsuspectingly into the ambush, less than six hundred remained. Completely surrounded, outnumbered two to one, they

were fighting with the desperation of the doomed. Fiercely exultant, the Karsisians crowded in upon them, swords rising and falling with deadly precision.

All this Don took in with one glance, then, a gun in each hand, hurled himself into the fray, followed by his motley troop of riflemen. Coolly, methodically, they fell upon the Karsisians, rifles roaring a song of death. For just an instant, two globes would blend, then as a bullet found its mark, one would pass on. A strange, bizarre picture it presented. Here a Roman centurian, in helmet and breast plate, aimed a rifle at a bewhiskered buccaneer; here a 17th century dandy, with wig and knee-breeches, fired a chattering sub machine-gun; and here a tall Egyptian, grave, austere, cleared a path for himself with two automatics. Bewildered, slaughtered by this hail of lead, the Karsisians wavered, fell back.

"*Nom de Dieu!*!" Devoreaux, the musketeer, waved his rifle. "They yield! Haste, or, *sangdieu!* they will escape us!"

Don slipped another clip into his automatic, bored into the mass of golden spheres. Two of them merged with his own, and a scarred buccaneer raised his cross-bow. Before he could release the sputtering bolt, the gun roared and he slumped to the ground. Whirling, Don fired again, in time to check his second opponent. At that instant a furious, wild-eyed figure sprang toward him. Livid, his bald parchment-skinned head creased by a bullet, Gismond, the ruler of Karsis, plunged forward.

"Body of God!" he roared, raising his sword. "I'll . . ."

The words ended in a hacking cough as Don fired from the hip. A bloody froth welled to Gismond's lips and he crumpled, lifeless, against the wall of his globe.

The death of their leader sent a wave of panic through the thinned ranks of freebooters. Taking advantage of this hesitation, the group under Humphrey and Don

forced their way through the ring of attackers, commenced handing out rifles, handfuls of cartridges, with curt instructions as to their use. Recovering their spirits, the men of Thyllos threw themselves into the fray, rifles spitting death. Through the walls of his sphere, Don could see Captain Ross, clutching the broken stump of a sword, old Ahu, calmly directing operations as though secure within the council hall.

The buccaneers were breaking now, melting into the masses of vegetation, taking to flight. Bravery against these deadly rifles was to no avail; shot down before they could come to close quarters, use their electric swords, the Karsisians abandoned this hopeless battle.

"At them!" Humphrey cried, motioning the others forward. "Quick!"

Cheering the men of Thyllos set out in pursuit . . . but the long march, the fierce battle had taken their toll. Scattering, the Karsisians began to outdistance their exhausted pursuers. In vain, Humphrey and Captain Ross urged them on; the victors had reached physical limits. Nor were rifles of any use unless within the merged globes of force. Panting, Don watched the buccaneers vanish among the masses of undersea growth. If only there were some way of preventing the defeated Karsisians from reaching their shielded island! Once behind the great dome, they might safely resist all attempts to enter it—and Anne, in the hands of these monsters!

Don's eyes roved over the corpse-strewn gardens; most of the dead and wounded were still shielded by their energy packs, but some, damaging the delicate apparatus as they fell, lay wallowing in the mud. Already fish were beginning to gather . . . With a shudder, Don turned away.

As he returned to the scene of the battle, the warriors of Thyllos were already straggling back from their futile pursuit.

"Don!" Humphrey stepped forward, his voice vibrant with triumph. "They've

broken! Crushed! As soon as we've rested, seen to our wounded, we attack Karsis!"

CHAPTER XI

BLIND ALLEY

KARSIS, second of the Isles of the Blest, lay like a great shimmering pearl upon the ocean's floor; about it, in the manner of small gems of a rich setting, lay the dome-shaped "tents" of the besieging army. Within these were the big sledges, laden with food, oxygen tanks, machines of various types. The vari-garbed soldiers of Thyllos were also visible through their glowing walls, cleaning weapons, binding wounds, resting. Here and there about the camp paced sentries, secure within their smaller globes, rifles in their hands.

Beneath the largest of these strange "tents" sat old Ahu, his wrinkled face set in grave lines. Beside him stood Captain Ross, Humphrey, and Don. The captain, somehow dapper in his brass-buttoned coat, his white ruffled stock, was staring with moody eyes at the ocean outside. Humphrey was toying mechanically with his dagger, while Don paced restlessly back and forth.

"Then you can do nothing?" Ahu quavered. "All efforts have failed?"

"Aye." Humphrey nodded hopelessly. "Old Knem built his domes of force too stoutly. How to breach a wall of lambent energy?"

"Why not match it?" Don demanded. "The small globes from the energy-packs are all of the same vibration, the same wave-length, and so will merge, blend. They're made that way, I guess, so people going outside the domes can meet, talk. Why not make a bubble of the same vibration rate as the one surrounding Karsis? Then we could merge with it, just as two of the small bubbles merge."

"No use," Captain Ross muttered. "We can't match their vibratory rate without

machines the size of those that control the Isles. Impossible to duplicate them in less than ten years . . . if then. And the Karsisians can always vary the rate slightly . . . a hundred minor variations a minute . . . making such a method hopeless."

"Then how about blasting open the locks?" Don demanded. "Maybe, with the torpedoes from the S-98 . . ."

"Worse by far," Ross muttered. "You'd drown all the captive Atlanteans. Drown . . . Anne."

"And they can always raise the island from the ocean floor," Humphrey cut in. "To be sure, we can raise these small domes, as well, but faith, what a devilish job to attack islands while floating a hundred, a thousand feet from the bottom!" He turned to Ahu. "You say they've the smaller lock, the one Master Harper escaped by, well guarded?"

"Aye." The old Atlantean shook his grizzled head. "It presents the same difficulties as the larger one. May Poseidon aid us! Too well did our forefathers build their shields of force! We . . ." He broke off as a tall white-clad sentry entered the dome. "What now?"

"A messenger from within the city," the guard said impassively. "Under a flag of truce he seeks to parley with you."

"A parley!" Ahu exclaimed. "Perhaps they wish to strike a bargain of some sort! Admit him!"

The sentry left, returned accompanied by a powerful man in boots and ragged breeches.

"You are the leader of these forces?" the Karsisian demanded.

"Yes." Ahu nodded.

"Good. I bring you greetings from our leader, Varhely."

"Varhely?" Don gasped. "Your leader?"

"Aye," the man said carelessly. "Upon learning of Gismond's death, we voted him the place, for his knowledge of Thyllos, of the upper world, were in his favor. These tidings, then, from Varhely. Unless you

abandon this siege of our island, swear never to return, he will send all captives, Atlanteans and others, through the locks without globes to protect them!"

"What!" Captain Ross cried brokenly. "Anne . . . sent through the lock to be crushed by the pressure! No, in God's name! He can't . . .!"

"Varhely gives you twelve hours to make your decision," the emissary said. "If your forces are still here at that time, he will carry out his threat. Have I your leave to go?"

Silently Ahu made a gesture of dismissal, and the messenger swaggered out.

"This settles it!" Captain Ross muttered. "You can't condemn Anne . . . the others . . . to death! And there'd be no way of saving them! No matter how quickly we rushed the lock, the pressure would crush them before we could do anything! Let's leave, Ahu! Now, at once!"

"Aye." Humphrey nodded. "No chance of entering the city, to boot. The Captain's right!"

DON stared through the walls of the small dome at the dark opaque stretches of water beyond. Varhely triumphant! Already, having through some means made himself leader of the fierce buccaneers, he would be in possession of the secret of anti-gravity. As soon as the besiegers left he would unquestionably raise Karsis to the surface, build a raft or boat, and head for Teneriffe to add this mighty force to the already overpowering Eurasian armament. America was doomed . . . Suddenly Don whirled about, faced the others, his jaw set.

"We've twelve hours!" he cried. "And a lot can be done in that time! I've a plan . . . a crazy sort of a plan! If it fails to net anything before the deadline, you can break camp, leave! And if it works, we'll take Karsis! Listen!" He spoke swiftly, tersely.

When he had finished, old Ahu remained silent, then squared his shoulders. . .

"You risk your life," he said slowly. "And the plan seems hardly likely to succeed. Yet we lose nothing by staying here until an hour before the allotted time! I shall give you all the information I can, and pray that the gods watch over you. If by some miracle you should be the means of freeing our people within the city, then any reward in our power shall be yours!"

An hour later, Don Harper moved toward the main locks of Karsis. Great masses of seaweed covered his globe, obscuring its glow, making him all but invisible in the dark water. Had anyone been able to penetrate the screen, however, they would scarcely have recognized the young naval lieutenant. Dirt obscured his features, while in place of his uniform he wore the ragged garments of one of the buccaneers killed in the battle at the marine gardens. A cutlass hung at his side and the hilt of a dagger protruded from his scarlet sash. All in all, he seemed one of the swaggering freebooters who ruled Karsis.

Near the mouth of the great lock, Don paused, crouched immobile among the tendrils of kelp. Five minutes he waited, then a dozen globes approached from the camp of the besiegers. Humphrey and a troop of his followers were visible behind the spheres of force, laughing, joking, making derisive gestures at the guards behind the city's dome. Closer and closer they moved, and now Don could see that they dragged a sledge laden with equipment. The guards within the city seemed alarmed, now, as if fearing some attempt to blast open the lock.

Suddenly Don, peering through the masses of weed, saw figures running behind the city's wall of force. A moment later the great bronze door swung open and some fifty Karsian warriors emerged, raced toward Humphrey and his troop. At once *there* was a blue flicker of swords, a flurry of sharp fighting.

Crouching, Don inched nearer. Aid from the camp had arrived, driving the Kar-

sians back. Stubbornly, faces to the foe, they retreated toward the lock.

This was the instant, Don realized now, while the men from the city were too busily engaged to notice him. Swiftly he shook the covering from his sphere, stepped forward to join the retreating Karsians. Hard-pressed, they paid no attention to him, believing him one of their own forces. Now they were returning to the lock, fighting back the besiegers as they did so. Less than thirty of the fifty who had made the sortie remained when all who were able to walk had entered the lock.

The massive outer door was swinging shut. Sword thrusts cleared the entrance of those among the besiegers who sought to follow. A moment later the lock had clanged shut, pumps were emptying it of water.

Don snapped off his energy pack, glanced at his companions. Clad, like himself, in ragged finery, they were panting from exertion, muttering oaths, growling threats of vengeance. And still Don's identity was not questioned.

The inner door of the lock creaked open. Blinking in the yellow haze, the remnants of the raiding party stepped out into the broad streets of Karsis. As they emerged, a tall, sallow figure strode toward them. Don clenched his fists, heart racing. Varhely! Would he be recognized?

The Eurasian aviator's eyes swept the group of returning buccaneers.

"Well?" he snapped. "Did you get the sledge?"

By way of answer, a grim-visaged Spaniard dragged forward the clumsy vehicle. Varhely stripped off its canvas cover, revealing a heap of stones.

"Just as I thought!" he growled. "A trick! Making us believe they were about to blast the locks in order to draw us out! As if they'd break open the lock, run the risk of drowning their precious kinsmen!" His gaze flicked derisively toward a group of the Atlantean slaves.

"Ten hours yet remain! Before they

have passed, these fools of Thyllos will have abandoned the siege! Meanwhile, let there be no more sorties!" Turning on his heel, Varhely strode off.

AS THEIR leader left, the party of buccaneers broke up, some heading for nearby wine shops, some returning to the posts they had abandoned when the alarm sounded. Don, falling in with a group of the former, made his way toward a tavern. Standing in the doorway sipping a beaker of wine, he surveyed the city. Its streets crowded with freebooters, its locks and fortresses well guarded, there seemed little chance of putting his plan into effect. Directly ahead lay the great palace of the kings of Atlantis below which, so Ahu had told him, were the huge machines which supplied the energy for the dome of force. In front of the building, however, the throngs were thickest. It would be necessary to wait. . . .

Minutes dragged into hours and still Don idled in the tavern, watching the slim dancing girls, the gaming tables . . . a bored, somewhat drunken pose concealed his feverish impatience. At length, one by one, the roistering buccaneers ceased their revels. Dice games ended, the music ceased, wine-laden profligates reeled off to bed. Soon the streets were empty, silent, except for the monotonous pacing of the sentinels. With a feigned stagger, Don left the wine shop, made his way toward the shadowy black palace of Karsis that reared its immense bulk above the city.

As he neared the neglected gardens surrounding the building, Don dropped to his knees, crawled toward the small postern gate set in the wall. Here a single sentry stood, reflectively eyeing the deserted city, chewing at his ragged moustache.

Silently Don drew the dagger from his sash, touched the button on its hilt that sent the deadly charge surging along its narrow blade. Still the sentry remained motionless, lost in thought. The American was

less than six feet away, every muscle tense, scarce daring to breathe. Closer and closer, keeping in the shadow of a thick, flowered hedge. . . .

All at once, Don's knee came down upon a twig, snapped it. Like the crack of a whip it seemed, in the bitter silence. Gasp ing, the sentry spun about . . . and as he did so, Don leaped.

One touch of the dagger's point against his breast and the Karsinian toppled to the ground, a limp, inert figure. Don turned, tried the gate, found it, as he had expected, locked. But there were vines running up the face of the building, and the narrow loophole above might admit a slim man . . . Swiftly Don sprang forward, grasped the vines, commenced to climb.

The ascent was hazardous. Twice tendrils of the queer purple vine pulled away from the wall as he put his weight upon them; but both times he managed to grasp another strand before falling. At length he reached the deep-set window, dragged himself upon its sill.

There were no bars in the narrow aperture. Don squeezed through, dropped lightly to the floor. He was in a corridor, it seemed, though where it led he could not tell. Very cautiously, he crept along, sword in hand. The great building was like a tomb; none of the doorways which he passed showed light. At length the corridor met a cross-passage. Don glanced up and down, undecided. The machines controlling the wall of force lay, Ahu had said, below the palace. And to reach them he must find steps, go downward. But which way. . . .

Suddenly, as he stood there, Don froze to immobility. Sharp footsteps shattered the silence behind him! Snapping about, he saw a squat Karsisian, his rusty armor glinting dully, striding toward him!

All at once, the buccaneer caught sight of him, gasped.

"Dammee!" he roared. "What knavery

is this? Noll! Portugee! Haste!" Sword gleaming, he sprang forward.

With a quick leap, Don jumped into the cross-passage, lost himself in the shadows. Behind him he could hear the clatter of armor, the labored breathing of his pursuer. Soon other voices had taken up the cry as the dark castle came to life. Don redoubled his efforts, twisting, winding, among the maze of passages.

All at once, as he rounded a corner, Don gave an exclamation of despair. The passage came to a halt directly before him! He was in a blind alley! Trapped!

Glancing about, his gaze swept the four doors that opened upon the *cul-de-sac*. Of copper, they were curiously worked with strange images and devices. As Don hesitated, undecided which to open, the thudding footsteps drew nearer and nearer. All at once, from one of the rooms, he heard a sound of weeping, gasping sobs. A woman's voice! Swiftly he turned the handle, stepped across the threshold.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROMISED REWARD

THE room was small, hung with rich draperies. At one end of it was a low couch, upon which lay a sobbing figure . . . the figure of a girl. Silken robes clung to her slender form; her hair flowed in dark rivulets over the pillow; her lips were a scarlet slash against her fair skin. With the click of the door, the girl gave a muffled cry, sat up.

"Anne!" Don whispered. "Anne!" Then, as hoarse shouts echoed through the corridor outside, "They . . . they're after me! The guards!"

"Here!" The girl sprang from her couch, drew back the heavy tapestries against the wall. "Quick!"

Nodding, Don stepped behind the arras. Hardly had the curtain settled back into place when a barrage of knocks sounded

upon the door. Throwing a robe over her sheer night-dress, Anne opened it.

"Yes?" she said coldly.

The squat guard's eyes darted about the room.

"I saw a stranger in the passageway," he muttered. "He may have entered here."

"Do you see him?" the girl said evenly. "Do you think he could have come in here without my knowledge? Varhely will be pleased to learn of the visions of his drunken guardsmen!"

"Aye, Roger!" One of the man's companions laughed. "Wine does strange tricks. There are no intruders here! Come, let's to bed!"

The stocky Roger swore, glanced uneasily at the girl. She had, it was rumored, great influence with Varhely. And there was, he knew, wine upon his breath.

"As you wish," he said stiffly. "Yet I saw what I saw. If Varhely prefers the word of this wench to that of honest men, he's more the fool! Come!" Motioning to his companions, he left the room.

When the door closed, Don stepped from behind the curtain.

"Too narrow for comfort," he said grimly. "I expected any moment he would search the room. You . . . you've been well treated."

"Yes." Anne laid a hand upon his arm. "But what are you doing here? How did you enter the city?"

Swiftly Don told of his plan, his entrance through the lock with the defeated Karsisians. "And now," he concluded, "I've got to reach the Atlantean machines below the building! Quickly! Only a few hours are left! Unless I can do something at once, Ahu will have to abandon the siege to prevent you and the others from being sent through the locks!"

The girl nodded hopelessly.

"Often have I seen the vast engines beneath Thyllos," she murmured. "But to reach the ones here is impossible!—guards

at every door, every flight of steps . . . you would be killed before you had passed the first doorway! It's suicide, Don! Better for me, the others, to remain here, prisoners, than for you to throw away your life without a chance of success! There's no hope of . . ." The girl broke off, eyes wide with horror, as the door of the room burst open.

"So!" The stocky Roger sprang across the threshold, sword in hand. "A single move, knave, and I touch you with this blade! I was sure that by remaining outside the door I would hear voices! Perhaps Varhely will believe his 'drunken guardsman' now!"

Don stood motionless. The point of the buccaneer's sword was within an inch of his chest. One touch of it, he knew, meant death. He glanced at Anne. She was like an ivory image, drained of all color, her eyes tortured.

"Come!" Roger laughed. "Let us go! Varhely will want to see his guest!"

SHOULDERS drooping, Anne moved toward the door. As she passed Roger, however, she lunged to one side, caught his arm and dragged it down.

"Don!" she cried. "Quick!"

Even as she spoke, Don leaped forward, his dagger glittering in his clenched fist.

"Drop your sword!" he exclaimed. "And be silent!"

The squat buccaneer obeyed, and the blade fell from his hand, sputtering blue sparks upon the damp stone floor.

"And now," Don laughed, "Master Roger and I are going to the caverns below the palace! He will explain to the sentries that we are on an important mission, knowing that a word of warning will mean his death! Eh, Roger?"

The Karsisian nodded in sullen assent. One hand on his captive's arm, the other on the hilt of his dagger, Don turned toward the door.

"Don!" Anne's fingers brushed his cheek. "You . . . you'll be careful?"

"Right!" He flashed her a smile. "All set, Roger? Let's go!"

Memory of that walk lingered long in Don Harper's memory—dark passages, their walls glistening with slime, endless flights of steps, hewn from the living stone, massive doors of green, age-old bronze. And at each stairway, each corridor, each doorway, were guards, still, erect fellows, cruel-faced, insolent. As they approached each set of sentries, Don's heart increased its tempo, and his grip upon Roger's arm tightened. Yet never once did his captive's voice waver, or the curt explanation vary. His life, he knew, would come first, regardless of what else happened.

Don could feel pressure upon his eardrums, silent proof that the steps, the slanting galleries, had carried them far below the palace. The descent had seemed interminable and precious moments were slipping by. Quickening his pace, he urged his captive onward.

Now the last two sentries were passed, and a stone door blocked the way. Unlocked, it yielded to Don's touch. Still keeping Roger at his side, he stepped through.

The sight that greeted their eyes was so incredible that for a moment Don believed it to be some sort of illusion. A cavern, immense, endless, lit by a thin, ghostly light, lay before them . . . a cavern filled with gargantuan machinery. Huge grinding wheels, turbine-like engines, spinning cogs, all were roaring a song of power. Vast, dim, unreal, it seemed . . . Don felt like an ant that had inadvertently crawled into a grandfather's clock. As the cyclopean mass of machinery turned in its ageless manufacture of energy, great sprawling shadows flickered across the walls; jets of greenish flame danced like eerie lightning between terminals and a network of glowing tubes made a luminous spider's web over-

head. Power . . . the mighty cavern seemed a crucible of power . . . awe-inspiring, frightening!

Stunned by the grandeur of the sight, Don was seized with a feeling of his own insignificance. The spectre of the Atlantean super-scientist, Knem, the ghosts of countless thousands of toil-slain slaves, seemed to defy him, warn him against tampering with the works of men who were akin to the gods. And yet, for the sake of their descendants, for the honor of desecrated Karsis. . . .

A sudden movement on the part of his captive broke the weird spell. Roger had made a swift leap for the door.

Whirling, Don sprang. The buccaneer's hand had just closed over the door's handle when a knotted brown fist crashed against his jaw. Silently, he slumped to the ground. With trembling haste, Don tore strips from his captive's shirt, bound him securely, then turned once more to the maze of machinery.

Directly opposite him was a small platform, covered with curious dials, gauges, and switches, all marked with hieroglyphs. Don mounted the stone steps, studied the apparatus carefully. The great dome of force covering Karsis was, Ahu had told him, divided into many segments. Don reviewed mentally the old Atlantean's instructions. To do his task correctly, it was necessary to locate the correct segment, to momentarily remove it. Again Don surveyed the immense wheels and cogs, then, picking up a peculiarly-shaped wrench from the heap of tools beneath the control panel, he commenced work. Would he be able to finish the long task in time, he wondered? Face set in tense, drawn lines, he unloosened the first bolt.

As Don worked, the city above him woke. Parties of sleepy guards hurried along the broad streets, dragging wretched, half-starved Atlantean slaves. The buccaneers, grizzled leathery men, paid scant heed to the protestations of their captives; laugh-

ing, they herded the pitiful groups forward with waves of their shock-swords.

In the big square before the main locks, rows of men and women stared with hopeless eyes at the array of glowing spheres far beyond the dome of force, that marked the camp of their comrades. Yet between the marble splendor of Karsis and the "tents" of the besiegers lay the dark, greenish water . . . a barrier of death. Anne, standing in the front ranks of the slaves, gazed at it in horrified fascination. Less than an hour remained. Would the men of Thyllos break camp, abandon the siege in time to save them? And what of Don . . . would his desperate plan succeed?

Varhely, standing upon the steps of the ancient Atlantean palace, smiled smoothly. Already the ancient Atlantean tablets explaining the secret of anti-gravity were in his possession. As soon as the siege was raised, he would lift Karsis to the surface, make his way to Teneriffe. And then, with the greatest forces of all time in the hands of the Eurasian Alliance . . .

"They'll quit!" he murmured to the group of followers about him. "They're sure to break! Old Ahu'll never permit his people to drown. Which is what we want. No sense in destroying our slaves." His gaze flicked toward Anne, a slim, erect figure not a hundred feet from where he stood. "How much more time?"

ONE of the men glanced at a big water clock nearby; its float had sunk nearly to the last marker. "Three-quarters of an hour," he said. "Still they show no signs of breaking camp. Perhaps if we put, say, a score of these dogs through the locks by way of warning. . . ."

"Wait." Varhely nodded complacently. "Give them full time." He paused, glancing about. "Where's Roger? He was to have taken charge of the prisoners. . . ."

"Eh?" his companion frowned. "Why, he went below some hours ago, to the cav-

erns. On your orders, he said. One man accompanied him."

"My orders!" The spy straightened up, frowning, then turned toward the entrance of the palace. "Put the slaves through if the time limit expires! I'm going to find Roger!"

In the huge underground power-plant, Don Harper worked with furious haste, dismantling the control panel. Sweat-soaked, black with the dust of ages, he seemed a demon from the pit. Suddenly, with a gasp, he straightened up. Two queer copper wires, as thick as a man's finger, lay exposed. These, according to Ahu's instructions, had only to be touched, held together for the space of one breath, then separated again. Grinning exultantly, he reached down, grasped them.

At that instant a shout of rage echoed above the roar of the machinery. Don dropped the wires, turned! Varhely!—plunging toward him, sword in hand!

Jerking erect, Don snatched up his own cutlass. With a shower of sparks, a resounding clash, the two blades met. Cautiously, the men fenced, Varhely furious, shouting for aid—Don, tight-lipped, his eyes dull with despair.

The swords were whirling in circles of steel, now; parrying, lunging, the two men did a wild dance of death in the shadow of the huge whirling machinery. Their shadows sprawled in grotesque silhouette across the walls, flickering in the lambent arc of current that leaped between the swords. Back and forth they swayed, always avoiding the touch that, however slight, meant instant death. Like duelling with poisoned rapiers, Don thought, only far worse, since the skin need not even be broken for the lethal charge to have effect.

Varhely's shouts were being answered; a thud of running feet echoed along the corridor that led to the cavern. Don shook his head. The guards from the passageway! No chance! Unless . . .

Swiftly he began to retreat toward the doorway. Varhely laughed sardonically, pressed on. The American would be caught between him and the advancing guards! They were near, now, running toward the power plant.

Suddenly Don's cutlass licked out in two lightning thrusts, and Varhely was forced to leap backwards to save himself. In that instant Don threw his weight upon the big stone door. With a ponderous crash it slammed shut in the very faces of the advancing Karsisians; the massive bolt fell into place.

Quick as Don had been, Varhely had leaped once more to the attack. Turning from the door, Harper had barely time to raise his sword, ward off a murderous blow. Yet though he parried his opponent's stroke, his own blade, loosely held, flew from his hand, clattered across the small cleared space.

With a cry of triumph Varhely drew back his arm, prepared for the final deadly thrust. No time to think . . . Don acted instinctively. Ducking beneath that striking steel, he threw a hundred and eighty pounds of bone and sinew against his opponent.

Unprepared for this flying block, the Eurasian aviator staggered back, clawing at the air in a vain effort to recover his balance. Reeling, gasping, he tottered for an instant in the shadow of the gargantuan wheels, then toppled back into the maw of the machinery. For the merest fraction of an instant, the great cogs hesitated, then with a sickening crunch, the reddened spokes continued to turn on their inexorable way.

Dazed, panting, Don sprang toward the control plant. Outside, the guards continued their frenzied pounding at the door. Swiftly he snatched up the two wires, held them together.

In the square before the city's locks, Anne Ross stared with morbid fascination

at the marker of the big water clock. Suddenly a cry of despair arose from the ranks of the Atlantean slaves. The marker was level with the top of the big jar!

OUT beyond the dome, gleaming through the dark water, lay the glowing "tents" of the besieging army . . . unmoved! A sharp command rang from the group of buccaneers by the lock. At once guards, shock-swords in hand, herded the front rank of captives toward the great bronze doors.

Stoically, from long years of slavery, the Atlanteans moved toward the entrance. Head high, Anne walked with them. Just as they were about to step into the metal chambers, however, a roar of triumph rose from the grim-visaged buccaneers.

"They break camp! The siege is lifted!"

Anne stood like a run-down robot, her eyes bleak. Ahu and her father, fearing Varhely's threat, were returning to Thyllos! And the threat which drove them away would prevent their ever returning! She and these once-proud men and women of Atlantis were doomed to an eternity of subservience, slaves of the drunken, obscene warriors who ruled Karsis!—a slavery that would know no end, thanks to the immortality produced by the rays of force! Hopelessly, the girl turned away.

Anne's hopelessness was not shared by her alone. Humphrey Falworth and fifty fighting men of Thyllos, crouched beside the dome that surrounded Karsis, watched the retreat of the main body of the besiegers with bitter eyes. Not that Ahu, Captain Ross, were to blame for refusing to slaughter the captives within the city . . . but he, Humphrey, had hoped that Don's plan would succeed, that they would be able to snatch victory from defeat. Now, however, their last hope seemed to have failed. Gripping his rifle, Humphrey peered through the screen of kelp that concealed their globes. Behind the city's invisible wall

of force he could see the Karsisians cheering, waving their weapons in triumph. They had won! While the men of Thyllos. . . .

And then it happened! The segment of the dome behind which Humphrey and his followers crouched became misty, bulged! Suddenly a roaring torrent of water was spouting through an opening in the dome of force, sweeping Humphrey's little band through the aperture! Shielded by their globes of force, they shot forward, under the tremendous pressure of a mile down, tumbled like huge round electric bulbs into the streets of Karsis!

Within the space of one breath, the attackers had been sucked through the opening, then as if by magic it closed once more behind them. But in that instant, enough water had gushed into the shielded island to fill its broad highways to the height of a man's knees.

Humphrey, picking himself up, snapped off his energy pack, glanced about. The city was a scene of wild confusion—the groups of Atlantean slaves gazing about in mingled hope and terror, the ragged, fierce buccaneers plunging sword in hand toward these invaders who had entered through the momentary breach in the energy shield.

"Quick!" Humphrey cried. "Fire!" He threw his rifle to his shoulder, squeezed the trigger.

A roar of musketry echoed beneath the great dome, and a hail of bullets swept the advancing buccaneers. Again they charged, and again the rifles and sub machine-guns chattered their deadly choruses. Hopeless, such a struggle; it was impossible to get near enough to bring the lethal swords into play. Mowed down, torn by a storm of shot, the Karsisians broke, scattered.

Humphrey, reloading his rifle, shot a glance through the shimmering wall of the dome. Far out in the dark water, golden globes were assembling, moving swiftly toward the city.

"Ahu and the rest of the men!" he

shouted. "They're coming back! They've seen what's going on! We've got to reach the locks, open them!" Waving his band forward, he sprang toward the great bronze doors.

Others were there before him . . . the Atlantean slaves! As their harsh captors broke, fled, a wave of hope swept over the crowd of Atlanteans. Surging toward the locks, they overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers those buccaneers who remained at their posts, took over the controls. By the time Humphrey had reached them, Captain Ross and the advance units of the army of Thyllos were marching from the lock!

More, and still more, poured into the dome, sweeping the demoralized buccaneers into flight, cutting down all who offered resistance. The slaves, hastily armed, were pursuing their erstwhile masters, in quest of long-delayed retribution. Within an hour, Karsis, second of the Isles of the Blest, was once more in the hands of its rightful owners.

In the great cavern below the palace, Don Harper could hear the distant rattle or rifle fire. Feverish with impatience, he leaned against the big door, listening; the guards outside no longer sought to force an entrance; he could hear them conversing in worried tones, pacing back and forth indecisively.

Suddenly there were shouts in the passageway, a half-hearted clatter of arms that ceased abruptly. Then voices, familiar voices, were calling his name. With trembling fingers, he drew the massive bolt, opened the door.

"Don!" Anne cried. "You . . . you've done it! Saved Karsis . . . saved us all! Oh, Don, I was so afraid . . ."

Captain Ross, Humphrey, crowded forward to shake his hand. A moment later old Ahu joined them, his wrinkled face triumphant.

"United once more the twin cities of Atlantis!" he cried. "Poseidon be praised

that his free-born people are no longer slaves! And to you, Don Harper, the thanks of our race! I offered you anything within our power if you succeeded. We are anxious to prove that these are more than mere words!"

"Anything within the power of Atlantis?" Don cried. "Right! Listen, Ahu! A few miles from here, on the surface, a great fleet is assembling for the purpose of conquering my homeland, America! Lend me your aid in destroying it!"

For a full minute Ahu was silent, lost in thought. At length he spoke.

"For twice ten thousand years we have cut ourselves off from the world above," he said gravely, "for we feared that the fate of Karsis might be ours. Yet you have helped us free this Isle, helped us in overcoming our enemies. It is, then, only right that we help you overcome yours. "Humphrey" . . . he turned . . . "send a dozen men along the sea-bottom to Teneriffe to observe the movements of the Eurasian fleet and report to us when it leaves for America! You, Zoran," . . . he motioned to a tall Atlantean beside him . . . "bring all the craftsmen and scientists of Karsis here! We must start work at once!"

CHAPTER XIII UNDER THE WAVES

A WEEK later the Eurasian fleet left the Canaries. Its commander, Czensky, stood upon the bridge of his flagship, gazing exultantly at the long line of vessels—great battle-wagons, sleek cruisers, twenty big aircraft carriers, all surrounded by flotillas of destroyers and submarines. The greatest armada ever assembled, it steamed in close formation, heading west. Behind it, veiled in the smoke of a thousand funnels, lay the distant hills of Teneriffe; ahead, the grey wastes of the Atlantic stretching onward until they met the dim horizon. A thin cruel smile played over Czensky's lips as

he surveyed this tremendous array of sea-power. Turning, he motioned to an officer who stood nearby.

"Any news from the Pacific?"

The officer saluted, came to attention.

"A radiogram from our Asiatic forces, sir," he said. "They are holding the American fleet in the Pacific, avoiding direct engagements but keeping the enemy well occupied. The bombing of the Panama Canal has been in our favor, also. Our reports show that apart from a few obsolete coast defense guns, the Atlantic seaboard is at our mercy."

"There will be no mercy!" Czensky exclaimed. "One sharp lesson should bring them to their knees! Our bombers, our guns, will destroy New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington! —pound them into heaps of rubble. With their big cities wiped out, millions of civilians killed, they'll whine for peace!" He glanced at the big 16-inch guns below them. "It will make nice gunnery practice! We have only to lie off shore, systematically shell their cities! So simple . . ." He broke off, staring. "What's that?"

To the right, some distance from the line of ships, there was a swirling, boiling of the water—a strange submarine eruption of some sort, it seemed, sending forth vast waves! Suddenly Czensky gasped. Another giant whirlpool was stirring up the sea to their left!

Now a point of light was emerging from the waves, growing larger and larger with each instant. Two huge glowing domes were thrusting above the sea!

"What are they?" the officer muttered. "God! What . . ."

"Some . . . some trick!" Czensky said harshly. "Some new type of sub! Give the order to fire!"

A wild confusion had spread over the huge armada. Formations were broken up, ships were circling the glowing domes. As Czensky's orders were sent out, the flotilla stirred to swift grim activity. Tarpaulins

were stripped from guns, planes took to the air, huge muzzles swung toward the Isles. Then, with an ear-shattering roar, a storm of gun-fire broke.

Leaning over the rail of the bridge, the commander gave a narrow smile, waited for the smoke to clear away . . . and then he swore. The golden domes were intact!

"Again!" he shouted. "All ships!"

Once more the sea shook as guns of every size and type fired, point-blank. And still the domes of energy held!

Old Ahu, standing before the temple of Poseidon, shook a scornful head.

"They hope to penetrate a shield of force!" he muttered. "Madness! Let the first ship sink!"

Don nodded, flashed signals to the men on the ocean's floor. Here there were strange pieces of machinery, well shielded by energy domes, to which cables from the power plants of the Isles were connected. Upon receiving directions from Don, the Atlanteans moved their machines into position, adjusted levers. All at once the engines began to hum a deadly ominous drone.

Don peered through the energy screen, staring at the first of the great battleships. Slowly, as though being drawn down by an invisible string, it was beginning to settle lower in the water! The men on its decks, caught by the terrible force of gravity, could barely crawl. Deeper and deeper it sank, until the decks were awash. Suddenly the waves closed above the ship, bubbles of air dotted the surface, and the vessel was gone!

Consternation reigned throughout the great fleet. The firing had ceased, men were leaping into the sea, brushing aside frantic officers in an effort to launch the lifeboats. Battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, all were held fast by the inexorable gravitational drag, were slowly submerging. Destroyers alone were left unharmed, in order to pick up the survivors . . . for these light craft, Don knew, could constitute no menace to America.

IN LONG grey rows across the sparkling sea stretched the main portion of the Eurasian fleet . . . sinking lower with each second. Quietly, Don gave his directions to the men below the surface. The gravity generators, a mile down, increased their deadly hum. One by one, the helpless vessels went under . . . funnels, masts, then only the foaming waves, littered with wreckage, struggling men. Suddenly old Ahu nodded sombrely.

"It is done!" he said. "Let the others, the small ships, rescue those who survive! Atlantis has paid her debt to you, Don, and America no longer need fear for her liberty!"

Anne, standing beside them, shuddered. One minute, a great fleet, proud, arrogant,

in the full panoply of war, bent upon easy conquest . . . and now, only a scattering of little destroyers seeking to drag the struggling seamen from the waves!

"Gone!" she whispered. "A hundred ships . . ."

"And a million homes, ten million lives saved from destruction!" Don said. "These" . . . he glanced at the white-robed Atlanteans before the temple . . . "these men from the past have given the world a new future!"

Anne nodded, placed her head upon Don's shoulder. Silently they watched the wall of water rise outside the dome. One last look they had of the blue, cloud-flecked sky, then the Isles, in all their golden, brilliant beauty, sank beneath the waves.

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