

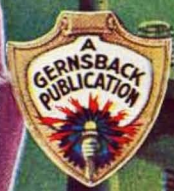
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WONDER Stories

HUGO GERNSBACK
EDITOR

August

**"THE REIGN OF
THE REPTILES"**
By A. Connell



THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION



WONDER STORIES

"The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction"



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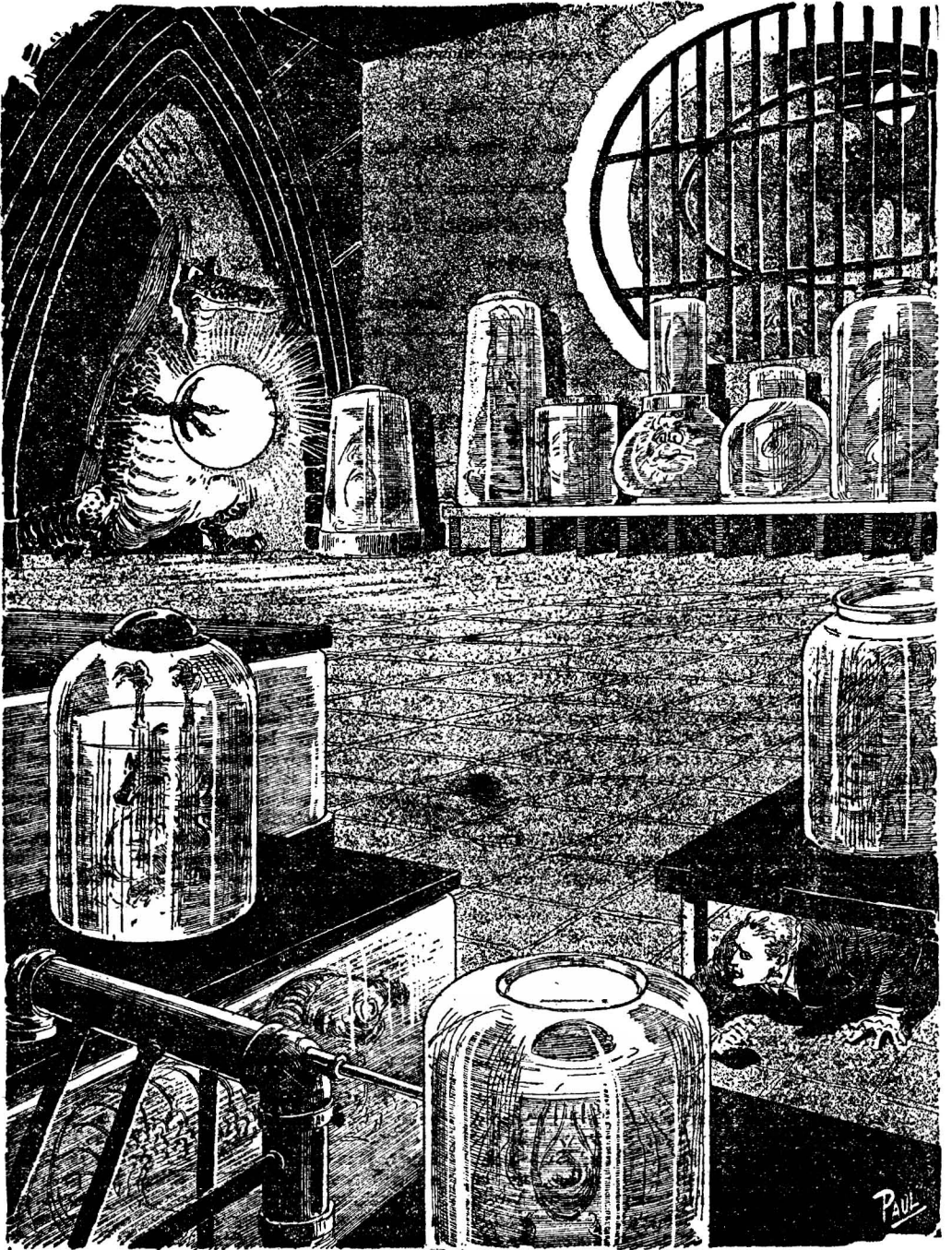
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● ON THE COVER

This month we find the hero in A. Connell's thrilling story, "The Reign of the Reptiles," about to be sent into the past, against his will, by the three enthusiastic scientists, where he is on the verge of the strangest experience ever to confront a human being.



(Illustration by Paul)

And now it revealed itself as a transparent sphere filled with some phosphorescent substance.

THE REIGN OF THE REPTILES

By A. CONNELL

● Kane stood up and stared at me heatedly. "There are a hundred different things," he said, "that go to prove the theory of man's evolution from lower forms of life. I don't see why you shut your eyes to them and insist that our ancestors were created instantaneously out of nothing."

"I'm satisfied," I said. "I'll stick to religion; you can have science."

"Religion?" said Kane. "In twenty years—"

"Why can't we have them both?" I interrupted him, and quoted:

"A Fire Mist and a planet,
A crystal and a shell,
A jelly fish and a saurian
And caves where the cave men dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty,
And a face turned from the clod—
Some call it Evolution, ...
And others call it God."*

"Oh, shut up!" said Kane, with customary disrespect for poetry—especially when called upon to support arguments. He got up, went from the room; I heard him tramp down the stairs, slam the front door after him, and I smiled.

Kane Sanders is related to me in some indistinct way, and I first met him when he wrote asking me whether I could give him work. I invited him to come and see me. I liked him then—and have grown to like him even more—and he stayed to look after the business side of my life—which is far from complicated, involving, as it does, a mere disinterested correspondence with the fed-up publishers of my short stories. Fed-up because, through other interests forcing themselves on me, my material has deteriorated from common poorness to something unmentionable.

*William Herbert Carruth.

● It is a great satisfaction to us every time we receive a story like this—it makes us believe that our authors are putting more effort into their work and trying to favor us with really original tales.

We find here again our old friend time-travel which brings us back to the Mesozoic Age. Here, in the dim past, we are to learn a secret which is to upset the theories of the world's greatest evolutionists—an idea never before hinted at, but presented with so much conviction that it is likely to start you on an entirely new train of thought.

As a piece of science-fiction, you will find here all the thrills and adventures that you can expect in any story except the most blood-and-thunder, which have no place in our magazine.

Read this new-policy story and receive your share of enjoyment which can come from only an A-1 science-fiction tale.

During my two-year association with Sanders, I discovered only one flaw—and it was of little consequence—in a very pleasant personality; he was too fond of arguments. Since I am a victim of the same fault, and it became habit and tradition to oppose him, things might have been disagreeable if one of us hadn't always been able to see the humor of the thing before it went very far.

On this night I paid little attention to Sanders' departure. He would, I thought, be now walking morosely down the road to the beach; and he would return in his usual high spirits before very long.

I was right on the first score, but wrong on the second.

● Some time in the early morning I awoke and remembered that I had not heard Sanders come in. I got up and went along the passage to his room. Just as I opened the door, I heard the click of another door

downstairs. I waited, and presently a man came up the stairs. At first I did not recognize him; the clothes were tight on his broad frame, the shoes were laceless; then I saw that it was Sanders.

A stubble of crudely-removed hair grew on his chin and cheeks. I think it was this that struck me as most fantastic at the time—Sanders had left me not many hours before, perfectly shaved; now his face was covered with traces of recently removed black bristle!

There were other incredible things; he was browner than I had ever seen him before; always big-limbed, he was now superhumanly developed; and his hair, I saw when he came closer, was longer than it had ever been before.

He greeted me with a faint smile, took my arm and drew me into his room. When he switched on the light, the half-seen details of his transformation stood out starkly. I had an experience I never hope to have again; I felt the blood running out of my cheeks, felt my face go dead white.

Sanders looked at me with strange eyes. "You remember our arguments about evolution and God?"

I nodded.

"I have an awful kind of suspicion that we were *both* wrong," he said. "Did you know," he went on abruptly, "that there was a time millions of years ago when reptiles ruled land, sea, and air?"

Without waiting for me to answer, he took something from his pocket and unrolled brown paper from it.

Stark in the white light was a black, scaled, five-fingered thing, loathsomely suggestive of the reptilian. It had been severed smoothly at the wrist, and in the bent clutch of the wrinkled fingers was the dim reminiscence of some nameless threat.

Fantastically, too, about each of those members was a blue-jeweled ring!

"Fulu, emissary of Luad," said Sanders, half to himself. "I wonder what he thinks now!"

"Kane!" I said. "What—"

He thrust away the black claw. "Sorry," he said. "Listen and I'll tell you." He hesi-

tated and said fretfully: "These clothes are choking me." Then he took off coat and shirt and sat on the bed with knees drawn up in an odd squatting position; and while I stared dumbly at the leathery brown of his chest, he told me what follows.

CHAPTER II

A Human Guinea-Pig

● When he left the house, Sanders wandered down the track to the road with the idea of walking to Salabec, but dusk fell and he stood hesitating on the concrete. He heard the sound of a car and saw its headlights come around the bend. He stepped aside to let it pass, but it halted, crept slowly forward, and stopped again like a man in doubt.

Presently someone got out and came around to stand between the headlamps. Sanders felt a man's keen eyes staring at him, and he turned away, flushed and ill at ease. But a voice stopped him. "Just a moment—do you mind?"

Sanders said: "Well?" and faced the man. He was short, fragile-framed, and loosely dressed, and his gray hair was untidy above a white face. His bright eyes studied Sanders from head to foot, and sensing the young man's discomfort, he said: "Your pardon. I was looking for a man."

"Why?" asked Sanders. "Is something wrong with your car?"

"Why—yes! My car—"

"Then I'm sorry," Sanders said. "I can't—"

"I'm sure it's something insignificant," the other interrupted. "I'd like you to look."

In the face of this point-blank request, Sanders went to the man's side as the latter lifted the cover from the engine.

"There—I think the trouble's there," said the man, indicating the ignition. "I'll hold this torch while you look."

Later Sanders was able to see humor in his acting as this man's mechanic—this man who probably knew more about machinery, from the simplest system of pul-

keys to the most complex electrical apparatus, than anyone else in the world.

For several minutes he fumbled in the yellow light, then straightened. "I can't see anything," he began—and stopped.

There was a peculiar tenseness about the stranger's face, and involuntarily Sanders' eyes went to the back of the car where there were two dim faces. He was conscious of dwelling in a strange atmosphere and his lips formed a question. Then something whipped up from the darkness and smothered his face. He choked and began to fall.

For a time that he could not estimate, a heavy greyness lay about him, then suddenly fell away. For a while he stayed quiet, then opened his eyes. He was lying on the bed of a plainly furnished room. Three men stood over him. One was the man from the car; the second he judged to be a Japanese; the third was a thin, fair youth, whose eyes held something greater than mere genius.

During an unembarrassed silence, the three stared down at him; then the first man said to the other two: "All right. Go and get everything ready. I'll talk to him."

As the two left the room, Sanders made an effort to get up—a vain one, for he was handcuffed to the bed. "Let me up!" he demanded. "What—"

The man held up a hand. "There's not much time to waste. Listen—my companions and I are what you might call experimental scientists. Tonight we were driving to Salabec in search of a man for one of our—experiments. I saw you; I knew you were the type I wanted, so I took you. Do this thing willingly and we'll pay you well, otherwise—"

"You can go and be damned," said Sanders, heaving on the bed.

"I thought you wouldn't. But we'll use you just the same. Now listen even more carefully.

"Juan, the young fellow, is an abnormal. You've heard, I suppose, of mathematical geniuses and people with fantastic memory powers. Juan, too, is frankly a freak intelligence; his brain really belongs hundreds of years in the future.

I don't think he has ever read any technical work on higher mathematics, but by sheer power of reasoning, he knows more than all the mathematical giants of the world put together.

"Takashai and I discovered him. We attached ourselves to him because we realized his possibilities and because—to be frank—we want a share in the fame that must inevitably come to him. Juan as yet doesn't worry about making money, so when we began to develop his talents he insisted that our first work of importance be the contriving of an apparatus for transporting objects along time-lines, so that he can confirm certain monstrous theories he has formed from studying palaeontological data. Under Juan's supervision, Takashai and I have built that apparatus; already we've tested it on bricks and guinea-pigs—transported them along artificial time-lines to both past and future; and now Juan is impatient to settle his horrible ideas on the origin of Man. He'd go himself, I believe, if his presence were not needed at the apparatus. . . ."

Handcuffed to the bed, reflecting on the oddities of fate that had thrown him among these madmen, Kane Sanders looked straight at the man and said: "You're mad."

His captor bent over him. "I am not mad," he said distinctly. "I ask you, what would a man of the year 100 A. D. think of our present-day science? Wouldn't it be plain magic? And you and I are just the same when confronted with Juan's plans and ideas—for I'm as much a child as you are when Juan speaks. His thought-processes are almost unimaginable. . . ."

The Japanese came into the room. "Everything is ready, Carlyle," he said, "and Juan is impatient."

Carlyle produced a heavily-scented pad and pressed it to Sanders' nostrils, leaving him in an unresisting half-stupor.

"I'm sorry to do this," Carlyle said, "but it's necessary, since I can't convince you that we are only over-zealous scientists."

Sanders was carried into a brilliantly lighted chamber and placed on a metal

table. Half-dazed, he looked about him. He felt a shock of doubt. Across the ceiling a giant power cable was slung in drooping loops; in far corners crouched green, polished machines, oddly vital; near at hand, circling him, were bright complexities of copper wire and giant silvered tubes. If the men were mad, Sanders thought, then their madness had followed strange paths. . . .

He felt hands at his waist; a belt was fastened about him. "Water, food, an automatic, and ammunition," Carlyle explained, then went to help Takashai with the machines in the corner. As Juan, silent and aloof, took his place before a keyboard that seemed the vital part of the whole mechanism, Carlyle returned.

"When you next open your eyes," he said, "you will be somewhere about the close of the Mesozoic, the great age of the reptiles, some millions of years in the past. But I warn you, don't be afraid. Remember, you are armed—and there is Juan, who will draw you back when he thinks you have had time to examine the conditions."

Juan turned, hesitated, and said doubtfully: "I would like you to notice what life there is."

"Yes," said Carlyle, and he pressed Sanders' hand. "I think I'm insane to force this on you," he went on, "but I can't help myself." He drew back.

The machines in the corners took on a sudden devil-scream; there was strange light through which the room reeled in grotesque colors; the sensation came to Sanders that hundreds of little demons were plucking his body into millions of particles and scattering them far and wide. . . .

CHAPTER III

The Room of Horror

● Sanders fell jarringly on one shoulder.

His eyes went swiftly around a vast gloomy room. Through the half-ovals of windows far to his left, white moonlight poured.

He did not know where he was; it did not occur to him that Carlyle's fantastic

predictions might be fulfilled, and he wondered where his three captors had gone.

He went to one of the windows, which were glassless, and as he gazed out, the first terrifying doubt came. Below him was a dim expanse of sloping roof, then a period of darkness, then a wall of impregnable thickness that rose sharply, shutting out jungle growth of such unbridled magnificence and gigantic size as he had never imagined could exist. Somehow allied with ferns, but incredibly bigger, they reached their plumes hundreds of feet into the night sky, looming high above the building in which he stood until they seemed to touch the moon. It was a strange moon, big and tinted with green—but its peculiarities were negligible before the chilling terror of the gargantuan forest—chilling despite the warm, tropical breeze that blew in his face.

As he turned from the window, Sanders heard an unnatural screaming emanating from the dark forest, and a roaring and bellowing. He hurried back across the room, blundered into something that rocked unsteadily, and with eyes rapidly becoming accustomed to the half-light, he stared at it. He saw that it was a glass globe supported on flimsy legs—and in it was a great wet thing, soft and shapeless, that stirred stupidly. From it came a nightmarish sucking and squeezing as it heaved itself up and down. . . .

With a terror that was silent but none the less real, Sanders went back and forth across the horrid chamber; and each step brought a new ghastly sight imprisoned in a transparent vessel—luminous eyes sunk in white membranous bags of skin—eyes that followed with insensate intentness his every move; things that swam like butterflies in amber liquid; jelly-like, pulsing things; mutilated forms floating lifeless in the fluids of their containers. And there were tables loaded with instruments and shapes he dared not look at. There was death unspeakable and life madder than the weirdest dream.

Sunk into one of the walls was a shelf of vessels filled with strange-smelling chemicals, and as he felt his way along

this, he thought he heard a shuffling sound in other regions of the building, and he groped forward with new speed until he touched what resembled the bars of a cage. He looked between the bars and at the sight of the thing that leered at him from within—a swaying, ape-like creature with pouting lips, sightless eyes, and mutilated limbs—he involuntarily voiced a hoarse cry.

Almost simultaneously, it seemed to him that the far-away shuffling took on a quicker and more definite rhythm; and with an overwhelming instinct to hide, he sank beneath the shadow of a bench.

● For minutes he crouched there, listening to the shuffle and scrape of the nameless feet as they hastened to their hiding place. Instinctively he knew that whatever inhuman thing owned this room of horror was coming to investigate the sounds he had made; and again, in spite of the tropical warmth of the night, he felt cold.

Now the wall farthest from him grew faintly luminous, and soon he made out the outlines of a high, oval-topped doorway, between which, deep in the darkness beyond, a spot of light hopped up and down. Nearer it came, reached the portal, hovered there a moment, and entered the room, shedding a glow of flat white light about it. And now it revealed itself as a transparent sphere filled with some phosphorescent substance; on two sides of its surface were black blurs.

It came closer to Sanders.

He felt the beat of blood at his temples—

The globe was held by a creature like a mythical devil incarnate! Its oily green, needle-fanged head hovered just above the luminous sphere, the hellish red eyes darting from side to side in search of the intruder; and where the shoulders should have been were hunched lumps that made the man think of folded wings. The body and shuffling feet were invisible; the claws appeared in silhouette on the surface of the globe that the monstrosity held before it.

Back and forth like an embodied demon it roamed, thrusting its long, hideous snout suspiciously into corners, pausing to hold its strange lantern beneath benches, and even stopping to peer from the windows as though it suspected someone of having made a hasty exit. But incredibly good fortune was with Sanders, for the devil-thing, though it hesitated near him, eventually passed him by and, satisfied that nothing was amiss, betook itself and its luminary from the chamber and shuffled along the corridor.

Many minutes later Sanders stirred, rose to his feet, and groped to the doorway. In the corridors beyond he soon found himself lost, and in the unrelieved darkness he fumbled and felt as though through a maze, all sense of direction gone. At odd times sounds from other quarters of the building stopped him like an animal at bay, but mostly all was still.

At length, with dying hope and in utter dejection, he sat down with his back to the wall and stared at the dark until his eyes grew heavy.

CHAPTER IV

In the Corridors

● He awakened suddenly to daylight and got stiffly to his feet. Before and behind him a corridor reached. It was colored vividly and grotesquely, and in merging hues which changed so subtly that he could not detect the exact spot of transition.

Sleep had been like a stimulant and clarifier to Kane Sanders. He knew now that all this was neither dream nor imagination—there was no more doubt—Juan's almost magical apparatus had thrown him back across ages of time to a prehistoric past. And recognition of this, without the horror of the night, gave him immeasurable relief and a kind of growing courage to win his way through this new existence. He had brains and strength, and at his hip was a weapon. Behind all that was the everlasting promise that Juan would again bridge the time-gulf and draw him back to reality.

He drank some water and ate a little of the concentrated food at his belt; and before he had finished, he heard a hissing and souging like the beat of wings. Far along the corridor he saw an approaching shape. Caution uppermost, he ran in the opposite direction until he reached an oblong of curtain cleverly set in the wall. He pushed through it, nor was he too soon, for a moment later a creature soared past him. A little it resembled a gigantic lizard, and the fanged snout, if not the same one, was at least practically identical with the one Sanders had seen in the room of horror. Only now it had lost its supernatural and diabolical aspect, appearing still hideous but only in a reptilian, scaled way. It propelled itself on hissing, leathery wings, and its sinuous body was clad in a blue, silken robe. About its ugly brow was a jewelled diadem; its claws were alight with jewels.

Alive now to the dangers of the main corridors, Sanders made his way along the side passage which the curtain had hidden. He came to another curtained doorway, hesitated, then tentatively parted it.

The room beyond the draping was as fantastically hued as the corridors. From the ceiling, suspended on golden chains, hung a number of canoe-shaped couches, and in each of these sprawled a hideous monster like the flying lizard of the corridor, but these were smaller and evidently females. Their faces were repulsive, with flat, tooth-rimmed snouts and little red eyes, but in their claws they held polished metal plates in which they constantly admired their frightful images. They were garbed in cloths swathed tightly about them and on their smooth skulls were set turbans or headdresses.

Grouped about these monstrosities were smaller, abject creatures of another reptilian species—but these were unclothed and evidently slaves. They held urns from which they sprayed their mistresses with jets of perfume.

Presently one of the monsters in the swinging couches elevated herself and be-

gan what seemed like a song—though its compound of garbled hissing and screechings bore no likeness to any music Sanders had ever heard. At the song's conclusion, the slaves flapped their atrophied wings in applause, and another monster took up the tune. Sanders turned away. And as he did so, his foot caught in the curtain, strained it taut, and released it fluttering.

He stood frozen. There was something ominous—

The singing had stopped!

He parted the curtain and saw that each of the lizard-creatures was staring at him.

As he ran, he heard a shrill shrieking and the flutter of ungainly wings, and intent on escape, he passed back to the main corridor and fled along it. Before long he knew that he was being pursued, and ran even faster amid the clatter of his heavy-soled boots. This last proved his undoing, for one of the flying lizards, attracted by the noise, soared from a side passage and threw itself upon him before he could reach the revolver at his belt. Boney claws dug into his arms and held him immovable until three more monsters arrived.

One, who wore a jewelled circlet about his brow, muttered some shrill words. Sanders stood quiescent, aloof, lips firm. The monster repeated the words, then fastened its crimson eyes on him and gave him his first glimpse of the uncanny power of thought transference possessed by these creatures.

Two questions built gradually up in his mind: "How did you escape? Why did you disobey?"

Sanders did not attempt to answer.

By what seemed like endless mental repetition, another question was forced on him: "To whom do you belong?"

Again Sanders was silent. He watched his questioner dismiss his fellows, then, with both arms tightly held, he was lifted and carried swiftly beneath the clacking wings of his captor, through great lengths of colored corridor, until they alighted in a room.

It was the room of his ghastly experience of the night before—the room that he was to know as the creative laboratory of the reptile scientists of Luada.

CHAPTER V

The Mystery of the Pit

● In the yellow light of day, the room had lost much of its horror, but still there was a breath of unholy mystery in its lizard-like inhabitants as they bent with shining knives over bizarre distortions of human bodies that were stretched on tables before them. Blood trickled from those tables and down into the little gutters that carried it to the brownstained drains in the floor.

On the walls hung parchments inscribed with anatomical cross-sections, some of which suggested vague oddities of inner structures to Sanders. . . .

At the entry of captor and captive, the monsters looked up from their work and stared at Sanders. Again he was aware of the mental question: "Why did you disobey," and then, "To whom do you belong?"

When there was no answer, one of the creatures gave an order. The one who held Sanders gave a garbled reply, then thrust its claws into his clothing and ripped every thread from him, even bending to tear off his shoes. The thing was done so quickly that Sanders' fingers could not reach the revolver before it was torn away with his belt.

As the man's clothing vanished, the reptiles pressed forward with hissing cries. Screeching with fanatical glee, they laid possessive claws on him, and he caught a jumble of mental communication which they abruptly resorted to.

"A first-class specimen; he must be from my pit."

"No," interposed a second; "You have none as good as this. I am certain he escaped from my pit."

"He belongs to neither of you," interrupted a third. "I was working on a particularly good specimen. I feel sure that this is the one."

Now a monster larger than the rest came forward and took hold of Sanders. "None of you seems to know whom he belongs to; therefore he shall go in my pit—where, in any case, he probably belongs."

Sanders was taken down the aisles of tables, past the loathsome things in the glass vessels, and to a table near the end of the room, where the lizard scientist opened a metal trap-door in the floor and dropped him through the opening.

Sanders felt himself fall one or two feet, then he struck a slide and rushed diagonally through the darkness. A spot of light appeared ahead, swelled, and he was spilled into hot sunlight. His prison was a roofless pit walled to a height of twenty feet on four sides. Behind him, above a slope of lower roof, were the windows of the laboratory. The far wall held back the gigantic fern forest that towered green above it to the vivid sky in which burned the brilliant sun.

Standing back a little, his face turned from the jungle, Sanders could see the mingling of marble domes and granite turrets that made up the great city-palace of the reptiles. This pit was one of many walled squares projecting from the main body of the palace.

● Sanders was not the only prisoner.

In scattered groups about him were creatures of both sexes and some that were doubtful. Almost without exception they were covered with ape-like hair and all who were not entirely naked wore only meagre strips of cloth. All were human in a disconcerting way, and a few (these were practically hairless and more sanely built) looked comparatively intelligent. Many of the creatures showed the marks of recent wounds, and Sanders could not avoid thinking of the shapes on the tables in the laboratory.

One of the men shouted some words at Sanders; they were oddly like the speech of the reptiles. Sanders did not attempt to answer, but leaned against the wall in a kind of detached wonder. He thought of those three men in the far reaches of

Time, of Juan who was to draw him back across the unguessable centuries, and of Juan's quest. There was surely much material about this reptile city, if he could only plumb its significance—this strangely distorted condition where lizard monstrosities dominated a grotesque humanity.

Sanders smiled bitterly. Was it likely that he would ever have an opportunity to present such material to Juan? Wasn't it more logical to suppose that these four walls and the patch of tropic sky would be all he would ever see for the rest of his life?

The day faded into twilight. A number of the smaller reptilian slaves flew overhead erratically and dropped strips of flesh into the pit. Sanders chewed a little, reflecting that he might as well accustom himself to the fare.

That night he slept uneasily on the cold ground, dreaming repeatedly that all was normal again, only to awaken to the hopeless reality.

Sitting in the shade of a wall in the sultry heat of the next morning, to pass the time, he began to fashion a crude loin-cloth from the furry strips of skin left from the previous night's meal. While he was thus occupied, the man who had addressed him on his advent in the pit squatted before him and again spoke to him, this time at sufficient length to convince Sanders that the tongue was identical with that of the reptiles, though with a minimum of the hissing inflections.

Sanders looked at the heavy-browed squat fellow with a sense of superiority; then he smiled—he himself was more ignorant than a baby in this new world. He made himself open to friendship to Nu-Az, as the man named himself, by a gift of the meat that was dropped in the pit that morning; and the companionship was established which, through the days that followed, gave him an insight of the new language.

When the first glimmerings of coherency were built up, Sanders found he had paved the way to some puzzling questions.

"Who are you?" Nu-Az wanted to know. "You don't belong in this pit."

"I don't understand," Sanders answered. "I don't belong in any pit."

Nu-Az drew back suspiciously, and Sanders realized that he was setting about things in the wrong way. He went on, stumbling over the new tongue taught him, and now he employed subterfuge.

"I can't remember anything. I had a fall and hurt my head. Perhaps if you told me a little, everything would come back."

Nu-Az hesitated, then accepted the story.

"You are in the pit of Lo-Lo, greatest of the evolutionary scientists. You and all of us are the subjects of his experiments. Each of the scientists has a pit like this; and there are many scientists in Luada."

"What is Luada?" Sanders asked.

"Your injury was bad," said Nu-Az. "Luada is the palace and domain of Luad, emperor of the ruling reptiles. I have been told that there are other palaces and other emperors across the great seas and forests, but of these things I am not certain."

"Where do your people live?"

This question puzzled Nu-Az. "These are my people," he said, indicating the beast-creatures about him. "These and those in the other pits."

"But where do the others of your race live?" Sanders pressed—"the people from whom you were captured?"

"There are no others. I was never captured."

"You mean that the reptiles have killed them all?"

"There are no others," Nu-Az repeated patiently. "The reptiles reign everywhere. We of the pits are the only ones of the new race. There are none outside. You and I and the others of the new pits were made by the scientists."

Cold seemed to creep up Sanders' spine; there were vague stirrings of unholy theories in his mind, and he thought of the puzzling, vacant factors in the evolutionary tree built up by men of the twentieth century. A great fear of this ghastly mystery of the past came over him, and he dared not question any fur-

ther. He looked across the pit at the colossal fern forest, at the shadowy green aisles of its inner depths.

"The jungle would be kinder to us than the reptiles," he said. "You and I could easily escape once we had scaled the wall."

Nu-Az was disturbed. "It is wrong to think of leaving the pits. The scientists have forbidden it. You know that we are to be their new slaves in place of the Zori, who cannot be had in sufficient numbers."

The Zori, thought Sanders, must be those smaller reptiles who waited on the female Luadans. Evidently there were not enough of them to do all the cloth-spinning and food-gathering that the Luadans required, so there was to be a new race of slaves.

Sanders said: "Yes, it may be wrong to leave the pits—but that's what I'm going to do. Will you come?"

A longing look crept into Nu-Az's eyes. "I will come," he said. "But there is a young girl in the next pit whom I want. She must come with us."

● They waited until nightfall, then Nu-Az climbed the wall. Sanders came more slowly, feeling precariously for the little crevices and protuberances; and when he was within reaching distance, Nu-Az leaned down and drew him up. They stood balanced on the top. The dark warmth of the forest stole about them, and they heard the stir of invisible bodies in its far reaches.

Nu-Az was uneasy and hesitant, but Sanders urged him on. They went along the wall a little way, then Nu-Az descended into the darkness of the next pit. Sanders watched. He heard movement, whispering voices, and on the jungle side of the wall there was a vast slithering sound that he could not define.

Nu-Az came back up the wall. At his side was a long-haired, black-browed female who clung to his arm in terror. She wore a strip of stiffening hide, which gave her a certain unconscious superiority over Nu-Az, who wore nothing.

The three crept farther along the wall to where a tangle of thick vines hung

within easy reach. "Here we can climb," said Nu-Az. "We can climb to the tops of the trees and there be safe." He thrust the girl, and she grasped the creepers and began to climb agilely, though doubtfully. Nu-Az followed, then Sanders.

CHAPTER VI

The Primeval Jungle

● They clambered higher and higher on the rubbery tendrils, and soon Sanders was envying the muscular energy of Nu-Az and the girl, who both climbed tirelessly and without effort. A hundred feet from the ground he had to loop his foot through a creeper and rest, and thereafter he repeated this at every fifty feet.

It was during these rests that he became aware to the full of the creeping, rustling life that seemed to fill this jungle. He saw nothing, but in the sliding and climbing of those invisible entities, he began to sense a greater peril than he had dreamed of. His ascent became faster.

The vines ended in a mat of parasitic upper growth that covered the tree-tops, and here he found Nu-Az and the girl lying on the vegetation with great leaves wrapped around them. He followed their example with the leaves, lay down in a yielding bed of creeper, and slept.

The next day and the ones that followed did not have much significance for Kane Sanders. He was aware that accompanied by Nu-Az and the girl Yzul, he wandered through the upper reaches of that gigantic semi-fern forest, eating peculiar nuts and fruits, drinking from little tree crevices where water gathered; but all this was just like an exotic nightmare—it was too far removed from reality to seriously impress itself upon him.

There were, of course, some things that left a terrific impression. Once he swung down from the upper foliage, climbing in microscopic smallness among the huge leaves and vines, and there below him he saw the ground and on it rolled two horned and armoured beasts in a shrieking death struggle. There was blood, and a hideous roaring, and an earthshaking

thunder as the monsters fell over and over each other, crushing the lesser vegetation in a welter of flying green.

Sanders watched, dry-mouthed, until one of the brutes broke away, shook itself, and lumbered out of sight; then he began to climb slowly back to the safety of the upper foliage. He realized now that much of the story of the dawn ages was lost irretrievably to palæontologists of the twentieth century; he had seen many restorations of the prehistoric giants of this era, but none even approached in size the battling creatures he had just witnessed.

When he regained the tangled garden of the tree-tops, he found Yzul in a state of panic and Nu-Az clumsily trying to comfort her. "She says something"—he waved his hands in inadequate descriptive gestures—"chased her."

"Don't worry," said Sanders. "All the monsters are on the ground—this is the only safe part of the jungle."

But he was wrong. That night, as he lay in a natural hammock of leaves and creepers, he awakened suddenly to hear a rustling and sliding; and as he lay there staring at the darkness, an unimaginably huge cylindrical body swayed and heaved across his vision, and two green slant-eyes turned briefly to look at him. Then it was all gone.

The next morning Sanders made himself a rough spear—a tough, six-foot barb that he tore from one of the thorny ferns. He saw too that Yzul and Nu-Az were similarly armed. He no longer felt that the tree-tops were safe.

Towards mid-day he set off to hunt for a yellow berry that was his favorite food. His search took him down to the middle terraces where the berries grew—one of many parasites in this jungle—from crevices in the giant trunks of the ferns. He swung downward with the easy grace of a trapeze artist, slipping down the vines like a spider on a thread. Where the foliage was less tangled, he walked fearlessly across great natural bridges from tree to tree, careless of the green depths below. On one of these bridges he went down on hand and knee to reach down for the yel-

low berries, and as he crouched there, he felt the great bough vibrate; and looking up he saw the Thing writhing along the aerial path toward him.

It was a snake. But it was two hundred feet in length, and its vast heaving body was six feet thick.

For one instant Sanders stared at the polished coils driving toward him, then he turned and ran. A few dozen paces, a glance back at the sliding monster, and he saw the futility of trying to outpace it. He swerved to the edge of the bough, leaped into space, caught a bunch of creepers and slid down with feverish speed. He looked up. The head of the incredible serpent peered down from the branch above. For a moment, the slanted green eyes watched the escaping prey, then the great spade-shaped head drove downward with the speed of an arrow.

Sanders' feet had touched another bough, but there was a mossy growth on it that gave underfoot and threw him on his face. When he regained his feet, the head was almost upon him and further flight was useless. He had no fear of poisonous venom, for such a monster as this had no need of subsidiary weapons, but one snap of those gigantic jaws would cut his body into two distinct pieces. He snatched his spear from his belt, and as the head rushed upon him, he drove the point into one of the emerald eyes. Then in the brief instant as the monster recoiled, he threw himself from the branch.

● For thirty feet he fell, then a matted mass of leaf and creeper caught him and held him. He lay still while a crashing turmoil raged overhead, moving not a muscle until that king of snakes ceased its frenzied lashing and raged away to another region of the forest.

There was quiet again. Sweating from heat and excitement, Sanders resumed his search for food, and when he had eaten, he hurried back to Nu-Az and Yzul and told them that all three must look for a new home.

They moved across the forest-top all the rest of that day and the whole of the

next day, putting as much distance as they could between them and the haunts of the giant serpent, though Sanders began to think that flight was useless and had an uneasy conviction that they were surviving in this jungle by luck more than anything else.

Once during their long travels they passed the fringe of the prehistoric wilderness and saw the white breakers and far-reaching blue of an ocean or great lake. For almost an hour, Sanders stood on the limb of a giant tree staring out over the glittering waters as though any moment he expected some weird craft of this forgotten age to hove into the shore; but none came, and soon something of the loneliness of those uncharted waters began to seep into him, and he turned his back on the roaring breakers and hurried back to the companionship of Nu-Az and Yzul. The old bitterness against Juan returned and hope was dying. He felt now that he was doomed to spend the rest of his days in this immemorial world of the past, naked and forever flying from perils whose extent he could not even guess at

He said to Nu-Az: "In the morning, we'll move on again."

Nu-Az agreed, but this wandering was not what he wanted. With Yzul always at his side, an idea of a place of permanency and stability was developing in him—the desire for a fixed shelter in a fixed locality.

Back across the forest leagues they ranged, dawn after dawn, night after night. Now Yzul began to complain about the restless, aimless roaming. "Stay with me one more day," said Sanders, who hated to part with his companions and found no less abhorrent the thought of settling down to watch their home-making. So they went on through the morning.

In the cool of the afternoon, he swung down to the lower terraces of the trees, and there he found something that froze him into keen-eyed stillness.

Plodding along a newly-beaten trail was a string of about twenty naked human

beings, each bearing a woven basket filled with freshly-picked fruit. For an instant Sanders was in doubt, then he guessed that these hairy creatures were from the pits of Luada. And this was soon confirmed, for behind the basket-bearers came two of the ruling reptiles, wings folded, walking on ungainly feet. Each carried a long club, but it was evident that they relied less on force than on the ingrained obedience of their slaves to keep things in order.

From the party's heavily laden state, Sanders deduced that it was on its way back to Luada, so he swung on ahead of them. Presently he glimpsed a patch of granite through the dense green ahead, and his fears were realized. He had wandered right back to the city of the reptiles!

He climbed to the utmost height of the forest, crawled on to a projecting limb of fern, and looked down on the domed roofs of Luada. Even as he watched, a number of the reptile slaves appeared on a high balcony with a great quantity of meat. With pieces of this in their claws they flew over the pits of the scientists, dropping their burdens with piercing cries. It was feeding time.

One of the slaves flew close to Sanders and stared directly at him, so that he drew back and climbed away in search of Nu-Az. He found him sprawling on a great leaf, basking in the sun, and swung lightly to his side.

"Luada is nearby," he said.

Nu-Az sprang to his feet; Yzul crept to her lord's side.

"We'd better move off again," Sanders counselled. "It wouldn't be safe to stay so close."

"Yes," agreed Nu-Az — then Yzul shrieked and pointed up.

Hovering above and a little behind them were three Luadans!

In a flash Sanders knew that the flying slave had seen him and informed its masters. "Down," he cried. "Down to the lower terraces!"

But it was too late. The reptiles alighted on the huge fern frond. One, robed with

grotesque richness and heavily jewelled, stood forward.

"We have found you. But Luad is merciful, and though the penalty for disobedience has always been death, I, Fulu, am charged to tell you that you will not be punished if you return to Luada with me without resistance."

Sanders followed the garbled words with difficulty. "We're not going back."

"You will come," said Fulu, "and for your resistance you will warrant death." He signed to his companions. They darted forward with true reptile swiftness, seized Nu-Az and Yzul, and bore them struggling away in the direction of Luada.

Fulu advanced on Sanders. "Back," said the latter, and he began to retreat.

"Do not try to escape," Fulu commanded. "You are a strange specimen; you exhibit new traits of disobedience for which I cannot find an explanation; and I intend to have you thoroughly examined when I have you back in Luada. Come willingly. I do not want you killed. Look, the other two have been taken and are even now entering Luada—it is foolish for you to resist."

"I'm never going back," said Sanders.

"You shall!" Fulu cried, and sprang with wings and claws extended.

Two things were confusingly synchronized: Sanders saw the crimson-eyed lizard leap toward him; at the same instant he felt a dizziness and the air about him was tinted with blue, crackling sparks. He felt the claw of Fulu fasten about his wrist, then he lost consciousness.

● He was lying stretched on a cold table.

In his ears was the dying hum of great machinery, the fading of immense power. Bending over him were three faces—and suddenly he remembered and understood.

The faces were those of Carlyle, Juan, and Takashai.

And most concrete reminder of all that had happened—clutched about his arm was the severed claw of Fulu!

"You are back," said Takashai, "and the experiment is a success."

"Yes," Sanders said with a ghost of a smile. "A success."

CHAPTER VII

Man from Reptile

● When Sanders finished his story, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his borrowed trousers and slipped his legs back to the floor.

"You don't believe me?" he asked.

I had been staring wide-eyed at him. "Of course," I protested. "Yes, of course. But there's so much—"

"Yes," he interrupted; "there's a lot unexplained—you want to ask questions. Well, go ahead."

I thought over the many things that were puzzling me, then decided to start at the beginning.

"You travelled in time?"

"Yes. Or better, time rates were altered for me. Juan told me something about it, and I'll try to give you what I can remember.

"Time is not a constant. Juan told me about a practical experiment performed about fifteen years ago, which definitely proves this. You may not know it, but the plain sodium atom is a better clock than you can buy in any shop; for, when its electrons are excited, it emits electromagnetic waves at a frequency of something like $509\frac{1}{2}$ millions of vibrations per second—and this is the same for any sodium atom, no matter what peculiarities of condition and surrounding it is subjected to.

"Now, there's lots of vaporized sodium in the chromosphere of the sun, and spectroscopic analysis of this shows that its atoms vibrate at a slower rate than the earth atom. In other words, time—as a measurement of physical change—passes more slowly on the sun.

"That then was Juan's basic principle; time is not a constant. Then he went further to discover what time really is a product of, and the ready solution was that the variation in solar- and earth-time can be accounted for by difference in mass. In other words, in the presence of a gravitational field greater than the earth's,

time passes more slowly. Similarly you can conceive of time travelling faster on a midget world."

I said: "I still don't understand how Juan picked you out of a whole vast world of sea and jungle."

"Juan didn't pick me out—that part was practically automatic. You see, I and my clothes were the only foreign elements, the only things that didn't *belong*, at that particular world-point."

"How—" I began.

"Wait. Imagine Juan's laboratory. It is fifteen minutes after my departure into the Mesozoic. Juan is ready to bring about my return. He has calculated—from time and gravitational-potential relationships between earth and sun, and from the power of the gravity field he could create without collapsing space—that my journey to the past would occupy some three hours. But once having dispatched me, he is no longer concerned with that part of my trip. He chooses a point in the world-line—which is the path of a body through both space and time—a point a month in advance of the one he sent me to. Then he creates two more gravitational fields and projects the inner one to that point.

● "There it contacted with me, and within its deadening influence, time passed slowly, while outside, as it were, whole centuries of earth-time rolled by, ultimately reaching 1935 and Juan's laboratory. If I had been conscious and watching a clock, it would have been only four hours journey to me."

"Four?" I asked. "Why not three, the same as before?"

"That had Juan puzzled a little. He did suggest that part of the gravitational field must have fastened itself on my clothes somewhere in Luada—thus lessening the power of my field and stretching the trip to four hours. I wonder where those clothes are now? The miniature field may yet land them in the laboratory in a day or two; or, since Juan has relinquished control, they probably finished up in the Ice Age!"

"And to think that the last remnants of that almost unimaginable reptile civilization must have long ago vanished from the earth!" I said.

"Not everything," Sanders reminded me. "Remember the claw of Fulu, who must consider himself lucky that he didn't have his head taken off by the field Anyhow, that's the wrong way to look at it. It's a queer thing—past, present, and future—all seeming to exist at once, like—like a reel of movie film unrolled along a road. Only by moving along the film do you get the illusion of movement in it and the idea of time. Yet past, present, and future are all there at once, though the people in the film have to follow the path set out for them. If only those people could free themselves from the film—though of course they're only images—they'd have the whole panorama of Time open for their inspection. I think it was something like that with me."

"There's something else," I said. "Those reptiles were intelligent—like human beings."

"Like human beings," Sanders repeated, as though the words held some secret meaning. "Yes; Juan thinks that the civilization of Luada was Nature's last try at giving the reptiles the sceptre of world supremacy. You know, as far as has been learned, the reptiles were Nature's first big attempt at populating the earth—but they were failing, so Nature had one last fling and evolved the reptiles, for it was more likely that a race of home- and tribe-makers would survive. One of the prime essentials of survival is tribe-making, and that's why the ants may one day rule this planet. But when the Luadans started to play about in their laboratories, they undid all Nature's plans and unconsciously brought about their own downfall."

"It's terrific," I said, "just to think of it."

Sanders shook his head. "Just one of the many strange epochs that must lie hidden in Earth's history."

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THE REIGN OF THE REPTILES

By A. Connell

(Continued from page 275)

"By the way," I asked, "did you discover where Nu-Az and Yzul and those others *did* come from?"

Sanders sprang up angrily. "My God! Have you missed the whole meaning—the whole truth of the thing? Don't you remember Nu-Az's words: 'and we were made by the Luadans.'? Now do you understand? *The human race was created in the Luadan laboratories!*"

"That's pure madness," I said, controlling myself with difficulty at the grotesque statement. "I'll believe everything else. But that—never."

Sanders sat down and stared somberly at the wall. "Why not? The human race—the apes—and Heaven knows what else! The Luadans and their laboratory explain a lot of things—I can see them meddling, meddling, everlastingly meddling with life—sending out those puzzling blind alleys and false shoots in the evolutionary tree—starting those dim legends of serpents who ruled—of the great Nagas"

"It's insane," I said. "If I were to believe you, then I couldn't have a little lizard cross my path without wanting to shut my eyes and run. Besides, your evolutionists and palæontologists state that Man appeared long after the last of the reptiles."

"No," said Sanders. "There was never any definiteness of time. And I was on the last fringe of the Mesozoic where all was changed." He was talking half to himself. "Man and Apes both from the reptiles—Darwin and others knew this, but the bridging of the gap between reptile and mammal seemed insurmountable. The Luadans hold the key."

"They couldn't create life," I said in an effort to make him see reason.

"Why? Life is only a chemical curiosity. And anyhow, that isn't the solution

as Juan sees it. The scientists of Luada experimented *with germ-cells from their own bodies*—a warped and planned ectogenesis—and man and his evolution were started. So you see, Juan isn't so far from the common theory of Man's descent from the reptiles. He's just filled in the main link."

"I refuse to believe," I said. "It's too fantastic—it's revolting. You were misled."

"I hope to God I was—though it all fits in with what Juan had anticipated before the experiment."

"That reminds me," I said suddenly. "Those men—you must know where they are. I'll call police headquarters and have them taken for—"

"No," Sanders said, smiling wanly at my excitement, "you won't do anything like that. You see, I've made arrangements. Tomorrow I'm going back to the fern-jungle and Luada—to learn the truth once and for all."

● And even as he promised me that night, so he went; and as I write the conclusion to this, my mind toys with Sanders' incredible theories—Reptiles—man—and next the insects.

And who knows what non-protoplasmic cycles of malevolent monstrosities shambled in the primal ooze and vapor of a coalescing Earth, aeons before Nature even thought of the reptiles? And who can even guess at what anthropomorphic shapes will straddle the deathless night of this planet when our sun is an ember and reptile, man, and insect are all a forgotten dream?

Sometimes, in moments of religious doubt, I envy Sanders, for it is in his power to know these things—from beginning to end, one and all, indisputably.