

Weird Tales

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The POLAR DOOM

by EDMOND HAMILTON



"The red ray flashed after him, and in a moment he, too, lay a distorted thing of cloth and flesh upon the ground."

IT WOULD be as well, perhaps, in attempting this record of the most deadly peril that ever threatened our planet, to give first only the bare facts of the thing's beginning, as they came before the public at the time. There is information enough for our use. In the staid columns of scientific journals one finds it, and in the monographs of certain anthropological societies, and in the headlines of filed newspapers. So it is back to these that we go now, back to that first startling announcement which marked, for us, the thing's beginning.

It was early in January that the great Eastern University gave to the press the information that a scientific expedition to the Arctic was being organized, of which Dr. Angus

McQuirk, the university's brilliant anthropologist, was to be the head. The expedition's objective, it was stated, would be Corson Island, one of the numerous little ice-covered bodies of land lying north of the Parry Archipelago, within several hundred miles of the pole itself. An extensive search was to be made for ruins and other traces of ancient man believed to exist there, and it was hoped that the results of that search might throw new light on the problem of man's place of origin. The announcement added that the party would leave for the north early in July, proceeding in a chartered ship up to Baffin Bay and through the Belcher Channel, and then north to the island itself.

That first announcement, brief as it was, aroused a very definite inter-

est among members of the scientific world, an interest that was derived in great part from the prominence of Dr. McQuirk, the expedition's moving spirit. For McQuirk, though but a few years over forty, was conceded to be one of the three greatest living anthropologists, and his works on the subject had become contemporary classics. A tall, lowering-browed Scotsman of dour speech and manner, he was to pupils and colleagues alike a forbidding figure, though the brilliant quality of his work was respected by all. It was only that respect, indeed, that saved his projected expedition from the attacks of his fellow scientists, since the enterprise itself was such a departure from accepted theories that it could hardly go unchallenged.

For long, it was true, there had been suggestions that some traces of man's origin or past might lie hidden in the bleak white wastes of the north, but such suggestions had been considered only as interesting fancies. For whatever remains of ancient man might exist in the Arctic, it was pointed out, were forever hidden from discovery by the great ice-fields which cover all land around the pole, extending as far south as the lower half of Greenland. Any quest for clues to man's past in those mighty frozen wastes would be a search comparable only to the proverbial needle in a haystack.

This much, indeed, was admitted by McQuirk himself, but against it he asserted that his own expedition was working on a definite lead, and would confine its efforts to the relatively small area of Corson Island. For many years a strange story had been current among the Eskimos concerning that island, a story changed and distorted as it passed from mouth to mouth but remaining at bottom the same. The core of the tale was that somewhere in the island's interior was a place where great ruins of stone and metal pro-

jected partly through the ice, ruins which the superstitious natives asserted had been erected by devils long ago. The place itself was shunned by them as a spot accursed, but more than one of their wandering hunting-parties had landed on the island and had glimpsed the ruins from a distance.

It is probable that this tale, in one form or another, had been related to most of the white explorers and traders who had ever visited that section of the Arctic, but apparently it had been rejected by all of them as a mere fabrication of native legend. One man, though, a missionary from one of the Prince Albert Land settlements, had heard the story several times and had been struck by the fact that whoever told it always placed the scene of it at the same spot: on Corson Island. Such unanimous exactitude of position seemed to him quite unusual for an Eskimo legend, and also he was aware that the interior of the icy island had never yet been explored by white men. His interest in the thing had steadily grown, and finally, through his curiosity and letters to the press, the matter had come to the attention of McQuirk himself.

To the average scientist, perhaps, the thing would have seemed flimsy enough as a ground for forming an investigating party, but to McQuirk it was the opportunity of a lifetime, the chance to realize his deepest ambition. He was a great anthropologist but he had resolved to be greatest, to solve anthropology's greatest riddle—the riddle of the birthplace of man. Year after year others had sought the answer to that enigma, and across the bleak plains of Mongolia and the fastnesses of African jungles and the scattered isles of the Pacific their expeditions had toiled and searched, and toiled and searched in vain. And such efforts would remain always in vain, McQuirk contended, since it was his belief that

the place they sought, the place of man's origin, lay hidden somewhere under the polar ice-fields of the north.

So it was that this news of strange ruins in the icy Arctic was as flame to tinder to his fanatic scientist's soul. On the strength of that news, using all his prestige and influence, he had managed to obtain backing for his expedition, which he confidently predicted would lay bare the last secrets of anthropology and throw a flood of new light on the past of the human race. So through the months that followed that first announcement the expedition's supplies and equipment were gradually assembled, and in the first week of July it took its departure from New York in the auxiliary schooner *Delight*, which had been specially chartered and fitted for the trip.

The party, when it sailed, proved to be a comparatively small one. It included, besides Dr. McQuirk, his only close relative, his sunny-haired younger brother David, who had long acted as his assistant; three archeologists and ethnologists from Eastern University's staff, Drs. Lowell, McGrath and Drivoli; and a field representative of the North American Museum named Chapman, who was to act as the expedition's radio operator. There were also three hard-bitten Canadians experienced in Arctic work who were to have charge of the new motor-sledges which would be used in penetrating the island's interior, while the ship itself was manned by New England officers and crew.

FOUR days after leaving New York the *Delight* touched at St. John's harbor, taking on the last of its supplies and then proceeding north along the Labrador coast and up Davis Strait. Daily the ship reported its position and progress by radio, but as it crept farther and farther north the calls of its powerful appa-

ratus came fainter and fainter to the listening stations. By the time the schooner had passed through Belcher Channel and was threading its way northward through the maze of the Parry Archipelago, trouble was already being experienced in receiving its signals.

On September 4th, two months after the expedition's departure, a message from the *Delight* was received by the Canadian government station at Fort de Roche, announcing that the ship had anchored off the coast of Corson Island and that the scientific party was completing its preparations for the expedition into the interior. The motor-sledges had been tested and had worked perfectly, the message added, and a start into the island would be made soon.

Almost immediately after the reception of that message the thread of communication with the schooner was abruptly snapped, since a few hours later there burst out one of those intense electrical disturbances peculiar to the polar regions, which smothered all attempts at communication beneath an unbroken roar of static. For almost a week the static tempest raged before lessening. It was on the sixth day, when the crashing bursts were just beginning to subside, that a half-dozen Canadian stations picked up that brief, fragmentary message from the *Delight* which was to focus on the schooner the attention of most of the world.

It would be best, perhaps, to give that message verbatim, in the incoherent, static-broken condition in which it was first taken down. So it is presented hereinafter exactly as received at the time, just before midnight on the 10th, the records of it kept by the receiving stations having been collated and checked against each other.

" . . . e days ago that McQuirk and our par . . . ooner's crew to help us . . . at came out of the do . . . uirk had dug up death . . . ivoli, captain, mate and all of

crew. All are dead, all dead, and I am
 onl . . . ying myself, God help m . . . s
 is a horror from . . . th . . . enth going
 fas . . . bye . . ."

For many hours after the reception of that broken, enigmatic message constant calls went out to the schooner in an effort to re-establish communication with it, but there was no faintest signal of response. The message itself had been at once relayed to the officials of Eastern University and had at the same time been seized upon by the newspapers, the more sensational of which headlined the matter on the following day. And through all that day, and the next, and the next, the unceasing calls of the northern stations to the schooner went quite unanswered.

By that time the matter had become a press sensation of the first importance. This was due not only to the prominence of Dr. McQuirk and his fellow scientists, but also to the mystery which surrounded the expedition's fate—mystery which had been intensified by the last, incoherent message from the *Delight*. If reliance could be placed on that message, at least part of the expedition's personnel had already perished. What mishap they had met with, though, remained a problem, and an even greater problem was whether any members of the party had managed to escape the death which had overtaken the rest.

It was the latter question, indeed, that seemed of most importance to the university officials, and through their urgings extraordinary efforts were made to re-establish communication with the ship. Constant calls were broadcast from the powerful Fort de Roche and Lac d'Or stations, while over all Canada and the northern United States professional and amateur operators alike listened intently for some signal from the *Delight*. But all such efforts proved in vain, since at the end of a week the veil of silence that screened the schooner

from the world remained quite unchanged.

By that time it had become apparent to the authorities at Eastern University that there was no hope of radio communication with the ship, yet there seemed no other possible method of getting in touch with the expedition. It was impossible to send a ship to the island for investigation, for it was now well into September and already the first floes of the great polar ice-pack would be sweeping down upon the island from the north. Long before any ship could reach it the island would be hemmed in for hundreds of miles by a mighty frozen waste through which no ship in the world could force a way. Because of this it was conceded by all that nothing could be accomplished until the breaking-up of the ice in the spring.

A last chance, however, showed itself in the form of an announcement from the Canadian government, stating that one of the aviators attached to the government topographical expedition in Victoria Land had been ordered to attempt a flight to Corson Island, five hundred miles to the north. Lieutenant Warren and his plane were to start at the first favorable moment, the announcement added, and it was hoped that he might be able to combat the Arctic storms long enough to reach the island and discover the expedition's fate.

This news held little of hope, though, even for the most optimistic. For by that time almost all had come to believe that the members of the expedition and the schooner's crew had already perished. The "all are dead" phrase in the *Delight's* cryptic last message was recalled, and the general expression of opinion was that the matter might be considered a closed one, another tragic chapter in the tragic history of Arctic exploration.

Even the university officials were forced to admit the probability of this view. Reluctantly they decided that until spring, and the breaking-up of

the polar ice, nothing further could be done. The matter was already disappearing from the newspapers, by that time, passing simultaneously from the fickle public interest. Even in scientific circles the loss of the brilliant McQuirk occasioned only a few expressions of polite regret. The sensation, like all sensations of yesterday, was already all but forgotten.

Forgotten—and in street and building, factory and office, theater and school, the life of the busy world hummed on—a life, a civilization, so complex and broad-based and well ordered that it was incredible that it could ever be shaken or destroyed by any force or forces. So it must have seemed, then. Certainly none there was who guessed that even at that moment an ancient menace was rising and gathering and growing beneath which that civilization would crash like a flimsy toy. None there was who dreamed that the only warning of the coming terror that was ever to be received had been disregarded, misunderstood, and that away in the icy north the events of eons were rushing toward a climax which would mark the end forever of the age-old reign of man.

2

IT SEEMS probable now that no complete history of the coming of the terror will ever be written. The very scope and magnitude of the thing make that impossible. One could as well write a history of an earthquake, for there is no visible chain of cause and effect, no sequence of rationally connected events to be detailed. Nothing but panic, ruin, death, smiting suddenly out of the unknown and then receding into the unknown again before their nature had ever been suspected by the dazed and staggering world.

The best that can be done, indeed, is to make some attempt at picturing the thing as it appeared at the time,

on that fateful evening of September 20th, when it burst first upon the world. And one begins such an attempt, inevitably, with the striking of the thing at Winnipeg, since it was there that the first blow fell.

The sources of our information concerning the attack on the northern city are unsatisfactory in the extreme, being mostly garbled and distorted accounts of terror-stricken survivors, which contradict each other at a score of points. Even seen through these conflicting stories, though, the main phases of the thing are clear enough, though some minor features of it are subjects of dispute to this day.

It seems established now that it was some few minutes past 7 o'clock when the thing first struck, just at sunset of the long September day—a sunset that flamed crimson and gold in the west, its last glowing rays falling upon the city's streets, in which the ever-moving life and traffic seemed to have lessened for a moment. The last crowds of homeward-bound workers had surged through those streets an hour before, and now there were only a few chance pedestrians hurrying toward an awaiting dinner, and a thin last trickle of automobiles hastening toward the suburbs. The evening theater rush had not yet begun, and for the moment the streets lay comparatively empty beneath the waning westward light. And it was then that there came the terror.

There was, a sudden startled cry from one of the pedestrians, a cry that spread along the street like flame, that was taken up and repeated by a score of voices almost instantly. And simultaneously there was a craning of necks toward the sky, as those in the streets gazed up in response to that shout. But as they looked, they fell suddenly silent.

Sweeping above the city from the north, a score of dark, mighty shapes were speeding smoothly through the air a thousand feet above the streets—shapes that were each a score of feet

in diameter, with flat bottoms and curving sides and domed tops, resembling gigantic chocolate-drops in form. Their smooth sides glistened dully in the last afterglow from the sunken sun, and as they sailed through the air with effortless ease and speed there came down to the stunned watchers a thin, buzzing whine as of the operation of fine-running, high-powered machines.

And now, in answer to the cries of those who watched, the buildings of the city were vomiting their occupants into the streets, and as from house and office and factory they came forth they, too, looked up and saw, and shouted in wonder. The massed flying-domes were moving ever more slowly, by then, until at last they stopped, and hung motionless in the air a thousand feet above the heart of the city. And from below the thousands watched.

Until that moment there had been not the merest hint of fear in all those watching crowds, their strongest emotion being an overpowering surprize and curiosity. It was the general half-formed thought, no doubt, that these were airplanes or dirigibles of a new sort, being presented to the world in spectacular fashion, and as the dark shapes hovered above them in the graying dusk a babel of excited discussion and speculation was sweeping through the crowds who watched.

Then, abruptly, the massed domes above separated, dropped downward within a hundred feet of the city's roofs, hovering here and there in strategic positions above its streets and squares. And as they sank downward through the deepening twilight a puzzled murmur sped across the crowds below, a first vague sense of fear. There was a sudden stir of movement from beneath the dark shapes that loomed above, a backward-moving suction of the crowds from under them, a moment's uneasy silence. And then the whole tableau was cut suddenly

short as death leapt down upon the city from the hovering domes above.

From each of them sudden rays of brilliant red light stabbed downward toward the massed crowds below, sweeping swiftly over them and cutting across them in gigantic swaths of death. For wherever that ray passed over stupefied men and women it left behind only tiny, twisted little masses of flesh and cloth, the humans it touched shrinking instantly into those tiny heaps of dead flesh, lying silent in dreadful death. There was a single moment of terrible stillness as that death seared across the crowds, and then with a vast, composite roar of utter terror they were turning, flowing away in all directions, buffeting in mad panic through the streets while after them leapt the crimson, merciless ray.

It is only now, indeed, that we have come to appreciate, with understanding, the terrible power of that ray. The principle of it, however, we had understood long before. We knew that any matter, any object, is composed of vast numbers of tiny molecules in ceaseless motion, molecules spaced as far from each other proportionately as are the planets of our universe. Knowing this, we know, too, that if in some way the molecules of an object could be spaced closer, pressed together, jammed into a compact mass, the object which they formed would be destroyed, shrunken, compressed itself into a tiny and inconceivably dense form. And it was this very compression of molecules which the red ray accomplished, since in some way it endowed the molecules of any object it touched with a power of attracting each other, drawing closer together because of that attraction, compressing the object which they made up into a dense, shapeless fragment of its former self.

And as this compression ray swept over the fleeing crowds, every object touched by it dwindled, compressed instantly. Humans shrunk to com-

compact little masses of distorted flesh and cloth, streets furrowed deeply beneath its touch, automobiles changed to twisted little wrecks of metal. And as the brilliant rays lifted and seared along the sides of buildings there came crash upon thundering crash, as the stone and steel on those sides shrank suddenly and allowed the rest of the edifice to collapse and fall.

It had become completely dark, by then, and under the pall of that darkness the city had changed into an inferno of roaring terror, a place of fear-mad rushing crowds and panic inconceivable. Through the streets they surged and swept, while ever from above the blinding rays played on, sweeping deliberately about the city, leveling great buildings with mighty crashes that buried thousands beneath falling wreckage, sweeping through street and square in brilliant death to lick up and destroy the mobs that pressed madly through those streets.

WITHIN ten minutes the heart of the city had become a place of unearthly ruin and death, piled with the wreckage of its buildings, choked with the distorted and shrunken dead. Over all the city lay darkness, by then, no electrics relieving it because of the severed cables, but out in the surrounding suburbs were shouts and moving lights, as the first exodus of the terror-stricken masses swirled along street and road. Over these, now, the flying-domes were speeding, flashing the red ray across them as they passed, cutting wide lanes of death across the cowering masses, passing from over the city to the great steel web-work of the railroad yards and lines, the communication center of half a continent. There the ray cut and whirled again, ripping great swaths of destruction across the clustering tracks beneath, crippling the nerve-centers of Canada's transportation system. That done, the smiting rays vanished; there was a gathering,

buzzing drone as the domes massed together again; and then they were speeding away to the east, leaving the wrecked city a place of death and ruin and utter panic fear.

Because of the destruction of the telegraph lines it was many minutes, as we now know, before there went out to the world the first word of the death that had devastated Winnipeg, in the form of a halting radio-message which stated only that unknown forces of terrific power had appeared above the city and destroyed the greater part of it. Even while that first message of warning was flashing through the ether the flying-domes must have been speeding east with incredible velocity, for within a quarter-hour they had covered the eight-hundred-mile stretch between Winnipeg and Montreal, and were descending to rain death and destruction from the upper darkness upon the latter city.

It would be profitless to give here any close attention to the attacks on Montreal and Quebec. Striking at the two metropolises of the north in quick succession as they did, and before any warning could be received or understood, the two attacks were replicas of that upon Winnipeg—minutes of red terror during which the blinding rays seared down through the upper night to cut across the cities in great trails of ruin and death. And then the domes had massed again and were again speeding away, this time toward the south, their objectives, as we know now, being Boston and the city of New York.

We know, too, that by the time they started south some warning of the attack on Winnipeg and Montreal had already been broadcast, and so it was that by the time the domes reached Boston they found the city already in the throes of an intense panic, its streets already choked with the rush of fear-driven thousands. Because of this the loss of life at the Massachusetts city was far below that in the

three Canadian cities, for thousands had already made their escape by that time. The work of destruction, though, was the same at Boston as at the others, the rending rays cleaving across massed buildings and bridges and streets until the city lay a single waste of wreckage. And then again the domes had lifted and were racing still farther south, this time toward New York itself.

It is probable that the hour that preceded their coming to the Hudson-side metropolis had been the most frenzied in the great city's history. Out from east side and west, through the narrow streets and across the parks and squares, had rolled the first panic-stricken mobs, sweeping in vast waves toward the bridges eastward or toward the ferry-docks, pouring between the walls of the clifflike buildings in continuous human torrents of increasing density. And as word came in quick succession of the destruction of Montreal, and Quebec, and then of Boston, the last doubters were convinced of the death that was racing toward them, and ran out to join the swelling mobs outside. When the massed domes finally swept down upon the city from the north, bridges were jammed with tight-packed thousands, pushing blindly forward, while other thousands in the last extremities of panic had streamed toward the vehicular tunnels beneath the Hudson, since by then the crews of the ferry-boats had refused to return to the island to transport more hordes to the farther side.

During the time that had elapsed since the first warning, though, the military authorities at New York had not been idle, and had had time to make a few hasty preparations. Inconceivable as these successive attacks upon the northern cities were, in power and motive, the authorities at Manhattan yet realized that their own city would be likely to suffer next, and so even while the domes sped southward through the night, men were

working madly to prepare for their coming. Some three-score of anti-aircraft pieces mounted on tractor-mounts had been stored at the navy yard in Brooklyn, and these were swiftly rushed across to the island of Manhattan, where they were distributed at strategic positions in streets and squares over the island and hastily camouflaged by covers of tarpaulins. Far out at sea, too, the North Atlantic battle-fleet was racing shoreward under forced draft, and though it could not reach the city for some hours the planes of its two great aircraft-carriers, the *Delaware* and the *Bennington*, were rising from the decks and roaring westward through the night toward the threatened city.

While these preparations went on, the millions on the island were pressing still toward its edges, forcing hundreds into the water, pushing and striking to win their way out. Behind them, as if in silent mockery, the flaring electric signs that rose above the streets were still winking on and off with insensate persistence. And high above these there swung and stabbed and circled the great beam from the giant searchlight on Governors Island. Abruptly that beam stopped, swung back, held steady. And then, over all the shouting tens of thousands beneath, there swept a sudden silence, dense, overwhelming, a silence in which all gazed up as though stricken by a very paralysis of awe and terror.

For there, two thousand feet above the city's highest pinnacle, there hung a score of dark, clustering shapes, domes of metal whose sides gleamed beneath the brilliance of the great searchlight, domes that hovered silent and motionless above the great city. And silent, motionless, the vast crowds watched.

Abruptly there burned down from one of the hovering domes a narrow shaft of dazzling light, that struck downward and swept along the river east of the island in a titanic, slicing

sweep, cutting through the three great bridges there as a knife might cut through cardboard. With a rumbling thunder that was like the crash of doom the bridges buckled and fell, collapsed into the waters below, spilling the jammed thousands upon them downward in a falling shower of tiny figures.

Over the city again was silence, now, the silence of death, and then the domes were dropping smoothly downward, lower and lower until they were within a scant five hundred feet of the city's towers. Then a rocket flared green above the city in dazzling signal, tarpaulin covers were abruptly pulled aside, and the descending domes were suddenly confronted by the muzzles of a half-hundred upward-pointing guns.

There was an instant in which the world itself seemed to hold its breath, and then red flame burst skyward from the massed guns in one tremendous burst of shattering thunder. Amid the crash of exploding shells above, six of the hovering shapes crumpled, twisted and fell, whirling blindly down into the streets below.

FROM the watching crowds there burst forth a tremendous shout of mad triumph, a shout that suddenly stilled, broke off, changed into a dull, crescendo roar of terror. For the domes above, staggered by that unexpected blow, yet held their ground, and from them there leapt downward a hell of crimson death, a hundred shafts of deadly rays that stabbed and seared along the streets in swift, destroying power. Before one of the guns below could fire again they lay sprawled in twisted wrecks of metal, the men around them shrunken lumps of flesh, while the wild sweep of the whirling rays sent a score of mighty towers crashing to the earth in sudden collapse and ruin.

And now, as the frenzied masses below swirled from street to street in blind effort to escape the death-trap

of the island, there came a powerful droning from the east, and over the island and into the glare of the searchlights came the great seaplanes from the approaching fleet, their guns spitting lead as they drove toward the hovering metal domes.

The latter minded them hardly more than a swarm of angry flies, the bullets glancing harmlessly from their metal sides while their own rays swept the sky in brilliant destruction, sending plane after plane crumpling down toward the ground. Within fifteen minutes, more than two hundred planes had utterly perished, driving fearlessly toward the domes until the last. In an agony of expectation the masses below waited for the death from which they could not escape, but instead of sending that death down upon them the domes themselves dropped quickly toward the darkened city, toward the spots where the wrecks of their own companions had fallen, leaving only three above to circle and hover in watchful observation.

A few minutes only the shapes on the ground remained there, evidently inspecting and removing something from the wreckage of their companions, for the clatter of moving metal came through the darkness to the tense, waiting crowds, though none could glimpse through the darkness what was taking place. Then the metal shapes drove up again toward the zenith, hovering for a moment, and then sped northward, leaving the destruction of the metropolis beneath but partly accomplished. The crowds in that metropolis watched them going, breathless, hardly able to credit their own reprieve from death. Then all of them were suddenly shouting.

Out in the suburban cities, though, to north and south and west, the exodus of panic was still continuing, and from there, through radio and telegraph and telephone, the first news of the events at New York was flashing across the nation, across the world.

And that news, at once, precipitated the greatest panic which the world had ever known, a panic intensified by the mystery behind this staggering invasion. None knew who or what these invaders might be, and none knew what city they might strike at next; so within hours, from every city in the world, from Amsterdam and London and Melbourne and Buenos Aires, thousands were fleeing, pushing their way out into open country with the fear of death at their backs. And though through the passing hours there came no word of further attacks, or any news as to where the invaders had gone, the panic deepened instead of lessening.

All the forces of law were crumbling beneath the anarchy of universal fear; the organizations of centuries were swiftly disintegrating and disappearing; and over all earth men waited in expectant terror for the return of those enigmatic invaders from the unknown whose first colossal blows had already shattered the civilization of a world.

3

IT IS only now, looking back upon the terror with the insight born of later knowledge, that we can see upon what trivial circumstances depended the outcome of it all. Much of the working of fate's tiny cogs we can not even yet discern, no doubt, but we understand enough now to appreciate the results which were to follow from that brief order which sent young Francis Warren and his plane roaring north over the gray expanse of Melville Sound toward Corson Island.

For three months Warren, a lieutenant in the Dominion Air Force, had been attached to the government party which was mapping the bleak stretches of Victoria Land, that great, barren island which lies just north of the Canada mainland. It had been monotonous enough, his work; so when the order came to attempt a flight to

the icy island northward he was eager to obey.

It was on the morning of the 20th that he made his start, some several hours before that staggering attack on Winnipeg. His little amphibian plane rolled lightly across the level ground and then lifted smoothly into the sunlight while Warren, who had elected to fly alone, waved his arm in a farewell gesture to those on the field behind him. Slanting sharply up, he turned and circled once, then sped away toward the north.

The morning was one of brilliant sunlight, and Warren, snug in his electric-heated flying-suit, whistled and sang to feel the rush of the cold, clean air against him as he fled north. He was confident that he could reach the island, if no sudden Arctic storm arose, since the tanks of his plane held sufficient fuel for almost two thousand miles of flight, while Corson Island lay less than six hundred miles to the north.

The misty brown land behind faded quickly from view as he sped north over the gray waters of the great sound, holding an even height of a mile and keeping a sharp lookout for drifting wreckage which might give some clue as to the *Delight's* fate. Nothing was to be seen, however, except occasional white bergs, forerunners of the vast polar ice-pack, drifting majestically southward like mighty floating cathedrals of ice. As he sped farther and farther to the north, the bergs beneath dotted the sea ever more thickly, until at last, by the sixth hour of his flight, he was flashing on over tremendous drifting floes which lay upon the ocean's surface like floating ivory islands.

Ahead, the redly glowing sun was dropping swiftly toward the horizon, marking the end of the brief Arctic day. Its last rays gleamed bloodlike for a moment on the drifting ice below, and then vanished like an extinguished light. And then around him was the swiftly gathering night,

and the white Arctic stars peered down at him incuriously as his plane thundered on.

For how long he sped on through the darkness, his eyes straining down through the pale starlight for some glimpse of the island, he could not later guess. He knew only that his whole attention was suddenly attracted by a glow of light from ahead, a flood of pure, brilliant white light that welled up from behind the northern horizon in frosty splendor. And as he raced on toward it he knew that it could be no aurora, for it was taking form as a great perpendicular ray, or beam, a gigantic, dazzling beam that seemed to stab straight up into the zenith. Swiftly it seemed growing in brilliance, until it had become so blinding to Warren's eyes that he seemed to be flying into a radiant white sun. He was on the point of swerving to one side to regain his power of sight when there came, with casual abruptness, the end.

A blast of wind of tremendous power struck his plane with a dizzying shock; it spun madly in midair in a crazy whirl of light and darkness, and then was tumbling swiftly downward through the darkness of the upper night. As it cometed downward, Warren, with a last instinctive reaction, pulled back the control-stick in his hands, swinging the ship's nose upward. The next moment the plane had struck something with a mighty shock, he was flung violently against the cockpit's side, and as his head struck its rim he felt himself catapulted into a sudden, flame-lit unconsciousness.

How long it was before Warren struggled up from the dark depths of oblivion he could not estimate. He became aware first of hands upon him, touching him, hands that sought to bring him back to consciousness by rubbing wrists and temples. For a moment he lay motionless, with closed eyes, and then as remembrance

rushed over him he scrambled to a sitting position. Unbelievably he stared about him.

He was sitting on a long, sandy beach, a beach lit by a steady white light whose source was somewhere behind him. A few yards away long waves were rippling in against the beach, from a stretch of waters that extended out into the darkness. Not far away he made out the shape of his own plane, drawn up on the sand and apparently not seriously damaged by its crash. From high overhead came a keening of powerful winds, but where he sat only a warm, balmy breeze stirred the air, and though someone had stripped from him his heavy flying-suit he felt uncomfortably warm.

Warren stared for a moment in utter bewilderment, unable to connect his surroundings with the bitter Arctic seascape that was his last memory. Then abruptly he became aware of a man kneeling beside him, a young man whose clothing was torn and disheveled and whose face showed strangely haggard and drawn beneath the white light that fell upon it. He was gazing at Warren with burning eyes, and when the airman turned toward him he spoke in a tense whisper.

"You're all right?" he asked. "I heard your plane—saw it fall——"

Warren raised his arm weakly and strove to speak. "This place," he said; "warm—where am I?"

The other laid a swift warning hand on his lips. "Speak low, man," he breathed. "God knows how near they are," he added, in a whisper, turning his eyes from Warren and toward the source of the white light that fell upon his face. Warren himself turned toward it and then crouched motionless, gazing in sudden awe. For there, miles and miles away, blazed the great light he had seen from his plane, a single huge shaft of frosty white brilliance that soared straight up into the heavens, looming up like a gigantic pillar of

white luminescence, stupendous, incredible, paling the stars and throwing a thin, ghostly illumination over all things around him.

Warren was silent before the sheer wonder of the thing, his brain reeling. Beside him the other was speaking again. "You came down on the water there," he was saying, "and I saw, and pulled your plane up on the beach here. This is Corson Island."

"Corson Island!" repeated the airman. "It was this place I was trying to reach! And you——"

"I am David McQuirk," was the other's answer. "You know of our expedition? You've heard?"

Briefly the Canadian explained how the *Delight's* last, mysterious message had aroused the interest of the world and had resulted in his own attempt to reach the island by plane. When he had finished, the man beside him was brooding darkly.

"So Chapman lived to send a message," he said, half to himself. "God, man! if you had but understood what he was trying to tell you! For while we talk here, they are somewhere to the south, spreading death and terror over the nations."

He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again it was on a new thread of thought. "Warmer and warmer—hour by hour—and the end comes soon—and all our fault!" He broke off, his voice a dry, despairing whisper.

Warren felt reason leaving him as he listened to the other's words, felt the stir of warm, heavy air around him where there should have been only a frozen, bitter waste. But abruptly the man beside him was speaking on, his voice low and eager now.

"Yet you and I," he was saying, "even yet we might win, if you but understood——"

He paused for a moment, seemed to struggle for self-control, and then continued in a voice he strove to keep calm: "You know already, you say,

about our expedition, and you know how we came north to find the legendary ruins which Angus believed to exist on this island. It was on September 3rd, less than three weeks ago, that we got here, and beached our schooner securely on the island's coast.

"It seemed a dreary enough place, covered with the great folds of the polar ice which had lain upon it for ages, and cowering beneath the bitter polar cold, a desolate, frozen desert. We minded its appearance but little, though, for we were intent on getting into the interior and finding the fabled ruins. So our preparations were rushed, and three days after reaching the island our party, with its motor-sledges, started into the interior, leaving the schooner's officers and crew aboard the ship.

"I AM not going to tell now of the days we spent ranging the island's interior in search of the place of ruins. A week we spent without result, and it began to seem that, after all, the tale was only another baseless native legend. Angus himself was half crazy over the thing by then, utterly unlike the brother I had known and loved since childhood, all his fanatic scientist's soul bent upon the search. Though some of us were convinced by then that our quest was useless, he drove us on, and in the end, miles in the island's interior, we found what we sought.

"It was at the top of a low, ice-covered mound that our search ended. For there, rising out of the ice on the mound's broad summit, were the great walls of stone, just as the Eskimos had told—cyclopean walls of gray stone, the exposed parts of which were crumbling from the storms of ages. Here and there, too, were twisted wrecks of metal, beams and girders of a strange silvery metal that was as shining and unoxidized as it must have been when new. And at the very center of the broad summit was the

most enigmatic object of all, a large dome of the same smooth, silvery metal, whose upmost, rounded tip only projected through the ice, though we could faintly glimpse the rest of its shape through the solid, transparent veil of the ice.

"For a time after our discovery of the ruins, Angus was like a madman. He was not thinking now of the immense, precedent-shattering importance of our discovery, nor of the honors the world would accord him for it, but was driven on by an intense, overwhelming curiosity—an unholy curiosity to lay bare whatever secrets of the long-dead past might lie beneath us. All his interest was centered upon the smooth, enigmatic dome whose tip we could see, and it was around this, on the morning after our discovery, that we began our work.

"It required but an hour's work with our ice-picks to show us that excavating the dome in this manner would be a task of months. In the schooner, though, were large supplies of a special chemical compound which we had brought with us, a heat-generating compound akin to thermit, a small amount of which would give off enough heat to melt a large volume of ice. So we sent the Canadians back with the motor-sledge to the ship to procure this, Dr. Lowell going with them. When they came back, two days later, they were accompanied by the schooner's officers and crew, who had become excited over the news of our discovery and wished to witness the excavations. Although the ship itself was thus left quite alone it was securely beached and could come to no harm.

"On the following morning, therefore, we began our work, the crew helping us to scatter the powdered compound on the ice in a hundred-foot circle around the dome's projecting tip, and then pouring on it the igniting acid. At once the process began, generating a terrific heat, and

swiftly the ice in that hundred-foot circle melted, canals having been cut to carry away the water as it did so. Hour after hour we continued the process, placing more and more of the compound on the ice, until by late in the afternoon it had eaten down to a depth of almost twenty feet, a great pit in the ice more than a hundred feet across, out of which rose the dully gleaming, half-cylindrical bulk of the metal dome, itself some twenty feet in diameter. Still we kept on, until at last the pit was more than a score of feet in depth and its floor was brown, frozen earth. We had burned our way directly down through the ice to the earth beneath.

"By that time it was near sunset, and all of us had flocked down the steps we had cut in the pit's icy side, our curiosity mounting to fever heat. What were we to find inside that metal mystery? Books or models or records that would make clear to us the history of whatever long-dead race had built it? The sailors and our three Canadians were as interested now as we ourselves, and with the rest of our party they hung near us in a little group as Angus, Dr. McGrath and I advanced upon the dome. There were no openings or sign of openings in those smooth metal sides, and Angus swung up the crowbar in his hand to sound the metal wall. Then, abruptly, he stopped short, while on every heart there lay for a moment a cold hand of terror. For from inside the dome, which had lain beneath the ice for ages, there had come a sound—a low, muffled sound that was like the deep note of a muted bell!

"We stood quite still, gazing at one another with wild eyes, a sick dread stealing into our souls. A tomblike silence had fallen, and still we stood and stared, while northwestward the crimson, descending sun lit up the whole scene with its weird light. Another muted note came from the dome's interior, and another, and then, quite without warning, the whole

metal dome itself suddenly glowed with misty white light and sent a sudden wave of smothering, radiant heat rolling out over us. Beneath that warm radiance the pit's interior warmed instantly to a point where we sweated in our furs, while the ice of its sides began suddenly to melt and drip. There was a silence that must have lasted for minutes, and then, in the dome's smooth side, a door began to open.

"It opened like no door we had ever seen before. The only thing to which I can compare it is the opening shutter of a camera-lens, a steadily expanding circular aperture. One moment we glimpsed a tiny hole in the dome's metal wall and then the hole was larger, and larger, widening out until it was a circle five feet across, at the wall's bottom. Our eyes, dazzled by the sunlight and the misty light from the dome itself, could not pierce the darkness of its interior, but out from it came a breath of intensely hot air, and a smell of strange and pungent chemicals which was, somehow, terrifying. Silent, motionless, we gazed at that amazing door. And then there was a stir in the darkness inside it, a sound of movement, and through it there came—a thing.

"It was a thing out of nightmare, a monstrous, incredible thing that filled us with horror inconceivable. Standing less than five feet in height, it was vaguely reminiscent of a toad because of its spotted back and front skin of sickly white, but the form was not toadlike, not reptilian at all, except for the cold, unwinking eyes. There were two short, straight lower limbs, seemingly stiff and unjointed, and two short upper limbs which gave the thing a grotesque manlike appearance. The body, or trunk of the thing, was smooth, dead-white, and except for the two staring eyes the only features in its bulbous, unhuman head were close-set ears and a narrow slit of a mouth which opened and closed with its breathing. There was a

dreadful silence, then, as we returned its gaze.

"How long we stared thus I can not say, but I know that the spell was suddenly broken by a dozen smothered cries of horror from behind me as the group in the pit reeled back, while we three, nearest the thing, stood rigid. A moment only the group behind me staggered back, and then death was upon them. One of the creature's short arms came up, a silvery tube in its grasp, and from that tube intense red light leapt toward the running men, a crimson ray beneath which they staggered and fell, lay upon the ground in horribly shrunken little masses of distorted flesh. Chapman alone, who had been standing on the steps themselves, managed to reach the top of them, but even before he could leap outside and away from the pit the ray had swung upward and struck glancingly along his right side. I saw the flesh itself twisting terribly beneath the ray, and then he was gone. I could not at the time know his fate, but I know now that he must have dragged himself back to the schooner to send out that warning message before he died.

"All of this had taken but a few seconds to enact, and Angus, McGrath and I still stood motionless, the only ones left alive, and waiting in petrified terror for our own death. The toad-creature in the doorway seemed to regard us, its inhuman eyes shifting over us, and then it moved toward us, while behind it another appeared in the doorway.

"The sight of that was too much for McGrath, and with a choking cry he reeled back, ran shakily toward the pit's side. Before he had gone a dozen paces the red ray flashed after him and in a moment he, too, lay a distorted thing of cloth and flesh upon the ground. By then others of the toad-men had emerged from the dome, until there were more than a dozen of them before us. They seemed to

be regarding us, and then we heard their speech for the first time, a confused, clicking whispering, while the one nearest us still threatened us with his deadly ray-tube. Then two of the others came toward us with metal clamps in their hands, clamps which they fastened upon our wrists and ankles tightly. We sprawled upon the ground, prisoners—prisoners of these creatures whom we ourselves had released from the ice beneath which they had slept for ages!

“DURING all this time the dome itself had continued to glow with intense, radiant heat, and now one of the toad-men brought forth from inside it a long, hoselike, flexible metal tube, one end of which remained inside the dome while the other ended in a flat nozzle. This was pointed toward the icy sides of the pit, and instantly from the nozzle there sprang a broad beam of the same misty light and heat which glowed from the dome, a concentrated ray of radiant heat beneath which the ice crumbled and melted instantly. Within a half-hour, using this broad ray, they had melted all of the tons of ice upon the mound’s summit, the waters rushing down its slopes in torrents. The melting of the ice uncovered a waste of shattered ruins on the summit and also uncovered no less than a score of close-grouped domes of almost the same size as the one beside us.

“Upon these, one by one, the broad heat-ray was then turned, and beneath its touch each gave forth the three muted notes and then opened like the first, though none glowed with radiant heat as the first had done. And from the lens-shutter door of each came forth some ten to twelve of the toad-creatures. I saw then that whatever apparatus was inside these domes was thermostatically operated, being automatically actuated by any heat from outside, and that it was the heat from our ice-melting compound which had actuated the apparatus of the first.

“By that time complete darkness had fallen, but now the summit of the mound was illuminated by the light of the glowing, central dome. And the heat from its radiant sides was so intense that on the summit it was as warm and balmy as a summer’s day, while beyond the summit stretched the great fields of ice—a tiny oasis of warmth in a desert of Arctic desolation and cold. And now the toad-men, more than two hundred in number, became extraordinarily active, bringing forth tools and instruments and small, complicated mechanisms from the domes and beginning to link great strips of metal into a large framework, beside us. They stayed always within the heat-area of the clustering domes, though, and a few moments later I saw the reason for this; for one of them, bringing a long metal section from a dome near the summit’s edge, was jostled by another and pushed for a second outside the circle of the glowing heat. At once he seemed to quiver spasmodically, dropped his burden and fell and writhed violently on the ground, and then lay still, his white flesh turning swiftly to a deep black. It was apparent that these creatures died instantly when subjected to extreme cold; hence their caution.

“The rest paid but little attention to the mishap of their companion, working on at the great framework beside us, until at last I forgot the desperateness of our position and drowsed and slept. When I awoke it was daylight around us, but all on the summit seemed unchanged, the toad-men working on at their metal structure while we lay pinioned and helpless, watching them. Once we were handed a metal container of water and some hard sticks of brown, fibrous stuff which was their only food, and which we ate hungrily enough. Again, though, after unnumbered, despairing hours, I drowsed away while they worked, and when I awoke, sometime during

that night, I was astounded and horrified to find that two of the creatures were crouching beside us and endeavoring to carry on a conversation with Angus, who was essaying to utter some of their own clicking, whispering tones.

"It was only then that I learned that the intensity of our search had unhinged my brother's mind, and fathomed the depths of his madness. For he told me that he was determined to throw in his lot with these toad-men, at whose mercy we were, and who were, he claimed, infinitely the superiors of man in intelligence and science. All my horror-stricken remonstrances went for nothing with him, and day after day he spent hours in learning the murmuring whispers and clicks of the toad-men's speech, until at last, four days after our capture, he had attained to an exchange of ideas with them and learned for the first time who and what they really were.

"And it was through him, then, that I learned what a horror we had loosed upon the world. These creatures, I learned, had inhabited earth eons ago, when it was still a warm, steaming ball. Ages before the fore-runners of man were born their civilization and their cities had risen in what was then earth's most habitable portion, the regions around the northern pole. And on an island in those regions, the island we now call Corson Island, had stood the greatest of their cities.

"Theirs was a civilization which had endured for centuries and which, it seemed, could be menaced by no power on earth, but at last it was threatened with certain destruction by the greatest of all powers on earth, the southward drift of the great tides of glacial ice. For, as the ages passed, ice had formed around the northern pole, little by little, and now that ice began to drift slowly south, a majestic, resistless white tide which nothing could stand against.

"It seemed to mean extinction for the toad-men, since their scientists predicted that the ice would roll south until it covered all earth, before it receded. And their own bodies, injured for ages to the warm, steaming climate of the young earth, died instantly when subjected to bitter cold. There seemed no possible escape for them, but at last a plan for escape was devised, a plan which made use of the biological phenomenon known as suspended animation.

"It is a thing which we know little enough about, now. We know that some animals and insects can remain without air, food or water for great stretches of time, lying in deathlike sleep until revived to live again. We know, too, that certain Hindoo fakirs have been buried in earth and let lie for days, then dug up and brought back to life again. One of our own scientists, the great French biologist Berthelot, had studied the phenomenon and had become convinced that so long as there is no molecular disintegration the body of any animal might lie with animation suspended for unlimited time, and live again when restored from its long sleep. And the scientists of the toad-men had studied it even more, and knew a process which could induce this living death in themselves for unlimited lengths of time.

"It was this secret which they now used to save their race. For it was their plan to bury themselves and lie in this deathlike sleep while the ice rolled south over them, and then when it rolled back, though it were centuries later, they could rise from that sleep and again build up their cities. So on the island of their greatest city, on Corson Island, they constructed countless strong, dome-shaped little buildings of metal, fitted with all necessary apparatus and scientific equipment, and into each of these went a certain number of the toad-men. Once inside, they closed the wall and released the chemicals which

suspended animation in themselves. And each of these domes was arranged with thermostatic apparatus which, when the temperature outside rose again, would release other chemicals inside that would bring the sleepers back from their living death, so that when the ice rolled north again and the polar world warmed once more the domes would automatically revive and release the sleeping, imprisoned hordes inside.

“Over the island stood these domes, thousands upon thousands, holding vast hordes of the toad-men inside them; and at their center, in a score of domes grouped close together in a special spot, were their leaders and greatest scientists. These were last to enter and bring on themselves the living death, and when they had done so the last of the polar race was safe inside the domes. And soon, above them, the mighty floods of the polar ice rolled south, burying the domes and the cities of the toad-men beneath its frozen tons, forging south until it covered all earth.

“**T**HEN, at last, the ice began to recede, but it receded only a few hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle and then stopped. The domes and cities of the toad-men it still covered, and so their hordes slept on beneath the ice, not knowing that their great plan had failed. And as the ages passed and man vaulted to supremacy and to science and power of his own, the polar race slept on beneath the ice, unconscious, like dead, waiting through the centuries in vain for the receding of the ice which would awaken and release them.

“And then our expedition had come, drawn north by the tale of the fabled ruins, and had released them from that first dome through the heat of our ice-melting compound, which had been sufficient to actuate the thermostatic apparatus inside, releasing the chemicals and awaking the toad-men from their eon-old sleep, and

releasing too the radiant heat from the dome's sides which made it safe for them to venture outside. We had released them, had loosed a horror out of long-dead ages upon the world, and now they were working to awaken and release all their hordes that slept in domes beneath the island's ice, to bring those hordes back into life and power and seize the world from man!

“It was for that that they were working on the great mechanism beside us. For that mechanism was to be a great heat-magnet, a magnet which would be able to bend and attract heat-vibrations as Einstein has shown that light-vibrations are bent and attracted by the bodies they pass in space. They would project from this great magnet a shaft of terrific force out into space, which should bend and attract and suck down the vibrations of radiant heat which flood unceasingly outward through space from the sun, and this concentrated heat drawn down by the great magnet upon the island would be of sufficient intensity to overcome the bitter polar cold and melt all ice on the island, and in time would raise the temperature to such a degree of warmth that the apparatus inside each of the island's thousands of domes would be actuated. That would mean the revival and release of the hordes inside, who would come forth to seize the world.

“It was the plan of the toad-men, too, before this happened to flash south and strike at the present civilization of man, which Angus had described to them, a series of mighty blows, which would prevent any chance of their being interfered with in their work on the island. Their domes themselves were fitted with lifting and propulsion-ray apparatus by which they could attain terrific speed, and it was in these that they would venture south, first in a small terrorizing party and then in all their vast hordes, when those hordes had been awakened.

“This was the plan which I heard,

in helpless horror, and then Angus himself told me that he was going to join forces with the toad-men and help them. All my protestations and entreaties had no effect on his crazed mind, and for hours he continued his whispering speech with our captors. And finally they released him from his bonds and he began to help them, working with them on the great heat-magnet mechanism.

"That mechanism had taken form as a giant metal cylinder, the connections from which seemed mostly to run down into the earth itself. Set in its side were its controls, a row of shining little levers like the semaphore-controls in a railway signal-tower, and below them was a single large lever of burnished red metal. Swiftly the great mechanism approached completion until at length, last night, it was finished, and was at once put into operation, one of the creatures pressing the small shining levers in a certain order and then pressing down the red one.

"At once, quite noiselessly but with the swiftness of terrific power, there sprang from the top of the great upright cylinder a blinding shaft of brilliant light, stabbing up toward the stars, projecting far out into space from earth, I knew. And almost at once, it seemed, a flood of radiant heat rolled down from the shaft and outward over the island—a flood of heat sucked earthward by the shaft of force from the space-speeding heat-vibrations of the radiant sun itself. It rolled over the island and set the ice-fields to melting and dripping in a few minutes, while from above came a shrilling of great winds as the warm air currents from the shaft drove up and outward, the same currents which later caught your own plane as it neared the island and whirled it down. Hour followed hour while that flood of heat from the light-shaft poured down. The toad-men had snapped off whatever apparatus made their own central dome glow with

heat, apparatus which it alone had possessed, evidently. And now they began to prepare the domes on the summit for the first sally south.

"Through all of the next day, today, they worked, Angus helping them, and through all the day I glimpsed from where I lay the ice of the island melting and running away, while around the mound a vast forest of dully gleaming metal domes began to emerge from the melting ice. By late afternoon all ice on the island had melted and vanished, and there were wet brown soil and the thousands of metal domes. By that time, too, the work of the toad-men on the summit had ceased, and now, in their own domes, they rose with whining power above the island and raced south, flashing the crimson ray upon the beached schooner as they passed over it and then speeding on.

"I knew upon what mission of dread they were speeding south, and then, at last, I knew utter despair. They had left behind them a score or more for guards, Angus among them, who were watching now the operation of the great heat-attractive shaft above us. With each hour the thing was raising the temperature on the island higher, and soon would be releasing the hordes in the domes around us. My hope had reached its lowest ebb, then, when suddenly it welled up again.

"I had glimpsed suddenly a metal tool one of the workers had dropped near by—a long, thick blade with a serrated edge. Cautiously I crawled toward this and at last had it, unnoticed by the guards who were clustered beneath the great cylinder. Then, holding the tool between my knees, I drew the metal clamp that held my wrists back and forth across the serrated edge.

"Slowly, toilsomely, I worked on at this, ceasing when any of the guards glanced toward me, then working on. It was night, by then, and with each minute the warmth of the air around

me seemed to be increasing. At last, after an effort that seemed hours in length, the bond that held my hands gave way, and at once I was filing away at the clamp around my ankles.

"Within a few more minutes I had severed this, too, and then glanced cautiously toward the guards. None was observing me, for the moment; so I quietly slipped back and over the edge of the mound's summit, stealing down its side and then running frantically through the lanes of metal domes which lay around me. I heard whispering cries behind me, a sudden clatter of pursuit, but ran blindly on, no thought in my head except to leave behind me those things of horror who pursued. At last pursuit seemed to die away, and I found myself at the island's shore. And as I reached it I heard the droning of a motor above, saw your plane spin down into the water, and managed to drag it up onto the beach.

"And now, you understand—you understand the thing that menaces our world, the creatures of hell who stir and wake to spring upon it. For soon, now, very soon, the waxing warmth will open the thousands of domes upon this island, revive and release the hideous hordes inside. Already their first attack has gone south to stagger and stun our world, and once those hordes inside the domes are loosed they will go south in all their might, annihilate the civilization that we know and bring earth beneath the rule of the toad-men for all time!"

5

SILENCE reigned when David McQuirk had ceased to speak—a silence that was to Warren's ears thunderous. On the beach before them long waves were washing in, and from high above came the whine of winds, but except for these there was utter stillness. Then abruptly the other stood up, and the airman did likewise. Together, without speaking,

they gazed toward that shaft of blinding white light that split the night ahead.

"There is—one chance," David was saying, his eyes fixed upon that column of frosty brilliance. "If we could get to that heat-magnet, that cylinder, and destroy or turn it off, such action would stop this increasing warmth and prevent the domes from opening. It would be a respite, at least. But if we do not——"

Warren spoke, striving to keep his voice steady. "If there's a chance," he said, "there's nothing for it but to try."

"Have you any weapon?" asked the other, and the airman strode toward the plane and drew from its holster in the cockpit a heavy automatic pistol. He hesitated a moment, then handed it to the other. "You take it," he told him. "I was always a rotten shot."

David McQuirk grasped it eagerly, swiftly examining magazine and action, and then straightened. He glanced once more at the light-shaft ahead, then back to Warren, and without speaking the two started off toward the great beacon that was their goal.

A thousand feet in from the beach a dark, humped shape loomed before them, and as they strode past it Warren saw it for a dome like those David had described, of dully gleaming metal, a thing twenty feet in height and of equal diameter at its base. Inside it, Warren knew, lay others of the toad-men, sleeping their sleep of ages, but soon to be awakened now unless their mission succeeded. He strode on, after McQuirk.

Before them, now, and on both sides, long rows of the same metallic dome-structures extended into the distance, and from a slight elevation which they crossed Warren glimpsed square mile upon square mile covered with a forest of them, realized what vast hordes must lie within them.

(Continued on page 717)

The Polar Doom

(Continued from page 607)

David, though, wasted no glance upon them, pushing rapidly on, until both men were sweating profusely in the tropical warmth. It was with an effort that Warren remembered himself to be within a few hundred miles of the supreme icy desolation of the pole itself.

The great light-shaft ahead was growing in apparent size as they forged on toward it, and McQuirk had begun to move more carefully, more quietly. Suddenly he flung himself prostrate on the ground, pulling Warren down beside him. In a moment there passed over them a buzzing, dwindling whine, and then they saw, silhouetted against the white brilliance ahead, a dozen or more dark shapes that were dropping smoothly down toward the mound from which the light sprang.

"The first raiders!" McQuirk was whispering. "They've come back; God knows where they've been!"

The two lay motionless for a moment, then crept stealthily on. Through the unending lanes of gleaming domes they threaded their way, forging on and on, until at last they were within a few thousand feet of the dark, low mound of the light, and could catch a few drifting fragments of whispering, clicking speech from the mound itself, and once a snatch of human-voiced imitation of the former, at which Warren felt his arm convulsively gripped by the other. And now they had slowed their progress to a crawl, and were creeping onward with infinite stealth and patience, hiding as much as possible from the revealing light from ahead behind the domes and their shadows, crawling from shadow to shadow and drawing ever nearer toward the sides of the low, broad mound.

At last they had reached the end of the forest of domes which encircled

that mound and crouched in the shadow of one at the very edge, but a few yards from its sloping side. Crouching there they heard the sounds from its summit clearly, now, and saw beneath the mighty brilliance above scores of the dark, hideous shapes of the toad-men, clustered on the summit, moving to and fro. McQuirk had paused, now, and his eyes held Warren's.

"It's death for us if we show ourselves on that summit," he said, in a whisper, "but up there is our last chance."

Warren gazed up toward the mound's thronged top, and something seemed to tighten across his chest. Then, without speaking, his hand went forth to the other, who gripped it once, then crawled slowly out of the protecting shadow, across the narrow, illuminated belt that separated them from the mound's sloping side. And Warren followed.

Once again they paused, glancing up toward the summit; then crawled on, up its side toward the mound's top, up, up, toward death, until they were within a few yards of that top, a few feet, a few—

Boom!

A tremendous, powerful note, deep and low and muffled strangely, it sounded from the air around them, from over all the island, it seemed, thundering out with cosmic, deliberate grandeur.

McQuirk gripped the airman's arm. "The domes!" he whispered. "They're opening; they're—"

Boom!

Again the vast, deep note had pealed out, a mighty note whose source was the myriad synchronized individual notes from the myriad domes around them. And the toad-men above had heard, too, and were rushing down the mound's side, only a score of yards from where the two crouched, down toward the domes from which arose that mighty warning note.

Boom!

With the last note there was a faint, sighing sound, a sudden increasing babel of whispering speech-sounds, and in the sides of the massed dark domes Warren glimpsed expanding circles opening, figures emerging. . . .

David, beside him, crawled suddenly upward, to the edge of the mound's summit, turned to whisper rapidly: "It's a chance! They're all off the summit, all gone down among the opening domes. And now—"

Without finishing he crawled up onto the flat summit itself, followed instantly by the airman; then they sprang to their feet, glanced for a moment over the broad, ruin-littered summit, and then were racing across it. For on it was no sign of the toad-men, for the moment, and a hundred yards away loomed the great cylinder from which the light-shaft soared—the great cylinder, and the switches on its side.

Speeding across the mound's summit toward the cylinder, Warren heard a mighty wave of clicking, whispering speech from all around, knew it to be the speech of the newly released thousands from the forest of aered domes around the mound. They were within a hundred feet of the cylinder, of the switches, were staggering on, on—and then both stopped dead in their tracks.

Ahead of them a dark figure had suddenly sprung from behind the cylinder itself, a *human* figure, the figure of a tall, black-browed man who raised a hand toward them in warning gesture, holding them with his mad, burning eyes. Warren heard, issuing from his lips, a clicking, sibilant cry, and then heard it answered by scores of cries from those below the mound, heard the sudden scramble of their feet as they raced up toward the summit in answer to that cry. Then David, beside him, had flung an arm out toward the man ahead in a gesture of infinite entreaty.

"Angus!" he cried, his voice ago-

nized. "For the love of God, Angus!"

The man before them answered only with another hissing cry, a cry echoed again by the hordes who rushed up the mound's sides toward his aid.

And then David shot him down. Warren heard the pistol crack, beside him, and saw the mad figure before them crumple to the ground, a spreading red stain on the breast of his shirt. Then he had leapt over and past that prostrate figure and was at the switches in the cylinder's side, was jamming the great red one frenziedly upward, just as the hordes of toad-men from below rushed up onto the mound's summit.

As the great switch clicked beneath his hands the mighty shaft of light above vanished, and at the same moment there vanished with it the flood of tropical heat about them, replaced instantly by the bitter polar cold, that searing, icy cold which the great heat-magnet alone had held at bay. And beneath that cold the toad-men on the summit were stumbling and falling, writhing and twisting and then lying still, the white of their bodies changing swiftly to black. Far out on the island and over all its surface was rising a confused babel of whispering cries and speech, that cut short and ceased as the mighty hordes from the domes fell beneath the icy sword of the arctic cold. The toad-men who had slept for ages had arisen from that sleep to be annihilated. The polar race had awakened at last—to death.

Warren turned, now, saw his companion kneeling beside the man on the ground, stepped to his side and with him gazed down into the face of the dying scientist. It was a face from which the madness had been suddenly wiped away, from which the man's wide eyes looked up at them uncomprehendingly.

"Why, Davie!" he said, staring up into his brother's face with infinite surprize and wonder; "why, Davie

lad!" and so stared, and choked and died.

6

DAWN was flinging its white brilliance across the island when Warren and David made ready at last to leave. In the interval they had buried the anthropologist's body in the fast-freezing earth, where it had fallen, and then had taken their way slowly down from the mound and across the island, across that desert of stupendous death where the hordes of the newly released toad-men lay black and stiff and dead, struck down by the polar cold. Now, after an examination which showed it to be comparatively uninjured, they were wheeling Warren's plane into position for a take-off on the long, level beach.

In a moment Warren was in the pilot's seat and his companion stepped toward the propeller, then paused, glancing away into the island where the mound and its great cylinder rose black against the sunrise. The airman saw now that his lips were working.

"That cylinder," McQuirk was whispering, "the domes, the secrets inside them—we gain all that, the world gains that. And we lose——"

He turned, abruptly, spun the propeller, once, twice, and then the motor had caught and was roaring its song of power. In a moment McQuirk was in the seat behind the airman and the plane was rolling down the long beach, slanting sharply up into the sunlight and speeding toward the south.

Moments they flashed on, and then, with a common impulse, the two turned and looked back. Far behind, now, lay the island, a dark-brown mass against the gray, berg-dotted sea. On its surface there seemed to glitter a myriad brilliant points of light, shining, dazzling. It was the light of the rising sun, glancing off the myriad domes of metal which had held for eons the menace and the power of the polar doom.