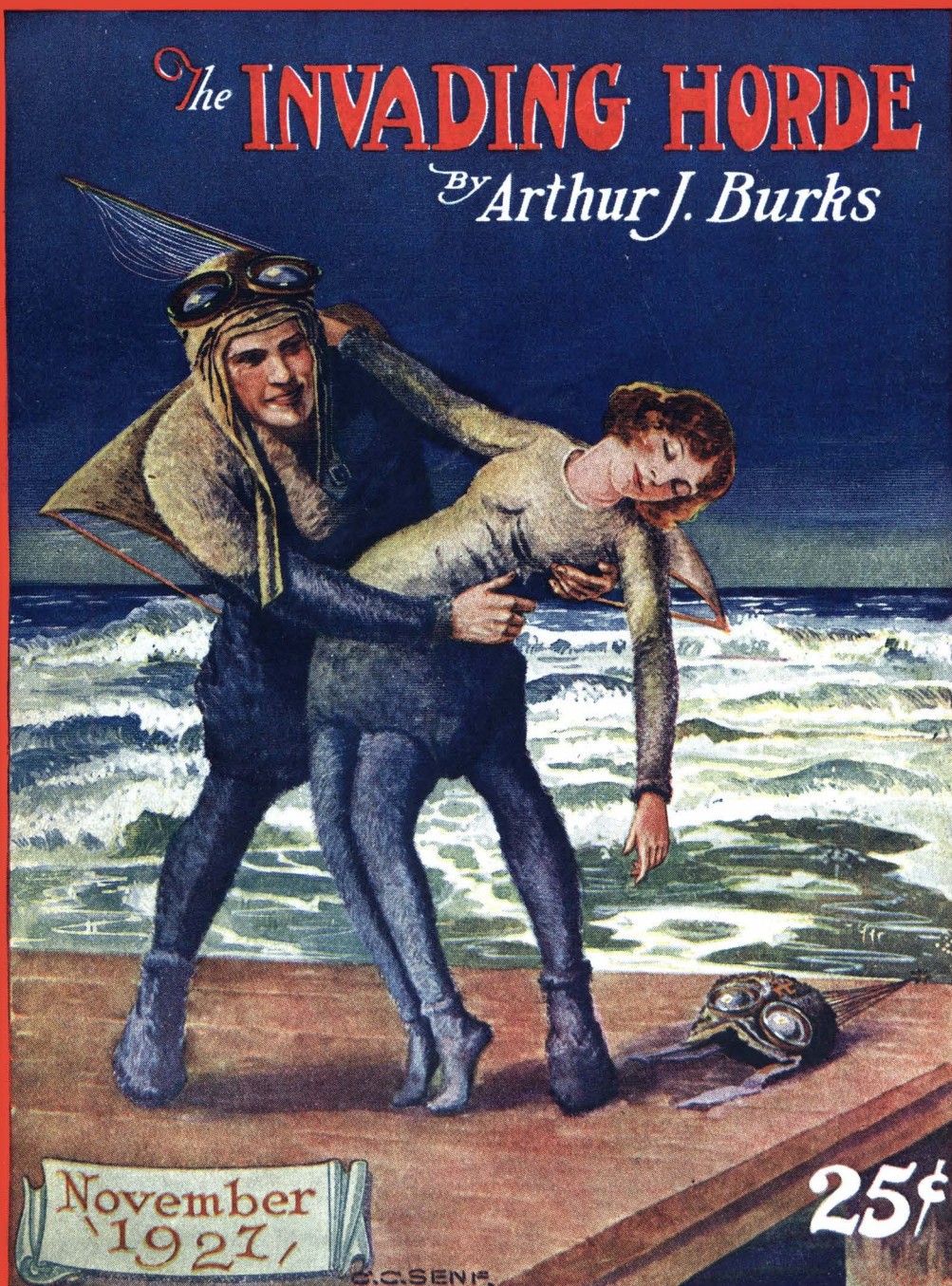


Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

The **INVADING HORDE**

By Arthur J. Burks



November
1927

25¢

Edmond Hamilton — Will Smith — Henry S. Whitehead
G. G. Pendarves — Clare Winger Harris — and Others

Weird Tales

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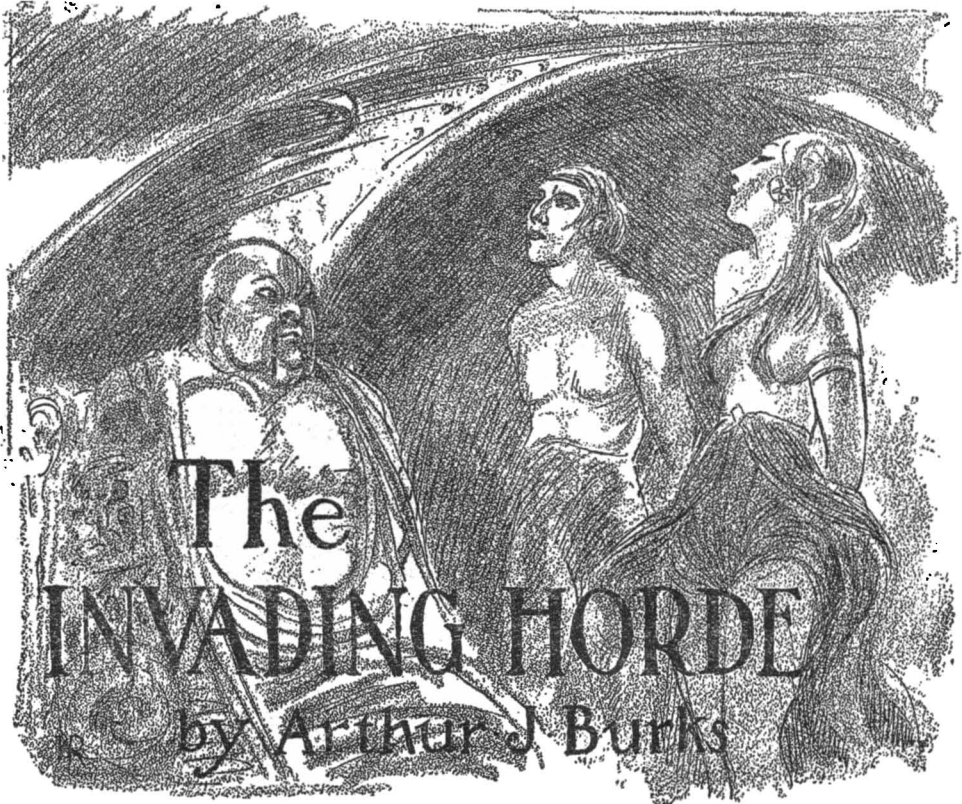
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Contents for November, 1927

Cover Design	C. C. Senf	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "The Invading Horde"</i>		
The Eyrie		580
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		
Despair and the Soul	Leavenworth Macnab	584
<i>Verse</i>		
The Invading Horde	Arthur J. Burks	587
<i>A weird-scientific story of America far in the future— Asiatic hordes invade City of the East in giant submarines</i>		
The Wolf	Sewell Peaslee Wright	609
<i>A weird tale of the Canadian Northwest—across the fire the man faced the evil thing that sprang for his throat</i>		
An Old House	Cristel Hastings	614
<i>Verse</i>		

(Continued on Next Page)



"I leave you to choose the manner of your death."

"YOU see before you," said Sark Darlin, with a gesture toward his office window, "the realization of a dream that endured for a thousand years. Eighteen generations of long-lived architects have had their part in the dream, and through that window you see the result."

Of course I had seen it before, but I never tired of it. Sark Darlin had reason to be proud. The culmination, this man, of a thousand years of specialization. He was old, and his wife had given him no man-child to carry on the family tradition. The growth of City of the East would die with Sark Darlin, and a little of the sadness of it showed in his face as he beckoned me to the window. I, as his son-in-law, must take up the torch he

must relinquish, but I—I was not a Darlin, and the pill was a bitter one for Sark to swallow. Yet he loved me, else he never would have allowed my addresses to his daughter—for that is the law.

His hand was on my shoulder as we stood side by side and gazed from the window. We were in his office on the top floor of the Executive Building, five hundred stories above ground level. Outside the window, the platform for the landing of monopters thrust outward into space. Looking downward beyond the edge of the platform I could see the other platforms below, one at each window, scores and scores of them, like perches before the uncountable doors of some mighty Gargantuan dovecote. Straight across

from our window yet well below it, since the Executive Building is the tallest in all the City, were other platforms, and as we talked there, watching, men and women and children, like monster bees, dropped from windows in their monopters, and glided across to this or that window in the Executive Building. All the windows were numbered or marked with other distinguishing signs. It was like this throughout the whole City, so that the great and awesome canyons between the buildings were fairly alive with flitting and industrious people, going about their mysterious business speedily and in silence.

Over the top of the building opposite I could see some of the other buildings, their spires glistening in the sun, now visible, now obscured as wraiths of white clouds, like fingers of some bodiless entity of space, moved into and along the canyons. Below the spires, many stories below, there often were clouds, shutting out the world beneath, so that at times, looking from this window, it was as though our building had been cut in twain somewhere below us, leaving us here in space, immovable. At such times as these the myriad noises of the City were muffled, as well they might be, when one considers the depth of the great canyons. But even then, when impenetrable fog held the whole city in its grip, the noises came up to us, even through the almost sound-proof walls of Sark Darlin's office. A vast, voiceless roar, as though some subterranean monster, imprisoned in a pit that was bottomless, cried out in agony at his restraint. But the clouds, white misty draperies, sent their tentacles into the canyons and paid no heed. While the clouds were passing through, it was always interesting to watch the monopters, each encasing a human being, stand upright on the platform, patiently waiting for the

mists to lift or move on. With clouds in the canyons it was virtually suicide to attempt a crossing from one platform to another. Sark Darlin, I knew, had all but perfected a device whereby monopters might be directed at will toward a fixed destination, but the purpose of the invention had been defeated because, among the mists, monopters might collide and their occupants be hurled to the depths. As we watched there, while I sensed, without looking, that the face of Sark Darlin was radiant with pardonable pride, the platforms opposite were fairly aswarm with monopters waiting for the mists to lift or clear. Like doves standing before their cotes. It was impossible, of course, to tell which were men and which were women. Not that it mattered, especially, for in the City of the East there is no difference between them, save the fundamental difference of sex, and women and men work side by side. Sark has told me, he having read extensively, that this was not so, long ago; but Sark is getting old, and I have never believed it. To me it is inconceivable that women were once considered to be of a lower order than men—or the other way around. My principal reason for loving the daughter of Darlin is that she can do everything that I can do.

"See, Gerd?" he pointed vaguely beyond the window. "The City of the East! The greatest city of all time! The realization of a dream of my first recorded ancestor. Would that he lived today to see his dream in truth as he must have seen it then in his mind! He promised himself, this dreamer-ancestor of mine, to dedicate his life to the building of this City which lies before you, and the tradition was passed on to his son, and from him to *his* son, and the line has never been broken. Only now is it threatened, because my time is coming. Lona is my only offspring.

To her, and to you, I tender the torch which has burned brightly through all the generations of the Darlins. You, and she, must carry on."

Something of the solemnity of the thing entered into me there as we stood by the window. I stood like a statue, his hand resting on my shoulder, harkening to the myriad sounds of the City that persisted in invading the silence of Sark Darlin's office—and realized a little of the tremendous responsibility that was one day to rest on my shoulders. I shook off the feeling, however, in a moment, and gazed into the old man's eyes.

"Nonsense!" I said sharply. "You have twenty years of active service before you yet. You are only sixty-five!"

"Sixty-five," he repeated. "That is young, I know. Ordinarily I should live to twice that age. But I have led a strenuous life, and I shall welcome the chance to leave it behind me. I have received warnings——"

He pressed his white hand, slim and graceful as Lona's, against his heart. A pang shot through me. I wondered if something of his affliction might not have been passed on to Lona. To win her for my own, only to lose her to Death! But I shook myself impatiently. Lona was too young, too replete with health and brimming vitality.

"So," continued Darlin, "you must study City of the East as an artizan studies craftsmanship. Every spare hour must be spent in the air, learning all there is to learn about this City in whose future you will have such an active part. The sun is high now, my son, so drop off and busy yourself. This is a tremendous responsibility I am passing on to you."

I fancied I read a vague hint in his voice as he said it, as though he somehow doubted his choice of a

successor—and decided instantly that, before he should leave us, I would erase any lingering doubt of me his heart might harbor. Now, however, there were other things to do. He had bade me go, and to obey his slightest wish was my law—since I was soon to become his son-in-law. We stepped back from the window and Darlin kept up a running fire of conversation, while I stepped into my monopter and adjusted the filament wires to the headpiece which, last of all, would be set in place, closing the monopter to all sound save that which was transmitted by the mechanism of the wireless telephone inside the headpiece.

WITH Sark Darlin's words ringing in my ears I stepped to the window. Darlin opened it and closed it swiftly behind me. I was alone on the platform, preparing myself for the duty to follow. To see and to learn, and to remember, and the whole of City of the East was my place of operation. Added to this duty, which I loved, was the anticipation of again seeing Lona, who had promised to meet me at the fifty thousand foot air lane, directly east of the Executive Building, at the edge of the Great Rampart which holds back the rising waters of the vast Atlantic—our usual trysting place where, hand in hand, communing by telephone, we were accustomed to flying far out to sea, beyond the usual range of other monopters, where we might enjoy the privacy our love demanded. From day to day I lived in anticipation of that winging flight outward from the Great Rampart in which, like a Lord and Lady of Creation, we talked lovers' nonsense and looked down upon the vast dominion we were to inherit from Sark Darlin.

My heart was all aflutter as I stood on the platform, waiting for the mists to disperse slightly before

leaping into space. I knew that behind me Sark Darlin stood by the window, wishing me a silent God-speed.

The monopter, as you must know, is nothing more nor less than a slip-over suit of specially prepared material which, equipped with a tiny atomic engine resting compactly behind and between the shoulders of the wearer, keeps out the cold of the higher altitudes. No one has yet found it necessary to ascend to any altitude greater than fifty thousand feet, which is almost the ceiling for monopters. There are air lanes below this level, a lane for each two hundred feet, in fact, and each type of monopter, passenger and freight, keeps to its particular level, assigned by law, the monopters of the various trades and strata of society being designated by words on the outside of each monopter as, for example: "Engineer, Air Lane 50,000", or, "Building Level 200, Air Lane 35,000". This last indicates that the occupant of the monopter is a man or woman from that City level indicated by the two hundredth story of City buildings, assigned by law to Air Lane 35,000, which is to say, that monopters from this level must confine themselves to an elevation not greater than 35,000 feet. The first designation is virtually self-explanatory, indicating that the Engineers, whose business is the building of the City of the East to still grander proportions, are allowed to ascend to the highest lane, whence they are enabled to view everything below them, which includes every activity known at present to the City of the East. I am of the Engineers, soon to be the head of the Guild, through my marriage to Lona Darlin. But in reference to the monopter: as I say, it is no more than a slip-over suit, entirely enclosing the occupant, and the motive power is supplied by a small, compact, atomic engine, an invention of

Sark Darlin, and is guided and directed by tiny buttons inside the finger-tips of the right glove. In the air the monopter and its occupant are one entity, directed by one brain. Lenses of specially prepared material, with fused quartz as the principal alloy, allow the eyes of the occupant full view in all directions, or as far as the eyes may swerve in any direction. To look at the rear requires a turning of the entire monopter. From which it may be seen that a person in the air is virtually the same in appearance as a person on the ground, free of the monopter, with the exception of the slight enlargement of the head and torso, caused by the covering which houses the engine of propulsion and the mechanism of the headpiece. It is as though man had suddenly lifted into the air on invisible wings, and when all the monopters of the City of the East are in the air, which seldom happens at one time, the City resembles more than ever a gigantic dovecote, with its inhabitants circling about in preparation for landing, filling the air to the very crest of Air Lane 50,000. An awe-inspiring sight, even when, as I am, one is accustomed to it.

Standing on the platform before Sark Darlin's window, I was glad that I had locked myself securely inside my monopter, for I was slightly giddy with my thoughts, inspired by the stupendous responsibility soon to be mine, and, in my excitement, might have fallen from the platform. This would have been disastrous had I, as I sometimes did, left the fastening of the headpiece of the monopter until I had taken my place on the narrow platform. Now, however, it would have been perfectly safe to step off into space and drop like a plummet, for to slacken speed required but the pressure of finger on button, so that I would have landed at the bottom of this great canyon as

lightly as a feather fluttering downward.

It has always been a great moment for me, a thrilling moment, to stand on the platform before leaping outward. From far below comes the bellowing voice of the City, welling up like thunder from the depths, rattling the very headpiece about my ears, causing my whole body to tremble, so that the platform under my feet seems to sway as though some invisible hand is shaking it from side to side. A cloud of snowy whiteness passes through the canyon below me, blotting out some of the sound, shutting out the world below, so that it seems the world as I know it has its foundation in space, with spires and towers afloat in the whiteness, a City in the air. The moving of the clouds gives the sense of motion, so that, as I gaze at the building across from me, it seems to be leaning in my direction, so that I have an insane desire to leap into space before it shall have toppled against the Executive Building and both shall have fallen crashing into the canyon. Even the Executive Building seems to be moving, as though it tilted away from me, toppling me forward, so that I unconsciously lean backward to keep from falling over the edge. It is intoxicating and I never tire of this experience. But a tapping sound comes through the phones and I turn to look at the window through which I have just stepped. Sark Darlin is tapping the window with one hand, while his other hand makes a sweeping gesture which bids me soar aloft on the business assigned me. Thus, in a gesture, I am brought back to the matter in hand, recalled to a mission that never becomes humdrum.

However, just for the joy of falling, I step to the edge of the platform and lean forward until the pull of gravitation topples me from my

perch and I go plummeting downward. I always revel, dropping thus, in the thought that there may be something wrong with my monopter and that I shall not be able to halt my downward flight. I might have failed to connect some all-important filament, a failure that would assuredly spell disaster. But when I decide to check my falling, speed slackens gradually until, by an effort of will, I am moving in the opposite direction, upward. Once this is accomplished the matter is simple. I keep on climbing, straight into the clouds.

My flight upward is uninterrupted, for the aerial traffic laws compel monopters already in the air to keep out of the way of monopters ascending or descending while, in the up and down traffic, descending monopters keep out of the way of those ascending.

So in a few moments, I find my monopter becoming almost stationary, indicating that I have reached Air Lane 50,000 or the ceiling for monopters, 50,000 feet above ground level. Here for a moment I tilt forward to peer down. What a magnificent sight! No wonder Sark Darlin is proud! Air lane after air lane, each alive with its myriads of fitting, darting monopters, as the individuals occupying them scurry here and there toward unknown destinations. A veritable cloud, black layer upon black layer, extending downward to swathe the very buildings of the City of the East. A cloud, moreover, through which it is easy to get glimpses of the City itself.

As I have said before, the highest building is the Executive Building, 500 stories, almost in the mathematical center of the City. All about this building are grouped the others, many of them far more massive, most of them in fact, since

Executive Building is more like a slender spire than a building—and they vary in height from two hundred and fifty stories to four hundred and ninety, the latter building being an annex to the Executive Building, housing the subordinates and apprentices of the Engineers, who themselves are housed in the Executive Building. This latter building, with its sprawling annex, is the most industrious hive in all the City. Its work is the City's progress. Its officials are the City Administrators.

A City of spires, of great heights, cloud-wreathed, reaching to all the horizons. A city of mighty canyons, since the invention of monopters made it possible to remove the suspension bridges of my father's time. A City—but I find this the best simile: it is as though a great piece of cardboard, cut to represent, on a tiny scale, all the country lying between the Atlantic and the Mississippi, so-named in ancient times, and extending into the region of cold to the north and the region of the tropics to the south—and this cardboard literally obliterated from view by pins thrust upward from the underside, a vast pin-cushion with all the points extending outward. Only the pins of the simile are the towers and spires of the City of the East. The sun glistening on the spires bears out the simile, for the spires shine in its rays like pin-pricks of silver, deluging the sky with silvery glamor. A marvelous creation, full-sprung from the brain of eighteen generations of Darlins.

But I turn for the flight into the East where, at the edge of the Great Rampart, I have an appointment with Lona. Together, after our lonely flight, hand in hand, across the waters of the Atlantic, we will come back across the City of the East, which we must one day govern, to examine the Invisible Frontier. This frontier, if I may explain in

passing, is that invisible line of demarcation, beyond which people of the West may not come—for they are aliens. These people are the races of color, which occupy all the country west of the Mississippi, representing the descendants of the races of color who, centuries ago, all but overthrew the people of the American white race. Only the foresight of one of the Darlins prevented this racial catastrophe. He had already caused the installation of the Invisible Frontier.

In itself the frontier is simplicity. At each quarter-mile along its length is a tiny station housing a corps of engineers, whose duty it is to see that the mechanism of the aerial ray producers do not fail. These rays, which are invisible, are hurled into the sky to a height twice that of the ceiling of the most perfect monopter, and played back and forth so that it would be impossible for any person of the West to pass through the Invisible Wall, for to attempt such a foolhardy thing would be death. No monopter has yet been perfected which is able to pass through this wall of rays. Certain foolhardy people of the West have tried it, only to have their monopters, less perfect than ours, melt away from about them, allowing the occupants to plummet to the earth—a painless death after all, since even before the beginning of the downward plunge, the occupant of the offending monopter has been burned to a cinder.

Only through a traitor along the Invisible Frontier would the invasion of the people of the West be possible. We have long known that the scientists of this country of the West have been trying to perfect machines capable of passing through the frontier, for these people breed like flies, and must eventually find some place for their expanding population or perish. But the possi-

bility of a traitor, a man or woman who would deliver the City of the East into the hands of the races of color, would be unthinkable. The attack, when it does come, must be from another direction and—but one shudders to think of such a catastrophe.

So I thought as I fled eastward toward the Great Rampart, little guessing that already an attack was being launched, and that Lona and I were to witness the very first contact.

2

THE speed of my monopter is three hundred miles an hour, so that it is a pleasure jaunt from the center of City of the East to the edge of the Great Rampart—a pleasure jaunt all the more pleasant because I know I shall find Lona at my destination. Lona! There is romance in her very name! This flesh and blood woman sired by Sark Darlin, the greatest living architect, to whom he was soon to turn over the vast responsibilities inherent in his dreams. To Lona, and to myself, as one after the marriage which should take place very soon; but never too soon to please me. Lona! The bright-cheeked girl of the golden hair, and the form of a goddess of the olden times, when men had not yet conquered the air lanes, but crawled slowly along the ground in liquid-driven, clumsy vehicles, or soared to unimportant heights in unwieldy machines even more clumsy. Lona, whose very name spoke of perfection! And I was hurrying into the East to keep my daily tryst with her.

Already, far ahead, I could see the mists which shroud the shoreline of the Atlantic, and was glancing about me among the hurrying myriads of monopters, seeking that which bore upon its crest the swastika-and-star which is the signal of

the house of Darlin. Only Sark Darlin himself, who rarely makes use of the monopter of his own invention, and Lona, may wear the insignia of the star superimposed upon the swastika. The significance of the signal has been lost in antiquity; but the whole City of the East knows that inside the monopter marked with the swastika-and-star is Lona, the promised bride of Gerd Sota, myself.

So, speeding eastward, with now and then a glance downward into the vast canyons of City of the East, evading the streams of other monopters to right and left of me by instinct, I pondered the matter. I wonder now, as I look back upon that flight, whether I didn't really harbor some slight intuition of the catastrophe so soon to follow. Perhaps. Else why had the thought of attack obtruded itself upon my consciousness? Men and women in other monopters at my level, all of them belonging to this lane because of their importance in the City of the East, raised their arms to me in passing, and I returned their silent greetings abstractedly. The word had already gone forth, I could see, that Gerd Sota was soon to take the place of Sark Darlin as chief administrator of City of the East, and these greetings from the other monopters were silent pledges of fealty. Soon the very least of these would carry out orders originating with me, or with Lona.

But I was approaching the Great Rampart, which merits a brief description. The first noticeable rising of the waters of the Atlantic is shrouded in remote antiquity. Suffice it that the first Darlin took cognizance and caused the first stones of the Great Rampart to be laid. At first it was only a great wall, a thousand feet in width and two hundred feet of elevation, a fortress against the ocean. From

which I know that the rising of the waters had been an exceedingly slow progress, since the base of that first wall is at the present moment but fifty feet below the surface of the Atlantic. I can, however, but marvel at the foresight of the first inspired Darlin, for even that fifty feet of rise would have spelled disaster had there been no wall. However, as time passed, and as the population of the City of the East increased, and especially after the invasion of the races of color, when the white race was driven back from the Pacific, back behind the Mississippi, at whose farther side the Invisible Frontier had already been installed, and beyond which the races of color could not penetrate, it became increasingly evident that, because the people of the white race literally covered the ground level, the only possible expansion must be upward.

Under the leadership of a Darlin, every able-bodied man and woman was pressed into service. Hills and mountains were leveled overnight, and from the very bowels of the earth came the materials which went into building of the Great Rampart. From great depths they came, those materials, for this farsighted Darlin wished to preserve as much of the native soil as was humanly possible from which to get the food to feed the City of his dreams. And as his myriad army of laborers moved westward from the first Great Rampart, the wall itself was broadened, and on its first humble beginnings, that thousand-foot-wide barrier, was erected the first series of the then highest buildings in all the world. But the first one was an insignificant hundred and fifty stories, so that our shoreline, which should really be a thing of beauty, is but a drab collection of time-worn, ill-shaped, comparatively tiny buildings.

But that was a beginning. And with this as a starting-point the wall itself was extended, so that today the ground is invisible, and the bottom of the deepest canyon in the City is two hundred feet above ground level. Beneath this level expanse of imperishable stone are the Menials, subjugated peoples who toil in slavery to feed the multitudes above them. One wonders at the fears which must ever be with them, when they realize the number of uncountable tons of material which hover over them. But all they see are the great pilings which are the foundations of the Great Rampart, upon which, in turn, the buildings of the City of the East have been erected. These pilings, so Sark Darlin has told me, are of slenderness unbelievable; but the matter of stresses and strains has been worked out so carefully that there is little doubt that the City will stand, immovable, for centuries yet to come. The slenderness was made necessary in order that every available bit of ground might be cultivated. The Menials are never allowed above ground level, and are the only inhabitants of City of the East who are denied the use of monopters.

So, to sum it all up, the Great Rampart, except where it sets flush with hills of solid stone left by the builders, extends from the shore of the Atlantic to what was the Mississippi before its waters were diverted to the use of the white race. It is a veritable White City, and no ground at all is visible, save that which may be seen when the waters of the Atlantic are clear, extending from the shore to that point where they vanish into the depths.

Some day City of the East will extend still farther eastward, for on our journeys, Lona's and mine, over the waters, we have discussed this possibility of further vanquishing the waters, driving them back be-

fore a moving wall of stone. But all that is in the future. It will be my problem, God willing, and Lona's; for day by day people are being born, faster than they die, so that, inevitably, City of the East must grow to house its myriads of inhabitants.

Among other duties, I must strive to familiarize myself with the duties of the Menials; but that will come later. I must know, Sark Darlin tells me, something of the vast quantities of food necessary to sustain the life of City of the East, so that I can plan against the future, when the population will be too great to feed under present arrangements. Another glimpse of the varied responsibility which is to be mine—

“GERD! Gerd!”

Musically the name beats against my eardrums from the phones. I know that marvelous voice. Somewhere among the monopters which hem me in, Lona is calling my name, directing the sound into space, seeking me. She knows that I should be in this vicinity now, and that in a few minutes I should catch her signal.

“Gerd! Gerd!”

I know that she is approaching, from somewhere off to my right, as I can tell by my direction finder. So, upon the membrane which presses tightly against my lips, I speak her name, putting into its pronunciation all of the love I bear her.

“Lona! Beloved!”

“Wait, Gerd! I am coming!”

So I slacken my terrific speed into the East, remaining virtually motionless, as I revolve slowly, seeking among the myriads of monopters for that on whose crest is the sign of the swastika-and-star. I locate it finally, far below, off to the right, shooting up toward me from perhaps the five thousand foot level, the monopter

which causes my heart to leap with excitement. For on its crest, gleaming in the sun, is the sign of the swastika-and-star. I raise my arms and touch my fingers above my head, holding the pose until Lona has picked me out—a pre-arranged signal between us. For, being below me, she can not see my own insignia, unless I stand on my head, which is unpleasant if one must hold the position for any length of time. She waves her hand to indicate that she has seen my signal, and in a moment her monopter is beside mine, and, hand in hand, we continue the dash into the East, toward the shoreline which is now visible, with the vast blue canvas beyond, a canvas extended to north and south to be lost in the mists of distance, paralleled by the Great Rampart as far as the eye can see, even when aided by the magnifying qualities of the eyelenses that glide into place when I will it.

“Gerd!” it is almost a whisper, scarcely breathing through the phones.

My heart fills, unaccountably, with a feeling of dread. Lona is alarmed. There is no mistaking that fact. She has witnessed something dreadful while awaiting my arrival. But I wait for her to tell me.

“Gerd,” and I know she is striving for control to tell her story, “I thought you would never come, dear. You are on time, sweetheart—I am not censuring you. But I have been in agony because there was no one to whom I dared entrust this news of mine. I could have sent the message to Father Sark; but there was a chance that it might be picked up by some enemy and my purpose defeated. That's why I am now talking to you in our own private code. For all I know, though it may be a silly woman's fears, the monopters all about us may encase the persons of enemies or traitors.”

She paused, and my heart leaped again because of her absolute trust in me; because she believed that I, Gerd Sota, would know the proper thing to do. But I knew that, had I not arrived as arranged, Lona herself would undoubtedly have done whatever was necessary, and she would have made no error in judgment. I waited, wondering, in dread, for her to continue.

But she said no more. She merely gripped my hand, and I fancied, though it was more mental suggestion than speech, that the phones carried to my ears the single whispered word: "Speed!"

For side by side, our hands clasped tightly, we were rushing eastward with a speed such as I never before had flown. The other monopters in this air lane seemed to go back from us as we passed, as though they had been standing still; yet I knew that they traveled at a speed in excess of two hundred miles an hour. It was like traveling through a veritable fog of monopters, held in aerial suspension. But the swastika-and-star on Lona's crest assured us of a clear right of way, so that there was no danger of collision, even had I not released the outside buzzer which cast a radio warning forth into the air, so that monopters in our path would draw aside.

Speed, speed, speed! The air through which we fled met us like a wall. Right below us now was the edge of the Great Rampart, its white immensity bathed in flying spume at its ponderous base, as the waves, mountain-high because of a gathering storm, threshed out their futile strength against that stony inspiration of the first of the Darlins. But we did not pause. Lona gripped my hand, so that I turned to look into her eyes. It is difficult to see eyes through the intervening lenses of

two monopters, but I could see Lona's as though their very intensity of gaze commanded. They were large and frightened, and as soon as she knew I had seen, she raised her free arm and pointed out to sea.

Then I noticed an odd phenomenon. The beating of the waves against the Great Rampart was only a local disturbance, covering a distance of perhaps five miles to right and left of where we were—and ten miles out to sea the surface of the Atlantic was as smooth as a mill-pond! It was unbelievable. As though some monster of the deep faced this particular portion of the Great Rampart and lashed a mighty tail in fury, causing the waters to crash against the immovable stone, breaking high along the face of the Great Rampart, bathing it in flying, angry spume. What had caused this vast disturbance? What mighty upheaval in the depths of Mother Atlantic was thus arousing her ancient displeasure? And, catching a glimpse again of Lona's face, I saw that it was white and set—and a little of her abject fear communicated itself to me through our clasped hands.

"What is it, Lona? For God's sake tell me!"

"Wait!"

I knew then that she intended showing me, and dread was at my throat again. I knew that I was destined to witness some monstrous thing. Yet why should I be afraid? Lona, undoubtedly, had already seen; yet she was going back—with me! Some of her invincible courage imparted itself to me with the thought, so that I resolved, come what might, to live up to her faith—and to dispel the haunting doubt of Sark Darlin, which I had detected in his voice as he had wished me Godspeed at the beginning of my flight from the Executive Building.

Now we were hurtling straight out to sea while, looking backward with a swift turn of my head, I could see that the waves still broke as high as ever against the Great Rampart. But I could not see into the depths, here. It was as though all the ocean were a-boil, lashing the surface to a white foam, so that only the surface was visible. What monstrous thing wallowed just below us, invisible below the mantle of white which made of this section of the coast a boiling cauldron?

Lona again grasped my hand tightly. Our speed slackened, as though her will had dominated mine, so that I slackened my own monop-ter instinctively.

"Look down, Gerd!" she said. "Below the surface! Study the depths as soon as we are far enough out to be beyond the milky whiteness of the boiling water. Move slowly, or we may pass it!"

What did she mean? I was soon to know, for gradually the whiteness of the puzzling boiling faded, so that, here and there, I caught glimpses of the blue of the depths, into which, at intervals, I could penetrate with my eyes. I pressed my free hand to a button outside my headpiece, and powerful lenses dropped into place before my eyes. I had only aped Lona in this, for I had seen her own eyes vanish behind opacity as she did the same thing. We were both virtually motionless in the air now, except that we dropped gradually downward, leaning forward both, so that our view beneath would be unobstructed.

I almost leaped free of my monop-ter when I saw the thing! It was monstrous.

A submarine such as the wildest nightmare might not have conceived! Even at the depth at which it must have been lying, for we were several miles from shore, the re-

flection of the sun's rays from the elliptical body of the thing was blinding. It must have been all of a mile in length, and it rested on the bottom, broadside to the shore and the Great Rampart, a silvery mass of what looked to be a mountain of gleaming steel! A metal monster beyond all imagining. There was no propeller that I could see, though, taking its vast size into consideration, it was now not inconceivable that the thing might be provided with a myriad of metal legs, on which it had walked the ocean's floor, following the coastline from—where? It was not hard to guess, when one took into consideration the desperate necessity of the races of color to secure the vast country in which was City of the East.

The more I thought of it the more I was sure that the metal thing was possessed of legs; that it was a senseless amphibian. It had probably followed the coast into the south from some place on the North Pacific, thence by land across the neck connecting the two great Americas. Reason tottered as I strove to fancy this great thing walking across the Isthmus, trampling whole mountains under foot, wiping out cities and towns which stood in the way. But what was it doing here? Its activities were making a boiling cauldron of this portion of the ocean; but how?

In the instant of asking the question I knew the answer. For by scores and hundreds there darted from the massive side of the thing, under water, egg-shaped things not unlike our own monopters. Tiny submarines, these, each with a man inside it! That was the answer. There were thousands of them, so that, darting into the deep water, visible until they had entered the boiling area to be lost from view, they looked like a vast school of speedy fish, darting headlong toward that section of the Great Rampart

upon which the waves were breaking their crests into wisps of flying spume. That boiling had been induced for the express purpose of masking from the view of our aerial scouts whatever the enemy was doing.

Even as one school of the tiny submarines darted into the whiteness, another emerged from it, dashing against the side of the metal monster to be taken in and absorbed. Like a great fish spawning, then receiving her young into her body again. Even as I thought this, my brain working furiously to find a solution, school after school of them broke from the whiteness and were lost in the side of the monster.

Inside my left glove, which is part of the monopter, my fingers worked like mad upon the tiny instrument with which, in the air, I keep in contact with Sark Darlin. I gave him the section of the rampart where the mysterious activity was going on, and a brief description of the monster in the slime below, of the tiny submarines which, their work already accomplished perhaps, were returning to the mother sub with the speed of game fish.

Faintly to my ears came the answer of Sark Darlin.

"I have your message. I am acting. Watch the Big Submarine!"

By the renewed pressure on my hand I knew that Lona, too, had caught her father's message. Motionless there, both leaning forward, watching the metal monster feverishly, we were totally unprepared for what followed. For behind us, with a roar that made the very air about us a seething maelstrom, a five-mile section of the Great Rampart, carrying with it the hundred and fifty story buildings of early days, leaped skyward and crashed back again, a smoking, powdery ruin—into which, on the instant, poured the mighty Atlantic to fill the breach!

Simultaneously the surface of the seething ocean became a welter of dismembered, horribly mangled corpses. But all that I could see were nude. Sark Darlin, then, had acted in time, when he had had but seconds in which to do so. Only the unimportant Menials had suffered from the catastrophe.

A monster wave, breaking against the broken wall beyond the breach, rolled back to sea—a veritable mountain of water. I saw it crash against the metal monster in the depths. Swiftly she heeled over—and I knew my first guess had been correct. Metal legs waved in sight for a few moments as the thing strove to right itself. Then they disappeared, in all their monstrous bigness and tentacle-like waving, as the submarine came back, upright and, with the same motion, swerved to the right, to disappear like some unbelievable deep-sea fish, into the darkness of the Atlantic!

3

A KIND providence must have been with us at that moment; for we faced each other and I took her hands in mine, while our eyes met in questioning and horror. I am sure that this involuntary, instinctive clasp of hands saved the life of Lona. In the instant of the clasp, while those soundless messages passed between us, the aerial maelstrom caused by the explosion and attendant rupture of the Great Rampart was upon us—a shock such as I hope never again to feel.

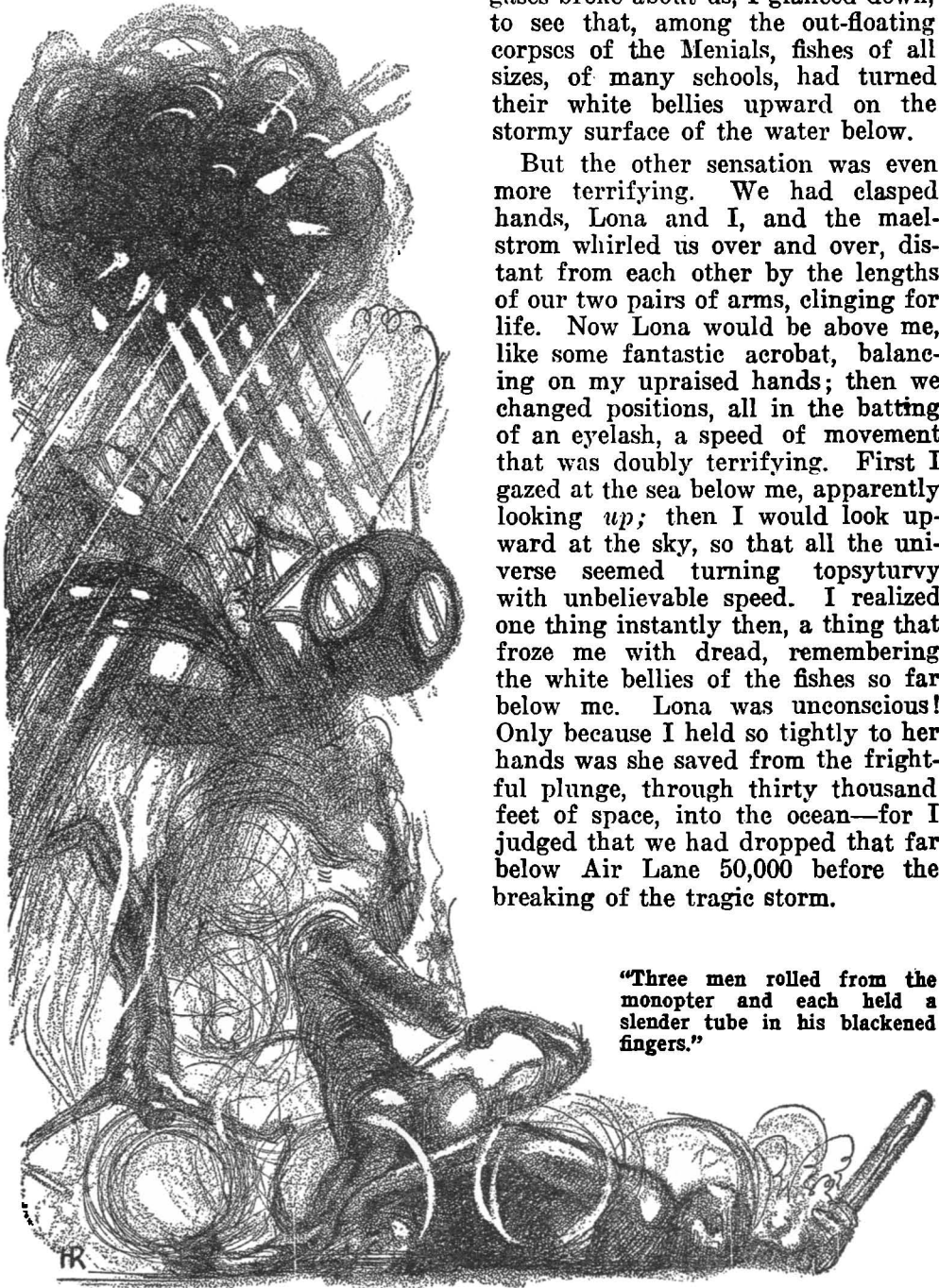
The noise of City of the East is a vast and awesome thing when one hears it without the ears protected; multiply that sound by a thousand and you have some idea of the shock which that explosion caused us, and we almost ten miles off-shore from the breach in the wall. It was like being instantly compressed in a monster vise, with all the fiends

above and below the earth hurling gibes into the teeth of the sufferer, so that palsied hands fly to ears and fill them to save the hearing. One

wonders at the massive strength of that great submarine, that it was not riven in twain at the explosion; for even as the swirl and crush of the gases broke about us, I glanced down, to see that, among the out-floating corpses of the Menials, fishes of all sizes, of many schools, had turned their white bellies upward on the stormy surface of the water below.

But the other sensation was even more terrifying. We had clasped hands, Lona and I, and the maelstrom whirled us over and over, distant from each other by the lengths of our two pairs of arms, clinging for life. Now Lona would be above me, like some fantastic acrobat, balancing on my upraised hands; then we changed positions, all in the batting of an eyelash, a speed of movement that was doubly terrifying. First I gazed at the sea below me, apparently looking *up*; then I would look upward at the sky, so that all the universe seemed turning topsyturvy with unbelievable speed. I realized one thing instantly then, a thing that froze me with dread, remembering the white bellies of the fishes so far below me. Lona was unconscious! Only because I held so tightly to her hands was she saved from the frightful plunge, through thirty thousand feet of space, into the ocean—for I judged that we had dropped that far below Air Lane 50,000 before the breaking of the tragic storm.

"Three men rolled from the monopter and each held a slender tube in his blackened fingers."



Was Lona dead? Could I support her dead weight and transport us back to some safe platform in City of the East? I'd do it, I told myself, or plunge with her to the depths. For if she fell from me I had no desire to live. So I clung to her and prayed.

Slowly, when the swirling of the aerial maelstrom had abated somewhat, so that I found myself once more in a state of equilibrium, Lona hanging before me, her head against my limbs, I faced toward City of the East and drove my monopter toward safety. Was she dead? Could I maintain my grasp upon her hands? Would the mechanism of my monopter support us both? The answer to the last question was capable of a speedy solution. We were making excellent time toward the shore; but we were losing altitude with fearful rapidity—a planing glide that seemed endless.

It seemed hours; but reason told me but a few minutes had passed, before I sank, all but exhausted, on a platform of a building just westward of the breach in the rampart, with the still unconscious Lona clinging to my hands. I sat down weakly and held her in my arms.

All this time my phones had been transmitting a message from Sark Darlin; but I could not use my hands to answer him. He was asking after my safety and Lona's, and for information about the great submarine. Claspng Lona the more tightly with my right hand, for the number on the window back of me told me that we were two hundred stories above the bottom of this particular street-canyon, I managed to send a feeble message of reassurance through the air to Sark Darlin. He must have caught it instantly, for his answer came back, after I had assured him of our return:

“Thank God!”

I whispered the words myself,

reverently, for Lona had stirred in my arms. She was not dead, and I lived again. I unfastened the headpiece of her monopter, so that she might have the fresher air outside; unfastened my own headpiece and placed it close beside me. Lona opened her eyes; her whole body quivered in my arms in a shudder I understood. She was, after all, a woman, and I loved her. She said nothing of our return from above the Atlantic, though she must have known how she had been brought back; but her eyes were eloquent. I had saved her life; more than ever, now, was that life a part of my own. Our lips came together in a kiss which was a delirium of happiness, of which there is all too little in this world of ours.

IT WAS Lona who first recalled the horror we had witnessed.

“Quick, Gerd!” she exclaimed, rising to her feet, wavering so that I held her fast lest she topple from the platform. “Our headpieces immediately! I am all right now. We must get back to Father Sark. He needs us, as all City of the East needs us now!”

I made no reply. None was needed. She had spoken truth. Our headpieces were replaced swiftly and in silence. Still hand in hand we soared aloft from the platform, rising straight upward between the walls of the street-canyon until we had cleared the tallest buildings about us. Then, straight as homing pigeons, we turned our goggled faces toward Executive Building, a vast white needle eastward. Did I fancy it, or had an ominous black cloud suddenly dropped down to hover above the spire of the Building of the Engineers?

I do not know. I do know that as we fled toward Executive Building, through air lanes that now were silent and deserted because of the

catastrophe, a vaster dread than any which had yet been mine was at my throat.

What must be done to combat this monstrous menace that had come to us from the deeps of the ocean? For centuries we had been looking to our Invisible Frontier as protection, and this had been so perfected that nothing had yet been invented which could pass through or over the Wall of the Rays. But we had paid little heed to the ocean. We knew that City of the West, the city of the Aliens, possessed monopters as good as our own. Yet our whole City was surrounded by that Invisible Frontier, save only that side which faced the ocean. We had thought of submarines as obsolete, and our cocksureness was threatening us with disaster. Of course we were not being caught entirely unprepared; for that would have been the height of folly. We had prepared, after a fashion, against attack from the Atlantic by separating City of the East into sections, each of which could be isolated in a second by the man at the keyboard in Sark Darlin's office—so that, were entrance gained to any one section, that section could be shut off from the City at once, and the remainder of the City be as impregnable as before. This had been my reason for sending that message, naming the section, when I had caught my first glimpse of the great submarine. Sark's instant warning had cleared that section of the people who mattered. In fancy I could see them quitting those buildings in their monopters like swift birds that are flushed by the hunter. Some, of course, had been caught; but there had been few, for I had been able to distinguish below us only the nude bodies of the Menials.

Of this I was thinking as we hurtled toward the Executive Building, wondering subconsciously at the black cloud which hid the glistening

spire in which was the office of Sark Darlin—wondering at its meaning, and why a vague intuition told me that all was not well.

Nearer and nearer we flew, yet the spire did not appear from the black cloud. That meant we should have to land on some lower platform until the lifting of the cloud. Delay, delay, delay! But we dropped down into the canyon swiftly, along the edge of that ominous cloud, and landed upon the first platform of the Executive Building we could see. And made a ghastly discovery!

There was no spire of the Executive Building! This platform upon which we stood was the highest platform remaining of the needlelike shaft which was the Building of the Engineers! We stood on a platform on the four hundred and ninety-eighth story; there should have been two stories above us. Yet half of story 498, all of story 499, and the glistening white spire which had been the pride of Sark Darlin were gone! All the mass of the building above where we stood had been sheared off as though a great knife had passed cleanly through the building! No debris at all and, as far as we could see, none in the canyon below. The upper portion of Executive Building had vanished! From where we stood we could look into what remained of story 498, where the office appurtenances stood in the open as their fleeing users had left them, no cover above them to protect them from the elements, shadowed by the ominous cloud which, from a distance, I had thought obscured the crest of the Executive Building.

Lona and I still clasped hands. Now her hand gripped mine more tightly, and I returned the pressure. No words were needed. We both knew that Sark Darlin had vanished as mysteriously as his office had vanished, together with all of those high officials who had occupied the

offices that should have remained above where we stood. In one blow, mysteriously delivered, the enemy had shorn City of the East of leadership. Then the realization following on this thought staggered me: *I* was the leader now, with Lona my equal in power! In an instant that responsibility which I had not expected to assume for years to come had settled upon my shoulders—and I must get busy at once.

That ominous cloud was settling. Lona suddenly stepped to the edge of the platform and dropped off into space, pulling me with her. As we fell, plummeting downward, her words whispered into my ears.

“That cloud, Gerd! Whatever took Daddy and the crest of Executive Building is inside that cloud! In another instant City of the East would have been leaderless indeed! We must prepare!”

“**WE** MUST prepare!” Yet what were we to do? For with the obliterating of Sark Darlin’s office had been obliterated that vast mechanism of his by which he had been in communication with all the City. There was now no way to send forth a warning. But Lona knew! Her father had confided in her, more than he had seen fit to confide in me before I had in fact become his son-in-law. Her hand held mine as we continued dropping into the canyon. We struck the bottom as lightly as feathers and, Lona leading, both of us running awkwardly because of the impediment of our monopters, approached a tunnel-like opening in the bottom floor of the Executive Building. This was the closest I had been in all my life to ground level. And we still were going down.

Inside the tunnel we ran, into darkness. We dropped into ebon space and our monopters were automatically in use again. Then we were in the cavernlike immensities of

the level of the Menials, and I had set foot on the soil of Earth for the first time in all my days, the first of all my family so to do for generations! But there was no time to think of this now, for Lona was running again, leading me swiftly with her, among the nude people who were the Menials, bowing and bending, toiling and steaming in perspiration, as they labored with the soil to make it bring forth fruit for food. I had no opportunity then to observe what they did, for Lona was leading me to one of those slender piles about which I had been told—one of those piles which support the Great Rampart, which is the floor of City of the East. She opened a door set flush with the surface of the slender piling, and we were in the piling’s heart.

“See!” cried Lona. “Sark Darlin, dead though he may be now, was still too far-sighted to be caught as they thought to catch him! Here, in miniature, is a keyboard of communication which is an exact duplicate of that in Father Sark’s office—a duplicate whose secret Daddy gave me only yesterday. Gerd Sota, you are now the chief administrator of City of the East! Give your orders!”

I am thankful, looking back upon that moment, that I acted without hesitation. I doffed my headpiece and took my stand before the myriad-faced board of communication—ticked my frenzied message forth into space. It was a message to the nearest station of the Invisible Frontier, and it was a command that a single one of the Invisible Rays be directed into the heart of the black cloud which hovered over Executive Building. When I had finished the message I turned to Lona, feeling a certain pride in my own ability; but Lona was nowhere to be seen! Frightened, I stepped to the door and called her name. But no one answered. The Menials, some of them,

looked dully up from their tasks for a moment; but a sharply snarled oath from me caused their eyes to fall. A member of the upper levels does not allow the Menials to gaze upon his face—it is the law.

Then, from directly above, Lona settled to the earth beside me.

“I went up to Rampart Level,” she told me breathlessly, “and I was right about the cloud! I reached the bottom of street-canyon just as the ray was turned upon it. I couldn’t see the ray, of course; but I could see the effect, for the cloud vanished in a breath, and tongues of fire filled the air where it had been! Out of the fire fell a single monopter, like no monopter in City of the East, but larger than any three of them, and marked in motley colors, like the costume of an ancient clown! It crashed to the ground quite near where I stood, and three men, mere blackened cinders, so that I could not tell the color of their faces, rolled from it! I ran and looked at them—each one held in his blackened fingers a slender tube. These three tubes, whatever powerful agency they may have contained, were, I am sure, the inventions which wrought such havoc with Executive Building!”

“But, Lona!” I objected. “How could the monopter have got through Invisible Frontier?”

“It didn’t come through the Frontier!” she retorted. “I am sure it came from the other way, else one of our people at the Frontier is a traitor, which I’ll never believe! That submarine brought it, just as it brought those tiny submarines which caused the breach in the Great Rampart. The big submarine must have emerged far out to sea to discharge the monopter, and the monopter, hiding itself in a cloud of its own making, floated over the city. Some way, which we may never learn, its occupants kept in contact with a common leader inside the submarine,

so that the leader was informed of the proper moment to make his attack. Ugh! Imagine it, Gerd Sota! An evil monopter, traveling in its own cloud, high above even Air Lane 50,000, emitting its self-concealing blackness like a giant squid that has left the water suddenly and grown wings! Then, at the proper moment, the attack. God! Beloved! Daddy Sark!”

It had been too much for Lona Darlin. Even as I once more removed her headpiece she swooned in my arms, and I bore her inside the room of the board of communication. With the two monopters, hers and mine, whose material is soft as eider-down, I prepared her a pallet on the floor. I laid her down, covering her with cloths which I found at hand. Then, knowing that a good rest would be the best thing in the world for her, and that she would waken when nature willed it, burdened only by the natural sorrow caused by the loss of her beloved father—I seated myself before the board of communication and began to send forth my messages.

To Commander of the Air:

Clear the air lanes of all monopters save those which are of the patrol service. Under your personal supervision the skies above the City will be patrolled until orders for your relief are sent you. Do not relinquish vigilance day or night. Am sending orders to the electricians to keep searchlights playing into the skies during the hours of darkness. SOTA.

To Master of Electricians:

Have men posted, in reliefs of one hour, at each aerial searchlight throughout the City. Keep the skies as light as day throughout the night. Report any bodies in the air, clouds or otherwise, which are not the monopters of the aerial patrols. SOTA.

To Department Heads of Invisible Frontier:

Be ready at any moment to raise Invisible Wall along your section of the Frontier. Have extra men posted at each tube, with instructions to turn the rays upon any object in the sky, cloud or

monopter, indicated in orders from me giving location and direction-reading.

SOTA.

To Chief of Interior Administration:

Satisfy yourself that there are no traitors in the corps which has charge of the Invisible Frontier. Report results.

SOTA.

This last I sent in the code always used in communication with City of the East's secret service, a code which Sark Darlin had taught me. I was proud of the fact that I was able to send, in the code, from memory.

These orders sent forth, I connected the phones of my monopter with the receiver of the board of communication and, satisfied that any message would waken me instantly, flung myself down with my head against the beloved feet of Lona, ears attuned to the tympanum of the phones, and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

4

IT WAS Lona who wakened me. She had slipped into her monopter again and had mine straightened for use. There was utter silence inside the piling, not even the monotonous humming of the machinery used by the Menials coming through to us. An ominous silence. Yet no message had come over the wires. If anything had happened outside, in City of the East, no warning had reached us. Yet I knew upon waking that something was wrong. So did Lona, for she was as pale as chalk as she faced me in the pale light of the dimmed incandescents which lighted the room inside the piling.

"Look, Gerd!" she ejaculated, pointing at the board of communication.

Then I realized why no alarm had reached me, and cursed myself deeply for having jeopardized City of the East for the sake of a bit of sleep. But the sleeping had saved my life. For I had turned in my sleep and,

because my phones were fastened tightly in place, my turning had pulled the connection of the phones with the board of communication. It had saved my life, I repeat, for the board of communication was nothing but a twisted mass of metal. The myriads of wires were fused together in a single ugly mass, and the wood of the board was as black as coal. The board of communication was useless—and I had been asleep. What had happened? None of the officials knew the location of this second board of communication, and they might have been trying for hours to arouse me for the purpose of asking for orders. Anything might have happened because of my negligence.

There was no time to waste. With Lona's hand in mine, since I needed her strength and woman's courage, I stepped out of the room. Lona led the way to the opening in the Great Rampart through which we must rise to first story level. But as we went another and more terrible revelation burst upon me.

Something ghastly had befallen the Menials!

I could only guess how many there were of them; but as far as the eye could reach in all directions, massed against the slender pilings, grouped here and there in all sorts of contorted positions, not a nude figure moved. Sightless eyes gazed straight at the ceiling, glassily staring, while faces were contorted into masks of horror unimaginable. One man, a brown one, had clasped his hands at his own throat, and the grip still held in death, so powerful that the tongue, swollen and discolored, protruded from between teeth which glistened like snarling fangs. Another man lay doubled in such a way that his face was almost against his own nude loins, and the veins on his neck stood out like cords. Dead Menials, by scores and hundreds, slain swiftly before they could at-

tempt escape, stricken down in the positions in which the unknown agent of death had found them.

What had slain the Menials, and why had they been slain?

The reason was obvious—the Menials, who did the work of City of the East, had been slain in order that not a wheel of commerce should turn throughout all the city—and the agency which had destroyed them had been created for the very purpose it had served—and the Menials had perished.

But how?

It came in a flash, then. The Menials were nude, and only the nude had perished. Horror-stricken, I bent and examined one of the laborers.

Weird, unknown rays! That was the answer—rays which acted only upon nude flesh! For just below the breast-bone of each contorted corpse, indelibly etched in the flesh, was a brownish circle perhaps two inches in diameter—much like the light circle a small flashlight makes upon an opaque object when held close to that object. The flesh inside the circle was burned to a crisp. Turning one corpse over I found a similar circle on the back, bisected by the spinal column! The ray had pierced the nude body!

I shuddered with horror. Those little submarines! The breach in the Rampart, and men, countless men, from City of the West passing among the Menials with those gruesome little flashlights in their hands.

Lona and I had escaped because they had not found us! Now I understood the silence, and why the machinery of the Menials was motionless. That machinery is, or was, operated by electricity, and such of it as I could see as we hurried through the contorted forms in the direction of the opening upon First Floor Level, had suffered the fate of the board of communication. Twisted

metal, wood black as cinders, useless junk. In all the level of the Menials was a chaos of twisted wires, fused and odorous, twisted and contorted human bodies, a vast mausoleum which made me understand something of the ruthless power of the agency we were combating, and something of the horror we might yet expect. What would we find in the upper levels? Had, while we slept, the same mysterious agency which had slain the Menials made a holocaust of City of the East? It was unthinkable.

But there was no time to lose. It takes time to tell, but scarce two minutes could have elapsed after my wakening before Lona and I once more stood at the first story level.

CITY of the East was as light as day and the catastrophe which had fallen upon the Menials had thrown all City of the East into turmoil! Great searchlights played across the heavens, their diverging rays crossing and recrossing, their varied colors creating a kaleidoscope more brightly tinted than the greatest rainbow. Imagine the wonder of it! A City of a million spires and turrets, of a million buildings whose crests were in the clouds; buildings which formed a City of the East whose boundaries were the Mississippi on the west, the Atlantic on the east, and the regions of cold and heat to the north and south; a City divided into sections, each of which comprized no more than two square city blocks, each of which was part of a still larger section which was, roughly, five miles square—and each of the lesser sections equipped with powerful searchlights. Uncountable searchlights, of a myriad of colored beams, each playing across its allotted portion of the midnight sky.

City of the East, vast and immeasurable in the human mind, was the abode of terror unutterable, for

attack had been delivered from an unexpected quarter and countless lives had been lost. I looked upward at the flight after flight of the aerial patrols, close-mustered specks in the sky at Air Lane 50,000, and the lights from the searchlights gilded their monopters eerily, so that they seemed like monster moths, with sunlight glinting on their wings. Swift darting moths, patrolling all the sky.

Lona and I turned westward, speeding at the ultimate limit of our monopters for the Invisible Frontier. This could easily be seen now, for where the lights from the darting searchlight-wedges encountered the Invisible Frontier the beams broke short off, so that the Wall, invisible as I knew it to be, was indicated by a night-black mass, through which even the beams of the searchlights could not penetrate. Even light disintegrated and refused to penetrate the Wall of the Rays.

Though we looked as far as we could in both directions, the black wall seemed endless, and we flew for several miles parallel to it to satisfy ourselves that there was no breach. An eery experience, if you will, for we could not see the apparatus which directed the rays. Just an ebon wall against the West, as though it had been the edge of the absolute darkness of outer space—and silence. Satisfied that there was no breach along the Invisible Frontier, Lona and I turned back toward the Atlantic and, since Air Lane 40,000 was deserted, we flew with the speed of the hurricane.

From this height we could see little of City of the East, so far below us, for our eyes were blinded by the glare of the myriad of lights which blazoned the heavens through which we sped. Through yellow light now; now through blue; now through pale green, we fled into the East. I was now in communication with the commander of the air. Two black clouds,

he told me, had been dispersed at his orders when he had been unable to communicate with us; two black clouds which had apparently hung motionless at least ten thousand feet above Air Lane 50,000. He had ordered the nearest of the ray stations of the Invisible Frontier to disperse these clouds, which had been done instantly—and out of each had fallen a single huge monopter (huge, that is, in comparison with our own monopters), to plummet downward into the heart of City of the East.

I had an idea whence the clouds came.

“Am heading out over the Atlantic,” I wirelessly the commander. “Keep your wave-length adjusted for contact. Lona Darlin is with me. Obey orders sent by either of us. Keep a sharp lookout on the Invisible Frontier. If the searchlights penetrate it at any point let me know at once.”

Then I severed connections and Lona and I hurtled onward into the East.

FOR the second time in twenty-four hours we could see, dimly it is true, and then only with the aid of powerful night glasses, the outline of the Great Rampart. We could not see it until we had left the shoreline several miles behind, because of the searchlights; but when it did become visible I began to get some idea of the terrible thing that we faced. Before, mountainous waves of water had crashed against the Great Rampart along a distance of little more than five miles, a local storm artificially induced, in some way, by the big submarine. Now a storm so vast in comparison as to dwarf that other into insignificance crashed against the Great Rampart. The roar was so vast that its very volume caused Lona and me, holding hands to keep from being separated, to be tossed to and fro like chips in a mill-race. No

threat of destruction to a mere five miles of Rampart this time, for the storm was visible to right and left as far as we could see.

It might have extended along the whole length of the Great Rampart, as I believed, and later verified, that it did. But outward from the coast-line a mere ten miles the ocean was as untroubled as a pond—and for an excellent reason!

Side by side, each in contact with its neighbor to right and left, submarines, only less vast than the first we had seen, pointed their steel noses at the Great Rampart! No beams as from searchlights came from their decks, and I knew that Lona and I had not been seen—yet. This was a terrible danger into which I was taking her. Had I tried to send her back she would not have understood my reason for so doing; besides which I wished her with me, even though both of us lost our lives.

Submarines afloat, abreast, their noses pointed at the Great Rampart. An attack was imminent; but how would it be delivered? It would be useless to charge the Great Rampart, even with metal monsters as vast as these. What, then?

I was soon to know. As before we had seen the tiny submarines dart back from the artificially created maelstrom before the Great Rampart, we saw them drop back again; but multiplied in numbers by the number of the big submarines which had lined up offshore to begin the offensive.

Here is where I made the mistake which was to prove the ruin of City of the East, for I sent a message to the commander of the air to clear the City immediately of all inhabitants, ordering them to the unmapped ways above Air Lane 50,000. I knew the monopters could do it, under pressure, though it would be a terrible strain on the nervous systems of the flyers, and many must, of necessity,

fall by the wayside. Sacrifice the weak that the strong might live—it seemed sensible reasoning to me, in view of its stark necessity.

Looking back, after receiving the acknowledgment of the commander of the air, I saw the monopters rising from City of the East in veritable clouds. Not until the space below Air Lane 50,000 had become empty of aught save the beams of the mighty searchlights, whose operators were left behind at their posts—and I knew that the inhabitants who were able had been herded into the spaces above Air Lane 50,000, did I realize how neatly I had been tricked. The commander, then, of this barrier of big submarines had known all the time that Lona and I were above them; but had been subtle in his reasoning beyond imagining. It proved he had known of our presence that other time, too, when the one big submarine had wrought such havoc with the Great Rampart. From my actions then he had reasoned out my own probable line of reasoning, and I had done exactly what he had figured that I would do.

For no explosion occurred; no new breach showed in the Great Rampart. The commander of the invaders had worked a ruse the like of which had never before been encountered in the annals of modern warfare—and I had fallen into the trap. How well I knew it when the next episode occurred!

From the giant submarine directly below where Lona and I hung in the air, watching, shot a great funnel of blinding light. A funnel, or inverted cone, with its apex at the point of departure, broadening as it lifted to our place in the sky, so that the light was all about us. But it was different from the lights which the City of the East used, for we could see through the sides of the cone, around which we circled like moths in a mighty lamp chimney, unable to get through

because of *something* inherent in the strange light which dashed us back when we would have gone through, dashed us back as effectually as a stone wall would have done, holding us prisoners inside the gleaming cone.

But we could see—great God, we could see! And in the hour or so before the end I realized to the full the catastrophe my lack of reasoning, my lack of experience with the minds of men, had brought upon City of the East! I understand now the reason of that hint I had caught in the voice of Sark Darlin when he had told me I must become worthy to be the leader in affairs of City of the East. I had failed and, moving about the sides of the cone, seeking a way out, I suffered such torments as no man before me has ever suffered and, I hope, as no man may ever suffer in the future—for I could see!

AS THOUGH at a signal the under-sea hatches of the countless submarines opened and were flung back and, as the bees must have come forth when Pandora opened the box, came forth in swarms and myriads the monopters of the invaders! Now I realized, too, where even Sark Darlin had been shortsighted. He had never known of these submarines of the people of the West, feeling, no doubt, that the Invisible Frontier made it unnecessary for him to send spies and secret agents into the country of the Aliens. He had taken it for granted that City of the East was far in advance of the Aliens in point of inventions and the paraphernalia of warfare—a great mistake. We had not needed to make war, and were caught unprepared; the Aliens had been preparing for war for generations, building their monopters and submarines on the west coast, so far away that not even a whisper of warning had reached us. Then, when everything was ready for the greatest offensive in history, the

long voyage down the coast in the fleet after fleet of metal amphibians, the unbelievable *walk* across the narrow neck of the Isthmus, the plunge into the Atlantic, and the lining up of the monsters before the Great Rampart of City of the East.

But my own mistake had been far greater. Yet, after all, what could I have done? I am sure they would have beaten us in any case, and our people would have worked out their lives in slavery instead of meeting the merciful death which was their portion because of my mistake. Yet I feel that I shall go into eternity with oceans and oceans of blood upon my soul. I *might* have done something.

But it was too late now. I knew it when, watching from the cone, desiring above all things to lose the power to watch because of the frightfulness, I saw those myriads of monopters swarm from the hatches of the metal monsters and advance upon City of the East by thousands. But stay! There was still the Invisible Frontier. I could communicate with the department heads of the Invisible Frontier and tell them to turn their rays across the top of the City. For, foreseeing the time when this very move might become necessary, Sark Darlin had caused ray reflectors to be erected on certain lines above the City so that the rays might be bent to follow the curvature of the earth, leaping the gaps between the lines of reflectors with the mathematical nicety which only a genius like Sark could have managed. It would be better to ruin the buildings, for they could be built up again, than for those huge monopters to swarm up in a surprize attack against our people, all of them now in the highest air lane and above. If I hurried I could have an invisible barrier built up between our people and the up-

(Continued on page 708)

The Invading Horde

(Continued from page 608)

rushing hordes of the enemy monopters.

But I reckoned without the deep wisdom of the unknown enemy commander who led the mighty offensive. For I found that even as Lona and I could not get out of this great cone of light, neither could our aerial messages! We were as separated from the City of the East as if we had been in the very bowels of the earth. The corps in charge of the Invisible Frontier would never get our message, and before they could see what was happening it would be too late—and thus it turned out.

Even as the hordes, carrying a wall of dark cloud ahead of them, climbed into the skies, high above the ceiling of our monopters, I thought of another way. Lona and I were both perfect physical specimens. Perhaps we could endure the terrific coldness of the atmosphere above the ordinary ceiling of our monopters—and win our way to freedom by flying out at the *top* of the cone of light.

I shouted to Lona, who nodded wearily. We lifted straight upward with all the speed we could get from our monopters, nor did we even slacken pace until we had attained a height twenty thousand feet greater than the accepted "ceiling" of our monopters; but the cone of light stretched upward away from us still, seeming to reach the very stars—and at an elevation of eighty thousand feet there still seemed no way of winning free, and we could climb no higher. The air would not sustain the weight of our monopters, and from this grand and awful height we were compelled to remain and watch the slaughter of our people.

The clouds which went with the

(Continued on page 710)

(Continued from page 708)

enemy monopters fell away from their myriad numbers when they had reached the airways above City of the East, and the monopters, in plain sight now, lifted skyward toward our hordes of defenseless people in and above Air Lane 50,000—and before the corps in charge of the Invisible Frontier could have seen what was happening, the enemy monopters were among our monopters, so that the rays from the Invisible Frontier would now have meant at the same time the wholesale slaughter of our own people. There was a chance that our people might win the fight in the air, I thought, and knew that the department heads of the Invisible Frontier must have thought likewise.

But it was hopeless. The enemy fell by thousands, yes; but where one enemy fell, fell a hundred of our people, free of their monopters, which had been burned away from around them by the mysterious rays used by the enemy, the occupants themselves burned to cinders even before they fell. Downward-drifting moths, their wings singed, their bodies lifeless and shapeless, soulless and lost! Black myriads, like feathers drifting earthward from a horizon-to-horizon flock of crows which is set upon by millions upon millions of fighting sparrows. The black clouds under which the enemy had launched its attack settled about the spires of the skyscrapers—and those spires vanished in a breath, disintegrated into invisible powder before our eyes, while our searchlights faded and died. Their operators, I knew instinctively, had died at their posts of duty, one by one.

From our place of imprisonment inside that cone, shut off from all our precious world, we witnessed the colossal destruction of the inhabitants of City of the East.

We watched until the last inhab-

itants of City of the East fell into the City to vanish in a breath as their falling cinder-bodies encountered the black clouds which hung about the skyscrapers. Then the enemy marshaled forces for the return to the submarines.

DARKNESS finally settled over all that remained of City of the East. Of all that vast myriad of white men and women, only Lona and I remained. But still the cone held us; and we were being drawn downward!

Looking up we knew the reason, for the cone was narrowing above us to become an ellipse, narrowing and retracting, drawing us in and down toward that pin-point of light whence came the light of the cone.

Swifter and swifter we dropped downward, forced by the narrowing, constricting cone, until we stood at last on the deck of that big submarine we had first seen.

Here men of color awaited us. They caught and removed us from our monopters, carried us into the heart of the metal monster, to stand before the grim commander of the invading Aliens—a great lump of a yellow man whose brow, smooth as an egg, was so ponderous as to be terrible, housing, plainly evident, such a brain as neither Lona nor I had ever before encountered.

“I am sorry,” he said in our language; “but it was all inevitable! The fortunes of war, my friends, and you have lost! As you are the last representatives of your race, I wish to express to you the high respect in which I have held you, and my sorrow that there was no half-way ground upon which we could all meet. It was either you or we—and we have triumphed. As prisoners of war you are to be executed; but as a brave man and woman, who, I see, love each other, I leave you to choose the manner of your own departure

from the world. You have all the time you desire in which to make your decision."

So, locked together in a room far below the deck of the big submarine, together for our last hours on earth as we shall be together in death, we have written, in collaboration, this story of City of the East. The commander of the Aliens has promised that it shall be published to the world, so that all living men, whatever their color, shall know of the wonder, the glory, the awesome grandeur of what was once the home of the white race—wonderful City of the East!

So it is finished, and tomorrow we die, Lona and I; but our death shall be glorious because of the promise of the commander of the Aliens. From the deck of the big submarine, which will emerge as part of the ritual of our passing, we will hurl ourselves heavenward in our monopters, which were not destroyed at our capture, to the very "ceiling".

There, when we have gone as high as we can, we will face each other. My right arm will support Lona while, with my left, I remove the headpiece of her monopter; with a flirt of her hand she will do the same for me. Then we shall begin that long, plummeting descent toward the Atlantic, which will be, if our strength holds in the ascent, eighty thousand feet below us.

Lieutenant Burks, author of the above story, has written for you an eery tale of the sea, called "Bells of Oceana"—a goose-flesh story of shuddery horror. It will appear in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES.