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ASTOUNDING STORIES

THE INCREDIBLE INVASION

by *Murray Leinster*

Stories by

- Weinbaum Fearn
- Schachner Gallun
- Williamson



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ASTOUNDING STORIES

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Table of Contents

Feature Serial Novel:

- THE INCREDIBLE INVASION (Part 1) *Murray Leinster* . . . 6
Something was happening—like a pestilence—hitting spots—then cities—and one man alone knew the answer.

Novel:

- PROTEUS ISLAND *Stanley G. Weinbaum* 96
Strange things happened here—it was taboo—and he was beginning to see why.

Novelette:

- THE RETURN OF THE MURIANS . *Nat Schachner* . . . 60
A tale of vast distances in time and space—and memory—

Short Stories:

- EN ROUTE TO PLUTO *Wallace West* . . . 39
Which has to do with the usefulness of wings.
- A LEAK IN THE FOUNTAIN OF
YOUTH *A. R. Long* . . . 48
By the author of "Scandal in the 4th Dimension."
- THE SCARAB *Raymond Z. Gallun* . . . 80
A fascinating idea—and possible!
- BLACK LIGHT *Ralph Milne Farley* . . . 87
A plot which depended on science.

Serial Novel:

- THE COMETEERS (Conclusion) . . . *Jack Williamson* . . . 121
Ending the epic sequel to "The Legion of Space."

Science Feature:

- MERCURY *John W. Campbell, Jr.* 91
Article 3 covering the Solar System. This month it is Einstein's World.

Readers' Department:

- BRASS TACKS (The Open House of Controversy) 154
- EDITOR'S PAGE 153

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The Incredible Invasion

*Part One of a gripping serial novel of
the earth and its dimensional secrets.*

by **MURRAY LEINSTER**

FOREWORD:

To us, after the event, the really extraordinary thing about the Incredible Invasion is that it seemed incredible at the time. It is hard for us to realize that there was ever a time when Straussman's theory was considered a wild guess, when the human race was crowded upon the small continents of the Mother Earth alone, and when only a few thinkers even tentatively debated the possible existence of the other side of here—and usually disappeared shortly after beginning to experiment. It is more difficult still for us to realize that all the innumerable evidences of Straussman's theory were denied or explained away as hallucinations.

But the decade 1930-1940 was backward indeed, compared with to-day. Until very nearly 1940, even television was hardly more than a laboratory toy. Surgical operations were performed under gaseous or injected anæsthetics. Newspapers published their illustrations in black and white only, in a hodgepodge of black dots which absolutely omitted all details. It was not then possible to make, even by photography, a stereoscopic picture.

Radios, which carried sound only, were cumbersome instruments requiring batteries so heavy that pocket sets did not exist, and "portable" ones filled small suitcases. Cars were driven by gasoline. Telephonic service—without vision—was carried on by wires. The planes of the period were driven by gasoline as were the cars, and by comparison with the aëros of modern times were mere toys.

Most peculiar of all, though, and inevitably, is the fact that Straussman's theory was ignored except by individual scientists. There was, to be sure, some indefinite teaching concerning other dimensions than three. But no none, apparently, dared reason with the boldness truth requires.

In consequence, when communication with

the other side became inevitable, the civilization of America tottered. And since Steve Waldron was the cause—with Lucy Blair and Fran Dutt—of the course history has taken, the story of the Incredible Invasion is the story of those three, together with Steve's friend, Nick Bannerman.

—Murray Leinster, Oct. 3, 2037.

ON THE FOURTH DAY after Professor Blair's disappearance, Steve Waldron went unhappily to report no progress at all toward finding him. He was to report to the professor's daughter, which made it bad. He was engaged to her, which made it worse. And he was not a detective but a biologist, engaged in research under Professor Hamlin, which made him feel singularly incompetent and helpless in the whole matter.

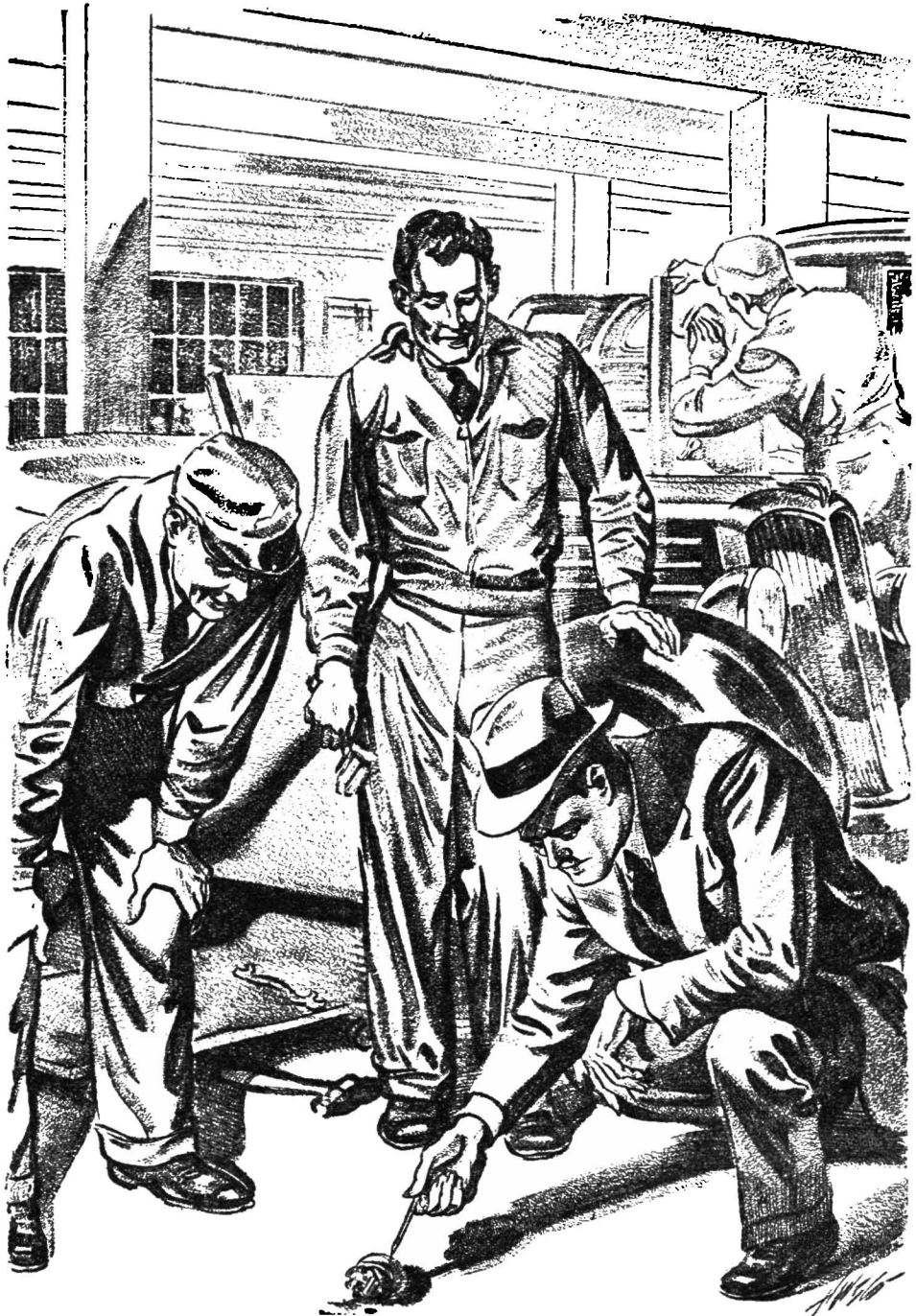
He stopped outside of Lucy's house in a gloomy irresolution. It was just after sunset, and even out here in the Forest Hill section of Newark he could hear the voice of the city. It sounded abstracted and indifferent to his helplessness, and to Lucy's distress.

Lucy was waiting eagerly. Her eyes searched his face; she tried to smile.

"Nothing, Steve?"

"Not a thing," he admitted. "But Fran borrowed my car. He wouldn't tell me what he thought he'd found, but it's a possible explanation of how your father vanished, if not why. You saw to-night's papers?"

She shook her head. Steve took the



So—Fran had put the thing underneath his car—and Steve suddenly believed he knew why.

folded paper from his pocket and pointed out the two-column head:

NO TRACE OF MISSING SAVANT.

Police Fear Foul Play.

The disappearance of Professor Erasmus Blair, noted authority on wave mechanics and mathematical physics, is still a complete puzzle to the police. Since he left his laboratory in response to a telephone call last Friday there has been absolutely no clue to his whereabouts.

Police admitted late this afternoon, however, that they are anxious to re-question Fran Dutt, Professor Blair's assistant, who is the last person known to have seen the missing man. His statements, it is understood, are contradicted by facts the police have lately learned, and a quiet search for him is being made.

Lucy looked up, startled.

"What's this about Fran?"

Steve shrugged. "Probably nonsense. Fran said that a phone call came for your father. Fran spoke to somebody, put on his hat, said he'd be back shortly—and vanished as if into thin air. The police have found out that the phone in your father's laboratory had been disconnected at his request. Consequently, they reason Fran must be lying—especially as they've been unable to find any record of such a call going through either the central station or the switchboard in the laboratory building. And as Fran's a foreigner——"

Lucy clasped her hands and unclasped them again.

"What do you think, Steve?"

"I loaned him my car this morning. When he comes back I'll tell him to get set for a third degree. We'll find your father sooner or later, of course!"

LUCY SAT DOWN. She was pale, and she looked markedly thinner than she had looked only a few days before.

"Steve," she said hesitantly, after a moment, "what do you know about Fran?"

Steve looked blank.

"Why—not much. He was your fa-

ther's assistant, of course—a foreigner of some sort, though he speaks very good English. That's all. Why?"

Lucy bit her lip.

"I—can't believe he'd have anything to do with father's disappearance. He's in love with me, Steve."

Steve growled.

"No," insisted Lucy, "he hasn't asked me to marry him. But I know. One does. And—Steve, I don't know anything about him, either. He's a foreigner. From what country?"

"I never asked him."

"I did," said Lucy, "and he turned off the question. The only thing I do know about him is that he has some brothers and sisters. Not a single thing else! The police called up to ask, today. That started me to thinking. But even if Fran is mysterious, it wouldn't make him want to harm or kidnap my father, would it?"

"Your father's work on Straussman's theory that two objects can exist in the same space would hardly infuriate Fran!" said Steve dryly.

Lucy clasped and unclasped her hands again.

"That's what makes it so—hard to bear," she said jerkily. "Not seeing any possible reason back of it! I'm—getting superstitious, Steve! Do you realize how many people disappear and are never heard of again?"

"Men who're tired of supporting their families? Women who just quietly run off with another man? People who fancy they want to live their lives without interference——"

"No," said Lucy constrainedly, "something else, Steve. Do you remember Professor Milham? He vanished. A month later they decided that he was probably the man seen to dive overboard from a coastal steamer at night. Never found, you remember. And Professor Holt?"

"Auto accident," said Steve, frowning.

"They found a car overboard—his car. But they never found him, Steve. Maybe he did die—that way. But maybe he didn't. I can think of at least three people who've vanished in six months, right in father's line of research. Why?"

"Coincidence," said Steve. "Coincidences happen, Lucy. Your father's all right. Three men in that line have vanished, but there've been plenty of others disappearing, too. There always are!"

"Yes—but more than usual, lately. Really, Steve! There've been people disappearing as if—as if something huge and horrible and invisible had—eaten them!"

"Steady, there!" protested Steve. "This thing is pretty tough, Lucy, but you mustn't go haywire!"

Lucy gulped, and then smiled shakily.

"When your father just—vanishes as if he'd evaporated, without any reason, Steve, and he doesn't try to communicate, and—and you begin to think of other people who've disappeared, too, with no trace even of—of their bodies ever being found——"

Steve held both of her hands firmly.

"But we haven't given up yet," he insisted. "We've gotten nowhere so far, I'll admit. But we will——"

The phone rang sharply. Lucy started. Then she quavered. "Every time the phone rings I—hope—— You answer, Steve."

FRONING, Steve went across the room. He was realizing that Lucy was right about Professor Milham's body never having been recovered, nor Professor Holt's, nor any of half a dozen eminent scientists who presumably had died within the past six months.

As he picked up the receiver he remembered with a sensation of shock that the laboratory fire in which four of America's leading physicists had perished had been so fierce a blaze that

no particle of their bodies had ever been recovered from the ashes.

He put the receiver to his ear. "Hello?"

A voice with the faintest of accents—an unidentifiable accent—came to his ear. It was Fran Dutt. His tone was strained.

"Steve, isn't it?"

"Yes. Where are you, Fran?"

"Not far away. I can't come to Lucy's house, Steve. Police are waiting to arrest me, and I have something I must do—for the professor's sake."

"You've found out something?" asked Steve eagerly. He saw Lucy, across the room, raise her head. Her expression grew tense.

"Something, yes," said the strained voice. "The professor is alive and unharmed. I do not dare say more over the telephone. The thing is too big—and it is incredible. I have found out——"

"What?"

"I do not dare to say. I have been to New York in your car, Steve. And I have found out that you and Lucy are not safe. I am not safe, either, but that does not matter. Something terrible is about to happen! I beg you to believe me in one thing, Steve!"

Steve put his hand over the transmitter and said swiftly to Lucy, "He's found out your father's safe, not harmed."

He said into the transmitter: "Go on, Fran!"

"You must go to New York—you and Lucy. There is a letter at the Mayfair Hotel for Lucy. Take your car and go at once. I am going to stay here. There is danger—terrible danger. You must not get out of your car until you have reached Jersey City at any rate! No matter what happens! You understand?"

"I get it," said Steve reservedly, "but I don't understand."

"Let me talk to Lucy," said Fran's voice desperately. "Please!"

Steve beckoned to her. As he handed her the receiver he said shortly: "He wants us to go somewhere in my car. And he's got it!"

Lucy, very pale, took the telephone. Steve watched as she listened, and as she said steadily: "Yes. . . . I know that, Fran. . . . I think so. . . . Very well. . . . Where is the car? . . . We'll go at once. You're going to stay here?"

She listened again. Steve heard the click of the other receiver. Lucy was even paler than before.

"He knows where father is," she reported quietly. "He says he loves me and something terrible is going to happen. I must be away from here. I promised to go at once. Your car is parked just around the next corner. And we must stay in it, no matter what we see."

"You're going?" demanded Steve.

She nodded.

"I believe him," she said steadily. "He does love me, Steve. He wouldn't let anything happen to harm me. He's going to try to—get father away from where he is."

"I've no gun," said Steve rather grimly. "I like Fran, too, but if you're in danger I want a gun. Your father had one."

"I'll get it," said Lucy composedly. She left the room.

Steve paced up and down, scowling.

Lucy came back. She handed Steve the revolver. She had on a coat and an absurd, small hat. She led the way out of the house and turned confidently to the next corner. She walked fast. They reached the intersection. Steve's car was there, the key in the lock. Steve inspected it suspiciously. He got in and stepped on the starter. It whirred. The engine caught.

"All right. Get in!"

HE let in the clutch. The car sped forward. And now they retraced the way he had come but a little while since—down a wide, still street, between houses with softly shaded lights. Once a frantic braking because of an unlighted bicycle coming out of a side street. Here there were lawns and the houses were large.

Then the mounting piles of apartment houses, as the car headed downtown. The lights were less softly shaded and were more varied in color. The street was less quiet. Then a turn into a long street of shops and crowds and glaring lights. Night had definitely fallen, now, and the crowds were consequently thicker. The car purred quietly in a respectable stream of vehicles.

The roar which was the voice of the city rose serenely to a misty sky. Children played, shrieking to each other. Men and women bought and sold, talked, quarreled and doubtless made love to each other on the sidewalks that slid by the little roadster. Cars purred, chuffed, rattled or clanked thunderously probably upon important errands from one place to another place.

And suddenly the sound of the city changed. Steve did not notice it at first. He was absorbed in his thoughts. But the humming sound which the city sends upward changed its timbre. It had been a smooth, almost a purring sound. But now there came a queer, harsh grumbling, as of a gear grinding in a machine which was out of adjustment. Then there was a shrill, high-pitched noise like distant screaming.

The grumbling grew louder, like a well-oiled motor beginning to seize from overheating. The thin, shrill sound, from a distant whine, became a near-by shriek. The grumbling noises sounded farther apart. They became individual impacts. They were separate, spaced crashes, sometimes thunderously loud.

And then, far ahead along the slant-

ing street they followed, Steve heard an impact which—because he heard it without reëchoings—he identified. It was a car crashing into another. There was a sudden ululation of screamings.

Three blocks away a heavy truck was in the act of turning from a side street into this main thoroughfare. It rumbled around. It did not straighten out on the street. It continued to turn. It went crazily, blindly up on the sidewalk and crashed into a plate-glass front. Then it reeled drunkenly and fell on its side. More cries. People—plainly in view upon the sidewalks—did not run to the spot. They keeled over stiffly, like discarded marionettes, to lie upon the ground.

TWO BLOCKS AWAY a car swerved to the left, careened across the street, and crashed into a lamp post. A trolley car, a block and a half away, suddenly ceased to clang its bell. It came on, gathering speed. Its lights burned brightly. It moved faster and ever faster. It reached and passed the roadster which Steve was now braking madly. He saw the motorman, utterly rigid at his post.

A car behind Steve tried to make a sudden, suicidal U-turn in the middle of the street. The trolley car, without a clang, without faltering, without braking, went on and into the turning automobile. Steve saw the passengers in the street car sitting stiffly in their places. Several of them had turned their heads to gaze behind. Now, at the shock of this collision, two of them toppled over. The rest remained rigid, not turning about at all to see what had happened ahead. And the street car did not turn off its power even after the collision. It continued to push and push the wreckage—

That took only seconds. Half a block ahead, people stared at the progressing tide of the incredible. Then they suddenly stiffened where they

stood. They fell woodenly, stiffly, making no gesture to break the violence of their falls. Others, still nearer, screamed. Somebody began to run. Others fled as insanely. Another crash of a runaway car. As far as the street ran ahead, there was now a vast stillness. Nothing moved anywhere—

Lucy said, tight-lipped: "No chance to turn around, Steve?"

"Not a chance in the world," said Steve grimly. "This is what Fran meant. Sorry."

There was a crash behind him. Something bumped the car violently. He wheeled by sheer instinct. ♦ A light closed car was scraping the roadster's fender. Its driver sat rigid in his seat. The other car pushed, and pushed. The driver sat motionless. As the roadster rolled on, the other car swerved and—still bumping Steve's fender—scraped off to one side and went blindly up on the sidewalk. It hit something and swerved, and then came to a crashing stop against a fire plug. Water began to drip down from its radiator. The driver did not stir. He held the wheel in wooden, motionless fingers.

Half a block behind there was a crash. More screams. Ahead there was only silence.

The roadster purred on. Lucy's eyes were wide and frightened. But she moved. A block ahead, a long black limousine came slowly out of an intersecting street, moving at no more than five or six miles an hour. It went deliberately across an intersection, lurched as deliberately up the curbstone, and buried its nose in a drug-store window. There it stopped. No one got out. No one moved anywhere. A dwindling, lessening chaos moved farther and farther away. It must have reached a certain apartment-house district. A shrieking tumult proved it. Then there was silence.

"Wh-what's happened?" demanded

Lucy through chattering teeth. "Is—everybody dead?"

"I don't know," said Steve unsteadily. "Everybody but us, apparently, is dead or something. It was very sudden, for death." He drove on. His hands felt cold. There was sweat on his face and it felt cold, too.

He said abruptly: "Lucy! We mustn't get out of the car! Not under any circumstances! Understand? No matter what we see! This is what Fran meant!"

One block—two—three—silence. The sidewalks were littered with still, stiff, strangely angular shapes. They did not look like dead bodies. They looked like lay figures, toppled over in some elaborately arranged store front. They seemed to have frozen in the act of speech, of gesticulation, of movement or thought. Here and there a solitary figure stood erect, balanced by some freak of chance at the instant that it was frozen into stiffness.

Once, as they passed, such a balanced figure was thrown off its exotic uprightness by the vibration of the car's passing. It was a woman pushing a baby carriage. She fell stiffly, sidewise, dragging the perambulator with her. The sound of her fall seemed incredibly loud, now that the voice of the city was still.

Street lights burned and house windows glowed. As the roadster went weaving in and out of stalled and piled-up traffic, even the show windows downtown gleamed invitingly. But the patrons lay, or leaned, or very absurdly stood in the extraordinary likeness of manikins—motionless, silent, not death-like, because not even lifelike.

And the stiffness had come upon downtown with less warning than upon the suburbs. Here, on Broad Street, there were serried rows of vehicles with purring motors still running. A traffic light had held two blocks of cars in

check at the instant the stiffness fell upon their drivers.

STEVE swung to the left side of the street, and found the way clear. Farther on, he swung to the right again. He turned left. For three blocks there was chaos. Then all was clear once more. But the silence was terrifying.

Only once in all the ride did Steve hear any sound except the noise of his own motor, and once or twice the chattering of Lucy's teeth. That once was a radio, blaring insanely into a town which seemed populated solely by discarded puppets.

Suddenly, the houses thinned. The road was clear ahead. Then there was a sudden tangle of cars on the left-hand side of the road, emptiness on the right. Steve drove on. He jammed down the accelerator, now.

"Steve—Steve," said Lucy with a little gasp, "what—what has happened?"

"I don't know," said Steve grimly. "But I've got a hunch Fran Dutt knows what it is and who's done it, too!"

A traffic light was ahead, underneath a vehicular bridge. A figure stirred under it to wave them on.

Lucy gasped. "We ought to stop and—warn him," she said.

"No," said Steve more grimly still. "We don't get out of the car under any circumstances until we reach Jersey City. I'm going to get you to New York safe!"

The speedometer swept up—thirty-five—forty—fifty miles an hour. Rather odd, they met no traffic coming in the opposite direction. But they heard—and their ears were attuned for such a sound—the city roar ahead of them. Then street lamps reached out toward them. Streets with houses enveloped them. People moved about. They walked, and chattered, and laughed—

Steve braked suddenly.

"It seems like a ghastly bad dream!" he said violently.

He stopped the car and looked back. Far away and far behind, the innumerable glittering lights of Newark sprawled across the dark horizon. From here, it seemed impossible that the city could be a place in which no living thing moved.

Then Lucy gasped again. In one huge, irregularly-shaped section of the distant city the lights had turned reddish. They dimmed. They went out. Another huge section—a third. Then, with methodical deliberation, one part after another of the city on the horizon went dark. It was blotted out.

II.

THE WAY through the tunnel and to the hotel Fran had mentioned seemed like a series of kaleidoscopic flashes: the light-rimmed, yawning mouth of the vehicular tunnel; the glistening tile walls and the hollow roar of the car's motor echoed from all sides; the sudden emergence into wide, night-still streets that seemed cañons between clifflike buildings; then the plunge into traffic, which seemed to begin abruptly at Fourteenth Street; the crawling, spasmodic movement northward to the Mayfair.

They spoke little, in the car. They had come from the impossible to what seemed the incredible. It surely seemed incredible that the people swarming the streets through which they drove should be so indifferent to the colossal tragedy across the Jersey meadows.

They were not indifferent, of course. The news had simply not arrived. Steve and Lucy had outrun all tidings of the catastrophe. And naturally! They had started for New York before the thing began, and Steve had kept on grimly until Lucy was in safety. But as they stopped before the ornate entrance to the Mayfair, the tragedy in Jersey was being discovered.

When Steve jammed on the brakes and rather curtly told the doorman to have the car parked for him, the phone exchanges were growing bewildered. By hundreds, it seemed, indignant telephone users were dialing the operator to protest that they had been cut off from their parties in Newark. By other hundreds, telephone users were waxing sarcastic about the quality of service which could not get a connection just on the other side of the Hudson River. And supervisors were harassedly bedeviling the maintenance department to know what was the matter that no operator in Newark could be reached on any trunk line.

When Steve, at the hotel desk, asked for a letter for Lucy, scared Tube employees were clustered about a train in the Beekman Street terminal. It had come out of Newark and flashed past the Jersey City stations without a pause. The line was clear, so the automatic stops had not checked it. It had come grinding through the underground tunnels, brightly lighted but traveling blindly. Station employees had telephoned affrightedly ahead. Dispatchers hastily conferred and passed the buck.

The train went boring through the tunnel under the river, and a flung switch brought it to a stop just before it reached the Beekman Street platforms. Then the station crew found every human being in it in startlingly lifelike attitudes—but with their flesh iron-hard and no sign of life in them.

The motorman sat at ease, his hand on the controller bar. His hand was not clenched, but the flesh was so hard that they could not loosen it from the handle. Passengers held their newspapers or clung to straps. The newspapers tore when removed. The straps had to be cut for the passengers to be taken out. Doctors, hastily called, pronounced them dead. But their appearance was so lifelike that the doctors reversed themselves. They were alive.

But there was every sign of a *rigor mortis* so intense that they must be dead. But no *rigor mortis* could be so intense, so they must be alive.

They sent the passengers and train crew to hospitals and tried desperately to understand what had happened. Their bewilderment increased when they could get no information, nor even an answer to their calls to Newark for information.

And when Lucy, rather pale, sat down in the lounge of the Mayfair to read the letter Steve handed her, people in East Orange were pulling out strangely stiffened, incredibly hard-bodied human beings from a trolley car that had driven blindly into a motor truck and stopped then only because its trolley jumped its wire.

STEVE had been rather curt when he asked for a letter for Miss Lucy Blair. He grew almost savage when he saw it. The handwriting was not that of Lucy's father. He handed it to her, searching her face.

"It's from Fran!" said Lucy startled. "Why couldn't he tell——"

"Read it!" said Steve. "I've got a hunch!"

He frankly read the note over her shoulder. It was Fran's handwriting all the way through—a queerly crabbed, foreign-looking script.

Dear Lucy:

I am going to ask you to come to New York to get this. It is necessary, because something terrible is to happen to Newark and you must be out of the way. If nothing has happened before you read this, I beg you to stay here for one hour or two, or overnight. You will be safe here. You would not be safe at home.

Your father is alive and well. I assure you of that upon my honor. And I also assure you that if you tell any one but Steve, or if he tells any one that you have had this letter from me and that you escaped the thing that will happen, by my warning—your father will not be harmed. He will be just as safe as be-

fore. But I will be killed. I say this to you also upon my honor.

And therefore I beg of you not to explain to any one how you escaped from Newark. Let it seem an accident—anything you please. But if you say that I caused it, I am a dead man.

Wait, I beg you, until I can come and explain.
Fran.

Lucy looked up uncertainly.

"He—he knew what was going to happen."

"It's fairly clear that he knew," said Steve grimly.

"And—he knows where father is now——"

"That's clear, too."

Lucy hesitated unhappily. "Steve," she said in a small voice, "I'm afraid that—that maybe the police were right—maybe he—had something to do with father's disappearance."

"Maybe he did," said Steve, very grimly indeed. "But it's certain that you and I would have disappeared or died or whatever has happened to everybody else in Newark, if it hadn't been for Fran. And I've got something important to see to right away! Wait here!"

He flung away, through the brightly-lighted lounge of the hotel, which was still a place where a certain number of people leisurely read, or wrote, or talked in low voices. He thrust through the revolving doors and spoke urgently to the doorman.

"I had my car parked five minutes ago. Where is it?"

"Back in the garage, sir," said the doorman. "If you wish it brought round, sir——"

"I don't. I want to go where it is. Something important left in it."

"Yes, sir. The garage is in the back, sir, down this way, sir——"

Steve moved quickly. His hunch was strong. Something made him feel the need for haste—for much haste. He went down the narrow service alley—cobble underfoot, blank walls on either

side, the clatter of dishes and the rank and curiously unappetizing smell of food and steam and dishwater from the restaurant kitchen. The feeling of a need for speed grew greater. He ran, his footsteps echoing.

Then came an odor of stale exhaust gas and oil, and the many varied smells of a garage. But there was a smoky reek here, too, and voices babbled excitedly. Steve went tearing into a great vehicle door and smelled the smoke of burning insulation and the pungent odor of hot metal. He saw his car standing alone with thin, blue smoke shimmering out from below it, while attendants played a gasoline extinguisher underneath.

The smoke ceased as he burst into the group.

"What's happened?" he demanded, though his hunch told him he knew. "That's my car! What happened to it?"

"I dunno," said a greasy man in jumpers. "It come in, an' we was puttin' it on the elevator when it begun to smoke. So we turned on the extinguisher."

A clanking rattle. Somebody dragged forward a crawler. The greasy man pulled himself under the car.

His voice, grunting, came out. "Wasn't a fire—no sparks left, anyway. Umph. Here's somethin' still red-hot." His tone changed, as if he were talking exclusively to himself. "Now, what the hell? What was it there for? Never saw anything——"

He pulled himself out and sat up, scratching his head.

"Somethin' attached to the frame," he said querulously. "Looks like it got shorter an' melted down. What was it?"

"I didn't put it there," said Steve, "but I think I know who did. It's no bomb, though. See if you can get it out."

THE MECHANIC slid under again with an assortment of tools. While Steve thought many things, his face growing ever darker, the tools clanked and the man grunted. At last there was a heavy, metallic thump. The crawler rolled out. The mechanic gingerly raked an irregularly shaped ball of still-hot metal into view.

"There y'are. Hm-m-m. I'll put this car where we can keep an eye on it. Now what?"

Steve handed him a bank note, examining the metal ball closely. It was almost a round mass of bronze or something similar. But it had been so hot that the metal had softened and run. Through the gaps in the bronze coating, half fused and now shapeless masses of wires and solid metal showed.

"Put it in water so I can handle it," commanded Steve bitterly. "But I'm damned sure it's melted too badly to tell me how it worked!"

The ball hissed luridly. The mechanic held it under a tap until it was cool enough to handle. Steve wedged it into his topcoat pocket—where it was still uncomfortably warm—and distributed other bank notes. He went back to the hotel lounge. Fran had put the thing underneath his car. And Steve suddenly believed he knew why.

Lucy greeted him, somehow paler than before.

"They're broadcasting—what's happened," she said quietly.

There was a curious stirring in the lobby. People clustered about the desk. The switchboard flickered with innumerable lights. A tiny desk radio gave forth a voice that was almost inaudible but was laboring under intense excitement. It was a desk radio, for the comfort and entertainment of the night clerk after all the normal business should have ceased during the small hours.

"—and the entire city seems to be isolated from the world. From the Empire State Building it appears that all elec-

tricity in Newark has been cut off. There is neither telephone nor telegraphic communication. Radio Station WOR still transmits its carrier wave, but the transmitter—located in the Jersey meadows—reports that it can get no answer to calls to the Newark studio.

"A Tube train has arrived with all its passengers dead—apparently dead before they left Newark. A trolley wreck in East Orange disclosed that a trolley car from Newark was tenanted only by dead bodies, with a dead conductor. Police cars from Jersey City are speeding toward the stricken city and will report by radio. All traffic out of the city has ceased.

"Here's a flash from Jersey City: A police car driving into Newark reported a mass of wrecked motor cars ahead, and immediately afterward stopped transmitting. It does not answer calls. Whatever has happened in Newark has happened suddenly. Efforts are being made through the Amateur Radio League to contact short-wave operators.

"Here's another flash: The Newark airport does not answer calls.

"Here's another flash still: The telephone company reports that all its lines to Newark went dead at the same time. Tests show no trouble with the electric circuits, but every person talking from Newark apparently ceased to answer or dropped dead at the same time—"

A murmurous sound of horror went about the lobby of the hotel. There was something like terror visible on the faces there, which contrasted startlingly with the self-absorbed look on the face of a couple who came through the doors, not having heard of the tragedy.

Steve plunged into a telephone booth. Lucy saw him looking up numbers, dropping in one nickel after another—dialing, dialing, dialing. He could get no answer, no connection. Because, of course, he was trying to tell some authority that he had escaped from Newark, and volunteer information concerning it.

And, of course, every crank in New York, as well as every man with relatives in Newark, was besieging authority with terrified questions which as yet

no man could answer. And also, of course, there were the habitually timorous, agitatedly demanding assurance that whatever had happened to Newark would not now happen to New York.

IN THE END, Steve went to the desk, forcibly attracted the attention of the desk clerk, and secured rooms for Lucy. He went back to her.

"I told the clerk," he said briefly, "that you live in Newark and I won't let you go back because of what's happened. I can't raise anybody who ought to be told what I know. Phone service is swamped. So I'm going in person. You go up to your room and wait. Will you?"

Lucy smiled rather wanly.

"I'm sort of dazed," she confessed. "I—can't believe in what's happened. This afternoon I was frantic about father's disappearance, and now there's this horrible thing, and—Fran—I'm sort of stunned. I think I'll try to straighten out things in my own mind."

"Good!" said Steve, still grimly. "Just one thing. You know Fran, and so do I. I think he kept us from sharing whatever fate has befallen the people in Newark. So I more or less trust him. But, also, I think he had a hand in your father's disappearance. So I distrust him, too. If Fran wants to see you, Lucy—see him downstairs here, where there are plenty of people around. And don't go anywhere with him where you'll be out of sight for an instant—not even in an elevator! And especially, don't leave the hotel!"

"A-all right, Steve," said Lucy.

She smiled gamely at him as the elevator took her upward.

Steve reflected abstractedly that she was being a good sport, holding so tightly to herself in the middle of things that would make most women hysterical. But he couldn't spend his time admiring Lucy just now. New York was

getting news of a sort to produce panics.

He hailed a taxi. The driver was white and scared. The radio inside the cab babbled on:

"Absolutely nothing is known of the nature of the catastrophe which has unquestionably overtaken Newark. On all sides, the suburbs report that it is a city of the dead. Telephone messages indicate that something has wiped out all life in a roughly circular area, bordered——"

The driver turned a white, scared face to Steve.

"That's a damn funny thing, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Steve shortly.

"Wh-what in hell is it? D'you suppose it'll come over here? It's a—a plague, ain't it?"

"No," said Steve more shortly still. "It isn't a plague. It isn't coming to New York. I know. I was in Newark when it happened and I got out."

The taxi driver turned to stare. Shrieking horns warned him of the danger of driving blindly in heavy traffic. He jerked his head about just in time to avoid a smash-up by a miracle.

"M-my Lord!" said the driver a moment later, the near collision forgotten. "Ain't you afraid you—caught it?"

"No!" said Steve. "Look here! I gave you the mayor's address. I've got to see him to tell him what I know. I saw what happened. It's got to be told to somebody in authority. Now, get through the traffic, won't you, before the city goes crazy with fool notions that it's a disease?"

THE DRIVER forthwith became inspired. He considered that an emergency existed, and he acted up to it. He jammed down the accelerator and drove like a crazy man with second sight. Red lights ceased to have any meaning to him. He worked through a forest of moving vehicles. He left behind him a bedlam of indignant hoot-

ings and more than once the shrilling of a traffic officer's whistle.

They reached the twin street lights before the mayor's residence. There were half a dozen cars already before the door. The brakes squealed.

"You'd better wait," said Steve. "They may not believe me and I've got to find somebody who'll listen."

There was an argument with a policeman on guard, insistence, the appearance of an only half-attentive secretary to the mayor, who listened and said soothingly that the mayor was in conference but would send for Steve. Yes. He would send a car and a motor cycle escort. But he was in conference. Mr. Waldron's address was——

He disappeared, and Steve ground his teeth. He went back to the cab.

"They think I'm crazy," he said in forced calm.

Some one came running down the sidewalk, babbling to himself. "I've got to see the mayor. I've got to see the mayor. I've got to see the mayor." His eyes were bright. He explained urgently to the patrolman on guard: "I've got to see the mayor about the trouble in Newark. I did it. I sent spirits over there to make everybody go to sleep, and now they won't wake them up. I want some policemen to arrest the spirits who've stopped obeying me. I've got to see the——"

Steve's taxi drove away as the patrolman resignedly rapped on the sidewalk with his nightstick. Steve's bitterness became alloyed with irony. He had seemed to the mayor's secretary merely the first of the cranks who appear in droves whenever anything either horrible or mysterious occurs. Always they have the full explanation. Always they alone are responsible or can solve or correct the mysterious phenomenon. They appear with offers to drive away comets, or cause rats to drop dead, or balance the city's budget, or select, infallibly, only perfectly honest men for



"Now!" said Steve—and he flung the switch.



The white mouse—which for twelve hours had been an iron-hard seeming corpse—squeaked!

appointive offices. It was not remarkable that Steve had been thought one of their number.

For three hours Steve fought to get a hearing. There was panic everywhere. Newspapers came out with two-hundred-point headlines: PLAGUE WIPES OUT NEWARK! Their presses whirred frantically to cope with the demand for copies. All the city was awake. All the streets swarmed with people. Extra after extra emerged and was cried.

There were no fonts of type large enough to furnish headlines for news of such supervoltage. And the news—beyond a certain number of catastrophes to trolleys, one Tube train and a transcontinental bus—was simply that there was no news from Newark—none at all.

What Steve had to tell was not listened to. In any condition of confusion, and especially when fear is involved, the first loud voice alone is listened to. In this case the first voice was the newspapers, which shrieked of a plague wiping out a city in an hour. Therefore, Steve was considered to be a crank, because he claimed to be a biologist and flatly declared that no plague was responsible for the obliteration of Newark.

His statement that he had seen folk stiffen in the streets and that the onset of their affliction had been on the edge of an ever-widening circle, instead of capriciously as a plague would have smitten its victims, simply proved him a liar.

The one place where men seemed inclined to credit him was the health department, where he had gone in despair to give clinical details of the improbable phenomenon which happened to be a fact. He had thought his tale would prove that the stiffening of bodies was not a disease result. But a terror-stricken under-physician chattered that he must be put under strict

quarantine at once, as having come from the stricken city. He pressed a button to summon help to isolate Steve. And Steve, in a passion of frustration, knocked down the white-faced ignoramus, and stalked out.

DOWNSTAIRS, in the cab, he cursed the newspapers for their headlines, which had filled men with terror and thereby closed their minds. And then a really rational thought came to him. He remembered the one newspaperman in New York he really knew—Nick Bannerman, press photographer on the *Messenger*.

He ordered himself driven to the *Messenger* office.

Nick was in a bustling flurry of preparation.

"Hello, Steve," he said happily. "Say, want to be quoted as an authority? You're a biologist. Let me call a guy who'll quote you on the plague in Newark! O. K.?"

"I am an authority," said Steve grimly. "I came out of Newark after it went dead. And it isn't a plague."

"Huh?" Nick stared at him. "Stop kidding! I'm getting ready to go in after pictures—big expedition, everybody in germproof clothes, gas masks, and all the rest. Like going into an operating room."

"You'll never come out," said Steve. "Dammit, listen to me!"

He poured out his story—or part of it. For the first time he realized how lame and unconvincing an account it was, when he had deleted all references to Fran Dutt, who could not be mentioned on account of Lucy's father. Besides, Fran Dutt was Steve's only hope of information. The story was lamed by that fact alone. And since, for the same reason, Steve could not mention the melted-down device in his pocket, his story was unconvincing indeed. But Nick listened to him with open mouth and a queer expression.

"Word of honor?" he asked. At Steve's nod he said slowly, "Then the trip's a suicide party. I'll chuck my job and stay home."

"You're wise," said Steve. Then he added impatiently: "Now get somebody who'll write what I've told you. Men are doing this thing, and men can lick it. But not until they realize it's men and not bacteria they have to fight."

Nick hesitated.

"How much of that story did you hold out?" he asked pointedly. "I know you, Steve. I'm taking your word of honor. You're not looking for publicity. But it's a damned lame story. How much did you leave out of what you told me?"

"The help I had in getting away," said Steve grimly, "and—I see it now—all the evidence that it is men, instead of a disease. But I can't tell that, Nick! Somebody else is involved. I can't!"

"But," said Nick, "without just that the yarn's too thin. It sounds faked and guesswork, too. Mind you, I know it's true! But it sounds faked. And the plague yarn is more plausible and a better story, too. No newspaper in the world will print what you told to me. You'd be laughed at."

"Then what the hell can I do?" demanded Steve savagely. "I can't tell any more!"

NICK ran his hands through his hair.

"Hm-m. If men are pulling this stunt," he said, "they'll be expecting planes to fly overhead and take pictures. Like I expected to, besides the stuff I'd get on foot. You say the germproof clothes won't work?"

"They won't!"

"Then nobody will get pictures till morning, when the planes try it. And if men are pulling the trick, they'll be set to get the planes. Yes?"

"I suppose so."

"So nobody will be able to get pictures, because they'll believe it to be

a plague and it isn't. This is assuming you're right, Steve, and I'm going to gamble that way. Now, if people who do believe it's a plague don't get pictures, well, you tell me a way to get pictures, and then everybody'll believe whatever you say it is, is the truth."

Steve paced up and down the office.

"It's lunatical!" he said angrily. "Lunatical!"

"Sure!" said Nick. "And dammit, anybody else would tell me I was a lunatic to believe that phony-sounding yarn of yours! But I do."

Steve fingered the warm metal ball in his pocket. To display it would convince nobody, explain nothing—it was too thoroughly fused to be informative—and would cause disaster to Fran. He could not use it. He suddenly stopped his pacing and called up Lucy, to reassure himself that she was all right. As he hung up, an inspiration struck him.

"For your damned pictures," he said abruptly, "how about kites? Flying low and trailing cameras? We'd be out of the danger zone, and if they shot down the kites we'd still be all right."

"Swell!" said Nick. "Perfectly swell! And I know a guy who rents 'em for advertising! Here, give me that phone!"

So Nick Bannerman and Steve conducted, themselves, a highly exclusive expedition to the Jersey meadows, at the earliest break of dawn. The expedition Nick had at first intended to accompany reached the edge of Newark and ceased to report back. It was apparently dead. But still Steve felt that Nick was dubious.

They were not alone in their expeditionary ideas. Far away, to the north, sputtering motor cycles pushed cautiously forward on a causeway. High up on the elevated roadway which takes the through traffic from the vehicular tube, there were other expeditions. Motor-boat engines purred or

hummed on the winding channels through the meadows. There were police expeditions, health-department expeditions, newspaper expeditions, mere curiosity expeditions—though these were few—and Federal government expeditions.

From a base in Jersey City or Union City or Bayonne, these parties floated cautiously, or waded cautiously, or drove slowly and very tentatively toward the silent city to the west. Doubtless other hardy explorers moved upon Newark from other directions, also. But out here it was, perhaps, most picturesque.

The newly-risen sun sent its nearly horizontal rays across the world upon Newark's tall buildings. They were aloof. They were silent. No smoke, no steam, no sign of activity appeared anywhere about them. The city loomed dreamlike above the mist. It looked like a fairy city, from a distance and in the early morning.

No word, no sound, no sign of life had come from it during all the dark hours. There was no sign of life now. And parties had essayed to enter it which were protected against contagion, against gas, against every conceivable form of death which might have destroyed half a million people in a moment. Not one party had returned. Not one had given, even by radio, the faintest hint of the cause of its disappearance before it vanished into oblivion.

SUCH EXPEDITIONS had proved that the towers of the city were exactly as inapproachable and exactly as remote as dead cities in the craters of the Moon.

But with the first sun rays yet other attempts of men to explore the city began. Over the cliffs of the Palisades came a roaring, humming sound. A yellow-winged plane hurtled forward. The bottom of its fuselage showed the

square black hole of an aerial camera. It sped forward toward the still city. Aloft, it should be secure against gas or contagion or any other harmful thing.

It swept above the city in a beautiful, sweeping curve. Sunlight glittered upon it. It hummed throatily over the buildings. Nick Bannerman swore.

"It's going all right," he said bitterly, "and I ought to be in it! You scared me off, Steve!"

Steve watched. His lips were tightly pressed together.

"It's still flying the same curve," he said quietly. "Look! It's got to change course now! It's flying low! Too low! It'll hit those buildings!"

The distant dot which was a flying thing did not swerve. Its motor running faultlessly, it swept on in the same graceful, sweeping curve. It did not change course. It went swiftly, smoothly, blindly, into the sheer wall of a man-made cliff. There was a little puff of smoke, perhaps, or dust, a distant flare of flame, then nothing.

There may have been a murmur of horror from those expeditions which fumbled delicately toward the city of the dead. But they were not united. No concerted sound arose. There was a pause, and they went on.

And another plane appeared. This plane flew high—so high that tiny streamers of otherwise invisible mist sometimes partly hid it. It droned like a monster fly, high, high above. Its pictures would not show the detail of those in that other wrecked ship, but it should be safe. It swung above the dead city. Its cameras would be clicking, changing their own plates, clicking again—

It went into a shallow dive. The dive became steeper. It was a power dive, a nose dive, a tail spin. There was not one movement of any control to pull it out. Motor roaring, rotating crazily as it fell, it went spinning

down to destruction in the city below.

"And that," said Steve brittly, "is that. Remember, Nick, that men are causing this! And now let's get to work!"

III.

THEY WORKED for an hour, there in the early-morning sunlight. Steve had not flown kites since his boyhood, and Nick had apparently never flown them at all, but the man who rented them for advertising purposes was an expert. The main drawback was that his idea of the proper way to fly a kite was as nearly overhead as possible, and Steve and Nick wanted the kite to reach as near to the distant city as could be managed.

Time after time they sent the kites up, and every time their owner painstakingly adjusted them to rise as nearly vertical as they could, because that was the way to fly an advertising banner.

In the end Steve lost patience, adjusted the lines himself, and after three false starts sent the first box kite and its camera floating a bare two hundred feet up, and with the end of its string very nearly parallel to the ground. He hooked on a second box kite to hold the string aloft, and then a third.

Nick danced lightly in his excitement, when they came back.

"The damn thing," he babbled, "was nearly over that bunch of stuff that must be a couple hundred cars piled up in a heap. Now let me load this camera up for keeps. We'll send it all the way across the city, and I'll go back and spit in the city editor's eye!"

They sent the camera kite up again, with a cage of white mice dangling beside the camera as an offering to science. They used kite after kite to keep the string off the ground. When Nick, watching through binoculars, announced profanely that the camera and mouse cage were actually above the very heart

of the city, there were nearly two miles of line out and almost a dozen box kites strung along its length.

From the reel on the kite-man's car the thin white cord reached up in a graceful catenary curve, and swept down in another curve more graceful still and up to the next kite, and so on until it became invisible. Then there were merely the motionless little white cubes which were box kites aloft.

Nick pored over the minute hand of his watch with a frenzied impatience.

"Two minutes more," he said feverishly, "one and a half—one-half a minute—finished! Give it fifteen seconds more and reel it in. Hurry up! Speed!"

The kiteman put the reel in gear. The kite line started to come in.

"Let's get going!" babbled Nick. "Reel it in as we go! I've got to get those films to the developing room! I'm going to go crazy till I see if I got it! What a sweep it'll be!"

He was beside himself—with anxiety about the camera and with the reporter's craving for speed. The camera, of course, was one such as a newspaperman uses to cover fires, floods, spectacular arrivals, and catastrophes from the air. It was really a mapping camera, changing its own plates either after each exposure or at predetermined intervals, with the exposure of each plate automatically arranged for. It had been changing and exposing its own plates over the dead city. The white mice were for scientific experiment, if they became stiff and iron-hard like human beings.

And Steve could see reason for speed. He started the kite-reel truck and went swiftly toward Jersey City, with the reel hauling in kites and camera as the truck towed them. Steve stopped where wires crossed the road between two poles at the very edge of the town.

There he waited, the motor idling,

until Nick caught the camera in his arms and cried zestfully: "Home, James, and don't spare the horses! Step on it, Steve!"

Steve obeyed, while the kite man stowed his kites. Presently, at the necessary stop before entering the vehicular tunnel, the kite man took over the wheel. Nick crooned unmusically over the bulky camera.

"We got some action," said the kite man proudly. "Those other fellows are still stuck."

"Stuck, are they?" said Steve sharply. "Stuck?"

"I saw a couple cars that were headin' for Newark go off the road in the ditch," the kite man explained. "The fellows that were next to us gave up, seemingly. When I stowed the kites they were all lyin' down. Even the motor cycles wasn't goin' on. They were lyin' down, too. They were stuck, weren't they?"

Steve's jaw clamped tight. Nick stared, wide-eyed.

"Steve! My Lord, Steve! That doesn't mean——"

"It very probably does," said Steve grimly. "They got the planes. They saw that we got pictures with kites. They didn't want us to take them away. So they enlarged the dead area—whatever causes it!"

NICK SWORE in an awed and shaken voice. The truck swooped up out of the underwater tunnel. Steve reached back and took the little cage of white mice that had come back with the camera. He had barely glanced at them before. That they would return stark and stiff and still had seemed a foregone conclusion. Now he opened the cage and poked them experimentally. He had been right.

"I need a biological laboratory," he said abstractedly, "so I can work on these mice. I want to find out what

happened to them. Then I'll know what happened to the people in Newark. And maybe I'll be able to guess at a protection from it."

"If our pictures are good," said Nick, "anything you say will be taken as gospel."

"All right." Steve seemed indifferent. Actually, he was absorbed in planning the work, the tests he planned to carry out. The small furry bodies were startlingly lifelike. "I'm going up to see Professor Jamison. He's done a lot of work on the blood stream. He isolated a new intermediate product in clotting. He'll have everything I need, and he'll work with me."

"If only these pictures turn out!" said Nick yearningly. "Steve, if they turn out, you'll talk?"

"Surely. I say! Let me out here! I'll get a taxi and speed up to Jamison's laboratory. It's at Columbia."

The truck swerved to the curb. Steve climbed out, carrying the cage of white mice, and then hailed a taxi. He was gone into the thick of the traffic before Nick began to swear at his own failure to arrange a definite means of reaching him. But even that oversight could not keep Nick Bannerman's attention long. He was on fire with impatience to get into a dark room with his plates.

Steve examined the mice, his specimens, on the way uptown in the cab. The news accounts of this strange condition had been markedly accurate. The flesh of the little creatures was hard—harder than *rigor mortis* would account for—harder than any form of catalepsy could produce. Harder—it seemed to Steve—than even frozen flesh would be—which was to say harder than ice.

But even with the evidence before him, Steve could not quite believe that. Yet he did notice that the normally soft, sleek fur of the little animals had a queer feel. The long whiskers re-

sisted bending to a surprising degree. They seemed almost like wires! He could prick his finger with them! But queerest of all was the utterly lifelike look of the mice. They did not look dead. They did not feel alive. They seemed like consummately carved images of mice, perfect past the possibilities of art.

Then they reached the cut-stone walls and somber buildings of Columbia. Steve went directly to Professor Jamison's laboratory. He carried the stiffened mice in their cage. He knocked on the door, planning absordedly as he knocked.

THE DOOR OPENED. Not Professor Jamison, but a young, unobtrusively foreign young man looked inquiringly at Steve. He wore a laboratory apron, work-stained and torn. The indefinable smell of a biological laboratory struck Steve's nostrils: alcohol, formaldehyde, chemicals, guinea pigs and—

"Where's Professor Jamison?" asked Steve urgently. "I'm Steve Waldron, doing some research work with Hamlin, in Newark. You know what's happened over there! I've got some specimens from Newark, and I've got to work on them and find out what's what. Where's Professor Jamison?"

The young man smiled.

"He is not in just at present," he said cordially. The barest trace of a somehow familiar accent marked his speech. "He will be back later. But have you specimens from Newark? That is news! It is an opportunity! How did you manage to get them? Come in! You surely need no better introduction than that! The professor—"

He opened the door wide. Steve stepped in. He flung off his coat.

"First thing," said Steve feverishly, "is to take a look at the cells of the

various tissues and see what causes that rigor. I saw the damned thing happen in Newark. It's not a plague. It might have been a gas, but I don't believe it. But we can check for extra substances—especially colloids—in the blood stream—"

He stopped short, staring. The young man had continued to smile, and Steve suddenly noted with a sense of extreme shock that he was subtly foreign. His hair was jet-black and absolutely straight. His skin was faintly pigmented—but most of the white races are pigmented more or less. His smile was pleasant, but his cheek bones projected, and his lips were just a trifle thin, and the shape of his head was most extraordinary.

Steve stared at him, startled out of even his absorption in the technical problem at hand. This young man was, to be sure, the born pattern of a laboratory assistant or an unusually gifted student permitted to help in research. In a crowd, he would pass unnoticed. But an uncanny sense of familiarity came to Steve. The smile was familiar. The combination of head form and jet-black hair and slightly noticeable cheek bones associated him with a type—a racial type which was unobtrusive but distinctive.

"I know," said Steve, staring with all his eyes, "I know a man who looks a great deal like you. I wonder—"

The young man's smile widened just a trifle.

"You have come from Newark, you say. I think your story will be most interesting. Did you, in Newark, see anything like this?"

He opened a drawer in a laboratory table. He reached in his hand. And suspicion struck Steve with a sudden violence. The young man turned, with a queer, tubelike thing in his hand which looked partly like a pistol and partly like almost anything else.

"Did you ever see anything——"

His eyes were suddenly intent—and deadly. He jerked the thing—it was a weapon—up to cover Steve. And Steve struck like a madman. He had never struck so swift a blow before. It went home to the young man's jaw. The pistollike object fell from his grasp as he went limp on his feet and crashed soggily to the floor.

"My Lord!" said Steve, stupefied. "He—Fran Dutt—— He could be Fran's brother!"

He stared down at the man he'd struck. There was a sudden crackling noise, the smell of hot metal. The pistollike thing on the floor gave off a thin curl of pale-blue smoke. It grew hotter. It glowed a dull-red, then a cherry-red on the concrete floor of the laboratory. Its outer shell sagged and melted in spots, and the fused interior partly ran out to make a puddle of melted metal, and partly collapsed into an unfathomable shapelessness, like the bronze ball underneath Steve's car.

And then some instinct made Steve look in the direction of the cages in which guinea pigs lived and moved. In one cage they did not move; but in another they were motionless, stiffened—cataleptic! The pistollike thing had pointed at that second cage. Steve opened the cage and put his hand in. The flesh of the guinea pigs was hard—harder than *rigor mortis* would account for——

HE LEFT the young man on the floor and went desperately in quest of a telephone. He called the office of the *Messenger* and demanded Nick.

Nick answered the phone with the manner of one singing songs of triumph.

Steve curtly told him exactly what had happened, demanding that Nick send police and reporters—the police to arrest Professor Jamison's assistant and sweat him for information about the

plague, the reporters to describe the pistol and the unquestionable truth that it had produced every symptom of the Newark plague in guinea pigs. It would change the whole attitude of men toward that plague. Nick listened, but with less than absorption.

"I got the pictures, Steve!" he said exuberantly. "That camera got clear snaps of the streets! Cars smashed up! People lying on the pavements, propped up in doorways, frozen stiff in their cars—— I got the pictures! I'll send somebody up to the laboratory. A rewrite man did the yarn as you gave it to me. This'll help for a follow-up until we can get more."

"Send a cop or a lot of them," Steve told him grimly. "When my young foreign friend comes to, he should be made to talk!"

"O. K., guy!" Nick was much too pleased with himself to be wholly rational. He added suddenly: "Say! Somebody—a Miss Lucy Blair—has been trying to get hold of you. She asked for me, told me to tell you Fran's come, whatever that means. How'd she know I knew you, Steve? She's at the Mayfair. That your hotel?"

Steve barked into the transmitter.

"Yes! Get those cops to come grab that young fool I slugged! Tell 'em to slap him in jail and hold him! I've got to get to Lucy in a hurry!"

Hatless, he plunged out of the phone booth and out upon the street. He caught a cruising taxi, and, by the use of cash, persuaded the driver of his need for extreme haste.

He got it. Had he been less worried about Lucy, he might have grown gray-haired on his own account on that ride. But his distrust of Fran was more intense than ever since a man with Fran's own racial characteristics had tried to use a strange weapon producing exactly the strange catalepsy which had wiped out Newark. And with Fran



And then some instinct made him look in the direction of the cages—

where Lucy was, Steve knew anxiety of the most nerve-racking sort.

IT WAS NEEDLESS—partly. He went racing through the revolving doors of the Mayfair. He saw Lucy, pale but composed, talking quietly to Fran on a sofa at one side of the lobby. Sheer relief came into her eyes as she saw Steve. Fran looked sick and wretched.

"Hello, Fran," said Steve grimly. "Let's go in the lounge and talk. I think we'd better."

He led the way. It was still fairly early in the morning and there were few people about. Steve led the way to a group of chairs by a window. He seated Lucy. Fran shrugged and sat down. Steve took a chair himself.

"What're the developments, Fran?" he asked quietly. "You were quite right. It was wise for Lucy to get out of Newark. Something terrible did happen there. Now what?"

"He's been begging me to go out West somewhere," said Lucy, very pale. "He's offered to lend me the money."

Steve's eyes narrowed.

"Why, Fran? Is your crowd planning to do the same thing for New York?"

"Why do you say my crowd, Steve?" Fran's voice was strained.

Steve noticed afresh that he had the same faint, almost unnoticeable accent as Professor Jamison's laboratory assistant.

"I think I've proved that I wish Lucy well—and you, too. What's this talk about my 'crowd'?" Fran continued.

"You wish Lucy well, yes. Me—I'm not so sure. And by your crowd, I mean the men who've—done whatever's been done to the people in Newark."

Fran Dutt said harshly: "I resent that, Steve! You've no reason to believe men caused that catastrophe—"

"Don't be a fool, Fran!" Steve's

eyes glowed. "I'll be willing to bet that about your person you've got a—well—we'll call it a pistol. It's something like a pistol; but it doesn't shoot bullets. If you drop it to the floor it will heat up and melt itself, so nobody can figure out what it was meant to do, or how. But I know!"

Fran had been pale. He went paler yet. He went livid. "Where'd you hear about such things?"

"Where I've just come from. I knocked a man cold who tried to turn such a pistol on me. It did hit some guinea pigs, and they're the best-looking dead guinea pigs you ever saw—like the people in Newark. You see, I do have reason to say men did that!"

Fran Dutt hesitated in an agony of indecision. He looked at Lucy. Then he said desperately: "All right, I'll admit it! To you! I've got such a pistol in my pocket. I'll use it if I have to. That's warning! But I point out that I did get the two of you out of Newark! Didn't I? And I'm going to keep on trying to see that Lucy's safe. But if you fight me, Steve, I can't! My life's in your hands, but I'm the only man who can help Lucy and—and her father."

Steve said between his teeth, "Are you asking a price?"

Fran flushed hotly and then went deathly pale again. "I am not! For Lucy I will do anything that I can! I love her, and she knows it. I am risking my life and more than my life in what I have said to you here and now! You cannot understand what I am risking! But I would be a traitor to my homeland if I did more than try to protect Lucy. What I did for you, Steve, was incidental. It was necessary that some one take Lucy away. That is why I looked out for you. You were my friend, but my homeland—"

"You concede that men have destroyed Newark? Your countrymen?"

What is this, Fran? A war? An invasion?"

Fran hesitated, and said helplessly: "You would not understand, and I would not tell you anyhow."

Steve's eyes were extremely intent. "Tell me this! You were working with Lucy's father. He had an idea that Straussman was nearer right than most people believe—two objects in the same space at the same time." Steve nodded as Fran's eyes widened. "Yes! Straussman! Your compatriots are working from where Straussman left off?"

"That is nonsense, Steve!" Fran's tone was convincing enough, but his eyes were almost frightened.

"Very well. Professor Jamison had an assistant. He looked like you, Fran. Was he your countryman?"

"How could I tell, Steve? I do not know him!"

"Professor Jamison has disappeared, hasn't he?"

"Yes— How do I know?"

"You do know, Fran. He has disappeared. His assistant is your countryman. He was a spy; wasn't he? And aren't you a spy for your country in a war that my country doesn't yet know exists?"

Fran's hand went into his coat pocket. He had gone paler and yet more pale at each question. Now he said bitterly: "You do want Lucy to hate me, don't you? All right, it's true! I am a spy! My country has invaded yours. But tell your countrymen so! They'll call you a lunatic!"

"I have been called a lunatic," said Steve. "I'm used to it."

"I hate it!" said Fran fiercely. "There was no need for this war. There are many of us who do not believe our leaders are right in this thing. Many of us hate our leaders. We would be glad to overthrow them, to wipe

them out utterly. But what can we do? I was sent through to be a spy. My family is in my homeland. If I fail, if I do anything against our leaders' plans, my parents, my brothers, my sisters——"

"I see," said Steve. "You're saying there's a revolt brewing in your country. That's probably why it's starting a war against mine!"

"Perhaps," said Fran desperately. "But——"

A NEWSBOY shouted outside the hotel. "Pictures from Newark! Pictures from Newark! Extra! Pictures from Newark! Dead bodies in the streets! Men done it! It ain't a plague! Extra!"

Fran Dutt started up.

Steve called a bell boy and sent him for a paper.

"It'll be Nick Bannerman's work," he said curtly. "We got those pictures not much over an hour ago."

The bell boy came back, panting with his haste.

Steve took the paper.

"I want to know how straight Nick got the story," he said grimly, "and how much people will believe."

He ran his eyes down the account, while Fran Dutt looked helplessly at Lucy.

Then Steve exclaimed angrily, "The fool! He's hashed together a lot of nonsense, and then put in:

"Steven Waldron, through whose assistance these exclusive photos were secured, said in his rooms at the Mayfair Hotel, 'That's all I can tell you now. I've proved that men are responsible for the destruction of Newark. I'm going to get some rest, and then start to lick them!'"

Steve ground his teeth. "The fool! Whoever wrote that story didn't believe a damned bit of it, and wrote none at

all! They've told nothing! Nothing! Nothing!"

But Fran Dutt said harshly: "Fool? You're a fool, Steve! Get Lucy away from here! At once! This hotel was mentioned as your headquarters, and I'm not the only spy in New York!"

Steve glanced at Fran Dutt's chalk-white face. Then he stood up, took Lucy's arm, and led her swiftly out the front revolving door. A taxi discharged a passenger.

Steve thrust Lucy into it and snapped: "Drive on! In a hurry! Speed!"

The taxi lurched. In half a block there was a traffic jam. In a block there was a red light—two blocks, three, four—

Then, behind them, there was a sudden crashing sound. There were screamings. There were heavy, sodden bumps mingled with other screams, and the shattering of plate glass, the roaring of automobile horns, the shrilling of police whistles.

Steve looked back and saw. He said grimly: "Driver, the stuff that hit Newark is working back there. You'd better step on the accelerator!"

IV.

IT WAS NOT HARD to find out, once they'd persuaded the panic-stricken driver to stop away uptown, just what had happened about the Mayfair Hotel. For two blocks in every direction every street, every building, and every room was in the condition of the city of marionettes across the Jersey meadows. Human beings, frozen instantly in the position and the gesture of the moment, lay on the ground, or leaned drunkenly against some object which had arrested their fall.

Motor cars, trucks, and surface cars had gone blindly ahead when their

drivers stiffened into the semblance of waxworks. They had crashed into each other. They had rolled across sidewalks and into plate-glass windows or into areaways. And along the ways leading out of the affected district, Juggernaut vehicles had come with seeming corpses at their wheels. These last monsters caused the screamings Steve and Lucy had heard.

They heard the explanation in a tiny restaurant into which Steve had taken her, in part for breakfast and in part because of the over-resonant voice of an announcer to be heard within it. They listened to the report of the "plague spot" about the Mayfair Hotel. Only after it was ended did a rather pretty waitress come to wait on them.

She made no apology for the delay. Business was not being carried on as usual, this morning. Even the radios for once became noncommercial. News bulletins came through with such rapidity that no possible fifteen-minute period could be completed without interruption for a news flash. So the broadcasters flung out the latest news and then played records until it was time for more news.

Steve ordered breakfast for Lucy and himself.

"We've got a breathing space," he said somberly, when the waitress had gone to the kitchen with their order. "But we've got to think what to do. That plague spot around the Mayfair was designed to get us—me particularly. Heaven knows that newspaper didn't describe me as knowing much, but Fran's compatriots evidently thought even that too much. I'm going to call Nick at the *Messenger*."

He rose from the table and closeted himself in the little booth by the cashier's desk. Lucy sat still, waiting. Things were moving fast! The disappearance of her father and the anxi-

ety and heartache attendant upon it; the misery of Fran Dutt, which at first had seemed grief like her own, and was now all too plausibly shame that he had been the person to cause her that grief. But he did say that her father was alive and well, and he had kept her and Steve from being the victims of whatever had wiped out Newark.

That catastrophe, itself, was too vast to be real. Lucy simply could not make herself believe that nearly every human being she knew was a stiffened, iron-hard manikin, toppled in some grotesque attitude of the moment among half a million other such manikins in a silent city. The idea was too big to be grasped and too horrible to be believed. It was too grotesque to be accepted as anything but a dream.

THE MUSIC of the radio cut off abruptly. An announcer spoke:

"The authorities announce that it seems most probable that the outbreak of the plague in a sixteen-block area in Manhattan, an hour ago, is due to the bringing of the plague germs from Newark by a newspaper photographer and a Mr. Steven Waldron, who claimed to have escaped the onset of the plague there. The new plague area has been surrounded by a military cordon.

"Steve Waldron, it is assumed, was involved in the outbreak, having been in the Mayfair at the time the plague struck. The newspaper photographer has been isolated, and every precaution has been taken against further outbreaks."

Steve came out of the phone booth, his brows dark. He sat down opposite Lucy. The waitress served them.

When she moved away, Steve said shortly: "This world is run by lunatics! Nick was arrested as a possible plague carrier and was ordered, practically at the point of a gun, to join another expedition to make an aerial survey of Newark by means of kites. He having gotten pictures before, they think he can do it again. And the men

who're taking him know they run a chance, anyhow. He's gone with them."

The radio boomed:

"Doctors are not yet able to understand the condition of the bodies recovered from the Tube train last night. They show absolutely no sign of life, but neither is there the faintest proof that they are dead. Physicians refuse to conduct autopsies in the absence of clear proof that the victims are actually dead, yet admit that they have no hope that life remains. So far the bodies have shown no sign of changes indicating death. Bacteriological examination of such body fluids as have been obtained are wholly negative."

Steve stirred impatiently.

"But why don't they use the animals I got for them? It would be like the police, going after Jamison's assistant, to miss those guinea pigs and white mice altogether! The doctors could autopsize them, anyhow! There's one thing I can do that I won't be cursed for, anyhow! I'm going to telephone again."

He pushed back his chair and went to the booth for the second time. Lucy, eating bacon and eggs and mildly amazed that she could eat at all, could see his frowning concentration as he dialed. Then he asked for some one, waited, and talked crisply.

An instant later he looked incredulous, then furious. He barked at the transmitter, and the tone of his voice came out into the small restaurant though no word could be distinguished. He was raging. He snapped a last, apparently blistering phrase, hung up, and came out with his eyes blazing.

"Sorry, Lucy," he said in a voice he kept calm by a tremendous effort, "we'll have to go on. I won't have time to eat my breakfast. You'd better leave the rest of yours. Come along!"

He left on the table a sum which would pay for the food twice over, and ushered Lucy swiftly out into the street.

"The fools!" he raged, the instant the door had closed behind them. "I called the health department to tell them there were some small animals they could conduct autopsies on in Professor Jamison's laboratory. And the fool at the phone ordered me to stay where I was and keep myself isolated until a quarantine car could come for me. He added that the phone call would be traced instantly, so I couldn't get away."

"But—Steve——"

"Fran Dutt," said Steve furiously, "wants you to go out West. Don't you see what that implies? He wants you safe! You won't be safe unless you go West. Do you think I'm going to leave you here after a hint like that? Dammit, they'd quarantine you, too, because you've been with me—and we'd have a plague spot appearing to include us both! It happened this morning, didn't it?"

He hailed a taxi.

"But—where are we going now?" asked Lucy uneasily, getting into the taxi.

"That taxi that took us from the Mayfair was headed uptown. And the driver was scared, you remember! We're about six blocks from Columbia now. I'm going to get some of those stiffened animals before the police get there. They'd be just fools enough to burn them as possible centers of contagion! And then I'm going to go where I can work on them, find out what Fran Dutt's friends did to them, and figure out a way to prevent it. Then I'm going to take some men into Newark and fight! Fran Dutt said it was a war. They've done all the fighting so far. It's time we Americans did a little scrapping!"

In less than an hour, though, Americans were fighting. But they were fighting among themselves. Steve had called the health department not later

than a quarter past nine. He left the little restaurant immediately. In exactly forty minutes the radios of New York announced the appearance of a second plague spot in Manhattan. It centered six blocks from Columbia University—at the restaurant. Ten minutes later a third plague spot appeared on the Columbia campus.

STEVE AND LUCY heard the commissioner of police when he took the air a little later. He informed the public that Steve had telephoned from one plague spot just before the plague struck it, and directed the police to go to the other just before it, too, manifested itself as a place where all human beings died. Then he referred to Steve's presence at the Mayfair Hotel, which instantly thereafter was smitten with the plague.

The commissioner went on:

"We can only assume that this man is a plague carrier, himself immune to the strange disease he spreads. His last phone call was plainly motivated by a news broadcast of a few minutes before, so we are sure he listens to the radio.

"Therefore, I make a personal appeal to Mr. Waldron to surrender himself, to permit himself to be isolated, so that uncounted thousands of his fellowmen may live out unharmed the lives that are so precious to them; that women and little children——"

And so on. It was an impressive appeal, but it proved that Steve was considered at least a lunatic and that the belief in a plague was so firmly rooted that nothing could overthrow it. The one edition of the *Messenger* which had quoted Steve on the human origin of the Newark disaster had been supplanted by others which made no further reference to that theory. So the commissioner made one mistake in showing Steve that he would have no help and no chance to uncover the real cause of the disaster.

And the second mistake was that it let the public know that further outbreaks of the plague might happen anywhere, and at any time.

The first mistake set Steve grimly at the task of getting out of New York to some spot where he might work on his recovered specimens without ill-advised interference. The second mistake made panics.

Not all of New York went mad, of course. But the hysterical and the ill-advised tried to bolt from the city. They fought for places on trains, battled for room on the river steamers, and thronged the streets offering vast sums—at first—to any motorist who would take them out of New York. But there were many who had no money. They begged rides. Then they demanded rides.

There were riots in which panic-stricken fools swarmed upon cars stopped at traffic lights, crowded them crazily, and insanely demanded transportation out of the danger area. A driver was dragged from his car that some one more fearful than himself might take his place.

People thought only of themselves.

The elevated and subway stations were mobbed. The trains taking the longest routes were jammed far past even the normally preposterous crowding. And then battles began, with folk on the platforms fighting to drag out those within the trains, so there would be room for them inside. The subway systems in particular were paralyzed, because, of course, the safety systems would not let the trains start until all the doors were closed.

There were gruesome happenings in the subway stations.

Steve saw the beginning of the panic, even far uptown. First, there were madly speeding cars, loaded far past capacity—with passengers on the running boards, the mud guards, hoods,

and even the roofs. Those passengers shouted for road room.

Elevated trains were moving tumults. Motor trucks drove by, with seeming lunatics at their wheels, so crowded that it was not uncommon for a figure to be jolted from its hold. Even horse-drawn drays rattled northward, the horses lashed furiously by drivers who assuredly had not taken the animals from the stables that morning.

In such a river of traffic, driven by senseless panic, Steve's and Lucy's actual and pressing necessity seemed impossible of achievement. Steve grimly watched the flood of vehicles go by.

"No safety in that sort of escape," he said coldly. "We'll have to wait till the worst of it is over."

THEN some one touched his arm. A man in a cap nodded to him.

"You lookin' for a way to get outa town?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," said Steve as quietly. "But not like that!"

"Right," said the man with the cap. "You look able-bodied. Nobody but you an' her?"

"Nobody else," agreed Steve.

"I got a car," said the man, "an' I got some kids. Those lunatics would drag the kids out to make room for them. Another fella an' me, we're figurin' on makin' a break. With people goin' crazy like this, there's goin' to be trouble presently. My wife can drive. I'll make room for you two if you help in any scroppin' we have to do. Three of us with ax handles oughta keep the runnin' boards clear."

"I'm on," said Steve.

It worked out well enough. The car was parked in a back yard. Four children, three women, and three men cramped themselves into a five-passenger touring car of decidedly antiquated

pattern. The children crouched down on the floor. Steve and one other man perched themselves on the folded-back top. The owner of the car sat on the back of the front seat. His red-headed wife looked up at him; he nodded; she drove out into the street. The three men had shed their coats and waited, bare-headed and grim, with ax handles frankly ready for trouble.

They got out of town. The exodus had been coolly if hurriedly arranged. They were in the thick of the traffic just once, when they had to cross a bridge. There they were crowded toward the side of the open way and figures jumped for the running board, babbling. The ax handles came instantly into play, without argument or remorse.

For ten minutes it was nearly a continuous battle. Then the red-headed woman managed to get farther out into the middle of the stream. A little later she managed to break out of it onto a side road. Her husband consulted road maps, and for an hour or more they threaded narrow country lanes. In all that time they saw no more than a dozen other carloads of refugees. The great mob of the panic-stricken stayed on the main highways, fleeing senselessly from a plague amid all the conditions which produce contagion.

They stopped. The owner of the car said satisfiedly: "Well, we made it! Where you want to go, fella? We're headin' up for Vermont. The wife's got a family up there, an' we'll visit a while. My pal's goin' near all the way. What's on your mind?"

"I'm hunting for the nearest town with a biological laboratory in it," said Steve. "What's the nearest town, and which way is it?"

More consultation of the road map. White Plains was three miles off.

"Thanks," said Steve. "That'll do, I think."

He started to get out of the car.

"We'll take you most of the way, anyhow," said the owner of the car. "Set still. I like the way you swing an ax handle!"

The embattled car took them all the way to White Plains. There they saw the thick, clotted stream of fugitives passing through. There their benefactor spoke to his red-headed wife; she braked, and instantly turned the car in readiness to speed away. Steve and Lucy got out. There were grins. A child piped, "G'by!"

The car dwindled on the way to Vermont.

"NOW," said Steve, "to find a laboratory. I've been doing some thinking, though. I believe I can get somewhere with just a decently equipped doctor's outfit. We'll see."

He found what he needed. He frankly explained who he was and that he had specimens from Newark and had to do some autopsies in a hurry.

The leading family physician of White Plains heard him out. Then he led Steve into his office. He was not a specialist, but to keep the confidence of his patients a family doctor nowadays can frequently do a certain amount of X-ray work, bake out a rheumatic pain, or perform a minor operation. And a family physician knows—none better—the importance of exact information.

"I've been disbelieving that it was a plague," said the doctor dryly. "Germs don't work that way! But I haven't even a guess as to what it is. So go ahead! If there's anything else you need, ask for it."

He went out.

Steve set to work. It was then about noon. At two o'clock he had found absolutely no faintest clue to the cause of the death of three mice, which he had dissected with infinite care. Their flesh was hard—harder than ice. More,

each and every internal organ was hard, too—which was hardly an expected discovery. There was no discernible abnormality in any organ, muscle, or tissue. They were hardened, but that was all.

No ordinary chemical process could have produced that hardening—not while the normal amount of fluid remained in the tissues. The blood seemed thickened, but it had undergone no change in constitution or color. It had neither clotted nor separated. Its corpuscles were normal in appearance and number.

At four o'clock Steve had found no anomalous chemical in the tiny bodies. The doctor had bought living white mice at a pet store for him. Blood from the stiffened, frozen mice, injected into the others, produced absolutely no effect. Which, of course, proved the absence of poison, but would not be proof of the absence of bacteria until an incubation period was past.

A culture medium, made from the hardened tissues, was apparently un-nutrient. Bacteria simply acted as if the tissues were no longer organic material. But there was no chemical change that could be found, and only the hardness as a physical change to distinguish the tissues of these stiffened, supposedly dead mice from any others.

It was at five that Steve, determined to unravel the nature of the change, tried an electric current. He essayed to measure the electrical resistance of a given section of muscle to compare it with normal tissue. And, to his amazement, it was a nonconductor!

At first he could not believe it. He tried again and again. Then he stepped up the battery voltage. At twenty volts, the needle flickered over to show one thousandth of an ampere current. At twenty-five volts the current was nearly the tenth of an ampere. At thirty volts—

Steve stared in stupefaction. The bit of tissue on which he had experimented—was gone! It had vanished utterly.

He paced up and down the room, thinking furiously. Lucy watched him anxiously. During all these hours of work she had sat mousy still, feeling the need to be near him, yet very anxious indeed not to disturb him.

Steve suddenly exclaimed to himself. He took one of the remaining stiffened mice. He adjusted two moistened electrodes to its body.

"Lucy! Watch this!" he commanded excitedly. "I'll throw the switch."

HE DID. The electrodes remained. The wires remained. Even, it seemed, a drop or two of water that had been on the mouse's fur remained. But the mouse—the tiny thing which looked like a superlatively perfect carving to represent a mouse—the mouse vanished like a blown-out candle flame!

"Steve!" cried Lucy. "Where has it gone?"

And Steve regarded the empty space where the mouse had been with an entirely grim and entirely savage satisfaction.

"To the place Straussman guessed at," he said. "I guess we'll call it the other side of here! Some people have called it the fourth dimension; but it isn't that. Some have called it Avalon, and Tir-Nam-Beo, and some have called it Hell. All of them are wrong. I'm going to work like the devil to keep you from going there!"

Now he began to labor more furiously than before.

"Halfway between," he muttered. "Intermediate stage. Now, what will cancel it? The mouse is—well—magnetized. A crazy idea. Analogy, no parallel. See what happens—"

He worked swiftly with wires and rheostats, improvising a connection to an ordinary electric plug. He turned it on. He read off the A. C. ammeter.

The current going through this second mouse. He cut out resistance. He cut out more, and more, and more.

At the end, the acidulated water used to make contact with the mouse's body was bubbling furiously, and actual heat was being developed. But nothing happened. Steve snapped off the current and frowned.

"The creature's ruined now," he muttered again. "All that juice going through it at a hundred and ten volts and——"

He picked up the mouse. There was a change in the feel of the furry small corpse. It was still hard—harder than even *rigor mortis* would account for. But it was not as hard as it had been.

Steve stood still, frowning at nothing, his lips moving rather absurdly as he wrestled with his problem. Then he exclaimed. He went to the X-ray machine. Its transformer would convert low-voltage current up to a tremendous potential—a hundred thousand volts, perhaps. Steve inspected it absorbedly. He wrenched open the cabinet and traced wires. He brought leads out and fixed a spark gap and improvised condensers.

"If this works," said Steve absorbedly, "one of those medical shocker batteries will do the trick hereafter. If it doesn't work, I'm crazy to have thought it might. But Straussman said two bodies could exist in the same space at the same time, and then he vanished into thin air, as far as the world could find out. And that mouse just vanished into thin air. Straussman probably knew what he was doing. Fran Dutt knew his name, anyhow. He changed color when I mentioned it."

The physician whose apparatus Steve was using now came in. Working busily with his wires, Steve told him jerkily what he had discovered—that with thirty volts of direct current, the mouse vanished like a candle flame. That with even a hundred and ten volts

of alternating current nothing happened—but the iron hardness of the tissues lessened.

"I've got a hunch," he explained, twisting wires feverishly. "It's crazy! But I've made a spark gap here that'll use the juice from the X-ray transformer. I've no time for fine work just now, but I'll get more or less variation in the high-frequency output by varying the gap and these condensers. And I think that if sixty-cycle has some effect, that higher frequencies ought to have more. Suppose you watch this!"

He made a last connection. One of the tiny frozen bodies lay on a great sheet of plate glass. Wires ran, one to a foreleg and another to a hind leg. Current went to those wires through condensers only.

There would be no surge of thousands of volts through the small creature. There would only be high-frequency electricity on the border of radio wave lengths, which is the familiar high-tension electricity with which side-show performers allow themselves to be "electrocuted" and perform other brazennesses. It sparks. It is showy. It looks deadly. But though it passes through the human body it is not even felt, because it reverses its direction so often that it has no effect at all.

"Now!" said Steve.

HE FLUNG THE SWITCH.

There was a startling, lurid sparkling at the improvised gap, the pungent smell of ozone, the harsh crackling of a spark.

And then there was a squeak!

The white mouse, which for twelve hours or more had been an iron-hard seeming corpse, squeaked affrightedly and struggled with the two wires which held it.

Steve cut off the switch. The mouse struggled frantically. He released it gently and dropped it in a porcelain

instrument tray. It ran about there, squeaking, and presently subsided with its beady eyes fearfully regarding the humans above it.

Steve's eyes glowed.

"I've done it!" he cried explosively. "Now we can fight those devils! Doctor, I'm Steve Waldron, as I've told you. All New York is crazy with terror, and they believe I'm a plague carrier. Actually, there's a swell spy system in operation somewhere, and a brilliant young foreigner must be helping the health department track down and isolate all possible plague carriers. That's me.

"Now, we've got to get this news broadcast: High-frequency waves below radio frequency will revive the people that are frozen to stiffness. And I tell you honestly that if you start to tell this stuff openly, one of their spies will know it as soon as the authorities do and they'll take action. They've done it three times to-day in New York, trying to get me!"

The doctor fumbled at his chin. Without words, he took one of the remaining frozen mice. He examined it carefully, making sure it was in that extraordinary cataleptic state. He placed it between the two wires. In silence, he waved Steve back and turned the switch. Again the spark, the stinging scent of ozone, the harsh crackling noise. He cut off the current.

This second mouse struggled frantically to release itself from the wires about its feet.

"You have done it," agreed the doctor, "and I shall not waste time congratulating you. I am going to call every doctor in White Plains to witness a demonstration and learn the exact technique. Then some of us will go to New York, to the hospitals where the plague victims are under observation—in the morgues. We will revive them. And then we'll name you. I

have heard radio news broadcasts to-day. Any man who appeared in New York and admitted that he had been in contact with you, Mr. Waldron, would be mobbed."

He shook hands with Steve, very formally, and sat down at his telephone. He made more than a dozen calls, and Steve heard what he said. At the end, Steve was not altogether satisfied.

"They can't all get here for two hours," he said, his eyes narrowed a little. "I'm sorry. One of them might talk in that time. But I'll get to work, modify one of these medical batteries to turn out high frequency. It wouldn't be a bad idea to fix several of them. Equip as many men as possible to revive as many patients as possible. Yes?"

HE SET TO WORK. Lucy dragged him away from his labor to have him eat something, with the doctor and herself. Then he went back to the job. He realized, now, just what the mysterious bronze ball had been, and why Fran had fastened it under his car. It had generated high-frequency waves, which neutralized whatever wave or field of force had been used to make Newark a city of death. He looked at it, but it was too badly fused to serve even as a source of information. He threw it away.

He made one battery-driven high-frequency generator. He set to work on a second, on a third. An hour had passed since the doctor's notice to the other physicians. Darkness fell. An hour and a half passed—an hour and three quarters. The doctor and Lucy watched as Steve worked, and talked, and made wild guesses.

The office was brilliantly lighted, and the expressions on the faces of the three were distinctive. Steve was intent. The doctor was absorbed. Lucy watched Steve with a wistful, maternal pride. And outside they heard the steady, unruly tumult of that never-end-

ing column of refugee cars and trucks, which had poured out of New York since ten o'clock, and showed no signs of ceasing now.

"It's a crazy guess," said Steve intently. "Here, I think this one will work now! It's a crazy guess, but there've been about a dozen men to vanish, just about the time they began to work on Straussman's theories."

He flung the little battery switch and heard the faint whine of the spark within. "And Straussman took the usual fourth-dimensional theory, turned it inside out, and put trimmings on it which only now——"

The noise which was the column of refugees changed. The motors did not stop. They kept on. But there had been a continual ululation from the folk in them—babblings, cursings, some hilarious, drunken shouting. Those voices cut off as if some one had thrown a switch. Then there was a crash, then another, and then a monstrous, long-continued thunder which Steve had heard twice before. It was the noise of collisions coming so close together that they made one steady, ghastly roar.

He jerked his head up, his face whitening. The other two in the office sat quite still. The doctor looked absorbed in what Steve was doing and saying. Lucy gazed at him with a wistful, ma-

ternal pride. Steve stared at the two of them. Neither one moved a muscle. They did not even wink. They were stiff, motionless——

"Good Lord!" said Steve thickly.

He sprang up, savagely. Then he realized. He listened. The sound of crashings died down. The city fell silent, utterly silent. It was as still as Newark was still, and as those plague spots in Manhattan were still. It was the silence of death. No, it was worse than that. It was the silence of life which was frozen, was chained, was hopeless imprisoned in stiffened flesh.

And then Steve heard quiet, unexcited voices. They spoke in an unintelligible language. He heard footsteps. They moved in an approximate cadence, as of men marching together upon a certain definite errand. They came closer. They came directly for the building in which Steve stood with clenched fists.

Steve knew bitterly that White Plains had become what men would call a plague spot, because some one of the city's physicians had reported the presence of the plague carrier, Steve Waldron, in the city. And Fran Dutt's compatriots had made a new dead spot of the city, so that they might seize him, frozen, and Lucy, and——

They were coming now.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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VOLUME XVIII
Number 1

ASTOUNDING STORIES

SEPTEMBER
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Table of Contents

Novel:

- FINALITY UNLIMITED** *Donald Wandrei* 8
Time, Space, Matter, Energy, Life, Intelligence—running rampant!

Novelettes:

- LITTLE HERCULES** *Neil R. Jones* 62
Suddenly horror swept him—they were not large; he was small—
- DESERTED UNIVERSE** *John Russell Fearn* 137
So it happened—and so one day, aons hence, it might happen again.

Short Stories:

- THE HOUSE THAT WALKED** *Dave Barnes* 37
Vibrations—which moved with a strange, horrible slowness—and yet with unerring speed!
- A BEAST OF THE VOID** *Raymond Z. Gallun* 48
Might not Nature contrive a creature to fly through interplanetary space!
- FOLLOW THE ROCKET TRAIL** *Warner Van Lorne* 89
Balance—the one word, the one important thing they had forgotten.
- THE SONG FROM THE DARK STAR** *Richard Tooker* 125
A story of Egabl—of the star, Xarthon.

Serial Novel:

- THE INCREDIBLE INVASION** *Murray Leinster* 104
Part Two of a gripping serial novel of the earth—and its dimensional secrets.

Science Feature:

- THE VEILED PLANET** *John W. Campbell, Jr.* 99
The fourth in a fascinating series of scientific articles which embrace the solar system.

Readers' Department:

- BRASS TACKS (The Open House of Controversy)** 152
- EDITOR'S PAGE** 7

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The by MURRAY LEINSTER Incredible Invasion

*Continuing the serial of the
earth and its dimensional secrets*

UP TO NOW: Professor Blair, while in the midst of his work on Straussman's theory—showing that two objects can exist in the same place at the same time—suddenly and mysteriously disappears.

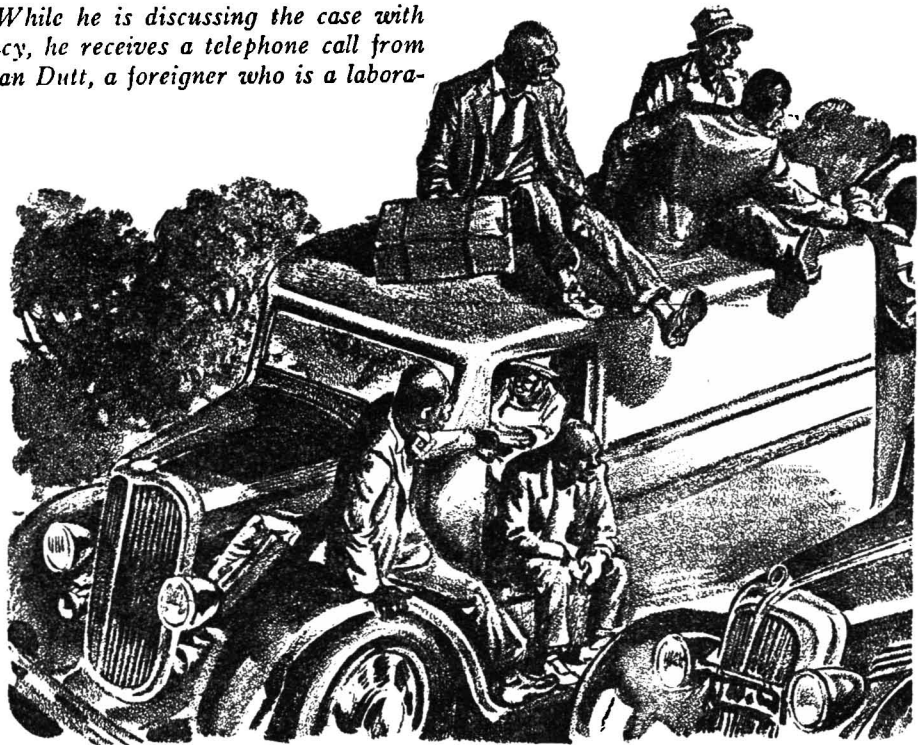
Steve Waldron, a biologist, who is in love with Blair's daughter, Lucy, tries to find the missing professor—but to no avail.

While he is discussing the case with Lucy, he receives a telephone call from Fran Dutt, a foreigner who is a labora-

tory assistant to Professor Blair, and who is also in love with Lucy.

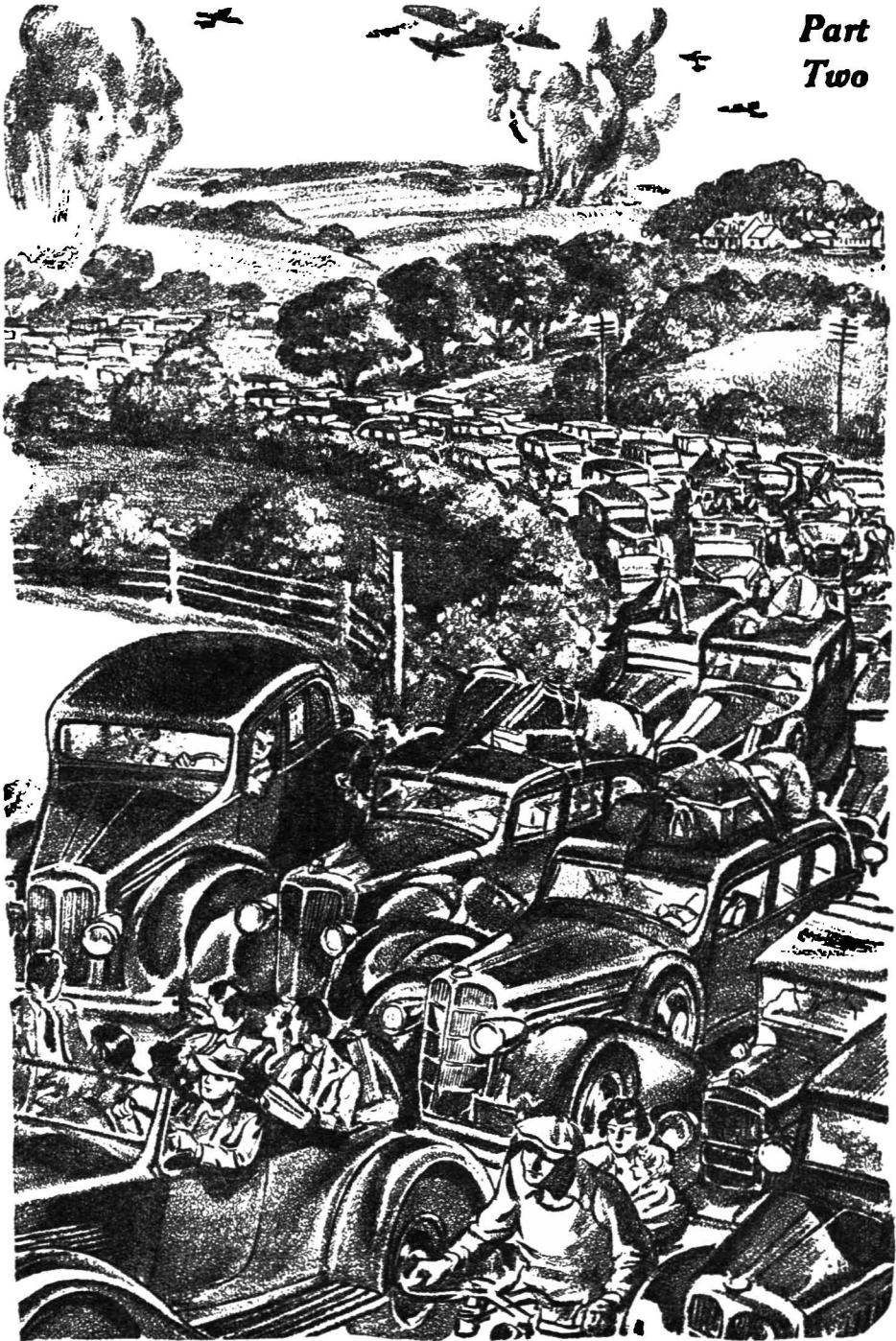
Told by Dutt to follow instructions—regardless of what they see—if they wish to find the professor, Steve and Lucy start for New York.

They witness accident after accident, until it seems that all within sight are



*There were bitter curses, grindings, scrapings— Each car
was loaded beyond capacity—*

**Part
Two**



***A black, crawling mass—humanity in flight from
the terror of stillness!***

dead. Human beings freeze in their tracks as if paralyzed. Steve and Lucy, alone, go on their way unharmed.

They arrive at the hotel in New York just before radio flashes announce the disasters they have already witnessed.

Newark is a dead city, cut off entirely from the rest of the world! The newspapers report: "Plague wipes out city!"

Steve, however, knows differently, though no one will listen to his theories. Finally he enlists the aid of a reporter, Nick Bannerman, and together they set out for the stricken city.

Nick secures pictures of the area, by means of kites; Steve, in the same way, secures white-mice specimens stricken with the so-called "plague."

On their return to New York, Steve goes to the biological laboratory at Columbia to examine his waxlike specimens. He is met by a foreigner who looks very much like Fran Dutt, and finds himself covered by a gun. Striking swiftly, he knocks his foe out and telephones Nick, requesting aid.

Steve dashes back to the hotel in search of Lucy.

When they realize that every place they have visited has become a stricken area, they are accused of being plague carriers. Secretly, they set out for White Plains, in quest of a sufficiently equipped laboratory for Steve to carry on his experiments.

They are discovered, however, by the persons Steve believes to be responsible for the disaster, and White Plains becomes another stricken city, but not before Steve discovers that by means of high-frequency electricity he can bring the hard, corpse-like mice back to life.

V.

THERE WAS one last smashing sound. After it came the clattering tinkle of broken plate glass. One last moving car, probably upon a side street, had been traveling

slowly, and its course had been accurately laid. It had rolled onward for minutes, before something caused it to swerve. Then it deliberately climbed a sidewalk, and as deliberately pushed its radiator through a shop front.

Then there was utter stillness, save for the men who came in quest of Steve and Lucy. Aside from the slurring cadence of their footsteps, there was no noise anywhere. White Plains was a dead city, occupied by toppled figures who looked vastly more like discarded waxworks than human beings. Human beings commonly relax when struck unconscious; they fall limply. But these figures lay, or leaned, or stood absurdly upright and motionless in exactly the poses they had held at the instant they were stricken with rigidity.

A man lay at the foot of a flight of steps which he had been mounting. He lay flat on his back, one hand in his pocket where he had fumbled for a key. And one foot was upraised for the step he had been about to take.

A woman lay forward on her face, frozen in the act of applying lip stick. A fat man lay helplessly, his lips pursed and his expression intent, stiffened into immobility as he painfully tied his shoe, and retaining that same position and that same expression, though he had fallen over and rolled downhill for a matter of yards.

And Steve stood upright, the third high-frequency generator he had improvised clasped all unconsciously in his hands, sick with fury and listening to the approaching footsteps of men who warred upon America and sought him out because he was dangerous to their cause.

Lucy was stiff, frozen in the catalepsy which held not less than six hundred thousand people in its grip, now. The doctor was frozen. All the town was occupied only by stiffened, motionless human beings, unable to move a muscle and—it was to be hoped—unconscious.

But men came, speaking an unintelligible language——

Veins stood out on Steve's forehead. But he fought back his rage. He looked down at the high-frequency generator in his hands. In its interior, a tiny tongue of metal wavered back and forth and a tiny blue spark flickered. Because of that spark and the high-frequency currents it generated, Steve himself was still alive. And there were the other outfits——

He threw the switch to the X-ray transformer. He took in his hands the wire leads which had revived the mice. He moved swiftly while the spark gap rasped. Holding one lead fast, he touched the other to the doctor's hand, and moved back his fingers so that the current flowed through the body of the doctor.

The doctor stirred.

"Quiet!" said Steve in a low tone. "You've had a dose of what they call the plague. Now you're out of it. But keep quiet and listen! While I keep this high-frequency flowing through your body and mine, too, take this high-frequency pack. Quick!"

THE DOCTOR stared at Lucy. Then he listened.

"Yes," said Steve bitterly. "The town's dead! Quick!"

The doctor moved like a man accustomed to emergencies. Steve drew back. The doctor still moved.

"Good!" said Steve grimly. "You're safe! Lift Lucy over here. The wires won't reach to her."

The doctor moved like a man who confronts the daily emergencies of a general practitioner in days of automobile smash-ups, learns to act without argument. He lifted Lucy to within Steve's reach, to the current. She shuddered, stared, and paled.

"Yes," said Steve, "they've frozen the town. Take that battery generator, Lucy. Quick! Give me the third."

He felt its comforting grasp. There was no sensation at all from the current, though. He snapped off the big transformer. The sound of nearing footsteps was plainly audible, and Steve nodded more grimly than to the doctor, when Lucy looked at him, frightened.

"Fran Dutt's compatriots," he told her. "We've got to get out of this! And we've got to do it quietly! We can't fight! Doctor, it's up to you to lead us out of here without a sound!"

Again, without a word, the doctor led the way, to a side door of the office, a dark hallway, steps leading down. Steve steadied Lucy, cautioning her under his breath. The doctor opened a door with infinite caution. They were out in the cool fragrance of the night. Behind them, feet tramped up a flight of steps, going to the office they had left.

"They may or may not figure out we escaped being frozen and are running away," whispered Steve. "But we've got to get as far away as possible as quickly as we can."

They reached the street. They moved away from the center of town, heading for a curving, tree-lined avenue which reached nearly into the business section of the city.

Behind them they heard voices, an argument. Somebody clumped heavily downstairs again. The trio moved faster.

But, despite their haste and despite the formless but very real danger from those who walked about unconcernedly in this city of silence, they could not but feel the gruesomeness and the horror that lay all about.

The street lights still glowed brightly. Lights in the houses still burned. But no living creature moved anywhere, save the men who had caused this immobility. The three could see into a lighted room, and could see a family seated there. Every one was motionless. It was somehow shocking.

They passed a car, parked before a house. A young man and a girl sat in

that car. The motor idled softly. The girl had just gotten in beside her sweetheart. He had snatched a furtive, quick, and eager kiss—and had frozen in the act of it.

And a long, long way on it seemed—when they felt almost safe—they saw a woman sitting on the steps of one of the meaner houses. She held a tiny, carefully wrapped bundle in her arms, and she bent over it. The bundle was a baby. The three of them looked, and went quickly on. That woman would sit there in that pose of all-unconscious tenderness, through the night, and through the day, and through perhaps many nights and days—

Steve said harshly, a little later: "We want a car. No use being squeamish. You, doctor, have to get in to New York. They've got people in the hospitals on whom they don't dare conduct autopsies and whom they don't dare bury. They think they're dead. You go there and revive them. Take care these devils' spy system doesn't forestall you! And when you've revived a few, maybe some of the fat-heads who talk about a plague will believe you!"

The doctor said: "Here is a car."

He stopped beside a roadster of a cheap make. Its parking lights burned. He opened the door and peered in.

"The key's in the lock. It should run."

He took the driver's seat, turned the key and stepped on the starter. The engine caught. He reached for the light lever. Steve stopped him.

"No lights!" said Steve grimly. "We're still in the dead spot. If Fran's compatriots know too much they may come after us. We'll ride with you for a way. Try to be as quiet as you can."

He thrust Lucy in and climbed after her. The car purred away.

THE DOCTOR drove as silently as he could, but three times the brakes squealed as he checked the car to avoid

obstacles in the road. The street lights showed them. One was a car overturned for no reason that they ever discovered. A second was a gruesome smash-up of two cars with three others that had run into the first wreckage. The third was a family that had frozen and toppled to the pavement in the act of crossing the street. The doctor ran up on the sidewalk to go around them.

"They're actually alive," he said as if defensively.

The houses grew fewer. The road became clear. The lurid lights of a filling station loomed up ahead. They drew near it. It was deadly, deathly still save for the blaring of a radio within.

"We'll make sure you've got gas," said Steve crisply.

They pulled in. A big, black, glistening car waited. A filling-station attendant stood beside the pump, looking at the gauge. He was motionless. There was no one in the car. Its occupants had gone inside the station for cigars, perhaps. Steve saw a litter of bodies on the floor.

"I'll take that car," said Steve. "Hunted as I am, I need something with speed to it."

The radio said sonorously:

"—for the tenth consecutive hour, the borders of the plague-stricken areas in New York have remained unchanged. The area about Newark, however, has enlarged twice. The first enlargement was just after sunrise, when investigating parties were stricken. A second enlargement occurred at two this afternoon. Again parties of scientists were victims. It is understood that every member of every party was simultaneously stricken, despite all precautions against infection—"

"Nick Bannerman's gone," said Steve grimly. "They sent him back there!"

The radio went on:

"There is some hope that the virulence of the plague is dying out. This is not an unusual case in epidemics. In any

case, the failure of the plague spots in New York to spread is encouraging. No cases outside of the plague spots have been reported, thus proving that the infection is not carried by the wind. It has been suggested to the plague administration, in fact, that the plague may be artificial——"

Steve's eyes gleamed.
"Brains at last!"

"The suggestion is due to the fact that Steven Waldron, known to have been the source of infection in the New York plague spots, was doing bacteriological research work in a Newark laboratory. It has been suggested that in his experimenting he came upon or developed a new type of bacterium, producing the effects observed in Newark and elsewhere. It is thought that his mind became un-
hinged and that he released the new plague because of his insanity. It therefore becomes more important than ever before that this person should be apprehended and prevented from further destruction.

"The plague administration has not officially accepted this view of the origin of the plague, but requests all police officers and all citizens to seize Steven Waldron wherever he may be found. If possible he should be taken unharmed for questioning, but at all costs his career as a plague spreader should be brought to an end."

Steve laughed without any mirth.

"I spoke too soon, crediting the authorities with brains," he said bitterly. "At that, though, I'd probably believe the same thing. Take care, doctor, not to admit you've seen me until the revival process is in full sway and the ones doing it are protected as you are right now."

The doctor very deliberately lifted the gas hose from the tank of the car he had commandeered. The tank was full, now.

"I shall be careful," he said dryly. "I pay you no compliments, Mr. Waldron, not yet. They would be rather futile, when I think what your discovery will mean. I shall drive on to New York

at once. Just one question: Will Miss Blair accept my protection back to the city?"

Steve was silent.

"N-no!" said Lucy. Then she said desperately, "Don't you see, doctor? I've been with Steve. They'd lock me up as a plague spreader, too. And—and Steve and I—— M—my father disappeared just before this horrible thing began——"

The doctor held out his hand.

"I understand. I must hurry. I'll go."

"Watch out for refugees," said Steve grimly. "They're crazy to get out of New York!"

The radio cut off the music to which none of the three had listened. The announcer boomed:

"Special news bulletin! All communication with White Plains has ceased! There is no definite information, but it is feared that this city has also become a plague spot!"

Then Steve laughed again, and very bitterly indeed.

"Now the people leaving New York will be sheer lunatics! I hope you make out, doctor! I'm going to load this car with storage batteries from the battery rack I see in the back room. These dry cells won't keep us alive forever."

The doctor stepped on the starter and meshed the gears. He drove off into the night. Steve and Lucy never saw him again. No one has ever learned exactly what became of him, but it is certain that at just this time the panic-stricken mobs trying to leave New York were at their worst. There were ghastly riots on the edge of the metropolis. What few cars did head into the city were seized by fear-maddened folk, forcibly turned around, and driven madly away from it.

Possibly, even probably, Dr. Armistead of White Plains encountered one of those mobs. Knowing the im-

portance of his errand, he would have protested. He might even have offered resistance. And he would have been killed. In any case, it is certain that he never reached any New York hospital with his information and the apparatus Steve had improvised.

Half an hour after his departure, Lucy and Steve drove away in the other, larger car Steve had chosen. It was loaded down with full charged storage batteries, automobile condensers found in the repair shop stock room, and an assortment of contact points and such induction coils as Steve had been able to discover. He had also taken some canned food.

THEY DROVE OFF into the darkness, leaving behind them a filling-station attendant looking up at a gasoline gauge with an expression of absorption which would remain upon his face for days or hours or weeks, and a litter of bodies on the floor of that same filling station. One of them was laughing heartily at something one of the other figures had said. He would continue to laugh—

Steve drove. At first he drove slowly, using the big car's parking lights only. Then he used the dimmer. At last he turned on the full lights, and the big car leaped ahead. And a long time later a rabbit hopped affrightedly from the road before them, and Steve knew they were beyond the plague spot. He relaxed. He had known a savage unease because of the possibility that one of the high-frequency generators might cease to work at any instant.

"We're out of the dead spot," he told Lucy. "Tell me, while you were frozen, did you know it? Were you conscious?"

"N-no," said Lucy. "One instant I was sitting in the chair, watching you twist two wires together. And suddenly you had your hands on my arms and I wasn't in the chair at all. I didn't have any feeling of time lapse at all."

"I think we should thank Heaven for that," said Steve. "If all those thousands of people could see and hear and feel, but not move— But they won't know anything until they're revived. That, at least, is merciful."

He slowed the car, searching the sides of the road.

"What are you looking for, Steve?"

"A hiding place," said Steve briefly. "These generators we have are all right. They saved us! But they're makeshift affairs. I want to connect them up so they'll use storage-battery current while we're in the car and go on dry cell only if we get out. And I want to change the dry cells. Also, I think you need some rest."

"How about you? I rested last night, even if I didn't sleep. You haven't even been still!"

"All the more reason for a hiding place," said Steve. "When that last news flash about White Plains is confirmed, there'll be another wave of refugees running away from everywhere. We want to be pretty well concealed or they'll try to take this car."

He found a little side road presently. It was hardly more than a timber road, where once there had been a cart track through the pine woods here bordering the concrete. It showed no sign that anybody had traveled it for many weeks. Certainly no car had used it. Steve turned in and drove about a hundred yards, with the low-hanging branches swishing against the car's body.

"O. K.," he said, and cut the ignition. "Now we should be all right until morning. I'm going to fix our life-savers. When they're done, I'll take a nap until sunrise. Curl up in the back and go to sleep if you can."

Lucy hesitated, but then obediently moved to the wide, soft rear seat. Steve cut all lights but the instrument-board bulbs and set to work again by that unsatisfactory illumination.

There was silence. A breeze blew

outside, and tree branches sighed and whispered. Lucy was still. Steve spliced wires and made contacts. From time to time there was a faint humming sound as he tested some new arrangement.

LUCY STIRRED. Then she was quiet for a long time. She stirred again. Then she said: "Steve—I haven't asked anything about my father for a long time. Does—what you've found out tell you anything about him?"

"Yes. Fran Dutt said he was all right, you remember. I'm sure of it now."

"But, Steve! Where is he?"

"Where Fran Dutt said. In his homeland."

"But Fran said his people were fighting America! What nationality is Fran? What country is it?"

"I've no idea what its people call it," admitted Steve, "and it would be hard to explain——"

"But, Steve, you tell me my father's there! What happened to him? Where did he go?"

Steve hesitated and frowned. He scraped wires busily. Presently he said: "You remember your father was working on some of the applications of Straussman's theory. Straussman sprang his wild ideas all of thirty years back. More, I think. And scientists laughed at him. The theories were too wild! Two objects in the same place at the same time? They said that was ridiculous! When Straussman claimed experimental proof, the scientists of the time laughed harder and wouldn't even go to look at his proofs.

"So Straussman disappeared. He vanished into thin air. And nobody bothered about it. His theories lay fallow for nearly thirty years, until somebody found that he'd anticipated some of the most ticklish and abstruse of modern quanta theories. Then they dug into his stuff. And he had something. I

don't think anybody gets all of it even yet."

"I know. I don't understand what it was, but my father said that much, Steve."

"Just so. Your father grew interested in that two-objects-in-the-same-space-and-same-time angle. It was just about then that Fran Dutt turned up and was so brilliant and so admiring that your father gave him a job as his assistant. Remember?"

"He offered to work without pay, or even to pay for the privilege of working with father in pure scientific research."

"His motives," said Steve ironically, "being as pure and as scientific as possible! As we know now."

He twisted two wires and tightened them with pliers.

"In the living room in your house," he said presently, "there's a mirror hanging on the wall next to the dining room. If you look into that mirror you see another living room in the space where the dining room is. Don't you?"

"You see a reflection," said Lucy. "What has that to do with my father?"

"You'll understand later. You say a reflection, not another room, because you know it's an illusion. You know that the room you see in the mirror is—well—imaginary. You can't walk into it. It does not affect other things which you know are real, and so cannot be real itself. But if it did affect other things it would be real, whether you could walk into it or not. Wouldn't it?"

Lucy knitted her brows. "I suppose I understand," she said doubtfully. "But I don't see——"

"You will presently. Now, Straussman says that the fact that we can't touch a thing—or, say, walk into it—doesn't prove that it doesn't exist. There are a great many things we know exist, but never see: the printing press which prints the morning paper, the radio transmitter which sends out a program

we hear, the dark companion of Sirius. We do not see any of them, and the last we can't possibly see. But we infer their existence by their effects. That's clear enough, isn't it?"

"Yes. I understand that well enough."

"WELL, Straussman took some unexplained effects: the difficulty in calculating the moon's exact position, the anomaly in the orbit of Mercury, half a dozen other things like that. He suggested that they were the effects of—well—something like the reflection of that other room in your mirror. Matter we can't touch or discover in any physical way. Matter, you might say, is another set of dimensions—though that wouldn't be accurate at all."

"Another set of dimensions? You said something about the fourth dimension once before, Steve. Is my father—"

"Wait a bit! Straussman pointed out the extreme probability that all atoms are miniature solar systems, and in even a solid object are relatively as far from each other as the stars are. Then he went into the matter of atomic polarities and the planes of rotation of electrons—what you might call the atomic planes of the ecliptic.

"He suggested that all the atoms of a given bit of matter must have their poles pointing very nearly in the same direction or they wouldn't hold together. They'd have to face the same way, like a company of soldiers. If they don't face together they're not an organization but a mob."

"But, Steve! All this doesn't seem to mean a thing!"

"It means everything," said Steve. "Just before your father disappeared, he was working on an experiment designed to prove or disprove just that! Because, if Straussman is right, there is more than one kind of matter. There are at least three kinds, probably six, possibly eighteen and conceivably fifty-four dif-

ferent kinds of earth, air, water, and, of course, fire."

Lucy was silent.

"Like companies of soldiers," added Steve, "in open order. Some of them face east. Naturally, they're not part of the organization of those who face north. They can pass right through each other as companies of soldiers. And then there are companies lying flat on their backs, staring up at the sky. They wouldn't even see the others as they marched between them.

"Change atoms for soldiers, and atomic poles for faces, and have the atoms face in different directions, and, according to Straussman, the two or three different groups of atoms would have no effect on each other at all. Matter of one of the other sorts could pass right through our kind of matter without causing any effect at all. There's certainly enough space between atoms! We couldn't feel a cannon ball passing through our bodies, if it were made of one of those other sorts of matter."

Lucy spoke fumblingly. "You mean—the same as if it were a fourth dimension such as people write stories about. There *might* be another world right around the corner, or something like that."

"Good!" said Steve dryly. "I've been hoping to bore you so you'd go to sleep and get some rest. But you've hit it. Only, Straussman says there *has to be* another world occupying the same space as ours. Because the pressure down toward the center of the earth is so tremendous that atoms would be jammed together. And atoms facing—say—in the direction which is east at the moment, would be horribly crowded, yet by merely changing the direction of their poles they'd get plenty of room.

"So some of them would necessarily relieve the pressure by changing. They'd do it until there was another world of atoms facing another way. And then there'd be pressure built up which would

"Yes," said Steve, "they've frozen the town. Take the battery generator—quick!"



cause some to change to another direction still, until—if the raw material held out—there'd be a world in the same space as ours, with its atoms facing in every one of the possible directions. And if the pressure still held up—why, they'd shift back and forth—individual atoms

AST-8

would—and the three, or six, or eighteen or fifty-four worlds all occupying the same space would be bound together by that fact and all revolve together around the three or six or however many suns occupy the space of our sun. Rather wild, eh?"

"I remember my father talking like that," said Lucy dubiously. "But, Steve, I haven't a head for that sort of thing. And what has it to do with my father's disappearance?"

STEVE was silent while he painstakingly fitted two small parts together. Then he said: "Those mice I worked with had been into something, some artificial condition of some sort, which partly changed the direction of their atom poles. Instead of east or north, they faced part way between. And when I put a direct current through them, they seemed to vanish into thin air. But, actually, it just completed the change in the direction of their atom poles. They all switched over to north. They ceased to be real in our world, but they became real in a world which—well—I suspect it's Fran's world. As you know, alternating current restored them to their former direction, and so to complete reality.

"I think that Fran Dutt turned a sort of pistol on your father, like Professor Jamison's assistant tried to turn on me. Your father became stiffened, like everybody in Newark and White Plains—and as you were. Fran had made arrangements in his own world, and he ran a direct current through your father—not enough to harm him at all, but enough to make your father vanish from our world and appear in that other world, where Fran's compatriots were waiting to welcome him. That's where he is now. And we've Fran's word for it that he's alive and well."

There was silence for a long time.

"How could he—live?" asked Lucy faintly. "It isn't possible!"

"How do you suppose Fran got here?" asked Steve. "He's healthy!"

"Y-yes——" Then Lucy said desperately: "But, Steve! Do you think you can do anything——"

"Of course!" said Steve, as if in surprise. "Armistead's on the way to New

York. When he's revived some patients, he'll explain things. I'll go in, give my proofs that Straussman was right, and set to work with some capable men. It won't take us long to break into Fran's homeland and force those devils to mind their own business!"

Lucy sat still. Then she got up from the back seat, moving to where Steve still worked. She bent over the back of his seat.

"I—don't quite understand, Steve," she said unsteadily, "but somehow I know you can do all you say. Won't—won't you kiss me good-night?"

Steve kissed her and then said gruffly: "Now go back where you belong, woman!"

Steve continued his work, though he had already finished two high-frequency generators which were much better than the original ones. He worked until he heard her soft breathing grow even and regular. There were an incredible number of small sounds in the night outside. The wind in the trees had many varied notes. The rustling of leaves and pine tags made many different, sibilant sounds. Even when Steve shifted his weight in the car there were tiny creakings.

But, after a long time, he dared turn on the car radio. He kept its volume down to an absolute minimum while he searched for a New York station. And, presently in the darkened car on the unused country road, a voice whispered gutturally:

"The reported outbreak of plague in White Plains has now been confirmed, and forty thousand more human beings are victims to the senseless experimenting of a lunatic. It is now considered as established that Steve Waldron developed the bacterium of the plague during his experimental work in biology. He seems to be immune to its effects, and he rides as a madman, sowing the seeds of death.

"We do have the comfort that the plague does not seem to be infectious in the ordinary sense. But Steven Waldron

infects the earth, so that perhaps for years to come the spaces where he has spread his spawn of death will remain untouchable to man. I have authority to say that any man who kills this maniac will be praised and rewarded by his fellowmen. He is like a mad dog, to be shot down ruthlessly——”

Steve snapped off the switch and the murmuring voice ceased. And Steve grinned without any mirth at all, alone in the darkness.

VI.

STEVE backed the car out of the little road at dawn, or nearly. Lucy blinked sleep from her eyes and smiled at him confidently. A girl who is going to marry a man is capable of an immense and frequently insane confidence in him.

“Dr. Armistead should have made it safe for us to go to New York now, shouldn't he, Steve?”

Steve shrugged. He had dozed a little toward dawn. Forty-eight hours with no rest to speak of was taking toll of him.

“That's something I can't tell you, Lucy. Let's have something to eat and then turn on the radio.”

“Turn it on first, Steve! Good news will give us an appetite.”

He grimaced and shook his head. Somehow, he had no real belief that the physician from White Plains had gotten any chance in Manhattan. It was a thing which had to be tried. But somber debate with himself after the last broadcast he'd heard filled him with misgivings. The promptness with which his telephonings to authority had been followed by the appearance of the plague about the spot from which he spoke was evidence either of an almost incredibly efficient spy system or else of an even greater efficiency in wire tapping.

“Which might be the answer, at that,” reflected Steve somberly. “They could probably tap in and run their

lines straight over to the other side——”

Lucy looked at him with maternal concern.

“Steve! You look so unhappy! What's the matter?”

“I still feel unpopular,” said Steve dryly. “We've grub, all right, but nothing to cook it in. Let's go find a farmhouse that hasn't got a radio and get either breakfast or a way to cook breakfast. Right?”

Her smile was affirmative. He sent the car forward along the broad concrete road. He drove slowly, trying to plan ahead. The road seemed oddly empty. They passed gates which hung open. Once they heard gruntings, and saw swine rooting contentedly in a field of corn, pushing down the tall stalks to get at the ears. Farther on, they saw horses and cattle mixed together in a field of standing rye. Chickens were loose. Gates had not been closed. There was a chair on a roadside, fallen from some vehicle, with a torn patchwork quilt caught in the network of its back. Half a mile on there was a litter of broken crockery on the concrete.

The road came out upon a high place which gave them a view of miles across country. At the very edge of their field of view they saw another road. And the other road was black with a moving mass of cars and trucks and wagons—everything that went on four wheels and could be made to move. It was a veritable serpent of humanity in flight. Fugitives.

Steve braked and regarded the distant exodus with a vast calm.

“It's evident,” he said steadily, “that Dr. Armistead hasn't convinced anybody. What we've found out licks the invaders as soon as it's applied. There'd be no need to run.”

He cast his eyes upward. A single line of wire ran on spindling poles alongside the road—a telephone line, of course, with an earth return. Perhaps

a quarter of a mile beyond, another line branched off.

Steve said grimly: "There's an idea! There were spies in New York, but they can't have covered a whole countryside with them, or tapped every wire in the whole State!"

He went ahead. A narrow, rough dirt road led toward a not overly prosperous-seeming farmhouse. He turned in. The big car jolted and lurched as Steve drove toward the house. But a single wire went on before them.

They reached the farmyard. The house doors were open. There was a litter of precious and semiprecious objects—from a housewife's viewpoint—scattered here and there. Evidently this family had fled in haste, carrying away only such possessions as were priceless. Gates swung wide. Live stock roamed at large.

Steve stopped the car.

"Now I'll telephone—and see what happens!"

HE WENT INSIDE the house, hunting for the telephone instrument. The smells inside were strange, to a city man. One does not notice smells to which one is accustomed. Here was the smell of wood-burning stoves, and the cookery of many vegetables, and soap, and the entirely uncitified odor of all outdoors coming in an open window.

He found the phone. It had a handle on its box, and to call central it was necessary to twist that handle vigorously. Steve did so, and held the receiver to his ear. He heard the humming, roaring sound which is inseparable from rural telephones, a tinny voice: "Hello?"

"Is this central?" asked Steve quietly.

"Yes. What line do you want?"

There was a sudden pause. Then central's voice said amazedly: "Weren't you rung last night and told to get away at once? White Plains was struck by the plague last night. Everybody is

warned to get as far away from it as possible."

"This is a deserted house," said Steve. "I'm an outsider. Driving by, I stopped in to use the phone. I want to speak to somebody in authority—the mayor, a health official, a State policeman—somebody who hasn't lost his wits in pure funk!"

His tone at the end was sardonic. Central's voice came back, dubious and uncertain.

"I don't understand! What's the matter?"

"My name," said Steve grimly, "is Steve Waldron. I want to give some information——"

He did not finish the sentence. He heard a scared squeak and a crash at the other end of the line. It was not encouraging. Steve waited, his lips twisted. So horrific had his name become, now, that a woman was afraid to listen to him at the other end of a phone wire. The line roared and hummed. Steve turned his head to tell Lucy that it was hopeless to try to communicate.

Then a man's voice said breathlessly, in the receiver: "Hello! Mr. Waldron?"

"Yes," said Steve. "I want to give some information about the plague."

"Mr. Steven Waldron?" insisted the voice more breathlessly still. "The same man who escaped the plague in Newark?"

"Yes! I want to tell you how to revive the victims of what you call the plague!" said Steve. "If you'll pass this——"

"Just a moment! Where are you, Mr. Waldron?"

"In a deserted farmhouse," said Steve impatiently. "If you pass——"

"But which farmhouse, Mr. Waldron? If you really have the information you mention, we'll send a plane out for you. There are several farmhouses on this telephone line." The voice was suave and desperately plausible. "And

how can we send out a plane unless you tell us which one it is? What color is it?"

Steve swore.

"Never mind the farmhouse," he said angrily. "The people in Newark are not dead, nor those in the three dead spots in New York, nor those in White Plains. I came through White Plains last night with apparently dead men all about me, and nothing happened to me. Now I'm telling you how——"

"And the world, Mr. Waldron," said the voice, in a desperate attempt to be hearty and admiring, "the world is waiting for just the information you have to give! Did you say the farmhouse was white?"

"High-frequency current——"

"I may tell you, Mr. Waldron," said the other voice, "that the President of the United States will be glad to receive you and hear your plans. A plane is ready to come for you immediately and take you at once to Washington."

Steve swore savagely.

"Listen to me!" he said furiously. "I know you think I'm crazy! But for Heaven's sake listen to what I say and try it! The people in Newark are not dead! They are in something like a cataleptic state from which they can be roused——"

"Mr. Waldron," the voice protested aggrievedly, "I don't think you are crazy! Far from it! There have been a few evil-disposed persons who are jealous of your fame. They envy you the reputation you have won by your discovery of—of a way to revive dead people. But you have only to show yourself to prove them fools. If you will only describe the house you are in——"

STEVE HUNG UP the receiver, livid with rage. He went out to the car again.

"I got somebody on the wire," he said, his voice shaking with wrath. "The fool

was so convinced that I am crazy, and the whole world's so sure that I'm spreading the plague, that he wouldn't listen to me. Offering to send a plane for me. Flattering me with offers of a conference with the President. Humoring me as a lunatic! And all the time trying to get me to describe the house where——"

Lucy stared.

"Plane—description—— Steve! They could tell that you were in one of just a few houses! The phone line would tell them that! And planes——"

"Get back in the car!" said Steve savagely. "Damn them, they'll be trying to trap us. If they did, they'd brag that they had us isolated, and where. Fran's friends have struck four times already, trying to capture us! I'm the most dangerous man in the world to Fran's gang. If we were caught, they'd strike that place——"

The car shot for the gateway. It careened crazily down the long, rough dirt road.

There was a distant, buzzing mutter of the sort that is unmistakably an airplane motor and nothing else in the world. It was very far away. It rose and fell and rose and fell. Suddenly there were distinct, booming detonations—two, three, four, five!

"What's that?" asked Lucy, scared.

"They've given up the idea of isolating us," said Steve. "They want to get me, because I spread the plague. They know the farmhouse I could have telephoned from. They're all supposed to be deserted, except the one I was in. So they're bombing them. It's safer than approaching me and getting the plague!"

Now they were on the concrete. The big car picked up speed with an acceleration which pressed both of them back against their seats. It roared along the smooth road.

There were dull, booming sounds far behind.

"They don't know which house," said

Steve, "so they'll bomb all of them! And if they see this car——"

They went down a steep hill in the road, with a curve at the bottom of it. They rounded that curve. Before them, yet a mile away, was the black, crawling mass of vehicles and men which was humanity in flight from the terror of stillness. It followed a road which crossed the one on which Steve drove. There was not one gap in that swarming line. It filled the road and overflowed it. It crowded itself so that it moved at a snail's pace. From it rose an effluvium which was burned gasoline and cylinder oil, and terror, and the smell of sweating, fear-ridden human beings.

Steve took out the clutch and let the motor idle for a space. Behind him there rose the syncopated, unrhythmic roar of planes in flight.

"See if you can pick them out, Lucy," he said curtly. "If you can, they can see us too, and we're sunk."

Lucy searched the sky through the windows of the moving car.

"N-no, I can't see them. They're behind that hill we just went over."

"In that case," said Steve, "we may live a while longer. We're going to hit this migration."

Again the black car's motor roared. It shot forward. Its siren shrieked. There was no possible way for the mass of fugitives to open a path for it. There was not two feet of space between any two cars. But it shot toward the stream of traffic. The scream of its horn and its seemingly irresistible momentum made a flurry ahead. Cars tried desperately to close up the one-foot or two-foot spaces between them, to avoid being struck. A protesting din of horn hootings arose.

But no clear path opened. The utmost that could be managed was a gap in the line of vehicles nearest the point of collision. And that gap did not go all the way through. It went only into the first line of cars, and the road was

packed solidly for all its width. There was no chance for travel in the opposite direction here!

Steve jammed on the brakes, when the traffic before him was a bedlam of horns and shoutings. He swung the big car around. He got the front wheels in the gap. And then he drove ahead. It was not safe driving. He simply thrust the nose of his car into the line of vehicles and gave all other men the choice of making room for him, or smashing him and themselves.

BITTER CURSINGS rose around him. There were grindings and scrapings. The black car was jarred and struck and dented. There was a wave of bumper clashing which went backward and forward along the line like the disturbing ripples of a stone dropped in water. Where Steve had entered the traffic, too, the line was thickened as if the ribbon of slowly moving cars were a snake and had swallowed some object whole, so that it showed as a lump along the undulating body. But he was in the line, and moving, and breathing in its mephitic fumes, as three planes swooped at terrific speed above the low hill to the left of the road. Then terrific concussions sounded behind them.

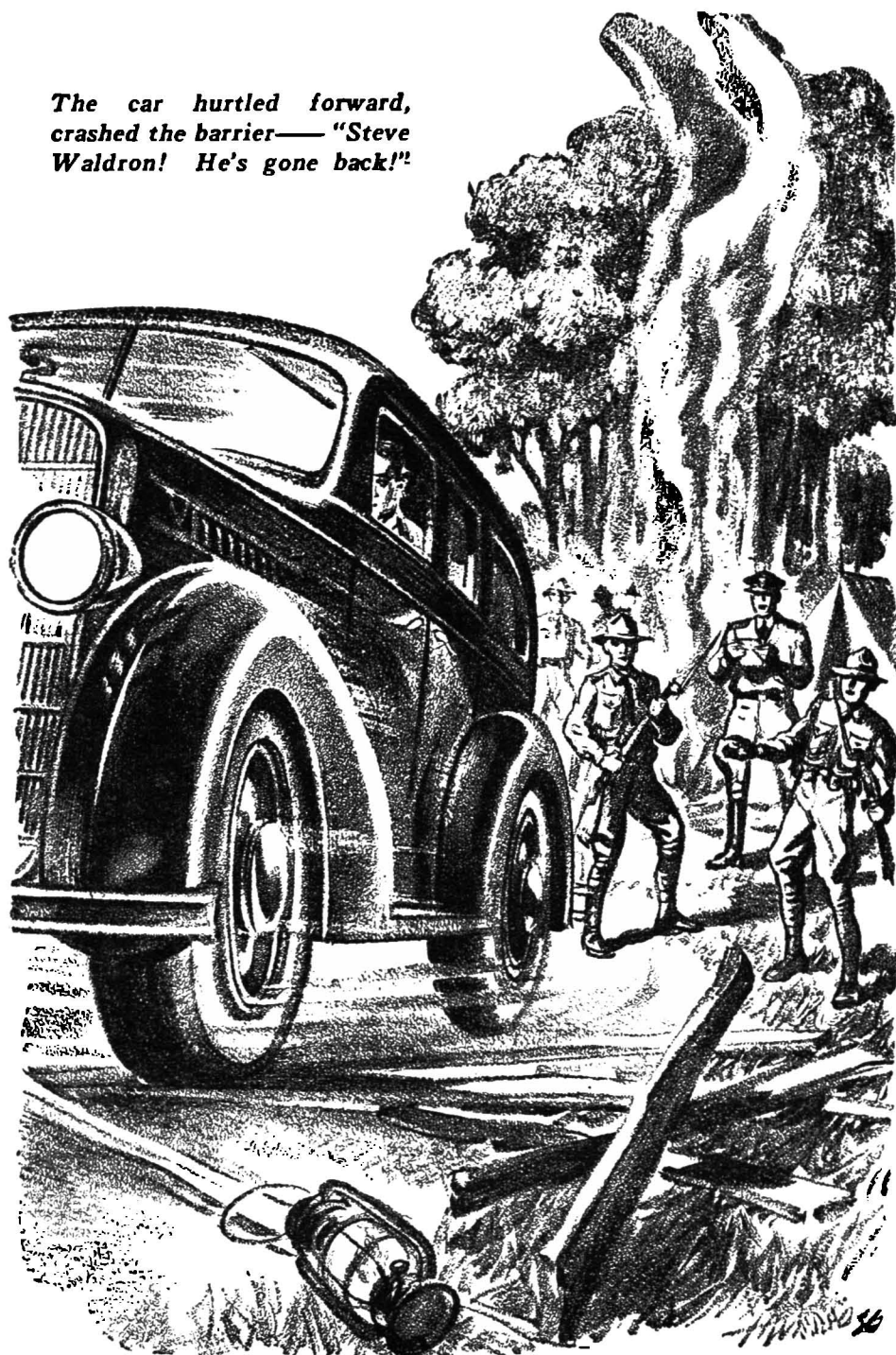
They had bombed the last farmhouse. The explosions were so violent as to be heard as deafening above even the tumult of the motors on the road. The shock of their detonation spread out as an earth wave, and was transmitted, even through the rubber tires, to the fugitives in the cars.

The planes whirled and darted back out of sight. There came other explosions, as violent and as loud. Then the droning hum of the plane motors dwindled swiftly until it was a bare mutter, and that mutter merged with the sound of the flight Steve and Lucy had joined.

Lucy was deathly pale. Steve was savagely grim.

"When human beings get an idea in

*The car hurtled forward,
crashed the barrier— "Steve
Waldron! He's gone back!"*



their head," said Steve, "it's unwise to try to get it out."

The car next to them was an ancient taxicab jammed with scared foreigners, including a woman with a pallid, soddenly sleeping baby. The car directly ahead was a delivery truck, obviously from Harlem, loaded to the guards with Negroes. Beside that was a roadster containing seven people.

A motor-cycle and side-car combination seemed lost in the traffic, although carrying three children and a woman beside the operator. A heavy-duty Jugernaut of a truck was filled with household possessions as well as a family—certainly not those of the corporation which officially owned the truck.

There was a sedan, neat and trim and newly polished, but with all the windows on one side smashed as if by rocks; a limousine with a white-haired woman and an elderly man in the back, and servants in livery in the front. The footman beside the driver had a repeating shotgun between his knees. A maid in a neat cap bent over something on the floor. Those in the nearest cars could see a bandaged figure there. And when the elderly man turned his head, there was visible a gory smear across one side of his face.

Driving in this horde of cars, Steve came to realize that there were four lanes—four lines of vehicles. All four lines moved in the same direction, and they moved bumper to bumper, so that there was very rarely indeed any opportunity for any one car to change from one to another.

He noted this first when he realized that one lane of cars was moving more slowly than the rest. His own car edged slowly past the cars on the next parallel line. Presently he saw the cause. There was a wreck in the next line—a flivver of the most antiquated pattern. Steam rose from its radiator and a thunderous thumping noise came from it. More, the steam arose from activity that was

past. The engine was no longer running.

The thumping came from somewhere in the gear case as the wreck on four wheels was pushed along by the car behind it. And that other car did not serve willingly. Its driver cursed and shouted furiously. The other occupants of the pushing car shook fists in frenzied rage.

The little, white-faced man at the wheel of the broken car slumped down in his seat, desperately steering, desperately extracting every inch of distance that he could, from the fact that the man behind could not progress without pushing him. Steve heard a pounding noise and discovered that the wreck on wheels had also a flat tire, which bumped and banged and thumped. But in that traffic it was not possible to change tires or—

THE HORDE of fugitives moved on. Once something made the whole column slow down. It stopped, and there was raging expostulation about the wrecked car. It started again, and a little later the river of moving things flowed past the car which had caught on fire. Men had heaved it from the road by sheer strength, that the flight might go on.

Once, too, planes flew low down the column of automobiles. And once there were further explosions to be heard off to the left. But, for hour after hour, Steve held firmly to his place in the traffic line. He could make no more than five miles an hour, but he was safe from discovery in the mob of those in flight.

Toward noon Lucy—worried, womanlike, about the fact that Steve had had nothing to eat—took Steve's knife and hacked open a can of the fruit they had brought from the filling station in White Plains. She fed him as he drove. Such driving was nerve-racking, requiring constant attention and covering

practically no ground. At Steve's insistence she fed herself also.

She had seen other drivers in the swarm being fed and refreshed in the same way. But the strain was great, not only on men but on machines. Traveling at such low speeds, motors heated and boiled. Then engines seized. Sometimes they caught fire and flamed luridly.

Once they passed a place where the solemn, slow procession parted and went out on the shoulders of the road, to pass around a car which stood deserted, a pyramid of fire. Its gas tank exploded when they were but a hundred yards beyond, and there was tragedy. But the snaillike flight kept on.

Quite suddenly, the line broke. Some cars darted to the right, where a great highway led northeast. Some swerved to the left, and their motors roared as they sped away. Some went straight on, and divided farther along the road, and redivided—

Steve turned on the car radio.

"I've got a hunch," he said grimly, "of what I'll have to do. But we might as well check up on developments during the day."

THE RADIO HUMMED. Music came out of it. Steve estimated the traffic ahead and behind. He drew out of the road. At least he could get back on it when he chose, here.

The music stopped. The loud-speaker said resonantly:

"Special news bulletin: It is still not certain that Steven Waldron has been killed. After spreading his artificial plague about White Plains last night, he communicated with authorities by telephone early this morning. His insanity was evident. He talked incoherently of reviving all the plague victims, which now number nearly six hundred thousand.

"Planes bombed several deserted farmhouses from which his call might have come, but searchers later found no sign of human bodies. Two automobiles which moved in a suspicious fashion were also

bombed. One was found to be in use by a band of looters, rifling the abandoned houses outside the plague area. The occupants of the other car have not yet been identified.

"It is hoped, but it is still not certain, that Waldron is dead, and until his death is positive there remains the possibility of further outbreaks of the plague. Military cordons have already been thrown about Newark and the plague spots in Manhattan proper, and a cordon is being made about White Plains."

Steve snapped off the switch. There was silence. Fifteen feet away, fugitive cars sped by to vanish in the clouds of dust in the distance.

"It's four o'clock," said Steve. "Lucy, there's only one thing for me to do to knock some sense into the heads of the powers that be. It's going to be dangerous. I'll drive you somewhere to a railroad station. I've got some cash. You can get on a train and go as far as it'll take you—"

"No!" said Lucy fiercely.

"It would be safer," said Steve grimly. "Though how much safer I don't know."

"There are just two people in the world I care about," said Lucy fiercely. "My father and—and you, Steve. My father is—alive, perhaps, but in the hands of the people who are making this monstrous thing they call a plague. And you— Don't you see, Steve, that if anything happens to you I've nothing left to live for anyhow?"

"I'd question that," said Steve dryly. "But, at that, I don't see much for anybody to live for if Fran's gang isn't licked. Fran wanted you to go out West. That means all the East is likely to be frozen. And Fran—" He frowned. "If Fran's people know you're with me—and they probably do—if you were captured they'd make sure of you. Fran risked his life and that of all his family to prevent that! The only choice is staying with me or going West."

"I stay!" said Lucy. "Anywhere you

go, I'm going too. And if you—if you're killed——"

Her voice wavered. She was silent. Steve put his hand on hers.

"You're a good kid, Lucy," he said. Then, brusquely, "Our first job is getting gas and oil. We need it. Then we'll have just about enough time to smash that cordon about Newark in twilight, when we can drive without lights, but can't be seen from a distance. So let's go!"

The wheels spun, gripped the gravel, and the car roared into the traffic which here was speeding, and a bare mile or two back was barely crawling. Three miles on, Steve stopped and bought gas. He asked for road directions to the ferry across the Hudson at Tarrytown. Traffic remained heavy, but not heavy enough to bar a reasonable speed.

They descended into the town of Tarrytown, found it agitated and uneasy. It was far enough away from White Plains, to be sure, but there had been a steady stream of refugees pouring through it, telling lurid tales. The population of Tarrytown was about ready to run away.

They went over on the ferry. They climbed the slanting road that took them to the level of the Palisades. The regular Bear Mountain highway was so thickly packed with cars—all headed northward—that to head south along it would be either dangerous or impossible. Steve had studied road maps on the ferry. Now he drove far enough back from the river to avoid anything like a direct approach to Newark. He did not want to be stopped and questioned.

At that, he was questioned once. It was close to darkness and he had made two slanting trips by secondary roads, so that he was close indeed to Newark.

He had had the radio turned on, and heard the special bulletins as they were broadcast. There was no further development in the matter of the plague.

The bulletins had to do with the exodus of fugitives from New York; with

the exact limits of the dead area in White Plains; with the announcement of a youthful bacteriologist that he had isolated the germ which was responsible for the plague; with the arrest of divers individuals who confidentially offered for sale absolutely sure and certain specifics against the plague.

It was disclosed that for five dollars these gentlemen had offered a draught which immunized you against all germs. They reaped a harvest in Harlem, but nothing like the harvest of bank notes gathered in by the more scientific gentlemen who announced a serum, charged ten dollars for an injection, and gave many hundred people a sense of security and a subcutaneous injection of salt solution—only indifferently sterile.

THE BULLETIN mentioned Steve more than once. Hysterical mobs had thought they recognized him in seven different places. Anybody who acted suspiciously was likely to be taken for Steve Waldron these days, and Steve Waldron and Satan were thought to be one and the same person. Three of the poor devils were killed. The others were at the least severely mauled. Steve heard their discovery, mauling, and proved innocence announced over the air.

But he was stopped and questioned in Englewood. Knowing his surroundings perfectly, he was able to answer all questions satisfactorily. The State trooper warned him against certain roads which led in to Newark, informed him that a military cordon forbade traffic near their line, and waved him on. Steve saw that it would not be easy to get through that cordon.

It was at this moment that he saw—alone among the stores of Englewood—a tiny drug store remaining defiantly open for business. He stopped his car before it and went in. He bought envelopes and paper. He took his foun-

tain pen and scribbled a message. He signed his name.

Fifteen minutes later, a sentry stopped him at a barrier across the road.

"No civilians allowed to go farther," he announced. "The cordon's only a little way farther on. You'll have to turn around, buddy, and go back."

"I've got a letter for the commanding officer," said Steve, "from the mayor of Englewood. The officer in command along here," he said. "I don't know what it's about, but it's important."

The sentry hesitated. Steve held out the envelope. The sentry shrugged.

"O. K. Go ahead! But listen, guy! You don't want to go too far! Maybe a quarter of a mile down this road there's a barrier with a red lantern on it. That's all there is to stop you from goin' right on into the middle of Newark. An' you don't want to go there, guy! Besides, there's orders to shoot to kill if anybody goes into infected territory an' then tries to come back. See?"

"I see," said Steve.

He drove on. Lucy's hand closed tightly on his sleeve. There was a barrier—a red lantern, lighted. A few paces to the right a bonfire burned. Its brightness emphasized the darkness already deepening. Steve came up to the barrier. Soldiers ran to intercept him, shouting.

"Officer in command?" called Steve. "Letter for him."

"Here!" said the officer by the fire.

He came forward leisurely and took the letter from Steve's hand. He returned to the firelight to read it. Other soldiers, of course, relaxed. There seemed no need for vigilance.

But Steve had not stopped his motor. He put the car into low gear, as if to turn around, suddenly shifted gears, sent the car hurtling forward, and hit the barrier with a crash. It toppled over; he rolled across it, and was in the forbidden area in seconds. He flashed on his lights, and instantly flashed them

off again. They had showed him the road ahead. He drove like mad.

BEHIND HIM there was stunned amazement. Every man looked to the commanding officer for orders. He stood staring at the sheet of paper in his hands, with the look of a man regarding a snake. The blood had drained so completely from his face that he looked white even in the ruddy glow of the fire.

He croaked unintelligibly. Then he dropped the paper into the flames. He stripped off his gloves, feverishly, and flung them in also.

"Good Lord!" he croaked. "That was Steven Waldron! He's gone back to Newark!"

He had not read the letter. Like most men, receiving a letter on one sheet, he had glanced first at the signature. And the signature was enough. Steven Waldron! In frozen terror, he thought instantly that this might be the way in which Steve, the plague spreader, had created other plague spots elsewhere—germs, bacteria, in a letter that was opened to scatter them! The officer had dumped the letter frantically into the flames, so that no germs would be scattered about by his aid.

The letter, of course, had contained exact instructions for reviving persons who were victims of the plague. But it had been signed by Steve. Hence it had not been read at all. And, therefore, six hundred thousand people remained stiffened and, to all intents and purposes, dead.

But Steve and Lucy careered onward through darkness, toward the city of silence and of death. At a snapped word from Steve, Lucy turned on the little high-frequency generators which had saved them in White Plains and had been improved since. He did not turn on the car lights, and as he neared the city he slowed down for more-silent driving.

Toward the last the car crawled, while the touch of sunset color faded from the sky and the obscurity of dusk became the blackness of night. Presently something crunched under the car's wheel. Steve could make out the outlines of houses in the outskirts, but he had been unable to see the thing lying on the ground.

Sickened, he stopped. He made sure of his revolver. Then, taking Lucy's hand, he started cautiously toward the center of the town, on foot.

There is no darkness as black as that of an unlighted town. Here, as the houses became solid masses about them, the darkness became more nightmarish because of the stars overhead—and, of course, the silence. There was no sound, in the furry night; no dog, no cat, not even an insect stirred. There was silence which was sheer horror. And that horror became greater when, presently, Lucy stumbled and went to her knees, and found that she had caught herself by putting her hand upon the upturned, dew-wet face of the man who

lay with his face to the stars and did not stir at all.

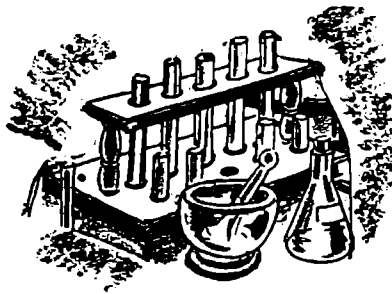
She bit her lips to keep from crying out. She clung to Steve's hand and stumbled on.

Then he said: "*Sh-h-h-h!*"

There was a furtive vibration somewhere. Steve led the way toward it. Presently, in the blackness, they made out shapes moving. Motors hummed subduedly. A truck went quietly away; another came. There were men at work—many men, hundreds of men. They worked feverishly, at something unguessable. Then a faint light showed somewhere to guide an arriving truck. They saw one of the men in its faint glow. His appearance was weird, incredible, utterly unhuman.

Then came a rustling at Steve's elbow, and a voice rasped a suspicious challenge—with hundreds of others of its own kind to call upon for aid, when Steve did not reply in its own unintelligible tongue. It came closer and rasped its cryptic, snarling speech more suspiciously still.

TO BE CONTINUED.



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Table of Contents

Novel:

- GODSON OF ALMARLU** *Raymond Z. Gallun* 8
Born to believe himself a genius—he accomplished things of which science had only dreamed—and he did not guess the purpose toward which he worked!

Novelle:

- NIGHTMARE ISLAND** *Douglas Drew* 98
Biology gone mad—with the dividing line between plant and animal wiped out—

Short Stories:

- POSITIVE INERTIA** *Arthur Purcell* 43
The professor's eyes were bright with a driving force when he asked: "Do you want to win?"
- THE TIME ENTITY** *Eando Binder* 73
A thought-variant story of "Looping Time" which is worth a careful, slow reading.
- THE SAPROPHYTE MEN OF VENUS** *Nat Schachner* 84
A pillar which ate its way through towns and drove men mad!
- INFINITY ZERO** *Donald Wandrei* 130
At a certain balance, matter will cancel and become Zero.
- FLIGHT OF THE TYPHOON** *Clifton B. Kruse* 140
An epic of the I. S. P., of brave men on the starways.

Serial Novel:

- THE INCREDIBLE INVASION** *Murray Leinster* 52
Part Three. In which a man and a girl draw toward a solution of a dimensional catastrophe.

Science Feature:

- THE DOUBLE WORLD** *John W. Campbell, Jr.* 125
The fifth of a fascinating series of scientific articles which embrace the entire solar system.

Readers' Department:

- BRASS TACKS (The Open House of Controversy)** 150
- EDITOR'S PAGE** 149

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In the uncanny silence of this strange dead city the explosions were incredibly loud—echoing from building to building—

The Incredible PART THREE Invasion

*Slowly, silently, they stalked
the city watching, learning,
seeking an effective weapon*

by Murray Leinster

UP TO NOW:

Professor Blair, while in the midst of his work on Straussman's theory—showing that two objects can exist in the same place at the same time—suddenly disappears.

Steve Waldron, a biologist, is in love with Blair's daughter, Lucy, as is Fran Dutt, a foreigner who is laboratory assistant to Professor Blair.

At Fran's request, Steve and Lucy drive from Newark to New York. They see human beings freeze in their tracks as if paralyzed, till all seem waxlike and dead. They alone, because of something Fran has put in the engine of the car, escape unharmed.

Newspapers report Newark a dead city, wiped out by plague.

Steve knows differently and suspects Fran's compatriots of invasion. No one will listen to his story except Nick Bannerman, a newspaper reporter and a friend of Steve's.

Everywhere Steve and Lucy go becomes a "plague spot."

Crowds flee from New York in panic, causing riots and bloodshed.

Steve and Lucy go to White Plains, where they take refuge with a doctor who allows Steve to use his laboratory.

Before White Plains is stricken, Steve discovers that, by means of high-

frequency electricity, he can bring wax-like mice, supposedly stricken with the plague, back to life.

Equipped with battery generators, to protect themselves against the supposed plague, Steve and Lucy set out to explain their find to an anxious world. But, being believed plague carriers, it is not safe for them to even let their whereabouts be known.

After a futile attempt to explain his discovery over the telephone, Steve decides their only chance is to invade the stricken city of Newark and learn more of the foreigners—who Steve is now certain are from the fourth dimension, or the other world occupying the same space as ours.

They break through the barricade on the outskirts of the city, and, on foot, walk cautiously toward the center of the unlighted town. Presently, in the darkness, they make out moving shapes. Then comes a rustling at Steve's elbow, and a voice rasps out a suspicious challenge in an unintelligible tongue.

VII.

A MYRIAD of bitter thoughts and desperate fancies ran through Steve's brain in the next few seconds: Bitterness because he had found out how to revive the six hun-

dred thousand seeming corpses the world thought really dead—and the discovery had done no good. Because here before him was proof that the so-called plague was really an invasion—and there was no way of making any one else see that proof. And he felt a surpassing bitterness because, in the effort to open the eyes of his countrymen, he had not only come back to Newark himself, but had brought Lucy here, and had walked into a trap.

Perhaps because it was a trap his mind fumbled among imagined miracles which would bring about escape. A wild hope flickered in his mind that the man who had challenged him might drop dead, or decide that it was absurd to challenge any one within this dead city; a wilder hope that silence would seem the scornful refusal of a superior to reply; and then, wildest of all, the desperate wish that this man might be one of those of whom Fran Dutt had hinted, who hated the thing they were forced to accomplish, and desired nothing so much as to overthrow their own rulers and withdraw from this invasion of America.

Each one of these ideas was lunacy, but the last one saved Steve. He said "Sh-h-h-h!" and moved toward his challenger.

It is not possible to guess what the other man thought. But men who are in hiding do not usually hush those who discover them. This man lowered his queer weapon and bent forward, trying to make out Steve's features in the blackness.

Steve's fist lashed forward and landed accurately on the point of his jaw. There was not enough light to judge distance. It was either blind luck or a miracle, according to one's estimate of such matters. But the other man staggered, and Steve hit him again and again with everything he had. He rained blows upon the dazed and staggering Invader.

The Invader collapsed, and Steve hurled himself upon him, his hands groping for the other's throat.

A long time later he whispered over his shoulder: "Lucy!"

"Y-yes——"

"He's got some kind of armor on—scale armor. I'm guessing it works like our high-frequency packs, to protect him. I've got to get it off. Then he'll stiffen like everybody else, I think. And if we hide him——"

CARRYING THE MAN he had battered into unconsciousness, cold sweat oozed out on Steve's skin. The panic that filled him came solely from a fantastic terror that now—now!—his generator of high-frequency current might suddenly cease to function. Its wavering tongues of metal seemed horribly fragile. Its manifold connections seemed makeshift and insecure.

Under such circumstances, he did not carry his prisoner far—fifty, sixty feet, perhaps. Then he laid the man down. He pulled off the close-fitting helmet and put it on his own head. He stripped off the close-fitting, curiously worked scale armor and, with whispered and urgent instructions to Lucy in case he "froze," he slipped it on. He wrenched away the leggings and donned them. Then, only, he felt secure. Lucy's life depended on his own, and, for battle, he needed something more certain than dry-cell connections.

He felt the body of his victim. It was hard, harder than even a dead body should be, harder than *rigor mortis* would account for. This man, a compatriot of Fran Dutt, had yielded to the strange force that had made and kept the city a place of grotesquely posed pseudo-corpses.

Then Steve hid his victim and he and Lucy crept away. In whispers, he explained to her what he had done. He could not find the weapon that had been pointed at him. Most probably it had

fallen from the sentry's hand and now lay somewhere off in the darkness, perhaps heating itself to melting, but with its glow unseen.

He oriented himself carefully. They heard the rumbling of muffled, quietly driven trucks. The trucks headed toward the business sections of the city. They moved without lights. Their drivers must have had the eyes of cats.

Steve went quietly along a parallel street, Lucy clinging to his hand. For block after block they moved through soft and rather horrible blackness, with only the stars for light, and that muted, almost purring murmur of motor trucks for sound.

Belleville Avenue joined Broad Street. Steve peered, and listened. It seemed to him that another stream of silenced trucks came from somewhere and joined the first. He swung to the left and followed on again.

His eyes were not accustomed to the darkness yet, but now and again he saw a vague grayness, or a vague whiteness, or an indefinite difference in the color of the sidewalks on which he moved. Starlight was enough for such perceptions. Those patches of color were human beings, toppled where they stood at the moment the "plague" struck Newark. Sometimes, though, they were wreckage, as when a monstrous heap of debris nearly closed the street, and the reek of stale gasoline—which is quite different from fresh—was in the air.

They circled it and plodded on. Gradually even Lucy ceased to gasp faintly if by chance she trod on something which should have been soft and yielding, but was not. Yet they gained new expertness in avoiding such accidents. And all the while the soft, purring mutter of many motor trucks moved parallel to their course.

THEY came to a wide, open space. Here a triangular park verged on Broad—the street along which the procession

of trucks had moved. It seemed that the open space made the starlight more effective as illumination, or perhaps there was a dim, diffused radiance supplied from somewhere. In any case the line of trucks could be seen to turn and go growling across the soft green sward of the park, to vanish into a great building on the farther side.

The building was a trolley terminal, and within its bulk there was a huge waiting room almost warehouselike in size. All of the trucks went into it. None of them seemed to come out. The two watchers saw enough trucks roll into the building to fill it on every floor, to fill it twice over, three times. Yet not one vehicle came out again.

"We're going around behind that place," said Steve shortly. "I think I know what's happening, but I want to make sure!"

They began a wide circle to get to the back of the building. Their route required that they scale a fence—since Steve would not go even into a corner of the park proper—and then pick their way across railroad tracks, each one of which had a third rail beside it.

"I'll see about this," said Steve. "The juice will be off, I'm sure. But I'll try it."

A little later he came back to whisper that the third rails were not charged. They crossed tracks, and clambered upon platforms—the still, stiffened forms were very numerous here—and presently hurried down a street which should have been empty, but was actually filled with such a chaos of smashed motor trucks and their loadings as to make climbing a necessity.

It took them half an hour to go the short distance Steve contemplated, to the back of the trolley terminal. There they could see signs of lights within the building, but all very carefully screened. Steve pointed out tiny, glowing cracks, barely visible from across the street, surely undetectable from such a distance

as would be the least any outsider could report from.

Steve got out his revolver and went quietly to look through them. Lucy clenched her hands and went with him.

"If anything happens to you," she whispered desperately, "it's got to happen to me, too! Don't you see, Steve? If you run risks——"

Steve nodded abstractedly. He flattened himself against a wall. He edged to a window with a crack of light showing. He peered in. His hand, holding Lucy's for her comfort, closed hard—so hard that she caught her breath to keep from crying out. Then he reached over and moved her head with his hand until she peered in with him.

SHE GAZED into what had been a waiting room. It was what all designers of traffic terminals term a "grand concourse." It had a twenty-foot ceiling. There had been a very neat concrete floor, nicely painted and daintily divided into squares. There had been seats, very prettily varnished. There had been a news stand with magazines and packaged candy and tobacco, and a soda fountain, and there had been a certain number of plate-glass boxes which were serving advertising purposes up to the time the Invaders took over the building.

A corridor ran away from the two who peered in. It ran toward the entrance, which looked out upon the park. Once upon a time it had resounded to the decorous muffled sound of rubber heels and the brisk footsteps of business men. The doors had been revolving doors, and above them there had been a quite artistic transom which reached up to the ceiling.

Now all that was torn away. The end of the corridor gaped open. Transom door and all were gone. The floor was fouled with mud and clay and trampled grass. Trucks came rolling in the opening, having bumped and growled

across the grassy park. The sound of their motors was made louder by the echoes within the building. They came lurching in, past men who barked orders in an unintelligible language, and rolled fairly into the view of those who peered through the crack.

The soda fountain had been torn out and thrown away. Ends of the piping still gushed water, which ran off unheeded in a mess of mud and grass and scattered magazines. The news stand, of course, was destroyed. The trucks came bumping in and up upon a platform of rough wooden planks, raised perhaps a foot and a half above the floor. The platform looked rather like a cage, because of a helical coil of bars quite an inch thick, wound around and around to form a hollow spiral into which the trucks drove as they mounted to the platform.

And in that helix they vanished! They came growling into the huge room. They rolled across the untidy mess the wheels of many predecessors had made. They changed gears and went ponderously up upon the platform, inside the helix. And then, like candle flames, they flickered and were not! Other trucks followed, and others and others——

Heavy copper cables led to the helix of bronze bars. A queer, unearthly, bluish wild fire seemed to play all about the platform, though there were other shades than bluish in it, too. The glaring electric bulbs made the interior of the place seem like day. The trucks came in, filling the air with a humming thunder, and rolled up upon the platform in an unending procession.

Each time the two watchers saw a massive, solid vehicle. Sometimes it was a heavy-duty, long-haul truck. Again it was a smart light delivery truck from a department store or expensive grocery. The next might be something aged and dilapidated, with streaks of worn fabric showing where the tread of the tires should have been.

But each one was loaded, and each one was driven by a man who wore curious, scaly armor, and each one rolled upon the clumsy platform and flickered and vanished like a candle flame—and then there was room for another.

But the strangest, the weirdest thing of all was the fact that the bluish, flickering wild fire seemed half solid—no, not half solid but half phantomlike. It shimmered in an uncanny fashion, in an incalculable combination of many rhythms. At times Steve had the feeling that it was not merely flame or luminosity. It was something else.

He watched one certain spot. The blue glow came and went. But when it was present, and when it was strongest, it had a curious and very definite pattern impressed upon it. That pattern moved. Presently Steve saw a man's face in it. The light flickered out.

It came back and the man had shifted his position. It looked almost as if colored motion pictures were being thrown upon a screen of smoke which wavered and vanished and appeared again irregularly. It was as if something impressed a deep-blue tint upon the projected image, and the smoke which served as screen appeared only in patches and flecks and nowhere displayed a complete picture at once.

LUCY DREW BACK uncertainly, to look at Steve. The light that came out through their peephole showed her his face clearly enough. His eyes were glowing in deep satisfaction.

"Steve!" she whispered. "I don't understand!"

"Those pictures," he whispered in reply. "They're of the Other Side of Here! That's the way through to Fran Dutt's world! The trucks go through, and some small bits of light come back! We're seeing where Fran came from! In case of need, now, we might even

invade that world to get back the things they've stolen from us!"

He watched an instant longer.

Knowing or guessing at the full meaning of Steve's inadequate explanation, Lucy gazed desperately at the fragmentary scene. Her father, Steve had said, was most likely in Fran Dutt's world. She looked, then, upon an enigmatic planet which was not earth and yet was the earth; which was in what might be called a fourth dimension, and yet was bounded absolutely by the common three. She gazed with totally illogical intensity, as if hoping for a sight of her father. But the shimmering, flickering vision, such as might come from a television set far past the limit of its amplification, showed her snatches of light only.

She saw torches flaring—though she saw them but intermittently. Once she saw a truck which was of earth. She even remembered its huge and sleekly shining shape. It had rolled up upon the platform and vanished a bare two minutes before. Now she saw its image in those phantom bluish flames, with men swarming about it. It had vanished utterly, and yet it still existed. It did not exist on this earth, and yet it existed on another earth which was in the same space as this earth.

Steve drew back and touched her arm. "We'll go."

Again he led the way. But now it was Lucy who kept a lookout. Steve seemed so engrossed in the meaning of what he had seen that he would have turned straight into the open space across which the trucks ran softly. Lucy checked him.

"Steve! The trucks!"

He stopped instantly.

"Thanks. Stupid of me, when I know things that will mean— What won't they mean! We've got to hurry!"

He seemed to come back to the time and the moment, now. But though he spoke of haste, he stood still. He stared

at the blackness all about. He glanced upward at the stars.

"They're working out Belleville, cleaning up as they go. They're nearly all the way. They can't go but so far toward the Oranges. The cordon would hear them. We've got to find — Professor Hamlin would do! They'd have to listen to him, and he's worked with me. He was one of my instructors! We must find him, and I'll explain——"

"Steve! He's——"

"Frozen or whatever it is. I know. But we'll revive him! The first thing, though, is to get to him. We've got to dodge around—— Come along!"

HE TALKED uninterruptedly of the marvelous fact that Straussman's theory was now proven true. There was another planet occupying the same space as earth. It must be approximately the same size, containing nearly the same elements in the same proportions and doubtlessly its atmosphere and oceans and clouds resembled those of earth. It might even have been peopled from earth, though how it could be done was hard to say.

And Straussman, being proved right in this prediction, was most probably right in his further belief that there not only could be, but in cases of sufficient mass there must be, not only two but three objects occupying the same space, but there were probably six objects, and conceivably eighteen or fifty-four.

And while Steve talked, he was making another huge circling movement around the part of the city which seemed to be receiving attention from the Invaders.

"There'll be worlds to explore," he said eagerly. "Great shining globes as big as ours, with continents and oceans unmapped and still unknown. There'll be creatures such as we've never dreamed of, and fruits no man has ever

tasted. There will be colonies to create and grow. There'll never be need of war again, with half a hundred worlds in which our nations can expand——"

Lucy said, "*Sh-h-h!*"

She pointed. There was a light ahead—a curious, dull-blue glow which was bright enough to see by, but made no glare which could be noted by observers at a distance. Steve checked himself instantly. He heard voices, speaking in the unintelligible language of the Invaders. A voice spoke harshly and arrogantly. Another voice replied humbly. There was a little cracking sound and a whimpering noise, the arrogant voice again, commanding and contemptuous, silence.

Then another voice. By its tone it made a jest, and the voices which had been so arrogant replied in the manner of one talking to an equal. There were small sounds which were men moving, another humble voice, the arrogant voice again, harsh once more.

Steve put Lucy behind him, and gestured for her to stay where she was. He moved forward, taking infinite care to make no noise. He instinctively drew his own revolver. The blue glow enabled him to avoid a tumbled heap which had been a group of human beings, now sprawled in insane poses on the sidewalk. He reached the corner and peered cautiously around it.

There was a small truck beside the curbstone. It stood before a marquee studded with letters a foot high and designed to be illuminated from behind. A motion-picture theater. This was on Market Street. The letters spelled out a supposedly alluring play title and, in much larger print, the name of an actress of demonstrated fascination.

BUT THAT was not the thing which made the blood suddenly pound savagely in Steve's temples and made him see even the ghostly blue glow as if



*And he was utterly motionless—not a muscle moved—
—not an eyelid flickered.*

through a film of red. There were two slim, arrogant figures on the sidewalk. Each carried, as if it were a cane, a limber, lissom stick which held a dozen snaky filaments at one end. Some-

thing at the top of each filament glittered metallicly.

The pair wore the scaly armor which protected its wearers against the artificial catalepsy which was the Invaders'

principal weapon. They seemed officers or more probably noblemen in the organization of the Invaders. Certainly the other men Steve saw had no such arrogance of manner, nor such magnificence of attire.

Of the others—and he instantly remembered Fran Dutt's use of the word "Underones"—he saw altogether perhaps a dozen. There were three in view at first. Two jumped down from the body of the truck and cringed before the slim figures before they scuttled into the motion-picture theater. It seemed as if that unspeakably abject shrinking of the whole body were a standardized thing, equivalent to a military salute. They vanished. The third of the Underones remained in the truck, stowing something away. The two superiors remained in elegant idleness, talking together in their cryptic language. There were footsteps within the theater. A man came out—and Steve saw red.

He was one of the Underones, and he carried a human figure. More, it was the stiffened, frozen figure of a girl. She had been in the theater, of course, at the instant of the coming of the plague.

The Underones put her down upon the sidewalk and cringed. Another of his kind came out, with a second girl. The two superiors talked amusedly. Other Underones came out. Five—six—a dozen stiffened figures had been brought out of the theater. All were girls. None was over twenty, and the blue light was not flattering, but Steve could see that they had not been selected for any other reason than the fact that they were slim and young and pretty.

An Underone made a humble noise. The two superiors turned and inspected the loot of the theater. To Steve, who knew that these girls could be revived unharmed, the air of the two superiors immediately became as a red rag to a bull. One commanded that hats be

pulled off. The two superiors, gayly, began to divide the unconscious, immobile victims. An amused difference of opinion arose. One of the two bent over and pulled loose a girl's hair to show its length. The other protested, laughing. The first gave an order. The Underones began to load the pathetic forms into the motor truck.

Steve felt a hand upon his arm.

Lucy whispered shakenly: "Steve! What are they going to do?"

"Load them on the truck," said Steve savagely, under his breath, "then to their own world. Revive them there, I suppose, as slaves or wives. They've just divided them—all but the last. They're arguing over her now."

The debate between the two superiors was amused and bantering and incredibly inhuman. One of them, laughing, took out a queerly shaped knife and began to slit away the jacket this last girl wore. At the instant the plague had struck her motionless, she had been smiling faintly at something which was then upon the screen. She was very pretty indeed, and very young—

One of the Underones stumbled with his load. He brushed ever so lightly against one of the two young lordlings. That lordling rasped an order. The cringing man moaned a little, but put down his load and stood still. And then the limber, canelike thing with the tentacles on its ends flashed up. It struck viciously upon the unprotected face of the Underone. The metal tips of the lashes—it was suddenly a metal-studded whip—made deep gashes. It struck again—and again—

"I can't stand this!" said Steve fiercely.

He spoke in a thick voice of wholly normal volume. The next instant he went around the corner. His revolver flashed. It flashed again. In the uncanny silence of the city the explosions were incredibly loud. The buildings echoed and reechoed the noise.

The Underones turned and gaped at Steve. One of the two superiors made a choking noise and collapsed. The other panted furiously at Steve—who was wearing the scaly armor of the Invaders. His hand went to his hip. Steve shot him, too. The noise of the revolver seemed enough to wake the dead.

Then the Underones fled, squealing. "Now I've done it!" said Steve savagely. "I've done it! Here, get in the truck, Lucy! We've got to get away from here!"

He flung her up into the truck.

VIII.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER Steve said, "Maybe this'll be seen and prepare people for what I hope to pull next. It'll surely tell them there's somebody alive where they think there are only dead men!"

He worked the light switch feverishly. Three long flashes of the headlights, then three short ones, then three long ones again. He repeated the signal twice. Then he left the switch on, leaped from the driver's seat, and fled with Lucy into the shadows.

He left the truck parked at the top of a steep hillside street—Third Avenue—which fell away before it. The headlight beams reached out into sheer emptiness. In the utter blackness of all Newark, the beams would make some faint illumination even in Kearney.

But meanwhile Steve and Lucy ran headlong. They wanted a hiding place, to be sure. But they had a tremendous advantage in that their existence seemed impossible to the men who should have pursued them. Shots in the supposedly dead town would seem to the Invaders more like one of their own number firing an unfamiliar weapon by accident, than like a raid by former inhabitants.

So that Steve and Lucy had a good start. Three times, while in flight, Steve

had checked the small truck to unload it of its cargo of young girls chosen to be slaves or wives to the two men Steve had shot. Steve had put those girls out of the truck in the middle of great heaps of shattered machinery—cars which had smashed and piled themselves up gruesomely at street intersections. The girls were less likely to be picked out of such heaps of scrap iron by others of the Invaders than from any other hiding places Steve was likely to contrive. He could not go about selecting imperiled damsels to revive. He had to try to arrange for the revival of the whole city.

As Steve and Lucy ran, they heard motors purring angrily. The truck's headlights staring out from a hill crest had told of its position, of course. The Invaders were rushing to put out those lights. And Steve felt a certain vengeful satisfaction when he heard one or two minor crashes ringing through the silence which overlay Newark. They had run into smash-ups.

In the twenty minutes of his flight, Steve had not given up the plan he had formed before. Now, running from the truck, he led the way to the home of Professor Hamlin. They broke into it by the back way. It was undisturbed. Fran's compatriots had not yet reached the Forest Hills section in their systematic looting of the city.

But the bachelor scientist evaded their cautious search for some time. Steve looked for him in his bedroom, because of the darkness. It was Lucy who remembered the hour when the plague had struck Newark. She led the way into the dining room. They found the portly scientist stiff and immobile at dinner.

STEVE unslung his own high-frequency pack, depending solely upon the scaly Invader's armor for continued life. He fitted the pack to the body of his old instructor. Then he turned it on. The scientist moved, in the darkness. He continued the gesture he had begun

forty-eight hours before. His spoon seemed empty. He grunted, and listened. The room was dark. He called out to some one to light a candle. He had no sensation of time lapse. He thought that a fuse had blown out to leave the house in darkness. Then Steve spoke to him.

It took Lucy's insistence and her bedraggled appearance as revealed by match light to make the dignified biologist believe that Steve was not insane. It took a painstaking examination of his two servants, and then an even more painstaking examination of the goldfish—one of which he slit open—to make him believe that the condition was not conventional *rigor mortis*.

Lucy took one of the fish between her two hands, and the high-frequency current, which she did not even feel, passed through the small creature. It flapped convulsively. She released it—and it was stiff and stark and still once more.

"Now come along!" said Steve grimly. "You'll see plenty to convince you as you go out of town! I can't leave! I'd be shot, and probably Lucy, too. But if you go to the cordon and tell your name, it will carry weight. They'll listen to you. And you'll tell them how to fix up a regiment or two and come marching in over here to settle this business!"

Professor Hamlin felt of the pack Steve had placed upon his shoulders. He sniffed the dust that fell from his clothing in small clouds when he moved.

"I shall do so, Steven," he said with dignity. "What you tell me is impossible, according to all preconceived ideas, but it is apparently true. And it seems to be a fact that Straussman was right. I know that Professor Blair was inclined to accept his theories. My dear, have you heard anything of your father?"

Lucy said bitterly: "He's in that—other world Steve and I saw, where the trucks go through."

Again instinctive incredulity. But the portly scientist accompanied them out of the house with the high-frequency pack strapped to his shoulders. The utter darkness and utter stillness of the town tended to convince him. They came upon a pathetic bundle upon the sidewalk. A boy and girl—high-school children—had been talking together. They had fallen, stiffened, together. Professor Hamlin recklessly struck a match. He saw their faces.

"Girls," said Steve harshly, "are being loaded on those trucks and carried to that other world. This girl is pretty enough."

Professor Hamlin groaned softly. He blew out the match and came on. A long distance farther, he halted again. Steve risked a match for him. The professor saw a piled-up heap of smashed cars. They went on, and on— Steve talked crisply and urgently.

Professor Hamlin listened. Presently the scientist in him awoke. He asked questions, more questions. He took Steve's theory and shrewdly pointed out a weakness in it—and found the explanation that removed the weakness. He had Steve describe in detail the appearance of the helix about the platform in the trolley terminal.

"They're running one of the power houses for the energy for that," he said. "Probably only at night, so no smoke will be seen."

He walked briskly, stumbling now and again over the heaped bodies on the pavement. He had become so absorbed in the scientific aspect of the affair that even these gruesome reminders of the condition of the city ceased to affect him. Steve was calloused to them through his consuming hatred of the Invaders. Only Lucy still shuddered in horror.

A RUDDY LIGHT appeared a long distance ahead. It was a bonfire of the military cordon.

"I know enough," said Professor Hamlin, "to vindicate you, Steven, and to put an end to this ghastly attempt upon our nation. That fire must be one built by the soldiers of the cordon. I will go forward, identify myself, and tell your story. This apparatus upon my back will revive some of the victims in New York. It will be easy to make more. I feel that I can promise, Steven, that within twelve hours this terrible catastrophe will be at an end. And I consider that you deserve the best from your nation."

He shook hands.

"Be sure and call ahead when you go up to the cordon," said Steve grimly. "They've orders to shoot anybody who tries to come out. You'll have to argue with them."

"They will not shoot me," said Professor Hamlin confidently.

But they did.

Steve saw it happen. The portly figure of the scientist moved away from them into the darkness. A long time later Steve and Lucy heard his voice, shouting undistinguishably. There was a sudden flare of light. A searchlight stabbed through the darkness. Steve and Lucy saw the elderly man outlined in its glare.

He waved his hands and moved forward. They could not distinguish words, but somebody shouted back to him. The tone was commanding. Professor Hamlin replied, halting. The other voice bellowed again. Professor Hamlin argued. Then he went deliberately and dignifiedly ahead.

There was a sudden outburst of tiny sparks, the tearing *rat-tat-tat* of small-arm fire. Outlined in the searchlight beam, Professor Hamlin staggered, wavered, and dropped quietly to the ground.

The two who watched were silent. Lucy, because she could not speak. Steve, because he was shaking with

fury and grief that seemed to strangle him.

It was a long time later when he said in a rage-thickened voice: "The report of a man coming out and being shot down will add up very neatly to the car lights we turned on! Don't you see? They'll think one man got the plague they believe in, and didn't quite die of it. That, after forty hours or so, he'd gotten back his strength, tried to signal with car lights, and then essayed to walk to where he could get help. That he was shot down. All of which means that we've accomplished nothing but his murder!"

Lucy said; "But—Steve, won't Fran's—friends think he was also the man who shot down two of them on Market Street?"

"Probably. You weren't seen."

Then Steve wilted drearily. His voice broke. "But damn, Lucy, it looks so hopeless—so uselessly hopeless! I've killed a friend! If they'd only listen to——"

Lucy pressed close. "Steve, you're tired. You got no rest at all last night. Let's go back to the car and—and listen to the radio reports. There might be something said that would give you an idea——"

Steve let himself be turned around. He plodded back. He was tired. He had slept practically not at all for two nights. The first was the night of the catastrophe in Newark; he had spent all the dark hours trying to get himself a hearing. The second was the night after their escape from White Plains, after that city had been frozen in the attempt of the Invaders to capture Steve. Steve had worked most of that night improving the high-frequency packs and making spares.

"We need to replace the batteries in your pack, anyhow," he said dully. "We'll go back to the car and hook onto a storage battery while we do it."

THEY FOUND the car they had taken from before the White Plains service station. Steve clipped a storage battery to Lucy's outfit and replaced the dry cells. As long as she stayed in the car, however, it would draw from the storage battery.

Then he said wearily: "They'll be hunting all over the place, probably. If they see me with this armor on, they'll want to ask me questions. I'm going to get it underneath my clothes. Then if anybody comes around, we'll just stay motionless. They probably won't look closely—not while they're hunting for somebody who's alive and kicking."

He took one of the spare packs he had made and stepped outside the car. He came back again, the scaly armor hidden under his clothing. He settled down wearily behind the driver's seat. He turned on the car radio and adjusted its volume to a bare whisper.

"We'll listen," he said tiredly.

There was only music on the air. This was an interval between the news bulletins, the broadcasting of which was now the principal occupation of the New York stations. In a very little while, Steve slept.

He slept heavily, his head fallen forward. The silence of the city became very tense and horrible indeed to Lucy. There was literally no sound at all. The murmur of the looting trucks was too faint or too far away for her to hear. The radio had been turned so low that it was rather the ghost of a sound than a sound itself. The houses were blank and dark and still. If they had been empty, it would have been horrible. But they were occupied, by motionless, staring figures which were more horrible still.

The streets were utterly dark, which in itself would be nerve racking to a girl. But there were toppled, motionless figures on the sidewalks which were more than nerve racking. There were not only the shuddery feeling of one

alone in dense blackness and feeling that furtive figures might be creeping close. Lucy *knew* that there were really figures moving somewhere in the dark city, searching for Steve and for herself. And besides, there was the sensation of a terrible isolation, of a nightmarish helplessness, because of the cordon of soldiers in a wide-flung circle about the town, whose special duty it was to prevent the escape of any one who might be in it, or the entry of any one from without.

Lucy's teeth chattered suddenly. She lifted her hand to waken Steve. Then she stopped. He was exhausted, worn out. And more, he was defeated. Something maternal stirred in Lucy, and with it the strange and quite incredible courage of maternity. She clamped her teeth tightly, to watch and let Steve rest.

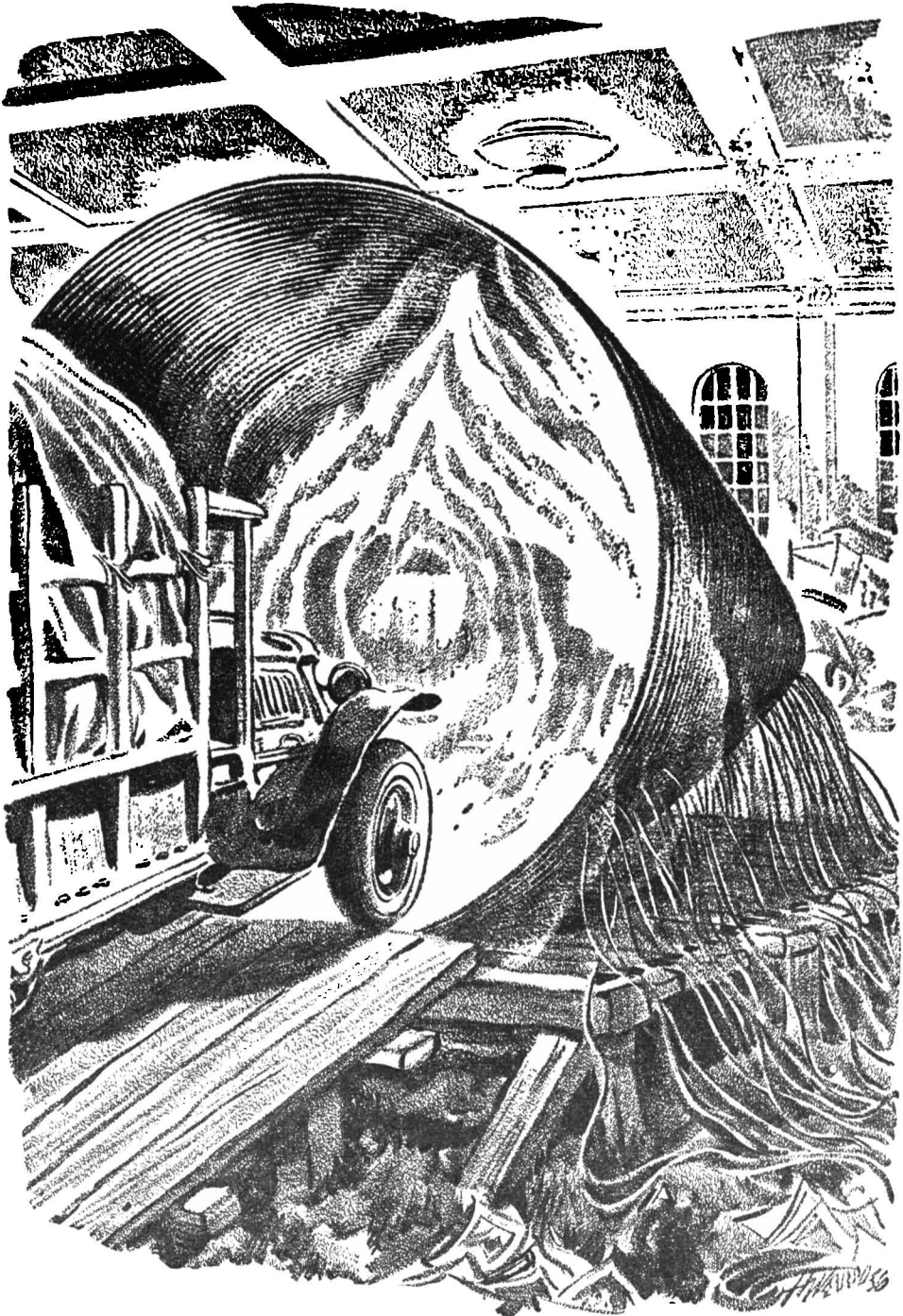
The ghost of sound which came from the car radio changed. The whisper of a man's voice came out:

"Special news bulletin—Shanghai, China: News of the plague appearing in Newark, White Plains and New York has caused a Mr. White, of Shanghai, to communicate with the American consul general.

"Mr. White declares that while traveling near the Mongolian border some eight months ago he came upon a small walled town in which the inhabitants seemed to have perished suddenly from a plague resembling in every way that which has killed six hundred thousand people in the United States.

"He investigated the condition, but was fearful of remaining in the city for fear of contagion. Some three weeks later, returning, he found the city alive and bustling. The inhabitants informed him that they had all slept from the time of the new moon to the last quarter, and that during that time a great many of the younger and prettier girls had disappeared, and thieves had stolen many beautiful things.

"Mr. White did not report the occurrence on his return to civilization, not thinking he would be believed. Now, however, he is in conference with Federal



*As he watched, a truck, and then another, and then another,
rolled into the haze—and disappeared completely—*

AST-5

health authorities in Washington via short-wave radio. Much doubt has been expressed as to the accuracy of his statements and the value of his observations. For further details——"

Steve stirred in his sleep. Lucy bent forward and turned off the radio.

Steve stirred again. His lips formed the words: "They were testing——" A little later he said distinctly, "Short-wave radio" and slept again.

THERE WAS SILENCE—fearful and nerve racking; nevertheless, Lucy let him sleep on. She sat beside him in the car, and rolled down a side window that she might listen more closely for the searchers who undoubtedly hunted them. She heard nothing. With even the radio cut off, the silence was so deep that the blood in her own ears seemed to make a pulsing, roaring sound. There was no light anywhere. But presently she noted a pale glare in the night sky. It was the glow of New York's myriad street lamps.

Steve slept on—one hour, two, two and a half. Lucy heard only the murmur of Steve's breathing. Then there came an abrupt crash as of tinware falling, a block or more away. She caught at Steve's hand. He was instantly awake.

"I—heard a noise," she whispered faintly.

He listened an instant, nodded, and opened the car door with infinite care. He slipped out. She joined him. He opened the back door and fumbled delicately there. He found a spare high-frequency pack. He lifted it out and tucked it under his arm.

"All right," he whispered.

He led her away, half a block, a block. He froze, clutching her arm tightly. A little knot of men, all of a dozen, came out of an alleyway. They crossed the street and vanished. Steve relaxed.

"Close, that!" he whispered. "They're

going to turn the town upside down to-night!"

"What will we do?" asked Lucy fearfully.

"Go out to the cordon," said Steve. "I woke up with a new scheme ready-formed. Silly of me not to have thought of it before."

"Steve, not the same thing Professor Hamlin——"

"No," said Steve. "Something else. Hold it!"

The last was whispered. Another patrol of the Invaders passed. This one was not as near as the first had been. It went on, oblivious. There were two more such alarms in the next five minutes.

"There must be a couple of thousand men in town here, looting it," whispered Steve. "And half of them are hunting for us. But I'll bet they think Hamlin was the one who shot two of them and set those truck lights glaring. I'll bet they think he was one of them turned traitor—and they know he's dead."

They probably did. Certainly the hunt for the two fugitives was not intensive nor very enthusiastic. It was merely widespread. But in pitch darkness, and with all lights and all noise alike forbidden, no search could be intensive over a large territory.

Steve and Lucy had little trouble in evading the patrols which marched about the city. But it took them a long time to make the great circle which Steve's new plan required. The stars which had been overhead when they began were far down toward the western horizon when they went cautiously out upon a causeway running across the Jersey meadows.

In a car, they could have made the trip in minutes, but, of course, they dared not use a car despite the number of them about. Their journey took them hours, and Lucy was as exhausted physically as Steve had been mentally.

Yet he urged her on. He still carried the extra high-frequency pack.

AT LAST, a luridly bright star rose above the eastern edge of the world, flickering only a little and casting perceptible shadows. It was Venus, the morning star; dawn could not be far away. Only then would Steve let Lucy rest. But then he went into a filling station along the causeway and found a place for her to lie down in, while he stared out the windows at the street lights of Jersey City. Presently they paled.

Lucy fell asleep, utterly worn out, just as the gray light to eastward began to be flecked with the colors of dawn.

When she woke, she heard voices. It was near sundown again. The amazingly fragrant odor of freshly-made coffee and something else more tantalizing still came to her. She stirred. Steve came in from the front of the service station.

"Rested?" he asked, smiling.

"Steve! I smell coffee!"

"And hot dogs," he told her. "Waiting and ready. Come on out and meet Nick Bannerman."

When she went out, Nick grinned cordially, with a mug of coffee steaming in his hand and the extra high-frequency pack on his back.

"Nice mess this, isn't it?" he asked cheerfully. "I came out with some high-hat scientists, to show them how to fly kites, though it was Steve who did the work yesterday; or was it yesterday, Steve? I've been dead or something, Steve tells me. Anyhow, all of a sudden I didn't know anything. The plague got all of us in the same instant, and the next thing I knew Steve had this dinkus strapped on me and was explaining a lot of improbable things. So we came back here to wait for dark."

"We've got those devils licked, now!" said Steve savagely. "We've got them!"

He gave Lucy coffee. She drank thirstily, and then said ruefully: "I look a fright! What are we going to do, Steve?"

"Wait till dark," said Steve, "and then walk our legs off again. I'm sorry, Lucy, but I don't know Morse code, beyond S O S, and Nick does. So we had to come out to where he and his bunch of investigators were frozen."

"Thanks," said Nick blandly. "Your solicitude for me, Steve——"

"And more than that," said Steve triumphantly, "Nick knows some radio amateurs—ham operators—and at least one of them used battery current for steadiness of signal. So that's where we're going!"

Nick put down his coffee mug and expertly strewed more frankfurters on the gasoline-heated stove. They sizzled.

"I suspect," he commented, "that we're going to run away again as fast as we go to it, but maybe I'll get something across before they catch us. Remember, Steve, those mugs have been planning this thing for a long time. They've had spies planted for years, and they picked off their most dangerous opponents before they started anything at all. Lucy's father, for instance."

He turned the frankfurters with calm efficiency.

"Nevertheless," he added, "we're in the trouble zone, and we'll be shot if we try to get out of it, and frozen if we're caught in it, so we might as well try something. Lucy—maybe I'd better say Miss Blair—will you have another weenie?"

"Lucy," said Lucy, and held out a roll. "I will."

Somehow it seemed less horrible when they moved back toward the city as darkness fell again. Steve had rested a little, if not enough. Nick Bannerman, however, was capable of a jest. More, he had used his eyes during the daylight hours while Lucy slept.

Before they had gone more than a few hundred yards, he had stopped twice and fumbled at prone, stiffened figures on the ground. Both were State policemen. The two men had revolvers in holsters and full cartridge belts besides, when they crept cautiously into the dead, dark streets of Newark again. Steve, too, silently passed Lucy the revolver that had belonged to her father.

HERE, among the first houses, Nick's blandness deserted him. He stumbled upon a pitiful heap of stiffened flesh which had been a child. Lucy knew that he touched it and found that it was a child. When he stood up, he was whispering blood-curdling profanity to himself.

It had taken them a long time to reach the city. It took them longer to reach the house of the short-wave fan whom Nick knew. It was not easy to find the way on foot, in dense blackness, without even street lamps to tell them where they might be.

At the end, though, Steve cracked a window with every possible precaution against noise. The three of them entered the house. Presently, trickling the glow of a flashlight through his fingers, Nick found the amateur's short-wave set. His friend sat stiffly in a chair, making some adjustment to the set. It was not turned on, which was fortunate. The batteries were not run down. Nick checked here and there. He flung over a switch and the tubes lighted. He fingered the key.

"Now," he said calmly, "it all depends on whether our friends, the enemy, happen to be listening in for short-wave stuff. If they are, they'll slap a directional antenna on us and come here running. If they aren't, we'll raise hell with them! You two had better stand guard."

The key flicked up and down. "CQ-CQ-CQ-DE 9XY2, 9XY2. Dot,

dash, dot!" The key tapped noiselessly, and Nick spoke slowly as he worked. "I'm giving a general call, begging somebody to answer. Very important, emergency call, everybody stand by. I think I'll put in an SOS to get more attention."

He flicked in the speaker switch, but only a hum came out of it. He returned to his calling. "CQ-CQ-CQ-CQ-CQ-DE 9XY2, 9XY2. Dot, dash, dot!" Again the speaker switch. It hummed once more. Staccato, musical sounds came out. "*Beep, bee—*"

"Got 'em!" said Nick joyously. "Now listen to what I give that egg!" The key wavered beneath his fingers. He spoke as he sent. "Nick Bannerman calling. I am with Steve Waldron in Newark. Everybody apparently dead but us. We have found way to combat plague. Are you listening?"

Again the switch. The speaker hummed, and instead of musical sounds it emitted a harsh and strident shriek—a raucous shriek. It was composed of dots and dashes sent insanely, meaninglessly, in a dozen pitches and at a dozen rates of speed, so that it would scramble and obliterate any possible meaningful message Nick might send.

Nick listened. He glanced up at Steve.

"It's no go," he said composedly. "The Invaders were listening in. They've scrambled my message, and they'll be all set to scramble any other. They know this station call and can get the address in three minutes, if they choose to hunt it up on a list of short-wave amateurs."

"Come on!" said Steve bitterly. "We're licked again, but there's no sense in letting them catch us!"

NICK snapped off the current and came after him as, half carrying Lucy, Steve raced down the stairs and out into the street again. Silence inside a house is not abnormal, but in a street

it is. Wherefore the utter stillness of outdoors smote sharply upon their consciousness again.

Steve said, more bitterly still: "They coming!"

There was a purring sound in the air. Cars were racing through the still and silent streets—muffled cars, unlighted cars, but cars driven at breakneck speed. And they would be loaded with many men—

"Quick!" said Steve. "They're going to try to ring us in!"

He ran ahead. Nick tumbled over something with clothing on it, lying in a grotesque heap. He scrambled up and after the others. He heard the purring sounds divide. They could be heard distinctly. Some came from the north; others sped to east and west, and still others came racing even faster than the rest and curved around to block off all possible escape to the north.

Lucy heard little clicking noises. Steve and Nick were clearing their newly-acquired guns. Steve dragged the others into an areaway.

Then there was a rush and a roar. A huge car, already braking, slowed smoothly before them. It came to a stop a bare fifty feet beyond. Men tumbled out, weapons clanking. A harsh voice snarled orders. The men spread out across the street. They went on.

"There's a break," whispered Steve. "They're stopping to feel everybody they stumble over. Lucky they stopped beyond us. We couldn't have passed for bodies."

Other cars were slowing and stopping on other streets. The amateur short-wave station from which Nick had been sending was completely encircled. There must have been fifty—sixty—a hundred men making a closing circle about the spot.

"Wait here," said Steve in the faintest of grim whispers. "I'm going to see what I can do."

He stood erect and walked to the car. It was deserted. He fumbled for the key. He stood straining his ears. The advancing patrol reached and passed the next street corner. Steve beckoned.

Perhaps the starlight was brighter, or perhaps the second night of activity in such a lightless environment had made Lucy's eyes more sensitive. She brought Nick quickly to the car.

"Inside," whispered Steve. "Down on the floor, Lucy. Nick, get set for fighting!"

The starter whirred. The motor caught. An angry hail—but guarded in tone—came from ahead. Nick slammed the car door; Steve let in the clutch with a jerk, and the car shot forward. He raced it in second and switched on the headlights for a fraction of a second. He saw the line of scale-armored men in the act of halting. Some were half turned toward him. He cut off the headlights and bored ruthlessly through them. At that, though, one man leaped onto the running board. But Nick's revolver exploded with a muffled roar and he fell off again.

Straight ahead, the next corner, another flicker of the headlights—Steve swept around it and away. A sudden surge of other men before the car, as disclosed by the flicker of the lights again—Steve left them on for fifteen seconds, while his revolver crashed. Other crashes came from the back. Not only Nick, but even Lucy was firing vengefully into the scale-armored Invaders as they flung themselves recklessly upon the speeding car.

But Steve broke through, his wheels grinding horribly over something which shrieked. Then they were away again.

FOR TEN MINUTES—fifteen—twenty, Steve tore through winding streets upon an untraceable course. The headlights flicked on and off. Half-second flashes showed the way for two or

three blocks, but did not give a steady beacon for the pursuers to trail, and more especially did not point out a course so he could be headed off.

"Steve," said Nick suddenly, "what're you gaining by all this?"

"Throwing 'em off," said Steve shortly. "We'll jump out in a minute or two and run. They'll have trouble finding the car and more trouble finding us."

"No," said Nick. "Not so good, Steve. They've got short-wave listeners now, Steve. We just proved it. And most likely they have a directional outfit, too. If it weren't for their own cars, they could trace us by our motor. And—we're depending on sparking contacts to keep us alive."

Steve drove for perhaps five seconds. Then he groaned. "And they'll have noticed those things, now!"

"Sure!" agreed Nick. "But we can get in a sheet-iron building, like a garage. Most likely the short wave those sparks make—there are bound to be some—will be grounded by the sheathing. And the Invaders may not be able to pick them up outside. Then we can figure out something else to try."

"All right," said Steve grimly. "Watch out for such a building. I'll let you out, drive on past, set the car to wreck itself and come on back."

"There's one now," said Lucy breathlessly.

There was. A garage sign above its ungainly bulk showed that it would be desirable in other fashions, too. Dry cells for the high-frequency packs, for example. Steve stopped the car. Nick and Lucy tumbled out.

"Right back," said Steve shortly.

He plunged away in the car. Around one corner, two, three—a long, straight street ahead. Steve settled the car's wheels in a trolley track to guide it. A flash of the headlights showed the way clear for a long distance. He set the gas lever for a good speed, swung over the side, and jumped.

He tumbled over, once. The car rolled swiftly away in the absolute blackness. It would go five blocks surely, perhaps ten, before some obstacle flung it from the shallow grooves of the track. Then it would smash—and no searcher could find evidence that its occupants had left it before the smash-up.

Steve got up and shook himself. He

started back toward the sheet-iron garage, listening keenly for sounds of search. He heard motors purring here and there, but nothing near enough to cause alarm. There was, now one infinitesimal sound which puzzled him a little, but he could not locate it.

It was, as a matter of fact, the vibrator of the high-frequency pack he had donned as a spare after giving his own to Professor Hamlin, and which made a slight noise where the others were silent. The pack had been turned on by Steve's fall. He had forgotten that he wore such a pack. It had happened simply to be the most convenient way to carry an extra one in case Nick or Lucy needed it.

He heard the crash as his abandoned car shattered itself against the trolley on the track it followed.

HE WENT ON through the darkness. All of fifteen minutes later he found the ungainly building in which the others had taken refuge. He went in and called softly.

"We're here," said Nick quietly. "There are some cars and things here, too, Steve, and plenty of batteries."

"We'll just keep quiet until the hunt dies down," said Steve tiredly, and then try to think of something else. We've got to get word of what we know out to where it can be used. The fools still think it's a plague——"

Discouragement weighed heavily upon him. He sat down and put his head in his hands. His efforts to combat the Invaders, by proving their ghastly weapon to be a weapon instead of a plague, had resulted in the use of that weapon upon three areas in New York and the wiping out of White Plains. It had probably cost the life of the one White Plains physician with the courage and intelligence to recognize proof when he saw it, and it had certainly cost the life of Steve's old instructor, Professor Hamlin.

He had achieved absolutely nothing. He and Lucy were alive. That was all. And they were hunted ruthlessly by the Invaders, and if they went out of the area the Invaders held, they would be shot down like mad dogs. Steve had enough to make him heartsick.

Then came more. He jerked his head upright. There were footsteps outside the garage. Then a voice, hushed and

cautious. "Steve! Lucy! Steve! Lucy!"

It was Fran Dutt. He came furtively into the darkness of the garage and spoke desperately, "I know you're here! I traced you with a short-wave receiver. The Leaders haven't thought of that yet. I realized that you must have found out how I kept you from being caught when all of Newark went dead, so I fixed up a set to find you. I knew you'd come here after you got away from White Plains. I'm your friend, Steve! And Lucy's! I've got to talk to you!"

Dead silence. Then Steve's voice, cold and deadly. "I've got a gun on your middle, Fran. Come over here and talk. But talk quietly!"

Fran slid the door shut, with infinite care to avoid making a noise. Then he turned a flashlight on his own face. It was haggard and worn.

"I've been nearly crazy!" he said bitterly. "Lucy, you're all right?"

He swept the beam around. It touched Lucy, and its reflection showed Nick.

"Three of you, eh?" said Fran Dutt. "You are clever!"

He put the flashlight down on the floor, with its beam still glowing.

"There's nobody hunting near here," he said jerkily, "but it's worse than I thought, Steve. You've got to get Lucy away from here! They're taking women back to my homeland, to divide among the Leaders. It is horrible! Horrible! If Lucy is caught I will go mad! She must be made more safe!"

Steve sat down. Fran Dutt wrung his hands. The love he felt for Lucy

had saved both Steve and Lucy in the first place. Now Fran looked like a man in torment. Steve holstered his revolver.

"Well?" said Steve cynically. "How can Lucy be made more safe? I've tried, Heaven knows! What do you suggest?"

Fran Dutt made a lightninglike movement.

"This!" he said desperately.

A flash and an inadequate report came from something in his hand. A blue spark shot out from Nick's high-frequency pack. The tiny, silenced gun spat again. A wire of Steve's pack parted and a lurid spark flared momentarily.

Then Lucy cried out. Nick toppled slowly forward, every muscle instantaneously stiffened in that ghastly tetany which men called the plague. He struck the floor of the garage and careened to one side, unspeakably grotesque because he retained the pose in which he had been standing. And Steve, seated on the running board of the dismantled car, was utterly motionless. Not a muscle moved. Not an eyelid flickered.

Lucy cried out when she saw Steve stiff and still. She thrust forward the revolver Steve had given her hours before. She pulled the trigger desperately. It clicked in complete futility. She had fired it empty not twenty minutes since, helping to shoot a way through the Invaders who had tried to capture them near the short-wave station.

"I almost wish," said Fran Dutt in exquisite bitterness, "that you had killed me, Lucy. You see, I love you."

(To Be Continued)

In Part Four the struggle reaches toward its tremendous crisis with Lucy alone able to combat Dutt.

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Table of Contents

Novel:

- THE ETERNAL WANDERER . . . Nat Schachner . . . 14
Death—torture he could stand—but this strange, unknown, non-death—this dissociated being—

Novelettes:

- DYNASTY OF THE SMALL . . . John Russell Fearn . . . 59
The metamorphosis of bacteriological evolution—
- ANTON MOVES THE EARTH . . . Ross Rocklynnne . . . 124
Cold black of interstellar space—misty curtains of stars—incredibile distances—

Short Stories:

- THE PATH . . . Raymond Z. Gallun . . . 38
Drifting hopelessly in space—no longer part of the world—a world that needed him—
- THE LAST SELENITE . . . A. Macfadyen, Jr. . . 48
Supreme power—supreme knowledge—unusable!
- MACKLIN'S LITTLE FRIEND . . . H. W. Guernsey . . . 83
Out of the unknown!
- THE THOUGHT WEB OF MINIPAR Chan Corbett . . . 112
The secret of thought transference—release of personalities!

Serial Novel:

- THE INCREDIBLE INVASION . . . Murray Leinster . . . 94
Part Four of the gripping serial novel of the earth—and its dimensional secrets.

Science Feature:

- RED DEATH . . . John W. Campbell, Jr. . . 43
The sixth in the series of scientific articles which embrace the entire solar system.

Readers' Department:

- EDITOR'S PAGE 123
- BRASS TACKS (The Open House of Controversy) . . . 150
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Nick worked like a madman. Two more men dashed in. A burst of shots brought down one—

The Incredible Invasion

Part Four

by Murray Leinster

UP TO NOW:

Professor Blair, while in the midst of his work on Straussman's theory—showing that two objects can exist in the same place at the same time—suddenly disappears.

Steve Waldron, a biologist, is in love with Blair's daughter, Lucy, as is Fran Dutt, a foreigner who is laboratory assistant to Professor Blair.

At Fran's request, Steve and Lucy drive from Newark to New York. They see human beings freeze in their tracks as if paralyzed, till all seem waxlike and dead. They alone, because of something Fran has put in the car, escape unharmed.

Newspapers report Newark a dead city, wiped out by plague.

Steve knows differently and suspects Fran's compatriots of invasion.

Everywhere Steve and Lucy go becomes a "plague spot."

Crowds flee from New York in panic, causing riots and bloodshed.

Steve and Lucy go to White Plains. There Steve discovers that by means of high-frequency electricity he can bring waxlike mice back to life.

Equipped with battery generators, Steve and Lucy set out to explain their find to an anxious world. But, being believed plague carriers, it is not safe for them to let their whereabouts be known.

They decide their only chance is to invade the stricken city and learn more of the foreigners—who, Steve is now certain, are from the fourth dimension,

or the other world occupying the same space as ours.

In the city, Steve attacks one of the Invaders and dons his protective armor.

In their wanderings through the city, they find, within a trolley terminal, a great helix of bronze bars. Trucks, driven by the Invaders, are run into this and disappear. It is the entrance to the other world!

The Invaders are looting the city—taking away all they can of any value and all the most beautiful girls. The work is all done by the Underones, who cower before the loaded canes of the Leaders.

Steve, remembering that his friend, Nick Bannerman, a newspaperman, is within the stricken area, sets out to find him. After Nick is revived he takes them to a short-wave station to attempt to get a message to the outside world. The message is intercepted by the Invaders, from whom they barely escape.

They take refuge in a garage, where they are discovered by Fran Dutt. He points a tiny gun at Nick and Steve; they become waxlike figures. Fran then declares his love for Lucy.

IX.

LUCY SOBBED. Steve remained utterly motionless. Fran no more than glanced at him. The radiation or field of force—whatever it was that turned living men into corpselike images in the fraction of a second—had been so utterly effective

that merely to see Steve rigid was to Fran Dutt proof that he would stay that way. There were already six hundred thousand human beings in the cataleptic state of the Invaders' contrivance.

Fran put away the small-caliber pistol and said desperately: "Listen to me, Lucy! I have tried to save you. I have acted as a traitor to my homeland, trying to make you safe. I have not asked anything in return. I have made no bargain. But you must listen to me!"

"You've killed my father," cried Lucy bitterly, "and you've killed Steve, and now——"

"Your father is not dead," insisted Fran. "I beg of you, Lucy! See, I go down on my knees to you! But listen!"

He did kneel before her, his features contorted. He was horribly in earnest.

"I cannot let the Leaders take you!" he cried. "You do not know our Leaders! You cannot imagine such beings! I will not let them take you. You are beautiful, and they would want you for themselves! I will kill you first. Lucy! I love you, and I will kill you first!"

"Then do it!" said Lucy fiercely. "You've killed every one else I care for!"

"No! Your father still lives. He is in the laboratories of the Leaders. He works—but he is treated well. He is even happy! The Leaders know better than to illtreat scientists! Straussman filled them with such reverence that they will only keep your father prisoner. And Steve is not dead. You know that also. He will go to the laboratories, too. He will help your father, perhaps. They will be friends. They will have work that they love and good treatment—everything but freedom."

"Then—then if my father is alive and well, but a prisoner," cried Lucy desperately, "and if Steve's going to be a prisoner, let me be a prisoner, too!"

Fran Dutt wrung his hands.

"I could not! Everything that is

taken through the tunnel is inspected—especially women. You would be taken for the Leaders. I could not take you to your father."

Lucy made a helpless, despairing gesture.

"But, Fran—I liked you once! And—you've kidnaped my father and maybe you've killed Steve, and you're fighting my country! How can I believe you couldn't help me if you chose?"

Fran Dutt stood up. He did not touch her, and his tone was infinitely pleading.

"But hear me, Lucy! I cannot be more of a traitor to my homeland! I hate this invasion as you hate it. I hate the Leaders as you would hate them—more, because I have felt their whips! But my father and mother and my brothers and sisters—they are security for me while I am in this world of yours. If I fail our Leaders, they die by torture! How can I fail them?"

"Then what can you do; what am I to do?"

"You can let me save you," said Fran Dutt bitterly. "That is all that I can do. I will hide you. I will take you to a place where you will be hidden from my countrymen. Soon they will strike New York. They will strike Philadelphia. They will strike all the cities of the East. Then they will forget this place and I can come back to you and—and we can be happy, perhaps, because I will never let our Leaders see you. I can do no more than that, Lucy, nothing more. I swear it!"

LUCY stared at him in the queer, reflected glow of the flashlight on the floor.

"I—think I believe you," she said through stiff lips. "After all I—used to like you, Fran. You're probably trying to be decent, in your way. But it isn't enough. Losing father, and Steve, and everything else—— No. It

isn't enough, Fran. I think—I think I prefer dying."

Again Fran wrung his hands in anguish.

"And I can't let you! I won't let you! I—I cannot plead with you, Lucy. I have said all that it is possible for me to say. But you must not die! I will take away that device Steve has made, and you will become like Steve. I will hide you carefully, and come back and waken you and plead with you again. I cannot let you die, and I cannot let our Leaders have you!"

His expression was pitiful.

"Don't make me do that!" he begged. "Please, Lucy, let me hide you where you will be safe——"

There was a sudden, quite impossible movement. And Steve's voice came, quite icy and entirely even. "No need, Fran. I'm still on hand to look after Lucy—and I'll blow you to hell if you reach for that gun!"

He moved easily forward. The muzzle of his revolver touched Fran's side as he plucked away the small-caliber gun Fran had used before.

"I killed one of your gang," he said, pocketing the weapon, "and put his armor on. It's under my clothes and works very well, thank you. I needed to know a few things, and I found out one or two. Incidentally, I don't think you hurt my high-frequency pack. Lucy, slip it off me. I think there's just a lead to my right wrist broken. If so, you can twist it together again and put it on Nick."

Lucy's hand trembled as she moved to obey.

"I—had forgotten about that armor," she said shakily. "But, Steve, I think Fran is telling the truth. You won't kill——"

"Kill him? Not if I can help it," said Steve.

He shifted his gun from one hand to the other as Lucy slid the straps from his shoulders.

"When Nick comes to," he said grimly, "we'll talk."

Lucy tried to get Nick's broken pack off him, but could not because of the iron hardness of his muscles.

"Stick the leads of my pack on his wrists," said Steve curtly. "Then make sure the juice is on."

Lucy worked with fumbling fingers. Nick's rigid figure relaxed; he fell forward on his face. He swore luridly and got up.

"What the hell—— Oh!" He swallowed suddenly. "I saw him shoot. Then I was on my face. Damn! Have I been dead again, Steve?"

"Something like it," agreed Steve evenly. "Get your pack settled and put a gun on Fran, here. And understand, Nick! I haven't any particular grudge against him, because what he's done I believe he's had to do. But he's got something we need, so if he tries to get away don't hesitate to shoot him! This is a sort of war in which we're fighting like hell. That's all."

"I get it," said Nick vengefully, "and I promise not to mind shooting him!"

HE got out his gun and settled down with the muzzle bearing on Fran. Steve holstered his own weapon and fumbled in his pocket.

"I bought some writing paper and envelopes a day or so ago," he said dryly. "I only used one sheet and that one did no good. I forgot to throw away the others. Fran, could you make a suit of armor like the one you're wearing?"

Fran Dutt said harshly: "No, I couldn't. I am a spy and a theoretic physicist, but I do not know the processes for making this armor. Your high-frequency outfits work as well, but are not as dependable."

"Good!" Steve rested a sheet of paper on the mud guard of a car beside him. He prepared to write. "We'll pretend, for the purposes of this docu-

ment, that I haven't invented it either. Now listen as I write."

The fountain pen scratched as Steve wrote:

"Report of Operative 27D, in Newark, N. J.: I have so far failed to secure more information concerning the armor used by the Invaders, and Fran Dutt has been able to supply me with only one more suit for examination and tests. He points out that this is extremely dangerous work for him, and that the revolutionary plot in which he is engaged is much more likely to lead to the failure of the invasion.

"With a sufficient supply of the NN gas, whose effects and use I have described to him, he is sure that he and his fellow conspirators will be able to overthrow the entire governmental system of his nation. He offers to sign a treaty with the U. S., promising all possible reparations for damages done in this invasion, if we supply his party with poison gas. He is authorized to sign, 'Fran Dutt, for the Revolutionary Committee.' I do not know how much reliance can be placed upon this. The helix by which the Invaders maintain communication will be fully sketched and an outline of its theory is promised within three days."

He glanced up. Fran Dutt looked like a dead man.

"Steve! What—what do you mean by that?"

Steve folded up the paper.

"It's phony, of course," he said. "It's a lie from beginning to end. But I'm putting it in my pocket. Your crowd can't get me except by killing me. The need to kill me will arouse curiosity. They'll search me carefully. They'll find a suit of armor and wonder how I got it. Then they'll find this. What will they think when they find it, Fran?"

Fran's forehead glistened with sweat. "That I'm a traitor," he said in a thin voice. "They'll kill me. But that doesn't matter. They'll torture my father and mother and brothers and sisters. Steve, you don't know what hellish——" His voice broke. "You

can't do this, Steve! You don't know what it means!"

Steve said grimly: "It's because I can guess what it means that I'm doing it. It's war between your nation and mine, Fran. As an individual, I rather like you. In your place, I'd probably do just what you've done. In my place I'm sure you'd do what I have. But while I have this on me you won't tip anybody to anything useful against me."

Fran Dutt's knees gave way. His teeth chattered. "If you'll kill me and tear that up," he said unsteadily, "I'll thank you, Steve. On my honor, I'll bless you if you just kill me and tear that up!"

Steve shook his head. "I can't. I'm up against it. Your fellow spies have our authorities pretty thoroughly fooled. So I have to fight as I can. I'm guessing, Fran, that you wouldn't be killed instantly."

Fran shook his head. His throat was dry.

"Torture, too," he said huskily. "But not only myself——"

"They'd ask you questions," said Steve inflexibly. "Under torture. You'd talk. You know you'd talk. And even if to avoid it you'd killed yourself beforehand, if this was found on me they'd question your friends—the ones most likely to sympathize with your revolutionary aspirations. Wouldn't they?"

Fran made a choked sound in his throat.

"So my advice," said Steve, "is to go back to your homeland and tell your friends about this. Get that revolution going! Because either I win, over here, and your damned Leaders are licked, or else I'm killed over here and they find this on my body. So—go home and start your revolution!"

FRAN DUTT sat still. The color did not come back into his face. But from a man utterly crushed, very slowly

there came over him the look of a man who sees a fighting chance—not a good fighting chance, not even a fair fighting chance, but a chance that by sheer desperation might possibly be made to work out.

"I offer you my life," he said unsteadily, "if you will tear it up."

"I can take your life anyway," said Steve. "It's not enough. No price will be enough but a revolution—unless we win and drive back all you Invaders, and then make what you call tunnels of our own and come to your world and fight you there!"

Fran Dutt said, still unsteadily: "I—I shall try it, Steve. I cannot help myself. And perhaps"—he smiled in a peculiarly mirthless fashion—"you have done us a favor. Our Leaders keep we Underones thoroughly cowed. I have urged revolt before. But they keep our spirit broken by whippings with the metal-studded whips all Leaders carry instead of canes, by tortures for rebukes, executions more horrible than you can imagine, for offenses that in this world are trivial. So many of us fear the punishment of failure that we have not dared to act. But now there will be punishment if we do not act!"

Steve said nothing. He watched, his eyes narrow.

Fran Dutt steadied himself. "I know what I face. I will tell others. If I am accused of treason there are others who will be accused. Under torture, they would accuse yet others. Ah, yes! And it would be accusation of such a treason that no man would be forgiven for having concealed it for one hour! There is a Revolutionary Committee, Steve. We call it by another name in our language. And it has been afraid to strike. But now it will not dare to strike! Either you have done us a favor or——" He smiled again, his face dead white.

"Yes, either you have done us a favor, or else you will be cursed by so many

men, suffering such agonies as they die, that their curses will pass even the boundary between your world and mine and strike you!"

Steve said evenly: "Every blow struck against your Leaders here is so much of a help to your revolution in your own world."

"True," said Fran Dutt. "But there are some things one cannot do even to win a revolution, Steve. And to be a traitor not only to our Leaders but to my homeland—that I cannot do. I tell you no secrets of our weapons, even of those I know."

"My guesses, though, have been right? About Straussman?"

Fran Dutt smiled faintly, still chalky white. "To be sure. What harm to tell you? Straussman appeared suddenly in our world many years ago, thirty or more. He appeared suddenly in an open field outside of one of our cities, with a structure of metal about him. It was like a monster egg, and many people saw it appear. For a long time he did not open it. I suppose he was testing our air for breathability. There was a huge crowd of our people about his huge egg when he did open it. There were Underones and Leaders, too, and all were a little frightened. When Straussman appeared some thought he was a god."

STEVE glanced at Nick. Nick listened, but skeptically. He kept his revolver pointed at Fran.

"Our Leaders," said Fran, "were respectful to Straussman. They took him to their palaces and gave him rich food and women—women whom they took, as is their custom, from us Underones. He learned to speak with them. He showed them marvels.

"A palace was built for him in which many Underones labored on strange machines. And Straussman became more arrogant than even our Leaders. Then new things began to appear, new

weapons, new books, strange knowledge. The Underones who worked in his palace told of groups of Leaders who went into a strange machine with Straussman and vanished, and many hours later returned. It was a tunnel, I suppose. They brought back machines, sometimes living things, plants, dogs, which were more intelligent than the dogs we possessed. They even brought back horses. And there were men who were wounded or drugged, and much more often there were women.

"Those other persons from your world, Steve, were not treated with the respect given to Straussman. They were kept in a stockade. Children of the Underones were sent to them to school. I was one. We were to be trained as spies. We learned many things, but we were never allowed to forget that we were Underones, and that a terrible punishment awaited us and all our families if we failed our Leaders."

Lucy said uncertainly, "Charles Fort wrote——"

"What's that?"

"He wrote books," said Lucy, "listing mysterious disappearances and appearances, people vanishing under impossible conditions. He thought it was what he called teleportage—carrying to a distant place."

"Our Leaders' doing," said Fran. "They brought many people, by ones and twos, from different parts of your world. They brought machines, and even ships. But usually they killed the crews of those ships. There was one ship whose crew fought so fiercely that they brought no more. It was called the *Cyclops*."

"The *Cyclops*!" said Nick, staring. "The hell you say!"

"That was its name," said Fran. "Its disappearance caused so much comment in this world that our Leaders were alarmed. Because they feared this world. There are more people here—

many more people! And this people believes in rule by itself—democracy—which is a fearful idea to our Leaders.

"For many years they have been terrified lest other scientists duplicate the work of Straussman, who is dead now. For a time they planned to make our world so great in civilization that it could defend itself. But they dared not trust we Underones to learn too much of science, and they are too arrogant and too indolent to labor at research themselves."

"I begin to see," said Steve dryly. "They kept spies here. And recently those spies have been reporting great interest in Straussman's theory. Your Leaders, Fran, have decided that it's only a matter of time before our scientists duplicate his work and we learn about your world. And, being afraid of——"

"They have attacked," said Fran. "Our two civilizations were about to meet. And ours would have been destroyed by the contact. So our Leaders attacked yours first. They propose to shatter your civilization utterly. First they struck Newark, so that all your truly wise men, your scientists, would come to try to understand what had happened. Then they struck at them. Most of your scientists are already victims of what they call the plague, and our Leaders will scatter the rest of your civilization without danger. It will yield them unlimited loot and countless pretty women—and our Leaders will have two worlds in which to swagger!"

"Meanwhile Lucy's father works in their laboratories," said Steve dryly, "and I suggest that he might help you in your proposed revolution. He's no fool, Fran. But neither am I, and your armor is better than our high-frequency packs. I'm going to take it, Fran."

Fran went white.

"That's the same as killing me, Steve. If you do it, you ought to tear up that paper you wrote. Others——"

"I'm giving you a high-frequency pack," said Steve. "Nick, hand me your gun and hold his wrists so he'll draw high frequency from your pack while he slips his armor off. Lucy'll put it on and give him her pack. It's playing a dirty trick on both of you, but Lucy has to be safe."

Fran stared at Steve. Steve's face was absolutely grim.

"I don't want to knock you cold, Fran," he said shortly, "or shoot you, either."

Fran licked his lips. He shrugged. Nick gave Steve his gun. He took hold of Fran's wrists. Fran wriggled out of his armor. Nick suddenly removed his hands. Fran stiffened and started to fall. Nick caught him and he straightened up, biting his lips.

"I just wanted to be sure," said Nick vengefully.

Lucy donned the armor, discarding her skirts behind one of the dismantled cars. She looked slim and very boyish when she came back, carrying the pack for Fran. He slid it over his shoulders.

Nick stepped back. "I'll take my gun again," he said. "I don't trust this guy!"

Steve nodded. "Now," he said coldly to Fran, "we'll be on our way. Nobody else has a listening set to pick up the noise of Nick's pack, which is a great relief. I'll take this flashlight. I think it's going to come in handy. You stay here, Fran. I'll leave your pistol on one of the four corners a block to the east. It'll take you some time to find it, and since you don't know where we're going, you're not likely to track us down."

HE BECKONED to the others. Fran stood ashen white in a queer costume of tunic and leggings which was obviously the national garb of the Invaders.

"But Steve! Fran!" said Lucy. "What will he do? If he appears with-

out his armor and with one of our packs they'll——"

"He knows what I'm going to do!" said Fran harshly. "What I've got to do!"

"He'll knock out one of his countrymen and take his armor. That other man will disappear until all of Newark is revived. But Fran will set to work on his revolution."

Fran clenched his fists. The other three went out of the garage and into the uncanny, horrible silence and darkness of the dead city. It was not a silence nor a blackness to which one could become accustomed. After speech and light—even furtive speech and dimmest light—within a shelter, to come out into the tomblike horror of the city whose inhabitants lay in contorted heaps — And there was the sensation of being hunted to add to the feeling of horror.

Steve led the way purposefully. A block from the garage he stopped and put down Fran's pistol as he had promised.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Lucy in a whisper.

"The same thing," said Steve. "But this time we can't lose! We've gone shuttling back and forth between the cordon and the town until it's getting silly. And it's especially silly because we could have tried this trick last night, or to-night for that matter, without coming back to town at all. Nick has to do it, though."

"What?" demanded Nick gloomily. "I can't use short waves without those devils picking it up."

"We've both got flashlights," said Steve disgustedly, "and didn't think of using them before. It's certain to work. But it wouldn't be a bad idea to have Fran making a back fire for us anyhow."

Nick exclaimed profanely. Then Lucy said "*Sh-h-h-h!*" and the three of them stopped short, motionless as so

many statues. There was a little rustling somewhere near, presently the purring of a car. It died away.

A thought came to Steve as they tramped through blackness. It was a disturbing, even a terrifying thought. But he fought it back. The Invaders could do one thing to make all his attempts at signaling useless. It would require quick action, almost instant action. It would mean pushing forward all the Invaders' plans. But they could do it.

He told himself that they would not think so quickly. He had to believe that, or he would have had no hope at all.

THEY came out of the town. There were open spaces on either side, stars overhead, and glittering blue-white street lamps, far away. They trudged on heavily. All of them were weary. They trudged on, and on, and the armor tired Lucy greatly. Once she had to stop to rest. But then the long, straight road ahead showed a winking red flame which was a bonfire in the military cordon. It drew nearer and nearer.

"I wonder," said Steve drearily, "if they watch those fires and can see us silhouetted against them?"

The others did not answer. In point of fact, though, if watchers in Newark had seen the fires eclipsed, they would have thought them blotted out by soldiers near by. The trio dragged themselves as near as they dared go. Nick would have gone forward until they were challenged, but Steve would not risk shots at Lucy. He halted quite three hundred yards away. They left the road and Steve had Nick take up a post behind a filling station. The building itself would hide what they might do from Newark.

"Now, it's up to you," he said exhaustedly. "I'm going to rest!"

He flung himself down. He heard

Nick saying to Lucy: "They use lights for signaling in the army. Short-range use, of course. I'll use regular Morse code. It may take a little time."

There was silence for an instant. Steve drifted off toward exhausted slumber.

Nick's voice again: "I'm giving an attention signal. When somebody sees it they'll call a signal corps man who'll flash back to me with another flashlight. Then I can tell them what I please, with no danger of shots or interference by the guys in Newark."

Again silence. Nick was flashing, very patiently, the attention signal in Morse. Sooner or later some one would see it.

Lying on the ground, with every muscle worn out and his brain completely fagged by lack of sleep, Steve went into the comalike slumber of the completely exhausted.

He waked as Lucy protested: "But he's tired! You mustn't wake him, Nick! He needs rest!"

Steve opened his eyes. His head was fairly clear, but his body felt heavy and lethargic.

"What's the matter, Nick? You got them?"

He saw that it was early dawn. The sun would rise at any moment. There were bright colorings in the eastern sky, and the dawn light filled all the world. Nick looked tired and troubled.

"I signaled for half an hour. Then somebody answered with a flashlight. I wanted him not to signal except when he had to, to avoid possible notice from Newark. The light was paling then. I began to give him the stuff as I knew it from you. He gave me check signals twice. He was getting it. Then I finished, and he didn't acknowledge. I can't get any more signals. And—and it's getting light now, and I don't see anybody moving!"

"I told Nick you needed rest," said

Lucy anxiously. "You need to sleep, Steve!"

Steve got to his feet. He stared across the brown grass at the cordon. It was in plain view, now. There was a little group of pyramidal army tents. No one moved in or out of them. No sentry paced. Then Steve saw a figure lying on the ground. He saw another.

He raised his eyes. The light was momentarily stronger. He saw the streets of Jersey City. And—at dawn—those streets were nearly deserted. But Steve saw a few figures. He saw a milk wagon, and the human figures were prone on the sidewalk. The horse which drew the milk wagon had toppled sidewise in its shafts.

Steve stared. Then he shrugged in surpassing weariness.

"Come on," he said tiredly, "we might as well go over."

He started toward the cordon. Lucy caught at his arm.

"Steve! They'll shoot——"

"No," said Steve. "They won't shoot. They're frozen. The 'plague'—the word was all irony as he said it—has hit Jersey City anyhow. Maybe it's taken New York, too. But it's happened within the past few minutes. Maybe we can do something before Fran's crowd gets organized."

X.

A SENTRY had fallen against a thicket of brushwood, his rifle at right shoulder arms. He looked absurdly like a toy. There were men with unbuttoned blouses in the tent which served as guardhouse; shooting crap on a blanket on a cot. Not one of them had fallen from his position. They looked unreal in part because of the naturalness of their poses.

Steve found the signaler who had been receiving Nick's message. He was seated on the ground, a pencil in his hand, scribbling in his notebook with

his eyes fixed upon the spot from which Nick had ceased to signal some twenty minutes since. A commissioned officer lay absurdly upon his back, his face fixed in a frown. He had evidently been reading the message as the signaler wrote it down.

A little purring sound became audible. Steve moved toward it, the other two with him. They passed a signal-corps truck, parked and with its mast raised and antenna stretched. Nick moved to enter it. Steve checked him.

"Nick! They'll catch your call and scramble your message."

"I know!" said Nick. "But there'll be some dry cells in here. And I'm getting goose flesh wondering when the batteries in my pack are going to give out."

He vanished. A minute or two later he came out with his pockets bulging. Steve had found two men with automatic rifles, evidently in the guard detail on duty when the plague-area extended. The purring noise was that of an idling motor. He indicated the rifles. Nick helped him carry them and a supply of ammunition.

They reached the idling car. It was a khaki-colored Q. M. C. car, a five-passenger sedan. It was empty. Steve opened a door and thrust in the rifles.

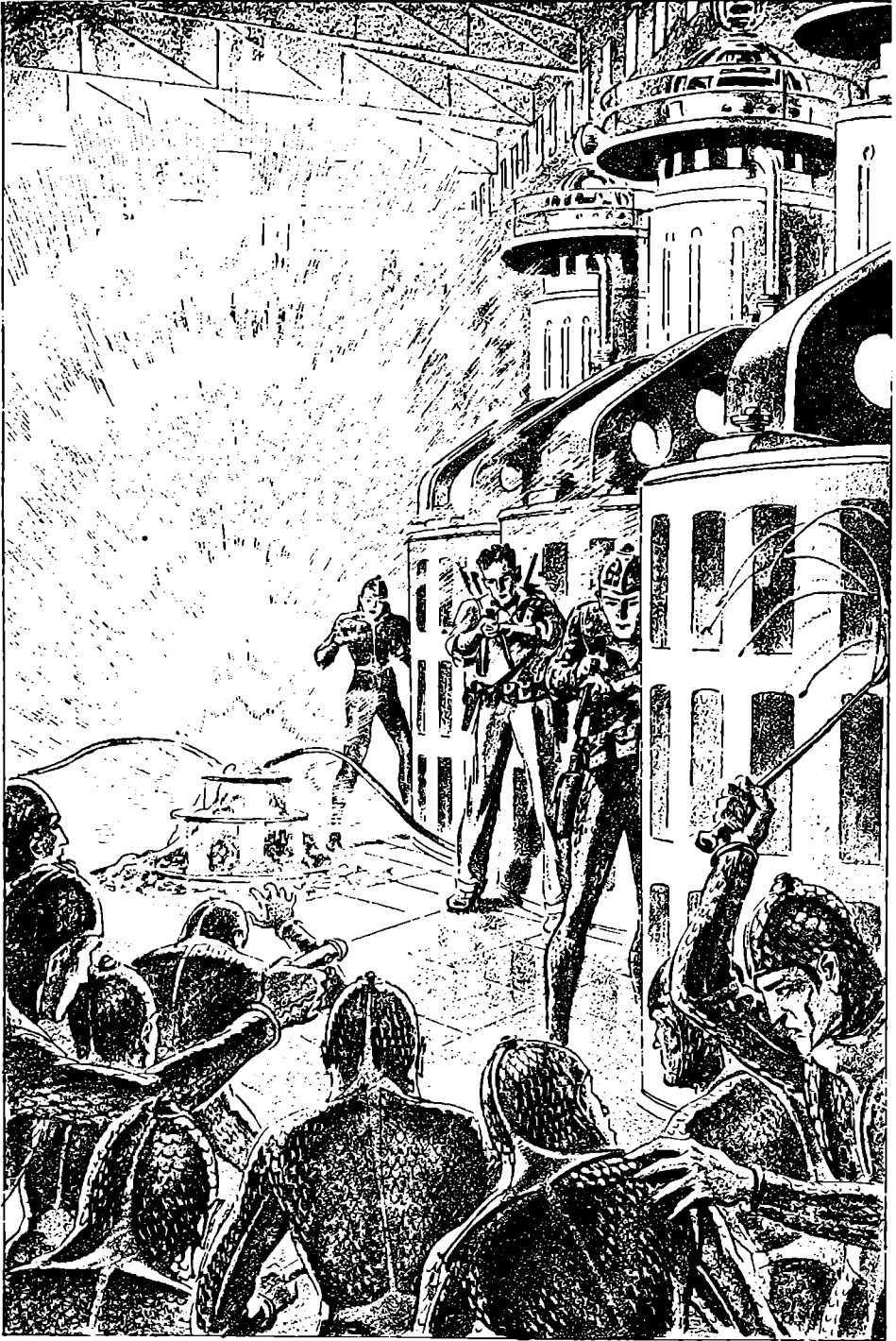
"You can probably clear the rifle to shoot out of some window," he said. "Some extra pistols wouldn't be a bad idea, though."

Lucy moved aside. When Nick came back with three pistols, she had half a dozen complete belts of weapons. She entered the back of the car.

"If there's—fighting," she said, "I'll help shoot, too."

"They can't be organized yet," said Steve. "Only, if they're guarding the mouth of the vehicular tube we'll have to cut and run. Let's go!"

He slid the car into gear. The sun was distinctly up, now. It had been



In the unholy glare of the green flame, Nick and Steve fought savagely—dodging, shooting—

sunrise when they reached the cordon. When they reached Jersey City proper, the tops of all the city's taller buildings were gilded by the sunshine. When they turned off on the boulevard, it was day.

But it was a strange day. Jersey City was utterly still and utterly silent. It was in the same cataleptic trance as Newark. But it did not look the same. Newark had been struck at six thirty in the evening, when its streets were crowded, its trolleys jammed, its highways a-throb with vehicles.

Jersey City had been smitten at five in the morning, when it was a city asleep. Policemen could be seen, grotesquely sprawled on the pavements. Milk wagons appeared, weirdly tilted or toppled over completely by the fall of the horses in their shafts.

NEWARK looked like a city smitten by incredible catastrophe. Jersey City looked like a city depopulated by plague. It was equally strange, but not so gruesome. For one thing, one could drive and not worry—much!—for fear of coming unexpectedly upon a tumbled heap of shattered automobiles; or of feeling one's wheels crunch horribly over something lying in the road—

They swung from the boulevard to the long ramp leading down into the vehicular tube. Quite incredibly, a roadster came slowly up that ramp. Its driver was stiff and stark, staring ahead, with wide-open, sightless eyes. The motor throbbed and labored in second gear. The car, traveling blindly, had edged into the curbing at just such an angle as permitted it to slide slowly forward. It scraped its way, laboring, at the rate of perhaps a mile and a half an hour. The khaki-colored Q. M. C. car went swiftly past it, hovered warily for an instant before the entrance of the tube, and dived in.

The tube was dark. The rows of

glittering electric bulbs which brighten its white-tiled walls, were unlighted. The sedan's headlights glared on ahead. They showed emptiness for a long space. Then one of the tunnel police appeared, his legs sticking out absurdly into the roadway as he lay upon the guard walk. An expensive limousine was stalled and emitting dense blue smoke from beneath its hood. They drove through the smoke. It was the reek of hot rubber.

Up and out into the New York of before-dawn, but with golden sunshine playing upon empty streets and closed and silent buildings. It would have been strange to look at, at best. But in the quite impossible silence that hung over the city, it was very much more than strange.

Steve had had some hope of New York. But he saw the ticket-takers immobile in their cooplake boxes. He saw a policeman tumbled to the ground, his hand still upraised in the act of scratching his head. And then he stopped the car—and there was silence. There was no underground rumbling of subways. That is a sound which never ceases in New York. No surface car clattered and banged, however far away, and there was not a motor running anywhere. There was not even the flutter of pigeon's wings, which is a sound quite amazingly characteristic of downtown Manhattan.

There were just empty streets, with piled-up cars both rare and far between, and a stillness which was more than the stillness of night or of the Sabbath—the stillness of death.

Steve even switched off the motor, and there was still no sound.

"We're too late," he said heavily. "Much too late! By the time we could get high-frequency packs made and any number of men waked up and convinced and armed, the Invaders would find us. In empty streets like these

we'll be plainly visible. And I hardly think they'll worry about noise now. If they took over New York they'll have taken over Brooklyn, too. They won't worry about the sound of shots getting out. Nobody is alive within range to hear them."

Nick chewed at his fingers.

"It looks like we're licked," he said dismally. "Damn it, Steve, they'll get us sooner or later. Let's go hunt up those guys and use up this ammunition we've got!"

"I would like to do some damage," said Steve calmly. "They've really got my goat. Look here! This thing isn't half an hour old! They haven't had time to get organized! And if it's only a few minutes old, why——" His eyes glowed suddenly. "Nick! There'd still be steam at the big power plant on the East River. They've got automatic controls on the boilers and stokers over there! Nick! Let's try it! There'll be at least a hundred thousand horse power and——"

STEVE had the car started and in first speed, and was in the act of changing to second before Nick could reply. He raced away toward the east. As they got away from the wide approaches to the tunnel and dived through the narrower streets acrosstown, the uncanniness of the dead city grew more oppressive.

They saw more people, though—an amazing array of shabby human beings turned up, frozen into immobility upon the sidewalks. There were scrub women and janitors, and once a too-richly-dressed woman with a wide, calm forehead. There were bearded men—three of them—fallen beside their empty pushcarts. And once a woman with a gray checked apron, magnificently matronly, lay in the midst of half a dozen bundled-up children, whom for some

inscrutable reason she had been leading no one could guess where.

Down Canal Street they went sweeping past the Bowery, dark beneath its elevated track despite the sunrise, then up, and up, and up in the great sweep of the bridge across the East River.

Down below them, on the water, midget tugs puffed sturdily but aimlessly. Their crews smitten with the Invaders' plague, they would move at random about the harbor until their fires died down or they ran aground. Far over to the left, the multiple chimneys and pale brick bulk of the power house loomed through morning mist. Some smoke still came from the tall and monstrous stacks.

"There'll still be steam," repeated Steve, "but it's pretty probable that we'll run into something. Fran's gang cut off all power to the city, of course. When we go in there, Nick, we'll want to take all our guns."

Now they came to wreckage on the bridge. Cars had met almost head-on and crashed, and from their impact they had swung partly around and blocked the roadway. But some one—spilled gasoline and oil and scratches on the roadway showed it—some one had come along since the crash and shifted one car enough to clear the road again. Which meant that some of the Invaders had crossed the bridge since the city became a dead spot.

Steve noted it, and probably Nick, too. Nick, at any rate, very painstakingly put fresh batteries into his high-frequency pack, and began to sling extra pistol belts about himself until he looked rather like a harness rack. He got one of the two automatic rifles ready to use.

Down the sloping other side of the bridge, they sped to the left and swiftly through streets which were mercifully clear—not altogether clear, of course, but nearly so. Steve gave private thanks that New York and Brooklyn

had been struck before dawn, instead of during the hours when traffic was heavy. These streets were narrow, and had there been piles of débris and mounds of stiffened people, he could not have passed.

As it was, he drove swiftly up to the power house. He coasted—for silence—into the great doorway through which maintenance trucks and such things normally had egress. The car slid to a soundless stop.

HERE the air was not altogether empty of noise. There was an indefinite but sustained humming sound, once a faint, mechanical clanking. Steve slid open the door beside him and got down. He motioned for Lucy to give him one of the automatic rifles. He took it, and extra supplies of shells for it. Nick got cautiously out on his side.

"I don't hear anybody," said Nick in a hushed tone, "but there must be somebody tending the machinery."

His voice echoed cavernously. Lucy stepped to the ground, a quaintly brave and exotic figure in the armor and helmet of the Invaders, yet with the most familiar of weapons slung about her waist.

They went cautiously into the power house. They found the boilers, long rows of insatiable maws to be fed with coal. Here and there the red glitter of their fires came through the front of the furnaces. They saw men here, too, toppled to the floor and frozen in the poses of the moment when the plague struck. One figure lay before the door of an open furnace, and the fire glaring out of it seemed to scorch and shrivel him. They saw no moving figures.

They went to the generator room, in which the hum of many dynamos was clearly audible. The room was monstrous in size and the machinery was gigantic, though not in proportion to

the power it developed. And there was no moving figure anywhere. The only attendants were small, stiffened figures in blue denim, scattered among the generators. And even alive they would have seemed too puny to handle such monsters.

Steve feverishly traced bus bars and power leads. He followed them across the huge hall to the main switchboard, with its maze of glittering conductors.

And there—dwarfed by the sheer size of his surroundings—he said: "The master switch! Somebody threw it! Nick!"

"Right!" said Nick. "We'll want some sheet metal for condensers. We ought to have platinum for the points, but we haven't got it. Nobody has enough for what we want! So we'll build us a flat arc, with crushed porcelain to make walls around the metal when it melts. I think we can use a two-inch gap, Steve."

"Right!" said Steve in his turn. "You get to work on the gap. I'll hack off some bus bar and get tools and sheet metal. Lucy, stand guard."

Lucy climbed to a high walk where she could see every entrance and exit of the huge room. She did not understand what they planned. They had spoken of steam and boilers and horse power by the hundred thousand, of condensers and gaps and melted metal. They seemed to refer with full comprehension to some fully matured plan at which she could not even guess. But Lucy had come to have an extraordinary confidence in Steve. Women do have that confidence in men they intend to marry. And all Steve's failures up to date did no more than fill Lucy with resentment because factors beyond his control had brought his plans to nothing.

Nick knelt on the floor, hammering porcelain insulators to bits and building the fragments into a mound such

as children build on the seashore with sand. Then there was the sound of blows upon metal and Steve came back with ten-and fifteen-foot sections of shining, square bus bar. He staggered under their weight. Nick grinned at him and bent them into desired shapes by inserting them in parts of still machines and heaving on the ends.

Steve came back with more bus bar. He disappeared once more. Lucy watched. Once she thought she saw a movement through one of the open windows, but she could not be sure.

"It's all right," said Nick, when she told him. "We'll either win or lose this time, and no draw is possible. Let 'em look!"

THERE WAS a shot, then two more. Nick sprang to his feet and ran for the sound, tugging with both hands at the apparently innumerable holsters dangling from his body. Lucy turned white and darted for the steps to the floor.

But Steve came into the huge room, dripping big sheets of thin sheet metal as he came.

"Only one man," he said calmly, "and I killed him. But we'd better hurry. Nick, are these all right for your condensers?"

Nick grabbed them.

"Get me some panes of glass from the windows. Big ones!"

Steve shattered a windowpane and strained at the muntins which held the others. Lucy carried the glass to Nick. He built up highly improbable condensers, sacrificing capacity, neatness and efficiency for speed and a reasonable chance that they would not arc. There were only two plates to each condenser, but they had to do.

A man in the scaly armor of the Invaders stormed into the huge room. He carried one of the canelike whips

with metal studs that Steve had seen on Market Street, in Newark. He saw Lucy first, and Lucy looked like one of the Invaders herself. He rasped a savage and wholly unintelligible sentence at her.

Steve shot him dead with one of the automatic rifles and said: "Better speed up, Nick."

Nick worked like a madman. Two more men dashed in. A burst of shots brought down one. The other tripped over him and fell. But he saw Steve and screamed, in the cryptic syllables of the Invaders' speech. He crawled behind a dynamo and continued to scream shrill warning.

A man poked his arm around a door. A queer, pistollike device was in his hand. It looked familiar to Steve. But, very quaintly, the man used the door as a shield instead of the sturdier building wall. Steve filled the door with holes, and the man with lead. The pistollike weapon dropped to the concrete floor, heated up, and melted.

There were running footsteps and babbling voices.

"Watch the doors on that side, Lucy," said Steve.

Nick stood up, panting.

"I think I've got it," he wheezed. "I think so!"

He ran to the great master switch. He jammed it home. There was a flash of blue-white flame, then another, then a harsh, unbearable glare.

Nick had built a sort of flat-topped mound very much like a sand castle on the concrete floor. It was made out of pounded porcelain insulators, and its top contained two shallow depressions filled with scrap metal and separated by a dyke of the pounded stuff. To each of the depressions ran one of the huge bus bars, and the two heaps of metal were temporarily connected by thin scraps of fine wire.

With the switch thrown, sixty-six hundred volts of electricity, and nobody knows how many amperes of current, tried to go through the tiny, temporary connections. They heated and exploded—and started a giant arc. The current leaped between the two heaps of scrap metal.

At first the arc was blue-white. Then it became tinged with the ghastly hue of vaporized copper. It threw an unbearable glow, an intolerable glare, upon the ceiling. The heaped-up scrap smoked fugitively and then began to glow a dull red. In seconds it was white-hot. It verged upon blue-white and abruptly slumped down. Blocks of incandescent copper melted down into more than incandescent pools on either side of the central dyke of powdered porcelain.

ON THE FLOOR of the great generator room there flared an electric flame like the surface of a blue-white star, smoking, flickering, crackling, spitting—

Men in scaly armor flung their hands before their eyes and drew back, fearful of what seemed to be unfamiliar to them. Harsh voices from shelter lashed them on. But Nick and Steve set grimly to work with their automatic rifles.

And then noises began in the city outside!

The sixty-six-hundred-volt arc was, of necessity, a producer of high-frequency current. The condensers Nick had improvised served after a fashion to increase that output. The arc itself, as far as the power lines were concerned, was a resistance which cut down the voltage reaching power transformers and hence the voltage reaching lamps and motors. But that was all the damage done to the power lines. The benefits were greater.

The inductive capacity of the line was

—naturally—high. Its resonance period was far below radio frequency. Surges of high-frequency but not radio-frequency current went out through all the feeder lines of the city. Automatic switches cut in the lines normally allotted to the other power houses, and automatically synchronized alternators cut in the enormous reserves of storage-battery power to take care of the unquestionable failure of the dynamos to hold up their output with untended fires.

Every feeder line in the city became filled with the mighty surges of high-frequency current of the period dictated by the capacity of the lines. And every human being in the city had small, high-frequency currents induced in his body!

There were many, many thousands of horse power in the arc now flaming between pools of melted metal. There was more power in the arc, producing high-frequency current, than in the apparatus which had thrown some millions of people into a cataleptic condition. And trivial as was the current induced in each person in the feeder lines' field, it was enough to neutralize the paralyzing force and something over. It was enough to start the process of revival—and finish it!

The life in the city had been that of before-dawn. But New York and Brooklyn are not silent at any hour. And there had been many clocks set for alarm in the hour during which the city had slept. The sunlight wakened many more, because to sleepers who had been "frozen" as they slept, their revival brought daylight into their eyes with the seeming suddenness of the turning on of an electric switch.

All over the city, by thousands, men and women started awake. By other thousands, people saw smashed cars and other signs of catastrophe and hastened to report them. Some few even guessed what had happened to them, from the

fact of finding themselves suddenly tumbled upon the ground. Rather quaintly, it was the occupants of the plague spot about the Mayfair Hotel who raised the greatest commotion. They were fully dressed and upon the street. They saw condensed catastrophe about them in the wrecked cars of what—at that place—had been mid-morning traffic when the plague spot came into existence. But the rest of the city made commotion enough.

The noise came even into the power house, and Steve and Nick Bannerman heard it in between the cracklings and roarings of their own guns. The Invaders attacked with a queer helplessness, driven on by whip crackings and raging voices behind them. They did not know how to take advantage of the cover of the machines. When, presently, they began to use firearms they were clumsy and unskilled in their management.

THE GREAT HALL rang with the roaring of the automatic rifles, and with the poppings of revolvers. Nick and Steve defended their unholy flame with insensate savagery, while noises grew in the city about them.

A bedlam arose upon the river. Tugs and steamers found themselves suddenly violating all rules and customs of navigation. They got their high-frequency current through the fact of earth return to the power house. They whistled furiously at each other to straighten out the tangle in which they found themselves. Those which had collided with each other or had run aground, or had rammed the docks which lined the river banks emitted the mournful, wailing blasts which called for immediate assistance. There were frantic ringings of engine-room bells, the hectic blowing of whistles, and the deep-toned groan of fog horns. In combination, the water fronts made a

tumult which would wake New York and Brooklyn from slumber.

But there was more. Policemen everywhere found themselves prone upon the ground. They scrambled to their feet again to see wreckage all about them—crashed cars, smashed windows. Their whistles shrilled. They raced to their beat telephones to report tragedies, or else competently smashed in the doors of the nearest stores to call ambulances with the minimum loss of time. Police whistles alone would have waked New York.

And then there were the other sounds. Between the time of the coming of catalepsy and the time of the shutting off of power to the city, the elevated trains had run wild. Three cars of the uptown elevated lines had jumped their tracks at curves and buried their noses in convenient apartment houses. There was a rear-end collision in midtown, with splintered cars flung sidewise of the entire elevated structure, and one car dangling—very much like a link of sausage—almost to the ground. Trolleys at Columbus Circle had gone amuck and one was jammed in a subway entrance as if it had become panic-stricken and had tried to take refuge below ground.

Downtown, the East Side el had made a shambles of a tenement house where Delancey Street crossed it. The tools of a repair crew on the track were responsible for that. And all of these tragedies produced calls for ambulances and for fire engines, whose screeching progress through the streets waked up any human beings yet unaroused.

And besides these things, there was Brooklyn. And, if possible, in Brooklyn conditions were worse. There were elevated lines in Brooklyn, too. There was, at this early hour, considerably more automobile traffic than in Manhattan, especially along the traffic routes into Manhattan. A bedlam arose in

Brooklyn composed of human voices screaming, and sirens shrieking, and bells clanging. It joined to the bedlam of New York, wherein ambulances and growling subways and police whistles and much greater shrieking made another din. All joined the water fronts, which were a monstrous, braying, bellowing ululation.

There was uproar everywhere—save above a Hundred and Tenth Street in New York, where the feeder lines Steve and Nick had charged did not run. An irregular boundary remained there, between the quick and the seemingly dead. But elsewhere—

Elsewhere New York cried out tumultuously.

STEVE AND NICK fought savagely. They dodged about among the generators, sending bursts of shots at every attempt of the Invaders to get enough men inside the great room to overwhelm them by sheer numbers. The attackers were of that cringing, cowed class Steve knew as Underones. They were not good fighting men. For leaders to remain safely under cover and try to threaten their men into bravery does not bring out the highest type of combativeness, somehow. So that Steve and Nick held the space about their ghastly green flame. It flickered and flared and filled the great room with an unholy glare. The crackling echoes of shots stung their eardrums. The light blinded their eyes when they glanced at it.

Lucy had climbed aloft again and from her observation post called down warnings of other attempts to gather and to rush. The dynamos hummed and hummed. The two men fought des-

perately, and even more desperately wondered when this uproar would bring police and, consequently, help to them—and the police worked like madmen to cope with the emergencies they knew of, and did not dream of this.

Then a pilot light went out, before one of the giant generators. Then another, and another. The droning sound of the dynamos had been a steady, throbbing hum. It became a fainter sound. It degenerated into a whine. The whine grew fainter. More pilot lights flicked out. The ghostly blue glare wavered. It was running exclusively on the great banks of storage cells now, and they had been drawn on heavily for a very long time.

Guns continued to crackle, but the arc which leaped between pools of melted metal grew unstable. It wavered more and more erratically. Then the same hands that had cut off steam from one turbine after another found the switch to the battery banks.

The arc went out.

The noises in the city stopped. The shrieking of sirens cut off to the sound of so many crashes. The whistles upon the river died away, save that far down toward the Battery one lone boat wailed on, and on, and would so continue until the steam in its boiler was finished.

"They cut off the steam from the boilers," said Steve in icy calm. "The city's gone dead again, Nick. But it was a good try, anyhow!"

There came another sudden rush of men. This time some of their Leaders followed them, striking with their whips at the men who were to do the actual fighting. There was the courage of pure desperation in that rush. Revolvers crackled in the front rank.

To Be Concluded.

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Table of Contents

Two-part Novel:

INFRA-UNIVERSE Nat Schachner 118
Part One of a great, thought-stirring novel.

Novel:

WORLD OF PURPLE LIGHT Warner Van Lorne 48
A world which traveled in slow motion—and from which there was no return. A sequel to "Strange City."

Novelette:

TRYST IN TIME C. L. Moore 10
A thought producer! Science—and fantasy—which will hold you breathless.

Short Stories:

THE FLAME MIDGET Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 28
So small it could not be seen with the naked eye—yet, so great in power—

FRANKENSTEIN—UNLIMITED H. A. Highstone 38
The Machine Age—unrestricted!

THE FOURTH DYNASTY R. R. Winterbotham 82
In which the history of the world is changed—in the 1501st millennium!

THE EXPEDITION FROM KYTLM M. F. James 111
Human beings—as forms of bacterial life!

Serial Novel:

THE INCREDIBLE INVASION Murray Leinster 94
Concluding the gripping serial novel of the earth and its dimensional secrets.

Science Features:

THE SINGLE CLUE John W. Campbell, Jr. 89
The seventh in the series of scientific articles which embrace the entire solar system.

4th-DIMENSIONAL POSSIBILITIES Harry D. Parker 115
A scientific discussion.
A.S.M.E., S.O.A.E., etc.

Readers' Department:

EDITOR'S PAGE 152

BRASS TACKS (The Open House of Controversy) 153

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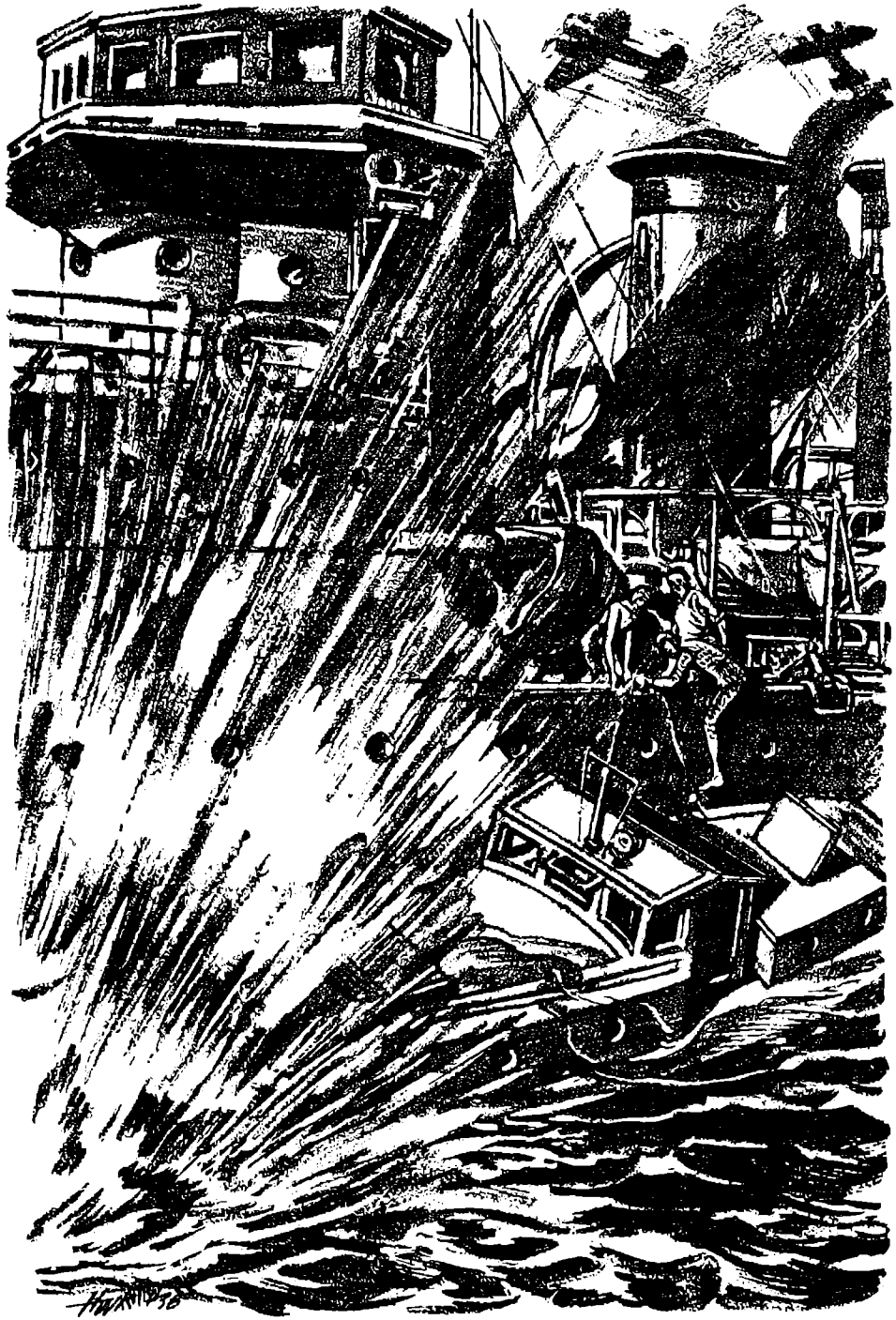


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A fair hit on the patrol boat blew off its bow. It went down in seconds.

The Incredible Invasion

*Concluding a gripping serial novel of
the earth and its dimensional secrets*

by Murray Leinster

XI.

AS the scale-armored figures plunged toward him, bunched together for courage, Steve slaughtered them. He rested the automatic rifle on a steam pipe and traversed it with an inhuman deliberation. Bullets poured from its muzzle in a deadly stream. A storm of lead poured into the charge. It shattered it. Of the men who had composed it, a dozen dropped at once. Ten more dropped as they recoiled from the slaughter. More flung lead dropped all but three of the balance. And two of the three were Leaders, judging by the whips which dangled from their wrists.

Steve savagely concentrated on them. One crashed down with half a dozen bullets between his shoulders. The other screamed shrilly as bullets pulped his left arm. He careened through a doorway and continued to squeal shrilly.

"Not much nerve," said Steve in icy calm. "Those Leaders ought to learn to take it."

"Now what?" demanded Nick.

"Oh, there'll be more of them coming," said Steve, "and we'll kill them, and presently they'll kill us."

Lucy said: "W-will you tell me when you think you—can't hold out any longer?"

Steve jerked his head to face her. She was pale, but she smiled at him. If her voice wavered, she could not help that.

"We—tried, anyway, didn't we?" she asked cheerfully. "But after what Fran said, I don't want to take any chance of not being killed."

She touched the revolver in a holster at her side, over the Invader's armor she wore. Steve swore savagely, then.

"We're fools, Nick," he said bitterly. "Fools! Because we hate these devils, we've thrown away our lives! We could have made a break for a place where they haven't struck! The cordon was down! There was nobody to stop us! We could have broken through, and told what we knew, and organized men to fight."

Nick pulled out a pack of cigarettes and was absurdly painstaking in his choice of one.

"Rather late to think of that now," he said. "But we'd better be moving, Steve. We don't want to stay here!"

"Why? What more can they do than kill us?"

"They had spies," said Nick. "And those spies would know something about tear gas. And your friend Fran Dutt didn't speak very highly of their methods of execution."

Steve suddenly flung up a revolver and fired at a man dodging past a window. The window smashed. Something came in and exploded with not at all alarming violence.

"That's gas now," said Steve. "Come on!"

He took Lucy's hand. With Nick on

the other side of her, they broke into a sudden sprint. Steve swerved sharply as something else sailed in and burst, ahead of them. He plunged for the wall and tore wide a small door there. A spiral stairway went up and up—and descended to the ground.

"We can't go down!" said Steve harshly. "Mobs of them down there! We're going up!"

HE RACED AHEAD. For seconds, for perhaps half a minute, there was no pursuit. Initiative was not encouraged in the Underones by the Leaders of the Invaders. Steve reached a landing with the others close behind. He halted and listened. A small window was close by. He peered out.

"I wish," he said between his teeth, "I wish we could convince 'em we'd gone down! Something to throw to make a noise in the courtyard below, there! What can I use?"

Nick was helpless. Concrete walls. Concrete floor. Steel spiral stairway. Nothing— But Lucy reached up.

"Here's a light bulb," she said quietly. "It'll sound like a shot when it goes off, too."

Steve took it from her fingers. There was a sudden babbling down in the stair well. Men had at last pushed open the small door through which the fugitives had vanished. There was no sign of them. A voice bellowed arrogantly. Men started both up and down the spiral.

Then the light bulb struck outside. It made a sufficiently loud *pop* to sound like a shot to ears unaccustomed to fire-arms. The arrogant bellow rose in pitch. Men tramped down. Shoutings arose.

"Go quietly," said Steve under his breath, and again led the way.

He reached out and gathered electric bulbs as he passed through, and Lucy imitated him when they reached the top of the stair and came out into the office-like spaces above the generator room.

There were many light fixtures here. Nick blinked, and filled his arms when Steve offered to load him.

"Now we go up again," said Steve. "I've got a hunch."

They climbed interminably, flight after flight of steps. And up here, of course, the Invaders had no occasion to go. What few figures they saw were those of power-house employees, stiff and stark for the second time.

Suddenly they came out upon the power-house roof. Here was a small platform and a sort of hut from which one might see very far indeed down the river and Narrows, and across to Manhattan on the one hand and almost to Coney Island on the other.

Steve went to the edge of the roof and peered down. All was still. But he saw a few scurrying figures. He flung out half a dozen electric-light bulbs. When they struck, they created a commotion by their sound. None of the Invaders actually saw them. They merely heard the noises. And Steve—making due allowance for wind—threw two more, and then three, and a half dozen, and saw an intensive and extremely cautious search begin among the buildings half a block downward from the power house.

"They'll think we've gotten away," said Steve with some satisfaction. "They consider that they heard us shoot, down there. They'll never suspect we're actually up here."

"But—what are we going to do?" asked Lucy.

"Wait for night. I threw those bulbs farther away with every batch. They sounded like a rear-guard action as we ducked. We simply wait for night."

He sat down. Slumped down, really.

"And what are we going to do when night comes?"

"Sneak away," said Steve in weary bitterness. "Heaven knows how much of America they've got in their damned plague spots now! Fran said they'd

take Philadelphia and all the other Eastern cities. If they take 'em, they can hold 'em, unless we can get somebody to listen to us. And I doubt that we can. Every man in America who was qualified to understand what's happened has been caught by now. They swarmed here to find out what the trick was. And they've learned!"

His lips twisted bitterly.

WIND blew strongly but irregularly across the top of this high building. From here they could see the small vessels of the river moving again in blind, unguided fashion toward either ground- ing or collision. They could see the cities spread out, with infinitely small specks which were human beings in cataleptic trance, and larger dots which were catastrophes.

"I wish," said Nick, "I wish I had my cameras."

Time passed. The last of the moving dots, which were vessels, became im- mobile. The cities were utterly still.

It became midday.

At one o'clock, and two, and three, there had been no change anywhere. There was a feeling—hardly an impres- sion, more probably a hunch—that fran- tic activity went on in the power house below. Steve watched over the roof edge, however, and saw not even move- ments of Invaders on foot. But he could not see into the courtyard through which they had entered the building. At four, though, they did see a motor truck mov- ing on a street in Manhattan, and at about five thirty one of the great smoke stacks of the power house belched out lazy clouds of dense black smoke.

"Firing boilers," said Steve. "What'll they be using power for?"

Nick painstakingly changed the dry cells in his high-frequency pack.

"Oh, for a life on the ocean wave!" he said gloomily. "Steve, this——"

But Steve stared at him suddenly, and grinned.

AST—7

"That's an idea!" he said. "Is it the naval militia you belong to, Nick?"

"Uh-huh," said Nick, surprised. "Sure! What's the idea?"

"Come over to the edge of the roof," commanded Steve. "Take a squint down into the navy yard. You'll take command to-night, if we have luck."

He took him to the edge of the roof. He pointed. He and Nick seemed to discuss some plan in detail. Steve came back, leaving Nick flat on his stomach, studying the ground below.

Lucy looked up at Steve and smiled.

"Woman," said Steve gruffly, "now that we've got a chaperon and he's busy, let's put something over on him! Come around the corner and get kissed."

Lucy stood up. They walked together around the corner of the grubby little penthouse atop the power-house roof.

"I—I thought," said Lucy, only sec- onds later and somewhat breathlessly, "I —was thinking to-day—when it seemed like we were all going to be killed—that it was horrible to have it happen with- out really having—kissed each other since—all this began. We've been to- gether for days without saying a word about—caring for each other."

She was interrupted. She did not seem to mind.

"But I'm glad," she said illogically, an instant later, "I'm glad you felt like that!"

AND THEN there were footsteps in- side the penthouse. The door opened. A figure came out, looking curiously around. It wore the scaly armor of the Invaders. It saw Nick, lying flat on his stomach and gazing downward. But Nick happened to be motionless at the moment. The figure gave him only a glance. It gazed interestedly at the river and Manhattan over the water.

Steve drew his revolver, disengaging his arm from about Lucy with a slow precision. She saw his face. She whirled. The Invader was less than

fifteen feet away. Lucy cried out in a choked voice.

Steve shot him. There was nothing else to do.

While Lucy wrung her hands, Steve faced the penthouse door. But the wind blew strongly at this height. The sound of the shot was loud, to be sure, but most of it would go upward. The wind blew some of it away. Unless there were other Invaders close below it, it might go unheard.

Nick came running lightly, a revolver in each hand.

"Here's armor for you, Nick," said Steve grimly. "If this chap just came up here to look about, we may be all right. But if he's missed, it'll be just too bad!"

For five minutes, for ten, they waited desperately for the penthouse to erupt charging figures. None came. Then Steve opened the door, with Nick ready to pour a storm of fire within it. The penthouse was empty. The man had been alone.

Nick stripped him of his scaly armor and sighed gustily in relief when he had donned it, though he left the high-frequency pack in place until he was sure it was safe.

"Now I feel better!"

But they continued to stand guard over the stairway from below. If one man had come up, others might. And an alarm, now, meant that they were trapped like rats. The man they killed was an Underone, doubtless slipping away from the supervision of the Leaders to gaze curiously at the mighty cities he and his kind were to loot for the exclusive benefit of his superiors.

Because of that watching, the three on the roof were not really aware of the stirring about the gates of the giant power house. Because of the wind, blowing at this height, they did not hear the purring of motor trucks begin. And because of their preoccupation they did not see the extraordinary appearance of

Manhattan across the river, when night fell.

In the gathering night the greatest metropolis of all the world lay silent and motionless and seemingly dead.

Darkness settled down. High in the air, they might have been the only human beings living anywhere. Save for the Invaders, they were the only quick among ten million dead, for whom the cities were mausoleums.

"We might as well try to make our break," said Steve. "You've got your bearings pretty thoroughly, down below?"

"I know the way backward," said Nick confidently.

"Then let's get moving!"

Steve took Lucy frankly in his arms and kissed her, and then led the way down the long, many-stepped stair to the ground. They had checked over their weapons. The automatic rifles were ready for instant use. The revolvers were all fully loaded. And Steve, using Nick's no-longer-needed high-frequency pack during the change, had shifted his scaly armor from beneath his clothing to the outside. He might pass as an Invader, in a sufficiently dim light.

IT WAS in the appearance of Invaders, then, that they descended. And, as they went down, they heard the faint whining of dynamos, and a dull rumbling which could not be anything but trucks. Once they heard voices behind a door on one landing of the stairway.

They reached the spiral stair and descended that. They came to the doorway through which they had escaped from the generator room. The drone of dynamos was distinctly audible, but there was another louder noise elsewhere. Descending, that other noise became loud indeed. Suddenly they had reached a hallway, and some one moved near by. They walked quickly, but very quietly, through the nearest other door, and they were in the courtyard into which they

had driven the Q. M. C. car that morning.

It was a scene singularly like the one in the trolley terminal in Newark. A platform, with a helix of heavy bronze bars inclosing it raised above the ground. A ramp led to the platform, and a wavering, bluish light flickered above the bars of the helix. A truck rolled into the courtyard, up upon the platform, flickered—and was not. Then another and another and another.

An unending stream of heavily laden vehicles trundled in the gateway. One by one they rolled up into the coils of the helix. One by one they vanished utterly—and the fact that Steve and Lucy—and Nick, too, now—knew that they simply had had the direction of their atom poles changed did not make it seem the less magical. Their atoms changed the direction of their poles, and they became matter of another sort than the matter of our world, and vanished from it. But they also became matter of the same sort as the strange world from which the Invaders came, and they appeared in it.

Suddenly there was a warning flash of light, and the stream of trucks checked. Men materialized from nowhere upon the platform. They were clad in scaly armor. They were Underones, and they gaped at their surroundings as they shuffled docilely off the platform into the courtyard. Voices roared harsh orders at them. They formed over at one side of the open space. The light flashed again, and the movement of trucks began once more.

The men from the Invaders' world filtered out the entrance in groups of four and five and six. Passenger cars whisked up, halted, and darted away fully loaded.

"Efficiency!" said Steve coldly. "They've been taught to drive in the other world. Cars have probably been taken there during the last twenty years

and more for their training. Now they're brought here, hauled out, told to find trucks and load them up with whatever loot is to be taken out, and drive them back. Efficiency, eh? I'll bet they've even studied maps of the city!"

There was a muffled clanking sound behind them. Men came out of the doorway they had just quitted. The flickering bluish light of the helix lighted up their bodies. Their armor, though scaled, glittered with the prismatic colorings of many jewels. They carried the metal-studded cane whips which were symbols of nobility. There were arrogance in every movement, in every pose.

The three Americans stood in deep shadows. They were heavily armed, as Underones seemed not to be, but otherwise they would pass to the casual eye as Invaders themselves. Steve's eyes darted here and there, searching for a way to slip out of this crowded place unobserved.

HE WAS so intent that he did not notice the just-emerged group. Nick stared open-mouthed at the quite incredible phenomenon of giant motor trucks vanishing like so many bubbles in the midst of the flickering light. Only Lucy heard, and turned, and gasped.

The group swaggered on. One of the lesser Leaders brushed against Lucy. He rasped at her. He raised his whip and lashed savagely at her. Lucy cried out in mingled terror and pain—and Steve went mad.

He whirled, to see the lash descending on Lucy's face. Steve became an entirely primitive man. He had an automatic rifle slung across his back and four revolvers at his waist. But he roared inarticulately and sprang. His hands closed about the throat of the man with the whip, just as that man realized that Lucy was a girl and was half stunned with amazement. The two of them went to the ground together, rolling over and

over, with Lucy crying out to Steve to stop.

The balance of the arrogant group gasped in incredulous shock at the sight of an apparent Underone daring to lay hands upon one of their superior mold. Then voices raised in thick cries of fury. Whips flashed aloft, their metal lashes glittering, to rake the flesh from the bodies of these unspeakably insolent Underones.

Nick opened fire with his automatic rifle. He, alone, had kept his head. He knelt down, very coolly, pulled the continuous-fire stud and played the rifle upon the armored men as if it had been a hose. They collapsed in a kicking and suddenly shrieking heap. A man cried out, choking, and a wave of horror filled the whole courtyard with a panic greater than merely terror of Steve and Nick and Lucy. Nick had killed men who were important among the Invaders. He had killed, in fact, thirteen of the Leaders of highest rank.

Some of the Invaders gasped and fled. The Underones, especially, scuttled off into the dark like rabbits. Lesser Leaders, who an instant before had been the very embodiment of authority, ran agitatedly about, bawling orders which an instant later they countermanded.

Steve stood up and said thickly: "There's one damned swine who'll never lay his finger on Lucy again!"

"You fool!" panted Nick. "You've played hell! But come on! Let's get out of here before they get back their senses!"

He shook Steve's arm, and Steve said grimly; "All right, then. Lead the way. You know it!"

They ran out, the three of them, and once blundered into a knot of men who shouted and fled—though not before Steve had emptied a revolver into their midst. Then the dark street and the line of passenger cars waiting for Underones to be taken out in quest of trucks and

loot. Steve roared and charged the first car. Men fled terrifiedly.

Steve thrust Nick into the driver's seat, Lucy in next to him, and climbed on the running board with a revolver in his hand, as Nick sped off into the darkness.

In minutes, the car sped into the navy-yard gateway, narrowly missing the stiffened form of the guard who had lain immobile since the city went dead.

Then Steve was saying anxiously; "But Lucy, did he hurt you? That whip—did it cut you?"

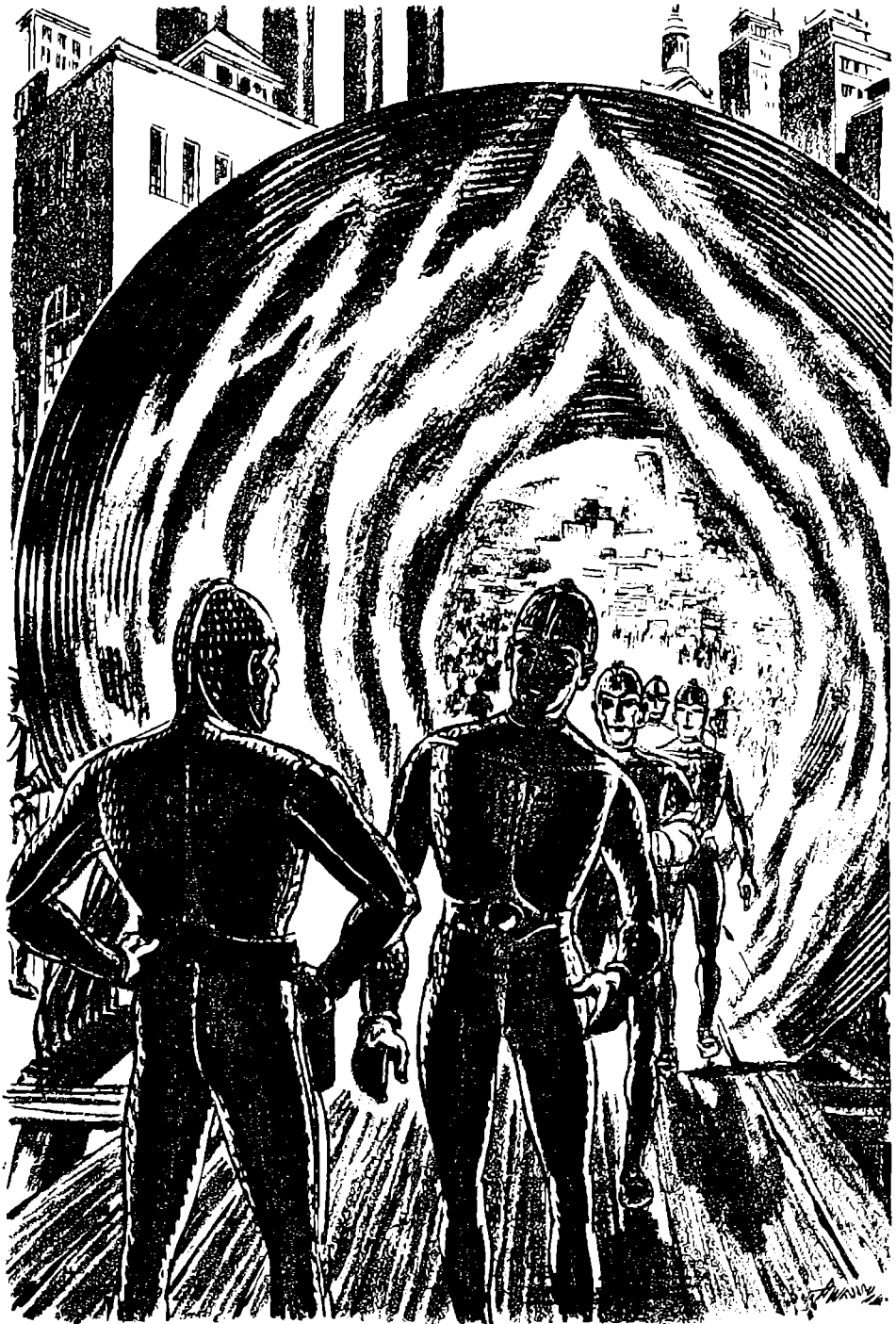
Nick expertly threaded a maze of roadways, each one of which he had learned by inspection from the powerhouse roof, and brought the car to a stop beside a dock. In the starlight the deck house and upper works of a fast patrol boat reared up beyond the wharf deck.

"Diesel engines," panted Nick. "I think I can start 'em. Don't know how much fuel, but we can get going. You cast off while I see what I can do below."

He jumped to the deck and hustled below. In seconds, it seemed, there were lights down there. He had turned on the battery illumination system of this craft. There was an uproar about the power house which was audible even here, but the three of them paid no attention.

Steve anxiously inspected Lucy's face by the light coming up the engine-room hatch. There was but a single cut on her cheek. The helmet and collar of the scaly armor had absorbed the rest of the whip blow.

A sudden roaring, throbbing sound set up. Nick bobbed above the hatchway and babbled profanely. Steve ran to the lines and cast them off. Water thrashed below the patrol boat's stern. She backed out into the river. Nick wrestled mightily with the gears and clutch and sent her forward again. Then she swept downriver at full speed.



"Steve, we've had our revolution. We've got this city—the one you see—and we'll get the others."

XII.

IN A DEAD WORLD there are no laws. Therefore the small patrol boat sped through the night without riding lights or any other thing to betray her position to possible pursuers. Her draft was small. Her speed was reasonably high. Steve, at the wheel, sent her streaking for the high seas. And, upon consultation with Nick, they agreed that it was unwise to use the radio close to New York. Wherefore they cleared the land and set off to southward along the Jersey coast.

For an hour or more Nick pattered over the engine—running much risk of doing more harm than good. He then poked about among the stores, and at last managed to come to some decision on the amount of fuel there was on board and the boat's probable cruising limit. He came up to the wheelhouse to report, and yawned as he did so.

"All right," said Steve, and yawned with him. "We'll keep going till day-break, and then start the radio. That will be far enough."

"It should be," agreed Nick. "Steve, this hero business is wearing. I'm going to sleep on the engine-room floor."

He stumbled away, to throw himself down on the steel decking and fall instantly asleep. Steve settled down to an age-long vigil. But he was at least as weary as Nick was. He dozed at the wheel, and Lucy smiled maternally upon him and stood shoulder to shoulder in the darkness, steadying the boat on the course picked out practically at random.

Steve dozed, and jerked awake, and dozed again, until hours later when Lucy shook him, crying out that she saw a light. Which, of course, should have meant living people. She ran to wake Nick, while Steve steered toward it.

It turned out to be an automatic beacon, of the sort which is run by acetylene, is controlled by a photo-cell, and operates for three months at a time with-

out attention. The only conceivable virtue in the incident was that Nick took the wheel of the patrol boat for the rest of the weary hours before dawn, while Steve slept the sleep of the utterly exhausted.

At dawn, Lucy investigated the galley and they drank coffee in the dawn light, while the patrol boat, with an unskillfully lashed wheel veered remarkably from its course and nearly ran ashore.

A broadcast receiver in the skipper's cabin gave them news while they ate. It should have taken their appetite, but it did not. The only station they could tune in was one in Chicago, despairingly broadcasting at what was four a. m. by Central time. The announcer said drearily:

"Rioting on the lake front, which began at four this afternoon when mobs tried to storm the wharves of lake steamers, is still continuing. Six policemen have been killed. The number of civilian deaths has not been ascertained, but at least thirty persons, many of them women, have been torn to bits by the mob which struggles to escape the city before the plague strikes."

Nick blinked at the other two. The announcer went on more drearily:

"At midnight, the mobs which have blocked all exits from the city moved nearer the center. All efforts of car owners to leave have been nullified by these mobs. Every car which has attempted to get through has been stormed by panic-stricken people, fighting for a place in it. In most cases the cars have been shattered past all usefulness, the mob thereby defeating its own ends. At present, gangs of men and women are raiding private garages to seize cars for escape."

Steve drank meditatively and put down the coffee mug.

"In other cities rioting continues. St. Louis is still under martial law, which means that the authorities have not yet been overwhelmed. Pittsburgh is a city of madmen, according to advices broad-

cast from there. Three fourths of the population is frantically trying to leave the apparently doomed city. The balance, hopeless of escaping the plague which yesterday wiped out the Atlantic Coast from Boston to Washington, has given itself up to frantic revelry."

Lucy uttered a cry of dismayed horror.

"Boston to Washington! Millions upon millions of people!"

"Moral effect," said Steve. "They can't loot all those cities. But they smash our civilization with the panic induced in the part not seized. You remember Fran said they were afraid of us."

The announcer went on dispiritedly:

"The last advices lead to the belief that the plague has ceased to advance. But it was quiescent for a time after overwhelming Newark. The cities known to have been wiped out include Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, in New York, besides New York City proper. And Trenton in New Jersey; Scranton and Philadelphia in—"

The voice droned through a long list of names, from Maryland north to Massachusetts. It went on:

"It has been noticed that only the larger towns have so far been affected. No city much under one hundred thousand population has so far been smitten. The meaning of this oddity is not yet known. Flash. Niagara Falls is believed to have fallen victim to the plague. No communication has been had with that city since early to-day. The water power from the falls, both American and Canadian sides, failed at eleven o'clock."

Steve said calmly: "They would hit at Niagara. There's plenty of electric power there! With arcs of power-transmission lines, the trick we tried in New York yesterday morning would revive a good many thousand square miles. If we have to work on a long-time basis, Nick, we'll fix up a sort of army and try to seize that for a base of operations."

He switched off the radio.

"Let's try to start something. You all set, Nick?"

"Yes," said Nick. He gulped down the last of his coffee. "It ought to take 'em an hour to reach us from New York after we start sending, even if they use planes. And I doubt that they can handle them."

LUCY said nothing. But she started to clear away the dishes from which the two men had eaten, as they went to the desk which was the radio room.

Nick sat down at the patrol boat's small transmitter. With somewhat the air of a musical performer he adjusted small controls, flipped over a switch, listened keenly on a head phone as he ran through the short-wave bands, and reached for the key. He sent swiftly and smoothly, talking quietly as he sent.

"I'm tuned to a channel already in use. Sent emergency attention and snapped to hook in a directional antenna and will get my stuff through that. Said a scrambler would be at work on me and this was official and emergency." He flipped a switch and flipped it back again. "The Invaders are at it already, trying to jam the air. There's a chance, though, that the angle's big enough to separate us. We've got a directional antenna, too. Wait a bit and I'll tune it in. They use it for navigation in fog, sometimes."

He worked for a moment or so, swinging a control with one hand while he alternately sent and listened.

"Good! I've got him. He's catching me. Hears the scrambling, too! Now I'll shoot the works!"

He poured out his message for five minutes without a pause. He listened, and sent again. At the end of the second transmission he jerked back his head.

"He wants to know what frequencies neutralizes the stuff?"

"It must be under fifteen thousand cycles," said Steve harshly, "because it

doesn't seem to radiate at all. The feeder wires carried it all over New York. And it's probably over ten."

"Sounds most likely," said Nick composedly. "All right. I'm telling him."

His hand wavered imperceptibly at the key. He sat intent and earnest, now listening concentratedly, at odd moments sending a few symbols. Then he flicked off the switch and unconsciously brushed off his hands.

"It's done," said Nick. I had about six hams—amateurs—listening in on me—all on directional aërials, which cut out most of the scrambling. And every one of them swore that his first job—even before making a high-frequency pack for himself—would be to spread the dope I gave them over all the rest of America. But it's doubtful how much good it's going to do. Every one of them says his own town is crazy with terror. Our whole civilization's going to pot. But we've done our stuff! Now what?"

As if to answer the question there came the stuttering, droning hum of an airplane motor. Then another. The sound became the deep-toned, distant roar of many engines.

Steve plunged to the deck to see. Small, wabbling dots appeared in the sky—not from the direction of New York, but from the West. Philadelphia, perhaps. There were all of a dozen planes, but they had not the riveted, rigid look of an army formation. These planes were flown by men who had had little experience in formation flying. It showed the raggedness of their intervals and in the variation of those intervals in flight.

Steve straightened out the uncertain course of the little patrol boat.

"This is hell!" he said with an extreme calm. "I'll have to run the boat ashore, and we'll take to the woods, eh?"

The planes were still a very long distance away—bare specks against the sky.

"We must be—almost past the dead

area," said Lucy uncertainly. "If we could get help——"

"There's a navy boat," said Nick crisply. "A cruiser!"

STEVE STARED. A nearly formless gray blob upon the sea, it floated aimlessly. It gave no sign of life at all. Steve suddenly realized that they had not seen one sea gull. The dead spot, then, reached out to sea. He swung the bow of the patrol boat around. Nick dived for the engine room.

"I'll see if I can get more speed out of that engine of ours," he said hungrily. "The cruiser'll have anti-aircraft guns."

"Better than that," said Steve. "She'll have dynamos on board, and fighting men! And an arc——"

Nick uttered a cry which was almost a yelp of joy, and vanished down into the engine room. The engine's speed picked up, but almost imperceptibly. The little patrol boat bored through the waves, straight for the far-away war vessel.

But the planes came on. There is nothing more impressively military than aircraft in combat formation. Yet the least uncertainty, the least deviation from mathematical exactitude, and there is nothing much less so. These planes came on swiftly, and they were handled competently enough, but without the precise deadliness which would have destroyed all hope of escape.

Their droning hum rose to a growl. From a growl it became a roar. From a roar it rose to a thunderous, deafening reverberation which filled air and sky and sea with sound. And then the first of the planes dived. The sound of its motor rose in pitch. Steve jerked over the wheel. The patrol boat heeled over as it swerved.

The wings of the plane hung batlike above the fleeing craft for the fraction of an instant. Something small and smoking dropped from it. It struck a wave and exploded with a racking de-

tonation. A miniature wall of water flung the patrol boat's bow aside—but the plane had gone on ahead.

Steve straightened out, his lips tense. But he said evenly to Lucy: "That wasn't as bad as I expected. Watch out for me!"

A second plane dived. Lucy watched, her face ashen.

"Coming! He's leaning over——"

Steve jerked the wheel frantically. Another miss. This bomb exploded in mid-air. Steve glanced up.

"I begin to think we've got a chance," he said. "These chaps are amateurs. The Invaders didn't expect to fight. They didn't train for it."

Again the rising whine of a plane diving for them. The two foremost now roared on ahead. The third plane's roar grew more and more intense, until it seemed almost upon them. Steve, blanching, flung his head around to see the big passenger ship no more than fifty feet above the water and two hundred feet behind. There was no possible chance to dodge. He saw the pilot fling his missile—a cylindrical thing with something that smoked trailing out behind it. It struck the water no more than ten yards ahead. Spray fell all over the patrol boat.

"Dynamite," said Steve. "No regular bombs. Get Nick up with a rifle. Quick! Then take the wheel!"

He zigzagged desperately. There came another savage, rasping whine, as another plane dived down to repeat the tactics of its forerunner. From fifty feet up, the patrol boat was a target that simply had to be hit before long. Lucy reappeared, breathless, as Steve was about to abandon the wheel regardless.

He seized his rifle and shouted to Nick; "The propeller! Smash it!"

NICK OPENED FIRE. Steve flung bullets at the cobwebby disk before the fuselage. There was a sudden shrill squealing sound. Something went flying

away, shrieking. The unbalanced propeller set up a terrific vibration. The plane shot past the patrol boat before the pilot could even cut off his motor. It struck the water with a terrific crash—and instantly thereafter vanished in a gigantic detonation. The explosion wave made the patrol boat careen dangerously.

Yet another plane had essayed to dive, but it leveled off. It climbed and dropped a scattering handful of dynamite sticks from two hundred feet or more. Some of them went off from the impact when they hit the water. Others vanished harmlessly.

"If one of them hits our deck, though, it'll go off!" said Steve grimly. He called loudly above the dim of motors. "Keep shooting, Nick! Keep 'em aloft!"

The patrol boat sped on. The flight of planes swept past, peppering the sea about the fugitives with explosions, none of which were comparable to an actual aircraft bomb, but any of them certain to do deadly damage to a craft as small as this. It was easy enough to understand, of course. The Invaders had not anticipated battle, but a raid. Nor combat, but looting.

Faced with an emergency and furious orders from their surviving Leaders, those who had gone to prepare for the looting of Philadelphia had taken what civilian planes their fliers knew how to handle, had loaded easily discovered dynamite in them, and taken off in a desperate attempt to obey orders.

But their lack of practice in battle tactics was apparent in the fact that, having dived for and dropped bombs about the patrol boat, the first ships dared not swing sharply about to bomb again. They feared to foul their followers. They sped on and went about in a huge circle, their ragged formation following them, and then swept across above the patrol boat again.

Again there was a rain of death from

the skies. Detonations and spitting flames and columns of spume and spray sprang into being all about the dodging, darting small boat. Once a tall column of water fell athwart its stern. But save for a smashed hatch and some hundreds of gallons of water admitted, there was no damage.

Steve had steered erratically, as if dodging without real purpose, but he sped desperately for the cruiser as soon as the second rain of bombs was over. Nick coiled a rope, which he hastily knotted to a small-boat grapnel.

They came alongside the cruiser just as the squadron of planes made a ragged turn. Nick heaved up the grapnel. In seconds he was swarming frantically up the line. In seconds more he was hauling away at Lucy, to help her up. And then, just as Steve dragged himself to the cruiser's deck, the roar of motors filled all the universe again with unbearable sound. Dynamite exploded beside a ventilator and shattered it.

A fair hit on the patrol boat blew off its bow. It went down in seconds. More dynamite ripped the cruiser's deck astern. Nick dived for a steel door. Steve dived after him, while detonations and crashings resounded all about.

But a cruiser is not as easy to sink as a patrol boat. One stick of dynamite will tear up planks and dent mild steel. But even a light cruiser requires more than even a case of dynamite to produce real damage.

THE THREE AMERICANS hunted eagerly. They found the commander of the cruiser. Steve swung down from his back the high-frequency pack with which he had first protected himself, which had wakened Nick when Fran Dutt ruined Nick's own pack, and had been used again by Steve when changing his Invader's armor to the outside of his clothing for a disguise.

He put the pack on the naval officer and turned on the switch. The little

tongue of metal began to vibrate. A tiny blue spark flickered and danced. High-frequency currents, which he could not even feel, coursed through the officer's body. And he awoke.

He had been in the act of drinking his after-lunch cup of coffee when the plague struck his ship. Now he swallowed automatically, stared at the three weirdly armored figures who stood before him—and then heard the crashings and felt the shock of bombs falling on the cruiser's decks. He leaped to his feet.

Steve said sharply: "Commander, your ship's being attacked by the chaps who're responsible for the plague you've probably heard of. Your crew is under its influence now, and you have been. But if you'll help us, Nick and I will make an arc and get things going——"

From a distance, the cruiser would have seemed to be in a bad way during the next quarter or half of an hour. It floated aimlessly upon the water. Planes darted about and above it, raining down small black things which exploded upon its decks and filled the air with flames and smoke. It seemed as if the cruiser were helpless.

But suddenly the war vessel awoke. Its commander's voice roared out of the speakers which filled every deck and compartment with sound. Order after order issued from his lips. And, in the navy men obey orders first and ask questions afterward.

At one instant the ship was a helpless, floating hulk with the reek of dynamite about it. The next instant its cannon moved. Men flung themselves across its decks to anti-aircraft guns. And suddenly it was spitting flames exclusively its own.

In three minutes its gunners brought down two of the Invaders' planes in flames, disabled four others whose pilots were able to land without crashing, and a lucky shot hit the store of dynamite in the cockpit of another. It vanished in a colossal sheet of flame which

suddenly doubled when a second plane shared its fate.

Three planes of the squadron turned and fled for the distant shore. One of those wavered in its flight, abruptly turned over in mid-air, and then dived straight into the waves. A bullet had weakened some control wire to the breaking point. Two planes, only, reached land.

The crew of the cruiser could not live beyond the steel hull of the ship, into which high-frequency current was poured by a giant arc. They could not get to the small boats. The cruiser itself—when steam was had again—swept slowly up to the disabled, sinking planes. Nick flung ropes to the pilots.

They came on board, clad in the armor which had so astounded the cruiser commander, and with the stunned, broken look of men who still cannot understand their defeat. They were of the same racial type as Fran and the biological assistant at Columbia. The sailors of the ship stripped off their armor and enviously watched chosen men don it.

And then the cruiser headed for New York harbor at full speed, while her electricians worked feverishly.

SHE WAS seen approaching, a good many hours later. Smoke pouring from her funnels, white water hissing at her bows, she came steaming in the Narrows with a vengeful confidence. One great bombing plane had been gotten aloft from Governor's Island. It circled, and dived—and such a storm of anti-aircraft fire poured upon it that it reeled drunkenly and went dizzily down with smoke pouring from it.

Then there were monstrous detonations on shore. The forts at the Narrows were firing point-blank. But the guns were not designed for such short-range work, and their desperate, improvised gun crews did not know their work. The guns fired, at most, two shots apiece. Not one was a hit. The

cruiser disdainfully refused to return such fire. She swept on.

Up the East River. She came to a stop opposite the great power house, and small boats dropped from her sides. There were at least two men in each, in the scaly armor of the Invaders, but in addition each boat carried contrivances built by the ship's electricians. They were very simple—merely battery-driven induction coils and spark-gap contrivances. Flexible wires ran from each of these devices to each man of each landing party. They were clumsy. They were very cumbersome. But machine-gun fire spat out from the small landing boats when rifles opened from the shore. Nearer, one man stood up in each boat and threw grenades. The rifle fire from shore died, and scale-armored figures fled.

The boats moored. Compact groups of zestful fighters swept into action, though hampered by the need to keep close to the generators of high-frequency current. They, though, were fighting men, whose leaders had not the habit of carrying whips nor the policy of breaking spirits.

To the cracking of rifles, they went into the power house. Tumultuous rifle fire and the explosion of grenades kept up for perhaps two minutes. From the ship, now, other boats put off. Not to reënforce the landing party, but racing to the navy yard. Their crews, also, landed. Carrying their portable generators, they vanished into other naval ships.

Then a strange quiet descended. The two cities were utterly still and utterly silent. The ships of the harbor were grounded or sunk or still drifted helplessly with the tides. The streets were empty of all save stiffened, grotesquely posed bodies. Not even rats scurried about the sewers. Not even insects flew.

The only sign of life anywhere was one light cruiser of the United States navy, with smoke pouring from her fun-

nels, her screw turning just enough to hold her opposite the power house. The power house itself trickled smoke from one of its mighty stacks only. From within it, at long intervals, came perhaps one shot, or two, or perhaps a flurry of three or four.

Then, simultaneously, smoke came from the balance of the giant stacks of the power house. At first thin and white, it thickened and became dense. Then smoke arose from the funnels of the frozen, immobile ships tied up at the navy yard. Electricians were working in the inward of those ships, while other men got up steam—being careful not to break free from flexible wires which ran to each man of them.

ABRUPTLY, one of those moored warships emitted an exultant bellow from its whistle. Figures stirred upon its decks. Some of them stared incredulously at the stillness of which they had been a part until a few short seconds before. A second vessel boomed triumphantly, and signal flags fluttered from its masts.

And then figures in scaly armor came out of the power house—but the armor was bloodstained, and gob hats still served as headgear—and began to wig-wag to the belligerent cruiser.

With startling suddenness, there were noises in the cities also. Bells clanked, whistles shrilled and voices babbled everywhere. The cities were alive again. Because, with trained men to work, and the problem outlined before, the great arc in the power house had been reconstituted just as soon as the landing party could clear the generator room and get up steam in the extra boilers below.

That was not all that had to be done, of course. There was more—much more. Commandeered trucks, hastily fitted with dynamo and a gasoline engine apiece, trundled across the bridges with men in second-hand scaly armor on each one. Those men wore the hats of

sailors or the uniform caps of marines, and they were heavily and very efficiently armed.

They whooped derisively at each other, and at certain bewildered civilians who could not understand that they had just been revived for the second time by the arc in the great power house.

Those trucks separated and drove at full speed for other power stations; some uptown and others in New Jersey. They would build up arcs in each station after zestfully demolishing any of the Invaders who protested. They would then instruct local electricians briefly and go on to repeat the process farther away.

In six hours every city as far away as Philadelphia would be again its normal self. In twelve—with police and national guard units taking over the task and spreading the revival process in geometric progression—Washington would come back to life. In twenty-four, even Niagara Falls would again be awake and its enormous water-power output of electricity diverted from industrial use to make impossible any recurrence of plague.

But that last was a precaution. Long before that time the menace of the Invaders was over. Steve took measures to bring that about almost at once. Because, with Brooklyn awake, adequately armed parties from the ships at the navy yard had turned up at the power house. Steve asked for them.

They came in a highly professional manner, with strict discipline and their commissioned officers in command. But they marched through the streets and saw some of the things that had come of the Invaders' hold upon the city. They knew, too, how many cities had been subject to the sudden, horrible paralysis of all, save machinery, and the results of that machinery running on unguided. More, they knew of the looting of the cities of women as well as of goods.

Steve had them drawn up before the helix in the courtyard, with its flickering bluish flame. He had refused to allow the current to be turned off from that helix. He had found from a position facing its open end that the blue flames seemed to coalesce and fill the whole center of it. And the pictures on those flames—which elsewhere were fragmentary—combined together so that he looked directly into the world which was the Other Side of Here.

HE SAW, then, a scene very nearly normal: green fields, clouds, sky, and sunlight; a long distance away, the forbidding towers of some sort of stronghold; between that stronghold and the opening of the helix there was a city of sorts. Its streets were narrow and its houses mean. But the stronghold was vast and strong. And there was fighting going on in that city. Men battled with swords and spears, and other men fought savagely with weapons which were noiseless and unfamiliar. It was a quaintly alien city, yet there were motor trucks of utterly familiar mold, and men using them as fighting machines to charge other men.

But the fighting was less, now. It seemed rather the cleaning-up process after street fighting, when individuals and groups of the defeated party made their last stands as they were hunted down.

Steve had watched for a long time. And when there were many grim, armed men drawn up before him he told them, very briefly, all that he knew about the Invaders and their world. He told them that the helix was the entry way to that world. And he asked for volunteers to join him in seizing a foothold there, for the avenging of the Invasion and to recover the loot and especially the women who had been taken for the pleasure of the Leaders of that alien race.

A sound like a roar answered the call for volunteers. But, as extra ammuni-

tion was being served out, machine guns allotted, and swift and decisive preparations made, in that other world men advanced directly toward the mouth of the helix. There were six of them, and not one was unwounded. Fran Dutt strode ahead. He walked up to the helix, and into it, and came out of it into the courtyard of the power house. He faced Steve grimly.

"Steve," he said, unsmiling, "we've had our revolution. Thanks to you, perhaps. We've got this city—the one you see—and we'll get the others. I'm speaking for the Revolutionary Committee."

"We've had," said Steve dryly, "a few doings in this world, too."

"I know," said Fran. "It scared our Leaders and made our job easier. Now—you're getting ready to return the Invasion. I'm here to make terms. There's no use fighting. What's happened wasn't our fault, not the fault of we Underones. It's the fault of our Leaders. We've started the job of kicking them out, and we'll finish it. Let's make terms."

Steve said quietly: "You've been in our world enough to know I can't assume authority to make terms, Fran. But if your terms are fair, I'll urge them."

Fran drew a deep breath.

"For peace, we offer to return all that's been looted or pay for it in gold. We've plenty of that. We'll pay as well as we can for the damage done to your cities. We offer the return of all prisoners, of course. And we offer to finish kicking out our Leaders and then hold a plebiscite on asking for annexation to your country."

Steve stared.

"We ask," said Fran, "no punishment for Underones who did damage while obeying the orders of Leaders. You can have the Leaders to hang, if you like. We don't want them! And

we ask for colonists. We've only half a million human beings in our world, and it's as big as yours. We need colonists to teach we Underones many things—but especially to hate our Leaders as such men would be hated in your world. We need them, and we'll give them land and welcome them, and we'll learn never to cringe to any other living man——”

He stopped, his eyes aflame. The five men behind him nodded. One meditatively tightened a bandage about his arm. Blood was oozing from it. All five nodded again.

“Fran,” said Steve soberly, “those terms are all we could ask. But—for guarantees——”

“March your men through!” said Fran Dutt fiercely. “We ask nothing better! They'll encourage waverers to believe in freedom, anyhow! And you tell them, Steve, to grin if they see any one look scared or angry, and everything will be all right.”

There was a conference. So complete and bloodless a victory seemed almost suspicious to the naval officers. One of them began to stipulate the number of men and arms who could go through to Fran's world.

“Damn it!” cried Fran, “I'm asking you to go through! My people went mad and fought to-day. But to-morrow they might be frightened and cringe before what Leaders survive, through pure habit. I'm begging you to come through, so my people will have the courage to stay free forever! We've been slaves too long!”

IN TEN MINUTES there was the steady tramping of men marching into the helix which was the entrance to the Other Side of Here. From one side they could be seen to march into it—

and vanish. But from the end they could be seen in that other world.

Fran turned suddenly to Steve.

“One question,” he said harshly. “Lucy?”

“She's all right,” said Steve. “She's on the cruiser. She's going to marry me to-morrow.”

Fran had been pale. He went paler yet.

“I thought so. Well—you're decent, in your way. I'll go back to my world. It's a pretty good world, and it's going to be better. And this Invasion won't turn out to be such a bad thing for your world or mine.” He started for the helix. He stopped. “Lucy knows I love her,” he said evenly. “Her father's been sent for. He'll be here in an hour or so. Wish her happiness for me. And I mean it!”

He did manage to smile. He walked into the helix with half a company of sailors. He vanished.

“And now, Nick,” said Steve with a faint smile, “to get back to normal!”

It did not take long. Full realization of the benefits that would come from the doubling—later to be the multiplication by a much larger number than two—or the space available for use by the human race did not come for many years. But the affairs of the world went back to normal in a surprisingly short time.

In fact, only the next day the wedding of Steve Waldron and Lucy Blair was interrupted by a conscientious bureau of health official who insisted that there was a warrant for the arrest of Steve which had never been quashed and so had to be served. It seemed that Steve was required to be arrested for having violated the order of quarantine, forbidding any person to come out of the plague-stricken city of Newark.

THE END