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Contents for February-March, 1931

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Cover Design | C. B. Petrie, Jr. |
| | <i>Illustrating a scene in "Siva the Destroyer"</i> |
| The Eyrie | 148 |
| | <i>A chat with the readers</i> |
| The Song of a Mad Minstrel | 158 |
| | <i>Verse</i> |
| Siva the Destroyer | 160 |
| | <i>A thrilling weird story of super-science and a conflict to the death with a genius that threatened the world</i> |

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

| | | |
|---|--------------------|-----|
| Tzo-Lin's Nightingales | Ben Belitt | 170 |
| <i>A tale of horror in a Chinese antique shop—an unusually fascinating and peculiar story</i> | | |
| Fungi from Yuggoth: | | |
| 8. Mirage; 9. The Elder Pharo | H. P. Lovecraft | 175 |
| <i>Verse</i> | | |
| The Ghost-Helper | Seabury Quinn | 176 |
| <i>Jules de Grandin, the little French occultist, long known as a ghost-breaker, essays a new rôle, that of "ghost-helper"</i> | | |
| The Horror City | Edmond Hamilton | 192 |
| <i>Two aviators are drawn by the suction of the winds into a black-domed city of horror in the heart of the Arabian deserts</i> | | |
| The Thing in the Bush | Jane Scales | 211 |
| <i>Weird and awful death struck down the man who penetrated the Australian bush in search of the strange blue diamonds</i> | | |
| The Picture | Francis Flagg | 218 |
| <i>Crazy Jim, the baba, attained to every power and dominated the destinies of nations</i> | | |
| The Tree-Man | Henry S. Whitehead | 232 |
| <i>A remarkable story of the Virgin Islands, and the every superstitions which the Blacks brought with them from Dahomey</i> | | |
| The Horror from the Hills (Conclusion) .. | Frank B. Long, Jr. | 245 |
| <i>A powerful story of shuddery horror—a goose-flesh tale about a hideous stone idol brought from China</i> | | |
| Weird Story Reprint: | | |
| On the River | Guy de Maupassant | 274 |
| <i>A ghastly find was made by the man in the boat—a tale by one of the great French story-writers</i> | | |

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The Horror City

By EDMOND HAMILTON

In the heart of the great Arabian desert lay a vast, black-domed city of horror unspeakable, and into this city were drawn three aviators by the tremendous suction of the winds

I REMEMBER very clearly the morning on which Harmon and Hunter and I started on that fateful flight northward that was to bring us in the end to the horror city. Dawn it was, that desert dawn of Arabia that is like nothing else on earth, with the coppery crimson sun blazing up eastward to touch with a warning fiery finger the vast yellow sands that stretched to the horizons. Our great metal plane, sheening in the growing light, was drawn up north of the straggling little oasis that held our camp, and as I sat at the motor's controls, its deafening roar waxing and waning as it warmed up, our two sun-tanned English camp-foremen and their score of white and brown garbed Arab camel-drivers stood in a watching semicircle behind us. Harmon, his gray eyes brilliant with excitement and his spare figure tense from the same cause, was handing into the cockpit the last items of our equipment, while Hunter, his dark face thoughtful, was standing beside the plane, whipped by the wind of its propeller, gazing intently northward over the illimitable sands.

As I fingered the motor's controls the same last-minute excitement and tension that held Harmon and Hunter was strong in me also, for that morning saw us standing on the threshold of an ambition that had been ours for years. For years we three, of the topographical department of one of New York's greatest museums, had had as our goal this enterprise upon which we now were starting, this bold

venture by airplane out over the great Arabian Desert. That thousand-mile expanse of burning desert in the Arabian Peninsula, the last great area on earth unexplored by men, had long baffled all the explorers of earth. The Shackley-Stevenson party, the Université de France party, the Snelsen expedition, and but a few months past the party headed by a friend of our own, Dr. Ferdinand Austin—all these had ventured into the vast desert's hidden interior, but none of them had ever returned, and never yet had any airplane flown into those barren wastes and come back. But Harmon and Hunter and I had recked little of this tragic record in our overpowering ambition to be first of all men to explore the great desert's interior and return.

Now, though, as I saw Hunter gazing thus fixedly northward beside our plane I shouted sidewise to him over the motor's roar. "Not losing your nerve now?" I asked, and he turned, smiled, shook his head.

"Hardly, Kirkland," he said, in the same shouting tone, as he climbed up into the cockpit with me. "I was just thinking, though, that it must have been from here or about here that the Austin party's two planes started north but a few months ago."

I nodded without turning, my eyes on the dials before me. "What got them's waiting for us, eh?"

He smiled again, leaned to answer, but then Harmon was climbing up into the cockpit with us, taking the third seat and

W. T.—3

adjusting his safety belt. "All right, Kirkland," he was shouting to me. "Whenever you're ready."

I nodded, signaled to the Arabs on each side of the plane to withdraw from its wheels the blocks that kept it from moving forward, and as they did so the plane lurched over the ground with gathering speed, its motor roaring louder, and then was lifting smoothly up into the

growing sunlight. Swiftly, as we headed northward, the vast, tawny expanse of the desert was widening out beneath us, the oasis and our brown tents and our followers dwindling and dropping behind. While Harmon and Hunter began to adjust before them the chart-frames and chart-sections on which they were to record all noticeable features of the land below, I kept the plane lifting



"He was raised with titanic power by the great tentacles."

higher until at last we were flying on at a full two miles altitude. This not only gave us a wider view of the terrain beneath but counteracted by the coldness of the air at that height the heat that already blazed from the sun upon us. Also, as I found, a steady northward wind was blowing at that height which added to our speed and would help to conserve the fuel in the plane's great tanks.

So, with that wind behind it, our big metal plane thundered on like some strange fabled bird high over the dun Arabian wastes, in toward the great desert's unknown heart. For hour on hour, while the sun swung up toward the zenith and burned with brass-like splendor on the barren land and swung downward again, we flew on. At every hundred miles or so we departed from our northward course to swing in a great loop or circle to east or west, Harmon and Hunter with binoculars and chart-sections noting every unusual feature of the land below. Little there was to note, though, for there stretched beneath but an unending, slightly rolling expanse of yellow desert, broken here and there by series of black ridges, slopes of cruel naked volcanic rock. All went down upon the chart-sections, however, and ever we came back to our northward course, heading farther in toward the desert's center, flying by then over a part of it that no man had ever seen and survived to tell of. By then, too, the northward wind that had been with us from the beginning at that altitude had become so strong as almost to whirl us on without need of motor, and I saw that the plane was becoming more and more unmanageable in it.

I turned to Harmon. "Turn back?" I cried to him over the motor's roar and the howl of winds, and he nodded, leaned closer to me.

"Best not risk it farther," he shouted.

"It's late and this wind is getting too strong for safety."

"Getting almost too strong for a safe turn, too," I yelled back. "But I'll try it."

By that time the roaring of the wind was drowning almost the thunder of our motor, and it was hurling us on at tremendous speed, blowing only at our own great height, since far below the desert sands were unstirred. I grasped the control-stick tighter, then pushed over it and the rudder to bring us out of the wind in a great bank, and then death stared us in the face as the world whirled about us! For as I brought the plane sidewise against the wind's current that current, of terrific intensity now, slammed sidewise against our wings and tail and sent our craft whirling over in a moment like a leaf in a gale! I heard the muffled cries of my two friends, saw yellow sands and wide sky and sinking sun westward whirling about me in a wild kaleidoscope of spinning light, and then was aware that instead of falling the plane was being whirled northward still at immense speed by the gale that gripped it! Desperately I held to stick and rudder, and then with an effort had brought the plane's tail up, was holding it level as it rushed on in the grasp of the wind.

"No chance to turn in this current!" I cried to Harmon and Hunter over the wind's thundering bellow. "We'll have to ride it out!"

"But it's taking us northward at terrific speed!" Harmon shouted. "It's taking us on into the desert's center!"

I shook my head. "To turn is to smash the plane," I yelled back to him. "We'll have to keep with it till the current slackens!"

Yet in the next minutes the great wind seemed increasing, rather than slackening, in intensity, bearing us onward now with cyclonic power. I could not conceive of any current of wind that

could blow so steadily and with such terrible strength northward like this one, but was aware that even with the motor throttled down to its utmost we were traveling at a truly tremendous velocity. The blazing sun was sinking westward, the whole world lit up with coppery flaming fire, the tawny sands and ridges far beneath flashing back at higher and higher speed. I knew that we must be close to the great desert's centermost part; then as there came muffled shouts from Harmon and Hunter I turned to find them pointing excitedly downward. Far beneath on the yellow sands I saw what they were pointing at, a great circle of black, broken ruins that once had been a city. I could glimpse shattered spires and walls of strange design, a great mass of ebon ruins circular in shape and miles across, covered thick here and there with drifted sand. I heard Harmon and Hunter shouting excitedly to each other as the wind's terrific speed bore us on high over that circle of black ruins, heard them shout again as in minutes more we glimpsed two more such circles, one a little to the west and the other far to the east.

Even in the tense work of holding the plane level I thrilled at sight of them, wondered momentarily what people of the dim past had raised those black circle-cities ages before. I did not know, could not know, how soon and how awfully that wonder of mine was to be answered. And in a moment I had forgotten, for now the winds that hurled us on were thundering with such titanic force and speed about us that it seemed impossible our craft could escape destruction in them. At the speed of a hundred hurricanes, it seemed, we were leaping through space high over the desert, and as I saw Harmon gripping the cockpit's edge, gazing ahead with set face, Hunter clinging beside him, I was aware that not for much longer could the plane live in that

gigantic increasing current. Then Harmon tensed against his strap as he stared forward, spun to me, clutching my shoulder and shouting madly in my ear.

"The city!" he screamed. "The city ahead—this wind's taking us down toward it!"

"The city!"

There ahead and below there loomed in truth a city, such a city, even glimpsed from afar in that moment, as none of us had ever imagined might be. Black it was and circular of shape, but it was no city of ruins like those we had already passed. It was a circular city of near ten miles diameter, completely covered by a single colossal low-curving black dome that stretched over it, making it seem one gigantic black-domed structure, its frowning walls hundreds of feet in height! At the center of that vast roof, we saw, was a round opening hundreds of feet across; and then as we glimpsed that, as we became aware that the great currents were rushing us lower toward the city, we realized the fearful truth. *The mighty winds that held our plane were being sucked down with it into the great opening in the dome!*

FOR a moment death seemed full upon us as our plane whirled comet-like down toward that opening in the sunset's blood-like light, and then I grasped the last slender chance left us to escape from the wild maelstrom of air-currents, and opened the plane's throttle to the utmost! Like a falling meteor we plunged toward the opening, our own speed added to that of the down-sucked winds about us, and then as it yawned just beneath us I swung the plane abruptly sidewise and over. There was a crazy moment in which we were flung this way and that with insane fury by the bellowing chaos of winds, and I heard the snap of a wing-strut, gave all up for lost. But abruptly, astoundingly,

the thundering about us quieted a little, and as I instinctively righted the plane I saw that the mighty wind-whirlpool had tossed our plane out from over the great city's dome.

It was reeling now over the desert west of that city, its left wing sagging from the snapping of a strut. Just before us a long, high sand-ridge rose black against the fading sunset, and for an instant we all held our breaths as the plane sagged over that ridge. Then it was past, was sinking downward over the steep slope on the other side, coming to rest on the sand, its motor stilling.

After a moment of utter stillness the three of us clambered out of the cockpit, were gazing ahead and backward. Behind us the ridge hid from view the black-domed city over which we had almost met annihilation, while ahead the sunset's last colors were fading, dusk creeping swiftly out over the desert. From high overhead a thin keening of ceaseless winds came to our ears, but save for it all things in the world seemed gripped by a sudden hushed silence.

"Good God—that city!" It was Harmon who broke the silence. "That opening—sucking those winds down from high above that caught us far out in the desert and whirled us north!"

"But what can it mean?" I exclaimed, helplessly. "A city here at the desert's heart—one that must have life—"

"The thing's unbelievable," Harmon said, shaking his head as though to clear it. "If that city is peopled, why should—"

"But look there!" Hunter suddenly exclaimed. "There to the left—beneath the ridge!"

We turned to gaze where he pointed, then were running as one in that direction, running for a half-thousand feet and then stopping, surveying in stunned silence the object that loomed before us in

the darkening dusk. It was an airplane, a great metal one larger than our own, but one crumpled and wrecked hopelessly where it had come to earth. The cabin was empty, but upon the side of the twisted fuselage were silver-lettered words that held us all silent in amazement. They read: "Austin-Arabian Geographical Expedition."

At last Harmon spoke. "Austin—one of Austin's planes!" he said. "Then the great winds that whirled us north must have—"

"Must have caught Austin's planes and whirled them north likewise," I finished for him. "Those terrific unceasing winds—we know now why no plane has ever flown into the Arabian Desert and returned!"

"But what of the other plane?" Hunter exclaimed. "And where did those of Austin's party who were in this plane go?"

We turned instinctively for a moment toward the high ridge looming in the dusk behind us, and then Harmon nodded quietly. "Yes—that city," he said. "They can have gone no place else. And we—we can't leave here until we ascertain their fate."

Our eyes met for a moment and then without speaking we had turned back to our own plane, were swiftly beginning the replacement of its snapped strut. It was but a matter of minutes to replace that strut with one of the spares included in our equipment for such an emergency, yet darkness was upon us by the time we had done, and the white desert stars burned forth. The heat of the darkened desert, swirling liquid-like about us, made us mop our brows when we finished, but then we were seeing to the loads of our automatics, slipping them into our belts. And then, Hunter and I following Harmon, we were starting up through the

thin starlight toward the summit of the ridge, halting there.

Less than a mile ahead of us there loomed against the starlit sands the colossal black mass of the enigmatic city. Its frowning encircling wall and gigantic low-curving dome bulked black and vast in the starlight, while from openings along the great wall came a pulsing thin white light strange to our eyes. Those white-lit openings, stretching far away to right and left in the desert night, outlined and made clear to us the true colossal size of this strange desert city. From it there came to our ears the dull rushing roar of the winds sucked down into its central opening from high above, and the dim beating and clanking of machines of some kind. Silent in the amazement and awe that clutched our hearts we looked, until Harmon made a gesture forward, and then we were following him over the stretch of sands that lay between us and the city.

Every moment saw its great frowning wall, dotted with the white-lit openings, looming greater before us, until at last we stood just beneath that wall. And there, to Harmon and Hunter and me, the strangeness of the great place was overpowering. For though there came out to us now a medley of dull humming and clanking and stamping metallic sounds, and now and then the sound of thick, throaty voices, those voices were not human voices! The whole thing seemed to us, as we stood silent there, unbelievable. The arch of the star-sown desert sky over us, the giant black wall looming with its pattern of white-lit openings before us, the vast dome that stretched for miles out over it, and the medley of metallic machine-sounds and thick, un-human speech-sounds from within. But then, with pistols ready, we moved silently along the great wall's base. It seemed without door or gate of any kind, though

for minutes we moved along beneath it, the lowest of its white-lit openings a dozen feet above us. At last, beneath one of those openings, Harmon paused and turned toward us.

"There seems no door at all in the wall," he said, "and we daren't take time to search completely around the city."

"These openings, then," I said, in the same low tone. "We can get in by one of them, Harmon."

He glanced up keenly for a moment, then nodded. "All right, but be careful," he cautioned. "God knows what is inside."

With that whispered caution Harmon stepped over to the side of the immense black wall, bracing himself in the sand with shoulders against it. Then Hunter was clambering up on his shoulders, bracing himself likewise against the wall, and then with a short silent run I was climbing up over both, grasping the edge of the opening above and pulling myself up into it.

I SAW in a glance that the wall was all of a dozen feet in thickness and that there were no bars or obstructions in this opening that led through it to the white-lit interior. Then I reached down, and in a moment more Hunter and Harmon were beside me. We rested, then were crawling in over the opening's flat bottom, a current of cooling air meeting us from within. We came to the opening's inner edge, crouched in it, gazing down and inward. It was a great curving hall, we found, into which we were gazing, one following the curve of the city's edge and with towering black walls and floor, the black material seeming a smooth artificial stone with metallic luster. The long hall, as far as we could see along its curve, was filled only with pulsing thin white light without visible source. Then as we half straightened there came a sound of

movement, of thick voices, away to the right, and there came into view around the hall's curve there a half-dozen beings at whom we gazed with amazement and then with horror unutterable.

They were great black octopus-men! I can only describe them thus, for it is thus they seemed to me in that moment. Each of them seemed a sphere of black flesh a foot or so in diameter, in which were set two round black-pupilled eyes and a narrow mouth-opening from which came their thick and throaty speech-sounds. Out from this central ball of flesh or body there branched innumerable black tentacles five to six feet in length, of which each creature must have possessed dozens, branching out thickly in every direction from the central ball-body. Upon some of those tentacles each of the half-dozen black octopus-men were walking along the hall, and with others they held metal tools and instruments. Down the curving hall and beneath the opening in which we crouched they strode smoothly on part of their multiple limbs, conversing in their thick voices, and then had passed us, were moving on and disappearing around the hall's other curve.

Stunned at the sight of those creatures of horror, we could not move, could not speak, in the moment that followed, and well was it for us that it was so. For hardly had the creatures disappeared around the hall's curve to our left when there appeared other great black octopus-men like them, a half-score in number, returning along the hall. They did not glance up toward us as we crouched low in the opening above them, but passed quickly around the hall's curve and out of sight, one addressing a thick word or two to the others as they passed. None of these carried anything, but swiftly there came still others from the right, following the first we had seen, and carrying

metal tools and small mechanisms as the others had done. In groups of ten or twelve they passed us, until more than a half-hundred had gone by us, and then as no more came there was silence in the curving hall for a time.

In that silence, broken only by the sounds of distant machines and thick voices and dull roar of winds high above, we regarded one another in mind-dazing terror, and when Harmon spoke his voice was a strangled whisper. "God!" he whispered. "This city—those creatures!"

"What does it mean?" I demanded fiercely, clutching his arm. "Harmon—those octopus-creatures—intelligent—"

"It means that those things—those many-tentacled black monsters—are a form of intelligent life, one that we peoples of earth have never dreamed might exist upon it."

"Then these octopus-things," Hunter exclaimed, "are the people of this city—of all this great domed city?"

My mind reeled at the suggestion in those incoherent words, but Harmon caught my shoulder and Hunter's in a tense grasp. "There's some great mystery about these things, I think," he whispered tensely, "and maybe some great horror. But despite that we've got to venture into the city to see if Austin's party or any of it is here!"

"But Harmon," I began, "this whole vast city—those octopus-men—perhaps in countless swarms here—"

He shook his head, his voice low and urgent. "We must chance it," he declared. "We can evade them, I think, and we've got to find out whether any of Austin's party are here. We couldn't go back, without knowing."

I felt the force of his words, and after a silent moment in which I fought the horror that chilled me, gripped his hand. "You're right, Harmon," I said. "We couldn't go back, without knowing."

Hunter silently nodded, and Harmon turned at once to the edge of the opening in which we crouched. "Down into this hall, then," he whispered. "We've got to get farther into the city."

With the words, and with a final glance to right and left along the white-lit hall's curve, he was swinging down over the opening's edge, dropping to the smooth black floor. In a moment Hunter and I had followed and stood with automatics ready beside him, finding that the air inside the hall was far cooler than that in the desert night outside, a steady cool breeze blowing along it and out the wall-openings. As we began moving silently along the curving hall, on the alert for sounds of approaching octopus-men, we came in a few moments to a narrower hall that branched inward from the one we followed, toward the great city's center. It was lit with the same sourceless pulsing white light as the curving one, and along its length we could see great doors from which came some of the dull mechanical sounds we heard. Instantly Harmon motioned to us and led the way down this narrower hall.

As we moved down it we made out, far ahead, a few octopus-men coming and going at intervals across it, but these were too far away to glimpse us in the thin light of the towering-walled corridor. Once too we heard a rumble of thick voices that seemed close behind us and whirled in swift panic, but to find that it was a half-dozen or so of the octopus-men moving along the curving hall we had just quitted. So we crept on, and as Harmon and Hunter and I followed that narrow hall we would have made a strange enough picture for any who had beheld it, we three comparatively little humans with pistols glinting in our hands, creeping along beneath the towering wall of the thin-lit corridor, creeping on into this enigmatic city of horror in

which all about us we could hear the sounds of unnumbered octopus-men and their activities. Then we reached the first of the great doors opening from the hall, peered cautiously around and through it.

It was a great room into which we peered, and the chief objects in it were a battery of huge globular things of metal ranged against its walls, in the front of each of which was a translucent section of quartz-like substance. From each came a steady hissing sound, and out through the translucent section of each was pulsing a white light, the wavering light that illuminated all this city as though without source. These great globular mechanisms were giant light-pumps, pumping that pulsing light ceaselessly out of themselves, just as another mechanism might pump water! They pumped an unending vibration into the ether in the city, it was evident, and it was evident too that the vibration was tuned to pass through the solid black walls, for it did so without hindrance. Tending these great light-pumps were a half-score of the black octopus-men whose countless tentacles were busy at their intricate controls.

FOR moments we three stared at the strange, unearthly scene, and then as Harmon made a silent gesture we were moving on, slipping one by one past the great door without being glimpsed by the octopus-men inside. Once past it we moved swiftly ahead, glancing into the next rooms and finding that they too held great light-pumps and their attendants. As we went farther down the corridor, though, crouching now and again against the wall as octopus-men crossed the hall ahead of us, we came to rooms of a different type. They were, it seemed, great laboratories of different kinds, and in them were busily moving scores of octopus-men. There seemed to have but little occasion to venture out into the corridor,

and so we were able to peer into the great rooms unhindered.

In one of them octopus-men were testing strange, humming motors that seemed to run with enormous speed and power though with no visible source of current. In another a score of the creatures were gathered about a mass of retorts and delicate metal tubes, and one was pouring silvery liquids from these into a single retort, the others watching the experiment with utmost apparent interest. In still another great room that we peered into three octopus-men standing on a high insulated platform were controlling great coil-like mechanisms from which blinding sheet on sheet of lightning was crashing toward a central coil, the creatures on the platform observing those crashing bursts and manipulating the controls of the mechanisms that produced them.

It was in still another room that we saw what filled us with a greater wonder still. This room had none of the pulsing omnipresent light, but was darkened and seemed to extend up to the great dome of the city itself. In that room were ranged five giant squat tubes swinging in frameworks, connected to unfamiliar mechanisms, and at an eyepiece near the bottom of each sat an octopus-man, gazing up through them! They were telescopes, we knew, strange telescopes of a design unfamiliar to us but which could apparently be turned upon the stars through the great black roof that lay above! Octopus-astronomers were these, and in rooms beyond their strange observatory we glimpsed great astronomical models, computing-machines, other octopus-men coming and going.

That room was near the end of the narrow hall we followed, and as we slipped past its door, the corridor making a right-angle turn a dozen feet ahead, we moved like men caught in some strange dream, coming to a halt before reaching

the hall's turn. Crouching there, the steady cool breeze from inward upon us, we felt our minds reeling from what we had seen.

"Octopus-men in thousands," I whispered. "In thousands, with as much intelligence as we have—perhaps more! A city of them—as Hunter said—"

"Steady, Kirkland," came Harmon's voice. "It's a city of horror, surely, but we've got to get farther into it."

"But we've seen no trace of Austin's party," I said. "If we had only some idea as—but look!"

My horror-stricken whisper was not needed, for Harmon and Hunter had seen at the same moment, had seen the five great octopus-men who had abruptly come round the corner of the corridor just ahead and who had halted short, the eyes in the central ball-body of each full upon us. For only a moment they stared, and then, their numberless tentacles flinging them forward at incredible speed, had leapt toward us!

Before I could raise the pistol in my hand one of the creatures was upon me, and in that instant I seemed grasped tightly by numberless hands as his tentacles fastened upon me. I heard a throaty cry from one of the things, a hoarse shout from Harmon, and in the same moment the swift lashing crack of an automatic beside me, repeating swiftly. I was raised with titanic power by the great tentacles, and as the whole scene thus spun around and beneath me I gripped my own pistol and more by accident than design pressed its trigger, sending a stream of fire into the central ball-body of the thing that held me. There came from him a thick, strangled sound, and then he was slumping over sidewise, his tentacles going limp and letting me fall to the floor. I rose, to find that two of the things lay dead before us, that another was falling, and that two others had gripped Hunter

with countless tentacles coiled about him. My pistol spoke at the same time as Harmon's, and as the lead from both tore through the ball-like black central bodies of the two things they too fell. We stumbled to Hunter's side, Harmon shouting in my ear.

"Out of here before they have us!" he cried. "They're coming—behind us!"

I spun around, and glimpsed far down the corridor through which we had come an increasing horde of octopus-men racing toward us. A few of the foremost held metal tubes which they pointed toward us, and from those tubes little shining darts or blades flicked through the air and over us. They were shouting in a growing clamor of thick voices.

"On around the corner!" Harmon was crying, and we stumbled forward, around the corridor's turn just as more of the shining darts stabbed past us.

THE narrow hall, we found, turned sideways for only a dozen feet and then back toward the city's center. And as we flung ourselves around the second turn, into another far-stretching length of the thin-lit hall, we heard from behind the thick-voiced clamor of alarm growing each moment, spreading swiftly far out over the great city, taken up and echoed by octopus-men through its maze of halls and corridors. Desperately we ran on, praying that the alarm might not spread ahead of us. We could glimpse no octopus-shapes in the corridor ahead of us, though behind the clamor of pursuit grew ever greater, and as we raced on we were running past the doors of great, busy rooms almost careless of discovery by the octopus-men working inside them.

Glancing into some of those rooms as we hurled ourselves on I saw more great light-pumps and laboratories of strange activities, saw too one great hall or series of halls into which we gazed for an in-

stant even in the peril that was ours. It was only a glimpse—a great white-lit room with other rooms beyond it in which were looming mysterious shining mechanisms. From these, into strange molds there poured a thick black viscous liquid, while at one side we glimpsed other things being taken from molds, ball-like black flesh-masses from which branched countless tentacles—bodies of octopus-men, apparently, being taken from those molds and being worked on by groups of octopus-men in the great rooms beyond! I caught the flash of steel instruments, the pulsing glow of strange rays or forces being turned on those new-made bodies, and then we were past the great door, rushing still on down the corridor.

"Those bodies!" Harmon was panting as we ran on. "Artificial bodies—all this city then—"

But I was scarce listening, for at that moment the spreading clamor of thick voices behind came suddenly louder to our ears, and glancing back I saw that a horde of the octopus-creatures had burst into the length of the corridor we followed, far behind!

They glimpsed us, were racing forward, throaty voices shouting, hallooing to others behind them. I glimpsed an opening in the wall beside us that was not that of a room, and jerked the others toward it.

"This other corridor!" I cried, and in the next moment we had thrown ourselves into it, were racing along it for a few score of yards and then turning inward toward the city's center again.

It was only to the central regions of the great city, it was apparent, that the alarm had not yet reached, for far across its halls and rooms behind us was coming and going the confusion of sounds of alarm, the thick-voiced cries and rush of hurrying octopus-men. It was only by keeping ahead of that alarm that we

could evade them, yet as we raced onward, through the maze of intersecting corridors and past the doors of countless rooms, I knew that not for long could Harmon and Hunter and I escape thus. For the time being, it was true, we were leaving our pursuers a little behind, since they were forced to spread out and search all the rooms and corridors after us, while we could run straight onward. Yet as we ran on through the thin-lit halls with the cool breeze in them upon us, with the sounds of the city's mechanisms and octopus-people all about us and the other confused sounds of pursuit behind, I knew that not for long could we evade thus the hordes that swarmed in the city around us. For even in the next minutes we were forced to throw ourselves blindly into this corridor or that to avoid octopus-men appearing suddenly ahead.

That mad flight through the octopus-peopled mazes of that city of horror had a quality of nightmare. Ever, it seemed, we were stumbling forward through endless white-lit halls, past rooms in which the monstrous octopus-shapes labored in unguessable activities, and ever from behind there beat dully in our ears the clamor of the aroused city. Far across the interconnecting rooms and halls behind us were ranging the throaty shouts of our pursuers, and there came to us now and then a sharp jangling of bell-signals. Our long flight northward over the desert, our battle with the winds that had hurled us on to this city, our venture into it—all these had sapped our strength, and as we ran on we all knew that minutes more would see our pursuers upon us. That knowledge was closing like a cold tight hand around my heart when, running on through another narrow corridor, we all but burst out into a vast, white-lit space that loomed suddenly ahead.

We caught ourselves on the very point of rushing out into it, and shrank back

into the corridor. Peering forward, panting, we saw that it was a circular hall a thousand feet across that lay before us, one whose great walls rose to the giant dome-roof of the city itself. More than half of this vast hall's space, however, was occupied by a gigantic cylindrical column, smooth black like the walls, that rose to the great roof overhead and that was several hundred feet in diameter. From inside that cylinder came an unceasing thunderous rushing sound, while out from openings around its base there blew steadily toward us and toward all the corridors that branched from the great hall a strong cool breeze, the unceasing currents of cooling air that vanquished the desert heat in this desert city. Upon the giant cylinder's side near its base was set a square panel of metal gleaming with innumerable white button and wheel-switches, while ranged before that panel were a score of octopus-men armed with the dart-flinging tubes.

As I gazed at this strange scene, at the mighty cylinder from which the cool breezes blew ceaselessly outward, I had a dim comprehension of what we were seeing. "That cylinder," I whispered. "It's here—at the city's center—beneath the dome's central opening that sucks down the great winds—"

Harmon's eyes widened with sudden understanding. "Then it's the cylinder that sucks down those winds! And from it—"

"Harmon, they're coming down this corridor!"

It was Hunter's tense whisper that broke in upon us, and as we turned swiftly we heard, far back around the turns of the corridor, the steadily waxing babel of thick octopus-voices of our pursuers. They were searching along the hall in which we were and in moments more would be pouring around its last turn upon us! An utter despair for

a moment seized us, for it was too late now to return along the corridor and enter one of the others that branched from it; yet if we waited where we were a few minutes more would see our pursuers upon us. It was Hunter, though, whose voice again came to us.

"This great hall ahead!" he whispered. "To get across it—it's our only chance!"

"Across it—and with those guards in it—" Harmon said, but Hunter pointed swiftly forward.

"They don't face us—grouped around that control-panel as they are. And if we could slip along the left wall without any of them turning toward us we could get across and into another corridor!"

SILENTLY, with Harmon leading and pistols ready, we slipped out of the corridor and into the vast white-lit space, along the wall that curved to the left. Like shadows we stole along that great black wall, our eyes upon the guards on the cylinder's other side. In a moment more we were in one of the opposite corridors.

With something like renewed hope we ran down this new hallway, in whose thin-lit length were the doors of other great rooms. Behind us the clamor of alarm was spreading still across the city, but was fainter to our ears than before. And then, with shattering suddenness, there emerged into the corridor but a few feet ahead of us two great octopus-men, who stared full at us for an instant and then, as we ran squarely into them, gripped us with countless powerful tentacles!

For a moment I strained there like mad in the grip of those great tentacle-arms, striving to bring my pistol up in their pinioning grasp, Harmon and Hunter struggling as wildly beside me. But abruptly we ceased our struggles, stood

motionless as though turned to stone. For one of the great creatures that held us, his two strange eyes upon us, was speaking rapidly to us in his thick, throaty voice—was uttering, hoarsely and distortedly, not the speech-sounds of the octopus-men we had heard, but *words*, human words, English words! In a stunned daze we stood there as from that monstrous octopus-shape came the stumbling, throaty words, pronounced as though by a child learning to speak.

"Harmon"—the throaty word seemed to thunder in our ears—"Harmon—you and Hunter—and Kirkland—here—"

As those thick-voiced words came to us I saw Hunter reeling white-faced against the wall, overcome by the horror that held me in a daze, saw Harmon reach a shaking hand forward toward the great octopus-shape before us who had spoken.

"You—who—what are you?" he was ejaculating, the words stumbling in his throat. And from the black octopus-man came an answer, a word, that sent a greater horror crashing through our minds.

"Austin!" The throaty voice held compressed in it a hell of torment. "Austin—and this beside me, Cooper—like this—but us—"

"Austin—Austin and Cooper!" choked Harmon. "Oh God!—it can't—"

Closer behind us again burst out the throaty clamor of our pursuers, crossing the great hall. The two great octopus-men before us glanced swiftly down the corridor, then grasped the three of us, were jerking us on 'down the hallway toward one of its doors.

"In here!" commanded a thick voice in my ear. "They're almost on you."

As though in a dream we felt ourselves propelled down the corridor by the tentacles that grasped us, felt ourselves hurried through the door and into a long thin-lit room that we saw in a moment

was a great storeroom that held small plates and sections of metal, and flat, strange mechanisms, stacked one upon the other. Into a corner behind these stacks the two octopus-men propelled us, then turned again to the door. In a moment more came a rush outside, an increasing clamor of thick voices, and we glimpsed a horde of octopus-shapes rushing down the corridor. Many held the metal dart-tubes, and as they passed the door they halted for an instant, flung throaty questions at the two octopus-men in the room, whose quick reply sent them racing on. In a few moments all had passed, the alarm spreading out before them as they beat through the city's rooms and hallways for us, and then the two black octopus-shapes were coming again to our corner, crouching beside us, hidden like us from view by the stacks of metal sections.

At sight of those two monstrous bodies close beside us, the ball-like central bodies with their round black eyes and their countless branching snake-like tentacles, all the horror I had first felt rose again in me. Then one of them reached forth a great tentacle to grasp Harmon's shoulder, though the latter shuddered when it touched him.

"Steady, Harmon," the throaty voice uttered, the words thick and slurred. "I know what you feel—but it is I—Austin—in this body."

"But that body," Harmon stumbled. "That great octopus-body like the others—Austin—impossible—"

The octopus-man's unhuman central body came toward us, the eyes terrible. "Not impossible, Harmon," he said, the throaty voice whispering up to an appalling crescendo. "Not impossible. Oh, God, no! I, Austin—in this body—and Cooper here like me—here in this horror city that the fiends of hell loosed on earth ages ago!"

"Cooper!" I whispered. "Austin's assistant! Then it's—you?"

The throaty voice of the other monstrous shape answered. "Yes—I—Cooper—caught like Austin in this body—in this hell on earth—"

"And the others?" Harmon asked.

The thick voice of the first octopus-man—of Austin—was deeper. "The others died," he said. "The others had death—clean death—and Cooper and I this!"

His throaty voice went on. "You know how our expedition started—how we started to do what never men had done, to penetrate the secret heart of the Arabian Desert. In two planes we started from an oasis at the desert's southern edge, Cooper and I and a photographer in one plane, Garrett and Simms and two others in the other. We flew north over the desert for hours, and the northward winds about us got ever stronger until they were hurling our planes on despite themselves. It was those winds that brought your own plane here, Harmon? I thought so. They slammed us north toward this city, and when we reached it Garrett's plane was sucked down into the great opening of winds at the center of its dome. Our own managed to win clear from the winds over the city, but was so battered that it was hopelessly wrecked on landing, killing the photographer. Cooper and I thought, though, that perhaps some in the other plane might have survived in this city, and it was in any case the one place for us to go. So we came here."

"We came here. We got through one of the wall-openings. We were seized in the next moment by the monstrous octopus-men that appeared around us. They took us before a group of octopus-men who seemed rulers of some sort and who gave orders concerning us. In obedience to those orders we were taken then to a

series of great rooms where other of the creatures were making, from viscous black flesh-compounds, great octopus-bodies like their own! We saw them prepare two of those bodies, placing in them eye-lenses and nerve-structures already prepared, saw that in each ball-like central body was an open cavity. Then before we could guess their purpose they had pumped a gas quickly into Cooper's nostrils that instantly anesthetized all his body. That done, they suspended him in an odd metallic frame and at once, using partly fine metal instruments and partly a disintegrating liquid of some sort, were opening his skull. They cut away half its bony structure, skilfully cut around and beneath the brain, disconnecting the nerve-connections, and then were quickly lifting the brain from his skull and placing it in the cavity prepared for it in the octopus-body!

"Swiftly they connected the nerve-ends of Cooper's brain to the connections awaiting them in the octopus-body, and as quickly they closed the opening in that body, fusing the flesh itself together. And then that octopus-shape rose, walked unsteadily to and fro, held by the others. It was Cooper! Cooper's brain, Cooper's mind, cased in that monstrous body! And even as I watched in horror they were grasping me, carrying out with me the same procedure. The anesthetic gas they pumped into my system made me lose all sensation of feeling but I could see and hear them as well as ever as they worked on me, cutting the brain from my body! All went dark when they severed the nerve-ends, but soon I came back to consciousness to find that it was not my own arms and legs that responded to my brain's commands but great tentacles! I too was one of the octopus-men, my human brain imprisoned hopelessly in that monstrous body!"

"IN THE days that followed, they made Cooper and me see the hopelessness of any attempts at escape, for even could we escape across the vast desert that hid this city what fate would be ours in the world of men? And in those days, even through the horror that numbed our minds, we learned something of the strange tongue the octopus-people spoke, and thus learned something of their past. We had been set to work operating and watching some of the great light-pumps, but could move through the city and see the things it held. And from what we saw, and what we heard, we pieced together the past history of these strange octopus-creatures. And we learned, then, that ages before the brain of each had been in a human body also, that they had been men!

"They had been men, members of a race inhabiting the land where now is the vast Arabian Desert. They had built many great black cities, the ruins of which we had ourselves glimpsed in our mad flight northward, but had all come at last into this one great domed central city. Its giant dome shut out the sun's direct rays, the light-pumps keeping it illuminated beneath the dome. And to keep it cool always despite the fierce desert heat they had devised the giant cylinder-pump you saw at the city's center, that sucks down through the dome-opening immense volumes of the cold air high above in the upper atmospheric levels, causing thus the great winds that rush ever toward this city. That great cylinder-pump forces the colder air out through all the city's halls and ways, escaping at last out through the wall-openings, and is of colossal power. If it were turned on at full force it would suck such titanic winds down into the city as to smash it into fragments with their cyclonic power, the great pump's controls

being always guarded for that reason, as you saw.

"In this domed, cooled city, therefore, the peoples of that race had lived, cut off from the rest of earth by the impassable desert around them. They could easily make their foods synthetically, and their one great remaining ambition was the conquering of death. And they had found a way at last to do that. They could make artificial bodies of synthetic flesh, and they began to transfer their own brains, their human brains, into those bodies, as their immense science permitted them to do. After trying various shapes they adopted a many-tentacled octopus-like body-shape, it being simpler than others and giving them greater powers, and into those octopus-bodies they transferred their brains.

"That was ages ago, and ever since they have lived thus, human brains in octopus-bodies. Whenever a body was worn out or damaged in any way they needed only to transfer the brain from it into a new body, and so they had achieved their last desire and had conquered death. The few men from outside who reached their great city across the deserts they captured and made into octopus-men like themselves, placing their brains also in the artificial bodies. And that is what they have done to Cooper and me—have prisoned us in the most terrible of all prisons, in octopus-bodies like their own!"

As the great throaty voice ceased, Austin—or that octopus-body that held his brain—crouched silent with the other monstrous shape beside us. The distant clamor of pursuit across the city, the thin white light that pulsed about us, the two terrible shapes beside us—they all infused more than ever the quality of nightmare into our surroundings. Then Harmon was speaking, his voice strangled.

"Austin—Cooper!" he was whispering.

"In those octopus-bodies! But what is there for us to do?"

"There's but one thing to do if you're to escape." Austin's thick voice was decisive as he came closer. "You must get back across the city to its edge, back the way you came."

"The way we came?" I exclaimed, and both of the great octopus-bodies seemed to make an affirming movement.

"It's your one chance," Austin said. "While those pursuing you go on across the city there's a chance for you to double back the way you came and get to the city's wall. For once they find you're no longer ahead of them they'll know you're hiding and will start a systematic search of all the city."

"But you, Austin," Harmon began, "what of you and Cooper?"

The octopus-man's strange eyes looked at us in silence for a moment before replying. "Cooper and I have had a plan of our own for some time," he said finally, "and we want to carry that out. But if you three are to escape you must start back across the city now."

The two strange shapes had risen now on their supporting tentacles and we rose beside them. Harmon's eyes searched their alien ones. "You really have a plan of escape for yourselves?" he asked, and it was Cooper that answered.

"We have really a plan," his thick voice assured us. "The one way in which we can escape."

"But you three must get clear first," Austin's throaty tones broke in, "and we daren't lose more time."

He was leading the way to the room's door, by then, moving outside and peering up and down the corridor, then motioning us to follow him. As Harmon and Hunter and I stepped out into the hall in turn, Cooper's octopus-shape close behind us, I felt a sudden weariness. What length of time it had been that we had

raced through the city from that wild pursuit I had not been able to guess, but hours it must have been, I knew, since first we had entered this place of horror. Away to the eastward we could hear the wave of alarm still sweeping through the city, the crowds of octopus-men who had pursued us still searching across its halls and rooms for us, but ahead of us the clamor had died somewhat, and as we moved down the corridor toward the great hall we had crossed at such peril I felt again a slight hope rising in me.

STRANGE and unearthly must our little procession have seemed as we moved along the narrow hallway. The great octopus-man that was Austin went first, moving on part of his countless tentacles, the eyes in his central ball-body on the alert. After him came Harmon and Hunter and I, haggard and disheveled, automatics still in our hands, and the monstrous shape that held Cooper's brain came last, as alert as Austin. And well was it that they were so alert, since before we had gone more than a score of yards down the hall there came a sudden sound of throaty voices and there emerged into it from one of the great rooms beside it a half-dozen or more octopus-men who came straight down its length toward us.

At the first sound of their voices Austin's great shape had wheeled to us, a tense throaty whisper coming from him, and in answer to that whispered command Cooper had sprung to his side, both ranging themselves against the corridor's wall, while the three of us crouched low between them and the wall. Their two shapes, standing together as though conversing, hid us from a casual inspection, and as the group of octopus-men went by, with a word to Austin and Cooper, we prayed dumbly that none might turn a more penetrating glance in our direction. None could have done so, though, for all

moved on down the corridor, conversing still. Then, without words, we were springing up, were moving on.

We came without further incident to the place where the corridor debouched into the great hall of the cylinder of winds. Peering out into it we saw that the guards at the cylinder's control-panel were still ranked before it, to one side of the cylinder itself. There seemed none other in the big white-lit space, and across it from us opened the mouth of the corridor we sought, through which we had come. With all our nerves taut, therefore, we moved out again into the great hall, slipping along its wall. The thunder of winds sucked down inside the cylinder, the cool rush of its out-pumped breezes about us, were loud in our ears. We heard, too, over them the distant clamor of the searchers far behind, eastward, and an occasional thick utterance from the guards. Still we stole on, came as though after an eternity of time to the mouth of the corridor we sought, were slipping into it—and then as we set foot in it we recoiled in horror. But a half-score feet before us was another group of a half-dozen octopus-men just emerging from it!

In the instant that they saw us there came from Austin's great shape a throaty shout. "On, Harmon!" he cried. "Get past them—!"

His cry was broken into by other throaty cries from the octopus-men before us, cries of alarm echoed by the guards in the great hall. Then as they and the guards alike leaped from before and behind us my own automatic and those of Harmon and Hunter were detonating, spurting flame toward the six before us. Two crumpled, collapsed, and then as another fell Austin and Cooper, towering on their supporting tentacles in monstrous size and strength, then grasping with numberless tentacles the central ball-bodies of two of the creatures who leapt on us and crushing them

in a titanic grip, crushing the human brains inside them! The remaining one of the six had grasped both Harmon and me with its tentacles, great arms that coiled swiftly round our bodies, but there came again the crashing report of Hunter's pistol and the thing sank lifeless.

Clang—clang—clang—clang—the sound was of shining bladed darts that flashed around us from behind and struck the black wall! We spun about, saw the guards of the great cylinder's control rushing toward us, their upraised tubes spitting the swift-flying deadly darts! Then the great tentacles of Austin and Cooper had flashed out around us, had drawn us with a lightning movement into the corridor's mouth.

"On!" cried Austin's throaty voice. "The city's edge, Harmon—your one chance now! The whole city's rousing!"

For as we fled forward the guards in the great halls behind us, leaping into the corridor after us, were uttering thick shouts of alarm that were bringing answering shouts from all the city's vast maze around and behind and before us! Shining darts again flicked after us, clanged against the wall as we threw ourselves round a turn in the corridor, but Hunter this time half halted, blood welling from his shoulder. But with the great tentacles of Austin and Cooper half supporting and half dragging him he was stumbling on with us.

Through the great maze of intersecting hallways we were racing, Austin's great octopus-shape leading, the vast throaty roar of the aroused city loud about us now. I heard louder shouts from behind, the flick and clang of more darts, then vaguely glimpsed other octopus-men pouring into the corridor ahead of us! Again our pistols cracked and the little group that had rushed into the corridor seemed to collapse before us. Over them we went, raced around two right-angle turns and into another corridor, down its length in the thin

light. I was half aware of great tentacles reaching at me from a doorway, missing me as we raced past, of a great hallooing of throaty voices and jangling of bells behind and to our right and left. As we reached the end of this corridor's straight length I glanced back and saw the mass of octopus-men rushing down it after us, the guards of the great cylinder of winds still at their head, dart-tubes loosing death toward us.

Through shorter connecting ways we were rushing now, our breath coming in great sobs. Two octopus-men appeared from a connecting corridor before us, and hardly had I glimpsed them in the thin light, when the tentacles of Austin and Cooper had caught them, slammed them sidewise against the wall with terrific force. We stumbled on, bursting into another straight long corridor, stretching far ahead. As we ran into it Austin and Cooper abruptly halted.

"The city's edge is at this corridor's end!" Austin cried. "On down it, the three of you—get to the wall and out its openings!"

"But you, Austin?" Harmon clutched the great octopus-man frantically in that moment. "You and Cooper?"

"We go no farther with you," the throaty voice answered. "Cooper and I have our own way of escape, man—we're going to use it!"

We hung for a tense moment beside the two great octopus-shapes, their eyes upon us, the wild babel of pursuit bursting louder behind. The great tentacles of the two gripped my shoulder, and Harmon's and Hunter's, for a moment, and then they had thrust us forward.

"On, Harmon!" came Austin's thick voice again. "The city's edge—get clear!"

And then, half pushed forward thus, we were stumbling ahead again, and as we glanced back saw the black great octopus-shapes of Austin and Cooper slipping

through one of the doors in the corridor's wall. With fast-waning strength we flung ourselves forward, past other doors, glimpsed far ahead the end of the long hallway we followed, glimpsed the curving hallway there that marked the city's edge. But we were not half-way to that curving hall before there burst loud in our ears from behind a triumphant clamor of throaty voices, and we glanced back again to see a great horde of the octopus-men bursting into the long corridor and racing after us! And as I sent another tortured glance backward at them I saw that as they raced past the door into which Austin and Cooper had gone, the two octopus-shapes of our two friends were slipping out of that doorway and racing back toward the city's center.

WITH the last of our strength we flung ourselves down the last few hundred feet of the long corridor, Harmon and I supporting the staggering Hunter between us. Flick—flick—clang!—and I felt something like a red-hot iron brush against my side, felt it wet, as one of the swift-flying darts from far behind grazed me. But before more darts could flash towards us, with the great shouting horde of our pursuers still some hundreds of feet behind us, we were bursting out of the corridor into the curving hall in which it ended. Before us in the opposite wall were the great openings, through which we glimpsed the starlit desert. We stumbled toward one of those openings, and with frantic strength Harmon and I lifted Hunter up into it, dragged ourselves up after him. But from the right, along the curved hall, three other octopus-men were running toward us.

My automatic roared twice and two of them went down as the bullets ripped through their central ball-bodies, but my third pressure on the trigger produced but a hollow click. The pistol's magazine was

empty! And before Harmon could reach around me to fire, the great monster had reached up with swift and mighty tentacles that coiled like light about us. He was pulling us down into the hall again, and at the same moment we heard the wild throaty clamor of the horde of our pursuers racing down the long corridor. For an instant we strained with all our force against the deadly grip of the thing's numberless tentacles, and then abruptly I wrenched my arm free from it and hurled the heavy pistol with all my strength at the creature's central body.

It crashed into that soft ball-body between the round eyes, and the thing went limp, its tentacles releasing their hold on us. We leapt through the opening, half dragging Hunter, and dropped to the soft sand outside, the wide star-gemmed desert sky over us, the vast black light-dotted bulk of the city behind us.

"The plane!" Harmon was shouting. "If we can get to it in time——"

We staggered forward in a stumbling run away from the wall. From behind came the throaty clamor of all the octopus hordes of the aroused city. A hundred feet — another hundred — with a last mighty effort we rushed forward in the starlight. There came a choking cry from Hunter and he went limp in our hands, collapsed. Falling, he carried Harmon and me to the ground with him, the last of our own strength gone, into a bowl-like hollow in the sands into which we slumped. And as we collapsed there came an exultant throaty shouting from behind again, and we looked back in that instant to see hordes of octopus-men pouring up from inside the black city into the great wall-openings. They had glimpsed us, were pointing toward us. Over the thin keening of the winds high above came their triumphant thick-voiced shouts, and another moment would see them rushing

out upon us. Another moment—captured—our brains in octopus-bodies—

But why had they paused, there in the openings? Why were they looking upward, crying out? Why were they shouting back to those inside the city, shouting back as though in terror? A strange, terrible sound was forcing itself to my brain, a growing, thunderous roaring that had replaced the shrilling of the winds high over us. A vast crashing and rumbling of gigantic cyclonic winds that were suddenly whirling in a wild chaos of bellowing air-currents from all directions toward the city. Colossal hands seemed buffeting us as those giant winds smote us, even in the shelter of the hollow in which we lay, and as their mighty currents rushed toward the black city and toward the opening at the center of its dome, thundering on it with a vast roaring as of a universe made vocal, there came to our ears crash on crash of walls inside that city. Its mighty dome and walls were being riven and shattered to fragments by the colossal winds roaring into it!

"Austin! Austin and Cooper—the cylinder of winds!"

"Austin!"

I cried out even as Harmon screamed beside me, light flashing into my brain as the giant city crashed into destruction before us. Austin and Cooper—their way of escape—they had seen the guards of the cylinder's control pursuing us—had slipped back to that control and opened it to its utmost! And even as Austin had said, when opened to its full power that huge cylinder-pump was sucking down into itself, down into the city, such cyclonic winds as to rive the city like one of cardboard, to crush its domes and walls and rooms and corridors to fragments! And as walls and dome crashed down thus

in awful destruction before us, the long-drawn thunder of their shattering mixed with the roar of winds, burying beneath them Austin and Cooper and all the octopus hordes. I cried out again. The way of escape—the one escape for Austin and Cooper that they had spoken of—death! For death only, death that they had brought down upon all the octopus-people, could free them from those octopus-bodies in which their human brains were imprisoned!

The colossal winds were lessening, now; the whirling walls of sand they had raised were sinking again. And as their thunder and the crash of collapsing walls subsided we staggered up from the sand-drifts that half buried us, gazed through the starlight toward the city. There was no city! There was only a vast, far-stretching mound of broken black fragments, covered thickly here and there with great drifts of sand. Harmon and Hunter and I gazed, as though incapable of comprehension. The winds about us had quieted to a strong breeze, and it was as though all the world's forces, after that thundering moment of destruction, had withdrawn into a hushed silence. Above us the stars shone palely, the dawnlight showing eastward.

We found ourselves, in a moment, stumbling toward our plane. Protected from the winds by the high ridge, it seemed unharmed. In moments it was climbing upward, motor thundering, heading southward over the vast mound of fragments; heading over the desert toward our distant camp, toward civilization, toward the world that did not know and never had known of the horror city that had for ages stood behind us until it had drawn upon itself and all within it its own great crashing doom.

