



Weird Tales

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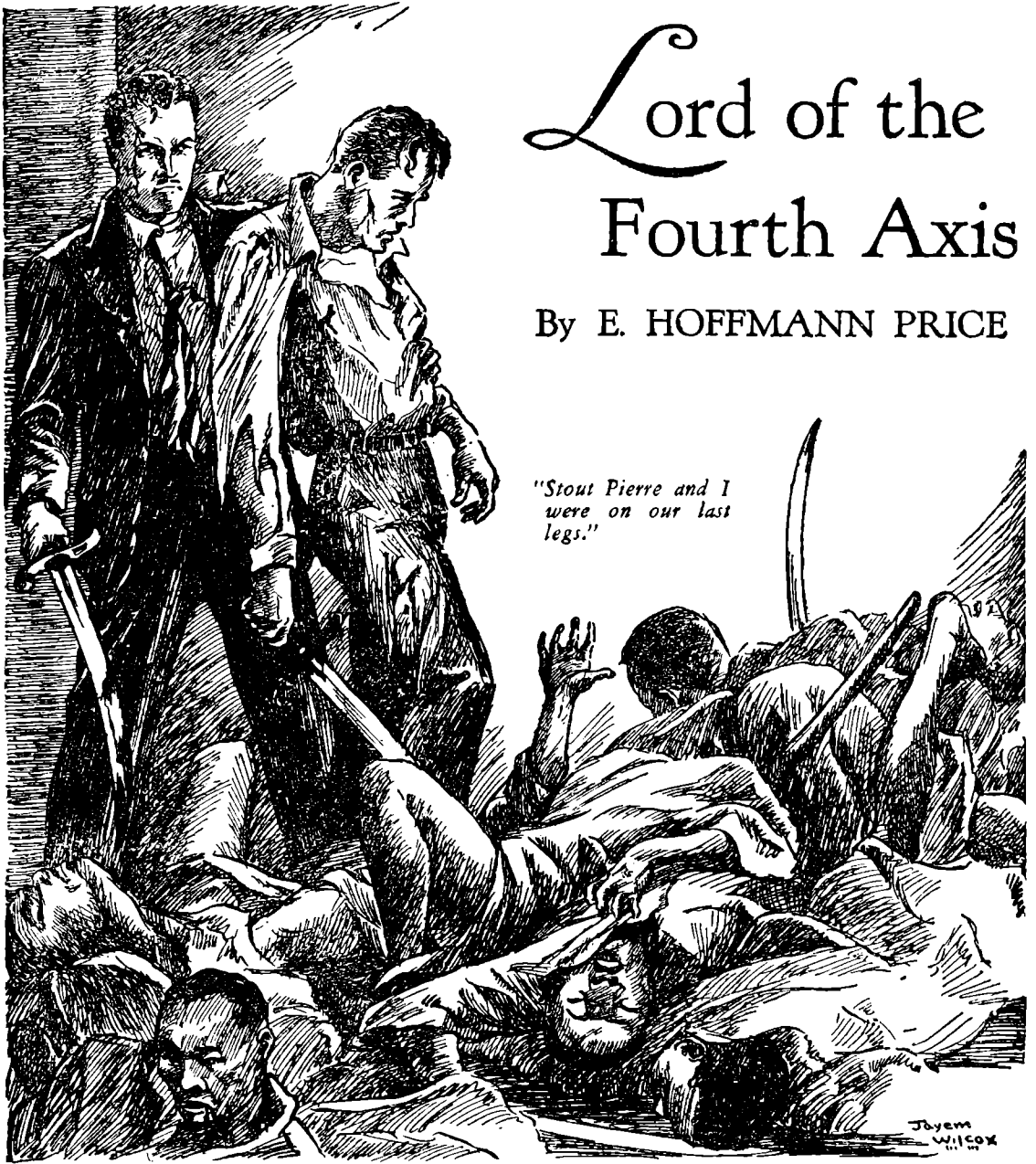
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Lord of the Fourth Axis

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE



*"Stout Pierre and I
were on our last
legs."*

An utterly strange thrill-tale of a malefic conqueror from the Fourth Dimension, whose plans for world conquest make Genghis Khan and his Mongol horde look like amateurs

... till shapes of men that were
Point, weeping, at tremendous dooms to be,
When pillared pomps and thrones supreme shall
stir,
Unstable as the foam dreams of the sea."
—George Sterling.

"MY FRIEND," began Pierre d'Artois, "what would you say if I told you that one man could have halted the terrific march of

Genghis Khan's Golden Horde, or stopped the relentless sweep of Tamerlane's power?"

"I would say," I replied, certain that d'Artois was proposing one of those paradoxes with which he loves to garnish his speech, "that Jake had mixed too many Sazerac cocktails."

"And you would be wrong!" retorted d'Artois. He struck light to a *Bastos*, several hundred of which villainous cigarettes he had left of the supply that he had brought with him from France. "But I grant that it could not have been accomplished unless that one man had acted in time."

"Certainly," I conceded. "If either of those conquerors had been assassinated at an early age."

"Perhaps," suggested Pierre, "if that excellent servitor of yours would mix you another one of those cocktails, your stunted imagination might be equal to what I am about to explain. Listen then!

"There is another conqueror stirring in Central Asia. And he will make what you call the monkey of Genghis Khan, and lame Timur who limped his way over half the earth, destroying and building as pleased his fancy. And I, Pierre d'Artois, am here to stop him!"

D'Artois, who had arrived in New Orleans not more than an hour before, is the most sane and practical man I have ever known. I had been delighted when I received his unexpected telegram, announcing his proposed arrival on the Crescent Limited, Wednesday; and surprised when he arrived a full day ahead of time, having travelled via air from New York. He had smiled cryptically at my demands for explanation of his haste, and had changed the subject; but now, apparently, he was in his dramatic way startling me into full attention.

I could see from his grim expression as he pronounced the last words of his speech, that he was in earnest, and that the Sazerac cocktails which Jake, my negro handyman, had mixed, were in no wise responsible for Pierre's staggering remarks. Nevertheless, I regarded him with a stare that finally made him smile at my bewilderment.

"But no! It is not that I propose to stop an army, single-handed," he continued. "It is rather that I am here to thwart a psychic menace which is to pave the way for a conqueror who will be more devastating than Genghis Khan, whom they rightly called the Mighty Manslayer. I said psychic; yet perhaps I should have said cosmic, or possibly ultra-cosmic. But decide the word for yourself."

He exhaled a cloud of acrid smoke from his vile cigarette. Pierre would have none of our widely advertised American brands. And then he resumed what already promised to be as strange a discourse as that which had preceded his fight against the Lord Peacock in Bayonne, that devil-haunted, charming city in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

"History has commented on the super-human genius of Genghis Khan. History offers no comparable figure. Alexander the Great—Iskander Dhoulkarnayn, they call him even to this day in the Asiatic lands he invaded—was what in your idiom is termed a boy wonder, a flash in the pan, which soon burned out, and left an empire that disintegrated before the dead of his last battle. And our Napoléon, that Corsican made his fame by wasting the manhood of France, and to what end? Consider, he abandoned an army in Egypt, lost a larger army in Russia, rode to the fiasco of Waterloo, and died in exile, leaving his infant son heir to a fictitious crown. That sweeps the field clear, except for Genghis Khan, and his successor, Tamerlane. They came from the nowhere of High Asia, and they ravaged the world from end to end. The successors of the Great Khan amused themselves building empires of the fragments of that vast heritage left by an obscure nomad chieftain from the Gobi Desert. History has been baffled at the colossal force of him they called, and rightly, the Master of Thrones and

Crowns, the Perfect Warrior, the Mighty Manslayer, the Scourge of God, that Genghis Khan whose line and whose conquest persisted for generations, cropping out in that brooding, terrible Tamerlane, and Baber, that empire-builder.

"Mark this well: Central Asia is a vortex and a reservoir of power. There was in the old days, *and there is today*, a fountain of energy which at irregular intervals surges forth and sweeps the world with fire and devastating slaughter."

PIERRE sipped from the glass which Jake had filled. I followed suit, but scarcely noted that Jake had poured wine instead of another cocktail. The history that d'Artois had summarized was familiar territory to me; but the voice with which he had recited his epitome gave it a terrible significance that had heretofore escaped me.

"Central Asia is a vortex and a reservoir of power!"

That, and his previous remark about the impending appearance of another invasion which he, Pierre d'Artois, was to halt, left me dazed.

Then he produced a sheaf of papers from his inside coat pocket. They were official documents. Two bore the seals of European powers; and one, I noted, had the spread eagle of the United States to give it authority. I saw how Pierre was accredited, and wondered at the eminence he had attained. And if I had any doubts as to his sanity or sobriety, they were dispelled by the evidence he presented. I knew then that Pierre was actually in New Orleans to halt the impending apparition of some terrific menace, for those whose signatures followed the embossed seals would scarcely accredit one suffering from hallucinations, or delusions of grandeur.

"As you know," he resumed, "before you made my acquaintance in Bayonne, I

spent a number of years in High Asia, and in Kurdistan, the land where they worship Satan as Malik Tawus, the Lord Peacock; and in the mighty ruins of Bora Bador, in Java; and in Ankor Wat. I was admitted to the secret circles of adepts in thaumaturgy and occultism of a nature that makes the astonishing feats of Hindoo magic and telepathy seem puerile. And in Tibet I saw things of which I do not care to speak in detail, except to mention that I know that men have the means of becoming gods. Literally, not figuratively.

"Yet beneath this diversity I sensed a unity of effort and purpose: the opening of the Gateway through which the Lord of the Fourth Axis can march to our plane of existence."

"What do you mean, Fourth Axis?" I ventured, as he paused to light another cigarette. "That suggests fourth dimension, and the like."

"You are not entirely out of order," admitted Pierre. "But more of that, shortly. Now, as I hinted, there was an underlying oneness of purpose in all the obscure places I visited, and the rituals I witnessed. And once, I took part in them."

He shuddered just perceptibly as he paused to re-vision the scene that he had mentioned in passing. And then he continued.

"As a result of those studies, I unearthed certain evidence to show that the superhuman power of Genghis Khan arose from his having reached across the Border and made contact with the Fourth Plane. He tapped a reservoir of forces that enabled him to overrun the world, overthrow the finest armies of Europe, not by force of numbers as is commonly supposed, but by a terrific genius that valor and steel could not resist. In their terror, Europeans — your ancestors and mine — called him the Scourge of God, but they were wrong. He was the neo-

phyte, the insignificant servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God who rules a universe of three dimensions."

"Good Lord, Pierre, that's almost blasphemy!" I protested.

"Blasphemy lies in intent, not in expression," retorted Pierre, solemnly. "If I could explain the thing as a whole, you would see that there is nothing irreverent in that statement.

"But Genghis Khan did not make complete contact, else the very features of the earth would have been everlastingly altered. And his successors retained but a fraction of his inspiration from across the Border. Yet they were gigantic in their way. Consider Tamerlane, sitting at chess while his troops hacked to pieces the army of Bajazet, reputed the greatest captain of his time. Is that the doing of any *man*? I mean, man in the sense that other commanders were men.

"The credentials that you examined show that I am not the only one who holds that opinion. A certain Captain Rankin, of the British Secret Service, years ago, rendered a report of his investigations in High Asia, and among the Yezidees of Kurdistan. Captain Rankin was politely but firmly placed in a sanitarium for observation and treatment. But the successors of his short-sighted superiors were wiser. They know, now, that if the impending disturbance is not halted, all Asia will burst into a mad flame of destruction which will end by sweeping an empire from its already unsteady feet."

"But where does New Orleans come into this picture?" I demanded.

"You suggested, a moment ago, that I had hinted at something mathematical in my expression, Lord of the Fourth Axis. There was more truth in that than you realized. There is a mathematical relation of this earth to our space, and to

the ultra-space of more than three dimensions. That relation demands that the Enemy start his operations in the neighborhood of New Orleans.

"New Orleans is but a mathematical point in this colossal scheme. *Point d'appui*, if you comprehend my idiom; taking-off point, I might say . . . occult, rather than geographical.

"And thus you see the reason for the documents which I carry. And finally, the credentials from those United States, they are but the courtesy rendered to other governments. With all respect to your government, they are strangely blind. Their doubts as to our sanity are concealed more politely than effectively.

"'Most obscure, Mr. d'Artois,' said that one whose signature you see here. 'How can the ghost of Genghis Khan, and forty or fifty Chinese spiritualists, upset the world?' he remarked as he set his hand opposite the seal with its eagle. And vainly I explained that it was not the ghost of the Mighty Manslayer that we fought, and that those were not the Chinese laundrymen he knew, but Mongol adepts from High Asia that we were to thwart — not by force of arms, but by weapons like their own. *A bas!* That one, I fancy, thinks Genghis Khan a cousin of Otto Kahn!"

D'Artois paused, drew a farewell draft of his foul fuming cigarette, and extinguished it against the side of the ashtray.

"Specifically, we will combat them by gaining possession of a certain piece of ritual equipment they require; or failing that, by upsetting the vibration-resonance they must develop in order to break down the barriers, and establish contact with super-space. And this is what I propose to do in order to thwart the successor of Genghis Khan! And now may I look at your telephone directory?"

I handed him the book, which he consulted.

"Ah, here she is," he remarked, after a moment's glance down the page. "Mademoiselle Louise Marigny. Note the address, and drive me there at once, if you please. Immediately, in fact!"

"**B**UT how does this Miss Marigny come into your plans?" I wondered, as we drove up St. Charles Avenue.

"She has unwittingly come into possession of a unit of that ritual equipment I mentioned," he replied, "a rug of unique design. It is one of three which first appeared in Central Asia. Panopoulos, a Greek, brought the first one into the country. As a courtesy to one of the governments to which I am accredited, he was detained for questioning, but not for long. He was stabbed, and the rug was quite inexplicably stolen from the officials who held it pending further investigation, made at the instigation, let us say, of other governments. Nazar Shekerjian, an Armenian, bringing into the United States what was reputed to be the second of the three rugs, met a like fate when detained for questioning. The officials in whose custody the rug was were placed in an embarrassing position, I assure you. And thus, finally, I was detailed to trace the third rug, which secret agents of a power interested in Asiatic tranquillity knew was on its way to Stamboul, and thence to the United States."

"That accounts for your unexpected arrival, ahead of schedule?" I suggested. "To get ahead of those who are seeking to take the rug?"

"Precisely," admitted Pierre, as we turned down one of the cross-streets not far from Lee Circle, and drew up at one of those old-fashioned houses with tall white pillars that supported a broad gallery on the second story.

THE Marigny's were an old Creole family; *vieille noblesse*, you might say. I had never met the Miss Marigny we sought, but I remembered her as queen of the Mardi Gras several years previous.

An old negro servant took our cards and ushered us into a high-ceiled living-room to await Miss Marigny.

"How do you do, Mr. d'Artois? And you, Mr. Landon? This is an unexpected pleasure."

Her manner was cordial, albeit reserved. But she contrived to convey, in spite of her gracious air, that she was at a loss to know just why she was thus favored.

"I am sure," began d'Artois, with that inimitable bow which always assures him of a favorable reception, "that you will pardon the liberty we take in calling uninvited. Would you be kind enough to show us that rug which you bought in Stamboul, in the course of that Mediterranean cruise from which you have just returned?"

"Why, certainly," assented Louise Marigny. "But how did you know——"

"That I will explain presently," replied d'Artois. "In the meanwhile, I would appreciate your great kindness."

And then, a few moments later, as a servant unrolled the rug and spread its lustrous folds across a table: "*Regardez donc!* It is magnificent, yes?"

It was more than magnificent. It was utterly outlandish. Those rich colors had not come from the dye-pots of Persia or Turkistan; and its pattern was as unique as its dyes. The interlaced and interwoven curves of Moorish architectural adornment were expressed in a textile, giving an effect utterly different from the floral richness of Persian, or the straight-line geometric motifs of Caucasian weaves. The longer I looked at it, the more compelling it became; and in spite of the

closeness of the design, there was an effect of sweeping curves of inexpressible breadth and vigor.

The rug was about four feet wide, and hardly more than seven feet in length. Its upper corners had been clipped, giving it a form similar to the inner panel of a Turkish prayer rug; but the cut had run along the line of a corner piece, so that the unity of the remaining pattern was unmarred.

"Look at it!" Pierre repeated. "It is vibrant and alive, like a beast of prey lying asleep and dreaming of stalking resistlessly to its next slaying."

There was something breath-taking about these incredible arabesques, with their dynamic, fluent curves; and something ominous. I glanced at Louise Marigny, and saw that she was regarding d'Artois curiously as he made his comments on that satanically lovely piece of weaving.

"It seems that we agree on its personality," she said, "except that you perceived its sinister beauty at a glance, whereas it took me several days to get the effect."

"For once, *mademoiselle*," replied d'Artois, "advance knowledge is superior to feminine intuition. You sensed, in a few days, what I know as the result of years of study, and a definite warning."

"Why, Mr. d'Artois!" she exclaimed. "That sounds alarming! It did make me uneasy, the longer I looked at it, but I didn't suspect that there is anything dangerous about it."

During their exchange of remarks, I noted that it had not been mutilated, as I had at first thought. The remaining vestiges of finishing web and fringe, such as Oriental rugs have at their ends, were present. This added to the utter oddity of the piece, for in my several years of dabbling in rugs, I had never encountered one in the form of a rectangle with the

upper corners shaped by the weaver as though they had been clipped.

"It is a sinister thing," I remarked. "It looks as though some master weaver went mad, and played monstrous tricks with all known color schemes, yet achieved beauty in the end."

"But how in the world did you know I had this rug?" wondered Louise Marigny.

PIERRE offered her the document with the seal of the United States.

"This will introduce me, although I am not permitted to go into detail," he replied. "Secret agents of various powers learned that it came from an obscure spot in Central Asia, and found its way to Stamboul. And while I do not know, I have my suspicions as to how you acquired it. Did the person who sold it to you know that you were bound for New Orleans?"

"You're nothing less than a mind-reader, Mr. d'Artois! Or else you are very well informed," she answered. "I was shopping in the bazars of Stamboul, with the intention of selecting something as a souvenir of my cruise. The merchant, an old, white-bearded fellow with unusually keen eyes, was asking the most exorbitant prices for perfectly wretched rugs. But I sat there, drinking tiny cups of coffee, which they serve prospective customers. And in the course of the bargaining, I mentioned being on my way to New Orleans. He then and there dug into a pile, and brought out this rug. At a glance, I knew I couldn't possibly afford such a magnificent thing. It fascinated me at once. But to my great surprize he offered it at a perfectly ridiculous price. I naturally took it at once.

"But on the remainder of the trip I had a feeling of being followed, kept under close surveillance; though to be truthful about it, I can't even remember any one's actually spying on me, or even

staring obviously. And when I landed in New Orleans, and had the rug unpacked, it began to grate on my nerves. I hung it on the wall of my room, and in the early morning light the sweeping bands of color in the pattern seemed to writhe, and twist, and change in hue. I knew it must be the illusion caused by the angle of the light striking the rug, but I couldn't stand seeing it when I awoke in the morning; so I put it on the floor.

"But that was no better. To use your own words, it suggested a beast of prey, sleeping, but ready to awaken and leap."

She shuddered; but before she could continue her remarks, d'Artois began, "That rug was given to you for a purpose, Miss Marigny. You were the unwitting means of getting it into this country. And I venture to state that you will not keep it long."

"Why, what do you mean?" she demanded, arching her brows in amazement.

"I am not permitted to go into detail," replied Pierre. "But glance at this report."

He handed her the report I had seen.

"You will note," he remarked, as she regarded the paper intently, her alarmed expression becoming more intense as she read further, "that Panopoulos, a Greek, and Shekerjian, an Armenian, both encountered serious difficulties. Fatal, as you observe."

"But they were detained at the customs. I passed this rug lawfully," she protested.

"So did they. They were detained for other reasons. And they died because some one did not want them to answer what they would have been asked. The reason that you were allowed to pass the customs without questioning is that after two failures, those I represent decided upon different tactics. I am here to pay any price you care to name. And to assure you that this is bona fide, you may

confer with the Federal officials in New Orleans. They do not yet know that I am here, but they will recognize my credentials."

Louise Marigny reflected for a moment before replying. She glanced at the sinister, satanic beauty before us, and shivered.

"Mr. d'Artois, I'll take your offer. That rug has worried me ever since I unpacked it."

Pierre took from his pocket a thick roll of bills.

"Tell me when to stop," he remarked, as he stripped them off, one by one, laying them fanwise on the rug. "It is your property by purchase. I do not want you to feel that I am forcing a deal."

"Oh, Mr. d'Artois!" she gasped, as she noted the denomination of the bills. "One of them would more than pay what it cost me."

"*Tenez!* Never let it be said that Pierre d'Artois drove a sharp bargain," he said as he added another bill to the pile. "The pleasure is mine, Miss Marigny."

We then took leave of Louise Marigny, who, despite her more than moderate circumstances, had reason to feel that it was a fortunate stroke of business to have her casual purchase in Stamboul pay several times over for the entire cruise. And Pierre on his part had made progress in his mysterious mission.

"They planned to relieve her of this rug at their convenience," said d'Artois. "But now they have me to rob, which will not be so simple. But from now on, you and I are in danger of assassination and robbery. This is a dangerous article.

"But now, let us get to work on this devilish rug; although first I must call the excellent Father Martin, of the Society of Jesuits."

"Help yourself," I said, handing him the directory. "And by the way, what has this priest to do with your mission? I

would hardly think him to be an adept at the devil-mongering you suggest."

"Father Martin," replied d'Artois, as he thumbed the directory, "is an outstanding mathematician, and a prominent member of that most learned society. I met him in France, where he served as a chaplain with an artillery regiment during the late war. While our problem is occult, there are mathematical relations to consider. Modern science is finally realizing that chemistry, physics, and the metaphysical sciences are interlinked, and that every manifestation of matter is finally resolved into ultimate force, which has a mathematical expression. We are reverting to alchemy, devoid of its trickery and charlatanism, in a way. But more later. I must ask Father Martin to call on us, at once."

WHILE d'Artois was at the telephone, I turned again to the oddly shaped rug. The workmanship was exquisite, and the knotting was exceptionally close, surpassing that of any museum piece from the looms of Ispahan.

"Pierre," I said, as he returned from the telephone, "how does this thing fit into the picture? It is all scrambled to me."

"Listen, and let me make the unscramblement, so to speak," he replied. "It is thus. Watch!"

He took three slips of paper from a pocket memorandum, clipped the upper corners with a pair of shears, and then set the cut edges together, so that a three-branched figure was formed by the slips of paper, with an equilateral triangle in the center.

"Very much like three prayer rugs placed so as to get their upper edges as close as possible to a common central point," I remarked.

"Precisely. And as I said, there are two similarly shaped rugs," he replied. "They

are to be arranged as I have indicated. Then three adepts will take their posts. The figure at the center, formed by the junction of the rugs, is what they call the Triangle of Power, and in that space will be the Gateway that opens into the Marches beyond the Border."

"Interesting, but obscure," I remarked, more puzzled than ever. "What is the point of this ceremony, and what has it to do with the successor to Genghis Khan, whom, by the way, you are to stop in his tracks?"

"Concealed in the intricate arabesques of this rug," explained d'Artois, "are curves which represent mathematical equations relating to ultra-dimensional space. This rug and its companion pieces contain the key to a complex system of vibration harmonies, psychic and physical, which if set in motion will open the Gateway."

The door-bell interrupted his further remarks. Pierre accompanied me to the door.

"Good evening, Father Martin," he said, after I had greeted the priest and invited him in. "My good friend here finds my explanations somewhat difficult. Be pleased to join us, and cast light on the matter."

I led the way to the living-room.

"And this is the rug concerning which you and I have corresponded for some time," said d'Artois, as the priest seated himself at the table. "You doubted its existence, *n'est-ce pas, mon père?* But there she is. And where my elementary mathematics leave off, your learning shall pick up the trail."

"And so this is what you have called Satan's Prayer Rug, eh, Pierre?" remarked Father Martin, as he scrutinized the exquisite border. Then he frowned, and indicated a certain figure in the design.

"This," he said, as he glanced up at d'Artois, "leads me to believe that there

is something in what you hinted. Our missionaries have encountered Asiatic cults that make that symbol the object of mysteries whose outward manifestations——”

Father Martin stopped short, apparently unwilling to start any discussion of that ominous device.

“Suppose,” he resumed, “that you let me hear your views. Just to refresh my memory concerning your letters, and to add any new features you have discovered.”

I hitched my chair up closer to the table.

D'ARTOIS began by repeating his earlier remarks about the vortex of power that existed in Central Asia, and its historical manifestations in the unbelievable conquests of Genghis Khan and his successors.

“The assault,” he concluded, “will probably begin by the enemy's establishing contact with the Fourth Plane. The first move will be made as soon as this one of the three rugs falls into their hands.”

“Well, why not destroy it, here and now?” I asked.

“Because until we have studied the rug, we can not be certain whether its presence is vitally necessary, or whether the space equations represented by its curves would suffice the enemy. In a word, we must be prepared to fight them with their own weapons. Thus we delay in order to study. Perhaps its destruction will suffice; perhaps we must in the end track them to their rendezvous and use our knowledge to overthrow them. We know only that they are here, in New Orleans, to make a permanent connection with the Fourth Plane.

“And now, Father Martin, let us get to work on our calculations,” said d'Artois

as he turned to my desk and took from it paper, pencils, and colored crayons. “And you, *mon ami*, stand guard while we study this accursed thing. We have no right to invite the fate that overtook Panopoulos and Shekerjian.”

I loaded my Colt automatic, slipped it into my pocket, and made the rounds of the house, locking doors and windows. Then I posted myself where I could watch both the street, and, from an inside window, the courtyard of the house.

Sitting there and listening to the muttered remarks and occasional exclamations of d'Artois as he and Father Martin paused in their calculations to confer on some intricate bit of integration would have been the height of monotony: but this was no dry discussion of theory. The room was a battlefield. It was pervaded with the tension of actual physical combat. The priest's strong features were set grimly as he hunched over the table; and d'Artois peered fiercely from beneath his shaggy brows at the many sheets of cross-ruled paper before him. They were fighting the master from High Asia: and that magnificent silken rug was mocking them as they sought to tear from its intricate mazes the secret of the Fourth Plane.

I glanced at my watch. Scarcely three hours had passed since we had left the Marigny house. Then I realized that the tense atmosphere of the room had made the time seem much longer.

THE crackle of the radio at the farther end of the room startled me. I leaped to my feet to cut off the power. Then I remembered that I had last set it to tune in on the local police calls, and paused.

“Attention all cars,” it began, after the station call. “Three men impersonating Federal Revenue Agents. Driving Packard, Louisiana License number 43376.”

The number was twice repeated, then: “Number one: six feet, weight about 180.

Very white skin. Brown eyes. Scar on forehead. Black hair. Age about 40. Broad features. Eyes slightly slanted.

"Number two: at wheel. No description.

"Number three: sat beside driver. No description.

"Last seen in 1400 block Louisiana Avenue heading toward Saint Charles. Wanted at headquarters for questioning. Detain at all costs. Report at once. McGowan."

"Ha! We were just in time!" exclaimed d'Artois as he leaped to his feet. "They were trying to get the rug from *la Marigny*! And she reported them to the police. The slanted eyes betrayed him!"

"Shall I phone her for particulars?" I asked.

"*Mordieu!* Of all things, not that!" exclaimed d'Artois. "*Imbécile!* Will they not be watching her? Tapping her telephone? Tracing calls?"

He glanced at the dial setting of the short wave set, then continued, "Leave it as it is. Its occasional chatter will not disturb us. We know now that they will be making their next move. *Eh bien*, back to your post, and keep that siege-gun ready for visitors!"

Pierre and Father Martin resumed their calculations. Time and again I forced myself to relax from the unconscious tension of my muscles as I watched them in their desperate struggle with the mystery from High Asia. The enemy's setback at the Marigny house had revealed our hand in the counter-attack: and the master would not remain idle. It was urgent that we solve the riddle, and destroy that satanic rug. A doom was even now seeking us. Two men armed with pencils, and one with a .45, striving to halt the march of the Golden Horde! Fantastic, and terrible.

It was dark now. I had drawn the shades. We had moved the table into a

corner not commanded by any of the windows. We dared not chance a shot from the outside. We remembered Shekajian and Panopoulos. The courtyard was a dangerously weak point in our defense. The enemy could approach from the roofs of the buildings whose walls inclosed the patio, and advance through the shadows.

Our hope was that Pierre's movements had been so swift and secret that the enemy would not be able to track him down in time. And once d'Artois succeeded in closing for ever the Gateway that they sought to open wide, that fierce old soldier would take the attack and hunt them down to the last man. The Master, if he but knew it, was himself in peril.

The outcome depended upon strokes of a pencil. Had it but been sword thrusts! Midnight was approaching.

FATHER MARTIN sighed wearily as he pushed his chair away from the table. Pierre shook his head, and ground a cigarette butt into the floor with his heel. I did not wonder at the gesture of disgust and baffled rage. For the past hour the room had been vibrant with intense concentration. I had begun glancing nervously about me, at times sensing a personal opposition to d'Artois and the priest. I had dismissed it as the result of a highly keyed imagination, until Pierre spoke.

"*Mon père,*" said d'Artois, "did you notice it also?"

The priest started and regarded d'Artois intently for a moment.

"Yes," he admitted. "For the past half-hour *something*—I would almost say, some one, has been fighting me." He stabbed with a red crayon at the paper before him. "And it was not that equation, either. A personal presence in the room has been opposing my efforts to reason this thing out."

"*Mordieu!*" growled Pierre. "Then it was not my imagination. We outwitted them, and they do not know where we are. That is, their physical bodies do not know," he amended. "So they are projecting themselves, or their mental force, into this very room. For the past hour my mind has been all awry. While the enemy is seeking the rug, and us, he is striving to prevent our learning the secret. Just how much have you deduced? Before this projected force addled our brains?"

"I was very close to the solution," replied Father Martin. He then explained very briefly the mathematical relations he had deduced from the curves. His voice was hurried. He sensed that it would not be long before we would be overwhelmed either in body or mind.

"*Magnifique!*" exclaimed d'Artois. "Then with what I have done, we are almost through. Forward! Let us hurry before they completely paralyze us!"

His voice rang like a bugle sounding a charge.

They hunched forward once more over the table to renew the fight.

The fate of the world depended upon pencil strokes and integration symbols, and on the significance of strangely spiraling curves that marched across the sheets of paper.

The priest's high forehead was now beaded with sweat. Pierre's lean dark features were drawn. He muttered to himself as he calculated. The tension was heightening. At first I thought that it was the suppressed excitement of realizing that victory was around the corner. I sat clutching the arms of my chair, just as one watching men heaving at a heavy weight will contract his muscles in sympathy. Then I saw my error, and realized that it was not impending victory but the redoubled efforts of the Master that made the room vibrant with energy.

A mist was gathering and thickening

the air. It swirled in eddies, and wraith-like wisps emerged from the corners. They were closing slowly in on the table. The lights were dimming. I could now look at the hundred-watt bulb and see its filament very clearly, so much was its incandescence obscured by the density of the air. Along the walls and in the shadows were shapes of spectral gray: vague blots whose quivering and twitching suggested monstrous forms seeking to assume substance.

We were walled in. The table was now an island in a fog-shrouded sea. The forms that lurked in the shadows were becoming more distinct. I could distinguish tall, bearded men with solemn faces. They regarded us menacingly, and rhythmically gestured toward us.

D'Artois, despairing but grim, thrust his chair aside as he rose.

"Look at them!" he cried, as with a sweep of his arm he indicated the ever-shifting, weaving fog wisps and the silent presences that they but half obscured. "They have projected their *selves* into space to seek us, and their thought-force to beat us! We know all but the ultimate secret. And that we can not get. We are lost, unless——"

"Light the gas grate!" he yelled. "Quickly! Destroy this accursed rug. We have waited too long!"

The one-hundred-watt globe over the table was now a sickly, half-hearted glow. The air was so dense that the features of d'Artois and Father Martin seemed to peer at me through veils. I struck a match and could barely see its wan flicker.

"Quick! The grate!" shouted d'Artois. "When their *selves* return to their bodies, they will know and will come to overpower us!"

But where was the gas grate with its imitation logs heaped on andirons? The mist had grown immeasurably denser even during those few moments of dis-

may. The mist about us was viscous as oil. A writhing impenetrable grayness walled us in.

I SEIZED the rug and turned to plunge into the gray horror that surrounded us. But d'Artois seized me by the shoulder.

"Tenez!" he cried. "They may be in the shadows waiting for it. They may be materialized enough to grasp it!"

The filament of the bulb was now a dull reddish ember. Breathing was difficult. The density of the atmosphere hampered our movements even as waist-deep water impedes one's wading ashore through the surf.

D'Artois cursed fiercely in a low voice as he paced back and forth, clenching his fists, striving to grasp at some thought that would save us. Father Martin's lips moved soundlessly.

Then we became aware of something that was imperiously demanding our attention. As I glanced up, I saw that both Pierre and Father Martin were staring at the grayness that encircled us.

The presences that hemmed us in were slowly fading into their background. As they lost their identities a vortex of spiralling mist was momentarily becoming more and more dense.

"Mordieu!" exclaimed d'Artois. His lean, tanned features had become paper-white. "Did you see the center of that whirlpool?"

The priest nodded, and shuddered.

The vast sweeping spiral was dizzying. Its involute curve extended immeasurably beyond the confines of the room. My senses reeled, and I saw d'Artois and Father Martin clutching the edge of the table for support.

"Good God, Pierre, what is it?" I whispered.

"The bottom of that whirlpool extends beyond space as we know it," replied

d'Artois. "It is just as our calculations led us to expect. It is sucking the light out of this room as a centrifugal pump would empty it of water. We are marooned in space."

He shivered. I noted that it was becoming colder in the room.

"Regardez," he continued, "we are now in an island of dimness surrounded by a sea of absolute cold blackness. The rug is safe. We can not destroy it. The master has indeed found us."

"Well, let's try to get out!" I yelled. And before d'Artois could restrain me, I leaped toward the encircling grayness, but in vain. That twitching vibrant mistiness was an adamant wall. I dropped half senseless to the floor, bruised by the shock as though I had dashed myself against the door of a safe.

"The master has found us, and we must await his pleasure," said d'Artois resignedly, as I picked myself from the floor. "There is no power——"

"There is indeed a power!" declared Father Martin solemnly, with a gesture of invocation.

D'Artois nodded, and bowed his head.

"I beg your pardon, Father," he muttered. But I saw that his reply testified to his unflinching courtesy rather than to his faith. I recalled his remarks about the three-dimensional god of a three-dimensional universe, and wondered how that calm priest could still hold to his belief.

The vortex was reversing its spiralling. Even as we watched, it became a vast evolute curve. We instinctively shrank, for its appearance was now as if a water-spout were to emerge from what had been a maelstrom in space. But the mists instead of jetting forth were coalescing. They became denser. We heard a whirring and humming as of monstrous flies buzzing and droning.

Then we saw him.

He was there, the Master.

His head and shoulders filled the room: a solemn presence, but shrouded with mists so that we could get only the impression of awful majesty and brooding omniscience that mortal eyes could not bear to scrutinize without a protecting veil.

"Pierre d'Artois," said the Presence, "you might have thwarted us had you denied your childish curiosity and destroyed the rug. But now that you know, your knowledge will avail you nothing. Neither you nor your two acolytes may use that forbidden knowledge.

"An occultist, a scientist, and a soldier: we will use all three if you will serve us. If not, we will utterly destroy you and your assistants. We remember you from old times when you sought us in High Asia. Now that we have found you, you may profit by your knowledge as no man has ever before, or else you will be annihilated as no mortal has ever been reduced to non-existence."

The voice paused. The mists shrouded the awful features and almost hid them. The room still reverberated with the surging thunder of that declaration, that threat combined with a promise.

D'Artois stared full into the shadows that marked where those all-seeing eyes had burned. His face was strangely exalted: and I knew that he shared with me the compelling charm of that mighty voice and that august, mist-shrouded face.

"Beware, my son," said the priest at his side, "the spoiler and the outlaw is tempting you. The Rebel himself is speaking."

That quiet voice cracked the spell. My exaltation at being included as one of the servants of such a Master was dispelled, and I trembled with fear.

"I will go," said d'Artois. "But my acolytes are not suited——"

The veiling mists thinned, and the features of the Presence became more

sharply limned than before. The prodigious voice thundered again, "Your acolytes will go or we will destroy them. You have no present choice. You will choose when you are in our holy of holies, where you will see in full that which we have tonight hinted. We do not request. We command."

We were animalculisms before that lordly head whose tall, many-terraced miter towered in the weaving, dancing grayness. The satanic rug glowed and smoldered and twinkled in the dim light. It mocked us for having spared it.

The Presence was fading. The grayness was now a multitude of fine, wavering tongues that wove an impassable barrier. The awful personality had departed.

I turned to d'Artois. He sensed my question before I spoke.

"The Master and all his adepts were concentrating. That face was either the Master, or a composite of all his hierarchy of adepts. They will be here in physical presence at any moment, now that their projected minds know where we are. They know the secret of this mist they have created, and can penetrate it.

"Think, while you can yet think," he concluded with a gesture of despair, "and picture an enemy who can surround us with a wall of thought-concentration as infrangible as granite!"

The mists were closing in and engulfing us. The doom was settling.

"Good God!" I gasped, as a hand clutched my arm, and another seized my pistol.

D'Artois nodded. I could barely see him.

"They are here," he murmured. "Resistance is vain."

I wondered at the gleam in his eye, and the glance he shot at Father Martin. The priest saw, and nodded almost imperceptibly.

We were drawn into the impenetrable blackness of everlasting night. But the hands that clutched us were human: and that in a degree relieved the horror.

I felt the paving of the courtyard beneath my feet.

"Not a word!" growled a harsh voice at my side. The muzzle of a pistol prodded my ribs.

We were on Saint Peter Street, in front of my house. Our captors were thrusting us into a sedan. The Master, it seemed, had not thus far developed enough power to whisk us through space and into his *sanctum*. The awful grayness ended at the door leading to the court.

As we seated ourselves, with two of our captors facing us, pistols levelled, we saw that they were stalwart fellows with grim, Mongoloid features. Resistance would be futile. And the rug was in the hands of the one who sat next to the driver, commanding the party.

"I wonder why they don't blindfold us?" I asked d'Artois.

His smile was grim and despairing.

"They do not intend for us to leave our next stopping-point," he replied. "What harm if we see?"

Then he slumped back against the upholstery.

PIERRE seemed resigned, but I felt that he had not yet abandoned hope. Father Martin's face was white and stern. Nothing but his faith remained after that terrific demonstration by the Master. As for me, I was numbed by the enormity of it all. The mighty utterance of that awful Presence, the fearful weaving grayness that had overwhelmed us, the throbbing, surging hammer-blows of psychic force that had shattered the concerted attack of d'Artois and Father Martin: these were but preliminaries to what would happen when the Master unleashed the full armory of his powers, rent the veil, and loosed

into the world those monsters from beyond the Border, those ultra-dimensional horrors whose existence Pierre had but suggested.

"The neophyte, the insignificant servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God who rules a universe of three dimensions."

And if this dreadful master were the neophyte, then what would emerge from the Gateway that led from the Fourth Plane?

In the meanwhile, the police were looking for three men who had impersonated Federal Agents! They were seeking to arrest the servants of the Last Scourge for impersonating customs officials: and the Golden Horde was about to swarm over the earth again, slaying and pillaging and spreading ruin as even the Grand Khan had never dreamed when he heaped 70,000 heads into one ghastly pyramid.

The envoys of the Last Conqueror, liable to arrest!

I laughed. The laugh was too terrible and mocking for the despair that one expresses in the face of disasters that men have heretofore faced.

Pierre started, then understood: not my words, for I had not spoken, but rather my mood.

"*Mon ami,*" he whispered, "you are right. Even with what I once saw in High Asia, I am at a loss to predict what will come next, except that we have seen but a vague glimpse of the terror to come. This fog was but a trifle."

We were driving out toward the Chef Menteur Pass that connects Lake Pontchartrain with the Gulf of Mexico. Somewhere in those marshes was the rendezvous of the Master. Somewhere in that maze of swamps and bayous was the *sanctum* of the Last Conqueror. He would rise triumphant from the mud and sweep dazzlingly across the earth, fol-

lowed by his acolytes and those forces from across the Border.

Our captors left the highway as we approached the bridge that spans the Chef, and drew up on the elevated ground near the abandoned fort that years ago commanded this one of the two approaches to New Orleans from the Gulf via Lake Pontchartrain. In the moonlight we could see the brick bastions with their gunports that commanded the surrounding marshes. Dismantled cannon lay on the crumbling gun emplacements.

From the parapet we could look down into the area. It was all overgrown with weeds and shrubbery. Trees had taken root and forced the masonry apart in spots.

"Where are we?" whispered d'Artois.

"Chef Menteur fort," I replied in a low voice, although, as far as I could see, it made little difference where we were.

"Silence!" snapped our escort.

The commander of the party led the way. The two who had faced us in the car fell in behind us. Their pistols were still drawn and ready.

We heard the car starting. The Master, it seemed, had other errands requiring attention.

WE DESCENDED from the parapet into the area, and thence to the entrance that opened into a casemate. Our footsteps rang hollowly in the vaulted passageway. Through the embrasures of the casemate I caught glimpses of the surrounding moat. As we advanced, I saw that we were on the side nearest the Chef.

Sentries at intervals challenged us. Our escort muttered a password, and continued the march. Finally we halted at the end of the casemate.

The leader advanced and tapped. What had seemed in the light of his flash-lamp to be a blank wall of seasoned

brick swung silently out, revealing a wall of concrete and a door of steel plates.

He beat a tattoo on that barrier. We heard the whine of an electric motor picking up speed, and a muffled humming of gears. The massive, armored door slid slowly aside. Our captors thrust us forward into a passageway pervaded with a diffused, rosy glow.

From a guard room at the left of the entrance a dignitary in yellow robes and a tall miter emerged to take charge of us. He addressed d'Artois in a language unfamiliar to me. Pierre answered in the same tongue, and without hesitation. Then he turned to me.

"I hope to see you and Father Martin later," he said. "The Master wishes to confer with me. Acolytes, it seems, are not entitled to interview him. In case I do not see you again——"

Instead of completing his speech, he bowed gravely.

Two others in yellow robes escorted Pierre into the guard room. The leader of our captors, carrying the rug in his arms, followed. We were for the moment left alone in the pulsing rosy glow of the passage.

The massive sliding door was firmly sealed behind us.

As I looked about and saw that we were surrounded by walls and a ceiling of reinforced concrete, I began to realize the resourcefulness of the enemy. Most, if not all, of the rendezvous must be underground; and in this marshy country caissons would have to be sunk before excavations could be made. With what infinite patience they must have worked, setting the first course of a caisson, then digging, and moving the excavated earth by night through the casemate embrasures and into fishermen's skiffs, thence to be dumped far out into the lake, lest mounds of earth about the fort betray their presence.

And what of the laborers? Why had not some one of them mentioned the mysterious excavations?

The solution had a dreadful simplicity.

Drifters had been engaged, brought out by night, imprisoned until the job was completed, and then—the waters of the Chef were deep, and the current was swift. There would be none to betray the Master's digging.

All surmise: yet how else could this system of passages have been sunk so secretly?

"Father Martin," I finally said, "do you think that the Master seeks us as allies? Or is this just to give us a secret graveyard?"

"God alone can say," replied the priest, "although it seems that Pierre is known to them, by reputation at least. He seems to have commanded their respect to such a degree that they believe he can be of service. Much of his past is a riddle to me. I know only that he is a very learned and profound student of things which the Church has forbidden."

He paused a moment, then hastened to add, "Understand, I do not personally criticize. His attempt to thwart this menace is indeed worthy. Only——"

I understood his uncompromisingly orthodox view. Mathematical research as such was one thing; the actual dabbling in forbidden mysteries was another.

As we speculated on the outcome of Pierre's conference with the Master, I heard the faint, high-pitched whine of a dynamo picking up its load. Then I heard the humming of transformers being energized.

"We'll soon know," I remarked to Father Martin. "Something is about to happen."

MY OPINION was soon justified. Scarcely half an hour elapsed when a squad of our captors, arrayed in saffron-

colored robes and tall cylindrical miters, approached from the guard room.

The leader, a Mongol like his men, addressed us.

"Be pleased to accompany us," he ordered in the impersonal tone of a soldier.

They formed in a hollow square in whose center we were to be escorted. We marched to the end of the long passageway. Its floor sloped at a steeper pitch than we had realized from glancing down its length.

The detachment halted at the end of the long passageway. The steel door that barred further progress slid open in response to the leader's command.

"Let them enter," said a voice.

The Master was speaking. We, Pierre's supposed acolytes, were about to enter the Presence.

The front rank of the square side stepped to the left. The rear rank advanced, so that Father Martin and I were thrust ahead of them and into the blackness beyond the doorway. Then the massive door slipped silently into place, leaving us in a darkness so dense that my first thought was that no natural exclusion of light could possibly result in such an absence of even the faintest suggestion of visibility.

"You are now in the presence of the Last Conqueror," announced that same voice, speaking with the majesty of inexorable doom. "You will witness the opening of the Gateway and see the Lord of the Outer Marches. Then you will serve Him whole-heartedly or else be destroyed in a way inconceivable to your human minds."

Silence. Then from a great distance I could distinguish a scarcely perceptible pin-point of light. It began to expand into a glowing disk of phosphorescence that pulsed like a living thing.

"You have opposed us out of incom-

plete understanding," resumed the voice. "Therefore see, hear, learn."

The disk of light became nebulous, then coalesced to form the head and shoulders of a man whose Mongol features were the very majesty of fate itself: a sage whose contemplation of the vastnesses of space had sublimated every trace of humanity. We saw clearly outlined the awful Presence we had seen limned in weaving mists and spectral grayness. The Master had revealed the august splendor of his presence so that there could remain no lingering doubt that it had indeed been he who had projected his *self* to thwart our meddling with his monstrous plans.

The slightly slanted eyes were profound and inscrutable as those brooding colossi that hold eternal watch over the wastes of Egypt: without pity, without passion, and without prejudice.

And d'Artois, the only man who could contend with this master of doom, was a prisoner somewhere in this vortex of madness, to elect either service with the enemy, or destruction.

Blackness blotted out the Presence.

Then I noted that the darkness was rolling away like a wind-driven mist. Light advanced pace by pace until it occupied the entire vast, vaulted chamber into which we were looking. We were standing in an entrance passageway from which to witness the ritual that would prepare for the apparition of the Lord of the Fourth Axis.

The hemispherical dome of the chamber was supported on walls buttressed with severely straight columns, and recessed with arched niches—entrances, presumably, like the one in which we stood.

Along the wall sat the enemy's dignitaries, each on a throne shaded by a gilded parasol. The thrones of those adepts were arranged according to height, the

tallest ones being nearest the lofty dais of the Master, whose position was exactly opposite our niche.

I saw now that some of the arched niches in the wall contained intricate networks of cables, helices, and bulbous glass tubes; a part of the ray and vibration generating devices that Pierre's explanation had led me to expect.

We tiptoed forward, halting in the archway of our niche.

"I wonder where Pierre is," I finally ventured to whisper to Father Martin. He did not answer. A human voice was outlawed in the presence of those impassive faces along the wall. They were devoid of emotion. They were passionless brazen sphinxes crouching in wait, the masters and not the slaves of time. They sat like old gods brooding over the destinies of worlds not yet created. Hatred, fanaticism, thirst for blood; anything would have been a relief from this terrific emotional vacuum.

THE first sound other than our whispered remarks was a single note of exquisite sweetness. As its vibrant richness died, the Master on the central throne made a gesture with his left hand. From one of the arched entrances emerged three figures, gray-robed and wearing cylindrical miters. Each held before him, by the fringe, a rug: Satan's Prayer Rug, and its two companion pieces.

As they stalked statuesquely toward the center of the hall, I noted for the first time their obvious objective: three panels so placed that they joined, leaving a triangular space in the center. Each panel was shaped like the rugs: a rectangle with clipped corners. They were advancing as if in cadence to a rhythm; then, halting, each before his appointed panel, they spread their rugs with ceremonious gestures and genuflections. This done, each stood erect at his post behind his rug.

There was a moment of silence as heavy as that which broods in the lost gulfs between the uttermost stars, and the farthest frontiers of space; and then the resonant, majestic note of a brazen gong rang through the hall, mighty as the greeting to a god stepping from world to world across the vastnesses of unlimited space. It rolled and thundered, and died to a whisper like the rustling of silk, and the hissing of serpents, then swelled full-throated and triumphant in a peal of colossal splendor, its surge and sweep shaking that cyclopean vault and reaching the unplumbed depths of creation.

Then the ultimate note of that tremendous brazen roar blended into a piping, wailing harmony that sighed and moaned and whispered against a background of muttering drums purring in a rhythm that started chills dancing up and down my spine. It was the complex, maddening cadence of elemental spirits chanting sinister invocations as they plucked stars one by one from the face of heaven and mirthfully discarded them.

"That music is a greater blasphemy than the tongue of any man could utter!" exclaimed Father Martin, speaking into my ear. "Resist it, or you will join them!"

He was right. And I clenched my fists, and set my teeth, seeking to fight the compelling wizardry of that diabolical music.

In the niches along the wall I caught the flare and sputter and glow of the bulbous glass tubes. Beams of many-colored lights swept the vault. Some interlaced in dizzying networks; others were deflected into swirling vortices at the center. Tiny tongues and flashes of bluish flame played and leaped along the thrones of the adepts, and hovered in halos about their miters, and glorified their solemn features. The vault was a concentration of vibrant energy, visible and invisible forces that wove, and writhed, and twist-

ed in accord with the harmonies of a law beyond our conception.

Thus far, ours had been the only human voices since the blackness had rolled out of the hall. But as the sweeping bands of light interwove, the transfigured adepts on their thrones began a chanting that rose and fell, sinking to a whisper, and rising full-throated and sonorous in an infinitely rich, obscure tongue. It was with such resonant syllables that Lucifer sang to the morning star, and Shaddad enticed the gardens of Irem to rise from the sands of Arabia.

Above the rolling thunder of the chanting, and the whine and sob of those soul-searing pipes, and the savage clang of mighty gongs, I could hear the three at their posts by the rugs, each in his turn pronouncing a sentence, each syllable as crystal-clear and clean-cut as it was utterly foreign. They were enunciating the inscriptions on the borders of their rugs; reading the poisonous runes woven into those oriflammes of darkness that lay shimmering in sinister beauty before them.

The Master on his dais was nodding, now, and with a tiny baton beating the cadence of his intricate symphony of sound and color and invisible radiations. And sound and color were blending into one! I could now *see* the color of that terrific brazen roar of the gong, and I could *hear* the vibration of those surging waves of light. Every conception of matter and force was running amuck, maddened by the concentration of force directed toward the central point where those solemn hierophants in regular order read their archaic runes, and shook the foundations of all creation with their portentous utterances.

In that weird weaving of heretofore incompatible elements into a harmonious pattern, every belief and certainty was melting away and blending with mad-

ness. If those inscrutable squatting figures beneath their parasols had shown only a trace of human emotion! Some shadow of lingering humanity, some vestige of kinship with flesh-and-blood men! But they sat there, holding in reserve some power as yet unsuggested and unhinted, some awful force yet to be unleashed. And the fear that there could and would be a further rending asunder of all logic and reason froze and terrified me.

I WAS trembling violently, shivering from the immeasurable cold of interplanetary space; but my brain was a glowing ball of incandescence that threatened to burst forth and mingle with the terrific splendor before me.

"Steady, my son," came the voice of Father Martin from the other end of a succession of infinities, "this too is illusion and mockery. We are in the presence of more than seemed possible to this master of unmentionable blasphemies. But High God is witnessing this infamy. And He will speak."

Strange, hearing mention of God in that diabolical mockery of every rational fact and foundation of the universe. I remembered Pierre's solemnly irreverent-seeming words, and believed that we were indeed before the servant of Him who is beyond the scope of our God and His three-dimensional divinity.

The harmonies became even more outrageously baffling. They were now interfering, and the interference beats were weaving even stranger patterns of vibration. This colossal engine of frequency-blending was pouring together not only light and sound, but the higher rays from the bulbous glass tubes, all into one heterodyne whose beats were now upsetting the very geometry of creation.

The circle of the vault was no longer a circle, but a curve that my mind could

not name, or even conceive. It is madness to speak of a hemisphere with angles, but angles it had, and they were neither right, nor obtuse, nor acute. There were parallel lines crossing before my very eyes. The insane geometry of that vault was now a defiance of every principle of engineering and architecture. I knew that the dome would have to collapse, and bury us beneath its mass. No substance aggregated into that shape could cohere. I shrank instinctively, to avoid the crash of that impossible structure.

"Hold to your sanity!" shouted Father Martin. "If it must fall, it will fall!"

Sanity! When even he was resigned to the madness of it, and the absence of his God from this maelstrom of perverted space!

Bands of light rang with infinite sweetness in my ears. I could see hyperbolas and parabolas from their origin to their extremities that extended to infinity, and mighty spirals that reached beyond. And there were sounds whose curves swept with inexpressible grace. There was neither forward, backward, sidewise, neither up nor down in that vortex of vibration. I began finally to understand the words of that obscene chanting!

Then came the supreme terror, the uttermost blasphemy; I became aware of a column of greenish haze in the space between the rugs. In that space was the final outrage: the three dimensions of our cosmos, and a fourth axis of direction at right angles to each of the three we know. In that zone of fourth dimension, I could perceive a pathway along which I could walk to escape from the heart of a steel globe without penetrating its walls. And whoever could march along that Fourth Axis could master this and all other worlds with the forces that would follow him from across the Border of our tri-dimensional universe of height and breadth and length.

There was the Gateway, and there were its keepers, reading the equations that defined the pathway, pronouncing tremendous syllables of the master vibration.

"They are doing it!" groaned Father Martin. "The door is open. And look—great God, look!"

I looked. And even in that horror of visible sound and audible color I could still recognize the destruction of the last hope, and the severance of the last link to sanity.

Our world was but the intersection of a plane that cut a fourth-dimensional cosmos. In the incredible geometry of that section of super-space, the small triangular base between the rugs contained enough room to deploy armies and engulf worlds. In our world that triangle covered but a few square feet, but in that diabolical perversion of all sense, it was an abyss that cleft the uttermost depths and frontiers of the universe. The Golden Horde of Genghis Khan, the uncounted hosts of High Asia could march and countermarch, lost in that vastness; Antares and Aldebaran could roam about, lost, hopeless sparks in that terrific gulf. In that green, shimmering haze was a Presence, the Lord of the Fourth Axis marching at right angles to our three dimensions; and in his trace were monstrous entities that transcended all experience and conception. I closed my eyes to the terror, but in vain; for our eyes looked along the Fourth Axis, and through our eyelids!

The edges of the green zone were rolling toward us, engulfing the master hierophants, and reaching toward those on the outer fringe. The Master on his throne saw, and terror swept his god-like features, and the adepts crouched back toward the wall, shrinking from the march of the Lord of the Fourth Axis and his followers. They, the evokers,

were stunned by the apparition of that which they had evoked.

At that instant of immeasurable terror, a figure leaped from the niche at our left. Pierre d'Artois! He charged across that anteroom of hell to confront the Presence from across the Border. In his left hand he held, extended, a roughly fashioned *crux ansata* of copper. As he advanced, he chanted, full and clear against the terrible weaving of harmonies of rays and sounds and colors.

Green, crackling flames leaped about the thrones and parasols. We heard the tremendous wrathful murmur of outraged space; and above it, new, strange whisperings and rustlings and chirpings. Pierre's great voice and prodigious utterance was rending and slashing the web of sorcery, and shattering its exquisitely attuned harmonies. The uncannily distorted angles and monstrous spirals and terrifying, nameless involute curves were assuming rationality as the perverted geometry of the vault began to correct itself. And the zone of greenish haze in the center grew vague and unstable; and the clear vistas of spatial vastness grew dim and obscure.

"Look!" I yelled, clutching Father Martin's arm. "He's breaking it up!"

WITH a howl of rage, the dazed adepts emerged from their stupor, and poured from their thrones and their posts. Father Martin and I charged through the dim twilight that remained of the wrenched symphony of blended vibrations, joining Pierre, and seizing the staves of parasols from the vacant thrones. The enemy, still dulled by the rending of their mesh of vibrant power, of which they themselves had for the time been an actual part, could not collect their wits soon enough to prevent d'Artois and the priest and me from

forming, back to back, for our hopeless stand.

We were lost, and the world with us. For having seen, we now *knew*, rather than surmised. They would overwhelm us, and re-establish that awful vortex of power at their leisure, the next time stopping short of the full evocation which had terrified even those bronzed lords of doom. Pierre had for the moment saved the world, but he had surely saved its destroyers also.

We used the parasol staves as quarter-staff or pike. We salvaged blades from those disarmed by Pierre's uncanny adaptation of any arm, however hopeless, to the cunning play of a skilled swordsman trained in the *salles d'armes* of those old French masters among whom he was eminent. It all happened in a moment; and then, steel in hand, we sought to resist the wave that rolled toward us as the adepts got their wits back to the third dimension.

"Here's to a finish!" I shouted to Father Martin above the howling rage of the enemy.

"A good finish!" he roared in return, swinging his salvaged ceremonial blade with unskilled but vigorous strokes.

"*Tenez!* Hang on! Sock them!" bel-lowed Pierre, as with deadly skill he wove harmonies of steel as amazing as those vibration harmonies he had just shattered. His blade bit and slashed, lengthwise and athwart, compensating for our cruder, heavier efforts. He was slaying with a dazzling swiftness that was so precise and finely timed as to seem deliberate. "We can hold them!"

Luckily the enemy had only their broad, curved ritual swords. One pistol in the crowd would have wiped us out. The priest had turned into a fighting-man, sturdy but awkward, leaving himself open with every stroke he made. And Pierre, dancing in and out with his flickering

steel, found time once and again in that mill of slaughter to deflect with his own blade the cut that would have shorn Father Martin in half. As for me, I held my own; but my arm was becoming numb, and my parries were slower, and my returns less effective.

"We can hold them!" Pierre had shouted, confident in his mastery of steel. But the priest and I were wearing out. It was Pierre's indomitable spirit that spoke, rather than his reason.

The cuts and batterings of the raid were telling. And soon Pierre was favoring me with the protection of his blade. The enemy, wary from our first whirlwind of slashing, was now more subtle. With a great cry, one of them hurdled the wall of slain behind which we resisted their advance, and impaled himself on Father Martin's sword-point; and at the same instant, his companion slashed clear through the priest's lowered guard.

Two of us now. Stout Pierre, and I, on my last legs. Another rush of Mongol swordsmen, and then—— A terrific detonation shook the floor beneath our feet. Then a second and sharper explosion, and a rush of smoke from the passageway leading into the vault.

"*Tenez!*" roared Pierre. "Hang on! They are here!"

Even as he spoke, I heard the crackle of pistols and the roar of a riot gun. I saw men charging in through the acrid clouds of smoke.

My distracted attention cost me a grazing sweep that parted my hair. But I emerged from my crouch with an upward stroke, felt my blade rip home, and free again. Then through eyes half blinded by blood, I saw the sheriff's posse driving in and closing, hand to hand.

"Those excellent deputies!" exulted d'Artois. "*Imbécile! En garde!* We are not through!"

I followed behind the shelter of his

blade as he hacked his way toward the posse.

IT WAS soon over. In another instant the surviving adepts had been swept back and slugged into submission. We found Father Martin where he had fallen athwart the three satanic rugs. He clutched the fringe of one, as though to guard it as long as life remained.

Pierre knelt at his side.

"Carry on where I left off," he contrived to say between gasps, and coughing of blood. "On your life, destroy those rugs. . . ."

Pierre's fingers closed about the grip of a sword. But as he rose, the priest's hand detained him.

"Those who live by the sword——"

Father Martin could not complete his speech.

"Very well, Father," replied d'Artois as he laid down his blade. And then, with more reverence than I had ever before heard in his voice, "*Grâce à Dieu*, he lived long enough to know that he did not take up the sword in vain. And if I recollect rightly, it was a well-established precedent that he followed."

The posse was returning from the corner where the enemy lay in a heap about the throne of the Master.

"Ho, there, *Monsieur le Shérif!*" he hailed. "Be so good as to have several of your deputies lend us a hand."

He indicated with a gesture the body of Father Martin. The sheriff started in amazement at seeing a priest lying in the tangle of fallen adepts. He lifted his hat, and inclined his head for a moment.

"You do well, *monsieur*," said d'Artois as he saw that gesture of respect to the cloth. "And you know not how well. That is more than a priest. He is——"

Words failed d'Artois for an instant. Then, to me, and speaking with a hoarse, strained voice, "And do you give me a

hand with these accursed rugs before Satan himself snatches them from our grasp. They have cost us too much already!"

WE FOLLOWED the posse to the cars in which they had come to our rescue.

Our adversaries, like most Asiatics, had used the cutting edge instead of the point; and though they had just fallen short of slashing us to bits, they had not vitally damaged us. One good thrust is worth a dozen of all but perfectly directed cuts. And then, they had been occultists and not masters of the sword, else they had hewn us to pieces before the rescuers arrived. Nevertheless, it might be said that when we returned from the emergency hospital, we were so bandaged that we had to be stacked into chairs in the courtyard of that house on Saint Peter Street, which I had not expected to see again.

"Now that we're back in the third dimension," I began, "suppose that you tell me how it happened."

"Skipping details," replied Pierre, "I learned, shortly after I left you and Father Martin in the hallway, that they had a radio sending-set for communication with their other units about the country. They were so sure of themselves that they did not watch me as closely as they might have. They were certain that they would make an ally of me, doubtless. At all events, I bent a wrench over the head of the radio operator and took advantage of the opportunity to put in a few words which most fortunately were picked up by the New Orleans police sets. You see, I remembered the proper wave length from having seen the dial of your set when we heard the general alarm and orders to pick up those agents of the Master who were impersonating Federal men.

"Those explosions?" Pierre grinned.

"*Mordieu!* I was too busy to inquire! But judging from the smell of the fumes, I should say they used a good quantity of 80 per cent blasting gelatin. Whatever it was, it tore the steel door from its housing. And incidentally, the shock for a moment halted the charge that would have overwhelmed us."

"Whether it was blasting gelatin or TNT," I said, "the sheriff didn't get in a second too soon! But what I wanted to know was what happened just as you popped into the scene. When the Last Conqueror looked flabbergasted, right when space and geometry and time and light and sound were so hopelessly scrambled, and that damnable Thing came marching down—it seems like a pipe-dream, but for a moment I could see It approaching at right angles to height, length, and width, all at the same time. *Four mutually perpendicular axes!*"

D'Artois smiled and shook his head.

"*Cochon!* He overstepped himself, that one! First, of course, in assuming that I would be tempted by power unheard of, and join him. But as your American aviators put it, he over-controlled, and the Gateway became too wide. It admitted too much. That is a crude expression, but it must suffice. There are no exact words, you comprehend. We were closer to the fourth dimension than I ever wish to be, myself!

"He was momentarily disconcerted at having done more than he had intended, perhaps more than he dreamed possible. I don't know what would have happened if I had not interposed."

"Neither, for that matter, does *he!*" Pierre smiled grimly, then continued, "And he'll never find out, that would-be successor to Genghis Khan, who was a schoolboy compared to what today's enemy would have been had he achieved his purpose."

Then he resumed his explanation.

"At that instant, I ran to the center of the vortex of force and upset the complex harmony, destroying that devil's resonance of light, rays, and sound vibrations which he had created. It was so terrific, yet at the same time so delicately synchronized and balanced that it could be shattered more readily than you would think.

"I pronounced the equations of super-dimensional space that I had with Father Martin's aid deduced from studying the rug; although to be frank about it, I'm not sure that it made any difference what I said. For right in the heart of the vortex, even a discordant *thought* might conceivably cause that diabolical heterodyne to skip a beat or ring a false note in its higher harmonies of interfering waves.

"That piece of copper cable I had twisted into the shape of a crude *crux ansata* was to—how do you say it?—buck up my own courage, for I carried with me the moral backing of what it symbolized.

"And you, my friend, were not out of your mind when you thought that you heard colors, and saw sounds, and observed angular circles. That vortex of vibrations all attuned to the conditions demanded by the equations woven into those rug patterns literally upset a portion of what we call space of three dimensions, and did outrageous things to it.

"And that reminds me." D'Artois paused a moment, then resumed in a low, solemn voice, "I made Father Martin a promise. And had it not been for his profound learning—

"Jake, build for us a fire! *Immédiatement!* At once! Here, in the courtyard."

Then, as Jake heaped kindling and touched a match to it, d'Artois resumed, "And God forbid that we delay another moment in carrying out the last wish of that brave priest. Those damnable rugs are unique in containing the secret of

opening the Gateway to the Fourth Plane, of Super-space of which our world may be but a cross-section.

"Jake, throw them into the fire!"

"No, suh, Mistah Peer, no suh! Ah ain't gonna tech *none* of them!" he declared, rolling his eyes and edging away.

"*Mordieu*, and I do not blame the boy," said d'Artois as he painfully emerged from his chair. He flung the rich folds into the hungry flames. Instead of the stench of burning fabric there came a sweetish, pungent odor, and clouds of violet smoke.

"No honest rug would burn that way," I remarked.

"That flame," replied Pierre, "does seem to confirm some statements made by the Master. The *late* Master, I could more accurately put it," he amended. "He claimed that the dyes and yarn came from beyond our three-dimensional cosmos. Whether that was in good faith, or to impress me so that I would join them, I can not say. But you were in that vault, and you saw."

"Which makes it all the more unreal," I answered, "to be sitting here in my own courtyard, looking at the coals that contain all of that vast scheme."