

FAMOUS fantastic MYSTERIES

Combined with
FANTASTIC NOVELS MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1952

MARY GNAEDINGER, Editor

VOL. 13

NO. 3

Full Length Feature

THE DEATH MAKER Austin J. Small 16

One man alone held the power to wipe out a great city in one night, to obliterate an entire nation in seven short days. And he meant to do just that, secure in the knowledge that there was no possible defense against his dread weapon that would soon make him the mad master of all human destiny!

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Short Story

THE NEW SUN J. S. Fletcher 96

The blazing holocaust hurled itself earthward, while mankind cowered, trembling, in whatever dark burrows they could find. . . .

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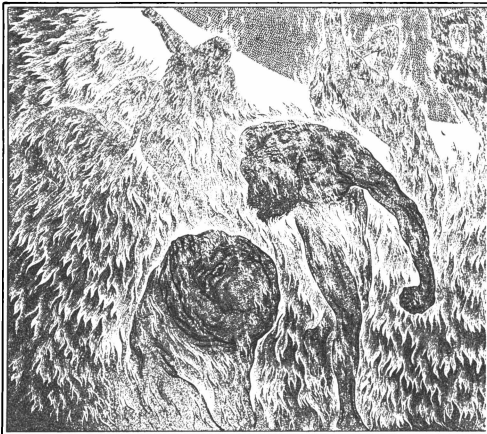
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THE NEXT ISSUE WILL BE ON SALE MARCH 19.

Cover by Lawrence. Inside Illustrations by
Lawrence and Finlay

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Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., at 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President; John J. McVeehan, Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Indiana. Copyright, 1952, by Popular Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Single Copy, 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, \$1.50; other countries 50c additional. All correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana, or 205 E. 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U.S.A.



THE NEW SUN

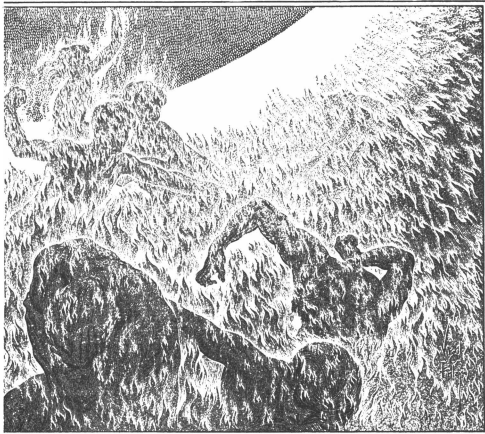
By J. S. Fletcher

FROM the time that he had taken up the study of astronomy as a pleasant means of spending his newly acquired leisure, and had built himself a small but well equipped observatory as an adjunct to his house, Mequillen had formed the habit of rising from his bed every two or three hours of a cloudy night to see if the sky had cleared.

To some men such a habit would have been highly inconvenient, for many obvious reasons. But Mequillen was in a lucky position. He was unmarried; he possessed much more

than ample means; he had therefore no business or profession to attend to, and accordingly no train to catch of a morning in order to keep office hours. He could sleep at any time of the day he chose; and if he did jump out of bed at two o'clock in the morning, to find that the sky was still cloudy, he could jump back and go to sleep again on the instant. And he was, moreover, an enthusiast of the first order.

On one night in a certain February, Mequillen, who had gone to bed at ten o'clock, sud-



Heralded by a new star in the constellation of Andromeda it came—the blazing holocaust which hurled itself earthward, while mankind cowered, trembling, in whatever dark burrows they could find. . . .

denly awoke, switched on the electric light at the side of his bed, and, seeing that it was then ten minutes past twelve, sprang out, shuffled himself into his thickly padded dressing gown, and hurried up the winding stair which led to the observatory. One glance into the night showed him a perfectly clear sky. From the vast dome of heaven, wondrously blue, the stars shone out like points of fire. And Mequillen, with a sigh of satisfaction, began his work at the telescope, comparing the sky, field by field, with his star chart, on the chance of finding new variable stars.

After his usual fashion he was immediately absorbed, and, the sky remaining clear, he went on working, unconscious of time, until a deep-toned clock in the room beneath struck the hour of three. Then Mequillen started, and realized that he had been so absorbed that he had not noticed the striking of one or two. He leaned back from the telescope in a suddenly assumed attitude of relaxation, stretching his arms and casting up his eyes to the still clear vault above him.

The next instant he became rigid; the next he began to tremble with excitement; the

next he could have shouted for joy. For there, in the constellation which astronomers have named Andromeda, Mequillen detected a new star!

He knew as he gazed and gazed, intoxicated with the delight and wonder of his discovery, that the burning and glittering object at which he was looking had never shown its light to man before. There was no need to turn to his star charts. Mequillen, being a rich man, was always equipped with the latest information from all the great observatories of the world. That star, burning with such magnificence, was on no chart. Nay, he himself, only twenty-four hours previously, had taken a photograph of that particular field in the heavens wherein were stars to the twelfth magnitude; but the star at which he gazed was not among them. It had suddenly blazed up, and as he watched he saw it visibly increase in brightness and magnitude.

"A new star!" he murmured mechanically. "A new star! I wonder who else has seen it!"

Mequillen continued to watch until, as the February dawn drew near, the clouds spread great curtains between him and the heavens, and sky and stars were blotted out. Then he went to his bed, and in spite of his excitement slept soundly until ten o'clock in the morning.

WHEN Mequillen woke and looked out across the Surrey hills and vales, the entire landscape was being rapidly blotted out by a curious mist, or fog, which seemed to come from nowhere. A vast, mighty blanket of yellow seemed to be dropped between him and everything as he looked. At one moment he saw the summit of a hill many miles away; the next he could not even see his own garden beneath his windows. And when he went downstairs half an hour later the fog had become of the color of gray ash. The house was full of it, and the electric light was turned on everywhere and to little effect.

Mequillen's sister, Adela, who kept house for him—with the assistance of a housekeeper and several female servants—came to him in his study, looking scared.

"Dan," she said, "isn't there something queer about this fog? It's—it's getting worse."

Mequillen laid down a bundle of letters which he had just taken up, and walked out to the front door and into the garden. He looked all around him, and sniffed.

"H-m! It certainly does seem queer, Ad-die," he answered. "We've never had a fog like this in these parts since we knew them."

The girl sniffed, too.

"Dan," she said, "it's as if it were the very finest dust. And—look therel!"

She had been wiping her hand with a tiny

wisp of handkerchief as she spoke, and now she held it out to Mequillen.

"Look!" she repeated.

Mequillen looked down and saw a curious stain—a species of smudge or smear of a faint gray color. Without making any remark, he ran the tip of his finger along the nearest object, a trellis.

The same smudge or smear appeared on his finger.

"It's on everything," whispered the girl. "See—it's on my cheek! It is some sort of dust, Dan. What's the matter?"

But Mequillen made no answer. He asked for breakfast, and they went in together. By that time the interior of the house was as full of the fog as the exterior was hidden by it, and everything that they touched—plate, china, linen—gave off the gray smear. By noon everything was wrapped in an ashen gray atmosphere, and the electric lights had no power beyond a very limited compass.

"This is vexatious," said Mequillen. "I was going to have the motor out and take you across to Greenwich. I wanted to make an inquiry at the observatory. Do you know, Addie, I found a new star last night!"

"A new star!" she exclaimed. "But you won't go, Dan?"

"Won't go?" he said, laughing. "I should like to see anybody go anywhere in this, though it may be only local. By George! Weren't the Cockerlyne family coming out to dine and sleep tonight?"

Addie nodded.

"Well, I hope they won't run into this," continued Mequillen. "I'll ring up Dick Cockerlyne and ask him what the weather's like in town. And then I'll ring up the observatory."

He went off to the small room in which the telephone was placed. His sister followed him, and as they passed close beneath the cluster of lights in the hall Mequillen saw that the girl's face was drawn and pallid.

He stopped sharply. "Why, Addie!" he said. "Frightened?"

She laid her hand on his arm, and he felt it trembling.

"Dan," she whispered, "I'm—I'm horribly afraid. What—what is this? You know, there's never been anything like it before—in our time. What's happened?"

Mequillen laughed, and patted the hand that lay on his arm.

"Come, come, Addie!" he said soothingly. "This isn't like you. I think this fog is uncommon, and I can't account for it, but I've no doubt it can be accounted for. Now, let's ring up Cockerlyne. I've a notion we shall hear they've got a bright morning in London."

The girl shook her head and acted as if she would follow him to the telephone, then suddenly turned away. In the silence, a woman's shrill scream rang out.

"That's cook—in hysterics," said Addie. "I shall have to be brave for the sake of the servants, Dan. They're all as frightened as— as I am."

Nearly an hour later, Mequillen came out of the little room and called his sister into the study.

He closed the door, and beckoned her into the arc of the electric light.

"This is queer!" he said in a whisper. "I've been talking to Cockerlyne and to the observatory. Dick says this fog struck London at ten o'clock. It's there just as it is here, and everything is at a standstill. Dick hasn't the remotest notion how he's going to get away from the city. But that is nothing, Addie, it's all over Europe."

The girl made a little inarticulate sound of horror in her throat, and her face whitened.

"All over Europe, so they say at Greenwich," continued Mequillen. "From Lisbon to Moscow, and from Inverness to Constantinople! Land and sea—it's everywhere. It—well, it's something unexplainable. Such a thing has never been known before. But it's no use getting frightened, Addie; you must be brave. It's no doubt some natural phenomenon that will be accounted for. And—phew, how very hot this room is!"

The girl went close to her brother, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dan," she said, "it isn't the room. See, the fire's very low, and the ventilating fan's working. It's the same everywhere. Come into the garden." She led the way out into the murk.

MMEQUILLEN followed her out of the house, knitting his brows and snapping his fingers, as he always did when he was puzzled. For several days the weather had been unusually cold for the time of year. Released now from the preoccupation of the last few hours, he suddenly realized that the day was as hot as July should be under normal conditions. He turned to an outdoor thermometer.

"Why—why," he exclaimed, "it's over seventy now! Seventy in February! Addie, something's happened to this old world of ours. Look there!"

As they watched, the mercury rose one, two, three degrees. The brother and sister stared at each other. And Mequillen suddenly dropped his hands with a gesture of helplessness.

"Well," he said, "there's nothing to be

done but to wait. I—I don't understand it."

They went back into the house together, and into Mequillen's study, only to stand and stare at each other in silence. Then Addie made a sudden effort at conversation.

"Tell me about the new star, Dan," she said.

Mequillen started.

"The new star!" he exclaimed. "The new star! My God, I wonder if that has anything to do with this? It—"

The parlormaid, white and scared, came noiselessly into the circle of electric light within which the brother and sister were standing.

"You are wanted at the telephone, sir," she said.

In a few minutes Mequillen came back, shaking his head.

"That was the observatory," he said quietly. "This fog, or whatever it is, is all over the world—over South Africa, North and South America, India, Australia, anyway. And the heat's increasing."

"And—the reason?" whispered Addie.

Mequillen sat down and dropped his head in his hands.

"There's no man can tell the reason," he answered. "He can't even make a guess at it. Something's happened, that's all. We must wait—wait."

And he took up the letters which had remained unopened on his desk, began to sort them out and to read them.

"Let us go on with our ordinary routine," he said. "That will be best."

The girl left the room, jangling a bunch of keys. But within half an hour she was back, accompanied by the housekeeper.

"Dan," she said quietly, "the servants want to go. They think the end of the world's come, and they want to get to their own homes."

"How do they propose to reach them?" asked Mequillen. "They can't see a yard before them."

"I told them that, Mr. Mequillen," said the housekeeper, "but it was of no use. You see, sir, they all live pretty close to here, and they say they can find their way blindfold. They'd better go, sir, or we shall have more hysterics."

"Give me some money for them, Dan," said Addie.

Mequillen rose, and, unlocking a drawer, handed a cash box to his sister.

"I don't see what good money can do them if the world's coming to an end," he said with a laugh. "Well, let them do what they like."

When the two women had left him, Mequillen went outside again and looked at the thermometer hanging on the wall.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Eighty already! What can it mean?"

And then, standing there in the strange all-wrapping fog in his quiet garden on the slope of the peaceful Surrey hills, Mequillen's thoughts turned to the great city lying only a few miles away. What was happening in London? He saw, with small exercise of imagination, the congested traffic, the discomfort, the inconvenience, the upsetting of all arrangements and order in an ordinary fog. What, then, must be the effect of this extraordinary one? For Mequillen was sufficiently versed in science to know that the world had never—never, at any rate, since historical records of it began—known such a day as this. And supposing it lasted, supposing—

But then he interrupted his train of thought to glance once more at the thermometer.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered to himself. "Yes, but supposing the heat goes on increasing, increasing as it's increased during the last few hours? My God, it's awful to contemplate!"

The house was very quiet when the frightened servants had left it. Mequillen and his sister made some effort to eat the lunch which the housekeeper prepared; but the attempt was a farce, and presently they found themselves pacing up and down, from room to room, from house to garden, waiting for they knew not what.

There was no change in the atmosphere, so far as the fog was concerned, but the thermometer rose steadily, until at six o'clock at night it reached ninety, and they were feeling as if they must soon gasp for breath. Unknown to Addie, Mequillen went to the telephone, and eventually got into communication with Dick Cockerlyne, who was still at his city office.

"Dick," he said, as steadily as he could, "are you still there?"

"I am," came back the answer in tones that Mequillen could scarcely recognize.

"How is it with you?"

One word came along. Mequillen felt it to be the only word that could come.

"Hell!"

Mequillen shivered, and again spoke.

"Dick, what is happening? What—"

But then he was sharply rung off. From that moment he had no further communication with the outer world. Once—twice—three times he tried the telephone again before midnight; no response was given. And all around the house a silence reigned which was like the silence of a deserted ocean. Nothing but the fog was there—not a voice, even of fear or terror, came up from the valley. And the heat went on steadily increasing.

There was no sleep for Mequillen or his sister or the housekeeper that night. They had all changed into the lightest summer garments they could find, but by the middle of the night the two women were lying prostrate with exhaustion, and the thermometer was a long way over one hundred degrees. Mequillen did all that knowledge could suggest to him to obtain relief and coolness for them, but there was no air—the atmosphere was still, lifeless, leaden. And when the morning came the all-enveloping fog was still there, and the heat was still increasing.

How they got through that second day Mequillen never knew. He had visions of what might be going on in places where the water supply was bad. He, fortunately, was in command of a splendid and probably inexhaustible supply; he had, too, a well-stocked larder and a well-provided cellar of good wine. Only just able to crawl about, he looked after the two women—the housekeeper, a woman of full habit, was more than once on the verge of collapse; Addie's wiriness and excellent physique kept her going. But as it grew to the second midnight they were all gasping for breath, and Mequillen, making brave efforts to keep the women alive, knew that before many hours were over all would be over with them. And then, as he lay stretched out in a lounging chair, anxiously watching his sister, who lay on a sofa close by, the door was pushed open, and Dick Cockerlyne, reeling like a drunken man, staggered in, and dropped headlong at Mequillen's side.

MEQUILLEN summoned up what strength remained in him, and set himself with clenched teeth and fierce resolution to bring his friend round. Cockerlyne was a big man, a fellow of brawn and muscle, who in ordinary times would have thought nothing of walking fifty miles on end, if need arose; now, looking at his great limbs, scarcely hidden by the thin silk shirt and flannel trousers which clothed them, Mequillen saw that he was wasted as if he had undergone starvation. His face had aged by ten years, and there was a look of horror in its lines and in his half open eyes which told of human fear and terror. And once more Mequillen wondered what was going on in the congested city of London.

As he poured a weak mixture of brandy and seltzer down the unconscious man's throat, Mequillen glanced at his sister. She had paid no attention whatever to Cockerlyne's entrance, but lay motionless, her hands clasped across her chest, slowly and regularly gasping for breath. But Mequillen knew what would rouse her, for she and Cockerlyne had been

engaged for the past six months, and were about to be married and one great source of her anxiety during the past two days had been her fears for his safety. And as he saw Cockerlyne reviving, he returned to her.

"Addie!" he whispered. "Here is Dick!"

The girl slowly opened her eyes and turned her head, and a faint flush came into her white cheeks. Mequillen reached across and handed her a glass out of which he had been giving her liquid food at intervals during the past hour.

"Drink that, and then get up and help me with him," he said.

Cockerlyne opened his eyes to the full at last, and as he saw the brother and sister, struggled up from the floor.

"I got through, anyway," he said. "I thought that if we—are all going to—to die—I'd see Addie first. I—have I been in a faint, Dan?"

"Lie down again, Addie, this instant!" commanded Mequillen sharply. "Now, then, Dick, drink the rest of that brandy and seltzer, and then you shall have some of this concentrated meat extract. No hysteria, now. What we've all got to do is to keep up strength till this passes. I'm off to our housekeeper. I forbid you two to move or to speak until I come back."

When he returned Mequillen found his sister staring at Cockerlyne, and Cockerlyne staring at her, as if they were looking their last at each other.

"Come, come!" he cried, with the best imitation of a laugh that he could raise. "We're not at that stage yet. Now, then, obey your doctor."

With that he fed them both as if they were children, and presently had the gratification of seeing the color come back to Cockerlyne's face, and a new light into his eyes. The big man suddenly rose, shook himself and smiled grimly. There were sandwiches on the table, and he reached over and took one in each hand, and began to eat voraciously.

"Chuck the nursing, Dan," he growled. "I'm all right. I said I'd get it done, and I've done it. I'm here!"

Mequillen saw with thankfulness that Cockerlyne was going to be dependable. He nodded with assumed coolness.

"All right, old fellow," he said. "And—how did you get here?"

Cockerlyne moistened his tongue.

"Fought through it," he said grimly. "I've been thirty hours at it—thirty hours!"

"Yes?" said Mequillen.

"You know," continued Cockerlyne, "when you telephoned to me at six last night? After that, I think I went mad for a while. Then I got out of the office, and somehow got to the

Bank station of the South London—the tube trains ran now and then. I don't know how I did it, but I traveled that way as far as the train ran—Clapham, or somewhere. And then—well, I just made along this way. Of course, I knew every bit of the road. It was like sleepwalking."

Mequillen nodded, and picking up a fan, resumed his occupation of trying to agitate the air about his sister's face.

"Well, you're here, Dick," he said. "But—London?"

Cockerlyne shivered.

"London is—oh, I don't know what London is!" he answered. "I think half the people are dead, and the other half mad. Once or twice I went out into the streets. One man you met was on his knees, praying aloud; the next was—oh, I don't know! It seemed that hell was let loose; and yet the churches were crammed to the doors. And people were fighting for the liquor in the dram shops and the public houses. I—I don't seem to remember much; perhaps I'm mad myself now. How long will it be, Dan?"

"How long will what be?" asked Mequillen.

"The—the end? I expect this is the end, isn't it?" said Cockerlyne. "What else can it be?"

"Don't talk rot!" retorted Mequillen sharply. "I thought you'd come round again. Here, pour some of the stuff out of that bottle into that glass, and carry it to the housekeeper in the next room. Pull yourself together, man!"

"Sorry," said Cockerlyne, and he rose to carry out Mequillen's commands. "I—I'm light-headed, perhaps. Don't ask me any more about what I saw."

He went away to the housekeeper, and Mequillen heard him speaking to her in the dry, croaking tones in which they all talked. And presently Cockerlyne came hurriedly back, and standing at the open door, beckoned to him with a shaking hand. Mequillen rose, and shambled across to him, looking an interrogation.

"Come out to the garden!" whispered Cockerlyne, and he led the way to the front door. "Listen!" he said. "I caught the sound in there! Listen!"

Mequillen grasped one of the pillars of the porch and strained his ears. And somewhere, so far off that it might have been thousands of miles away, he heard what he knew to be the coming of a mighty wind, and instinctively he tightened his grip on the pillar.

"It's a cyclone coming, Cockerlyne!" he shouted, though all around them was still and quiet. "It'll sweep all before it—house, everything! Quick—the two women!"

But before either man could turn to the

open door the great fog was swept away before their eyes as if it had literally been snatched from them by some gigantic hand from heaven, and where it had been was a burning and dazzling light of such power that in an instant they were groveling on the ground before it with their eyes pressed instinctively into the crooks of their quivering elbows.

OF THE two men, Mequillen was the first to comprehend what had happened; and with his comprehension came coolness and resource. Never had he thought so quickly in his life.

"Dick," he whispered, "keep your eyes shut tightly, and turn and creep back into the hall. I'm doing the same thing. You know the little room on the left? Don't open your eyes until you get in there. Now, then," he continued, with a gasp, as they reached the room and stood upright, "you can open them here, for the shutters are up. Ah! And yet, you see, although this room should be quite dark, it's almost as light as a normal winter morning."

Cockerlyne stared stupidly about him.

"For God's sake, Dan, what's happened?" he explained.

Mequillen was fumbling in a drawer. He brought out two silk mufflers and passed one to his friend.

"I have a very good idea as to what's happened," he answered gravely. "I'll tell you in a few minutes. But first muffle your eyes—there, you'll see through two thicknesses of the silk. Now for the women. Fortunately the curtains are closely drawn in both rooms, or I should have feared for their eyesight in that sudden rush of light—light, Dick, such as this globe has never seen before! Dick, we've got to blindfold them, and then get them into the darkest room in this house. There's an underground room—not a cellar—which I've sometimes used for experiments. We must get them downstairs."

It was easy to see, in spite of the mufflers, that the light in the hall was blinding, and in the curtained study as bright as on an open sea on a cloudless day in summer. And Addie was lying on her sofa with her arms crossed over her forehead and eyes, obviously distressed by the sudden glare.

"Don't move your arms!" exclaimed Mequillen sharply. "Keep your eyes shut as tight as you can."

"What is it?" she asked. "Has the fog gone, and the sun come?"

"The fog has gone, and a sun has come," replied Mequillen. "And its light is unbearable—just yet. Now, Addie, I am going to

blindfold you and take you and Mrs. Jepson down to the underground room. We shall all have to get used to the light by degrees. Do just what I tell you, and Dick and I will make you comfortable."

But when the two women were safely disposed of in a room into which scarcely any light ever penetrated, but which was then as light as noontide, Mequillen drew Cockerlyne into the study, and groping his way to the windows, closed the shutters and drew the curtains over them.

"Now you can take off your muffler," he said quietly. "There, you see it's light enough, even now, to read print and to see the time. And—you see the time? Half past twelve, midnight!"

Cockerlyne's face blanched. He swallowed, and straightened himself.

"What is this, Mequillen?" he asked quietly. "Do you know?"

Mequillen shook his head.

"Not with certainty," he answered. "But I think I know. Forty-eight hours ago I discovered a new star, which increased in magnitude at a surprising rate even while I watched it. Now I think it is a new sun."

"A—new—sun!" exclaimed Cockerlyne. "Impossible!"

"Call it what you will," said Mequillen. "It is, I am certain, at any rate, a vast heavenly body of fire, which was traveling toward this part of space at an inconceivable rate when I first saw it, and is probably at this moment nearer to us than our sun is. Do you feel that the heat is increasing?"

"Yes," replied Cockerlyne; "but it is different in character."

"It is difficult in character because the wrapping of infinitely fine dust which has been around us has been drawn away," said Mequillen. "But it will increase in intensity."

Cockerlyne gripped the table.

"And?" he whispered.

"In an hour or two we shall be shriveled up, consumed, like shreds of wool thrown into a furnace!" answered Mequillen.

Cockerlyne straightened himself.

"All right, Dan," he said quietly. "I'm glad I came here. What's to be done now?"

Mequillen had turned to a nest of drawers in one of the recesses of his study. He got out some spectacles fitted with lenses of very dark glass, and handed one to Cockerlyne.

"We will make an attempt to see this new sun," he said. "Put these spectacles on, and for the present fold that muffler about your eyes again once. You'll see through both muffler and spectacles. And now come up to the observatory."

Arrived there, Cockerlyne understood little

or nothing of the preparations which Mequillen made. Conscious only of the terrible heat, he stood waiting and thinking of the fate which was about to befall them; and suddenly a terrible impatience seized him. If there was but an hour or so to live, his place was with the woman he loved.

"Look here, Dan!" he exclaimed. "I'm going down! If the end's coming, then—"

But Mequillen laid a hand on his arm and drew him forward, at the same time removing the muffler from his head.

"We will go down soon, Cockerlyne," he said. "We must, for we shall have to tell them. But first—see! You can look with safety now."

And then Cockerlyne, following his friend's instructions, looked and saw widespread above him the dome of the heavens. But never had he so seen it in all his life. From north to south, from east to west, it glowed with the effulgence of shining brass; and in the north-east hung a great globe of fiery red, vaster in dimension than the sun which the world had known till then, and, even when seen through the protections which Mequillen had prepared, corruscating and glittering with darting and leaping flame.

"My God!" muttered Cockerlyne, in a hushed voice. "Dan, is that—It?"

"That is It," answered Mequillen quietly. "It is nearly twice the magnitude of our sun, and it is coming nearer. This is no time to make calculations, or even speculations; but I believe it is, at any rate, as near to us as our sun is. Come away, Cockerlyne; I want to look out on the world. Hold my hand and follow me."

And he dragged Cockerlyne away through a trapdoor and into a dark passage, and then into a darker room.

"Keep your hands over your spectacles for a while, and get accustomed to the light by degrees," he cautioned. "I am going to open an observation shutter here, through which we can see a vast stretch of country to the north. It will be a surprise to me if much of it is not already in flames. Now, if you are ready."

Cockerlyne covered his eyes as he heard the click of the shutter. Even then, and through the thick black glasses which he was wearing, he felt the extraordinary glare of the light which entered.

Presently Mequillen touched his arm.

"You can look—now," he said. "See—it's just as I thought! The land's on fire!"

COCKERLYNE looked out upon the great sweep of hill and valley, wood and common, which stretched across the fairest part

of Surrey from the heights above the Shere and Albury to those beyond Reigate. He saw the little villages, with their spires and towers and red roofs and tall gray gables; he saw the isolated farms, the stretches of wood, the hill-side coppices, the patches of heath, and the expanses of green which indicated land untouched by spade or plow.



It was a scene with which he had been familiar from boyhood. Of late he had explored every nook and corner of it with Addie Mequillen, and at all times of the year it had seemed beautiful to him. But under the glare and brilliance of this extraordinary light everything seemed changed. All over that vast prospect great pillars of smoke and flame were rising to the sky. From the valley beneath them came the shrieks and cries of men and women, and as the two men watched they saw the evergreens in Mequillen's garden suddenly turn to the whiteness of paper, shrivel up, and disappear in fine ashes.

"Look there!" whispered Mequillen, pointing a shaking finger. "There—Dorking's on fire! And Reigate, too!"

Cockerlyne tried to speak, but his tongue rattled in his mouth like a dry pea in a drier pod. He touched Mequillen's arm, pointed downward, and Mequillen nodded.

"Yes," he said. "We had better go down." He took Cockerlyne by the hand and led him back to the observatory, which, in spite of the fact that all its shutters were drawn, was full of light. And as they stepped into it a spark of white flame suddenly appeared in the woodwork and ran like lightning round the rim of the dome.

"On fire," said Mequillen quietly. "It's no

good, Cockerlyne; we can't do anything. The end's come! We—oh, my God, what's this? What is this? Cockerlyne—Cockerlyne, where are you?"

For just as they had seen the grayness of the great fog snatched away from the earth, so now they saw the extraordinary light which had succeeded it snatched away. It was gone in the flash of an eye, with the speed of lightning, and as it went they felt the earth move and shudder, and all around them fell a blackness such as they had never known. And as the two men gripped each other in their terror there suddenly burst upon the dome of the observatory a storm of what seemed to be bullets—fierce, insistent, incessant. The serpentlike trail of fire in the woodwork quivered once and died out. And Mequillen, trembling in every limb, released his hold on Cockerlyne and staggered against the nearest wall.

"Rain!" he said. "Rain!"

In the darkness Mequillen heard Cockerlyne first stumble about and then fall heavily. Then he knew that the other man had fainted, and he made his way to a switch, turned on the electric light, and got water to bring him round. But when he did so Cockerlyne for some minutes croaked and gabbled incessantly, and it was not until Mequillen had hurried down to the dining room for brandy for him that he regained his senses and was able to sit up, gasping and staring about him. He pointed a shaking finger to the aperture in the dome, through which the rain was pouring, unheeded by Mequillen, in a ceaseless cascade.

"Where is—It?" he gasped. "What—what's come of It?"

Mequillen shook him to his feet.

"Pull yourself together, Cockerlyne!" he said. "This is no time to talk science; this is a time to act. Come down, man; we must see to the women! We've just escaped from fire; now we're likely to meet our deaths by water. Listen to that rain! Here, help me to close that shutter. Now, downstairs! It's lucky we're on a hillside, Cockerlyne! But the people in the valleys! Come on!"

And, leaving Cockerlyn to follow him, Mequillen ran down through the house, to find his sister and the housekeeper in the hall. As he saw them, he knew that they had realized what he now had time to comprehend—that the terrible heat was dying away, and that it was becoming easier and easier to breathe. As he passed it, he glanced at a thermometer, and saw the mercury falling in a swift descent.

Mequillen caught his sister in his arms and

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pressed her to him. She looked anxiously into his face.

"Dick?" she said.

"He's safe—he's coming," Mequillen said.

Addie suddenly collapsed and hid her face in her hands. The housekeeper was already in a heap in the nearest chair, sobbing and moaning. And as Cockerlyne came slowly down the stairs, Mequillen saw that, strong man as he was, his nerves had been shaken so much that he was trembling like a leaf.

Once more Mequillen had to summon all his energies together in the task of bringing his companions around, and as he moved about from one to the other his quick ear heard the never ceasing rattle of the rain, which was heavier than any tropical rain that ever fell.

And presently he caught the sound of newly forming cascades and waterfalls, cutting new ways from the hilltops to the level lands of the valleys. Now the normal coolness of middle winter was coming back. The women picked up the wraps they had thrown aside, the men hurried into greatcoats. And as the February dawn came, gray and slow, across the hills, Mequillen and Cockerlyne went up to the observatory again and into the little lookout turret from which they had seen the spirals of smoke and flame rising from the land only a few hours before.

The rain was still falling, but with no more violence than that of a tropical storm.

But the air was throbbing, pulsating, humming with the noise of falling waters. A hundred yards away from the house a churning and seething mass of yellow foam was tearing a path, wide and deep, through a copse of young pine; down in the valley immediately beneath them lay a newly formed lake. In the valleys on every side, as far as the eye could reach, lay patches of silvery hue, which they knew to be great sheets of water; and now the air was cool, and the hitherto tortured lungs could breathe it in comfort.

"Mequillen," said Cockerlyne, after a long silence, "what happened?"

"I am as a child standing at the edge of a great ocean," he answered. "I cannot say definitely. I think that the great star which we saw, rushing upon us, was suddenly arrested, split into fragments, when that darkness fell, and that we were saved. Once more, Cockerlyne, the old world, a speck in space, will move on. For look there!"

And Cockerlyne turned as Mequillen pointed, and saw, slowly rising over the Surrey hills, the kindly, ordinary sized sun of a gray February morning. ■ ■ ■