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PLANET STORIES • Published quarterly by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc., 1658 Sumner St., Stamford, Conn. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1954, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Reentered as second-class matter September 30, 1952, at the Post Office at Stamford, Conn. Additional entry at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved. Price 25¢ per copy. One-year subscription: \$1.00; additional postage for Canada, 15¢; foreign countries, 30¢. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 1658 Sumner Street, Stamford, Conn.





THE LAND BEYOND THE FLAME

By EVELYN GOLDSTEIN

*Beyond the Flame Barrier lay knowledge of the
Originals. Long it stretched from horizon to
horizon, a thin stream of living light; a thin path
of peril for Allyn the Numan.*

CAUTIOUSLY Allyn the Numan moved to the edge of the outcropping rocks, black cloak swirling hip length about his lean seven foot figure. His close cropped silver hair was bare so that he had to shade his silver eyes against the shimmering waste ahead.

At his back, the jagged rocks rose and fused into wild hills. Before him stretched the Graysand Desert, cruel with heat and treacherous sands. And, shrill in the fiery air, came the squeals of the rat pack.

Giant carnivores, shaggy and foul-breathed, their wicked claws could tear a man fleshless. Fetid poison lay in the bite from their sharp yellow teeth, and those teeth were bared now in raging anticipation.

They were on the kill! Hunger in their voices and lust. And their gray bodies, a pollution on the landscape, surged after a desperate prey.

What did they pursue? Allyn strained to see.

An Olman!

The sun blazed on the sweat of the mighty chest heaving with exertion. Like all the males of that savage group he was naked, save for a loincloth, and his bronzed corded arms swung in tempo with his pumping feet. With each step, he left a bloody trail which spurred the rats to further frenzy.

The blood loss told! He fell! But, even as he went down, he spun on his back, teeth bared, and the burning wind carried his fierce yell of defiance.

The rodents went mad with triumph. They leapt for the kill.

Without thinking Allyn brought his flame gun from its holster. Lances of bright death seared the gray ranks. Squeals died. The rats swerved from the fallen man, scattered. Retreat was a panic stampede. And soon their shrilling faded in the distance.

The prone man twisted to hands and knees to face his rescuer. Hope was bright in his eyes. But then he saw Allyn. Elation became horror.

"*Numan!*" It was a despairing cry. Then he fainted.

Allyn hastened across the gray sands. Hefting the unconscious man to his shoulders he staggered toward the rocks. In a crevice, sheltered by a natural ledge, he deposited his burden, and set about examining the gashed thigh. The wound was more painful than serious, and he ripped a strip from the lining of his cloak to bind it tight and stop the blood flow. He had barely finished when the young savage stirred.

Allyn tensed, watchful, flame gun ready.

He saw the dark eyes open, not sleepy, but with full awareness, as with a wild beast. The well conditioned muscles tightened.

"Don't move!" Allyn aimed the gun.

The prone man froze. He well knew the power of the weapon. The taut muscles did not relax, but remained arrested, waiting for one unguarded instant to spring at the other's throat.

"Don't be alarmed," the Numan reassured, "I won't hurt you."

No sign that the other heard. But in the rigid muscles, distrust was plain.

"Try getting up—but slowly. You've lost a lot of blood."

The Olman rose with easy grace. As he did he noticed the dressing on his leg, and wild hate flamed his face.

"Why didn't you let the rats finish me! It would have been cleaner than death in your experimental camps."

"I didn't save you for the camps. You're free to return to your kinsmen."

The youth stared. "I never heard of mercy from a Numan," he said suspiciously. "A twenty-year-old like me would last a long time in the hands of the vivisectionists of your people."

Pain furrowed Allyn's lean face. "They are no longer my people," he whispered, "I'm an outcast."

His beautiful silver head drooped wearily. He had rebelled, flaunted the law of the logicians, even done the supreme crime. . . .

"I have struck a logician," he said, filled with the horror of his own deed. "The Gyro-Gard are hunting me." Apprehensively the two glanced skyward. But there was no dreaded black craft to be seen.

The Olman was curious. "Why did you strike your Elder?"

"For my sister, Aleena."

The Olman spat a furious epithet. "No Numan has a sister! Do you think I'm a fool! It is told around our council fires that your women die at the birth of their first child. You cannot have a sister! You are lying!"

Allyn's head lifted proudly. "A Numan does not lie! Aleena and I are twin—a phenomenon among my people. It was decreed that we would mate to pass multiple births on through our progeny. But, when the day of union was set, I refused, know-

ing that within the year of conception Aleena would die."

His head bowed recalling his own heresy. "Metas, our Chief Logician himself came to syko me. He told me I was a throwback, capable of emotions like an Olman." He shuddered with distaste that brought an angry growl from the Olman's throat. Allyn did not notice. "Metas decreed hypno for me."

"Hypno?"

"Control of the mind, so I would have taken Aleena through no volition of my own."

The Olman leaned forward eagerly: "Tell us how to storm the Nyloplast dome that surrounds your city. My kinfolk and I will crush your Logicians and get back your Aleena."

Allyn looked at him in horror: "Do you think even if I could I would betray Numan into the hands of beasts."

The young savage drew back. His face became hard in bitter lines, and for a moment his hand flashed to his belt, but his knife was rusting in the vitals of a rat.

"Beast?" his mouth twisted in hatred. "I—Keeven—am nothing but a beast to you."

Allyn was bewildered by the other's emotion. The sliver brows drew together in perplexity. Numan were dispassionate, and the Olman's torrent of feeling was totally new to him.

Whatever he might have said was never uttered. Out of the sky came the drone of a motor.

"Gyro-gard!" Keeven exclaimed. He crouched like a cat-thing moving fluid under the shelter of the rock ledge. Heart hammering, Allyn leapt down beside him. Dry-throated, cramped, they heard the motor come closer, then fade away in the distance.

"That was close," Allyn said as they came out of concealment. "The closest they've come yet. They're widening the area of search." He turned to the other. "Leave me quickly. I can only bring you disaster."

It was Keeven's turn to be perplexed. "I confess I don't understand you. You are a Numan, but you are different. What do they call you, Numan?"

"Allyn."

"Allyn, you saved my life. For your good

turn my people will shelter you now. When the chase dies down you can leave us."

Live with the beast-men? Allyn started to decline but Keeven pointed out, "If you travel without me you will be hunted both by your people and mine."

There was logic in his words. "All right," he agreed, "I will go to your people."

THEIR path lay upward into the somber outjutting hills. Keeven was a tireless traveler, but Allyn, with the endurance of the Numan, followed easily. The day paled, and shadows lengthened on the rocks when they came through a narrow path into the cup of hills where grass grew, and the land was fertile for crops.

Several times Keeven stopped, and stood, as though listening. Once Allyn said impatiently: "I don't hear anything."

"That's just it." Keeven's face was gray. "We don't hear anything." The words gave voice to his fear. He began to run. And Allyn ran behind him. Scrambling over boulders. Leaping over fallen stumps. Down they faced to the site of the village.

No sound greeted them. And there was no hint of movement.

At the first house Keeven braked to a halt. Doors were torn away from the wood shelters, as were the tanned skins over the mouths of the caves. All about, the grass was blackened with fire, and no crops would sprout this year in the deep burned earth.

In anguish Keeven rushed from door to door, calling the names of people who had lived there. His voice keened higher with despair at each empty dwelling. Slowly Allyn followed. His own throat was tightening at the other's shock and grief.

There were half prepared meals. In one hut a crude cradle swayed with the wind of their passing—empty. . . .

The breeze flapped the skins, and a rude door creaked where it hung bound with rawhide to the lintel.

Slowly the futility of calling struck Keeven. He turned. His hard face was drawn and bloodless.

"Gone," he whispered. "Nothing. No one left."

As though in mockery, a call sounded from the hills. They wheeled in shock, eyes

to the rocks, straining against the dusk. A figure scrambled toward the blackened clearing.

It was a girl!

She ran to Keeven. Threw herself in his arms. "Keeven! Oh, Keeven, I thought I was the only one left!"

"Marva!" Into her hair he stammered, "H—How did you escape."

"I was in the hills for water when the gyros came." Her voice was broken with wild sobs, "I heard the commotion and saw the flames. I hid all this time. Even when the gyros went away. I hid till—till I heard you calling."

Allyn watched how Keeven patted the soft bare shoulders, and stroked the tumble of silken hair that was so black it seemed blue. A stirring of strange passion went through him. His heart stumbled and raced. He had the warped mad urge to tear the girl away from the youth, to study her face, twine that hair round and round his lean long fingers. He stood like a rock, holding back churning emotions.

Metas was right! Over and over the bitter thought claimed him. Metas had known! Beneath the generations of logic that had bred him, lay a core of savagery. Years it had slumbered. Now it claimed him.

He must have made a sound. The girl whirled. Her eyes were great and dark, her skin rose over dusk. But now the rose-color fled, so that her wide gaze seemed black with terror and loathing.

UNDER that gaze Allyn felt whipped. For the first time he felt shame—shame for himself and for all Numen. Shame that they had caged these people, torn them, bled and killed them. All in the name of science! Experiment was survival! The Logicians had made it holy. The mirror of the girl's eyes told him what Numen were. Monsters!

She shivered. Drew back against Keeven. Her slim body, bare armed, bare legged in the brief skin garment, trembled against the young savage.

"Don't be afraid," he soothed. "This Numan is a friend." Briefly he recounted his experiences since leaving camp, till the terror left her face. Then he said to Allyn: "This is my sister, Marva."

"Keeven," she tugged at his hand. "We must get away from here. The Gyro-Gard have been circling all day."

The Olman's laugh was mirthless: "Go? Where?"

"Come with me," Allyn said impulsively. "I am going to the Forbidden Area. I am going to cross the Flame Barrier."

Even the wind stopped at the fearsome words. They shrank back from him.

"No one can approach the Flame!" Keeven cried. "It is death; death more terrible than by your vivisectionists."

Marva whispered: "It is taboo. It changes you into some monstrous thing!"

Allyn's straight mouth set. "Nevertheless I must go. It is told that beyond the Flame lies the knowledge of the Originals. Perhaps it will teach how to save our women from death in childbirth. It's my only hope of saving Aleena."

Thoughtfully Keeven regarded him. "It has been said around our council fires that there will be found a weapon to shatter the Nyloplast dome. Perhaps," he mused, "I will find it in time to save my kinsmen from the knives."

He smote a mighty fist into his palm: "We will go with you, Numan. For hope may lie ahead but—" his glance swept around, "only death lies here."

With a keen bladed knife he secured from one of the caves Keeven mapped in the mud the trail they must take. At night Allyn would lead, for night and day were one to Numen eyes.

They traveled close upon each other's heels, holding their leader's cloak for guidance in the darkness. By dawn they reached a small cave. There they rested, well hidden from patrolling gyros. When they woke at noon they were fresh for the next step of their journey.

Descending the rocky slope they came to the thin line of trees that marked the beginning of the forest. This time Keeven took the lead with Marva close beside. Allyn, at the rear, watched the easy grace with which the girl moved. Her slender brown feet in hide moccasins touched lightly on the path, and her body was erect and lithe.

How different she was from the unobtrusive women he knew. Raised in humility

to men, kept in secluded quarters, they were trained only for the breeding day that would be the culmination of their lives. Aleena alone stood apart from other Nuwomen. Because theirs had been a sacred charge from birth they had been permitted to work together in the hydroponics labs.

"Aleena." He thought of her now, gentle, with luminous eyes fringed in long silver lashes. The sheen of her silver hair that hung waist length was dancing moonlight. Loneliness lay like hunger in him. Withdrawn from Aleena, hunted by his people, what madness lay in his desire to feed himself to a flaming radiance forbidden by all. Surely he should go back, return to his rightful destiny. Leave these unheard of companions—turn back on emotion that was bitter, hurting. . . .

Marva glanced over her shoulder at him. Her smile was ~~sweet~~ encouragement. Her lips were red and full. Desire was as red as that mouth! And Allyn knew he would never turn back!

They moved into the deeper woods, where the heavy lacing trees made a green roofing to shelter them from seekers of the sky. Keeven caught an animal emerging from its burrow. The brother and sister worked in quiet union skinning and cooking dinner. They were skilled in making fires without smoke.

Used to dehydrated foods, Allyn was amazed at the savoriness of this meat. He watched his companions lick the juices from their fingers, and did likewise. Then wiping his hands on leaves, he sank back with a sigh on the fragrant pine nettled ground, while they destroyed all evidence of their repast.

Nothing untoward happened that first day of their journey. At dusk of the second they camped at the bank of a rushing brook. Keeven waded downstream to spear fish. Marva sat on the bank bathing her feet in the fresh water while Allyn stood close by. She rose, and stepped on a sharp rock. With a small cry her hands flailed. She almost fell backwards into the stream. Allyn's arms shot out. He pulled her so that she fell against him.

He did not move. Nor she. She was warm, her body like sunheat. There was a fresh pine fragrance from her hair. She

came not as high as his shoulder. They were short, these Olmen, and she was not quite six foot. Her mouth was beneath his, full and red and hot as blood.

He kissed that mouth, tart, delicious as wild strawberries. And her arms went around him in savage response.

This was mad! Mad beyond any madness! This was passion beyond legends, forgotten by Numan, tabooed by Olman.

Close to his face, hers yearned. Still she drew away slowly, out of the circle of his arms. "This is forbidden!" she whispered. She touched her sweet curved breast, "It hammers like the warning drum of the village: 'Numan and Olman cannot mate. Numen are inhuman. Mating is impossible.'" Her voice broke.

Under the agony in her eyes his hands fell to his sides like stones. He did not stop her when she ran from him into the grove of trees. He stood there, shaken by desire and by the ingrained lesson of years—Olmen are beasts. A man does not mate with the beast!

THEY were a quiet trio that took up the journey later. If Keeven noticed he was always center man, he made no sign.

The woods were dense and Keeven's mighty arm hacked often with the sharp blade to clear their path. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the woods began to change.

"We approach the Forbidden Area," Keeven's words were tense.

It was very silent. Insect and bird life seemed to have tabooed these habits. The landscape became twisted and strange. Seemingly normal trees sprouted bizarre growths. Giant bushes of a red mold color grew side by side with stunted trees that barely reached their knees, yet seemed fantastically aged.

The trio moved closer together, ears strained for normal sounds that did not exist there. The suffering ground was bitter, and erupted into convulsions, as though ejecting the monstrosities it had nurtured. Their feet ached from the humped and hollowed path. There was no whisper of wind. Yet Allyn shivered. A cold, ancestral fear laid lean fingers on his dry throat.

Light made their faces wan when they came to the edge of the deformed woods.

Ahead was the narrow stretch of barren waste that led to the rotted wood paling. The paling was only token warning now, encircling the shunned and dreaded Forbidden Area.

Movement caught their eyes. Instinctively, they fell to earth, hardly breathing, watching.

Into their line of vision paced a Gard, flame gun in hand. Even as they watched another Gard paced in from the opposite direction.

Allyn's whisper was sick: "They've thrown a cordon around the Forbidden Area!"

Keeven caught a gleam on dark metal. "There's a gyro—to the left. Can you fly one?"

Allyn nodded. "It's basic training for all Numen. But what good does it do us? There are the Gards."

The Olman's smile was grim. "You have a gun," he reminded.

Allyn stared. Use his gun? On Numen? Flame his own people!

The other sensed his thoughts. "Give it to me then. I'll make good use of it."

There *had* to be another way. His restless eyes sought the clearing.

In that instant Keeven sprang. Muscular arms caught the surprised Numan, crushing him to the ground. Swift fingers plucked the gun from his side. Then Keeven was off, crouching, weapon leveled straight for Allyn's breast.

There was a shout from the Gard. The three had been discovered. Flames of warning seared the shrubbery about them and the Gard made a rush toward their concealment.

Cursing, Keeven spun, flame gun ready. Allyn lunged at him, and his lance of fire struck harmlessly into the ground ahead. The gun rolled from his grasp. He surged up, flung the Numan away, leapt for the weapon.

"STAND!" The command froze Allyn. They were surrounded.

Keeven moved. With swift animal reflexes he caught the nearest Gard in the belly with his dagger. Another rushed in. Keeven smashed his jaw with a mighty fist that felled the Gard instantly. By brute strength alone he might have fought to

freedom. But the numbers against him were too great. They beat him to the ground, using guns like clubs. Finally he lay still, blood from a dozen wounds irrigating the barren ground.

Marva flung herself beside him. Over the prone man her dark glance caught Allyn's. Her eyes were wet with tears. But accusation blazed from them. Betrayer! Betrayer! As loud as though she had shrieked it. Yet, no sound passed her bloodless lips.

"Marva." He took a step forward.

A scarlet cloaked Senior Gard moved between. "Come quietly. Metas wants you unharmed for hypno."

Two gards moved to either side and grasped Allyn's arms. As in a nightmare he let them take him.

They marched down the stretch of waste land to the waiting gyro. One of the Gard clambered into the cabin, slid into the pilot seat and adjusted dials on the instrument panel. As Allyn and the Senior came aboard the motor hummed, warming.

Keeven was flung unconscious through the door. They had put irons around his wrists and throat connected by chains that rattled as he rolled against the wall. Marva, similarly shackled, was thrown unceremoniously into the cabin. She rose, panther-lithe, and came to her brother's side. With fettered hands she tried to staunch the bleeding on his face, and softly cried his name.

The Senior turned in annoyance. "Stop your noise!"

Oblivious to all but her brother's need of aid she sobbed, "Keeven! Keeven, open your eyes!"

Grimly the Senior advanced upon her, gun-butt raised. He brought it smashing down.

Allyn sprang. He caught the Senior's lowering hand, and twisted it sharply back. The gun dropped while a scream of pain filled the cabin. Allyn stopped the cry with a chopping fist that felled the Gard.

The pilot came out of his seat to his superior's assistance. Allyn caught the movement through the corner of his eyes. Whirling he met the charge, and they thrashed to the floor.

The pilot was wiry and gripped Allyn's throat, cutting off air. He pounded the face above him with clenched fists but, inexor-

ably, the fingers tightened. Allyn's sight dimmed, and sound became distorted. The pilot felt him weaken, and shifted for a harder grip. In that respite Allyn drew his knees up, lashed out with his feet, sending the other floundering back. Before he could recover Allyn leaped forward, bringing his hands down in a rabbit punch that knocked the man unconscious.

Groggily Allyn rose. His wavering sights caught the red flutter of a cloak in the open door. He charged, head lowered, across the intervening space, caught an incoming Gard flush in mid-section, knocking him into his companions. Catching himself against the door, Allyn pulled back, snapping it shut.

Breathing hard he made unsteadily for the pilot seat. His long fingers moved over the dials of the control panel, and the craft rose smoothly into the air. He looked out the window, and saw the recovered Gard raising weapons against them. A spurt of flame missed the motor. The second was true to its target, but short. They were too high to be reached now. He saw the scarlet clad figures make for their gyros and he jabbed the dials for maximum speed and height.

"Bring the Senior's keys from his pouch," he told Marva over his shoulder, "and take their guns."

He heard her chains rattle as she moved, and his lips set.

IN A MOMENT she was beside him with the keys and guns. He set the dials to automatic, laid the guns on the co-pilot seat and turned to free her.

The irons fell from her wrists and throat. Where they had been the silken skin was angry red. Hard eyed he took the chains and snapped them on the unconscious Senior. He similarly released Keeven, who was beginning to stir, and fettered the pilot with his irons.

Back to the controls he went. From the view-plate he saw the Forbidden Area black and pock-marked below. Ahead, at the horizon, sky and earth pulsed gold-orange. **The Barrier!**

Nothing living had been so close before. **Long** it stretched, from horizon to horizon, **a thin stream** of living light.

They winged closer. Allyn felt his hands

grow clammy on the controls. **Inherent** terror sat leaden in his stomach. The whispered warnings of the elders, thought lost in childhood, came to weird life in his mind, making him want to turn, even back to the knives of the medics rather than face the strange glow ahead.

He half-turned the ship, and saw, like birds in the distance, the formations of Gyro-Gard.

"Allyn," Marva whispered, her voice a plea.

He turned his head. Her dark eyes begged him, and he moved the controls—straight ahead—to the light. . . .

His communication board glowed. Quickly he answered to see the black and scarlet robed Junior Gard on the visiscreen.

"Surrender!" was the cold command, "or you die in the flame!"

He glanced to the rear view-plate. Their pursuers hung in space, not to follow, but to bar retreat. There was no turning. . . .

He smiled grimly and snapped the switch to cut contact.

They were close now, close enough for Allyn to see the truth. There were no fires, as legend told. Perhaps once there had been a holocaust that pulsed toward the sky and ate of the earth, but now, in the canal, was only the residue, a radiation that reflected upward like heat shimmers.

He felt Marva's hand tremble on his, like a frightened butterfly. He caught that hand, pressed it convulsively to his lips, and then they were directly over the radiance.

The gyro bucked, and plunged. As a moth it fell toward the light. The shock flung them forward. He sensed Marva's fall, but had no time for thought, other than an involuntary reaching for the controls. He strained to right the possessed ship, working against the siren radiations that pulled it down.

Brightness was about them. Skins shown golden, eyes were dazzled.

The gyro resisted Allyn's manual commands. Fingers numb with the pull, he fought. Slowly the nose eased up, giving them a precious moment's gain. The gyro shuddered—a doomed thing. He coaxed it further, but again the nose dipped. And

again he brought it up! And then—abruptly—the pull was gone. The brilliance faded.

They were past the Barrier!

Astounded they looked at one another. Bereft of speech or comprehension they could only stare. Save for the swiftly fading light they were as before—unchanged, unscathed. And behind them the Barrier pulsed, with no sign of transgression.

"Am I different?" Marva whispered.

He shook his head mutely.

A hoarse exclamation turned them to the others in the cabin. They too were fully conscious and aware of the unbelievable thing that had happened. They too stared at themselves and at each other, and then they rose, the Numen unsteady in their chains, and scrambled for a look at what lay below.

The land was devastated. A twin to the Forbidden Area! Allyn thought he must be mad. Surely they had gone through! And there at the boundary mark was a rotted fence to mark off the Area before the waste land became mutilated forestry.

Everything was the same! Everything—but the Gyro-Gard were not there. . . .

THEN they saw the forest. It was not the same, not the one they had left. It was smaller and terminated in the muddy bank of a twisted river. On the opposite bank were scattered signs of habitation. But such habitation! The style was squat, the material was red oblong blocks set in rows upon each other.

There were grain fields. People working in the fields looked up at their passing, and evidenced excitement. People working in the open! Unsheltered by hills or caves!

Habitations became more frequent, and soon they flew over the square of a town. A town unprotected by a Nyloplast screen!

Allyn brought the aircraft lower. People were congregating in the square, gesticulating.

Allyn felt a stirring in his mind and, as plain as spoken words: "Come down. Land."

Hesitantly his fingers touched the controls. The thoughts in his brain were gentle, encouraging. He glanced at Marva. Her eyes were on the scene below, dreamy, lips

half parted. Behind her Keeven watched. There was eagerness in his face.

"It's safe," he said to Allyn's questioning glance. "I sense it. They are friendly."

Allyn felt it too. There was reassurance in the sight of people gathering, without fear, in an unprotected area. He brought the gyro to a landing in the cleared space of the square.

Nevertheless he took gun in hand when he came to the door. Cautiously he opened it.

And saw a sight beyond believing.

These people were an impossibility! Dark haired people with silver eyes—silver eyed people with vari-colored hair! A cross-breeding of Olmen and Numen! It was absurd! Inconceivable!

A path opened in the throng for a man who was obviously the leader. Like the others, he was an impossibility. He was tallest of all, with silver eyes and his hair was long and incredibly red. There was a red growth of hair on his chin where no Numan could grow hair.

"Welcome, strangers from beyond the Radiation. Welcome to York. I am Jon, Elder of York."

A thrill pierced Allyn. He stared at the smiling man, the smiling people behind him. No word had been spoken. Yet the words had been clear in his brain.

Telepaths!

Marva gasped as she realized this too. "Why they aren't even surprised to see us."

Jon's answer was benign. "We know why you are here. You have not closed your minds to us. We knew that someday the Radiation would be conquered. It was predicted that generations would become acclimated to radioactivity and eventually find it no different to their systems than air or water.

The thought was startling. But it gave the voyagers new hope. Perhaps they would here find a weapon to shatter the dome! Perhaps find new life for Nuwomen! Eagerly they came out of the gyro.

That was their error. The Senior-Gard hurled to the door, catching the handle with his chained hands. Keeven turned. Too late! The door slammed shut. The Olman struck at the door with fists like battering rams. To no avail. The gyro

hummed, lifted straight up, and went winging back toward the Barrier.

"They're going for reinforcements!" Agitated Allyn turned to Jon. "They'll return and attack your town."

The Elder's eyes twinkled. "There is no fear in York. Come to my dwelling. You will eat, and perhaps we can help you find what you seek."

He led the way to one of the strange red colored houses. Inside were fabric hangings over the windows, and fabric covering the floor and furniture. Allyn found it colorful, but too barbaric for his own austere taste. The Elder's mate, a silver haired woman with friendly blue eyes came to serve them.

Over the dishes of unfamiliar, but steamingly good food, Jon told of the ancient records preserved in the archives. The records told of the Originals of the Earth, a mighty but warlike race. Their terrible weapons had laced the earth with Bands of Radiation whose rays had changed the genes of mankind. The Numen were evolved from this. But many Originals had gone underground, in lead-impregnated shelters, staying there for countless generations. These were the Olmen, untouched by the first and strongest radiations.

In York, when the Olmen came again to the surface, they found the Numen decreasing as their women died in childbirth. At first there was antagonism between the groups but, on several occasions younger and more lustful Numen seized Olwomen, and from that mating it was discovered that only in cross-breeding was there survival.

"Our medics," the Elder explained, "have found that pure breeding of Numen created a negative factor in the blood of the unborn child. These negative antibodies erupted into the positive bloodstream of the mother, causing a jaundiced condition that affects the brain, leading to death in labor. Yet that same X-condition goes through transformation in the baby's system after the birth eruption so that, by the age of one year, the child is of positive blood. The weird X-factor holds true only in pure Numan breeding, seldom in cross-breeding."

But Keeven said moodily, "The Numen

will not believe this. They will come with their gyros to destroy York for hersey." He leaned across the table. "But there are weapons," he told the Elder. "Our legends say there are weapons to blast the Nyloplast dome. If we are the victors, Numen will have to listen."

Jon shook his head. "There are no weapons. They were destroyed by the Originals when they saw how they had destroyed themselves. But there is a way." He looked at Allyn. "It is a hard way—and dangerous, but perhaps you can do it."

And he told them.

HOURS later the three went back alone. Back to the lip of the radiant crater. In quietness they waited.

Toward dawn, like dark glistening moths out of the radiance, came a squadron of gyros. The leading craft spotted the figures below, dipped and came down. The others hovered in space, watchful. When the lead gyro landed, its door swung open and the red-cloaked Senior sprang out, flame gun ready.

The trio raised their arms in surrender. In a moment they were disarmed and hustled into the gyro. Their craft took the lead, rising high so the pull above the Barrier would be lessened. Even so it took master maneuvering to keep the ship steady till they were through.

Within the hour the Nyloplast dome came shimmering into view. At a signal over the communication system, the top-right section leading to the hangars slid open, and the gyros droned through. When they landed, the captives were prodded out of the hangar into the dazzling morning light reflected more brilliantly from the Nyloplast screen.

The hygienic whiteness of the city struck Allyn forcefully, as though he viewed it for the first time. They were led to a large, gleaming white building, into a high vaulted audience room. Straight ahead was the dais of marbleized seats where the Logicians met in Council. They sat there now, in full knowledge that Allyn would be in judgment before them. Metas, in skull cap and robes of judgment, sat in the center, regarding them with cold eyes.

Allyn lifted a hand in salute of respect.

The Council was silent.

Drawing a deep breath Allyn glanced once at Keeven and Marva who were flanked by watchful Gards. "I bring hope for our people," he began and quickly recounted his adventures past the Barrier.

The council listened dispassionately. With sinking heart Allyn realized his words were in vain. Numan belief in the animalism of Olman was too deep set. Mate with the beast! He saw the distaste in their expressions.

"You go beyond the bounds of taste," Metas warned. "There is only one reason you are still alive, Allyn. You must consent to the mating as decreed."

"I cannot. It would mean Aleena's death. Besides, I love Marva of the Olmen."

Horror rippled through the Council.

"Take them to the Syko Room!" Metas thundered. "I will administer Hypno myself."

They were dragged to a side door, down a narrow corridor, into the thick doored syko room. Allyn knew it well—those white walls cunningly concealing lights and mirrors to stun the mind. The padded tables with bands of iron. He was pushed to a table, strapped down, flat on his back. Marva started toward him, but was flung back by a Gard and forced to stand against the wall beside her brother, while their captors stood with flame guns ready.

The stony faced Chief Logician adjusted switches. Lights dimmed. Mirrors of various colors danced light spots before Allyn's eyes. He felt his senses swimming. He clenched his fists. Sweat stood out on his brow.

Metas leaned over him, soft voiced, soothing. Allyn's mind strained against the lure. There was something he had to remember—a lesson, important as life itself.

Oh, how the lights spun! If he could sleep! Sleep! The voice lured—sleep!

"Allyn! RESIST!" Marva's voice! Then a Gard's fist silenced her.

RESIST! The key. Jon's words: "They can't hypno you unless you already believe. Don't believe! Resist!"

Then he fought back. Against the soothing sibilance. Against the dancing lights. He turned his thoughts inward, to things of his childhood, to sights he had seen;

gray rats chasing a man; an empty cradle in an empty hut; Marva sweet in his arms, perfume in her hair. . . . And his teeth were clenched over his lips. The pain was cruel, relentless. His nails in his palms. Pain and memory to fight sleep!

And he won!

The full white light flashed on. The siren voices died. The promising lights were defeated. He blinked his tired, weighted eyes. And Metas stood there.

"You have not succumbed," the Logician whispered. His face was haggard with strain. "No one has ever resisted hypno."

He turned to one of the Gard: "Bring Aleena." Bitter-eyed he said to Allyn, "Perhaps your consent will come quicker if the medics work on your sister."

"Metas," Allyn strained against his bonds, "if you harm her I will bring the Dome crashing about us."

The Logician leaned forward: "Ah, then you found the weapons of the Originals."

"No, only the power of the York folk . . ."

"If they are so mighty, why did they not cross the Barrier?"

"They need a vessel." Allyn tried to explain: "It is like transmitting and receiving waves. They will transmit, and through me you will receive super-sonics that will shatter the dome."

Metas laughed.

IT WAS hopeless. Talk would never convince him. The door opened. They brought Aleena in. She started at sight of her brother, and her face went pale. But they pushed her roughly to a table and began to strap her down.

Allyn shut his eyes against the room, shut his ears against sound. He flung open his mind, cancelling all imagery, so the York folk could come through.

"Jon! Jon of York!" Out against the miles he hurled his voiceless plea. Over and over he called.

Gentle tendrils touched his brain. At first it was like a whisper. There were no words. But the whisper grew—grew to crescendo. It pulled at every nerve in his body, used every particle that composed him. He shook with vibrations. His body was a stringed weapon out of which poured

waves pitched too high for hearing. He was blind and deaf and mute—an empty vessel from which poured destruction.

He did not know how long he was gone out of the shell of his body. Slowly, gradually, his trembling stilled. Identity settled back inside him. Sound came back. Over and over, the soft sobbing of his name: "Allyn! Allyn!"

Hazily the room came to focus. Vague outlines of a face above him. Featureless, at first. Dark hair, all atumble, dark eyes aglisten with tears. His cheek was wet with her tears.

"Marva," his voice came hardly out of him.

Behind her the Logicians were grouped, white and sick of face.

"You cracked the dome!" Metas' words were hoarse ill past believing.

Cracked the dome!

He could have shouted. Had he been free he might have danced. He sent a voiceless thanks to the Redbearded Elder. "We've done it."

His eyes shone. "Now do you believe," he cried aloud, "now will you admit that York folk who could achieve such power could achieve survival. Give us a year," he asked, "a year of grace—a chance to prove

they were right."

The room was still.

The answer he asked was past all teachings, past ingrained traditions. Would they consent?

The whispered amongst themselves. Allyn's eyes went to Marva, to Keeven, and to the newly freed Aleena. Their glances on him were wide, troubled and hopeful, anxious and eager. They barely breathed as Metas came away from his group.

"Allyn," he said, "you are a throw-back so you would be willing to mate with an Olman. But who amongst us would do likewise?"

"I will!"

The answer, proud and unhesitating, came from Aleena. And her eyes were on Keeven. "I do not find Olmen as bestial as our tales have warned."

Keeven's breath caught. He leaned forward drinking sight of the filmy clad beauty as a wanderer at sight of his home.

Metas made a sign and Allyn smiled.

They had won. He could sleep now, and be well content. For, within the year, a twofold experiment would come to fruition. And a new era of brotherhood would come to earth, bringing the furthest star within the reach of Man.