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by
**NELSON
S. BOND**

The WORLD WITHIN



SCHLATER had more patience than his companion. His method would have been to tie Alderson securely, then extort his secret in one of the approved fashions. The Gestapo had taught him many pleasant little ways of stimulating conversation. A hot flame applied to bare soles, the mute insistence of a foot of rubber hose, that little trick with fine wire and the eyelids.

But Koshu, being a Jap, was impatient, nervously impetuous. He scowled when the old scientist claimed he had no blueprints for the instrument that stood in the center of the room, and when Alderson staunchly refused to explain its operation, the little man's hair-trigger temper flared. So did the automatic in his yellow fist. A look of stunned surprise came into the American physicist's eyes. He coughed, choked on his own blood, pitched forward, and lay still.

Schlater said ruefully, "That was not too clever, my friend. You should have forced him to explain before you shot him. This looks like no war machine I have ever seen."

"We have no time to waste," hissed Koshu. "Someone may walk in here at any moment. We will not need any diagrams or explanations. We have the machine itself. That will tell us all we need to know. Let us take it to my place and study it. Give me a hand, please, friend?

Steady, there! Up with it. *Aie*—maledictions!"

He jerked his hand from the machine, mopping blood from his right palm with a not-too-clean handkerchief.

"Curse it, that metal flange is sharp! Well, let us make haste. We must get out of here. Lift, please!"

Schlater lifted. The hour was late, the sky black, the street deserted. No one saw them carry the odd-looking, projector-like instrument across the pavement, put it into a station-wagon. Schlater lowered the side-screens carefully. Koshu, still nursing his injured hand, waited fretfully. A few minutes later, gears ground; the station-wagon and its mysterious cargo sped away from the quiet laboratory in which lay the body of Dr. Robert Alderson, inventor.

SOME time afterward, in Koshu's quarters, they stood before their stolen toy, studying it. Their styles of approach to the new problem were typical of their thought habits. More clearly than their appearances it typified the differences of the races from which they sprang.

Koshu was all feline eagerness as, black eyes gleaming, he strode about the machine in short, mincing steps, lingering here to touch a tube, there a coil, tracing with long, sensitive fingers the path of a



**Unseen, mighty, they muster their marching armies,
the secret sentinels of the last uncharted frontier—
the human body!**

wire; delving, conjecturing, leaping to half-inductive, half-deductive conclusions.

Schlater did not finger the instrument. He analyzed it with the cold, mental detachment of the Teuton. He, too, was identifying the purposes of the cryptic parts—but his probing was entirely cerebral. And he, too, was slowly reaching a conclusion.

As he studied, some untouched portion of his brain found time to be scornful of Koshu's nervous concentration. Schlater neither liked nor trusted the Nipponese agent. He collaborated with him only because to do so was in accordance with orders issued to all Nazi agents in the United States.

Inasmuch, read the general orders, as a friendly understanding exists between our two nations, members of our Intelligence will cooperate, whenever expedient, with agents of the Japanese government. It is recommended, however, that discretion be employed in permitting valuable secrets to fall into the hands of our allies—

Schlater had followed the first part of his orders. Learning that Dr. Alderson had completed a new war machine, an instrument which the childishly hopeful Americans believed might be the "weapon to end all wars," he had joined forces with Koshu to steal that secret. Their carefully plotted effort had been successful, as was evidenced by the glistening projector that now stood before them. And Schlater wondered how far his "allegiance" with Koshu should now go.

If this weapon were, indeed, all it was rumored to be, and a growing conviction assured him it was, it was "a valuable secret." As such, it should be communicated to the Nazi, and only to the Nazi government. A war weapon shared by two countries is quartered in value. Therefore, . . .

He glanced guardedly at the Jap, just in time to find Koshu's beady black eyes intent upon him. Koshu's voice was

high-pitched with the excitement now.

"Well, Schlater? You understand its purpose?"

Schlater did, now. Or at least he thought he did. The curious, parabolic arrangement of the convex lenses gave him the needed key, that and the wiring which determined the concentration of focal radiation on a point established by a series of verniers. It was a staggering conception; one, Schlater admitted reluctantly to himself, of unparalleled genius. It made of this innocent-appearing projector a mighty weapon, a weapon that could, indeed, end wars. Or, in the hands of the proper persons, it could pave smooth the path of conquest.

But he shook his head. He said, "I don't know. We may have been hoaxed. There seems to be nothing dangerous in this maze of wires and coils."

"You think," queried Koshu, "it is worthless?" And a frown creased his forehead; his eyes looked worried. Scorn, mingled with an urge toward laughter, stirred within Schlater. Then he had guessed right. Koshu's intellect was not shrewd enough to grasp this novel, terrifying concept. Such an idea was beyond the yellow man's mental powers.

"Utterly worthless," said Schlater negligently. He shrugged. "We might have guessed as much. You know these *verdammte* Americans. Always straining toward the fantastic, the impossible end. Oh, I suppose there is some slight logic behind the machine. Maybe it could be made to work." He paused. "Suppose we try? Let us attach it. Apparently this is a small scale model, designed to operate on house current. If you will plug it in, *mein Freund?*"

Koshu darted to the wall socket, inserted the plug that fed current to the strange projector. For a moment his back was to Schlater, and the Nazi agent's hand went toward his pocket. He stilled the movement with an effort.

This was, after all, Koshu's apartment. Undoubtedly he had friends here. The bark of a Luger at this hour might rouse them, end forever Schlater's chance of winning complete possession of the projector. And, there was another way. A better way. If the instrument worked as he thought. . . .

Koshu was again at his side, fretfully eager.

"What now, Schlater?"

Schlater stepped to the machine, pressed a button briefly, experimentally. As he did so, current sang its high, whining song. The muzzle of the projector brightened; from it diffused a weaving spiral of light.

Koshu squealed in delight.

"It does work, Schlater! What is it? A death ray? A sonic beam?"

Schlater snapped off the light swiftly, grateful for Koshu's single-mindedness. The Nipponese agent, fascinated by the spiral of color, had failed to notice the more significant result for which Schlater had been watching. The weird effect the beam had had upon objects on the far end of the room. The Morris chair, that picture on the wall—

He muttered, "A moment, *bitte*. There is an adjustment to be made." He fingered another of the verniers. The scale bore numbers. He set the vernier at the number "4." That, he judged, should be about right. Koshu would be about four feet away when the beam was turned upon him.

The Jap was staring at him narrowly.

"What are you doing, friend Schlater?"

"Just experimenting. You want to find out how the machine works, *nicht wahr?*"

"Yes, but—" Koshu's small hands gestured. In the movement he tensed the muscles of his wounded right hand; the cut split afresh and he winced. "You know more than you have told me. You're hiding something, friend Schlater!"

"Don't be a fool!" Schlater had fin-

ished his preparations now. All but one thing. An equalizing correction to be made on the projector lens. That done, it would be but the work of seconds to end this little farce. One swift movement of the projector, the pressure of a finger, and Koshu would be eliminated. The Reich would not have to share this knowledge with a publicly embraced, but secretly detested ally.

It was then that Schlater made his mistake. Eager to complete his task, he stepped to the front of the projector. His hands sought the lens. Then, from the corner of one eye, he glimpsed sudden motion. Koshu, a triumphant grimace on his lips, was leaping forward. Schlater bellowed harsh warning.

"Koshu—be careful!"

He spoke too late. With a shrill burst of laughter, the Son of Heaven clawed the button. A mist of golden flame flooded the projector's nozzle, suffused Schlater with a fiery pain!

BLINDED, dazed, numbed, his flesh acrawl with a maddening sensation of contractile pressure, Schlater fought to stagger from beneath that radiant downpouring. But the golden mist followed him. Koshu, handling the projector, was training it upon his "ally" with deliberate, deadly accuracy. And there was gloating mockery in the Jap's gibes.

"So you thought Koshu a fool, eh, Schlater?"

Schlater screamed, "Turn it off, Koshu! Before it is too late! *This weapon condenses matter!*"

"I know," laughed the Nipponese. "Your Aryan pride did not let you believe another mind could be as quick as your own, did it, Schlater? You underestimated Koshu."

Schlater tugged despairingly at his pocket, but once more the Jap anticipated him. Before he could shoot, Koshu's hand

stretched forth and wrenched the gun from him as if it were a child's toy. And Schlater saw now, with a burst of horror, why the weapon had been so easily torn from his grasp.

Because he was shrinking! Koshu's hand was gigantic. The walls were racing away from him at a frightful speed. The eye of the lens now above him was as large as his head, almost as large as his body! The ceiling had disappeared, lost in a vague nebulosity. The soft carpet beneath him seemed to slip in all directions from under his feet. He staggered and reeled, finding he must keep in motion in order to stay upon his feet.

The ray burned down upon him, and through its golden aura he glimpsed the Cyclopan face of Koshu grinning at him. A great, pocked visage, mottled and brownish, coarse with occasional weed-like tusks of beard. Koshu's voice seemed to be deeper. Its taunting was thunder in his ears.

"So, little one, the first man dies before the new weapon that will make *my* nation ruler of the world! How does it feel to be the size of a kitten? Ah, you run? You flee? It is useless. But take courage, Schlater. Koshu will spare you the final ignominy. When you have dwindled to the size of a louse, I will crush you—*like this!*"

A ponderable darkness came between Schlater and the blinding sun; like a colossal Juggernaut it moved inexorably down upon him. He screamed, his voice a high, thin bleating in his ears, and tripped and fell upon a spiny trunk of wool, rose and scampered from beneath Koshu's massive foot.

Fear lent wings to his feet. The Gargantuan boot missed him by inches. Inches that, even as he scrambled, became yards. For that brain-seething pressure still flamed in his body; in some dim corner of his mind he was aware that the beam was still upon him, he was still shrinking.

Where this would end he could not tell—nor dared he guess. The carpet that had once been a soft surface beneath his feet was now a granite-strewn plateau, grinning with the leafless spines of fibrous growths. No longer was there a room, walls, or a ceiling, or a machine. There was just this drab, gritty wasteland, and an ochre sky from which hot, wracking beams scorched him deeper and yet deeper into the realms of nothingness.

A remnant of logic made him try to figure his present size, but the thought defied all computation. He was microscopic; that he knew. If grains of dust were, to him, mountains . . . if even now clefts appeared in solid terrain, tumbling him downward to imponderable depths. . .

Countless miles and aeons above him there was a dull and sullen roaring, cadenced but indistinguishable to Schlater. Stark fantasy had its will with him. It was the elder gods he heard, the gods of thunder, and the sun was blotted by their wrath. Actually, it was Koshu who now, upon his hands and knees, was seeking some faint sign of the "ally" whom he had thrust into the unimaginable. The thunder was Koshu's voice, screaming in rage and disappointment. "Then you think thus to escape me, mannikin? But you shall not. I shall crush the life from your puny body, hammer you to a pulp!"

His voice lifted to a bellow. Heedless of his wound, Koshu beat and pounded on the carpet. Dust rose thickly, and blood stained the dun as Koshu sobbed and cursed and clawed the carpet like a mad thing. But there was no sign of Schlater. He was gone. The Jap rose, weeping with rage, and cut off the current. A moment he stood there, gazing mutely at the empty floor, a long, long moment.

THE wrath of the thunder gods howled about him; a typhoon screamed vast winds about his ears, caught and spun him, hurled him viciously

into the depths of a spongy thicket. Jet blackness surrounded him, now that the sun had been blotted out. Somewhere above raged the fuller fury of the wind; the ground beneath him trembled and rocked. His world was a madman's dream in which small objects at his side grew while he watched, towered skyward, becoming monstrous, awesome impossibilities. New scenes sprang from nothingness. Valleys became ridges, pebbles boulders, as he slipped and skidded perilously through a treacherous universe.

Schlater dared not guess what yet might lie ahead. All he knew was that the persistent throbbing still tingled in his veins; that with each new breath his body became more minute. A memory came to him of a theory he once had heard; that there might be worlds within worlds, solar galaxies within atoms of the world on which once, a normal human, he had dwelt and dreamed and plotted for glory. If so, he was not far from learning the truth or falsity of this theory.

Out of the darkness came a strange, new feeling of sultriness and increased pressure. Warmth was about him, and movement. His mind reeling under the impact of this new mystery, he cast himself from his latest refuge and ran on tottering legs toward—he knew not what.

He had taken perhaps a half-dozen faltering steps when he felt upon him an insistent, wrenching tug, a sort of dreadful suction from above. He fought against it with the desperate fury of a doomed man, but the violent force became more potent every instant. He tried to cry out, but the cry died in his throat. Pain cut through him with the edge of a honed blade, his muscles knotted in agony, the very marrow of his bones seemed wracked with torment.

Once again, and futilely, he kicked out in a blind panic, but his attempt to free himself was waste and hopeless motion. There came a sense of lifting swiftness.

A giddiness nauseated him. His head felt weirdly light; his body sagged with impotence. He had no longer the strength with which to fight his fate. He surrendered, suddenly and completely, and all was black.

It was a strange world in which he awakened. He lay on a narrow shelf, scant inches above the crest of a sluggish stream that poured endlessly down the corridor of a vast, high-domed tunnel. There was no sky above him, no earth beneath; nothing but this plunging stream and the smooth, washed, plastic bore that was its aqueduct. But faint and far-off, in the direction toward which the river coursed, Schlater could hear a sound familiar to his earthly ears. The rhythmic pounding of a machine.

He rose, weak, dazed, uncertain, but taking courage from the fact that he still lived! And in the equally hopeful fact that the scene about him did not change before his eyes. Apparently he had reached the end of his mad journey in size; the period of his diminution had ended.

And if so, hope was not yet dead! What if his adventure had brought him to some microscopic universe? What if there were no beings like himself (Schlater was a logical man) in this murky world? There must be intelligence of some sort. The mathematical perfection of the tunnel argued that; it represented an engineering feat of no mean scope. And the beat of machinery off in the distance—where there were machines there must be thinking creatures to build them. Could he but find these builders, win their friendship.

Well, he had studied the machine of Dr. Alderson. With persistence and effort, Schlater thought he could build its counterpart, return to the world from which he had come, and avenge himself on the traitorous Koshu.

Spurred by this thought, he studied his surroundings more carefully. The ledge

on which he now stood was not constant, it was an accidental hardening or encrustation on the wall of the tunnel. He could not, then, walk to his destination as a man might explore the depths of Paris in the bowels of the sewage system. And there were no water craft. All he could do, for the present at least, was trust himself to the mercies of the stream. Swim with the current down the tunnel or feed-pipe, resting whenever opportunity presented itself, until he found himself in a more favorable location.

Gingerly, he lowered himself from the shelf. The stream was pleasantly brackish, and, so near as he could tell in the semi-gloom, a pale, muddy, yellowish color. The air he breathed was heavy and sickly sweet, but it bore no trace of the offal taint he had feared.

Apparently the aqueduct was part of a power plant, not a portion of a drainage system.

The current was deep and strong, the water viscous. It tugged at his foot. He loosed his hold on the ledge, and found himself drifting swiftly down the tunnel. He had but to paddle gently to keep himself afloat.

HIS eyes were becoming more accustomed to the gloom now. He noticed, with increasing wonderment, several things he had not previously recognized. One of these was the intricate construction of the feedline in which he swam. It was not, as he had first thought, a single, large tunnel; it was a labyrinthine network of small corridors, all leading into this major aqueduct. His sweeping passage bore him, in short seconds, past a half hundred tiny doorways, each sealed with tiny, automatically-operated portals of what appeared to be a plastic substance of some kind. These seemed to move with a predetermined rhythm. As he swam past one, it opened momentarily, and a sudden gout of water cascaded upon him.

Something sharp and hard struck him, bruised him. His hand, instinctively leaping to the object, identified it as a bit of spiny bone, like the skeleton of a coral.

It had, he saw fearfully, been gnawed clean, and for the first time a doubt entered his mind. He had placidly assumed himself to be alone in this watery grotto—but could he be sure? There might be other life here, dangerous antagonists. He sought, and found, the case-knife strapped to his calf.

As though his newborn fears had fathered the actuality, he saw, suddenly then, the first of the denizens of this weird place. A trap vent opened in the wall of the tunnel before him, and from it wriggled a creature that brought a choked cry to Schlater's lips.

It was a sallow, slimy, serpentine monster, almost half again as large as Schlater. It had no eyes, but in its thick, wedge-shaped head was a gaping, toothed vent that was its maw; and from the tip of its proboscis writhed two wiry antennae that now stirred inquisitively in Schlater's direction. It spun, a hundred coarse-haired cilia palpitating, and darted toward him.

Schlater, shocked to action, churned the water in a swift, fearful desperation. The creature whisked toward him, its maw opening hungrily. His arm raised, his knife slashed once, twice, and yet again at the blind face of the monster. It recoiled before that biting edge. A thin ichor oozed from the wounds; the water churned and boiled as the injured water-thing sought to close in upon its quarry and still avoid the knifing pain.

Sheer chance saved him then, for suddenly beside him was another rimy ledge, similar to that on which he had found himself at first. With a scrambling effort, Schlater dragged himself onto this. The sea-thing followed his scent blindly, butted its still-dripping head against the ledge a foot below Schlater, then seemed to lose

him. A moment it lingered there, its triangular head weaving back and forth in mute querulousness; then it wriggled off to the other side of the tunnel. A moment later it was burrowing, with a series of nauseating snuffles and mouthings, a ragged hole right through the wall of the aqueduct.

To what purpose, for what purpose, Schlater could not begin to guess. All he did know was that his forehead was damp and cold, his body quivering with disgust, his stomach churning with nervous fear. What kind of monster was this that could digest smooth structural plastic—and why?

He saw, then. It did not add to the quietude of his nerves. For before his eyes he saw the snakelike beast curl up within the tiny cavern it had burrowed, proceed to split in half, and vomit up a hundred, tiny, slimy simulacra of itself! The beast's nauseous puppies, each as large as Schlater's hand, turned instantly on their parent, tore it to bits, and gulped every morsel of the rent body!

Nor did their feeding end there. His eyes sharpened by this experience, Schlater saw now that there were still other life forms swarming in the humid cavern. Those pallid objects he had dismissed as stalactite growths, pending from the high, arched ceiling, he saw, now, were living blobs of matter. And in the water itself were still other mobile forms. Some, so tiny that they would have escaped his attention entirely had it not been for this sickening revelation, others very large. There was one form of fish or crustacean something like a clam, except that its "shell" was translucent, its shape that of a roughly hewn crystal. One constant form was a curious, disc-like creature with almost invisible cilia; these were a pale, yellowish color. The serpent puppies seemed to find them a delicacy, diving eagerly into the stream to fish them out, ripping them apart with

sharp, hungry teeth. These platter-shaped things were completely defenseless apparently. When torn, they exploded with a sharp, popping sound, and Schlater thought he could detect the faint, ammoniac smell of ozone whenever this happened. They were like the blowfish of Gulf waters, terrifying to look at, helpless in battle.

And as the puppies ate, they grew. As they grew to the size of the parent that had attacked Schlater, they, as had the parent, ceased their feeding, burrowed new cubbyholes for themselves in the wall of the tunnel. Within the space of minutes, the entire chamber was pock-marked with their burrowings; where had been one monster, pregnant with loathesome young, now the corridor seethed with this hateful life form.

The tiny shelf upon which Schlater crouched, trembling, had long since been undermined by this horde of swiftly breeding beasts. It would not be long now, he knew, before it gave way, catapulting him into their midst. And when that happened. . . .

He shuddered.

BUT at that moment a wild activity developed amongst the wedge-headed monsters. A swift current seemed to course through them; then, as if advised by some telepathic warning, as one they turned for flight.

And Schlater saw why. There was splashing movement from the farther end of the tunnel. Out of the gloom appeared a solid host of colorless, transparent creatures that slipped through the water with the fluid ease of gigantic amoebae.

Even before the wrigglers had assembled for flight, the first of the newcomers had invaded their midst. Schlater saw its long, colorless body expand before his eyes, stretch, grow pseudopods, and ingest a wriggler. The transparent body wall veiled, clouded, as strong acids di-

gested the enemy—and the colossal amoeba was twisting toward another of its prey!

Everywhere the same scene was taking place. Here a wriggler, lashing out desperately with its countless cilia, swarmed high to the tunnel wall. Its pursuer calmly, coldly, stretched tactile arms up the wall until it reached its quarry, devoured it piecemeal. There a wriggler, ripping and tearing with that ferocious maw, sliced an invader in two. Imperceptibly another of the pale amoebae took up the battle where its slain brother had left off, destroyed the wriggler, then proceeded to devour its comrade's carcass methodically!

Schlater saw, now, that not only from one direction had the tunnel-guardians—for he guessed them to be that—come. Another regiment had swept down from the farther end of the tunnel; still others had entered the battle chamber from the side ports. Flanked thus from every side, with no reinforcements, the wrigglers never had a chance. Within the space of minutes, the river had been swept clean of all wrigglers, the host of pale guardians disappeared to their posts, leaving behind a scattered few scavengers who tidied up by calmly devouring the slain bodies of friend and foe alike. Nothing escaped their painstaking housecleaning save one life-form, the yellowish, disc-like, harmless creatures upon which the wrigglers had formerly feasted.

So fascinated had Schlater been by this battle that he had completely forgotten his own peril. Now he was sharply reminded of it. One of the tunnel-guards, scavenging the pockmarks beneath his tiny ledge, sensed his presence, quivered delicately, and stretched a pseudopod up toward him.

In panic desperation Schlater screamed and screamed again, hacked at that exploring arm with his knife. The blade passed through harmlessly; where it had gone, new flesh grew instantly. The tactile arm

strengthened, crept up and tightened about Schlater, and then slid away again! The guardian, as though completely satisfied with Schlater, went on about his work!

He could not stay here; that was certain. And again hope blossomed within Schlater. Evidently he had been judged by the guardians of the tunnel and found harmless. Schlater wondered for a moment, fearfully, if these weird, amoeboid warriors were the ruling race of this new world in which he found himself. If so, his hopes were in vain. But if not—

Maybe, he thought hopefully, his presence had been discovered from afar by the real rulers? It was evident that they had some means of checking on all parts of their underground aqueduct. How else would they have sent this detail to destroy the invading monsters?

There was but one way to find out. Continue on his self-appointed journey toward the pump, the machine that continued to throb its rhythmic, hollow message of hope through the tunnel.

He hesitated a moment. Then, heart pounding, he dove once again into the racing flood. There was no attack. Instead, a gigantic, amoeboid watch-dog deserted its former tasks, slipped into the stream behind him, and followed him down the tunnel, for all the world like a patient bodyguard.

HOW many miles he traveled, Schlater had no way of guessing. The traveler marks distance by the passage of time; Schlater wore no watch, and in this murky tunnel, where never occurred a change of light, it might have been night or day, twilight or dusk.

But he had the feeling, as time passed, that he was getting somewhere near his goal. For one thing, the aqueduct down which he paddled was now larger than that in which he had first found himself. The transition had come about gradually,

during one of many twists and turns.

For another, he was moving faster now. At first the stream had been sluggish. But now, as the steady pounding of the central power plant sounded deeper, nearer to his ears, the flood waters gathered momentum.

For a time, his logical brain sought an analogy between this place and a possibly similar location on the Earth he had left behind him. But he could find none except in a dimly remembered passage from the poem of a mad Englishman of long ago.

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea. . . ."

But that, of course, was nonsense. For there were here no "gardens bright with sinuous rills", no "forests ancient as the hills."

Koshu!

The memory of the Jap's perfidy flooded back upon him, stirring him to sudden, renewed anger. Again he was afire with impatience to reach that mysterious, distant chamber where were the engines that utilized this stream. There to find creatures, intelligent inhabitants of this diminutive world. There to begin work on the machine that would bear him back to his own, now macrocosmic universe.

The trip was not without incident. Once, as before, he was attacked by a denizen foreign to this tunnel. This time his antagonist was a creature so contrary to common sense that Schlater had difficulty defining it to himself as living. It was more like an animated problem in higher mathematics. Its form was that of a spiral convolute of the third order; it had no evident organs of digestion, breeding, or sense.

Yet, lacking these things, it gave Schlater a bad moment as it came spiral-

ing toward him like a monstrous corkscrew, studiously intent on making him a *piece de resistance*. This time there was no fortunate ledge on which he could take refuge. Had it not been for his silent follower, his adventure would have ended abruptly there beneath the vaulted roofs of the dim, jointed caverns of the infinitesimal. But even as the looped attacker weaved toward him, the guardian amoeba charged past, brushing him out of danger's way, to fight his battle for him.

It was no battle. At the sight (or sense, Schlater could not guess which) of the pallid protector, the spiraloid spun in panic flight. Futilely, for the gigantic protoplasm swelled to a huge cup, inexorably surrounded its foe, and once more Schlater looked with shocked, wondering eyes upon the filmy acid clouds churning within his guardian as it ingested its prey.

And ever the sound of the motors deepened. For this Schlater was increasingly glad, for now a new factor began to disturb him. Up to this time there had been air space between the surface of the stream waters and the roof of the tunnel. Now this space was being filled, more and more, by the waters, as from the countless tiny sub-passages came minor torrents to fill the aqueduct.

And the air, Schlater noted uncomfortably, was growing thicker, more offensive, less breathable. He had to labor, now, to breath, and in his nostrils lingered an offensive, almost sulphurous odor. A new fear entered his mind. Perhaps he had been too sanguine in presuming that arrival at the mysterious "machine" would mean his salvation? Suppose this feed line led directly into the bowels of some gigantic force-pump performing some fathomless function? What then would happen to him?

But, no, that was unlikely. The builders of this tunnel must have prepared exits. How else to account for the fact of his

silent protector. No, soon he would come to an open space. There he would find intelligent creatures. Perhaps not men like himself, but at least reasoning creatures with whom he could make peace, to whom he could explain his plight and his desires.

IT HAPPENED so swiftly that he was unprepared. Not that he could have done anything about it. He was hopelessly within the grip of the forces that stirred about him, by will or main force he could not have prevented that which occurred.

But one instant he was drifting down the tunnel, the next the throb of the nearing engine had risen to a clamoring roar. A deep, booming torment of sound that threatened his eardrums trembled the fibers of his body.

The flood which bore him swiftened, foamed, became a swirling, churning maelstrom. He saw, with a burst of horror, that what little air space there had been was now vanishing as the frothy waters boiled against the portals of a huge flood-lock!

He had time for one agonized glance toward his calm "protector", time to gulp in one last, lung-filling draught of precious air—then that ponderous plastic gateway throbbed open! From inside came a tumultuous thunder of mighty forces at work, the ear-splitting rhythm of the machinery Schlater had dreaded. And then a terrible suction gripped him and the waters in which he struggled. Beaten, pounded, bruised by the weight of the torrent upon him, he was drawn into the heart of the clamorous chamber!

That he survived those next few seconds was a miracle in itself. The chamber into which the aqueduct fed was gigantic. Schlater caught a fleeting glimpse of tremendous, curved walls meeting in an arched dome over his head, felt, rather than saw, the brain-maddening, angry

crimson of those walls. Like the pulsant, scarlet drapes on the walls of Poe's *House of Death*.

Then he was being dragged down, down, down, into unfathomable depths. Water boiled and bubbled about him, frightful pressure racked his bones, threatened to force the last ounce of precious air from his straining lungs. All about him strange bodies seemed to live, fighting and struggling; he was tossed and spun like a chip in a steaming cauldron. Hungry fingers ripped the clothing from him, and his flesh was alive with pain from the brutal pummeling.

Then, as suddenly as he had dropped, he found himself rising. And again he was on the surface of the water, a spent tatter of humanity. He panted fresh air into his lungs, struck out violently for the nearest of the ruddy walls, hoping against hope he might find a foothold, a fingerhold on one of those smooth, curving surfaces.

Clawed hands scratched at the wall, but his effort was vain. For these walls, unlike those of the tunnel through which he had entered, were soft and yielding; they seemed made of a spongy, fibrous material. They gave beneath his frenzied attack. In his delirium it seemed that all the walls were suddenly racing away from him now; that the mighty cavern was expanding.

Then one wall sheared away entirely into a gaping vent, the retreating roof of the cavern came pounding down like the crimson gavel of the gods—and again he was seized in a terrific suction, thrust headlong through a second lock, into another thundering chamber.

Down again, down he went into the maelstrom, floundering, fighting, struggling like a madman to sustain that tremendous pressure; then up, up to a breath of air, up to clutch, screaming, at resilient scarlet walls; to claw horribly at barriers that shrugged him off, throbbing, pal-

ing, like the huge muscles of some giant. Muscles!

The simile was born out of Schlater's madness. But the instant it occurred to him, sanity came back to his mind like the douche of icy waters. Muscles! Schlater was a logical man. And now, even though about him beat and thundered a cacaphony that had long since destroyed his sense of hearing, he brought the force of that cold, Teutonic logic into play.

He understood, now, wondering why he had not guessed the answer before, where he was. He understood the tunnel, the rimy excrescence on which he had found himself, the battle of the monsters.

He understood, suddenly and completely, the chamber to which the aqueduct had borne him, knew the purpose of the "watch-dog," knew what his eventful fate must be. . . .

There was no last, lingering hope now. No chance of ever returning to the world outside. For in these murky caverns were no intelligences to befriend him, no metals with which he might build the machine that would be his salvation. His destruction was a matter of time. Die he must. But with him could, and *must* die. . . .

SCHLATER was a logical man. And he still had his case knife. He slipped it, now, from its sheath. Strangely, he found strength to do that which he must. Against the incessant pounding of the waters, he fought his way to the wall of the chamber, that great, towering wall of crimson muscle. All his strength, and all the fury of his new vengeance was in his right arm as he plunged the knife again and again into that yielding wall.

He had the satisfaction of seeing the wall rip into jagged shreds about him before the avengers came. The huge, amoeboid forms that had at one time protected him came swirling toward him in hordes as he hacked and carved at the

wall before him. Then one was upon him; its mobile body was expanding into the cuplike sac that, Schlater knew, would soon engulf him, burning his body into nothingness with its scalding acid secretion.

Once more and gloriously, with a choked laugh on his lips, he slashed at the faltering, throbbing wall. Then he thrust the knife deep and true into the wall, and turned to face his certain destroyers.

THE F. B. I. man nodded toward the odd-looking projector in the middle of the floor.

"Get that out of here, Peters," he said, "and keep it out of sight. From now on, that's government property. We mustn't take any chances on its being stolen again." He turned to the telephone in the room, dialed his superior.

"Chief? Thompson speaking. We found it. It hasn't been damaged. Young Alderson's with me. He says he knows how to operate it. And, Chief, you'd better throw a cordon around the city. The German is missing—Schlater. Apparently he and Kosku had a row. He killed the Jap and skipped. Get on his trail. Okay, Chief. I'll be back with the medical report."

He turned to the medical inspector, now rising from Kosku's side.

"I don't know, Thompson. I'll have to perform an autopsy to make sure. It's the strangest thing I ever saw. At first I thought it might have been death by poisoning—that open wound in his palm, you know. A virulent infection might have attacked him through that opening.

"But that's not it at all. It's some form of heart failure—but the most violent I've ever encountered in all my years of medical experience. His heart seems to have suddenly, and for no reason at all, burst like a rotten fruit! It's ripped into a thousand pieces. Just as if it had been sliced to ribbons—from the inside. . . ."