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# AMAZING STORIES

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# The Master of

BY  
POLTON CROSS

Blake Henthorne and his father are trapped by the ruthless ruler of Golden City. Subdued and enslaved in the underground mines, Henthorne, inspired by the love of a fellow captive seeks escape and revenge.

## CHAPTER I

### Hugh Dalaker's Story

**W**ORLD wide storms and shattering electrical disturbances were the basic reasons for three men occupying a lonely camp in the foothills of the Peruvian Sierras. . . . It was long past sunset: a high moon revealed the towering, snow-capped peaks of the Andes. The Sierras—boundary line between the Peruvian coast and the wild, trackless forest of the interior.

"I still think you're crazy!" Blake Henthorne remarked. "You figure that the cause of all the troubles in the outer world lies right here on this map? Somewhere in the interior. That it?" His sharp grey eyes darted a question in the light of the table lamp.

His father, Doctor Henthorne,

nodded his white head slowly. "Exactly it. Experiments don't lie, Blake. Besides, we have the word of Mr. Dalaker here—"

"Yeah, I know." Blake spoke gruffly, stood erect again. There was no love lost between him and the short, dark-skinned Hugh Dalaker. "I still think it's crazy," he growled.

Dalaker, lounging in a portable chair, studied Blake's six foot two and massive shoulders for a moment, then he laid his drink on the table. . . . His eyes were very dark, his forehead very good, but his lips just a trifle too thin and tight.

"I don't know why you persist in discounting my statements, Blake," he commented, smiling a little. "I know exactly what I'm doing. I know the South American interior backwards—spent all my life in it. And I repeat that two years ago I saw El Dorado."

"So did a Spanish sailor," Blake

# Golden City



*Illustration by Harold Welch.*  
"Get up from that floor!" The brutal overseer raised his whip.

grunted, lighting a cigarette. "Maybe he drank the same stuff as you. . . ."

Dr. Henthorne snapped, "There's no need for that, Blake! Since Mr. Dalaker has been good enough to offer his services to me the least you can do is to be civil."

Blake sat down, stared moodily at the map. Then he looked up at the men's faces. "Ask yourselves, does it make sense?" he demanded. "First we get vast electrical storms in all parts of the world. You, dad, with your experiments and your directional indicator definitely proved that the storms have a source, pointing directly to an unknown spot in the South American interior. You publish your report, but only one man believes you—Hugh Dalaker here. He comes along, offers to take you pronto to the exact source of the disturbance—El Dorado. . . . El Dorado the City of Gold!" he finished in disgust. "The myth, the delusion of a drunk, the— Oh, what's the use? There isn't any such place anyway. We're on a wild goose chase."

"There is such a place as El Dorado," Dalaker stated steadily. "Oh, I admit that it does not possess that actual name, but from its situation, from the vague records that persist about it concerning a city of gold—for it is composed of yellow metal—there is no doubt that it is the same place seen by the Spanish sailor of history fame. I've seen this city, marked its exact position—and that position coincides with Dr. Henthorne's tests. What more do you want?"

"Only a strait jacket, I guess," Blake said laconically, then crushing out his cigarette he lounged to the door of the tent and stared moodily out across the waste of country they had so far covered. It lay swathed in misty moonlight, and somewhere amidst it all,

heading homewards, were the mulatto muleteers who had guided them this far.

Somewhere further away still was civilization—and to Blake Henthorne civilization meant New York. . . .

He turned sharply as a figure came up softly in the gloom. It was Hussi Ranji.\* Tall, slim, tightly clad, with a broad sash and turban of dull cream hue, he was, thanks to the schooling of Blake, not quite such a warlike individual as he had been at first. But the fierce cruelty of an Afghan heritage was somewhere in his blood, though he managed to mask it with impartial calm, aided considerably by a rounded, weirdly clipped beard that always reminded Blake of an untrimmed hedge.

"The bird of heaven will move more smoothly than a thousand streams, Sahib Blake," he commented.

"Nice going," Blake answered, and he stared across the space to where the machine stood, now completely assembled from the sections that had been brought to these foothills. The moonlight glinted on the sweeping outspread wings.

"You've done a nice job of the final assembly, Ranji," Blake resumed, turning back to him, and he saw white teeth gleam in momentary approval amidst the whiskers.

"I seek no greater praise, sahib."

"Skip that and tell me something. Did you ever hear of El Dorado?"

"Only from sahib Dalaker. He gave me my instructions when the sun mated with the mountains. Tomorrow, by the graciousness of Allah, I shall fly you in the sky bird some five hundred or so miles into the rising sun."

"Easterly direction, huh?" Blake mused. "That'll take us right over the forest. . . . Dalaker's plenty free with

\* Pathan servant of the Henthorne household.

his orders, anyhow. Frankly, Ranji, I don't like the guy. . . ." He lowered his voice and looked back into the tent where Dalaker and Dr. Henthorne were still studying the map.

"I can always consign the body of sahib Dalaker to the tomb of all infidels," Ranji commented smoothly, his lean brown hand sliding gently into his sash. "If you but wish—"

"Uh-uh, nothing like that!" Blake interrupted hurriedly. "You keep that carving knife to yourself. . . . But, gosh, would I like to sock him!"

"Maybe Allah will provide," Ranji suggested, bowing a little, then he moved on sedately towards his own tent.

## CHAPTER II

### Into the Jungle

NINE O'CLOCK the following morning found the loaded plane traveling over pure virgin forest. Ranji was at the controls, following out the orders of Hugh Dalaker as he constantly checked position on the map. Dr. Henthorne, though he could do little to assist in this direction, watched with silent interest.

Blake was still openly skeptical. He kept his eyes on the verdure below, studied its changeless vastness, tried to picture how long it had lain thus undisturbed, only its veriest edges scratched by the probings of mankind. . . .

Hours passed. The powerful plane still droned onwards— Until at last Dalaker shot out of his usual impassivity and pointed to a spot in the greenness perhaps twenty miles away.

"There!" he cried. "See?" He handed over the binoculars. "Here, take a look. You first, Blake; you need

convincing."

Blake took the glasses, couldn't help starting a little as the keen lenses revealed what was apparently a yellow obelisk glinting in the sunshine, backed by a range of low-lying hills. He stared long and earnestly, lowered the glasses at last with a puzzled expression.

"Something there all right," he muttered. "Something yellow—"

"El Dorado!" Dalaker breathed, his dark eyes intense. He clenched his lean fingers on the window frame. "I knew I'd find it again. I couldn't help but—" He stopped suddenly, almost as if he had said too much.

But Blake had been listening intently. "Why?" he demanded curtly. "Why couldn't you help but find your way?"

Dalaker shrugged, turned easily. "Oh, calculations— certain landmarks familiar to an old hand like me, and—" He broke off, opened the driving cabin door. "Bear left, Ranji, towards that distant yellow tower."

The Indian nodded, swept round in a huge circle. Blake stroked his chin, his eyes a little puzzled.

"Listen, Dalaker," he said slowly, "there's something a bit strange about this. Fliers have passed over this forest before today— especially world-hop fliers—and it looks to me as though they couldn't help but see that gold spire just as we are doing."

Dalaker smiled with his lips. "No flyer has ever mentioned such a thing, has he?" he asked coolly.

"No. That's what I don't understand."

"And not every flier has returned, either," Dalaker finished steadily. "Many have been missing—mysteriously lost. . . ." He shrugged, left his meaning hidden in mid air.

"You're not suggesting—" Blake began in amazement, then as he saw the

explorer's eyes were coldly inscrutable he turned away and stared through the window again.

The golden spire was much nearer now, projecting over the summit of the hills, clearly visible above the tree tops. And, little by little, the view beyond the hills became clear, to reveal a verdure-free basin surrounded entirely by a hilly range. A volcanic range, in fact, for in one section smoke was curling lazily upwards on a hot wind.

Then something peculiar happened. The great obelisk, standing in the exact center of a sprawling city of yellow, suddenly began to sink downwards into the ground, controlled by some complex but exceptionally strong levitative system.

Blake wheeled round to question the mystery, turned so quickly that he caught Dalaker in the act of studying his wrist watch. Only it wasn't a wrist watch! In that split second Blake saw very clearly that it was a peculiarly designed compass with a false watch face made to fit over it.

Dalaker fondled his wrist gently as he saw Blake's sharp stare. His eyes were hard though his mouth smiled.

"So that's it!" Blake breathed, striding forward. "That spire is magnetic! You've got a compass tuned on it! No wonder you found your way so easily. . . . What's your game, Dalaker?"

"Game?" Dalaker shrugged. "I don't understand."

Dr. Henthorne strode forward impatiently. "Look here, Blake, will you stop making trouble? You and Dalaker have been at each other's throats ever since the trip started, and—"

"What about his wrist compass?" Blake demanded. "Was that in the bargain?"

The scientist looked surprised. "Wrist compass? Why, I—"

"This is really all very foolish, my friends," Dalaker smiled. "Certainly I have a compass. Why should I hide it?" What better way to reach El Dorado? I have seen this place before, of course, and I found that it had magnetic qualities. So—"

"So that golden obelisk is just sinking because it's so heavy, I suppose?" Blake asked sourly. "You're not fooling me, Dalaker. *And you're not going to land in that city, either.* Ranji's going to turn around. . . ."

"No he isn't!" Dalaker snapped, and he abruptly whipped out a small automatic from his pocket. He looked at the startled men with bitter eyes. "Since you choose to be—er—hostile, so shall I. . . . My apologies," he went on, smiling acidly. "And my compliments to you, Blake. You're far smarter than your father."

Dr. Henthorne gulped and colored. Dalaker still smiled.

"Yes, gentlemen, I have been here before," he resumed. "I call this place El Dorado because I believe it to be the supposedly mythical city that has been seen on occasions in the past. I have met its peoples: they knew I was returning—hence the obelisk. It is magnetic, but the city itself is not. You mentioned the fact that some fliers might have seen that obelisk. That couldn't be because I invented it only two years ago and it is used only for my own purposes. If however the city is seen by fliers, or the basin containing it, it is quite unlikely that those fliers have ever landed anywhere to tell their tale."

"You've seen to that too, eh?" Blake barked bitterly.

"Naturally."

Blake shot a glance through the window. The plane was fast nearing the outermost hills of the basin. He turned back to Dalaker.

"What's the big idea, anyhow?" he demanded. "Can't we look at this city on friendly terms? Why the hold-up?"

"You've only yourself to thank," Dalaker said coldly. "You were about to give orders to turn back. I can't allow that; in fact I can't allow either of you to return to civilization at all to tell the tale. . . . You, Dr. Henthorne, are the only man alive who guessed my secret, worked out scientifically the undeniable fact that electrical storms have been produced by artificial means from a South American source. . . ."

"Well?" Henthorne snapped.

"Well, naturally I couldn't allow so valuable, so *clever* a scientist to work out his experiments so successfully. I took the precaution of capturing the pair of you, and your servant."

"Then—then you're not an explorer?" Blake shouted.

"Oh, but I am. You will find my name in 'Who's Who.' Up to two years ago I was actively engaged as a scientific explorer, then I happened on this place and—"

Dalaker broke off and whipped up his automatic. For a second his vigilance had relaxed, and in that second Blake acted. He hurled his powerful body forward, clutched Dalaker round the neck and flung him to the floor. The automatic went off deafeningly, twanged on the metal wall. Then Dalaker found himself sagging in a sickly heap, numbed as a bunch of iron fist struck him in the face.

"Now get up!" Blake grated, snatching up the fallen gun. "Get up, blast you!"

Dalaker rose slowly, mopping a streaming nose. His dark eyes looked like those of an angry snake.

"You think this is going to help you?" he demanded thickly.

"No harm in trying," Blake retorted,

then he put the gun in his father's hand. "Keep him covered," he ordered. "I've one or two things to do."

He jerked open the cabin door, yelled to Ranji above the engine's roar. "Turn around! Fly back."

"Yes, sahib Blake."

Blake watched anxiously for a moment as the yellow city began to recede—then struck by a sudden thought he swung to the radio, gazing at the maps on the table as he made contact. After a few moments' delay Trinidad Air Port answered him.

"Henthorne Expedition plane calling Trinidad," Blake intoned quickly. "Send help. Urgent. Beware of danger. Hidden city. Approximate position, 16.20 South, 49.55 West. . . ."

Trinidad repeated the message, cut contact. Blake swung round swiftly, grinning.

"Well, Dalaker, what do you think of that?" he demanded in triumph—but before the scowling explorer could answer the ship dipped sharply as it swung round the range of hills. In an instant all three men were hurled off their feet. The Doctor's automatic went spinning through the air.

Blake dived for it, and missed. He saw Dalaker, face set and venomous, snatch the gun up, swing it down with the sharp butt foremost. Blake tried in vain to scramble out of the way but a blinding pain shot through the region of his temple and sent him sprawling into darkness. . . .

## CHAPTER III

### The Sleepers

AS he came back to consciousness Blake found himself staring up at something yellow and glowing. It was a lamp set in a ceiling of yellow metal. He jerked upright, groaned at the throb-

bing in his head, eased himself up more slowly.

By degrees he realized he was in some kind of cell with a single grilled window. Dr. Henthorne was standing before it, gazing moodily outside. On the bunk on the opposite wall Ranji was reclining, hands locked behind his turbaned head. He seemed utterly lost in thought.

"Say, dad, what's happened?"

Henthorne turned sharply at the words, smiled rather ruefully as Blake came to his side.

"Dalaker won," he said, obviously enough. "That was hours ago, though. I thought you were never going to regain consciousness. Night's just fallen. . . . Of course he had Ranji bring the plane down here—But, Blake, how are you?" he finished anxiously, studying him.

"Oh, I'll be O.K. Where are we exactly?"

Henthorne's white head shook in puzzlement. "We're in El Dorado; I know that much, and this seems to be a sort of prison. Hills all around the city—and a volcano. Take a look . . ."

Blake gazed over a floodlit expanse of yellow metal buildings—strange buildings, all of them of uniform height, perfectly square, most of them with a plentiful supply of window. And from them there floated a dull, low throbbing that told of immense industry and power.

Blake's eyes lifted to the further distances of the city. There were taller buildings there, having a certain stamp of officialdom. One of them had obelisks on its roof, obelisks that looked odd on account of a copper color amidst the pervading gold. Then there was the volcano . . . brooding and smoking over the whole strange basin, its steamy discharge lighted by the kindled

fires deep within its crater.

"Some dump," Blake observed at length, rubbing his aching head. Then he frowned. "Just what do you make of it all, dad? What sort of people are there? Seen any?"

"Oh, yes—men and women, pale skinned. All of them—or nearly all—dressed in somewhat Arcadian attire. The men wear shorts and long-sleeved tunics: the women knee length skirts, sleeveless blouses, and sandals. Men wear skin shoes . . . All most extraordinary." Henthorne knitted his brows. "This place seems to be extremely scientific. As we were brought here I had glimpse of machines, mainly electrical, defying anything I ever saw in my life before. I forgot to mention too that some of the people are peculiar—downtrodden in appearance, clad in rags for the most part . . ."

Ranji came silently from his bunk. "Might I suggest, sahibs, that people come from other world?"

"Huh?" Blake exclaimed, staring.

"For these people to have skin as fair as the sky and yet so close to the sun troubles me deeply," Ranji embellished. "One would expect them as dark as Allah's own children—yet they are not. I am disturbed, sahibs; deeply disturbed."

"Maybe something in it," Henthorne admitted, musing. "These people look as though they've spent ages out of sunlight. They are obviously not natural inhabitants otherwise they *would* be dark. But people of another world—!" He laughed a little incredulously, and Ranji shrugged.

"I wonder if—" Blake began, then they all three turned as the cell door suddenly opened to admit two of the curiously garbed men. They carried a collapsible table and four chairs, which they set up in the cell's center.



Then two other guards came in and began to lay a meal of fruits and cold meats.

"What's this? Execution feast?" Blake demanded, watching.

The men did not answer, so he watched them silently. They were hefty fellows, splendidly muscled, bull necked, with yellow hair and very vivid blue eyes. The Arcadian attire was very much in evidence, conveying an impression of easy comfort. . . . When they were through laying the meal they stood silently against the wall with folded arms.

Blake looked longingly at the open doorway, and at that moment Dalaker came through it, faultlessly attired in white flannels. He spoke a few short words to the men in a language that was entirely new to Blake, despite a fairly wide linguistic knowledge; then Dalaker turned and smiled cynically.

"So you've recovered, Blake? I'm glad of that. . . . Please be seated, my friends." He took his seat at the head of the table and the guards looked on in silence.

For some time the meal proceeded quietly. There was plenty of everything. The food, though strange, was extremely palatable, the wine light—but there was such an air of mystery and incongruity about the whole thing that at last Blake could stand it no longer. Leaping to his feet he slammed his fist down on the table.

"Come on, Dalaker, out with it!" he snapped. "What damned monkey business are you up to, anyway? Why this honored guest fiasco?"

"Still impetuous, eh?" Dalaker murmured. "Sit down, Blake, and try getting some knowledge through your thick skull."

"Why, you—"

"Sit down!" Dalaker thundered, and

at the bitter cruelty in the voice Blake slowly obeyed. Then he watched with interest as, at a signal from Dalaker, one of the guards stepped out into the corridor and wheeled in a contrivance like an ebony box with a ground glass screen, supported on a rubber-wheeled tripod.

With swift movement Dalaker switched a button, began tuning a figured dial that looked as though it ought to belong to a radio or television receiver. And presently the ground glass screen came to life, presented a color picture of an immense hall of yellow metal illumined with indirect lighting. It was a magnificent place, the mighty domed ceiling supported on carven pillars. . . .

And the hall was populated—by supine figures lying on yellow metal beds. They were dressed in white, gravelike shrouds, whilst wires were affixed by suction cups to various nerve centers of their bodies and craniums. It was difficult to see what the men looked like: there was a confusing impression of distance.

"What on earth—" Henthorne began, staring, then he stopped as Dalaker interrupted him.

"That is the main underground hall of El Dorado, my friends. Those men are the Eternal Sleepers."

"The what?" Blake jerked out.

"They are the real rulers of this city—my sleeping masters," Dalaker went on, thoughtful eyes on the screen. "This television enables you to see the hall, which ordinarily can only be unlocked from the inside by the Sleepers themselves. . . . I only show it to you now because, though you see so much, there is so little you will ever reveal— But I was saying, the Sleepers have slept for generations, generations without number. They are masters of thought and

sensory impression because, as they lie there, their minds are actively working.

"You see the wires? Those carry every sensory impression to them without them having to exert physical effort: that gives their minds free play. And the decision and orders of their minds are impressed on machines. Thought waves *do* react on sensitive machinery, you know, just the same as radio waves react on remote control mechanisms . . . You will appreciate the possibilities. Machines select what thoughts they receive; they set other machines in action which translate the orders of the Sleepers. Thuswise, without any physical effort, the Sleepers can both give orders and receive thoughts, sift the interesting from the uninteresting. A strange but infinitely sublime state of personal detachment."

"You mean that physical sensations, if desired, are produced by certain—er—nerve excitations through those numerous wires?" Doctor Henthorne demanded.

"Yes. And I am the Sleepers' ambassador. . . . They nominated me. They discovered that you knew of a scientific effort to rid the world of humanity through the medium of tremendous electric storms. They commanded I bring you here. I have done so—and you will never leave."

"That's what you think," growled Blake.

"But—but who are you?" cried Henthorne in bewilderment. "*What* are you?"

Dalaker smiled coldly. "Basically, I am a Venusian."

Blake started to say something, then he laughed shortly. "Oh, cut it out, Dalaker! A Venusian! Anybody knows Venus is a hellish hot planet and—"

"El Dorado, too, is in quite a warm

spot," Dalaker observed, unmoved.

"But—but— You mean *all* these people are Venusians?"

"The majority, yes—but there are certain low types here in the form of guards who are American. My own people could not do such tasks, so I chose a large number of low-class American types, together with one or two Britishers, and imported them here."

"Oh, you did . . ." Blake's eyes began to get hard.

"After all, this spot is not so much different from certain parts of Venus," Dalaker resumed. "On Venus direct sunlight is unknown—certain ultra violet radiations are blocked. That is why these people are white skinned. If I seem darker than the rest that is purely because I deliberately darkened my skin to fit in with my role as an explorer. . . . After all, it is not so strange a story as it seems.

"Countless ages ago—mere small spans for almost eternal Venusians—we lived on Venus, were born there. But changes in the surface, together with various other things, forced us to move out. We decided Earth would be a possible planet, at that time. But when we arrived here the world was only half formed, filled with rank vapors and ever changing landscape. We decided we must have a world of our own—" Dalaker broke off, then said slowly, "You are aware that the moon is not a true satellite of Earth?"

"Such a fact has been suggested," Henthorne admitted. "Some scientists believe in the theory very strongly."

"The theory is correct," Dalaker said flatly. "We made the moon for our own use, gouged it out of what now forms the Pacific Ocean bed. . . . But the moon didn't serve us long," he went on regretfully. "Its slight gravity permitted the air to escape very rapidly into space,

and with that came disaster. Not only from lack of air, but from the perpetual bombardment of meteorites and cosmic debris which created the craters you see today. On Earth, of course, the frictional quality of a dense atmosphere prevents such happenings—save in rare cases, such as the Siberian meteorite . . .

"But during our stay on the moon some of us—now the Eternal Sleepers—had become masters of mental and physical phenomena. We came to Earth again, transported the Sleepers with great care, and chose a spot where it was very warm, and where the chance of being discovered was negligible. Hence came El Dorado, which is of course a mere fanciful name and not our own. Actually this city is named Kirandol, but that is beside the point . . . City of ageless, imperishable yellow metal. . . . I hope I'm not boring you?" Dalaker broke off, raising his eyebrows and looking round.

"It sounds incredible to me," Blake muttered. "Especially when you say your name is in 'Who's Who.'"

"I had a status to maintain as an ambassador," Dalaker explained. "There was no better profession to choose than that of explorer."

"But your race is so identical to ours," Henthorne muttered, shaking his head. "It is by no means common for races of two worlds to be so identical. Especially Venus and Earth."

"I grant you that. But it isn't unusual when one life form is patterned after another. . . ."

A long silence followed Dalaker's observation, then at last Henthorne cried, "Good God, man, you don't mean that Earthlings were originally created by Venusians?"

"Just that. Creation of life is not difficult to our science. Yes, we created Earthly life at the time of our first visit

to Earth—or rather we created the first man and woman of Earth, after the image of ourselves, of course. It seemed the most natural thing. . . . You believe that man worked his way from the amoeba. He did not. The distinction between man and beast is absolute. The gap between—that which you call the Missing Link—really *is* missing, nor will it ever be found because man and beast are forever separate. *Man* began with the lowest cave-man form and worked up from that to his present rather childish status. We started it.

"Our original intention was for the Eternal Sleepers to control these children of our making for definite uses, but only a few—notably those whom you call geniuses—responded. The remainder ran wild. The experiment is a failure . . . Therefore the Sleepers have decided on other measures. What has been built up can also be destroyed. Electrical storms are the answer, mainly because they appear to be natural upheavals of the elements to the outside world. More direct and drastic methods would bring unwanted attention and attack down on ourselves. You, Dr. Henthorne, could have upset our plants with your unusual scientific knowledge, so, obeying commands, I captured you and your son. . . . Fortunately, Doctor, you were utterly discredited, and no other scientist seems to possess your ability. If one does appear, he will be taken care of. . . ."

Another long silence fell after Dalaker had finished. Lighting a cigarette he watched the three through the smoke, a faintly cynical grin on his bronzed face— Then suddenly Blake shot to his feet.

"And suppose I don't believe it?" he demanded fiercely.

"Again?" Dalaker was clearly surprised. "Will nothing ever convince you,

Blake?"

"I'll be convinced by the truth any time, but your story isn't truth. I say it's a lot of bunk! You a Venusian! Hell knows how many millions of years old! You expect us to believe *that*?"

Dalaker's thin lips compressed; then he shrugged. "Obviously it is no use expecting you to believe anything. Not that it matters in any case. I've better things to do than to waste time convincing fools. Maybe a few years in the Mines will teach you commonsense, break your spirit, force you to realize that obstinacy is the wrong line to adopt in the presence of your betters."

"Better!" Blake flamed. "By God, I'll—"

"No you won't," Dalaker interrupted bitterly, his automatic in his hand. "You'll take what's coming to you—and that's slavery! Same as all the rest of the damned fools in this city who thought they could defy the commands of the Eternal Sleepers. In the Mines you'll have plenty of time to think. Down there they obtain and smelt the yellow metal of which this city is composed. It has the name of *ymium* not *gold*, if that interests you," he finished with a sneer.

"If you're so anxious to get rid of us why don't you kill us right now and have done with it?" Blake demanded, glaring.

"Because," Dalaker answered softly, "I have certain recollections of a very strong punch in the face, back in the airplane. Naturally, one cannot treat the ambassador of the Sleepers in that fashion without receiving due punishment . . . lingering punishment through long years.

"For myself," he went on, shrugging, "I am really sorry that matters have come to so unpleasant a pass, but there are certain things that have to be done.

Confinement and punishment of all three of you is one of them. . . . So much slower than a bullet; so much more time to think!"

"B-but you can't send me to the Mines!" Henthorne burst out desperately. "I can't do it, Dalaker! Why, I'm over sixty years of age—"

"In that case you will have less time to brood over your misfortunes," Dalaker retorted coldly. "And take it easy, Blake!" he finished, as Blake stirred in restless fury.

Blake gulped, stared at the automatic, then at Dalaker.

"I'll get you for this one day, Dalaker, if I have to come back from the dead to do it. I'll break every damned bone in your rotten, slimy body—"

Dalaker ignored the outburst. He made a quick signal to the silent guards and they jerked heavy revolvers from their pockets. Blake looked at the revolvers in puzzlement, a vague thought turning over in his mind—then he was seized and bundled out of the cell. His last vision of Dalaker was his coldly triumphant face. . . . Blake felt himself grow hot with mounting but useless fury. . . .

## CHAPTER IV

### Slavery in the Mines

IT took an hour to reach the Mines, and in that time Blake, his father, and the silent Ranji were piloted by the unrelaxing guards through devious quarters of the strange, floodlit golden city, taken through broad streets and narrow alley-ways.

In the course of their journey they glimpsed only a few people, people that had in their eyes a dull expression of fear. Both men and women seemed to be laboring under an intense anxiety,

the exact reason for which was not altogether plain. Here and there, too, there were visions of actual slave gangs of men and women, most of them clad in rags, shackled together by chain and manacle. At their head there invariably marched a heavily muscled, apefaced taskmaster.

Indeed, the only natural thing about the whole place seemed to be the volcano, smoldering redly against the night sky. Blake bitterly reflected how slim would be the chances of escape if the thing ever chose to erupt—how slim too would be the hope of ever getting out of this infernal valley, surrounded by primeval jungle for hundreds of miles on every side.

He thought again about Dalaker's story as he marched along—and as before he still didn't believe it. He couldn't for one thing, reconcile Dalaker's perfect English-speaking voice with that of a multimillion-year old Venusian. From what he'd seen of the man he was after something, something he was determined to get no matter what the cost. . . . An innately cruel nature, a crafty brain, a smooth manner — they were deadly weapons for any man to own, and Dalaker had them in plenty.

Then Blake found his meditations cut short as he was bundled into an elevator alongside his father and the passive Ranji. The guards still kept their revolvers leveled, never once relaxed their attention as the cage began to hurtle downwards at dizzying speed, falling into blackness that became warmer and warmer as the seconds snapped by.

Blake judged they had dropped a full eight hundred feet into the earth by the time the fall ended and they were pushed out into a region of brilliant blue arlight and suffocating warmth.

Blake gasped involuntarily. The heat

struck him like a physical blow. His eyes traveled over a bewildering industry of figures, sweating men and women in dirty blue overalls, men stripped to the waist controlling titanic furnaces, overseers hovering with set, malignant faces in the midst of the hazy expanse. . . . The place seemed to recede into remoteness—a hive of pounding, hammering, thundering activity.

"We're to work—*here?*" gasped Henthorne haltingly, darting an anguished glance at Blake's set, perspiring face.

"Looks like it," he answered curtly. Then bitterly, "By Heaven, if I could only get my hands round Dalaker's neck—"

He broke off as he was seized and pushed forward, his protesting father beside him. Ranji still said nothing. The heat didn't seem to bother him very much; being a Pathan he was better fitted by Nature for the conditions. . . .

An overseer came forward and the three halted. He listened to the guard's strange language, then nodded briefly. He spoke in American, a satisfied leer on his shining, bulbous face. Obviously he was one of the imported guards Dalaker had spoken of.

"Henthorne, huh?" he sneered. "The old guy who figured he was smart enough to guess where them storms came from. . . . And his son, too!" He appraised Blake's massive form and spat on the floor. "O. K., you'll have plenty of time down here to think things out. . . . And this dirty Indian guy too. You can all work at them furnaces, and if you start letting up—" He stopped, patted his revolver holster and extended a vicious whip clamped in a hairy paw. "It'll be just too bad," he finished venomously.

He shoved Blake violently. "Well, what the hell are you waiting for?" he roared. "Get movin' to that furnace!"

Blake bunched his fists, hesitated an instant, then relaxed. Starting a fight would only make matters worse. He turned slowly, bitterly, stripping off his shirt and vest as he moved, revealing the broad, muscular tautness of his massive chest, the steel-corded strength of his heavy arms.

"Looks like we've got to stop here, for a bit anyhow," he muttered, glancing at his father. "Take it easy, dad—I'll do most of your work."

Dr. Henthorne groaned, stripped off his clothing so far as decency permitted and took the shovel thrust towards him by the overseer. Ranji took his without a word, but his dark eyes were glittering coldly. The reference to "dirty Indian" was burning across his mind.

Blake for his part measured the overseer with bitter eyes then slung his shovel into the compressed wood fuel nearby and took his place among the sweating workers. . . .

The overseer took a seat and mopped his face. Blake spoke now and again to one or other of the haggard workers, but they failed to respond. Probably they didn't understand his language. He watched his father with anxiety: the old man was working mechanically, forcing a body long past active service to a crushing ordeal. Somehow he kept going. . . . Ranji, without removing a single article of clothing, shoveled with a calm, malignant precision. . . .

Then suddenly Blake stopped shoveling into the raging inferno of flame in front of him. He twisted round at the scream of a girl. Puzzled, he stared across the industry; his father and Ranji stared with him. Work stopped momentarily as every eye focused on the figure of a girl lying prone on the floor, her slender body quivering under the lashing tails of a whip.

"By God, it's *our* overseer!" Blake

panted, darting a momentary glance at the now empty place where the man had been. "Thrashing a helpless girl—!" His jaws clamped shut; he dashed the dripping sweat from his face and began to scramble over the fuel heap.

"Blake, don't do anything rash—" his father cried anxiously. . . . But Blake wasn't listening. His smoldering fury was at white heat.

As he leapt lithely towards the disturbance he saw that the girl was held to the floor by a massive girder, her overall trapped beneath it. Evidently it had fallen as she had tried to raise it.

"Get up from that floor!" screamed the taskmaster, white with fury. "By heaven, we'll see if you'll get away with this!" He raised his whip in a whining arc and the girl's hands smothered her fair head in terror. But Blake got there first.

His left hand tore the whip away and flung it through space. His right shot out like a steam piston, smashed clean in the center of the overseer's astounded, brutal face. He didn't fall; he went sailing backwards with blood spurting from a broken nose.

"Guess I owed you that," Blake panted, striding over to him. "Want some more . . . ?"

The overseer couldn't speak; he was numbed with pain — so numbed he hardly noticed that Blake turned away and that a lithe, dark, bearded figure slid from the knot of interested but scared workers. It was Ranji, short but deadly Afghan knife in his hand. Without a second's hesitation he stooped before the groaning man, drove the blade clean into his heart, then withdrew it sharply.

"Filthy infidel," he whispered. "Offspring of a million infidels. Pig of an unbeliever. You sleep with your vile an-

cestors in purgatory. Allah is just . . . Allah is powerful, and Mohammed is his prophet."

He stood up, slid the knife back into his broad sash so that the hilt was hidden. By the time it was discovered that the overseer was stabbed to death Ranji was back at Blake's side.

Without effort Blake heaved aside the offending girder with a metallic clang, lifted the sobbing girl to her feet. She raised a youthful face that was dirty and tear-stained, enframed by bushy yellow hair. Her eyes were a curious misty blue, her mouth still young and full even though it trembled with emotion.

"O. K., honey," Blake murmured reassuringly. "Our charming friend got what was coming to him. . . . Say, you speak English by any chance?" he asked anxiously.

She nodded. "Many of us here speak it. I—I want to thank you for . . . My name's Lania, and I—"

"Hey, you!"

Blake twisted round, faced another overseer. He was pointing back at the bloodstained, dead body on the floor.

"You did that!" he bellowed. "Murdered him! And there's only one answer for murder down here. . . ." The man's revolver flashed out of its holster, but in that second Blake was upon him, lifted his struggling body by shoulders and trousers seat and flung him over the heads of the nearest workers. They went down like skittles under the impact.

But in doing that Blake started more than he intended. The workers, realising control had been twice flouted, surged forward to assist the crazy American. The air of tenseness suddenly disrupted into a babble of battling figures, the thwack of fists on flesh, the screech of whips, the banging of guns. . . .

Ranji, knife in hand, stood waiting at Blake's side.

"I consigned the animal faced infidel to his ancestors," he stated tonelessly. "It was Allah's will."

"Looks like Allah's started something too . . ." Blake looked about him anxiously on the battling, milling figures. Still clutching Lania he began to return to where he had left his father—but long before he got there he saw the old man go down before the revolver shots of an overseer.

"Dad!" Blake screamed, plunging forward. "Dad—!" He released the girl, dropped by the side of the old man's quivering body. Ranji mysteriously vanished.

Henthorne fought for breath. "Perhaps it's better this way, Blake . . . I'm finished—finished, anyway. I—S-stop Dalaker, Blake—" He choked over his sentence, made a desperate effort to rise, then relaxed limply. Dazed, Blake felt the still heart.

"He's dead!" he shrieked hysterically, leaping up—and found himself gazing into the sad, sympathetic eyes of the girl. She grasped his brawny forearm gently.

"I'm so sorry—" she began quietly, but Blake cut her short.

"Where's that damned overseer?" he breathed in quivering fury. "Where's—" He broke off as Ranji suddenly came into view. He was smiling in his beard, sliding his stained knife into his sash.

"Allah is just," he murmured, with a little obeisance.

"You killed him?" Blake whistled in satisfaction, and Ranji nodded. Then he looked quickly round on the struggle.

"I would suggest, sahib Blake, that dangerously close finish to our lives is imminent. We might suffer same fate as sahib Henthorne, and—"

"There's a way out of here," the girl interrupted quickly. "Up through the storage tunnels. Usually it's guarded but in the present upset we might manage it. Come on—this way."

With Blake's pile driver fists and Ranji's wicked knife to clear the way they finally fought clear of the main body of the mutiny into the comparative quiet of a small tunnel, leading away into drafty warmth and blackness.

## CHAPTER V

### Escape

THE girl moved onwards with unerring steps, holding Blake's hand. He in turn held Ranji's—until at last, after perhaps half a mile of progress, they came into a roomy, man-made cavern lined with cases and lighted with a single bulb of glowing yellow.

The girl closed and bolted the massive yellow metal door, blocking the tunnel up which they had come. On the opposite wall was the hole of the tunnel's continuation.

"We'll be safe enough here," she said, turning. "The tunnel's continuation is never used. It's an old conduit as a matter of fact. But there *is* a way out, as you'll see later. In the meantime, we can rest and regain strength."

She perched herself on a crate and breathed deeply. Blake squatted down and sat in silence for a time, moodily going over his father's last moments. Then at last he gave a resigned shrug and studied the girl, noted again the details of her slim, youthful body in its inappropriate, filthy dirty overall.

"I suppose," he questioned at length, "that you're a Venusian?" And he said it on purpose because he expected a denial. To his surprise, however, the girl nodded.

"By heritage, yes. Aren't you?"

"I'm an American, Lania. This chap here is an Indian—my servant."

Her misty eyes opened wide. "Oh, an American!" she cried. "Now I begin to understand—especially about your companion. I could not quite understand why he was so dark. . . ."

Blake smiled, briefly considered. Then he asked, "How old are you, Lania? Trillions of years?"

Her fair head shook. She had a most somber manner for so youthful a person. Like the rest of her people she was curiously downtrodden, afraid—and the experiences in the escape of the furnace room hadn't helped much to restore her confidence either.

"No, I'm not old," she answered slowly. "I'm twenty-three perhaps—maybe twenty-four. Certainly no more. I was born here in this city."

"But I thought you said—"

"My Venusian origin? I said 'by heritage'. These people in the city, except the overseers and Dalaker, are all Venusians by heritage, but Earth people by birth. The only true Venusians left are the Eternal Sleepers."

"Then Dalaker is *not* a Venusian?" Blake asked deliberately.

The girl's sad face became hard. "No! He is an Earthman—an Englishman, I think. He is self appointed dictator of this city and these taskmasters are people he's brought here. . . ."

"Ah. . . !" Blake got up and sat at the girl's side. She glanced at him in surprise as he looked at her very directly.

"Lania, there's probably a lot you can clear up for me," he mused. "Dalaker is the main reason for my being here—but his story doesn't match up with yours. . . ." He related as briefly as possible all that Dalaker had said, then asked, "Now, how much of that is



true?"

The girl's smile was weary, bitter. "Very little of it," she answered, thinking. "I can tell you the truth because I've nothing to gain by lying. I'm a slave: I live in filthy little workers' hovels underground. I— But my life doesn't interest you. It's Dalaker you want to know about. . . . Well, the story of the Venusians starting life on Earth is correct—so too is the story of them making the moon, returning to Earth, and bringing the Eternal Sleepers with them. . . ."

"Where the story goes wrong is in Dalaker saying that the Sleepers are trying to destroy humanity and start a new experiment. The Sleepers are peaceful: they created life on Earth to see if synthetic man and woman could evolve and survive against the beast. They proved it right—and they've no desire whatever to wipe out humanity."

"Then what do these Sleepers do?" Blake insisted.

"Have you never liked to lie and dream?" Lania questioned reflectively. "Do not some people in the outer world take drugs that give them pleasant dreams—cut them off from the woes of the physical being?"

"Oh, sure. Some even take drink. But how—"

"The Sleepers dream," the girl said steadily, her eyes just a little—a little envious. "They have lain like that for untold generations—suspended animation, of course. Their minds are studying the cosmos, and the only way to do that is to have absolutely no connection with worldly things. That is why, according to record, they were removed so carefully when my ancestors abandoned the Moon for Earth. They have lain like that ever since, deep in an underground hall. The remnants of the

true Venusians lived on in this city, minding their own business, hostile to nobody—until at last the true Venusians died out and birthright of necessity became Earthly, but of Venusian stock. . . . One day the Sleepers will awake. It may be millenniums: it may be tomorrow. . . ."

The girl became silent, pondering absently. She started a little at Blake's voice.

"Where does Dalaker fit into this, anyhow?"

"Oh, he came here two years ago on an exploration trip, found our valley by accident. He seemed cordial enough and gave his word to leave us alone—but a year later he returned in a large airship and brought a collection of men with him. Criminals, I believe, absolutely in Dalaker's power. . . . Of course, we were utterly defeated. Dalaker became dictator, using his scientific knowledge against us—turning our own machines upon us. Invasion was a thing almost unknown to us and we were caught unprepared.

"Dalaker set up an iron dynasty, invented new destructive scientific machines from our own cherished inventions, forced all the young and fractious ones—like myself—into newly opened pits. Others he forced into collusion with himself on pain of instant death; guards and so forth. He claims that he is the ambassador of the Sleepers—a deliberate lie of course—and says that the Sleepers have ordered the destruction of humanity and their cities. So he has been at work with electrical apparatus which produces storms sufficiently violent to bring about the slow destruction of all civilization."

"But why?" Blake cried helplessly. "Is he mad, or what?"

Lania gave a hollow laugh. "Mad! Good heavens, no. He's distinctly in-

genious. You see, the storm method will destroy most of the cities of the outer world, but it is not possible that every living person will be wiped out. There will be thousands of survivors, all of them demanding new homes—storm proof homes. . . . That's where *ynium* comes in."

"This yellow metal that's around everywhere?"

"Yes. It's ordinary iron ore mated to an imperishable ingredient which is the product of our science. Down here we mine the iron ore, smelt it. In the surface laboratories it becomes *ynium*. No known thing can destroy it entirely. . . . It's proof against explosive, acid, fire, pressure—almost everything you can name. This very city, built of it, has hardly changed in all the time man has evolved to a state of intelligence: it has survived earthquakes, storms—everything, and even now it is hardly tarnished.

"You'll see, then, that being in control of such a metal, springing it on the world after storms have shattered most of civilization, Dalaker can become a virtual world-dictator, name his own price for the stuff—and what's more, supply it. He will corner the market. That's why we are all mining iron ore, why Dalaker lets nothing slip. He has a vast fortune and world power in his grip, and means to get it. . . ."

"So that's it," Blake murmured, musing. "A commercial and scientific giant gone wrong. Nice going. . . . But maybe he'll slip up somewhere before I'm through with him." He turned back suddenly to the girl. "Thanks a lot, Lania, for the information. . . . And say, while we're about it, how come you know English?"

"That's easy. Before Dalaker came I was able to listen to the radio reception from the outer world. The coun-

tries that spoke English seemed to be the biggest and sanest and, in the hope that one day I might see such places, I learned the language. Just as Dalaker taught most of his guards our native tongue as well as their normal English."

Blake glanced at her quickly. "Do you mean that if Dalaker's rule were broken up, if peace were restored here, you'd still like to see the outer world?"

"For a very good reason," she replied seriously. "You must have seen Valcus—that's our native name for the volcano in the hills—must have realized how easily he could wipe us out. Six years ago he nearly did: our *ynium* buildings saved us. But in another eruption, although the buildings might stand it, we would perhaps be killed by poisonous gases, molten lava. . . . No, if I had a chance I'd like to be in the outer world. Out there one can live peacefully and yet achieve. Here, in normal times, there is nothing to achieve. . . . Can you understand me?"

Blake nodded slowly, studied the misty eyes for a while. Then he said, "I guess we've wasted enough time in here. I've got to get moving and settle a few scores with Dalaker. If I could bust him up I'd bust the entire morale of his cut throat gang. That's a certainty."

Lania restrained him as he got to his feet.

"Not now," she said quietly, shaking her head. "It must be nearly daylight outside. We'll do better to sleep through the daylight hours, then get out of the conduit by night. . . ." She looked around, drew up her slim bare legs onto the crate. "We can sleep here quite well. Besides, we need refreshing."

"Guess you're right." Blake settled himself on the crate opposite, lay for

a while looking across at the girl. She smiled at him a little.

"What's your name?" she asked, almost naively.

"Eh? Gosh, I forgot that! Blake Henthorne—and down here we have Ranji. . . ."

"Oh!" She said no more, coiled up and closed her eyes. Blake lay with eyes open for a long time, then he pilloved his head on his arm, fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

Below him, propped against the same crate, Ranji snoozed gently, his lean brown hand clasped in readiness round the hilt of his knife as it lay on the floor. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### Through the Sewers

ACCORDING to the girl, whose sense of time seemed uncannily developed from her constant life underground, it was nearly ten hours later when they all awoke—nearing night-fall again. Thus briefly refreshed they set off again under the girl's expert guidance.

After a time, Blake could tell they had left the main tunnel continuation and had branched off to the right. The darkness was pitchy; even the girl herself was at a loss at times. Then again she would go onwards, clinging to Blake's hand, he in turn pulling Ranji along with him. . . .

As they went they could hear the buried throb of the strange city's industry, muffled with intervening rock and distance. Evidently the mutiny had been gotten in hand: it sounded as though things were back to normal.

Now and again they passed below gratings which gave them an angled view of the floodlit city above. It was

night again; the girl's judgment had been correct. . . . At one particular grating, however, which according to the girl was near the city's center, they all came to an abrupt halt at the sound of voices.

"Are they in this sewer?" asked Blake tensely, gripping Lania's arm.

"No. Above. . . ." He saw the whites of her eyes as she stared upwards. He looked with her, could make out the feet and foreshortened figure of a man. As he moved a little he became revealed as a Taskmaster. Angling away from him, still and silent, were men and women slaves. The chin and face of another taskmaster appeared.

"If them damned planes land here we can look out for trouble," he said thickly. "One of 'em is a bomber, accordin' to what I've heard. Y'know what that means."

The other taskmaster laughed. "What the hell's eatin' you, man? You can trust the chief, can't you? He'll knock those planes into so many pieces it'll take years to find the bits. Just the same as has happened to other planes that have come nosin' where they're not wanted. . . . Besides, they're not even likely to find this place. If they do"—it sounded as though he spat—"they'll find plenty of electrical frequency waiting to meet 'em."

The other man's voice didn't sound as though he was very convinced. "I hope you're right, that's all. . . . Well, I'll be seeing you later. Got to get down to the mines. Plenty of trouble down there yesterday and we ain't gotten it properly straight yet. . . ."

"O. K." There came the crack of a whip and the feet of the men and women began to scrape over the grating. Blake looked quickly at Lania.

"You heard what he said?" he whispered quickly. "He talked about planes

coming here, a bomber amongst them. They must be coming in reply to that radio message I sent out. I warned them of danger, and— And that devil Dalaker knows all about it!" he finished anxiously. "Listen, Lania, I've got to find him! Stop him! He's planning on destroying the whole darned squadron—"

"Of course he is," the girl said, in bitter resignation. "That's what he always does to anybody or anything that comes too close to the valley. . . . But Blake," she went on seriously, "you can't possibly do anything. The generating station, source of all electrical power in this city, is always guarded."

"Let me worry about that!" he retorted. "Where is this place? How do I get there?"

"Well, I'll show you—but it's no use. Come on."

She broke into a run and they all went racing at top speed along the tunnel, faintly illumined now by the equally spaced gratings. It seemed to extend for miles, but at last the girl stopped before the shadowy outline of a metal ladder. Far above at its summit was another of the gratings.

"This is the only grating that's unlocked," she explained, turning. "I found it once by accident; the catch has snapped. Follow me. . . ." She began to climb steadily, Blake right below her, Ranji further down still with his knife now clamped in readiness between his white teeth —

Then suddenly the girl gave a cry and swayed perilously. Blake too felt the entire ladder move sickeningly and he nearly plunged the fifty feet to the conduit floor. With an effort he saved himself, swept his great arm round the girl's slender waist and fixed her back in position on the rungs. For a moment they all listened to a subsiding grumble

of sound.

"What happened?" Blake demanded in puzzlement, and he saw the girl's face was strained as she peered down at him.

"It's Valcus!" she said breathlessly. "The volcano— That was an earth tremor, just like the one that preceded the last eruption. . . ."

Blake laughed shortly. "Nice place you've got here. Well, we can't do anything about it anyhow. Carry on, kid."

After a moment or two the girl recovered her courage. The tremor had plainly unnerved her; evidently the horror of the earlier eruption was still imbedded in her mind. . . . But she climbed again with increasing steadiness, finally pushed up the grating and scrambled over the rim. In another moment Blake and Ranji were beside her, standing up under the stars. They stood appraising their surroundings.

El Dorado's massive, floodlit bulk lay to the left, spread out along the valley floor. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile to the nearest block of buildings, and one mile from the city's center. Beyond the city, dominating the range of hills on the opposite side of the valley, Valcus was smoking and glowing ominously, spewing forth little showers of reddened ash.

Blake eyed it dubiously, then shivered a little as the night air, cool after the hot underground, blew round his semi-nude body. He turned to Lania.

"Looks quiet enough. Now, how do I get to that generating station?"

She looked at him with serious eyes. "Blake, do you really mean to make an attempt to stop Dalaker?"

"Of course! What else did you expect?"

"But you haven't a chance!" she cried. "He'll kill you on sight if—"

"Listen, Lania, there's a job of work to be done—and I'm going to do it. Re-

## CHAPTER VII

## The Generating Station

member, there are more ways into a generating station than through the doorway. Come on, which is it?"

With obvious reluctance she pointed to the city center, indicated an edifice a little taller than the others with two tapering copper obelisks on its flat roof.

"That's it," she said in a low voice, dropping her arm. "The two ingots are transmission aeriels. I don't fully know their use—Dalaker erected them. It seems that they radiate electrical agitations in the same fashion as radio aeriels. . . ."

"So that's the place," Blake murmured, eyeing it. "I saw it from the prison, but I never guessed—"

"Blake, isn't there some *other way*?"

He stopped, looked down at the soft clasp on his arm. Then with a shrug he clasped the slim shoulders in his hands. "Fraid not, kid—but don't you worry. I can take care of myself. You stay here with Ranji until I get back. He'll look after you."

"Most charming memsahib will be protected from all infidels," Ranji promised, his hand in his sash. "Unless, sahib Blake, you would rather I—"

"No—no; you stop here and guard Lania." Blake stooped and looked into the girl's pretty, anxious face for a moment. Then very suddenly he kissed her upturned mouth.

"Sorry," he said hurriedly, seeing her look of astonishment. "I'll get Dalaker to give me a sprig of mistletoe to make it legal. . . ."

And without giving the girl a further chance to speak he turned and went off with long strides towards the city. He looked back once to wave and saw the two figures dimly outlined against the stars. There was something about the lesser figure, the slender appeal of her body. . . . Then he thought of Dalaker and went on again at almost a run. . . .

HE saw but few people as he neared the city, a fact which occasioned him some surprise. His surprise deepened to suspicion when he finally gained the generating station from the safety of an alley-way and found only one tall El Doradian on guard.

Blake studied the fellow for a moment, wished he understood English in order that he might make his purpose clear. Since that was out of the question the only permit was strong-arm methods. Blake began to edge forward slowly, keeping well in the shadows.

Then at length he had reached the angle of the four entrance steps, waited tensely as the guard paced rhythmically along them. He tensed his leg muscles, sprang lithely, hooked an arm under the guard's chin and bore him to the ground.

The Doradian was powerful, a mass of highly developed muscles, but he wasn't powerful enough to dislodge the brown arm that crushed round his neck, or the hand that cramped relentlessly in the small of his back.

"Sorry, pal, but this is business," Blake whispered, and suddenly releasing his hold he dealt the man a blow on the side of the jaw that sprawled him for a knock out, blood oozing between his lips.

Blake looked down at him for a moment, then snatched the man's gun from his holster and crept up the steps. Once through the main doorway he was faced with a vista of narrow hall, machine rooms leading off on each side.

He moved cautiously, alert for the slightest sound, reached the first machine room and peered within on an expanse of gigantic, whirring engines,

utterly confounding his rather limited scientific knowledge. Perhaps his father might have understood, but—

"Would you care for a guide, Blake?"

Blake twisted round with a hoarse cry as that icy question fell on his ears. He started to bring up his gun, only to find himself looking down the steady muzzle of Dalaker's automatic. The thin lips were smiling bitterly.

"Drop it, Blake. Quickly!"

Blake obeyed. If the situation had not relied so vitally on his gaining the mastery he would have shot it out there and then, but he couldn't afford to take chances. He stood glaring, and Dalaker still smiled contentedly. As usual, he was in immaculate white, a cigarette between his lips.

"I rather thought you'd be here sooner or later," he remarked pleasantly. "You should have known that in such a city as this television is a perfected art. I have followed you, that girl, and Ranji ever since you escaped the Mines. Later on, when I have settled with you, they'll find their lives at an abrupt end. . . . Unhappily, our television is not able as yet to receive sound as well—not without a transmitter, that is. I have had to guess your movements. I think I should be complimented on my powers of deduction."

"So you cleared the streets and lessened the guard on purpose?" Blake grated.

"Of course. . . . Oh, by the way, is it in order for me to extend my sympathies for the death of your father? A pity: he was such a clever man. . . . Almost too clever."

"That's on my debit account," Blake answered stonily.

"Dear me, how interesting. . . ." Dalaker came forward slowly. "You'll be interested to know that your radio

message from the airplane was picked up not only by Trinidad, but by several planes as well. In consequence five planes, among them a bomber sent from Trinidad, are about two hundred miles from here at the moment. Television discovered them, of course. In about another hour, allowing time for the planes to find this valley, they will be here. . . . But they won't land."

"I overheard all that in the sewer," Blake snapped.

"Oh, you did! That explains why you came here, then. It also saves a lot of explanation on my part. I shall of course destroy those planes with electric waves."

"I know that, too."

Dalaker threw down his cigarette; his dark eyes were glittering. "You know quite a lot, don't you? I suppose that infernal girl told you everything about El Dorado? Why I'm here?"

Blake eyed him steadily. "Keep the girl out of this, Dalaker. This is our fight."

"Then she *did* tell you!" Dalaker colored a little with inner fury. "She'll learn plenty before I'm through with her. . . . All right, Blake, I can throw all pretense aside. I'm mining *ymium* so I can sell it to a shattered world—and I don't intend to be balked by you or anybody else. I'll get you—then I'll get that girl and Ranji. Television will find them. . . ." He stopped, his obvious fury subsiding a little. He went on with his old calmness, "I'd kill you right now, Blake, only I think you ought to know a little about the workings of my destructive system."

"Nice of you," Blake sneered.

"It is only right," Dalaker murmured. He jerked his automatic meaningly. "Move forward until I tell you to stop—and don't try any tricks. I shan't shoot to kill, but I'll most certainly in-

capacitate you. Get moving!"

Blake turned, hands upraised, and marched into the center of the great, machinery filled room. Between two low-built transparent balls of a silvery substance, supported on heavily insulated pillars, he came to a halt at Dalaker's command.

"In case you're not aware of it," Dalaker said, "those globes are positive and negative spheres. They're essential in the makeup of this machinery. Upon the final release of my electrical energy into the surrounding atmosphere—energy which spreads out as it travels in the fashion of all waves of matter—the excess power stores up in potential form in these two spheres and is released from one globe to the other. It is definitely surplus power, which if not released might blow the entire city to atoms—if *ynium* can be destroyed, that is . . . But even a surplus power can have disastrous effect on any body or thing in its path . . ."

Blake said nothing, and Dalaker went on steadily.

"The actual disturbances are simple to produce. Electric waves—or, to be more exact, electronic waves—can of course produce havoc with the atmosphere if they are present in large quantity. They can cause severe thunderstorms, completely upset radio transmission and reception, produce electrical effects of dangerous intensity. The fact is proven by Nature herself by the electron streams reaching us from the sun, especially when his spots are numerous. The electronic streams agitate our atmosphere, at times, into severe storms. The same effect, artificially created and rendered a thousand times more potent is, of course, correspondingly increased in danger."

Blake stared incredulously for a moment, then he demanded, "You mean

you deliberately generate these electronic waves knowing they will spread out and produce shattering storms in their track?"

"Exactly that . . . And as for any airplanes, well—the waves naturally interfere with the electrical parts of the engines. Dynamos stop, generators cease, sparking plugs refuse to operate, radio is useless, ignition fails . . . And when ignition fails over a trackless jungle it is most unfortunate for the fliers. . . ." Dalaker smiled significantly, went on softly, "Right now I am building up power to destroy those approaching planes. The same wave, when released, will travel onwards and outwards, produce atmospheric havoc in its track until its energy is spent. Also, the surplus energy from that release will kill *you!*"

"Me?" Blake's eyes narrowed. "What are you getting at, Dalaker? I'll stand so much and—"

"You're in no position to say what you'll do!" Dalaker snapped. "If I shoot you dead you'll take a short cut out of all your worries. I don't like it that way. You've caused me plenty of trouble in the short time I've known you: you started that mutiny in the smelting room: you were responsible for two of my guards being killed . . . So I'm going to pay you back in slow coin." Dalaker stopped and nodded towards the globes.

"In roughly forty five minutes the surplus energy will be released. At that time you will be in the path of those two globes and—"

"Oh no you don't!" Blake roared; and utterly regardless of consequences he flashed down his hands and slammed round a right to Dalaker's jaw— But he missed.

The revolver went off stunningly; the bullet pinged off metal somewhere to the

rear. Dalaker went down, clawing and struggling, as Blake plunged on top of him—but that automatic was still useful. It twisted in Dalaker's vicious hands, came forward butt foremost so that the sharp edge struck Blake clean in the forehead. His intended knock out punch collapsed in mid air and he went down in a reeling tide of darkness. . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

### Trapped

**BLAKE** came back to consciousness with an aching head and the sensation of something gripping and biting into his body and limbs. He tried to stir, but couldn't. Jerking his eyes open he found he was bound hand and foot, securely fastened to one of the two great globes. Whether it was the positive or negative one he didn't know: either way they were equally dangerous.

The metal of the globe was cold under his bare back and arms. He tightened his powerful muscles in a vain endeavor to break away the tough cords that held him, triply knotted to projections on the globe's surface. But the more he pulled the tighter they became until at last he desisted, breathing hard, perspiration streaming down his face.

He was aware of two things during the brief respite—things apart from the rumble and thud of meshed gears and whining machinery. One was a more distant sound, a dull heaving booming, and the other was the trembling of the one great window in its sockets under the repeated concussions. He twisted his head round as far as the cord allowed and stared: through the window smoke was visible — heavy, yellow smoke drifting by like fog.

He frowned in bewilderment, then suddenly it dawned on him. The vol-

cano! Nothing else could produce such effects. . . . Instantly he redoubled his efforts with frantic desperation, wondering as he tugged and pulled how much time had elapsed during his unconsciousness. At any moment he might be blasted into infinitesimal dust . . . And Lania! Blake felt sick at the thought of her. If Dalaker had kept his word and gone after her. . . ! He could sneak up without Ranji seeing him in the gloom, and—

Blake gave a hoarse cry as the realization stunned in upon him. He tore on his ropes until his flesh bruised and bled; but Dalaker had done a good job of work. There was no shifting them. Aching from his efforts, Blake stared in bewildered fascination at the opposite globe, fifty feet from him. He'd have given his soul to know how long he had before death caught up with him.

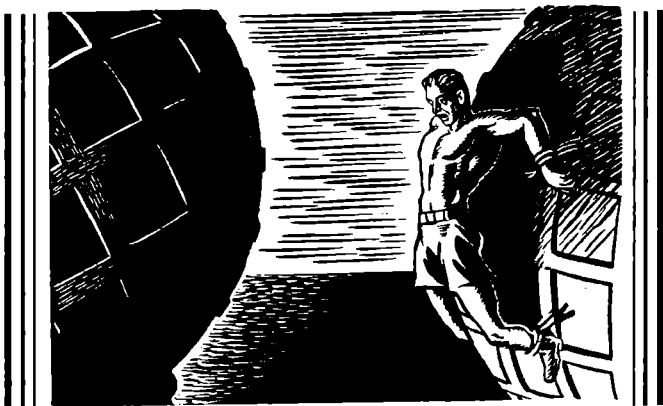
Outside, the boomings increased, and suddenly the tortured window cracked and splintered into pieces that tinkled inwards. Blake twisted his head again and gasped in hoarse delight as a cream-hued turban hove above the frame. A gleaming knife followed suit and in another second Ranji had vaulted lightly into the machine room, followed by wisping streaks of evil smelling smoke.

"Ranji!" Blake screamed. "Up here! Quick!"

The Indian glanced up, nodded, then turned swiftly aside and seized a ladder, evidently the one Dalaker had used. Propping it against the globe Ranji scrambled up it almost before it came to rest, sliced his knife to good effect, and supported Blake as the last rope gave way until he was able to get a grip on the rungs for himself.

They literally fell down the ladder to the metal floor—but they had not gone five yards before the thing happened. Violet streamers of electrical





Blake tore at his ropes until his flesh bruised and bled

energy surged between the two globes with a shattering, crackling roar, flooding the great place with a purple haze of light.

Blake felt his hair stand upright as a terrific wave of static beat around him. His body tingled violently. Shaking and gasping he and Ranji staggered away from the globes' near proximity. When at last they came to look back the globes were gray again. The machinery had changed its note, but it was still working steadily.

"Well, that's that," Blake groaned bitterly. "The electrical wave has been released so I guess there's nothing on earth can save those planes now—" He broke off and turned sharply to the Indian.

"Thanks a lot, Ranji," he breathed gratefully. "But how in heaven did you know I was here?"

"Infidel has lot to answer for," Ranji answered venomously. "Like reptile he sneaked out of dark. His gun was ready before honorable knife could spill his

blood. . . . He gloated like an overfed pig over leaving you tied to gray globe up there. . . ."

"Then?" Blake urged. "Hurry up, man! What about Lania? Why did you . . .?"

It was not in Ranji to be hurried. He went on with cold, passionate bitterness.

"Infidel Dalaker shot the memsahib, sahib Blake. Shot her in back. Bad wound. Then pig of a Dalaker shot at me. I wonderfully ducked, received long scratch on shoulder. Feigned death, like animal, sahib. Infidel then go way."

"Well?" Blake grated. "Damn you, man, step on it!"

Ranji shrugged, winced as he fingered his ripped shoulder. "Came for you, sahib Blake. Left the memsahib lying. Much fog to shield her, from volcano—"

"Let's go!" Blake snapped.

In one bound he vaulted to the window, dropped outside into the choking smoke wreaths with the Indian beside him. Doradians came scurrying past in the gloom, some of them gripping their

remaining possessions, searching frantically for the nearest place of safety. . . . The ground shook incessantly, and overhead the denser smoke banks were painted dull red from the volcano's furious crater.

"This way, sahib," Ranji exclaimed, and with an unerring sense of direction headed through the smoke. "I took note of my course. . . ."

They began to run at top speed, dodging the phantom figures that occasionally merged out of the mist—until presently they left the city's main buildings behind. The shouting and screaming and stampeding grew less—they had a vision of the wilder terrain of the valley ahead of them, almost clear here of smoke as a drift of the wind carried the volcano's discharge in the opposite direction.

Once they glimpsed the crater itself, flame-encrusted, spouting forth cinders and ash. There was a significant laboriousness about its efforts that seemed to presage it had still to get fully into its stride. . . .

Blake hardly heeded it. He strode on with a set face, burst into a run where he could, until at last, nearly spent for breath, he reached the fallen girl's side, lifted her limp body in his arms.

"Lania!" he cried hoarsely, raising her head. "Lania, say something—"

Her eyes still remained closed: her face was ashy gray in the volcano's glare. Blake shook her gently, then as she made no response he turned her over gently and stared like one fascinated at the discolored red on Ranji's make-shift bandage. Very quietly he laid her down, got to his feet. He turned a face that was like marble in its frozen setness.

"She's alive, but in a bad way," he muttered. "I wouldn't give a red cent for her chances without medical aid. . . . Guess you've done all you can,

Ranji." He clenched his fists. "Maybe she's only a jump ahead of us anyway. The volcano will finish the rest. . . . But before it does," he almost whispered, "I'm going to find Dalaker. I'm going to smash him, Ranji, if it's the last thing I do on God's earth!"

The Indian nodded slowly. "The infidel made remark of visiting generation station to see remains of yourself—"

"He did!" Blake's eyes blazed. "Right!"

Without a word he turned and vanished in the smoke. Ranji hesitated a moment, then, setting his teeth at the pain in his shoulder he stooped and lifted the limp girl in his arms, began to carry her gently in the direction Blake had taken. If death was to be the outcome of everything he preferred to die near his master and the girl his master so obviously loved . . .

## CHAPTER IX

### Blake Faces Dalaker

**B**LAKE strode through the gathering redlit darkness like a man possessed. At times he broke into a trot, his heavy fists clenched. His face was a taut mask, a mirror for the fury he was holding in rein until he found his objective.

By the time he'd gained the city, smoking cinders and occasional showers of fine ash were dropping from the overhead pall. The ground groaned and creaked under the forces of internal torment: somewhere a din like a dozen steam safety valves split the already hellish row.

Once in his journeying Blake found himself facing a taskmaster. He didn't stop to speak: he left the men groveling on the street with a pulped jaw . . . then through the haze and fleeing figures he

caught sight of the generating station, still unshaken in its main bulk by reason of the peculiar metal composing it.

Blake went forward again, paused, smiled twistedly as he saw a figure appear on the steps. There was no denying who owned those white flannels. The figure looked right and left, then began running swiftly down the steps—but at their base Blake caught up from behind.

"You!" Dalaker screamed incredulously, as he was whirled round in an iron grip. "B-but I thought—"

"Yeah: you thought I was dead," Blake nodded, and smiled as though his face was frozen. "Thought you'd killed me, like you thought you'd killed Ranji and nearly killed Lania, eh? Like you sent my father to his death . . . Remember?"

He stopped as Dalaker tore savagely at his revolver pocket. The weapon came out and traveled into the smoky haze under the impact of Blake's hand. Clutching Dalaker by the lapels of his coat he forced him to his knees, looked down at him long and steadily.

"D-don't look at me like that!" Dalaker implored frantically, sweat beginning to trickle down his face. "You look as though you've gone mad or something—"

"I'm not mad." Blake's voice was taut and measured. "I'm just taking a look at that pan of yours before I smear it into unrecognizable pulp—and your blasted body too!" he finished with a roar. "By God, Dalaker, you've asked for this and now you're going to get it! Other things I might have let slide—but Lania! Why, you're too damned rotten to be allowed to live, you—"

Dalaker scrambled to his feet by sheer force of effort, whirled round his fist. He missed his objective and instead received a punch like a steam hammer

that slammed his top and bottom jaws together like a rattrap. He dropped in his tracks, got up again in blind fury and hurled himself on his nearly naked aggressor.

The very thought that he was a predestined loser goaded Dalaker to a false strength, turned him into a battering, gouging tiger of a man fighting for his last chance for life. Blake fought more coolly, impacting all his rage into his punches, controlling his movements with a methodical, relentless strength. It was only when he took one on the chin that sent him staggering that he really burst into demoniac fury and set about the deliberate mauling of his enemy.

His right fist came up and slammed into Dalaker's sweating face, sent him reeling. He came back again with hands outspread, blood smeared in an unlovely mess across his mouth. Springing suddenly he clutched Blake's neck, struck down gouging fingers on his face, tore with his nails, until two vicious jabs across the kidneys made him relax with a howl of pain. He kicked in retaliation, sent a bone splintering impact on Blake's ankle and momentarily defeating his guard. Blake went down dazed, shaking the confusion of a punch out his skull . . .

Instantly Dalaker was upon him, clutched him like a leech and hung on with blind, furious tenacity while blow after blow crashed remorselessly under his broken jaw and into his unprotected face.

Blake began to realize he was dealing with a maniac: no sane man could stand up to such punishment. And suddenly the hands that held him relaxed and instead moved to his neck, tightened with hellish force.

Blake struggled desperately as he felt the air shutting off from his lungs, but

he couldn't dislodge that panting, clawing figure. . . . Then, mainly by accident, Blake found his hands locked across the small of Dalaker's back. Quickly seizing his advantage, he brought his right knee up with a quick effort and wedged it under Dalaker's chin. . . . Then, exerting every ounce of his strength he began to draw his powerful arms inwards, forced the chin upwards and backwards. Dalaker's back began to crack.

The fingers began to relax a little. Momentary sanity flashed back in Dalaker's brain as he realized what was happening. He screamed hysterically as a terrific wrenching pain shot the length of his spinal column.

"You—you asked for this," Blake ground out between his teeth. "I said I'd break you one day and—and I will . . ." His muscles bulged under the strain: Dalaker's back arched further. He yelled and screamed, pawed air helplessly, but he was powerless to save himself— Then suddenly a sound like the breaking of a bough in the wind. Dalaker's back had snapped.

The body of Dalaker relaxed limply, collapsed in curiously twisted fashion on the street. Shaking violently Blake struggled to his feet and drew a forearm over his drenched face.

"It was you or me, Dalaker—and I had the aces," he muttered. "You—"

"So the infidel goes to his ancestors!" Ranji's voice preceded his actual form as he merged through the smoke, still carrying Lania in his arms. "You are avenged, sahib Blake, and—"

He broke off, astonishment on his dark face. Blake too was standing motionless as, above the rumbling and booming of the volcano, there came the sound of throbbing engines.

The sound mounted with the seconds. "Planes!" Blake screamed, forget-

ting his aching body in sudden excitement. "Planes, Ranji! But how?" he demanded in bewilderment. "That frequency was released—"

"There, sahib!" Ranji cried, and he nearly dropped the girl in trying to point to a clear space in the smoke clouds, through which at low altitude were moving three ordinary fast planes and, more distantly, a heavy bombing machine. The drone of their engines began to beat heavily.

"Here!" Blake bellowed, cupping his hands and running up and down desperately. "Land here! Hey—!" He looked around helplessly for something to signal with—and suddenly the astounded Ranji found himself without his turban.

Instead a broad length of cream cloth was waving wildly in Blake's upflung hands. He watched desperately as the foremost plane swept by not more than two hundred feet above. As it went off into the smoke he groaned in despair—but in a few minutes it came back, much lower, began to nose through the mist of smoke and landed bumpily in the broad expanse of main square.

In an instant Blake had taken Lania from Ranji's arms and was racing towards it, the Indian not a yard behind. He cursed in his native tongue as a cinder just missed him. They were falling more thickly now, the dust and fumes were becoming chokingly strong.

The plane's door swung open. Without a word the girl was hoisted gently inside by willing hands. Blake and Ranji tumbled in after her. The door slammed again . . . But as the plane swept up to join the others Blake noticed something.

The slender copper electrodes on the generating station roof, formerly hidden by smoke, had collapsed under the incessant concussions and tremorings.

Being made of copper instead of *ynium* they had succumbed more quickly. In that moment he understood why the planes were safe: the destructive frequency had never been transmitted . . .

An hour and a half later, as the planes droned steadily over a waste of tropical forest, Blake leaned gently over Lania as she lay in a roughly devised bed by one of the windows. The plane's pilot, shirt sleeves rolled up, was smiling a little.

"I'm no surgeon, but I guess she'll be O.K.," he remarked. "We can get proper aid when we strike Trinidad . . ." He held up the forceps and studied the bullet in their grip. "One inch further," he muttered, "and—" He shrugged. "But why bother over that? Incidentally, you can thank that damned volcano for showing us where to find you. The smoke attracted us."

He broke off, glanced at his watch, smiled ruefully. "Guess I'm plenty late on my schedule. I've passengers to pick

up, but they—"

He shrugged and slid into his jacket as he saw Blake wasn't listening. He was concentrating on the girl's feeble enquiries as to what had been happening. Quietly he told her, tapped his face plasters for confirmation.

"So Dalaker's all washed up and you're on your way to New York," he smiled. "As for your city, I guess it's finished."

The girl shook her fair head slowly. "No, Blake. Nothing can destroy *ynium*, even if it be buried in lava. And the Eternal Sleepers are deep underground, so even yet they may someday awake."

"Until then, though, you'll look mighty good in America," Blake remarked. "That's if you'll accept the proposition?"

She smiled, lay passive as he kissed her gently. Ranji holding his bandaged shoulder, regarded them steadily.

"Allah is just," he commented. "Very just."

# Meet the Authors

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**POLTON CROSS**

**The Master of Golden City**

*Author of*

*(Page 44)*

I WAS born near London some twenty-eight years ago, and after a rather hectic youth, during which I batted around and about London in all directions, I finished school, and became a working man. That is, until the depression came along. I rapidly went through a dozen odd attempts at jobs of various sorts, all with the same result.

Perhaps it was the depression, or the urge to do something that started my writing. Anyway, I'd always had the urge to write, and had scribbled various things on the backs of memo sheets, or any sort of scrap paper, and eventually consigned them all to the flames.

Even with that excellent start, I did send the editors a few unquestionably bad manuscripts, and thus kept up my record for failures with a dark cloud of rejection slips.

However, I finally clicked, and after several appearances, began to stem the tide of rejections.

THE MASTER OF GOLDEN CITY was written with half an eye cocked at the work of A. Hyatt Verrill, whose work I had always liked. Apparently the editors liked it too, and I hope the readers do also. Because if they do, I'll certainly be back with more.

And that's no threat, it's a promise.—*Polton Cross, London, England.*