

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



VOLUME XIII

NUMBER 6

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE:—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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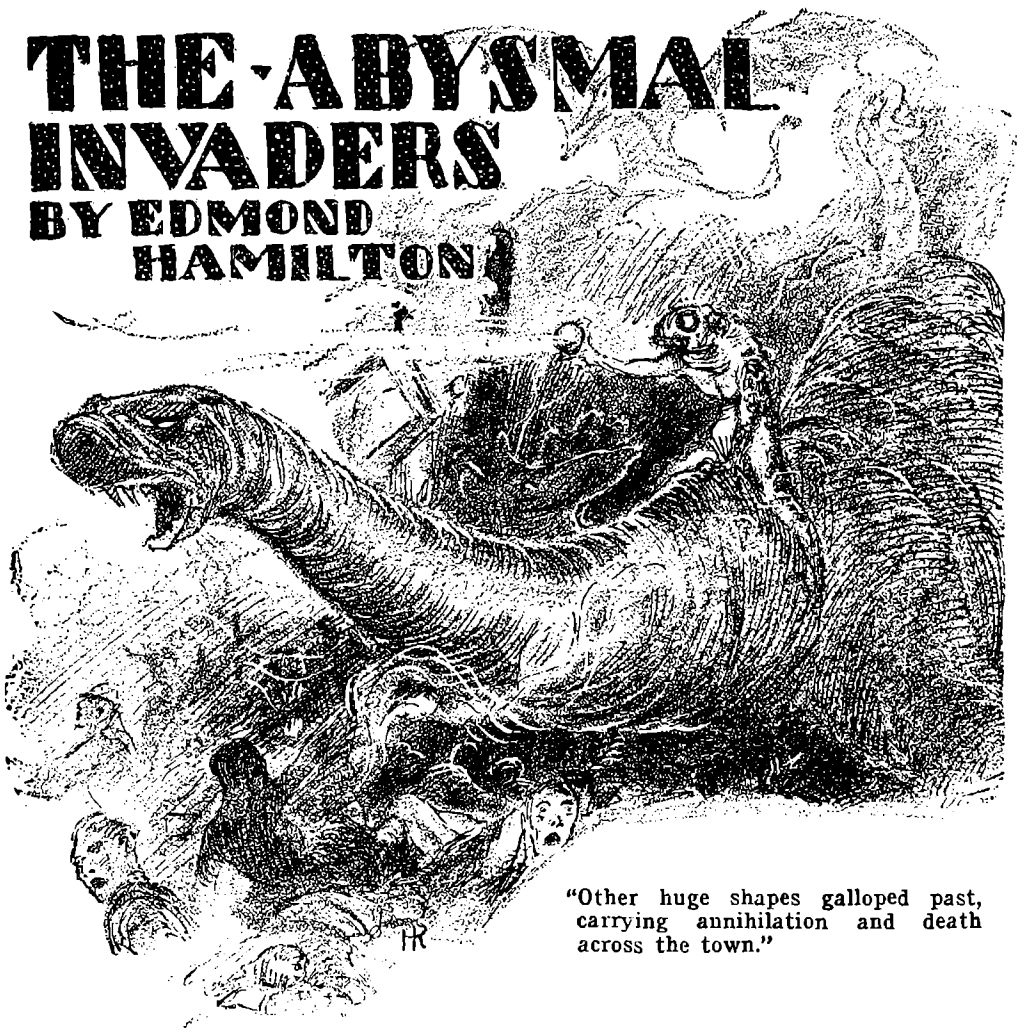
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THE ABYSSAL INVADERS

BY EDMOND
HAMILTON



"Other huge shapes galloped past, carrying annihilation and death across the town."

MUCH of the story, no doubt, we shall never know. Much concerning that staggering, deadly invasion which leapt out upon an unsuspecting world will remain forever hidden by that dark curtain of mystery which screens from us the workings of the unknown. Theories, suggestions, surmises — with these alone can we fill the gaps in our knowledge, and these are valueless. It were better to ignore them entirely, in any history of the thing, and record only the known facts. And such a record begins, inevitably, with the disappearance of Dr. Morton, and with the sensational circumstances surrounding that disappearance.

It is easy enough to understand the sensation caused by the thing, for Dr. Morton—Dr. Walter Morton—was considered the world's foremost living paleontologist at the time. Attached to the great Northcote Museum in Chicago for a dozen years, he had risen in those years to the summit of eminence in his chosen field of science. It was he who had found in a Kentucky cavern the first perfect specimen of the ichthyornis, rarest of Mesozoic birds; he who had completely shattered the "dinosaur-transition" theory by his brilliant comparison of saurpodian and ornithischian characteristics; and he who had discovered the rich bone-fields at Salty

Gulch, in Montana, unearthing there the superb allosaurus and stegosaurus skeletons which made the Northcote collections unrivaled.

Such achievements would have brought fame to any man, and in Morton's case that fame was heightened by the fact that most of his work he had carried out single-handed. It was his custom, indeed, to conduct his prospective surveys quite alone, securing help only for the actual unearthing of his own discoveries. So that it was alone that he had gone into the dark fastnesses of Sutter's Swamp, early in May, in search of the traces of prehistoric animal life which he believed might exist there.

Sutter's Swamp was an area of perhaps a dozen square miles which lay in the Illinois farming country some scores of miles southwest of Chicago, and a few miles east of the modern little city of Brinton. It was a place of almost incredible desolation, considering its nearness to the busy little town, a great, forest-covered tangle of sluggish streams and stagnant pools. Lying in a perpetual twilight beneath its canopy of vine-choked trees, its surface was a confusion of green water and treacherous quicksands and fallen logs, with here and there a mound of solid ground. To most scientists, no doubt, the place would have seemed unpromising enough for a paleontological survey, since never had prehistoric fossils been found in that section. Morton, however, had merely stated in his quiet way that he intended to carry out an exploration of the place, and had departed for it without further announcement.

Arriving in Brinton, quite alone, he had lodged at a hotel and had immediately plunged into his work. Each morning at sunrise he sallied out to the great morass in rough tweed and hip-boots, armed with a long probing-rod of slender steel. To those in Brinton he must have been a perplexing figure, for the great

swamp was avoided by them, always, but after a few days they became accustomed to him and took no further note of his comings and goings. And then, a week after his arrival, there burst upon them the sensation of his disappearance.

On that day Morton had set forth for the swamp at sunrise as usual, and one Brinton-bound farmer had glimpsed him entering the western edge of the morass. Through that day nothing further was heard of him, but as it was Morton's habit to linger in the swamp until darkness compelled his return, no anxiety was felt when he was still absent by nightfall. It was only on the next morning, when his absence had lasted for twenty-four hours, that it began to be commented on by some of his Brinton acquaintances.

Discussing it, their doubt and anxiety grew to such a point that shortly before noon two of them drove out to the swamp in the hope of finding some trace of Morton's whereabouts. It was some hours later that they returned, and when they did so they brought with them a tale which spread over the town like flame, and which set the wires between Brinton and Chicago humming with dispatches to the latter city's newspapers.

As told by them, the two had left their car at the swamp's edge and ventured for more than a mile into the morass, without finding any trace of the missing scientist. A mile in, though, they had abruptly come upon some things quite as inexplicable as the absence of Morton. These were great lanes of destruction which some force had torn across the forested swamp, wide paths in which the trees had been smashed down and crushed as though by the passage of some gigantic creature or creatures. And on the mounds and spots of solid ground along these pathways of destruction they had found strange large tracks, which could have been

made by no conceivable living creature but which were entirely unexplainable otherwise. Gigantic and five-toed, these tracks were sunken deep in the soft earth, and were each a full square yard in size. Wherever the lanes of smashed trees lay the great tracks had been found also, seeming to lead inward toward the center of the swamp. The two men had stared at these for a time, dumfounded, and then, not daring to venture farther into the gloomy recesses of the swamp, had hastened back to Brinton with their story.

Within minutes that story had spread over all of Brinton, and within hours it was being shouted forth by yelling newsboys in the Chicago streets. In itself the disappearance of so noted a scientist as Morton would have been startling, but coupled with the mysterious phenomena of the swamp it was sensational. By nightfall a dozen reporters and photographers had arrived in Brinton in quest of further details, and with them had come as a representative of the Northcote institution young Edward Rowan, who had been Morton's chief assistant.

Rowan and the reporters found the little town in a state of turmoil that night, the one topic of excited discussion being the phenomena of the swamp. A posse was being formed, they learned, with which to beat the swamp from end to end on the next morning, in the hope of finding the missing scientist somewhere in its recesses. Young Rowan himself instantly volunteered as a member of the posse and was accepted.

To those in Brinton, however, the disappearance of the scientist was almost a secondary consideration beside the strange tracks and pathways which had been found in the morass. Morton's disappearance, after all, might be due to his stepping into a quicksand, but no natural force or forces could account for the lanes of smashed trees and the giant tracks.

No animal on earth, of course, was mighty enough to cause those tracks and pathways, yet what could have done so? Was the thing only a practical joke or hoax of some kind?

Until late that night the town's bright-lighted streets remained crowded with unaccustomed throngs of citizens arguing the matter, sometimes heatedly, or exchanging jests concerning it with passing friends. By most, indeed, the matter was treated more as an elaborate joke than anything else, yet one might have sensed also among those shifting throngs an unspoken elation, a curious pride. Whatever was behind the thing, they felt, it was at least bringing fame to Brinton. North and south and east and west, they knew, the wires would be flashing the story. All the nation would read of it, in the morning. And in the morning, too, the swamp would be searched, the thing cleared up. In the morning . . .

Thus ran the speech and thoughts of those in the streets that night. And strange it seems, to us, that the people in the streets of Brinton could have spoken thus, that night, could have thought thus. Incredible it seems, indeed, that of them all none ever suspected what dark horror out of long-dead ages was even then rising from behind their little mystery, what mighty, resistless menace was even then crashing gigantically through the outside night, to sweep down upon the little town in one great avalanche of destruction and death.

2

IT IS in the account of young Rowan that one finds, now, the clearest picture of the coming of the terror to Brinton. There are other accounts, for though the survivors of that terror were but few most of them have recorded their experiences; yet for the most part their narratives are too horror-stricken and incoherent to be of any real value. Rowan, on the

other hand, not only saw the thing as well or better than any other single man, but set down his impressions of it in vivid style.

His narrative begins with the events already detailed, the disappearance of Dr. Morton and his own coming to Brinton. It had been some time after nightfall that he had arrived, and after making arrangements to accompany the posse into the swamp on the next morning he had ventured out into the streets of the town, which were still filled with the shuffling throngs discussing the sensation of the day. Along the streets the windows of stores were still brilliant, their proprietors taking advantage of the unaccustomed throngs, while a few raucous-voiced newsboys were selling late editions of a Chicago daily which had featured the sensation. For an hour or more Rowan strolled on through the streets and then, yawning, began to move back toward his hotel, through the thinning crowds. He had just reached the building's door when he suddenly halted.

From away toward the street's eastern end had come a sudden, high-pitched cry, a thrilling scream which was repeated in the distance by a score of voices, and then succeeded by a dull roar. Rowan stepped out into the street, gazing down its length, lit by the suspended brilliance of the street-lights. A few of the groups on the sidewalks near by had stepped out beside him, and with these he stared down the long street's length toward the source of the shouting cries.

He glimpsed, in a moment, a horde of figures running up the street toward him, a disorganized little mob which was giving utterance to a medley of hoarse shouts and screams. The mob parted, for a moment, and there roared through it a crowded automobile, racing up the street with immense speed, and past the wondering Rowan and those around him. And now he heard, simultaneously, a wild

ringing of bells toward the south and a far-away crash which murmured faintly to his ears from the east. With every moment the clamor around him was increasing, the whole city awakening, and lights flashing out in windows on every side.

By then the people around him had caught the contagion of panic and were hastening away toward the west also, but Rowan held his ground until the first running figures of the mob farther down the street were racing past him. Then he reached out and seized one of these, a shabby, middle-aged man whose face was contorted with panic.

"What's the matter?" he cried, striving to make himself heard over the thunderous, increasing clamor about him. "What's happening?"

The man he held bawled something indistinguishable in his ear, and at the same time wrenched frantically loose from his grasp, hurrying on. Some hundreds of feet down the street the main body of the mob was now racing toward Rowan, and then, beyond that mob, Rowan saw by the brilliant street-lamps the cause of their panic flight.

Far down the street there was thundering toward him a gigantic creature which his eyes refused for the moment to credit, a titanic, dark thing whose tremendous, rumbling tread shook the very ground on which he himself stood. A hundred feet in length and a third of that in height it loomed, a colossal dark bulk upheld by four massive legs, tapering into a huge tail behind and carrying before it a long, sinuous neck which ended in a small, reptilian head. High up on the great thing's mighty, curving back clung some smaller creature which he could but vaguely glimpse, and down the street behind it were thundering a half-dozen more like itself, vast, incredible, charging down the street upon the madly screaming mob which fled before them. For one

mad, whirling moment Rowan stared, and then he shouted aloud.

"Brontosaurus!" he cried, standing there for the moment quite unconscious of his own peril from the onward-thundering monsters. Brontosaurus! Monsters out of earth's dawn, thundering through a Twentieth Century city! Mighty dinosaurs of the Mesozoic age, the most terrible creatures ever to appear on this planet, bridging the gap of millions of years to crash through the little town! Rowan stood rigid as they thundered on toward him, heard their mighty, throaty bellows as they overtook the fleeing mob, and then saw them trampling over that mob as bulls might trample ants, smashing them beneath gigantic feet, annihilating them with sweeps of the huge tails, thundering, crashing on.

And now they were within yards of him and he found himself staggering back from the street into a crevice between two buildings at its side. The next moment the great monsters had thundered past him, their gigantic tread shaking the earth beneath him, and in that moment he glimpsed clearly the creatures who rode upon their backs. Small and manlike shapes were these, but lizardlike, too, their limbs and bodies green-scaled, their extremities armed with sharp talons, their heads thick and conical and featureless, except for the big, dark, disklike eyes and the wide-fanged mouths. And as they thundered past on their gigantic mounts he saw one raise an arm with a white globe in its grasp, saw a beam of pale and feeble light which flickered out from that globe and struck buildings to right and left, buildings which burst into great masses of flame as the pale beam touched them.

And now the great creatures had swept past him and from farther up the street came their bellowing clamor, pierced by sharp, agonized screams from the tiny running figures there. Around Rowan flames were shooting

up in great roaring bursts, and beyond he saw one of the great brontosaurus rearing up against the side of a building, saw that building's walls collapse and crash beneath the huge beast's weight. From right and left came other mighty crashes throughout the city, and an unceasing, thunderous clamor of sounds, the deep and terrible bellowing of the dinosaurs as they crashed across the town, the screams of their victims trampled beneath giant feet, the hiss of the flickering beams, the roar of bursting flames. Down the street, too, was the rumbling of more of the great brontosaurus, racing up the street and past the spot where Rowan crouched, galloping gigantically to the attack.

After them came a single dark, great shape, almost as huge, a great reptilian form whose huge paws gleamed with mighty claws, whose broad-gaping mouth showed immense fangs, leaping forward in quick, gigantic hops like some giant toad, its small eyes glittering in the flame-light of the burning buildings. In a moment it had whirled past Rowan in a series of mighty hops and he glimpsed it farther up the street, pouncing upon the few surviving little figures who ran screaming for shelter, inconceivably swift and catlike in its resistless rushes. And as Rowan saw it leaping on he felt reason deserting him.

"God!" he whispered. "A tyrannosaurus!"

Crouched there at the street's edge he huddled, the buildings around him a storm of leaping flame, while down through that lane of fire there thundered into the town from the east the creatures of a long-dead age, the mighty beasts of earth's youth extinct for millions of years. Rowan was never afterward able to recall all that he saw and heard in the minutes that he crouched there. He knew that other brontosaurus rumbled past, bellowing, ridden by the lizard-creatures whose pale rays swept and

stabbed in great circles of fiery destruction; that other tyrannosaurs swept by with swift and mighty leaps, pawing human victims from the wreckage at the street's sides, pouncing and whirling like gigantic cats; that other colossal reptilian shapes, their mighty, curving backs armored by great, upstanding plates, rushed past like great battering-rams of flesh and bone, crashing into buildings and through walls as though of paper, great stegosaurus that thundered on after the others who carried annihilation and death across the town; that still other huge rhinoceroslike shapes galloped past, triceratops who crashed resistlessly on with lowered heads, impaling all before them on their three terrible horns.

All of these Rowan saw, dimly, as though from a great distance, while in his ears beat all the vast roar of sound from the stricken town around him, screams and shouts and hissing cries and vast bellows, roar of flame and crash of falling walls. The great wave of destruction, the mass of the attacking monsters, had swept past and was rolling now over the town toward the west, but still Rowan crouched, motionless. Then behind him was a mounting roar of swiftly catching flame, and out toward him crept little tongues of red fire as the walls between which he crouched began to burn. Then, at last, Rowan rose to his feet and staggered out into the street.

The street-lights had vanished with the bursting of their poles and cables by the rush of the great dinosaurs, but all around him was illumined brilliantly by the light of the flaming buildings. North and south and west the city was burning, vast sheets of murky flame roaring up from it in scores of places, and by the light of those distant fires Rowan glimpsed the scores of titanic dark shapes that crashed still through streets and walls, glimpsed the play of the livid rays

and heard the thin cries of those who still fled before the mighty, bellowing dinosaurs. A moment he stood at the street's center, motionless, and then above him was a whirring and flapping of colossal wings, and he looked up to see a vast, dark shape swooping swiftly down upon him.

In a single moment he glimpsed the thing, the forty-foot spread of its huge, batlike wings, the great reptilian head thrust down toward him as it swooped, white fangs gleaming and red eyes shining in the firelight, and in that flashing moment recognized the thing for what it was, a pterodactyl, a flying monster out of the dead ages. Then he saw that upon it rode one of the scaled, dark-eyed lizard-creatures, whose arm was coming up with a white globe in its grasp as its dragon-mount dove down toward Rowan.

The next moment Rowan had thrown himself suddenly aside, and as he did so felt the great pterodactyl sweep over him by a few feet, glimpsed a beam of pale light that flickered down from the upheld globe and struck the street beside him, cracking and rending the pavement there with its intense heat and scorching his own shoulder as it grazed it. Then the giant thing had passed and was flapping on to the west, while behind and above it flew others of its kind, mighty flying reptiles ridden by the lizard-creatures, whose pallid rays struck down with fire and death as they swooped on with whirring wings.

And then suddenly Rowan was running, dazed and blind with terror, down the street toward the east, between the flaming lines of buildings and over the crushed fragments of humanity which lay there. Down the street's length he ran, and out between its last buildings, and on and on into the night, crazedly, aimlessly. The roar of flames and thunderous din of the town behind him dwindled as he ran, but he did not look back, throw-

ing himself blindly forward through the darkness, weeping and wringing his hands, stumbling, staggering on.

3

How long it was before the mists of terror that clouded his brain finally cleared and lifted, how long he stumbled blindly through the night, Rowan could never guess. When he finally came back to realization of his surroundings he found himself standing knee-deep in water and mud, standing in a thick forest whose dark trees formed over him a great canopy of twisted foliage, and whose floor was a swampy expanse of shallow pools and yielding sands. Far behind him there glowed feebly in the sky a glare of ruddy light, half glimpsed through the rifts in the foliage overhead, and as his eyes took in that crimson glare sudden memory came to his dazed brain.

"God!" he whispered. And again, the single syllable: "God!"

For minutes he stood there, paying no attention to his own surroundings, his mind on that tremendous and unthinkable attack which had crashed upon Brinton from the outside night, of the terrible dinosaurs and their strange riders who had descended upon the town. Whence had they come, those gigantic reptilian monsters whose like earth had not seen for hundreds of millions of years? And who, what, were those lizard-shapes who had ridden and directed them, whose pale rays had swept fiery death across the town?

Abruptly Rowan's mind snapped back to consideration of his own predicament, and swiftly he looked about him. The thick forest around him, the mud and stagnant water in which he stood, the odor of rotting vegetation in his nostrils—in a moment he recognized them.

"The swamp!" he whispered. "I came eastward from the town, and this——"

A moment he paused, glancing around and back toward the glare of red light in the sky behind, then turned and began to move forward. Through stagnant, scummy pools he splashed, feeling himself sinking once into treacherous sands but jerking out of them in swift panic, clambering over fallen trees and across ridges and mounds of solid ground, through thick tangles of shrubs and briars. Once he lay for moments on one of the mounds, panting for breath, and starting up through the twisted branches above to where the shining, unchanging constellations marched serenely across the heavens. Then he rose and pressed on, conscious only of the desire to put more and more distance between himself and the inferno of terror which Brinton had become.

Abruptly he stepped out of the close forest into a wide clear space, a broad pathway cut through that forest by some great force, in which the trees and bushes had been ground down into crushed and splintered masses. Rowan stepped into this broad lane of destruction, wondering, and saw that it ran east and west, apparently across the swamp. Then into his mind leapt remembrance of those great pathways of smashed trees which the searchers for Morton had found near the swamp's edge. Could it be that——?

Before he could complete the thought there came a sudden dull reverberation from the swamp to eastward, a quivering of the ground beneath him, a rumbling thunder rapidly nearing him. In sudden panic he shrank back into the forest at the broad path's edge, and the next moment their appeared in the east along that path a mighty shape, thundering down the path toward him and dimly visible in the starlight. It was a brontosaurus, he saw, bearing one of the dark lizard-shapes which rode at the base of its great neck, thundering down the path toward the west in giant, earth-shaking strides. Another

followed it, and another, until four had passed, and then the thunder of their great tread died away in the west, as they galloped on toward Brinton. Rowan stared after them and then, as a sudden thought flared in his brain, he crept again from the sheltering trees and moved steadily eastward into the swamp, following the great path by which the brontosaurus had come.

The path was beaten hard and flat, he found, and seemed to lead due eastward into the heart of the swamp. And as he followed it, as he crept onward, light came to his eyes from far ahead, a white brilliance which filtered faintly through the ranks of close-packed trees. Steadily Rowan crept on toward it, and then as its radiance began to strengthen he left the broad path and slipped again into the shelter of the forest, creeping forward ever more cautiously between the close-ranked trees and over the rotting, stagnant slime toward the source of the pallid light ahead.

A dull roar of sound came to his ears as he went on, a whistling, shrieking clamor as of some great wind which raged ceaselessly, louder and louder as he neared it. Through the trees ahead he glimpsed a broad open space lit by the white radiance, and dropped to his knees, crawling silently on. At last he had crept to the very edge of the open space and lay crouched in the slime behind a great tree, peering tensely forward.

Before him lay a great, flat mound of solid ground, elevated a few feet above the ooze of the swamp, roughly square in shape and fully one thousand feet across. It was quite bare and treeless, all vegetation upon it having apparently been sheared away, and was lit by a single globe of radiant white light suspended by a slender shaft of metal high above the great mound's surface. At the center of the broad, flat surface there yawned a tremendous pit which occupied half the mound's

expanse, a vast circular shaft some hundreds of feet across whose smooth, perpendicular sides gleamed dully as though coated with metal. From where he crouched at the great mound's edge he could glimpse only the round mouth of the great shaft and a few feet of its downward-sinking sides, but he perceived that it was from this mighty pit that there roared upward the thunderous torrent of unceasing winds. Then his attention shifted from the great pit to the creatures grouped near its rim.

At the far edge of the great shaft there rose from the ground a strange, three-pillared structure of gleaming metal, bearing on an upheld plate a number of shining studs and a single large dial or wheel of metal. And beside this structure stood a knot of unearthly creatures, green-scaled, dark-eyed lizard-shapes like those he had glimpsed in the attack on Brinton. These were standing across the pit from him, at the very rim of the great shaft, and one or two of them were apparently staring down into the darkness of the shaft itself.

And now, over the raging shriek of winds from the pit, came another sound to the crouching Rowan's ears, a faint but deep bellowing which grew swiftly louder. He saw the lizard-men at the pit's edge stir, look downward, and then suddenly there rose up out of the great shaft's depths a great, round platform of metal, a mighty, disklike platform fully four hundred feet across which all but filled the mouth of the great pit as it rose, separated from that pit's edge by a tiny circular gap of a yard or less. Up from the dark depths of the shaft floated this great platform, slower and slower, and he saw that upon it were standing two of the gigantic, bellowing brontosaurus and some half-dozen more of the lizard-men. Smoothly the vast disk and its great burden drifted up-

ward, until it hung level with the edges of the pit, its vast weight and the weight it bore suspended incredibly above the abyss. A moment it hung there, and in that moment the lizard-men on it stepped swiftly out onto the mound, prodding the two brontosaurus on before them. The empty platform hovered a moment longer at the pit's edge, and then began to sink slowly downward, gathering speed swiftly and dropping smoothly out of sight into the dark depths of the giant shaft.

Rowan gasped. That mighty platform, moving up the great shaft and down it, with upon it the great brontosaurus—from what unguessed depths below had it come? He saw that the lizard-men now were swinging up into curious, saddle-like seats affixed upon the backs of the giant beasts, and then heard them utter rasping cries, at which the two dinosaurs moved obediently forward, off the mound and onto the broad, beaten path which led from its edge westward through the swamp toward Brinton. In a moment the two great beasts and their riders had thundered down that path and disappeared, while on the mound were left only three of the lizard-creatures, who conversed in low, rasping tones.

MINUTES passed while Rowan crouched there, watching them, and then one pointed downward into the shaft again, and in a moment there floated up once more the great disk-platform, but empty this time. It swept smoothly up once more to the edge of the shaft's mouth, hung motionless momentarily again at that edge, and then sank from sight once more. Rowan saw, then, that its motion was apparently automatic, and then before he could speculate further on it all his attention focused on the three lizard-men on the mound, who were walking together

toward the great path which led west from that mound.

One seemed to point westward, where the red glare of light from burning Brinton still quivered in the sky, and then the three had disappeared down the path, evidently for a better view, since Rowan still could hear over the shriek of winds from the pit the rasping of their harsh, insectlike voices in the distance. Minutes he crouched, while the white-lit mound before him lay unoccupied, and then rose suddenly from his place of concealment and crept silently across the mound to the rim of the great pit. Tensely he craned forward, staring downward.

In his ears was the deafening roar of the winds from beneath, winds which tore at him with cyclonic fury as they rushed up from the dark depths of the shaft. Staring down into that shaft Rowan could see nothing, since its interior was of intense and unrelieved blackness, without spark of light. As seconds passed, though, and his eyes became more accustomed to the blackness beneath, he seemed to sense, rather than see, a quiver of light far below, a wavering, flickering of light that lasted for but a moment and then vanished. And then he glimpsed something far below that was rising swiftly toward him, something that gleamed a little in the white light from above him. The platform!

Abruptly there was a sound of sharp movement behind Rowan, and he whirled around, then stood motionless. At the mound's west edge there stood a single one of the sealed, unhuman lizard-creatures, his eyes full upon Rowan. From down the great path came the rasping squeak of the voices of the other two, but the one was silent, staring straight toward him. Then, with a movement inconceivably swift, he had leapt forward.

Rowan cried out as the creature

leapt, then felt himself grasped by powerful, taloned claws, thrown to the ground, whirling about at the pit's edge in threshing combat. He heard a harsh cry from the creature that grasped him, heard the cries of the other two as they raced now to his aid. The two struggling figures were at the very rim of the great shaft, now, rolling and twisting, and in one uppermost moment Rowan glimpsed the mighty disk-platform sweeping up out of the depths of that shaft, hovering motionless at its mouth, beside him.

He staggered to his feet, still in the other's grasp, striking frantically out with clenched fists. Now the other two had raced up on the mound, he saw, and were leaping toward the combat. Then Rowan gave a frantic wrench and twist, felt himself and the creature holding him tottering at the rim of the abyss, and then they had fallen, still striking and twisting, had fallen upon the great disk as it hovered momentarily at the pit's edge beside them, and locked still in deadly combat upon that disk were sinking ever more swiftly downward, into the darkness of the giant shaft, into the raging of the deafening winds, down, down, down. . . .

4

FOR how many minutes he struggled thus with his lizard-thing opponent on the great disk, Rowan could not guess. Twisting, squirming, striking, the two rolled about, and then as the powerful muscles of the creature began to wear down his own resistance, Rowan put forth all his strength in one last effort. Grasping the scaled body of the creature with his left arm he encircled its conical head with his right and twisted that head back with all his force. There was a moment of intense effort, a frantic threshing of the creature in his grasp, and then a

muffled snap as of breaking bones, and the thing lay limp and still. Rowan scrambled up to his knees, panting.

Around him now roared the deafening torrents of ascending and descending winds, and a few feet away from him the smooth metal wall of the great shaft was flashing upward with immense speed as the disk shot downward. From high above a pale white light fell down upon him, a little circle of white radiance that was swiftly contracting, dwindling, as the disk flashed down. In a moment it had dwindled to a spark of light, and then had vanished entirely. And then about Rowan was only darkness—darkness and the thundering bellow of the raging winds.

He crept to the edge of the great disk, now, peered down over the low protecting rail that rimmed it, straining his eyes down through the darkness. The flicker of light he had glimpsed from above was clear now to his eyes, a tiny patch of quivering red light that was growing rapidly stronger, larger, as the disk flashed down toward it. Crouched at the great descending platform's edge Rowan gazed down toward it, hair blown back by the great winds that raged past him, clinging to his hold against their tremendous force. The patch of illumination was swiftly broadening, until it lay across all the shaft far below, a crimson, quivering glare.

And now it seemed to Rowan that the downward-shooting disk-platform was slowing a little its tremendous speed. The gleaming walls around him were not flashing upward so swiftly, he thought, and then even as that thought came to him the great disk shot down out of the darkness of the shaft and into a glare of lurid crimson light, into a titanic, cavernous space which seemed to his eyes in that moment limitless.

He was conscious first of a mighty

curving roof of rock close above him, from which the disk was dropping smoothly downward, and in which there yawned a black circle which was the opening of the shaft down which he had come. A full mile below lay the floor of the mighty cavern, stretching away for miles on every side, a colossal underworld lit by the crimson, wavering glare. Then Rowan's stunned eyes made out, far away, the titanic, precipitous walls of gray rock which formed the great cavern's sides, miles in the distance, stretching from floor to rocky roof. And as his eyes swept along them they came to rest upon the blinding, dazzling source of the crimson light that illuminated all this cavern world.

In the gray wall to his right, miles away, was a great, slitlike opening near the roof, an opening through which there poured down a mighty torrent of blazing, liquid fire, a colossal Niagara of molten flame whose crimson, blazing radiance shot out a quivering glare which lit luridly the whole mighty cavern. For thousands of feet the great torrent of raging fires tumbled downward, caught at the base of the cliff in a canal of gray stone which conveyed it, a river of living flame, into a central basin of stone of the same diameter as the great shaft above, and which lay just beneath the opening of that shaft in the roof and beneath the descending disk, a lake of leaping flame. Around it were grouped a circle of strange, blunt-nosed machines of some sort, and down toward it the disk-platform was smoothly sinking.

And beyond and around it, on the stupendous cavern's floor, there stretched mass upon mass of huge buildings, gray and mighty and ancient in appearance, buildings which resembled masses of gigantic gray cubes piled upon each other in neatly geometrical designs. Broad streets cut through their square-cut masses, and in those streets moved great throngs of large and smaller

shapes, mighty dinosaurs and masses of the lizard-men. Far away to the distant, encircling walls stretched the massed buildings, and over them hovered here and there great pterodactyls bearing lizard-riders, flitting across the cavern from place to place on their immense, flapping wings.

Rowan stared, stupefied, stunned, crouching at the edge of his descending disk, and then became suddenly aware of fierce and increasing heat beating up toward him. He looked down, saw that the disk was dropping straight toward the lake of fire below, sprang to its edge in sudden fear as it dropped on.

Down, down—ever more slowly the great disk was sinking, now; down until at last it hovered motionless a scant fifty feet above the surface of the molten lake, hanging level with the edges of the circular stone basin which held that lake, and level with the floor of the mighty cavern. A moment only it hovered there, and in that moment Rowan saw that awaiting it at the great basin's edge stood a half-score of the lizard-men. Even in the moment he saw them they glimpsed him crouching at the disk's edge, and instantly two of them leapt upon the disk, with the white globes that held the heat-beam outstretched toward him. He cowered back, but instead of loosing the ray upon him one grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him from the platform onto the basin's edge, just as the great disk began to move upward from that edge. Standing there for the moment Rowan saw the great disk floating smoothly up once more into the lurid light toward the black round opening of the shaft in the roof of rock above, rising swiftly into that shaft and disappearing from view inside it as it flashed upward once more on its endless, automatic motion.

As one of his captors tugged suddenly at his arm, though, he turned, and the creature pointed toward the gigantic gray buildings ahead, at the

same time jerking him forward. Slowly Rowan started toward them, while on each side of him walked one of the lizard-men, their deadly white globes ready for action.

A moment and they had left the broad clear plaza of stone where lay the fiery lake, and were entering one of the wide streets which cut across the masses of the city's buildings. As he marched down that street between his two guards Rowan all but forgot his own predicament, so intensely interesting was the panorama before his eyes, a shifting pageant of creatures of the world's youth, enthralling to the eyes of the palcontologist.

For through the streets were pouring masses of the lizard-men, bearing tools or weapons, hurrying along on taloned feet or riding huge bronto-saurs, who tramped majestically along the street's center while the walking crowds clung to its sides. Here and there, too, moved other dinosaurs, almost as huge, bearing burdens or ridden by lizard-men, the reptilian beast-servants of a lizard race. Tyrannosaurs there were, moving along in their swift, hopping gait, the fiercest and most terrible of all the dinosaurs, yet servants, like the rest, of the green-scaled lizard-folk; allosaurs, like smaller replicas of the great tyrannosaurs; mighty-armored stegosaurs and great-horned triceratops, and over all the whirring wings of the great pterodactyls.

As they marched on down the street, attracting but little attention from the hurrying lizard-creatures, Rowan saw that in the great gray buildings on each side the doors opening into the street were of immense size, forty to fifty feet in height, and saw here and there a giant dinosaur entering or emerging from one of those great open doorways in obedience to the command of its lizard master. Then abruptly his two guards turned with him into one of them, and he found himself in a long, colossal corridor, its gray

roof fifty feet above him and its width almost as great. Here and there along this great corridor were open doorways, and into one of these he was jerked by his guards, finding himself in the presence of three other of the lizard-creatures who sat behind a metal block much like a legless table.

To these his guards spoke in their harsh voices. There was a moment of silence, and then a rasping command from one of the three, at which he was instantly reconducted from the room and down the corridor's length to a smaller, bolted door. A moment his captors fumbled with its bolt, then opened the door by sliding it down into an aperture in the floor, motioning Rowan inside and keeping the white globes full upon him.

Hopelessly he stepped in, and the door slid up and shut behind him, while in a moment the bolts clanged shut outside. Rowan turned slowly around, then stood rigid. Across the room from him a single figure was staring at him, and as his eyes took in that figure a cry broke from him:

"Morton!"

5

A SINGLE moment the other stared at him, unspeaking, a haggard, unshaven figure utterly different from the trim little scientist Rowan remembered, and then he came across the room, hands outstretched.

"Rowan!" he cried, hoarsely. "Good God, you here, Rowan!" Then his thoughts shifted, lightning-like. "They've gone out, Rowan?" he asked. "These things—these creatures—they've started their attack?"

"Yes," said the assistant. "Over Brinton, hours ago. I came—when you disappeared there in the swamp." Swiftly he spoke of the attack on Brinton, of his own crazed flight into the swamp, his own trip

down the shaft and capture, and when he had finished Morton was silent, his face a mask. When at last he spoke it was in a whisper.

"They've started," he whispered. "Over Brinton—and over all earth, now. And I who might have warned, captured——"

"You were captured by them there in the swamp?" asked Rowan, quickly, and the other inclined his head.

"Taken there by them, without a chance to escape. And taken down here. . . ."

"You know, Rowan, why I came to Brinton, to the swamp, to investigate the rumors we had heard of great bones and skeletons existing in the slime of that swamp. And in the week I spent investigating the morass I found that the rumors had spoken truly, for here and there inside the edges of the morass I found great bone-fragments which could only come from dinosaur skeletons. Then, a week after I had begun my search, the thing happened.

"I was working with my probing-rod, perhaps a mile inside the swamp, when there was a sudden distant crashing of trees and I saw a gigantic, slate-colored bulk rolling across the forest toward me. Before I could recover from my amazement the thing was on me, a great brontosaurus ridden by one of the lizard-men—a gigantic dinosaur out of the Mesozoic age, crashing through an Illinois swamp! Before I could gather my stunned wits another had crashed toward me from beyond it, and in an instant I was the prisoner of the lizard-creatures, who fettered my hands and feet, crashed back on the great brontosaurus with me toward that mound at the swamp's center, where there yawned the opening of the great shaft. Up and down that shaft moves the great disk-platform, endlessly, and on it they brought me down to this cavern world, down to this gray city of

theirs and into this building. And here, first, I was examined by three of their number who seemed to hold positions of authority among them.

"For hours the three examined me, striving to converse with me in their rasping tones, endeavoring to make plain to me the elementary word-sounds of their strange language. That language, I found, is a phonetic one, but aided by gestures and written diagrams we were able to attain to a rough exchange of ideas. And partly through their own questions, partly through what I had seen in the great cavern outside, I came to understand who and what these enigmatic creatures were, and where they had originated.

"They were beings of an age dead for hundreds of millions of years, I learnt, creatures of the Mesozoic age, that period of the earth's history which we call the age of reptiles. For in that age the races of mammals had hardly begun to arise, and the great and smaller reptiles and lizard-races were the rulers of all earth. And just as man, the creature of dominant intelligence, was to develop later from the races of mammals, so had these lizard-men, the dominant intelligence of their own age, developed from the races of reptiles. They had spread out in great numbers over what is now North America, the most habitable portion of earth during the Mesozoic age. They had built strange cities, had developed their knowledge and science in myriad ways, and had learned how to conquer and subjugate the great reptilian creatures who swarmed then on earth, to make servants of them. The great brontosaurus, more tractable than the rest, they used as mounts and beasts of burden; the fiercer tyrannosaurs and allosaurs were their beasts of war; and on the mighty pterodactyls they soared into the upper air and flitted across earth's surface. Great indeed was

their power, and through that power and through their terrible, giant servants they ruled all the habitable parts of earth unquestioningly.

“At last, though, there came that great convulsion of earth which was to mark the end of the Mesozoic age, that vast world-cataclysm in which continents sank beneath the seas and new lands rose from the oceans’ depths. In such convulsions and mighty quakes the cities of the lizard-men were shaken down and annihilated, and across all their world was wild confusion. They knew, then, that they must find some other place of refuge or perish, and so they hit upon the plan of descending to one of the great cavernous spaces which lie scores of miles down in earth’s interior. They had discovered long before that such great caverns exist inside earth’s crust, and so they pierced a shaft down to one of them and descended into it to investigate.

“They found it a place large enough to hold all their numbers, and one quite habitable. It was lit perpetually with crimson light, too, since the molten fires of earth’s heart had pressed up close to the walls of the cavern, and through an opening in those walls there poured down eternally a raging Niagara of molten rock and flame, that titanic fall of living fire whose blazing radiance illuminates all this cavern-world. So beneath this fall of fire the lizard-men constructed a canal which conducted it into a great stone basin which lay directly beneath the opening of their shaft in the cavern’s roof, and from this basin the molten fires were able to seep gradually into crevices beneath the cavern.

“Naturally, however, an intensely powerful gale of heated air roared up from this molten lake, and by setting a ring of current-projectors around the lake they were able to concentrate the cyclonic power of those winds into a single concen-

trated air-current roaring straight up and through the shaft, and capable of lifting titanic weights up that shaft, just as a cyclone, which is concentrated wind, will lift and whirl about great buildings. And this terrific, upward-thrusting current they used to lift their great disk-platform up the shaft, arranging the projectors beneath so that the force of the current automatically lessened when the disk reached the top, and allowed it to sink again to the cavern’s floor, to the fiery lake, whence it traveled up again, and so on ceaselessly, an automatic, never-stopping lift or platform on which the throngs of the lizard-people and their dinosaur-beasts were able to move down into this cavern world.

“Only a portion of their dinosaur servants did they bring with them, leaving the rest to perish above, whose bones, indeed, I had found in the swamp. When this had been done they closed tightly the opening of the great shaft, above, and dismantled the great ascending and descending disk for which they no longer had need. Then their hordes set to work to build up their cities anew in their new cavern home. Far above them the surface of earth writhed and twisted gigantically, annihilating all the hordes of dinosaurs above, but the cavern world of the lizard-men remained unchanged, as they had foreseen, and in it they lived serenely on.

“**W**HEN at last the surface of earth quieted once more they could have quitted their underworld and gone back up, but they did not do so, since by then their city was established in the safe, warm world of the mighty cavern and they had no desire to leave it. So in that cavern they lived on, while on the world above the races of mammals rose to replace the great reptiles; until with the passing of ages man

rose to dominance over all those races and set his cities where those of the lizard-men had once stood. The mouth of the shaft was hidden and covered by the great swamp, and on all earth none suspected the races who dwelt beneath them.

“So ages passed, and might have continued so to pass until the end of time, had not necessity pressed once more upon the lizard-people in their cavern world. As I have said, the interior fires of earth’s heart had pressed up close against the walls of their cavern, bursting forth in one place in that fall of flame which lighted their world; and now the molten fires began to press with more and more force against the walls, forced up by convulsions far beneath, and it was only a question of time until they would burst through those walls and sweep over all the cavern world in a great cataclysm of annihilating fire, instantly wiping out all life in the cavern. They must leave it, they knew, before that happened, so they decided to venture back once more to earth’s surface. So they again placed the great disk-platform in position, and as it again swept ceaselessly up and down a party of them rose on it and opened the mouth of the shaft, in the swamp far above. It was that party, exploring the swamp on their great brontosaurus, who had captured me, and brought me down here to examine me. They had observed that intelligent creatures, men, now were established on earth’s surface, that one of their cities stood near the swamp itself, and so they planned to send up first a striking force which would annihilate that city, annihilate Brinton, to prevent any possible interference from it. Then that first attacking force would return down the shaft, leaving guards at its mouth, and all the lizard-people and their dinosaur hordes would gather and assemble

to pour up the shaft on the great disk and sweep out upon earth to conquer and annihilate the world we know. Besides their dinosaurs they had their own heat-beam projectors, those white globes in which they could condense and concentrate heat-vibrations, holding those vibrations static and releasing them at will in a concentrated ray.

“So they poured up the shaft to attack Brinton, and now that that attack has been made, their first striking force will return down here, gathering together all their hordes for the last attack on earth itself. Within hours, I think, that attack will take place, their hordes will swarm up the shaft and out over earth. Up at the shaft’s mouth they have placed a great switch which will be turned on when all of them have left this cavern and are safely above, and which will release concentrated rays down here that will blast the cavern’s walls and allow the floods of fire that press against them to burst into the cavern. For they fear that if they do not do so the imprisoned fires will burst forth in some mighty cataclysm that will wreck all earth. To loose the fires upon the cavern while they are in it would be to annihilate themselves, of course, but if it is done through the switch above after all of them have gained earth’s surface there will be no harm to themselves.

“So all their plan has been carried out, so far, and within hours now their hordes will be sweeping up the shaft and out over earth. And what then? What will the forces of man avail him? What troops could stand against the thundering, gigantic dinosaurs? What guns against the deadly heat-beams? What airplanes could ever battle with the hordes of circling, swooping pterodactyls and the rays of their lizard-riders? For man, and for the world of man, there looms

swift annihilation only, when the hordes of the lizard-men and their giant beasts sweep terribly upon him."

Morton's voice ceased, and he sat motionless, staring across the dusky little room with strange eyes. From the great corridor outside came the rasping voices of passing lizard-men, and the thundering tramp now and then of one of the great dinosaurs, but in the room itself was silence, as the two men regarded each other. Finally, with an effort, Rowan spoke.

"And so they plan to sweep out over all earth," he repeated, "plan to annihilate the world we know. And no chance of escape, for us, no chance to get back up to earth's surface——"

Morton raised his head, a sudden eagerness on his face. "There is still a chance," he said. "If we could get out of here—could get to that disk and back up the shaft! And we must, soon; for soon, I know, their hordes will be sweeping up that shaft, and when all are gone they will loose from above the fires upon this cavern, annihilating us unless we are slain by them before. Soon, I think, they will come to take you for questioning, also; since had they not intended to do so they would have slain you outright. And when they come—here is my plan——"

Swiftly he unfolded his scheme to Rowan, and wild as it seemed the other agreed to try it, as their only chance. Then they sat silent, for a time, in the darkness. It was a silence and a darkness torturing to Rowan. On earth above, he knew, the news of the terrible attack on Brinton would be flashing out, would be spreading terror and panic over all the world. And soon, now, would come the outward, resistless sweep of the lizard-men and their dinosaur hordes from this cavern world. Unless they escaped——

HOURS fled by as they sat there, while from outside came the unceasing hurrying of lizard-men and dinosaurs through the giant corridor. Then from the distance came a loud bellowing and chorus of rasping cries, and a thunder of many gigantic feet passing the building where they lay imprisoned.

"The first attackers!" whispered Morton. "They've come back, from Brinton—they'll be assembling now beyond the city there, making ready for all to go——"

Outside in the corridor the sounds had lessened, almost ceased. It would be sunset, by then, in the world above, Rowan thought, and he wondered, momentarily, whether the desperate scheme which he and Morton had agreed on was to be of no avail. Then, as though in answer to his thoughts, there came a sound of footsteps down the great hall outside, and a fumbling with the bolts.

Instantly the two were on their feet, and at once they put into action their plan. Leaping toward each other they locked instantly in battle, gripping and striking at each other furiously, swaying about the room, smiting and kicking. Rowan glimpsed the door slide down and open, saw two of the lizard-men entering with white globes held toward them, but he paid no attention to them, nor did Morton, the two men staggering about the room as though locked in a death-combat, twisting and swaying in assumed fury.

There was a rasping command from the lizard-men, but they heeded it not, still intent upon getting at each other's throat. Another command was given which they ignored also, and then that which they had hoped for happened, since the foremost of the lizard-men came toward them, gripping Rowan's arm with a taloned claw and pulling him back from Morton. And as he did so Rowan turned instantly and before

he could raise the deadly white globe had leapt upon him.

As he leapt he saw Morton springing upon the other of the two creatures; then all else vanished as he whirled blindly about the little room with the reptilian creature in his grasp. He held in his left hand the claw which gripped the white globe, preventing the creature from raising it, but as they spun dizzily about he felt his own strength beaten down by the lizard-man, since the power of the muscles under its scaled hide was tremendous. With a last effort he clung to the creature, to the claw that held the globe, and then heard a cry from Morton, saw the other of the two scaled shapes hurl his friend to the room's floor and leap toward the door. The next moment his own hold was torn loose as his opponent wrenched free and leapt in turn toward the door with his fellow.

A single moment Rowan glimpsed them as he staggered back, and then he became aware of something round in his hand, the white globe which his frantic grip had torn from his opponent's grasp. With a last instinctive action he raised it and threw it at the two at the door. It struck the wall beside them, the white globe seeming to smash under the impact; then there was a great flash of pallid light there, a gust of intensely heated air scorched over Rowan, and then the two lizard-things lay upon the floor as two charred, shapeless heaps. The smashing of the globe and the release of its condensed heat-vibrations had annihilated them.

Instantly Morton was on his feet and the two were staggering out of the room, into the immense, dusky corridor outside. Down it they ran, for a moment, then suddenly stopped. For from ahead had come the sound of immense steps, while some vast black bulk had suddenly blotted out the great square of crim-

son light at the corridor's open end, ahead. Then, as it came on, they saw the great thing clearly—a gigantic brontosaur that had halted momentarily a hundred feet down the corridor from them. A moment it surveyed them with small, glaring reptilian eyes, then raised its mighty neck and head with a vast, hoarse bellow and thundered straight down upon them.

6

AS THE colossal beast charged down upon them Rowan stood motionless, stunned, seeing as though in some nightmare dream the great snaky neck and head, the gigantic, trampling feet, and hearing in his ears the deep bellow of the oncoming monster. Then suddenly Morton had leapt forward, beside him, uttering a high, harsh-voiced cry, a cry at which the thundering brontosaur suddenly slowed, stopped. A scant twenty feet from them it stood, regarding them suspiciously, and Morton turned swiftly to the other.

"Come on, Rowan!" he cried. "I heard the lizard-men direct these beasts with that cry—I think it'll hold this one till we get past!"

Together they ran forward, down the corridor toward the gigantic brontosaur, which was regarding them with its small eyes in seeming perplexity, its head swaying to and fro on its sinuous neck as they neared it. Now they were to the great beast, pressing past it and between its great body and the corridor wall, its mighty bulk looming above them awe-inspiringly in the great corridor. As they ran past it the huge beast half turned, half stepped toward them, but as Morton repeated his strange high cry it halted again. The next moment Rowan breathed for the first time in seconds, for they were past the brontosaur and racing on down the corridor toward its open end.

As they neared that end they slowed their pace, crept forward more cautiously, until they were peering out into the great, crimson-lit street. The broad avenue seemed quite deserted and empty, and they sprang out into it, toward the central plaza where lay the lake of fire and its ascending and descending disk. But suddenly Morton turned, pointed back. Far down the street behind them a great mass of huge figures was moving toward them—a mob of mighty dinosaurs and lizard-riders which was coming rapidly up the avenue.

“They’re coming now!” cried Morton. “They’ve gathered—they’re ready—they’re going to go up the shaft, now!”

From the advancing horde they heard, now, deep, gigantic bellowings, answered far across the great gray city by others like it, by other masses of dinosaurs and lizard-men moving toward the central plaza and the great lake of flame. Then abruptly the two men had turned and were racing madly up the avenue toward that lake, up the broad and empty street toward the great disk that was their sole hope of escape.

On and on they staggered until at last they were stumbling between the last gray buildings of the street and into the broad, clear plaza, toward the rim of its central basin of fire. Rowan looked up, as they ran, saw high above them a dark, expanding circle which was dropping down from a round black opening in the rock roof far above, dropping swiftly down toward the lake of fire ahead. And then he cried out, for emerging into the empty plaza directly across from them were a half-dozen of the lizard-men, who saw the two running men, and, uttering rasping cries, sprang around the rim of the flaming lake toward them.

The mighty disk was sweeping smoothly downward, now, down

until it hung level with the plaza, above the basin’s fires, and now Morton had flung forward across the two-foot gap and upon the disk. But as Rowan too leapt forward the racing lizard-men reached him, and as he threw himself upon the disk, which was rising now, one of them had leapt forward with him and pulled him back. He clung frantically to the great disk’s edge, and then the mighty platform was rising smoothly upward while he and his lizard-man opponent clung dizzily to its edge, swinging above the flaming lake and striking at each other with their free hands.

Rowan felt himself carried upward with ever-increasing speed, heard the roar of winds in his ears and glimpsed the raging lake of fire below, and then felt his strength slipping from him beneath the blows of the lizard-man, who clung to the disk with one taloned claw and struck out with the other. Then, as Rowan felt his grip on the disk’s edge slipping, loosening, there was a flashing blow from above which sent the scaled green body of his opponent whirling down into the flames beneath, torn loose from his hold. And as Rowan’s nerveless fingers released his own hold a hand above caught his wrist, there was a tense moment of straining effort, and then he had been pulled up onto the disk’s surface by Morton, and lay there, panting.

A moment he lay thus, then crept with Morton to the disk’s edge and stared down with him at the gray city which now lay far below. They saw, pouring into the plaza, a great mass of huge dinosaurs and a vast throng of the lizard-shapes, an eddying throng that was moving now toward the plaza and the fiery lake from all the city’s wide and branching streets. The next moment all this was blotted from sight as the disk shot smoothly upward into the dark-

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The Abysmal Invaders

(Continued from page 753)

ness of the great shaft, flashing up that shaft amid a thundering of confined winds. Over the raging of those winds Rowan shouted in the other's ear.

"They've gathered down there!" he cried. "When the disk goes down again they'll come up with it, after us! We have only minutes——"

Morton shouted back. "The switch! If we could open that wheel-switch up there, let loose those fires below——"

Rowan gasped. The switch! That switch which the lizard-men had themselves prepared, to use after they had all come up from their cavern-world. If they could open it, could release upon that cavern-world the raging fires which pressed against its walls, it would mean annihilation for the lizard-people and all their giant reptile hordes. If they could——

Abruptly he grasped the other's arm, pointed mutely upward. Far above them a spark of pale white light was glimmering, a spark that changed to a spot and then to a little circle of pallid light as their disk-platform flashed up toward it with tremendous speed. And now, as that circle of white light widened, the disk was beginning to slow its speed a little, the downward-flashing metal walls beside them were moving past them more slowly. Up, up the great disk lifted, while the two men crouched tensely at its edge, and then it had floated up until it hung level with the mouth of the great shaft, beneath the radiance of the suspended bulb.

It was night once more on earth. Rowan knew, but the brilliance of the white bulb overhead was daz-

zingly revealing as the disk swept up to hang at the shaft's mouth. In the moment that it hung there both he and Morton threw themselves from it onto the surface of the mound, and then as the great disk sank downward once more into the shaft they saw that their movement had not been observed, since the only figures on the mound were a half-dozen of the lizard-men armed with the white heat-beam globes, who lounged near the great three-pillar switchboard, at the opposite edge of the mound from the two men. They had not turned as the great disk reached the shaft's mouth and sank again, and after a moment of crouching Morton whispered to Rowan, who crept slowly off the mound in obedience to that whisper and into the shelter of the dark bordering forest around it. There he began to slip through the trees, stealthily, while on the mound itself he saw Morton crawling snakelike around the great shaft's edge toward the switchboard. Minutes passed while the two crept on, from different sides, minutes that seemed eternities to Rowan, and then he had reached the edge of the mound near the switchboard and was gathering himself for a dash toward it. And in that moment he was discovered. There was a harsh cry from one of the lizard-men guards at the mechanism and instantly two of them had leapt toward him, across the mound.

ROWAN sprang to his feet, but before he could gain the surface of the mound he was borne down by the charging of the two sealed shapes, thrust back into the swamp from the mound's edge and struggling in their grip. He heard another cry, glimpsed the other guards on the mound springing toward Morton, who had half risen; then all other sounds in his ears, the rasping cries of his opponents, the deafening

winds from the great pit, the panting of his own breathing as he whirled about—all these sounds were suddenly dwarfed by a sound that came to his ears like the thunder of doom, a deep, throaty bellowing coming faintly as though from far beneath but growing swiftly louder, nearer, coming up the shaft from the ascending disk there!

"Morton!" he cried. "*Morton!*"

Then he saw Morton whirl sideways from the guards who ran toward him, saw him leap toward the great switchboard and toward the wheel-switch at its center, felt himself thrust backward as his two opponents rushed back onto the mound with frantic cries. At the same moment the giant disk swept up again to the shaft's mouth, hanging there, crowded with massed lizard-men and a half-dozen of the huge tyrannosaurs. Out toward Morton leapt these gleaming-fanged monsters, and from a score of the lizard-men on the disk and on the mound there stabbed toward him rays of pallid light. But in the second before those deadly rays could be released Morton had grasped the great wheel, had spun it around in one frantic motion. The next moment the machine and Morton beside it had vanished in a flare of blinding flame, but even as they did so there came from far beneath a gigantic rumbling and crashing, a rending crash as of riven worlds, while the ground beneath Rowan swayed and rocked violently. The next moment there had burst up the shaft a vast gush of crimson fire, a molten flood bursting up from the suddenly released seas of molten fires below, annihilating the great disk that hovered in the shaft, raining in fiery death upon all on the mound, falling hissing into the water and slime about Rowan. Then was another rumbling crash and the mound itself seemed to buckle, collapse, as the walls of the great shaft

below it collapsed, and then before Rowan there lay only a vast, smoking gouge in the earth, with no sign of life in it.

For minutes Rowan stared, unable to credit the miracle which had taken place before his eyes, which had thrust back the lizard-men and all their dinosaur hordes at the last moment, annihilating them in their cavern world far below by the switch they had themselves prepared, by the molten fiery seas of earth's heart which Morton's hand had loosed upon them. But for all the incredulous emotion within him he could find no words, could but stretch out his hands speechlessly toward the steaming pit before him.

And then suddenly he became aware that he was weeping. . . .

7

IT WAS hours later that Rowan stumbled at last out of the great swamp and westward across the rolling fields toward Brinton. Behind him the first pale light of dawn was welling up from beneath the horizon, and as he went on the fields about him lay misty and ghostlike beneath that increasing light. Then, as he came wearily to the crest of a little rise of ground, he paused, gazing ahead.

Before him there lay in the distance the ruins of Brinton, a great mass of blackened wreckage in which was no sign of movement, and from which arose no sound of life. So silent was it, so wrapped round with the unutterable stillness and soundlessness of death, that it seemed to Rowan, standing there, that he must needs be the last living creature in the world, the last living man.

Yet it was not so, he knew. Out beyond the shattered city, out in those other cities beyond the horizon, out over all earth's surface,

there would be running men, and the fleeing of panic-driven crowds, and all the fear and horror which the invaders from the abyss had loosed upon the world. But soon would come an end to that. Soon those fear-driven throngs would be drifting back, returning, would be learning how those dark invaders had been thrust back, annihilated, the destiny of their race shattered by a single man. Soon . . .

Rowan looked on at the silent, ruined town, his lips moving. "You

alone, Morton!" he was whispering. "You—alone!"

Then, as he stood there, the pallid light about him changed, deepened, while from behind him there shot forth long rays of yellow light. Beneath the magic of their alchemy the whole world seemed transfigured suddenly from gray to glowing gold. But Rowan never turned, never moved, standing still motionless there on the crest, gazing westward, a black, lone little figure against the splendor of the rising sun.