

# FANTASY

## At Its Best

Imagination is both the spice of life and the stuff from which reality is made. It carries us away from the hum-drum world of worries into fascinating, and sometimes delightfully fearful worlds not visible to our five senses. Yet the stuff from which these dreams are made contributed to the making of the world we all live in. The telephone, the radio, the automobile, were all merely fantasies less than a hundred years ago. No wonder then that such stories as the *AVON FANTASY READER* publishes have a special thrill not to be found in other types of literature. For in these dreams may be hints of things to come, things that may have been, or things that may be even now among us. Consider some of the stories in this number:

***THE MAN FROM THE MOON*** by Otis Adelbert Kline: a story of an interplanetary war, of a struggle to the death between two of Earth's neighbors, and a hint of a celestial people who may walk among us today.

***THE FLOWER-WOMEN*** by Clark Ashton Smith: a colorful fantasia of life on a far-off star, a tale of exotic vampiric flowers with the appearance and wiles of beautiful wanton women.

***THROUGH THE VIBRATIONS*** by P. Schuyler Miller: where is Atlantis, that vanished home of the world's first civilization? In this story, reminiscent of the imagery of A. Merritt, the veil of time is pierced to unravel the most intriguing of ancient mysteries.

There's also Fritz Leiber, Jr.'s strangest story, ***THE MAN WHO NEVER GREW YOUNG***; that classic tale of midnight doom, ***THE NIGHT WIRE***, by H. F. Arnold; and many more specially selected stories of weird-fiction and science-fiction by the best writers of the field. The ninth *AVON FANTASY READER* is a particularly outstanding number of this highly acclaimed series.

—D.A.W.

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## *Through the Vibrations* by P. Schuyler Miller

*The legend of Atlantis, which dates back to Plato, has intrigued men for ages. Roman philosophers, Medieval monks, Victorian archeologists, and modern mystics have each taken a crack at the story, have weighed in their various balances the pros and cons of the legendary lost continent. You could arouse violent argument even today among some oceanographers and geologists with the Atlantis legend. It is an historical wonder worthy of the pen of an A. Merritt. So it is not without expectation that we recognize the Merritt influence in this excellent novelette by P. Schuyler Miller. Miller combines many of the elements of the lost-continent legend with some ideas of his own, and in "Through the Vibrations" carries us through the veil of time to unravel to his own satisfaction this most intriguing of ancient mysteries.*



“if I am wrong, well, then——”

“Then I am out of luck,” I finished for him.

“Exactly,” he agreed. “You may be able to return safely to our own system, but even then, you may materialize within some object, or in space, and so be crushed or frozen. Or you may do the same there, even if I am right. You are certainly taking a great chance, if you decide to go!”

“You can’t phase me, Doc! I’m on! And I’m going first, no one will miss me.”

About three years before my decision, as recorded above, I found myself with a college diploma and no job. Apparently nobody would trust the ability of an “infant prodigy” who had his B.S. at nineteen. So it was that I was practically on my last legs when Dr. Alexander Gregory, usually known as “Doc,” came to board at the farm where I was filling in for a few days while the hay-loader was out of commission. He had sympathy as well as money, and Christmas of that year found me installed as personal assistant in his private laboratories at Schenectady, where he cooperated with the General Electric Company, patron of Steinmetz, Langmuir, Coolidge, and so many of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century.

About noon on the day of which I am speaking, he called me into his "holy of holies," where he had been working since long before I met him, on some project unknown even to me, who had come to be closest to him in every other task.

"Jack," he broke out, "we will grant the existence of an ether."

"With pleasure," I grinned.

"There is something there that carries light and the rest of the vibrations as air carries sound, or rather, as a wave is carried in a long, taut wire or a string, for light waves are transverse rather than longitudinal vibrations. What it is, we don't know. It may be a substance, it may be another vibration, it may be—geometry—as some believe, but it's there, at least so far as our minds can fathom. Most men call it ether. That's good enough for me."

"Suits me, too, Doc. I won't argue the point."

"Light, heat, radio waves, X-rays, all are transverse waves in ether, or have the properties of such waves. You know that. Any fool does, or should. What is more, matter is a vibration too. The electrons and protons, or, more probably, the sub-electrons and sub-protons, if they exist, are little foci of infinitesimal waves, ether waves, so tiny that they seem solid. We are not really sure that it is so, we can never be, I believe, for we can not see them, but electrons behave as if it were, and I don't care very much so long as I can do what I want with them. Who cares whether his candy is flavored with natural wintergreen, so long as it tastes as he expects it to? I can make matter act as it would, if it were built up of tiny waves, and practically that is as much as I care to know. So let us call them waves.

"In our plane, our system I call it, we can see waves with frequencies of from 370 million million to 770 million million—roughly, from the deepest red to the darkest violet. The infra-red waves, the heat radiations, extend from 370 million million down to 950 thousand million. The ultra-violet runs from the visible violet up to about 6 million million million. Farther yet are the X-rays, in the region about 3000 million million million million. And somewhere beyond lies our fundamental, our 'matter-wave.' Why, if we were to take the diameter of an electron for a wavelength, which I am perfectly sure it is not, the resultant frequency would be approximately 75 heptillions—seventy-five with twenty-one zeros following along after it. And the actual frequency must be greater, far greater than that! But you know all that. I have been talking as if you were some tabloid reporter.

"Of what lies beyond we know nothing, have known nothing. For years I have hoped to explore the gaps on either side of our fundamental. Now I believe that I have succeeded, that I can cause our matter-units, whatever they may be, to vibrate in resonance with any frequency desired. You, Jack, could be a blob of green light or a bunch of radio waves, probably static, if you wanted to. Yet, because of the relativity of the universe, you would note no difference in yourself. If I were to step you down four hundred trillion vibrations or so a second, those gorgeous lavender suspenders and your sage knickers would be all I could see of you. But I could feel the heat

radiated by your blue eyes and your socks. That red apple on the table would be the color of a grape to you. The grapes themselves might sunburn you with their ultra-violet radiation. And, to yourself, you would remain the same as ever, trousers, suspenders, and all. What is more, if there chanced to be another system whose fundamental, whose 'matter-wave' coincided with your own, you could perceive it, you would be a part of it, while to me it remained invisible.

"It is my theory, my hope, that the characteristics of true space are absolute, that wherever in our system space has so focused matter as to form the suns and the planets, all the myriad bodies of the many universes, it will focus in a similar manner the "matter-waves" of every plane. No natural law holds unmodified by circumstance, and I do not mean that in these other planes there will be a pebble where there is one here, or a duplicate of yourself in relatively the same position that you occupy, for, to my mind, such a situation would be absurd and even impossible. The generalities will be the same, a sun for a sun, perhaps a planet for a planet, but the lesser details will be almost inevitably different. If it is as I think, Jack, you, and later I, may don the suit that I have prepared, strap the little box containing the resonator to your waist, set the dials, press a button and step off. We *will* do it!

"On the other hand, if I am wrong, well, then——

"Then I am out of luck."

Our plans were soon made. I, with the ray-proof suit, impervious to the dangerous radiations, with the tiny, compact and delicate resonator, and with a second powerful beam resonator which would "step up" objects at a distance of as much as a kilometer, would go ahead. If I found any system where I could stop safely, I would accordingly do so, and send back to the laboratory, with the aid of my beam resonator, a platinum plate, engraved with the readings of my various dials. Then Doc, instructing the other lab assistants, would send on such equipment as I might need, following it in person.

If, however, I could find no landing place, I was to continue through the vibrations until I was visible to Doc as a blob of yellow, then stop. If luck was with me, and I was able to hang relatively motionless in space, Doc could focus his own beam resonator on me and send me back to our own fundamental, provided, of course, that my resonator and other instruments would not work in reverse, and that the earth and, indeed, all the universe, did not whisk itself away into space when I stopped. Heaven help me if I should be refracted, though I should probably be light of a single color.

At last the day set for the experiment came. Full details of past work and of the experiment itself were carefully stowed away in the vaults. Arrangements for the future, in case either or both of us should not return, were made. The chief assistants were instructed as to our system of signals, and how to reply to them with the aid of the spare beam resonator that we left behind. Finally, the very few scientists who could be persuaded to come

were assembled, with suitable representatives of the press and the movies. It was to be decidedly a gala occasion!

At last the hour arrived, Zero Hour as it was called in France. Dressed in my insulated, ray-proof space suit, with its great quartz globe of a head, covered with insulating shutters and armed with periscopic televisors, its instrument belt, where hung a bewildering array of boxes, dials, projectors, and control leads, and its pressure control and air-renewer, I sat in an easy chair before the half-circle of obvious skeptics. Doc stood beside me, his hand on my shoulder, explaining the apparatus.

He was finished. For a moment he gripped my shoulder, then released me and nodded. Even as they disappeared, I could see the faces of the scientists take on an expression of incredulity and wonder. Then they were gone, leaving fading bodies that suddenly winked out. A Negro, Doc's chauffeur, lasted longest, passing through intermediate red-green shades, indescribably weird, into an intense red, very dark, then slowly fading into a shimmering phantom that vanished almost immediately. Then a flashing, changing panorama of myriad vivid colors and marvelous combinations, rich, beautiful beyond imagination, a formless mass of dazzling, leaping flame that filled all the empty heavens with its wondrous glory. And then—darkness. I had entered a region of no vibration.

For a moment I was panic-stricken. I was lost, hopelessly lost in eternal darkness, unable to see my dials and instruments, speeding endlessly through the unknown! It was the end! Never again would I see old earth, my own little speck in endlessness. Never again would I feel Doc's fond grip on my shoulder, see the flash of black Tom's ivory teeth, handle the loved familiar instruments, gaze through the powerful microscope at the endless crystalline forms showing so clearly in the blazing light of—

I flushed and grinned sheepishly. Here were the lamps at my forehead and wrists, ready to flash into instant light, real, visible, white light from a source independent of outside vibration. Of course Doc had prepared for such an emergency! I puckered my lips to form the whistle that would send them flashing into luminescence, then halted as other light burst on me, first glorious purple, then sapphire, emerald, all the colors of the spectrum, leaping, playing, and—taking shape! I slowed down, released my death-grip on the control, stopped, and awkwardly scrambling, shot upwards.

I was floating, helpless in my air-distended suit, in a pool of deep green, steaming liquid. I floated about as high as I would have at home, in the sea. And sure enough, water it was. Above me, in the misty heavens, shone a great ball of green flame, filling nearly a quarter of the dome of the blue-green, a monster sun. More I could not see, for the quartz globe that held my head had sunk deeper than the rest, and was almost entirely submerged. Putting my hand to my belt, I felt for the button that controlled the periscope, found it; raised my "extra eye" into position. Sure enough, there was land near me, steep clay banks, a great level platform of deep purple crystal, and above, showing at the summit of the red clay cliffs—grass.

Madly I paddled to the shore, puffing and floundering like a walrus, and climbed out on the amethyst platform, for such it was. The clay banks were too steep for me to climb alone, so, taking out my tools and platinum plate from the water-tight compartment in my belt, I set to work. Unthinking I had unscrewed the globe from my head, a truly rash thing to do, for I had not consulted the atmosphere analyser dials, so great was the feeling that I was merely in some unexplored corner of Earth. Luck was with me, however, for the air was safe. It was denser than our own air, with a good deal more carbon dioxide and oxygen, and less nitrogen, but decidedly breathable. So, inscribing my dial readings and a rough map of my locality, with a few brief explanatory words, I laid it in the middle of the crystal platform, set the control dial of my beam resonator, and pressed the trigger-button. The platinum, and part of the platform disappeared almost instantly, with a faint bluish glow caused by fluorescence of the abnormally excited atoms. Doc told me later that they materialized beneath the chair of one of the doubting Thomases, old Barnes, upsetting that grouchy and self-righteous individual both physically and mentally. Fortunately, the beam had penetrated into the amethyst a little deeper than my original immersion, about ten feet, thus preventing any serious trouble in Doc's journey.

As soon as he had read my message, he began to alter his plans to fit the conditions that I reported. All the supplies were enclosed in a sealed metal cylinder and projected from my former position; then, standing upon the amethyst pillar that protruded from the crumpled concrete of the laboratory floor, he "stepped off" himself.

Meanwhile I was trying to gouge enough steps in the red clay walls of my prison so that I might take a look at the hidden outside world, but vainly, for the clay very naturally crumbled as soon as I put any weight on it. Suddenly a metal cylinder popped to the surface of the quiet green pool, and a second later Doc, traveling a good deal slower than I had, appeared in a manner befitting the renowned Cheshire cat, on the spot where a moment before had been an elliptical hole in the crystal. He grinned, waved an insulated mitten, and began to unscrew his helmet, looking around him as he worked.

"Where do we go from here, and how, Professor?" he asked, removing the great globe from his head.

"Search me," I answered. "You won't find any ladder in my pocket."

"Well, let's try mine. Where the deuce is my pocketbook? Oh, there it is," pointing to the cylinder, "I must have dropped it. Here Fido!" He whistled sharply.

Sure enough, the cylinder began to hurry through the water toward us. It was uncanny, even though I knew that there was a motor and propeller in each end, keyed to different notes.

Hauling the heavy cylinder up on our natural pier, we opened it. I was anxious to see what Doc had sent. First out were a pair of individual flyers, with helicopter and pusher attachments. One strapped the apparatus to his

waist and shoulders, ran his fingers over the rather complex keyboard, and flew. They were one of the greatest productions of the century. These, unlike most of the commoner types, could be run either by the usual power beam or by individual power plants, with extremely compact storage batteries of the latest sort.

In addition, there were photographic equipment, condensed food, binoculars, compact sending and receiving sets for communication in case we became separated, projector pistols for either explosive bullets or short-circuiting rays, and, most important of all, a small power generator and transmitter, working by solar radiation. This, once set up and in order, would insure our power for flying so long as it went unharmed by outside agencies.

Doc had been taking in his surroundings while I unpacked and set up the generator. Suddenly he turned to me and spoke.

"Jack! Do you notice anything out of the ordinary?"

"Plenty!" I replied. "Who ever saw an amethyst this size, water of that color, or a great green sun like that?"

"I mean, aside from that?"

"Why no, I can't say that I do, Doc. What's up?"

"Maybe it's just my imagination, but—isn't it a wee bit cool for a sun of that size?"

"By Jove, so it is! Doesn't that mean——"

"That there is very little infra-red radiation. Exactly. Give me the binoculars, the ones with the analysers." Setting the radiation screens, he focused them on the sun. Then, twirling the selection disk slowly, he gave me the readings, which I scratched on the clay. Sure enough, infra-red radiation amounted to less than half that of our own sun; blue, yellow, and green predominated, while the ultra-violet was exceptionally strong.

"We're in for a siege of sunburn," I remarked.

"Rather. I'm glad I brought that skin-wash. Here, sponge yourself with that, wear your goggles, and you'll be O. K."

"Thanks. I was afraid I'd look like a boiled lobster before long."

"Not now. Of course you'll tan, but you won't burn, and your eyes are protected. I'm glad that this generator doesn't depend entirely upon infra-red radiation, though I suppose we could step up the colors if we had to. Got it assembled yet? Good. We can leave it here, where we ought to be able to find it without difficulty, and where it is most likely to be safe. Start it now; I have our packs all ready."

I ran up the projector arm until it cleared the walls of the pit, anchored the machine firmly to both pier and bank, and shoved over the lever. Immediately we heard the gentle, characteristic purr of the whirling mirrors, and the familiar green haze, hard to see in the light of the green sun, arose from the generator box. Then the projector arm began to spin, its drone rising to a thin whine, and to throw off little wreathes of tony, pale violet



sparks. Doc and I climbed into the harness of the flyers and then, Doc leading, we rose above the walls of the clay pit.

It was a strange landscape that lay before us. Behind, the green grass, long and heavy, with here and there a patch of huge green-white flowers resembling clover, gently rose to the base of a great, jet-black cliff some ten or fifteen miles away. In the binocular flying-goggles its pillar-like formation was plain. Before us, the same grassy meadow stretched for miles and miles into the distance, to meet the oily waters of a smooth green sea, so calm as to be mistaken for part of the level plain. Everywhere rose clusters of deep purple crystals, as big as and bigger than that of the pit, with here and there a single huge white one, or, rather, a more or less transparent one, that loomed like an obelisk against the green sky and the green sun. At their bases were the red clay pits, eroded by the tiny rills that wandered from the base of the black cliffs down between crimson banks of clay to the glassy waters of the sea or to one or another of the pits.

Still another thing struck us simultaneously. Despite the apparent size of the world on whose surface we stood, or, rather, in whose atmosphere we floated, the force of gravity was very little greater than on earth. In the pit, we had walked about freely, with approximately the effort of one who wades knee-deep in water. Yet, as we could plainly see, the horizon was a good deal farther away than it would be on earth. There were, of course, several explanations. We might be on a large world of low density. We might be on a hollow planet. This world may have been flattened out more than the earth, into the form of an onion. And we might be at the pole of a world approximately earth-size.

The last explanation was soon ruled out, however, for while we were still engaged in exploring the long slope below the cliffs, the sun sank into the sea, and myriad stars began to appear, apparently more numerous as well as brighter than in our own system. Indeed, the heavens fairly blazed with white light, a great relief after the green glare of day. Here and there were great red and blue and yellow globes, shining against the white. We saw no other green suns, nor could we detect a satellite, but it was strikingly in support of Doc's theories to note that aside from the greater visibility of most of the stars, which changed the appearance of the heavens greatly, the familiar arrangements of the constellations were all apparent as at home, though most of the colors had changed. Willingly we returned to where the violet sparks of the projector showed low above the grassy slope, to wait beside the cylinder for the morrow.

The night was long, nearly twice the length of an earth night, and we later found that the day was correspondingly short, showing that the season was far advanced as on earth, but as a whole the period of rotation of this planet was greater by nearly half than our own. During the night, which we spent star-gazing and planning, we thought that we noticed a sort of reddish glow above the distant cliffs, but we were content to leave further exploration until the morrow. When the sun appeared, we were ready.

Rising once more from our pit, we sped to the foot of the cliffs, then rose vertically, parallel to their face.

At last we topped the great jet rampart, over a mile in height, and gazed out over the bare surface of the smooth, flat plain, leveled as if by artificial means, where no vegetation grew, no crystal jutted, no pit sank, only that hard, smooth surface stretching endlessly away into the distance. It was like some great pillar of rock pushed up from the nether-world into the light of day, unruffled, cold and cruel, hard as only the compressed rock of a world heart can be. Yet the plain was, in truth, not entirely level, not totally unruffled. Far away, at the limit of the gaze, loomed an angular black mass. We sped toward it over the pitiless surface of the plateau. It grew, bulked huge, and towered above us.

It was a city, a great, black, towering city of the plateau. In twenty great terraces, each a hundred feet in height, it towered nearly half a mile above the plain. The base was square, perhaps a mile on a side, and in the center of each side, flanked by a pair of huge tapering amethyst obelisks, was a gate. Other opening in the sides of the lower terrace there was none, but in the higher ones were circular ports, twenty or thirty feet in diameter, placed midway of each wall, one facing each point of the compass. And atop the highest terrace, at the very summit of the gigantic pile, perched on the needle-tip of a great black cone, was a mighty crystal globe, glinting coldly in the glare of the sun.

We floated close to the nearest gate, a peaked half-oval of deepest green, so dark as to be nearly black. Indeed, we looked a second time at the rock of the walls and of the plain to see if they, too, were not of the same color as the gates, but they were black, the same glossy jet. The green of the gate was unbroken, except for the very center, where a pale blue ellipse, seemingly of metal, glowed. It seemed to radiate light of its own, but it was cold to the touch, deathly cold. And around its rim, as around the edge of the gate, ran a ribbon of pure soft gold, worked and tooled into millions of delicate geometric weavings.

The wall itself, as we viewed it closely, showed no joint, no sign of block or mortise. It seemed carved from the plateau as one might carve a shrine from the rock of a granite mountain. And over every square inch of its surface ran the twining lines of the delicate geometric filigree, a veritable maze of lines and angles and arcs in low relief, incredibly fine, and in very obvious order, in fixed relation to one another, though we could detect no repetition. Always there was some tiny variation in form that broke the monotony and made fantasy. It was truly wonderful, and strangely beautiful.

At last we left it, forced by the passing of time to continue our exploration. We rose above the floor of the first terrace, level and smooth as the plain itself, and advanced over the black seamless paving to the wall of the second terrace, and the gold-rimmed opening. It was closed with a disk of transparent crystal, through which we could dimly see the black cylinder of

the corridor stretching unbroken into the darkness. Far away, practically invisible, a faint crimson glow seemed to bathe the jetty walls, though we could not be sure of it.

Toward the end of the day, as the great green sun was sinking low, we approached the slender conical spire at the summit of the city. It was of the same hard, black rock as the walls of the pile below it, the mighty close-barred edifice that it crowned. But it was smooth, from the spreading base that covered nearly half the topmost terrace to the needle-point two hundred feet above. And yet a dozen feet above its tip, floating in nothingness, hung the sphere.

It was of crystal, perhaps fifty feet in diameter, floating immobile above the tip of the city. The crystal was colorless, transparent and flawless, yet in its very heart we sensed a slightest hint of rosy opalescence, incredibly lovely after the harsh black of the walls and the pitiless green glare of the sun. Even as we watched, it seemed to deepen, to permeate all the interior of the sphere. Then, while the great sun sank into the oily sea beyond the cliffs, its rose-glory burst into full bloom, a great gem of pulsing, star-flecked crimson flame, that bathed all the cold harsh terraces of the city with soft ruby light. Alarmed, we flew back into the darkness beyond its range. And as we withdrew, there rose from the ball of light a delicate pencil of lavender flame, a finger of rose-blue that pointed up to the blazing heavens. It leapt up and up, faded, waxed, pulsed and grew still. Then it began to sing, a thin, ethereal piping that shrilled loud yet faint at the farthest limit of our senses. And as it sang, the disks of crystal that barred the portals sank back into their recesses, and then disappeared in the veiling darkness. The gates of the city had opened.

For a while we watched expectantly, waiting for the inhabitants of the colossal pile to come forth. Then, as nothing happened, we flew cautiously toward the nearest portal. Suddenly we were sucked into a rushing current of air that swept us irresistibly into the black throat of the circular corridor. We were whipped through the gaping opening, sucked down between the endless shining walls, then suddenly hurled back into the open air, where we managed to escape the flow of the current, hot now, where before it had been cool. For some time we watched, puzzling, then Doc motioned to me to come over to where he was hovering. He pointed down the long corridor to a point, dimly lit by the reddish glow, where it branched into three. The central opening and the one on the left were closed with disks of crystal. From the right-hand opening rushed the river of air. As we watched, a crystal disk sprang across its mouth, while the corridor to the left flew open, sucking in a torrent of night air. We dropped from level to level, alternately attracted and repelled by the floods of air. Everywhere were the three branching corridors with their crystal valves, though near the bottom we could not see them, for the corridors were too long. Above the keening of the flame and the wailing of the eddying winds, Doc shouted in my ear.

"The thing is breathing!" he yelled.

I looked at him aghast. "Is that alive?" I asked.

"No, no. It's some sort of a machine, a ventilating system for the city and for whatever is below. The planet must be hollow. There are probably hundreds or thousands of these, sucking in fresh air and blowing out the stale, whenever night comes. The flame is a signal. It opens the valves with a certain note, just as we whistle for our lights, or as I called the cylinder. How it is produced I can't even guess, perhaps by some electrical phenomenon, but that is what it's for. Here, lay your fingers against the wall. Feel it?"

I obeyed. Sure enough, I could faintly feel the throb, throb, throb of great pumps sucking in the life-giving air, belching forth the impure. A sudden thought came to me.

"Doc!" I shouted. "They must be like us, they breathe!"

Doc shook his head. "Not at all," he replied. "They may eat it, as men once believed the chameleon did. They may extract certain gases for fuel in their machines, or whatever they use. They may use it in pneumatic tubes. It's probable that they do anything but breathe it. We are really freaks of nature, we men. You know that, Jack. The things below may not even be organic. I doubt if they are."

We were silent for a moment, then: "Doc!"

"Yes?"

"Are we going in there? To see what—they look like?"

"It is our duty as scientists, Jack."

"I know, but is there any good in going? Won't it be just useless?"

"Nothing is useless, Jack. You should know that by now."

"Yes, I suppose so. But aren't we likely to be trapped? What good could we do the world then? And how can we get in anyway? Those middle valves are closed."

"Don't forget, we have our resonators. If we get in a tight place, we can use them. As to getting in, don't you remember the glow which we thought we saw during the day? I think that central valve is open in the daytime. We'll go in in the morning, as soon as the pumps stop, and wait for it to open."

"I'm game. How long before we start?"

"Nearly twelve hours, I think. You know, the nights are twice as long as on our own planet. Let's go back and take forty winks or so and a bite to eat. We may need it. And we'll have to wear our helmets, or at least, take them along, for we may have to use the resonators."

"All O. K. with me, Doc. A bit of food won't displease me at all."

At full speed we returned to the pit, and made our final preparations.

Two hours before dawn, Doc's electric alarm-clock awoke us with a slight shock. Screwing on the globes, and overhauling the generator, we set out, each with a good sized pack. The light was just fading from the sphere as we flew posthaste into the topmost opening. Behind us, the crystal disk clashed shut, barring the exit. Ahead, the short dark corridor extended as

far as the threefold parting, where the central valve was slowly opening. Cautiously we flew to it, passed through, and looked down.

We gazed into a deep, smooth-walled shaft seemingly burned out of the black rock of the plateau, so smooth was its bore. For miles it extended below us, down into the heart of the planet. And somewhere, down there in the depths of the shaft, was the source of the rose-glory that flooded all its smooth cylinder of black and coral and crimson, revealing the branching corridors of the ventilating plant, and lower a broad inclined plane that ran from the level of the plateau, the level of the great green gates, down into the roseate mist below.

"They must walk, as we do," I yelled to Doc.

"Um. Maybe. But you needn't yell. Use the 'phone. Come on."

He vaulted over the low railing that closed the end of the corridor, and, his helicopter whirring to break the fall, drifted rapidly down past the black corridor openings. I dove after him, bringing up with a jerk just above his head, and we floated down together.

At the plateau level we halted, and entered the corridor that led to the north gate. Straight to the great green slab it ran, dark and polished, its level floor thick with dust. No living creature, as we knew life, had passed here for long years. Weird blue-green light came in through the pale oval and lit the desolate vestibule dimly. It had odd mechanisms in abundance.

"Automatic apparatus," Doc grunted. "They've left the outside for good, apparently, have no use for it, though it may be different somewhere else, at some other ventilator. I admit that this black desert isn't especially attractive."

"You're right," I agreed, "but we'll never find out about that if we stay up here in the attic. Let's go downstairs."

From the plateau level, the pit ran smooth and unmarred, except for the spiral plane. More than ever we gained the impression of a hole melted through black wax by a welding flame. Examination of the plane bore out this impression also, for at the edge nearest the wall it showed a decided jointure, as if it had been dovetailed into the wall after the pit was bored. Yet there were no visible joints in the plane itself. It was just another mystery, another paradox in this queer world.

For perhaps five miles the pit ran down, and for a major part of the time that we fell down its bore, the source of the rose-flame was visible through the mist. It filled the entire bottom of the pit, a great, still pool of fire, seemingly, yet one that gave no heat. And as we sank deeper and deeper into the crimson mist that filled the lower part of the shaft, there came a queer, half-familiar tingling in those parts of our body that were exposed. Following Doc's example, I drew on the long gauntlets that hung at my belt.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I can't tell," came the answer over the phone, "but there is some sort of radiation. We had best be careful."

"Could it be some sort of searchlight?"

"Possibly. It's apparently a mirror of some sort, but what it reflects, and why, I can't say. It must have something to do with the ventilator, though."

"Yes, that seems clear enough. Doc, why mightn't the sphere up there be some sort of light-sensitive cell that responds to a change in the intensity of this light and then controls the pumps by a sort of key-note, as we saw last night?"

"It sounds plausible enough, Jack, but why did that flame appear, and what made it sing? Maybe, though, that part of its radiation that isn't light has something to do with it. It is certainly beyond my experience."

"I'll say so! Let's put on a bit more speed. I'm anxious to see what the thing really is."

As we drew nearer to the bottom of the shaft, we could see that the seeming pool was indeed a huge parabolic reflector. Its surface was of a queer metal such as we had never before seen—apparently self-luminous, and capable of taking and retaining a high polish. Aside from its own radiance, it reflected the crimson light that poured from a large globe of the same metal, placed at its focus. This light-source was covered partially by a lead shutter, which revolved slowly, apparently in the same period as the planet itself, and controlled the strength of the radiation. It was akin to our own smaller searchlights and parabolic reflectors, but cleverer and better developed.

So engrossed had we been with our examination that we had not noticed our surroundings. Now, looking up, we found that the mirror lay in a deep bronze bowl, firmly bolted to the rock, in which the pit terminated. Above us, halfway to the rim of the bowl, a narrow balcony ran around the sides of this giant's cup of light, on which the inclined plane ended. From it several small doors opened, as well as a great peaked gate of metal with the port of bluish transparent metal, such as the great gates of the ventilator had had. This stood half open, showing part of a jagged rocky ceiling that glowed faintly in crimson light that flooded up from below. And everywhere the dust lay thick.

I ran out on the broad balcony that surrounded the outside of the bowl. Great cables anchored the cup to the rock of the ceiling, built to withstand the fearful gales that must result when the powerful pumps of the ventilators drew the foul air from this hidden underworld and hurled back the pure air of the outer planet. No wonder the ventilators worked only at night, for were they to act during the day, any high-flying aircraft that the builders of this world possessed must surely be dashed against the rough ceiling unless they kept to the lower levels. It was remarkable to me that the gray dust should cling so long, even though the interior of the bowl was almost entirely sheltered from the wind. Leaning over the waist-high railing, I looked down at the city beneath, a real city this time, rising in a steep pyramid from the smooth

rolling plain of the cavern floor—a city that we came to know very well in the weeks that followed.

From a wide zone of low, rather uninteresting buildings built on the level of the plain, the city rose in three terraces, each narrower than the preceding one, and each distinguished by more lavish and beautiful architecture than its lower neighbor. Four broad inclined planes led upward from great stone gates in the wall that surrounded the lowest zone, while raised runways, escalators, and, in a few cases, streets, made possible communication and transportation in each zone. A majority of these details, of course, we did not observe until much later, after we had been in the city for some time. Indeed, but for a moving picture we might never have learned that the very vitals of the city, its trunk lines, dynamos, and individual ventilators, were hidden in the heart of the mound, and attainable through only a few inconspicuous entrances.

Architecturally, the place was a puzzle. I might say, as Doc did, that it was like “nothing of Earth, yet like everything on Earth.” For there was a certain indefinable unity in it all, despite the really glaring dissimilarities of its parts. The most obvious explanation, which we later found to be essentially true, was that each zone aligned a social class or caste, while each class was limited as to its style of architecture. The evident arrangement bore this out, and later information from the library confirmed practically all our theories.

The lowest zone was of squat cubicles, much like our own buildings but more regular, with no single curve. Nor was there any visible decoration, aside from that afforded by a few lateral bands of a blue pigment. The first wall, around the entire city, appeared to have been plated with brass, now sadly tarnished, while the gates, like, indeed, the gates of every level, were of the green stone, gold-rimmed, and set with the cold, blue ovals.

In the second zone, within a low wall, tin-plated, began the realm of the curve. Here the architecture was more familiar, more earthly. There were domes and circular windows, and every edge was rounded. Yet, in general type, the cubicle prevailed. It was as though the citizens of the second zone adhered naturally to the style of the lower level, yet curved every possible angle to show that they *might* do so if they wished. We found later, from books, that this zone harbored the shops, and a few of the residences, of what we call the middle class, the tradesmen and professional men, who had ascended from the plebian level of the first zone, the zone of the common laborers, by reason of their own intelligence and ability.

The last wall was truly beautiful. It was plated all over with a form of the radiant metal, so that it cast a faint rose tint upon the roofs of the second zone. And here the gates were all fretted with little geometric filigree-work, like the ventilator, inlaid with gold. The buildings themselves were clearly residences, beautiful mansions of fretted and carved marble, snowy-white, quite unlike the dull red sandstone and brick of the lower levels. No building but had its frieze or its bas-relief plaques set in the sides of the entry, while everywhere, in niches, on pedestals, or lining the pathways, where fountains

played incessantly, were myriads of marble statues, groups as well as single figures, that were really miracles of skill and beauty.

This zone merged directly with the central mass, a single building of jet-black marble, shot with dull crimson. A narrow court surrounded it, in which were fountains of marble and life-size statues of solid gold, alternating. For a hundred feet there were no openings save the four mighty gates of open filigree. Then the entire building broke into a riot of intricate design—pinnacles, spires, minarets, arches, long festoons of conventional floral design, dripping with marble icicles, slender fretted pillars with elaborate capitals—a fairyland of orderly-disorderly wonder and beauty. It resembled, in a way, the great carven temples of Angkor and the other lost cities of Cambodia, yet this carving was not preeminently pictorial, nor yet so conventional as we see on Earth. And from its utmost peak extended a slim, pointed pinnacle, entirely formed from a vein of the blood-red marble. Above it floated a crystal sphere, like the sphere of the ventilator, that shed the same deep rose-glow, a glow that was mirrored at half-mile intervals about each terrace by lesser spheres, hovering above metal-work towers. The effect of the entire mass was indescribably wonderful. And there was another city, a city that was to this as the Taj Mahal to Notre Dame, a city that we saw only in part—. Perhaps it was well, after all, that we could not see it as it must have been, for even as things turned out, it has been hard never to return to that wonderful empire of a wonderful people. We have sworn, but perhaps some day even oaths will not hold us. Who knows?

So beautiful was the scene that lay before me, that some minutes passed before I realized the significance of what I saw. Indeed, we were a scant hundred feet from the upper terrace when I spoke.

“Doc,” I cried, pointing to the statues, “*they’re human!*”

“Yes,” he said slowly, “they are human. It—well it upsets nearly everything that I thought I knew. I had believed that a type does not duplicate itself in the same relative plane of intelligence anywhere in our universe. Mathematics forbade it, or so I supposed. There would be the same broad, general types of life, perhaps a few new ones here and there, but the range of intelligence would be different, and developed along different lines, studying different phases of Life and Space and Time. I—sometimes I should have welcomed a world of—civilized—ants, or spiders, or even plants. I think I would have been welcome among them. All too many are the times when I have longed to be free of the petty bickerings of my fellow men, and to submerge myself in Science, in the knowledge and understanding of our great universe! But it seems that I was wrong. I had hoped that our God was not a jealous, selfish God, limiting understanding to a single race, but a truly great, truly scientific God, a beneficent God, who would see no race neglected, no cosmic permutation untried, who would not suffer repetition of old, primitive forms lest He lose the urge of the eternally better! And—I was wrong.”



"But, Doc, maybe it's a mere coincidence, or something. And, after all, isn't it rather wonderful to find Man here?"

"I suppose it is, Jack. You're right. It was just a bit of a blow to my vanity to have my pet theory disproved. Come, we have our work to do. We have forgotten our purpose in coming here. We can't hang here all day. Let's land."

So we sank to the marble paving of an ancient garden, where fountains still played merrily, although the flowers and trees and even the people, the men like ourselves, who once trod there, had long since gone. All the terrace was thick with a fine, spore-like dust, showing no sign of footprint but our own. Our scuffling feet sent it up in thick gray clouds that swirled about our heads.

Doc had been examining the dust with a small but powerful lens from his belt set. Suddenly he sprang erect and cried, "Quick, the helmet! Pure oxygen! For your life!"

I obeyed instantly, substituting the oxygen flask for the usual respirator. Doc had done likewise. I motioned to the radio connection, but he waved me aside and brushed the dust from the broad rim of one of the fountains. Taking from his emergency case a beef-culture, he set it in the cleared space, and dropped on it a tiny pinch of the dust. Then he moistened it with water and stood back.

The surface of the culture seemed to writhe. Almost instantly it became a mass of swelling, twisting tubercles and fleshy tentacles, vegetable tentacles. Inside of a minute's time a repulsive mass of fleshy monstrosities rose where the culture had been, great livid sacs of dull purple on the end of thick stems of angry carmine, thick slabs of a sickening bilious yellow covered with little pale blue warts, twisting arms and tentacles of a dead white, flat and lustreless—a veritable nightmare jungle of disgusting fungus growths. And even as we watched, it crumbled and melted away into a thin film of gray dust, gray spores. I shuddered and turned away. Then came Doc's voice in the phones.

"Fungi, but I suppose you knew that. They're not used to much oxygen, apparently, it's too much for them. They grow faster, but they burn themselves up, literally, go all to spores and ash. They need organic food, so it's good we didn't breathe many. Look."

The culture had totally disappeared.

"I guess that's what did for these people of the city, Jack. They couldn't escape it, not many of them. Perhaps there are a few, somewhere, but this dust seems widespread, and we have seen no signs of living beings since we arrived."

"But how about the ventilator and the lights? There must be someone to run them. Maybe they're afraid. Maybe they're hiding from us."

"No. That argument won't hold. You have seen, are seeing, the realization of a great many Utopian visions. This is an automatic world! The nation has died, the race has died, so far as we know, on this planet, yet

their cities and their ventilators, all the vast mechanism of their vast civilization lives on in mute witness of the power that made Man eternally master over the machine! It must have been a great civilization. God alone knows how long this under-world has gone on like this and how long it will go on. Presumably the mechanism will wear out some day, and all the great mechanical life of the planet will finally stop forever, but that day may not come for many years. I would that it might never come, were that possible! Come, let us go into the building there, and see what we can find. Perhaps we may find some clue to the history of the race there. It seems to have been a building of importance."

The north gates were open, and we advanced noiselessly down the smooth black corridor, with the malignant grey dust inches thick on the floor. For perhaps a hundred feet it ran, straight into the heart of the huge pile, smaller corridors branching off at regular intervals on either side. Then there was a second filigree gate, a gate of hardened gold, which rose in a groove at a touch on a small bronze lever. Later we found that the opening mechanism could be locked from the inside. Evidently the ancient priests did not entirely trust their congregations.

Beyond the door lay the wonderland of the temple. There was a great oval room, hollow roc's egg, rising to a rounded dome two hundred or two hundred and fifty feet above the smooth sea-green pavement, flecked with little golden motes. The black of the exterior did not show through, except in a breast high band that ran all around the great room. All of its mighty, smooth ovoid was of the snowiest of marbles, veined faintly with gold, with sea-green, and with the rosy metal. This last formed a veritable maze of fine veins in the very summit of the temple, filling all those dim upper spaces with its roseate mistiness.

Beautiful was the temple, but there was that in the center of the great hall that struck me literally speechless! In size it was larger than life, perhaps thirty feet from the smooth, cool greenness of the floor to the tip of the lifted trident, a wonderful, majestic figure, surely equal to the best of the work of the great sculptor Phidias. There in the rose-glow, rising above the sea-green paving, it seemed alive and almost holy. Our voices, our very thoughts were hushed by its grand, awesome presence. Truly, I felt in that pagan temple more of true, great universal religion, necessary and inevitable as Time, than I have before, or since, in any house of worship on Earth. Doc, too, felt it, for I saw him half-stumble, then stiffen, head back, and—expand. But for the helmet I should have heard the awed hiss of his indrawn breath. I lowered my head, half disbelieving the evidence of my eyes, then looked again.

The level green of the floor rose smoothly up, twice a man's height, into a toppling foam-fretted peak, a great billowing wave of stone so nearly like sea-water that I half expected it to break and come thundering down, deluging us. From its highest crest, thrusting forth into the open air, sprang a triple team of winged horses, linked with thin gold chains to a golden chariot,

half submerged in the breaking sea. Of spotless white marble they were, with manes and tails and half-furled, stretching wings of tooled gold, steeds of the very gods, freeing themselves from the clinging waters of Earth and coursing straight upward into heaven, into infinity. Never do I wish to see such horses again! I could not stand it.

In the chariot, one hand grasping loosely the golden reins, the other thrusting high in exultation a trident of gold, stood the colossal figure of a man, a god, as majestic and serene as the roses were, and like them filled with the spirit and exuberance of Life itself. His feet were spread wide apart, his massive limbs and chest with their rolling muscles were bared by the single snowy garment that swept back in the wind of his passing. His golden beard and long yellow locks of half-curved hair, whipped back in the tempest that gripped him, and against which he braced himself. And in his calm face and far-gazing eyes was, perhaps, a little of pity and of farewell, aside from the great pace and majesty and expectation.

Here and there, buried in the cresting wave, clinging to the smooth black form of dolphins, were white and gold forms, female forms, nereids bidding farewell to their master. There was sadness, great sadness in the faces turned toward that great central form, but there was also hope, hope and a little of the vision, the expectation, that lay in the serene eyes of the sea-god, leaving his children, his kingdom, forever, answering the call of Olympus.

Doc's helmet was off now, dropped and forgotten, as he stood before a tablet of the radiant metal that rose to the height of a man before the mighty group. I heard muttering, half to himself, half to me, to the world:

*"These be the laws of Poseidon, given unto the children of Atlas in the beginning, erected by His will in this, His temple, in Yzdral, first city of the Underworld, fifth city of Atlantis after the transformation by the wrath of Zeus! Look ye, O sons of Atlas, and obey!"*

He was silent, then "'After the transformation.' Well, queerer things have happened, but to think—! It—it's wonderful!" He turned half toward me: "Jack, do you know your Plato? Have you read the '*Timæus*' and what there is of the '*Critias*'?"

"No, Doc, I'm afraid I haven't. Technical students were not supposed to need much culture, in college. It was above them."

"I suppose so. It is usually so. But I am glad that I have my share of culture, even though they called me 'the A.B.' back in the old days. But you have heard of Atlantis?"

"Oh, certainly. But that's a fable, isn't it?"

"A good many men think not, Jack. I am one. And, Jack, it seems that we are right."

"What do you mean, Doc? Has this anything to do with Atlantis? How could it? I thought Atlantis was on Earth."

"Wait! Wait! Let me tell you what Plato, what history tells us, first. Then you may draw your own conclusions.

"According to Plato, in the '*Critias*' and part of the '*Timæus*,' there was an Atlantic Empire, an island empire that extended from Egypt to 'the continent beyond the Western Sea'—America it would seem. Approximately eleven thousand years ago they waged war on an alliance of little Mediterranean states, and were defeated, somehow, despite their power. Shortly afterward the islands, where the capital was located, disappeared, swallowed by the sea, Plato says. In the '*Critias*' he meant to give the entire story in detail, but after a description of the island-continent of Atlantis, and of the metropolis, he breaks off, just as a council of the gods has been called by Zeus to arrange the annihilation of Atlantis. The '*Critias*' is but a fragment, but many years ago I thought I had found its other portion. The experts said not. They should know.

"My manuscript told of Poseidon's defense of his children, of the anger of Zeus at their war with the Greeks, his own children. They had strange, new weapons that slew at a distance as did the thunderbolts of Zeus, and the god was jealous. So it was that Zeus smote Atlantis with his own thunderbolts and turned the weapons of the Atlantides upon their own metropolis, 'and it became as if it had not been, and the god Poseidon buried the grave of Atlantis with his waves.' The Athenians easily overcame the advance-guard of slaves, who did not have the annihilating weapon, and the people as a whole ascribed the destruction of Atlantis to an earthquake and tidal wave, which, in truth, were caused by the disappearance of the island. Only the priests, and a few of the rulers and historians, knew the truth.

"Jack, the '*Critias*' speaks of an unknown, immensely valuable metal, orichalcum, 'that has a fiery resplendence'. We know not such metals. The classical dictionaries call it brass, but it would seem to be luminescent, even in the daylight. Many, some, think it a radioactive element or alloy, but there is no evidence, on Earth, of a deposit of radioactive material such as Plato indicates, and we have no samples. So the classical students label it brass, even though Plato definitely marks the distinction in his description of the city!

"Plato describes Atlantis fully. It was a zoned island, with a great central metropolis built on a hill or mountain. He describes the temple of Poseidon, describes the walls about the zones, and, Jack, *it is a description of this city*, except that the city is zoned instead of the island!"

"Doc! Why—! But—! You mean—!"

"I mean that this is Atlantis!"

"But how can that be? How did it get here? They were mere savages eleven thousand years ago."

"Plato doesn't think so. And they had orichalcum. Jack, I think that someone, some priest, discovered the principle of our resonator, built one, a huge one, perhaps as a weapon, perhaps merely because the tendencies of

Man seem to run to extremes in size, and with it brought Atlantis here! It may have been an accident, or, which is more likely, he may have been a priest of Zeus, a fanatic, who considered that Zeus had given him the secret of the divine thunderbolts in order that the dissolute, warring city might be annihilated. The transported island left a huge pit in the earth, a pit which the ocean filled, and which closed, submerging the rest of the island, when the sea-water struck the hot rock of the bottom. That was the tidal wave and earthquake that devastated the Mediterranean. 'Poseidon buried the grave of Atlantis with his waves.'

"They came out somewhere in this world, Jack, all but about two hundred feet being above the sea. It would be the farm-lands and the slum district that were submerged. They colonized the upper world, the surface of the planet. They grew crowded, found little land, only the hard black rock of the plateau. With their resonator, if it survived, or with some other tool of the sort, they bored through to this inner world. Their scientists would have known that it was here. Maybe they found a natural passage somewhere. At any rate, they built the ventilators, and this and other cities, copying the zoning and architecture of the old island, perhaps a myth by now, and making the ventilating system automatic, controlled by some strange property of orichalcum and of that crystal to emit the singing flame as well as light, the flame acting as a governor as I first suggested. It is a radioactive and electrical phenomenon, I feel sure.

"For a long time they lived happily. Probably they were able to raise food under the artificial light, or in greenhouses. Their science would care for that. Then, before their last orichalcum was used up, they made their entire world unified, automatic, and settled down to the business of living. We shall know more when I have seen their library, for the script is much like old Phoenician. The library will be intact, for one of their laws makes desecration of the library punishable by death. Evidently it was closely connected with the temple, and hence holy. Then something happened, I cannot guess what, and the fungus swallowed up their world. Perhaps they were entirely blotted out. Perhaps they escaped to some other cavern, some other world even. Time may tell. We have a good deal to do, here, and in other cities. Now let us take a bit of rest somewhere, and then plan for the future."

As we turned to leave, I chanced to look up. There, midway to the misted ceiling, was a little balcony of black marble, over the gate. With a word to Doc, I pressed the control and floated up toward it. Doc, seeing my purpose, followed.

There was little to see, but it told a great deal, more than we could have hoped. On the floor of the balcony was a square, box-like contrivance, with an extension and a lens. It turned out to be what it seemed, a camera. Beside it was a pitiful little pile of grey dust, all that remained of the cameraman.

While Doc examined the camera, I went alone down the narrow passageway that led off from the balcony. It was lighted, but after traversing a rather short flight of steps I came upon a great room built into the side of the building between the inner dome and the carved roof of the exterior. Through the crystal ceiling the light from the sphere above shone in, lighting the whole room brightly, though similar spheres, unlighted, were poised at intervals throughout its annular length. All the way around the building it extended, with passageways extending up and down into other parts of the building and of the city. Everywhere were tiers of strongly bound manuscripts and parchment rolls, while one entire section of hundreds of shelves contained roll upon roll of film, almost exactly like our own moving picture film, but metallic and very thin. Leading from this section, a broad stair opened into a darkened room in the very peak of the dome, filled with small booths capable of being connected with each other, so as to accommodate a party. Each booth was provided with a projection apparatus and a small and a large screen, the latter probably used when two or more booths were joined for a number of spectators. It was the library of the priests, and, as we later found, of the nobles of the marble zone.

I hurried back to Doc, to find him on his way to look for me. He carried the camera and a roll of film like that in the library.

"Look for a projector," he called, as he saw me. "This film won't need developing, and I think we'll see something interesting if we run it off."

"I've found one," I replied, "and what is more, I've found the library. Come on, I want to see what you have."

Alas for my hopes! Doc had to explore the library before we went a step farther, and then he insisted upon taking apart a camera and a projector to show how the things worked. As he explained it, light and sound activated a sort of ray which in turn produced an indelible impression on a paper-thin metal strip. The film needed no developing and was naturally far more durable than our own films. The frequency of exposure was almost doubled, so that every slightest motion and undertone was recorded faithfully. In the projector, a second scanning ray controlled a sort of microphone apparatus as well as a battery of tubes of different frequencies which produced fluorescence of various colors on an electro-chemically treated screen. Those are the fundamentals only; technically there was a great deal more to the matter than would appear at first sight, especially in the projector.

We settled down in the rather comfortable mesh-seats of the booth, while Doc put in the two reels that he had found in the camera. Alone, each was a perfect record of the type of our own moving pictures. Together, there was a decided effect of depth, due to a queer interference-phenomenon, peculiar to the special arrangement of treated screen and tubes, that made the result startlingly real. Part of the film, which had not been exposed, Doc had run off, after leaving a small gap, in scenes of the building as it now

was and in a panorama of the city. Apparently I had spent almost as much time in the library as he had later, after I told him of my find.

The first scenes showed a city like that in which we were, but a larger one—nearly twenty miles across. It was the New York of Atlantis. Queer one-wheeled cars and a few four-wheeled ones ran here and there along the inclined roadways. Aerocars, much like our own, flitted back and forth over the zones, rising and descending vertically to the house-tops. The view was a panorama, taken from an aero. We were able to distinguish the people on nearby cars, though we could not see clearly those that thronged the streets. They were tall, with fair complexion, probably due to continued underground life during several centuries.

Then, even as we looked, the city was gone! In its place gaped an enormous pit, ten miles across, cutting up through the heart of the city. On one side the terraces were intact up to the third zone, where toppling buildings were falling, crumbling, dropping down into the dust of the disintegrated planet! On the other side the hole extended for over a mile out into the plain, where fields of grain lay flat under the force of the rising wind. Seen from above, it was curiously like an eclipse, a huge black shadow cut from the vari-colored disk of the city. Our aero dropped dizzily, sucked down by a great current of air that rushed madly down into the gigantic pit!

Just in time it was checked, and hovered over a sphere on the intact side of the city. Everywhere people were scampering to and fro like frightened ants, some rushing to the gates, some toward the pit where the cyclonic wind was crumpling the marble palaces of the aristocrats into a battered chaos! I wondered what was holding the aero, but I could not tell. Perhaps it was some force from the sphere. Everywhere else, everything—aeros, cars, people were being sucked down into that great black maw by the irresistible wind!

We moved nearer and higher, above a second sphere. From here we looked directly into the pit, saw how it cuts its way down through the ordered heart of the city, down through level after level of great, dim-lit caverns, where throbbing machines sounded above the frenzied scream of the wind and the piping shouts of the people, where huge branching tube-systems of pneumatic railways ran out in all directions, where the vitals of the city were laid bare. Our aero was weakening now, its broad planes and undercarriage swept away by the tempest. Again the force of the sphere weakened, and we hurtled forward—and down! The roar of machinery swelled to a shattering clamor, faded, disappeared. We were falling, ever faster and faster, between great encircling walls of the glossy black rock that seemed to make up almost all of this planet, falling in near silence, for the voice of the wind was but a droning, sobbing wail. The pit's walls sloped slowly inward, forming a cone whose height or, rather, depth must have been many miles. It was as if someone thrust a stick through a snowbank

and twisted it, boring out a mighty hole through which the snow-castles of a race of children were falling eternally in flakes of snow and ruin.

Above, past the vainly whirring helicopter blades, the bore of the pit ran up to the rapidly disappearing opening dimly lit with a rosy light, where the world lay dying. Then it had gone, and for a long time we fell in a dull twilight, filled with the flashing of falling lights. At last, below, miles below, another dim light brightened, a different light, pale and phosphorescent with something of the hue of the Indian Pipe that one finds growing in slowly rotting woodlands. There lay another world, a world where the thing that had cleft the city had originated. What was it like? What Things lived there that had planned this destruction of the upper world? We forgot, Doc and I, that we were but onlookers. The crew of the aero could have felt no more strongly the horror of the moment, and the awed, high-pitched wonder of it set our nerves on edge.

For at least an hour we fell, the camera seemingly acting automatically, while the dead white light swelled from a pin-prick to a gleaming eye in the darkness, and the rosy twilight faded around us. Then, of a sudden, the wind ceased and the little aero was whirled here and there like a bit of thistle-down in the maelstrom of the winds! The Things below had closed the opening through which air was being sucked into their airless or highly rarefied world. Like a chip in a torrent we were tossed helplessly, the voice of the winds once more an exulting shriek, until at last the black wall spun close, there was a rending of metal and crystal, and we were tumbling dizzily down toward the pale white light!

Exploring aeros must have found the camera there, lying amid the debris of the upper world upon the vast disk of pure crystal, half a mile across, that filled the bottom of the hole, found it and brought it back to have its film run off by another aero-crew. For after one short, vague glimpse of a heaving sea of billowing luminous waters, and a wilderness of jagged black rock, smeared with red lichens, and covered with the crushed remnants of a once-mighty city, there was blackness, blackness that opened on another scene.

It was the city again, the shattered, torn remains of the once glorious metropolis, with that great gaping pit staring at us like a dead sunken eye. The roads that led from the four outer gates were thronged with human beings, four broad living rivers of writhing color stretching out over the level plain between matted fields of pale green grain. Cars, pedestrians, even crude man-drawn carts heaped with furniture and provender, all passing endlessly on, ever away from the city, the homes forever lost to them. We were in a closed aero now, one of myriads that thronged the air or hovered over the roads, watching. Higher still, in the traffic lanes, were mighty commercial ships, filled with freight and packed with staring, frantic humanity. Here and there, traveling in little groups or long drawn-out ribbons were the private aeros. Apparently ours was a news-aero, filming the



exodus of the peoples of Atlantis from their demolished capital, once the fairest city of all their empire.

Would that I could express the emotion that we felt as we watched that tragic flow of homeless people out of the shattered beauty of that great city! Some, who have also seen, have felt it, but not as we did, with the memory of the blasted city of grey dust fresh before us. Details stand out in my mind, quickly caught snatches as the aero hung low over the road or slowly moved along it. I see them again: the little ragged child, dressed in the blue of the laborers, toddling blindly along behind an old man of the aristocrats, who clutched to his breast his precious scrolls that dropped one by one from his weakening grasp; the delicate vase, a miracle in rose and ivory, lying by the wayside unharmed by the trampling feet that thundered all about it; the tiny, downy mite of a duckling, crying frantically, tottering on and on along the harsh stone of the road, stumbling, falling, beating with its featherless wings in a vain effort to fly, clamoring with its feeble voice, beating at the broken glass and twisted metal underfoot with lacerated, bleeding webs until a great foot came down upon it and mashed it into a tiny mat of blood and golden down! There were more, many more like that, but of them all the struggling duckling stands-out for me, for I have raised ducks and could feel with it.

For the last time the screen was filled with light. We were gazing from the little balcony into the great temple. It was filled with a frantic, milling press of men and women, trampling each other down in mad terror. They thronged upon the great statue of Poseidon, clutching at it with pleading hands, begging forgiveness, salvation, beating down the priests and guards who strove to drive them back! A figure clothed in flowing robes of green and gold appeared in their midst—the high priest. He raised his hands, spoke in a low, clear voice. As by magic the throng bowed its head, knelt. On and on rang that bell-like voice, reassuring, consoling, even as the first wisps of swirling grey appeared in the open doorway. He stopped, and all the multitude broke into song, a slow stirring chant that filled all the temple. Louder and louder, clearer and clearer it rolled to our ears, drowning out the cries of agony as the outer ranks melted and were gone. Like fire the malignant fungus ate its way through the praying throng, licking out tongues of sulphur or purple to pull down a tall youth or a feeble old woman, sending up twisting scarlet tentacles and wormlike arms of white! The cries drowned out the hymn now, but none stirred in fear. Fearless the tall figure beneath the golden statue gazed out over the dwindling sea of bent heads, as his strong clear voice sang on, leading, promising. Then he too was gone, and a thin, faint wisp drifted up toward the balcony. The camera toppled and the screen went blank. Doc stopped the projector. We had no desire to see again the grey desolation that lay over the city without.

For about a month we explored Yzdral—the “City of Heaven” the old Atlantides called it, for of all the two hundred cities or city-states of the Underworld, Yzdral was first, in beauty as in chronological precedence. One

city only, the capital of the empire, had a temple of Poseidon more lovely, but of that we saw only pictures, for Luda, their capital, was the scene of the great destruction. We carefully removed the library, the contents of the Museum of Nature and Art, and the scrolls from the Amphitheater of Law-Giving to the upper world and stored them just within the great gates, together with a great many scientific devices which we found in the dim vaults beneath the city. Incidentally, Doc sent back a large sample of the fungus-spores with the other things when the time came. We did not send them at once, for one of us must be there to receive them, and we had no intention of returning as yet. I do not know why, but I seemed to have a queer feeling that when we had once quit that other world, Poseidon, the Atlantides called it, we should not return. There was then no good reason for this, but—we have not. And we do not intend to.

Among other things, we had found hundreds of aeros on every level, aeros of varied type and mechanism. The smaller ones we used to transport our specimens to the ventilator, for only these long, narrow machines could pass through the door of the bronze cup at the shaft-bottom. Five of these, each loaded with orichalcum, we left with the other things. A sixth, an express aero too large to pass through the opening, we used later. It was long, cigar-shaped, with a crystal-enclosed control room and observation chambers in the front and sides of the stream-lined bronze hull. By means of the powerful orichalcum motors, using a sort of atomic energy, it was able to attain terrific speeds. We have done a thousand miles an hour in it, here on earth, where we were able to bring it after we found that the disintegrating ray from the Underworld had also blasted the roof of the upper cavern, above Luda, and opened a passage to the surface of the planet. It is capable of more.

Our work over, we started in the aero for Luda, about five hundred miles away, the maps showed. Using low speeds, we arrived in an hour and a half. There lay the dead city, buried in the malignant grey dust, there the gaping black pit, cutting through the vitals of the city into the unknown heart of the planet. Luda seemed bathed in a halo of green, as we approached it, for the light of the green sun poured through the riven roof in a great shaft of emerald light. We did not stop to examine the ruins, but flew straight to the pit and dropped down into the darkness, the control room revolving with us as the ship's nose dipped.

We went very slowly on our way down, so that the trip of a little over one hundred miles took over an hour. Then we slowed up and settled among the débris on the great crystal door that closed the narrow bottom of the pit. Through it we could see a pale white sea lapping at a craggy shore. Above the harsh black beach rose a ragged plateau, covered with ugly blotches of the livid red lichens that grew everywhere in this strange, unfriendly world in the planet's depths. There was no more. Evidently the Things, whatever they might be, had carried away the débris for examina-

tion, and sealed the pit, lest the inflow of air consume the vegetation of their well-nigh airless world. It would seem that any plan of conquest had been abandoned.

For a while we wondered how we were to get through without breaking the crystal, and spreading the alarm as the upper air rushed in. Then Doc discovered a sort of narrow air-lock in the pit's side, through which a single person could reach the inner world. Alone he went through, and returned alone. Beneath was the mechanism that moved the valve and he thought that he could operate it by himself, if I would pilot the aero. So, comparing our chronometers, we went to our posts. The seconds ticked off, slowly, slowly. Then, with a rush, the disk swung down and I found myself battling a screaming tempest that hurled me down, down until the pallid sea engulfed me. But the aero was water-tight and air-tight, and when I bobbed to the surface, the disk was closed, the wind had stopped, and Doc was dropping swiftly toward me. I opened the hatch quickly and soon we were speeding over the strange landscape of this innermost world, with Doc at the controls.

Bordering the pale sea, and extending for perhaps twenty miles back from its edge was the rocky waste, black and ragged, stained everywhere with the red lichen like great clots of drying blood. Wherever there were crevices in which water settled a yellow scum formed at its edge, be it in motion or stagnant, sending out twisting arms into the grey, dead pools and the oddly phosphorescing rivulets in search of some food or other, I know not what. Other than the Things, we saw but one creature in that inner world that was not plainly of the vegetable kingdom. It was a world of strange plants and plant-forms, adapted by the radioactive nature of the soil and water to exist upon the few thin gases of its air, or to live parasitically on one another.

Beyond the mountainous region in which we found ourselves, the land sloped down on all sides to a strange, unwholesome forest that filled most of the inner world. Indeed, almost all of the land that we saw, with the exception of the narrow rim of low mountains, was below the level of the white sea. Seepage fed the pools of the hot, fetid lowlands and dense clouds of vapor rose from the many swamps. For a while we hung over it, seeking a clue to the Things, then skirted the edge of the smooth cliffs that marked the edge of the mountains. The vegetation of the place was utterly unnatural and nauseating. Thrusting out of the steaming scum-covered pools were great tree-shapes with writhing, moving roots, and having smooth trunks like an eel's body. There was no foliage, but from the top of the trunk sprang a mass of slimy tentacular branches terminating in cup-like organs of a smoky orange, that contrasted strongly with the deathly white of the trunk and branches. From these hung little clusters of pale yellow fingers, lax or twisting hungrily. As we watched, a long branch darted down into the water near a root, then rose, the tentacles clutching the body of a small reptile, legless, with great white eyes, crimson gill-organs and a

lithe black body ending in a flat tail. A few moments later, on the shore, we found one, also dead, and examined it. It took certain gases direct from the air, then used them over and over again by running them through the radioactive water until they could be purified no more. We turned from the sight of the carnivorous plant devouring its prey. The crushed, pulpy form, the dripping juices, the eagerly writhing yellow scum—all sickened us. Was this the sole life of this inner world?

As if in answer to our question, a gap appeared in the cliffs, opening into a huge amphitheater beyond. Its floor was smooth and black, and in its center, some ten miles from us, towered a great black city, a coned city like Yzdral and Luda. On its great outer walls, in its streets, was no sign of life, but between us and it rose a thin barrage of pale blue flame, rising sheer to the lowering ceiling of luminous clouds that shed a ghostly white gleam over the entire scene. Doc pointed below.

A gate had once closed the gap in the cliffs, but now it was shorn through as if it had been wax, seared clean, with no clue as to its destruction save a slightly billowing layer of rock that covered the otherwise smooth floor. It had been melted! On the side toward the swamp a thin ribbon of orichalcum had stretched across the pass, the source of the blue barrage, but now it, too, was twisted and fused. Here and there lay a blackened, distorted body, all that was left of the warders.

"Atlantides," said Doc. "Apparently they came down here, those who survived, to avenge the death of their race. They built a city, a stronghold from which to attack the Things that had exterminated their race. They could live here with respirators, as you can see from the bodies. They warred against the Things, perhaps they were very nearly successful, but finally their hiding place was found and attacked, their barriers broken down, their last stronghold shattered. I do not understand how that barrage was retained after their destruction. Perhaps it is automatic. But——"

"Doc! Look!" I shouted. "It's happening now! They're still there."

Extending from the city walls for several miles beyond the wall of flame, a sheet of pure white was hiding the black rock. With the binoculars we could see that tiny jets were spraying the rock with white enamel. And now, revealed in relief against the white, a cloud of vapor appeared, intensely black, surrounding the city. It seemed to be stirring slowly within itself, though we could see it only as a silhouette, to be moving uneasily to and fro as if it were waiting impatiently for something. Now, suddenly, the ring thinned. Opposite us the vapor flowed out from the main body in a single great cloud that took a spherical shape, then sped to the barrage, tried it, flowed swiftly around its circumference, testing and trying all its surface. A smaller mass detached itself and returned to the main body. In response, the line thinned again, and the great sphere was doubled in size, reinforced. Off to the right of our position it formed a steep truncated cone, from which tiny darting wisps of black mist stretched forth to play over the face of the wall of flame. Now they returned, went forth again explor-

ing a single spot midway of its height, returned once more. The cone shortened, thickened to a globe supported by a thin stem, sent forth the little black fingers yet again, altered its position a bit, then hung motionless. A sort of breathlessness, a nervous and electrical tension began to build up around us. I could feel it, sense its purposeful unease, even at our distance. The whole affair was unreal and horrible. What was this vapor that seemed to move of itself? What controlled it? What was its use—a poison gas, a smoke screen, what? I turned to where Doc had been, but he was gone. Then he appeared again, suddenly, at my side.

"Jack, try the resonator," he said. "Watch that vapor out there."

I obeyed. The city, the plain, the ship—all vanished in the familiar play of vivid color as I shifted slowly through the vibrations. But that rolling cloud of gas showed no tint nor faintest color tinge. It remained black, absolutely black. Reversing the controls, I returned.

"Doc, what is it?" I asked. "It's absolutely colorless, but that isn't all. It seems almost alive."

"It is alive, Jack. That is no mere gas-cloud, no radio-controlled weapon. It is a living, intelligent entity like ourselves, like the Atlantides, perhaps superior to us. What are its properties, its powers? I cannot tell, for it is entirely unearthly. But this creature of colorless vapor is the Thing that destroyed Atlantis. It is the unnatural enemy that the last of the Atlantides are combating, that may at last exterminate them. We are powerless to help them, Jack. We can take the offensive, with our resonators, but we have no means of defending ourselves. No, we must watch from a safe place while the Atlantides meet their fate, for it is our duty to live and warn the world that this Thing exists. Science demands it."

"Yes, we must return unharmed, I suppose; we must take no needless risks. But it is hard to see human beings like ourselves slaughtered by a Thing like that, while we stand safely aside, even though we know that any aid would be useless. It is hard always to be the scientist, Doc."

"It is hard, Jack. I know it as well as any. But we have chosen to set aside personal interests for the good of our race, and we must abide by our choice. A general may not lead his troops, Jack; he must remain in safety, even though they be dying in thousands. But look, it is going to attack."

The great black sphere on its narrow base had contracted until it was but half its former size. Now it began to spin slowly, ever contracting. A narrow black streamer ran from the base to the thin ring that surrounded the city, a cable for communication and transfer of power, energy. This, too, was growing smaller, moving in, while the globe whirled faster and faster. The tension in the atmosphere grew intolerable. Then of a sudden the strain broke, the small black globe sprang in an instant to its former size, then dwindled once more, as a ball of scarlet, opalescent flame took form in its heart, and grew until the black globe was gone and the circling ring had waned to a narrow thread.

Now this in turn began to contract until it resembled a huge opal lying upon a pedestal of ebony and velvet. Again the atmosphere grew tense to the breaking point. And now my brain began to throb in unison with the pulsing orb of light from which sprang thin tongues of glowing red flame that struck the blue wall of the barrage and sank into it. Faster and faster the living gem swelled and fell, faster and faster the bombardment of light bathed the wavering wall. Now it no longer sank in at once, but spread and cascaded over the quivering surface, flame devouring flame in a colossal battle of light. Faster, ever faster those rosy hammers beat at the azure wall, until at last it became a seething vortex of purple fire that swirled and danced, then died as a crimson lance struck full upon the unprotected band of orichalcum and blasted it in a chaotic fountain of golden glory. In over the fallen flame-wall flowed the hosts of the Things, armed with hundreds of tiny opals that had been born from the great gem of the battle. An aero rose above the doomed city, melted and fell blazing beneath the caress of a flame-tongue. We could no longer see the black vapors, for they were invisible against the walls of the city, but we could see the myriad little gems of opalescence, darting their tiny, deadly flame-tongues, as they flowed in a great wave over the city, fusing it into a dead black mound of cold rock, rock upon which a white frost was forming as the Things sucked from it its every drop of energy. As the little lights flashed out, and the great cloud of black vapor rolled toward us, Doc put the aero about and we floated out toward the swamp. Then, with a cry of alarm, he sent the ship at full speed out over the writhing tree-tops. Startled, I looked back. *The Things had seen us.*

Down the narrow gorge and over the steaming waters of the swamp sped the great colorless cloud, crowned with a single mighty ball of light. Before it, straight out into the marsh, stretched a broad lane of blackened vegetation and boiling waters cut straight through the heart of the living forest by the darting flames that strove to strike us down. Then it was left behind, and Doc slackened our awful pace, for it would not do to miss the opening of the pit and be forever trapped in the wilderness of this inner world. Before, we had skirted the edge of the forest; now we were cutting straight across it to the spot, somewhere on the other side, where lay the crystal valve and safety. More than three hundred miles an hour we dared not attempt and the black cloud, a blot against the pale swamp, was gaining on us at an incredible speed.

Far to the left the trees gave way to a wilderness of giant fungi, scarlet and purple and bilious yellow, that covered all the ground with its huge heaps of rotting color and distorted livid spires. Above it hung the grey spore-clouds that had brought destruction upon the upper world. And in the very heart of this Devil's garden rose the Crimson City, the city of the Things. We saw little of it as we hurtled far above and to one side, but we

saw enough to make us wonder at the strange beauty of this fairy city of devils.

Spire on spire it rose into the thin air, over a mile from its base to the topmost pinnacle. There were straight, slender pencils that rose unbroken to a swelling sphere-top. There were twisted, spiral towers like a narwhal's tusk, crowned with mushroom roofs and overhanging balconies. There were great squat pyramids with level tops crowned by a pillared labyrinth. There were mazes of sky-flung columns, needle-pointed, hung with goblin arches and topped with golden spheres and ovoids. There were bulging Oriental minarets and peaked domes, somehow gone wrong. There were mad elfin pinnacles that earth has never seen, a chaos of peak and spire and arch that rivaled the twisting fungi in grotesque fantasy. And everywhere, blotting out the smooth walls of crimson marble, were the ugly, billowing vapors that were the Things. Strange that beauty and evil can be so associated.

Now, Doc had handed me the two spare resonators with his own and motioned me to the hatchway. I caught his purpose immediately. Soon we were speeding above the rocky cliffs between sea and jungle, and the combined beams of the resonators were biting deep into the rough rocks, cutting a great gash straight through the heart of the mountains, through and out into the sea. Then the chasm was the path of a raging torrent that fell relentlessly upon the swampy forests and the beautiful crimson city of the Things, burying them deep beneath the wan, white waters. Silhouetted against the tumbling flood I could see the black cloud that hesitated, then sped on in frenzy, the opalescent sphere gleaming balefully at the crest of the inky wave.

Then the crystal valve was open, blasted by my resonator, and we were struggling again in the maelstrom of the winds as the pressing atmosphere of the upper worlds rushed down to destroy the smothering life of the planet's core. The opalescent globe hung for an instant in the clutch of the winds, then hurtled against the rocky floor, to burst in a deluge of dazzling white flame that cascaded over the rough crags, smoothing them into a smoking, level plain. Against the frothing white of the sea a single wisp of black tossed madly and was swept away.

At last the winds lulled, and we won through to the cold bareness of the Atlantides' dead world, stripped even of the softening death-dust by the winds that gave vengeance. Two resonators, their power supplied by the remaining globes of Luda, we left to guard the bottom of the pit. If they are able to affect the Things, the upper worlds are safe from those inky clouds until the crystal spheres of Luda cease to shine. If there are still Atlantides somewhere in the upper worlds, the dust is gone, and they may start anew to form a great empire on their strange green planet—an empire that is secure in the knowledge of its inhabitants that there are those within reach who will give aid if it be needed. If such have survived, it is not impossible that the future shall see the reappearance of Atlantis before the Gates of Hercules, for we left in the rifled library of

Yzdral the tale of our expedition and the secret of the resonator. Time may witness the extension of the empire of Man to the myriad universes of two systems or more, if they exist. But Poseidon, the planet of the Atlantides, will never again be visited by Doc or me. We have witnessed the destruction of the stronghold of the inner world. We have seen the inundated Crimson City.

We have seen the dead upper world, the world of Luda and Yzdral. We have seen enough!