

SPICY 'ADVENTURE' STORIES



FEBRUARY, 1941

Vol. 13, No. 3

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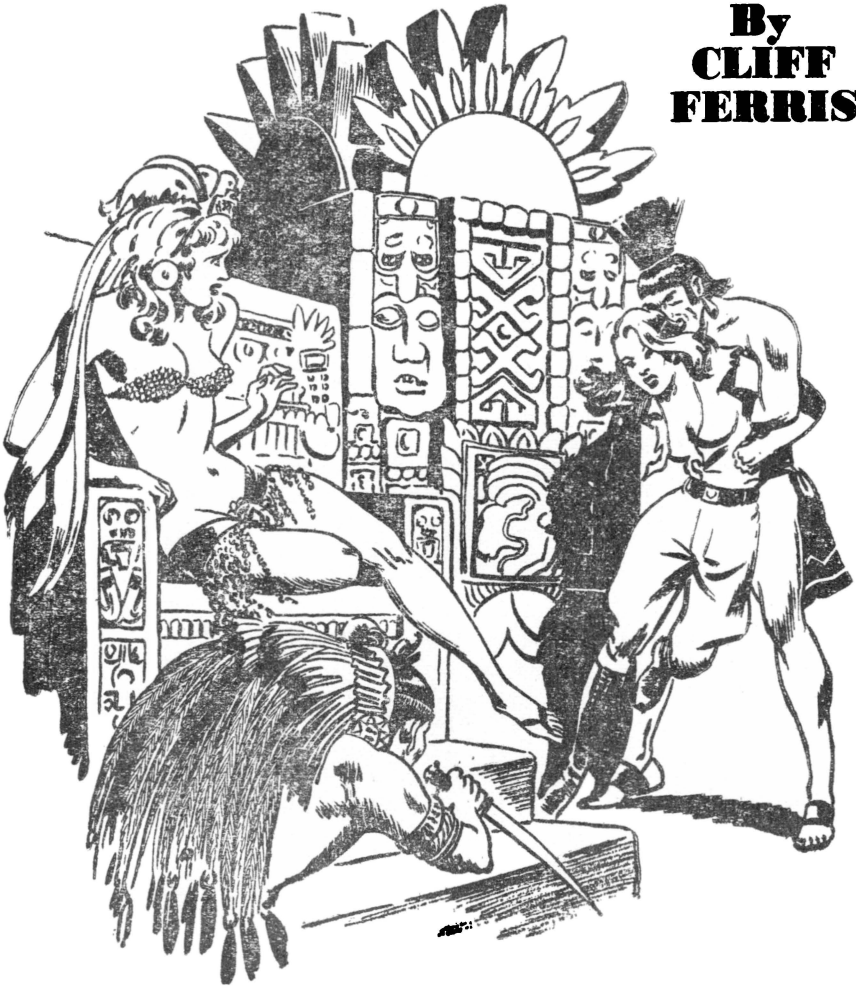
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SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES is published monthly by the CULTURE PUBLICATIONS, Inc. Editorial offices, 500 Market St. Wilmington, Del. The publisher assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.



By
**CLIFF
FERRIS**



"I shall make you Emperor of the World," she told him, and, in spite of his love for Lea, he was tempted by what she showed him from the top of the temple

WHEN first they glimpsed the granite tower through the leaves, the fleeing man and girl thought they had been maneuvered into a trap by the howling savages. Then, sensing the stillness of the vast pile, realiz-

ing that no flat-nosed Indians lay in wait for them there, they felt a stirring of hope.

A spear hissed between them as they ran, its bamboo shaft touching Dick Dorrance's cheek. He gasped, "Too close!" and thrust Lea Sands behind the thick bole of a mahogany tree, flattened himself beside her and swung out his revolver.

Naked brown men melted into jungle gloom as the .45 yammered twice and leaden slugs skittered

TEMPLE OF ETERNITY



The sprawling warrior fell directly between the strands of golden wire.

through underbrush. The hammer clicked on a spent shell and Dick fumbled in his pocket for the half-dozen extra cartridges he had been wise enough to bring from the camp of the Courtney Archeological Expedition.

Lea brushed curling strands of chestnut hair from hazel eyes. "If only we knew what they had

against us!" she cried. "The natives of this part of Yucatan are supposed to be friendly!" Her small breasts rose and fell stormily beneath her khaki blouse. In boots and torn jodhpurs, with a sun helmet awry over her more-than-pretty face, she looked tiny and scared.

Dick was beginning to suspect

the answer, and it had something to do with the huge Mayan pyramid rising there in the center of a broad circular pavement. He surveyed it with quick glances when his eyes were not searching the shadows for the brown men who had harried them these last three miles with spears and angry yells.

"They might have been trying to keep us from this very place," he muttered. "Maybe we've stumbled on something sacred, something that would be called *tabu* in Africa. Two or three times they tried to head us off."

Lean, dark-haired, nearing thirty, Dick Dorrance stood six feet in his laced boots and whipcord garments, which the thorny undergrowth had cut to ribbons. His craggy face was worried as he thumbed his last cartridges into the gun's cylinder. This was not his first brush with danger—as a field man for a Chicago museum he had hunted the secrets of vanished civilizations in many perilous parts of the world—but it was the first time he had faced death beside a girl.

Moreover, this was the girl he intended to marry. Lea had joined the expedition as an expert on Mayan hieroglyphs, and they had fallen in love the day they met in New Orleans with other members of the group to sail for Yucatan. Together they had helped explore ruins of temples and pyramids lost for centuries in the tropical jungles, and at dawn today they had set out to hunt for other evidences of the culture of the strange people which was already dying when Columbus found the New World.

It appeared that they had found

something, all right—but whether they would live to tell about it was questionable. . . .

Lea asked, "What do we do now, Dick?"

"We get out of this damned brush and into the open," he said. "Maybe they won't dare leave the woods, but if they do I can see what I'm shooting at."

HE peered once more into the shadows, seeing that no savage lurked near enough to throw a spear effectively, and took her hand. Together they raced through the remaining few yards of undergrowth and across blocks of smooth stone so cunningly joined that no blade of grass showed between them. They ran a hundred yards without hearing a yell or a footstep other than their own, and paused.

"Look!" she panted. "They are afraid to follow!"

He saw the Indians, twenty or more of them, watching silently from the edge of the paved area. They had abandoned the chase, at least for the present. For some reason they had no desire to approach that mass of gleaming stone.

Dick frowned. "One of the natives at camp was claiming that the ghosts of the old Mayan rulers inhabit these parts and are guarded by a tribe of fierce warriors. I didn't pay much attention, Lea—you know how they garble those legends—but now I wonder if we've found the home of the spooks, and if those were the guards who chased us?"

For the first time he could give his whole attention to the monu-

mental structure, and there was wonder and incredulity in his mind as he did so. Flat-topped and geometrically perfect, it rose far above the jungle that walled it in, larger than any pyramid discovered outside Egypt. It was no scrubby hill, overgrown with vegetation, like those pyramids the expedition had already excavated; this one seemed to have been untouched by the ages.

From its summit rose a startling device, unlike anything he had ever encountered in the Americas. It was a straight shaft supporting a horizontal disc of burnished metal, surmounted by a pierced upright. It resembled nothing so much as the *ankh*, the tau cross with the loop at the top, called the Key of Life—as potent a symbol to the ancient Egyptians as the Feathered Serpent of Quexacoatl had been among the Mayans.

Lea breathed, "The sign of immortality! Only that disc is like a concave mirror, upside down. . ."

"We might as well keep going," he said. "We don't want anything to do with those bloodthirsty devils. Maybe we can build a fire on top of the thing and signal for help."

They crossed the pavement to the first of the three-foot granite steps that mounted a hundred feet upward. He climbed ahead, pausing on each successive step to give her his hand and pull her up beside him. It was gruelling work under the high sun.

Gaining the summit, exhausted, they found a stone floor lower than the top of the walls. There was a thin strip of shade at one side, and after making sure the Indians had

not left the jungle, they sat down.

Lea lay against him limply. "Only for a moment, though, and then she cried, "Dick, the pyramid is trembling!"

He laughed, hugging her. "That's me, darling—scared and tired, but tingling with the excitement of being alone with you!"

He wasn't joking altogether. The thrill of holding her in his arms was speeding his pulse. Even the wonder of this find in the heart of the wilderness could not compete with the more primitive wonder of love. He saw the thrust of her young breasts against her blouse, the exquisite curves of ivory peeping through rents in the jodhpurs, and it was hard to think of anything else.

"Let's never go back," he whispered.

She moved, twisting her body so that her breasts were cushioned on his chest. Their lips met in clinging bliss. Her eyes brimmed with emotions more ancient than any culture of a dead race, and her breath was warm on his cheek. Her beauty sang in Dick's veins, filled his heart and brain, intoxicated him.

Their arms and lips and broken words merged into ecstasy. . . .

THE sun, rising toward its zenith, narrowed the line of shade. Rested, no longer breathless, Dick became gradually aware of a vibration so faint he sensed rather than felt it.

He said "You were right, after all, darling. It's moving!" He thought of electrical dynamos—the vibration was somehow reminis-

cent of a power plant—but the notion was too fantastic.

She nodded. "I wondered whether you'd notice, dear. I was afraid I was imagining things."

He looked at the lofty symbol—the Key of Life—with new interest. Could it be a part of a machine dating from the far times when the Mayans were supposed to have developed a great science? In some unexplained way, not by man-power alone, they had brought these blocks of stone, weighing as much as a thousand tons, a hundred miles from the coast through the jungle.

The shaft of the Key was of squared stone, and at a height of about ten feet was the sacred rayed symbol representing the sun, ringed with hieroglyphs.

"Maybe you can read them, Lea. Let me lift you up."

He put his hands on her waist and raised her effortlessly until she sat upon his shoulder, soft and warm and light as a child. She grasped the stone, steadying herself. . . .

Under the the pressure of her arms the Key began to turn!

"Look out!" she screamed, sliding down. "The floor, Dick!"

He heard the groaning of wheels that had not turned in ages. He saw a section of stone before him shudder and lift, and then discovered that all the platform was swinging back in sections like a series of trapdoors hinged against the walls, leaving only the small square space in the center where he and Lea clung together.

The Key of Life, turned in an ancient lock, was opening the pry-

mid and leaving them marooned over a black void.

Lea said almost hysterically, "They're made of gold!"

The sections had lifted far enough so that their bottom surfaces were visible, and those surfaces were covered with a bright yellow metal, paler than gold. An alloy, he supposed. . . .

And then one mystery was cleared up, for suddenly the burnished bottom of the disc overhead took on a dazzling brilliance. Almost blinded by the rays that showered from it, Dick understood that the hinged sections had tipped back until their metallic plating caught the sun's rays and flung them against the concave mirror.

Turning his eyes downward, he found the space beneath no longer a black void. The twice-reflected sunlight poured into the interior of the pyramid and was reflected over and over again from a floor and walls of the yellow metal. He glimpsed a vast chamber filled with golden light, and leading into it, a stairway winding about the shaft of the Key, which descended to the bottom.

The vibration was a distinct humming now, more than ever like the sound of electrical machinery.

Such fear as he had felt—not for himself, but for Lea—was swept aside by excitement. He urged her toward the stairs.

"We're going down," he said. "We're going to see what no living person has ever seen. Darling, you'll be famous!"

She corrected him. *We'll be famous!*

It didn't matter; they were practically one person, anyway. . . .



A spear slammed into a tree as they ran.

THE golden light increased as they descended, bathing them in its warm glow. The air was fresh and scented subtly with some unfamiliar perfume. The hum of machinery grew louder. Dick felt invigorated, as he had often felt in power plants, where high-frequency current made the nerve-ends tingle.

They reached the foot of the stairs and stood upon a metal platform in the center of a square hall whose walls rose straight for forty

feet and then narrowed. The machinery—it could be nothing else—was directly beneath their feet. All around, above and below, the shining metal reflected sunlight, except where an eight-foot margin along the bottom of the walls was faced with what appeared to be ground glass.

Dick was vaguely disappointed to find the chamber empty, save for the machinery casing upon which they stood. The men who had built this stronghold should

have hidden their treasures here, their sacred images and works of art. Perhaps in secret rooms—

"I can see through the walls!" Lea cried.

It was no exaggeration. What had resembled ground glass was beginning to resemble clear glass. Under the bombardment of light rays a gray vapor was lifting from it.

Dick sprang from the platform to the floor, pulling Lea with him. He rushed to one side of the chamber and saw what he thought were coffins behind the transparency, ranged in rows. Then, as visibility increased, a sense of awe came over him, for they were cushioned shelves, upon each of which lay the body of a bronzed warrior in full barbaric regalia, with sword and spear beside him. The shelves were in tiers of three, crowding a gallery two hundred feet long. At least two hundred bodies lay motionless along this side of the pyramid, he estimated.

Bodies? They might be images. No perfection of the embalmer's art could keep corpses so lifelike through the centuries. The Egyptians had known how to preserve the bodies of their dead, but their finest specimens had never given the illusion of life.

He looked at the metal ornaments around their arms and ankles, and saw golden wires attached to them—wires which were gathered into cables at the foot of each tier and passed into conduits sunk in the floor, exactly like the two elements of an electrical circuit!

He squeezed Lea's arm so tightly that she winced. "We've found

something really big!" he said exultantly.

Feeling the throb of machines that must have been in motion thousands of years, he could almost believe that these swarthy warriors still lived!

He walked along the side of the chamber with Lea trailing silently. They came to the adjoining wall, and there, in the same formation, lay copper-skinned girls with slender limbs and firm breasts cupped in golden shells. They wore circlets of jewels in their dark hair, embroidered skirts that ended above their knees, and sandals. Seeing the golden wires attached to their ankles and wrists, Dick had the uncanny feeling that they, too, were alive.

Behind the transparent section of the next wall were other warriors, like the first ones, tall and sinewy.

"These," said Lea, "must have been members of what is called the Older Race, the tall people who ruled the Mayans."

Dick had already arrived at that conclusion. Ethnologists knew from skeletons found in the burial places that the Mayans were round-headed, short and sturdy; but rare evidence had been found of a taller people with longer skulls, who were believed to have been the real creators of the culture that flourished and crumbled in Central and South America before the time of Columbus.

"These were rulers, all right," he declared, pointing.

They had come to the fourth wall, where the arrangement was different. Instead of the long gallery, a number of small individual

chambers lay behind the transparent substance, and in each lay a single figure clad in garments threaded with gold. They wore headgear crested with the Feathered Serpent and engraved over the brow with the Key of Life.

Dick had reached the middle of this fourth wall, and there he stopped dead, gazing upon a spectacle that left him speechless.

"She—she must have been their empress, Dick—or their goddess," Lea whispered.

Empress or goddess, it did not matter in that unreal moment. All he knew or cared was that he was gazing at the most beautiful girl he had ever seen or dreamed of.

UNLIKE the others, she did not recline, but sat in a larger chamber upon a canopied throne raised above the floor level—a throne of solid gold, lined with cushions of deep purple. Against the dark background her slender figure seemed to be all gold: her skin was not bronze, but the color of the sun; her hair fell over her shoulders, wave upon yellow wave; her eyes were closed, but he had the thought that if she opened them they would be golden, too.

Upon her head was a tall helmet bearing the Key of Life for crest, with the Mayan serpent twined about it. Across her virginal breasts were webs of jewels that adorned without concealing. Her girdle was a belt of gold with a jeweled buckle, and from it depended strings of precious stones, forming a tiny apron. Except for sandals upon her small feet, those things were all she wore.

Being a woman, Lea was less

deeply impressed by the vision. Lea whispered, "She must have been glorious."

"Not 'must have been,'" he said. "Darling, *she is!* She's breathing, living!"

It was true. The gems upon her breast glittered as breath stirred her bosom, and her eyelids fluttered. . . .

A thin whimper came from Lea's throat. "Dick, I'm afraid!"

There was a footstep behind them. Dick whirled, the short hairs at the base of his skull prickling. His hand started toward his revolver, but he stayed it when he saw it was too late.

The blade of a spear was poised six inches from his throat and a warrior stood ready to deliver the death-thrust. Other warriors with spears and clubs, and some armed only with short metal rods, surrounded them, and from the galleries at both sides more were coming. The transparent partitions had disappeared into the floor and men were arising from the couches where they had slept through generations.

In their glaring eyes Dick saw distrust and hatred. Fear came leaping over him as he thought of Lea's lovely body run through by spears, hacked by swords, subjected to unspeakable tortures.

And he was helpless. Even had there been time to use his revolver, what good were six bullets against the four or five hundred men massing around the circular stairway?

"We're friends," Dick said, knowing the words were futile because they would not be understood.

A man, apparently an officer,

pushed his way through the crowd and put a question in a harsh and unfamiliar tongue. Dick could only shrug his shoulders.

The officer issued a command. A warrior came forward with leather thongs in his hands. He directed Dick by signs to turn, with his arms behind him, and be bound.

There was nothing else to do. Dick saw the stark terror in Lea's face and murmured, "Steady, darling. They'll probably be grateful to us when they find out we brought them back to life."

Then his glance went to the throne where the empress or goddess sat, and when he looked at her he forgot all else.

NO WALL was between them now. She was awake and she was gazing at him, and her eyes were golden, as he had known they would be. They glowed with a strange light. They spoke to him—or perhaps it was her mind that spoke through some perfection of telepathy—and he found himself mentally recalling all the events that had happened to him that day, and knew that his thoughts were apparent to her.

The golden girl smiled. She spoke, commanding the warriors. They fell back, leaving Dick and Lea alone before the throne.

"Dick Dorrance," said the girl, "you will forgive my guards. They thought you intended to harm me."

He gasped, "You speak our language!"

"That is simple. I have looked into your mind and it has told me what words you will understand."

Lea's bewilderment was as great as his own. But, being feminine,

Lea was not to be dazzled by feminine charms, and being a scientist, Lea was curious.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Why have you slept in this place, and how long, and for what purpose?"

The smile faded from the girl's face, but her voice was gentle.

"You have a right to ask. I am Kalma, princess of Maya, destined to be empress when I have chosen an emperor to reign with me. I am the ruler of Maya and shall be ruler of the world under Quexacoatl, who was called the sun-god Ra by the Egyptians and Sar in Atlantis.

"In this temple the hour of Maya's greatest glory has been perpetuated. You would say that hour was two thousand years ago, but you would be wrong, for we have made time stand still. The twenty centuries your people have counted since then have been as a dream and will be blotted out swiftly.

"Our wise men know the future as well as the past. They foresaw the evil days that would come upon our empire, bringing death and destruction. With a science greater than your civilization could understand—a science of physics and metaphysics wedded—they planned to survive the cycle."

"They cheated fate!" Dick murmured raptly.

Her smile returned. "In a manner of speaking. They built this pyramid where no one would be apt to find it until the danger was past, and charged a tribe of savages with the task of guarding it. They made the walls so strong that no tools of the invading Spaniards could have opened it, even had they killed the guards and discovered us by accident. Until a few years ago it



"Tell me you love me," she demanded. He couldn't turn away.

was locked securely by a time device. The Key would not have opened it.

"Here I and my court have remained suspended in timelessness. The generator in this chamber and the time machinery in its four corners have been energized by sunlight penetrating the stones outside. Those machines create a force beside which your electricity is

coarse and crude—a force which can control the illusion of time and make a moment eternal, and expand that moment to cover the whole earth.

"When you opened the pyramid, the inner walls of radioactive metal were charged directly with sun-energy. The machines were speeded, the force was increased, and we awoke. We went to sleep on the

last day of our year 10410, according to the reckoning of Sar, and now that we have awakened it is still that day. Reckoning by your calendar, you would call it April 21, 88 B. C.”

Spellbound as he was, Dick could not credit all that this radiant being told him. He said, “How can you know about the Spaniards who conquered your people, and about our calendar and our electricity?”

“Did I not say that our wise men could penetrate the dimensions of time and forecast the future? Your modern history was written in our books before the beginning of the Christian era. If I wish to learn more, your thoughts are as clear to me as writing on a wall.”

He felt uncomfortable, convinced against his will. “I hardly know what to say, princess. . . .”

“Soon you shall call me ‘empress.’” She arose, her lithe body swaying. “Come and see proof of what I have told you.”

SHE moved toward the stairway. Turning, he saw that the people who gave way respectfully before her included not only the warriors, but the firm-breasted maidens who had slept opposite the throne and the gorgeously robed personages who had occupied more dignified couches in their separate chambers.

He caught a glimpse of Lea, her face anxious, her eyes resentful. He tried to reassure her. “Don’t worry,” he said.

But he couldn’t help worrying, himself.

Kalma mounted the winding stairs effortlessly. Behind and beneath her, Dick watched the ripple

of muscles under her satin skin and reflected that beauty such as this had been lost to the world, together with the art and Science that had made this Temple of Eternal Life possible. The scientist within him regretted the latter, but the man yearned toward her loveliness. . . .

She gained the little platform at the summit and waited for him. She turned the Key by means of the branch Dick had thrust through the shaft. Slowly, ponderously the mirrored sections of the roof closed.

He thought of Lea, imprisoned below with the resurrected ancients. He asked, “Won’t it be dark down there?”

“No. The walls will continue to reflect light for many hours. Our cities were made largely of that metal, which has a miraculous affinity for the sun, and there was sunlight in the streets all night.”

Her glance swept the horizon and came back to him. There was an incongruous touch of shyness in her manner.

“The girl Lea Sands is in love with you?”

He nodded. “And I’m in love with her. We’re going to be married when we get home.”

A curious expression came over her face. “You will never have any other home but Maya. She will never be your bride. I brought you here to tell you that because I had no wish to hurt her. You are going to be Maya’s emperor.”

It took him a minute to absorb the shock. “But I—I—”

“Listen, Dick Dorrance,” she said softly. “Before I entered the temple I made a pact with my gods.

I knew no man whom I wished to rule beside me. I promised that I should take for my mate the one who should find and open the pyramid, and in return for certain sacrifices the gods were to see that he should make a fitting emperor. The gods have kept their bargain. I am pleased with you."

"But Lea—"

"She shall have riches and power. She may choose a husband from among our finest men."

He inquired, "Do you think love is set aside so easily?"

"What is love compared to my wishes? I am Maya's ruler and shall be the world's ruler." She made an imperious gesture. "It is for me to say what shall be done, not you. I could have you tortured until you chose to obey, or I could sacrifice her by fire to the gods." She smiled. "But there will be no need of that. You say you do not love me, but I can change your mind."

"I think not."

"Then I shall have to demonstrate." She stood with head thrown back, the jewels upon her moving breasts bright in the sunlight. Her eyes were pools of mystery, her radiance more than human.

"Love me," she commanded.

His words of protest would not be uttered. His will crumbled before her arrogant dominance. He wavered.

"Love me, Dick Dorrance."

He took a step toward her—and was lost. His hands reached for her nude shoulders and slid to the curving circumference of her waist. With the thrilling contact came irresistible longing. The fire of the

sun entered into his veins and was enhanced by the fire of her supple body, arching like a golden flame against him. His mouth sought her red lips and her kisses burned.

"Kalma," he said brokenly. "Kalma. . . ."

"Tell me you love me."

"I love you, Kalma."

She twisted out of his embrace with a tinkling laugh of triumph. "You see? There is no escape. But never fear, we shall be happy. Your Lea will find happiness in time, too. You shall live in a world more glorious than you ever guessed a world could be. Come here and see the rebirth of that world."

He stood at the low wall of the platform and looked toward the encircling wall of the jungle, where last he had seen the Indians who had attacked him descendants of the tribesmen charged two thousand years ago with the guardianship of the Temple of Eternal Life. An exclamation came unbidden to his lips.

The jungle was melting away!

WHERE the tangle of trees and vines had been was a spaced and cultivated grove of fruit trees, bright with blossoms. Past the grove an aery shimmering of yellow solidified as he watched and became a tower of metal. Beyond the tower appeared another, and the wavering outlines of other buildings, large and small.

All at once there were glittering warriors at the base of the first tower, a hundred or more of them, marching in formation.

"It is the city of Xalo," said Kalma proudly. "It is my capital and

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Temple of Eternity

(Continued from page 81)

the most beautiful city ever built. In a few minutes we shall see the palace, built of gold, with white swans upon the lake that surrounds it and white peacocks in its gardens."

"The time-force," he stammered, "—whatever it is that turns time backward—it's spreading!"

"It is as I told you. The hour we have perpetuated here will expand over the world, moving in a widening circle at the rate of a hundred miles a day, until all things are as they were then. The circle will pass over stretches of wilderness and cities will spring up, and it will pass over cities and they will vanish as if they had never been. I ordered Xalo destroyed and the people slain after the pyramid was sealed, knowing that the buildings would rise again and the people return when the temple was opened."

His brain reeled under the immensity of this knowledge. He could not be dreaming; when he pinched himself it hurt, and when he moved two inches to the right he felt the warmth of Kalma's naked arm. The memory of Lea, tormented by fear and uncertainty in the chamber below, was too real to be compounded of fantasy.

"My world and yours," the princess said. "Do you like it?"

"It's more beautiful than I ever imagined it could be."

He knew he was looking upon

that which no man of his day had ever seen, and no man would ever believe if he should tell of it. But if the circle of antiquity kept spreading, there would be none to tell, excepting those to whom Maya's grandeur was familiar.

He watched Xalo grow, building by building, street by street. If the force went out into the world at the rate of a hundred miles a day in all directions, the camp of the Courtney Expedition would be swallowed up in two and a half hours, and the men with whom he had worked would have vanished forever. By this time tomorrow the Mexican city of Campeche would be gone, with hundreds of towns and villages. In a week all of Mexico and Central America would be changed, the Panama Canal would be no more, most of Florida would have gone back to its beginnings.

He remembered New York, Chicago, London, and Paris with a pang. All that men had lived and died for, all the labor and love and spilling of blood for twenty centuries, would have been for nothing. There would have been no Church battling persecution and oppression, slowly conquering evil; no Shakespeare to lift the torch of poetry upon the loftiest peaks of wisdom; no Plato; no Phidias.

What would there be instead? Barbarian hordes spreading rapine and destruction over Europe and the islands of the North Atlantic, mad with the lust of killing; the harsh brutality of the Roman conquest; a world of slaves and masters, with human life cheaper than dirt; a world of fear and ignorance and disease. . . .

"Come down with me," he said to Kalma.

Her curved eyebrows lifted at the sharpness of his tone, but she went with him to the center of the platform and waited while he turned the Key and raised the mirrored sections, and then preceded him wordlessly down the stairway.

He rested his hand upon the butt of his revolver. Her uncanny insight must have told her what was in his mind. She would try to thwart his desperate plan, of course, and it was likely that he would die. But he had to make the attempt, nevertheless.

Better that these long dead people—for he could think of them in no other terms—should continue dead, than that the teeming millions of the Twentieth Century should die to enthrone pride and arrogance in a setting of golden splendor.

His life was a little thing to pay for saving the world. . . .

Kalma ascended her throne ominously. Lea stood alone in the center of a semi-circle of warriors and courtiers, her worried eyes questioning Dick. He went close to her and took her hand.

Facing the princess, he opened his mouth. . . .

"Silence!" Kalma cried. "I know what you have to say, but I will not hear it. You shall be emperor of Maya in spite of anything you can do!"

She raised her voice, giving an order in her own tongue.

Twenty warriors advanced, carrying not spears or swords, but the short metal rods that were part of their equipment. Dick drew his revolver.

"You die if you come a step nearer!" he warned.

A BRONZED arm pointed one of the rods. From its tip flashed a pale beam that touched the shoulder of Dick's jacket, ripping the cloth.

The revolver roared, filling the chamber with thunderous echoes. The guard dropped, his face ludicrous with surprise, blood spurting from his throat.

The others halted, cowed for the moment by this weapon which was strange to them. They had ray projectors and were used to scientific devices beyond anything the modern world had produced, but they found the detonation of cordite terrifying.

Lea waited for the outcome, her chin high, her eyes flashing. She was no longer bewildered. She had been frightened by the unknown, but she was not afraid to die with him.

He was filled with a fierce pride of her.

From the purple cushions of her throne Kalma shouted angrily. Nerved by her words, the warriors rushed. The pale rays leaped from a half-dozen rods, shredding Dick's clothing as he dodged out of their path, rubbing against his skin like solid bars.

He triggered swiftly, spending the last of his bullets. Men dropped, but there were more behind them. It was only a question of time. . . .

One of the rays hit him squarely in the right shoulder. It did not burn or pierce, but its impact hurled him backward and down, as if he had been struck with a sledge-

UNCERTAIN seconds ticked away before a hand touched his shoulder and a soft voice said, "Dick! Oh, Dick—have they killed you?"

His eyes focused blearily on Lea's face. Leaning on her, he managed to struggle erect. He stared around the chamber, vaguely at first, then with sharpened interest as he became aware that once more the impossible had occurred.

The main chamber was deserted except for the two of them. Transparent walls again shut off the galleries, and a frosty mist was gathering over them. Dimly he saw warriors stretched on their couches, copper-skinned girls lying row on row, men sleeping in the small rooms reserved for the more exalted courtiers. Attached to wrist and ankle ornaments of all of them were the golden wires, and there were no signs that any of them had ever been disturbed.

Last of all he looked at Kalma upon her throne. Her face was serene, her beauty so poignant that he trembled. . . .

This time Lea helped him up the long stairs and turned the Key of Life, shutting the sunlight from the temple. Dick stared out over the jungle, where now was no trace of the golden city of Xalo, but where twenty or more naked Indians knelt in attitudes of worship.

"We needn't be afraid of them any more," Lea murmured. "They must think we're gods, or the favorites of gods, because we entered the temple and came out again unharmed."

The sun had passed its zenith and there was a thin strip of shade

hammer, and the revolver dropped from fingers that were all at once paralyzed.

Now he must take the final suicidal chance. In another second it would be too late.

He scrambled toward Kala's throne, where the golden wires that had been attached to her wrists and ankles lay upon the floor. . . .

He knew that a mild force-current had sustained life within the pyramid through the ages. But the current was no longer mild; the generators were racing under the power of direct sunlight and the force had grown so powerful that it was altering the face of the earth.

If he could grip those wires and short-circuit that potent force through his own body. . . .

A man sprang upon his back, clubbing one of the ray rods. Dick twisted, catching the warrior's wrist, staving off the blow. He bent forward from the waist, jerking the Mayan's arm. It was a wrestler's trick he had learned in college, and it worked as neatly now as it had on the gymnasium mats.

Grunting in surprise, the bronzed fellow shot over Dick's shoulders. He sprawled heavily upon the floor before the throne, on which Kalma suddenly cowered in terror. The warrior's knee rested upon one of the golden wires, and as he tried to rise his hand touched the other.

A flash of red fire blinded Dick. There was a hideous crackling in the air. He was caught in a terrific concussion and flung bodily against the platform in the center of the chamber, his brain spinning like a top. . . .

at the opposite side of the platform. They rested there.

Dick said, "That nightmare machinery of theirs was *making* time, Lea—spinning it like cloth out of solar energy. I can't explain it, but the force it generates must be the same stuff of which time is made, except that it operates in reverse, reconstructing things while ordinary time deteriorates them.

"The credit was charged to capacity with the time-stuff. The flow had to be continuous, not only to extend its range of influence, but to maintain what had already been established. If ancient Maya had returned, its existence would have depended upon the infallibility of the machines, and so it would never have been real in a natural sense, but the greatest illusion ever known. It sounds screwy, but that's the only way it could have been.

"When the body of that Mayan closed the circuit, releasing the potential that had been built up and should have been renewed constantly, all that had been accomplished evaporated. Everything and everyone returned to the point at which we first arrived. The men we killed aren't dead. As far as they are concerned, the things we saw happen didn't happen at all. The only casualty is me, with a sore shoulder and a million bruises, and I wouldn't have them if my life had depended upon the illusion of the time-force."

"Supposing someone else blunders into the pyramid?" she said. "Supposing the machinery is started again?"

"If it has been hidden for two

thousand years, no one will be apt to find it before I can come back with an army of scientists. We'll cover the mirrors, study the machines and find a way to control the force. Maybe we can recreate a Mayan kingdom in Yucatan without destroying the rest of the world."

Her eyes narrowed. "Count me in on the party, Dick. I'll never let you go without me. As soon as Kalma smiled at you, I knew she wanted you for herself. And she was so **good-looking—in a flashy way**—that I was actually afraid of losing you!"

"You'll never lose me," he said.

Being human, he sighed for the Emperor Dick who might have lived in a golden palace with white swans in a private lake and white peacocks in exotic gardens. But it was only a little sigh, and did not include the golden empress who would have shared that palace. Lea was snuggled against him, and in that moment he knew that her kisses were worth more than all the gold in the world.
