

All Stories Complete

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DIANA AND THE GOLDEN RING (Novelette — 10,000) by S. M. Tenneshaw 8

Illustrated by Robert Gibson Jones

Pan had to find the magic ring he had lost—but a little girl was searching for it too . . .

GIRL FROM MARS (Short — 2,500) by Robert Bloch28

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

Was the Girl From Mars a sideshow hoax? Possibly — but how then could you explain her wings?

DETOUR FROM TOMORROW (Short — 5,500)by Rog Phillips34

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

Freddy didn't know the alfalfa field was a crossroad in time — but he saw the accident . . .

INOCULATION (Short — 4,800)by Roger Flint Young46

Illustrated by Julian S. Krupa

Exposing the traitor was the logical thing to do — but treachery is a matter of viewpoint . . .

MR. DESTINY FOLLOWS THROUGH (Novelette — 10,000) by Gilbert Grant58

Illustrated by Edmond Swiatek

They discovered Mr. Destiny's shop by pure accident. At least, that's the way it seemed . . .

THE WORLD OF THE LOST (Novel — 45,000)by Paul Lohrman78

Illustrated by Bill Terry

Great dinosaurs had ruled the Earth for ages; but then man challenged the monsters . . .

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Diana and the Golden Ring."

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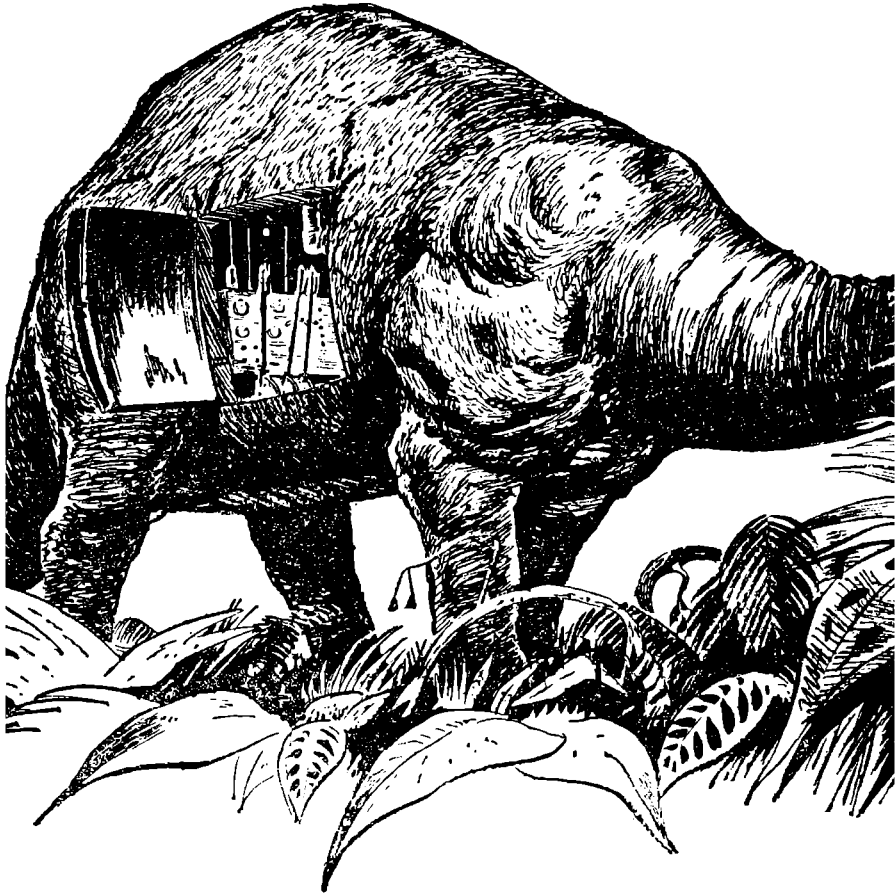
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THE WORLD OF THE LOST

By PAUL LOHRMAN

A long time ago, on Earth, giant dinosaurs roamed, and if they remained, there would be no chance for man—so they had to be killed . .



Gur and Suima crouched in the undergrowth watching with wide eyes as the door swung open in the side of the supposed beast.

"Apollo, my son, God of Tah, behold the red star, the earth, she cometh through thy dominions."

The Book Of Apollo

THE WOMAN, Enthippe, was wisdom, heavy-eyed with study, long enthroned in respect.

White she was, her skin soft and young, with shapely woman's arms, long, clever fingers, and a body in which beauty and leadership had been wed to one meaning.

Black as night her hair, and her face lovely and sad with knowing the sorrows of men. Her eyes were dark, deep-lined with the knowledge, and her dark head hung, thinking

that man, the whole race born of woman, was doomed to witlessness—to misery, war and to the life of a driver ant.

For while her wisdom told her how men might be saved from their futility, it did not tell her how to make men know what she had for them, or how to give them the way to save themselves. For knowing and doing are two far different things. And it was this knowledge of how to do that she sought, wearily.

In her dark home in unknown and mysterious depths beneath the Earth's surface, she sorted over the ancient records of the early days of the plan-



et—the days of men and Gods upon earth.

Sorrowfully she watched the misty vapors of the thought cloud swirl within the globular force fields. Within the fluorescing vapors the images and happenings of another time and place were real before her. Perhaps this one would tell her.

It was the record of the God Apollo, to whom the care of Mother Mi, the planet Earth, had been given when she swam into his domain.

She leaned forward, and she knew the thought of the God as he watched.

The vital energy she had absorbed from the ancient beneficial machines coruscated about her in a visible aura, moving too, forward with her body in a flashing interplay of a myriad colors.

Within the vapors was a red star, and bending over the scene was the great shadow of a being whom she knew was Apollo, watching from his mighty ship of space—the *Airavagna*.

Closer came the red star, and presently it became green and blue, white sands bordered the blue, a great continent was seen on the globe. Closer, and the father of all rivers flowed pale-yellow and sluggish down the whole face of the continent. She knew this vast sluggish sea of a river was what the Mississippi had been when it was a part of the Ep'hsu, the great waterway.

Now the view swept up the current, and in the North were two great seas, and their names she heard as Vid and Saijans, but she knew they were Superior and Michigan.

Closer to the eye came the yellow flood, and snorting and splashing in the water were great-toothed saurians, vast-bodied, long-necked; with tails to beat down a hundred men; and others plated like tanks with

bony armor. Vast masses of water-weed lined the current, and dragonflies with the wingspread of a hawk hovered brilliantly. The smell was of a swamp with no drain, choking with weed-life. Great white watersnakes writhed through the openings of the weed, the sturgeon poked its sharp nose after frogs, and the singing of insects was a symphony of multi-varied sound in the ears.

Closer still to the view came the yellow flood, and the powerful shadow of the God leaned closer over the images—for upon the yellow flood, beyond the choking grasses and floating weeds, in the open water of the sluggish current—floated a long craft with a bright red sail. The shadow of Apollo was interested in the people of this planet given to his care.

The craft was a kind of barge, half raft and half ship, built of rough-hewn logs. On it were sprawled several figures, and at the tiller dreamed a youth.

The hold was filled with rough bars of copper, hides of deer in bundles, skins of foxes and white winter pelts of the marten.

Telepathically, Enthippe entered the mind of the youth at the tiller of the ship. Enthippe smiled to see he was thinking of a girl, like other youths. She lost herself in the happenings of that life and of the mighty shadow that was a watching God—and Enthippe was no more herself, but a youth named Gur.

Gur was an Ongwee; long black hair, copper skin, strong, straight limbs, sharp black eyes as piercing as a hunter's sighting game.

The girl of whom he was thinking was an Ihin. He had no right even to think of her, for she was of the sacred people. The Gods forbid love or intercourse between the Ong-

weeghan and the Ihin.

Gur looked at her back, where she walked on the deck near at hand, all those delicate curves undulating sensuously. Gur wondered what evil spirit possessed him that an Ihin maiden should be his desire. For was it not forbidden? Yet was it not also true that the Rabbahs said that the Ongweeghan sprang from the union of Ihins and Ihuans? How then could it be wrong of Ihins and Ongwee to love? Gur wondered if those people who prate of the greater God's commands always tell the truth.

The sun was sinking lower, and the night of Adu, of swift death from the hunting flying-beasts, was coming nearer. Gur called the girl to him while yet the sun was pleasant and the air balmy with odors rank, but to his nostrils sweet, telling of the mighty growth of the land along the Ephsuh—and of the meat that might be killed there by a sharp-eyed hunter.

"Come and talk to me, Suima. To sit alone..."

"You know forbidden it is!"

"Suima, it is even forbidden to kill the great lizards for food, yet the whole race of the Ongwee feed upon the flesh of the great lizards. If you listen to all the words of those God-addled praters, you will not even laugh! Come and sing to me a sinful song, and we will laugh a sinful laugh, and even steal a sinful kiss or two when no one is looking!"

Suima tossed her bright head and turned her far too graceful back upon Gur again.

But after a moment she thought better of it and came and leaned against the low plank stern railing of the ship beside him. She asked—"How is it that only the Ongwee

work these ships that travel Ephsuh's waters?"

The tail of a plesiosaurus slapped the great boat like thunder as its sliding weight nudged his sleeping back, and for a time the boat rocked, the timbers creaked and groaned, and the waves of the driving swirl of power alongside as the beast dived away pounded heavily against the ship. Gur answered.

"Many are the dangers that beset travelers along this water-way beside the plains of Go'magat. But chiefly they are in danger from the raiding of the wilder tribes of the Ongwee. Mainly they raid to kill as many hairy Ihuans as possible, not because they want the copper or the timbers. That is why I and my kind are here in these boats. We are strong and swift in a fight, good men with the bow and quick with a copper blade; but the real reason is that we are Ongwee. The wilder Ongwee who have not made compact with the king of Avaya will not fight with us, for we are their brothers. They wait always along the river-sea for ships to come manned by the hairy, short-legged and ugly Ihuans, for they think they are ordered to kill them by their God. And I think their God is as wrong as your God who tells you to be silent to me."

"How is it that you speak like an Ihin, quick and sharp and open and wise, instead of wild and boasting as other Ongwee with their war-talk and their blood-thirst?"

"You know that the Ongwee are descended of the Ihins and the short-legged Ihuans, not so long ago. Is it odd that I should be like my grandfather?"

Gur looked at her eyes, reflecting the blue of the sky like the morning, and the sun gleaming on

her hair like many lamps. It was very strange that a daughter of the sacred Ihins should be traveling so very far alone. Like a daughter of the sun she had come to the docks of the miners on the shores of Vid, and taken passage to Om, which is by some called Mexico.

"Why alone, little beauty? Have you no father and mother, no strong brothers? Must I be your brother against them who would take you by force?"

"I am Suima. I am not afraid. I came the long way north with my mother, across half the world it seemed, to join my father. He had been sent to help with the shorings of the mines, for he is a great builder. We found my father dead, killed by the foolish work of those who had worked there before him. My mother took poison from her ring, as was her right and duty. I return again to my own land where I know the way of life, and leave all this barbarous land to the savage meat-eaters."

In spite of her young show of courage there was sorrow and strain in her voice, and Gur clucked his tongue between his teeth like a mother hen. She changed the subject.

"Have you ever been to Om, and seen the glittering towers of Rakowana; seen Thes'onka, her polished copper roofs shining in the sun like gold; seen the dances of the Ihin maidens at mating time; seen the white-sailed boats flying over Lake Owane? Have you ever been to Om, Gur?"

"Once I stayed with a rich ship all the way to the towers of Rakowana. But I was ordered back with the rest at once. The soft Ihuans like not the sturdy Ongweeghans making a habit of traveling

their cities. They fear us. It is a rich land, but it is not a good land, Suima. Give me the free air of the plains, the rich hunting of the swamps of the great snakes, in preference to all their cities of stone and their feathered parades of mimic might. Fancy are their blades of obsidian and lovely are their copper maids gilded and decorated.

Foolish and evil are they to throw such maids to the sacrifice. I like it not, Suima."

"We Ihins like not their customs, either. But they need us and our wisdom. They leave us our freedom for the use of our wits. And wise are the leaders of the Ihins to keep the secrets of masonry and of building and the ways of digging canals to themselves. Else they would treat us as they treat their own Ihuans—like dirt under their feet.

"Yet they use you Ihins, as they use the Ongwee, for all the things they cannot or dare not do themselves. Why is it, little Suima of the golden hair, that we who are in many ways wiser and more able than the Ihuans are yet their laborers?"

"Because they are stronger by three to one than all of us together. And so the God has decreed."

"I would like one day to meet this God, Suima. I would say many things to him he would not like."

"Perhaps I would do that, too, O Gur of the bold eyes."

How Gur should take that remark, and what were the inward workings of the nature of this lovely young Ihin, Gur might have learned before that long voyage down the Ephsu, past the plains of Gomaghat, and past the plains of Takshan and her great stone walled cities, and onto the long quiet canals of Om, where the great serpents and the leaping

three-toed lizards are never seen...

Boiling suddenly now before the bow came the mighty lashing whirl of a battle between monsters under the yellow flood...

From that yellow boil of fury and driven water came a roaring as of the winds of heaven at war. From that tangle of a great snaky entwining neck topped by a vast triangular head that was all one trap-like mouth with teeth the size of an Ongwee war-shield, wrapping about the striving lashing body of a garkil. The garkil is half mouth like a great gate to his belly, and four strong limbs like young oaks, and after that a tail as long and as strong and vastly thicker than the mast of a ship.

Fighting free from the grip of the nixtli, the garkil saw escape upon the dry deck of the ship. Surging aboard half his length lay across the ship, and half over the side. The ship, big as she was, listed terribly; and the rail was awash with the yellow water pouring in on the cargo.

Suima screamed again and again, and her soft city-bred arms were around Gur's waist now so that he could do nothing, were there anything to do against such vast strength and clumsy power.

With a threshing as of a great waterfall, the long-necked nixtli came around and swept down again upon the crocodilic garkil, the vast prehistoric ancestor of the modern alligator. The creature flung the rest of its tremendous scaly weight upon the ship as he tried to get his body wholly out of the water and upon the ship. The nixtli, great head rearing on its long neck, began to climb aboard after its prey. His great triangular mouth dripped blood and fragments of the garkil's hide. The

nixtli roared with the lust of battle, and added his weight to the vast weight of the garkil.

The red-sailed ship gave an ominous, increasing creaking and groaning of timbers strained beyond their strength. Half the deck came awash, the tall mast cut a slow, dignified arc against the brassy evening sky—and Suima and Gur were suddenly swimming in the surging waters filled with endlessly varied seeking death.

Behind them was a great boiling place where the ship had been, a floating mass of fragments and bales of skin. The weight of the copper cargo had taken the overturned ship straight to the bottom. There were other swimmers, calling for help—the guards, good men of the Ongwees and stout friends of his; but Gur's hands were full of Suima. The others would have to take care of themselves. The shore was a good half-hour swim away through water that teemed with savage and voracious life. They swam but slowly, Suima beside Gur making little, ineffectual paddling movements, Gur swimming hard, pulling her along.

Fear swam beside the pair making deep surging ripples underneath them, snorting fearful nostrils now and again near at hand, or touching their bare legs with great rough skin that tore and left bloody marks and pain. But on they swam, and ever nearer came the green waving grasses of the swampland that was shore to this sea of primal life. Green slime covered their lifting arms, weighting them down, Suima was gasping, her face near smothered out of sight with the algae. Gur was puffing like a sea-lion, but his strokes still strong, they made progress.

At last they touched their feet

into the thick mud and tried it—and sank beneath the water with its softness, struggling terribly against drowning ere they freed themselves and swam again a long way in and their knees struck the mud again.

Now paddling like two lizards they drew themselves flat across the green muck and up, up, onto firmer ground. All muddled from head to foot and covered over with the green slime, they looked like two green moss-covered apparitions risen from the muck.

Fear of another kind came now to them, the fear of the life that hunts the shoreline; of the giant *Diatryma* that hunts always, running with its great legs faster than any deer; fear of the swooping pterodactyl, that comes out with the setting sun to hunt for the great fish washed ashore and stinking ripe for such things as its own horrible self to enjoy; fear of the "big snakes", things like the *Nixtli*, but which hunt the land, running with great strides on two legs, their little forelegs with hands like men for grasping, and heads that split open to make a great flexible maw like a python's, to swallow anything of any size they can overtake.

There were of these dinosaurs known to Gur some hundred different kinds, from small ones like rats to great ones sixty and more feet in length, armored or slick skinned, scaled and toothed, a nightmare of gigantic fast-running death, waiting for them on the shore. And him with but one wet-stringed bow, and some thirty arrows to protect them. All these fears' awful actualities he knew were waiting for them in that trackless low-hilled waste of the distance, hidden in the man-high grasses, lying in the labyrinths of prickly thickets, nesting among the great fernlike

trees.

Gur was struck with a great fear, not so much for himself, but for the helpless, small, soft, appealing *Suima* beside him covered with slime which she set about scraping off, her golden hair wet and filthy with mud about her shoulders, her soft city-bred form leaning against his own with weariness from the long swim. Gur looked down at her, his face grimacing with a foretaste of the agony of death at the hands of the predators that he knew would surely be theirs.

With the sinking of that ship, Gur had known. They could not survive the wilderness; not only two! Whole hunting parties of strong men sometimes came not back at all, after starting some herd of giant dinosaurs from their beds in the thickets.

Over him Gur felt a strange stirring as of a god shape invisible but all-powerful, a weird shadow running through his mind as much as across the landscape, and a gigantic whispering voice made a meaning in his mind.

"Fear not. The reptiles are my study and my work, now. Your earth has come into Apollo's realm."

And what that might all mean Gur did not know or dare to think, but he fell down on his face and gave his mind up to awe. "If it is true there are gods such as I now hear talking our life depends now on your good heart."

For an answer Gur heard a faint humming all through his body, and a great tide, a charge of vital energy grew swiftly within his fibres, and strength to lift a mountain seemed now suddenly come to live within him. He got up, grinning an awed grin, for he had always thought the tales of the gods but old men's prattling over the food-fires, and not a man's truth at all. Knowing

was about suddenly, Gur had to grin what all that talking of the gods at what a fool he had been all his life. No more would he laugh and go fishing when the procession wound to the mound temple. He would be in the front, chanting. For the gods had suddenly given him strength, and that was good.

CHAPTER II

"The Lord said: Thy God findeth the earth filled with beasts of prey and great serpents, which must be destroyed. The time hath come for the labor, O Apollo."
The Book Of Apollo

GUR BUILT a fire there on the shore, and dried his bowstring. They cleaned themselves and dried their clothes. Night was upon them before they finished, and Gur made ready to defend himself during the night.

Gur had a thin copper blade about a foot long in a scabbard. His heavy dino hide shield, covered with bosses of copper for strength, and his other gear, had gone down with the barge. His bow and the thin light blade were his only equipment against the fearful carnivorous life of this primal jungle.

Suima was clad in a short tunic of cotton, block-printed with the sacred symbols, and with the protective double-headed serpent in a border at the hem. A belt of square beaten copper plates on each of which the little figure of a sacred animal was engraved, and a necklace of gold beads were her sole possessions now. The gold beads were little carved faces of men, some with the duck bill of a priest's mask, others with the fierce eyes and huge ears of a god.

Gur's clothing was a skirted clout of dinosaur hide, a belt and sword scabbard of the same universally used material, and a quiver over his

bronze shoulder. His bow, about four feet in length, he carried hooked by a thong about his neck, hanging down his back. The thong was slip-knotted, came loose at a tug. Of ornaments, he had a gold band about one bicep, and about each leg just below the knee hung two tassels, the scalp-locks of enemies.

His bow was fashioned of hickory wood. He had made it himself, carefully, with much consultation with the older members of his tribe. There were three tribes of Ongwees about Lake Vid, the Sastaks, the Normaks, and the Haldaks. Gur was a son of the Normaks.

The Normaks were famous hunters, living chiefly on the flesh of the bigger predators, the dinosaurs whom lesser men feared to hunt. But the Normaks had developed a system of hunting, and trapped and slew regularly more than enough of the great beasts. Chiefly they used a baited log-fall on the smaller beasts, and they kept always many great pits baited and ready for the larger of the carnivores, for they hated them with a personal hatred, remembering the comrades and relatives slain by them. So along the great tracks of the feeding dinosaurs, along the trails they used at the water edge, they dug always the great pits—and always the stupid giant snakes walked into them. And always where the Normaks hunted rose into the air the stench of putrefying carcasses, too huge to be all useful.

Gur thought of the great trees of his homeland, in the north, where they waited and hid on the hunting platforms while the great beasts were aboard. He prayed for just one such tree to rise out of the great grassy plain, but it did not. Only the moon rose above the horizon, softly lessening the fast gathering dark with its placid light.

Gur gathered more of the green brittle branches from the thickets, and fed the smoky fire. Suima sat, quiet and lovely and confident. Gur wished he was as confident as she looked. He knew that just one of the great beasts scenting them would mean their end. But the night passed slowly, quietly, and the moon drifted on across the black god-paths above, and went to rest. The black closed down, and in the distance laughed the hyaenadons, the dongas. Overhead the great batlike forms of the pterodactyls, the garbats, wheeled and gave their weird scream like a wounded beast in agony; wheeled and swooped toward the fire and away again from fear. Through the thickets crashed great forms that made the soft ground tremble, but none came near the fire-glow. And Gur gave thanks to the god, Apollo, who had spoken to him, a god he had not known before.

The sun came up at last, brazen and full of heat. The sweat started on Gur's body early. They traveled north, back to his people—where else should they go? Suima knew there was nowhere else for them. Hundreds of miles they must travel, up along the shore of the Ephsu, and along Vid to the north to reach his people. Then their dugouts would take Suima again to the docks of the copper mines, and himself again to work on the ships that travel the Ephsu's slow current.

But Gur did not expect to reach home again; for no other ever had managed to travel such a distance alone. Only in the trees of his homeland forests could a man travel far and live. And then only if he stayed in the trees.

But there were terrors in those stretches of swamp and grassy bottoms and low forested hills that even

Gur had not ever imagined.

They toiled on through the saw-edged grass, Suima ahead where Gur could keep an eye on her. Sweat poured, the swamp stunk in the sun, the little black flies and the big dino-flies bit, hummed and darted. Overhead wheeled a single condor, a lone dot gloriously high, and closer in great slow arcs swung a half-dozen buzzards. Gur felt they had seen the pair of mad humans, were waiting to pick their bones when their sure death came to them.

But Gur was following a half sensed, half visible trail. He knew it was a human foot path, and where such marks lay, there was nearby some kind of village. As the trail grew plainer, his worries lessened, for if it had grown less plain, it would mean the village lay behind.

They toiled up a low hill, painfully crawled to the brink, parted the thick growths to look down beyond. On their bellies, flat and motionless, they took in the scene below.

Nestling between two hills on the far side of a grassy valley lay a young city of hewn stone. The roofs of polished copper, the armored guards pacing the walls, the great copper sheathed tower of the temple topping the pyramid marked it to Gur as a city of the Ihuans, one of those settlements built by the southern rulers of the Ihuans to push their empire northward.

Through the gaping gates hunkered throngs of the shortlegged, hairy Ihuans, women carrying great bundles of fuel, baskets of meat cut from some hunter's kill, green stuff from the gardens surrounding the city walls. Soldiers strutted, their bandy legs sheathed in metal-studded wrappings, round targets on their back, swords glittering in

sheaths at their sides. Hunters, mostly Ongwee, and only one to ten of the other, were scattered through the throng, their taller, more graceful forms proud, their war-plumes nodding, their scalp trophies tasseled at waist and knee. Gur's heart stirred strongly to see thus the proud difference of race that made the Ongwee hunters stand out like men above monkeys to the hairy, ugly, big-mouthed, heavy-bellied Ihuans.

To Suima the sight was a release from fear, the fear she had hidden so well from the watchful eyes of Gur. The Ihins—a proud and quiet race, who lived by their wits among the denser, more primal Ihuans—were too proud to show fear before an Ongwee. For the Ongwee were savage barbarians, while the Ihins considered themselves civilized by comparison.

Even as they looked, a strange confusion, a furore swept through the throng of people. A trumpet blared from the walls. Soldiers could be seen running, singly... then squads of them pouring out of the barracks beyond the walls. The people still outside the walls began to run madly toward the gates. Only the Ongwee hunters showed no haste. They stood, proudly fearlessly, shading their eyes with their hands as they peered toward the north for the cause of the sudden fright.

Gur raised himself from his cover, peered to the north too.

Thundering down the long, shallow valley was a vast herd—a dinosaur herd—in stampede. Gur had never seen so many of the great lizards. It was a very strange thing, for the dinos do not ordinarily congregate in such numbers. A dozen shes feed about some great bull, yes, for the protection. But hundreds of

them in one mass—it was unheard-of to him.

Moreover they were not of one kind. Leaping far ahead of the rest came the tyrannosaurs, speedy on their great jumping legs, called by Gur and his people "adunes", meaning "friend of death". Behind them came the thunder-lizards, vastly larger than the adunes, but not so fierce, a grass-feeder with long neck and vast elephantine legs. Still behind them lumbered the brontosaurus, armored tanks on legs; triceratops, their triple horns jabbing right and left to keep off the press. For each of these Gur had a name of his own, an Ongwee word.

Down upon the walls of the town thundered this mass of mad flesh and fury. Gur and Suima lay still and silent, frozen with worry and an inability to understand the significance of what they were witnessing.

The walls—a stockade of logs filled with rocks and rubble and earth between the double wall of log uprights—held at first, broke the first mass of the rush. But a great brontosaurus blundered against the shut gate, the thing gave, crashed down, and the town lay open to the maddened beasts.

Gur knew that this was a new town, a temporary structure, a place for workmen to live while the stones were cut for the strong permanent homes, for a strong and massive stone wall to be built all around—as was the custom of the civilized of the Ihuans. Only the tall temple had been finished, and inside the wall Gur could see the people fleeing their flimsy structures to take shelter in the stone temple tower topping the pyramid.

Now, as Gur watched this scene, a mad thing happened, a thing that he could not accept any more than

we can accept the fourth dimension.

A great, peculiarly colored and textured reptile lumbered nearer and nearer their hiding place in the grasses. Slowing at last before them, the great thing stopped its ludicrous gait, came to a halt, its head sagging to the ground in weariness.

And Gur's eyes popped out of his head as a door slid open in the side of the monster, and a man like himself came out of the bowels of the big snake.

He lay down beneath the now strangely motionless monster, put to his eyes a queer tube and lay watching the town below a long time. The screams of the dying, the crash and dust and commotion of the monsters tearing the town into small fragments, trampling the fleeing people, came to Gur through a haze of wonder. What magic was this, for a man to come out of a monster, for a man to live in a monster?

Gur could not move away, for the monster and the man were close, just under the brow of the hill. But Gur could do another thing. Softly he slid his bow forward, nocked an arrow. Carefully he picked the place in the man's neck—and as the bow thumped deep and true and all his senses told him the arrow sped true, he whipped another arrow from the quiver and set it in the man's back just under the blade. The man half rose, gurgled blood from his throat, turned slightly, horribly, to see what had struck him, and fell dead.

Gur leaped forward, his slim copper blade gleamed, and the man's queer thatch was lifted neatly from his bare gleaming skull, was tucked into Gur's belt.

Gur motioned to Suima, stunned at Gur's intrepidity, and at his bloody ways, her eyes wide with

disgust and yet also with curious awe at Gur who was afraid of no wonder, came forward to him where he leaned peering into the dark interior of the strange beast that housed a man.

Gur had never seen anything like it. The inside was fitted with leather benches, with strange metal levers and glittering magic of which Gur had no knowledge. Fearfully, carefully, but yet irresistibly drawn, he crawled into the interior, sat on the bench, peered out of the two holes that were the animal's eyes. He saw the plain for a long way down the slow fall of the hill and nothing else. Suima came in, her mouth round with wonder, and peered too over his shoulder. And now Gur wonderingly laid hand on the glittering levers, pulled one, and let out a whoop as the great thing began to sway about him. The ground rocked, moved, and he was riding away inside the beast.

Suima screamed and grabbed Gur around the shoulders. Gur nearly fell over, grabbed hold of a lever to steady himself. In the two round windowing eyes, the whole world whirled in a circle, the room turned, tipped, began again its steady alternate swaying. The monster had turned around!

Through Gur was running now that strange strength-giving hum. He knew that the god-shadow was again in him, was conscious of him—and he knew too that something about this synthetic, metallic dinosaur had vastly interested the peering god-mind from afar.

Gur prayed softly to the god, under his breath. "Whatever God you may be, save me from this nightmare. I cannot understand. I am lost."

On plodded the great mechanical animal, and Gur and Suima sat, froz-

en with awe of the unknown, within.

CHAPTER III

"This, then was the size of the Adavay-sit; two thousand miles east and west. And the ship within it was one hundred miles, east and west."

The Book Of Apollo

FAR OVERHEAD floated the great ship of Apollo, and at the controls, peering into the great vision screen, sat the giant figure of the god, a son of Earth of long, long ago, peering down at the strange thing he had witnessed.

Behind him stood Cimiad, goddess of Noad and Rak, a small woman, dark-eyed, black-haired, with soft, deep emotions evident in the aura of force about her. Under her were some million female warriors. Beside her, also leaning over and watching the scene on the screens, was Phaeja, god of the Nors, and of Um, and a master of legions in his own right.

"Just what does this mean, this mechanical thing upon Earth? I had thought that none of the races now on Earth had recovered from the great destruction, that all were still primitive and without mechanical arts."

"It means that some race unknown to us has either come to Earth from space for conquest, or that some of the more advanced of these primitives have found the ancient sealed chambers under ground. Which it is I do not know—it may be both—but we shall soon know. And they had better mean well by these Earth peoples, for the Master has given the Earth into my keeping. That exhibition of cruel savagery in wiping out that settlement does not speak well for them."

Apollo turned his great head, curled with bronze wiry hair, his broad Jovian brow lighting as he

looked on Cimiad—for he loved her well and she knew it. And on the brow of Phaeja, his friend, a cloud gathered to see the light in Apollo's eyes, for he too loved Cimiad—and Phaeja was not noted for meekness or hesitation.

Apollo noted the cloud on the face of Phaeja, and the rift that had come between them widened—for he understood, and it was not good that Phaeja should think that ill could come from such a source.

The great ship drifted lightly, following the slow lumbering mechanical monstrosity north, and ever the swift vision rays searched under Apollo's knowing fingers for the source of that monster.

INSIDE THE lumbering fake Dino, Gur was wearying of the motion. His stomach refused the unnatural feel of the swaying thing and he was dizzy. The air was close and with strange, oily smells and it was hot.

Now near at hand he saw through the two windows other similar lumbering beasts, all going northward in the same oddly regular and unhurried, yet too steady a gait for any wayward reptile, and Gur's sharp eyes knew at once they were also beasts like his own—not real, but machines made to look like beasts.

Northward and northward along the edge of the swamps that bordered the wide, river-sea. Then the weird procession turned away from the water toward a low mountain range to the west.

Gur did not wish to go with the mechanical dinos, did not know how properly to turn the thing, let it run on straight northward, crushing down the growths ahead, lumbering on.

Crashing after him swiftly, gro-

tequely hurrying came a larger mech-dino. Gur fiddled with the strange levers, trying to increase his speed. Instead the thing stopped!

Gur looked at Suima aghast. He pictured her given over to the warriors of these strange people who built these imitation monsters; his heart became lead. His long face told Suima what he was thinking.

"Never mind, Gur, we would have died anyway. Maybe it will not be so bad as you think."

The pursuing beast came alongside, stopped, the door in the side swung open—the enemy got out. Gur could not see them, the two eye windows pointed only straight ahead. He heard them pounding on the door, shouting in a strange tongue. Like all the tongues of that day, it was very similar to his own—he knew what they wanted.

Gur pulled out his copper blade, handed it to Suima. "Stand behind me, golden hair. If they try to take me—stab swift and sure."

He fitted arrow to bow, kicked the release catch—stood staring at the strangers over a broad-head war-arrow.

They leaped back in surprise. Suima gasped. Gur grunted.

They were not Ongwee, not Ihuan hairy men, not the sacred, golden-haired Ihins!

They were white-skinned, black-haired, big-eyed and most unmuscular. They were no people of whom he knew. That was why he was surprised.

Three short men they were, standing there, backgrounded by the open door in the side of their monster. Clad in woven fabrics instead of skins, without knives, swords or bows, they yet carried weapons in their metal-mesh belts of which Gur could make nothing.

About their heads a fillet of sil-

ver, and on the front of it a round medallion, and on the medallion the sacred T symbol crossed by two lightning bolts.

"Who and what are you?" Gur's voice showed his youth—it shook a little. These people were vastly mysterious.

For answer one man took from his belt a little round object, touched it with his finger—and the limbs of Gur froze suddenly, painfully. He could not move.

The men entered, laid Gur and Suima to one side roughly. One sat at the seat where the levers were, one sat looking down on Suima and Gur, one went back to the first beast.

The two mech-dinos lumbered off on the trail of procession. Gur could not see much, could not move.

MMUCH LATER the motion ceased, the man sitting beside them took Gur's bow and the blade from Suima's hand, pointed at them a round something—and they were free, could move again. Painfully Gur stretched his stiff muscles—and leaped suddenly upon his captor. Gur had never been a captive—did not like the idea.

The little man went down with an ease astounding to Gur. Gur wrapped his hands around the slender throat, the man's tongue popped out—his eyes bulged, his face darkened ruddily—and the strange frozen force came again to Gur's muscles. He could not move. The man from the front seat at the levers had pointed the round thing at him again.

He jumped back, pried Gur's fingers from the throat of the other.

They trussed Gur up securely now with twisted grass rope, left only his ankles free for slow walking.

The two men pushed Gur and

Suima ahead of them out into dim, cool air—a great cavern of rock was about them. Gur looked about wonderingly.

To Gur the vast, glistening, polished dome above, rock which the polishing, marvelously mirror-like, repeating endlessly and rotundly, distorting everything the Elder ones had placed there. It was another world, that polished rock about them, breathing stone instead of air—inlaid with lovely colors, deviate stars of pink and grey, subtle shadings, moving evanescent life within the granite. The marvelous forms of the Elder machines, incomprehensible to Gur, were lovely as woman is lovely and for the same obscure reason the mind—it is so, that is all.

The people who moved through the mirroring halls and vast wonder of magic mechanisms and endless beauty weirdly repeating in the rock reflection—those people were also strange to Gur.

Small and pale and dark-haired, there yet was about them a vast confidence in their power, and Gur had an awe of them, seeing the things they were doing.

That was magic higher than any Ihin prophecy or mumbo jumbo he had ever heard of. For into great hoppers they were dumping cars of earth—and from the other end of the mech to which the hopper was attached came mysterious metal pieces, shaped and ready. These workmen took and placed together in order, and from their work was emerging a row of fearful mechanical beasts, such as Gur had just ridden.

Neither Gur nor the strange people knew that the mechanisms were a factory of the Elder race of long ago—that the weird beasts whose parts they assembled had been but a

kind of toy—made for the giant children of the gigantic Elder race. Neither Gur nor they knew that the giant children had ridden on the beasts and not *in* them—that their use of the weird, life-like animals to fool and devastate the Ihwan people, to drive them from the land, was not at all the purpose for which they were designed.

Gur did not know this race was nearly as ignorant as himself of mechanics—had only learned the secret of operating the unrusting machinery they had discovered in the sealed caverns a century ago. Gur could not have understood that a man can run a machine without being able to build or repair it—even though he had operated one himself, it had been inadvertently.

They were led before the chief of this people—an old man, grey haired. His little black eyes roved over Suima's young grace lewdly, and he licked his thick, ugly lips, glanced at his chief officer beside him suggestively. Suima raised her head proudly. Within himself Gur felt the humming strength that told him the far off wonder of the strange God presence was watching—was giving him strength magically for some undisclosed purpose.

The chief sat on a rude wooden throne, upraised on two wooden steps so that he could watch the activities of the great factory cave about him.

One of the men standing in a group about the throne, at a nod from the chief, stepped forward and with a single motion grasped Suima's tunic at the neck and ripped it from her body. She stood, naked, before the throng of people. Lovely, her face startled and suddenly embarrassed—she looked appealingly at Gur as if to ask: "Can't you do

something about such indignity?"

The humming strength within Gur rose in pitch till it was audible all about him. It gave him a terrible confidence to know the invisible God, was also angered—and the Godlike anger of the far-off being took possession of Gur as though his own anger were suddenly grown giganticly into a terrific strength.

With one convulsive effort Gur burst the ropes about his arms, about his legs, struck the guard beside him in the face with his fist. As the man fell, forward, like a death-stricken warrior falls, Gur caught the body, ripped the sword from the scabbard and leaped at the other guard. The sword passed through the neck, chopping hard on the spinal bones. Gur pulled it loose, twisting with incredible speed to avoid a charging warrior. Gur did not know the rays racing, humming through his body gave him synthetic animal energy in floods, made him a superman. He only knew that magically he was several Gurs rolled into one.

LEAPING like a flame through the muddled group tugging at the swords still useless in their belts, tugging at the strange cylinders of which Gur knew already the nature—Gur was invincible. Man after man fell before the sword that had become a sorcerer's wand in his hand, striking with blurring speed and irresistible force through any parry, through any metal or leather shield, through bones and flesh equally well. His progress toward the throne which he had made his goal was only stopped when the hardened copper gave under his savage use—turned into a useless piece of bent metal in his hand. Gur struck the next man beside him with his hand, flat on the back of

the neck, and he fell to his knees. Gur seized the metal cylinder dangling at his belt. All the time Gur had wondered at the strange slow movement of these people, who seemed frozen by some hidden fear of force. Gur had much to learn of the ways of the Gods.

Gur pressed the stud on the gleaming cylinder, swept the thing in a circle upon the struggling mass of warriors pushing to place their bodies between the chief and this madman. Instantly they froze into complete immobility. The paralysis ray worked as well on themselves as on their enemies, Gur noted, for his superstitious mind had wondered if such magic were not selective, usable by themselves only.

This sudden turn left only himself and the naked embarrassed, yet proud Suima active among all these grouped about the throne. Quickly she freed her hands, which had been held by a single thong in the hand of the guard, put her torn clothing back in place as best she might, tied it with strips of its own fabric.

Meanwhile, Gur, suddenly weary, pushed the frozen, staring body of the chief from the rude throne. It toppled, thumping to the floor down the two tall steps—and Gur sat down in the throne, puffing, and eyed Suima.

"How do you like that?" asked Gur.

"You are the strongest, fastest man with a sword I ever saw. No Ihin has the right to feel superior to such an Ongwee! Gur, you were so angry when they did that to me—and look what you have done to them." Suima giggled loudly. "They lie about as though lightning had struck them!"

Suima's laughter was infectious. Gur began to laugh too. And it was

thus that the curious people found them, as they came from their many tasks in the far caverns, attracted by the tumult, or came from their tasks near at hand assembling the parts of the metal monsters manufactured by the magic of the Elder mech from iron ore—came and stood in awe before this hero who had calmly laid the whole court low and sat himself laughing, upon the throne.

The strange humming came again to Gur's body, the weariness left. And with the new strength came an idea—perhaps his own, perhaps from the far God. Gur stood up, held up one red-stained hand.

"My people, as your new ruler, I decree today a holiday in celebration of the accession of Gur, the mighty, to your throne. You are a lucky people. No more will you have to work for these foolish ends. Gur has mighty plans—but they do not include such unnecessary labor. Go now, and celebrate properly."

As astounded as even Gur was himself at this development—the people trickled from the hall as they had entered, bemused with what had happened, home to their huts within the darkness of the hidden caves. Gur had acquired a mighty kingdom, though he did not fully realize it yet.

Suima, weary, gracefully stretched herself on the throne dais, her head on Gur's knees. Looking up at him, brooding over the sudden things that kept happening to him lately, her blue eyes shone with gratitude. It had been all too evident what her fate would have been otherwise.

FAR OVERHEAD, in the *Airavagna*, Apollo looked at Phaeja and Cimiad, chuckling, his face wreathed with humor.

"That savage is a whirlwind when you give him the energy, isn't he? I

didn't expect him to do nearly so well. That little outfit of misusers of the ancient wisdom got theirs in a hurry. I think I will stick with this Gur and his charming Suima. They should make fine tools for the cleaning of this earth."

Phaeja, the cloud banished from his brow with interest in what they were planning, answered.

"They can be used to great purpose. But we will need many, many thousand such as Gur."

"Gur will get them, of his own will—but we will help him think a little. Methinks we have set a man on the path to greatness who would fight his way along to success without our help."

Cimiad spoke. "Gur is a healthy seed of the old race. Good lad, indeed."

Apollo mused. "It was a good race; it is too bad this sun is what it is. But we will try." From his words one would have thought he remembered the very beginnings of the race from which Gur sprang.

The great ship hung in the ether, waiting, and busily the mighty ones employed themselves with plans for the future of men.

GUR PONDERED for a long time, and Suima closed her eyes sleepily. She started awake as Gur spoke, sudden decision ringing in his voice.

"Write for me a message, Suima. To my people. I need men I can trust—I cannot continue with such tools never knowing who is loyal and who plots against me. Tell them to come to me..."

Obediently she found writing materials, stretched a soft skin tight with stones upon the planks of the dais—drew with a brush the primitive pictures.

"My brothers of the brave Normak,

sons of the Eagle of Heaven, come to me, Gur, of the straight-talk. I have found a great treasure of value—the tribe will be rich forever. Come and help me. Across the terrible plains—come with my messengers. Ride always an armed warrior, ready to kill, as I do not know if these men be loyal to me or not. Come, my brothers—fear not the trail, for glory may be won beyond the tales of the old men, beyond the glory of the sun. Come to me.”

Gur made his mark, a bird upon the back of a deer, and Suima set the message to dry. Gur held up a hand to one of the men who was standing, watching curiously, no doubt set by the others to tell them what he could of this new power amongst them.

The man came, timidly, bowing his head with awe before the warrior who had struck down the whole mass of the bravest men among them. Gur spoke, his own tongue sufficing, for the words were not dissimilar—only differently accented.

“You are one who drives these false beasts; I saw you get out when we arrived. I want you to get ten others who drive these things, and make a long journey for me, to the shores of mighty Vid in the north land. Are you afraid?”

“If you command we will go, O Hero. But what are we to do when we arrive?”

“You will bring the others of my people back here with you. You will talk to no others on the way. I will mingle the two peoples, these of this cavern, and those that are like me. They will be strong together, we will fear no one. Now go, and when you are ready—I will give you my message to my brothers.”

THAT WELL known sword hanging by a hair became Gur’s

chief worry. These people were armed, they did not love him. It was just a question of time till they decided to rid themselves of him.

Gur took measures. The throne was moved to a smaller chamber. Nobody entered till unarmed and passed by Suima. A dozen guards selected by himself stood outside the doors of the chamber where Suima interviewed those who would a word with the new ruler.

But there was the hunting, the breath of life to Gur—he could not leave it alone.

Stalking the giant saurians with the false beasts was simplicity itself. Killing them with the ray tubes was simple too. It was all too simple, and it showed Gur how easily himself might be done away with if he did not reorganize his life to that end.

These people were fat and sleek, always well supplied with dino meat. Too well fed to be healthy, to Gur’s thinking. And too idle, now that he had curtailed the labor, to keep out of mischief. They were grateful to him for relieving them of the other ruler, some had confided—but Gur worried.

To amuse himself and pass the time, Gur had those older, wiser members of this strange tribe teach him what they knew of the magic of the machines.

During the process of learning how the great vision rays were used to watch the surface life, for locating herds of dinos, and for watching the distance; the old man was showing Gur how the distance focus worked when into the center of the screen lumbered a long procession of false mech-dinos. Gur, startled, looked at the old man.

“Who is that?”

“They are another of our tribes

from another cavern. They are coming this way. It may be that they have a meeting scheduled with us which the former ruler failed to mention."

Gur and the old man, accompanied by his guards, men he had selected by careful inquiries for individuals who had failed to get along well with the former ruler, hastened to the chamber where Gur had locked up the former ruler and some dozen of the men who had lived through his attack. The paralysis ray with which he had felled them was not fatal.

"What does the procession of mech-dinos coming toward us mean?" asked Gur of the former ruler, sitting disconsolate on his haunches, surrounded by his "court", several of whom were chewing hungrily on bones—which was about all the tribe gave them to eat.

The ugly ruler laughed sneeringly.

"It means your new fortune is at an end. They come to make war. Unknown to you I have sent a message to my cousin and friend, the ruler of the Batongwee tribe of Treasure-seekers. They have everything we have in these caverns and are quite as formidable, and are coming to put me back on my throne. Pleased?" The little ugly man leered triumphantly at Gur.

"Thanks," flung Gur over his shoulder, racing back to the screen where he had seen the long column deploying across the plain outside.

Gur, under the eyes of the old teacher, flung the ray across the wide plains, seeking the rest of the enemy. Far down the long shallow valley, where the ruins of the fortified town of the Ihuans lay stinking under the noon sun, he found another sight that gave him pause. Out of a score of ships drawn up to the shore were unloading a small army of troops,

building material and ordinary people from the Ihuans southern Empire. Whether they were sent to rebuild the town, or whether the Empire in the south did not even know the town had been destroyed, Gur did not know. These could be just reinforcements and material sent to the destroyed town before it had been destroyed. It could also be a vengeful expedition of retaliation, the first forces landing to make ready for the greater might to come. Gur looked at the old adviser, who said,

"The Ihuans bring more death upon themselves. They can not understand that someone does not want them here."

"What will that bunch mean to these other cave people? Will they attack them, or come on to smoke us out?"

THE EXPEDITION forces from the south marched up the long grade from the landing, came at last in full view of the town they expected to find. They stopped, evidently aghast at seeing nothing but ruin and death. A wailing and a vast chatter of speculation as to what had happened to the town arose among them.

Over the ridge from the south came the long columns of the false dino beasts, on their way to annihilate the usurping ruler, Gur, and place the rightful king back on his throne. The foremost lumbering mech-beast paused, stood looking at the new batch of soldiers and colonizers from the southlands. The columns drew up behind him, all the big false eyes turned down on the strange people. Over the brow of the hill poured more and more of the tank-like metallic beasts. Gur watched with vast interest, hoping the newcomers had something in the way of a weapon against the strange cavern people. It would save him a lot of trouble if the

Ihuans spent their blood fighting his new enemies.

Gur did not expect his people from the north-land for another week, did not want any strain placed on his slowly strengthening reins of government till he was more sure of himself. No one was more astounded than himself when another ray-watch turned to him from a nearby vision ray, saying:

"Our brothers return from the north, O Hero-king."

Gur swung the vision ray along the other's pointing ray—and on his screen sprang a sight beautiful to his eyes. Strung out behind the ten lumbering false beasts he had sent to the northland came his people, scattered well to avoid annihilation by any sudden charging dino, quivers well filled with broad-headed copper-pointed arrows, bows carried at the ready, women and children in the center of the column, warriors well spread on each side to give plenty of warning when trouble arose. Gur was proud of his people's military, confident appearance, the tall copper bodies, the fierce, painted faces, the nodding plumes, the bunches of scalp locks at the older warriors' belts—the whole fierce, warlike appearance of his own people.

Gur looked at the old man, standing beside him, his old eyes filled with a look Gur knew, the look a warrior has before a battle. The smell of blood gets in a man's nose, his pulses pound—this old one was sniffing war and longing for action, long denied him.

"Look, old one, you are a friend to me?"

"As good as any. I have seen you fight. I admire courage."

"Take one dino-mech. Go north to that column of my people approaching. Set aside the women, the children, and lead the warriors to this

feast of blood preparing. Those enemies of ours who are so ready to tell us who may be our king are going to charge upon those defenseless settlers from the south. Our mech-dinos are going to charge upon their rear, catch them against the shore and against the Ihuan soldiery—weak as it is. You lead the newcomers down upon the melee, swift and hard. Strike from the north as they are heading."

"Those arrows of your people will not pierce the metal of the mech-beasts. How will they fight?"

"Show them how to rope the legs of the mech, how to approach from the blind side. They will prove troublesome enough, will they not?"

"That way, yes! The beasts can be overturned.

"But you will do yourself a disservice: those soldiers from the south will observe how the strange dinos are not real beasts, will observe how they may be overthrown. Your chief weapon against the Empire of the South will be lost you!"

"They will be at first overawed with the revelation of the magic within the beasts. I will invite them to join our forces—a ruler must grow, have many peoples. They will fear to refuse because to them this is mighty magic. We will have more people than ever—is that not good?"

"You are right. I had not thought of that. I obey."

The old man got into one of the beasts, the hillside opened before him, he went out into the sunlight, a lumbering dinosaur.

Gur got his men into the rest of the beasts. Two hundred strong they filed out into the heat, lumbered and creaked away to the south. Inside the lead beast, sitting beside the dark-haired little driver, Gur exulted, thinking what a surprise the enemy cavern dwellers were going to get

when the Ongwee warriors struck, after his first charge had penned them against the river.

CHAPTER IV

"And all the Lords shall be called Apollo. And they shall inspire men to make images of stone and wood. And the images shall have short arms and long legs; and nails instead of claws on the fingers, and well formed mouths, with shapes for motion of the cheeks.

"He cometh to the young mother's dream, and shapeth her unborn, with limbs like a racer. He standeth in the idol, and knoweth the mother's prayer..."
The Book Of Apollo

THE NEWCOME colonizers, soft city people from the cities of Om, stood about looking at the ruins of the place that had been built to receive them. The stench of rotting bodies in the sun was nauseating, the grasses and thickets seemed filled with the threat of death. "What sort of beasts were these who leveled a city as though touched by the hand of God?"

Their Ongwee hunters pointed out that the tracks were of a horde of dinosaurs. The great snakes had smashed over the whole place, leaving nothing alive. Even as they stood there in indecision, over the brow of the hill came lumbering the column of the beasts, stopped and looked at the victims waiting, gathered themselves into a great mass for an annihilating charge.

"Back to the boats," screamed the officers of the armed warriors, knowing they had nothing that would stop such a magic as was evident in the column of evidently disciplined beasts. Such a thing was unheard of.

The people and the soldiers fled toward the ships that had just disgorged them. Down upon their disorganized flight, as fast as their mech would drive them, came the thundering herd of queer beasts.

Even as their charge gathered head-

way, over the curve of the hills to the north came a column of the beasts even larger than their own. Unobserved by the down-driving mech-beasts, their round eyes pointing only toward the river, down upon them thundered Gur's warriors in the beasts, and Gur's heart exulted, for he saw now how they might be overcome.

And even as this apparently double doom smashed down through the thickets upon the colonists, came the Ongwee from Lake Vid screeching a war-cry from five hundred fierce throats. Surely never were colonists met by so mighty a mass of destruction.

As the three forces rushed together from three divergent directions, that happened which Gur could never understand.

Down from the heaven's blue flashed a long fiery streak, capped by a silver magic of grace; and suddenly before the charging war-angry beasts appeared the vast silvery bulk of such a thing as had only been seen by men in dreams, or heard of in the old tales of the Gods from the skies.

Huge it was as a fleet of hundreds of ships. Still and beautiful, shimmering in the heat of the sun, twelve feet from the ground it hung. From its sides streamed strange and lovely rays by the hundred, out upon the rushing forces of war and death.

Gur felt the rays, and a great peace came upon him, peace such as only a God could give a man. No more would he say the Gods were the prating of old men. For there hung the God-magic in front of them, and upon them came the great good peace of will which was told of long ago.

The great mech-beasts lumbered to a halt, the doors in the sides opened, the small dark men came out

and walked peacefully toward the great 'ship. Gur got out, the old man in the fore of the charging Ongwee force got out, everybody came out of their protective chambers in the mech-beasts—and the whole of the war-faring forces walked peacefully toward the ship of strange magic.

The colonists, frozen with fear a moment before, now turned, their flight forgotten, and stood beside the ship, waiting for the God to speak. For nothing but a God could appear so suddenly where before had been empty space.

GLORY CAME out of the strange gleaming ship of space—glory, tall and well shaped, glittering with gold and colored garments, horned Apollo, grave Phaeja, beautiful, womanly Cimiad.

Three gigantic man-Gods, tall as great trees. They stood above the people, their hands held out in benediction over the upturned faces.

The immortals were forty to sixty feet tall, and their voices boomed like the wind of a storm; and their words, although of another tongue, were clear to the people because of the rays from the ship which spread a magnetic field of thought-conductive which conveyed the thought meaning as well as the words to them.

"My people," spoke Apollo, "I have come to care for this earth. It has been given into my charge after much heavenly neglect on its far course through space where no God dwells. This war you are engaged in will stop; you will join together as one to work for the rule of your lord Apollo, and my teachings shall be your way of life. Beauty I will give your children—peace and plenty for your lives I bring—and the great beasts who slay you I will destroy. If there be a way to set the feet of men upon the paths of greatness I will

find it."

The power and intent of the Lord Apollo was seen clearly by their human minds because by the conductive rays, they saw with the mind of a God.

Thus seeing what great good fortune had come to them in this aid from the stars, they fell on their knees as one person, weeping for gratitude. Visions of what life could be—a paradise on earth—came to them from the God-mind. They knew what gifts of wisdom and pleasure there were for the God to give them, and they wanted such things more than life.

Phaeja walked carefully among the prostrate people, a little telaug in his great hand, taking readings; and ever he touched one of the more intelligent of these people on the shoulder and at the touch the vast vitality of the God body flowed into them, filling them with power and understanding, and they rose to their feet and walked toward Apollo because they knew they were so commanded.

When some fifty such were selected, Apollo spoke.

"These chosen will be your leaders, those who will bring my teachings to you, those who will lead you in our wars against the evil of this world. They will be respected as instruments of the Lord and must answer only to me for their decisions, for their deeds. Go now, and rebuild this city for all."

Gur had been selected as a leader and was somewhat surprised to see Suima standing by his side. He nudged her, his mind in a whirl from the sudden turn of events, from the actual appearance of something he had thought must exist only in some intangible way.

Suima turned her sweet face to him, her golden hair aureoling from

the electric force of life she had absorbed from the body-electric of the mighty Phaeja when he had touched her.

"I, too, was selected, my brave Gur—you are not alone in your clever mind; I also have such a mind."

"My little Suima is not only beautiful, she is also clever," murmured Gur, pleased.

WITH THE great ship standing now on the ground—and its vast power rays reaching out to do the lifting, its tiny dis-rays to do the cutting and shaping, the humans present only for measurements and for planning how the structures were to lie, the city rose within days to a mighty size, big enough for a dozen times the number of people present. Gur realized the city was to be the center of a vast growth of organization of these peoples, and said nothing, but he could not help thinking that all this was already prepared and waiting in the caverns where the machines lay waiting to build more mech-dinos—and his thought was noticed by Apollo.

Apollo called the man to him, looking down on Gur interestedly; for he was the first human he had seen when he had returned at last to this earth from the skies.

"Your thought is troubled. Speak, Gur of the Normaks of the Ongwee, what is it that troubles you?"

"All this labor of building, would it not be better to use the caverns of the hidden dino men, where I have lived of late? They have there vast empty cities under earth, full of machines and wisdom waiting for the student to learn. Why do you not use those places?"

"There are two reasons, my son. These people will appreciate and care for and love a city they have helped to build and can understand. In those

Elder caves it is all too easy. It is all ready and waiting; they do not have to learn how to build a machine, they have only to touch the button and the machine works. Knowing what I know, I know that to use those places for the growth of healthy sane peoples of might and wisdom will not work, as there is no need for real effort. All has been provided. There could be no growth there. The people would grow weak and puny away from the sun and from the turmoil of the surface life. It is not good."

Gur was dissatisfied. His face showed that he thought it much better to move into the cavern with all these people and begin to learn the way of the people who had built the places originally.

"To teach you that I am right, I am going to let you take those of your comrades you wish, and those of the people whose ruler you displaced who wish to go back with you, and go back to that cavern and make a life for yourselves. You will soon see that I am right. Otherwise you will be dissatisfied."

"You need me here, where the work and the activity and the plan is going forward. Back there in the holes of rock, what will there be for me to do? I cannot plan a war, for the peoples will all be under your officers; I cannot hunt, the snakes will be slain by you!"

As he spoke, a resentment rose up in Gur that this great one should have upset all his life and his ambitions and his plans, and shown him how little and puny were his mind and his future compared to what it might be. And Gur, notwithstanding the great awe and gratitude he bore toward the mighty being, said:

"I had planned to conquer these people and the other people who ride the false snakes and make them one under me and this whole land my own, the

property of Gur. You have done all this without striking a blow, but the effort and work of my life are gone; there is nothing for me to live for. I will take my brothers and my comrades and go, and wrest for myself another place from the wilderness or another cavern from the darkness, and will not have to live with the mighty light of your wisdom plaguing me with my own puny worth continually."

Gur turned on his heel and went out of the presence. After him went a score of the Ongwee who had heard him, and a score of the people of the cavern who had helped him the first days of his rule.

Sadly Apollo looked after this one who had not enjoyed the advent of a greater, and then he looked at Cimiad. Cimiad returned his look knowingly.

"You are right, beloved. It is woman's work."

She hastened after Gur, her tallness and beauty that of the Goddess she was, full forty feet tall. Her long strides overtook the group of savage warriors almost at once. They had paused to gather together their belongings. She stood before them, casting her glorious mind into their own, seeking to inspire there, love and trust and a desire to serve and make the glory of the wisdom of the God-race grow on earth.

Gur looked up at her sullenly, loving her woman-beauty, made by the growth of time and the terrific health and strength of an immortal a multiple of the beauty and attraction of an ordinary woman. Still within Gur in spite of the vast pleasure of her presence, was a knowledge that he was nothing—and Gur did not appreciate being nothing when for a short time he had tasted the sweets of power.

"GUR, THE brave, you make a great mistake in your thinking. Under Apollo you can become a great Lord, full of wisdom and strength. With his knowledge in your mind, you can even in time learn the secrets of immortality, leave this earth and take to space as a Lord of the far trails of the stars. That is what Apollo once was, such as yourself; but he did not place his own thought before the thought of the greater one. Can you not understand love, Gur? The master loves you and each of these people because he is a greater one, and his heart is great and able to love each one. You will always get fair dealing, and his plans will be vastly more satisfying to work out than your own puny ones."

"They are at least my own," Gur answered sullenly, not fully seeing her meaning.

"I ask you to give this Lord a trial, Gur. You may not serve him except willingly—it is not allowed. But you have known him but this short while. Give his ways a month—two months—a year—before you decide that it is better to be free and alone. He has come to this world only to bring order and peace and safety and wisdom, not to usurp your power and your privilege as you see it. He is above these things, and presently so will you be also. Stay awhile, Gur and learn what love and wisdom can be." And Cimiad cast the full revelation of her inner beauty into the mind of Gur and brought him mentally to her feet in a slavish adoration.

"For you, I will stay and try to like it. But these great males, Phaeja and Apollo—I bristle at them like a dog to another. I see the light of love for them in Suima's eyes, and I cannot stand that."

"In your own eyes, now, what is

there that shines for me?"

"That is true, Cimiad."

"Suima is also jealous of me. She loves you. Even with the great male presence of Apollo before her, she still loves you, Gur. And you were going away from her, to break her heart forever. Is that good?"

"I will stay, then, and see how these things work out. It may be that they are beyond my understanding."

"I need you and Suima for reasons. Do you want to labor for me, and not for Apollo? Then you and Suima can be together?"

"That is infinitely better, Cimiad. I can understand your heart, while his is a great secret to me."

GUR WAS somewhat troubled in mind as he realized more every day that these Gods, whom the Rabbahs had always taught were spirits, and not material, were very definitely flesh and blood like himself. Gur deduced that the other times of the Gods' descent to earth they had been flesh and blood and muscle and metal wonder-work as well.

As the days went by, several more ships made their sudden landings from the sky, and a legion of mighty warriors drilled on the great plains of the Gomagat. With them, learning to work with them, drilled Gur and his Ongwee, his cavern people and their mechanical dinosaurs, and the people from the south, the city dwellers, the Ihuans of the bandy legs and ugly faces.

Gur's mind was also troubled by the reason for the Gods' presence. He could not reconcile his practical analysis of motives with Apollo's effort. Why did he spend his time and effort for these primitive people? What was in it for him? Phaeja noticed these puzzling thoughts in Gur's mind and made him an answer.

"You see, Gur, we belong to a

mighty organization of space governments—very huge, many, many planets as well as great cities built in the ether itself of metal and plastic, as big as planets but very light with little gravity. This master government has a use for everything and a reward for every effort. If we make this planet into a huge factory of production of these things we need, make it worth taking into the union, we get a reward. That reward will consist in greater responsibilities as well as of greater means of gratifying certain ambitions we have for research and experiment with life forms. One of Apollo's reasons for being here is to prove a theory he has as to how the race—any race—can be vastly improved in hereditary beauty and strength of mind by certain methods which you will see him apply as the organization of the planet proceeds."

Phaeja looked at Gur, who was listening attentively. Satisfied he understood, Phaeja rested the huge ray he was swinging across the far landscape, taking a count of the beasts to get an average estimate of the labor required to get rid of them.

"There is also another, bigger reason. That is, the sun up there is due to begin throwing off certain terrible emanations within the year. Those rays will change all life for the worse on earth, and lose its value to the God race forever unless we find a way to circumvent those effects by establishing counter force. Great generators of damping and neutralizing magnetic fields must be set up all over the planet to repel those waves. If we do not get this done, those waves will madden all life on the planet, degenerate every mind into a killing mechanism. Blood and war alone will rage over the planet. Every great peaceful foliage-eater will turn into a maddened beast that will slay whatever approaches it, and the whole

progress of the planet will be set back beyond redemption. This is a terrible thing to happen to the sweet young race represented by such as Suima. There are perhaps a million of sweet creatures like Suima over this planet, and it is to save that seed of the future represented by such as her that we are making this effort. Do you see now why we did not let you go your own way into war and conquest and foolishness without our guiding hand?"

Gur looked up at the noble head of Phaeja. An impetuous, bristle-mustached face it was, broad brow and short nose, wide round eyes snapping a strange eager fire, little round ears and a round strong chin. The whole fire-eating aspect of him was somehow belied by a cool nobility of judgment sitting behind the eyes and Gur understood Phaeja as like himself somewhat: one whose warlike nature must be continually curbed by a strong rein of judgment which sometimes fails to function. "If you speak truth, I can understand why you are here. It is because you have loved such good, simple creatures as Suima long ago and feel you owe a debt to the mother; Mi, the planet which bore them. Is that not so?"

"That is very true, my Gur. Apollo himself was a son of this planet long, long ago, and owes his mother every effort he can make for her. Her future depends on our work. Now will you get in the harness properly?"

GUR FILLED himself with the strange eager fire of haste from Phaeja's eyes, and went and had a long talk with the old man whom he had come to use as the link between himself and the strange, cold people of the caverns, as well as a long talk with the Elder men of his own Ongwees. And after that the work went much better.

In a great circle, out from the city they had built upon the ruins of the Ihuan colony, went their army, steadily clearing away all the beasts, the great snakes, all the useless savage life entirely.

At distances of two hundred miles apart the giant men from space built great towers of shining metal topped by round balls of metal mesh—and in the great stone buildings they constructed beneath, they set vast metal generators humming. From the round balls began to hum out a mighty field of power, a strange cool power of electric that bathed all things for a hundred miles in a soft crackling of electric. This electric Gur found was vastly healthful. The weariness one noticed after a few hours of sunlight no longer came, but instead one was fresh the whole day through. He began to understand what the Great Ones were about.

Every day one of the great ships flashed skyward with a roar, and every day one landed, loaded with hundreds of tons of supplies for the building. Sweeping in great arcs over the plains, the ships that were detailed to the work slew hundreds of the roaming beasts with the dis-rays, and their stench was on the breeze like a pestilence. The plains of the Gomagat were nearly all under the new reign when the sun trouble began. Apollo's face grew more and more grave as the sun changed from day to day, becoming ever redder and more sullen and oppressive. The heat was terrible outside of the artificial protection of the great towers of repellent electric which screened the worst rays of the sun.

Up from the unprotected southlands of Om came wave after wave of maddened beasts, the heat and the de-rays of the sun having changed them from peaceful herbivores into savage, racing hordes of killers,

trampling all before them.

Now their legions of builders, their fighting planes which swept over along the borders, might not venture out into the areas unprotected by the shielding magnetic fields from the great towers. Instead all the efforts were expended in swiftly enlarging this area by building ever more great towers on the rims of the protected area. Built within the rim of shielding force, they extended the protection ever outward in a great circle.

But the work went far too slowly for Apollo.

NEAR TO Apollo's realm in etherea, lay the possessions of Ashtoroth. Ashtoroth was a beautiful, lascivious, lawless and self-willed female, who inherited vast power from her father—Osiris. Baal, her consort and friend, and Ashtoroth, as well as the older Osiris, were false Gods—that is, they denied the power of the Creator, and set themselves up as rulers in their own right. Their main reason for cutting loose from the Federation of Etherean States of which the Creator was heard, was to avoid giving up their warriors and workers to the service of the Federation; but also they wanted the freedom from restrictions upon their activities. So long as they did not enter into active war against the organized space powers, they were tolerated, left alone.

As earth, on its course through space with the other bodies of the group called the Serpent, on the great orbit in space, passed through borders of Apollo's realm, it also passed through a corner of the area in space which was under the hand of Ashtoroth.

It was not the passing of the little planetary system that called her attention, but a message from Apollo. The message said:

"The Serpent passeth through your lands. Only madness and death awaits life upon this planet called earth, and upon the other planets of this sun, for the sun has gone into the 'de' stage of degeneration, which all such burning bodies pass into in time. In case you think to annex this planet and its people, I must warn you that yourself cannot stay long on this planet without madness and the horror of age coming upon you."

Ashtoroth, reading the message, laughed with curling luxurious lips.

"This glorious sycophant of the even more glorious Creator thinks to be-fool me from the conquest of these teeming people with a lie. I will just take a look at this earth. It is said to be the original birthplace of the great Apollo. He seems pretty healthy to source upon a planet of age and death."

Down, now, toward the Red Star, the planet Earth, shrinking smaller and smaller from out of the tenuous grades of solidity of her own etherean planes of being, the contractile dynamos plugging a deep drone of power through all the tenuous atoms of her ship. Smaller and smaller into the densities of the grade of solidity of Earth, came her great vagnacraft, the *Viperfang* of Ashtoroth.

Huge and sensual in the cabin of controls, Ashtoroth, the beautiful, proud and merciless, waited, her deep black eyes intent upon the new source of life that swam now through the rim of her Etherean Empire. Denser and denser grew her ship and her body, and the bodies of her monstrous crew of robots and outlaw warriors, closer and closer came the earth.

Now, swooping suddenly down upon the southern hemisphere of Earth, her view rays surveyed the primitive peoples and primal forests, the completely savage land she pro-

posed to make her own. Unknowing that in the Northern hemisphere Apollo and his legions of warriors and skilled engineers were laboring to lift the magnetic field of earth out of its terrible sun "de" inductive atunement, and thus free the life-planet from its evil, unknowing that Apollo planned to make the planet safe for the man-culture experiments he planned, unknowing that she was setting herself up against the mighty Lord of the Etherean realms, who had ordered Apollo to right the affairs of Earth, unknowing even, in her ignorance of the past before her birth that earth was an ancient home of the God race itself once upon a time, unknowing that this earth was anything but a savage and unsettled planet that Apollo had thought to keep from her by a lie, an earth that was anyone's claim, her ship landed. After it, swimming down through plane of density after plane of density, from the vast expansion used by their science to traverse the endless infinitudes of ether, came her armies within her vast navy of ships and the cargo craft carrying her endless supplies for the building she planned.

NOW SWOOPING down upon the southern half of the globe, the great vagnacraft planed the thin air of the stratosphere as its density still increased, and its size decreased.

Below lay awesome primal forests untouched by organized men for an age, teeming with savage life, gigantic beasts and the terrific sized reptiles of the age of dinosaurs, vast yellow tinted seas swarming with aquatic life.

She did not know, nor would have cared greatly to know, that in the North would land the Legions of Apollo to train there and to build to make the planet safe for the man-culture experiments he planned. In

fact, she planned certain experiments in tecto-genetics herself, but her purposes were far from the noble motivations of the God Apollo.

Ashtoroth was in some ways an ignorant outlaw among the cultured ancient wisdom-gatherers of the vast realms of the Etherean worlds, but in other ways Ashtoroth's education had been intensive, and the scientific methods used to promote the pleasures of life into an intricate fabric of continuous ecstasy were to her as a primer to the teacher.

Her purposes in landing upon this savage, untouched planet were a mixture of mischievous curiosity as to what she could do with its numerous life-forms in bringing about startling and numerous new life-forms, and watching the ensuing chaos resulting from tampering with the natural progressions of life. Her education had been onesided, true, but it had been thorough.

She took a sensual delight, a sadistic thrill, in certain facets of this tecto-genetic science, the whole science of the God races was essentially one of the study of life, its causes and changes, the reasons for its protean developments, and her own fascination with the science was a product of sensual impulses within her mind.

A woman may dream of a man as strong as a bull embracing her. Ashtoroth could dream in a more actual way, and by her work with gene cultures, with stripped chromosomes, with beneficial rays and culture nutrient solutions, by micro-surgery and their combination in the science of tecto-genetics, she could reproduce in a short, quick growing time, a man who was half bull, and who became of adult size in a short span of forced growth. In her endlessly active and sexually hungry mind her libido insisted upon performing such imagery of transformations, delighted in vis-

ualizing vast phantasmagoriae of life in multiform variation, all bent to forms to suit her cravings for sensual variety and power over life. That impulse in Apollo which was leading him to remake man into a greater and more beautiful thing, was in Ash-toroth an irresistible impulse to re-make man as well as animals into another sad thing, a thing mentally enslaved from birth to certain channels of thought that worked out into a life-pattern of a certain horrible kind that satisfied her cravings, her perverted appetites, that infinitely pleased her weirdly out-of-joint ideals of beauty.

Months went swiftly by as she laid the few sparse peopled kingdoms of Africa under her domination, as she found the caverns under Africa where the Elder race had left much that she found of value and interest to her heretofore unknowing mind, which had never contracted any of the ancient works of the beginnings of the life of the Edler race that now ruled space and had forgotten it's lowly beginnings upon the little Earth.

Within those forgotten caverns she built for herself a vast system of laboratories. Swiftly her great rock melting rays bored new and suitable chambers to fit her great size and a veritable factory of production of multiplicate polymorphic life-forms sprang up under her hands. Around her awful kingdom grew a bizarre, heterogeneous non-comformity of monstrous aberrations from the theme of life. She made such improvizations by the thousands, and released so many of the unsuccessful experimental animals that the plains of Africa swarmed with the by-products of her handiwork—the griffin, the centaur, the elephant, the giraffe, the hippogriff, the hydra are but a few, some of which survive till today to tell us of the awful handiwork

of this adventuress in the science of tecto-genetics.

Ashtoroth created much for the mere pleasure in seeing what would happen next when she distorted the germs of life with her rays, her cell surgery, her perfusion solutions, her mixtures of pure genes which combined into any mad life-form her brain could conceive.

WHILE MUCH of this was pure experimentation to see what would happen next, she had a darker purpose in her work, a purpose hidden from all but herself, a purpose which would, if successful, place her in control of far vaster dominions and far vaster sources of the materials of ecstatic and immortal debauchery than any other monarch of space.

To magnify the sperm and egg of divergent species, to treat this or that portion with tiny stimulating growth rays, while with minute cut-ray needles she killed another portion of micro-surgery, to mate the products of this micro-surgery and to raise the offspring to maturity swiftly in their forcing incubators was an ancient science long before the birth of Ashtoroth. That Ashtoroth was a kind of comprachico, a producer of purposeful and pitiful monstrosities, was not new. There had been others before her for ages, and the practice had its profitable side. There was a huge market for these peculiar life forms in the pleasure palaces that flourished in the outlawed areas of space.

The introduction into this science of these forbidden procedures, to produce these sensually useful though monstrous creatures, was a branch of science that lived in technical virtuosity only among such outlaws as Ashtoroth had gathered about her. That the study and practice of this science should become an appetite, a

terrible obsession, is *understandable only to those who have experienced super-stim rays* and their hypnotic effect, their diabolical insistence upon increased functional operation of the primal urge and its consequent domination of the life-course.

Thus for a year of her fearfully superhuman activity, earth and its numerous life-forms were subject to the whims of this ethereal ecstatic, this sensual product of a debauched way of life beyond the mortal human's power of visualization, a life of pleasure of a vastness and wasteful multiplexity for which we have no word but the Moor's "Paradise", or "Nirvana" or perhaps the lower concepts of Heaven.

Due to her having taken up her dwelling within the hidden and sealed Elder caverns under the African surface, neither Ashtoroth nor her activities were observed by the scout planes' ray eyes of Apollo's preliminary survey of earth. The work of building the sun "de" shields over the northern hemisphere was well forward before they even knew that Ashtoroth had touched the earth at all.

LITTLE Suima, among the others had been sent by Cimiad to make a survey of the Northern plains of Africa preparatory to setting up a camp there.

At that time, Ashtoroth was out with her beaters, hunting. Hunting, to her, was a process of trapping all the animals as well as men that she could gather in. These she used as a source of plasma, filling her vats with the raw stuff from which she created an ichor, a fluid which supported the accelerated growth which her own body demanded as well as the experimental creatures she manufactured. This manufacture provided her with both slaves and amusement. Her

armies were made up of mercenary warriors she had hired and recruited in the great cities of the ethereal worlds.

Seeing the extensive, glittering caravan of the mighty Ashtoroth, Suima shut off the jets of her little scout plane, swooped down to investigate. As she slowed and circled, a great ray reached up from the degravitized pavilion where Ashtoroth lay in her ever-pleasure of super-stim, sheltered there from the daily increasing rudeness of the African sun, pinned the tiny craft in its magnetic beam, pulled it down...

The tiny Suima was led before the tremendous, sensual figure dominating the utterly luxurious pavilion—and little Suima's innocent eyes widened in fascinated horror as she took in the terrific complexity of evidences of Ashtoroth's immortal and complete and passionate absorption in utter self-indulgence.

Ashtoroth herself was enough to widen the eyes of one who had formed her ideas of the Gods from the relatively austere and clean intellectual beauty of Apollo's mighty features, the great horned head topping his lean muscular strength. Or from Cimiad's wholly warm and human, dark and appealing and sympathetic immortal womanhood. Ashtoroth was not of that stripe, however.

Her wide, luxurious lips curved in a sensual, lazy smile, her great teeth glittered as she savored the sport to be had from introducing this innocent child mind to all the complex temptations of her, Ashtoroth's, daily regimen. This little envoy of whom? Ashtoroth wondered, of *whom?*

Her thoughts searched Suima's fragile mind as Suima in turn searched with her eyes the vast engulfing sensuality of beauty of Ashtoroth's dominating figure. The black, deep eyes, half hidden under drooping sultry

lids, the curled and perfumed midnight hair, the great smooth lure of her breasts outthrusting, and the smooth glistening oiled skin of her graceful limbs negligently tossed in an abandon of relaxed pleasure under the heavy, mind enthralling throb of the intoxicating stim rays that one knew were always upon her. The glittering mesh of intricately fragile golden links about her incongruously thin waist, the strong augmented aura of her too-vital body electric surrounding her and all things in the pavilion's circumference with her possessing will-to-power that engulfed the self of the weaker onlooker, a will to power that was as well a will-to-pleasure.

Ashtoroth was one to upset all Suima's recently acquired ideas of what a Goddess should look like and of what was and what was not God-like.

Suima, in spite of herself, bowed her head to the sensing of this overmastering will of Ashtoroth, and at this the strong thought of the outlaw Goddess swept through her mind, the barriers down, leaping from fact to fact of what Suima represented.

"You know Apollo?" asked Ashtoroth, her deep contralto humming through the place, revealing in every soft note the inward hedonism, the activating sexual principle that was her soul. And even as she asked, Suima knew she was projecting on the screens of her vast mind the scene of her future meeting with Apollo, and whether the virtues of the God's nature would triumph over her tempting, or whether he would allow her to go her way in what she called peace. And as Suima thought of the word *peace*, she looked about at the warriors and armed slaves thronging the great circular chamber, basking in the reflected rays and vaporized nutrients of the chamber,

some the bodies of men with the heads of animals; the great lion that lolled beside her and violated all the laws of God and man with its head, the human head of a blond giant, weirdly displaying in its lines the effects of its lion blood; behind the great throne a line of strong black men with the heads of leopards; and across the chamber an armed guard of gigantic warriors, men with a weird *something* distorting all their form, so that Suima, with her innocent untutored mind, could not imagine why they were not as other men, but knew that they were not men as she knew them. Their bodies, twenty feet in height, half as great as the Goddess' own mighty form, glistened with revolting dew. Their skin was faintly mottled as a lizard's skin, their hands webbed, but long and human in shape. Suima turned away her eyes, and looked again into the faintly curious and oddly mocking eyes of Ashtoroth.

"Sit here beside me and tell me everything you wish about yourself. No human who is protected by the glorious Apollo need fear the anger of Ashtoroth." The Goddess leaned forward and extended her great rosy palm to Suima in the gesture of peace, taking her tiny hand as she advanced, showing her where to sit beside her knee. The calculating gleam in her eyes told Suima that she was planning something, that herself was of some value to that plan, but it was beyond her to fathom the complexities of the heard thought of the mighty being.

EVEN as she seated herself beside the subtly smiling Goddess, sleep came upon her, and Suima closed her eyes. And upon a great cubical screen of force suddenly erected before Ashtoroth, all the inward thoughts of Suima came alive, and Ashtoroth's

own thought probed the sleeping mind of the girl so that displayed before her was all of her knowledge of the plans and work of Apollo, and of Phaeja, and of Cimiad—and dark were her great black brows at seeing the face of Cimiad within the mirroring force screen. For Cimiad was an enemy of old time! A slight smile played upon her lips to see the face of Phaeja. A calculating smile that boded ill for someone. Particularly did she smile to see that Phaeja and Apollo were both attentive to Cimiad, and the possibilities there intrigued her mightily.

OVER this weird scene of Suima's capture by the powerful Ashtoroth, the sun glowered redly, and Apollo on the other side of earth, looking upward, knew that madness for all earth was near at hand. But this knowledge of the steady increase of the sun's production of the deadly de force ions was understood and possessed in its entirety only by himself, on earth.

Apollo had extended his conquest from the Lakes of Vid and Sajins, east and west to the ocean, and south to the borders of Om. Now ever southward pushed his ships, clearing the land of the more dangerous carnivores. After these came armies of scouts. Many of these were of the Ongwee, under Gur. After these came the armies of builders, constructing the great towers and dynamos to generate the protective field Apollo proposed to throw over most of earth.

Gur's job was dangerous and one well suited to his talents. After the first cleansing of the next site of construction by the rays from the great warships of the air, his army of bowmen, preceded by a few score of the lumbering dino-tanks, came directly to the next site to complete the job of making the area safe for un-

armed workmen. Rounding up the few remaining big snakes in the area, searching out settlements of humans who might prove troublesome, and placating or conquering them, setting up a guard to keep the peace and protect the workmen from any chance monster or raid, then pushing on to the next site.

To Cimiad had been given the continent now called Europe, then called Orupe, and in the north her armies found little resistance. In the south they had crossed the Mediterranean and were pushing south into Egypt. The armies of Cimiad were all female warriors, for the most part her own contracted Ethereans, but some few were, like Suima, earth women undergoing training.

CHAPTER V

Ashtoroth said: "By the flesh of my thighs am I sworn, this thing shall not be."

GUR WAS uneasy. Since Suima had been detailed to Cimiad, and himself retained by Apollo because of his experience with the peoples of the Ephsu, he had not seen her. He knew they were on the other side of the world, but his ideas of the world and how far the other side might be were rather hazy. Lately he felt depressed; forebodings as to Suima's well-being had settled on him. He was a man longing for his mate. Not that he thought of her as his mate; he just wanted Suima.

He was not greatly surprised when Apollo sent for him and told him that Suima had failed to return from a scouting flight. He looked at the great grave eyes of the tall God, gigantic among the other giants of his company, and asked:

"Must I stay here, where I am not too greatly required, while she may be dying? Give me leave to search for

her."

Even as they talked, a great airship of strange design circled, landed outside the pavilion of Apollo. A Looi dashed in with the cry:

"A plane arrives from Ashtoroth. She must be on earth!"

"Go and see what the pilot desires." Apollo seemed unruffled. To Gur it meant nothing. He did not realize that this was the first move in a gigantic contest of wits that might lead to terrible war among the Gods themselves.

The pilot proved to be a great black giant, one of Ashtoroth's Loois, called Anobun. He carried a message sealed with the fiery heart that was Ashtoroth's sign. Apollo unrolled the scroll, frowning, and read silently. Gur, undismayed, stood waiting an answer to his request.

The great leader turned to Gur.

"This Ashtoroth, among other things, tells me she has met with Suima, and is entertaining her as a very charming visitor, and requests whether or no she may keep her indefinitely, as she is interested in her. She also requests a visit from me, to determine what my attitude toward her residence on this planet may be. Gur, methinks you will see your little Suima very soon. For I will visit this she-demon at once."

Several of the gigantic men from space stepped forward, their hands raised in warning, speaking all at once in alarm.

"Not in person, O leader. She may plan to destroy you and thus win her designs at one stroke. This cannot be!"

"How do we know she has designs? Has not just stopped here for curiosity's sake? I must talk with her in person."

"You can't walk into her camp alone, unarmed. It is not good sense, O Lord."

"She presents an invitation to

peaceful conference. It must be accepted. I want to be there to read her face, and her thought if she is not wary. I have never seen this female, but have heard a great deal. I just might want to favor her."

"It is playing into her hands. You know her works of old. Why take the chance? What is to be gained?"

"Maybe the lives of the lot of you. How do we know what she has planned in case we are enemies? We must give her no cause to think we suspect her of evil designs.

"Phaeja, you take our swiftest planes, make a survey of her strength as quickly as you can. Meanwhile I will ready the rest of our fleet for immediate war if she so chooses. As soon as you report, we will visit her—in force! Does that please you alarmists?"

The gigantic crew nodded assent, and action hastened their limbs from the vast pavilion. Gur was left alone with the Lord Apollo.

The great one smiled upon Gur.

"Twill not be long before you see your beloved, Gur. And maybe action too, if Ashtoroth proves as proud and wilful and wrong-headed as her reputation."

"Who is Ashtoroth?" asked Gur.

"She is one of a number of Gods, Osiris and Baal and others, who seek to found a power independent of the God of Gods whom I serve. Not for any grievance, but only to sate their appetites and pleasure themselves without obeying the law that says: To every one his right to exist and grow as is best for him. These individuals such as Ashtoroth, when they grow wise, find many strange pleasures denied them, for to sate themselves they must deprive others of the rights our God guarantees. You will understand this better after you have seen Ashtoroth and learned of her ways, seen what she and those

like her do to life-forms. Great power, when it is greedy, can be very depressing to all life under it."

A WEEK passed in swift preparation, and Phaeja returned.

"She has not half our strength in sight, but what she may have hidden away underground I cannot say. There is no sign of preparation for a trap."

The armada of Apollo took the air at once. The thunder of the jets of the fleet was a vast roar across the land. The Ephsu faded behind them; they were over the broad blue Atlantic, a vast V of great warships of space, arrowing through the air of earth.

In that sea swam monsters, gargantuan, cavern-mawed, thewed and finned, clawed and toothed—a vast sea-life of unending, ravening violence. Ever from the waves thrust a nightmare head, to disappear in a swirl followed by the slicing fin of some pursuer, surfacing only to dive in grim attendance to the death.

Over those seas of endless contention over food, the fleet of Apollo was the peace of logical life, ordered and designed, on its way to build the power of designed life upon this chaotic globe. And their goal was a great power for the very chaos they sought to overcome—Ashtoroth, the lustful, who sought ever greater power over men to sate her appetites.

So did Gur think, watching the swift shadow of the fleet upon the white-capped waves. So did Apollo think, and Gur did not realize he was but reflecting the heard thought of the mighty God-mind in lesser images.

The Pillars of Hercules fled beneath, the vast sea-shadow of the fleet sped across the blue Mediterranean, across the forested coast lands and out upon the great grass plains cover-

ing what is now the Sahara.

There her camp, near to the Nile, not far from the great Temple of Osiris, now called the Great Pyramid. And Apollo bethought him how Osiris was the tutelary father, if not the actual father, of this Ashtoroth, and wondered why she was here where Thothma had built the great Temple to her father. There, with the quiet Nile water in the distance, and the waving grasses a great sea of shimmering green around her pavilion, waited the forces guarding the mighty Ashtoroth, a Goddess whose power, mysteriously, grew ever greater in spite of the opposition of the God of Gods.

Rank on rank were her space ships, waiting. Rank on rank were great land tanks which had been brought out of these ships. And rank on rank were the formal guard about her pavilion. Beautiful in the sun was all the polished metal of the ships, the armed raytanks, the weapons of her warriors, busy on their military errands. The bustle of the armed camp was bright luxury to the eyes.

But there was horror there for the eyes of Apollo, and for Gur, and for Phaeja—for their eyes were not expecting the full truth of the things they had heard of the works of this Ashtoroth.

The great fleet spiralled, came to earth with vast fury of thunder from their massed jets breaking their weight against earth-pull.

And Apollo, and Gur as his shield bearer, and Phaeja and his man, and other of the great ones of Apollo's officers, stepped forth from their ships. Mighty war-like figures they were in the ominous light of the changing sun. Apollo looked up at that sun, now brazen without the usual magnetic force shield filters he habitually built against the sun de force, and knew that horror would be

upon this earth before many months had passed. For he knew what that red, brassy violent stare from a sun meant. He knew as he looked about that Ashtoroth did not realize what it meant or she, too, would have built force-shields against it.

It was horror that greeted them, for the ranks of soldiers were not fully men, were the products of the vari-form technique taken by a lewd hand and made into another thing. In the ancient days—the “vari-form technique” was a free-will exercising of a method by which lovers, of divergent life-streams from separate planets could have children if they so desired, and from this method sprang many strange hybrids. It was evident that Ashtoroth had taken the vari-form methods, and had made for herself a people out of sportive desire for variety.

Now, as Apollo looked at the ranks of wolf-headed men, of leopard-headed men, of ape-bodies with men's heads, of reptilian monsters on which had apparently been grafted human parts, he realized that here was deeper mockery of the life-process than mere curious experimentation.

He saw a tendency toward a certain unmentionable end, a deep vileness in this handiwork, a revolt against the Master-God who had seeded all these planets with life in the long, long ago with a certain plan of development in mind, a certain respect for the innate design plans of Nature herself. He saw here the working out of an evil plot to overthrow all the work of the ancient First-Master, to upset the primal design for life, and he knew a deep anger.

These thoughts of Apollo's, from his great strength, reflected in the men of his following, and on each face the anger of their leader was reflected strangely. Phaeja stepped to Apollo's side.

“O my leader, it might be wiser to conceal your anger until we have had time to think about Ashtoroth and just what she means to us and our plans upon earth.”

“It is plain enough she has already done us much harm. How can I incorporate these monstrous life-forms into my planned human beauty? How? It is as if she knew all about my orders from the Father, knew in advance what were only thoughts in our minds—and had set herself to thwart us.”

With an effort Apollo wiped his anger from his mind, the faces of his companions smoothed into peaceful acceptance of the phantasmal incongruity of the heterogeneous human-beast distortions before them.

TO GUR, looking at the beast-like warriors, occurred the thought:

“Where are the women who produced these children in the beginning? Certainly they must be most unattractive creatures!”

Gur looked at Apollo, whose passion for human beauty was well known to him, wondering, but Apollo's face was a schooled mask of unreadable stillness, and his thought was unhearable to Gur.

From the great pavilion beyond the massed ranks of war-equipment came glittering toward them a bejeweled court functionary, a tall, repellent antiquity, white-haired and slim and elegant in his linked mail and jeweled weapon belt, thin white hands fluttering in greeting gestures, his face one great smile of insincere and flattering joy. His words were flowery and ornate with the imagery of the space races, completely enigmatic to Gur.

Striding and grim in their plain war-harness, the gigantic Apollo and his men, some ten of them, followed this emissary toward the pennanted

and colorfully draped pavilion, round and gaudy with luxurious trapping, from which came soft rich scents and the vibrant hum of greeting stimulant rays, caressing and invigorating and subtly cloying in their sensual appeal to the lower impulses of the body.

One knew, at the touch of those pleasure rays—that within that pavilion waited temptation, a temptation that could not be avoided by reason of the necessity for conference with Ashtoroth. Gur knew that Apollo was glad that Cimiad was not here, and he understood why the Lord was glad.

They entered the perfumed spaces within the mighty structure, and though there were glorious and beautiful sights, all were dwarfed and dominated and unseeable at first glance due to the presence of Ashtoroth upon her throne, rising now and smiling down her greeting to these great men from far and powerful states of the far spaces.

Her body was gleaming with perfumed oils, glittering with many jewels, and the sensual, avidly smiling lips and bold eyes, black and deep and richly eloquent with the vital essence of the electric which is called "ne", the great round forms of her Goddess' breasts, the narrow waist, the swelling near-naked thighs, the terrific appeal to the masculine eyes, all calculated to impress and bewilder the senses. As they came before her, the many greeting pleasure rays swelled in power to a symphony of stimulation of the subtle, will-enslaving kind that is not used except by such as flaunt the regulations placed upon ray uses by the council of space rulers.

In spite of his previous anger, Gur knew the mighty Apollo was favorably impressed by the beauty and intelligence of the Goddess, and himself knew that Ashtoroth as vastly

more irresistible than was Cimiad, but he did not know that this was due to her use of rays to overcome the will, was due to an unscrupulous manipulation of their thoughts by unseen ray-attendants. Apollo knew this, but he had expected it for it was not unusual. It only confirmed his opinion that Ashtoroth was unscrupulous and told him that she feared him and desired his friendship so to flaunt all regulations in her use of forbidden electric attractions in such conferences which must of necessity be conducted with all minds perfectly uninfluenced from without. Apollo bowed, not low, but slightly, to the resplendent figure before the throne, and motioned to her to seat herself again. Then he spoke.

"Ashtoroth, is it seemly you should so influence my judgment? You know it is forbidden."

"I did not know the great Apollo had come to pass judgment upon me. I had thought only to greet him pleasantly as a friend, to show him relaxation from his labor." Ashtoroth waved a hand, the many pleasuring rays upon the visiting company ceased, and they stood now before her with all the mental magic of the ray impulses stripped away, seeing Ashtoroth as she was and not as the mental rays of subtle inspiration said she was.

Gur's eyes widened in astonishment at this sudden stripping of the magical illusions from the great form of the woman before him, and realized that there was much poor Gur did not know of the affairs of the great.

For at the cessation of the soft humming rays upon their bodies, the de-field of the sun's magnetic came again into possession of their senses and faculties, the glorious trappings of the pavilion became tawdry drapes across ill-conceived workmanship, the

glittering throne became just a great seat for the almost gross body of the Goddess. Gur eyed the change in her, the soft glory about her was stripped away, leaving her strangely changed. Still beautiful she was, but her black eyes were heavy and with a strange stare, her great smooth limbs and outthrusting breasts larger than seemed right, her hands too broad and capable for beauty.

NOW GUR, as his eyes adjusted to the sudden change, saw the sun gleam on a soft halo of hair at her feet, upon the top step of the dais, and his heart leaped as he saw the sweet face of Suima wreathed with a smile that spelled the word "home" to his heart. Without thought of the great ones and the mighty issues that might lie at stake about him, Gur leaped impulsively up the steps of the low dais, and lifting Suima to her feet, clasped her to his breast. Strangely, the glory that had been stripped from Ashtoroth seemed to have wafted to a glow around Suima—and the magic that had been Ashtoroth's now had found a dwelling place in her blue eyes. Gur lifted her face with his hand and kissed her blushing cheeks. Never had he known he loved her so much as now. Gur did not hear the soft understanding laughter of the mighty giants around him, did not realize that his action had brought to the strained welcome a note of relief and that both Ashtoroth's officers and Apollo's gigantic leaders were joined in sympathetic amusement at his innocent impulsive action.

Neither did even Apollo realize that the hidden rays of Ashtoroth had brought this about by subtle control of Gur himself, and by playing upon Suima soft and potent though unobservable flow of "ne"—the synthetic essence of all sexual attraction so to

cause the very thing that had occurred—a relief to distract the minds of the great ones from the full import of this meeting.

Ashtoroth laughed lightly and clapped her hands. Tables were brought, and food and drink and seats for these mighty visitors. Ashtoroth came down from her throne and took her place at the head of the board. The tables were set in a long line across the round pavilion, and on one side sat Apollo and his officers, and on the other sat the leaders under Ashtoroth.

At the head of the board sat the dark beauty of the Goddess, once again aura'd round with the glory of the "ne" rays, her beauty thus enhanced to the very rim of endurability. And Apollo made no murmur against it, for he realized that there was something boorish about denying a woman her right to be beautiful, no matter how.

Apollo, sitting on the right hand of Ashtoroth, as the feast progressed, engaged the Goddess in conversation—for he wanted vitally to know what she intended on earth.

"O mighty Ashtoroth, do you know that the sun is changing every day to one of greater generation of 'de'; and that both beasts and men will soon be maddened by the sun and run across the land ravaging and slaying? That the men of earth not protected against the 'de', will engage in wars, unknowing why—and that most of them will die? Do you know these things, and still stay here on this earth?"

Ashtoroth, her thoughts protected from Apollo's seeking mind by her vigilant unseen rays, conjectured that Apollo was seeking to drive her from the earth peaceably by such warnings, and that they were not true. So she answered:

"I know this is true, O my lord

Apollo! I do not intend to remain here long. It could be that I have come here only to see and to learn from Apollo—that I knew I should find you here!"

"You flatter me. Your interest in me springs from what?"

"From your mighty masculinity. I am a woman; I wanted to know the great Apollo and to see him."

Apollo bent from his height and looked into the sultry black eyes of the Goddess.

He saw there a molten pit of strange emotions. He could not fathom her, but he was attracted to her. For it is true that attraction between male and female partakes of magnetism; and the greater the magnet in size and strength, the greater the attraction. This fact the cunning Ashtoroth had used by her subtle augmenting stim-rays to make an opening in his armor of indifference.

So she laughed lightly at his side, turned her half revealed body supplely beside his and looked at him with her deep and sultry eyes, smiled at him with curling, enticing lips, and whatever she said seemed to Apollo to be wisdom. The heart of Phaeja leaped within him, for he knew that Cimiad would be his if Apollo turned to another.

Ashtoroth's hidden rays worked subtly, continually, and set all the veins of the God afire with the want of her, so that his judgment was asleep.

But Apollo had been given a task on earth, and his mind was set on that. This Ashtoroth's experiments in human-beasts; beast-humans; in mutants; in controlled mutations; with various micro-operations upon the genes controlling heredity, were vast obstacles to the plan as he saw it set by the ancient beginner of things on this planet and many

others. So that the attraction he felt toward her did not overmaster him, but aroused within his own mind a conflict between duty and between his own desires and plans for similar work with human kind but with a greater regard for the subject and a more noble concept of the building of a great race.

"ASHTOROTH, the temptations of individuals with power such as ourselves are numerous and perhaps too great to withstand; but I see around you many products of tectogenetics—I presume you are the author of these constructed species?"

"I have always held that the ancient laws and subservience to tradition in this field of biotechnics were stifling the growth power. I have indulged my love of liberty—perhaps broken all the laws, I don't know. But I have learned a great deal."

"The ancient one, the God of Gods who originated the original life-pattern of this globe and of those from which the modern races sprang is still alive, still all-powerful. This work of yours may have its justifications, but to do what you are doing is to set yourself up against his long term plans. Even I would not dare so much!"

Ashtoroth smiled quizzically at Apollo.

"Wouldn't you...?"

"I would not! This earth is passing into a long period of dis—an era of degeneration. You know something of what suns do when they go into de. The God whom you do not fear, who started the life patterns now paramount, has commissioned me to do certain things. One is to rid the earth of the reptilian plague which devastates it. Another is to set up a counteractive and neutralizing field over the earth, to shut

out the degenerative rays of the sun, to reduce the effects of the dis period as much as possible, to save this remnant of the mighty race of man from the horror that will come upon it in the near future. Another thing I must do is to reaffirm the original patterns of heredity in these humans, to make beautiful again what is not beautiful among men. The ideas of beauty I have been taught and uphold are not the ideals I see you working out here. There is a point of conflict there. But I think you do not understand what is going to happen on this earth or you would not even be here! I would save you from your ignorance of the nature of life when de-force becomes predominant in such strength that it makes the thought of all life turn to destruction."

Ashtoroth was no longer smiling. Her face was set in lines, the lines a woman's face takes on when she is insulted. Her strong, beautiful rounded chin jutted in determined, stubborn anger.

"You think to turn me from this earth with falsehoods, to have it for yourself! Well, you shall not succeed. I took possession of this planet when it passed into the borders of my ethereal kingdom, my rightful holding, inherited from my ancestors. You think to frighten me away with a child's tale of de. I know de is a deadly emanation, I know it causes age—"

Apollo turned his face, now grim, closer to her own angry one.

"Yet you have landed yourself and your armies under a sun that is in de, has been so for a thousand years—increasingly so. Why do you think the Elder ones abandoned this planet? Why do you think it has been allowed to drift the full circuit of the greater orbit without supervision? Do you want age to come upon you?

Even now I see the effects of the terrible de of this sun upon you, and if you were not of reputation wise and of some value, I would not have ventured out from under my force-shields into the sun de to talk with you. I come to save you from a thing of which you seem in ignorance—and you call me a liar! Must I abandon you to a terrible fate? Within months from now, if you do not listen to me, you will be mad as a ravening garkil, slaying all before you, and you will be slain—perhaps by me—surely by anyone of power whom you attack in your madness. Your objections to my helpful counsel are themselves born of this approaching madness which will come to all upon this earth whom I fail to bring under the protection of my anti-de fields of force—and you are angry with me. Why?"

"I cannot believe what you say. I think you are motivated by a desire for this rich planet, to add it to your holdings as it passes through your own possessions in etherea—and that you seek to befool me who took possession first."

"Believe me, Ashtoroth, I did not know you were on this planet till I received your letter about little Suima."

"Enough!" Ashtoroth rose, her figure towering above the seated Apollo. "Go from me. Go, while I have restraint left not to slay you. I can listen to your lies no longer." Her face was flushed a dull red, her lips compressed, her breasts heaving, her dark eyes flashing black fire. "Little Suima I will keep with me. At least she will learn to tell the truth."

GUR HALF rose from his much too large seat at the foot of

the board. Apollo too rose, for he loved the child.

"Do not keep Suima, O Ashtoroth," pleaded the gigantic God, humbling himself before her whom he saw was already under the sway of the subtle destructive rays from aging suns which insert a false will in the personality (resulting from a concentration of disintegrant electric within the body). Apollo saw that already Ashtoroth was suffering from this de-mentia, and that there was no reasoning with her. Wonderful as she may have been once, in her wisdom and her beauty, Apollo saw before her only a swift degradation into madness and death. To save Suima from accompanying her on this trail was his only thought. But it was not to be so.

"Go! The child remains with me. At least I will not lie to her. Go now!"

Ashtoroth's hand pointed to the door of the pavilion. She stood, a picture of outraged Godhood, but to Apollo and those few who understood, a pitiful picture of madness. Apollo, reading the angry thought leaping about her mind, knew there was no way to bring her to her senses at this time. Rising, he signed to his officers and the group left the pavilion in silence, their tall, stalking figures topping all of Ashtoroth's followers by a head, their faces grim and foreboding. For they all knew that only a miracle could save them now from the necessity of war to the death with this mad ruler.

Bitterly Apollo pondered what he might have said to placate her, but he knew better than to plague his wits with such worries, for none knew better than he that no group of words can stay the mental drive to destruction imparted by the ter-

rible sun de when it has accumulated a charge within the body. It was inevitable, this clash, because of forces within her mind more powerful than reason, forces of which she was ignorant. Carefully Apollo cursed the teachers who had given Ashtoroth her early training in the far-off land of her birth. For they had left out the most important knowledge of all, the thing with which every Titan baby or Godlet begins his alphabet—A B C D, a baby see de—and which permeates all their thought in school from that time, so that never will their mind fall under the disillusion caused by too great de flows. But all this did not help in the present emergency.

Sadly the gigantic men returned to their fleet where it lay as if afloat upon a sea of grass, washed by the waves of green in the gentle wind.

But, unnoticed by their gaze, Gur had remained seated at the lengthy banquet table staring at Ashtoroth standing like a frozen statue of anger, and at Suima, crouched near her, and wondering vaguely why he stayed when his leader left. So it was that Gur came to be a part of those who followed Ashtoroth.

As the distant fleet thundered briefly and was gone again into the skies, Gur stood up and nobody seeming to notice him. He stole to the side of Suima.

It was a bright smile with which she greeted him now, even better than the magic greeting which had warmed his soul upon his first approach. And again Gur took Suima into his arms and kissed her.

Ashtoroth lowered her arm and came out of the deep and angry pit of warring thoughts which had engulfed her. Beside her she saw the two little earth people, Gur with Suima in his arms, and softly her huge hands touched the young heads.

"So you chose love before glory, young one?"

Gur looked at the great black eyes of this strange sorceress, this being who to him was vastly more mysterious and perhaps powerful than his own better known Lord Apollo. And as Gur looked into her eyes, a strange vortex of emotion whirled within his mind. He could not tear his gaze away, and a swift and strange transformation took place within him. He could not know that this seeming storm of strange overpowering impulses she aroused within him was but the work of her unseen ray workers, taught to change all who neared Ashtoroth into mental slaves of her will. He could not know that hypnotic impressions of terrifically augmented thought were being driven into his mind by invisible rays, making him love Ashtoroth, making his self will, his self thought, instead concern for her welfare wholly, making of her in truth his worshipped Goddess, and through no choice of his own. He did not know why he had remained, but in truth it was but a trick of these same hidden ray workers to get yet another of Apollo's intimates into their hands for the information to be had from his thought.

CHAPTER VI

False Gods: "War is justifiable, lest the earth become too full."

Apollo: "Will they turn away from the idols of Apollo, and set up on their own account? The Creator's Lords mold the inhabitants of earth as clay. To those who have attained to be Gods, there is spontaneous growth forever. Find thou the symmetry of the flesh, of music and spirit."

The Book Of Apollo

PHAEJA questioned Apollo as their great fleet thundered back to the North to make contact with Cimiad and acquaint her with the turn of events and take counsel on

what action to take.

Cimiad was to their hungry eyes a fresh breath of spring magic. Freya herself was never more beautiful, and Apollo compared her honest, sane eyes with the sultry, passionate glances of Ashtoroth. And he pitied Ashtoroth, for he knew her ignorance of Evil was leading her to a pit.

"Cimiad, there is in the south lands a great encampment of a force nearly equal to our own, of space voyagers and warriors like ourselves, but under Ashtoroth. They have been on earth even longer than ourselves and consider it the property of Ashtoroth. Unprotected by the anti-de force shields, Ashtoroth is near to de-mented, may soon run amok in a terrible war upon us. There is no way to show her reason for every word seems to her an insult: you know how de madness is, and that all things seem enemies. We visited her camp in force to show our strength, and because we did not know what might lie there. If we had found her even a few days sooner we might have made some headway against her inverting mind, but now it is too late. How can we avoid this war?"

"There is but one way: abandon the planet and Ashtoroth and all the people of the earth."

"That you know I will never do, Cimiad!"

"Then crush her quickly, and go on with your labors for your people."

"It might be better to allow her to become even more demented, until rage and mad thought lead her to attack us. Then we could trap her with less loss."

"Meanwhile all your time and effort must be taken up with spying upon her and with constant vigilance against her and with the everlasting

preparation for a war. I say attack and overcome her now, before she herself has realized the need for full preparation. She cannot have known of us for long."

"Little Suima was taken by her over a week ago. On our visit just now, Gur deserted us as we left, stayed with Suima."

"I have searched long for Suima. It is good to know she is alive."

"Both of them are in increasing danger. The madness will grow upon Ashtoroth, for she does not believe my warning of the danger of this sun to one from dark space."

"Two more reasons why we should attack at once."

"There is no knowing what she might do to them in time. But I think they are safe for a while."

THE COUNSEL of officers voted unanimously for attack. But Apollo ruled that as yet Ashtoroth had not given sufficient reason for attack. That she might yet learn of her own doom if she remained under the sun and return to her own space kingdom, to her own constructed places afloat in the darkness of the ether.

Phaeja then said:

"If your knowledge of her future course of madness brought on by her ignorant exposure to the rays of this sun is not sufficient to cause an attack out of sheer self-protection, why do you say that it will happen?"

"It will only happen if she does not leave."

"'Twould seem then to do her a favor to drive her from this earth and away from the cause of her madness."

"Phaeja, I do not say we will not attack. I only want not to undertake rashly what might prove too costly. What we saw of her strength is far from all. There are the armies of Osi-

ris her father, not too far off in these space fields for her to summon, and as well the armies of Baal who is well known to be as close as a brother to her if not her lover. Moreover, she may have concealed much of her own strength during our visit. All we saw were her armies of humans, and some few Gigante officers of hers from space. Enough ships and space-built armaments to impress us, but not in truth anything to tell us what her real strength might be. The mighty growth of some of these outlaw rulers such as Ashtoroth is well known, for their best are not taken from them every ten years for the central powers' armies, as is our own. We do not know if we are strong enough for this job, in truth."

"We can learn, quickly enough."

"How, O wise Phaeja?" Apollo's voice was faintly mocking.

"I can go to her. I can go to her as one who has had an argument with my leader, Apollo. His stubborn mind is well enough known that she would believe it. And if yourself approves, this plan we should follow. I could learn everything about her by pretending to fall in love with her. If my judgment of the female is not incorrect, she is one vastly in need of a *suitable* consort."

"You know the skill of her ray-hands with the stim and hypnotic effects of ray. Could you keep yourself unenslaved did she set herself to enslave your mind to her usage?"

"I am not entirely ignorant, my Apollo."

"Phaeja, the danger is greater than you perceive. This Ashtoroth has not undergone the training and the mental conditioning which is our upbringing. Her father, the false Osiris was an evil sorcerer, always struggling with the greater powers

for the opportunity to sate his own unbridled appetites. There are arts known to evil that are unknown to us, forbidden in our teaching—whether wisely or no we cannot say, not knowing. If Ashtoroth should really become enamored of you—and I see no reason why she should not—there is no length to which she would not go, and there are innumerable arts unknown to us which she might practice upon you. You have seen what she has done, to the humans under her power. They are less than beasts, her slaves, and she does not even see the evil of it all. Hers is a mind raised in an evil school, and she is unknowing and unlettered in the arts of logic. Your own mind, trained to deal with logical minds, would find itself at a loss to forecast her actions. There is no knowing what her inverted logic may decide upon.”

“What you say is all true enough, if I were to be there for years. But for a week or two—long enough to learn her actual strength—then to seize my first opportunity and return. Your caution has you by the throat, Apollo. Is my life worth so much to you?”

“It is because I love Cimiad as much as yourself that I do not want my natural jealousy of you to sway my decision. I would choose another for this errand, Phaeja. If you should die, it would always be said that I sent you to your death. It might forever hold me back from advancement if such an event came to the ears of the Central Council. You know that. The worst injury you could do me would be to die, did I send you on such an errand.”

“Nevertheless, Apollo, the job must be done and who is better fitted for it? By now she has read of our rivalry for the affection of Cimiad in the minds of Gur and of

Suima. She will believe my story the more readily. And who else is so well schooled among us for the job? Who else could make her ray-hands read within my mind a lie as if it were the truth? My very difference with you now can be converted by myself into convincing thought fragments to uphold my story of desertion from your banner.”

“You are persuasive, Phaeja, if you can learn to hate me, then she would believe you.”

PHAEJA looked upon his leader for a long instant—the terrific mental conflict within him plain upon his face. Suddenly he strode one great step forward and his mighty fist struck a pile driver blow full into the beautiful face of Apollo. The perfect nose crushed, the blood spurted, Apollo’s gigantic form, a head taller than Phaeja, staggered backward and fell to the ground.

The officers standing about, at first appalled, now leaped to seize Phaeja, but too suddenly in his hands the flame-sword glittered and snapped an arc of terrible power about him. Running, suddenly he leaped through the ring of armed men, sped across the field toward his own swift ship where it lay on the great field of Cimiad’s building. Bolt after bolt from the side-arm rays of the officers followed his flying feet, but whether they were shooting to kill or just to speed his parting Phaeja could not know. He did know that many of these soldiers loved him, would purposely miss, while their zealous seeming efforts kept others from joining the pursuit.

He gained the long, slender needle that was his ship, the Wolfgang, and his supple, gigantic form poured itself through the door lock like a leaping salmon. The jets roared a

fiery defiance as Phaeja, now a rebel, took to the stratosphere.

Shaking his head, the tall figure of Apollo raised painfully from the ground. Ruefully he touched his face, looked at the blood on his hand. A sorrowful smile came to his bloody lips.

"That one kicks with his fist like the recoil of a master-ray. Let us hope he returns soon. We will make no report."

Few around the pair had heard the interchange preceding Phaeja's attack upon the person of his leader. And those who had, kept their counsel, for even so they could not know whether or no Phaeja had not deserted when he had made an opportunity by his leading words.

"It was wrong to fire upon him. It was a personal matter entirely, our quarrel. Hereafter fire upon no man before he is adjudged guilty of some crime by proper tribunal procedure."

Apollo went to his own quarters aboard ship, and there Cimiad found him, deep in thought. As she dressed his wound and with subtle surgery straightened his flattened nose, she said:

"I feel guilty of this affair. I should have declared my choice long since."

"And what is your choice, O most beautiful among the highest forms of creation—which shall it be?"

Cimiad smiled a bit cruelly.

"There is no need to declare that now, space separates the two whom my heart holds dear."

"Strangely enough, Cimiad, that speech leads me to tell you our quarrel was not about you."

"It is about some woman, then. Since the only woman on the planet who could attract men of your caliber is Ashtoroth, it seems she must have put her spell upon each of you.

And if either of you are the kind who could be attracted to that daughter of Evil, why then neither of you will be my choice!"

"Cimiad, your deductions are subtly close to the truth, but believe me, not as you think. Our quarrel concerned Ashtoroth, but we are far from being under any spell of hers. The woman is mad!"

Cimiad's soft cheeks were flushed a bright pink.

"I will learn the truth, my leader, and if it is as I think, I will have no more of you. It is not bad enough, what has happened, but to add a lie to your offense!"

Apollo's heart contracted. The ways of women, even to his wisdom, were still a mystery.

"You are the second female to call me a liar this day, and without cause. Our de-shields must be checked. Something is splitting our unity, and only de could lead us into such mental err. See that your best hands attend to that checking, Cimiad. That is an order!"

"I shall obey, but I assure you it is not Sol's logic that leads me to anger with you."

"The dis-illusion is exceedingly confusing, Cimiad. One's friends seem enemies, and the whole safe base of one's inner life turns topsyturvey. Yourself will conduct this check. I do not like the look of things. Remember the day—a short moon ago, it was—when you swore I was the truest friend of your life. Now you name me liar!"

For a long time after she had completed her doctoring of his injury and gone, Apollo sat in thought. Was this planet worth the effort needed to save it, but for some few centuries more? The sun *would* continue its degradation. Its de rays would continue to degenerate the life upon it and only endless labor

could save the primitive people upon the planet from the greatest evil, the most profound degeneration into beastliness. What was the Father's purpose in giving this thankless task to him? Doubt of the wisdom of the Central Council and of the All-Father came to Apollo, but he shook it off, and composed his great limbs for sleep that would not come. The heavy, tainted darkness pressed upon his eyes, pressed there hot and sultry like the stare of Ashtoroth's lustful black orbs, and whispering came her words from the deep memories she had impressed upon him subtly with her hidden ray work.

"I am a woman. I wanted to know the great Apollo and to see him for myself. I have always held the ancient laws stifling to all life and pleasure. Stifling, noxious laws... stifling... stifling..."

The black dark pressed down, stifling too, and his memory kept murmuring of the strange witchery of release from the trammeling restraints which ringed all science under the Central Council, of the strange witchery of release, which it seemed was for him only, found in those mad, dark eyes of Ashtoroth. And Apollo wondered if all wisdom was to be found in the ancient pronouncements of the Elder ones, and whether even in her madness Ashtoroth had not found a truth or two. He slept, and the fierce, wild witchcraft which Ashtoroth's hidden ray-hands had worked upon him unnoticed came to life within his mind in strange, weird, lustful dreams of the great white body of Ashtoroth, giving him pleasure beyond the knowledge of those who lived under the restraint of the pronouncements of laws that limited all tampering with life and man's synthetic energy production, and the strange powers that

might be grafted into a body of biotechnics, of thecto-genetics and of surgical grafting of glands and the injection of nerve stimulating hormones which caused a greater growth of the sensory apparatus. And Apollo wondered, if, under a different training in his earlier days he would not see this thing with different eyes? Somehow, Phaeja was playing the nobler part in his dash to—save the witch Ashtoroth?—or to obtain information for Apollo? Vaguely Apollo wondered which was Phaeja's true motivation—or did he truly want his independence, to cut loose from the central powers' domination? As he fell asleep Apollo was conjecturing just what a man could do with such freedom from restriction. Certainly there could be vast pleasure and gratification of all a man's less worthy dreams in it. And he wondered about the word *worthy*. Was it *worthy* to refrain from so much experimentation of obvious value to future races if the right man was the moving spirit?

WITH ASHTOROTH, Gur and Suima were in for some new and upsetting experiences. Their first inkling that life was not the ordered beauty and dignity of the Apollo legions came when, during a conclave with her officers, Ashtoroth's orders to ready themselves for war with the interlopers under Apollo was disputed by several of her lesser generals. Gigantic men from kingdoms unknown to Gur, as indeed they might be unknown to Apollo himself, battle-scarred veterans had no wish to tangle in open conflict with any who had the Central Elders backing them.

Their attitude they expressed in words like this, caught by Gur only from the abstract thought, as the

language was very different.

"A man can by cunning avoid a Juggernaut, but he cannot outcrush it. We cannot openly face the whole power of the Federation under the Council, and that is what you propose. Conceded we might vanquish this Apollo, after him would come avenging hordes from his own kingdom of Tah, and from the City of Donga, from far Suad, all of whom owe allegiance to Apollo. And if we defeated them, which I doubt, not long after would come the full power of the Central Council fleets, for they would not be able to avoid the stigma of defeat, it would put the issue squarely up to them. Such as we, who hold aloof from the restraints of the great Federation under the Council, can live only by avoiding open conflict or attack upon that power. So they ignore us as being no danger to them. But once oppose them, *especially* if some little way successful, *then* they *must* crush you utterly, or suffer a loss of prestige. It would be vastly more unlucky for us to *defeat* Apollo than to *flee from him* in defeat. For if we fled, that would mean for us war to the death with an avenging power some million times as strong as our own. Ashtoroth, what you propose has not been fully considered by you?"

"I am not proposing, I am ordering. Obey or die. I will not allow Apollo to drive me from my possessions *with his lies*."

"In which case, my Ashtoroth, I must hereby withdraw from your service. I relish life more than you think."

"There will be no desertion." Ashtoroth's face was an angry, evil mask. "Just to make sure you will be made an example for others of similar craven mind!"

Ashtoroth, standing now before them, was a figure to inspire fear. In battle harness, gleaming ray armor of gold colored metal, her hair caught up in a gleaming net of gold links, her ray helmet in her arm's crook, a plumed and chased example of the armorers best art, her black eyes flashing in fury, her strong white teeth bared in a half-snarl, half-smile of grim humor that these who served her should think to command her, she cowed them all. They were men of some thirty feet height, on the average, great monsters in bulk beside the tiny Suima and Gur, who flanked Ashtoroth, for she amused herself with their novelty and innocence.

Black browed, armored now at Ashtoroth's order—their great swarthy faces marked with an age of rough living in the ranks of more than one buccaneer of the space lanes, they were yet not men enough, or cunning enough, to circumvent this Queen under whom they had taken service. They sat and took her up-setting of all precedent and of all justice, her making of the virtual slaves to her domination, and watched while their comrade was led by the gigantic guards from his seat at the table up to the dais, where the throne sat empty, for Ashtoroth had taken her place at the head of the council board. On each side of the throne stood two tall, veiled forms which had caused Gur's curiosity before. Now at Ashtoroth's gesture the veil was plucked from the left one of these veiled gigantic forms. It was not a statue as we conceive statues, but an example of the art of synthesizing flesh and fabric and metal into one gigantic counterpart of the human figure, a robot made in the form of a giant woman. She stood, beauty beyond beauty, the

sum of all ideal forms welded into a symphony of weird, awe-inspiring magic. Ashtoroth's hand made another gesture and the statue came to life. The great eyes opened and looked down into the eyes of the doomed man before her. They were eyes in which the tender passion of the mother, the shy lure of untouched maidenhood, and the devouring passion of nymphomania were mingled inextricably into a glance of pure sorcery, grasping forth at the soul with a magnetic lure overpowering. The giant officer who had been too outspoken in his opposition to Ashtoroth stepped slowly forward toward this weird thing of terrible beauty, visibly resisting, his brow beaded with sweat, his face contorted in utmost reluctance. To Gur the drama playing out before him was mystifying. Why should the man fear a thing that promised so irresistibly all the ecstasies of beauty, love and joy, a thing that said with every utterly lovely line and now with outflowing electrifying force flows of synthetic meaning that life was something to hold fast, life was worth any degradation, any torment, only so it could be held onto till the arms of such being could be reached. She fanned to roaring flames the desire for life.

As he neared the gigantic robot of beauty, the officer's reluctance, his will to resist, lessened. His steps hastened, until at last he flung himself into the arms of the artificial woman-thing. Those great, soft lovely arms closed about him, crushed him with a mockery of tenderness to that mechanically heaving bosom.

The warriors stared, a kind of horror on their faces, though some few had a strange light of evil pleasure, of sadistic delight in their eyes. But one and all were held by the utter,

stark abomination of the monstrous drama of death they knew was playing out, for Ashtoroth was not disposed to relent. Her face was eagerly alight with a fierce blood-desire, a lust for what was to come.

Now that that fearful woman-trap had closed its arms on its victim, the deadly bait, the lure of the promise of all delight, dropped from off it as the devil might shed a cloak of camouflage. The lovely face writhed suddenly into a mask of horrible destroying anger, the eyes shot fire. The at first too-tender breasts became glowing hot with pain fires, fires that began to lick in little flames of unbearably agonizing torment all over that fearful creation of Ashtoroth's worst devising. Clear across the pavilion, Gur could feel the pain from those licking little flames of electric energy, the same energy, he knew, which courses up one's arm when the hand is slashed with an enemy's knife. He knew that because it felt the same, even at this distance. The tall, hardened warrior in the robot's arms howled, writhed and pleaded brokenly for mercy, but the flames only increased in strength. Somewhere her hidden ray-workers were manipulating the terrible machine that was as at once lovely as a Goddess and as horrible as Hell's worst servant. Visibly the man's flesh melted away now under the terrific energy of the pain vibrants. In a short time only a moaning wreck hung in the arms of the statue, a moaning wreck of scorched flesh which trembled and at last died.

Ashtoroth's voice, an ugly triumph ringing in the mookingly soft, deep tones of it, said:

"Anyone who does not realize I am the ruler, your only ruler, may have the same fate! The day for soft

treatment has passed—we are at war! You will obey orders or die. And if this death is not terrible enough to assure obedience, I can devise worse—and lengthier. And if you fear the suckling from the Council, if you fear the wrath of that far off empire of space, it might be wise to fear my present anger more.”

GUR NOW saw what himself and Suima were suddenly become, the slaves of a madwoman who thought no more of human life than she did of an insect's. He realized that her mastery of the situation was regal, and perhaps even necessary to prevent defection from her ranks, but still Gur saw that her reasoning was sunk in some savage error, for he knew that this woman could avoid conflict with Apollo did she wish to. Something was driving her to destruction, for even Gur could tell that these warriors were no match for the Gigantes from Tah under Apollo. Anyone with half an eye could see they had no real chance with such as Apollo—or so Gur figured. He did not feel so sure a half hour after the Conclave and its end in torture and death, for down from the sky spiralled the long needle ship with Phaeja's winged serpent upon its prow, landed on the long strip of burnt earth, and from it stepped out—Phaeja!

Gur looked at Ashtoroth, as a guard confirmed what his eyes had told him already, and saw a strange exultation at this unexpected development.

Phaeja coming here could mean but one thing, and her heart leaped at the possibility, for Phaeja was fully as rich and powerful a man in his own right as was Apollo, perhaps as powerful as herself in his inherited holdings. Coming alone—alone!

Ashtoroth called her slave girls, sharply clapping her hands. Swiftly she set them to work making her beautiful, feverishly she helped them strip off her armor, put on her skin scented oils, dress her hair, sprinkle the deep midnight tresses with gold-dust, deck her with jewels. It was a quick but thorough toilette by a dozen hastening maidens for her lush, avid body. The thin waist, wasp-like between her wide hips and outthrusting breasts, a waist such as only those who live on Icor injections, on fluid foods, on a hundred nutrient-bearing vibrants, can acquire. That thin waist they cinctured even smaller with a girdle of glinting mesh, jeweled with hyacine and sapphires, and over it all a fine scarf, revealing rather than concealing that form that would be remembered for an age on earth as the utmost in temptation, hetero-chromatic scarf, woven of spider silk that glittered in the light like the breath of a rainbow. On her feet they laced high-heeled sandals of golden leather—and she rose and swept out to meet him who might hold her fate in his hands.

PHAEJA stood waiting before her throne dais, pacing up and down, his face a study in conflicting emotions. A bolt from the guards who had sought to impede his flight had burned a crease across the shoulder muscles, and red blood had made a long zig-zag down his breast. He was unarmed, clad but lightly in the blue and scarlet of Apollo's legions. His jeweled weapon belt and cross straps were empty but for the flame-sword.

“Ashtoroth!” Phaeja exclaimed as she came toward him like a dream of too-great beauty, the floating scarf and glittering cincture almost her only clothing. Phaeja, seemingly involuntarily, extended both hands to-

ward her, and seemingly without thought upon the meaning of the gesture, she took both of them in her own hands as if they were friends of old time instead of two who had but spoken three words to each other before.

"Phaeja, I can guess somewhat the reason you have come to me, but I must hear it from your lips. I noted your high, impetuous bearing when you came before with your leader, Apollo, and thought that here was one who would not tolerate the yoke for long. Tell me, is it true?"

"We quarreled—about you. I struck him, and left before worse came of it."

"Tell me exactly—about the quarrel. It is pleasant to a woman to hear of men fighting over her."

Phaeja looked at the smouldering, banked fires in the depths of her eyes, wondering just how far he could go in this deception—if it was a deception. Swiftly he hurdled the barrier of caution, speaking rapidly.

"O Queen, you must know that in certain things you misunderstood Apollo. It is true that madness can come from this sun if it is not guarded against. I insisted we must bring you certain apparatus to guard you and yours from the de infection from this sun. He said: 'Let her fall. It will save us the trouble fighting her.' I could not conceive of letting this neglect of your welfare proceed. It was criminal to hold a grudge against you for your treatment, which was perhaps justified. But no matter. I am here. I bring you much, if you will have me. If not, the space lanes are wide, and my own people of Norse, and my own throne in Um waits for me. But you can understand that there would be a certain satisfaction in thwarting Apollo—and there is also the matter of

yourself and I, which is perhaps better left unmentioned between ourselves until we understand one another better. That I am here speaks much that words cannot say."

"I can understand that, Phaeja. Under other conditions it might be I who came to you, because I saw in your face understanding I found not elsewhere. Be seated, yellow-head, and my maidens will refresh you with wine and song."

ICE-CRYSTALS glittered like new snow in the wine, and the music those maidens made for him was also glittering with bright notes, and sensuous with soft rhythms. The eyes of Ashtoroth smouldered before him. Phaeja was strangely content beside this Queen, and enrapt in her free talk of things to which his ears had been forbidden all his life. There was much to learn of life for one raised by the Elder council's strict precepts, much strange and forbidden pleasure and exciting news of events that never reached ears guarded from discontenting truths. Or so it seemed as he listened, and Phaeja wondered again if he were deceiving Ashtoroth or himself, or mayhap Apollo, in this visit to this Queen of mystery and madness?

It was many hours later that Phaeja was shown to a sleeping couch, and if his steps wavered a bit, there were many a flagon of strong wine and mayhap a drug or two responsible. And in his inner eyes the soft flesh of Ashtoroth still gleamed, moving in a dance of terrific erotic meaning. The veil of Ashtoroth rippled in his very brain, a revealing magic half-concealing mysterious unguessed delights. And who can blame him if he drifted off to sleep vaguely wondering whether he was trapping Ashtoroth or she was trapping him? And

the giggles of the guarding ray-girls, watching over his sleep and reading his thought, did not reassure him that he was not suspected. His mind was clever, they would not see the truth, but, by the thighs of Ashtoroth, neither could he discern where lay his will—with her or against her?

In the days that followed, Phaeja worked hard, constructing for Ashtoroth the de-shields he had convinced her were necessary, had led her to believe Apollo had purposely been abrupt in the telling of this need to her so that she would be led to believe him lying, so that the sun itself would do his work of conquering her.

And in the days that followed, as his avid superior mind drank in knowledge of Ashtoroth and her ways and works, he realized it could well be he was far too late to save Ashtoroth from the de madness. For even more rapid than his own work, driven as he was by necessity for protection of his own mind from the sun-infection, was the work of her warriors in readying their equipment for war.

The nights he spent in converse with that phenomenon of seductive fascination, Ashtoroth, who made men serve her with both fear and an awful unquenchable desire for her within their breasts marked Phaeja deeply. His mind staggered under the double load of convincing the ray-watch that he was not deceiving Ashtoroth, and of convincing himself that he was. And Apollo's words kept coming to his mind, so that he had always to put them away where they would not be seen by listeners. *"There are arts innumerable, unknown to us of the Orian states, which she will practice upon you. Hers is a mind raised in an evil school—unlettered in logic. You will find your-*

selt at a loss in dealing with her. Her will may rule you wholly." And again he would see his own impulsive blow crashing against Apollo's divine face and remorse would seize him so that he doubted his own wisdom for the first time in his willful, swift-thinking life.

Day followed day, and the brazen sun burned ever angrier. Some awful damned-up force was struggling for release from that chaining gravity.

Phaeja got his de shields into operation. The angry irritation of the de lessened in the vast encampment, and Ashtoroth became even more fascinating to him as they sat nightly talking of the vast diversity of their separate training. She exposed to him the infinite delights in the complex branches of life-science forbidden to Orian science, of the great pleasure palaces built by the outlaw Titans, Norse, Manas, and other races of space who had rebelled against the restrictions, of the women raised from childhood under certain growth-provoking vibrants and saturated in nutrients, with their minds bent wholly upon pleasure, of the Satyrs and their ways, of the infinite delights of the body to be obtained in such places. Not the least of their talk was of forbidden dream-makers, who are creatures raised from childhood under beneficial rays that enlarge and power the mind to make vast phantasmagoriae, intensely actual dreams, in such power and profuse sensual reality that men give up whole kingdoms to bask for a lifetime within the dream mech. Such evil growths of life, Phaeja had been taught, were unlawful, but he had heard whispers and now had come into contact with one who knew and had experienced the whole vast gamut of evil life in the forbidden reaches of space where the

laws of the Orian Gods did not hold.

In spite of himself Phaeja was fascinated, for he realized that in their too great repression his own Elder rulers had deprived his life of much that would have enriched it.

Phaeja wondered too about the sending of himself and Apollo to this tainted Earth, for he well knew that when they returned they would be under suspicion of dementia from the degenerating sun, a suspicion which would probably defeat their aspirations for advancement, and somehow Phaeja knew that there was much to be said against the rule of the council of Orians.

Ever his soul wavered between this fearful female's attraction, which in his tremendous strength and youth was more powerful than mortal man can conceive, and ever his loyalty to Apollo and Cimiad swung him back to his decision to aid in destroying Ashtoroth.

THESSE decisions were taken suddenly out of his hands, for Ashtoroth ordered the expedition against Apollo by air. Something of the conflict within Phaeja had been whispered to her by her handmaids at the telaug beams. They were not all fools to miss his hidden planning to escape. She saw that there was no opportunity for him to return to Apollo and exerted herself to the utmost to appear to be what would most cause affection in him for her. In this she was vastly successful, and her handmaids worked tirelessly to transform Phaeja into a willing tool.

It was a man torn between two terrific attractions, who took the air with Ashtoroth's war-fleet. The thousand lifting jets thundered about his *Wolfang*, and he pulled the

levers to lift his own swift ship with them. Even as he did so, he visioned himself firing the Master-ray upon Cimiad's loved maidens and her own worshipped beauty becoming a cinder in the winds of heaven.

Ashtoroth, in her flagship ahead, had stolen a glance with a telaug penatray at Phaeja's mind in the confusion of the launching and laughed a throaty exulting laugh at his inner conflict, exulting because she knew that only by her death and complete defeat could Phaeja escape her. It was good to have power, to know that a great fish like Phaeja was helpless in her net.

His crew aboard the *Wolfang* were men old in her service, men as big as himself in growth and vastly more experienced in the tortuosities of Ashtoroth's thought. He realized that he was but the pilot, the man at the controls, and that his crew would rule him did he contemplate turning his coat again. And just what the whims of Ashtoroth's cruel fancy might do to him for that he did not know, but his imagination supplied him with an interesting series of examples from his talks with her, for she had included in the entertainment not only talk of the ways of outlaws, but examples of what might be done with wayward followers by rulers who were not squeamish. And though his thought during these experiences had been under iron control not to show aversion, still these examples had set a certain fear of her within him, as she had intended. As the blue Mediterranean fled beneath the speeding war-fleet, Phaeja realized he was trapped in a closing net of circumstance which even his own nimble mind and superb physical equipment were not going to elude.

CHAPTER VII

Apollo: "Think not that only great thunders and terrible stratagems can govern the heavens and earth."

The Book Of Apollo

APOLLO and Cimiad, under strained relations since the defection of Phaeja, yet had to ready themselves and their forces for the very probable clash with Ashtoroth. To be on the safe side, Apollo sent to Gau, the place of the Central Council, for ships and men. But, since earth and her sister planets and the sun had traveled a long way from its first approach to Gau, he did not expect an answer from this ship for some months, and mayhap no forces for more months. He knew that battle would be joined before that with Ashtoroth. Apollo resolved to send a quieting message to Ashtoroth and apologize humbly to her in hope that she would cool her anger and her madness with thought of her own best interests. But he put this message off from day to day, and his scouting planes brought him no news of any movements of Ashtoroth's armies—and he sat quietly waiting for the return of Phaeja and his information.

Thus Apollo was at a loss for decision when his watching arrowships came in from the African borders telling him a great fleet had taken the air and was advancing toward him.

THE NIGHT before the fleet of Ashtoroth took the air against Apollo, Gur got wind of the thing from the unwonted preparations, and unlike Phaeja, who was watched because he was important, he saw that his opportunity to escape this place must be now or be at war with his

own leader.

The little scout plane in which Suima had been captured still lay within the vast underground hangars where the great space warships were housed.

Usually it was shut off from egress by the vast bulk of these ships, but tonight the larger part of the fleet was fueled and wheeled out upon the field in readiness for the departure in the morning. Thus it was that Gur saw his chance was tonight, and his whisper to Suima went unobserved by the ray-watch in the great preparations.

When at last the vast camp had settled for the night, the two figures, diminutive indeed beside the great bodies of the pacing guards, went unnoticed as they strolled arm in arm like lovers through the African moonlight.

To get a ship was necessary, for Gur knew that the chances of life on a trip clear across Europe were feeble, nearly as feeble as their chances of long existing on the plains of Gomagat where the tremendous reptilian life made all other life fugitive and hidden.

How to get that tiny winged jet-plane out upon the great burned flight-field was his problem. The pacing guards were from two to three times as large as himself and by no means less in wits or watchfulness.

Gur had to cause a distraction to get the guards out of the way. The simplest way occurred to him: shuffling near the edge of the field his hunter's ears told him was a rhinodon. Gur's tools were only his bow. Though he now carried a ray tube at his side, the use of the bow was more natural to him.

Drifting around the edge of the vast field in the shadows, Gur silent-

ly got himself downwind from the rhino, and placed a half-dozen of his slender shafts in the rump of the huge, thick-skinned beast. Two or three of his arrows made no impression, but persistence rewarded him, and at last he sank a point through the beast's armor. A bellow of rage rewarded him. The rhino, half blind, short-sighted, snorting with outraged dignity, saw but one thing that could have caused this pain, the flickering lights about a great space battle-ship where last-minute loading operations were still going on.

His great horn pointed at the target of the flickering lights, his nose telling him that there were no friends on the field, the rhino started a charge clear across the wide open space of burnt earth. Gur slipped quietly back to the hangar doors, and as the huge bulk of the maddened beast loomed suddenly out of the half-dark, cries and ray flashes told him the rhino was doing his duty by his outraged rump. Suima and himself slipped by the staring guard, watching the sudden commotion, and as the man slipped his side-arm from the holster and started on a run for the ship out in the field, Suima's little jet plane shot out of the hangar doors and was into the night sky in a flash of flame.

A search beam of transparent penetray shot into the sky after them, but Gur circled widely, shut off the jets, and was gone into the north in a long, undetectable glide. Out of sight of the camp, he gave the controls to Suima, sat back to figure how best the way to Cimiad's northern camp might be found.

Suima, no great shakes at navigation's finer points, followed the coast of the Mediterranean, a white ribbon of surf in the moonlight, to the Pillars of Hercules, crossed the

strait and winged up the coast of Europe. There were few breaks in the great dark forests covering the inland. This was primeval wilderness. Northward and northward fled the little plane, and Gur dropped off asleep.

HE WOKE to a great crashing, a rending of limbs and fabric, and a thumb on the head that brought comets spinning through his head—and darkness again.

He awoke the second time with a vast throb of pain in his brain, and opened his eyes to see Suima's tear-stained face above him, and beyond her a sullen morning sun just over the tree tops. Not far off lay the wreckage of the little plane.

"I fell asleep, too, Gur!"

"Women drivers!" said Gur, holding his head, and looking around for comfort where there was none. "Where are we, anyway?"

"I don't know. We can't be more than a few hundred miles from Cimiad's camp."

"As bad as a thousand, that. Suima, it will take us weeks of travel on foot. We may never get there—and the fleet takes off this morning, and no one to warn Apollo. We held his life in our hands, and we fell asleep. Oh, why did I let you take the plane?"

Suima raised her nose heavenward.

"Because you were sleepy. It never occurred to you I was just as sleepy. Ashtoroth kept me by her side every night, and she sat up talking and making eyes at Phaeja every night for the past week till hours after midnight. I was dead for sleep."

"Suima, in the old days, before we knew the Gods really Nved, did you ever think they were as they really are?"

"I have learned much, my Gur. I

have learned I love you for being Gur, and not a God who has loved a thousand women and forgot them. I have learned that though we are mortal, still life is new and clean to us, while to them it is an old worn-out story with nothing new in it. They have seen it all better before, in some far place."

"Apollo claims *that is a dis-illusion* that the men from the dark spaces suffer from here on earth. That out in space where their vast home-spheres drift there is no such dis-illusion and that life is ever wonderful and new!"

"Well, just the same I am glad you have not lived a thousand years."

"I don't know, Suima. It must be fine to be so wise. Ashtoroth enjoys life, even the mess she makes of it."

"Ashtoroth is not a normal woman. She has made herself oversexed with her rays and with forbidden graftings of glands. She is not like other people. Life is exciting to her even on earth because all her appetites are out of balance. She is not a woman!"

"She seemed to wind those great space warriors around her finger well enough. And Phaeja, whom we thought so independent, catered to her every whim like a lackey."

"I think he was after information, and not truly enamored of her."

"So did she. You notice he didn't escape as we did."

"He is a little large for such work. Too, she might have had another reason for not letting him get away. I would not want to be Phaeja today."

"Phaeja can take care of himself."

"But today he will be forced to take the air against Apollo, and against Cimiad! Can you imagine his ship firing on Cimiad, and him unable to give orders against it?"

"That will be terrible!"

"And of us—we will not even see the battle. Apollo will be taken unaware, they will be all slain. They are so good and wise, his people. Even if, after seeing the ways of Ashtoroth's people, they seem a bit...."

"I know what you mean! A bit wound in red tape."

"You mean priestly rigamaroles. Yes, there is such a failing in them. But I think Apollo will not be taken unaware. I have sensed a watch upon the camp of Ashtoroth, it came from very far away."

AS THEY talked, Gur built a fire, and warming his arrows one by one over the heat, straightened them across his thumb, eyeing the shafts with care. Without rising, he suddenly whipped up his bow and set a shaft after a small leaping animal that was not a rabbit, but more like a deer, the size of a large rabbit.

As they munched and talked over the fire, peace came upon them here on the sea-beach, after all the strain of fear that had been upon them, fear of the strange, mysterious pressures upon the life under Ashtoroth, and of her uncertain temper—and of the things she sometimes did to men and women for mere amusement. Fear of becoming a monster's head and shoulders, a centaur manufactured by her grafting surgeons, who sometimes made such things, fear of a hundred peculiar fates and over-excitations that made of her people slaves to her science. Fear of becoming one of the things that pleased her idle moments with odd appetites she forced into their minds to become their ruling impulse, fears for which their simple life among mortals had not prepared them.

A great roaring sound suddenly swept upon them from the sky, and

the light dimmed as across the rising sun thundered sky ships by the thousand, darkening the whole south sky. Abruptly Gur scuttled into the brush above the sandy beach and after him raced Suima. Neither had any desire to be picked up by Ashtoroth.

Even as they turned to watch the mighty war-fleet pass overhead, an echoing roar came from the north and spinning about, Gur saw, swooping from higher in the stratosphere, an even greater fleet of needle sharp otevas, diving down, down, upon the slower moving airavagnas of Ashtoroth.

Even to his ignorance it was plain to Gur that somehow Apollo had the drop on Ashtoroth and was pushing home a mighty charge with full power of atomic jets and the gravity of earth combined.

That vast spear of power, a great acute V of diving death-ray bearing ships, blazed, screamed down and down! Gur held his breath in an agony of suspense, and Suima screamed again and again, holding her ears with her hands against the terrible roar of jet exhausts that filled the whole sky with tearing sound. But her eyes were riveted upward on the point of that diving V of death for Ashtoroth.

At the last moment, the widespread armada of lower planning airavagnas split right and left smoothly. The down screaming V shot through the sudden opening, and as the long V streamed past, rays shot up and down upon them from the larger heavier ships of Ashtoroth.

From that flashing instant of ray-contact, came spinning down a dozen great riddled, flaming hulks, down upon the forest and into the seas about Gur and Suima.

Going too fast to turn upon the evading ships, Apollo's V of ships

flashed on down slower and slower, bow jets flaming vast thunder and lightning power before them, sped in a long curve down and then up, up, the speed of their flight only slightly diminished, and now came around in a full turn, spinning over as Gur visualized the giant warriors inside manipulating the gyro levers to spin the ships into firing position again upon their flight axis.

Once again above the vaster, slower fleet of heavy-bodied, older ships of Ashtoroth, the long curve tightened, flashed again into blinding speed of power dive, and their rays lashed out ahead in that instant of ray-range contact—even as the fleet split again to right and left before them. This time a dozen of the great, heavy airavagnas dropped, spewing forth suddenly a thousand leaping warriors from the flames of hell that filled the ignited metal bellies of the ships. Now it was raining swarthy warriors from the riddled hulks above. The sky was dotted with them, diving in gravity falls, turning on their anti-grav packs a few hundred feet from the earth, drifting to the sand of the beach, lighting in the trees, perching there like giant birds to watch the battle above.

Gur and Suima crouched lower in the brush, not to be observed by these armed soldiers, most of whom were of Ashtoroth's forces, for most of the ships speared by the flaming rays above had been Ashtoroth's slower little flurries of ray fire from their ships. Here and there these fought in side-arms as they killed off the occasional drifting warrior from a dead ship of Apollo's. It was no place for an Apollo warrior to come down.

But in the sky above the armada of Ashtoroth was cut in two, and swirling now in savage individual resistance against the swarms of smaller,

fewer-manned ships of Apollo, which worried the great ships as killer whales worry and gnaw a great sperm whale until they feed upon him in death. So it went above, many and many of the fast needle ships they picked off from the greater ray ships of Ashtoroth, but always there were more, and one clean-driven dive un-intercepted counted for a whole ship-load of a thousand warriors, while the needle ships of Apollo were manned but by a score of men, were but a fraction of the loss.

This vast whirling sky of death above was rent every while with the earth shaking sound of atomic fuel exploding as some burning ship struck the earth, and the vast pillars of smoke and heaving flame and dust billowed now like terrifying mushrooms growing suddenly from the fertilizing, titanic death of the world herself.

ALL THE air was now dark with the billowing smoke clouds, rent by fiery fingers of death searching right and left above, and down through that fire-lit smoke clouds plummeted ever another great blazing hulk.

To Gur it seemed the end of all Ashtoroth's vaulting, oftspoken ambitions for rule and license and power over men, for all her ideas of a world ordered after her own mad ideas of *how life should be*—a phantasmagorical mixture of all life forms coupled in every mad combination, all brought up to but one idea—pleasure—and powered physically by her own undeniable knowledge of life science with the strength for a lifetime of indulgence, an endless lifetime, for Ashtoroth planned not on death, but figured there was an answer to age as well as to all other

problems, for in her ignorance she thought all problems could be overcome by setting a slavish technician to work upon it. This was the reason she could not accept Apollo's warning that age and madness both came from this sun, for her pretending wise-men had told her otherwise, not knowing why this sun and this phalanx of planets was different from those where life did not die, but kept on growing till size and conflict over food caused death.

This dream of hers of a world organized into her own ideas of how a world should be was what had set her against Apollo's overtures and warnings, for he had not compromised on whose world it was. It had been assigned him by the All-father, and that had seemed to him to settle the matter.

Maddened by the death and destruction visited so suddenly upon her seemingly unconquerable array of power by the swifter, smaller ships of Apollo which had seemed to her from her spies' reports to be much less formidable, Ashtoroth stared out of the fore-view rays of the bridge of her ship, the *Viperfang*, stared and silently behind her stood her general, and behind him the Admiral of the war-fleet, and in their eyes was the knowledge of death coming swift upon them for their slower speed, unknown to them before they adventured the attack, made it impossible and disastrous to flee or to stay.

So it was that when the telesolidograph showed her the horned, golden head of Apollo, she leaned forward and tried not to show her awful venom for him. Even she bared her great, even teeth in a half smile as he spoke.

"If you will concede defeat, we can call off this slaughter? I like it no

more than yourself. I will be generous, Ashtoroth."

She turned her still proud head, the plumes nodding, to left to the face of Bel-Marduk, her general, and to the right to the face of Hammar, her admiral, and in each face she read: "This offer must be accepted or else death."

Anger and frustration mingling on her face, her tall helmet plumes flung incongruous glory above her face as she nodded her head to the stern face of Apollo in the telesolidograph cube.

Like great cows shepherded by dogs, the great war-fleet of Ashtoroth was directed to the landing field of Cimiad's female legions. As the last of the huge dreadnoughts of the space seas came to rest, down from the outer atmosphere screamed the flashing needles of glory, the legion of the women of Cimiad, where they had waited for need to arise to descend upon the enemy in a crushing blow—a need that had not arisen.

As this unused strength of Apollo's came into view, flashing fighter after fighter circling down, air screaming about them and nose jets thundering just above the field as they stalled into landing speed and settled evenly on their anti-gravs, perfect piloting brilliantly executed, Ashtoroth realized how greatly she was outclassed by these warriors of the Ruler of Tah, sent to earth by the Central Council, how utterly she had been wrong in attacking!

Ashtoroth was unable to face the officers about her whom she had over-ruled in ordering the attack. She hung her head in a vast shame, her face scarlet, and Phaeja, watching her over his own vision ray, thought he had never seen her lovelier than with this honest embarrassment upon her.

Phaeja himself had not been

obliged to do much but pilot his own *Wolfgang* and dodge the diving, ray flaming ships of his former comrades. His crew had fired steadily upon them, but strangely their pilot had given them little opportunity for effective shooting.

Ranged before their ships upon the burnt, hard crooked ground of the landing field, the men of Ashtoroth waited, for they knew not what?

UP TO HER group, Ashtoroth's swarthy officers and men, fronted by her own sultry-eyed, proud-armed figure, up to this would-be Goddess strode Apollo, topping them all by head and shoulders, and Ashtoroth's heart fluttered at the sight of the blond tower of strength, so different in his horned, golden beauty from her own race of dark-haired people, olive-skinned, almond-eyed, so contrasting was his physical beauty to her own sensual appeal. A full realization of her own unworthy, vaulting pride and uncalculated aggression came to her from the watching rays of Cimiad's women, so that she hung her head in shame and the watching rays augmented that sensation of shame in her till it flooded all her body with a wilting debasement before Apollo.

Apollo spoke: "O my vanquished enemies! I sprang from this red star, the earth, long, long ago. Time has made this earth unfit for proper growth. I am here to see if something may be done to preserve the ancient source of the roots of my people. You, in your ignorance, assumed I was here to add yet another world to those which own me ruler. That is not true, and it is unfortunate that your reason was blinded to the truth, and that men died from a misunderstanding. In order that your ignorance may be alleviated, and that you

may not fall into errors of thinking, and in order to save your immortal lives, that you may realize that a world under de-generating rays from an aging sun is not fit for immortal habitation, I sentence you to one hundred years in the schools of my Capital City on Tah, there to attain to the knowledge of the reasons for immortality, and to learn the patterns of life as they are decreed from ancient time, so that you will not tamper with these patterns again. You, Ashtoroth, although you have been in vast error due to disintegrant infections, have been called *evil*. I see much promise in you, much that must be cared for by the best scientists to save your mind for the future of the Elder race. Therefore you are to take up your habitation in my own palace on Donga, to be cared for by my own teachers, and will be free to go when those teachers approve your logic as it forms in your mind."

As Apollo said these words, a deep red flush suffused Cimiad's face where she stood just behind Apollo before Ashtoroth, for this was an honor Ashtoroth's actions had not merited, and Cimiad saw in this action a desire in Apollo to have this luscious wanton by his side.

Cimiad's flushed, angry and embarrassed face and flashing eyes turned to Phaeja where he stood behind Ashtoroth, having come up from his own ship, leaving his men to attend this surrender conference and to hear what his own fate at Apollo's hands might be.

Phaeja returned Cimiad's look with a stare that told her nothing, and truth to tell Phaeja was stricken with jealousy at these words of Apollo, for Ashtoroth's maidens at their ray-work upon his mind had implanted there a strong attachment for Ashtoroth. He realized that this sending of Ashto-

roth to his own capital was in the nature of holding a hostage to put a barrier to any counter-action by Ashtoroth's relatives in Hored, and in truth he saw good reason in it.

To take the weapons of these piratical men of Ashtoroth's, men she had acquired from the mercenary pleasure palaces and corrupt and outlaw worlds of space, men hardened to every form of evil and who had fought through the bloodiest battles of space history in the last century, to take these hardened adventurers, strip them of weapons and glory and opportunity to get into mischief, to send them back to school like children was acutest irony, and it would be punishment enough for them to find themselves placed with smooth-cheeked youngsters before the doddering Elders of Apollo's schools. Phaeja could not help smiling as he thought of it. Phaeja knew they would not escape, for the watch rays would see to that. But to place Ashtoroth in his very home, where every day he would have to explore that sensual, avid mind with his own in unavoidable contact, somehow Apollo was far too willing to be tempted. Phaeja wondered if there was not a subtle baiting of Cimiad in it. Cimiad's face told him this was true and his confused heart leaped, for Apollo had given him an opening here to turn Cimiad's heart more firmly toward himself.

As he pondered this, standing stiffly at attention, Phaeja realized that Apollo's heart might be as confused as his own by the conflict between Cimiad's non-committal affection and Ashtoroth's unlawful tampering with their emotions by use of the stim rays which can subtly upset all the ties and affections and substitute new and irresistible objects of erotic attachment.

THE EMBARRASSMENT faded from Ashtoroth's face as she pondered Apollo's words and the meaning that might be inferred from them. She looked at the smaller, slighter, less full-blown beauty of Cimiad. Dark and lovely as she was, still her attraction was that of the purest, new opened lily, while that of Ashtoroth was like the red-and-black-spotted, flesh-odored passion-flower.

CHAPTER VIII

Apollo: "How shall I comprehend thy designs, O My Creator? Thou drivest me back to the time Thy angels came and stood man upright, saying: Be thou a man, and, be thou a woman! But they would not."

The Book Of Apollo

SO IT WAS that the great war-fleet took off into space, driven by prize crews of Apollo's warriors, and loaded down with the prisoners, prisoners who took very ill the laughter of the seasoned warriors of the crew that they should be sent back to school like truant children whose ignorance had led them into error.

And on the ship, *Viperfang*, Ashtoroth and her crew languished behind locks on the long voyage, and with them was Phaeja, and Phaeja was very angry that he too should be sent away like a war prisoner, for he had expected that Apollo would recognize that he had struck him only to have a clean break with him in his mind to present to the suspicious telaug rays of Ashtoroth so that his spy work should go unnoticed. But Apollo had not seen fit to recognize that, and had perhaps seen here an opportunity to rid himself of a restive follower while at the same time keeping the strength of men who owed Phaeja allegiance with his armies.

In truth Apollo had not known what to do, and had ignored Phaeja,

allowed him to be placed with the other prisoners as though he were no longer fit to speak with openly before others.

But not the last ship of the former fleet of Ashtoroth had left the ground when Apollo sent a swift ship into space after the *Viperfang* to bring Phaeja back. Apollo had allowed him to go because he had read of the conflict in his mind, his strained allegiance to all the accepted laws and patterns of behavior planted there by Ashtoroth's influence and errant reason, and had allowed this oversight to take place in order subtly to frighten him, to plant there in his mind a full realization of the dangers of opposing the Elder precedents and laws, to give him a chance to think of his life as an outlaw did he so contemplate.

As Phaeja stepped out from his locked cabin saw there waiting him in the *Viperfang's* corridor the old friend and adviser of Apollo, *Bos*, a surgeon. It was a glad feeling to know that Apollo had sent for him.

Swift again to earth, and there Phaeja was embraced by Cimiad and by Apollo, and welcomed as a loyal friend who had been away, and all their hearts were light again where they had been dark.

Still were the ships out picking up those who had fallen and leaped from the wrecked ships of the battle, and on the coast of England, where the greatest part of these had fallen, Gur and Suima were found among the prisoners and were brought to Apollo shortly after Phaeja's return.

Now, that madness that Apollo had known was coming, descended upon the earth. In the morning the sun rose, a ball of terrific size, increased by more than twice by some sudden layer of fuel the fire had struck into upon its interior surface, and the de

rays came down upon the earth in terrible strength.

Nearly the whole northern hemisphere had been covered with Apollo's anti-de gen towers, creating a force-field which kept out the worst rays, and wherever the underground generators functioned, there life remained peaceful, sweltering in the heat, but still sane and unmaddened life.

But at the equator and in the whole southern hemisphere, all life became maddened with destructive will, and vast herds of animals raced across the plains, poured through the passes of the mountains, and what cities were there were crushed beneath the thundering maddened herd of giant reptiles, of mammoths, of deer and horse and other animals, all fighting and running onward from they knew not what.

In the southern hemisphere, man-life was nearly entirely destroyed, while the animal life was decreased by two thirds.

The equatorial belt itself was now too hot for any life, and there fleets passed over, and in the northern parts of Asia and Africa and South America they set up the beginnings of the building of the gigantic network of field generators that would cover the planet with a protective force-field when they were finished.

Day followed day full of hard labor and of slaughter of the hordes of maddened animals that drove ever southward, and attacked anything that moved before them.

Cimiad was vastly relieved that Ashtoroth was gone from her life, and that she had her two great Titans paying her court, but her heart was confused, her mind too busy, to realize that she must choose between them.

So it was that ever in their two

minds hovered the images and emotions planted there by Ashtoroth, of infinite pleasure and the pursuit of pleasure, of her own curling luxurious lips and sensuous, swaying hips, and in their sleep it was the breasts of Ashtoroth they saw and not the sweet smiling lips of Cimiad.

AT THIS point in the labors of Apollo, a message came from the Central Council, saying:

"Earth has now passed beyond the regions of influence of Tah, and therefore is under the rule of Thor, God of Palla. I have sent therefore a message to Thor, saying: My son, behold the red star, she courseth from Mos to Dae, and now draggeth in the swamps of Asath. Behold, thou shalt deliver her..."

So it was, that though their labor on earth was far from completed, the fleets of Apollo, and of Cimiad, and of Phaeja, rose from earth and left. The red star faded behind them, and the great force-fields they had built pulsed on, for they were atomic-powered and would so function for some centuries without any repair. And the people of earth remembered Apollo, and the Apollo legions. The ideal of bodily beauty he planted in their minds still functions to this day, causing maidens to choose well-formed lovers, and men to choose well-formed maidens, and the race of man progresses in beauty and in love of music and symmetry of every kind. For such was the pattern laid down by Apollo.

But even Apollo could not take the aging of the sun from man, and man remains mortal to this day.

IT WAS A happy party aboard the Airavagna of Apollo, with Cimiad laughing often, and Phaeja's mind now somewhat free of the dark lure

placed there by Ashtoroth, and Bos and their other long-time comrades all happy in their release from labor by the council and by the onward journey of earth from out Apollo's jurisdiction.

Many and diverse were the relaxations they planned upon their return to the City of Ptimus on Tah, where lay Apollo's palace. And only in Cimiad's mind was the knowledge of Ashtoroth's presence there a shadow of menace. For the others, her stinger was drawn, but for Cimiad her beauty remained a threat as great as ever.

This future threat Cimiad resolved to neutralize by setting certain subtle tests before Apollo and Phaeja, and choosing between them the one that best passed those tests.

As the long voyage continued, the expanding dynamos throbbed ever through the ships of the fleet and they rose from density to ethereal density, and as they neared Tah, were of the same specific gravity as the city of Ptimus, that floats above the vast sphere of Tah.

CHAPTER IX

Apollo said: "To condense and to expand, to expand and to condense, is this all? Who shall fashion a corporeal world by compressing ether?"

Also Apollo said: "From Me, my virgin mother, the earth who conceived me, I rise me up and go, forever!"

The Book Of Apollo

ASHTOROTH'S captive fleet landed, after some two hundred days, in the vast ethereal city of Ptimus.

Ptimus was a vast artificially constructed world floating just outside the ethereal sphere of Tah. The glorious beauty and tremendous size of the lovely ethereal city overawed Ashtoroth at first. Her graceful knees ~~note~~ ~~together~~ that she had been rash enough to oppose the mighty ruler of such a vast place of such intricate, in-

finite labor of construction.

Ashtoroth herself was treated like an honored guest in the palace of Apollo and Ashtoroth was given the freedom of the whole palace. She knew with great surety that this was only done by order of Apollo, conveyed with her by the officers of the prize crews of the fleet, and she smiled to think him such a booby as to have an affection for her, for she knew this affection had arisen only from the work of her ray maidens upon his mind.

Her captive warriors, slave maidens and other members of her party were all treated very like wayward children and sent to the great military barracks of the schools of the city. They were forced to attend classes daily, with the beardless youths of Ptimus, and great was the humiliation of the swarthy, battle-scarred veterans of a dozen wars that they should be treated like children.

Nearly a year elapsed, and still Apollo and his swift ships came not from the far-speeding earth, and space like a great ocean now lay between Ptimus and the earth, ever increasing. And as the distance between earth and the ethereal realm of Tah grew ever greater, so did the plans and subtle wiggling stratagems grow within the plotting mind of Ashtoroth as her body desired over its wonted indulgence and was denied.

Ashtoroth also had been ordered to attend classes. These were held daily in the cyclopean spaciousness of Apollo's demesne, by the wisest of the teachers of the city. Only the friends and relatives of Apollo and their children might attend these classes, and the dark, sensuous beauty of Ashtoroth among these blond, horned people was as a red rose full blown among half-opened lilies.

Ashtoroth's already great and diversified learning entranced the

teachers' innocent minds, and fascinated their repressed sexual natures with its broad and free interpretation and talk of those fields of wisdom forbidden to their minds by ancient law. They held long ecstatic conversations and libidiously thrilling discussions with this subtle sorceress, and her lovely face stilled their will against her. While she was seemingly being questioned on the nature of the teachings she had acquired elsewhere, she learned more than they of their own store of secret things.

Having access to the great laboratories, which were nearly empty for a great part of the time when the teachers, busy, self-important and blind to the evil in Ashtoroth were at work elsewhere in the great capital, Ashtoroth conceived a daring plan whereby all this mighty world might fall like a ripe plum into her avid lap.

Accordingly, with blandishing smiles wreathing her lips with the sorcery she knew best of all enchantments, Ashtoroth requested and obtained permission to work in the laboratories, and also obtained certain of her men from the schools of the city to "do the heavy lifting" for her studies which included the use of many great carboys of chemicals and nutrients and acids.

The simple, sheltered minds of the teachers saw no wrong in the request, for did not her mind lay open before their rays, could they not read that she had reformed once and for all?

And in the laboratories, deserted now, Ashtoroth smiled her dark, secret, lusting smile, and prepared to commit the greatest crime of her centuries-old career of subtle and intricate crimes against all life not her own.

beings such as the one who had embraced and consumed the body of her dissident general in Africa, beings that look like life, are alive in every way in truth, but are constructed of metal and fabric and wire and covered with synthetic flesh, and also contained most of the organs of life supported by synthetic media.

Ashtoroth planned carefully to build the most useful and valuable android ever built by any being. Useful to Ashtoroth's plans, that is.

Accordingly the vats were filled with nutrient fluids, and the converter vats were filled with the living flesh of animals, the flesh dissolved. All the cells separated from their various symbiotic labors and took up their life as individual entities subsisting upon the nutrient in the fluids, awaiting their new symbiotic assignments.

Ashtoroth thus had several great vats filled with the free protoplasm of life which is the base from which sprang all specialized cells.

Now in the synthesizer and integrator matrix circuits about certain great low vats, she placed those electrical intricacies which were the patterns which she had obtained from the stores of records in the lofty libraries, records of the thought and physical electrical patterns of Apollo himself, records which contained the whole of his physical nature and character patterns.

Into the vats of jelly she dropped very carefully measured amounts of amino acids: *trypto-phane*, *aspartic acid* to stimulate the sudden specialized growth she wanted, *di-methionine* and *glutamic acid*. Some thirty-five separate amino acids she measured and added to the jelly, and activated the records of the matrix of force lines around which these cells

ONE OF Ashtoroth's greatest arts was the construction of *androids*,

would cluster in obedient organization. Precisely calculated, intricate and dangerous labor, for discovery meant to her the loss of the last shreds of her freedom, she knew well.

As the cells grew into specialized cells, and organized and integrated in the vats into organs of life, she transplanted with vast care these embryonic organs into their place in the matrix of life electric (ulegra) which was laying down the force lines around which other plasma was forming into bones and muscle fibres.

Day by day passed over her fierce absorption in her task. Steadily she labored, keeping off sleep by fortifying herself with strengthening beneficial rays. And ever her demanding body called for the pleasures of stim denied her, and for all the vast diversity of vice and gratification so suddenly taken from her life.

At last came the day when a figure lay complete in the low life vats, mind and organ and muscle and bone built over the slight mechanical framework with which she had begun, and each organ and muscle, each outer form and inner mental compartment, designed, copied diligently, from those records of the long and busy life of Apollo, the magnificent, within his own library.

Still existing on the nutrient fluids, but now a figure of life that could not be told from Apollo himself, she turned on the activating currents of life-electric ulegrays and brought her sleeping Apollo-Pygmalion out of his sleep of gestation. She looked upon his opened eyes with almost, but subtly and horribly different affection which shone hypnotically from her eyes into the candid childlike blue of the eyes of "Apollo".

The great and beautiful man-body

of the mighty android being lay and looked up at her adoringly with its great eyes, and she saw its mind was yet a child's.

It was long past midnight when she got the monstrous parody out of the vats and placed it in a dream-mech. She turned the current to the high, hypnotic notch, and placed there in the projection socket all the records, all the endless wire-spools of Apollo's past life and thought which had been carefully preserved in the record libraries, so that presently the android's mind was filled with the conviction that it was Apollo! Subtly and undetectably, the mind was also filled with a virulent poison of thought, a slavish and complete adoration of Ashtoroth, placed there by her own mind's careful watching insistence all through his laborious creation.

So now she had an Apollo of her own, and within its mind was no thought but what had been once Apollo's in the past, except that one thought: "obey Ashtoroth".

WEEKS HAD passed unnoticed, and Ashtoroth thrilled to see how long she had been at her work, how very near must be coming the day of her release into all the vast possibilities for pleasant sinning this mighty city could offer its ruler. For she had no doubt her plan would succeed.

She could not bear thus waiting. Her nerves would not hold still. Her muscles craved ever for the slow flux of the floods of pleasure ulegra through their fibres. Her mind groveled before the remembered images of her past infinite debaucheries. She set again to work to still her desires.

Another great body grew within the vats, but she was hurried and weary of the work, and "Phaeja" did

not look wholly like Phaeja.

Days had passed, and with a subtle vindictive pleasure humming like a wasp in her inner mind, she set about building a viciously caricaturing figure of Cimiad, so close to Cimiad's appearance as to fool anyone, but yet with certain features slightly exaggerated so that Cimiad would not have so very great popularity from her beauty alone, or from the paths her mind would invariably take in conversation. Pleasant it was to make a wanton, capricious and wholly evil Cimiad, and pleasant it was to contemplate the shocking reaction of her former friends when the new "Cimiad" began to act out her in-built character.

And the cells of these creatures' minds believed wholly that they were slaves to another irrevocably and forever.

Now she and the quiet-faced technicians of her own race who had assisted her waited. The days dragged on for all of them, and their nerves shrieked at the waiting.

NOW AT last the fleets of the glorious Apollo, darkened the skies above Ptimus, the beautiful. For a day and a night the stream of ships poured down upon the city and upon the vast sphere of Tah nearby.

After short ceremonies of welcome, the mighty returned warriors took to their sleeping chambers, weary with the year-long voyage from far-speeding earth. The palace was silent, though out in the city and far off in Tah, the fireworks were set off and the welcoming parties went on all night and into the next day. But toward morning the palace of Apollo grew quiet. Through all its gargantuan complexities of corridors and lofty chambers was only sleep.

Now had come her opportunity, and Ashtoroth was not asleep!

Through the great doors of graven metal flanked by the tall winged serpents given Apollo by Phaeja, stole Ashtoroth's chosen, silent and swift as shadows, their secretive feet making tiny whisperings of doom.

Past the titanic marble form of Suc, his arms about the gleaming white polished shoulders of Sivian, Goddess of Izaracha, a gift long ago to Apollo from friends who greatly and mutually admired the Orian chief, Lord of Ithivivus.

Down the still corridors, the shadowed eyes of the paintings of noble figures of the mighty past followed these gliding figures, screaming silently from their painted world of flatness, of the danger!

And the white-veiled figure of Ashtoroth joined the swarthy, dark men from Hored and led them to the corridor which ended in the great doors of Apollo's sleeping chamber. On each side the door stood an officer of Apollo's personal guard, and at the side of each officer stood five tall warriors, sleepless and vigilant.

Now from each swarthy, hairy hand rolled from the shadows one small glistening fragile egg of death, and the small popping sound of their breaking against the wall at the feet of the twelve warriors was heard by them. Instantly each man drew weapon, flame sword in his right hand, deadly ray cylinder in his left. Six of them ran toward the source of the small white fragile spheres of death, and six of them drew a line of tall flesh and sinew across the door of the chamber of Apollo. Even as their limbs moved into this action, their heads dropped weakly upon their shoulders and their hands groped to

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 142)

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 140)
 their mouths. Their throats closed as the deadly yellow gas poured into their nostrils, and twelve strong warriors lay in death.

Swiftly the guards were dragged into the shadows and small metal tubes were squeezed under the crack of the door by Ashtoroth's own hands. The potent gas she had brewed herself squeezed into the sleep chamber from the little flexible plastic balls which she had enwrapped about the gas.

This gas was a different gas than the other, and her purpose was different in its use. For Ashtoroth had yet a use for the person of Apollo.

As the sleep became the deeper sleep of unconsciousness, Apollo saw the avid eyes and heavy red lips of Ashtoroth brooding over him, and said, "Go hence, temptress" and became then as one dead.

NOW, IN the morning, the palace awoke. Apollo rose and dressed himself, and went into the dining hall and breakfasted with his friends. He was strangely silent and said but little to them. At the hour of audience Apollo proclaimed a week of general rejoicing at his own safe return. Phaeja came and embraced him in the throne room. Came too, Cimiad, looking strangely different now after her long period of labor on the far-off earth, and embraced the ruler Apollo, and made pretty speeches that did not seem to ring quite true.

The gathered people cheered Apollo and his two famous and beloved friends, and the three sat themselves; Apollo upon the throne, and Cimiad and Phaeja in lower seats near at hand. Everything was right once again in the great city of Ptimus and in the palace of Apollo, it's lofty minded ruler.

But deep under the Cyclopean complexities of the vast royal palace were the prisons. In the most isolated cells, those guarded from ray tamper by metal impervious to all rays were three cells guarded each by new-come warriors from the armies of Apollo guards unknown to the usual garrison of the prison. In the three cells were three prisoners forbidden all contact with the world outside, forbidden even to behold the faces of their fellow men. Their food was specially prepared and brought to them by men wearing masks, for they were not to see the faces of any human being. All of which seemed strange, but the papers were in order and bore the personal great seal of Apollo himself and who could argue with that? It was not usual for the merciful Lord to be severe with prisoners.

Within the cells wept Cimiad, and cursed and fretted Phaeja, and sat dry-eyed and brooding Apollo himself. He wondered a long time how it was that one so renowned for intelligence as himself should yet be as big a fool as there were in all the ethereal realms. And only his own logic made him answer in the dank silence of his cell saying: "Yet it is so!"

Outside of these three forbidden cells with their special guard, none knew in all the city of Ptimus or in all the great realm of Tah that anything was different than it had been before Apollo had left for earth.

In a few days the wedding of Ashtoroth and Apollo was consummated. At the same time, to make the appearance more artfully deceiving, Cimiad wed Phaeja!

It was a crafty move, for Ashtoroth composed a letter to Phaeja's home in Um telling his relatives and ministers of his decision to remain

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 144)

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 142) with Apollo in Ptimus for a long time to come.

The letter was an artful forgery placed upon the paper Phaeja used for his own letters to Apollo. It had Phaeja's own signature upon it, though the date was now different.

Likewise a similar artful preparation of deceiving script went out in Cimiad's own writing.

There was now no immediate danger that anyone would discover the three robots were not the rightful men and woman they seemed, and much can be done with power through a short time.

Now Ashtoroth was ruler in the mighty ethereal sphere of Tah, and strange were the changes that took place. Strange too the lying rumor that the mighty Apollo slept not in the bed of the beautiful Ashtoroth, but at its foot like a trained dog!

THE THREE cells of Apollo and Phaeja and Cimiad were imper-vious to rays. So were many prison cells that rays from outside might not talk to the prisoners. It irked Ashtoroth that she might not gloat over their plight. She brooded over her ray that would not reach through the metal walls and show her the anguished thought in their minds.

Thinking thus, an idea came to her how she might torment, them, especially Cimiad.

She had the three prisoners placed in one small cell directly under the former apartments of Apollo. She hoped that Cimiad would be embarrassed by the continual presence of the two men and the lack of privacy, and that the two men might fall into conflict over Cimiad.

The roof she had prepared with a small opening that slid back to admit her rays. Now she could look in on

the three unfortunate victims and read their minds, and torment them by inserting thoughts and impulses not their own.

As she looked in for the first time, Apollo was saying bitterly to Phaeja: "Are you glad now that we saved the immortal Ashtoroth from age and madness and brought her here to teach her wisdom and mercy and virtue?"

"It is not my fault, Apollo, that she found it so easy to use the opportunities you gave her so lavishly. If you were an hostage in Ashtoroth's home, would you not seize control if you found it so ridiculously simple?"

"Yes, I would."

"So would any of us. What she does with us now will be educational, too, to you who prate of the virtues of maintaining the ancient life-patterns, and of the wisdom in following the outworn precepts of the Elder wisdom, laws built for a people and a culture and science vastly different from our own today."

"We are apt to learn a great deal more of Ashtoroth and her pagan ways before we are through. We will not relish the learning." Cimiad was bitter in her despair, and somewhat scornful of Apollo's lack of vigilance in allowing Ashtoroth to do what she had done. "I have always detested her—the very sound of her name makes me bristle. She is a woman who cares not for other women. She would have a world filled with men and herself the only woman in it!"

Ashtoroth, amused, laughed triumphantly over her ray, so that all three minds below heard her, and said: "I shall get a great deal of strange pleasure out of you three wriggling creatures before death releases you from me." She sent a

strong stim ray down upon Phaeja. His body undulated and trembled with the force of the flow of pleasure vibrant. "My pet, Phaeja, will yet decide where his heart casts anchor and where his will intends, my way or the way of the Elder council."

At this mark of her favor toward his friend, Apollo frowned upon Phaeja in sudden anger, as Ashtoroth intended. Cimiad drew a little way from him, and toward the seated Apollo. Where-upon Ashtoroth sent the impulse of jealousy into Phaeja, so that he frowned upon Cimiad and Apollo. Then Ashtoroth shifted the stim-ray upon the body of Apollo so that he too trembled from head to foot with the sudden overwhelming pleasure. "Apollo, you shall yet be glad to take the place of the poor robot at the foot of my bed." She laughed mockingly as his thoughts under her direction desired mightily this mercy from her, and in his mind she made him grovel before her, asking that this boon might come to pass. His real self writhed with shame at this debasement, not knowing surely whether it was his own vile impulses made him beg of this woman or no. Now she changed the stim rays to blue rays of pain, and flung them flooding down upon the small, sweet figure of Cimiad. She fell writhing to the floor with terrible pain. And Ashtoroth's voice gloated in Cimiad's mind alone: "You have your two lovers with you day and night, are you happy thus, little enemy? Have I not given you your heart's desire in double measure? Is not your imprisonment the greatest good I could give you? Why are you not grateful? Why do you hate Ashtoroth?" And subtly she made the minds of Apollo and Phaeja rejoice that the pain rays

went to Cimiad and not to themselves, and despise themselves for this unworthy thought.

DAY BY day she made Cimiad's bright beauty to fade before the eyes of the two princes and rulers, and they grew to detest the sight of her inadvertently. It was a continual embarrassment to have her witness their shame and degradation.

Day by day she made their minds desire the coming of the rays from Ashtoroth's powerful pleasure mech, for their monotony of imprisonment had no relief but her visits. Try as they might, they could not think their own true thoughts, but only those thoughts given to them by Ashtoroth's alien attendants at watch over them now with rays. These thoughts were hate of each other, disgust with all their bodily presence, so that every breath each drew seemed an imposition upon the privacy and silence of the other. No matter what they tried to say to each other to alleviate these unnatural repellances and disgusts, the words came out uncouth and mal-appropriate.

Day followed day, and this continual tempering with their minds bore fruit, so that they stared at each other continually like wild animals wishing to spring at each other's throats.

She also made them both desire the slim beautiful body of Cimiad continually, but in a vile disgusting way. Their minds shrank from this continual vicious thought, suspecting it was their own, born of close imprisonment and unnatural life together. And when she herself, Ashtoroth, threw her stim rays down upon them from where she lay in luxury on the couch of Apollo, and spoke mildly and pleasantly to them,

it was as a great light of glory coming into their darkness. She made the two males to hate Cimiad, as standing between themselves and Ashtoroth's full pleasuring of them and herself.

When she gave Cimiad her daily hours of pain over the ray, they rejoiced inadvertently in Cimiad's agony, and cursed themselves for so rejoicing as though it were their own selves responsible for the alien, unworthy thought.

Week followed week, and they were changed from their former brilliant health and beauty to thin emaciated creatures, and madness shone from their eyes upon each other, held in check still by iron wills and cultured, unbreaking minds.

Ashtoroth gloated over the change, and devised ever new methods of giving them endless mental anguish.

Upstairs, in the throne room. Ashtoroth used her ancient methods of acquiring strong and loyal supporters. One of her favorite methods was by seducing the young officers of Apollo's loyal legions to her bed, and this had two fine results. First it made the military clique hold "Apollo" in despite. Second, it made the recipient of these favors look to Ashtoroth for orders, and avoid contact with Apollo as one apt to wreak his anger upon him at any time. And thirdly, Ashtoroth enjoyed the business mightily.

The false Apollo stood complaisant at her side like a servant while the luscious plump Ashtoroth held nightly revels and fearfully contrived debauches in the great palace. The young people of the city came to know that Ashtoroth was the true ruler and Apollo now, by some strange sorcery, but a puppet upon her string. These young minds were carefully weaned by Ashtoroth's

words and favors from their thin varnish of high-minded idealism, founded as it was not on experience but upon teachings, and they found that progress and advancement came from pandering to the queen, and not on achievement or ability in other fields.

Likewise the scientists learned that when they wanted something they must go to the queen, for "Apollo" who had been lavish heretofore was now able to give them but empty promises and resounding phrases to all their requests. Gradually all the most important posts of the empire were given to men from far Hored, and narrow-eyed black-bearded men connived and mulcted all the innocent unwary of the great people of Tah. These were often men who had come to congratulate their ruler in Hored on her new estate in Tah, and had remained at her nod by invitation. These swarthy conniving outlanders now held all the posts of official power, and the great land of Tah had become so swiftly the footstool for the swarthy, hard-eyed men from Hored.

Many and great were the impositions under which the people of the country suffered. Murmuring grew into open action against the Queen's favorites, and some of them were murdered. Ashtoroth laughed when they came cravenly to her for protection, and asked them if they had not better try the paths of virtue.

Meanwhile her lusts and carouses and open flouting of all custom and discretion became the favorite topic of discussion in the social gatherings of the land, and Ashtoroth was often defended for her actions by those who thought that lust and love are one and freedom another name for what was coming upon the land under Ashtoroth's lewd ministrations.

Men and women, when grouped in these scandal mongerings and discussions of the fate of the people under the new state of affairs talked most of Ashtoroth. Her beauty and her mind-tampering ray-hands' work in their minds had already enslaved many of the stronger of these people to her following. Though her behavior was as stench in the land, all those who had been irked by the ancient restrictions upon license found in her a savior, and spoke well of her.

NOW, Ashtoroth and her scientists from Hored were not the only creatures who had ever built a robot reproduction of a human being. Far from that, there was a well-grown science of constructing such creatures out of synthesized flesh, and many of their more careful products were in great demand in certain not too secret circles. The process was well known, in a hush-hush way, and when Cimiad and Phaeja failed to return to their own possessions and put their affairs in order after their marriage, and when the unusual and sinister whispers of Cimiad's peculiar and unnatural behavior came to the ears of the loyal female warriors who served and loved Cimiad, and came to the ears of those who loved Phaeja, the men of Um who knew Phaeja and Cimiad well, a large dead rat was smelled by them.

Since logic showed them but one way in which Ashtoroth might have turned the tables upon Apollo, investigation showed them that this could have taken place—nay, must have taken place.

Logic, carefully exercised, showed them several paths by which the tables could be turned back again upon the fleshly lust in woman-form

called Ashtoroth.

Those men of Apollo's who had left the capital when they were slighted and forgotten, and all those who had followed Cimiad and Phaeja under Apollo, a mighty army, in truth, comprising much of the strength of Um and of the Norse, and much of the strength of Cimiad's own queendom of Noad, and her men from Rak, that place which had joined itself to her out of sheer admiration and for no other reason. This suddenly gathered strength lay not far outside Ptimus, and sent in secretly messengers who apprised the still loyal warriors of the armies of the truth of what had occurred. These began deserting to the fleet lying out of ray range in open spaces, and the strength of Ashtoroth shrank daily, and the quietly waiting fleet grew by scores of ships daily.

Came the day when Ashtoroth, rousing her luxurious, soft body from sleep, and getting at last out of her busy bed, was handed a large piece of parchment sealed with a seal strange to her. It read:

"To the usurper Ashtoroth, false ruler of Ptimus and Tah. We know that your Apollo is but a robot. For we have with us the true Apollo and the true Cimiad and Phaeja. Therefore it were better for you to flee at once than for you to await the sure and terrible punishment we will visit upon you."

Her large and lovely knees knocking together at this ugly awakening, Ashtoroth flashed her telaug beams down into the cell beneath her feet where the prisons of Apollo and Cimiad and Phaeja still lay in despair. And she knew that the message they had the true Apollo was but a bluff. Still, they might also have a false Apollo every bit as good as her own.

To her she called Hamnar, her dark and capable master of ships in Hored, Admiral now of all the Navies of Tah. Silently she handed him the large-sealed envelope, torn open, and the wide parchment it had contained. Gloomily he read, looking askance at her lewd nakedness, which she strove not to conceal greatly except at ceremonial functions.

Hamnar was not an overly impetuous man. He pursed his lips and hummed, then blew out his breath in thoughtful hah's. "It may be, my Ashtoroth, that I can drive these avenging friends of the imprisoned Lord away *this* time. But now that your betrayal of your parole to Apollo is known to the people of Tah—and you can be sure these enemies have been very careful to so aware the people—I should say that soon or late they will have your head and mine too, and many another about. Revolt after revolt will flare against you in this mighty land, and on the other planets that hold allegiance to Apollo, and in time the Central Council will look into the disturbances and uncover the truth for themselves. It is a situation which depended entirely upon secrecy, and that secrecy has been wiped out by circumstances, by your own careless activities, and by the acuteness of these friends of the Lord Apollo. I see no answer but swift and instant flight in the arrowships of Apollo. We can loot the palace of enough gold and gauds to make the venture not all loss. They will never catch the ships I have kept in readiness for just this combination of circumstance. They are the fleetest ships in all the fleets of Tah, built but recently, some of them at my own orders. In time, we will find refuge in distance. Otherwise

there is little chance of our surviving for long."

"We will fight, Hamnar, we will fight and we will die—but flee we will not!"

"The trouble with *that* is, my loved Ashtoroth, our captains and pilots, those not of the blood from Hored, have been steadily deserting for weeks by the scores and the hundreds of scores. They of course, take with them, each desertion, a few more ships to this fleet lying out of range of our base ray. We have now not near enough loyal men, or ships either, to fight *with*, and those are not dependable, held only by innocent ignorance and disbelief of the things they have heard. They too would largely desert upon the slightest evidence of the true fate of Apollo. Call it off, Ashtoroth, and let us seek the free paths of space, sure we can do as well in less antagonistic fields of endeavor. Our talents will not go to waste! We will soon have not a thousand ships, and those undermanned by our own men of Hored, and you cannot fight with those!"

Ashtoroth had learned at last to listen to reason from the mouths of her generals. So it was that a few hundred ships arrowed swiftly up into the night from the great glittering ethereal city of Ptimus and the name Ashtoroth was known no more except as a bawdy joke in all those regions of Etherea. And they had no sooner lifted into the hiding dark than down upon the city descended the thousands of fire-ships from Um and from the many planets of the Nors, and from Noad and from Rak, and they were vastly welcomed in the city.

Up toward the dark palace now clanked a legion of marching female warriors, and a legion of men from Um, the tall blond Nors of that city in the blue and scarlet of Phaeja with the winged serpent, topped by the serpent and wand of Apollo, upon the shoulder, in their hands the ray rifles ready.

Clanking up through the streets and into the broad avenues of the Cyclopean palace came the great ray tanks from the bowels of the ships of the fleet. And they found the palace silent and occupied by but a few hiding left-overs from Hored.

Pitiful was the sight of their beloved Apollo and of Phaeja and Cimiad, their hair grown to their waists, their bones barely held together by their flesh, and their eyes staring pools of madness and hunger.

It was a long time before the marriage of Phaeja and Cimiad took place. And it was longer yet before their love for each other came again to full bloom, for the evil work of Ashtoroth's subtle hands putting powered telaug thoughts into their minds, etching them deep in lying, hideous, seeming truth, had lanned their minds with strange hates and vile images which time alone could cure or erase.

According to Oahspe, these three still live in the ethereal realms. Their love still blooms, and there too, Gur has become a mighty figure, an elected God with his gentle and gracious Suima now a vast and capable and still gentle and loving Goddess herself. A fit mate for a God. And whether this Gur of Oahspe is the same Gur of this story, I do not know. Nor do you!

THE END
