

# SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 5

SEPTEMBER, 1949

No. 4

## THREE UNFORGETTABLE NOVELS

- MINION OF CHAOS** ..... John D. MacDonald 8  
Wisdom was his destiny—learn and conquer his creed . . . until in an atom-scarred universe there was but one thing left to overcome—Man;
- MINUS DANGER!** ..... George O. Smith 66  
From tiny nonexistence, Man's brightest highest attainment grew to an enormous nothing—a nothing vast enough to engulf not only him—but his universe!
- THE METAL MOON** ..... Neil R. Jones 102  
In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men found a peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight-armed Arnolascos of Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods!

## SHORT STORIES

- BRIDE OF ETERNITY** ..... Margaret St. Clair 36  
She had waited eons for her subjects—until the dark day she awoke to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!
- THE MINIATURE** ..... Peter Reed 46  
In the vault, he knew nothing of his long journey between birth and death. . . . But what dreams disturbed the sleep of this man, whose body was more precious than diamonds?
- WORLD OF NO RETURN** ..... Bryce Walton 56  
Under the twin moons of Mars, Cliff, the Earthman, could not live . . . and Della, poor misguided Della, could not die!
- STAR-BROTHER** ..... Stanley Mullen 88  
Dying Earthman and deathless Venusian, they joined in the strangest comradeship the stars had seen . . . to build, from its mind wrenching horror, a barrier that would forever preserve their planets!

## DEPARTMENTS AND FEATURES

- POPULAR FILMS** ..... Ted Palmer
- FANDOM'S CORNER** ..... Conducted by James V. Taurasi 7
- LAWRENCE PORTFOLIO** ..... 55
- THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER** .. Conducted by Frederick Pohl 100
- MISSIVES AND MISSILES** ..... The Readers 122  
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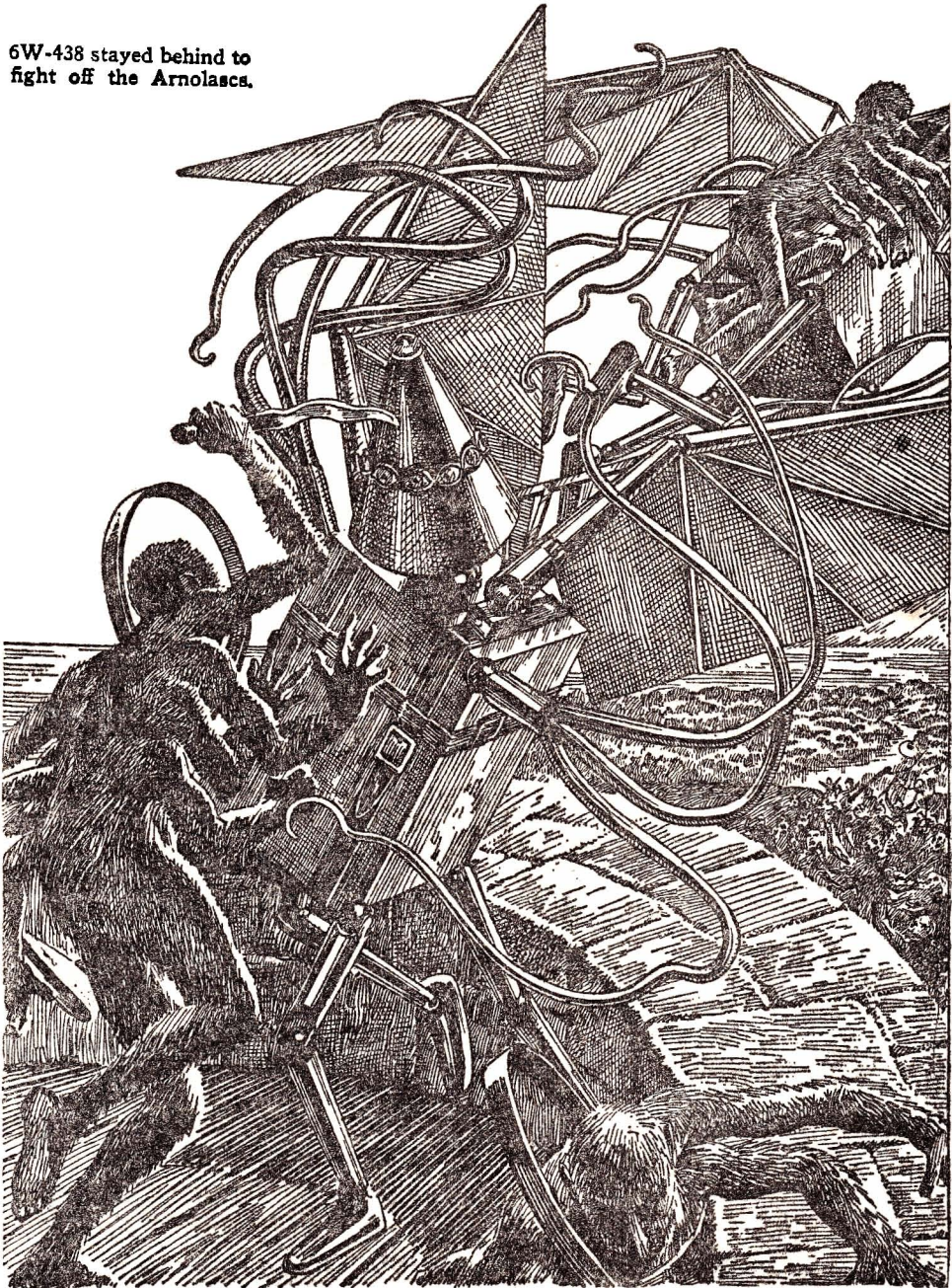
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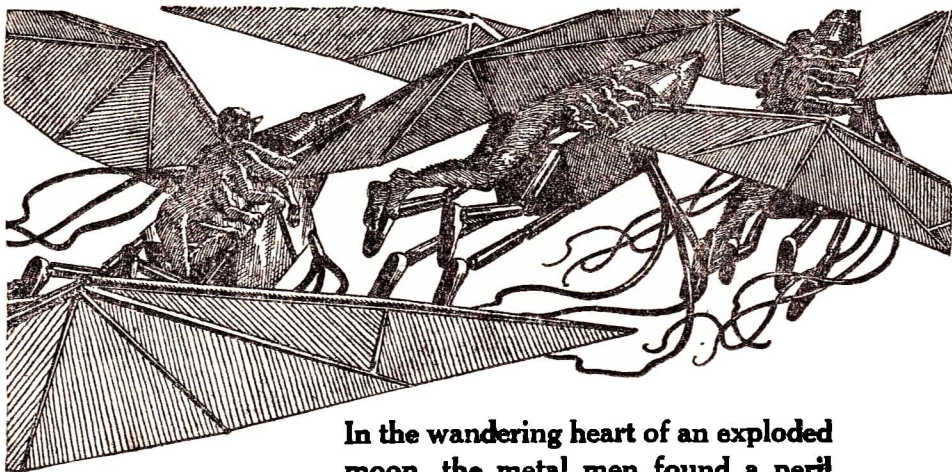
# The METAL MOON

Neil R. Jones

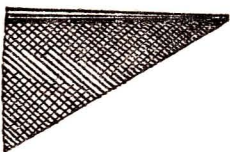
6W-438 stayed behind to  
fight off the Arnolasca.







**In the wandering heart of an exploded moon, the metal men found a peril greater than they had ever faced—the eight - armed Arnolascs of Dwom, who made gods of strangers—and destroyed their gods!**



## FOREWORD

**T**HE ADVENTURES of Professor Jameson are legion, yet of these only the most interesting are chronicled. Were we to present a complete record of his discoveries and adventures from world to world with the machine men of Zor, such a boundless narration would make for interminable reading, filling many large tomes. Much of this would interest only the scientific savant too absorbed in archeology, mathematics and kindred sciences to appreciate the mystery and romance scattered throughout the records. Let me play the romanticist again, bringing before you the strange discovery made by the machine men among the moonlets of a ringed world.

A word, in passing, about Professor Jameson and the Zoromes. In his Earthly life, it had been the professor's

belief that there was no organic dissolution in space, and he selected himself as the subject for his own experiment. He left elaborate instructions and a space rocket when he died. His nephew placed the professor's body in the rocket and shot the projectile into space from the leaning tower in which it lay.

For forty million years, the rocket satellite circled the earth fifty thousand miles distant. The Earth grew old. Mankind had long ago vanished into obscurity. The Earth no longer supported any life. On one of their expeditions into space, the machine men of Zor, a far-off planet in a distant corner of the universe, passed the Earth and discovered the professor's cosmic coffin. Long ago, the Zoromes had transferred their brains from organic bodies to coned metal heads surmounting a cubed body up-

held by four metal legs and equipped with six metal tentacles. Mechanical eyes encircled the coned head, an eye staring directly upward from the apex. Communication they held by mental telepathy. When parts of their bodies wore out, they were replaced. Barring an injury to their heads, the machine men of Zor were immortal.

They recalled to life the professor's brain, placing it in one of the mechanical bodies. He became one of them. They visited many worlds and met with many adventures before the spaceship returned to Zor, where a new expedition was organized under the joint command of Professor Jameson and 744U-21. To the machine men, the professor was known as 21MM392.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Among the Moonlets

**T**HE ORANGE sun cast a dazzling glitter upon the spaceship of the Zoromes as it approached the ringed planet. Like a massive bracelet of awesome, majestic proportions, the conglomeration of tiny moonlets circled the slowly turning world.

The machine men were heading straight for the ring. From afar, the nearer side of the ring appeared solid. As they came nearer, it seemed comprised of tiny dust motes reflecting the sun's rays in various degrees of brilliance. As they raced closer, the motes grew in perspective to the proportions of pebbles and oddly-shaped boulders. Like a giant ribbon, the ring lay arched across the entire sky before them, a vision of solemn beauty and celestial grandeur.

"There was a world of my own system which had rings," Professor Jameson observed.

"I recall it," 744U-21 replied. "We stopped and examined it in passing. It was later that we visited the Earth and found your rocket satellite."

"Much has befallen you since then, 21MM392," 6W-438 said, "for that was long ago."

The spaceship decelerated rapidly as the ring towered before them like a massive wall. To avoid collisions, they threaded their way cautiously among the moonlets. Many of the small bodies loomed like miniature mountains, while others ranged in size down to tiny pieces which for the most part clung to their larger companions through a slight attraction of gravity. As the spaceship plumbed deeper into the slowly revolving mass, the sunlight became less brilliant, and occasional periods of darkness reigned. Lights were directed from the ship which threaded its way slowly. The darkness grew complete, although now and then a rare stab of sunlight sped like an arrow into the ring, momentarily illuminating a group of moonlets where the ever-shifting and restless sea of cosmic bodies chanced to leave an opening. In spite of their caution, the spaceship occasionally bumped one of the moonlets.

"It seems strange and unreal that these millions of pieces were once a single satellite," said 6W-438.

"This moon you speak of kept revolving closer to its parent body, until the attraction of the planet grew so great that it broke its smaller companion up into these many small pieces," the professor added. "There was a man named Roche—before my time—who drew attention to this universal law."

"What strange shapes many of these chunks possess."

"It comes from occasionally bumping one another. Most of them, you

will notice, conform to a roughly spherical contour. Some of them are oblate. You will notice a marked absence of corners on any of them."

They continued onward through the myriads of moonlets, slowly picking their way and keeping to a slanting course which would carry them edge-wise through the ring. Many of the Zoromes gathered scientific data with intricate detectors and other apparatus. Foremost was their analysis of the various minerals to be found in the ring.

"There is a strange metal which is yet far off but plainly registers on our detectors," 454ZQ3 reported.

"Which direction?" 744U-21 asked.

"The ship is now approaching it."

Keeping a close watch upon the detectors, they slowly felt their way along the invisible path of growing emanations.

"We are very close now. It should be here somewhere ahead of us."

"What a queer looking moonlet that one is," 119M-5 remarked, raising a tentacle to designate a bulking object ahead of them.

The machine men instantly recognized a marked difference. The contour of the moonlet departed from the usual rough, spherical appearance. The side towards them was actually flat and smooth, and at least two perfect corners were visible. The coloring of the moonlet also varied from that of its neighbors. As they came closer, 454ZQ2 verified it as the source of the metallic emanations they had picked up, 6W-438 venturing that the moonlet was a huge piece of ore.

"More than that, 6W-438," said the professor as they drifted closer. "It not only appears to be pure metal but designed by an intelligence. See how smooth and regular those two sides are."

They circled the object. Upon the moonlet's antipode an even more surprising discovery was made. A long, square arm projected from the rising bulk of the metal moonlet which they now recognized as almost a perfect cube.

"What can it be?"

The question arose almost in concert from the metal ranks of the machine men. Few ventured to answer it, however. The spaceship maneuvered carefully around the edge of the long projection, gently pushing aside a moonlet whose momentum sent it careening and bumping its nearest companions. The projection ended in a square, flat side upon which were handles and knobs.

"An entrance way!" 6W-438 said excitedly. "It is a way into the—"

Here the machine man paused, finding no mental equivalent for the unknown confronting them.

"We must try to get inside it," said the professor.

A party of five machine men, including the professor, 744U-21, 6W-438, 12-W62 and 284D-167, prepared to attempt an entrance. Temperature equalizers were hastily put over their coned, metal heads, and they were ready to emerge into space. Carrying heat rays and other emergency apparatus, they were let out into space, floating gracefully in the direction of the studded entrance to which they clung. To the surprise of them all, the door, or trap, turned back easily once they all laid hold of the grips and turned them. In fact, it seemed almost as if the door had been thrust outward purposely from inside. 12W-62 was ready to enter at once, but the professor deterred him while he shone his body lights into the square, darkened passage. He examined it carefully.

There was another door similar to

the first one, situated halfway up the corridor. They walked down the metal passage and found that the door operated on the same principle as the first. Again, they had no difficulty in opening it. Far ahead, and presumably somewhat inside the great metal cube, was set a third door. They were on their way to this when the second door clanged shut behind them. They advanced no further, sensing a possible trap. 6W-438 went back to examine the second door. He found that it opened easily and saw the mechanical device which had shut it behind them. He allowed it to close again. Satisfied, they proceeded to open the third door.

**A** DARK chamber lay beyond. They sensed something tangible, something which moved gently past into the corridor behind them.

"A gas—or an atmosphere!" 744U-21 exclaimed. "That is why there were three doors."

"There seems to be little pressure behind it."

In the glow thrown by their body lights, they saw intricate scientific apparatus, some of it fastened, the rest of it floating free. Much of it was unquestionably wrecked. What caught the initial interest of the machine men, however, was the dome which loomed from the floor of the chamber. It was situated in the centre and rose more than halfway to the ceiling. The dome was transparent, and from where they stood the machine men could see dim, misshapen things within it.

They advanced to the dome and shone lights through it. Four weird creatures lay on pallets, apparently lifeless. A strange, glistening crystal-like ice completely covered them, casting back the light into the mechanical eyes of the Zoromes. They saw that

the transparent solid covered everything inside the dome and lay many inches thick on the floor of the chamber. In the absence of gravity, this latter fact puzzled the professor.

The four creatures possessed long, angular bodies which were covered with a short fur. Their lower limbs were two in number, while upon their sides the machine men counted four sets of arms, the lowest set the shortest, the others gradually increasing in size and length. Sharp, pointed noses projected grotesquely from otherwise flat faces. Other details were vague.

"There is a way in there," 12W-62 told them, pointing to a transparent door.

"How do you suppose they met their end?"

"They died peacefully, at least," said 744U-21.

It was 284D-167 who opened the transparent door and ventured inside. The others followed. The door, though fitting hermetically, did not close automatically behind them as the last two had done. 744U-21 followed. The others watched from outside.

"What is it?" the professor asked, after 744U-21 had touched the crystal.

"A frozen atmosphere, I would say. We cannot determine its components, however, without a more detailed examination."

"This must have been a spaceship after all," said 12W-62, "and when some accident befell it they died while they slept."

"It does not seem that they would all have been sleeping," the professor suggested. "And how did this ship get in among the moonlets?"

"There is no telling how long it may have drifted. Those four in there may be even older than your own brain, 21MM392."

"Do you think that we can recall them to life?"

"It may be possible."

"The gas which drifted past us when we opened the third door cannot have been the same as that which we see solidified," 6W-438 observed.

"I know. There is much which we must learn about this great cube. If this is a spaceship, it is the strangest one which we have ever found in our travels."

The five machine men eagerly examined the mechanical equipment. Puzzled, they could find no propellant mechanism, although means of creating a synthetic atmosphere supply was discovered and readily understood. The more detailed their examination became, the more certain they were that the great metal cube with its long-necked entrance was not a spaceship. 744U-21 suggested that it might have been an interplanetary station maintained by creatures of this system for observation or other purposes. It had eventually drifted among the moonlets or else it had been stationed there.

One thing still troubled them. The floor was not equipped with any means of synthetic gravity.

"One of these machines now in disuse may have supplied it," 744U-21 offered.

"Look!" cried 6W-438 suddenly, waving his metal tentacles in wild excitement toward the dome. "Something is happening to the solidified atmosphere!"

In surprise, they saw the crystal substance slowly in motion, moving within itself, slowly expanding its state changing.

"It is changing to liquid form!"

Fascinated, they watched. They saw the dripping liquid slowly disappearing, evaporating into gas.

"The temperature here is rising!" said 6W-438.

"We must have set a heating unit to working," said the professor. "At this rate, the atmosphere will soon return to its normal condition."

The change of the crystal to liquid and then to gas became more rapid. Soon, it had entirely disappeared. The four silent figures were now free of the encumbering crystal and became subject to the gentle examination and probing of the machine men.

Professor Jameson and 744U-21 looked at each other in quick surprise as they reached the same conclusion.

"These creatures are not dead as we know death!"

"Their life forces are in suspension, then. Their life is of that character which we occasionally meet with in our travels. For one thing, they are not warm-blooded."

"Call 141L-14. He is best familiar with these conditions."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Resurrection

FROM time to time, the machine men had radiated their discoveries to those within the spaceship. Now, they called to 141L-14. With seven more of the machine men, 141L-14 entered the cube by way of the long corridor with its airlocks.

"No, they are not really dead," he said. "Their life forces have been suspended, much as we have known creatures frozen in ice to return to life when thawed out."

"Will they live again?"

"21MM392 was once dead, and his brain was made to live again," said 744U-21, "so why should we not be able to exert our art on these creatures of indefinite life suspension and return

their entire bodies to normal functioning?"

"They have air, now, such as they knew, and they have heat," said 141L-14, "but there is no way of knowing how long they have remained like this. They may never return to life unaided, or it may be some time. Before attempting any aid, we should first be patient and watch to see what happens."

The suggestions of 141L-14 were acted upon, the machine men maintaining a tireless vigil. Finally, 141L-14 attempted revival by means of stimulants, mechanical stimulation of the respiratory movement and other physical processes, besides introducing nourishment intravenously and intramuscularly. Reactions of the creatures were favorable, proving 141L-14's contention that they needed but little help.

The first signs of the reawakening were scattered, miasmic impressions on the machine men's brains, strange memories hopelessly muddled with fantastic imaginings. The machine men derived no practical information from these mental vagaries and watched for a more clarified understanding.

The creatures' minds wandered less, their mental processes throwing off the fog of chaos. One of the creatures opened its eyes and stared blankly a moment before bringing objects into focus. Puzzlement as to his whereabouts assailed the creature first of all. A low mutter of gibberish accompanied the thought, rising to a sharp inflection. This, the machine men were unable to interpret, yet they knew the thought which prompted the words.

The creature saw them, yet he did not seem to be able to consider them coherently. He thought them figments of his imagination, realizing rather vaguely that he had slept for a long time. He seemed to realize the presence

of someone by him, however, for his thoughts suggested as much.

"So you have come back for us. What is the verdict? Has the pestilence been conquered? Or has it passed and taken civilization with it?"

"We do not know," Professor Jame-son radiated into the creature's mind. "Perhaps you can tell us more about it."

"Tell you more?" chattered the creature in voluble surprise and indignation. It is for you to tell! We know nothing that has happened since we were left here on Yriid! Where are your tongues? Why do you not say something? But you did say something! I know what you said, yet I cannot recall hearing it! How strange!"

At this point, the creature raised a paw and rubbed his face, especially around his eyes which were so deep-set as to give him a rather sombre appearance. Then he stared silently at them, suddenly realizing that what he saw was no figment of his imagination but was really true.

His mind suggested madness. He looked around at his companions. Two of them were revived and were looking at the machine men in surprise. He who had come to his senses first was becoming better oriented. His next remark suggested as much.

"Robots. We must have lain here many years. What kind of a world is it now? They send robots to bring us back to our own world. Are we no longer among the greatest brains of our planet, to be treated so lightly by metal proxy? And why have they not come for us before?"

He turned and spoke to his companions. A brief conversation followed. The last one was emerging from his coma. Then he turned once more to the machine men of Zor.

"Take us home," he said. "How long



have we remained inert and asleep here?"

"Perhaps for ages," 744U-21 replied. "Who knows? As for our being robots belonging to your people, you are mistaken. We shall be glad to transport you to your world when we know where it is."

Bewilderment akin to terror swept the minds of the creatures. "Who are you? Where are you from?"

"We are not robots, though we are nearly so," 744U-21 explained to them. "An organic brain directs each of our metal bodies. We are from a world far distant from your planetary system."

They stared in speechless amazement. "Then the pestilence must have conquered! Our world may be a dead world!"

"We do not know, for we have not visited any worlds in this system as yet. Our first interest was the ring of moonlets, and then we discovered your space terminal, or whatever it is."

"Moonlets? Space terminal? What do you mean? This sounds like madness!"

"Perhaps if you tell us how you came here we can help you understand things better," Professor Jameson offered. "You spoke of a pestilence and suggested that you four who were greatly advanced in education on your world were to be isolated from it until it passed. Then, someone was to return here and get you. Was that not so?"

"Why, yes—of course! We were buried on Yriid in a sealed chamber."

**F**LASHES of understanding radiated among the Zoromes. The story was commencing to reveal itself to their practical minds.

"What is Yriid?" the professor asked. "A world other than your own?"

"We are scientists from Dwom. Yriid is the satellite of Dwom."

"How far is this moon from Dwom?"

the machine man inquired. "Give us the general characteristics of your home world."

The scientist of Dwom answered the questions promptly, adding a query of his own. "Why do you not ask me about this moon?"

"Because this is no moon any longer. Your chamber is floating in space in the dark depths of millions of moonlets encircling Dwom at less than three-quarters of the distance you stated the orbit of Yriid to be. Your description of Dwom quite accurately describes the world this world encircles."

"It—it cannot be!" one of them exclaimed. "It would mean more than a hundred thousand years since we were left here!"

"See, Reyadip!" one of the first speaker's companions addressed him. "It is as I said would happen! Yriid broke up!"

"One hundred thousand years!" breathed Reyadip. "It is wonderful we are still alive!"

"Many things could have happened to our civilization," said another of the creatures. "We may find a superrace on our world."

Reyadip shook his head. "A superrace would have found us. The pestilence must have wiped out our species. That is why no one returned for us."

"Let us go with these metal beings who have found us," said one. "They will take us back to our world."

Reyadip arose experimentally from his pallet and placed his feet on the floor. Weakness and lack of gravity caused him to lose his balance. 6W-438 leaped forward and caught him. The four scientists of Dwom were told how they had been revived after the frozen air had returned to a gaseous state, and they were warned to be careful until their condition was improved.

The machine men decided to tow

the sealed chamber to Dwom. There was no air inside the spaceship suited to these creatures, for what air remained was from the last world the machine men had visited and was unbreathable. With the freeing of the air in the chamber from a solid state, the right pressure had again been reached, or nearly so. Reyadip thought it rarified, and so the machine men in the chamber did not leave to go aboard the spaceship, for use of the airlocks freed a portion of the atmosphere each time.

"How damaged all our apparatus is," Reyadip said, looking about the inside of the chamber. "The atmosphere plant is wrecked."

"We shall be on your world very soon," the professor assured him. "There is little chance of this air becoming too stale to breathe before then."

While the spaceship slowly guided the metal chamber out of the moonlets, much was learned from the four scientists. They were skilled in all fields of science and education, and when the pestilence had come and had promised to be of appalling proportions, the four of them had banded together in this scheme of lying dormant until it was past. Various governmental agencies had cooperated with them, wishing to spare their useful lives if it were possible. Besides Reyadip, there were Gnarst, Ebynth and Torfg.

The Agrids, as they were called, had listened in awe to the subdued bumping sounds they had heard as the spaceship drew their sealed chamber out of the ring of moonlets. They were subsequently surprised to find the trip to Dwom over so quickly, for most of the time had been spent in threading cautiously among the little moons which had once been the great satellite of Yriid.

Their first intimation of an approach to Dwom was a growing sensation of gravity. The professor issued a mental warning to 20R-654 aboard the spaceship against any twisting and turning, since the metal chamber possessed no artificial gravity.

Dwom's attraction grew stronger, and they were told that a landing would soon be effected. They were warned of a shift in gravity, and they seized hold of stationary objects before it came. The chamber was lowered to the ground. It touched with a shaking bump and rolled over on one side, then lay still.

"Now you can find out what changes your world has undergone," said the professor. "Let a few of us precede you to see that all is well."

Machine men and Agrids made their way out of the long entrance past the airlocks. The first thing the Agrids noticed was the great ring around their planet. Exclamations flew thick and fast.

"How beautiful it is!"

"And it was once our moon!"

"You have been revolving in that ring about Dwom for a long time," said 744U-21. "There is no telling how long ago Yriid broke up."

"The sun has lost some of its heat," Reyadip observed.

"Yes, it is probable," Professor Jameson agreed, "even though you may be a bit closer to the sun than formerly."

"The vegetation has changed," said Torfg, bringing their attention to things nearer at hand, "The sward is not like that we knew, and the bushes are different—and the trees—what strange bark and leaves!"

"Where are we?" queried Reyadip, turning to the machine men. "On what part of the planet did we land?"

"Sixteen degrees north of the

equator," 28A-155 replied, using the Agrids' own terminology. "We are near the eastern shore of a continent some four thousand miles across and six thousand miles long."

"Paxt," muttered Torfg. "We must be somewhere near the city of Afg."

"Let us go into the ship," the professor suggested. "Then we can course around the world, and you can see what changes time has wrought. You may be able to come to some approximation of the time which has passed since your companions isolated you from the pestilence."

The Agrids regarded the spaceship of the Zoromes in wonder and admiration. Once inside, they marveled at the scientific apparatus which they vowed surpassed that of their own period.

"We were less than a century beyond the inception of space flying. We travelled occasionally to Yriid, and a few times expeditions returned safely from our two nearest sister worlds. Mrn, the inner world, we planned to colonize."

"We plan to explore the other worlds of this system," said 744U-21, "but right now we are more interested in this world of yours."

**T**HE SPACESHIP cruised slowly about Dwom, first high and then low. The Agrids chattered excitedly among themselves as they gazed down at the changes which time had made in the outlines of the continents. When they found their bearings, the ship was dropped sufficiently low for them to search with the telescopes. The great cities were gone.

It was 41C-98 who first saw signs of civilization. The machine man saw a small village of queer houses. Speeding along and coming nearer the ground, they picked out several more of the villages.

The Agrids became very eager to land and meet the inhabitants. Gnarst sounded a warning possibility. "This world may be peopled by a different race, sprung up since our entombment."

"Or perhaps they are creatures from another world."

"The last seems unlikely, for their habitations do not suggest an intelligence capable of spacetravel," said 6W-438.

The spaceship came to rest not far from one of the villages. They saw no one. From on high, indistinct signs of life and movement had been perceived. The Agrids and nearly a score of the machine men left the ship and walked toward the village.

The houses were crude and suggested a barbaric civilization. Warning the Agrids that they might be attacked, the machine men surrounded them protectingly as they penetrated the queer, winding avenues of the village. Several of the machine men reported fleeting glimpses of watching eyes from the cover of the houses. Presently a subdued whispering arose and surrounded them, spreading through the village like a soft, sighing breeze, quickly it subsided.

Professor Jameson was about to issue a mental overture of friendship to the hidden inhabitants, when 6W-438 called the attention of all. "Look! Coming down that avenue over there!"

All eyes were focused in the direction the machine man indicated. What they saw were strange counterparts of the four Agrids. Fully a dozen of the things advanced slowly, armed with long clubs. Each one also held a rough piece of stone fastened by a long cord to the club. They were dressed in strange harnesses, part metal and part leather. Iron loops, welded to their breast plates, circled their heads.

"There are your descendants!" 744U-21 told the wide-eyed Agrids. "It would seem that they are no super-race; rather, it would seem that your species has degenerated."

"There are more of them coming from the opposite direction," said 119M-5.

As the machine men and Agrids looked around, they saw the villagers advancing grimly and purposefully from all directions. As the creatures came nearer, marked differences between them and the Agrids became noticeable. Their fur was lighter in color, and they seemed shorter. Their eyes were not so deep-set as those of the Agrids, while their two lower sets of arms were stronger and more developed.

The machine men recognized that the inhabitants of the village were driven more by fear than by animosity. "Be not afraid of us," the professor radiated. "We do not come to harm you or do any damage to your village."

The moving ranks stopped instantly in consternation and perplexity at this voice which had spoken to them without sound. They saw strange thought pictures, too, which demonstrated the invincible qualities of the machine men against their clubs and whirling stones. The machine men were firmly clustered around the four Agrids, and for the moment the latter were not visible to their armored descendants.

A strange jabber of words totally unintelligible to the four Agrids issued from the mouths of the villagers. Reading the thoughts behind the words, the machine men interpreted queries regarding their origin, who they were and what they were doing in the village. As well as he could, the professor explained to them what they wanted to know, finally alluding to the four Agrids.

"We have brought to you four of

your ancestors from the dim, dark past who have survived in a strange manner."

The machine men drew back to let the villagers see the Agrids. Instantly, an excited hubbub arose. The machine men acted as interpreters for the Agrids. They learned but little of the history of their descendants, but they did learn that there was a slightly higher civilization in other parts of the world and that boats plied the ocean.

The Agrids became more hopeful. Meanwhile, they found themselves accepted as prophets and deities and were offered the best of everything. The machine men were accepted as mechanical minions who served the Agrids. As long as everything went smoothly, both machine men and Agrids were content to let matters stand.

The Agrids set to work learning the language of their descendants. They visited nearby villages and learned that all over Dwom religion was closely linked with government,—in fact was a part of government. The Arnolascas, as these distant descendants of the Agrids called themselves, worshipped many deities, reminding Professor Jameson of the old Greeks of his own race. Their religion and customs were very strict, and any who opposed them in any way were promptly outlawed and banished from the communities. There were many such, they learned, who, having no rights or protection, banded together in difficult, inaccessible places to establish their own communities and escape persecution and assassination. The Agrids found the government heads strictly opposed to any progressive move which ran counter to their religion.

In the spaceship of the Zoromes, the Agrids journeyed all over the world, hailed as near-gods and prophets, find-



ing themselves liberally exploited by the priesthood to uphold the faith of the people. They found the more advanced centres still far below their own standard of civilization.

They traveled, said little and learned much until it became quite evident to them wherever they went that the world was laboring under a severe superstitious restraint. Once they realized this, they commenced using the veneration and respect accorded them as a means for enlightenment and mild reform. They urged laxity toward those holding contrary beliefs, urged, and suggested pardons for those already outlawed. But they met resentment and determined opposition, mostly from the priesthood.

Many of the machine men were for exploring the rest of the planets. The professor elected to stay with the Agrids until the spaceship returned, and when he called for four volunteers to remain on Dwom, 6W-438, 119M-5, 29G-75 and 75J-02 were first to respond. The spaceship left the machine men and Agrids in one of the principal cities and headed sunward.

**N**OT MANY days after the spaceship had left, reports commenced filtering into the Arnolasc city that the Agrids were no gods but devils. It was also said that they were minions of the outlawed, self-styled intellectuals, the Uans, who had fashioned the machine men to fight for overthrow of the government, after the morale of the people had been lowered by subtle suggestions from the Agrids. It was reported that the spaceship had not left the planet as so many gullible people believed, but had gone to bring back more machine men and spaceships from an area deep within a nearby continent of vast swamplands. These accusations were

backed by an assertion that the Agrids had spread sickness behind them wherever they had gone. At first, such reports were taken as mere rumor; later, they aroused speculation and concern, especially when an epidemic broke out in the city where they were established.

"It would seem that there may be something to this theory of your spreading sickness," the professor told the Agrids. "Do you suppose that it is germs of the pestilence? You could easily have carried germs into your sealed chamber, these same germs later coming to life and activity when we brought you to Dwom."

The Agrids seized the first opportunity to examine some of the cases. They disproved part of the machine man's theory while establishing the rest.

"This malady has in truth been spread by us," said Reyadip, "but it is not the terrible pestilence. Such possibilities were guarded against scientifically. We took no active germs of the pestilence into our sealed chamber, but we evidently took other germs with us, as these cases prove. This disease has not the fatal effects of the pestilence which swept our world. In fact, the people of my time rarely suffered at all from this malady, probably because our bodies had built up resistance against it. These people will soon recover."

Nevertheless, consternation gripped the Arnolases. The terror was fanned into malice by the priesthood, who were envious of the fame and enthusiasm accorded the Agrids. At a public meeting, the Agrids tried to explain conditions and circumstances of the disease which had followed in their wake, but a rumbling roar of anger never quieted long enough for them to be heard.

Reyadip despaired. The few machine

men were kept busy protecting the four Agrids from the violence of the mob, nor would they have succeeded had it not been for the Arnolascs' superstitious fear of the Agrids, which had not entirely worn off. It was well, as the professor remarked, that their quarters were in a round, stone tower on a bluff overlooking the city. Behind them, a dense forest stretched for many miles to the seashore. If they plan violence, we are well situated to be warned in time. We must remain vigilant."

"What can we do against so many?" asked Gnarst. "They can even overwhelm five machine men like yourselves."

"Yes," the professor admitted. "But if the worst happens, we have mechanical wings left us by the spaceships. We can fly with you to a spot of refuge in the forest."

The Agrids remained disappointed and despondent. Their hopes of a superrace had been dashed completely.

One day, not long after the ineffectual address of the Agrids, three Arnolascs came to the stone tower on the bluff. They came, they said, as agents for those who had been banished and dwelt on the continent of the swamplands.

Word had reached the communities of the Uans in the depths of the great morass about the coming of the Agrids and their mechanical aids. The Uans of the volcanic city of Pteth, more learned and progressive than the Arnolascs of true belief, were interested in the four creatures who claimed that they were ancients. Word had reached them of the attempted teachings of the Agrids, and it had so pleased the outlaws to hear that the Agrids had risen to their defense that they were offering them a welcome to their city, wishing to confer with them

and learn of the past and many other things.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Attack on Pteh

"WE HAVE suspected a glorious past in far-gone days, for we found many hints by digging and finding old ruins," one of the outlaws told them. "We have even found petrified bones, and I must say that you four appear somewhat like the plastic reconstructions they have inspired us to fashion from them. We have believed that we may have declined from a superrace, for from time to time are born individuals who show extreme advancement from the usual types. Generally, one of three things happens to them. If they rise to the front, assert themselves and follow the lines of truth and logic, they are banished as outlaws. If they remain quiet and discreet and do not betray any radical tendencies, submitting to the bigotry of state religion and custom, they are unmolested. If they are unscrupulous as well as ambitious and intelligent, they sometimes become government heads or religious dignitaries, receiving a part of the confiscated goods and property of those banished to outlawry."

Agrids, machine men and the three Uans from Pteth conversed together for a long time. The Uans were intensely interested in the machine men and how they had rescued the four Agrids from the ring which had once been the satellite Yriid. Professor Jameson learned that the sinking continent of the swamplands was comparatively near, lying just across the straits from the forest behind them. Pteth lay inland. Other cities and villages of the Uans lay farther from the

coast, but Pteth was the nearest and one of the largest of the outlawed communities.

"You must be amazingly old," the Agrids were told. "Our scientists estimate that Yriid broke up as long as sixty thousand years ago."

The Agrids were anxious to leave for Pteth, but the machine men urged them to wait until the spaceship returned, arguing that they were such prominent figures in the eyes of the Arnolascas that they would never be allowed unhindered passage to the land of the Uans. Reyadip regretfully recognized the wisdom of this advice. Meanwhile, two of the three Uans set out for their return to Pteth, while the other remained in the city as a spy.

The Agrids, like all organic creatures, had periods of sleep, and, according to the usual routine of civilizations the universe over, did their sleeping during the planetary periods of darkness. The machine men never slept. Mental lassitude, or deep introspection was their nearest approach to sleep.

It proved well for the Agrids that the machine men did not sleep, and perhaps for the machine men themselves. The attack which the professor had feared soon came, but not the way he had expected. Instead of rising against them in a howling mob, attackers came in a small party, by night and by stealth from the dense forest to the rear of the tower. Whatever their intentions may have been toward the almost invincible Zoromes, their design upon the Agrids was plainly assassination.

Somehow or other, they contrived to get inside the tower despite the protection of locks and bars. There were ten or more of the assassins, and they were inside the tower before the machine men and Agrids were aware of their presence.

The first intimation that they were there reached 75J-02, who became troubled by vague mental radiations unlike those of the Agrids. Prompt investigation was none too soon.

The marauders wielded curved daggers shaped for decapitation. Torfg had a close call as he was awakened by the clattering din of the running machine men. One of the assassins made a quick stab at him which was partly blocked by 6W-438, who instantly crushed the Arnolasc in the embrace of his metal tentacles.

Most of the others met similar fates, but a few escaped. One of them carried a bar of metal and slashed desperately at 75J-02 when attacked. There were a few nicks, dents and scratches on the machine man's body, but that was all. Examination of the dead Arnolascas revealed several individuals wearing the insignia of the priesthood.

"More trouble will come of this," said Reyadip. "None of them should have escaped."

Reyadip was right, and the trouble came with the dawn. Several officials came to the tower, and accused the four Agrids of murder. This, together with their spreading of a malignant epidemic, called for the forfeit of their lives. They were to be given a hearing, and the evidence was to be weighed, but they could expect no mercy.

All the entrances to the round tower were locked and barred, and the machine men hastily donned the mechanical wings left them when 744U-21 had departed with the spaceship. Word of their arrest had evidently spread through the city, for thousands of the Arnolascas were hurrying up the bluff, and the city streets were swarming with them, eager to see what would happen when those who called themselves ancients were taken into custody.

The machine men were none too soon in fastening on the mechanical wings, for as they hurried to the roof of the tower they heard the city officials smashing their way inside the tower on the ground floor.

With the exception of 6W-438, each machine man carried an Agrid in his flight. 6W-438 stayed momentarily to fight off several Arnolascs emerging upon the roof. One he knocked over the roof's edge into the milling throng beneath, forcing the others to give way before his flailing tentacles. One of them leaped upon him as he took off to join his winging comrades. More of the Arnolasc swarmed upon the roof. Professor Jameson, carrying Reyadip, turned back to his aid, but 6W-438 won clear. The Arnolasc still clung to him, hacking frantically with a knife, finally shivering the nicked blade into several pieces which fell sparkling amid the surging populace beneath.

Missiles commenced to fly among the machine men carrying the Agrids, and they soared higher. 6W-438 dropped the Arnolasc and flew to join them, his victim catapulting to the ground. The machine men considered themselves temporarily safe, for the Arnolasc knew nothing of aircraft.

Over the forest they headed in the general direction of the sea, leaving the city far behind. For a long time, they could see the tower on the bluff, and then that too melted into a horizon of haze and obscurity. The four Agrids, frightened at first, gradually became calmer.

Passing above a village, they were surprised by a volley of missiles. One of them struck the flying apparatus of 29G-75. 6W-438 quickly flew to his aid and took the Agrid, giving the machine man more power to recover. After several ineffectual attempts, 29G-75 managed to rise and fly even with his

companions once more. Another volley flew by them, a large rock ricocheting off the metal body of the professor.

"The elastic guns," said Torfig, recalling the stone throwing machines of the Arnolasc. "They have relayed messages from the city with notes from their pipes."

"How far are we from the coast?" the professor asked.

Reyadip computed a distance of approximately fifty miles.

"Let us fly across the straits to Pteth. We shall not be safe in the forest if they are determined to follow us."

The suggestion was agreed upon, and they kept on until they saw the open sea, carefully skirting all communities they passed. Reaching the coast, they struck out toward the sea. A large seaport town lay to their left, and Reyadip drew their attention to several ships which were leaving port. He expressed the opinion that they were being pursued.

THEY were well out of sight of land when 29G-75 commenced to have trouble with his flying apparatus, which had been damaged by a flying stone from one of the elastic guns. He continually lost altitude. Suddenly he lost all control and dove into the sea. Under the circumstances, there was nothing his companions could do for him. He sank to the bottom and reported an estimated depth of a hundred and fifty feet or more.

"Remain there until the spaceship returns," said the professor.

There was no cause for alarm, the machine men assured the Agrids, for machine men had remained under water for long periods before this. They flew onward.

The coast of the sinking continent appeared as a purple line on the hor-



izon. It was low and swampy; rank vegetation marked the coastline, growing up out of the water. Numerous bays and inlets cut into the log bogs of the interior. A stream wound and twisted away into distance.

For many long miles there was little to look upon but vegetation and water, and then the terrain grew firmer and a little higher. There were many lakes. After this, the morass began once more. Reyadip expressed his opinion that what they had passed was in effect an island of solid ground.

They gained altitude in order to locate Pteth, but the Agrids soon complained of the cold, and so they went no higher. Leaving 119M-5 and 6W-438 with a triple burden between them, Professor Jameson flew alone on high. Far off in the interior, he spied a slight rise in the surface of the marsh. Returning to his companions, he carried Reyadip again, and they continued on their way. Soon the mound came in sight. It had been barely perceptible to the professor, but now as they came closer it broadened into vast proportions. A city lay inside high walls.

From that distance, they could see tiny figures running excitedly along the walls. Something long and glittering was turned in their direction. They learned later that it was a telescope.

Pteth lay upon a lava foundation. Most of the houses in the city were built of the same material. The larger buildings were built of stone hauled from across the straits by boat. A narrow, winding stream, the same one they had seen near the coast, passed through the swamp.

They flew above the city, circling it once and then dropping to what appeared to be a public square. They were recognized and heartily welcomed. All about them they saw marks of progress foreign to the Arnolasc

cities they had visited, this in spite of the fact that these outlaws had less to work with and were surrounded by adverse conditions. The fugitives told them of the boats they had seen leaving the seaport city across the straits. The Uans did not seem alarmed. They calmly went about making preparations for a siege.

"They have tried taking Pteth before but have always been repulsed. Their greatest enemy is the swamp-land. They soon become sick and many of them die," said one of the Uan spokesmen.

Scouts were sent downstream. Meanwhile, the four Agrids were given medicinal preparations to protect them against the diseases of the swamps. The machine men examined the defenses of Pteth and found that the outlawed intellectuals had mastered a rather effective explosive. It was used mostly in grenades, although there were a few cylinders similar to crude cannon which were used but rarely, because they eventually burst or back-fired, killing their operators. The Uans marveled at the heat ray installed in the professor's fore-tentacle.

Three days later the scouts returned and reported that a large flotilla of boats was coming up the stream in single file. They were loaded with armored soldiers from the continent across the straits. From the shelter of the bogs, the scouts had seen many large elastic guns. Each soldier was armed with cutlery of several types, and each one carried a flame thrower.

Inquiring as to the nature of the flame throwers, the professor learned that the Arnolasc were experts at throwing large, heavy capsules of oil specially prepared to burst into flames on contact with the air. The Uans had first invented this trick, but they found the grenades more effective. Neverthe-

less, to be struck with one of the capsules generally meant a flaming death.

"Their advantage is their huge numbers. If we can throw back their early attacks successfully, we have a good chance. Reinforcements will join us from our strongholds deeper inland. We could retreat to them, but we do not want Pteth to fall. It is very important to us. When the swamp sickness overcomes them, we shall hold the advantage."

Scouts came in two days later to report that the Arnolasc were moving up on Pteth overland, dragging and carrying their elastic guns.

"They could be waylaid with devastating effects," the professor suggested.

"But we would lose some of our numbers, too, and we cannot afford to let them find the city inadequately defended."

The Arnolasc came into sight and surrounded the city. They demanded its surrender. The Uans refused, nor did they show any signs of acquiescence when it was cautiously suggested that the Agrids and the machine men be the price of peace.

The next move of the Arnolasc was to move closer and set their elastic guns into place. Powerful strands of rubber were stretched back and cocked by scores of the creatures. A boulder was inserted, aimed and let go, the missile hurtling among the houses and citizenry with crushing effect. Although there were few casualties, considerable damage was done.

**T**HE UANS retaliated to this first offensive move with a barrage of grenades accurately thrown at a number of Arnolasc who were sneaking up with flame balls. These created fearful havoc, killing so many that few of the flame balls were thrown,

and these were ineffectual. Most of The Arnolasc were ignorant of the grenades and became demoralized until their leaders took them in hand. The elastic guns were quickly drawn out of range of the grenades and continued to hurl heavy stones into the city.

"Have you any mechanical means of throwing the grenades?" 6W-438 asked.

"Yes—we have elastic guns of various types, but we cannot use the grenades, for the siege may be a long one. We are using them only at close range."

The Uans were right; the siege promised to be a long one. Again and again the Arnolasc rushed the walls and were repulsed. The grenades were always effectual in repelling the enemy, but were becoming scarce. The flame balls were thrown into the city from time to time, sometimes at random but more often at the Uans on the walls during a charge. The machine men saw them strike individuals who became living funeral pyres.

Dead Arnolasc lay mangled and torn amid shattered vegetation outside the city. Creatures of the swamp slunk up out of the slime at night to feed in the fitful glow of the night torches, often dragging their victims, or fragments of them, down into the muck out of sight.

The four machine men did excellent work as sentinels. Not only were they sleepless, tireless and eternally vigilant, but they searched out any unusual mental activity of approaching forces. They had no fear of the flame bombs. Several times they were struck, and the oil flamed all over their metal bodies, yet they remained uninjured. One of the elastic guns picked 119M-5 off the wall one day, damaging two metal tentacles, but the machine man climbed back up again undaunted. The

Arnolascs' cry of enthusiasm died half-uttered.

Reinforcements of Arnolascs constantly refilled the positions of those slain. Never before, so the Uans said, had a siege been so long or so bitterly contested as this one. Swamp sickness finally broke out among the Arnolascs, but the cases were fewer and shorter than ever before. An antidote had evidently been discovered.

The allies the Uans had expected from the communities further inland did not come. The professor flew to the nearest village to find out the cause. A large force of Arnolasc waited outside the walls, holding back their assault, yet ready to prevent reinforcements leaving for Pteth. The professor returned to the besieged city and reported the conditions.

"If we can only hold them off until the spaceship returns, there will be no question as to the outcome," said 6W-438.

A few reinforcements did come from the farther communities not patrolled by Arnolascs. They gained access to Pteth by night under escort of the machine men. The latter shot down many of the Arnolasc with their ray guns which were effectual only at close range. The professor often wondered about 29G-75 at the bottom of the straits but knew that he must be safe and trying to be patient.

The supply of grenades grew so low that they were used only in the most desperate of crises. Hand-to-hand combats became common. In these, the machine men worked terrible havoc, flying above the heads of the Arnolascs and wielding their ray guns with devastating effect, or fighting on the ground where they were not prominent targets for the elastic guns.

One of the enemy gunners disabled the mechanism of 119M-5, and they

nearly carried the machine man off a prisoner. The other Zoromes and Uans fought hard and rescued him, robbing the Arnolascs of a great moral victory.

More bitter fighting followed. It was feared that the city would fall, so one night the machine men under cover of darkness carried the Agrids to Ropth, another city of the Uans farther inland.

The next day, reinforcements came to strengthen the Arnolascs. Knowing the state of affairs in Pteth, they made a desperate, wholesale charge upon the city, coming over the walls in an overwhelming rush which could not be repelled.

Outnumbered twenty to one, the Uans were subdued along with the machine men. Both 119M-5 and 6W-438 were disabled in the fighting, and 75J-02 and the professor were soon captured in spite of the terrific cost of life to the Arnolascs. They never had a chance to put on their mechanical wings, the charge had come so unexpectedly.

Although the Arnolascs searched everywhere, the Agrids were not to be found, and even when threatened with torture the Uans refused to tell where they were. Realizing the futility of further secrecy, Professor Jameson spared his organic friends by telling the Arnolascs that the four Agrids were safe in another city of the Uans. He warned them, too, of what would happen to them when the spaceship returned, especially if any machine man were harmed.

The Arnolascs, flushed with victory, ignorantly confident of their might and divine right, expressed their contempt and curiosity both at once by dismantling the machine men. The tentacles and legs were taken off; then they discovered how to unfasten the heads from the bodies. The heads lay

helpless and saw from many eyes the patient and finally successful efforts of the Arnolasc to get the cubes apart and make junk of the inner mechanisms.

They feared what would happen when the conquerors should start on the heads. More than ever, the machine men hoped for the coming of the spaceship.

**T**HAT night, the four heads were thrilled and startled by a clear, mental call from outside the walls of Pteth. At first, they thought that it might be the return of the spaceship, but they were even more astonished when they learned that it was 29G-75 whom they had left at the bottom of the straits. His story was quickly told in reply to their concerted query.

"One of the Arnolasc ships lowered anchor near me. I held to the anchor and was pulled up with it. I clung to the ship beneath the water level and was brought into port. I came upstream holding to the bottom of one of their small boats. From the minds of the Arnolasc, I have learned of all that has happened."

"And you are uninjured?"

"All except my mechanical wings, and you knew about them."

"Get us out of the city," Professor Jameson instructed him. "We are now but a collection of heads. They have torn our bodies to pieces. At present, they have tired of the sport, but it is in their minds to disassemble our heads next."

The thought was well timed. The Arnolasc came, seven in number, and thoughtfully looked at the coned heads, regarding the shuttered eyes with curiosity. One of the creatures promptly poked out one of 75J-02's mechanical eyes with a metal rod, looking for a purchase with which to

tear off the outer covering of the head. Another hurled 6W-438's head to the floor so hard that his brain was stunned.

"Hurry, 29G-75!" Professor Jameson radiated as an Arnolasc turned his head over speculatively, first raising and then lowering the eye shutters. "They are tampering with our heads!" "Guide me! I am coming!"

Another of the Arnolasc entered with an iron which he jabbed into an eye socket of 6W-438, who had not yet regained consciousness and was unaware of his peril. A dull clatter of metal sounded against lava pavement, and into the room burst 29G-75, his ray gun spurting quick death among the Arnolasc, cutting short several raucous screams.

Hastily, he gathered up the four heads and raced out of the building, bowling over two more of the Arnolasc who came running in answer to the cries of alarm. Straight for the city wall he rushed. Behind followed cries of consternation and warning. Advice was hurled to those blocking 29G-75's passage. Metal tentacles and a flaming ray gun disposed of them, and 29G-75 was up a set of steps and over the wall.

He raced for the bogs, and not until they were beyond pursuit and at the bottom of a deep pool of water did he stop. Meanwhile, 6W-438 recovered consciousness and learned of his close call.

Many days passed before the gladdening radiations of machine men of Zor broke in upon their mental conversation. The spaceship had returned. 744U-21 had learned of all that had happened in the Arnolasc city. The machine men had then come to Pteth and had been told of the flight of a machine man carrying the four heads. From on high in the spaceship, they



had scoured the surrounding swamp-lands with a thought amplifier, finally locating the five machine men.

The spaceship landed in the bog, crushing down vegetation both great and small. Out of the pool strode 29G-75, his tentacles curled carefully about the four heads of his metal brethren. In the spaceship, the heads of the four machine men were fastened onto new bodies which were equipped with metal legs and tentacles. Repairs and replacements were made to their mechanical eyes, and they were soon as good as new.

Returning to Pteth, the machine men ordered the Arnolascos out of the city and back to their own continent. When the conquerors refused, the machine men loosed such a tremendous burst of power upon their encampments in the swamp that they immediately yielded.

Having restored Pteth, they next found the Agrids and came back to Pteth. A general council was held at which 744U-21 set forth a plan to the Agrids and their allies, the Uans.

"Why not colonize the nearby world of Mrn? There you can live as you

wish. Some day, you may be able to return here and guide this world to a better way of living. We shall be glad to move you there in as many trips as it may require of our spaceship. We have explored Mrn, and it is a wonderful world, well suited to all your living requirements."

The Agrids and Uans were not long in accepting the offer. Both envisioned a near-Utopia such as the Agrids had described as having existed prior to their entombment during the pestilence.

"I wonder," the professor radiated when all had been transported to their new planet, "what new wonders wait for us in the next star system?"

"As long as you are able to appreciate wonders," 744U-21 told him, "there will never be an end to them. The cosmos is a treasure house, my friend. And like a true man of Zor, I think that you will never grow weary of its delights—not till the stars grow cold, and darkness writes an end to the universe."

"And that," Professor Jameson assented humorously, "will be a long time from now."