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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Spawn

By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

A colossus of gold strode over the mountains, bent on conquest, and the murdered body of Nicholas Svadin, Dictator of Europe, rose from his bier to rule the world from his palace in Budapest

PEDANTS spout glibly of probability, quibble and hedge, gulp at imagined gnats. Nothing is impossible to mathematics. Only improbable. Only *very* improbable.

Only impossibly improbable.

Earth, for example, is improbable. Planets should not logically exist, nor on existing planets life. Balances of forces are too impossibly delicate; origins too complexly coincidental. But Earth does exist—and on Earth, life.

We see Earth and we see life, or we see something, however improbable, and call it Earth and life. We forget probabilities and mathematics and live by our senses, by our common sense. Our common sense sees Earth and it sees life, and in a kind of darkened mirror it sees men—but men are utterly improbable!

Ooze to worms and worms to fishes. Fishes to frogs and frogs to lizards. Lizards to rats and rats to men, and men at last to bloated, futuristic Brains. Brains are improbable: brains and senses, and above all, common sense. Not impossible—because nothing is impossible—but so improbable that nowhere in all the improbable stars, nowhere in all the improbably empty space between the stars, is there room for other Earths and other rats and men.

Nowhere—life.

* * * * *

An improbable man is drunk. A man

with improbably carrot-colored hair, with an improbably enormous nose. With a cold in that nose. With a quart of potato rot-gut to encourage the utter improbability of that cold and that nose, and of the world in general. With a plane's rudder bar under his feet and a plane's stick between his knees, and the Chilean Andes improbably gigantic underneath.

A man is tight. And coincident with that tightness he is witness to the Improbable:

FRIDAY, the 25th of July: James Arthur Donegan, thirty-odd, red-haired, American, has witnessed the Improbable.

A cliff, hard and quartz-white, softening, puddling, pulping away in a vast heaped monstrousness fat with thick ropes of gold. Raw gold, yellow in the Andean sunlight. Mother-gold, knotted in wadded worm-nests in the shining sock. Medusæ of golden fascination. Gold burning in hemp-dream arabesques in the naked cliff-face, in the white quartz that is pulping, dripping, sloughing into monstrosity.

Jim Donegan tipped his bottle high and lifted his plane out of insanity. Jim Donegan's brain reeled with the raw white fire of potato whisky and the raw yellow luster of fat gold. And with the gold a quartz cliff melting, puddling—stone into pudding—sense into nonsense. . . .

Jim Donegan tipped his bottle again and remembered to forget. Landed in Santiago. Disappeared.

* * * * *

An improbable man is sober. A thousand improbable men and a thousand even less credible women, and of them all only a hundred drunk. Only another hundred tight, or boiled, or mildly blotto. And half a thousand improbable men and women, drunk and sober, see and hear and photograph the Improbable eating whales:

WEDNESDAY, the 20th of August: Richard Chisholm, fifty, grizzled, British, has entered the Improbable in his log—has stirred one wrinkled cerebrum, accustomed to the investigation of probabilities, in unaccustomed ways.

Zoölogist Heinrich Wilhelm Sturm leaned with polished elbows on a polished rail and stared at a burnished sea. Daughter Maria Elsa Sturm leaned and stared beside him. Secretary Rudolf Walter Weltmann leaned and stared, but not at waves.

Waves lifted lazily along a great ship's flank. Waves swelled and fell unbroken with listless, oily languor of old dreams. And caught in the warm web of the sun and the malachitic waxiness of the waves a score of whales basked, rolling and blowing, under the weary eyes of Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm.

The molten, lucent fluid of the sea clotted and cooled. Color went swiftly out of it: greenstone to apple jade, jade into chrysoptase, prase into beryl spume. It folded in uneven, glistening hillocks of illogical solidity. And Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm choked on his German oaths as a score of drowsing whales fought suddenly with death!

Acres of empty sea became quivering pulp. Gray puffs of it pushed out of the waves and sank again. Horrible, avid ripples shuddered and smoothed across

its sleekness. And twenty whales were caught: gigantic, blunted minnows wallowing in a pudding mold; titanic ebon microbes studding an agar bowl. Drowned by the gray-green stuff that oozed into their gullets and choked their valved blow-holes! Strangled and stifled by it.

Swallowed and eaten by it!

The sound of it was unreal—the whoosh of blown breath splattering jellied ooze, the soft, glutting gurgle of flowing pulp, the single soughing sob as giant flukes pulled loose to fling aloft and smash into the rippled greenness that was darkening with the shadow of the ship.

One last sucking sigh—the fling of one mighty glistening *upsilon* against the sky—the babble of half a thousand human beings gulping breath. And Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm, staring through thick, dark lenses at the blob of gray-green jelly on his wrist, at the spatter of jelly on the deck at his feet, and swearing happily his guttural German oaths. . . .

* * * * *

A dead man lay in state.

And I was there:

FRIDAY, the 22nd of August: Nicholas Svadin lies for the third day in solemn state before the people of the world.

Nicholas Svadin, Dictator of Mittel-Europa, lay waxen white under the heaped callas, under the August sun of Budapest. Nicholas Svadin, son of a Slavic butcher, grandson of German *führers*, lay with six soft-nosed bullets in his skull and breast. Nicholas Svadin, whose genius for government had won the loyalty instead of the hatred of nations, whose greed had fed on the conflict of languages and races, whose shadow had covered Europe from the Volga to the Rhine. Nicholas Svadin, who had held all Europe under his humane tyranny save for the bickering fringe of Latin states and the frozen, watchful

silence of the Anglo-Scandinavian confederacy.

Nicholas Svadin, dead in the August sun, with all Europe trembling in metastable balance under the fast-unfolding wings of Chaos.

And four men were the world. And four men were afraid.

They stood as they had stood when Svadin's great rolling voice burst in a bloody cough and his great body, arms upflung in the compassionate gesture of the Cross, slumped like a greasy rag on the white steps of the Peace Hall. They stood with the world before them, and the world's dead master, and the vision of the morrow brooded in their eyes.

Four men were the world: Rasmussen, bearded, blond, steel-eyed premier of Anglo-Scandia; Nasuki at his elbow, little and cunning with the age-old subtlety of the East; Gonzales, sleek, olive-skinned heir of the Neo-Latin dictator; Moorehead the American, lean and white-headed and oldest of the four. Two and two in the August sun with the sickly scent of the death-lilies in their nostrils, and I with my camera marking Time's slow march.

I marked the four where they stood by the open bier. I marked the spilling lines of mourners that flowed in black runnels through the silent streets of Budapest. I marked the priests where they came, slow-treading with the stateliness of an elder civilization.

I marked the resurrection of the dead!

Nicholas Svadin rose on his white-banked bier and stared at the world of men.

Nicholas Svadin rose with the white wax softening in his massive jowls and the round blue scar of a soft-nosed slug between his corpse's eyes. Nicholas Svadin swung his thick legs with an ugly stiffness from the bier and stood alone, alive, staring at mankind, and spoke four words—once, slowly, then again:

"I—am—Nicholas—Svadin.

"I am Nicholas Svadin!"

And men had found a god.

* * * * *

Svadin had been a man, born of woman, father of men and women, the greatest Earth had known. His genius was for mankind, and he enfolded humanity in his kindly arms and was the father of a world.

Svadin was a man, killed as men are killed, but on the third day he rose from his bed of death and cried his name aloud for the world to hear.

Svadin the man became Svadin the god.

I photographed the world-assembly at Leningrad when Svadin called together the scientists of the Earth and gave them the world to mold according to their liking. I marked the gathering in America's halls of Congress when the rulers of the world gave their nations into his bloodless hands and received them again, reborn into a new order of democracy. I watched, and my camera watched, as the world poured itself into these new-cut patterns of civilization and found them good. And then, because men are men and even a Golden Age will pall at last, I turned to other things:

A bathysphere torn from its cable in mid-deep.

Fishing-fleets returning with empty holds after weeks and months at sea.

Eels gone from their ancient haunts, and salmon spawning in dozens where once streams had been choked with their lusting bodies.

Cattleships lost in mid-Atlantic, and then a freighter, and another, gone without a trace.

Two men and a girl whose names were on the rolls of every ship that crossed and recrossed the haunted waters of the North Atlantic.

And from the South vague rumors of a god.

MIAMI'S sun-bathed beaches were black with human insects. Miami's tropic night throbbled with the beat of music and the sway and glide of dancers. Maria Elsa Sturm glided and swayed in the strong, young arms of Rudolf Weltmann and laughed with her night-blue eyes and poppy lips, but Heinrich Sturm stood alone in the star-strewn night and stared broodingly at the sleeping sea. Maria basked in the smoldering noonday sun, a slender golden flame beside the swarthy handsomeness of her companion, but the old masked eyes of Heinrich stared beyond her beauty at the sea.

Long waves swelled sleepily against the far blue of the Gulf Stream and sank and swelled again and creamed in tepid foam along the sands. Gay laughter rippled and prismatic color played with kaleidoscopic lavishness under the golden sun. Wave after wave of the sea, rising and falling and rising against the sky—and a wave that did not fall!

It came as the others had come, slowly, blue-green and glistening in the sunlight. It rose and fell with the ceaseless surge of the Atlantic at its back, and rose again along the white curve of the beach. It was like a wall of water, miles in length, rushing shoreward with the speed of a running man. Men ran from it and were caught.

Spots of bright color spun in its sluggish eddies and went down. Tongues of it licked out over the warm sands, leaving them naked and bone-white, and flowed lazily back into the monstrous thing that lay and gorged in the hot sun.

It was a sea-green tumulus, vast as all ocean. It was a league-long hillock of green ooze, apple-jade-green, chrysoprased-green, gray-green of frosted flint. It was a thing of Famine—not out of Bibles, not out of the histories of men—a thing that lay like a pestilence of the sea upon the warm, white beaches of Miami, black with

humanity running, screaming, milling—a thing that was greedy and that fed!

Tatters of bright rag swirled in its sluggish eddies, oozed from its gelid depths; fragments of white bone, chalk-white and etched, rose and were spewed on the white sands. Arms of it flowed like hot wax, knowingly, hungrily. Veins in it, pale like clear ribbons of white jade in green translucency, ran blossom-pink, ran rose, ran crimson-red.

Maria Elsa Sturm lay in the white sand, in the warm sun, in the strong arms of swarthy Rudolf Weltmann, under the unseeing eyes of Heinrich Sturm. Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm woke to the world with horror in his eyes, horror in his brain, shrieking horror come stark into his life. Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm saw tongues of the green sea-stuff licking over Miami's bone-white sands, supping up morsels of kicking life, spewing out dead things that were not food. Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm saw the Incredible, mountain-high, suck up the golden straw that was Maria Sturm, suck up the brown, strong straw that was Rudolf Weltmann, swell like a flooding river against the sea-wall at his feet, purling and dimpling with greedy inner currents; saw it ebb and lie drowsing, relishing its prey; saw the bright, scarlet rag that had wrapped Maria Sturm oozing up out of its green horridness; saw the black rag that had clothed Rudolf; saw two white, naked skulls that dimpled its glistening surface before they were sloughed away among tide-rows of eaten bones.

League-long and hill-high the wave that was not a wave lay glutting on young flesh, supping up hot blood. League-long and hill-high, with the little insect myriads of mankind running and screaming, standing and dying; with the buzzing wings of mankind circling over it and men's little weapons peppering at its vast, full-fed imperturbability. Bombs fell like grain from a sower's fist, streaming shadows

of them raining out of the bare blue sky. Vast sound shattered the ears of gaping men, crushing in windows, shaking down ceilings, thundering with boastful vengeance.

Fountains of green jelly rose stringily; wounds like the pit of Kimberly opened and showed sea-green, shadowed depths, stirring as the sea stirs, closing as the sea closes, with no scar. Bricks crumbled in little streams from a broken cornice; glass tinkled from gaping windows; men milled and babbled and stared in fascination at Death. And Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm stood alone, a gray old rock against which the scrambling tide beat and broke, seeing only the golden body of Maria Elsa Sturm, the laughing, upturned face of Maria Elsa Sturm, the night-blue eyes and poppy lips of Maria Elsa Sturm. . . .

Long waves swelled sleepily against the far blue of the Gulf Stream, and sank and swelled again, and creamed in soft foam against the bone-white sands. Wave after wave, rising and falling and rising higher with the flooding tide. Waves rising to lap the sea-green tumulus, to bathe its red-veined monstrousness whose crimson rills were fading to pink, to gray, to lucent white. Waves laving it, tickling its monstrous palate, pleasing it mightily; waves into which it subsided and left Miami's white beaches naked for a league save for the windrows of heaped bones and the moist, bright rags that had been men's condescension to the morality of men.

Cameras ground clickingly along that league-long battlefront while Horror fed; microphones gathered the scream of the sight of Death from a thousand quavering lips—but not mine.

Men turned away, sickened, to turn and stare again with horrid fascination at the wet white windrows that were girls' bones, and men's bones, and children's—but not I.

Other eyes saw that vision of the Incredible; other lips told me of it when I asked. I did not see Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm when he turned his back on the drift of smiling skulls and went wearily with the human stream, when he paid with creased and hoarded notes the accounts of Maria Elsa Sturm, deceased, of Rudolf Walter Weltmann, deceased, of Heinrich Wilhelm Sturm.

I did not see Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm when he stepped out of the hotel with his battered suitcase, plastered with paper labels, his round black hat, his thick dark glasses, and disappeared.

No one who saw cared.

There was no one, now, to care. . . .

* * * * *

Out of the South the rumor of a god!

OUT of the Andes word of a god of Gold, stalking the mountain passes with Wrath and Vengeance smoking in his fists. A god wrathful in the presence of men and the works of men. A god vengeful of man's slavery of rock and soil and metal, jealous of man's power over the inanimable. A god growing as the mountains grow, with bursting, jutting angularities shifting, fusing, molding slowly into colossal harmonies of form and function, with growing wisdom in his golden skull and growing power in his crystal fists. A god for the weak, contemptuous of the weak but pitiless to the strong—straddling adobe huts to trample the tin-roof huddle of shacks at the lip of some gaping wound in the ancient flesh of Earth.

A god with power tangible and cruel, alien to puling doctrines of white men's love of men. A god speaking voicelessly out of the distance of things that awoke old memories, roused old grandeurs in the blood of small brown men and in other men in whose veins the blood of brown kings flowed.

A god of red justice. A god of Revolution!

A god to bring fear again to men!

In the South—Revolution. Little brown men swarming in the mountains, pouring into the valleys, hacking, clubbing, stabbing, burning. Revolution in small places without names. Revolution in mud villages with names older than America. Revolution flaming in towns named in the proud Castilian tongue—in cities where white women promenaded and white men ogled, and brown men were dust in the gutters. Revolution in Catamarca, in Tucuman, in Santiago del Estero. Revolution half a thousand miles away, in Potosi, in Cochabamba, in Quillacolla. Revolution sweeping the royal cities of the Andes—Santiago, La Paz, Lima, Quito, Bogota! Revolution stalking the up-thrusting spine of a continent like a pestilence, sucking in crazed brown warriors from the *montes*, from the *pampas*, from barren deserts and steaming jungles. Blood of brown ancestors rising beneath white skins, behind blue eyes. Revolution like a flame sweeping through brown man and white and mostly-white and half-white and very-little-white and back to the brown blood of ancient, feathered kings! Guns against machetes. Bayonets against razor-whetted knives. Poison gas against poison darts.

And in their wake the tread of a god of Gold!

Revolution out of Chile, out of Argentine, into Bolivia, into Peru of the Incas. Revolution out of the hot inland trough of the Amazon, rippling through Brazil, through the Guianas, into Ecuador, into Colombia, into Venezuela. Revolution choking the ditch of Panama, heaping the bigger ditch of Managua with bleeding corpses, seething through the dank forests of Honduras, Guatemala, Yucatan. A continent overwhelmed and nothing to show why. A continent threatened, and

only the whispered rumor of a god of Gold!

Men like me went to see, to hear, to tell what they had seen and heard. Men like me crept into the desolate places where Revolution had passed, and found emptiness, found a continent trampled under the running, bleeding feet of a myriad of small brown men driven by a Fear greater than the fear of Death—crushed and broken under the relentless, marching hooves of the god of Gold.

A village, then a city—a nation, then a continent—and the armies of the white nations mobilizing along the border of Mexico, in the arid mountains of the American Southwest, watching—waiting—fearing none knew what. A necklace of steel across the throat of the white man's civilization.

Repeated circumstance becomes phenomenon; repeated phenomena are law. I found a circumstance that repeated again and again, that became phenomenal, that became certainty. A man with red hair, with a bulbous nose, with a bird's knowledge of the air, and an old man, peering through thick glasses, muttering in his beard. How they came together no man knew. Where they went men could only guess. The wings of their giant plane slid down out of the sunset, rose black against the sunrise, burned silver-white in the blaze of noon. They went—they returned—and none questioned their coming or going.

War on the edge of America. War between white men and brown—and more than man behind the brown. Death rained from the sky on little brown men scattering in open deserts, on green jungles where brown men might be lurking, on rotten rock where brown men might have tunneled. Death poisoned the streams and the rock-hewn *cenotes*; death lay like a yellow fog in the arroyos and poured through gorges where brown men lay

hidden behind rocks and in crannies of the rock. Flame swept over the face of Mexico and the brown hordes scattered and gave way in retreat, in flight, in utter rout. White fury blazed where brown hatred had smoldered. Brown bodies sprawled flayed and gutted where white corpses had hung on wooden crosses, where white hearts had smoked in the noon sun and white men's blood had dribbled down over carved stone altars. Hell followed Hell.

Then from Tehuantepec a clarion challenge, checking the rout, checking the white wave of vengeance. The challenge of a god!

Planes droned in the bare blue sky over Oaxaca, riddling the mountains with death. Polite, trim generals sat and drank and talked in half a dozen languages wherever there was shade. The sun blazed down on the plaza of Oaxaca in the time of *siesta*, and the grumble of war sank to a lullaby. Then out of the mountains of the east, rolling and rocking through the naked hills, sounded the shouted challenge of the god of Gold!

I HEARD it like a low thunder in the east, and a German major at the next table muttered "*Donner!*" I heard it again. A Frenchman beside him looked up a moment from his glass. It came a third time, growling against the silence, and the roaring like the voice of Bashan in the sky, and all up and down the shaded plaza men were listening and wondering.

Far away, across the mountains in Tehuantepec, the guns began to thud and mutter, and in the radio shack behind us a telegraph key was clicking nervously. The Frenchman was listening, his lips moving. An English lieutenant strode in out of the sun, saluted, melted into the shadow of the colonnade.

Out of the East the challenge of a god!

I heard the triumphant, bull-bellied

shout thundering across the ranges as the guns of Tehuantepec grumbled for the last time. I saw a light that should not be there—a mad, fanatic light—gleaming in the eyes of an officer of Spanish name, from the Mexican province of Zacatecas. The German's eyes were on him, and the Frenchman's, and those of the English subaltern, following him as he stole away. The wireless operator came out and saluted, and handed a slip of yellow paper to the Frenchman. He passed it, shrugging, to the German. A Russian came and looked over his shoulder, an Italian, an American, a Japanese, and their heads turned slowly to listen for the chuck and patter of distant guns that they would never hear again. And then, again, that voice of the mountains bellowed its triumphant challenge, stirring a cold current of dread in my veins—in the veins of all men of Oaxaca—of all men who heard it.

The victorious god of Gold shouted his challenge to Mankind, and in answer came the distant burring of a plane in the north.

It passed over us and circled for a landing outside the city. An army car raced away and returned. I knew two of the three men who climbed stiffly out of the tonneau. I saw tall, red-headed air-fiend Jim Donegan. I saw stooped, gray, bog-gling Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm.

I saw Nicholas Svadin, once-dead master of the world.

Svadin against the god of Gold!

Again that bull-throated, brazen thunder rolled across the ranges and I saw Svadin's blunt, hairless skull cocked sideways, listening. Old Heinrich Sturm was listening too, and Red Jim Donegan. But I saw only Nicholas Svadin.

It was five full years since that August day in Budapest. Wax was heavy in his blue-white jowls. Wax weighted down his heavy-lidded eyes. A puckered blue hole probed his sleek white brow. His great body was soft and bloated and his

stubby fingers blue under their cropped nails. There was an acrid odor in the air, the odor that heaped callas had hidden in the sun of Budapest, that not even the stench of a thousand sweating men could hide under the sun of Mexico.

They talked together—Svadin, the generals Sturm, Red Jim Donegan of Brooklyn. Donegan nodded, went to the waiting car, disappeared into white moonlight. Soon his great silver plane droned overhead, heading into the north.

One day—two—three. We on the outside saw nothing of Svadin, but men of all nations were at work in the blazing sun and the velvet night, sawing, bolting, riveting, building a vast contrivance of wood and metal under the direction of Heinrich Sturm. Four days—five, and at last we stood at the edge of the man-made city of Oaxaca, staring at that monstrous apparatus and at the lone figure that stood beside it—Svadin. His puffed blue fingers went to the switch on its towering side, and out of that giant thing thundered the bellowed defiance of Mankind, hurled at the giant Thing that walked the ranges, bull-baiting the god of Gold!

Its vast clamor shuddered in the packed earth underfoot. Its din penetrated the wadding in our ears and drummed relentlessly against our senses. It boomed and thundered its contempt, and in answer that other voice thundered beyond the blue-tipped mountains. Hour after hour—until madness seemed certain and madness was welcome—until the sun lay low in a red sky, painting the ranges—until only Svadin and gray old Heinrich Sturm remained, watching beside their vast, insulting, defiant Voice. Then in the east a flicker of light tipped the farthest ranges!

It was a creeping diamond of light above the purple horizon. It was a needle of white fire rising and falling above the mountains, striding over valleys, vaulting the naked ridges, growing and rising

higher and vaster and mightier against the shadow of the coming night. It was a pillar of scintillant flame over Oaxaca.

It was the god of Gold!

QUARTZ is rock, and quartz is jelly, and quartz is a crystal gem. Gold is metal, and gold is color, and gold is the greed of men. Beauty and fear—awe and greed—the Thing over Oaxaca was a column of crystal fires, anthropomorphic, built out of painted needle-gems, with the crimson and blue and smoky wine-hues of colloidal gold staining its jeweled torso—with veins and nerves and ducts of the fat yellow gold of Earth—with a pudding of blue quartz flowing and swelling and flexing on its stony frame. It was a giant out of mythery—a *jinni* out of hasheesh madness—a monster born of the Earth, thewed with the stuff of Earth, savagely jealous of the parasitic biped mammals whose form it aped. Its spiked hooves clashed on the mountain-tops with the clamor of avalanches. Its flail-arms swung like a flicking scourge, flaying the bare earth of all that was alive. Its skull was a crystal chalice wadded with matted gold, brain-naked, set with eyes like the blue sapphires of Burma, starred with inner light.

It roared with the thunder of grinding, tearing, grating atoms, with the sullen voice of earthquakes. It was the specter of Earth's last vengeance upon delving, burrowing, gutting little Man, the flea upon her flesh. It stood, a moment, straddling the horizon—and out of the north a plane was winging, midge-small against the watching stars. So high it was that though the sun had gone and the shadow of the Earth lay purple on the sky, its wings were a sliver of light, dwindling, climbing to that unimaginable height where the rays of the vanished sun still painted the shoulders of the god of Gold. A plane—and in its wake another, and

another—a score of whispering dots against the tropic night.

Red Jim Donegan saw the monstrous, faceless visage upturned to watch his coming. He saw the white fires chill in its moon-great eyes, saw vast arm-things forming on its formless body, like swinging ropes of crystal maces. He saw the sinews of massive yellow gold that threaded its bulk, tensing and twisting with life, and the brain of knotted gold that lay in its cupped skull like worms in a bowl of gems. He saw that skull grow vaster as his plane rushed on—mountain-vast, filling the night—saw those star-backed eyes blazing—saw the evil arms sweeping upward—then was in empty air, sprawled over vacancy, his ship driving down into that monstrous face, between the staring sapphire eyes.

He swung from a silk umbrella and saw those kraken-arms paw at the crystal skull where a flower of green flame blossomed—saw the second plane diving with screaming wings—a third beyond it—and a fourth. The air was full of the white bubbles of parachutes, sinking into the edge of night. He saw the shadow of the world's edge creeping up over that giant shape, standing spread-legged among the barren hills, a green flame burning in its golden brain, a flame eating quartz as a spark eats tinder; a flame devouring gold, sloughing away crystalline immensity in a rain of burning tears, ever deeper, ever faster, as plane after plane burst with its deadly load against that crystal mass.

In blind, mad torture the god of Gold strode over Oaxaca. Green fire fell from it like blazing snow, pocking the naked rock. One dragging hoof furrowed the rocky earth, uprooting trees, crags, houses, crushing the man-made lure that had dared it to destruction. Fragments of eaten arms crashed like a meteor-fall and lay burning in the night. A moment it towered, dying, over ruined Oaxaca, where Nicholas Svadin

stood dwarfed among the shambles of broken houses, the slight, stooped form of Heinrich Sturm beside him. Then in the sky that consuming flame blazed brighter as some vital source was touched. A pillar of licking light wiped out the stars. It took one giant stride, another, and the world shook with the fall of the living mountain that crashed down out of the burning night. Among the eastern hills the fractured limbs of the colossus of the South lay strewn like sown grain, and in the rocky flank of San Felipe a pit of cold green fire ate slowly toward the heart of Earth.

One who had been a man turned away from that holocaust and vanished in the darkness: Nicholas Svadin, his dead flesh clammy with dew, his gross bulk moving with the stealthy silence of a cat, with Heinrich Sturm trotting after him through the night.

Svadin, who had met the challenge of a god of Gold—and won!

* * * *

A Thing of the Sea—a Thing of the Earth—a Thing of Men!

Three things outrageous to Man's knowledge of himself and of his world, improbable beyond calculation, impossible if impossibility could exist. Three Things raised from the dead, from the inanimate, from the inanimable, to live, and feed, and stalk the Earth among other things that lived and ate and walked properly, probably, possibly. Three Things that sought the sovereignty of Earth—a Thing of ravening hunger, a Thing with a hate of men, and a Thing that was god-hero of all men.

One of the three lay destroyed beyond Oaxaca, and the brown men who had done its will were fugitives from vengeance. One still basked and fed in the tropic sea. And the third was Nicholas Svadin.

Rumors spread like ripples in a quiet pool. Even a god grows old. Svadin

was a god whose word was law, whose wisdom was more than human, whose brain devised strange sciences, who brought the world comfort and contentment greater than it had ever known. In life he was a genius; dead, a martyr. He rose from the dead, wearing the mark of death, and men worshipped him as a god, saw in him a god's omnipotent wisdom. He remade a world, and the world was content. He slew the giant god of Gold and men followed him like sheep. But there were others who were not impressed by gods, or men like gods, and there were rumors, whisperings, wonderings.

It was my work to hear such rumors, listen to whisperings, tell men the truth about what they wondered.

Few men were close to Svadin, but of those who were, one told strange stories. A man who in other times had made his living on the fruits of such stories. Svadin—from whom the marks of death had never vanished, though he had risen from the dead—in whose forehead the puckered mark of a bullet still showed, whose face was white with the mortician's wax, whose fingers were puffed and blue, whose body was a bloated sack, whose flesh reeked with the fluids which preserve corpses; who fed privately, on strange foods, quaffed liquids which reeked as those fluids reeked; who showed strange vacancies of memory, absences of knowledge about common things, yet was a greater genius than in life-before-death; whose only confidant was the mad zoölogist, Heinrich Wilhelm Sturm.

I heard of the strange wicker and elastic form which was made by a craftsman in Vienna and worn under his heavy, padded clothes. I heard of a woman of impressive birth who offered herself as women have—and of the dull, uncomprehending stare which drove her shivering from his chamber.

I heard of the rats that swarmed in

his apartments, where no cat would stay, and of the curious devices he had erected around his bed—of the day when a vulture settled on his shoulder and others circled overhead, craning their wattled necks.

I saw Nils Svedberg, attaché of the Anglo-Scandian legation in Berlin, when he fired three Mauser bullets into the flabby paunch of the master of the world—saw too what the crowd discarded when its fanatic vengeance was sated, and children scampered home with bloody souvenirs of what had been a man. I heard Svadin's thick voice as he thanked them.

Rumors—whisperings—questions without an answer. Svadin—to some a god, born into pseudo-human form, immortal and omnipotent; to some a man, unclean, with the awakening lusts and habits of a man; to some a Thing brought out of Hell to damn Mankind.

And a Thing of the Sea, feeding in the Caribbean, in the turgid outpourings of the Amazon, along the populous coasts of Guiana and Brazil. Devil's Island a graveyard. And at last—Rio!

* * * * *

A plane with a red-haired, large-nosed American pilot cruised the coasts of South America. A worn, grayed, spectacled old man sat with him, peering down into the shallow, shadowed waters for darker shadows. They marked the slow progress of Death along the tropic coasts, and in Rio de Janeiro, Queen City of the South, the mightiest engineering masterpiece of Man was near completion.

Jim Donegan and Heinrich Sturm watched and carried word of what they saw, while Nicholas Svadin schemed and planned in Rio of the South.

RIO—rebuilt from the shell of Revolution. Rio fairer than ever, a white jewel against the green breast of Brazil. Rio with her mighty harbor strangely empty, her horseshoe beaches deserted, and

across the sucking mouth of the Atlantic a wall, with one huge gateway.

Crowds on the mountainsides, waiting. Drugged carrion bobbing in the blue waters of the harbor—slaughtered cattle from the Argentine, from America, from Australia—fish floating white-bellied in the trough of the waves—dead dogs, dead cats, dead horses—all the dead of Rio and the South, larded with opiates, rocking in the chopped blue waters of the harbor of Rio de Janeiro. And at the gateway to the sea a glistening greening of the waves—a slick mound flowing landward between the guarding walls—a gray-green horror scenting prey. A silver plane above it in the sky. A small black dot on the curved white beach.

Svadin—and the Thing of the Sea.

Food was offered, and it fed. It poured sluggishly into the great land-locked harbor of Rio. It supped at the meager morsels floating in the sea and flowed on toward the deserted city and the undead man who stood watching it. And as its last glistening pseudopod oozed through the man-made gates, a sigh went up from the people on the mountainsides. Slowly and ponderously the barrier gate slid shut behind it, sealing the harbor from the sea. Great pumps began to throb, and columns of clear green brine of a river's thickness foamed into the unfillable Atlantic.

The plane had landed on the beach and Svadin climbed in. Now it was aloft, circling over the city and the harbor. The Thing was wary. It had learned, as all preying things learn, that each tiny insect has its sting. It sensed a subtle difference in the tang of the brine in which it lay—felt a motion of the water as Svadin's colossal pumps sucked at the harbor—detected a tension in the air. Its eddying lust for flesh quieted. It gathered itself together—swirled uneasily in the confines of the walled harbor—lapped questioningly against the rampart that barred it from the

Atlantic. Its glistening flanks heaved high out of the blue waters. It gathered itself into a great ball of cloudy jade that rose and fell in the surge of the quiet sea. It lay as a frightened beast lies—frozen—but without fear, biding its time.

Day after day after day. Day after day under the burning sun, while curious human mites dotted the Beira Mar, thronged on the white moon-rind beaches—while devout thousands crammed the Igreja de Penha, spared by Revolution, knelt on its winding stair, prayed and knelt in the many Houses of God of Rio of the South—while inch by inch and foot by foot the sparkling waters of Rio's mighty harbor sank and the gray-black ooze of the sea floor steamed and stank in the tropic sun, and the vast green Thing from the sea lay drugged amid the receding waters.

Atop hunched Corcovado the majestic Christ of Rio stared down on Mankind and the enemy of Mankind. Atop sky-stabbing Sugarloaf, poised between sea and land, Nicholas Svadin stood and stared, and with him Heinrich Sturm. Above the sinking waters of the bay, great ships of the air droned and circled, dropping the fine, insidious chemical rain that drugged the Thing with sleep. And in the jewel-city below, Ramon Gonzales, human link between the Latin blood of old Europe and new America, stood and stared with burning eyes. Leagues across the oily, sleeping sea three other men stood or sat staring, grim-eyed, into nothing. Moorehead the American. Nasuki the Asiatic. Blond Rasmussen of Anglo-Scandia.

Day after day after day, while the miasmic stench of Rio's draining harbor rose over the white avenues of Rio de Janeiro, while the darkening waters lapped lower and ever lower on the glistening jade-green mountains of jellied ooze that lay cooking in the sun. Day after day after day, while those who had crept back to the Beira Mar, to rock-rimmed Nictheroy,

returned to the green, cool hills to watch and wait. A handful of sullen men in the Queen City of the South. Another handful on the naked cap of Sugarloaf and at the feet of the mighty Christ of Corcovado, miraculously untouched by the ravaging of the god of Gold. And above it all the whine and drone of the circling planes and the far, dull mutter of the giant pumps.

Living things acquire a tolerance of drugs, demand more and more and ever more to sate their appetite. Drugged meat had lulled the Thing, and the rain of drugs from circling planes had kept it torpid, soothed by the slow lap of brine against its gelid flanks dreaming of future feasts. Now as the waters sank and the sun beat down on its naked bulk, the vast Thing roused. Like a great green slug it crept over the white thread of the Beira Mar, into the city of jewels. Buildings crumpled under its weight, walls were burst by the pressure of its questing pseudopods. Into the pockets of the hills it crept, over the broken city, and behind it on the summit of Sugarloaf was frantic activity. Nicholas Svadin's puffed blue hand pointed, and where he gestured a ring of fire slashed across Rio's far-reaching avenues, barring the exit to the sea. Slowly the zone of flame crept inward, toward the empty harbor, and before its fierce heat the Sea-Thing retreated, grinding the city under its slimy mass. Little by little it roused—its ponderous motions became quicker, angrier. Little by little fear woke in it, where fear had never been—fear of the little gabbling human things that stung it with their puny weapons. It lay like a glassy blanket over the ruined streets of Rio—a knot of twisting serpent-forms craving the cool wet blackness of the deep sea. Before its awakened fury the wall across Rio's harbor would be like a twig across the path of an avalanche. Its fringe of lolloping tentacles dabbled in the salt-encrusted pool that was

all the pumps had left of the Bay of Rio, and in minutes the rippling mirror was gone, sucked into the Sea-Thing's avid mass.

And then Svadin struck.

I STOOD with my camera beneath the Christ of Corcovado. The sun was setting, and as the shadow of the western summits crept over the gutted Rio the Sea-Thing gathered itself for the assault that would carry it over Sugarloaf, over the wall that men had made, into the welcoming Atlantic. Then in the north, where the sun yet shone, came a flicker of metal gnats against the cloudless sky, the burr of their roaring engines speeding them through the advancing twilight. From Sugarloaf a single rocket rose and burst, a pale star over the sea, showering spangled flame, and the heavens were filled with the thunder of Man's aerial hosts—bombers, transports, planes of all sizes and all nations in a monster fleet whose shadow lay long on the curling sea like a streamer of darkness. Their first rank swung low over the hollow harbor and out of them rained a curtain of white missiles, minute against the immensity of Rio's circling hills. Like hail they fell, and after them a second shower, and a third as the fleet roared by above. And then the first bombs hit!

A ribbon of fire burst against the twilight. Fountains of golden flame vomited skyward, scores of feet over the naked surface of the Thing. Hundreds—thousands of bursting dots of fire, sweeping swaths of fiery rain, cascades of consuming flame—until the Sea-Thing blazed with one mighty skyward-reaching plume of golden glory that licked at the darkening heavens where the wings of Mankind's army of destruction still roared past, the rain of death still fell like a white curtain, painted by the leaping yellow flame of burning sodium.

I saw it then as old Heinrich Sturm had

seen it months and years before, as Nicholas Svadin had seen it when he began his colossal plan to bait the Thing into the land-locked bay of Rio de Janiero. Flame, killing and cleansing where no other weapon of Man would serve; green flame devouring the Earth-born god of Gold, corroding its crystal thews and consuming its golden brain; yellow flame feeding on the sea-green pulp of the sea-born Thing—changing the water that was its life into the caustic venom that slew it. As that colossal golden torch flared skyward over broken Rio I saw the mountainous bulk of the Sea-Thing shrivel and clot into a pulp of milky curds, crusted with burnt alkali. Water oozed from it like whey from pressed cheese, and tongues of the yellow flame licked along it, drinking it up. The black ooze of the harbor was drying and cracking under the fierce heat. Palms that still stood along the bare white beaches were curling, crisping, bursting into splinters of red flame, and even against the rising breeze the steaming stench of cooked flesh reeked in our nostrils.

The murmur of voices behind me stilled. I turned. The crowd had given way before the little knot of men who were coming toward me, driven from the crest of Sugarloaf by the fierce heat of the burning Thing. Flame-headed, red-nosed Donegan pushing a way for those who followed him. Gray-whiskered Heinrich Sturm pattering after him. Behind them, surrounded by men in braided uniforms, the fish-white, corpse-flesh shape of Nicholas Svadin.

I gave no ground to them. I stood at the Christ's feet and gave them stare for stare. I stared at Red Jim Donegan, at Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm, and I stared at the gross, misshapen thing that was master of the world.

I had not seen him since that night in Oaxaca, three years before. He had been hideous then, but now the scent and shape of Death were on him as they were on

Lazarus when he arose blank-eyed from the grave. A gray cloak swirled from his shoulders and fell billowing over a body warped and bloated out of all human semblance. Rolls of polished flesh sagged from his face, his neck, his wrists. His fingers were yellow wads of sickening fat, stained with blue, and his feet were clumping pillars. Out of that pallid face his two bright eyes peered like raisins burnt glassy and stuck in sour dough. The reek of embalming fluids made the air nauseous within rods of where he stood. Nicholas Svadin! Living dead man—master of the world!

I knew Donegan from Oaxaca. He told me what I had guessed. Old Sturm's researches, made on bits of the jelly left by the Thing, on fragments hewed from it by volunteers, showed it to be built largely of linked molecules of colloidal water. Water-stuff of the sea—bound by the life-force into a semblance of protoplasm—into a carmate pulp that fed on the sea and took life from it even as it fed on living flesh for the needful elements that the waters could not give it. Living water—mountain-huge—destroyed by decomposing forces that no water could quench—by bombs of metallic sodium, tearing apart the complex colloidal structure of its aqueous flesh and riving it into flames of burning hydrogen and crusting, jelling alkali. Chemical fire, withering as it burnt.

I knew, too, Ramon Gonzales. I had seen him when he stood beside Svadin's bier in the sun of Budapest—when Svadin gave him the united Latin states of two continents to govern—when he stood ankle-deep in the green slime that the Sea-Thing had left coating the white walls of gutted Rio. I saw him now, his dark face ghastly in the yellow glare, screaming accusations at the immobile, pasty face of Nicholas Svadin. Those button eyes moved flickering to observe him; the shapeless bulk gathered its cloak closer about it and

swiveled to consider him. Higher and higher Gonzales' hysterical voice raged—cursing Svadin for the doom he had brought on Rio, cursing him for the thing he had been as a man and for the thing he was now. No sign of understanding showed on that bloated face—no sign of human feeling. I felt a tension in the air, knew it was about to break. My camera over Jim Donegan's shoulder saw Ramon Gonzales as his sword lashed out, cutting through Svadin's upflung arm, biting deep into his side, sinking hilt-deep in his flesh. I saw its point standing out a foot behind that shrouded back, and the flare of Jim Donegan's gun licked across my film as he shot Gonzales down. I saw, too, the thick, pale fluid dripping slowly from the stump of Svadin's severed arm, and the puffed, five-fingered thing that twitched and scabbled on the gravel at his feet.

Above us, lit by the dying yellow flame, the Christ of Corcovado looked down on the man who had risen from the dead to rule the world.

* * * * *

Four men were the world when Svadin rose from the dead in Budapest. Nasuki, Rasmussen, Gonzales, Moorehead. Gonzales was dead.

Two men had stood at Svadin's side when he slew the Thing of the Earth and the gelid Thing of the Sea. Donegan, Heinrich Sturm. Sturm alone remained.

I SHOWED the pictures I had taken on Corcovado to drawn-faced Richard Moorehead in the White House at Washington. I showed them to Nasuki in Tokyo and to Nils Rasmussen in London. I told them other things that I had seen and heard, and gave them names of men who had talked and would talk again. I wore a small gold badge under my lapel—a badge in the shape of the *crux ansata*, the looped Egyptian cross of natural, holy Life.

I went to find Jim Donegan before it

should be too late. It was too late. Since the morning of the day when Nicholas Svadin's silver plane slipped to the ground at the airport of Budapest, and Svadin's closed black limousine swallowed him and Donegan and Heinrich Sturm, the tall, red-haired American had not been seen. Sturm was there, close to Svadin, with him day and night, but no one could speak with him. And gradually he too was seen less and less as Svadin hid himself in curtained rooms and sent his servants from the palace, drew a wall of steel around him through which only Zoölogist Heinrich Sturm might pass.

Something was brewing behind that iron ring—something that had been boding since long before Svadin stood in Oaxaca and lured the god of Gold to its death—since long before he was first approached by the bearded, spectacled little German scientist who was now the only man who saw him or knew that he was alive. Yet Svadin's orders went out from the great, empty palace in Budapest, and the world grew sullen and afraid.

When he was newly risen from the bier, Nicholas Svadin had in him the understanding of a leader of Mankind and the genius of a god. Men took him for a god and were not betrayed. He thought with diamond clearness, saw diamond-keenly the needs and weaknesses of men and of men's world. He made of the world a place where men could live happily and securely, without want, without discomfort—and live as men.

As the months went by Svadin had changed. His genius grew keener, harder, his thinking clearer. Scientist—economist—dictator—he was all. The things he ordained, and which men throughout the world did at his command, were things dictated by reason for the good of the human race. But at the same time humanity had gone out of him.

Never, since that day when the heaped

callas fell from his stiffly rising frame in the sun of Budapest, had he spoken his own name. He was Svadin, but Svadin was not the same. He was no longer a man. He was a machine.

Conceivably, a machine might weigh and balance all the facts governing the progress and condition of one man or of all humanity, and judge with absolute, mathematical fairness what course each should take in order that the welfare of all should be preserved. If it meant death or torment for one, was that the concern of the many? If a city or a nation must be crushed, as Rio had been crushed, to wipe out a monstrous Thing that was preying on Mankind, should not Rio rejoice at its chance to be the benefactor of the race? No man would say so. But Svadin was not a man. What he was—what he had become—it was the purpose of the League of the Golden Cross to discover.

No movement is greater than its leaders. Those who wore the looped cross of Life were led by the three men to whom the world looked, next to Svadin, for justice—to whom they looked, in spite of Svadin, for human justice. Before he rose from his bier, they had ruled the world. It was their intention to rule it again.

No lesser men could have planned as they planned, without Svadin's knowledge, each last step of what must happen. That things went otherwise was not their fault—it was the fault of the knowledge that they had, or their interpretation of that knowledge. I had not yet found Jim Donegan. I had not seen Heinrich Sturm.

Through all the world the seeds of revolt were spreading, deeper and farther than they had spread among the little brown-blooded men who were rallied by fear of the god of Gold. But throughout all the world those seeds fell on the fallow soil of fear—fear of a man who had risen from death—of a man who was himself a god, with a god's power and a god's unsee-

ing eye, with a god's revenge. Men—little superstitious men in thousands and millions, feared Svadin more than they hated him. At his word they would slay brothers and cousins, fathers and lovers, friend and foe alike. Reason and justice meant nothing to them. There must be a greater fear to drive them—and it was my job to find that fear.

In every place where Svadin had his palaces, his steel-jacketed guards, I peered and pried, watching for the sight of a red head, an improbably distorted nose. And not for a long, long time did I find it.

Svadin's grim castle loomed among weedy gardens above Budapest. I found old men who had planted those gardens, others who had laid them out, who had built their drains and sunk the foundations of the palace in a day before Svadin was born. Where only rats had gone for a generation, I went. Where only rats' claws had scrambled, my fingers tapped, pressed, dug in the fetid darkness. Ladders whose iron rungs had rusted to powder bore my weight on the crumbling stumps of those rungs. Leaves that had drifted for years over narrow gratings were cleared away from beneath, and light let in. The little Egyptian *ankh* became the symbol of a brotherhood of moles, delving under the foundations of Nicholas Svadin's mighty mausoleum. And one day my tapping fingers were answered!

Tap, tap, tap through the thick stone—listen and tap, tap and listen. More men than Donegan had disappeared, and they crouched in their lightless cells and listened to our questions, answered when they could, guided the slow gnawing of our drills and shovels through the rock under Budapest. Closer—closer—they had their ways of speaking without words, but no word came from the red-headed, big-nosed American of whom their tapping told. Something prevented—something they could not explain. And still we dug, and

tapped, and listened, following their meager clues.

There came a time when we lost touch with the world outside. Three of us, in a world of our own, forgot that there was an outside, that there was anything but the one great purpose that drove us on through the dark and the damp. We had no word of the world, nor the world of us.

Nasuki grew impatient, and the man who was in Gonzales' place. The work of the Golden Cross was progressing, its ring of rebellion strengthening. To Rasmussen, to Moorehead, they cried for action. The brooding stillness that lay over Svadin's palace, the brutal coldness of the orders that issued through Heinrich Sturm's lips, shaping the civilization of a world as a sculptor would chisel granite, drove them to the edge of madness. Revolution flamed again—and this time brother was pitted against brother all across the face of the planet—fear against fury—Svadin against the Four.

I HAVE seen pictures of the Svadin whom that flame of war drew to the balcony of his palace, to shout his thunderous command of death above the kneeling throng. The disease, if disease it was that changed him, was progressing swiftly. There was little resemblance to the man who lay dead a handful of years before, and on whom life fell out of an empty sky. He was huge, misshapen, monstrous, but so utter was their fear and awe that those groveling thousands questioned no word of his and cut down their kin as they would reap corn. The looped cross was an emblem of certain death. Men cast it from them, forswore its pledge, betrayed others who were faithful. At last one desperate, embattled horde stormed the grim castle above Budapest, while the sullen ring of the faithful closed in around them. Under their feet, ignorant of what

was happening above us, we three dug and tapped, tapped and dug—and found!

I remember that moment when I knelt in the stuffy darkness of the tunnel, digging my fingers into the cracks on either side of that massive block. For hours, two sleeping while one worked, we had chiseled at it, widening the crevices, carving a grip, loosening it from the bed in which it had been set a lifetime before. My numbed fingers seemed to become part of the cold stone. Dunard was tugging at me, begging me to give him his chance. Then the great block shifted in its bed, tilted and slid crushingly against me. Barely in time I slipped out from under it; then I was leaning over its slimy mass, Smirnoff's torch in my hand, peering into the black cavern beyond. The round beam of the torch wavered across moldering straw—across dripping, fungus-feathered walls. It centered on a face, huge-nosed, topped with matted red hair.

It was Donegan!

We fed him while Dunard hacked at the gyves that held him spread-eagled against the wall. As he grew stronger he talked—answering my questions—telling of things that grew too horribly clear in the light of past happenings. At last we parted, Dunard and Smirnoff to carry word to the Brotherhood of the Cross—Donegan and I into the dark dungeons of Nicholas Svadin!

The guard at the cell door died as other guards have died before; we had no choice. I remembered those voices which were only fingers tap-tap-tapping through stone. I knew what those buried men would do if only they could—and gave them their chance.

We were a little army in ourselves when we charged up the great central staircase of Svadin's castle against the grim line of faithful guards. At the landing they held us—and outside, rattling in the gardens beyond the great doors, we could hear the

gunfire of that last stand of our Brotherhood against ignorance and fear. We thought then that Dunard and Smirnoff had won through, had given their message to those who could light the flame of revolt. We did not know that they were cut down before they could reach our forces. But armed with what we could find or wrest from the men who opposed us, we charged up that broad staircase into the face of their fire, burst over them and beat them down as a peasant flails wheat, turned their machine-gun on their fleeing backs and mowed them down in a long, heaped windrow strewn down the length of the corridor to Svadin's door.

We stood there at the head of the stairs, behind the gun, staring at that door—half naked, filthy, caked with blood. There was a great, breathless silence broken only by the patter of gunfire in the courtyard outside, muffled by the walls. Then Donegan picked up the gun and stepped over the crumpled body of a guard. His bare feet slapped on the cold stone of the hall and behind him our footsteps echoed, in perfect time, drumming the death-roll of Nicholas Svadin. We came to the door—and it opened!

Heinrich Sturm stood there. Sturm—grown bent and little. Sturm with horror in his eyes, with horror twisting his face and blood streaming down his chest from a ripped-out throat. Sturm—babbling blood-choked German words, tottering, crumpling at our feet, who stood staring over him into the great, dark room beyond, at Svadin, red-mouthed, standing beside the great canopied bed, at the ten foul things that stood behind him!

Donegan's machine-gun sprayed death over the bleeding body of Zoölogist Heinrich Wilhelm Sturm. Soft slugs plowed into the soft body of Nicholas Svadin, into the bodies of the ten things at his feet. He shook at their impact, and the pallid flesh ripped visibly where they hit, but he only

stood and laughed—laughed as the god of Gold had laughed, in a voice that meant death and doom to the human race—laughed and came striding at us across the room with his hell-pack trotting at his heels.

There are fears that can surpass all courage. That fear drenched us then. We ran—Donegan with his gun like a child in his arms, I with old Heinrich Sturm dragging like a wet sack behind me, the others like ragged, screaming ghosts. We stumbled over the windrows of dead in the corridor, down those sweeping stairs into the lower hall, through the open doors into the courtyard. We stood, trapped between death and death.

A hundred men remained of the Brotherhood of the Cross. They were huddled in a knot in the center of the court, surrounded by the host who were faithful to fear, and to Svadin. As we burst through the great doors of the castle, led by the naked, haggard, flaming-haired figure of Jim Donegan, every eye turned to us—every hand fell momentarily from its work of killing. Then miraculously old Heinrich Sturm was struggling up in my arms, was shouting in German, in his bubbling, blood-choked voice, and in the throng other voices in other languages were taking up his cry, translating it—sending it winging on:

"He is no god! He is from Hell—a fiend from Hell! Vampire—eater of men! He—and his cursed spawn!"

They knew him, every one. They knew him for Svadin's intimate—the man who spoke with Svadin's voice and gave his orders to the world. They heard what he said—and in the doorway they saw Svadin himself.

He was naked, as he had stood when that door swung open and Sturm came stumbling through. He was corpse-white, blotched with the purple-yellow of decay, bloated with the gasses of death. Svadin—

undead—unhuman—and around his feet ten gibbering simulacra of himself—ten pulpy, fish-white monsters of his flesh.

He stood there, spread-legged, above the crowd. His glassy eyes stared down on the bloody, upturned faces, and the stump of his hacked arm pounded on his hairless breast where the line of bullet-marks showed like a purple ribbon. His vast voice thundered down at them, and it was like the bellowing of a lusty bull:

"I am Nicholas Svadin!"

And in hideous, mocking echo the ten dwarfed horrors piped after him:

"I am Nicholas Svadin!"

In my arms old Heinrich Sturm lay staring at the Thing whose slave he had been, and his old lips whispered five words before his head sagged down in death. Red Jim Donegan heard them and shouted them for the world to hear.

Svadin heard, and if that dead-man's face could show expression, fear sloughed over it, and his thick red lips parted in a grin of terror over yellow fangs.

"Burn him! Fire is clean!"

I CAUGHT up the body of Heinrich Sturm and ran with it, out of the path of the mob that surged up the castle steps, Jim Donegan at their head. Svadin's splayed feet pounded across the floor of the great hall, his hell-brood pattering after him.

Then the crowd caught them and I heard the spat of clubbed fists on soft flesh, and a great roaring scream of fury went up over the yammer of the mob.

They tore the little fiends to shreds and still they lived. They bound the Thing that had been Svadin and carried him, battered and twisting, into the courtyard. They built a pyre in the streets of Budapest, and when the flames licked high they cast him in, his hell-spawn with him, and watched with avid eyes as he writhed and

crisped. The beast is in every man when hate and fear are roused. Far into the night, when Svadin and his brood were ashes underfoot, the mad crowd surged and fought through the streets, looting, burning, ravening.

When Svadin died, four men had ruled the world. Today four men rule a world that is better because Svadin rose from the dead that day in Budapest, that is free because of his unhuman tyranny. Moorehead, Nasuki, Rasmussen, Corregio. Red Jim Donegan is a hero, and I, and a hundred other living men, but none pays homage to dead old Heinrich Wilhelm Sturm. He was too long identified with Nicholas Svadin for men to love him now.

What we know of Svadin, and of other things, Sturm had learned, little by little, through the years. He told certain things to Donegan, before Svadin grew suspicious and ordered the American's death. It was Heinrich Sturm's mercy that won Donegan a cell instead of a bullet or the knife, or even worse. For somewhere during his association with the decadent dregs of Europe's royal courts the reborn Svadin had acquired, among other things, a taste for blood.

"All I know is what Sturm told me," Donegan says. "The old man was pretty shrewd, and what he didn't know he guessed—and I reckon he guessed close. It was curiosity made him stay on with Svadin—first off, anyway. Afterward he knew too much to get away.

"There must have been spores of life, so Sturm said. There was a Swede by the name of Arrhenius—back years ago—who thought that life might travel from planet to planet in spores so small that light could push them through space. He said that spore-dust from ferns and moss and fungus, and things like bacteria that were very small, could pass from world to world that way. And he figured there might be spores of pure life drifting around out

there in space between the stars, and that whenever they fell on a planet, life would start there.

"That's what happened to us, according to the old man. There were three spores that fell here, all within a short time of each other. One fell in the sea, and it brought the Sea-Thing to life, made mostly of complex molecules of colloidal water and salts out of the sea-ooze where the spore fell. It could grow by sucking up water, but it needed those salts from decomposed, organic things too. That's why it attacked cities, where there was plenty of food for it.

"The second spore fell on quartz—maybe in some kind of colloidal jelly such as they find sometimes in the hard stuff. There was gold there, and the Thing that came alive was what I saw, and what the Indians thought was one of their old gods come to life again—the god of gold and crystal. Svadin killed it with some radium compound that he invented.

"The third seed fell on Svadin and brought him to life. He wasn't a man, really, but he had all the semblance of a man. He had the same memories in his brain, and the same traits of character, until other things rooted them out. He came to life—but to stay alive he had to be different from other men. He had embalming-fluid instead of blood, and wax in his skin, and things like that, and he had to replace them the way we eat food to replace our tissues. When he changed, it was in ways a dead man would change, except that he used his brain better and more logically than any live man ever did. He had to learn how a man would act, and he had some willing enough teachers to show him the rotten along with the good.

"Those other things grew as they fed, and so did Svadin, but he was more complex than they were—more nearly like men. Where they grew, he reproduced, like the simplest kinds of living things, by

budding off duplicates of himself, out of his own flesh. It was like a hydra—like a vegetable—like anything but a man. Maybe you noticed, too—a couple of those things, that grew after he lost his arm in Rio, had only one arm too. They *were* Svadin, in a way. They called his name when he did, there at the last. . . ."

The sweat is standing out on his weather-beaten forehead as he remembers it. I see the vision that he does—those ten miniature Svadins growing, budding in their turn, peopling the Earth anew with a race of horrors made in mockery of man. He reaches for the bottle at his elbow:

"We've seen Nature—the Universe—spawning," he says. "Maybe it's happened on Earth before; maybe it'll happen again. Probably we and all the other living things on Earth got started that way, millions of years ago. For a while, maybe, there were all kinds of abortive monsters roaming around the world, killing each other off the way Svadin killed the Sea-Thing and the god of Gold. They were new and simple—they reproduced by dividing, or budding, or crystallizing, and it was hard to kill them except with something like fire that would destroy the life-germs in them. After a while, when the seed of life in them would be pretty well diluted, it would be easier. Anyway, that's how I figure it.

"Svadin looked human, at first, but he wasn't—ever. What he was, no one knows, not even old Sturm. It's pretty hard to imagine what kind of thoughts and feelings a living dead man would have. He had some hang-over memories from the time he was really Svadin; so he started in to fix over the world. Maybe he thought men were his own kind, at first—at least, they looked like him. He fixed it, all right—only, after a while there wasn't anything human left in him, and he began to plan things the way a machine would, to fit him and the race he was

spawning. It's no more than we've done since Time began—killing animals and each other to get what we want, eating away the Earth to get at her metals, and oil, and so on. The god of Gold was kin to the Earth, in a way, and I guess he resented seeing her cut up by a lot of flesh-and-blood animals like us.

"I said he learned some of man's worst vices. Once someone had taught him a thing like that, and he liked it, it became part of the heritage that he passed down to future generations. Somehow he got the taste for flesh—raw flesh—and humans were just like any other animal to him. After Sturm stopped being useful to him, he attacked the old man too.

"You see, he had a human brain, and he could think like a man, and scheme and sense danger to his plans. Only—he didn't ever really understand human psychology. He was like an ameba, or a polyp, and I don't guess they have emotions. He didn't understand religion, and the feeling people had that he was a kind of god. He used it—but when awe turned into hate, and people thought of him as a devil instead of a god, they treated him like one. They burned him the way their ancestors burned witches!"

He tosses down a shot of rye and wipes his lips. "Next time it happens," he says, "I'm going to be drunk. And this time I'll stay drunk!"