

MAY

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

20¢

THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

PRISONER OF TIME

A NOVEL OF TOMORROW'S DESTINY

by POLTON CROSS

THE MISSING DAY

by HENRY
HASSE

OUTSTANDING STORIES BY

ARTHUR
MACOM

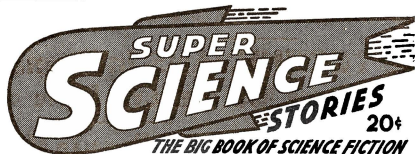
OTTO
BINDER

AND
MANY
OTHERS





Virgil Finlay



**SUPER
SCIENCE
STORIES** 20¢
THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 3

MAY, 1942

NO. 4

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Marked for death by the race she had created was the girl of eternal youth—the alluring, ephemeral daughter of time, who had lived five hundred years.

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"Go down to the sea, my people—or ye perish to the last man!"

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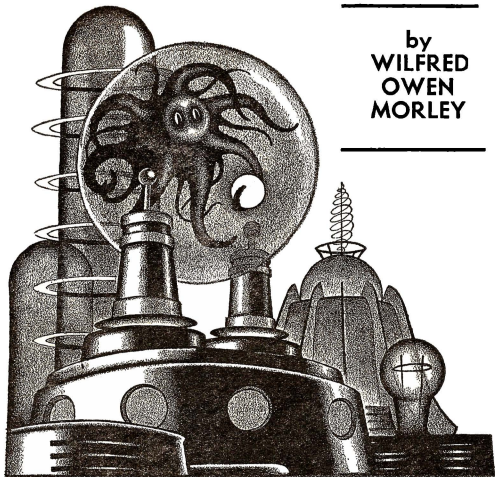
The official voice of science fiction fan clubs

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COVER BY VIRGIL FINLAY

Illustrating a scene from "The Lemmings" by Wilfred Owen Morley

by
**WILFRED
OWEN
MORLEY**



IN THE hushed glow of the street lamps I could make out only that she was tall and somewhat ethereal. She moved like one in a trance, looking neither to the right nor left, and I thought of hypnotism and a vampire movie I'd seen a few nights before. But it wasn't the thought of Draculas lurking in some dark alley that made me follow her, nothing as romantic as that. Whoever she was, she'd likely be slammed down by a truck or bus if she didn't stop when she came to corners.

I'd never had any experience at tailing, but it was a cinch to keep tabs on her. She wore a light topcoat at a time when most people were draped in dark, heavy clothes, particularly around this

section where the wind from the waterfront was no zephyr.

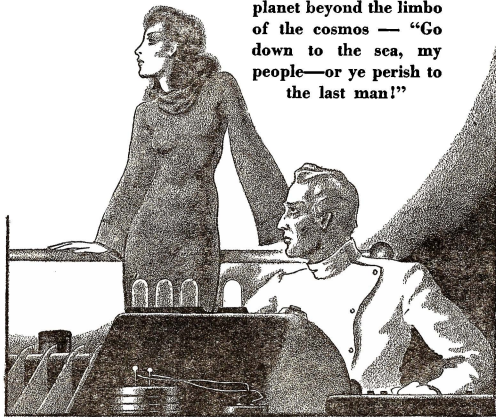
Then I saw that, as I had suspected, she wasn't going to stop at the Bowen Street intersection. I sprinted forward and pulled up alongside, then nabbed her.

But I might as well have been a statue for all the attention she paid me. Just then the corner copper tooted his all-clear whistle, and I let go.

I let her pull away and trotted along at a healthful distance behind, always ready to make a grand dive if the necessity arose. You see, I'd lamped an eyeful of her when I held her back at the corner, and she was pretty slick. Sort of snooty in a way, but the kind of snootiness that hits me hard. She looked as

THE LEMMINGS

**Alien, foreboding, came
that message from a
planet beyond the limbo
of the cosmos — “Go
down to the sea, my
people—or ye perish to
the last man!”**



though she could talk pure algebra and psychoanalyze you between paragraphs.

Besides there was the mystery of it. What was she doing down here by the waterfront? Why the sleepwalking act?

There are no more intersections from Bowen Street down to the water. Bay Street is a wide alley running from one

end of town to the other, and there's a nice solid railing all along to keep people from contaminating the fish. Up north, it becomes a neat, ritzy drive; farther south it's full of commercial docks. At this point, it was betwixt and between class and commerce. There was a line of more or less well-kept piers here.

She kept going straight ahead until she came to the railing. Then she stopped, but she stood there, trying to push ahead, apparently not realizing the strength of what was in her way. Finally she turned slowly to the right and started down the steps to a pier.

The possibility of suicide didn't hit me until she was halfway down the stretch of it. I jumped forward, yelling at her to hold it, and started after her. I didn't suppose she would hear, but if she were walking in her sleep and I could wake her up before she got too close, it might save her. And, if someone else were around, I might need a bit of help.

It was a waste of time, yelling. She walked straight down the length of the empty pier and into the icy waters, without a hitch.

And less than sixty seconds after, I had my coat and shoes off and was in the water after her.

Did I say icy waters? Terrific understatement; these were waters which had had centuries of practice in how to be cold. But I knew what I was after and I spent important seconds looking for her, surface diving until my eyes were so salty I couldn't see. There's always a light at the end of the pier, so I should have been able to find her, unless she sank to the bottom immediately and never came up. But I couldn't find a trace of her.

By this time my yelps had been heard. When I finally climbed out there was a reception committee waiting. I let them give me a hand and waited for the bluecoat to pitch in to me. But damned if they didn't accept my word that a pretty girl had just jumped off and I'd jumped after her without question. The bluecoat nodded, helped me get my own overcoat back on, told one of the other guys to fix me up. He asked me wait at the place where they'd fix me up with a change of clothes and some coffee so I could give

him the details about what had happened.

Later I spent about two hours answering questions about the girl. During the course of the interview, I learned that she was the sixth to go like that this week. The coppers didn't ask me a thing about my own doings.

DAVY KNOTT told me quite a bit about the business after I'd managed to recover from the swim. We've always been chummy. He was at the desk when the first call came in—someone reporting that a man had walked off a pier. All the victims had the same earmarks. They all looked and acted as if they were hypnotized, all headed straight for the bay and walked in without a qualm, and *no bodies had been recovered*. After the third case, the police were on the watch, but the "Lemmings," as they were called, began to display a remarkable amount of cunning.

What I didn't know, for example, at the time that the smooth jane had led me on to a cold plunge, was that the patrol had been decoyed away on a false alarm just about five minutes before. The call had come from a store just above Bowen Street. Any reasonably fast walker can make it from Bowen Street to the end of the pier in five minutes; the Lemming girl made good time for all her sleep-walking. They gave me an uncomfortable few minutes over at the station at first, because the copper at the Bowen intersection hadn't given the agreed-upon alarm whistle upon seeing the tall girl; he mistook me for one of the boys and figured the situation was in hand.

They'd dredged that section of the bay four times in the past month—the Lemmings had apparently started operating just about a month ago—and still found nothing. They sent divers down to see if something might have caught the stiffs, or if there was some unsuspected current at the bottom which might have

swept them very swiftly out to sea.

Didn't I read the papers, Knott wanted to know. Or listen to the radio? What was happening in this town was nothing compared to the big cities on both the East and West Coasts. New York, for example, was under what amounted to a police dictatorship—very quiet, very much undercover, but there. They cracked down on the newspapers first; they made it clear that any editor who broke the news would find himself in a very unpleasant position and investigations afterwards wouldn't help him much. They got tough.

I told Davy that I'd stopped reading the papers after we licked the Japs, and Hitler and Benny were swept away like so much paper in the wind. Sure, I'm patriotic and I take pride in the Western Hemisphere Federation, but the write-ups on the proceedings aren't very exciting.

As a matter of fact, Davy confided, this town was being put under the censorship too. There had been some mention of the Lemmings in the local press, but it had been played down. They clamped on the lid after the divers came up from the bay—because what those boys found wasn't comforting, and didn't explain anything.

They found clothes.

Male, female and some child clothing. The only conclusion was that the victims stripped themselves as soon as they got into the water. Purses were found, with water-logged bills, make-up kits, coins, and what not.

Well, after I heard all that I felt that I just had to offer a bit of suggestion. So I sat there drinking coffee, thinking, when suddenly something popped into my head.

"Davy," I said, "you mentioned something about this business applying all up and down the coast. Have you fellows found out whether or not it goes beyond the borders of the USA? Or, even more interesting, have any of the victims jumped

into fresh water? A lake or river maybe?"

It was plain to see that I'd hit upon something.

He called the station and talked excitedly for about three minutes, then hung up.

"You've got something there," he exulted. "According to HQ, the Lemmings haven't shown any interest in fresh water at all. At least three of them were much nearer the lake than the bay at the time they got the urge. Yet they paid no attention to the possibilities of fresh water drowning."

I shook my head. "Mass suicide doesn't seem to explain it either. Why did they take off their clothes?"

IT WASN'T until several days later, after my suit and coat had come back from a cleaner, that I found anything. I'd become pretty well het on the Lemming business, and the police were friendly enough after I gave Davy the suggestion on fresh water; that cut down the necessity of a lake patrol, among other things.

When the kid from Feldman's brought back my suit and overcoat he said something about a button in the pocket which didn't belong to the coat. Did I want it? I said sure and thanked him with a quarter, then looked at the button. There was a bit of thread and cardboard sticking to it. I recognized the latter; it was part of the cardboard tag Feldman's puts on coats for identification.

Then I remembered where I got that button. The tall jane! When I grabbed her at the intersection I remember feeling something come loose in my hand, and I slipped it into my pocket.

I hoofed it down to Feldman's.

Before I finished describing the tall girl, Mina Feldman nodded. "Oh yes, I knew her. That was Miss Kristoff. I was awfully sorry to hear about her being drowned. Was it really an accident?"

"It seems to be pretty definite," I said. "But, look, Mina, this means a lot to me—and keep it under your hat, will you? Do you know anything about this Kristoff woman?"

Mina's black eyes sparkled for a moment. "Not very much, Jerry. She was some sort of chemist; she had a Ph.D., was going around with some boy who's an instructor at the college. That's about all."

"Sure, Mina?"

"That's all I can think of."

"Well, did she act at all strange the last few times you saw her?"

"She was sort of preoccupied. I made a remark about something the last time she was here—don't remember what, but it was something in which she ordinarily was interested—and she paid no attention. I guess she didn't hear me. She seemed to have something on her mind—the boy friend, I suppose."

I groaned inwardly. Perhaps Mina knew important facts, and didn't know what she knew. "Think back, Mina. She died Tuesday night. Did you see her at all Tuesday or the day before?"

"She came in around noon, wanted her gloves cleaned. She was going to some sort of club, I think."

Wonderful, I thought. "She didn't mention what club?"

"No, but that was sort of unusual, Jerry. Anna Kristoff hardly ever went out—even with the boy friend. She was very much aloof, afraid of people, I think. It was only after she'd been coming here for almost a year that she'd say anything more than just what she wanted done, or ask the price."

"Did she ever talk to you about the boy friend?"

"Sometimes, Jerry. Is this important? We're getting into personal affairs now, you know."

"Do you know who the boy friend was?"

"Yes. Randall. Lives up on Fremont Avenue. I don't know what his first name was—she always called him Blackie. I think I was about the only woman in whom she confided. And I'm not going to tell you any more, Jerry."

"That's okay," I said. "You've told me enough."

She caught my arm. "Jerry, you're not getting into any trouble, are you?"

"Nope," I grinned. "Just following a hunch. There's something funny going on and I won't feel right until I learn something more about it."

THERE were two Randalls on Fremont Avenue; with my typical luck in such matters I got the wrong one first. But it did get me a good working description of Blackie Randall. It was toward dusk when I finished talking with one oldish man a few doors down. He looked up suddenly and said, "There's Mr. Randall now."

I followed his gaze to see a pale-looking man of about thirty turn a corner. Then I excused myself and started after him, because Randall was walking in the same manner as the Kristoff girl that night she took the plunge.

Not taking chances this time, I put in a hurry call to police headquarters and we grabbed Randall in about three minutes flat. He didn't resist; he just kept turning in the direction of the harbor and pushing forward.

He paid no attention to anything or anyone.

Down at headquarters we had a doctor look him over. He seemed normal except that he just didn't respond to non-physical stimuli; we had to strap him to a chair. He sat there, leaning forward against the straps, an engrossed expression on his face. After about three quarters of an hour, the doc gave up.

"I'd say hypnotism," was his comment. "Only I can't see how we are going

to make him snap out of it. Call me if any change is observed."

Then, right while we were watching him, Randall gave a sort of strangled gasp and began to struggle desperately with the straps. His face began to grow purple; his eyes bulged, and he showed every indication of suffocation. We rushed to him, tore open his collar, took off the straps and threw open the windows. He thrashed about frantically for about two minutes while we worked just as feverishly trying to give him air; and then he collapsed.

The doctor pronounced him dead. His comment was, "The man drowned."

Just why it seemed to be a good idea to snatch the little black address book out of Blackie Randall's breast pocket before anyone else noticed it was there is one of those things I can't explain. But that's what I did and it turned out to be a good lead. I checked on every address in that book and found one which didn't check. It said merely: *La Mer, 87 Wentworth*.

Huh, I thought to myself. Just some skirt, he's been seeing on the quiet. But even so, something might be found. I dropped in at Feldman's.

"Mina," I said when the place was empty except for us two, "did Anna Kristoff ever talk about a dame called *La Mer*?"

"*La Mer, Jerry*?" She seemed puzzled, then brightened up. "*La Mer* is French for 'the sea'. Anna did mention it once or twice offhand, but I got the impression it was some sort of club."

"Was her boy friend in on it too?"

"I think they went there together."

"Mina," I beamed; "you're wonderful. And now I'm off to the wars."

"Wait—Jerry!" She looked frightened. "You're not going there alone, are you?"

"Why not?"

"Why not! Look what happened to Randall and Anna Kristoff!"

This complicated matters. I spent the next ten minutes comforting her. But it wasn't wasted, because I did a bit of thinking, too. And when I went out, the first thing I did was to call Davy Knott, tell him where I was going, and ask the police to follow me.

When I arrived at 87 Wentworth, I had to admit that maybe Mina was right. There was no *La Mer* listed. I rang the bell and waited. "I'm looking for *La Mer*," I said to the attractive blonde who opened the door. "I have a message for her."

There was something regal about her, and something that made me feel cold, too. She motioned me inside and shut the door. We went into an inner room which was curtained off and filled with swanky chairs and sofas.

"What is the message?" she asked.

"It's from Blackie Randall," I said on a burst of inspiration. "He met with an accident last night; I was there when it happened and he grabbed my hand and whispered, '*La Mer, La Mer.*' I tried to get more out of him, but that was all he said. He started to say, 'Tell—' but that was all. I found your address in his book."

Her face was impassive and I didn't like the way those sapphire eyes bored into mine.

"Then Mr. Randall is dead?"

"Yes."

She arose. "I appreciate your coming," she said, and I thought I detected a sardonic note in her voice. "It means nothing to you, of course, but there is a great deal of meaning in it for me."

"But I owe you more than mere thanks. I will show you something." She touched a stud on the wall and the lights began to grow dim.

"Don't be alarmed," she said quickly. "You're only going to see some motion pictures."

At the other end of the room, curtains

were being drawn aside to reveal a standard motion picture screen. It lit up instantly, and a sound apparatus went into operation, playing music by Debussy, I think it was. It was just pictures of the ocean. But they were beautiful.

I've always liked salt water, always appreciated the seashore and gotten a kick out of the few times I've taken ferry rides; but it was nothing like this. There was some sort of spell worked in with the music and the pictures, I think, because I began to have a positive yearning for the sea.

The pictures went on and on until I began to wonder how long a session this was going to be. Then something on the screen caught my attention. It was a sort of flickering. Sometimes it would be the splash of spray on rocks, sometimes sunlight, sometimes the glint of jewels—but always the same strange flickering. It got so that at last I couldn't keep my mind on the pictures, just watched the flickers. And I began to grow sleepy.

I didn't want to go to sleep; it was much too pretty. But the effect was too strong for me, despite the fact that I should have been interested in what the commentator was saying, and my not liking to pull something like this on that blonde. I felt my head falling forward and the scene faded away.

The next thing I knew, Davy Knott was shaking me.

“GO AWAY,” I murmured.
 “Listen,” came his voice,
 “will you snap out of it and
 tell me what happened at Wentworth
 Place?”

“Happened?” I sat up and looked around. This was my room; I was home. “Did anything happen? How did I get here?”

“Happened!” he snorted. “I’m asking you! You walked out of that place like one of the Lemmings, went right by

where the chief and I were going to meet you if we didn’t have to come in after you. I wanted to grab you then and there, but the chief said no, we’d better follow you and see if you headed for the bay.”

“Did I?”

“No, you just came home and crawled into bed. Now suppose you tell me what went on in there.”

I opened my mouth to tell him, then realized suddenly that I couldn’t. I couldn’t tell anyone.

Davy nodded. “I understand,” he said. “Don’t worry about it; we have all the dope we need. Drop around to the station after you’ve had a good rest.”

And all my dreams were of the sea; I was living in the sea, living there with people like myself. The land seemed ugly and unreal. Seldom would we come to the surface and look out. And among those who lived under the sea with me were the tall girl called Anna Kristoff, and a number of others whose pictures I’d seen among the Lemmings.

THE little white-haired man who had been introduced to me as Dr. Mason smiled.

“You are one of the few people, Mr. Holman, who seem to realize that the Lemming matter is much more than a local, or even an interstate disturbance.”

I nodded. This Mason bird seemed to know his stuff. “Did you find anything when you hypnotized me, Doctor?”

“I’ll come to that later, Jerry. You have imagination—much more so than the boys at headquarters—so I think I can safely let you in on matters which I wouldn’t think of telling them.

“First of all, the Lemmings. An excellent name for them, by the by. I presume you’ve heard of the legend of the Lemmings, small rodent-like creatures who suddenly appear in swarms and rush into the sea. Well, these human Lemmings began to appear three months ago,

in Florida. Do you happen to recall anything in the papers about that time concerning Kellant's experiments?"

I shook my head. "Sorry, Doc, I don't read the papers."

"You should. Kellant was on the track of something big, I think. We'll never know now, because he was one of the first—perhaps the very first—to go.

"I'm not going to tell you much more right now, Jerry, because there's something to show you first. More movies. But they won't put you to sleep, I can assure you of that.

"Kellant was after something big, as I said before. He was sure it would be important; had some service men guarding him. These films I'm showing you were taken by one of his guards, as proof of what the man knew would not be believed otherwise. Without going into detail, I'll merely mention that the guard disappeared too—but the films were recovered. I got hold of them because he was my nephew."

"Oh," I said. "I'm sorry to hear about that, Doc."

He nodded. "It may be, however, that Len isn't dead. I've a theory—" He waved his hand. "But no more of that. We have business on hand. Come into the other room, Jerry, and I'll show you what my nephew dared not tell without documentary proof."

The film was a bit jumpy in spots, but that added to its reality. At first there were just shots of a work room full of various radio apparatus, some of which I thought I recognized. At one table, however, there was an odd-looking set equipped with headphones.

It wasn't too odd. But it looked queer, nonetheless. I couldn't figure out what those two terminal-like gadgets with the open space between them might be for. But my attention was taken away from them when the film jumped a bit and I saw two people putting on the phones.

"Doc," I whispered. "That girl—she's the one who's at 87 Wentworth Place now. The one they call La Mer."

"So? Good work, Jerry. But watch closely now."

The man was twisting the dials of the apparatus and plugging in switches. And suddenly sparks began to fly in between the two terminals. A strange, visible zig-zag of sparks.

Then something began to appear there. It was small at first, but it grew rapidly, like a bubble, until it was about the size of a basketball. No—it was bigger than that. By this time I could see that it was gradually becoming transparent—

Then I almost jumped out of my seat.

There was something inside of that bubble. It was alive; I could see it moving. It made me think of an octopus and a dragon and a crocodile all in one. It was green, covered with scales like a snake, had tentacles like an octopus. The tentacles were scaly, though—no suckers on them. And it had a little head like a young cabbage.

I couldn't make up my mind whether it was beautiful or horrible. I'll compromise and say it was fascinating.

In one of those tentacles it was holding something—something too small to make out clearly. The object looked like a little ball, with a beam coming out of it, like a flashlight beam. It shot out of the object, out through the walls of the bubble, and shone on the faces of the man and the blonde woman whose eyes were like sapphires. They were hearing something over the head earphones, too. I could tell by the intent expression on their faces.

This lasted for awhile, then the beam from the object in the bubble snapped off; the thing waved its tentacles, as if in dismissal, and the man spun some dials again. The bubble grew opaque and slowly shrank until it was gone and there were only the funny sparks darting back

and forth between the two terminals.

THE screen went blank abruptly. I blinked, bewildered, for awhile, then turned to Mason.

"What does it all mean, Doc?"

He shook his head grimly. "There is much we cannot comprehend as yet. But this we know. That creature is not of our world. We have looked upon one of the attributes of a science far superior to ours. Whether that science be friendly or unfriendly to us, we cannot be sure as yet. But I am positive that this has a direct bearing upon the case of the Lemmings.

"Tell me, Jerry, what strikes you as the outstanding feature about the Lemmings? Think carefully."

I cupped my chin in my hands. "It's hard to pick out one thing, Doc, there are so many. But what strikes me as most mysterious is the fact that no bodies have been found and that when they dredged the harbor they found the victims' clothes.

"It's all mysterious, of course, but you can understand people being hypnotized and made to jump in the harbor. If you asked me for a second choice, I'd say it was Blackie Randall's death.

"Doc!" Something hit me then. "Could that have been hypnotism? Could he have been made to think that if he didn't get to water within a reasonable period of time, he'd drown? Was he killed by suggestion?"

"Yes and no, Jerry. He was impelled to seek the water; he did die because he could not get there in time. But it wasn't mere suggestion. I was present at the autopsy. We found things which ordinarily we wouldn't dare believe. Blackie Randall had been changed, Jerry. He wasn't an ordinary man any more. He was a fish!"

"Huh?"

"Remember your biology, Jerry?"

What's the difference between a man and a fish, really? Why can't a man breathe water or a fish breathe air?"

"Why—why their lungs are different. A fish has gills through which it extracts oxygen from the water. A man has lungs which are adapted to taking it straight from the air."

"You have the right idea," he approved. "There's a little more. A fish's gills dry up in no time at all once they're out of water, won't operate any more. That is mainly because there's no apparatus for their retaining moisture, no mucous. Otherwise a fish might be able to come out of the water in damp weather, when the moisture content of the atmosphere is high. Lungs, now, are something else. They aren't equipped for the osmotic process that gills undergo, and they just can't get rid of water at all. They're spongy, you see.

"But—if a lung could be altered in some way so as to function in the manner of gills—extract oxygen from water through an osmotic process—then a man could live under water very easily. The only rub is this: he'd have to live under water. Without major alterations in his body, he couldn't have both lungs and gills."

"Wait a minute, Doc," I interrupted, thinking furiously. "You said something about mucous, didn't you? Well, isn't the mucous the stuff that's around your eyes and the lining of your mouth and throat and so on?"

"That's right."

"Jeepers, Doc, a guy would have to have more than his lungs fixed up. Didn't you ever go swimming in salt water? After awhile, no matter how careful you are, your eyes start to burn from the salt, and your throat gets sore. A person would go blind under water after awhile, or go nuts from the pain. Salt on that mucous is hell."

Mason clapped me on the shoulder.

"Good work, Jerry. I see you're not dim-witted at all. There is more to the Lemmings than just the alteration of their lungs. Just exactly what it is, I'm not certain, as yet. I only have a theory which seems to explain the matter. I haven't broached it to anyone else so far, because without substantiation, it would be dismissed as too utterly wild.

"I was in on one of the early cases of Lemmingism; we managed to capture the victim and subjected him to hypnosis. Before he drowned we made a recording." He took a record out of one of the cases lining the wall and placed it on the phonograph. "I'm just playing the third record, which contains the heart of the matter."

The needle scratched for a moment; then a voice spoke: "*—room is filled with scientific apparatus.*"

Mason: *Do you recognize the apparatus?*

Voice: *No. There is what looks like a coffin, with a glass top. There's a sort of lamp set over it so it will play upon the full length of the coffin.*

Mason: *What is happening now?*

Voice: *They have disrobed me. They are lifting me and setting me in the coffin. The top is being fastened down over it. Now they are setting up screens around it. The screens are very heavy.*

Mason: *Are they lead screens?*

Voice: *They could be; I'm not sure.*

Mason: *Please continue.*

Voice: *They have turned on the lamp-like thing. I can see a faint glow around the rim of it, but no light seems to be coming out. I feel a sort of tingling.*

Mason: *Is it painful?*

Voice: *No. But it feels as if something strange is happening to me. I am almost afraid, yet it is not unpleasant.*

Mason: *It is later, much later. Are you still in the coffin?*

Voice: *Yes. The lamp is still glowing. The sensations have passed away now.*

I feel as if it is almost over. . . . Yes, the lamp has been switched off. They are taking away the screens. . .

A scratching indicated the end of the record; Mason took it off.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I believe that the victim was subjected to a concentration of cosmic rays. Kellant was working on that just before the creature came. "Here's the theory though: we know that every human embryo passes through every evolutionary stage through which man has passed before it is born, a complete homo sapiens. There are still traces in the human body of rudimentary gills, and other apparatus necessary for a submarine existence. What has happened to the Lemmings is that their entire bodies have become adapted to under-water conditions, the entire make-up of the cells altered."

"Wouldn't autopsies show something?"

"Yes. And that is another queer thing about this business. No autopsies besides Blackie's have been taken. The deeper you go into it, the more it seems as though the organization behind the Lemmings is exerting a subtle influence upon the entire world."

JUST where the dreams began that night and reality ended, I cannot be sure. The events of the night following my conversation with him will always be confused, I'm afraid.

We were both up late that night because three more of the Lemmings found their way to the sea and were lost in it. Mason told me that after his successful attempt at hypnotizing a Lemming, the organization must have taken steps to prevent further interference. Now any Lemming put under hypnosis died immediately.

We tried desperately to piece together what we had found, checking against the staggering compilation of facts from all over the world. Mason insisted that it

was useless to put forward his theory at this time, and I could see his point. What the situation was like that night in New York, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Liverpool, and other big cities will never be known. Perhaps this night was little different from other nights, perhaps a sort of apathy to the phenomenon had been reached. We heard very few reports; we heard that the newspapers were under military control, that great staffs of psychologists and propagandists were at work to divert public attention.

There seemed to be a sort of monstrous self deception in the way that the world carried on, for this affair had by now reached monstrous bounds. It was no longer possible in some cases to ascertain even the precise number of the missing. One factor stood out; the missing were not solely residents of cities, towns, or villages within easy access of salt water. From all parts of a country they came to these points and rushed into the sea. Patrols by police and armed soldiers were for the most part useless.

In New York it was discovered that any attempt to use counter-hypnosis upon the Lemmings resulted in the almost instantaneous death of the subject. Those which were held over a varying period of time, which never exceeded three hours, died like fish out of water. Some were kept in huge tanks and aquariums, but they died through a complete inability to feed themselves.

I TRAMPED back to my apartment that night, my mind reeling with what I'd learned in the past few days. A weariness was upon me. As I climbed the stairs, the scent of salt water was in my nostrils and I breathed deeply of it, feeling a keenly refreshing aspect in it.

I threw myself on the bed with a half sensation that I was floating atop the crest of swelling waves. I lay quietly and let the movement of the breakers carry

me along until at last all was still. But at once there came a tormenting dryness and a searing heat. I opened my eyes to find the sea had vanished and I was stranded upon the salty shores. The horror of that discovery nearly stopped my heart; I closed my eyes, striving desperately to will the sea to come back, but it was no use. So at last I arose and looked about me, searching for a sign which would show me the way home.

Around me stretched the reaches of a city, and I remembered that in the dim, misty past I and all men had dwelt in such places as these. It seemed even that this particular city was familiar to me, for I could recall specific landmarks and knew that one street led to this spot and another to that. But try as I might I could not recall what combination of streets led to the bay.

Along the empty ways, past the great eyes of deserted shops, many of them filled still with those goods which had been on sale before it came, I hastened, my breath coming in great gasps, a fire lancing through my being. As I strode along, a vision came to me of the last days—days when these ways were still swarming with people. I could see them here, all intent upon their business, oblivious of that which hung over them. Out of the deeps beyond the sky it came, a cloud which drifted into the atmosphere and let the winds of the world swirl it into every part of the planet. And the winds of the world breathed upon the city and those who walked its ways, smote them with the cloud that had come out of space, and the people fell, their bodies shriveling away until only skeletons were left. Even these dissolved after a brief time so that nothing of man was left save the cities he had built.

Another fear was upon me, a fear that I might not find my way home to the sea before the winds blew.

Then the thought came to me: there

is a woman at 87 Wentworth Place who knows of these things; she it was who learned of the cloud and who first showed men the way home. I will hasten there and seek the goddess with sapphire eyes, that the winds blow not my flesh away.

So, even as the fire within grew more and still more painful, I turned my steps along the way I knew and came at last to the small building on the cliff and rang the bell. The door opened and she stood there, a smile upon her face. I knelt at her feet and said, "I am lost; show me the way home." She beckoned me to enter and took me to an inner room.

I entered her shrine, and there she performed rituals and made vapors, bidding me to inhale of them. When I did so, the fires within me died and I felt again refreshed.

Then she led me gently to the doorway of the temple and said to me, "Go now, go home quickly; let nothing turn you aside, for that which I have given you will not linger long and should you still be away from home when the spell has died, then none can save you from your doom.

Again I thanked her and turned my steps away. And I cannot be sure, but I thought I heard a hammering upon the door and the blowing of whistles.

"**T**HERE'S little left to explain," said Mason. "That is—as regards the phenomenon of the Lemmings itself. But I'll begin as closely to the beginning as possible, going by Katherine Kellant's story.

"Kellant and his wife were working on a super-radio when they discovered the being. I think, while it is entirely accidental that they contacted it when they did, that contact would have been made sooner or later. Because whatever the creature was, it was friendly toward us; it brought the first warning of the gas cloud from space."

"But why hadn't astronomers discov-

ered it long before then?" I asked him.

"It was between Earth and the sun, and of so tenuous a nature that it simply could not be seen. We would have discovered it later, but by that time it would have been much too late. The cloud was a deadly poison to all life and could not be shut out by any combination except salt water. Some day chemists will tell us more about that.

"The thing read the minds of the Kellants, obtained from them the psychological data necessary for it to make plans for the most effective means of saving the best of the human race. It determined, from what it had learned, that to tell humanity what was up would have been to provoke disaster and war.

"There were many months to go before the cloud could be discovered. Thus, with the aid of the Kellants, an organization throughout the world was set up, an organization whose sole aim was to operate upon individuals of the race and replace their lungs with gills.

"Again, we shall have to wait to learn precisely what was done. But from the evidence we have, we know that there was a transition stage of several hours between the time of the operation and the time that the subject became a true fish; that further, the subject was given post-hypnotic instructions to seek the water—salt water—without delay. The subject was further post-hypnotised in such a way that his heart would stop were counter-hypnosis used upon him. A necessary precaution.

"Why was the set-up not discovered until so late? Another thing we won't know for a long time. One explanation is that the actions of police and investigators, were, to a large extent, directed by the being."

"How were the subjects selected?" I interrupted.

"First of all, the scientists. Not just any scientist, but those who specialized

in branches the use of which would be primary in adapting man to live under the sea. And, in addition, those individual specialists who were, as human beings, best suited to take positions of authority and responsibility.

"Then great masses of people—although again, not just plain people. At all times individuals selected were those who would rank high in tests for intelligence, meaning adaptability in this case, sense of social responsibility, and capability along directions which would be useful here."

He fell silent for a moment. "To me," he half murmured, "the most amazing thing is the really vast numbers of all types of people who were selected."

"But this cold-blooded selection—"

"Regrettable, but necessary. There was so little time, you see. What would have happened had the world as a whole been informed? There would have been panic, degeneration, mass hysteria. Could an organization have been openly set up to determine who was to live and who to be left behind? Suppose it was your responsibility to select people openly, living from day to day, knowing that thousands of people you saw or knew or cared for must be left behind. No, this was the only way. That is why it was done secretly, why the victims were hypnotised, why they were given post-hypnotic instructions to die rather than reveal anything. I still don't know how that was accomplished. There's a great deal to learn about all this, Jerry."

WE ARE building a new world under the sea. It is a simple world in comparison to the one we left behind us, a world more restricted. It will be a long time before man can again become a star-gazer, Dr. Mason says, but he is confident that a way will be found.

I am almost constantly in a state of

amazement at what is being done here, at the role I am playing. Because my amateur detective work found Katherine Kellant, I had to be made a Lemming, and from what they found when they questioned me before the operation, Dr. Mason was added to the list. Although I think they would have taken Mason anyway.

Yesterday we had a general meeting and the Kellants told us the whole story from beginning to end. How the creature came and directed the entire organization. The thing lived on some planet in our own solar system way beyond Pluto—a planet so far away that it could not be seen by our telescopes. This creature was a scientist there and had been engaged in some experiments which got out of hand and resulted in the cloud. It wasn't a very large cloud, but the gas was extremely tenuous. It could seep through anything on the surface of our world except salt water. So it came to our world to do what it could to keep our race from being completely wiped out as a result of its mistake.

However, the crowning point of that meeting came later. The co-ordinators—that's the closest thing to government we have here—thought I might make a good mate for Anna Kristoff.

Well, I'm not kicking. What I said about Anna back in the beginning still goes. And best of all, Anna doesn't seem to find the idea of marrying me objectionable either.

Right now Anna is working in the chemistry department and says she's just about broken down the problem of a paper which will stand up in salt water. That's good news, because, as I mentioned to Mason some time ago, we'll go to seed in a generation or less if we don't have books. Offhand, I'd have said the problem couldn't be solved, but I've already seen so many impossible things here. . . .