

fantastic

ADVENTURES

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 2
FEBRUARY
1940

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STORIES



Jalu, the Golden Girl of Kalendar, returns once more in Orlin Tremaine's newest story, in the March issue.



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ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.
William B. Ziff, Publisher;
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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
FEBRUARY 1940
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 608 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. Entry as second-class matter applied for at the Post Office, Chicago, Ill. under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscriptions \$2.40 a year (12 issues); Foreign, \$3.40.

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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua depicting a scene from *The Prince of Mars Returns*
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NEW YORK FIGHTS

BY BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

"HELLO—hello—Tony! Hey, Tony! Do you hear me? What's wrong down there?" Jerry Edwards, barking into the phone, watched the pressure gauge on which the lives of some thirty men depended, pressed by a weird premonition of trouble down in the new subway.

He felt now as he had that day on the river job when Big Mike Hennessey was blown clear into the pathway of a tug and half the Hudson came into the job, drowning seven of the boys before they could get to safety. There was no explaining how a man knew it, nor what it was that warned him, but there was unmistakably trouble brewing.

Even as he called anxiously, the needle leaped. No slow descent such as came from a small vent. No vacillating decline that might mean a leaky packing in a pump. Just one wild jerk that sent her clear to the peg and hung her there without a single tremor of life, as if the top had blown off the job.

"What'n hell can that mean?" he gasped. "Hello—hello—Tony! Tony! You there, Tony?"

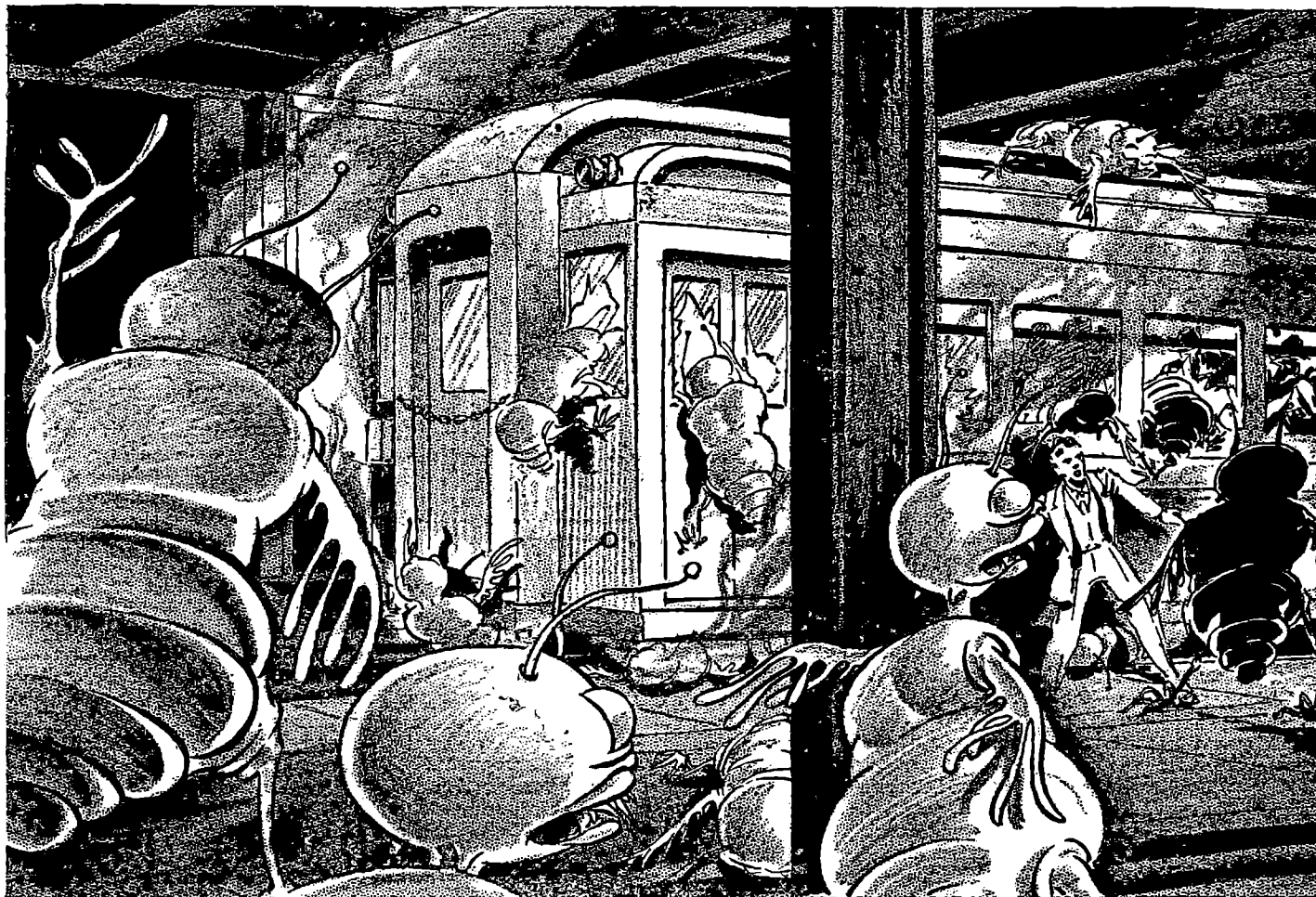
There was no answer but the groaning moan of a body trying to suck air into tortured lungs. His face bloodless, he reached for the other phone that was constantly connected with the air lock.

"Hello, the lock. Anybody there? Any of you hogs make it?"

He was holding both receivers to his ear and shaking in spite of himself. Accidents like this sometimes ruined the careers of men who watched the gauges. Once the rumor got about that if any engineer was unlucky the hogs would refuse to work under him.

That sudden gasp, announcing that somebody was trying to reach him, might be over either line. Then the voice came, gasping and weak, but recognizable. Instantly his pulses steadied. The wild panic left him. It was Tony Lukowitz, foreman on the job, talking from beyond the lock.

"Jerry—it's me—Tony. She jus' blew. Lights too. Knew you'd worry, so made the phone first. Queer thing. Big hole just ahead. Got my flash on it, but can't make it out."



IN AN INSTANT THE SUBWAY WAS A BEDLAM OF TERROR AS THE GHASTLY WHITE CREATURES ADVANCED.

THE TERMANITES

"Yeah, Tony, but how'd she blow? You don't mean we pushed that ledge up and blew the top off a hundred foot hill? We wasn't carryin' enough for that."

"I'll give a look. Too sick to talk much. Boys in bad shape. Try to herd 'em—into lock. Let her down. We got nothin' here."

Jerry knew that, for the needle hadn't moved off the peg. The pumps were ramming air down there just as fast as they could, and that hole was sucking it up without filling. Never before had he encountered anything like this.

Minutes were precious, he knew. Men who had been working under such conditions must not stay long as they were. Like divers who have been deep under the surface of the ocean, they were in danger of the dread nitrogen bubbles in the blood that men call the "bends" unless they could be hurried into that lock and put back under a similar pressure which could be released slowly. That lock must serve now as the diver's decompression chamber.

How could New York stop these awful monsters from underground? They swarmed up like ants in an endless stream of death.

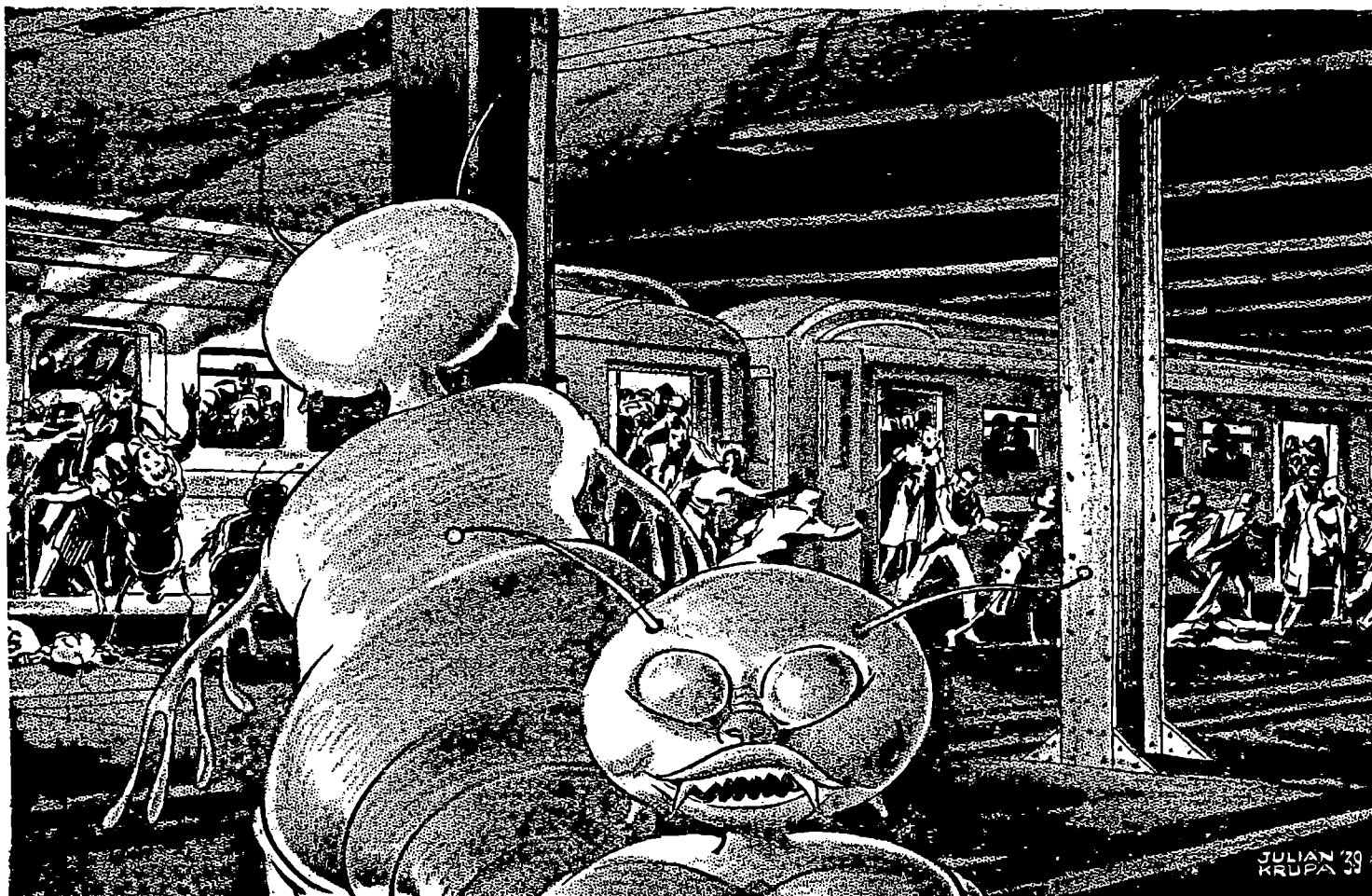
EVEN above the hiss of escaping air as he let off the lock, he heard that scream from the phone. It was like nothing he had ever heard before.

Piercing, shrill, filled with an unutterable horror, that cry rang from the receiver, more horrible still because it came from those hard-bitten sand hogs who knew how to die.

"What is it?" he screamed, half hysterical with dread.

There was no answer save a repetition of that scream, seemingly a mingled cry now of many voices. Then he heard Tony's voice, but more hysterical than he had ever heard it before.

"Hit it, Joe. Smack the blood sucker. Kill it, for



NEW YORK WAS BEING INVADIED FROM BELOW BY THE MOST HORRIBLE CREATURES OF A NIGHTMARE

God's sake, before it gets all of us!"

"Tony, what is it? Are you all goin' crazy down there?"

The foreman's voice was subdued, shaken as he jerked out a reply. "I think so, Jerry. Maybe it's the sudden drop. Guess we're seein' things that ain't. Got that lock pulled? I'm shovin' the boys in—what's left of them."

"Okay, she's down." Then he caught the significance of those last words on the rebound. "God, Tony, how many?"

"I can't say. Busted my flash. That damned thing knocked it out of my hand just before— Hey, damn you, let go my leg! Stop it, I say. Keep your shirt on, boys. Nothin' to go panicky about. You're cold as hell. Stop draggin' at me, I'm phonin' top side. I gotta— Let go, damn you, you cold fish. I'm—"

The words choked off as if the foreman gasped for air. Then there came the thud of the falling phone and silence.

Again Jerry Edwards shook like a leaf as he jiggled first one hook and then the other without a sound of life from either. Ghastly green under his tan, he faced the super.

"I'm jumpin' down there," he called. "Something queer's happenin'. Stand by the phones. I'll want air into that lock in a hurry when I call for it. We'll lose the lot of 'em if we don't get 'em under pressure soon."

Even as he raced down into the tunnel he wondered if the men had all cracked simultaneously. Probably they had struck an old fissure in the rock, where some gases lay imprisoned, gases that had overcome them, set them to dreaming or fighting among themselves. It wouldn't take much to set men panicky when pressure dropped so suddenly.

He felt of his own pocket to make sure his flashlight was in readiness. It was no joke poking around a job without light. Probably a fuse had blown when the wall ahead fell, or somebody might have jerked over the switch by accident. There was no knowing what a man would do when terror hit him.

The lock doors yielded. He saw that a feeble electric light was still burning above those benches where the sand hogs sat while the pressure was being adjusted to let them in or out. But the benches were empty. There was not a slumped form on the floor, fallen in an effort to reach the chamber that might mean life.

The door to the job had been swung open. He shot his beam through it, then blinked at the ghastly sight that he beheld.

SOMETHING almost human in size and shape, yet horribly inhuman in other respects, was dragging at the limp body of one of the sand hogs. Naked, its ghostly white body gleaming with a mildly phosphorescent glow, the thing that looked oddly human, yet oddly like a massive ant, was tugging and jerking with more than one pair of arms, while its head, seem-

ingly without developed eyes, was swinging out from side to side, waving antennae that quivered and jerked.

The thing lifted the body easily, swung it over its back, and went off toward the far end of the tunnel, walking very much like a man bent over at the hips under a load, but balancing itself by the use of other minor limbs than the two or more that supported the limp form.

Jerry Edwards screamed and leaped after the thing, picking up a bar and preparing to drive it into the phosphorescent whiteness of flesh. But just as he started that lunge of the bar, his flashlight revealed the gaping hole in the end of the tunnel, a hole twenty feet across and lined all the way with similar sightless heads, waving antennae, and reaching arms.

At the same instant they came lunging up, darting from side to side with the queer quick jerking movements of exploring ants, making way for their burdened fellow who jostled past them and down the gaping hole, still carrying his burden.

Edwards saw in that one swift sweep of his arc that the job was empty of anything living but those unnamed creatures that seemed to keep spewing up from subterranean depths. Combat was useless against such numbers, pursuit of the one carrying the dead or unconscious sand hog ridiculously foolhardy. There was nothing that he could do but retreat.

That, he realized, must be done quickly. The foremost of the advancing horrors had halted at a few drops of blood, presumably where somebody had bled at the nose at the sudden drop of pressure. But the others pushed him on, their antennae waving jerkily, to point in the direction of the staring Edwards.

As they swept at him with incredible swiftness, considering their evident blindness, he came out of his physical trance, rushed through the door, and clamped it shut after him.

The phone was jangling, but he had no stomach for trying to tell the super over the phone what he had seen. That sort of thing wouldn't sound credible face to face, let alone over a wire.

Shaking with horror he went fumbling upward. He could only guess at the death the boys had met down there in the gloom. If any of them had still lived when carried off into the cavern beyond, he must die soon of the bends.

THE super stared at him incredulously and started for the ladder. Edwards gripped him.

"They're shut out of the lock," he said. "Don't let 'em through, whatever you do. Don't go down there without a gun. They're devilish."

The super jerked out an automatic.

"Been carryin' this ever since that Polish guy ran amuck. Guess this'll stop 'em."

Edwards seized an axe and followed at his heels. He had closed the doors at both ends of the lock to make sure those things didn't come through. There was going to be work enough to do without having

those horrors swarming over the completed part of the tunnel.

The super jerked off the clamps and yanked open the door. He thrust his head in, preparing to follow, but halted instead and lifted his automatic with frenzied speed. With a roar that all but deafened them in the confined space, he poured four or five shots into the dimly lighted chamber where those vaguely discernible forms were groping over benches and floor.

Edwards saw to his horror that the wood about the farther door was eaten away as if by powerful teeth or a biting acid, so that the hinges had allowed the door to drop. Inside the lock was a veritable swarm of the things, their shining bodies tight packed.

There were quick jerks of pain as the bullets smacked home, but the survivors merely lifted their dead out of the way and bore them to the rear, or came swarming over them. By the time the fourth or fifth shot was fired, an arm-like limb had reached out and seized the wrist holding the gun. Another wrapped around the super's neck, jerking it horribly. Edwards knew by the crunching of bones and the sudden limpness of the form that the super was killed instantly, his neck broken.

Again he turned and fled, conscious that those darting, questing forms were flooding the finished portion of the tunnel behind him, feeling, sniffing, jerking, searching, as if eager for more and more human bodies to bear off to their unknown caverns.

Weak and sick, he made the surface, staggered to the phone.

"Police headquarters," he managed to gasp, "quick. Emergency!"

In the awful interim while he waited, he could not take his eyes from that ladder he had just ascended. They might come swarming up that at any instant, rushing about like a nest of enraged ants, killing savagely, bearing off their victims.

"Subway construction job number seventeen," he yelled. "Rush as many riot squads as you can over here. Hell's broke loose. Gas. Machine guns. Anything you've got that'll kill. For God's sake hurry!"

There was no use trying to tell them what had happened. They would know he was a mad man if he tried to explain those ghastly things that had taken over the tunnel.

Sirens screamed. Squad cars began to rip tires to a quick halt about the job. Officers came running with machine guns in their hands.

"What's up?" called a captain. "Labor troubles? We're not turnin' machine guns on strikers."

"Nobody's askin' you to," snapped Edwards, his nerves so raw that manners were forgotten. "Take a look down that hole at the murderin' things that just rushed our job. You'll be glad to turn your guns on 'em, if you see what I did."

through the hole and was waving those odd antennae. In the light of day it was easy to see that the head carried sightless, undeveloped eyes that looked as if they would never mature into usefulness. There was no nose. The mouth was a working set of mandibles that seemed to slide together like the shutter plates of a camera, hard bony things that looked capable of tearing flesh horribly.

Even as they watched, arms appeared, long slender limbs of the same pale whiteness as the head and body. But there were no hands on the extremities, only suction disks that gripped eagerly at the rough planking.

"Shoot the devilish thing," screamed Edwards. "There's an army of 'em below. They've cleaned out thirty men. Broke the super's neck before my eyes."

The bald head, with the bluish bulges of the undeveloped eyes the only sign of color in the glowing whiteness, seemed to sense cause for alarm. With evidence of fear in its bearing, the creature jerked its suction hands loose with a squidgy tearing sound, partially whirled, almost like a man on a ladder, and began to descend.

To the horrified men the descent was even worse than the appearance, for it veered away from the ladder and walked down the concrete wall with those odd squidgy sounds of broken suction as each limb tore loose from the wall.

Other similar heads poked out, wavered, and retreated. But the hole was not deserted. More and more and more of the unnameable creatures came poking and sniffing up, to retreat in a similar fashion against and even over their jostling fellows who kept streaming up to the hole to discover for themselves what lay beyond.

Unable to comprehend why they were retreating, Edwards could only gasp feebly.

"Do something, Cap'n. Shoot 'em. Gas 'em. Drive 'em back somehow. They'll swarm down that tunnel. They'll be into the subway."

A commissioner forced his way through the awe-struck ring of numbed officers. His eyes bulged as he took one look at those ghastly white heads with their unborn eyes and their waving antennae.

"They've swarmed out of a cavern we struck," explained Edwards hurriedly. "They've killed and carried off thirty men and our super. Will you do something?"

"Got any gas, Captain Merkel?" asked the commissioner, his lips colorless and his face drained white.

"Plenty of it."

"Give 'em a taste."

The captain motioned. Gas throwers leaped to the shoulders of the two foremost men, shot the fumes down into that seething horde.

Above ground men gasped and choked in the mere whiffs that seeped up through the planking. Eyes began to water. Handkerchiefs mopped freely.

But there was no change evident within the tunnel below. The antennae waved a trifle more, perhaps, but the white forms showed no increased animation,

THERE was no need to go down. The leader of the weird creatures had already thrust his head

no faintest sign of excitement.

"Tear gas can't touch 'em because they've no eyes," called Edwards. "Give 'em the works. Something that'll kill. We'll be overrun with 'em."

"We don't carry poisonous gas about with us," the captain was explaining in response to the commissioner's inquiring look. "But I could have some over here."

"Better get it. And rush a couple of squad cars with machine guns down the street to the nearest entrance to this new tunnel. Tell 'em to keep these things from passing 'em, if they have to mow down the lot. We can't have them invading the operating subways. The city'd be panicked."

The captain nodded agreement and turned to issue orders in a voice subdued by horror. Men darted to their cars and tore away. The captain jerked his head toward the hole.

"Want us to try a few rounds on 'em, sir? Might scare 'em back where they came from."

The commissioner hesitated, remembering how half human those forms seemed. Then his face hardened.

"Give 'em a few shots," he nodded. "See what they do."

THE machine guns leaped to shoulders. The officers stepped forward. Barrels depressed to send a hail of bullets down into the teeming horde as guns leaped and chattered.

The effect was nil. Again the sound creatures picked up their dead and wounded comrades and bore them easily to the rear, even as an army of ants might dispose of their dead or wounded. The others showed no alarm at the stutter of the guns, no fear of the lashing bullets.

"They ain't human," gasped a gunner falling back.

It was evident that they lacked normal human reactions. The absence of any flinch at the discharge of the guns would indicate that they had no sense of hearing. Blind and deaf, they must rely on their sense of smell and their delicate sense of touch to guide them, yet they darted about as quickly as the most energetic and highly animated human being.

Yet they seemed to be much like human beings in their structure. Edwards had stared hard at those that poked their heads into the daylight and was convinced that their bodies more closely resembled man's than any insect's. They were plainly of flesh and bone, although their whiteness made him hesitate about declaring they had blood as well. The bone, furthermore, was an internal rather than an external skeleton, definitely putting them in the mammal class.

"It would take a week of constant firing to kill 'em off," sighed an officer who had been peering down into the hole, where more and more of the things kept swarming past. "Chernick and Gates won't be able to stop 'em for long."

Before the car was back with poisonous gas, the faint rat-a-tat-tat of the machine gun far down the completed portion of the tunnel was faintly audible

over the moving rattle and suction-breaking noises of those hundreds of darting figures squirming and wriggling and writhing past. Soon observers saw the returning creatures bearing their dead back into the lock, as more and more continued to shove forward.

The chatter of the distant machine gun became a steady purr. Then it slowed, stopped.

During the silence there came the scream of a police car siren up the street and the squeal of a hastily applied brake. Then one of the two that had been sent to halt that rush screamed in terror, "We run out of ammunition. Gates was goin' to hold on while I went for more. They came at him along the walls and even along the roof. I see 'em swarm over him. They've passed that entrance."

"Look," gasped the observer staring in fascinated horror into the hole. "There he goes."

It was true. Held in the same fashion as the sand hog Edwards had seen borne off into the earth, the body of Gates was riding past on the back of one of the stooped creatures that fought its way through the horde of newcomers toward the retreat whence all had spewed.

"Come on with that gas," screamed the commissioner. "Kill the devilish things. We've got to put an end to this. They must be stopped. Rush more machine guns and gas down the street. Try to halt them at each entrance. Shoot to kill."

THE captain barked his orders. More squad cars tore away carrying white faced officers. Jerry Edwards swung toward a phone.

"Who you callin'?" barked the commissioner.

"Friend of mine on a tabloid. A kid who deserves a break. She'll spill the story of her lifetime."

"Don't," gasped the white faced commissioner. "Imagine what it'll mean. The city'll be panicked. Nobody'll dare to use the subways. Everything'll be tied up. Surface accommodations can't begin to handle the mobs. We've got to keep this thing quiet until it's licked. Think what it'll mean to the thousands who visit the city every week."

Jerry Edwards shook his head. He knew that this dread menace beneath the streets of the great city would undoubtedly drive away prospective visitors, send those already on hand and spending generously into a panicky departure.

On the other hand, he knew what those things had done to thirty tough sand hogs and as fine a foreman as ever drove a hard working crew. He shuddered to think what a drove of them would do to men, women, and children in subway stations and trains far below the great city.

"Can we take the risk?" he asked seriously.

"Of course we can. We'll gas the devils, mop 'em up with hand grenades, pour 'em full of machine gun bullets. There must be an end to 'em."

"Somebody'll break the yarn. I want my friend to have it."

The commissioner waved a hand. After that first

quick glance at the poking heads protruding inquiringly from the hole, he had whispered orders. A cordon of police had refused admission to everybody but officers. Not even a reporter had come near enough to the job to guess what was happening.

"This story can't leak," snapped the commissioner. "That's understood. Not a man of you is to whisper what has gone on here. This thing must not reach the press until the danger is past. We can't handle the panic that would result."

Jerry Edwards thought of that girl reporter riding homeward on the subway, getting off at an uptown station, perhaps even now grinding nearer and nearer to that horde of questing monsters on her way home. He shuddered at the thought of those horrible suckers sliding their cold embrace over her soft flesh.

"I'm phoning her," he said grimly, "to keep out of the subways at all costs."

The commissioner stepped close, his eyes pleading. "Don't tell her why, I beg of you."

"Okay by me. But I'm warning her. I want none of mine facing those inhuman things if I can help it."

The gas came before he got her. He saw them donning masks around the hole, cheerfully preparing to kill the things below wholesale. If machine guns were operating far down the back stretch at distant entrances, he could not hear them.

"Let her go," called the commissioner.

He saw the officers retreat, saw something hurtle down the hole. Then he got his party.

"Miss Cartwright of the *Flash* speaking."

"Listen, Kate, this is Jerry, calling from the job. It's important. Matter of life and death. Do something for me? . . . Yeah, no questions asked. Cross your heart and all that? . . . Don't think I'm screwy, kid. I was never more serious in my life. Keep out of the subways. Ride a taxi or a surface, but keep above ground. Get me? Listen, it's no astrology nor spirit warning. It's serious dope. Tell you about it some time. But don't go below ground until you hear from me it's safe. . . . No, it's something you'd never dream about. You'd think I was crazy if I told you, but I can't. Police commish says it's not to leak to the sheets. But do believe me and keep above ground. Whatever you do *stay out of the subways.*"

Ruefully half convinced from the bantering tone in her voice that she would promptly hunt for the nearest entrance, just to show her independence, he pronged the receiver wearily. But the sight of that officer in the gas mask reeling back from the hole brought him back to the problem at hand with a jerk. The man was ripping off the mask, revealing a countenance drawn and worried.

"No effect on 'em at all, as far as I can see. They're still scurryin' past as if we'd tried nothin' on 'em. That dose would've wiped out a regiment caught without masks on."

Edwards nodded soberly to himself. These weird creatures from below must be equipped by nature to cope with pockets of deadly gas they must encounter

frequently. Something other than gas must be brought into play if they were to be stopped in their mad drive.

But the reports that came in were discouraging. Entrance after entrance was the scene of another vain attempt to halt them. Machine guns roared at them; hand grenades burst among them; a fire-thrower, rushed from a nearby armory, seared them and seemed about to halt the charge but ran out of fuel, allowing the massing hordes to sweep on and on.

"Less than half a mile beyond," moaned Edwards, "that tunnel leads onto a track where trains are operating. There's no knowing what'll happen when they hit that."

"The trains'll scare 'em," declared the commissioner, but it was more wishful thinking than conviction that prompted him.

"They can't hurt the trains much," declared the anxious Captain Merkel. "What I'm worried about is the stations. They'll raise havoc there."

CHAPTER II

The Horde Invades New York

AT the *Flash* Katherine Cartwright set a crazy little stylish hat at an absurd angle and pulled down her tailored coat over her trim hips. With just a bit of feminine determination to ignore the plea, advice, or orders of the man who thought he had some right to boss her around, she tripped toward the door.

"I smell a story aching to break," she smiled at the city editor. "Mind if I dash out and splurge it all over the front page? It'll be a wow, I'm willing to bet."

He did not bother to take his feet off the desk nor his hands from behind his head. He merely peered up at her incredulously from under his hatbrim, which had been cocked low over his brows so that he could doze.

"When you stumble on front page stuff, sister, the drinks'll be on me," he yawned. "But go have a soda with the boy friend, if that's what you want. Things're deader 'n dead this afternoon."

She hurried toward the elevator, thinking as it swooped earthward, of what Jerry Edwards had said about keeping out of the subways. If that guy thought he could order her around, just because she suffered his presence now and then, he had another think coming. She fairly ran for the subway.

Hastily she figured out the line that would take her nearest to the job where Jerry was working. Whatever he had in mind would be likely to emanate from his job. Probably they had tapped some gas that was escaping, were afraid it would cause an explosion or a fire.

He needn't think she was going to let a little thing like personal safety keep her away from what might be the story of the year. A big blow in the subway would make a sensation, people fighting through the darkness and smoke for light and air. Smashed trains. Screams of women. Madness of men gone crazy with

the desire to live. She would see it all at first hand, stand on the sidelines and watch, carry back to her paper a vivid eye-witness account—if she could only get there in time.

She made her switches anxiously, caught an express, watched eagerly for the right station to switch to a creepy local. Her leg work on the rag had taught her every trick of beating the clock in Manhattan's network of sub-surface trackage. Less than half an hour from the time she received Jerry Edwards' message, she was on the local and sliding toward the spot where the new branch would take off from the old track.

"Listen," she gasped, after fighting her way to the motorman's tiny compartment in the foremost car and tapping on the window until he dropped it to hear what she had to say, "something's due to happen along here. I'm a newspaper woman. I just got a tip."

He looked at her dourly, shifted his quid of tobacco, looked back at the unreeling tracks that shot at them steadily around the bend.

"What's likely to happen is I'm likely to get sacked for talking to a passenger while on duty. Ten or twenty years ago I'd've took the chance, but not even you—cute a trick as you are—could make me try it today. I'm gettin' too old."

"Take things easy," she begged, as the window started to slide up.

"Can't. Gotta hold to schedule, or they'll put a younger man on. If seein' the track open out scares you, go on back inside."

She did not answer. She was peering ahead, staring at the unwinding walls of concrete with the occasional offset for workers who must avoid trains, with those gleaming tracks glittering away into complete darkness ahead.

She almost screamed at the sudden glow ahead. It must be the fire. Could they stop in time?

But the motorman did not stop, did not even slow for several lengths. Then he brought the thundering train into the local stop and lowered his glass to grin at her as the doors clattered noisily open.

"Don't get your game, sister, but you sure are a looker," he ogled her. "Wish I was twenty years younger."

She did not answer, merely gave her body that little jerking twitch she always did to quiet a masher, and stared straight ahead. Out of the corner of her eye she could see a few passengers straggling towards the stairs. She found herself mentally congratulating them that they were safely out of it, whatever it was that threatened.

"I'm goin' off duty after the next run," said the motorman hopefully, "if you're still of a mind you want to talk we might try some beer and pretzels at a place I know."

Again she stiffened her shoulders in that way Jerry Edwards said would discourage anybody but a maniac. The doors clattered shut, the window slid up, and they started to move.

She tensed, her little hands knotted into fists. It

was awful standing there staring ahead into the ripening darkness wondering what it was she must expect. At any minute they might roar into a mighty conflagration blasting down the tunnel. The sparks streaking from the biting wheels that fought to cling to the steel rails might set off an explosive gas that had seeped into the locked air.

They swept around a seemingly endless curve and tore down a straightaway. He opened the throttle wide, making a little face at her worried countenance as her eyes begged him to slow.

Far down the track something gleamed. The floor, walls, and roof of the tunnel seemed lined with something that glowed faintly. She thought of the nitre on the walls of the catacombs in one of Poe's short stories: *The Cask of Amontillado*, wasn't it? and shuddered.

"They're bodies," she screamed, turning to find that the motorman was ogling her instead of watching the track ahead. "Naked bodies on the track! Stop before you run into them!"

SHE had a blurred wonder flash through her mind if this was some new sort of fanaticism, some combination of Gandhi's passive resistance and the Dakobars' nakedness. What, she wondered, could it possibly mean?

Then, just before they struck, she saw that they were not human, but weird creatures as large as men, shaped generally much like human beings, but otherwise much like giant insects. A scream of horror burst from her as the motorman, aware now that the tracks were teeming with something, slammed on his brakes.

She heard the sickening crunch of flesh and bone under those massive wheels even as the shoes gripped and the steel complained. She crashed against the forward window and nearly pitched through it into the shambles of piled bodies massing before the driving car, but braced her hands on the sides of the door and was saved from that.

But she had a good picture of those horrible things, caught some vague idea of their numbers as she hung there waiting for the train to stop so that she could recover her equilibrium and flee back along the aisles. Roof, walls, and floor of the tunnel were covered with those ghastly crawling bodies as far as she could see ahead down the broad passage.

Men and women were already fighting at the doors, clamoring to be released. The crushed bodies under the wheels had lubricated the brakes, so that the train slid almost its entire length into the horde before it stopped. Suddenly the train was plunged into darkness that brought a fresh scream of terror.

"Don't open the doors," roared the motorman, but he was too late. Already the guards had obeyed instinct or the clamor of the remaining passengers and started to open them.

Panicky men rushed through them, leaping into the darkness. That faintly phosphorescent glow of the teeming bodies closed over them, but their shrieks of horror resounded through train and tunnel.

Glowing heads peered in at the opened doors, horrible sucker hands clamped onto the floor to drag naked white bodies nearer.

"Come on," called the motorman, seizing his visitor by an elbow, "I'm getting you out of here. The Lord alone knows what has hit us. Run down the aisle. Run for your life."

He had a flashlight out and was playing it for her. The cars were almost empty. The few passengers that had not leaped were climbing the seats, swinging in terror on the straps, screaming hysterically as the ant-like things jerked their way into the cars, their antennae waving, their mandibles working hungrily.

The first car was fairly invaded as they left it. The second was barely touched as yet, a single white head appearing at the door. The third and last was deserted by human beings and ant-men alike.

"Keep right on going," urged the puffing motorman. "Them damn things are killers. I see one of 'em biting into a guy in the first car. Let's hope they slow down enough to give us out."

He threw the beam of his light back once. There was great activity among the marauders around the train. He had a confused picture of human bodies and crushed and mangled invaders being lifted and borne back up the tunnel. Then he saw that the advance guard was past the end of the stalled train and he turned to urge the girl to greater speed.

"Ladder up ahead," he gasped. "Keep an eye out for it."

The beam of his flash swept in a lifting and falling arc as he gallumphed along behind her. Her stilted heels made running difficult, but she managed to keep up somehow.

"There it is. Swing up it. Fast."

She ran like a terrified monkey up the steel rungs. Behind them darted the advance of the invaders, their antennae quivering as if with awareness of human presence near at hand.

She found herself against an iron manhole cover and tried in vain to lift it with her head and shoulders. Then the wheezing motorman, sensing her difficulty, squeezed past her to shunt it up and off.

His fat body was pressed hard against hers as he heaved. She felt him thrust the cover away, relax, and then tense again. His face was so close that his hot breath blew into her neck. When his muscles tightened in an even greater effort, she felt his terror ooze out to her.

"Take this flash and hurry up through," he gasped, making an evident effort to control breaking nerves. "And—tell the old woman I did my best to come through."

Then she saw that he was slowly being torn away from the rungs, although the steel actually bent under the pull of his powerful fingers and his lungs whistled with the strain.

His eyes, glaring out of a white face, told her to go on up. In another instant he was gone and she was scrambling through to safety. Whirling, she clamped

the iron cover down onto a horrible white head with ugly blue patches where the eyes should be. Then she hurriedly piled onto the cover a number of boxes that stood against a neighboring wall.

SICK and giddy with what she had seen and what she had escaped, she went on up. Another ladder led to the street. The sight of the afternoon sun cheered her. She could almost believe that what she had witnessed down in the subway was all a horrible dream. Then she saw a squad car draw up to the subway entrance just below her and spew officers armed with machine guns and white faced with terror into the yawning opening.

"Jerry," she whispered, starting for a phone booth on the run, "you started me after the weirdest story that has ever broken in Manhattan, but I wish to God it weren't true."

Change makers at local stations fled or were seized by the horrible swarming creatures. Trains were utterly lost during the next few hours. Anxious parents, worried dispatchers, and terrified patrons of the subway who saw the invaders approaching and fled in panic to the surface deluged police stations and newspaper offices with queries.

Thanks to Katherine Cartwright's newspaper instinct and the ability she possessed of remaining calm enough to write a coherent story, even under such trying circumstances, the city was aware within an hour of her escape of the threat that stalked beneath the pavements. Colorfully she pictured that ghastly scene of the stalled and raided train. Readers of the *Flash* rode with her on that forward platform, felt her fear of the dreaded unknown ahead, flinched with her as she revealed in her gripping style the mighty horror she had known.

Not a detail was spared. Her labored escape with the motorman and his last request, before he was hauled from shielding her by one or more of their pursuers, made the necessary human interest touch to turn her story into a masterpiece.

The commissioner lifted his ban against talking of the horror when the editorial in the *Flash* accused him of sacrificing the lives of those trapped below the earth's surface and endangering the lives of untold thousands of others by refusing to warn them of the danger.

He issued a frantic explanation that he had underestimated the effects, that he had been convinced the horde of invaders could be stopped by the heroic police efforts, that he had never dreamed they could stall trains and attack the passengers in such a fashion.

His answer, flashed out in extras by every paper in town, carried one reassuring note. The strange creatures seemed intent upon keeping beneath the surface, drew back at contact with the open air. Evidently the populace of the city was safe if everybody kept away from the subways.

Darkness fell to the tune of radio announcers blaring out theories regarding the invasion. Lifting the

ban of silence had resulted in disclosing to the public that the swarm came up from a fault in the ledge ahead of the new excavation. Hastily contacted scientists gave fantastic explanations of what they might be and whence they had originated. Not since the Orson Welles fright had men and women crouched in such terror over their loud speakers.

But this time the horror was real. Dialing in new stations for denial, they found confirmation instead.

THEN the horror grew. With the coming of darkness the horde no longer remained confined to the subways. All over the vast network of underground tracks there were darting white figures appearing, poking their heads out of the entrances, scuttling hither and thither on sidewalks and streets, probing doorways, rattling their suckers and mandibles against plate-glass windows behind which cowered horrified diners.

"The hope that the invading army of ant-like creatures would remain in the subways seems false," shouted an excited voice over the loud speaker, even as the guests screamed and women fainted. "With the dying of light, the horde has crept up the stairs. Reckless of the white glare of the brightest streets in the world, the horrid things are at this minute terrifying the Broadway habitués and carrying off the unfortunates who fall into their grip.

"We have a dispatch from the Forty-Second Street station at Times Square, junction of so many lines. Eye witnesses who were able to escape the sudden rush of thousands of the monsters claim that the invaders killed but a few of their victims, carrying many off alive. The terrified wails of the captives echoed weirdly through the vaulted tunnels as they were borne off on the backs of their captors, bound for some unknown fate in the dark depths from whence the invaders came."

Jammed into the restaurant before which those clawing figures were massing, Jerry Edwards seized Katherine Cartwright by an elbow and fairly lifted her to her feet.

"We're not stopping here," he said grimly, hurrying her out.

"But we can't face them, Jerry. They'll—they'll kill or capture us. Are you crazy?"

"Not crazy enough to loiter there. Here, shove into this elevator."

"Sorry, boss," grinned the boy on duty, "unless you got a key to an office above, you can't ride. After office hours, you know."

Edwards bent close to him, his eyes boring:

"You been reading the papers, boy?" he asked. "Or listening to the radio news broadcasts? Have you happened to see what's clawing at the outside doors?"

"Yeah, what are they? Know the answer?"

Edwards laughed. He had been considering that for hours. He had a name for them, a name that was to strike the fancy of the city when the girl reporter used it in her next special.

"They're *termanites*, a cross between the wood-devouring white ants of the tropics and human beings. And I know something else that hasn't hit the papers yet—they can bite through sticks of oak timber twelve by twelve square. They did on the decompression lock on the job where they broke through. Figure what they'll do when they sniff that wood that the doors are hung in! Now, take us up."

"I'm a newspaper woman," explained Katherine with an ingratiating smile. "I've got to get that to my paper. The city must know all that we can tell them about the things."

Half a dozen of the *termanites* were visible, even as the boy stepped aside to admit them to the elevator, rearing on their hind legs and snapping with those oddly extended cutting edges at the mouth, around the hinges of the big doors. They could hear wood rending and splintering:

"Hold it for me," called Edwards sharply.

He leaped back to the glass doors of the dining room and shoved them open, noticing that they were hung on metal, with no wood in evidence. His voice boomed out as if he were calling a group of disorderly sand hogs to order.

"Listen, people," he roared. "Your lives may depend on following instructions. I was at the scene where these things first broke through, and I know a little of what to expect of them. They can cut wood as if it were bread. They'll have those outer doors off their hinges in no time."

"It's a lucky thing for you that doorway is narrow. If you're smart, you'll upend that glass showcase against the door and barricade it. Then pile tables and chairs against these doors that lead into the main corridor. They're coming through any minute."

He did not wait to see if his orders were obeyed, but leaped for the elevator. The outer doors to the main entrance of the big building were swaying before the shove of those crowding bodies. He saw the white-faced proprietor of the restaurant rallying his men and the male diners to the job of barricading the place. Then the door clanged shut, and they were shooting upward, just as the outer doors crashed.

"Get us to a phone fast," urged Miss Cartwright. "The police and the public must know what we know. Jerry, what is to be the end of all this? Is the city doomed?"

"There's got to be an end to them," he insisted. "As they spread out like this, they will be falling victims to the police. Steady decimation will cut them down."

"But what can we do, Jerry? Won't they come up after us?"

"They might. I can hold them off for a while—like Horatius at the bridge. I doubt if their suckers will work any too well on marble or imitation marble. The surface is probably a little slick for good traction."

THE terrified elevator boy shot them to the top story and let them into a room which he unlocked. He loitered, after showing them where the phone was

located, as if unwilling to get far from them.

While the girl reported to the city desk, Edwards leaned far out of a window and studied the street below. The usual flood of electric light bathed the scene, but the cruising taxis, the raucous pleasure cars, and the pushing mobs of people were gone. Not even a trolley car moved on the streets. There was no life in evidence except scattered numbers of the termanites darting about questingly or knotted before doorways where the scent of packed humanity seemed to draw them.

A faint scream wafted up to them and they saw a tiny figure far below rush frantically into the street. Behind it, darting and dodging like puzzled hounds on the scent, were three of the ghastly white figures that gleamed with an even more intensive whiteness in their nakedness under the glare of the thousands of bulbs.

The speed of the fleeing figure lagged. That of the pursuers increased. Suddenly the terrified woman stumbled, but was caught before she struck the pavement, lifted, swung in air, and carried triumphantly off, still kicking and screaming hysterically, back the way they had all come.

Grim with the horror of it all and his inability to do anything to stop the carnage, Edwards turned to the girl.

"They're all over the city," she said in despair. "The populace is terrified. Everybody who has an automobile is vacating for the open country. The police are shooting the termanites down all over the city, but there seems no end to them."

"They ought to flood the tunnels and station militia on the bridges to confine them to Manhattan," suggested Edwards.

"The governor has called out the militia. Every machine gun available is being rushed to the outskirts to make sure the horror is limited to the island. But think of the millions left here, Jerry. What is to become of them—of us?"

The horrible noise of suction feet tearing loose from walls warned them. The elevator boy went ghastly white.

"You'll be safe in your cage, kid, if you're afraid to stay with us," called Edwards. "Shut the door and drop between floors. They can't reach you then."

The lad shook his head. He was searching vainly about the office for a weapon.

Edwards picked up a chair, a solid oak affair, and crashed it to splinter away the back legs. They extended up beyond the seat to form the sides of the backrest, making serviceable enough cudgels when rounds and back slats and seat were knocked away. Armed with these, the two went out into the marble corridor, the girl following.

A single bald and gleaming head with its sickening looking undeveloped eye blobs was peering around the corner at the top of the stairs. Edwards leaped forward, his club upraised. All of the pent-up desire to fight the ghastly menace that had been wreaking such havoc all about him went into that blow.

The head burst like a ripe orange, spattering a watery fluid over the walls. The body, twitching and jerking in the throes of death, released its suction grips and started to slide down the marble stairs.

In an instant Edwards had leaped and grasped it, halting the descent. A glance sufficed to show that there was no other termanite in sight. Although he listened, he could hear no more of those squidgy suction sounds approaching.

"Watch for any more of 'em, kid," he called to the boy and lifted the dead body.

IT was cold to his touch, heavy and limp as a dead human being. Sick to his stomach and fighting hard to keep from retching at the proximity of the ghastly thing, he lugged it into the room they had just quitted and bent to examine it.

"Low body temperature," he checked. "Probably from living naked in those subterranean caverns from which they come."*

"Look," gasped the girl, forcing herself to bend close and assist, although sick with horror. "The skin is slick—has no pores."

It was a fact. The skin showed no signs of those tiny openings so essential to the health of earth surface dwellers.

"They come from such an even temperature that they have had no need for body radiation for—well, maybe for millions of years," nodded Edwards. "Extreme heat or cold will probably kill them. Let's pray for a hot spell. If those tunnels will only bake as they often do at this time of year—"

"They won't until too late. Haven't you ever noticed how perverse the weather always seems? Jerry, how many arms have they?"

He bent close over the peculiar formation, tearing his eyes away from the ghastly head with those sliding cutters that were more formidable than the teeth of any animal he had ever seen, even of the vaunted saber toothed tiger of prehistoric ages.

"Look, they've only two arms," he gasped.

"How can you say so? Here are eight or ten."

"You're wrong, keed. Remember your anatomy, or didn't you take it? See, we have two arms here at the shoulders, short upper and lower arm bones as in most mammals. Those things that look like arms are overdeveloped fingers. Eight active ones and two immobile ones that correspond to the almost useless thumb of the early man. Each of the eight is equipped with a suction plate."

*The termite is an active, crawling creature with six legs, and there are both winged and wingless types. They have a social community in which various tasks are carried out by specialized types, just as in ant colonies. Scientifically, they are described as *Termitidae*, of the order *Isoptera*. The nests of the termite are built of earth, hard and persistent, and sometimes more than twelve feet high. These nests are divided into chambers and galleries of great complexity. There are generally two or three roofs within the dome-shaped interior. Termites attack the wood of houses, and soon reduce the thickest timbers to mere shells. The termite of the United States is called *Termes Flavipes*, since this is the only type with a northward range. They are known more generally as the "white ant."—Ed.

It was true. The similarity to human structure would have delighted a disciple of Darwin. Here was yet another astounding proof of the general relationship of vertebrate life.

Their findings were phoned in to the paper, which was issuing no fresh extras because the entire staff was barricaded behind closed doors to escape from being over-run by the termanites. Even if a paper could be printed, there was no way of distributing it.

But the information was duly forwarded to the broadcast stations, safe almost in the clouds at the tops of tall buildings. A detailed report of their findings went blaring out to anxious listeners.

Sexless as far as investigation showed, the creatures seemed incapable of reproduction. They were evidently like the workers of certain colonies of highly specialized insects, the form that lived solely to keep the reproducers of the race in idleness at home. Edwards shuddered at his imaginary conception of what the reproducing agent must look like, if it was in proportion to these others as the queen bee of a hive is to the honey gatherers.

He sensed that the city could never be safe again until whatever it was that produced such hordes of the fiendish things was dead in its dark cavern somewhere deep in the earth.

All night the city remained barricaded. Then dawn brought relief. The termanites scuttled back to the subways with the coming of daylight. Like nocturnal things afraid of being seen by day, they scurried and scuttled from alley and entries, from office buildings, theater lobbies, and other places where they were nosing about. By full daylight, when a red sun poked its inquiring head up to see if the rumored horror had really existed, there was no further evidence of the things above the street level.

But they had retreated no farther than the subways, as courageous investigation showed. Under the city the tunnels were crawling with the inquiring hordes that still darted about singly, in pairs, or in files like so many questing ants poking inquisitively about to familiarize themselves with the situation.

All morning long the police kept edging down to pop at them. A watch stationed at the original spot of entry reported that an almost constant stream of returning termanites was massed there at dawn carrying back into their caverns their dead and living victims of the night raid. Of the burden more than half seemed to be still alive, appealing with pathetic glances to the faces peering down at them, as they passed onward, to do something to rescue them from the horrible fate that evidently awaited them.

CHAPTER III

New York Declares War

EDWARDS and the girl had hurried back, hoping to be able to gain some idea of the extent of the raid. Sick with horror, fortified with black coffee

gulped hot, they stood and stared.

"Hey," screamed a boyish voice, "here's a couple here in this hole. Look at 'em try to climb out. They can't get footin'."

Edwards leaped. There was an excavation started on the site for a foundation. The big steam shovel was idle in the pit, a great hole with loose gravel sides.

They could hear gravel trickling, even before they saw the prisoners. Frantic, seemingly in some kind of torment, the two termanites in the pit were trying in vain to clamber up the sloping, sliding sides. Their suction grips found no real traction, only starting the loose gravel to rolling and tumbling, to precipitate them down again after they had run up the growing pile of tailings that had already accumulated at the bottom as a result of their tearing down the walls.

"They'll build themselves enough of a pile down there to raise 'em out. Shoot 'em," called somebody.

An officer jerked up his gun ready to carry out the suggestion, but Edwards stopped him.

"They're frantic over something," he said quietly. "Suppose we watch 'em and see if we can learn anything about 'em. That's the way to lick 'em. You can't defeat the unknown half as successfully as you can the known."

The policeman gave him an odd look, but held his fire. The creatures kept up their frantic struggles.

Then the sun, which had been shut off from them by the depth of the pit, slanted a beam at them. As the bright ray gleamed on the white flesh of the rearing creature, the termanite floundered madly away, tearing and lunging as if in a frantic effort to get at the suddenly reddened and blistered spot where the ray had struck.

Edwards tightened his fingers on the girl's arm, gazing intently, his eyes shining with hope.

"I've got it," he gasped, as the termanite fell, kicking feebly in a death struggle and the survivor, touched in turn by the sun, went into a similar mad gyration of agony. "They're not equipped to stand sunlight. The violet rays that eventually burn our tenderest skin when it is exposed for a long time, bite into theirs because they have lived for so many generations underground that they're particularly allergic to it, have never built up resistance."

"But—but what difference will that make?" hopelessly.

"That makes a lot of difference, keed. That explains why they shun sunlight, but venture out of the same holes by nightfall. There is ultra-violet in daylight, intensified in direct sunlight. The subways are cut off utterly from the rays—and are safe for them. But they won't be long."

She stared at him. "But you can't strip the top off the subways, Jerry, and let in the sun. Our streets are built over them, houses, huge buildings."

He laughed, running toward his automobile, dragging her with him.

"Don't worry about that. We can beat sunlight, keed. Pump the info to that rag of yours and the news

broadcasts that the city is safe above ground by day, that a scientific discovery has just been made that bids fair to sweep the subways clear of the invaders before many more hours. The fight's as good as won."

"But—but I don't understand, Jerry."

"Brain fag," he grinned, reaching a sympathetic finger to tap significantly at her skull, "or your feminine assurance of being the equal of the male would be sure to remember an invention called the ultra-violet lamp, in use for years now in aiding recovery from sprains and similar deep-seated injuries. Flood 'em with it. Burn the devils down—sunburn 'em to death by the thousands. Quicker, easier, and cheaper than sniping at them, dropping hand grenades, or even the gas that wouldn't work. Watch my smoke."

TEARING down street, he switched on the car radio and heard the announcers at different stations proclaiming that the invading creatures, now generally called termanites in all discussions, were susceptible to the rays of ultra-violet lamps.

Edwards had telephoned the executive offices of the subway management while Miss Cartwright was phoning her sheet. He had begged for an accumulation of all the ultra-violet lamps that could be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen. Rush orders must be shot to Jersey where they were manufactured. The biggest bulbs available were demanded delivered at once to Times Square for immediate testing. Extension cords by the mile must be accumulated.

It was the courageous young engineer who lifted the first lamp and headed for the network of tunnels, stairways, entrances, and exits at Broadway and Forty-Second Streets. With hope lighting his gaunt face for the first time since he had seen that horror in the lock at the job, he pushed past the policeman who were firing in desultory fashion at the white things below and slid down past them.

The thumb and finger that turned on the light were steady. Behind the shielding reflector that made his powerful lamp a beam, he felt safe from those rays that might otherwise have seared him in time with their blistering force.

Half a dozen termanites, sensing his bold approach, darted toward him with the characteristic motion of their kind when about to kill. But the beam from that lamp caught them. The rays, far more intense in the killing ultra-violet than the normal sunshine, bit into their sensitive bodies. The white skin turned lobster red, even as the pain grew intense and they hurled themselves backward down the steps in a vain effort to escape the torture that left them at the foot of the stairs, crumpled and inert in death.

Their fellows came to wave inquiring antennae in wonder before them, to lift their seared bodies, to bear them away. But now the beam of that lamp was sweeping over the teeming numbers at the platform. Before its roaming reach the moving masses broke into the same frantic antics as their fellows, to end in life-

less huddles on the cold cement.

More and more termanites came questing from other levels. They hurried up and down ramps. They sucked and squigged along walls. They poked their waving antennae out of stalled cars they had been ceaselessly investigating.

They seemed utterly devoid of resistance to even the tiniest dose of the ray. A few dodged back to safety from the edges of the beam, but those caught squarely in the sweep were touched with death a full sixty or eighty feet beyond where he stood.

Triumphant, Edwards screwed spare bulbs into the sockets he could reach, diffusing the light over the area formerly lighted by normal electric rays. He had the satisfaction of seeing those termanites that ventured over the increasing heaps of their dead fellows go into similar frantic fits and die under the influence of the light he was rapidly leaving behind him as he paid out cord and went on to kill more and more of the invaders and install more and more lamps in the sockets beyond.

Timid observers who had doubted the efficacy of his rays now tumbled down to help him. Stepladders were raised to replace the bulbs he had been unable to reach. Other hands fed him more and more extension cord, plugging in new lengths, trotting eagerly along to make sure that he covered the entire station.

It was evident within an hour that the city was saved from that wave. Edwards had not only cleared the mighty terminal at Times Square, but had rigged a powerful bulb in the searchlight at the front of a train and headed down the track to try its effect. The creatures fell in torment before its beams. The rays swept walls and ceiling as well as the floor.

Instantly word went forth. Ultra-violet lamps were rushed by fast train, truck, and airplane from neighboring cities. The bulbs that were not needed to prevent the creatures from returning along tunnels not yet swept clear of them, were removed from the sockets and carried away to be pressed into service elsewhere to clear other stations.

Squads were organized to clear up the dead. Gangs went ahead of creeping death-dealing cars to remove dead bodies from the tracks and stack them on the sides where they could be picked up later by the work trains assigned to collecting them and transporting them to the garbage scows for burial far at sea.

HALF dead from worry, over-work, and sleeplessness, as well as from the horror of the job of killing such thousands, Jerry Edwards finally released the job to others and staggered to the surface. At last he felt that he had compensated in some measure to the city for whatever share he had borne in releasing the hordes. Now he felt that he could relax and sleep.

But before he allowed himself that luxury, he would give Kate a buzz and tell her how things had gone. The trains were mopping up in the subways. Practically every line was clear. A squad had just left to walk into the new spur and brush the termanites back

into the cavern whence they came.

"Yeah, and hang about a dozen of those lamps right on the hole," he had warned. "Make sure none of 'em sneak by."

"Sorry, Miss Cartwright is out," chirped the operator on the board at the *Flash* office.

"Where is she? This is Edwards speaking."

"Oh, yes, Mister Edwards." He grinned at that. Since he had been news these last few hours he had stepped up considerably in the estimation of that dumb blonde on the switchboard. Hitherto she had coldly informed him that reporters were not to be disturbed during office hours for personal affairs. "I'm glad you called, Mister Edwards. We're getting anxious."

"Anxious about what? Where is she?"

"She got a report about three hours ago that her home was raided by them termanite things. Her mother was carried off by 'em, screamin' fit to kill for Kate. Guess the old lady thought Kate could do anything."

"But—but where did Kate go?"

"Where'd you go if your mother was captured like that? She lit out for that hole where the darned things come from, hoping to see her as she came past, to do something about it."

Cold and sick, he pronged the receiver and leaped for his car. Red lights meant nothing. Let the cops blow. Let the pedestrians and the cross traffic watch out for itself. He was going places and going fast. Like a burning streak he lanced up the length of the city, barely missing accidents by an eyelash, the accelerator down to the floorboards, the engine roaring its loudest.

Yet it seemed to him that he was crawling, although the needle touched seventy at times and the car fairly flew from one hump to the next without bothering to crash down into the depressions. With his hands white at the knuckles from the intense grip on the wheel, his nerves jangling from concentration and the million narrow escapes he sped past trolleys, trucks, busses, and taxicabs, wormed his way through cross traffic that cursed fluently after him, bore on smoking tires toward that hell hole where the one person that really meant anything in his life was undergoing an ordeal such as no human being should ever be called upon to witness.

Men were coming up that tunnel, scarcely a mile below the hole, with their searing lamps clearing floor and walls and ceiling of the dying creatures that dropped before them. But he knew they would be too late to liberate that sweet little old woman that the things had seized during the late hours of darkness.

He knew in that awful dash up the island that his job was only partially finished. In his exultation at having started the great sweep that would drive the things back to their lairs and keep them penned there forever he had forgotten those screaming captives borne off alive into the depths. Not until they were found, dead or alive, would the work be finished.

He almost wrecked the machine hauling to a stop

near that hole. He burst his way through the mob of curious. Barely able to speak in his excitement, he stared around at the faces lining the rail.

She was not there.

"Anybody seen Miss Cartwright?" he gasped, aware that her frequently published picture running beside feature stories had made her a familiar figure to New York's teeming millions.

"Yeah, that's the girl who jumped," vouchsafed a boy.

"Jumped? Jumped where?"

He knew, even as he asked. The world was reeling in a mighty wheel of sickening horror. He had thought this thing terrible before, but now the full significance of what it meant to those who had lost loved ones in the attack struck him like a blow of a fist to the pit of the stomach.

SHE had jumped into the hole, of course. Impetuous, big hearted, sympathetic under her newspaper pretense of being hard-boiled, pretty Katherine Cartwright loved her sweet little old mother as few girls of her generation love and revere a parent. Left to earn the bread for that mother by her father's untimely death, she had assumed the protective attitude that the father had always shown toward the gentle little woman whose very presence seemed to all who knew her a last breath of that lavender-and-lace femininity that seems to have perished almost completely in the hard-boiled hurly-burly and fight for existence that characterize the modern world.

Mother Cartwright was an institution. Mother Cartwright was a religion. Once having known her, life would be unbearable to one of her disciples who had stood at that rail and watched her carried past and done nothing about it.

Remembering that he had felt an almost irresistible impulse to leap from that high window the night before and battle for the unknown woman he had seen overpowered and borne off by pursuers in the downtown street, he understood the Quixotic impulse that had made Kate Cartwright leap at those fiendish things bearing off her dearly loved mother.

He felt his own muscles tensing to spring down there and lay about with lusty blows. Sheer mad instinct to kill flamed through him, made him berserk as men, sensing his intent, leaped and seized him.

"Let me go," he screamed frantically. "I'll show 'em. I'll kill 'em. I'll clean 'em out with my bare hands."

They carried him, still kicking and protesting violently, back through the mob. The same police captain who had been on hand at the first alarm bent over him.

"Better take it easy, feller," he urged. "No use killin' yourself. What's gone is gone."

Edwards had sobered, awed at the combined strength of those many hands that had gripped and held him. Somehow it was as if he had fought the termanites and been bested. But he was not beaten.

"Listen, chief," he babbled, smart enough even in his excitement to use the flattering term, "I'm goin' back down there. Not jumpin', you understand, but walking."

Then, at the returning frown of denial in the captain's eyes:

"I licked 'em at Times Square, you know. Ultra-violet lamps. I want the best available. Get 'em here for me. Remember all those prisoners they lugged past? I may be able to free 'em—if we work fast. Get me lamps, as many and as powerful as you can, and miles of cable. Extension cords that will couple together and let us advance. God alone knows how far."

The movement of the termanites scurrying back into their caverns was undoubtedly hastened by the approach of the killing lamps up the spur. By the time Edwards had convinced the captain that his plan was feasible and they had collected lamps and cords, the weary men walking up the tunnel over the bodies they had slain drove the last scurrying termanite down into the hole.

"I'm asking for fresh volunteers," called Edwards, fortified by more hot coffee yet weaving with weariness where he stood. "You all saw what these men did to 'em with their lamps. I'm asking for volunteers to go on with me into their caves after 'em, to see if—if we can free any of the prisoners they carried off alive. Who'll go?"

There was an awful silence. Strong men grew pale. Callow youths shuddered and drew back. The police captain shook his head commiseratingly.

"It's too much to ask," he muttered. "A body might stumble and disconnect the cords, or some of them devils might sneak up behind and kick 'em apart—and then where are you?"

A white faced man who had been standing staring dumbly down into the hole lifted a face drained of hope. His great solemn eyes rested on Edwards.

"Wh-where you goin'?" he asked suddenly, his voice cracking like a whiplash in the sudden silence.

"Down there to see if I can free any of the prisoners—before it's too late."

The man sidled forward, moving like a revived ghost. His great eyes were pathetic in their staring.

"I—I—could I go with you?" he whispered. "My—my—," his voice had a sob in it that he could not down. It broke into a shrill scream, "They got my wife—carried her down there—screamin' to me to help her. L-let me at 'em."

A big man with a red face pushed through until he faced Edwards. "I know Joe, and I knew his wife," he said quietly. "They live up by the fire station. His kids play around."

He turned, his own eyes swimming, and looked out over the mob. "What do you say, boys?" he called. "Who's goin' with him?"

There was a lusty roar. The firemen crowded forward. Eager hands reached for lamps and cord.

The rest of the crowd raised a cheer as they con-

nected up and went swinging down into the unknown caverns whence the horde had come.

CHAPTER IV

Into the Termanite Caves

THE jagged hole where the compressed air and the drilling had broken through into the natural cavern beyond gave downward into pitchy depths. But the powerful beams of the ultra-violet lamps bored into that darkness and displayed a sloping floor leading away some thirty or forty feet below. Loitering at the bottom, to kick and lunge and tumble at the touch of the beam, were remnants of the invading horde.

Sick with the sight of so many dying and dead, Jerry Edwards steeled himself and then swung over on the rope. Lowered by eager volunteers from the local fire station, he preceded the other members of the company, to bore that beam of death down the slanting passage at the scrambling termanites that seemed to sense the threat and go scuttling in terror before them.

One worry obsessed Edwards when he started the descent. The core drillings for the subway project had found no record of the caverns. It had not gone as deep as this slant, to be sure, so that even extensive caves or chambers might exist far underground. If the space beyond proved as extensive as he assumed it must be to support so many termanites, the daring little company of invaders might well worry about finding the prisoners, either dead or alive. But there was no need to worry about that as long as their course led down a single corridor.

The trail was evidently a fault caused by the slipping of the rock many centuries before. At its maximum height, it allowed passage of the tallest man in the company, but it grew shallow swiftly on both sides, so that a cat would have found difficulty crawling along fifteen feet on either side of the center down which they hurried as fast as they could reel out the cords, connect up, and send the beam of at least one lamp ahead of them.

They had barely begun the descent before they heard a shout behind them and paused to discover what was the matter. The beam of a flashlight cut through the gloom back there, and a shrill voice piped, "Wait for me, will you? I'm from the *Flash*. Looking for Miss Cartwright. Don't leave me behind."

Edwards grinned and nodded to the others to wait. He knew that pip-squeak. It was Charlie Emmet, the fat little photographer who often went with the missing girl reporter when she needed pictures.

"Whew," he puffed maturing out of the gloom as if by the assistance of a genie, "you guys sure are in a hurry. If you had to pack an outfit like this, you'd slow down."

Edwards frowned. The man was loaded with his full equipment for picture taking. The big camera was slung in readiness around his neck; a leather bag

was slung around his neck to slap and pound against his side, evidently with plates for re-takes; and he carried a flash bulb in its shield in one plump hand.

"This is no advertising stunt for the *Flash*," snapped Edwards. "We're down here to try to save human lives."

"Yeah, but you gotta save mine, Mister Edwards. The boss told me he'd cut my pay if I didn't get pictures of the underground homes of these things. Think what it would do to the circulation. BEAUTIFUL GIRL REPORTER ABDUCTED! FLASH SENDS PHOTOGRAPHER TO LAIR OF TERMANITES FOR INTIMATE GLIMPSES OF THEIR HOME LIFE. I'll get you into it, Mister Edwards; give you a big play."

Edwards lashed out at him so savagely that the plump little man surged backward, stumbled, and fell sprawling.

"This is a humane relief job, not a circulation boost for that rag," he snapped. "Come on, men. Let him look out for himself. We've work to do."

He had hoped that Emmet would be discouraged by their speed and head back, but he kept on after them. On and on they strode as fast as they could go. The rocks were not easy to negotiate, especially by men unreeling extension cord from their shoulders as they went, or carrying lamps and being careful not to crash with them.

Every step was a nightmare because the termanites were always in evidence just beyond the rays, skulking before them, or crumpling in kicking huddles to thrash out their remaining life in scalding pain when touched by the beam of the lamp.

Then the fault led into a mighty cavern which stretched away indefinitely.

EDWARDS gasped at what he saw before him. Tier on tier of soil was built up in floors supported by some substance that closer inspection proved was a paste of earth and some hardening agent that made the uprights equal to man-made concrete in strength. On these tiers acres and acres of odd fungi spread away in every direction, evidently the principal source of food supply for the pale termanites before they tasted human blood.

Down the center of the great growing beds, for such they plainly were, ran a corridor broad enough for the rescue group to proceed without danger of being attacked by surprise. Edwards led, sweeping that powerful beam from side to side, bringing searing death to the smaller termanite figures that were evidently engaged in some kind of labor over the various types of mushroom growth.

Remembering that he had read somewhere that a good general hesitates about leaving his flanks exposed, Edwards worried about those hordes of younger, smaller termanites that must be hidden away at the back of those mounting tiers of beds. To hunt them down and bore the rays of the beam at them would necessitate hours of climbing up structures built

for the convenience of those sucker plates rather than human hands and feet. Days would be lost seeking the remote corners of the great growing areas.

He knew that the creatures might come out and bite off the vital line that fed their lamp electricity, might accidentally kick or jerk at the line and disconnect any of the many jointures. The rescuers might be plunged into darkness that would spell horrible death at the hands of the horde at any instant.

But they must take the chance. If any of those prisoners were still alive, the rescuers must not loiter in their quest for them.

Down the long corridor they plunged. The light swept from side to side, up the tiers that towered layer after layer far above them, then ahead again, then about and up. Diminutive termanites squirmed and wriggled and plunged to their death on every side. The corridor became a walk of death, lined by the faintly phosphorescent bodies of the dead, which glowed even sharper in death.

"You boys realize what this means, don't you?" asked Edwards grimly, halting while his comrades gasped for breath and the shuffling, panting figure of Emmet limped up.

"Yeah, I do," piped Emmet. "It means you guys'll have blisters too if you don't slow. You can't afford to take such chances with your health. There's no knowing what this atmosphere may have in it. Probably lacking in oxygen. Even if it isn't, there might be deadly gases. Or a guy could die from a simple blister on the heel."

"You, or that other heel, your boss?" asked Edwards sharply.

"Listen," grinned the red faced fireman, "we know there's a chance some of them goonies will crawl out of their crevices and burn our bridges behind us, but we're in this thing to see it through, if that's what you want to know."

Edwards nodded appreciation and went on. Again that beam shed death about it as the delicate skins of the termanites turned red and blistered under its touch, seeming to set up a seething within their cold bodies of the watery fluid that served them as blood.

Suddenly there came a weird sound of clashing ahead of them, a mighty noise that fairly shook the tiers of growing beds with its echo. Then, far ahead of them, but dimly caught in the rays of the lamp, there loomed a yet more savage looking array than they had yet encountered.

These evidently were the real warriors of the termanite civilization. Slightly larger than their worker confederates who had swarmed into Manhattan's subways, these were equipped with savage claws instead of suction discs at the ends of each finger. Their eyes were larger, their antennae longer and more numerous, and their whole aspect carried more assurance than did that of the other termanites.

At that instant the small creatures on the tiers of beds decided to rush the invaders. Down they came swarming, their smaller bodies gleaming, their little

jaws clacking and clashing.

Edwards gave them sweep after sweep of the lamp beam. Their bodies seared and broiled. They tumbled and fell in ever mounting piles. Yet more and more of them plunged out and started the descent to death.

In his grim determination not to be bested on either flank, he swept that lashing beam of light up and down and up again in a never ceasing series of swings. Meanwhile the fighters were advancing more rapidly than he realized, their huge eyes equally as sightless as their comrades' but their antennae more acute and their speed correspondingly greater.

"I wonder if them rays will knock these fighter things for a loop too," one of the firemen worried aloud. "Hadn't you better give 'em a shot and see? They're gettin' close."

The last words brought Edwards about with a jerk. In his consternation at seeing the formidable scrapers bearing down upon them at such close quarters, he nearly fell. With a mighty sweep of the lamp in a floundering effort to regain his precarious balance, he

inadvertently jerked a connection loose, plunging them into instant darkness.

Then their eyes became accustomed to the gloom. Illumined faintly by the glowing bodies of the dead termanites, they grouped in a terrified body and waited for those clashing things to reach them.

Jerry Edwards alone had presence of mind enough to go groping in quest of that yanked connection to try and repair it, but the effort was plainly useless. It was only a matter of seconds before the fighters from before and the younger termanites from the sides would be upon them.

Jerry Edwards groped and prayed. A fireman cursed loudly. Another started repeating the Rosary in an awed voice that sounded weird in those awful chambers.

"They're on us," screamed the almost demented husband who had first volunteered.

Suddenly the entire cavern burst into a flame of light as a mighty report echoed and re-echoed back among the tiers. The firemen sprawled and groveled in abject terror, certain that this was the end. The



THE ENTIRE CAVERN BURST INTO A FLAME OF LIGHT AS A MIGHTY REPORT ECHOED FROM THE WALLS LIKE AN EXPLODING BOMB.

advance of the warrior termanites halted. There was no noise of any kind audible except the dropping of bodies from the tiers whence they had been crawling by the hundreds to finish the invading human beings.

THEN Emmet's cackle of laughter cut through the ringing echoes and the awed silence.

"I thought them flash bulbs with special ultra-violet riggings might come in handy," he grinned, holding his flashlight and sending its beam to discover where the cord had pulled out at the nearest connection.

Edwards caught up the cord and plugged it in. The strong beam of the lamp flooded a scene of carnage. That single flash bulb, loaded with the ultra-violet ray as was the beam, had wrought destruction. The warriors had proved as susceptible to the rays as had their white fellows. They lay as they had fallen, in twisted ranks where they had writhed in agony as the ultra-violet scorched and seared their vitals and set their juices to boiling.

"Thank God you came along, Emmet," gasped Edwards. "From now on I'll let you live, even if I do hate your sheet and its methods of getting copy. You, at least, have proved your usefulness."

They finally passed out of the beds, but came to an equally intricate series of cells that towered high over them. Each cell was loaded with what looked like large balls loosely covered with a thin membrane. Stalking among these, rolling them over as tenderly as an incubator tender turned the hatching eggs before automatic turning handles were devised for hatcheries, were more full grown termanites.

"These must be their young," grunted Edwards. "They must come in egg form and hatch. The things are an odd cross between man and insect in more ways than one."

They went on in awed silence past tiers on tiers of eggs of varying sizes. Then, suddenly, the deathly silence was split by a scream that started from a single throat, seemingly, and then burst from hundreds. Wild, hysterical, a strange mingling of terror, hope, and maniacal despair, the odd wail echoed and re-echoed until the very bins and racks and tiers seemed to be spewing the sound forth.

Suddenly the dazed little man who was searching for his wife leaped forward. Quivering with relief, he plunged beyond the sweep of the lamp to rush at an almost concealed opening, where a veritable grillwork of the odd termanite concrete barred the way. Beyond that grill human figures were packed in frantic appeal against the barrier, crushing, surging, screaming, entreating to be saved.

Then, looming like a prehistoric monster out of a mighty chamber near that barrier, something grimly horrible snorted and heaved. An enormous head with sightless eyes filmed, with mighty mouth yawning, with antennae waving, thrust out to bar the little man's way.

With a scream of defiance he leaped straight at it, evaded the great cutting blades of the mouth which

must have sliced him in two, and began hammering viciously at one of those great sightless eyes.

He had evidently picked up a jagged chunk of rock as he started forward, for he was delivering telling blows, even as Edwards swung the lamp into play.

The monster squirmed and wriggled and oozed a great repulsive body out to almost bar the grill, even as the head lunged in vain in an effort to evade that hammering on the sensitive eye. Great limbs writhed after the diminutive man whose courage was so superb.

Edwards bored the full force of the lamp at that horrid head, running forward to pour stronger and stronger rays into the great hulk. Emmet lifted his arm high in air and exploded another ultra-violet charged bulb. The caverns echoed to the din.

THE ugly body began to withdraw. The great head flinched and fell back. Quaking with evident terror, the monster sought to retreat into its den, but the deadly effects of the rays had bitten deep into its life stream.

Suddenly the whole mass began to thrash about as violently as the small termanites had thrashed in dying. The flesh, seared a lobster red under the rays, burst out with mighty blisters. There was a sound of bubbling within the great arteries as the fluid that served it as blood responded to the influence of the ultra-violet charge the head and body had received.

The little man was flung back against the wall, but he lifted and hurled a rain of rocks at the dying beast. Then, weak from his exertions, he staggered toward the gratings, ignoring the thrashing death struggle of the monster.

"Mary," he screamed, his voice high and shrill, "Mary, be you there? It's Joe come to get you."

There was a sob of relief behind that barrier. A woman's shrill voice rose above the clamor of the prisoners. "Here I be, Joe. Let us out of here. I knew you'd come."

Jerry Edwards was suddenly beside him. His voice too lifted above the frantic clamoring of those poor creatures that had thought themselves lost.

"Kate Cartwright, are you there? Kate, are you safe?"

"She's back with her mother, if you mean that newspaper woman," roared a man. "Her mother's too weak for this press. She's okay. Her mother's a bit shook up, but livin'."

For Jerry Edwards the world was suddenly bright in spite of the gloom and horror of those caverns. He sprang forward with a great chunk of jagged rock in one hand and began battering at the grillwork.

The termanite cement proved too hard for the rock, which shattered under the hammering. But others were hurrying to smash heavier and harder rocks against the mixture, which began to crack under the barrage. Soon it crumbled enough so that strong hands yanked away a segment of the grill.

A man thrust his head out, risking being brained by the uplifted rocks, and forced himself through.

A blow that could not be halted, crashed down on his hand, smashing two fingers, but he hardly seemed to notice it in his enthusiasm at being freed.

But Jerry Edwards was incensed at the pushing, shoving, and crowding behind that barrier as men fought women back and women yanked at the hair of other women before them in a mad struggle for freedom.

He swept that beam of light away from the mob and back along the route they had come. As he had expected, the termanites were barring their way in a packed and inquiring mass. Although the front ranks dropped before the beam, it was evident that there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, more behind.

An awed silence fell over the prisoners. Their frantic desire to escape from the pen where they had been held for the future feeding of the monster queen-mother of the hordes was seasoned with awed fear of what lay beyond that little island of light in those subterranean chambers of horror.

"Listen," called Edwards, "we came down here to free you people, if possible. We don't expect any mad riots. Remember that you are men and women. The old law of the sea goes here, the law of real men everywhere in time of danger. Women and children first. Stand back, all of you, until we smack this hole bigger. Then you men in there help the women and kiddies out."

He begrudged every instant of precious time wasted, for he knew that at any instant those crowding things in the corridor behind might disconnect the wire that made life possible for them. He was aware that cold sweat was coursing in rivulets down his weary body as he renewed the pounding, considered the hole large enough for a safe and hurried exit, and then started the women and children to coming out.

Meanwhile he had suggested that Emmet aim his flash bulbs back at the horde of termanites still crowding to be at them and blast as many as he could into eternity in that fashion.

SWIFTLY, like an army officer, he lined up the terrified remnants of the captive group. There would be time enough to learn later of the horrors they had undergone, of the decimation of their ranks for the purpose of feeding the monster that they must now crowd past to reach safety. Now every effort must be bent to get them back to the surface before their last bit of strength was spent.

Kate Cartwright came out last of the women, helping her little mother, who smiled bravely at Jerry Edwards.

"I knew you'd come," she laughed over the tears, hysterical with relief. "I told Kate you would. I'm proud of you, my boy." She bent closer and her eyes twinkled in the faint light. "And so's my Kate," she whispered hurriedly.

Edwards watched the men come filing out. Swiftly he counted them off, assigning the strongest of them to help the women and children, warning them all to remain in a compact body as they retreated.

Emmet stalked ahead, blasting their way with his flash bulbs as long as they lasted. Behind him came a fireman with the lamp sweeping away the remnants the bulbs had missed. On one side of him, careful to keep clear of the electric cords for fear of disconnecting them, huddled the rescued and the firemen who were helping the weaker ones along.

Behind, coiling up the cord and carrying it on their shoulders, were the strongest of the men who had volunteered.

Jerry Edwards had given all the necessary orders and now lapsed into the background. Tired as he was, he more than half supported the older woman, while Kate Cartwright, admitting her feminine weakness at last, hugged tight to his other arm and telegraphed to him at every step with every tingling nerve in her body how proud she was of him for what he had done.

Thus the little company straggled out and up, to be hoisted through the gaping opening at last and to pass upward to the surface, where relatives and friends had been keeping up a long, long vigil for their return.

"Gentlemen," boomed the delighted little mayor, "New York is proud of you. America is proud of you. As long as such courageous souls live, this country shall know no real defeat."

"Just the same," said Jerry Edwards grimly, jerking his head toward that hole from whence they had just straggled, "they can't block that hole up any too quickly to suit me. I'd suggest dumping tailings into the place and pouring concrete over every ten feet of rock, just to make sure any survivors stay down."

The mayor nodded, only to be brushed aside by the plump figure of Emmet, who squirmed and wriggled his way forward, his camera focused at his chest.

"Just hold it," he called. "You and Miss Cartwright, Edwards, with Mother Cartwright on one side giving her blessing and the mayor on the other. This'll complete the series of pictures and give a touch of human interest and romance to it all."

Then his face lost its cherubic grin. Horror paled his cheeks, allowed his mouth to gape open, popped out his eyes. One frantic fat hand groped at the bag of plates at his side.

"Twenty exposures," he gasped. "Twenty beauts, including that little cuss pounding out the monster's eye with a rock—and every one of 'em—every last blasted one of 'em—exposed on the same plate."

"That," grinned Edwards, looking about for a taxi, "is okay by me. And lay off shooting any more pictures of Kate and me, or you'll have no camera left to shoot with. This, ladies and gentlemen, is going to be an absolutely private wedding—no tabloids allowed."



»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

Author of

NEW YORK FIGHTS the TERMANITES

BORN at the junction of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and salt water, I was brought up in the shadow of New Bedford and the whaling industry. My mother's father was a mate on a whaler and his brother was a captain. My paternal grandfather was a circuit preacher in Wisconsin, leaving there to rally to the aid of John Brown in Kansas for the cause of abolition.

My father was born on circuit in a covered wagon. He punched cattle, laid ties over Ratoon Pass, and shoved westward over the Santa Fe trail to finally reach Frisco and ship around the Horn in an English brig for Liverpool. Then he engaged in coasting from New England to the West Indies for some years before settling down ashore.

Born with a whiff of salt water in my nostrils and quantities of the same in my veins, I never have missed an opportunity to hang around the wharves and ships. At thirteen years of age, weighing one sixty-five and standing the same five-ten that I do now, I was ready to ship for Barbados on a three-masted schooner carrying supplies to whalers fishing out of there and bringing back their oil, when an accident prevented me from sailing. After another year in school I shoved off on my own and have been self supporting ever since.

At eighteen I went back to school, attending East Greenwich Academy and preparing for Brown University in three years. Then the war came along, and I enlisted in the U.S.N.

R.F. as the only service promising release at the end of the war. Trained at Newport and sent to New London State Pier, I was busy fitting sub-chasing 75-footers with anti-sub and aircraft guns and listening devices, when I was shipped into Brown to study for a commission.

The Armistice left me there, and I stayed on, having played in every football game that year (they had no freshman rule at Brown then). I played three more seasons without missing a game, wrestled four years, was the first intercollegiate wrestling champ at Brown, and had some fun trying to throw the sixteen-pound hammer away.

Meanwhile I delved into everything that would pay a dollar to earn my way through, from structural steel work on tall buildings, to shipping before the mast on a fruit boat to Costa Rica.

Then teaching, coaching, professional football and wrestling, and a score of other jobs. But always with the intent of becoming a

writer some day. A little book of original verse, largely of the sea, sold 2,000 copies in 1922-23. Then I settled down to my quota of 5,000 words per week minimum at fiction. Although much of the output has gone into the practice listing, my yarns have appeared in over thirty different magazines, I have had my first novel published in England within the last year, and a second is in galley proof awaiting correction and revision at this minute.

In addition I am teaching English at the East Providence High School and lecturing widely on the absurdities of professional wrestling and my experiences at attempting to break into the movies. I was considered a possibility to replace the late Louls Wolheim (which places my particular brand of beauty) and rushed into a test, with an optional contract calling for \$50,000, for five years—but nobody signed the thing. Later I was urged to go to Hollywood and have been out twice, getting bit work the first time and writing scenarios the second trip.

My greatest gift is a curiosity to know all about it. I miss no opportunity to see and investigate. When I was in Pottsville with a pro football club I went into breaker house and coal mine—writing mining yarns as a result. When I visited Gloucester I had to chin with all the old fishermen I could find. At sea I pump officers, crew, and everybody else available, often spending my leisure hours with an engineer and getting to know something about the world in which he lives.

My interest in the Ziff-Davis books promises to be an active one. Jules Verne was one of my childhood companions and I have had some of my best work in the field of the weird invention. Incidentally the lure of only one thing surpasses that, the love of the south seas. I fairly hung over the rails all the way through the Bahamas and the West Indies on my first trip that way, dreaming of being marooned on a cocoanut studded isle—and the longing hasn't died yet.

I have a very fertile imagination and some editors think a knack for giving the illusion that I have been where I haven't. My biggest kick from that came some ten years ago when I sold a story about upper Burma to a now defunct book. The editor wrote, "I was up the river in 1905 but you must have gone up farther than I did. Won't you write and tell us when and just how far you went? Our readers would like to know." I had to confess I made my trip via the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC—*Bertrand L. Shurtleff, New York, New York.*