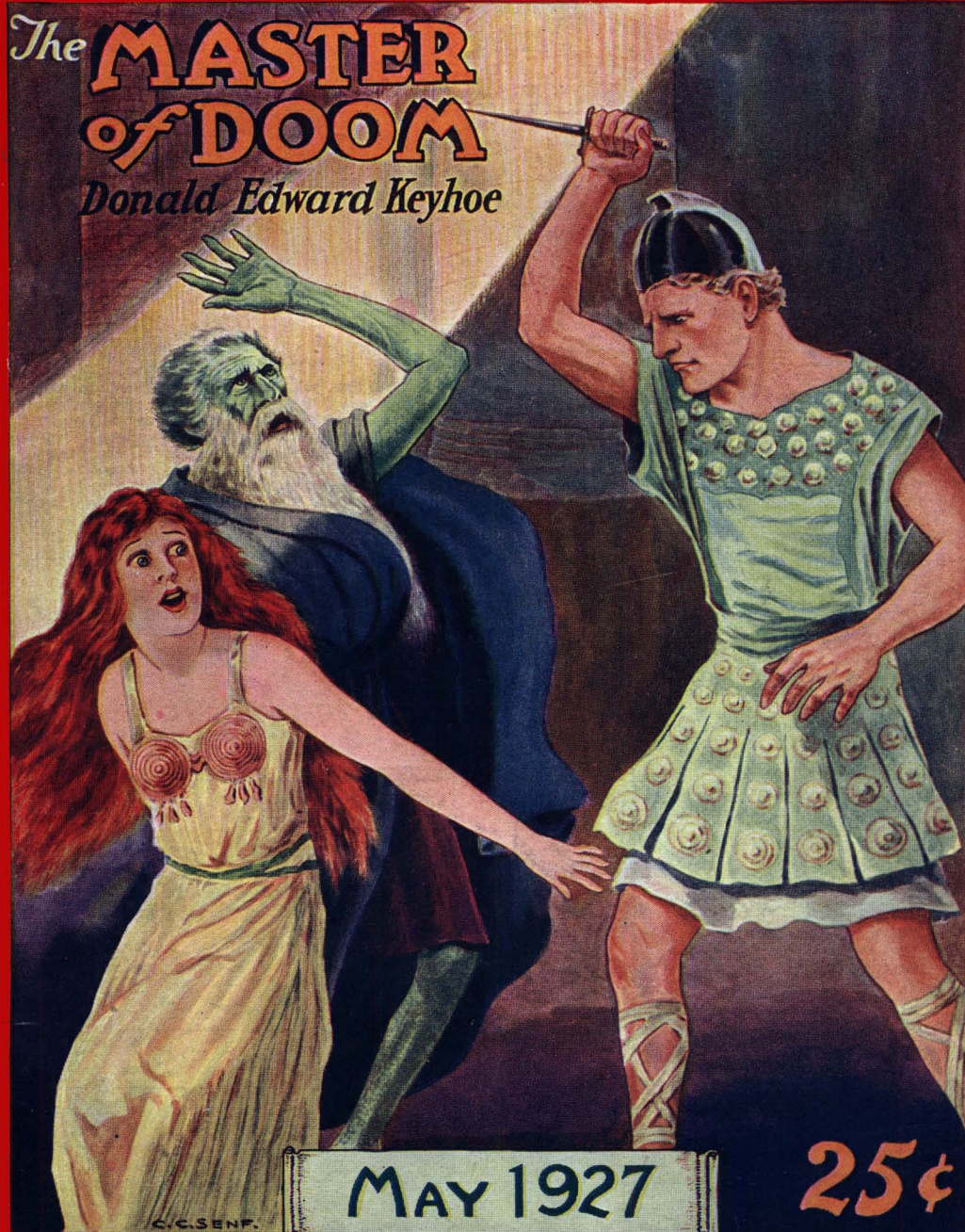


# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*



Ray Cummings - Seabury Quinn - Victor Rousseau -  
John Martin Leahy - Robert S. Carr - Oscar Schisgall

# Weird Tales

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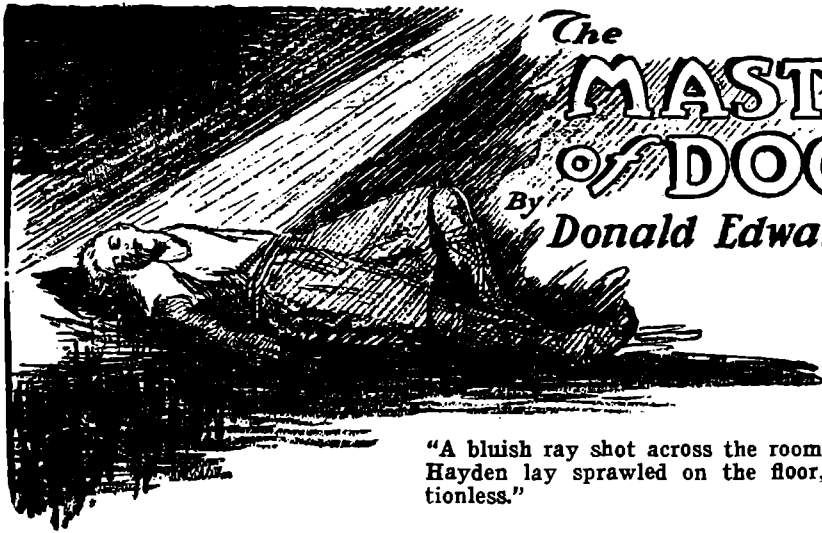
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# The MASTER of DOOM

By  
Donald Edward Keyhoe

"A bluish ray shot across the room, and Hayden lay sprawled on the floor, motionless."

**S**TANLEY GRAHAM paused in adjusting the seaplane windshield and glanced down at the Titian-haired girl who sat beside him in the cockpit.

"Betty, I wish you'd wait until some other time," he said earnestly. "The governor won't like it. He probably thought this was an ordinary 'hop' when he said you could go."

A mischievous dimple appeared in Betty's cheek.

"Don't worry about Uncle Bob—I'll fix it if he gets a grouch. And you needn't try to get rid of me, either. This 'vanishing island' of Captain Anderson's is the first interesting thing in Guam for six months. If you're going out to hunt for it I'm going with you."

She settled herself down in the seat, pursing her lips up at him in mock defiance. Graham ran his hand through his hair in pretended despair. Then his tanned face lighted with a good-natured grin.

"All right—and if we get lost, remember we'll probably drift a day or two before we're picked up. Every compass on this station has gone bad, and flying offshore is half guesswork. As for Andy's story—that's plain

bunk. He probably got tanked up on aguardiente and ran the *Rivaro* off her course onto a shoal somewhere. There couldn't be any island where he says his old tub sank—the chart shows three hundred fathoms all around there."

"Then why are you looking for it?" asked Betty with a slightly malicious twinkle in her blue eyes.

Graham shrugged his shoulders.

"Orders—from someone who isn't acquainted with Andy's capacity for native liquor. I'm to see if there's a new shoal sprung up overnight. And if you insist on going we may as well get started."

He tempered this last remark with a smile as he turned to signal the crew in the rear compartment, for he had a more than ordinary interest in the governor's attractive niece.

As the powerful F-5-L roared across Apra Bay a few minutes later he switched on the interphones, and for an hour he and Betty conversed while the Pacific sped swiftly below. When the plane reached the area in which the *Rivaro* was supposed to have met her peculiar end he carefully inspected the sea for various altitudes, but was unable to discern any sign of a reef or shoal. He was still

peering downward when he felt a hurried touch on his shoulder. Glancing back into the hull, he saw the excited face of his radio operator. The man handed him a hastily scrawled note.

"Radio Hill was calling for help," he read with startled eyes. "Then everything went dead. Can't raise the Hill or the air station."

Dumfounded, he stared at the words. Radio Hill was the commonly used name for the huge navy station which maintained communication with the United States. Surely there could be no practical joke connected with a distress signal sent from there. Yet what could have occurred in the peaceful little island to cause the broadcasting of such a call?

In sudden alarm he pivoted the F-5-L steeply on one wing and sent it hurtling back toward Guam. For several minutes the plane raced on, its motors at full speed. Gradually a perplexing frown spread over his face. At the point where the island should begin to show in a bluish haze there was nothing to be seen. He climbed quickly to a higher altitude, thinking that his erratic compass might have set him off his course. Still there was no sight of the rocky little island they had left such a short time before.

He glanced aside at Betty, whose lips were anxiously parted. As he looked down over the broad expanse of the sea a change in its surface caught his eye. The easy swells had grown into ugly rollers, which increased swiftly in size as the plane passed above, until finally they became great, white-topped walls of greenish water.

A horrible thought flashed through Graham's mind. Spiraling down to a height of a thousand feet, he leaned far out and almost fearfully searched the heaving sea, hoping against the premonition that had forced itself upon him. Then his face turned

gray under its tan, for in the angrily, tossing waves he saw a mass of sodden wreckage—bits of tangled debris with not a single sign of human life.

Guam had sunk beneath the sea!

Heartsick, he tore his eyes from the silent evidence of that incredible truth and mechanically throttled the motors for a slow glide. Betty had slumped against the side of the hull, white and faint, while the mechanics and the radio operator were staring in consternation from the rear compartment. As the plane dipped lower his bewilderment grew. What tremendous cataclysm could account for the almost total absence of such objects as might be expected to remain on top of the water? To create a suction strong enough to carry down every person—almost every proof of their existence—the island must have sunk instantly, without a moment's warning to its doomed inhabitants.

A sudden realization of their own plight aroused him from his daze. The F-5-L held only enough gas for three hours' flight. Before that time had passed they must find land or face a 1500-mile westward drift to the Philippines, a long, torturing passage from which none could emerge alive, for the plane carried no food and only a little water.

Disregarding his compass, he headed approximately northeast, using the sun as a rough check on his direction. The Japanese-owned island of Rota lay only a short distance along this course. Then as fifteen minutes passed his anxiety deepened into dismay. Rota also had disappeared.

The only other island of which he had definite knowledge was Saipan, much farther north. It was doubtful if they could reach it, but as it offered the only solution he swung the plane in that direction, praying that it had not suffered the mysterious fate of the lower Marianna group.



Betty was bravely endeavoring to hide the sorrow he knew she felt at the loss of her uncle—a sorrow which for the time dwarfed her alarm at their predicament. The mechanics, clearly understanding the danger which threatened, were carefully nursing the motors against the possibility of an inopportune forced landing.

AN HOUR passed. Graham was mechanically searching the horizon with the forlorn hope of sighting one of the few island trading ships which plied those waters, when a tiny blur became visible off to the north-west. In heartfelt relief he swung the plane toward it, descending on a long glide. Gradually the blur took form as an island about five miles in length and two miles in width, with steep, rugged sides broken only in one spot. At this point was a slightly sheltered cove, in which a large ship would have found close quarters.

But the cove ceased to claim his attention as the plane drew closer, for in the exact center of the island was a huge oval depression containing a white stone structure at least five hundred feet in diameter and a perfect circle in shape. In the middle of the building rose a low, wide tower, somewhat like a small lighthouse, from which glistening bands of metal led to numerous smaller towers spaced equidistantly along the perimeter. It suddenly occurred to him that all of this was invisible from the sea, placed as it was in this deep hollow. The thought brought with it a distinct foreboding. What could this strange place be, hidden away in a most forsaken corner of the world? This building could not have been erected recently, for such a project must have meant months, perhaps years of labor. It would hardly be a secret fortress of some foreign power, for it would serve no useful purpose there. The tiny harbor

would hardly hold one battleship. Yet there was obviously some purpose back of it all.

Extremely uneasy, but realizing that this might be their only chance of salvation, he nosed the plane down and prepared to alight. As he glanced down in leveling off, an odd sight met his eyes. Submerged on its side under the water lay the hulk of a large ship, completely blocking the entrance to the bay for any vessel drawing more than six feet. It flashed by before he could take a second glance, and the next second the plane settled onto the placid surface of the little harbor.

Taxiing well up onto the beach, he shut off the motors. As he had thought, there was no sign of the central building from this point.

"I don't like this," he told the others. "If I could be sure Saipan hadn't sunk like Guam I'd keep on. Anyone have an idea of where we are?"

Betty shook her head mutely, while the crew stared at each other for a moment.

"Maybe it's a leper colony," ventured the radio operator. "They put 'em way out on places like this."

Graham shook his head hurriedly, for Betty's face had gone pale.

"You're wrong there. I've seen those colonies and they're nothing like this. Anyway, we'd have heard of it."

"Somebody's lookin' us over," cut in Riley, the crew chief. "Watch that break in the rocks, sir. I saw —"

He fell silent as a figure emerged from the breach he had mentioned. A second one followed closely, and finally a score of dark-skinned men, trailing behind in single file. A hundred feet away the procession halted. The leaders proved to be white men, wearing the customary white duck and the pith helmets of the tropics. The blacks seemed to be of a fiercer race

than the Chamorros usually found in the Marianna Islands. Graham conjectured that they were of the Malay strain. He noted with increasing apprehension that each one was armed with a long machete, and that seven or eight carried rifles.

He and his companions had by this time climbed out upon the beach. The taller of the two leaders advanced calmly toward them, sweeping each one with a hard, unwavering gaze. Graham with difficulty repressed a start as he saw the eyes of the man. There was something repelling about them—an uncanny age-oldness, like burnt-out fires. Yet the features under the white helmet indicated a man under forty. When he spoke it was in a harsh, unpleasant voice.

"I presume from the insignia on your plane that you are Americans—perhaps you are not aware that this is private property. May I ask your purpose in landing here?"

Graham's face flushed at the open hostility in the other's tone.

"This is the only place we could find," he said shortly. "Our base—Guam—has been sunk by an earthquake. We were heading for Saipan when we saw this island."

The stranger's eyes opened in a peculiar stare.

"Guam sunk! Ridiculous! You would have gone down with it, too. Your story is——"

"I tell you it is gone," snapped Graham, his patience sorely strained. "We were flying some miles offshore. When we came back there was nothing left but some debris in the water."

Oddly, his explanation seemed to afford the other man a vague relief.

"Pardon my discourtesy," he said with sudden suavity, "but we have gone to great trouble in keeping our research work from the public, and I thought for a moment you were merely landing here in curiosity."

"Far from it," replied Graham

rather grimly. "I never even knew there was any island here. But I guess we'll have to force ourselves on you—at least till we can radio the army transport. She's due at Guam in three days, and I can have her put in here."

"We haven't any radio," said the other man carelessly, "but there's a small schooner that touches here once a month. We'll take care of you till then."

He turned and joined his companion, who had waited with the restless natives. The radio operator spoke in a cautious whisper.

"Say, lieutenant, there's somethin' crooked about this. If those ain't radio masts up there, what are they? This bird's got a queer look, too. He gives me the creeps." •

"He has a pistol under his coat, too," said Betty in a low tone. "I saw it when he turned around. Oh, Stan, I wish we hadn't stopped here. Who do you suppose they are?"

Before Graham could reply the man had returned.

"My men will draw your seaplane up on the beach," he began. "You may come with me and we can make any necessary plans later."

**F**OLLOWED by the castaways, he swung off toward the breach in the rocks. Close behind came a dozen of the blacks, the rest having remained with the plane at the direction of the second white man.

As they proceeded, Graham saw that there had been a wide road leading down to the beach, but that an effort had been made to conceal its traces. A moment later he noticed that the sullen natives had closed in on both sides as well as in the rear. His sense of impending evil increased. At last he strode up to the head of the column.

"I have changed my mind," he told the leader firmly. "We will go on to Saipan. You can give us some

gasoline and we will not bother you any more."

The man stopped abruptly.

"You will have to stay here now," he said coldly. "It was not necessary for you to stop here, but now that you are here you will have to stay."

"*Have to stay?*" Graham flared out hotly. "The United States will have something to say about this—that plane is a naval vessel!"

"The United States means nothing to us," returned the other with a contemptuous shrug. "As for going on, you would not get very far now."

He nodded coolly toward the beach. An ejaculation escaped Graham's lips as he turned about. The F-5-L was almost hidden by a cloud of smoke, out of which poured a yellow flame. Hurling aside the nearest native, he broke through the threatening blacks, only to halt as he realized the futility of unarmed resistance and the danger to which Betty would be exposed. At a curt command the natives had raised their menacing rifles, while several machetes gleamed in sinister suggestion.

"Think twice," commented the leader ironically, "before you trifle with these boys. They are not like your peaceful Chamorros."

He motioned them to precede him, and with a growing sense of helplessness Graham silently indicated to his companions a quiet submission. Passing through the opening in the rock wall, they descended into the oval depression containing the building they had seen. It was even larger than it had seemed from the air. It had been constructed of white stone, apparently quarried from the hollow in which it stood. Every window on the lower floor was heavily barred, as were also the wide entrances. The towers around the edge of the building were made of some dark substance, in appearance like hard rub-

ber. Each one bore a number at its base. The broad bands of metal which ran from each of these towers to the central one were of some metal Graham could not identify, for it did not seem to be copper although it had a red-gold glow. A second glance showed him a strange phenomenon. Around each band danced an ever-changing mirage, like fantastic heat waves.

As they reached the main entrance the barrier swung back silently, though there was no one to be seen. Then came a march of several minutes through a long passage, with many barred doors on each side. From behind some of these sounded the ceaseless whirl of machinery. At last their captor halted before a door at the top of a flight of broad stairs. Entering, the captives found themselves in a suite of rooms so sumptuously furnished that except for its barricaded windows it might have been the abode of an Oriental prince. Beautifully woven tropical rugs covered the mirrorlike floors. On all sides hung works of old masters, illuminated by the soft glow from exquisitely fashioned silver chandeliers. A long library table bearing several books and magazines stood in the middle of the room. The tropical furniture, of highest quality Bilibid, was carefully harmonized with the delicately shaded walls.

As the door clicked shut between the prisoners and their strange captor, Graham stepped to the nearest window and looked out into the enclosed circular courtyard which lay below. A blinding glare greeted his gaze. After a moment he made out a battery of many-primed reflecting mirrors, set in concentric circles and focused at some spot above, evidently below the top of the main tower. His inspection was cut short by an exclamation from Riley. He turned. The crew chief was staring at a silver pitcher he had picked up.

"Say—these birds must be pirates," he observed excitedly. "This thing came off the old *Menocal*. Remember—the freighter that checked out of Frisco four years ago and never showed up again? Everybody thought she went down in a typhoon but I'll bet these bums got her."

"I don't think they're pirates," said Graham thoughtfully. "It's something deeper than that. But you've given me a hunch. There was an old wreck just under the water in the bay, and it was big enough to be the *Menocal*. And if anyone wanted to hide away from the world and cover up his tracks he'd certainly get rid of the ship. This place wasn't built overnight—maybe it took two or three trips to get all the stuff here. That road down on the beach was probably made when they carted their supplies ashore."

Riley whistled.

"Gosh, you'd think somebody'd have got wise to it. But they surely picked a good place—nobody comes this way in a blue moon."

"Once they had it finished nobody could see a thing," Graham pointed out. "Even if some trader did happen by here he'd never guess the island was inhabited."

"But why should they do such a thing?" asked Betty incredulously. "That man said something about research work—what on earth could they study way off here?"

Graham shook his head.

"I don't know, but it must be pretty desperate to make them take such pains."

"You are right," cut in an ironic voice.

The prisoners fell back, startled. The man with the deathlike eyes had come in silently, and was watching them with grim amusement.

"I'm glad you realize that—it will save us all trouble. And now come with me."

"Wait a minute!" retorted Graham sharply. "Before we go anywhere we want an explanation of this. You have the drop on us just now—but that's no reason for not telling us what we're up against."

The man inclined his head with mock humility.

"If you will just be patient you will get your explanation. And it will not be long, now. I hope I shall not have to use unpleasant means to carry out my—ah—request."

He opened the door with a significant gesture and smiled maliciously as they saw the waiting natives. The castaways followed him without another word.

**I**N A moment they had entered a long room in which nine men sat about a sort of council table. Each one was attired in white and each had that hardness of gaze which characterized the first, a peculiar soullessness of expression that never lifted.

But if these nine seemed evil of face, the hunched and twisted being at the head of the table had the features of a demon. Malignant cruelty played across the distorted lips, while the sinister creases in the hollow cheeks sank so deeply as to appear like twin scars. A strange, hideous pallor, like human flesh under a mercury lamp, gave a horrible suggestion of death. Only the eyes—piercing, burning in their devouring scrutiny—gave hint of the feverish, restless power which animated that sickening, misborn creature. But when he spoke it was in a voice of such dominant power that Graham found himself listening spellbound.

"We have no time to waste with you, for you have interrupted us at a very important moment. Therefore, you must make your choice quickly." He turned to the man who had commanded the natives. "Hayden, have these subjects been instructed?"



The one called Hayden made a low obeisance.

"No, Master, there has been no time. They understand nothing—as yet."

The searing glance passed slowly over Graham's face.

"You seem to be the leader—you will choose first. Your decision may influence the others. Hayden, have him brought to the control room."

Motioning two of the others at the table to follow, the Master swiftly passed through a door at the rear, his misshapen body writhing like that of some repulsive reptile.

Graham entered between two files of guards. He saw that he was in a room at or near the base of the central tower. Glass-enclosed switchboards filled one whole side, and the adjacent one was covered by dials and gages at whose use he could not guess. Before one instrument board was an ominous-looking chair, from which ran insulated cables that connected with cone-shaped fluorescent tubes. Multicolored rays incessantly crackled and hummed through fantastically swirling vapor in these tubes. Thirty feet from this spot was a separate battery of similar tubes, joined by thick cables leading through openings in the wall. Graham surmised that they were connected to the towers he had seen outside.

THE Master placed himself before the bewildered flyer, his forbidding face thrust forward in an expression of challenge.

"You have already had proof of my power," he began in his sonorous voice. "But it is clear that you do not understand, so I shall explain. First of all, give up forever any thought that your country can aid you. No one knows where you are—nor would it make any difference if the whole world knew. For within

twenty-four hours the world as you know it will cease to exist!"

Graham staggered back in dumb amazement.

"If you doubt what I say, consider the destruction of Guam," the Master went on calmly. "No one but a fool would suppose an earthquake responsible for that. Such a disturbance would affect a much wider area, and it would also leave many drifting objects. There might even be some people to escape. And there were none—except you and your companions, who avoided death only by a freak of chance."

Graham struggled futilely for speech. The Master went on in the manner of one repeating a ritual.

"Guam was but a tiny bit of rock, compared to the continents across the sea, but the force which sent it crumbling to the ocean bottom will just as quickly reduce this entire globe to a mass of water—except for one spot. And that spot is this island."

Graham found his voice at last.

"You are crazy," he cried huskily, breathless from the statement he had just heard. "There could be no force that could destroy land thousands of miles away. You are——"

"Quiet!" commanded the Master sternly. "I tell you I sank that island, and I will sink your miserable country in the same way. Others before you have doubted and have learned the truth. Perhaps you know of the disaster which befell the *Rivaro*—she struck a vertical block on which we were experimenting. Power? Force? Poor fool—you have not the slightest conception of the word. From this room I control the most stupendous power that can ever exist on a single planet."

He stopped for a moment, then continued abruptly, an open contempt making itself evident in his compelling voice.

"In order that your childlike mind can grasp the idea of this force I shall explain further. Do you know what forms the core of this earth? It is a mixture of nickel and iron. Above that are two layers of what scientists call 'sial' and 'sima', which to you would be nothing but rock. The former floats, in a relative sense, in the 'sima', although it seems rigid. Under great force this lighter substance can be made to flow—though ordinarily even the slightest movement takes years."

He paused again, staring fiercely into Graham's puzzled face.

"You are an aviator—I suppose you know something of the earth's magnetism. Probably you think of it as a feeble force which causes errors in ships' compasses, and so forth. Perhaps, also, you have seen iron filings hurl themselves into lines of magnetic force on a sheet of paper, when an electro-magnet was placed beneath the paper. But have you ever thought of what would happen if all the iron in the world suddenly had its polarity completely reversed?"

Graham shook his head dazedly. The Master went on rapidly.

"You would not, of course. You are like all the thick-headed scientists who laughed at my early discoveries. In twenty-four hours they will have laughed for the last time. Look at this map."

He indicated a large map of the world, across which ran fine wires, radiating from a point which Graham saw to be the island.

"Each one of these wires represents an electro-magnetic current induced in specially designed generators, and transmitted, or rather, hurled out from this island on a new conductor I have perfected. It is called feridium, though the name will mean nothing to you. Half of these bands are positive and the others are

negative, alternating as they are spaced about the building. For more than two years this current has been passing around the world like invisible hoops of energy, causing the magnetic elements of the earth to arrange themselves in definite lines. Now, the entire globe is in magnetic harmony along the lines we have established. We have also learned how to shorten or lengthen the distance to which our currents are sent by varying the field circuits of the generators concerned. Do you begin to understand, simpleton?"

Graham's mind was reeling. Though he did not comprehend all that the Master was saying, the realization that the fiend before him was not mad was borne strongly upon him. As in some horrible dream he heard that powerful voice proceeding with its incredible revelation.

"What will a reversal of these currents mean? Ah—so your thick brain begins to act! It will mean reversing the polarity of the entire earth—so that all the magnetic elements in the center, under the crustal surfaces, will attempt to adjust themselves instantly. But that would only bring havoc beyond control, probably disruption of the world. I do not wish that, so I have planned a better method, much better. The polarity will be reversed only for a fraction of a second and then will be changed back again. In other words, an alternating current will be transmitted through each feridium band. It will be like shaking the crust of the earth through a giant sieve. Every foot of land will be vibrated and tumbled about with such violence that it will sink to the average level which existed before there were continents—when the globe was covered completely with water. And that average level is far down under the sea!"

The sinister eyes gleamed in anticipation of the horrible cataclysm he had outlined. Graham shuddered.

"We shall be undisturbed because we are at the hub of this wheel of force. For each active propagation of force along a direction line there has been an opposite reaction along the next line. Thus the area directly around us has been kept in stable equilibrium. This ceases as the angles widen. The experiment at the time of the *Rivaro* indicated this, but to be sure I tested my theory by a short-wave reversal covering Guam. You know the result."

Graham was transfixed by a breathtaking horror.

"But why?" he asked in a shaking voice. "Why this wholesale murder of innocent people? And even if you succeed in destroying the world, think of the hundreds of ships that will be left upon the sea. Some of them will find this place and revenge the millions you will have killed."

The Master's bloodless lips twisted into a disdainful smile.

"Do you think that your puny mind can conjure up obstacles I will not have considered—and met? Many of the ships you mention will be caught in the great waves which will rush over the sinking continents. That is why we have had to use this place—so that we would not be in danger. The few ships that escape will sail about aimlessly until their crews and passengers die of starvation. There are few ships which carry enough fuel and supplies to last over a few weeks. When these are gone they will be helpless. Hardly any ships cross the Pacific—and even if one or two should chance to find this island it would only mean a quicker end for those on board. The rays of the sun which drive our motors have also a peculiar way of starting a fire over a long distance. And I have other means of defense, if that should fail. We shall let one year pass so that there will be no chance of any living being or animal except

on this island. Then we shall begin the creation of the new world."

Graham's crackling nerves freed themselves at last in a short and terrible laugh.

"The new world! Do you think you are God—to talk of creating worlds?"

A ferocious glare shot over the Master's face.

"God? *There is no God!* Do you hear? I am Master—Master of the world. I alone! And the power which destroys the wrangling, discontented people of today will easily raise up a new world, a better world in which my word will be law."

"A dead world!" shouted Graham, his self-control almost gone. "A world without a human being—only beasts like yourself. What good will it do you to be master of a world like that?"

"Be careful, fool!" stormed the Master, his lips working in growing rage. "You will have no chance to choose."

Jerking his malformed body about, he motioned toward one of his associates.

"Show him a last-stage inanimado. Let him see the thing he will be if he dares to trifle with his Master."

A SLIDING panel moved back along the wall. Graham's eyes dilated as he saw what appeared to be a mummy, standing upright in a glass case. A second look showed it to be the figure of a young man, every feature preserved as perfectly as though life existed. The one who had opened the panel removed a label from the case and held it out.

"Inanimado complete," Graham read stupidly. "Effected July 27, 1923. Due to animate naturally about 2000 unless sooner desired. History: Medico (was assistant surgeon on the *Menocal*). Refused co-operation. To be assigned to third region."

"He refused to become one of us," explained the Master, with grim significance. "He is alive, though he seems to be dead. A tiny spark of life exists in his brain. It could not even be measured—but it is there. A doctor would call this suspended animation. But it is more than that, for he can be kept like this for hundreds of years. When we need him—to teach medicine as I wish it taught in the new world—he will be animated, a certain part of his brain deadened, and he will forget that there has ever been any life before his new one. In the basement of this building are hundreds of these inanimados, both men and women, carefully chosen for some particular talent or knowledge they possess. They were picked from various parts of the world—how we brought them here is nothing to you. They are here—and will form the nucleus of the world to come."

"But you will die before such a world can be more than begun," insisted Graham. "It would take hundreds of years to do all that you intend."

The Master fixed him with a piercing stare. At something back of those glittering eyes Graham shivered involuntarily. For that instant there had been a queer light, something oddly *unhuman* in the hideous face before him.

"Look at me," boomed the deep voice. "As I appear to you this moment, so shall I appear to my subjects five thousand years from now. So may you become—like these you see here, and the men who wait outside. For the inanimado control, which can send you into a state of death for centuries, can as easily supply vitality to your body in excess of that it can use. You will be immune to all ordinary diseases, all ravages of time—nothing but severe wounds can affect you in any way. But I have wasted too much time. Make your choice while I am still in a

mood to forgive you the outburst against your Master. Which will it be—power second only to mine in the new world, or"—his glance rested on the waxen features of the figure in the glass case—"to be like him, a mindless slave?"

Graham hesitated, thinking desperately of some way in which to spar for time.

"And Betty—the girl who came with me?" he asked, watching the pallid face of the Master with intent eyes. "If I join you, will you promise that she will not be harmed?"

An expression of deadly menace crossed the shrunken features.

"Choose for yourself alone!" he snarled. "It is not for anyone to question the Master's intent."

Something broke within Graham's mind. In a wild, unreasoning rage he struck out at the repellent face so close to his, throwing all of his pent-up anger into that furious onslaught. Shrieking like a madman, the Master crumpled to the floor.

The next second Graham was the center of a murderous attack by the native guards, who desisted only at a sharp command from Hayden. The other two white men had gone to the assistance of the Master, who lay moaning where he had fallen. Struggling to his feet, he writhed to within a few inches of the flyer, his eyes ablaze with fiendish hatred.

"You have made your choice," he cried thickly. "And as you sink into oblivion take with you the thought that your doll-faced sweetheart will never see you again—unless in centuries ahead, when you pass before her with your memory an utter blank."

Struggling wildly, Graham was dragged to the chair he had already noticed. As heavy clamps shot about his arms and body Hayden placed a light metallic helmet upon his head, its trailing wires dangling across his lap. Plugging the other ends of the

wire into the instrument board, Hayden closed a switch and rotated the rheostat beside it. An unseen motor sprang into life, then came a high-pitched screaming as of a high-tension current breaking across an arc. Gradually the cone-shaped tubes began to take on a sinister glow, at first pink, and finally a bright cherry red.

A dreadful roaring began to sound in Graham's ears, and a swirling dizziness took hold of him. Straining his head forward, he saw that the trailing wires from the helmet lay upon his knee. Jerking suddenly, he caused the wire to fall upon the floor, where it rested close to his foot.

Divining his intention, one of the Master's associates leaped forward quickly. Kicking out vigorously, Graham connected heavily with the man's leg, and he stumbled, falling headlong against the now flaming tubes. There was a deafening crash, an agonizing scream from the tortured wretch as the burning gases seared into his body, and then something snapped in Graham's brain.

## 2

WITH almost unbelievable slowness the consciousness of life returned to Stanley Graham. At first it was a vague, insistent something which beat upon his stupefied mind, like a tremendous call from a great distance. Then came a faint perception of weariness, an awareness of a body which ached dully throughout. The torturing heat increased, as though a powerful voice flayed him with its vibrations, though not a sound came to his suddenly listening ears. Against a purely animal fear he fought to open his eyes, succeeding at last with an agonized effort. At first only a blurred vision registered itself, then came a startled impression of seeing, and in that instant his dormant brain resumed thinking.

He was lying in a hollow of rock

hardly longer than his body, a hollow oddly regular in its outlines, as though a box had once lain there, to crumble into dust as the substance about it hardened into stone. A bright light penetrated this gloomy prison through a jagged hole a few feet above his head. Twisting sidewise and casting his glance downward, he saw with surprize that his body was caked with a strange gray substance. At his movement it cracked away in several places, leaving his skin bare. He endeavored to sit up but found that his muscles refused to obey his brain.

After several minutes of intense concentration he was able to drag one arm toward his shoulder and prop himself a few inches above the rock floor. It was fully ten minutes before he could attain a sitting position. Exhausted, he leaned against the confining rock and strove to recall what had passed before the moment of his awakening. But in vain. The past was hidden almost as though it had never existed. Yet there must have been something—who was he, and how had he come to be in this gravelike place under the ground?

Discouraged by the utter failure of his memory, he closed his eyes and sank back listlessly. Again came the odd beating at his brain, pounding, hammering until he forced his eyes open and spurred himself to action. Dragging painfully to a kneeling posture, he thrust his head through the opening above.

From a clear blue sky the sun was shining cheerily down at him, as though to encourage him in his laborious efforts. He felt tentatively of the rough edges of the apertures. A small piece broke away at his touch, and he soon found other loose fragments. In a few minutes he was able to stand erect. He was looking down a long, sandy slope, at the bottom of which was a jumble of white stones, suggestive of ancient ruins.

The slope extended a few hundred feet beyond him in the other direction, so that he could not see what lay below the crest.

He crawled out into the sunlight and rested until his first weariness began to leave him. Still with no memory of the past, he rose and wandered unsteadily down the incline. Finding no one among the huge scattered rocks, he was about to retrace his way when the sound of a human voice caused him to halt abruptly. Cautiously approaching the cluster of stone behind which the sound seemed to have come, he peered curiously around the edge.

Seated upon a smooth slab was a handsome youth attired in a peculiar garment of light blue, bearing a huge figure "7" upon its back, and edged about the collar and sleeves with gold braid. His feet were encased in highly polished black boots and on his head was a helmet of stiffened blue cloth, marked with a small insignia.

He seemed to be addressing his bitter remarks to some absent enemy, for there was no one else to be seen. Graham saw that he was in the grip of a powerful emotion, for he was rocking back and forth ceaselessly, his hands clenched and his eyes tightly shut. His words, though in English, were somewhat muffled, so that Graham was unable to understand what he was saying.

**S**TEPPING from his concealment, Graham placed himself before the youth. Opening his eyes, the lad started to his feet in alarm and amazement.

"Who are you?" he gasped, staring wide-eyed at Graham's gray-streaked body.

Graham's attempt at an answer resulted at first only in a silent working of his lips. Then words came, husky and halting, as he sought for a means of expression.

"I — can't seem to — remember. Where am I?"

The youth looked even more dazed.

"Are you blind? Where you find a Seventh Region guard can you doubt that it is the Seventh Region? But what has happened to you? Where is your uniform?"

The rapid rain of questions caused Graham to shake his head blankly.

"Everything is mixed up," he said, placing his hand wearily to his forehead. "I am beginning to remember some things, but they are very hazy."

The youth glanced at him oddly.

"You are not like any regionite I know. How is it that you do not know one of the Master's guards when you see him? Even in the farthest First Region there is said to be no such ignorance, though the people there are of lowest mentality."

Something clicked at the back of Graham's brain. The Master! Slowly, out of a lifting blanket of darkness, there came before him a sinister face, distorted with hatred. A deep, sonorous voice echoed in his ears.

"This one you call the Master," he cried hoarsely. "Who is he?—where is he now?"

The cheeks of the blue-clad youth paled in swift terror.

"You dare to speak like this? Be careful—I warn you through his power he may know even now——"

With a fierceness borne of his emotion, Graham seized the frightened lad by the shoulder.

"Quick! Answer me!"

"He is Master of the Earthband, of all the counselors, and all regions. Surely you can not have lived on any part of the Earthband without knowing this. His Palace lies in the Central Plaza, in the very middle of the Seventh Region. You can see it from the ridge up there."

"This Earthband," said Graham dazedly: "how long has it existed?"



The youth shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"I do not understand you. The Earthband and the Master have existed forever. But we—his people—were created by him only in recent times. It has been only a little over five hundred years since—why, what is the matter?"

Graham's face had gone ashen and he was trembling visibly.

"Five hundred years," he muttered in a broken voice. "God help me—that fiend has succeeded, and the world is gone."

He fell silent in utter despair. The youth stared down at him with a puzzled frown.

"You speak of 'God' and of a fiend," he observed. "I have never heard of the first, and the Master teaches that fiends die quickly, once they are found out. Either that, or they are sent to the northern boundary of the First Region, where they are forgotten."

Graham roused himself from his apathy.

"Have you no rights of your own?" he inquired. "Must you do everything the Master says?"

A strangely bitter expression came into the youth's face.

"A regionite must never dispute the word of even a sub-counselor," he answered, and there was a sudden hopelessness in his voice. "Even now I am breaking a law in being here. No one is permitted to leave the walls of the Plaza except by order of a counselor."

"Then why are you here?" queried Graham.

The youth searched his face for a long interval before replying.

"You may be a spy—but I do not think so. I will tell you the reason. Perhaps it will help for a little while to talk of my trouble, though nothing can ever help me after tonight.

"My name is Latta, though no regionite's name means anything.

We go by numbers and ratings. I am third officer of the Palace Guards, though I would have been a painter of pictures if I had had the right to choose. But all artists and musicians come from the Fourth Region, and such things are forbidden subjects here. Until a short time ago I had no reason to be unhappy, though I have always been different from other regionites I know. Few ever dare to question in their own minds the power by which the counselors and the Master rule over us."

He paused and cast a nervous glance over his shoulder, as though even here he feared being overheard.

"I have always had queer dreams—dreams of being free to do as I wished, but not a person knew of this except Rosita. She understood and sympathized—for we had made our pledges before the sub-counselor and were to be approved in union in a month from yesterday. But now"—his voice faltered and tears sprang to his eyes—"she has been taken from me. Tonight she becomes the chief wife of a counselor."

Dropping down upon the ground, he buried his face in his hands. Graham shook his head sympathetically.

"Isn't there any way around it?" he inquired. "Do you mean that these counselors can pick any woman in their region for a wife?"

"They have many wives," said Latta dully. "All that is necessary is approval of their choice by the Master. My poor Rosita dreads this night as well as I, but she can not change the decree. Even a hint of her feelings would bring great trouble upon her parents, who are faithful regionites. No, there is nothing to do. I came here to be alone—to brace myself against displaying my emotions tonight, when I shall be forced to watch the sacrifice of the one I love."

A question about Betty had been trembling on Graham's lips for some

time, but he gradually realized its hopelessness. Doubtless she had died long ago, if not at the time he had been hurled into inanimation, then in the centuries following. Never would she have assented to the Master's invitation to join in the destruction of the world. A deep sadness came over him as he remembered her winsome features, her merry blue eyes, and the arch way in which she had captivated the heart of every man who saw her. She was gone; and by some unhappy fate he had lived, the only survivor of that other age, except the human beasts who had caused its end.

In the place of his sadness there grew a consuming desire to confront the monster who had brought about this tragedy. Even though it meant his own death it would be worth that supreme sacrifice if he could revenge himself in that last instant on the deformed fiend who had spread his evil life over so many years.

"I can help you," he informed Latta calmly. "I do not promise I can give you the happiness you wish—but I can point the way. It is the only way you and your comrades will ever be other than slaves."

Latta's handsome face took on a glow of excitement.

"Somehow you give me new hope," he exclaimed. "You do not talk like anyone I have ever known. I will do as you say if you think there is any chance of saving my little Rosita."

Graham proceeded quickly.

"Do not question a thing I tell you. I am a being from another world—a world in which your Master means nothing but evil. If there is any way in which I can overthrow him I shall do it. But first you must tell me everything about this Earthband, and the Palace down there, so that I shall know exactly how to plan."

Latta's eyes had widened incredibly at Graham's statement.

"Another world!" he cried. "Then my dreams were not mad, after all.

The Earthband history says there is only one world in all space on which beings exist. I have not spoken of this, even to Rosita. But I have stolen out here to watch the night sky and to dream. One night—the last one when I watched the sky—I dreamed of great dark beings that floated slowly down through the sky. It was so real I sprang to my feet looking for them, but there were only clouds above me."

A startling idea came into Graham's mind. Were there airplanes in this Earthband? If so, he might yet obtain one and use it in his revenge. But at his question Latta only looked at him in wonder.

"Airplanes? I know not the word. No, there is nothing that travels through the air. Between regions run speed-tubes, in which cars are shot by air pressure at very great speeds. These are only for officials and transportation of supplies, except when a regionite is transferred to the Palace or the Central Plaza for special service."

"How did you get out here, when you say no one is permitted to leave the Plaza?" demanded Graham.

"There is a passage under the great wall. I found it long ago when inspecting the lowest storerooms. It is hidden behind old boxes, and I think no one else knows of it. At least, it has never been used by anyone but myself since then. I do not know its original purpose."

"Never mind that," said Graham tersely. "We have no time to waste. Tell me as quickly as you can how far this Earthband extends, how the people live, and anything else you can think of. I'll stop you when I don't understand anything."

**L**ATTA began hesitatingly, but soon warmed to his subject. Graham listened carefully, now and then breaking in with a brief question. In an hour he had obtained a fair idea

of the strange new world in which he had awakened.

There now existed but one wide strip of land, running parallel to the equator, and lying above the tropical belt so that all but its most northern edge was in a mild climate. This strip was about two thousand miles wide and was broken at regular intervals, so that the band consisted of seven regions. The rest of the world was water, divided into the expanse of the north, called the North Ocean, and that on the south, called the South Ocean. The entire absence of other land made ships useless. Therefore, all transportation was by speed tubes, as Latta had indicated, in which cars traveled about five hundred miles an hour. Some kind of improved radio communication existed between the Master and his officials, but there was no general broadcasting for the regionites.

The general purpose of all laws and orders was to keep the people under close discipline and ignorant of all matters but their own particular class of work. Study of other subjects was forbidden. Each regionite, man or woman, was compelled to wear uniform clothing indicating his or her status, and each one was tattooed on the left shoulder with an identification number and letter.

Life for the regionites was usually not over forty-five years. Graham conjectured that the Master had managed to control their life span in some way so that he would get the most work from them while they were in their prime. Their early demise would also keep them from gaining too much intelligence with added years, and thus wondering at his right to such great authority and power. How this horrible peonage had been attained he understood when he questioned Latta about other regions. The youth hesitated often, and sometimes confessed to a complete ignorance, though he

seemed to be above the average regionite, according to his description of his friends and comrades.

Regionites were not permitted to marry outside of their own region, and all unions were subject to approval of the officials. Money did not exist. Everything was proportioned by credits, which were given for a certain amount of work ordered by the sub-counselor or the counselor.

From one of Latta's comments Graham began to suspect that there was a powerful secret spy system throughout the Earthband, by means of which any regionite suspected of even questioning the Master's right to rule was speedily removed to the barren wastes of the northern First Region and starved to death.

It soon came to him why the Master had refrained from introducing airplanes. As long as the people were isolated and not allowed to communicate on any subjects he could control them, but given the freedom of the air they would soon be united, inevitably to rebel against him. Having never even seen a bird, the regionites would not imagine the possibility of flight.

Afternoon was drawing to a close when Latta concluded his description. Graham found he was beginning to suffer from hunger, which was not strange, he reflected grimly, when he had not eaten for over five hundred years.

"There are two things you will have to do," he told the youth. "You must get me into the Plaza and bring me some food. After that get me a uniform of some sort."

Latta inspected him critically.

"You are right. It would hardly be possible for you to walk through the halls or along the elevations under the Palace without causing curiosity. You are not small enough to wear anything of mine, but I can get the uniform of a guard who was transferred from the Palace. It is after

6 now. As soon as the sun falls, we must hurry in, for there is a full moon tonight. Then, too, this is a great event and I must be there early. The counselors from every region will be guests at the Palace tonight. I have heard, too, that some new proclamation is to be issued. I do not know the nature of it, though."

Graham did not answer him. His mind had gone back over the long years of his deathlike sleep, to a girl with Titian hair, a girl whose cheek showed a mischievous dimple as she smiled up archly at him. A gnawing loneliness came upon him, almost a regret that he had ever awakened from that terrible sleep. For the people of this Earthband were not his people—their minds moved in different ways, and their spirit had been crushed almost before it had begun to take form. He was alone in a strange world, and his heart was aching for a girl who had died five hundred years before.

"REMEMBER the signal," whispered Latta through almost closed lips. "When the bronze bell sounds—that is the Master's coming."

Graham's nod was imperceptible, but under his blue helmet his eyes took on a fierce gleam. Except for this, there was nothing in which he differed from the other guards who stood impassively beside the throne-like dais in the brilliantly lighted courtroom.

He was surreptitiously scanning the throng of richly attired counselors and officials when the great bell pealed a signal note of warning. The hum of conversation ceased instantly. Stiffening into immobility, Graham faced straight ahead, following the action of the other guards.

Slowly a door at the rear of the great room opened, and a procession appeared, flanked by still other guards. Graham's pulses leaped to racing speed as he saw for the second

time the malignant features of the man who called himself "Master." His writhing stride was gone, though there was still a suspicion of the hunched and twisted body. Except for this, and an increased appearance of age about his eyes, five centuries seemed to have made little change.

Beside him walked another man, one whose face also was strangely familiar. As he turned slightly toward the guards, Graham saw that it was Hayden. But all this was forgotten as his eyes rested upon two slender, robed figures following with halting steps and downcast eyes. The first was an unusually beautiful girl, with dark hair and a delicate, oval face. But the second was the one at sight of whom Graham almost jumped from his place. For the girl who followed the Master, her fair head bent in despair, was Betty—whom he had given up as dead!

Feverishly intent, he watched her approach, noting with keen anguish the deep sadness upon her lovely face. Then, realizing the danger of a sudden recognition if she should look up, he stolidly glanced away, steeling himself against any suspicious movement or expression. His fatalistic plan to sacrifice himself in killing the Master was quickly forgotten as the little procession moved by him. Why was Betty here at this time? Had she lived in some horrible slavery through all these years?

Half dazed, he listened to a proclamation read by an official as the Master mounted to his seat upon the dais. Slowly a cold horror descended upon him. Betty was to become the Master's consort! She was a superwoman (so read the proclamation) created by the Master to live forever as mistress of the Earthband. And at the same ceremony which effected this union, Hayden would be given the dark-eyed girl, Rosita. At this last, Latta reeled as though struck and his face went a sickly white.

Graham caught his eyes and shook his head in a hurried warning, though the hope which had revived at sight of Betty was giving way to a black despair.

As the mockery of marriage began before the dais, a final determination came to him, inspired by the misery in Betty's fair young face. Against the scores of guards and officials he was absolutely helpless to save her. There was only one way in which he could prevent her becoming the prey of the monster upon the dais.

Feeling cautiously for the dagger which hung at his belt, he closed his eyes in a last agonized prayer for strength to do the thing he planned.

"Oh, God!" he whispered brokenly. "Forgive me—and make her understand!"

As the knife hilt touched his hand he opened his eyes and drew a deep breath. In another moment it would all be over. A bitter sob rose to his lips but he fought it back. Then, before he could make the leap across the intervening space, a curious look on Latta's face drew his attention. The young guard was staring upward, while his lips moved silently. Graham started as he followed the lad's glance through the great, high windows that bordered the side of the vast courtroom. A strange, dark shape was passing across the newly risen moon. While he gazed in astonishment the thing was gone, only to be succeeded by another silhouetted object which descended slowly, almost vertically, like some huge bird.

*But there were no birds on the Earthband!*

A tremendous excitement possessed him. What had Latta said? "Dark beings floating slowly down through the air!" Had the youth really been dreaming—or was it possible that some near-by planet had established contact with the earth? He shot a hasty look about the assemblage, as a wild plan sprang into his mind. No

one but Latta had observed this odd movement in the sky. He stared once more toward the window. No longer was there any doubt. *Something* was descending toward the Palace.

With a triumphant shout he burst through the line of guards and halted, with uplifted dagger, before the dais before any of the amazed on-lookers could raise a hand to stop him.

"Stop—or I will destroy you and everyone in this Palace. Look—there is proof of my power!"

Betty had fallen back, startled at his dramatic appearance. As her eyes rested on him she gave a sudden, pitiful little cry and fainted into a little heap. A seething rage had filled the Master's pallid cheeks with a mottled flush, but this was replaced by a look of stark terror as he saw the lowering shadows beyond the Palace. Hayden and the other officials stood dumbly, as though in utter disbelief of what their eyes told them. Even the guards, who had hurriedly started after Graham, stopped to gaze in consternation.

HAYDEN was the first to recover. He dashed to the nearest window and peered upward. When he turned back his features wore a ghastly mask of fear.

"We are lost, Master!" he cried in a dry, crackling tone. "The sky is filled with strange machines——"

An ominous humming broke upon his words, seeming to come from the very room in which they stood. It grew quickly in volume and in a moment an impressive voice sounded with such volume as to set the windows trembling.

"Master of the Earthband," came the solemn words, "the end of your evil rule has come. There is no chance for you to escape. Answer at once by your radotrex system. If you do not surrender within three minutes we shall blast your Palace into ruins."

The voice died into silence. Almost at once a great outcry arose. Indescribable confusion took the place of the quiet order which had prevailed, as counselors and officials fought to gain the doors leading to the entryways. Except for Latta, who had reached Rosita's side, the guards joined in the general stampede. Though the Master's voice boomed out in a lashing fury the panic increased.

After a second of hesitation, Hayden forsook the lone figure upon the dais, but his desertion was fruitless. The Master reached swiftly into his wide robes. His hand reappeared with a tiny instrument.

"Traitor!" he screamed, leveling it at the back of the fleeing counselor. "You will not save yourself that way."

There was a click, a bluish ray shot across the room, and Hayden lay sprawled on the floor, motionless.

At the first sign of disorder Graham had knelt beside Betty and lifted her in his arms. Carrying her tenderly to the rear of the dais, where Latta had hidden Rosita, he hurriedly inquired of the guard the location of the radotrex transmitter.

"In the second room at the rear of the court," whispered Latta. "But look—you can not go there. See! The Master has gone to answer them."

Laughing insanely, the forsaken leader was staggering toward the door at the rear. Graham tightly clutched his dagger and quickly followed. As the Master reached the first room the strange warning voice came once more.

"We shall wait no longer—the three minutes are ended. Your life is ended—and may God have mercy on your black soul!"

Even in that instant of danger and excitement, a thrill of exaltation passed through Graham's mind at the significance of these words. The unknown invaders above knew God!

From outside a peculiar whine grew into a loud shriek. Graham's eyes filled with horror. The Palace was being bombed. Forgetting caution, he dashed into the second room, where the Master leaned over a complicated-appearing device upon a large table.

The fiend at the radotrex straightened up with a snarl, and the death-gun he had used on Hayden was raised in his trembling fingers. Graham threw himself forward, the dagger poised high in the air. In that tense instant there came a terrific crash, seemingly a few yards away, and a leaping flame flared brightly through the windows. With a cry of madness, the Master spun about, just as Graham's descending blade grazed his arm. Then, with a laugh that lived for hours in Graham's memory, he turned the death-gun upon himself and clicked the trigger switch.

After a stupefied second, Graham ran to the radotrex transmitter, which was humming steadily. Evidently the Master had been about to use it when he had entered. Praying that his words would reach the mysterious men above, he spoke rapidly into the glowing disk at the center of the device:

"The Earthband surrenders—the Master is dead. Do not bomb the Palace. Only four people are there —"

The whine of another bomb was his only answer. Desperately he tried again, shouting into the instrument. And this time the strange voice replied, louder and closer than before.

"We will land—and if there is any sign of treachery the entire city will be destroyed. Clear the central parks so that we can——"

The second bomb struck with a deafening boom, directly upon the Palace terraces. As its shattering pieces hurtled outward, the window casement beside Graham fell in



splinters, loosing a cascade of small stones. He felt a dull blow, a furious ringing in his ears, and then slipped to the floor, while from out of the growing darkness he seemed to hear Betty's voice, crying his name . . . .

WHEN he recovered he was lying on a wide divan, with his head in Betty's lap. She had just finished bandaging the cut upon his forehead. When he opened his eyes she gave a soft cry of relief.

"Oh, Stan—I was afraid you would never come back to me. When I saw you lying there on the floor I thought he"—she gave a shuddering glance across the room—"I was sure he had killed you."

Graham lifted his hand and patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"What has happened?" he asked rather weakly. "How long have I been here?"

"It has been almost fifteen minutes," she told him. "I think they have landed in the parks, for I saw searchlights pointed down that way from the air. But somehow, Stan, I am not afraid. They must be good men—for they came to destroy these evil people of the Earthband."

"They are not all evil—only the counselors and their helpers," said Graham. "But tell me how you came to be here."

"It is all so vague," Betty said slowly. "After the Master told us you had been killed by an accident to his inanimado apparatus, nothing mattered to me. I wanted to die, too, but they put me to sleep—I think the Master intended to revive me in a short time, but something went wrong. I remember nothing else until three days ago. At first I could not understand, but when I found out he was going to make me—marry him"—her voice faltered—"I thought I should go crazy. I prayed that somewhere you would be alive and would come to me. And even at

the last minute I did not lose hope, though once I was so frightened I tried to kill myself."

With sudden understanding Graham remembered the insistent pounding at his brain which had awakened him that day. It had been Betty's desperate call which had forced him from that deadly stupor. While he was explaining this, and the circumstances leading up to his confronting the Master, Latta ran into the room, followed by Rosita.

"They are coming into the Palace—the strange men who came in the air. What shall we do?"

Graham struggled to a sitting position.

"What kind of men are they?" he asked eagerly.

"They are huge, with great golden beards," returned Latta excitedly. "Hundreds of them are climbing from wonderful machines which they have brought down into the parks and even in the wider streets. Our people have hidden, except a few who were caught as they ran. But I do not think they have harmed anyone yet."

"Go out and meet them," directed Graham quickly, as a tread of heavy feet resounded through the outer hall. "Don't act as though you were afraid. I think they will be friends."

In a few seconds the young guard returned, nervously escorting a dozen men of unusual stature, whose blond beards and blue eyes immediately reminded Graham of a picture of the ancient Vikings. Each one was dressed in a close-fitting suit of leather, apparently designed to resist extreme cold. At their belts they carried peculiar-looking weapons connected by wires to small, rectangular pouches swung at their hips. The foremost, quite evidently the leader by his stern eyes and striking carriage, stopped the others with a gesture as he saw Betty and Graham.

Then his eyes traveled beyond them to the silent figure upon the floor.

"I am looking for the one who sent the message of surrender," he stated curtly, and in his powerful voice Graham recognized the tone which had echoed so mysteriously through the courtroom.

Graham inclined his head calmly.

"I sent the message. Your coming saved the four of us here from unhappiness—in fact, from death."

Briefly he related the situation which had existed at the moment when the aircraft of the conquerors had first been seen. As he explained the destruction of what had been a thickly populated world the stern eyes lighted curiously and several of the invaders glanced quickly at each other. When he had finished, the blond leader looked down at him with some great emotion on his face. Then, to Graham's intense surprize, he strode forward and clasped his hand in a mighty grip.

"A miracle has indeed taken place," he said with almost a tremor in his resonant voice. "Though all of this was known to us, not one ever dreamed that anyone but our forefathers had escaped the plot of the madman who lies there, dead."

Graham sat bolt upright.

"Your forefathers!" he repeated in amazement. "You mean that you—"

"We are descended from the lost Americans," replied the other solemnly. "In that terrible catastrophe of the Twentieth Century a few thousands were saved by what I have always believed an act of God. The story has been handed down carefully through generations.

"At the last moment, before the force-reversal which wrecked the earth, these demons who planned it could not resist the temptation to gloat over their intended victims. A radio message was broadcast over the

entire world, telling of the end of the continents and their people. At first it was thought an ugly joke, but almost at once there began a violent upheaval of land and sea. Except in one spot on the American continent every person perished. I believe there must have been a dead point, considered magnetically, somewhere about the eastern part of Pennsylvania. Either that, or there was a deep fault in the earth's crust. At any rate, an irregular bit of land, hardly as large as the state I mentioned, was shifted laterally hundreds of miles northward by the same force which sank all the rest of the land. As it shifted it also rose until it stood high above the surrounding seas. Our ancestors found themselves hurled into the bitter climate of the Arctic, though at that time they supposed some freak of nature had suddenly changed the temperature of the latitude where they had lived.

"Many died before they could adjust themselves to the rigors of that awful cold, but finally one mighty man took charge and brought hope out of fear and despair. In the years that followed these courageous souls struggled to overcome the handicap of nature, and to rebuild the civilization which had so nearly vanished. The centuries gradually produced a hardy race equipped both physically and mentally to survive the trials of the far North. And all through these centuries there has been one purpose: to become powerful enough to explore the lonely seas surrounding us and learn the secret of that which our history named 'The Destruction'."

He paused in his astounding tale, while Betty and Graham stared at each other with incredulous eyes. The blond commander smiled.

"It is hard to believe, I know. But it is true. Three centuries passed before we knew—or rather, our ances-

*(Continued on page 714)*

## The Master of Doom

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tors knew—that there was any other land on the globe. Finally our spies landed secretly on the northern border of what is called the First Region. It was then a barren waste, though now it is a place of exile for enemies of the Master. Years went by, with many secret expeditions, before they could get a full knowledge of what had happened. After that, the efforts of everyone in the New America were bent to overcoming those inhuman beings who ruled the Earthband.

“Aviation was developed to the utmost, for that was the Master’s weak point. Vertical control—what was called helicopter control in your time—is now used in all our flying machines. Our inventors and scientists have perfected hundreds of other things which have aided the cause. Voice projection, which I used in demanding your surrender, is one of them. At last we felt sure the Earthband would be helpless to defend itself when we attacked. We even made one or two practise flights here, on dark nights when we would not be seen. Our spies selected tonight as the best time to attack, for all the counselors and officials were to be at the Palace. And we have succeeded, for our men are sure to capture them within a few hours.”

As he concluded his story, the leader smiled quietly down at Betty and Graham, who were listening in a daze.

“I know it will take some time to appreciate these many changes that time has made,” he said gently. “But we shall help you—and we shall need your help in rebuilding the lives of these unfortunate regionites.”

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“Then you will not harm them?” asked Betty, tremulously. “There has been so much bloodshed——”

The leader shook his head, and the sternness had entirely disappeared from his face.

“They were not to blame. We shall help them—though it will be the work of years. The old regime is gone forever. The counselors will be imprisoned, for in the New America we do not punish by death; but they will soon pass away when their artificial life-stimulus is taken from them.”

He turned to his aides and gave a brief order. Then he beckoned to Latta and Rosita.

“Come with us, for we need guides who can explain our purpose to these people. Later, we shall send you back to your friends here, but in a short time you will all join us at our headquarters.”

They went out quickly, the blond giants marching in serene confidence of their power, the two regionites exchanging shy glances of adoration.

Left thus alone, the two who had lived to see the saving of a lost world looked for a long moment into each other's eyes. Then, somewhat unsteadily, Graham got to his feet, despite the girl's protest. Slowly, hand in hand, they passed from that clamber of death, with not a backward glance at the pitiful thing which had dared oppose its Maker.

As they reached the windows the golden moon shone tranquilly down upon them, creating a soft halo about the girl's wondrous hair. And then it was that Graham leaned down to whisper something to her. Betty's lips trembled for a second, then she smiled with all her archness of old.

“I never thought—way back there in Guam—I would have to wait five hundred years for you to ask me that.”