

Weird Tales

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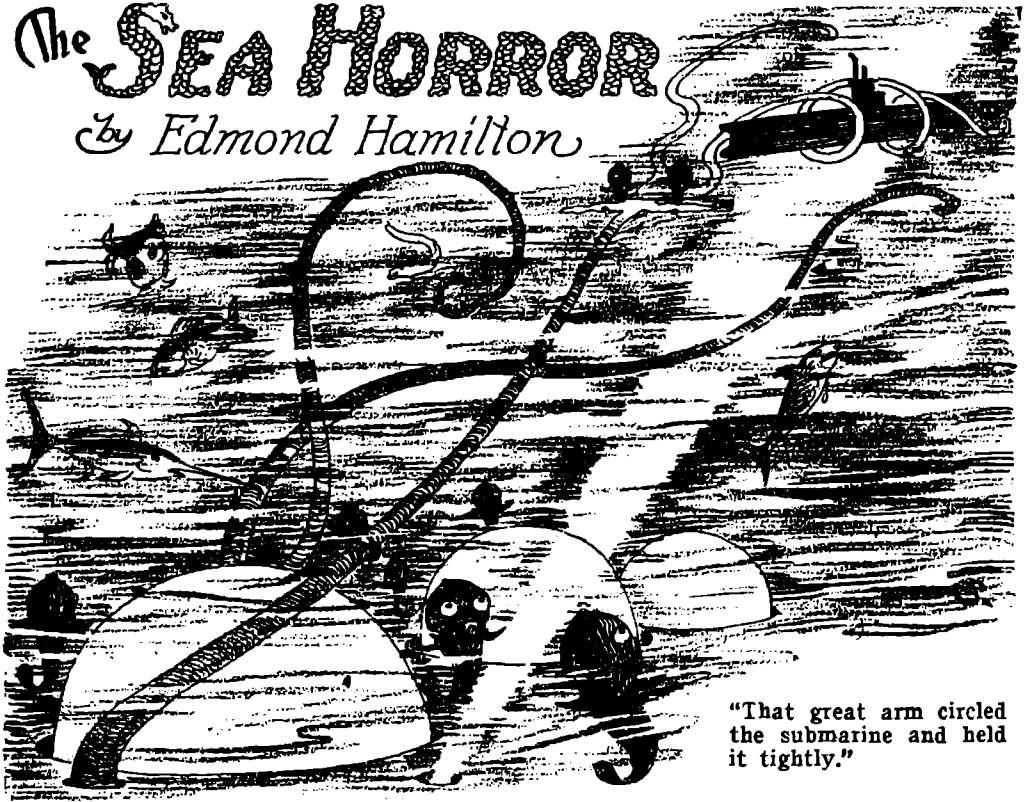
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The SEA HORROR

by Edmond Hamilton



"That great arm circled the submarine and held it tightly."

IT IS only now, when we know all the story, that we see at last how narrow was our escape, that we understand at last the power and the dread of that dark horror that rose to overwhelm an unsuspecting world. From the first sailing of the Clinton expedition to that last flaming hour of tremendous combat when the destiny of a planet was settled forever, we can follow the thing now, and can recognize what vast and unseen forces they were that wove around our world the net of a terrible doom. For it is only now, when the horror has passed over us, that we can understand that horror from its beginning.

It is with Clinton himself that the beginning lies, and with the expedition which bore his name. Dr. Herbert Clinton, holder of the chair of marine zoology at the University of London, was generally conceded to be the foremost expert on deep-sea life in all the British Isles. For a

score of years, indeed, his fame had risen steadily as a result of his additions to scientific knowledge. He had been the one to prove first the connection between the absence of ultra-violet rays and the strange phosphorescence of certain forms of bathic life. He had, in his famous Indian Ocean trawlings, established the significance of the quantities of foraminiferal ooze found on the scarps of that sea's bottom. And he it was who had annihilated for all time the long-disputed Kempner-Stoll theory by his brilliant new classification of ascidian forms.

Even to the general public the slender, gray-haired scientist with the keen gray eyes was a well-known figure, for it was his famous investigations into the forms of deep-sea creatures which had made possible the building of the new K-type submarines. These submarines, which had now been adopted by practically all nations, were built upon a new pres-

sure-resistance principle evolved by Dr. Clinton from his investigations, and could venture to depths and pressures impossible to the undersea boats of war and post-war types. Some of them, indeed, had descended to depths of a mile and more without experiencing injury, and it was Clinton's contention that they were in reality capable of depths of three miles and more. To many, at first, that contention seemed only a somewhat boastful exaggeration on his part, but when the announcement of the Clinton expedition made it known that one of these submarines was to be used by that enterprise, the scientist's sincerity was conceded.

It was early in December that the expedition was first announced, by Clinton himself, from the University of London offices. He had long desired, he stated, to investigate the peculiar forms of deep-sea life to be found in the great Nelsen Deeps. These deeps, lying in the Atlantic almost half-way between Ireland and Newfoundland, had been but little explored by oceanographers, due to their great extent and depth, the latter averaging somewhat more than three miles. Trawls used over these great deeps could accomplish but little, but they had brought up some curious variations of common bathic forms, and in one case had brought up an extraordinary portion of a skeleton, or reticulation of bones, that was quite unlike that of any deep-sea form known to zoologists. It was Clinton's hope, therefore, that a more thorough exploration of these great deeps might reveal forms as yet unknown to science, and for such an exploration he planned to use, he announced, one of the new K-type submarines which he himself had helped to design, and one of which had been specially equipped and placed at his disposal by a grateful Admiralty Board.

The submarine provided, the *K-16*, had a cruising radius which made a mother-ship unnecessary, and was

large enough to contain all of the necessary trawling apparatus, storage-tanks and laboratories, as well as the expedition's personnel. The members of the latter, it was announced, would be drawn almost entirely from the university's own scientific faculty, including besides Dr. Clinton, Dr. Randall Lewis, an expert on ichthyological and conchological forms; Professor Ernest Stevens, a young instructor of biology and friend of Clinton's; two laboratory technicians from the university's laboratories; and a half-dozen assistants, such as photographers, experienced trawlers, and the like.

It was Clinton's plan to proceed from London directly toward the northern boundary of the Nelsen Deeps, at an approximate latitude of 57° north, and from there work his way down to their lower boundary six hundred miles to the south, making free use of the submarine's trawls, and descending for detailed investigations at any promising spot; since, as he stated, his calculations showed the submarine to be easily capable of reaching the three-mile depth. Besides its regulation torpedo tubes and deck-guns, the *K-16* had been equipped with powerful undersea searchlights capable of dispelling the darkness of the lower depths, while small port-holes of immensely thick reinforced glass had been set in the sides of its control room, as in all the new-type submarines, making a survey of the surrounding waters possible. Communication with the expedition's headquarters at London was assured by its powerful radio apparatus. It was Clinton's hope, therefore, that by making use of all this equipment an extensive and yet thorough exploration of the great deeps could be carried out in a comparatively short time.

Late in April, therefore, the long, glistening steel submarine swept down the Thames and out to the open sea, with the members of the expedition

and two or three of its naval crew grouped on its low-railed deck. At the last moment the expedition's limited personnel had been limited still further by the loss of Ernest Stevens, the young biology instructor who was to have been of it. Young Stevens, on the day before that of sailing, had had the misfortune to twist his ankle badly as he ran down the steps of one of the university buildings, and as the crowded submarine was obviously no place for a disabled man, he was forced to watch it sail without him, contenting himself, during the following days, by following the expedition's progress through the radio reports received from it by the university station.

FOR the first few days, while the *K-16* crept out of the English Channel and into the broad Atlantic, the messages from it were for the main part but routine reports of progress. The submarine was following a northwestern course toward the upper boundary of the Nelsen Deep, and would, Clinton reported, begin its surveys at once upon reaching that objective. For several days thereafter the *K-16*'s messages to the university station at London gave only its position and progress, and it was not until May 5th that a brief report from the submarine stated that it had reached the desired latitude and was now forging slowly southward on the surface, the expedition's members already busy with their trawls and deck-winch.

For the next three days the messages from the *K-16* were reports of the work accomplished with the trawls. In those days, so Clinton reported, no less than a dozen new forms had already been brought up and classified. An entirely new species of the *Modiola vulgaris* was, he stated, probably the most important of their finds so far, but besides this a half-dozen variations of common malacoapterygii and acanthopterygii

forms had been obtained and examined. The submarine, Clinton added, was still forging south, working all her trawls, and as yet no descents had been attempted.

On the next day, the 9th, there came a further message in which Clinton reported the bringing up of several other notable variations from classified forms, this time of the dibranchiate and tetrabranchiate cephalopods. He stressed, in this report, the difficulty experienced in using the trawls at the great depths over which the submarine was forging, and added that they had been further hampered by the loss, on the preceding day, of one of their trawls, which, as he said, "was lost in a rather puzzling manner which none of us is able to explain." With this rather ambiguous phrase the message of the 9th concluded, and on the next day no word whatever from the *K-16* was received by the university station. Then, late on the morning of the 11th, there came that short and enigmatic message which was to make Clinton and his expedition the center of a sudden storm of speculation and discussion.

The message itself, received just before noon on the 11th, was a quite coherent one, yet seemed at the same time a quite crazy one. It read:

Either we are all mad, or we have made the greatest discovery ever made. One of our trawls has brought up a thing so incredible, so unbelievable, that our minds refuse to credit it though it lies before our eyes. I will not expose this expedition to the derision of the world by telling what we have found until we learn more, and for that reason we are making a descent within the next half-hour which will tell us all. When you hear from us again we shall either have made the greatest discovery ever made by men, or shall know ourselves the victims of some incomprehensible delusion.

CLINTON.

Considering that message, it is hardly surprising that the world found it interesting, and that within the next few hours the newspaper-reading public developed a sudden interest in the

scientific expedition of whose existence it had hardly been aware until then. Through the afternoon of the 11th, in a hundred radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic, press-writers and scientists alike crowded into the little receiving-rooms to wait for the first news from Clinton and his expedition. And in the university station at London, Stevens and Clinton's other friends and associates waited tensely for that news.

Through the long afternoon of that long spring day they waited, and the world waited, but still there came no word. Night fell, but a veil of silence had dropped upon the submarine, and when morning came it found Stevens and his friends still waiting in vain by the silent impersonal instruments. Through all that night the calls of a score of stations to the submarine had gone unheeded, and when the morning newspapers gave to the public the first news of the *K-16's* long silence, they stated openly that some mishap or disaster must have overtaken the submarine. Only young Stevens and his friends remained steadfast in their optimism, and even they began to doubt as the 12th passed and still no message came. By night it was universally believed that the submarine had met disaster, and out on the Atlantic a half-dozen steamers were heading toward the spot where it had last reported its position.

By the morning of the 13th the public was informed through the early editions that the ships rushing to the submarine's aid had been unable to find any trace of it whatever, though they had circled repeatedly over the spot. By that time, too, it was pointed out that the submarine's air-supply would be getting very low, even if it still remained intact beneath the surface. The general opinion, though, by then, was that Clinton in over-confidence had ventured to too great a depth in the submarine, and that it had been crushed by the terrific pressure. Even at the univer-

sity it was tacitly conceded that this must be the case.

Concerning the strange last message from the *K-16* there was still discussion, but even that was capable of more than one explanation. It was pointed out that Clinton was an ardent zoologist, and that the discovery of some entirely new form might have caused the exaggerated language of his message. Stevens, who knew the calm and precise mentality of his superior rather better than that, would not believe in such an explanation, but was unable to devise a better one to fit that sensational last report. It was the general belief, therefore, that in his excitement over some new discovery Clinton had ordered his submarine to a depth too great, and had met disaster and death there beneath the terrific pressure of the waters. Certainly, whatever its defects, there was no other theory that fitted the known facts so well.

Thus, in a few days, the brief sensation of Clinton and his ill-starred expedition was disposed of. It was useless, of course, to attempt to locate or raise the missing submarine at that terrific depth, and no such suggestion was ever made. Even Stevens and his friends were forced to admit, as the days went by, that there seemed no further thing to be done, nothing by which more might be learned of the hapless expedition's fate. The British and American newspapers combined to advise caution in over-estimating the capacities of the new-type submarines, but except for that, save in scientific circles, the loss of one of the greatest living scientists excited no particular attention. The world deplored the loss, indeed, but turned the moment after to consideration of its own affairs. Certainly, as the days and weeks went by, it never dreamed of the true importance of the strange sensation that had flamed so briefly from the headlines, nor ever guessed the existence of the calm and gigantic plans and forces of which that sensa-

tion was but an incident, and which were rising even then to the destruction of man and all man's world.

2

IT WAS on the fourth day of August, just three months after the passing of Clinton and his expedition, that the first news of the approaching terror was given to the world. That first news was in the form of a dispatch from the government oceanographic station at Portsmouth, in which it was stated that during the last three days the level of the sea had risen almost as many feet. Unnaturally high tides had been lashing the coasts of England and of the world during those days, the message stated, and a study of them had disclosed the astounding and unexplainable rise which had taken place. The dispatch added that the rise was a world-wide and not a local one, since corroborative reports of it had been received from associated oceanographic stations at New York, Yokohama, Sydney and Calcutta.

It is not wonderful that that brief first message aroused in the world of science, and even in the world of everyday, a very intense interest and curiosity. Published as it was in all the London journals on the evening of the fourth, and by them transmitted by wire and wireless to the world at large, it soon eclipsed even the latest atrocious murder as a theme of general discussion. For if there is one thing considered constant in this changing world of ours, it is the level of the sea. All our heights and depths are compared to and computed from it, so unchanging do we esteem it; since though great tides may come and go the level of the sea itself seems never to change, so delicately balanced are the combined processes of evaporation and condensation which deplete and replenish it. And for this hitherto unchanging level to rise suddenly for almost three feet, in as

many days, was a phenomenon of intense interest and mystery.

Scientists, indeed, when confronted with accounts of what had taken place, could only shake their heads in somewhat helpless perplexity. No ordinary conditions, of course, could account for such a tremendous and unprecedented rise as this. They ventured the suggestion, though, that some great subterranean upheaval or earthquake might have forced up the bed of the ocean in some spot to such a distance as to heighten the level of the waters. If such an upheaval had taken place in some central spot, they pointed out, such as the Arctic or Antarctic regions, it might well have caused such a great rise as this in the level of all the sea. They were unable, however, to explain the fact that during the last few weeks no such upheaval or quake whatever had been recorded by the seismographs of the world.

Unchecked by any positive knowledge as to the thing's cause, therefore, it could be argued and discussed during the next day or two with zest, and many and fantastic were the explanations that were advanced. The great space devoted to it by the newspapers had aroused the public's fickle interest, and during the next two days the sea and the great tides which were rolling in from it against the coasts of all the world became the center of a world-wide interest. In Sussex and in Anglesey, in Maine and in California, in Korea as in Ceylon, there were everywhere large groups of interested spectators gathered along cliff and sea-wall and beach, to watch those great green tides shattering themselves against the shore, and to speculate idly on the subject of general interest. In England and the Continent, as well as in America, special excursion trains were run to many beaches, and the proprietors of resorts reaped a sudden and unexpected harvest.

It was true that here and there some damage had been done by the rising of the waters, and by the great, unnatural tides, but it was not of a magnitude large enough to arouse attention. A row of bathing-machines wrecked, a road or sea-wall washed away, a beached boat or two swept out to sea—such events as these could hardly seem important to the mass of people in comparison to the strange conditions which had caused them. It was also true that the lot of ships at sea had become suddenly very arduous, due to the great seas running, and that large numbers of the smaller boats had been forced to remain in port until the great tides abated, yet even this made no impression save on that small portion of the world's population which follows the sea. The larger part of the public chose, during those two days, to regard this strange manifestation as a spectacle rather designed for its own entertainment and interest. On the evening of the second day, though, the 6th, there came that which suddenly swept away this attitude.

This was the second calm report from the Portsmouth station, given to the waiting newspapers late on the afternoon of the 6th. Within an hour it had flashed along the telegraph keys and wires, and had fallen into type and was leaping from the presses in London, and in New York, too, and in cities around the whole earth's girdle. And with the publication of that message the whole matter suddenly lost its lighter aspects, and the world that had theorized and laughed and joked concerning it suddenly sobered, and looked up with startled eyes. For the Portsmouth station's second report stated that the rise already noted had not stopped but was apparently still continuing at the same steady and extraordinary rate, having risen some two feet further during the ensuing two days.

"While this extraordinary rise is purely a temporary one, of course,"

said the report, "it seems advisable that preparations be made for the evacuation of whatever regions or sections lie at a height of less than ten feet above the former standard sea-level." It was this calm advice that sent a sudden chill across the peoples of the earth, so that for the first time there rose the thought of peril in connection with the thing. All during the next day, while the day and night slid around the world in endless alternation, men spoke of the thing with knitted brows and troubled eyes, and in Edinburgh and Chicago and Honolulu and Bombay said to each other, as though with a strange new thought, "If this thing—this rise—keeps on, it's going to be a bad thing, d'ye know?" It was as though that thought had stridden across the world like some giant specter of fear, to still with lifted ghostly hand the laughter which the matter had aroused at first.

But in one spot of earth men neither laughed nor spoke concerning it, but labored madly to stem the peril which they saw rising swift to overwhelm them and theirs. An observer hanging high over Holland on that fateful 6th would have made out, all along the coasts of that sunken little land, a desperate and unceasing activity, as of the efforts of some swarming insects to repair a breach in their tiny fortifications. For the last few days, indeed, the rising sea had been lashing with all the power of its tremendous tides against the dikes which alone protected the sunken little land from the fury of the ocean. Inch by inch that land had been won from the ocean's power, and walled with the thick dikes which until now had resisted all the ocean's blows; but thick as they were their height was not great, and toward their tops the rising waters had been steadily clawing during the last few days.

As sunset of that day gleamed blood-red in the west the anxious watchers saw that even the parapets of hastily filled sandbags which they

had placed upon their dikes were giving beneath the thunderous tides, and shifting and dissolving. Valiantly they labored, as men will do for their life and land, but before midnight of that night through a score of great breaches the long-repressed seas were rushing in upon the little land in ravening, titanic fury, and church bells were ringing wildly across the countryside and beacon fires blazing red, while roads and canals were choked with hordes of panic-driven fugitives fleeing blindly through the darkness from the terror that leaped upon them from behind. And when at last sunrise gleamed golden over the body-choked waters and over the flooded meadows and spires of cities, word had been flashed to the world that more than half of Holland was under water, its cities buried and populations drowned by the vast, inrushing floods.

With that word the strained anxiety of the world dissolved suddenly into stark fear. It was only the most emphatic messages of reassurance on the part of the newspapers and agencies of public information that prevented a great panic on that morning. They admitted that the disaster had occurred, but pointed out that it had been caused by the breaking of the dikes, as similar disasters had been caused before. No such thing could occur elsewhere, they stated, and assured the public that the rise in the sea's level was only temporary, caused by the subterranean upheaval which had been mentioned by the scientists. Not only would the rise not continue, they predicted, but it would be seen when the measurements were made public that evening that a positive lowering of the waters had taken place.

WITH such assertions the rising panic of the earth's people was calmed a little on that morning, but the foreboding of dread to come increased as the extra editions poured

from the presses that day hour-by-hour chronicles of further disaster. Parts of Lancaster and Norfolk were already flooded, they learned, their inhabitants fleeing by every road to higher ground. Louisiana and the lower valley of the Mississippi were under water, and the basin of the Amazon was a maze of flooded jungles. Fishing villages on the Chinese and Japanese coasts had been swept away with great loss of life by the vast tides of the Pacific, the plantations of lower Malaya had become salt swamps, and along the coastlines of India and Africa the waves were battering the shore with terrific fury. Scores of ships at sea were known to have foundered, sending out despairing calls for help until the last, while others making for the nearest harbor had been caught by the great tides and flung against cliffs and shoals to be pounded into unrecognizable wreckage.

Yet still, through the long hours of that tense day, the authorities and newspapers combined to allay the rising panic. These conditions were but temporary, they repeated, could be but temporary. The sea had risen almost a half-dozen feet during the last few days, due to certain extraordinary conditions, but it would rise no higher, *could* rise no higher. When the report from the oceanographic stations came, that would be seen. Until then they implored the public not to yield to the excitement of alarmists. So through all that day the peoples of England, and of America, and of all the world, remained tensely quiet, waiting, waiting for the word that would either explode their fears or spell their doom. And at last, late that evening, the word they awaited came.

"The extraordinary and unprecedented rise of the sea's level," said the general report issued from the Portsmouth and associated oceanographic stations, "has not subsided during the last twenty-four hours, but

on the contrary has increased approximately a foot more, indicating that this rise, whatever may be its cause, is still continuing at the same rate as when first observed. It is impossible to predict when the rise will cease, knowing as we do nothing of its cause, and it will be also impossible to issue further reports from these stations, since the rise of the waters makes their abandonment necessary. Our only suggestion is that the world's peoples make their way toward the highest grounds near them, since it is clearly evident that within a few more days this continuing rise will result in the flooding of the earth's surface to an unpredictable depth and extent."

That brief, calm message, the last to be sent out by the oceanographic stations, let loose upon the world such a hurricane of panic as it had never known before. We look back, now, upon the night that followed it as one of the most terrible in the history of humanity, a night in which death and fear stalked together across the world like gigantic twin destroyers. For in all the cities of the world, that night, were such scenes, such rushing crowds and shouting men and flaring lights, as no man had ever seen before.

In London the great Thames was already flooding over its embankments into the great basin in which the city lay. The power-plants that lit the great city were failing one by one as the rising waters reached them, section after section snapping into sudden darkness, while away to the west the soaring red flames of a great fire cast a quivering crimson glow across the doomed and drowning metropolis. Beneath that ghastly light, through the swift-running streets, the panic-driven mobs fought and splashed their way toward the nearest hills, toward the open country, toward safety. Crowded automobiles whirled through those streets in blind disregard of those whom they ran down. Ships all along the flooded harbor stood out to sea, preferring rather to face the

great waves and mountainous tides than to be smashed helplessly against their moorings. Airplanes high above buzzed unceasingly through the night, to north and south and east, to wherever was higher ground.

And in New York, too, the seas were lapping now against the great buildings that seemed to tower up in splendid disdain of the waters clawing at their bases. There, too, were flooded streets, and rushing, fear-mad mobs, and fierce men with burning eyes who bawled at street corners of the wrath of the Lord and of the returning deluge. Already immense crowds had collected on the heights of the island's northern part, and from there, and from the other heights westward, they watched with awe the sweeping seas that rolled and broke now across the squares and parks and avenues of the proudest city in the world. And by then, too, the populations of Boston, and Philadelphia, and San Francisco and Seattle were fleeing inland by every road, and of New Orleans there remained visible only the roofs of flooded buildings.

Everywhere on earth, in those hours, men were turning away from the coasts, away from the vast, ravaging seas that were hurling themselves over the land, and were pushing inland toward higher ground, toward the Alps and the Appalachians, toward the Pyrenees and the Andes, toward the Himalayas and the Rockies. And even as they fled, news was flashing along the last remaining lines of communication of great tidal waves that had wiped away life in the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands, of the waters of the China and Yellow Seas black with the bodies of drowned men, of the fear that had lit India red with the torch of terror, that had prostrated black and howling hordes along flooded African coasts, that had made of a hundred European cities infernos of roaring panic. For through all of earth's five continents, that night, the roads leading inland

were the scene of the stampede of humanity.

Through the darkness of that dread night they went, vast, unorganized mobs that fled blindly on, pushing and striking and trampling, and as they fled the last organizations of men were slipping and crushing, knocked down like children's houses of blocks by the giant hand of fear. It was the flood, the ever-feared deluge of all the legends of men, the horror that was springing upon all the earth. Men prayed and fought and sobbed and killed themselves in their raving fear, that night, but ever the remorseless waters rose higher, and higher, and higher. Up and up they came, slowly, steadily, surely, up toward the annihilation of man and the age-old reign of man, up toward the overwhelming of a world.

3

YOUNG Ernest Stevens, on that fateful night of the 7th which saw the climax of the world's fear, had found himself in the vicinity of Piccadilly when the first rush of the panic began. He had seen for himself the sudden rise of the waters of the Thames which had taken place during the preceding few days, and had also read the newspaper accounts of the extraordinary and unexplainable heightening of the sea's level, but was still so much centered on the strange passing of Clinton and his expedition as to give the subject of general interest but small attention. On this night, however, when the publication of that epochal last message from the Portsmouth station sent the first crowds hastening through the streets, Stevens realized his own position and started off across the city toward his lodgings.

Before he had gone far the first great mobs were rushing through the streets, beginning the vast exodus from the city, and disrupting all the ordinary means of transportation. Already, too, salt floods were creeping

through the streets, adding to the panic of the crowds, and as Stevens walked on, the lights of the city around him were beginning to fail, fanning the flames of fear higher in the already panic-mad crowds. By the time Stevens finally stumbled up the steps of his lodging-house, the street on which it stood was wholly dark, and covered by a few inches of water through which the fugitives along its length were splashing.

He found the house itself deserted, and going to his own rooms quickly gathered the most necessary of his belongings into a small bundle, which he formed into a rough knapsack or pack. This done he turned toward the door, then paused a moment at the window. Before him stretched away the roofs and steeples of the vast city, all their sparkling lights vanished now and darkened. From the west, though, came a flickering red light, and he could see there a mighty up-rush of flames. The street outside, the waters in it slowly rising, was alive with hurrying figures, many with great bundles or barrows, all pressing on to escape from the city, and shouting hoarsely to one another.

Stevens turned toward the door, but as he did so he stopped suddenly short. The door had swung open, and in its opening stood a man, a dark, slender figure. The red glow of light from the window fell full upon his face, and as Stevens saw it he cried out.

"Clinton!" he cried. "Good God! —Clinton!"

The other came swiftly toward him, and grasped his arm. "I thought I might find you here, Stevens," he said, quietly. "It was a thousand-to-one chance, but I came."

Stevens stumbled with him to the red-lit window, like a man in a dream. "Clinton!" he exclaimed again. "Where in God's name have you been, while this horror has been rising on the world? When did you come back?"

Clinton pushed him back into the chair by the window, and silenced his questions with an upraised hand. "I came back but a few hours ago, Stevens," he said, "and I came here for you because I sail again in an hour, and want you with me."

"Sail?" repeated Stevens, stupefied. "To where?"

"To the bottom of the Atlantic," said Clinton, calmly.

As the younger man stared at him he dropped into a chair beside him. "To the bottom of the Atlantic," he repeated, his voice suddenly pregnant with dread knowledge, "where I have been for weeks, where there is a secret which I first of all men discovered, where the work of untold ages is whirling now to its climax and sending this mighty flood rolling out to drown our world!"

He was silent a moment, gazing out over the red-lit city while Stevens stared at him in stunned amazement, and then went on. "You were to have been of our expedition, Stevens, and you know what my plans were. You know how we sailed in our submarine to penetrate the deeps that had never yet been penetrated by man. Out of the English Channel, out into the open Atlantic we sailed, west and northwest, until we had reached at last the northern boundary of the Nelsen Deep. And there our work began.

"I need not tell you of that work, for our own radio reports recorded the main features of it. We headed slowly southward, on the surface, using our trawls, and during the next three days we were amazed at the richness of the fields beneath us, the profusion of new forms and variations of old ones that our trawls brought up. It was late on the fourth day that we lost one of our trawls, as I reported. We drew up the steel cable, to find that it had been severed near its end, and though we were certain, of course, that it had broken when the trawl caught on a snag, it

was no ragged break but a clean, sharp cut, as though done by giant shears. That it was which touched us first with a sense of mystery and awe. Around us was only the vast empty panorama of sea and sky, but beneath us were three miles and more of lightless waters, a vast gulf unpenetrated since the world's birth by man or the science of man. We worked on, southward, feeling as though under some strange spell. And then, shattering that spell, came the thing which one of our trawls brought up on the morning of the fifth day, the 11th.

"It was not so much *in* the trawl as *on* it, hanging from a corner as though caught and brought up by the ascending trawl. It was a machine, or part of a machine, a thing of shining metal about a foot in each dimension. There was a framework of heavy metal rods, three of them; inside were a chain of little gears and six slender tubes of what seemed glass, with inside of each a red wire or thread. The framework's three thick pillars were broken off sharp at the bottom, as though the thing had been ripped by the trawl from some larger machine, yet in itself the thing was a complete mystery. It was totally unlike anything we had ever seen, the shining metal was a wholly unfamiliar one, and the glasslike tubes, we found, were not glass but a transparent metal of some sort. The thing was constructed, too, with a strength and heaviness unusual in so small a mechanism. No one on earth would construct it thus heavily; but suppose it had been actually constructed at the sea's bottom from whence we had dragged it, to resist the tremendous pressures there? What mysteries could be lurking in the three miles of water below us?

"There was but one thing to do, to descend in the submarine for further exploration, and after sending off a last message in which I hinted of our discovery, without telling more lest the whole thing prove a hoax, we began excited preparations for the

descent. The deck-fittings were dismantled, the heavy conning-tower doors clanged shut, and a moment later the submarine's electric motors began to hum and we slanted downward into the green waters, using both ballast-tanks and diving-planes for our descent, and moving downward in a great spiral.

“GAZING through the little port-holes in the control room, Dr. Lewis, Captain Evans, the submarine's commander, and I watched the sunlit waters outside darkening as we sank downward. In those waters there turned and flashed the shoals of surface fishes, but as we dropped on, these disappeared, giving way to other forms that we could but vaguely make out in the darkening waters. By the time the bathometric dial registered five hundred feet the darkness about us was all but absolute, and a word of command turned on the great under-sea searchlights, from which long lanes of golden light cut out through the gloom about us.

“Still down we sank, in that great spiral course, until we had reached a thousand feet, two thousand, a mile, a mile and a half. Now and then we glimpsed great sea-creatures that blundered into the glow of our lights, cephalopods and gasteropods, and now and then one of the larger deep-sea crustaceans. Most of these, however, seemed to flee from the brilliance of our lights, though in one case we caught sight of a long, snaky form that could only have belonged to the hydrophis family, though it was of unprecedented thickness and length.

“The dial now registered a two-mile depth, and we snapped off the submarine's lights, for in the waters about us were glowing the phosphorescent creatures that lurk in these great depths. Floating by in the darkness went here and there a *Brisinga elegans*, or luminous star-

fish, its nineteen long tentacles glowing with misty light. The snakelike stomias boa flashed past, the double rows of luminous disks on the sides of its long body adding to the phosphorescent brilliance. We made out, too, a squat, flat creature fully fifteen feet in length, with great fanged mouth and luminous tail and fins, quite unknown to the science of zoology, while scores of the rare *mala-costeus niger*, with its two headspots of greenish-gold light, could be seen around us. Then, as we sank still farther downward, the glowing phosphorescent forms about us thinned and vanished, while about us lay a dark and almost lifeless region of waters.

“I turned to order the lights snapped on again, but stopped short at a sudden cry from Lewis, at the port-hole beside me. He could not speak, only pointing down in utmost excitement through the glass, and as I too gazed down, awe and astonishment fell on me. For glimmering up toward us from far below, through the dark waters, was a faint white light, a strange, cold radiance that was growing rapidly stronger as we dropped down toward it. In stunned silence we watched, as our craft dipped down, and now at last we began to see its source.

“A thousand feet below us there stretched an unimaginable scene. It was the ocean's floor, a level, somewhat rolling plain, and on it, within this vast region of white radiance, were grouped scores, hundreds, thousands of strange structures, great globes of shining metal, pierced by doorways, which were of uniform size, each being fully three hundred feet in diameter. They were ranged in long streets or avenues with mathematical precision. Away into the distance as far as the eye could reach stretched this mighty city of globes, and I saw that on the top of each globe was a small squat mechanism, like that which our trawl had

brought up but larger, and while these mechanisms were not themselves luminous or shining, there sprang from them in some way rays of white light which made it plain that it was these which produced the strange white light that bathed all this gigantic city.

"Our craft was slanting downward, toward and across the city as we watched in awe, and as it did so we made out two things. The first was that far away there was a spot at the city's heart where were no globes, a vast, smooth-walled pit that seemed to sink down into the sea's floor for an unguessable distance, and which I judged was fully two miles in diameter. Near its edge there soared up above the globes of the city, for fully two thousand feet, a slender tower of the same shining metal, at whose tip was a small, bulb-like room. I seemed to see, also, vague, great shapes that moved about this tower, but at that moment my attention was shifted suddenly by Lewis' exclamation to the city beneath us, and I saw for the first time the people of that city.

"Through the streets, but a few hundred feet below us, now, there moved countless numbers of black forms, creeping along the smooth, metal-paved avenues like great black slugs. And as we dropped closer toward them we saw that that was what they were—great slug-people, their bodies thick cylinders of dark flesh, perhaps eight feet in length and three in thickness, on which they crawled forward like giant worm-things, their only limbs two short, thick flippers near the head, their only sense-organs that we could see being two great, dark, shining eyes like the eyes of an octopus—great slug-creatures, inhabitants of the waters here at the sea's bottom, crawling through this strange and awful city whose existence men have never dreamed—a city at the bottom of the sea, a city glowing with white,

unearthly radiance, a city peopled by unhuman creatures, but reared into being by more than human power!

"We stared down upon it, in indescribable awe and wonder, and then Evans, the commander, uttered a sudden exclamation. A group of the strange slug-creatures had collected in the street just below us, gazing up through the waters toward us with their strange, dark eyes, and now we saw that across the city toward us was striding an erect, gigantic shape. It came from the direction of the great pit and tower, where there could be glimpsed others like it—an erect, vast shape of metal, striding toward us on two mighty limbs or columns which must have measured a thousand feet in height, and which supported at their top a small disk-platform on which were grouped two or three of the slug-creatures, operating their vast mechanism. From below this platform, too, there projected a great jointed limb, or arm, of almost the same length as the two great legs, and as the vast thing strode toward us over the city of globes this mighty arm was reaching out toward our craft.

"I uttered a shout, and heard a hoarse order from Evans shouted through the speaking-tube, and a moment later the submarine shot upward with all the power of its motors. But as it did so there came a jarring shock and clash of metal, and then our craft was pulled downward, its propellers spinning in vain. The great upraised arm of the giant striding machine had gripped us and held us as a child might hold a toy.

"Now, with that great arm circling the submarine and holding it tightly, the vast mechanism began to stride back across the city, and a moment later had halted, and was lowering our craft to the city's floor. Below us, we saw, was a group of three of the globe-buildings set apart

from the others in a small clearing, and before one of these the arm that held our craft placed it, still holding it tightly. We saw the great door of the globe-building, fifty feet across and twice that in height, opening by sliding down into the metal pavement below. Ten feet inside was another similar door which was opening likewise, both great doors being quite transparent, though apparently of immense strength. In a moment our craft had been pushed inside, into the bare, white-lit interior of the great metal globe, and then both great doors rolled back up and closed tightly. Our submarine, with all in it, was prisoned in the waters inside.

"The next moment, though, there came the throb of great pumps, and swiftly the waters inside the globe began to sink, while a strange hissing began. A glance at the dials explained it, for as the waters sank they were being replaced by air, at a pressure the same as at sea-level. In a moment more the waters had disappeared entirely, and cautiously we opened the conning-tower doors and stepped out. The air, we found, was quite pure and breathable, though with a strange odor of chemicals, and had it not been for the vast white-lit city of globes lying beneath the waters outside our transparent doors, one might have thought himself in some room on earth's surface.

"I knew, though, as the submarine's startled occupants stepped out into our strange prison, how far we were from earth's surface, how unfathomably far from the life of humanity in this city of the sea's dark depths, this white-lit town of the trackless ocean's floor. For I knew now how far from humanity were these strange and fearful slug-creatures who were of more than human intelligence, but with no human point of view, who could capture men and put them in this prison of air at the sea's bottom as we of earth

would capture some creatures of the sea and imprison them in a prison of water, or aquarium, on earth!

4

"WE WERE not long left undisturbed in our strange prison. Within a few minutes we saw, approaching our building from outside along the smooth-paved street, a group of the slug-creatures who carried with them what seemed strange suits of flexible metal, with transparent eye-holes. Three of them donned these, fastening them carefully, and then the outer door of our prison rolled down and the three moved or crawled into the vestibule, or space between the doors, which was filled with water, of course. A moment later came the throbbing of pumps again, the vestibule emptied of water and filled with air, and as the inner door rolled down in turn the three crawled into our prison. Their armored suits, we saw, were filled with water to enable them to venture into the unfamiliar element of air, just as a human diver in an air-filled suit will venture into water.

"A moment we humans stared at these strange figures, in sickened horror, while those outside watched us carefully through the clear door, ready to open it and send the destroying floods in upon us at any wrong move on our part. Then one of the three, with a long, slender rod in his grasp, moved to the metal wall of our prison and drew a sketch, or diagram, of sea and land, with slug-like creatures at the sea's bottom and erect, manlike ones upon the land. He pointed from the former to himself, and from the latter to us, and I stepped forward and repeated his gesture to show our understanding.

"With this beginning he worked on, with other sketches and diagrams, establishing a slender line of communication between us, while

those of our party watched in fascinated horror. At the end of an hour or more of this the things left us, through the vestibule-chamber, leaving us all in a strange state of wonder and fear. There was but little conversation on the part of any of us, and though we examined our prison carefully there seemed no chance whatever for escape; so the hours that followed passed in a semi-lassitude and silence, broken only by a sketchy meal from our own stores, after which most of our party resigned themselves to sleep. The air, we noted, remained quite pure, and was apparently made artificially by these creatures in some way, and pumped to us from outside.

"The next day passed in the same way, and the next, and the next, strange nightless and dawnless days, eternally lit by the perpetual white radiance, which followed one another like the time-periods of a dream. In those days, however, the creatures who were our captors persisted in endeavoring to establish communication with us, for their own purposes, and gradually Lewis and I attained to an exchange of ideas with them. Their purpose, we found, was to question us concerning the world above, particularly concerning our nations and cities and their relation to the sea. We did not understand the purpose of those questions, then, but bit by bit during that exchange of ideas we came to learn something of their own history and plans, and began at last to understand what terrible peril was hanging above our world.

"These creatures, as we had guessed, were native to the sea as man is native to the land, developed from the lower forms of sea creatures in the remote past just as man developed from the lower land ones. Life began in the sea, as you know, and these slug-beings had developed into intelligence and power while man was still

a half-ape roaming the barren plains. They had built their great globe-cities at the sea's bottom, and for their greater convenience had lit them with the light-producing mechanisms on the globes, which set up a permanent excitation or vibration of the ether, of a frequency that formed perpetual light-vibrations. In their hidden depths they reigned, lords of the sea.

"But their domains were steadily diminishing. You know that since the dawn of time earth's seas have dwindled steadily, following the laws of molecular motion, that slowly those seas have retreated and dwindled, as on every planet they do, as on Mars they did eons ago. And since the slug-people could live only in the terrific pressures of the great depths their own realms were swiftly shrinking. They must either form some plan to halt the dwindling of the seas, or face certain extinction.

"They finally, after long discussion, adopted a stupendous plan, which was none other than to produce artificially such vast quantities of water as would replenish the dwindled seas, would cover all earth miles deep with them and give all earth as the slug-people's domain. They knew, in their science, how to form atoms of any element out of the primal ether itself by raising it to the desired frequency of vibration. Just as they had produced light from the ether they could produce matter, which is but a vibration of the universal ether. Suppose, then, that they set up vast generators to form immense quantities of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, and suppose those tremendous quantities of hydrogen and oxygen were mixed together, with a small proportion of certain chemicals added. The result would be that from the generators immense quantities of sea water would be shot forth to add to the sea's bulk, to cause it to rise until it covered the highest

peaks. They needed only to make generators of sufficient size and number, and at this they set to work.

"They set to work, and for the sake of convenience they built their vast generators under their own cities, which were located in all the great deeps of the sea over earth, in the Atlantic and Pacific and Indian oceans, vast cities with countless hordes of the slug-creatures. Under each of their cities lay one of the titanic generators, with a vast pit-opening at the city's center for the waters that would be formed to issue forth from beneath. It was a work of centuries, of ages, this building of the great generators, one beside which the building of the pyramids was but the task of an hour. Man rose to power on earth above them, never suspecting their presence, even, and still in the depths the slug-creatures worked on at their great task, that was to give them all the world.

"At last the great generators, under the cities of the slug-people in all the deeps of the sea, approached completion. It was necessary to provide a single control for all of them, so that all could be turned on at the same moment, since otherwise the inequality of currents might produce too great disturbances of the sea. This control, therefore, was placed in a small room at the top of a great spire at the center of one of their cities in the deeps of the mid-Atlantic, the city which we had discovered and where we were prisoned. And now, as we learned, the great work was almost finished, and soon the generators which had taken ages to build would be put into action. Around the spire which held the control of all the generators there watched always their giant striding-machines, since this little room at the spire's tip held all the energies of all their generators on earth centered inside it, and should it be damaged or wrecked the generators themselves would run wild, resulting

in titanic etheric explosions which would inevitably destroy not only all the generators themselves but also the great cities built upon them, and the numberless slug-people of those cities.

"IN SICK despair we watched the days passing, cooped in our little prison, while the plans of the slug-people came to their climax. Far above us, we knew, were sunlight, and fresh breezes, and ships going to and fro upon the waters, but around us were only the oppressing waters and the white radiance and the city of globes and its unhuman people. And at last the age-old plans of those people were finished, and the great generators were turned on. We saw them flocking through the streets toward the great spire and the vast pit, saw a gleam of sudden green radiance from the control room at the spire's top, in the distance; and then there was a great quivering of the ground and the waters about us, and up from the pit there shot with immense force and speed a vast current of waters, a tremendous solid stream two miles wide and of terrific speed, formed we knew by the combining elements in the vast generator beneath the city, turning each moment millions of tons of water into the seas above us. And we knew, too, that at that moment in all the other cities of the slug-people across all the deeps of the sea, other and similar currents were being shot forth by the titanic generators, adding each moment incalculable amounts to the bulk of the seas.

"Through all that day we watched the great current shooting ceaselessly up through the calmer waters about it, and through the next, and knew that on earth the waters must already be rising inch by inch, and that they would creep up, inch by inch and foot by foot, until they had covered all earth's fields and forests

and cities and highest peaks, until earth itself was covered miles deep with this sea of hell, and at its bottom the slug-people reigned triumphant. Then, at last, the agony of our despair broke forth, and we seized at once upon a chance for escape which presented itself.

"It was in a suggestion made by Evans, the submarine's commander, that we saw our chance. His plan seemed suicidal, almost, but it was still a chance, so we ignored the risks. Waiting for some hours until the street outside our prison had emptied somewhat of the passing slug-people, we took from the submarine's equipment a long, slender drill of steel, and with this, held and guided by two seamen, set to work on the metal wall of our prison. At first the metal seemed too hard for the drill to affect, but gradually it bit into it, deeper and deeper. Inch by inch it crept on into the thick metal wall, while we watched anxiously. The hours were passing swiftly, and in the distance we could see the mighty current from the pit still roaring upward, but at last, when it seemed that the wall was too thick for us, the drill broke through.

"Before we could withdraw it, it had been knocked inward toward us with terrific force by the pressure of the waters outside, and through the two-inch hole it left came shooting inward a solid stream of water of terrific force. In a moment that jet had filled the great room to a depth of a foot, and hastily we splashed toward our submarine, clambering up and inside it and shutting tightly the heavy doors. From the port-holes we could see the waters in the room swiftly rising, until within a few more minutes they had risen sufficiently to float the submarine, which had been lying on the bare metal floor of the great room.

"Instantly Evans gave an order, and at once the craft's motors be-

gan to hum and its reversed propellers to thrash the waters, backing us against the wall opposite the great doors. There we paused a moment, and then another order sent the boat leaping across the great room through the waters like a living thing, toward the inner of the two great doors, which could be opened only from the outside. With a great ramming shock the craft's prow struck the door; for this was our plan, to batter down the two doors if possible and make our escape. The door, we saw, had been shaken by the blow, its thick, transparent metal deeply dented, but it still hung fast; so again the submarine retreated to the opposite wall and again leapt forward to crash against the barrier.

"At the second blow there was a clash of metal against the sides of our craft and we saw that the great door had crumpled beneath the two blows. Only the outer door barred our escape, now, and excitedly we watched as the submarine reversed once more and leapt forward against that last barrier. We struck it with a great jar that again knocked us all from our feet but did not dislodge the door, and now there came a sudden exclamation from Evans as he saw, through the port-hole, a group of the slug-creatures who had stopped outside and were peering in toward us. As our craft leaped forward in another dash against the thick metal we saw them hastening down the street, and a moment later saw striding over the city from the distant spire three of the great machines that guarded that spire, hastening across the city in gigantic strides toward us!

"In spite of our second blow the outer door still hung fast, and swiftly the hastening machines were nearing us. By now the submarine's motors were humming at their highest power, and as Evans hoarsely shouted the order, the craft backed

against the wall, hesitated for a moment, and then leapt forward through the waters toward the outer door for a third time, with all the force of its whirling propellers. As we shot forward I saw, not a thousand feet away, the great machines that were bending down toward our prison, and then there came a great crash and jar, the great metal door was crumpled aside like one of cardboard, and our submarine shot out into the open waters. Swiftly toward us reached the great arm of the foremost giant machine, and for a moment, as we slanted sharply upward, we felt the end of that arm graze against the side of our craft. Then we had torn past it and were shooting up through the waters toward the surface at a steep angle, up until the city of globes and the white radiance that bathed it were lost from view beneath us.

"Up, up, up—until at last our craft shot bodily out of the waters into the sunlight and clean air. Panting and half senseless we ripped the doors open, breathed deep of the salt breezes. The waters on which the submarine floated were running in great seas, and from a hasty consultation of our instruments we saw that already the sea's level had risen several feet, and knew, too, as no others did, what was causing that rise and bringing doom upon the earth. So we set our course back toward England and raced homeward through the rising waters to bring our warning to the world, for in the general panic our radio calls received no answer. East and southeast we held, and at last were sweeping into the harbor of London, where, after a frantic hour, Evans, Lewis and I were able to convince the naval authorities of the truth of our story, were able to convince them that the only remaining chance to prevent the destruction of all our world is to descend into the depths in force and destroy or attempt to

destroy the great generator which we saw in action there in the deeps of the Atlantic, and after it the others.

"This was but a few hours ago, Stevens, and in those hours and while I have talked here with you the submarines of all the British fleet, the new-type submersibles which alone can descend into those terrific depths, have been gathered in the flooded Thames and soon will sail, with the submarines of all other countries that can be gathered, to make one last attempt to save our world. I had an hour or more, I knew, so while Lewis hastened away in search of his family, I, who have none, came here in the hope of finding you, Stevens, knowing that you would be with us if you could. And so now you know what terror it is that is flooding our world, that is rising toward the death of all humanity, and toward which, at the bottom of the Atlantic, we sail within the hour, for one final desperate attempt to halt this rising doom."

Clinton rose to his feet with these words, gazed silently out over the red-lit city, over the rising floods that rushed through its streets and sent the fear-crazed fugitives outside shouting down those streets in blind horror. Stevens, too, arose, gazed with him, and then with a common impulse and with no spoken word they had turned toward the door, toward the street. Half an hour later they had won their way across the dark, flooded wilderness that was London toward the rank on rank of long, grim steel hulls that swung by the shores of the swollen Thames, and a few minutes later they stood in the narrow control room of one of those hulls as they swung in formation out to the open sea, more than a hundred strong.

Out, out, they moved, into the darkness of the surging channel, and then southward around the foreland, where there fell in at the side of their

formation a similar formation of an equal number of craft, the combined Atlantic and Mediterranean submarine fleets of France, Germany and Italy. Still the combined fleets moved on, toward the west, through the surging, tremendous waves, in steady, unchanging formation. Onward through the hours of the night they moved, and on into the day, still westward, and through the night again until at last, at dawn, there could be seen on the waters far ahead a multitude of long black spots, long steel hulls like their own, the great American submarine fleet racing eastward in answer to the call for help. The two fleets met, coalesced, and then, in one great triangular formation, more than three hundred strong, turned and headed north. The morning waned, and the afternoon, and sunset came, but still those gathered scores of long grim craft forged north and north, toward the Nelsen Deeps and what lay at their bottom, toward the last great battle of humanity to save its drowning world.

5

STANDING in the submarine's narrow control room, Clinton gazed intently at the dials before him, then out of the port-holes in the wall. "We're there, Stevens," he said, quietly, gesturing toward the little windows through which the great fleet behind could be seen, each of its scores of craft resting motionless on the surface. And now the submarine's commander, Evans, who had been lost and prisoned with Clinton, came toward them.

"Our craft will descend first," he told them, "the others following in close formation. Our plan is to descend to an elevation of a few thousand feet above the city and attempt to cripple or destroy the generator beneath it with our torpedoes and bomb-charges."

While he spoke he had twisted

around the signal-lever on the dial before him, and a moment later, in answer to his signal, the boat's electric motors again took up their powerful hum. At the same time it began to move forward through the waters, slanting downward. Stevens had a last glimpse through the port-holes of the sea and sky outside, warmly lit by the sun that blazed above, and then the long green waves were washing up over the glass and over the submarine's conning-tower as it slanted downward, in a great spiral. And soon the green waters outside, alive with shoals of silvery fish, were darkening, changing, as the needle on the bathometer dial crept slowly around.

He looked up suddenly as he glimpsed through the port-holes a dark shape passing above, and then saw that it was but one of the submarines of the fleet above, descending after them and following them, score upon score of long, dark, fishlike hulls, that circled and dipped and sank after them, down toward the fate of a world. Surely in all the record of battles had men never gone toward battle like this, with no shouts or cheers or flying flags or defiant shots, but only the dark, grim shapes that sank gently down and down into the peaceful, darkening depths of the sea.

Down, down, down—a thousand feet the dial registered, and the waters about the submarine had become dark blue, all but lightless, and darkening still more as they steadily dropped lower. There were no lights turned on, nothing to betray their presence, and into a still deeper darkness the great fleet sank, while Clinton and Evans and the seamen in the little room stared from the dials to the dark port-holes with strange, set faces. Great currents had begun to rock and sway the submarine as it dropped on, currents from the mighty generator below, Stevens knew, but still they held to

their downward progress until the bathometric dial showed a depth of a mile—a mile and a half—two miles—

Abruptly Clinton, at the port-holes, made a sudden gesture, and pointed downward. Stevens gazed intently down into the blackness that seemed to press against the glass, and then he uttered a low exclamation. For he could make out, far below, a ghostly white radiance that filtered faintly up toward them through the filmy depths. Stronger and stronger it was growing as they sank down toward it, and he saw Evans turn, give swift orders through the speaking-tube by his side, and heard the clang and clash of metal somewhere in the submarine as its great torpedo and bomb tubes were made ready. In an instant, it seemed, while they dropped downward still, the stillness of the submarine had been replaced by swift activity. And then, cutting abruptly across the sounds of that activity, came a sharp cry from Clinton.

“Those globes!” he cried. “They are coming up! Look!”

But Stevens, too, had seen. Outlined dark against the growing white light beneath them he had glimpsed a dark, round object that was moving steadily and swiftly up toward them from beneath, that moved up with ever-increasing speed like the reversal of some object falling downward. Swiftly it came, and now he could see that it was a black metal globe perhaps a yard in diameter. He felt the submarine swerve sharply as Evans abruptly spun its wheel, glimpsed the uprushing globe grazing past its side, and then the thing had passed above them, and had struck full on the bottom of a submarine just above. There was a flash of intense purple light, flaring out through the waters in blinding intensity, and then the submarine rocked and spun like a leaf in a gale, while the great flash and the craft

above which it had enveloped vanished together.

“Bombs!” shouted Clinton. “Bombs of some kind that they release from beneath, to rise and strike us—and look, more—”

Even as he spoke there was rushing up toward them from beneath an immense mass of the round black globes, seeming in that moment to fill the waters about them.

Stevens remembered the next few moments only as a timeless period of flashing action. He felt the submarine dive steeply downward under the hand of its commander, saw through the glass scores of the deadly globes flashing up past them, and then the submarine again was rocked by titanic convulsions of the waters about it as craft after craft of the fleet above them vanished in blinding flashes of the purple light. In those few minutes, he knew, scores of the submarines that followed them had fallen victim to the deadly spheres.

But now the great fleet, diving sharply amid that deadly uprush of globes, was within a few thousand feet of the sea's floor, was slanting down through the white radiance toward the city below, which Stevens saw for the first time. A moment, as the fleet seemed to pause above the city, he saw it all plain—the multitudes of ranked great globular structures, stretching away as far as the eye could see, the dark, slug-like beings that hastened through their streets and squares, the vast pit at the city's center from which arose the mighty, half-glimpsed current of waters, and the towering spire near that pit's edge, the tiny bulbular room at its top a point of green radiance, around which were grouped scores of the vast, thousand-foot striding-machines. Then that one moment of pause was over and the whole great fleet was swooping down upon the city below, releasing a shower of great torpedoes and bombs as it did so.

The next moment there came a hundred flashes of fire beneath them as the torpedoes and depth-charges struck, and then it seemed as though in a score of places beneath them the city was crumbling, disintegrating, beneath the force of the great explosions. The submarine was rocking and swaying perilously from the effect of those explosions, only the super-resistant hulls of the new-type craft enabling them to endure the shock, but even while Stevens heard the men near him shouting hoarsely he was aware that the massed boats were diving again, and again the thunderous detonations below came dully to their ears through the waters about them.

But now he heard a sudden cry of alarm, taken up and repeated by all in the control room. From far away, all around the great city, there were hastening toward the attacking submarines scores of the giant striding-machines, their vast steps whirling them across the city with inconceivable swiftness, the great arm of each outstretched toward the submarines. An order was barked, and the craft's propellers spun swiftly as it headed upward to avoid those reaching, menacing arms, while the whole great fleet headed up also with the same purpose. The next moment, however, a spark of more brilliant white light broke into being in the city below them—a great, erect cylinder, they saw, that was suddenly shining with a dazzling radiance that darkened the white luminosity of the waters about it. And as it broke into being the submarine below seemed suddenly to waver, to halt, and then to be pulled slowly, steadily downward by great unseen hands, toward that shining cylinder.

Stevens heard the motors throbbing in his own craft, its spinning propellers only serving to hold it in the same position, and heard a shout from Evans.

"That cylinder!" he cried. "It's

a great magnet of some kind—it's pulling our ships downward!"

For now by dozens, by scores, by hundreds, the fleet's massed ships were being pulled downward, their screws thrashing the waters in vain, pulled down toward that mighty, dazzling beacon of light. The next moment the great striding-machines had reached them, were grasping them, crushing them, whirling them about like toys and hurling them far away to break and smash upon the globes below, spilling forth men and air-bubbles and great clouds of oil. Ever downward, downward, the mighty magnet of light pulled the helpless craft, while Stevens' own craft, highest of them all, could only resist that terrific pull by all the power of its humming motors. And among the helpless craft below he could see the great machines of the slug-people stalking about in terrific destruction, crushing and smashing the defenseless boats as they sought vainly to escape while Stevens' own craft sought frenziedly to win out of the remorseless grip that held it.

But now, below, the doomed submarines seemed suddenly to cease their efforts to escape from the great magnet's grip, and abruptly turned, paused, and then hurtled down with all their own force and that of the attracting magnet toward the giant machines below them whose great arms were destroying them. Stevens cried out hoarsely as he saw torpedo and bomb flash down and send a half-dozen of the great machines reeling and crashing down upon the city in flashes of bursting fire. At the same moment he was aware that their own craft was winning slowly out of the giant grip of the magnet, inch by inch, foot by foot, creeping upward and outward from that grip, while below the last scores of the attacking submarines were meeting their doom, crushed by the arms of the giant machines and annihilated by the purple-flaring bombs that

rushed up toward them from the city below.

And now the great machines were striding toward his own craft, the last remaining one except for a few far across the city that were battling their way upward against others of the machines. Slowly, slowly, the submarine crept upward, while the mighty shapes whirled across the streets and globes of the city toward it. They were below it, now, were reaching up with gigantic arms, and Stevens stared down upon those upward-reaching arms in a strange apathy of despair. The battle was over, he knew, humanity's battle, lost now forever, its last chance flickered out. Up came the whirling arms, up, while still the submarine crept higher, and then one of them had struck it a great, glancing blow, in reaching for it, had knocked all in it to the floor, stunning Evans and his seaman and Stevens himself against the metal walls, and knocking, too, the submarine out of the last limits of the magnet's giant grip.

Its propellers whirling with sudden power, it shot out of that unseen hold, over the city, and Stevens raised his head, stunned and bleeding, to see Clinton standing at the wheel, to hear his wild shout as he sent the submarine racing above the city toward the great pit and the uprushing current at its center, toward the towering spire at that pit's rim, and the round, green-lit little control room at its top. Straight toward that ball-like room at the great spire's tip flashed the racing submarine, and Stevens glimpsed the mighty striding-machines, far across the city, abandoning the battle with the remaining few submarines, which shot sharply upward, to whirl after their own; saw rushing toward them from around the spire others of the giant machines, their vast arms upraised to grasp and crush the hurtling craft. But before they could grasp it, before their great arms could do ought

more than graze along its sides, Clinton had sent the submarine flashing past them with a hoarse cry and had crashed it straight into the little room at the mighty tower's tip.

Through the metal walls of that room the hurtling submarine crashed as though through walls of paper, speeding still straight up and outward with the force of its tremendous impetus. To the half-conscious Stevens, crouched there, it seemed that for a single moment the whole world held its breath, and then he saw a fountain of brilliant green fire burst out and upward from the little control room at the great spire's top, felt a mighty, thundering detonation shake the waters about him, and then half glimpsed below him the sea's bottom and the great city upon it heaving, rumpling, breaking and crashing, as that city broke up and was annihilated by a tremendous uprush of dazzling fires from beneath it—broke up and was annihilated, as he knew, by the explosion of the mighty generator beneath it, whose titanic, pent-up energies the wrecking of the little control room had released—broke up and was annihilated, Stevens knew, as *all* the cities of the slug-people had been in that moment, when the mighty generators beneath each of those cities exploded likewise, the prisoned energies of all of them released by the wrecking of the little room from which all had been controlled. In all the far-flung deeps of earth's seas the cities of the slug-people and all their hideous hordes had met annihilation in that tremendous moment, he knew. The earth shuddered and swayed beneath those simultaneous, titanic cataclysms; the sea's whole floor rolled and shook; and then, as the submarine was flung wildly upward by the terrific convulsions of the waters, the vast fiery uprush of destruction beneath faded from his eyes.

Then Stevens felt his senses failing him, sank backward and was but

dimly conscious of the waters outside the submarine roaring wildly as it shot upward with terrific speed. For a time that seemed endless to his darkened mind that roaring continued, and then abruptly came silence, and a great shock and splash. Then he felt hands upon him, and hoarse voices shouting in his ears, heard the doors above clanging open, admitting a flood of sunlight and clean fresh air upon him, and then he knew no more.

6

SUNSET was flaming red in the west once more when Clinton and Stevens stood together again on the submarine's narrow deck, watching the preparations for its homeward voyage. Behind it floated a bare dozen of other long steel craft, as scarred and battered as itself, flung up and saved like itself by that last great convulsion of the waters—a dozen only, the last remnant of the mighty fleet of hundreds that had dived to the attack a scant few hours before. Even as they watched, three of those craft were moving away on their own homeward journey, toward the west, toward the sunset, over the waters that were now miraculously calmed and smoothened. Their last rejoicing farewells came faintly over those waters as they went, and then they were passing from sight, dark blots against the brilliance of the western sky, dwindling and vanishing.

There came into the minds of both

men, as they gazed across the peaceful waters, a wonder as to what frantic outbursts of joy were shaking the peoples of earth to see those waters calmed thus, to see their terrible rise thus halted. There came into their minds a vision of what might have been, of the seas that might have whelmed a planet, with a strange and terrible race triumphant and supreme upon it, and then one of what would be, when the hordes of fugitives, half hoping, half doubting, would creep back from their hills and mountains of refuge toward their deserted lands and cities, when the places that were silent now and dead would be ringing again with life, when all the terror that had riven earth would be but a thing of the remembered past.

Then these things slipped from the minds of both and they turned toward the east as their craft, and those behind it, moved away in that direction. Onward through the waters they moved, their propellers turning faster and faster, little waves breaking from either side of their prows as they clove the sea. The brilliance faded from the sky behind the two men, as the little fleet moved on, and the gathering night closed down upon the world, star-embroidered. But the two standing there alone on the little vessel's deck were silent still, and unmoving, gazing out into the darkness across the calm waters with the silence of men whose minds hold things too great for speech.

