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Volume 16
Number 1

PLANET of



She rose from her bed, seemed to take the hand of someone invisible. "I'm coming," she said

Doomed Men

by **ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS**

DR. RUTLEDGE was in too big a hurry to wait for the elevator. Instead the resident physician used the stairs, going up two steps at a time. And Dawson was right behind him. The well-known psychic investigator was panting after the hurried trip he had made in answer to Rutledge's urgent summons.

The hospital call system was still whispering huskily. "Calling Dr. Rutledge. Come to Room 309 at once.

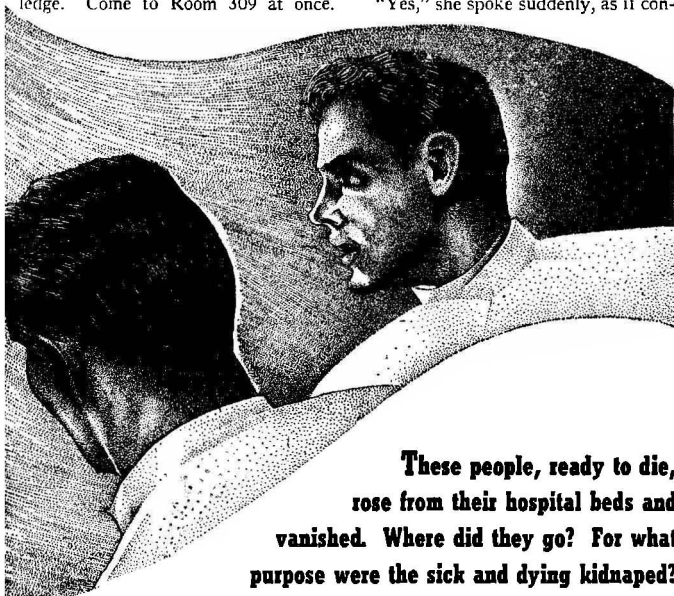
Urgent. Calling Dr. Rutledge."

Then they were in 309.

Two husky internes were already there. They were huddled together as if for mutual protection. There was also a nurse, her face as white as her uniform.

The patient was sitting up in bed. Her head was tilted a little to one side, and her eyes were fixed on a spot midway between the bed and the window.

"Yes," she spoke suddenly, as if con-



**These people, ready to die,
rose from their hospital beds and
vanished. Where did they go? For what
purpose were the sick and dying kidnaped?**

tinuing a conversation. "I can see you."

She did not glance toward the two men who had entered. Rutledge took one step inside the room and stopped. Dawson moved past the physician. Sliding his feet along the floor, he maneuvered until he had an unobstructed view, then reached behind him until he touched the wall. Never taking his eyes from the girl, he moved backward until the wall was firm against his back.

Now, if anything attacked him, it could come only from the front, not from behind. He would see it coming. Or even if he didn't see it, it could come from only one direction.

He did not know whether he was in any danger of being attacked. But he did not doubt the presence of danger in this room; for the fixed stare of the girl meant she was *seeing* something, the tilt of her head meant she was *listening* to something.

There was something in the room. The girl saw it. *But neither Dawson nor anyone else could see it!*

"It's happening again," Rutledge spoke nervously out of the corner of his mouth. "You've got to stop it."

"I will if I can," Dawson answered. He had just arrived at the hospital, in answer to a phone call from Rutledge, when the call to come to 309 had sounded. Consequently he knew nothing of what had happened. All he knew was that Rutledge was frightened. And that was bad, for Rutledge looked like a tough-minded skeptic who didn't scare easily. He had the jaw of a fighter. Doctors usually aren't afraid of death. They see too much of it to fear it. But Rutledge was scared. Well, then, if death couldn't scare him—what could?

Dawson watched the girl. She was about twenty-three, with a delicate attractive face. A haunted face now, but there was still strength in it. On the

foot of the bed a record sheet was hanging, with her name on it—Mary Nolan.

THE girl spoke again. But she wasn't speaking to the internes, to the nurse, to Rutledge or to Dawson!

Dawson suddenly felt cold, colder than he had ever been before. Search the room as he might, he could not see the person to whom she must be talking. Or had his eyes seized this moment to play tricks on his brain—

"Did you come for me?" the girl was asking. She waited for an answer, her head tilted a little to one side.

Out of the corners of his eyes, Dawson saw the two internes and the nurse holding their breath. Rutledge stood with his mouth open, his face blank with bewildered fear. He couldn't tear his eyes off Mary Nolan. Dawson wondered what Rutledge saw. Something about the girl baffled the physician even more than the fact that she was obviously talking to an invisible creature.

"But I don't understand," Mary Nolan was saying. "The Master needs me? Why?"

Some way, somehow, although Dawson heard nothing, her question was answered. Her face reflected awe and wonder.

"But what if I don't want to go with you? What if I choose to remain here?"

"—Oh! I don't have any choice." She wasn't scared. She was puzzled and her temper was rising. "You can't come in here and give me orders! I do have a choice. I choose to remain here. What do you say to that?"

"—But I can't!" Her temper was gone. She was unnerved now; her voice dropped in pitch. Terror showed starkly on her face. Bewildered terror. Utter terror.

"I can go with you—or stay here and die! That's the choice I have! But

how do you know—Yes, yes, I am to be operated on tomorrow. You could have learned that here at the hospital. But how can you be certain I'm going to—to die when they operate on me?"

Dawson felt his heart turn over and stop beating for a second, then resume with a mad thump in his chest. Rutledge's face was pasty gray. The internes were trembling. The nurse gulped, and slid to the floor in a faint. No one moved to help her. No one even noticed.

Mary Nolan spoke again, her voice a thin whisper now, without hope.

"You *do* know! If they operate on me tomorrow, I *will* die. I can *see* it—the operating room, the nurses, the mask for the ether, the scalpels. I can see myself on the operating table, still and silent, the doctors trying to revive me—and failing! I can see myself lying dead—You *do* know, don't you? You're not playing with me, scaring me. You're telling me the truth. I *am* going to die tomorrow!"

Seconds ticked away into nothingness as hopeless despondency stamped itself on her face. Then little by little it went away, and she tried to smile.

Here was courage, the only real courage. The courage to smile at death!

"But I would rather die than—have my operation fail. Death I can face; life I cannot face if my operation fails. So you have not frightened me by telling me that I am to die—"

Something interrupted the girl. She seemed to listen. Her voice grew a little stronger.

"You were not trying to frighten me. You are trying to explain . . . Oh—I understand. Yes, yes—"

Awe crept into Mary Nolan's voice, and a bewildered understanding. Whatever it was that she was being told, it left her momentarily speechless.

"Yes, I will go," she said after a

painful interlude. "Yes. Nothing but death is here for me. Yes, I will go—with you."

THE girl slid slim legs over the edge of the bed, swayed a little as she stood erect. No one moved as she walked across the room, took her clothes from a closet and dressed. Then she shyly extended her right hand, closed her fingers on an invisible object and started toward the door.

Rutledge broke the spell that had held them all motionless. "Seize her!" he snapped at the two internes. "She must not leave the hospital in her condition."

The two internes leaped to obey him. Dawson, his back against the wall, did not move. All over his body cold winds were playing.

The internes caught the girl, turned her roughly around. And then—then something seized them! Their husky bodies jerked as if they had touched live wires. Dawson, heart pounding, was positive no *physical* force had blocked them. Their hands seemed to leap away from the girl, their legs to fold up under them. They fell heavily to the floor.

But Mary Nolan continued on toward the door. She took two steps and Rutledge stepped in front of her. Dawson knew then that he had judged the physician correctly. Rutledge had seen what happened to the internes, but he was a fighter by nature. Yet he didn't try to use force at first.

"Miss Nolan," Rutledge said, his voice the calm tone that doctors use with patients who are not in their right minds. "You know you can't leave the hospital. It's raining outside and you might catch cold. Besides, it's night now. Why not wait until tomorrow morning? It will be time enough then."

The girl didn't seem to hear him or

to see him. She stopped, but otherwise she gave no indication of the physician's presence.

Rutledge continued talking to her.

"Please step aside," she said abruptly.

"But Miss Nolan—"

"I said to step aside! I know what I'm doing."

"I doubt it," Rutledge snapped, losing his temper. "You're not leaving this hospital in your present condition. You're going back to bed if I have to put you there. Come, now! No more of this stupid argument. Back to bed with you."

He took her arm. Instantly he jerked his hand away, a look of pained surprise flashing over his face. Almost bonelessly his legs buckled under him, and he collapsed limply to the floor, faint and sweat-soaked.

Mary Nolan walked out the door as though nothing at all had happened.

"Stop her, man!" Rutledge cried weakly to Dawson. "Don't let her leave!"

"Do you think I'm a fool?" said Dawson quietly. "I can't stop her any more than you could. She has a guardian, and against that guardian I am as a slab of jelly. The best I can do is follow her and see what happens."

Mary Nolan walked down the stairs and out the front door of the hospital into the night, her right hand still extended at her side in an unnatural position. A couple of people on the sidewalk stared as the girl walked by. An ambulance attendant started, made as if to hurry from his seat in the conveyance and catch the girl.

Dawson gestured quickly to him to stay where he was. Then, his face absolutely expressionless, he trailed on silent, unobtrusive feet after the girl. If he had any conception of the risk he was taking, that knowledge was not re-

vealed in his quiet, chiseled features.

Not such a mask was the light that shone in his steady gray eyes.

CHAPTER II

Three Who Vanished

IN FRONT of the hospital, Mary Nolan turned to the right and walked a block and a half. Then to Dawson's surprise, she turned up an alley. Ahead a single flaring light cast a dim circle of illumination. The girl's body was outlined against the light. Dawson followed her, keeping close to the wall of the building. The alley had a dead end. Mary Nolan stopped under the light. Dawson flattened himself against the building, his mind racing. Why had she come here? Where was she going? Even more important, what incredible creature guarded her, talked to her, was visible to her alone? What weird pattern was being traced here in the murk of this rainy night?

Dawson heard her voice then. He shivered, refusing to believe his ears, and thrust himself deeper into the shadows. He felt his muscles trembling, willed them to be still. Mary Nolan called again. He swallowed, and stepped forward.

There was no point now in trying to hide. She knew he was there. She could see him even in the darkness. Again she was calling to him. "Don't be afraid, Mr. Dawson."

He had never seen her before—but she knew his name!

"I'm not afraid," he said gruffly. "I may be scared more than half to death, but I'm still not afraid."

The girl's eyes fixed him with terrible intensity. She smiled.

"I see you're not," she said. "And that is very good. We need men who are stronger than fear."

Her words jarred him unpleasantly. "What do you mean?" he growled, his voice purposefully harsh.

"Don't snarl at me. I don't like it," Mary Nolan retorted. "As to my meaning, I'm not sure I have any. All I know is that something wonderful has happened."

"Something wonderful?" Dawson snapped. Then, more patiently, "You're getting wet, girl. Better come back to the hospital"

Her voice was altogether too assured. "I'm not going back to that or any other hospital. Never. I'm going to another world. And you're coming too, I think."

Dawson started, but kept his mind under rigid control. It was the only way. He could not let himself even think about what Mary Nolan was saying.

"You're going to catch your death of cold if you don't get out of this rain," he warned.

"Pouff!" she said. "You growl but you don't mean it. You do it because you know if you do anything else, fear will eat you up. I'm doing the same thing, Mr. Dawson—and for the same reason."

At that Dawson broke out in a cold sweat. But the girl's attention was distracted. She seemed to be listening—

"I must go," Mary Nolan said abruptly. "There is not much time. But before I go—Did you ever kiss a girl, Mr. Dawson? Ever before, I mean?"

THE question was so out of place, it almost shattered Dawson's remaining control.

"No," he answered involuntarily. Then he colored violently. For it was the truth. Dawson had been on earth thirty-three years, yet he hadn't kissed a girl since he'd been a kid.

"I thought so," said Mary Nolan. "And there's a reason, isn't there? One that nobodys knows but you. Two reasons, maybe. And they're both good reasons, too. I'm sorry about one—and glad about the other."

"Talk sense," Dawson snapped. Inwardly he was terribly frightened. Could the girl read his mind, he wondered. Otherwise, how did she know his name? How did she know that one terrible reason why he had never kissed a girl?

"Would you mind so much kissing me right now?"

Dawson literally jumped at the words. But Mary Nolan didn't wait for his answer. She moved forward and her mouth was raised. Rain splashed across her forehead. Her lips were soft and sweet.

Dawson groaned. In spite of all he could do to prevent it, his arms went around her. He felt the pressure of her lithe body beneath his fingers—

Simultaneously the deep note of a plucked harp sounded. The air rippled with the sound. A soft golden light pulsed momentarily. A door opened outward, an incredible door that was like no other door ever found on earth.

The note of the plucked harp died. The light was gone and the door was closed. Dawson's arms closed about—nothing.

Mary Nolan was gone.

Dawson felt her leave, felt his arms grow limp. He stood without moving, scarcely breathing, listening, watching. He heard nothing, he saw nothing. The alley was silent and deserted.

Grim hard knots bulged the corners of Dawson's jaw. He reached into an inside pocket, pulled out a tiny flashlight that he always carried. He searched the alley, found it reached a dead end in a blank wall. On his left was a warehouse. All the doors were

locked and barred. On the right was the empty wall of a building.

There was no way Mary Nolan could have escaped. But she was gone.

Oblivious of the rain, now coming down in torrents, Dawson strode back to the hospital, his mind seething with contradictions. A man was waiting for him beside the information desk. He glanced up at Dawson and came quickly to his feet.

"Hello. You're George Dawson, aren't you?"

Dawson blinked almost angrily. "I suppose you're a reporter. No need to ask how you knew me, in that event."

The newshawk grinned. "Reporters have to know a little bit of everything, you know. I read a book of yours. Had your picture in it. That's how I recognized you. You're president of the American Society for the Investigation of Psychic Phenomena, aren't you? A ghost hunter, eh? Well, I enjoyed your book, but the stuff you fellows do gives me the creeps. Spending nights in haunted houses chasing spooks, exposing fake mediums—"

The reporter rattled on. Dawson let him talk. He wanted to know what the man was doing at the hospital.

Finally the newshawk came to the point. "Say, we got a hot tip that there's something doing down here. A ghost of some kind is on the loose, and people are putting on a disappearing act. Seeing you down here makes me think there must be something to it. How about it? What's the lowdown?"

Dawson shook his head. "Somebody must have given you the wrong tip, buddy. There's nothing like that here." He started to walk away.

"Yeah? What are you doing down here, then?" the reporter demanded.

"Oh, Dr. Rutledge is an old friend of mine. I just dropped in to visit him," Dawson lied.

The reporter's lip curled. "And while he was busy, you walked around the block in the rain, I suppose. Look at you; your clothes are all wet. There's a story here and you're trying to deny it. Come on, Mr. Dawson. Give!"

"No story, buddy. Sorry."

Dawson strode determinedly away. The reporter stared after him with a half angry, half suspicious frown.

A MOMENT later Dawson entered Rutledge's office without knocking. The resident physician jumped. Then he saw who it was and went on pouring whiskey. Dawson carefully closed the door.

"There's a reporter out here," he said. "Have you talked to him?"

"Do you think I'm a fool?" Rutledge answered. "I haven't talked to him and I don't intend to."

"Good. If this thing should get out, it would scare a lot of people out of their wits. Whatever else this situation may need, it doesn't need publicity."

"Then you think this ghost is real?"

"I don't think it," Dawson answered. "I *know* it!"

Dawson slumped in a chair and mopped his brow, sweat mingling with the sheen of rain on his face. Rutledge's shaky hands finally managed to get a stiff bracer of whiskey into the glass, and he downed the stuff in one gulp. Not that it did much good, because his hands went right on shaking.

"This is absolutely the damnedest thing in my whole experience," Rutledge muttered when Dawson had finished his account. "Man, we've got to do something about this. Haven't you any idea what started it all?"

Dawson's eyes were brooding. "Something came into that girl's room. It must have been between four and five feet tall."

Rutledge's eyes widened. "But you

didn't see it! I mean—"

"I followed the line of her gaze. She looked straight across the room, and since a person naturally looks at the face of a visitor, the level of her eyes determined the height of what she saw. She talked to this visitor. We heard what *she* said, but we didn't hear what *it* told her. But *it* convinced her that she should go with *it*, somewhere, and when she walked out of the room she was holding *its* hand. That's obvious because her hand was extended."

"Eh? What's that? Something came and took her by the hand!" Rutledge exclaimed.

"I don't see what other reason she could have had for holding her right arm out from her body," Dawson repeated.

"My God!" the physician whispered. "I noticed that too, but I didn't realize what it meant."

"And then," Dawson continued grimly, "either I was the victim of an hallucination—or Mary Nolan walked right off the face of the earth."

"IT'S incredible!" Rutledge whispered. "Utterly incredible."

He downed another bracer of whiskey. Dawson felt sorry for the man. He knew how the doctor was suffering, knew only too well.

"Those are the facts in the case of Mary Nolan," he went on. "Now tell me—was she due to undergo an operation tomorrow?"

"Yes," the husky answer came. "So help me God, she was. And I—I was to do the operating. We were to open the brain case and remove the pressure on the optic nerve that had caused her blindness."

"Blindness?" Dawson almost shouted. "Was she *blind*?"

"Stone blind," Rutledge told him. "Not the slightest response in either

eye. Heavens, man, I forgot you didn't know, but that's one of the things that has been driving me almost insane. For when she walked out of that room, her movements, her actions, everything—indicated that she could see!"

Dawson had risen from his chair. Momentarily even his practical control was shattered.

"See? Of course she could see! She saw me, when I was hiding in the dark. Oh, Lord, this is a miracle! The blind miraculously regaining their sight—"

"Yes," Rutledge muttered thickly. "And the lame walk, and the hopelessly doomed find new strength and laugh at death and—disappear! You talk of a miracle. Listen while I tell you about two more of them! Would have told you before, but there wasn't any time."

Rutledge got a grip on himself.

"The first one occurred five days ago," he began. "We had a nineteen-year-old youth in the hospital, with a case of paralysis resulting from spinal meningitis. The muscles of the left leg had atrophied. He could walk, but only with a crutch. We were going to operate. The night before the operation the nurse on the floor called me to his room. She thought he was having a fit. He had got out of bed and had dressed himself.

"I was so dumfounded at seeing him walk that I didn't try to stop him. He walked out of the hospital and I haven't seen him since. Nor has anyone else. He didn't go home. I notified the police that he was missing, hired a detective—" The physician faltered, shrugged helplessly. "Well, we haven't found him."

"Hm-m," said Dawson. Thoughts raced through his mind. "What was the next case?"

"A woman of twenty-eight, a Miss Jennie West. Malignant carcinoma—cancer—of the stomach. Inoperable.

No hope. She had perhaps two weeks to live and not enough strength left to lift her hand."

"What happened to her?"

"I don't know," Rutledge said blankly. "When the night nurse entered her room on a routine inspection, the patient was gone. Whether she left the hospital or vanished into thin air, we don't know. We made inquiries, but with no results. She lived with a sister, but her sister says she didn't return there. The police can't find her."

"IS THAT all?" Dawson questioned.

"All?" The physician's face purpled. "Damn it, man, isn't that enough? Three people—gone—" He choked.

"Did Miss West have a chance to recover?" Dawson asked quietly.

"I told you she didn't! There was nothing medical science could do to save her," Rutledge snapped.

"And Mary Nolan. She was told she was going to die tomorrow. Was that the truth?"

"I don't know. But a brain operation is always dangerous. One slip of the knife—"

Rutledge shuddered, and Dawson knew the reason for the convulsive shiver that passed over the physician's body. Rutledge himself would have been handling that knife—

Dawson sighed a little tiredly. "She said she would rather die than have her operation fail. Why would she say that?"

"She was an artist, and she loved her work. You can imagine what the loss of sight would mean to an artist."

"Yes," Dawson nodded slowly. "I can." He drummed his fingers together a moment. "Now, this boy you mentioned—what was his name by the way—was this operation dangerous? Was there a chance that he would die from

its effects? You know—that nineteen-year-old youngster."

Rutledge fumbled with the whiskey. "Any operation is a risk." His voice rose nervously. "Why do you ask that? Why do you sit there and ask questions? Why in hell don't you *do* something? This has *got* to be stopped! These people have to be found—"

Dawson held up a restraining hand. "Take it easy, take it easy. I asked that question to establish a fact, and I think your answer does just that."

"What fact? What are you talking about?" Rutledge demanded irritably.

"That this ghost is appearing only to people on the verge of death, people who are doomed. Miss West didn't have a chance to recover. Mary Nolan would have died on the operating table. So would this boy, in all probability. Therefore, this ghost is taking with him only those who are about to die."

Rutledge stared at him blankly. "What good does that do?"

"It might do some good—if you'd tell me the truth."

"I *am* telling you the truth!" the physician blazed hotly. "Don't you sit there and call *me* a liar! I'm telling you the truth," he protested again.

"You're not," Dawson challenged. "Rutledge, you're holding out on me. You're telling me part of the truth, but you're keeping something else back. Your whole manner shows it. You shouted at me that I've got to stop this business. Why is it so important to *you* to have it stopped? What's your personal stake in this?"

The physician half rose from his chair, his face gray with anger. Dawson stared at him imperturbably. Rutledge sank back into his chair after a moment, wiping his sweating face.

"I didn't mean to tell you this," he said shakily. "I meant to maintain the proper professional attitude, to say that

my interest in having this thing stopped was solely because these people were my patients. But I'll tell you the truth, I'll tell you why I say these people have to be found—because this nineteen-year-old spinal meningitis victim was my own son!"

Rutledge broke down completely. "That's the personal reason I've got at stake. My son is gone. And I want him back. Do you understand, I want him back! Just thinking what may have happened to him is driving me almost insane. I've got to have Jack back. Can't you understand that?"

Rutledge laid his head on the desk and sobbed unashamed.

"Oh," said Dawson softly. He got up and walked around the desk. His fingers gently gripped the physician's shoulder.

"We'll get him back," he said. "Or we'll go with him. We'll get them both back—or go where they have gone. I've got a personal interest at stake, too."

CHAPTER III

To Trap a Ghost

THERE was a small basement room in the hospital which Dawson appropriated for his own. To it he had brought armload after armload of equipment. He had three different automatic cameras, one taking pictures by infra-red light, the second by ultra-violet, and the third by ordinary means. He had in addition an adaptation of a Geiger Counter, a device designed to record the impact of cosmic rays.

Dawson had altered the device so that it was no longer a trap for cosmic rays. He hoped that all four pieces of apparatus would present a formidable trap for a ghost. Unfortunately it hadn't worked out that way.

Occupied at the moment, developing

the film from the cameras, Dawson was trying hard not to think. He especially didn't want to remember what he had just seen.

Four days had just passed, four terrible days during which he had fought to solve the mystery of that incredible phantom that haunted the hospital. Tried—and failed.

For in the meantime three more people had vanished. The first two, overpowering all efforts to halt them, had walked out of the hospital—and then off the face of the earth. That was bad enough, but it was the third patient that had disturbed Dawson more than he cared to admit.

This one hadn't walked out of the hospital. He had been held in a special room, with doors and windows barred on the inside. He had been put in a strait-jacket. His name had been Roy Glenn.

Dawson felt ill every time he remembered the disease from which Roy Glenn had been suffering. Rabies—the final stage when Glenn reached the hospital. Bitten by a pet dog. No hope. Absolutely nothing that could be done to save him. In its first stages, rabies could be cured. But once it had reached its final stage, medical science could do nothing—except to put the sufferer in a strait-jacket and hope the end was not far off.

Dawson and Dr. Rutledge had been present, and four internes. Roy Glenn, trussed up like a madman in a room that was locked and barred, had twisted and strained as he tried to free himself, had begged them to do something—anything—to ease his suffering.

They weren't able to do anything. But *something* else apparently was—

Roy Glenn had suddenly quit fighting the straps that held him. His eyes had focused on an impalpable vision—

No one else had seen or heard any-

thing. But Roy had.

He tried to get out of bed and follow it. The strait-jacket held him back. He fought, but the straps were unyielding, uncompromising. Frantically he begged to be released.

It had taken real courage to resist his pitiful cries. But resist they had. Roy Glenn had fallen back on the bed, seemingly drained of further strength.

Bong!

The note of a harp sounded. There was a flash of golden light, the webbing of the strait-jacket fell in upon itself, the bed sheets collapsed.

The bed was empty! Roy Glenn was gone. Out of a strait-jacket, out of a locked, barred room, and in the presence of six witnesses!

DAWSON'S three cameras had recorded the whole scene. All his ghost traps had been in operation.

Gray and haggard, Rutledge had dragged himself back to his office and Dawson had come down to this basement room to develop the films he had exposed, to check the records of his other instruments.

He developed the three different films, one taken by ultra-violet light, the second by infra-red, the third by ordinary light, and ran them through a projector. What he found left him tremendously disturbed.

Roy Glenn's last struggles were on the film. Rather, *only* his last struggles. Whatever it was that had entered the room, it did not record on camera film. One picture showed Glenn in his strait-jacket, the second caught the flash of Golden light. In the next Roy Glenn was gone altogether.

Dawson checked the record tape on the Geiger Counter. He found nothing. His ghost traps had failed completely.

For a long time he sat thinking. He

heard people passing in the corridors overhead. Once he caught a chorus of excited voices, but he paid them no attention.

This "ghost"—was it indeed an apparition visible to one person but not visible to another? It eluded even a camera. Yet its existence was undeniable. And it had power; enough enough power to make its victims disappear, enough power to render senseless anyone attempting to restrain a victim of its own peculiar choice.

Dawson, head of an organization devoted to investigating all phases of psychic phenomena, from extra-sensory perception to spectral illusions, knew that literature was filled with allusions to ghosts. In most cases, he believed these apparitions were products of an overworked imagination. But there were other instances where unquestionably a supernatural agency had been involved.

A supernatural agency was at work here. But what was its purpose? Why was it stealing defenseless human beings? Worse still—where was it taking them? Where had it taken—Dawson winced—Mary Nolan?

A step sounded suddenly in the corridor outside. The door opened. Dawson glanced frowning at the figure of Dr. Rutledge.

The physician was calmer than he had been at any time during the past four days. The haggard lines of fear were gone from his face. With one hand thrust in the pocket of his white jacket, a newspaper under the other arm, he looked almost cheerful.

"What have you found out?" he questioned, nodding toward the cameras.

"Nothing. Not a thing," Dawson said shortly.

"Um. Well, it doesn't matter now. Hell's already broken loose."

"What's that?" Dawson snapped.
Rutledge handed him the paper.

THERE it was, on the front page. As Dawson read it, something cold turned over inside him.

**MEDICAL SOCIETY ON WARPATH
AS FORTY PATIENTS DISAPPEAR
MYSTERIOUSLY FROM HOSPITALS**

The County Medical Society was in an uproar today, after a tabulation which revealed that in the past ten days, some forty patients, the majority of them desperately ill, had vanished completely from local hospitals under circumstances reportedly bordering on the supernatural.

Nine patients are said to have disappeared from city hospital Number 1, twelve from Number 3, six from Johnson Memorial Hospital, ten from the Sherman Home for Bone Diseases, and three from the hospital of the Wright Pathological Institute.

In an interview which he granted reporters after keeping them waiting two hours, Dr. Morris K. Fishman, secretary of the County Medical Society, angrily denied that the Society as a whole was responsible for the mysterious disappearances.

"There will of course be a complete investigation," Dr. Fishman stated. "To say that these patients have disappeared, vanished is ridiculous. Nobody simply disappears just like that. However, I shall take steps to see that the individual doctors responsible for permitting patients to leave hospitals are severely reprimanded. Some may even have their licenses to practice medicine suspended, or revoked."

A reporter asked what would happen in the event a physician could prove that a patient under his care had vanished without permission.

Dr. Fishman declared that the ques-

tion was impertinent and retired into his office, declining to answer any more queries.

It is understood that a group of local physicians held "responsible" for the disappearances have secured an attorney to protect their rights, and will appeal to the State Supreme Court to forestall any attempt to revoke their licenses to practice medicine.

"What utter nonsense!" Dawson exclaimed when he had finished the account. "How could any doctor stop a patient from turning into a—ghost! Why, I myself saw some of these people vanish! I'll testify in your behalf too, Dr. Rutledge."

Rutledge seemed unaccountably complacent. "I'm afraid it wouldn't do any good, Dawson. People don't believe in ghosts in this country anyway, not until they've 'seen' them; and then they put it down as an hallucination.

"Good heavens, man, don't bother your head about me. Let me worry about myself, as a doctor should. It's better that we start worrying about those forty missing people. Now, is there anything you can do for them, any way to find what's happened to them?"

Dawson shook his head. The news had shocked him so profoundly that he wasn't thinking clearly. *Forty* people gone! Vanished! And the story spread all over the front pages.

"I could wring that reporter's neck," Dawson said savagely. "There's a lunatic fringe in this country that will go crazy when they read this story. There will be a panic here in Chicago before the world is a day older."

"There already is," Rutledge admitted. "Some of our patients here in the hospital got hold of this paper. We had kept it from them until then, and I had given the internes and the nurses strict orders not to talk. As soon as

they read the story, all the patients who were able to walk cleared out. And the staff went with them.

Dawson was incredulous. "You mean to tell me the doctors and the nurses have deserted their posts?"

"Right. I don't blame them. They're scared. This thing has been taking only the dying, but for all they know it may start on the living next. Since it seems to haunt hospitals, they've cleared out."

The resident physician looked speculatively at Dawson. "Is there anything you can do, any suggestion you can make, as to how we can stop this, or find out what's happened to the people who have been taken?"

"If there was anything, I'd be doing it," Dawson answered hopelessly. "I'm stumped. I don't know which way to turn. This thing is utterly beyond me."

"Are you sure?" the physician insisted.

"Of course. Say, what's come over you anyhow? A couple of hours ago you were the worst-scared man I've ever seen. Now you're just the opposite. You're calm. Have you been holding out on me?" Dawson rose angrily to his feet.

"Have you discovered something about this infernal business that you haven't told me?"

Rutledge maintained his poise. "Yes, I've thought of something. I've thought of a way to help the people who have vanished."

"You have!" The words jerked from Dawson's lips with explosive force. "Hell, man, tell me what it is!"

Rutledge took his hand out of his pocket. He held up a small round cardboard box, of the kind frequently used to contain capsules. There was a single capsule in it now. He held the box so Dawson could see it. The object glittered under the light.

"The secret to the solution of the

whole affair is right in that capsule," he said.

HAD the man gone mad, Dawson wondered. Had his mind cracked under the strain? Then he guessed the secret of that capsule and leaped toward Rutledge. But the physician was too fast for him.

"You get ideas quickly," he said. "But you didn't get this one quickly enough."

Like a man taking an aspirin, Rutledge popped the capsule into his mouth and gulped it down.

"In about twenty minutes," he said, "if that ghost only comes for the dying, I'll know how to solve this business."

Dawson's eyes were horrified.

"You've taken poison," he whispered. "You're deliberately committing suicide, hoping that this ghost will come for you."

Rutledge shrugged a little tiredly. "I said you get ideas quickly. You've got this one. I *am* committing suicide. You said you didn't know of any other way."

"I don't. But you're taking an awful chance. Supposing this ghost doesn't come for you."

"Then," said Rutledge, sinking into a chair, "I'll die."

Dawson could only stare at the other. "You're a brave man," he said finally. "The world can't well afford to lose you. And," he added grimly, "it doesn't have to lose you! For every poison there's an antidote."

"Not for this one." Thin beads of sweat were beginning to appear on Rutledge's forehead. "I'm a doctor and I ought to know."

"Then we'll try an emetic and a stomach pump," Dawson said tightly.

He started toward the door. He took one step—and deep within his body, in the region of his chest about the heart,

there was a spasmodic contraction. Pain, coming suddenly, drove through him like the thrust of a knife. Sparks danced before his eyes. He fell to one knee, fought for breath as the first spasm rolled a wave of red agony over his body.

It subsided, then, but the pounding ache was a furious thing. Dawson knew what had happened. He dragged himself to a chair.

"I guess," he whispered weakly, "I won't be able to use that stomach pump on you after all."

"Heart?" Rutledge asked softly.

"Yes . . . How—how did you know?"

"You've got all the symptoms. How long has it been bad?"

"Years," Dawson answered. "I've seen five doctors—They all said—it couldn't be cured—that I might live ten minutes—or ten years. Had a light attack—about a month ago. The doctors said the next one—would be the last. . . . I guess the strain of watching you commit suicide—was too much—"

That was the reason Dawson had never kissed a girl, the reason Mary Nolan seemed to have penetrated. His heart might quit beating at any minute. He couldn't honestly ask a girl to marry him when he knew he was already living on borrowed time.

Now the end of that borrowed time had come. Pains like red-hot needles were tearing through his chest. Cold sweat broke out all over his body.

"I'M sorry, old man," Rutledge said, "damned sorry. You oughtn't to have been a ghost hunter, you know, with a heart like that. Too much strain."

Dawson gestured weakly. "Oh, I could control it—as long as I didn't let myself get excited. That was the reason—a ghost couldn't scare me. I knew if I let myself be afraid—my heart

would act up."

He slid limply off the chair then and sprawled full length on the floor.

"So long, Rutledge. I'll see you—"

DAWSON looked up. The door hadn't opened, but something had entered the room—a man!

Or was it a man? He looked human and yet he looked—oddly *unhuman*. He was about five feet tall. Clad in a jacket of some sort, wearing sandals, bare-headed, he stood there and looked down at Dawson with utterly impersonal eyes. His face seemed as though it had been modeled by a classic sculptor. The features were chiseled, perfect.

"Yes," he said, and there was a sigh in the words, a sigh heard as from far off. "I am perfect—with one fatal exception."

"You read my thoughts!" Dawson gasped.

"Of course," the answer came. "Otherwise, how would I have known your name? How would I, on another occasion, have known you were hiding in the darkness watching a girl you had followed?"

"Who—who are you?" Dawson whispered.

"You may call me Karmak."

Dr. Rutledge breathed a sigh that might have indicated relief. "I take it you've come for us," said he.

Karmak nodded silently.

The ghost had come again. And with him came—darkness.

CHAPTER IV

Other World

THE first thing George Dawson noticed was the quietness. There was no sound, no noise. A big city is never completely quiet. But here there was utter silence.

Dawson opened his eyes. He sat up, and found he was lying in a bed of some sort, but it was not *his* bed. He remembered, vaguely, that he had been dreaming.

He had been in a hospital, seeking a phantom, and a physician had committed suicide, and Dawson's weak heart had started throbbing. The memory of that agonizing pain jarred him to complete wakefulness. That was no dream. He *had* had a heart attack. . . .

He was wearing a brown jacket now and brown shorts. He opened the jacket, felt of his heart. It was beating rhythmically, sturdily, as strong as if there had never been any leakage. And down his left breast was a long white line, a line that had not been there before. It looked—why, it looked a little like the mark left by a surgeon's scalpel!

Dawson knew instantly what had happened. The knowledge left him breathless.

"I've been cured," he muttered softly. "I've had an operation—"

A sound jerked his head around. There was another bed in the room. In it, Rutledge was sitting up. He had heard what Dawson said.

"On earth," the physician commented, "we didn't cure hearts that were as bad as yours. Nor," he added, "did we have an antidote for certain poisons. And that means—"

Rutledge shook his head. There was a window in the room and it attracted his eyes. He got up, walked to the window, looked out — and recoiled in awed amazement.

"Come and see!" he exclaimed. "Come and see!"

Dawson got up and went to his side. A moment later a whistle of incredulous amazement burst from his lips.

A city lay before them. And what a city! Designed by a master architect

who knew the effect of every curve, the sparkle that could be produced by sharp towers, the secret of every color! Built by an engineer who knew the strength of every metal, the loading of every arch!

Majestic, inspiring, almost ethereal, the city rose regally into the sky, towering for hundreds of stories above the surface below.

It stretched away into the distance mile after mile, a city of gargantuan proportions in which every detail was as true and as perfect as if it had been carved by a craftsman in precious gems.

A city of Titans, a city of supreme engineers. Dawson's eyes ran over it, incredulous, amazed. And then, far off to the left, he saw something that chilled his blood and started his nerves to rasping.

"Bombs!" he told himself bitterly. "Only bombs could cause wreckage like that."

For in that region the lofty spires were twisted and torn, and holes gaped in all the buildings.

Dawson looked upward. There was a reddish sun overhead, and in the sky a dark blot hung motionless. While he watched it began to move away to the south.

"Hm-m—was that a ship?" Rutledge mused.

"It must have been," Dawson replied.

He put the ship out of his mind and again searched the city. Something else was wrong—very much wrong indeed!

There were no people in sight!

"WHAT'S happened to the inhabitants?" Rutledge demanded.

Dawson could not answer him. Ramps, obviously designed for pedestrians, stretched away in all directions. But nothing alive moved on the ramps. He saw dozens of flat roofs—landing

fields— but no planes in sight. There were no airships anywhere, nothing except that one dark ominous blot that had moved out of sight toward the south.

Rutledge turned from the window, glancing toward the door. "I thought I heard someone walking," he said. "There it is again! Hear it?"

Soft footsteps were clearly audible on the other side of the door.

"Wait," Rutledge warned when Dawson started forward. "We don't know what it is. It might be almost anything."

Dawson paused, his hand on the door-knob. The physician was right. Anything might be out there. As he hesitated, the footsteps came nearer. Then, under his hand the knob began to turn—

Dawson yanked the door open. A youth tumbled into the room. The psychic investigator grabbed him.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

"Why—I—" It was only a boy. He stared at Dawson from frightened eyes. Then he saw Rutledge, and gasped a single word.

"Dad!"

"Jack!" Rutledge cried. "Oh, my boy, I've found you again at last!"

The two rushed unashamedly into each other's arms. Jack Rutledge was a handsome youngster, tall well-proportioned, eager for life and all its promises. There were honest tears in the eyes of both father and son; tears which revealed that for all his cynicism, the middle-aged physician was underneath it all a man who had wrapped about himself a mantle of brusqueness to ward off the pressure of responsibility and the barbs of jealous critics.

Finally Rutledge turned to Dawson, a new light in his eyes.

"My son," he said proudly. "Not a bad looker, eh? A chip off the old block,

what?"

"Well, not quite so hard a chip," Dawson muttered, and clasped the youth's outstretched hand warmly.

"Look at this leg," Jack Rutledge said happily. "It's as sound as the other one."

He kicked with it, pranced on it, swung it up for inspection.

His father's face grew serious again. He poked his fingers into the leg muscles, felt the knee joint, pounded on the knee cap to test the nervous reaction.

THERE was wonder in Rutledge's eyes. "The tissues have been restored completely. A perfect job. Dawson, your heart, Jack's leg, and my faith in life—fellow, in this world there are some super-surgeons!"

"In *this* world, yes," Dawson agreed. "Where you find super-engineers and super-architects, you will also find super-surgeons. And now I know why Karmak took the crippled and the maimed, people who were dying. Because in this world there are surgeons who can make them well. . . ."

He paused, and when he spoke again there was perplexity in his voice.

"But who and what is Karmak? What does he want with us? And where are we, anyway?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Jack Rutledge spoke up. All I remember is going to sleep in the hospital. I had a funny sort of dream. A strange little man came for me. He told me to follow him, made me *want* to follow him. I followed him and then I went to sleep again. I don't know how long I slept, but when I woke up, I found my leg had been cured.

"At first I thought Dad operated on me while I was asleep, but then I discovered I wasn't in the hospital. I called and no one came. So I got up to look for someone. Dad—what *really*

happened?"

Rutledge tried to explain. But his voice faltered. "I don't know, son. Mr. Dawson said something about other worlds. I—I guess we're on one of them."

There was a blank spot in all their memories. They had seemed to sleep. How long they slept, they could not even guess. It had been long enough for a surgical incision to heal completely. On earth, that sometimes took weeks, or even longer.

"Wonder what happened to the rest of—of us," Dawson muttered, frowning. "We know that at least forty people disappeared. Did you see anyone else?" he asked Jack.

"No. I went in two other rooms, but they were both empty."

"We'll look for the others then," Dawson said. "They should be here." They began a search. And began to find what and whom they sought: frightened, wondering, awed men and women. The erstwhile hospital patients were wandering along corridors, peering from windows, peeping out at the spectacular city. Twenty-eight of them were found. But not Karmak. Nor again Mary Nolan.

Dawson's face grew grim. Then Jack Rutledge glancing out a window, called, "There's somebody down below us here, Mr. Dawson. And it looks like a girl."

Dawson took one look and his heart leaped. In spite of the girl's abbreviated costume, there was no mistaking her. It was Mary Nolan!

THE girl walked out along a ramp and was looking down at the city. Dawson could see the rapt expression on her face. She had been blind; but now she could see. And she stared in ecstatic rapture at the city about her, drinking in its beauty through eyes to

which perfect vision had been restored.

His heart pounding, Dawson opened the window and leaned out to call to her. But the words fairly froze on his lips. With a horrified gasp he stared, thunderstruck.

A round, fat-bellied ship was arrowing down out of the sky. Coming at tremendous speed, it was diving straight at the unsuspecting girl!

"Look out!" Dawson shouted. "Look out, Mary Nolan!"

His voice startled the girl. She glanced upward instinctively. She saw Dawson at the window—and at the same instant the roar of the diving ship rose to a tornadic crescendo.

Like a bolt of lightning it hurtled out of the sky, driving in a mad fury of speed straight toward the helpless girl. It was the same ship Dawson had glimpsed before. Lingered over the city, screaming down the skylanes for its human victim.

Mary Nolan saw it coming, cried out and turned to run. Too late—the ship was already there.

Thirty feet below the window where Dawson stood, the ramp began. It was a dangerous drop. If he missed the ramp, he would fall for hundreds of feet to the ground below—

He jumped, hit limber as a rag, rolled over and over, scrambled to his feet in time to hear the girl's screams.

The ship had rocketed now to a blasting stop. No shots were fired at Mary Nolan. Instead, creatures leaped to the ramp and seized her as she tried to run. She struck at them wildly, kicked, scratched, but as Dawson raced toward her, one of the attackers smashed her in the face, a cruel knockout blow. As she collapsed another creature grabbed her, swung her over his shoulder and leaped into the ship. The port was slammed shut. Motors howling, the vessel leaped upward, carrying the girl

with it.

Mary Nolan had been kidnaped! And by the most repulsive of creatures! They looked a lot like overgrown monkeys, with tails, pointed ears and furry bodies. The second he saw them, Dawson's gorge rose within him.

Helpless, he stood there cursing, shaking his fist at them, while the ship sped away.

Then—"Dawson!" Rutledge yelled from the window. "Look out! There's another one!"

THAT very second it was diving down toward him, coming so fast that Dawson didn't have a chance to escape, even if he had wanted to. For he didn't attempt to run. Let them capture him, too! Then he might have a chance to rescue Mary Nolan. Let them take him inside the ship! If he couldn't whip twice his weight in those monkey-like creatures, he'd know the reason why.

Air screamed as the vessel braked to a halt beside him. Dawson dropped to a half crouch, the weight on the balls of his feet. The port door swung open.

But nothing leaped out at him!

Then Dawson saw that this ship was built on a different design. It was long and slender, like a torpedo. Sitting at the pilot's seat was—Karmak!

"Get in," said Karmak. "Quickly."

Surprise held Dawson motionless. He had expected more monkey-creatures to swarm from this ship. Instead it was piloted by a ghost, a phantom, an illusion. By Karmak himself!

"I'm real in *this* world," Karmak imperturbably explained. "In your world I was a phantom, but here I'm an actual entity. And if you want to save Mary Nolan, you had better enter this ship. There is no time to be lost.

Dawson leaped into the vessel. Karmak sent it screaming upward in mad

acceleration. His passenger stifled the questions he wanted to ask, as the ghost-being motioned him toward a padded seat.

"In the world from which you came," Karmak said, "you would call that device in front of you a gun. All you have to do is aim it and press the button."

It looked a little like a machine gun. Dawson squinted through the sights.

"But I can't shoot without taking a chance of hitting Mary!" he protested.

"That's true," Karmak agreed. "I'll bring us up even with them. A shot into the rear of their ship will cripple their motors."

"But they'll crash!"

"No. Their anti-gravitors are located in the nose of the ship. The machine will float gently down without danger if you stop its motors."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Dawson gritted.

Covertly he studied this enigmatic stranger, trying to fathom the mystery that lay behind him. A phantom in "your" world but real "here"! What incredible secret lay behind those words?

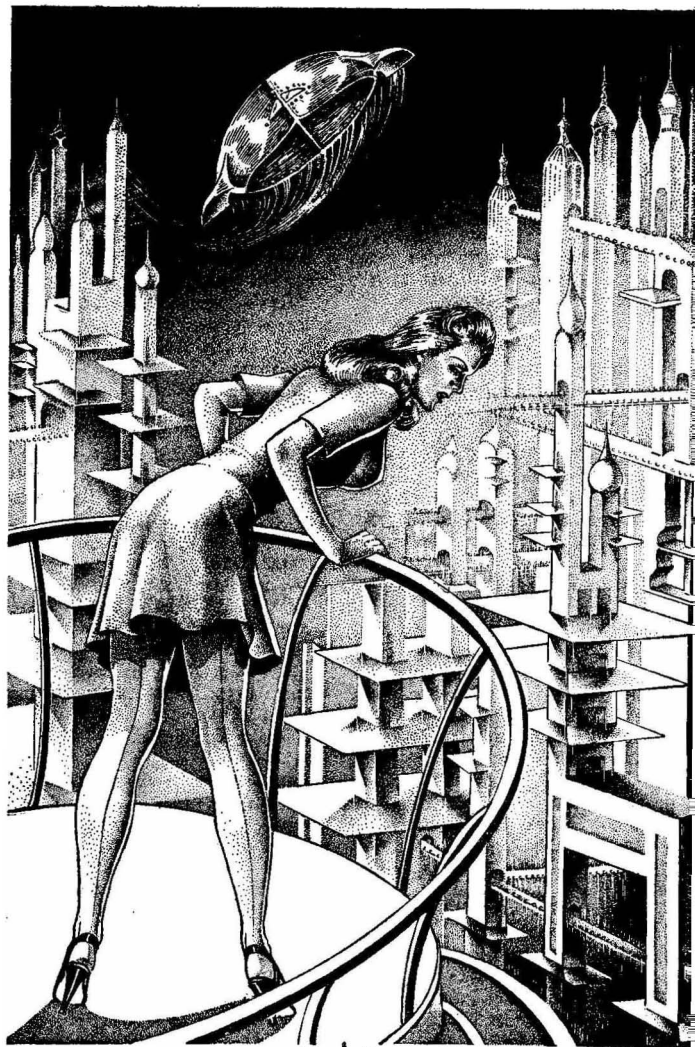
They were rapidly overhauling the fleeing ship then, when a spurt of flame flashed outward.

"They're shooting at us!" Dawson shouted.

Karmak's answer was to shove the power bar forward another notch. He showed no trace of emotion, no sign that he realized their danger.

"Aim!" he said abruptly. He had brought their vessel even with the fleeing ship.

DAWSON lined up the sights. He squeezed the trigger, then groaned. The bright spurt of flame that lanced from the gun missed the other vessel. Before he could aim again, Dawson felt his own ship swerve under him. It swept



Below her was an incredible city like no city on earth

out and away in a great curving arc.

"What did you do that for?" he blazed. "Now they may get away before we can get into position again."

"In this war," Karmak impersonally replied, "you're usually allowed only one shot. If you miss that one shot, you don't often get another one. Well, you missed."

"What the hell is this! We can try again," Dawson protested angrily.

"No," Karmak replied steadily. "There's nothing we can do now. They've gotten away. See." He pointed.

Looming in the distance was a gigantic pile of masonry. Glinting brilliantly, the sun reflected back the bright gleam of metal. It looked to be a huge fortress, as harsh and utilitarian as the city they had left was beautiful. A thin web, like a gauze curtain, sparkled in the air around it.

"It is a fortress," Karmak said, his explanation following so closely on what Dawson was thinking that he knew the other was reading his mind again. "The fortress of the Tolzans. And that web, which looks so thin, is an impenetrable ion screen. And there, rising from the fortress, is the reason we cannot go farther."

Dawson saw them—black dots rising upward like hornets.

"We may escape," said Karmak calmly. "We may not. The odds are about even."

He shoved the power bar forward to the last notch and the motors howled as the ship headed home.

"But they've got her!" Dawson cried. "We've got to rescue her. We can't leave her there, a prisoner of those—those things!"

"We have no other choice. If we attempt to rescue her, we will die ourselves."

"Then we'll die!" said Dawson savagely.

"No," said Karmak flatly. "Not you. We need you. We will not permit one of you to die if we can help it."

"But you're letting her die!"

"Not yet. It may be that the Master can rescue her."

"The Master?" Dawson demanded.

Uneasily he remembered he had heard Mary Nolan say, while she talked with a phantom in her hospital room:

"The Master needs me? But why does he need me?"

Karmak offered no answer. He drove the ship so furiously that the throbbing motors roared in protest. Behind them the black ships of the Tolzans trailed relentlessly. As they neared the city, torpedo ships rose up to meet the invaders and the black ships drew reluctantly away.

Karmak set the vessel down on a roof landing. As Dawson stepped out, Dr. Rutledge came from below to greet him.

THE first thing Dawson saw was the weapon that had been erected on the roof. It pointed a blunt barrel at the sky. Two men who much resembled Karmak served as its crew. Looking over the city, Dawson saw many of the weapons on the roofs. And high overhead a fleet of torpedo ships swung in a great circle.

"They began setting those guns up as soon as you were gone," Rutledge explained. "I gathered they were expecting something to follow you back and were arranging a warm reception."

Dawson frowned. Who had ordered the defenders out? Where had they come from? The city had looked deserted. Now an air armada swarmed over it.

Dawson turned sharply to Karmak, who was still seated at the controls.

"There are some things," he said bluntly, "that I want to know. Where

is this city? Who are you? Who is the Master? What's the reason back of all this?"

Karmak started to answer, then looked appraisingly at Dawson. Something made him change his mind.

"The Master needs me," was all he would say. "I must go to him." He started to close the port door.

"No you don't," Dawson said sharply. He wedged himself into the port. "Before you get away from here, you're going to talk."

Karmak showed no sign of annoyance. His perfect features were utterly calm. For a moment he studied the grim man who faced him. Then he reached forward and simply shoved Dawson out of the way. He had taken the ship into the sky before Dawson could scramble to his feet.

"They don't want to talk," Rutledge shrugged. "I tried."

Dawson got to his feet. "Somebody is going to talk," he said dangerously. He walked across the roof to the gun crew.

One look at them and all his baffled truculence vanished. What he saw was utterly incredible.

If the two men at the gun had been identical twins, they could not have been more alike. More incredible still, they both looked exactly like Karmak. Nose, eyes, features, haughty impersonal stare, height, coloring—everything was exactly the same, to an incredible degree.

"They look as though they all came out of the same mold," said Rutledge uneasily.

"What's your name?" asked Dawson as he approached the nearest man.

"Karmak," the reply came. Dawson went pale.

"And yours?" he rasped at the second one.

"Karmak."

DAWSON expelled his breath in a panting sigh. This was too much. He felt a little silly, as if somebody was making fun of him. But there was nothing funny about those two stern, impersonal creatures who stood there, each assuring him that his name was Karmak. There was something terrible about it, something frightening. It became more terrible and more frightening when he asked them what they were.

"We," they both chimed, "are an experiment that failed."

Dawson drew away from them. Long habit enabled him to control his nerves. But still he didn't want to be too close to them. In spite of the fact that a creature just like them had tried to help him rescue Mary Nolan, he could not be certain that they were friendly.

When he resumed his questions, they shut up like clams. During the time he had been talking to them, he noticed that they became sluggish in their movements. The color drained out of their faces, their eyes seemed to get heavy. It was with difficulty that they stood erect.

"Go away," they said. "Go away."

"Is something wrong?" Dawson demanded. "Are you sick?"

"No," the sluggish answer came. "The Master rests . . ."

They seemed to think that was sufficient explanation. When Dawson asked further questions, they both sat down, yawned, rolled over on their backs—and went to sleep. Swear and prod, Dawson couldn't awaken them.

"They're fine soldiers," Rutledge grimaced. "Sleeping at their posts! They could be shot for this."

"Come away and leave them alone," Dawson replied. "There's something distinctly wrong about them."

And then his eyes grew round and bewildered. Across the roof tops, as far as he could see, gun crews were sleeping

at their weapons.

CHAPTER IV

What the Stars Told

"I'VE been thinking," Roy Glenn said, as he glanced upward at the reddish sun, "I'm an amateur astronomer. You understand—it was a hobby."

"When night comes, perhaps we can tell where we are by the stars. What I mean is, if we can find any of the constellations we know, we can be pretty certain we're still in the solar system."

"What makes you think we might be in the solar system?" Rutledge questioned the man, one of the twenty-eight patients rediscovered.

"I don't have any reason for thinking that we are," Glenn answered. "But we might be. We might be on one of the planets—Mars, or possibly Venus. Although this world shouldn't be Venus, because there aren't many clouds in the sky and Venus is covered by clouds all the time.

"Maybe Karmak had a space ship hidden somewhere. Maybe he put us in that ship and brought us to Mars. Of course, I know space ships haven't been invented on earth yet, but they might have been invented in the world that Karmak came from. And maybe that's what's happened to us," he finished lamely.

Rutledge glanced at Dawson. "What do you think? Is Glenn possibly on the right track?"

"I'd only be guessing, too," Dawson answered. He looked at the sun, estimating its height above the horizon. "We'll know in an hour. Meanwhile, did anything happen while I was gone?"

They had found more humans—fifty-three in all, with Mary Nolan making fifty-four—but Dawson had already been told about that, and Rutledge

didn't repeat it.

"We went exploring," Rutledge explained. "I found their operating room." His voice quickened. "It was the most marvelous place I ever saw! They've got equipment that will make your head swim. And X-rays! You possibly know that on earth there is no known device that will focus X-rays. But these people can do it!

"You can see everything that's happening inside the body, every bit of tissue, every bone, the individual cells even, if you want to focus that close. And they have other instruments that I can't begin to describe.

"But I know this much. These people are ten thousand—no a hundred thousand years ahead of us!"

"We've already surmised that much," Dawson nodded. "Did you find the surgeons who used this marvelous operating room?"

"No," said Rutledge sadly. "We didn't find anybody."

The physician sounded rather forlorn. Indeed, there was a forlorn air about the whole group. They conversed softly, in awed whispers, and as the sun went down, they began to watch the sky expectantly.

What they would see in the heavens meant a lot to them. It would tell them where they were, possibly tell them where home was—the earth from which they had been taken to serve as cogs in the machinery of some secret, bewildering scheme.

THE sun was gone now. The whole group gathered around Roy Glenn, began to scan the heavens with him. One by one the stars came out. And again the group sighed with inner depression.

For there was no known constellation in the whole sky. The Big Dipper was not there, nor Orion, nor the Pleiades,

nor the Southern Cross, nor any constellation even remotely familiar. Nor, in fact, a single recognizable star.

"We're out of our universe," Glenn muttered. "I've never seen any of these stars before, nor any of the constellations. We're not even in the solar system. We've been warped completely out of our own solar system."

There was pained silence. Men looked at each other and then away, trying not to say the things that were in their hearts. Their uneasiness grew, until Jack Rutledge, in a small voice, said:

"Talk about Robinson Crusoe! He had nothing on us."

His voice broke the tension. Someone laughed, and another chuckle answered the first.

And then, across the roof, a foot scraped heavily. The Karmaks had risen. Completely alert again, they were standing at attention beside their weapons. Suddenly one of the earth group cried out.

A ship was coming through the starlight, a slim torpedo craft. It planned to a halt on the roof. Another Karmak emerged from it and came toward the expectant group.

"Food has been prepared and is waiting for you down below," he announced. "Unfortunately it is synthetic, but you will find it palatable, I think. Also your quarters are being made ready."

They had forgotten about food in their alternate moods of excitement and depression. Now Jack Rutledge laughed.

"Lead me to it! I could eat a cow and bawl for the calf."

Dawson started automatically to follow the others, but Karmak spoke to him.

"I have a message for you."

"Who from? What is it?"

"From the Master. He says that to-

night, after you have eaten, you and I may attempt to rescue the girl. He will assist us."

Dawson's heart leaped. "In that case," he exclaimed, "I can get along without eating!"

A chance to rescue Mary Nolan! It was the thing that had tortured his thoughts for hours. His purpose in questioning the gun crew had been to find out if he could obtain a ship. Now the opportunity had come.

Karmak, moving rapidly, led him to the vessel.

"Your people seem to have come out of their trance," Dawson observed.

"Yes," came the unemotional answer. "The Master no longer rests. In consequence we are busy."

"Then you loaf when he isn't on the job?"

"No," Karmak dissented. "It's not like that. When he rests, we rest too."

It was an enigma that the fellow apparently had no intention of clarifying. When Dawson asked further about the Master, he got no answer at all.

INSIDE the ship four of Karmak's duplicate companions waited, each looking exactly like the other.

"Tell me which is which," Dawson questioned. "I can't tell you apart."

"If it will help your peace of mind, I am the first one you met, the one who appeared to you in your world. Now, no more questions. If we are to defeat the Tolzans, the task will require our entire attention."

"In that case," Dawson replied, "I'll subside."

He did keep silent. But the questions kept turning over in his mind. The ship slid into the air, sped whistling to the southward. The fortress of the Tolzans came into sight presently, its ion screen a luminous blur. It was a huge thing, miles in circumference.



The castle loomed out of the mists before us

"Getting into that place is going to take some doing," Dawson told himself.

He was ready to take the chance, although he guessed there must be thousands of the monkey-men inside the huge pile of metal and stone. He wondered how Karmak, or his hidden, enigmatic Master, had planned for them to obtain entrance; or, once they got inside, to accomplish their mission. The ion screen was supposed to be impenetrable.

"We will stop here," Karmak said. He lowered the ship into a dark ravine, carefully jockeying it out of sight among the trees, landed. He opened the port door then and stepped out, his four companions following like wooden soldiers on parade.

"Are we going to tackle that place on foot?" Dawson demanded.

"There is no other way. Our ship

cannot pierce the screen," Karmak answered. "There is a gate near here. We will enter through that."

He slipped away into the star-broken darkness, his men following closely. Dawson joined them, thinking that perhaps Karmak knew of a secret passage.

Above them the fortress rose into the night, a black mountain surrounded by nebulous witchfire.

They came to the end of the ravine, emerged from it. The gate was readily visible ahead of them. There was nothing secret about it. It stood right out in the open, the ion screen coming down and touching it.

And it was guarded. At least twenty of the monkey-creatures lounged in front. Dawson's fingers closed over Karmak's shoulder, his fingers biting into the flesh.

"Is *that* the entrance we're supposed to use?"

"That is correct."

"But it's in the open and it's guarded!"

There was not a scrap of cover within a hundred yards. The starlight and the glow from the ion screen showed up every detail.

"Yes, it's in the open and it's guarded. But we're going to pass *through* it. And if you value the life of Mary Nolan, do exactly as we do, and under no circumstances utter a sound."

IT was impossible to believe that Karmak was lying. Yet Dawson remembered that something was not right about this people. Were they really allies of the monkey-men? His knuckles hardened as his hands balled into fists. The skin drew tight over his cheeks.

But there was nothing he could do except follow the Karmak. And perhaps they were going to rush the gate. A blast of devastating fire and then a rush? It might work. Something had to work, Dawson thought grimly.

Karmak did not order his men to fire. He did nothing, except stand still. Dawson caught the fleeting impression that the fellow was conversing with some unseen presence. Or perhaps he was praying. His eyes were partly closed and his impersonal face was even more immobile than usual.

Karmak opened his eyes. A frown of concentration creased his forehead. He took Dawson by the hand and walked into the open, straight toward the gate, his four companions marching behind.

They were plainly visible now. There was no cover of any kind. Yet Karmak was marching straight toward that guarded gate, making no effort to hide.

"But—"

"Silence!" Karmak hissed venom-

ously.

Dawson bit his lips. They marched forward, directly toward the gate. The guards glanced at them, then looked away, seemingly without seeing. Karmak pushed the barrier aside and the little party passed through the gate, through the ion screen, and into a corridor.

Dawson was sweating profusely. Karmak had got them past the entrance after all. He was not a traitor.

It was not until then that Dawson realized that something invisible, unseen, unheard guarded them, concealed them somehow. Some tremendous power was laid over them. They were protected by a hand whose power was all the greater because of its invisibility.

There are two kinds of illusions, Dawson knew. In the first, the spectator sees an object or a person that *is not* present. Karmak, or his hidden Master, was using the second type, in which the spectator does not see an object or a person that *is* present.

It was invisibility, worked through mental control. The minds of the guards had been seized by a stronger brain than theirs, and the hypnotic effect of that higher mind kept them from seeing the intruders pass.

Sweat ran down Dawson's face. A coldness chilled his body. For the first time in his life he knew the meaning of real fear, a sick chill that settled at the pit of his stomach. He was glad that those secret surgeons had repaired his heart. Otherwise it would never have stood the strain.

The tension was getting to Karmak, too, for his face had lost its immobility. It was lined now with wrinkles, and his lips were pulled back over his teeth in a fighting snarl. He was as tense as a scared cat and his actions were timed to split seconds, his eyes darting everywhere. But he never hesitated

on a turn, never faltered.

They encountered monkey men, at first only a few, then more and more, and as the creatures increased in number, the lines of tension dug deeper into Karmak's face.

These Tolzans began to look doubtful, to glance around, to call nervously to each other, as if they were beginning to suspect the presence of intruders in their fortress, as they guessed that something was wrong. They didn't *know* what was wrong, but occasionally Dawson caught startled glances from the monkey creatures, as if they *almost* saw him.

Then Karmak, hurrying through the maze of corridors like a hound hot on the scent of prey, stopped suddenly and opened a door.

One glance inside, and Dawson's heart rose into his throat. Mary Nolan was tied to a chair inside that room—with four Tolzans as guards.

CHAPTER V

Inside the Fortress

WHEN the door opened, an instant elapsed before Karmak could reach the minds of the Tolzans inside the room. His brows knotted with the intensity of his concentration. An incredible wave of mental force seemed to flow from him. The monkey-men looked up, blinked—and froze into immobility.

"Inside, quickly!" Karmak hissed. They leaped inside, closed the door.

Karmak, at the moment of entering, had extended his control to Mary Nolan so that no startled look from her would betray them. Now he released her mind, and she saw them.

"George Dawson!" she whispered. She was too stunned to move. In that terrible prison, in the heart of that

vast stronghold, the girl had thought herself beyond help. "Are—are you real? Or am I—seeing things that aren't there?"

"I'm real, all right," Dawson answered, trying to keep the emotion out of his voice. He started to explain what had happened, but the sudden sound of another voice brought home the terrible danger that was all around them.

It was a Tolzan who spoke, a monkey-man!

"I—I am positive the door opened a second ago," he was saying.

"Yes," said another. "It did open. And it closed. But no one came in."

"There is," a third creature said, "a center of force here in the room. It is trying to control our minds."

Karmak's power was weakening. These four Tolzans were of a higher type than the ones in the corridors. They looked more intelligent and their uniform decorations indicated they were of higher rank in the Tolzan scheme of things.

"Seize their minds!" Dawson whispered excitedly to Karmak.

Sweat was pouring from Karmak's face as he attempted to maintain his control over the four guards. Tried and began to fail!

"I can't," he wailed. "I can't—"

"But you must! We can't get out of here if you don't. Bring your hypnotic powers into focus!"

"I can't" Karmak whispered again; and when Dawson shook him, he began to tremble. "You don't understand—I have no power. It is the strength of the Master flowing through me that controls other minds. And the Master weakens—he must rest—"

"He can't weaken! We'll never get out without his help!" Dawson pleaded.

"He is weakening. He must—must rest. He is—ill. He can't—do anything more."



Dawson brought his gun up, and the Tolzan's body glowed silently and he died

Until then Dawson had not realized that the tremendous power Karmak wielded came from another source, that Karmak was in reality only a remote-control relay station. The fellow was fighting desperately to maintain the upper hand, but it was patently a losing fight.

"I see them!" one of the Tolzans shouted suddenly. "Karmaks! Right here in this room! Destroy them!"

His hand dived toward a belt gun.

DAWSON took one step. The Tolzan's hand was moving like lightning toward his weapon. Dawson brought up his fist. It had every ounce of his strength behind it. Hard knuckles connected like a mallet with the Tolzan's chin. A numbness sped down Dawson's arm. But the chin of the

monkey-man jerked backward. The sharp *crack!* of a breaking vertebra was loud in the room. The Tolzan guard turned a double somersault backward, his neck broken. He was dead before he hit the floor.

But there were three others. Their guns were out now and coming up. Dawson dived. He struck the nearest monkey-creature just above his furry knees, and the smash of his tackle carried another Tolzan with him. What the third guard was doing, Dawson did not know. He had his hands full with the two he had tackled.

He thought he had an armful of snakes, from the agility with which the creatures moved. Neither could fire at him for fear of hitting the other, but they could claw and scratch, and their teeth were viciously sharp.

Dawson brought up a knee. It struck one of the Tolzans in the stomach. Whooshing air, he subsided. Dawson grabbed the other, only to hear a sodden thump and feel the creature go limp in his hands. He looked up and saw Mary Nolan bending over him, a gun in her hand raised and ready to strike again.

Good girl, Dawson thought. He looked for the fourth Tolzan, saw him lying on the floor near the door. His body was still jerking.

"I shot him with a gun one of your friends dropped," Mary said. "But I couldn't shoot the two you were fighting with. You were in the way all the time!"

"Very good," Karmak spoke unexpectedly, his voice faint with weakness. "Excellent job. Proves the Master was right. Must rest—now."

He was already lying on the floor. As he uttered the last words, his eyes closed. He and his four companions calmly went to sleep.

"Are they hurt?" Mary asked, concerned.

"Hell, no!" Dawson snorted. "But something is wrong with them, and this going-to-sleep business is part of it."

He tried to arouse them, but they lay like the dead.

"I hate to tell you this," Mary told him, "but one of those monkey-creatures may come in any minute. They've been running in and out of here ever since they brought me in."

Dawson picked up the hand gun that one of the Karmaks had dropped.

"I pity any monkey-man that comes through that door!"

He pulled Karmak and his four companions to one side, so that they would not be the first object seen by anyone who entered. There was no exit from the room, other than the one door.

"We've just got to wait until they decide they've rested long enough," he

said. "All we can do is keep our chins up."

"You don't have to tell me to keep my chin up!" Mary flared.

"Sorry," Dawson answered. The girl was tense and still somewhat unnerved. He tried to grin, and her smile flashed a bit wanly in reply. "Mary, if we ever get out of this mess, there's something I want to tell you. Remind me of it, will you, if I should forget."

Mary blushed furiously. "I will not!" she snapped. "If you can't remember it yourself, it's not my place to remind you—*Watch* out!"

The door opened. A furry Tolzan stood there, gaping at them.

DAWSON shot him. The gun did not discharge a bullet. But whatever the missile was, it was deadly efficient. A blazing electrical discharge raced over the Tolzan's body. Dawson caught him as he fell, jerked him inside, started to slam the door, when he saw another monkey-face staring round-eyed at him in the corridor outside. He fired again, but the face had vanished.

A warning yell echoed down the corridor. It was immediately answered.

Dawson bolted the door. "We're in for it. They know we're here now."

He could hear the Tolzans gathering outside, their shrill voices chattering angrily. He collected all the guns, including those of the unconscious Karmaks. Setting them within easy reach, he stretched himself on the floor. Mary picked up one of the guns and lay down beside him.

"If you think you've got a monopoly on these things," she announced, "you're badly mistaken."

"Okay, pal," Dawson grinned tightly. "They'll get us in time—but before they do, they'll think hell is a comfortable place compared to this!"

A heavy blow against the door

drowned the girl's reply. The barrier was metal, and it clanged like a gong when struck. Another blow followed the first, and then another and yet another. Even metal couldn't withstand that pounding for long. It didn't. A panel was knocked loose and fell out.

Greenish flame licked through the opening at them. They fired together. A yell sounded outside.

"Singed one," Dawson diagnosed the yell. "Ah!" He fired again. Stabbing fingers of flame reached out at them, but the Tolzans could not shoot accurately without appearing before the hole. When they did that, they died—noisily.

"Only one thing—" Dawson began. "What's that?" Mary demanded.

He didn't answer. There was no point in wondering how long it would be before the Tolzans thought of using bombs.

A second later they did think of it. A bomb came flashing through the opening in the door, fell sputtering at the far side of the room. Dawson leaped toward it. He knew he didn't have a chance to get to it in time, but at least he could make the attempt. As he scrambled toward it a lithe body leaped ahead of him, seized the bomb and flung it back out the door.

The thunder of the explosion roared in the corridor, mingled with the screams of the monkey-men.

"Thanks," said Dawson, mopping his brow. "So you woke up. You people go to sleep and wake up at the damndest times!"

But Karmak, who had caught the bomb, scarcely heard him. He took in the whole situation at a glance. Instantly reacting, he turned to his four companions, who had also awakened, and barked at them.

"Two of you go out and clear the way for us."

TWO Karmaks promptly grabbed their guns from the floor. They didn't hesitate, didn't seem to stop to think. They had been given an order and they prepared to obey it.

"But they'll be killed," Dawson protested.

"Certainly they will be killed," Karmak admitted. "We will go out right behind them. Give your weapons back to my other two men. They can use them better than you can."

His manner was so forceful, his decisions so rapid, that Dawson didn't have a chance to object.

The two Karmaks leaped through the door. Their weapons up, fire flashing from them, they charged out—and died.

As they fell, Karmak stepped forward. He hesitated a moment before he took the next move, and his eyes closed as if in silent prayer. Then his face wrinkled into that terrible frown of concentration. He stepped out just as the first two expired. Gun flashes had now died away, even those from the Tolzans.

"Come on!" Karmak hissed. "We've got to move fast."

The rest followed him with beating hearts.

Outside the Tolzans stood around like so many statues, staring stupidly at—nothing.

"What's happened to them?" Mary whispered, awestruck.

"I think," said Dawson, "that the Master has finished resting and has got on the job again—with more power than ever."

Karmak didn't say a word. But the lines in his face deepened as the terrible power flowed through him. He walked forward, moving like an automaton. The rest followed. As though hypnotized, the Tolzans opened a lane and let them pass.

Then—they were out of the fortress, beyond the guards, past the gate. Safe. *Saje!*

A screech came from behind them. Turning, they saw hordes of the furry monkey-men pouring out of the fortress, coming after them like avenging furies.

"I can't control them any longer," Karmak whispered. "We're too far away. And my power is failing. The Master must rest again."

He faced Dawson. "You take Mary Nolan to the ship. You have watched me operate it and you know how to handle the controls. Go, now."

Dawson did not move. "What about you?" he said bluntly.

"We will hold the Tolzans while you escape," Karmak said the words casually, as if they were of no importance.

"You mean that while we run, you die," Dawson corrected.

"Yes," Karmak admitted calmly. "We will die. But that does not matter. All that matters is that you and Mary escape."

BEHIND them the yells of the Tolzans sounded clearly.

"No sale," Dawson snapped. "There are some things I don't understand about you, pal. But if you think I'm going to run off to safety while you stay here and die, you're barking up the wrong tree. We all escape together—or we all die together. Right?" He glanced at Mary.

"Right," she answered simply.

"But you *must* go," Karmak was pleading. "It is the will of the Master. And you don't understand—about us."

"To hell with the Master!" Dawson stormed. "I understand bravery when I see it. You sent two of your fellows to their death in that corridor, before I knew what you were doing. But you're not going to send two more, yourself

included, just so we can escape! No dice, my friend. I like to play games, but not that kind."

Karmak's face writhed with pleading but he saw that Dawson was adamant. He seemed then to turn his mind inward. Again he looked as though he were praying. A wordless conference seem to take place. Then he looked up. There was the ghost of a smile on his face.

"The Master says that your courage gives him strength to fight off his exhaustion and aid us a while longer."

"You mean he has seen everything that has gone on!" Dawson exclaimed.

"Of course. All that I have seen, he has seen. Every move I have made, he has directed. Now we must go. Not a moment is to be lost."

CHAPTER VI

The Master

THEY reached the ship, boarded it and took off. And just in time; for, from the huge Tolzan fortress behind them, a whole host of pursuers was rising.

"They're after us hot and heavy," Dawson growled.

"I think they're after more than us," stated Mary. "From what they said, I think they are planning a large-scale attack. They are ready to launch it at any moment, and our escape has been the signal that set them off."

"The Big Push, eh? What else did you find out?"

"Well, there have been sporadic outbursts of fighting for years, possibly for centuries, between the Tolzans and something that lives in the city where we were taken. Seemingly neither side has been able to gain a victory, but the Tolzans have learned recently that their enemy was planning some new surprise

against them.

"I don't know exactly what that surprise was, but I think we're part of it. They had been watching the city closely, and when they saw me walking on the ramp, they decided to capture me, so they could ask questions."

"What kind of questions?" Dawson wanted to know.

"Who I was, what I was, where I came from. I tried to tell them and they became very excited. They called in their physicians and made a careful physical examination," Mary blushed a little there—"and then they called me a primitive form, 'Unquestionably primitive.' And that really excited them.

"So that is what he has done!' they said, to each other. 'When his Karmaks failed, he sought out a primitive form to bring against us.' Do you have any idea what they meant, George?"

"I can guess. It's obvious that the Tolzans think we are to be used against them."

Dawson glanced out at the fleeting landscape, and then back at the oncoming pursuit. It was gaining on them, the dark ships drawing closer, but Dawson didn't mention it. Karmak, at the controls, had the power bar forward as far as it would go.

In the end they were saved, not by their own efforts but by three torpedo ships that came whistling to meet them. Three ships from the city, vessels that Karmak and his companions used. They came up just as fingers of flame were beginning to reach forward from the Tolzan ships.

The rescuers didn't hesitate, didn't attempt to set up a rearguard action. Spreading like a fan, the three ships drove headlong at the mass of Tolzan hornets. The night grew lurid with flame. A knot of ships milled in the sky, twisting, darting, turning. There

was never any doubt about the outcome. The only doubt was how long it would be before three coffins of burning metal dropped to the ground.

It might have been a minute, or two minutes. It was not long. The Dawson group had gained the necessary distance to make it to safety. The price had been the smashing of three ships and the death of their crews.

DAWSON prodded Karmak in the shoulder. "Did your Master send those ships out to aid us?"

"Yes," Karmak replied. He seemed weary.

"He sent them out to die so we might escape?"

"Yes. To the Master, your lives are precious."

"I gather that much," Dawson answered bitterly. His face clouded with anger. He was awed. And scared, too. Not of dying, but of that fearsome purpose that carelessly sacrificed lives that others might live.

"I want to see this Master," he ground out.

"That," Karmak answered, "is where I take you now, you and your fellows—to see the Master."

The ship slid to a halt on a roof landing. As they stepped out, Dawson looked to the south. The night was alive with lights—the oncoming Tolzan horde. Flashing two-man pursuit ships, heavy cruisers, and bringing up the rear—the lumbering hulks of battleships; great monsters pushing their way through the skylanes.

Not ten ships, not twenty ships. Hundreds of ships!

"It's the Big Push, all right," Dawson muttered. "They're coming with all they've got—and it looks like they've got plenty, and then some to spare."

By the starlight he could see Kar-

maks on the roofs. They crouched at their guns, waiting. And from three different hangars steady lines of ships were rising. Fighter after fighter took to the air. As he saw them going gallantly forth, Dawson knew a pain in his heart that was not physical.

"It will be a battle all right," he muttered. "It will be a battle."

Karmak was at his side now. "Come below. The Master waits," he was urging.

Obediently the group followed him. He led them below, where the other earth people waited. Rutledge's voice boomed once, at Dawson.

"I see you brought her back," he said. "Good." He said nothing more. He and all the others knew a battle was coming. Looking from their windows, they had seen the combatants sallying forth.

At a gesture from Karmak the entire group followed him downward. They came to the ground level and still headed down. Below the lower levels they found elevators functioning. Karmak motioned his charges to use them.

After a sharp descent huge doors swung open, revealing a vast chamber ahead of the party. It stretched away on either side, a tremendous cavern. Except for an open space in the center, it was filled, literally crammed with a bewildering array of machinery, most of which was electrical.

Switchboards and generators, the soft glow of tubes, round bulked housings that resembled cyclotrons but weren't, blank screens, apparatus that served an unguessed purpose — Dawson stared open-mouthed at the sight.

In the open space in the center was — the Master.

"**A**PPROACH," Karmak said. He led the way, then slipped unobtrusively to one side.

Dawson looked once, a hurried glance, and then quit looking and started wondering. Around him he heard soft gasps. He felt a hand creep into his and, glancing down, saw Mary standing beside him.

"He—he isn't like the Karmaks," someone whispered.

"Nor the Tolzans," another said.

"What—what is he?"

The Master was old. That much was certain. His legs were withered, his body frail and slender, his skin as white as alabaster. He was sitting in a kind of chair that was more of a bed than it was a chair, his hands resting on the arms. Beneath his fingers, built into the arms of the chair, were row after row of buttons.

There was a beard on his chin, a white beard. And his head—looking at that head, Dawson wondered how much knowledge it might contain. For it was big. Ten times as big as the head of a normal man, and all out of proportion to the body. A special rest supported it, enabling the aged patriarch to hold it erect.

This was the Master. And he looked more dead than alive. Not until Dawson saw his eyes did he fully realize that the Master was alive. For those eyes were bright. They glittered with an unmistakable brilliance.

As he watched, Dawson understood why the eyes were glittering. Tears were rolling from them.

The Master was crying.

Of all the things that had happened, this was perhaps the most incomprehensible. This frail creature sat there in his chair, and looked at them, and *cried*. Dawson felt the pangs of real sympathy. There was something heartrending about those tears; something awesome, too. It was Mary Nolan who understood that the Master did not have the strength to raise his arms. She stepped

forward and dabbed at his cheeks with a tiny handkerchief.

"Thank you," the Master said, his voice vibrant with emotion. "I—must apologize for this display, but if you knew how much it means to me to have you here, you would know why I can't help crying."

Dawson was thoroughly touched. But when he remembered that it was this same Master who had sent crews of three ships to certain doom, his sympathy hardened.

The Master read his mind. "They died willingly," he sighed. "To them it is all the same—life or death. They do not fear death because they have never been alive."

"*Never been alive!*" Dawson gasped.

"NO," the Master explained. "You see, they were an experiment that was unsuccessful. I could synthesize perfect bodies, but somehow I could never instill the life-force into those bodies, could never make them live. I could analyze the life-force, and the theory was correct, but somehow it would never work out. If I had had time—but the point was, I didn't have time."

"Then Karmak—and his companions—they were synthetic creatures. You created them."

"Certainly."

"But they lived, they moved, they talked and breathed. They were alive."

"I could animate them with my will. They *then* seemingly had life. When I withdrew my control, or when exhaustion forced me to rest—but look!"

His eyes flicked to the left. Karmak, the imperturbable, the impersonal, lay there. He had slumped to the floor like a dead man.

"I have withdrawn my control from him," the Master said. "And he lies like that. Nor will he awaken, nor

move, nor show any life at all beyond a sluggish heartbeat and a shallow breathing, until I reinvest him with my will. In a sense—

"Yes," the Master made a deprecatory gesture, "I see you were thinking about them in your world. He is indeed a robot made of flesh. I assure you it is not my wish for him to be that way. I tried every way to make them live, but everything failed. And I had plans for them too, if I could find some method to make them live.

"They were to be the race that carried on after me. As things turned out, I had no choice except to use them for another purpose. They became my hands, they did my bidding, carried out my orders. I can control each of them separately and thus accomplish many things otherwise impossible."

Dawson's mind reeled. Robots! The Karmaks were robots. Now he understood the fatal defect Karmak had mentioned. These faithful servants were not alive.

They were inanimate bits of flesh until invested by a greater, stronger will. Then, too, their rest periods. When their aged Master relaxed, they rested with him. When he became too exhausted to control them, they sank into a drugged stupor.

But what was the Master? And what was this strange world of his?

When Dawson asked that question, a sudden silence fell. All the whispering ceased, the nervous shifting of feet. Everyone looked toward the ancient figure seated in the chair.

It meant a lot, the answer to that question. It gave purpose to everything that had happened—or took away all purpose and all meaning.

"I," the Master said, "am human. I am a man. Rather, I am the far-removed descendant of the mutant which

you were expecting even in your day. I am the many times removed grandson of the superman you knew was coming. And this world—" he hesitated, and in the heavy silence someone caught his breath."

"—is Earth."

HE WAS fooling them, Dawson thought. He was playing with them, like a cat with mice. He was lying to them, had been lying to them all the time. This planet was not Earth, could not be Earth. The very stars in the heavens showed that the Master lied.

Blood rushed to Dawson's face and his mouth opened to speak angry words. But the Master, smiling a little wanly, held up his hand.

"Be not so impetuous, my son," he said. "All things come to those who wait, I believe it was once said on your Earth. Yes, the constellations you have seen in the heavens here and the stars are certainly different. But this is Earth—more than three-quarters of a million years after you left it. This is Earth in the beginning of its old age. The sun has grown red, and the constellations have shifted so you cannot recognize them.

"You, George Dawson," the Master said, "have been shifted in time, lifted across the warped loops that made up time, into the future of which"—his old eyes went from man to man—"some of you have perhaps dreamed."

It could be true. It might be true. There was a chance that this ancient being was not lying to them.

The Master went on to explain that he had worked out his time-transit method by means of a system of mathematics which had not yet been developed in the twentieth century.

This time-transference had been, too, a form of mental projection, with the active power emanating from the Master's

super-brilliant mentality. Back in the year 1940, from which they had been "kidnaped", the ex-patients knew that each atom was a form of transmitting set in miniature, that thought-waves were closely allied with radio waves.

But in 1940, although for centuries man had pondered the problem of mind over matter, the connection between atomic matter and thought-wave projection had never been seriously considered. The Master, then, had sent his mind back through time.

He had, in a word, perfectly visualized scenes from history—that is, history to *him*—and thus been able to re-create any particular historical condition through thought-wave projection as applied concretely to atomic substance.

DAWSON gasped at the implications of this great accomplishment. Another aspect of the Master's doings, however, caused his brows to furrow.

"But why," he asked, "why have you taken only the dying from the Earth? Why didn't you take the living?"

The Master sighed deeply. "Because they were the only people I could work with. My power, vast as it is, has its limits, too. It is certainly not great enough to affect the living—those with a healthy life span ahead of them in which to work out their destiny.

"The healthy individual will move and walk and talk and eat, and the strength of his normal energy forges ties which bind him to the present—his present. This relationship is so natural, so strong that even I cannot impede it. Nor, indeed, would I be so callous as to make the attempt."

The Master's eyes were shining. "But as for those about to die—ah, that is another matter entirely! And so I took only those on the verge of death, because the dead have no future, at least in my belief. The dying have no more

work to do, no more energy to expend. And they would serve my purpose just as well. Once here, they could be cured."

As he finished speaking, the floor trembled slightly. The Master's attention was for a moment withdrawn. He seemed to be taking counsel with himself. Then he spoke again.

"If you have any further questions, ask them of me now. Time passes swiftly."

"I have a question," said a member of the group. "Those Tolzans—those monkey-men? What are they?"

"You have named them correctly. That's what they are—monkey-men. Just as I am a human mutant, they are monkey mutants. There were monkeys in your world, curious little beasts whom you suspected were your far-removed cousins. They also evolved, grew into creatures of great intelligence.

"We ignored them, but two centuries ago they began to challenge our supremacy, our right to be masters of this world. They are still challenging it."

There was unmistakable grimness in the Master's voice.

"Two centuries ago, there were eleven of us. We lived here in this world, detached, aloof, our only link with the past the cities our race had built and then discarded. Sentimentally we kept those cities clean and neat. There were no other men. We were the last of the race, and we thought ourselves immortal and omnipotent.

"Then the monkey mutants challenged us. We had great powers and we thought nothing of the challenge. That was our first mistake. We underestimated the enemy. When the first Tolzan attack was over, there were only two of us left alive. And if we were to remain alive, we had no choice except to hide.

"Now, these monkey mutants were

devilishly intelligent. They asked no quarter and they gave none. The driving force of a young race was in them, and they were determined to rule, determined that men, who had for so many millenia been their masters, should be wiped out.

"Before we had completed this refuge, my companion died and I was left alone. His death shocked me terribly. It was then I discovered that I, too, was doomed, that the Tolzan scientists had infected us with a subtle poison. My death was certain. All I could do was delay the day when it would strike.

"I was the last man and I was dying. This did not seem to matter much. I would die. There would be another race on Earth. What difference would it make?" For a moment the Master paused, as if in reflection.

"Then the old pride of race rose in me, the drive that has brought my kind down across the centuries. Should I let my race die out, let the last man die like a weakling here near the end of time? Should I betray the hopes and dreams of the past? No! Not while there was a single chance.

"I created the Karmaks, hoping they would be the race to come after me. But—they failed. There was little time left for other experiments; and unfortunately, while I could send my *mind* back through time, I could not send *myself*. It was then that I thought to reach back through time to another age in order to find the parents of a new race to inherit my world.

"That was why I brought you here. Not to fight the Tolzans, but to bridge the gap in time when the last man dies."

DAWSON'S mind was reeling. He no longer doubted. The Master was telling the truth. There was a plan and a purpose to it. The parts all fitted to-

gether like a blueprint: the blueprints, perhaps, of destiny.

"The point, my son," the Master said, "is that destiny has no blueprints. There are no signboards to the future. You travel by trial and error." He paused, and his eyes ran over the group.

"No one has asked the obvious question: Why did I reach back three-quarters of a million years, to your age, to secure the progenitors of a new race, when I could with greater ease have reached back three centuries, before the Tolzans came to power, and warned the Earth what was to happen?"

No one could answer him.

"There," the Master pointed toward Karmak, "is the answer! He has a perfect body, though no mind. I have an almost perfect mind, but a body that a child could destroy. Man must be both. One without the other is worthless. That was why I reached back to your age. I wanted a primitive type, a strong mind in a strong body, because I, who thought myself perfect, am one of destiny's errors, doomed to destruction . . ."

The Master's words ran off into silence. There was awe in the faces of the people who watched him. He had stood at the end of time, watching the doom of the human race come nearer and nearer, knowing that with him the last man died. He had stood there alone, the last of his companions gone.

But he stood alone no longer. Now others stood beside him.

Dawson stepped forward. "We understand now, Master. And we're ready to help."

A ghost of a wistful smile tugged at the Master's lips.

"Thank you—" He started to say something else, but another tremor came, stronger than the first. The whole room rocked. A warning bell tinkled, a red light flashed.

"What—what was that, sir?"

The Master pressed a button on the arm of his chair. The lights dimmed in the chamber. Simultaneously a screen lighted up.

They had forgotten, in listening to what they had been told, that there was a war outside. Now they remembered it. The screen was a mirror of harsh reality.

Outside the sky was ablaze with lights. A maze of ships, locked in desperate combat, was whirling like a pinwheel in the night. Bright streamers of flame were reaching out. When they touched a ship, the stricken craft burst almost instantly into incandescence, and came downward, down toward the earth, flaming like a falling star. When it struck another tremor shook the ground.

Now and again one of the round ships of the Tolzans fell. But more often the craft that took the sickening plunge was a slim torpedo.

"You said you were willing to help," the Master reminded them. "Are you willing to go out into that hell—and fight?"

FOR a second there was stunned silence. Out there in the bloody night a man would be whiffed to nothingness before a watch could tick twice. Everyone knew it. Together, the group numbered fifty-four. The Tolzans swarmed by thousands.

A voice growled an answer. Later Dawson would realize it was his own voice speaking. Another answered it, and another, until the room echoed with the sound.

"Give us ships! Give us guns! We'll fight! You're damned right we'll fight!"

"No," the Master said. "I was only testing you. Come. Someone please give me a hand."

At the Master's command Karmak came out of his sleep to aid him. So did

Dawson.

The aged patriarch was so weak, he could not walk alone. They helped him, Karmak on one arm, Dawson on the other. At the Master's orders they led him to another, larger chamber. It was an armory, a hangar. Ships were here, fighting craft, guns. One, larger and sturdier than the others, stood apart from the rest.

"Take me to that ship," the Master said.

They helped him into it. There was a specially designed control chair. They helped the Master into it, and Karmak took up his place behind one of the guns.

"Open that small box," the Master directed. "You will find a hypodermic needle in it."

It was Dr. Rutledge who took the hypodermic needle from its place. His eyes were filled with questions, but the Master bared his arm and sternly told him to use the needle. The white flesh did not bleed when the point went home.

"It will give me my old strength, for an hour," the Master said. "After that hour, what happens does not matter. I am going now. If I fail, take these ships and use them to fight your way clear. If necessary, flee to the planets. The ships will take you there."

Dawson's face was pale and sorrowful. "But why can't we get into these ships and take you away with us?"

"And leave the horde outside to follow you? No," said the Master stoutly. "Perhaps you will be able to find a refuge here on earth. At any rate, I leave you as my heritage all the knowledge your race has gained. It is recorded on tapes, and each ship contains a record. You will need centuries to understand it, but understand it you must. Your duty—and in this duty you must not fail!—is to provide the nucleus for

a new race. That is all. Now close the door, please."

THEY stumbled out of the ship a little dazed at the Master's calm heroism. Inside, motors began to throb. The ship lifted and began to move forward. A huge door in the hangar swung upward, revealing a great tunnel slanting toward the surface. The Master's ship moved into it, moved upward and away.

He waved at them as he went out of sight. Then he was gone, with the faithful Karmak at the controls.

"He's going out to fight those monkey-men," Rutledge muttered doubtfully. "And he's a walking dead man, if I ever saw one. It seems very odd that he could cure us but couldn't cure himself. But possibly that was because he couldn't operate on himself. Say—where are you going?"

Dawson was striding purposefully toward the nearest ship.

"I'm going with him, after him. This is Armageddon, the battle at the end of time. He's gone out there to fight for us. If either of you think I'm going to stay here, you're both badly mistaken."

He jerked the port open, clumped forward into the ship.

"But he said—" Rutledge protested.

"I don't care what he said. I'm going!"

Rutledge climbed in quietly beside him. "Well, then, what are we waiting for?"

Dawson was about to snarl an answer. Then he saw the physician's face, and grinned.

"Not a thing, Rutledge, not a thing! Say—take a look at that!"

All the others had seen their two leaders enter the ship. Now they were counting off into crews—and each crew was choosing a ship!

"It looks like we're all going," Rut-

ledge grinned tightly. "Well—" The lock was suddenly opened. A youth entered. Rutledge took one look and grabbed him.

"You're not going, son," he said roughly. "You've been through enough already."

The boy's face lighted with the joy of impending battle.

"Take it easy, Dad," he grinned. "Give us young fellers a chance, huh?"

The physician's face worked strangely. He slowly relaxed his grip. Jack Rutledge slid behind a gun.

"Cut her loose," he sang out. "I want out, and I want action!"

"Close the lock," Dawson directed. The physician tried to shut it. It stuck. He opened it, to remove the obstruction—and Mary Nolan stepped inside.

"We'll make it a party," she said flatly.

"No," said Dawson firmly. "Women stay here. This is a fight."

"That's just the point, George."

"Don't be a stubborn little fool! You're not going, and that's final."

Dawson rose from his seat angrily. Mary faced him just as determinedly.

"If you go out there and die, what is there left for me?" she said.

KNOTS ribbed Dawson's jaw. He stood there undecided. Mary stared unflinchingly into his eyes. He sighed then, slipped back into the pilot's seat. Not another word did he utter.

The huge doors leading to the tunnel were still open. Dawson had watched Karmak operate a ship almost identical with this one on the rescue trip to the Tolzan prison. The controls were the same. Confidently he pushed the power bar forward.

And—nothing happened.

He jabbed at the bar again, viciously pushing against it. A click sounded then from the instrument panel, and a

tiny screen came to life. Wavering lines began to etch themselves across it. An image began to form.

"It's a television screen," Rutledge whispered.

"Look—the picture!" Mary exclaimed.

On the screen was the face of the Master. He was in his ship out there in the night sky.

"Thank you for trying to help," his voice intoned. "I appreciate your loyalty. But I had foreseen that you would do this, against my orders, and I designed those ships so they will not move until I release them. I will fight the Tolzans. If I fail, I will release your ships, so that you may flee."

"But we want to help you!" Dawson fairly shouted back.

"The Karmaks are aiding me. Everything will be done that can be done. Remember—your duty is to live, not to fight and die."

The screen went dead.

"He's got some plan," Jack Rutledge said awesomely. "He knows some way to whip those monkey-men. He doesn't want us to get hurt."

"Yes," Dawson answered savagely. He was midway between profanity and tears. All his instincts made him want to fight his own battles, to stand on his own two feet. "He's got a plan, all right. It's for us—What the hell's that?"

At the entrance of the tunnel a figure had appeared. It glanced inside, then ducked out of sight.

"A monkey-man!" Jack Rutledge yelled.

"They've landed in the city," Dawson snapped, reaching for a hand gun in the rack on the wall.

He had been wanting a chance to get in this battle. Now the fight had come to him.

Dawson kicked open the door, fired

quickly, aiming at the tunnel. A jet of flame answered him. It struck the nose of the ship. White metal flared in incandescent droplets.

All over the huge hangar guns were firing at the tunnel entrance. The monkey-creatures would get a warm reception if they charged.

But the Tolzans did not attack. After what happened next, they couldn't.

Perhaps a carelessly aimed shot from one of the defenders caused it. Perhaps the Tolzans did it deliberately. No one knew for certain. But the huge door that blocked the tunnel fell suddenly into place with a rending jar.

"That stops 'em!" someone exclaimed in a satisfied voice.

"Yes, that stops them," Dawson answered grimly. He examined the door. The hideous truth was immediately apparent.

"It stops us too," he growled. "That door must weigh several tons. It's wedged into place so tightly, we can't budge it an inch. Even if the Master turns power into our ships, we can't get out of here."

"That settles it," Rutledge said hoarsely. "We're trapped!"

CHAPTER VII

Armageddon

"WATCH it," said Dawson tersely.

He raised his gun and fired. Something squealed in the darkness and turned flip-flops and died. Dawson lowered the gun. His eyes roved through the blackness. "It must have been a member of that same landing party that trapped us down below," he said. "I don't see any more of them. But there's more around, you can bet."

The whole group had come up to the ground level. Even if the exit for the ships was blocked, there were ways

they could crawl out.

"What are we going to do?" Jack Rutledge questioned.

"Watch and pray," his father answered. "And shoot when we get the chance."

He fired quickly, looked to see the effect of his shot, then shook his head.

"I aimed at a shadow that time." He glanced upward. "Anyhow, I don't think we can do anything to decide this battle. Everything depends on the Master. If he wins, we're saved. If he loses, our goose is cooked. And from the looks of what's going on up there—well, he's not winning."

The Master's ship was still visible in the sky. It was surrounded by a protective fleet of slim torpedoes—Karmak-manned ships that the Master had called to his aid. They gyrated in an endless dance, like fireflies on a summer night, circling the ship that held him. Surrounding them, at a greater distance, was a circle of Tolzan flyers.

Like wolves leaping in at the kill, the Tolzan fighters were darting, flashing their coruscating beams at the torpedoes, and darting out. Occasionally they didn't get out again. Instead they took the long drop to earth. But more often it was a torpedo ship that hissed downward from the sky.

Here, then, was Armageddon, the battle at the end of time. Two races fought to see which would inherit the earth. One, an old, old race, had savored all the ups and downs of history; the other, a new race, was rising like an evil star. There could be no quarter. Only one race would survive.

"The Master's getting whipped," a voice whimpered. "He's losing. He's running away!"

The circle of protective torpedoes was thinning. Undeniably the ship which held the Master was accelerating, slipping away toward the south.

The majority of the Tolzan flyers followed it, clinging like jackals to the scent of wounded prey. But others dropped back toward the city.

"They're coming down for mopping-up operations," Dawson muttered. "They've got their big game on the run, so now they're detaching small units to clean us up. Here," he ended aloud, "is where we get into this fight!"

QUICKLY he deployed his group into a building.

Nine small Tolzan ships hurtled down toward the city. Automatically the Karmak gun crews went into action. The major battle overhead had been beyond their range, but these diving flyers were coming close enough for effective targets.

The Karmak gun crews swept the sky with streamers of flame. Flame struck back at them from the diving ships. Here a building crumbled as flame touched it. Hollow explosions sounded, apparently coming from heavy bombs. Smoke and dust and debris flew skyward.

"What a crying shame!" Mary Nolan said. "It's a sacrilege to bomb such a beautiful city!"

"Well, it's certainly going up in smoke now," Dawson grated. "Ah! They got that one." He followed the trail of fire from a falling Tolzan ship.

"Those robot Karmaks fight like real soldiers," Rutledge commented wistfully. "You know, the Master must have a tremendous brain to control each of them individually. Why, there are thousands of them!"

"What the hell good is a brain," someone asked bitterly, "when a coward rules it?"

The ship of the Master was low on the horizon now. While they watched, it disappeared.

"He's running like a whipped dog

with its tail between its legs," another of the group said disgustedly.

"Maybe he can't help it," Rutledge snapped back. "He's sick, near death. Perhaps the Tolzans are stronger than he thought. Anyway, who are we to judge a man like that?"

Of the nine ships that had dived downward, two got through the fire of the Karmaks. They disgorged their crews. The night was suddenly hideous with the shrill cries of the monkey mutants.

"They've located us," Dawson whispered. "It's all over now."

He had no hope of winning. The Tolzans numbered literally thousands of fighters. When they had cleaned out the robots, downed the ship of the Master, then they would swarm over this magnificent city. The handful of human defenders would be as ants beneath the trampling feet of an invading army.

Destiny had smiled on the human race for almost a million years. Now she hid her face. The human race was played out, finished, done. Here the brave march across the countless millenia ended, here in a ruined city a corporal's guard of humans fought the last fight.

Because of their heritage of battle, because they had learned to fight the hard way, they would go down to the last man and woman. And the last man would fling his weapon at the last attacker and die beneath the oncoming avalanche.

Men, even that superman the Master, were not the rulers of time and destiny. Everything must come ultimately to an end. Every brook reached the sea at last, every fight its finish. Now was the end of man.

AS HE entered that last fight, Dawson felt a little betrayed. He knew

the others felt the same way. The Master had brought them here. If he could not defend them, he should have let them die beside him.

True, his motives had been of the best. He was fighting to forestall the doom of the human race. But the people he had brought here wanted to fight at his side. He should have released the ships, permitted their occupants to enter the battle, let them die as men always had—not grub here in the darkness like cornered rats, unable to meet the enemy face to face.

Flashes from the Tolzan guns were coming in through the windows now, stabbing hungrily for their victims. A man cried out and collapsed to the floor, making a goggling sound as he tried to breathe. Flame danced at Dawson and he ducked, to rise and fire quickly over the sill. The whole side of his face felt as though it had been seared in a hot fire. The beam had barely missed.

Debris fell from the ceiling then, metal clanged, the very air grew hot and foul. In the darkness someone shouted shrilly.

"The building is about to fall! We've got to get out!"

True, the structure was fireproof. It wouldn't burn. But it would fall. And the guns of the Tolzans were tearing gaping holes in it.

"Into the open," Dawson ordered. "Courage, men!"

Taking a quick glance, he saw what was outside—a ring of fire from Tolzan guns. That was what they would have to face.

Grimly the men followed Dawson down the stairs, all that were left of them, and outside. They could have crouched on the stairs, where the Tolzan guns could not yet reach, but the building would have crumbled in on them. Dawson led them out. They would die, at least, as men under a starry sky.

With the shout of battle on his lips, Dawson kicked open the door and plunged out. Plunged out—into eerie darkness. The flame of the Tolzan weapons had died away. They weren't being fired.

For their erstwhile wielders were squealing in fright—and bolting like scared rabbits!

Wildly exultant the men of Earth mowed them down, nor even wondered for a moment why the Tolzan guns had suddenly lost their sting. It was pure slaughter, and the monkey-men died like pigs in an abattoir, screeching to the end.

"Look up!" Rutledge shouted suddenly. "There in the sky!"

SEVERAL of the Tolzan flyers had returned to renew the battle over the bombed city. A few of the Karmak's torpedo ships were hovering over them. But the horde of Tolzan ships were now falling, out of control, dropping like plummets, screaming downward toward the earth. Not flaming. They hadn't been struck. Just falling.

To the southward a great glow was in the sky. It was so vast as to resemble the sunrise. But the sun did not rise in the south. And this conflagration was mushrooming upward.

Gigantic streamers of flame were pushing skyward, reaching the upper limits of the atmosphere, going over higher. Vesuvius, in its greatest eruption, was never so terrible. A hundred volcanoes, erupting in violent concord, could not have created such an explosion.

Then the other sound came. It came in a blast of thunder. If all the cyclones that ever roared across the earth were gathered together into one cataclysmic outburst, the result could have been no more shocking. Violent sound waves tore at the air, frothed in it, buf-

feted it aside. Then the very ground shook mightily, and the surface of the earth undulated in gigantic rollers.

"It's the Tolzan fortress!" Dawson gasped, choking. "The Master exploded it!"

"And their ships are falling!"

Dawson's voice was filled with awe, almost reverence.

"The Master—he thought of everything. If we have survived, it is to him that we owe our continued existence."

Dawson got a grip on himself. "Well—there is still a reason for everything. Those Tolzan ships must have used energy transmitted by radio. When their fortress was blown up, no more energy was forthcoming from their central transmitter there. So—they simply fell to earth. And their weapons—their guns must have utilized radio energy, too."

"But I don't understand, sir," Jack Rutledge said. "Those Tolzan guns stopped firing before the Tolzan ships fell to earth."

Dawson nodded slowly. "We can only surmise what must have happened—even as we will never know from whence the Master came. Let us say that there were two power stations in the fortress—one to supply weapons and armaments with power, the other to carry warships through the skies.

"We must then assume that through mental projection, the Master must have contacted the brain of the Tolzan whose routine job it was to see the arms power supply continued to function smoothly. A routine job—a routine brain. Thus overpowered, this Tolzan shut off the supply, and his comrades bent on destroying us outside the hangar were left weaponless."

DAWSON searched the night sky with narrowed eyes. Here and there Tolzan ships, remnants of the

deadly unnumbered horde, were hurtling groundward to eternity.

"This same Tolzan attendant, then," Dawson went on, "his mind figuratively bewitched by the overpowering projection of the Master's thought-waves, must then have found his way into the fortress' central power magazine—and set off an explosion which destroyed the remaining radio-power supply station. And," he added grimly, "this whole monstrous civilization with it."

The last Tolzan flyer had now crashed in a shower of flaming debris. But a few of the Karmak torpedo ships were still in the sky, floating aimlessly about, as if an unnatural power had relaxed the hands at the controls.

"The Master—he's released his control over the Karmaks!" Dawson whispered. But even as he spoke, the Master's great airship hove into view as the first rays of a rising sun—the sun, now—etched the horizon in a dawn of ethereal majesty.

As though at a single command, the last of the torpedo ships suddenly swung into life. In precise formation, they lined up behind the Master's flagship and headed together for the last time toward the vastness of space.

"He's finished," Rutledge husked. "And he's heading out to space to die!"

"The sun also rises!" Dawson choked. "See how it gilds the last guardians of the human race. For them, a blaze of glory. And for us, the promise of a new life."

Only once did the Master's flagship falter in its course. Then and only then, it seemed as if the nose of the ship dipped fleetingly in a final salute . . .

Eyes wet with tears, Dawson turned to Mary Nolan, standing at his side with her arm about his.

"A new world!" he breathed huskily. "Not forever, but for our lifetime. For us, I think, that is quite enough."

Meet the Authors



Harry Bales

YED tells me Posterity wants my autobiography (and he cracks his whip. All right, I know when I'm down.)

I was born quite young in Pittsburgh and the first thing I did was yell in protest. Nobody understood, or cared. My second act was to put my foot in my mouth. At the time I did this because I was a born acrobat and it tasted good; but since then I have given the action a great deal of thought, and come to the opinion that it was also a double-barreled portent, straight from providence: first, an indication that I was always to be apt at this feat; and second, a sign that I was to make my way by some process of self-consumption, such as writing.

I was the darlinest baby—so they say. I remember how the women loved me. They'd bend over my crib, make the silliest faces, say the damndest things. I was pretty blooming fat. Later, when I was able to go from chair to chair, it was hard to tell whether I was walking or rolling.

Ah, happy days of my childhood!

I was moved to Philadelphia, and as my body elongated slowly in one dimension my mind ballooned rapidly all over the neighborhood. I passed through grammar school without a falter and in my thirteenth year stood composedly before the commencement audience and sang a

powerful love song, to the surprise and edification of all. I also was class poet, and wrote the words for the class song (with *sub rosa* help from my mother. I won't say how much, but she seemed pleased.) I also was voted the *second* most popular boy in the class of thirty, and given an underlug briar pipe to prove it. Then, on to high school!

Ah, high school!

I slid through three more years there without a hitch, never bothering to take a book home, and always therefore carrying a five-hour (maximum) condition in the previous term's Latin, which condition, *mirabile visu*, I was always able to replace with a later one in time to go up with my class. (Latin is a stupid waste of time.) Three years of this, then, *horrible dictu*, I was flunked. Some lousy little one- or two-hour subject jumped on the back of my Latin, and together they brought me low. There I was, then, a failure at sixteen!

I had gotten to be a clockmaker and went to work full time in my father's factory. At seventeen I unobtrusively disattached myself from all that, taking in a big hurry an all-day local train to Pittsburgh (I didn't know there was such a thing as an express!) I had thirteen bucks; the fare was nine; and with the four I gathered myself together and started life anew, my motto, *Di omnia laboribus vendunt*.

I became in succession a tool grinder, a railroad fireman, and a lathe hand. Just before my eighteenth birthday I sneaked up to Erie, Pa., spent several hours in the library reviewing all my knowledge, then hurried down to Allegheny College, at Meadville, and took and passed the entrance exams. (It was quite fantastic; don't ask me to explain.) I entered with twenty-five bucks, and lost sixteen of it the first day in a crap game.

Ah, college!

Geeze, I'll have to be brief from here on; I didn't realize I had so much autobiography.

I waited table and was janitor of the physics building—the start of my career in science. After the first year's work I teamed up with several pals and went west for a year and sold stereographs and stereoscopes to half the farmers between Canada and Mexico.

At nineteen I returned to Philadelphia and my father's factory and entered the University of Pennsylvania. There one year, then got job as reporter. Quit that and with friends started a resort magazine at Ocean City, N.J., the "Beachcomber." Included stories under the name of Yvonne Eclair and handed out cockeyed love advice as Wynsomme Wynnie.

Came to New York and did newspaper work.

(Concluded on page 240)

MEET THE AUTHORS*(Concluded from page 235)*

Wrote advertising copy. Was assistant book-keeper, salesman, and actor, on Broadway and in the sticks. Had a one-act play produced (Philly). Was laborer, then assistant cameraman, in movie studio in Yonkers. Somehow got to be editor of several magazines at Clayton's.

Have since been, variously, publicity writer, bibliographer, professor of English (yes!), and writer of some Science Fiction yarns. Sell everything, but hate to write. I'd rather play tennis. Lately I've been turning into an inventor. *Modus operandi desideratissimum* (Latin): work hard and pleasantly for a few weeks, then sit back and receive royalties for seventeen years. I've had setbacks—the war, especially—and the start is particularly slow because it takes so long to get patents; but things look very, very good.

Ah, inventor!

Geetze, what a screwy life! Mebbe there's a lesson in it somewhere. Posterity.—*Harry Bates.*