

fantastic

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STORIES



The Priestess Who Rebelled returns next month in another thrilling fantasy laid in the future when women rule the world and few men retain their self respect



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Front cover painting by Robert Fuqua depicting a scene from *The Little People*

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul

Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, H.R. Hammond, Julian E. Krupa, Leo Morey, Jay Jackson, Joe Sewell.

VOLCANO SLAVES

THE sea was calm, oily, and the galley slid like a ghost-ship over the low swells. Fog hung in an opaque pall, blotting out the moonlight, and a strange despairing lethargy seemed to grip the rowers in the ship's waist. Even Memar, the stocky broad-shouldered captain appeared ill at ease, for his eyes swung from side to side in a vain attempt to pierce the curtain of fog and darkness.

Kirk Bradley, perched upon the galley's carven taffrail, glanced at the shipmaster and laughed deeply.

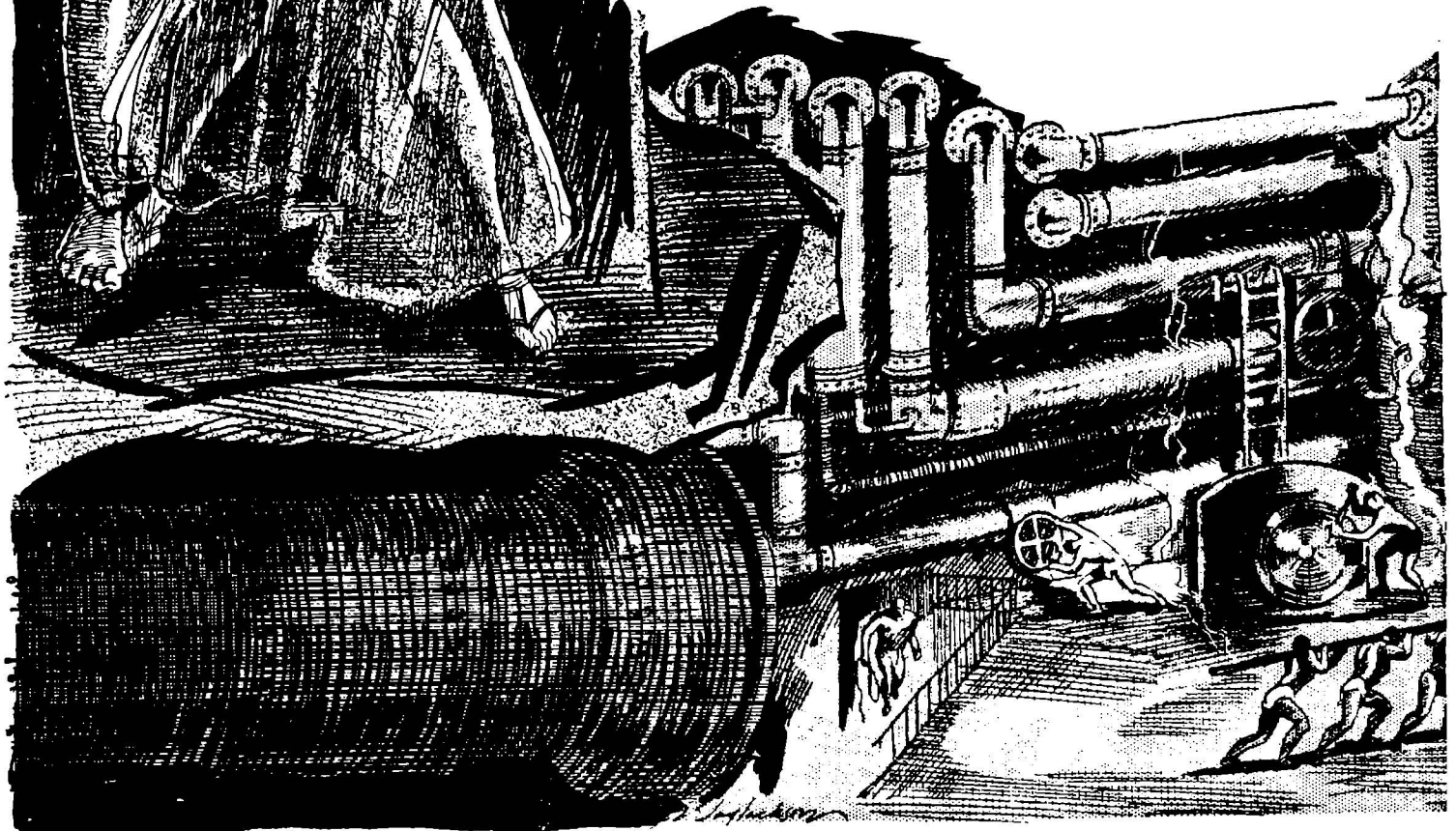
"You look as though you were expecting ghosts to walk out of the mists . . ." he chuckled.

"Quiet!" Memar shook his grizzled head. "Sound travels far in a fog!"

Kirk wiped the blade of his great bronze axe, reflectively. These men of Mu, he had found, were haunted by strange fears, yet when it came to a fight their bravery was unrivaled. Another of the contradictions of this strange, contradictory land of the past. . . .

"Listen!" Memar raised his hand. A distant boom-

Down in the pit they saw great machines that clanked and roared



OF MU

BY
**FREDERIC ARNOLD
 KUMMER, JR.**

ing of breakers was audible. "Those are the shores of Cnef, mightiest of the seven kingdoms of Mu! Terrible are its warriors in battle, and its priests, its magi, masters of fearful supernal arts! No science can equal theirs, nor can they be equalled in cruelty, or wickedness! Men say that glowing red devils rise from the bowels of the earth to work wonders for the men of Cnef! Pray that we reach Tanlis safely!"

Kirk grinned. Sailors, he decided, were the same in any age, with their superstitions. He swung down to the deck, gripping the haft of his axe.

"Bring on your devils, Memar," he said. "Heklos here grows rusty from disuse. If these men of Cnef

are so terrible . . . "

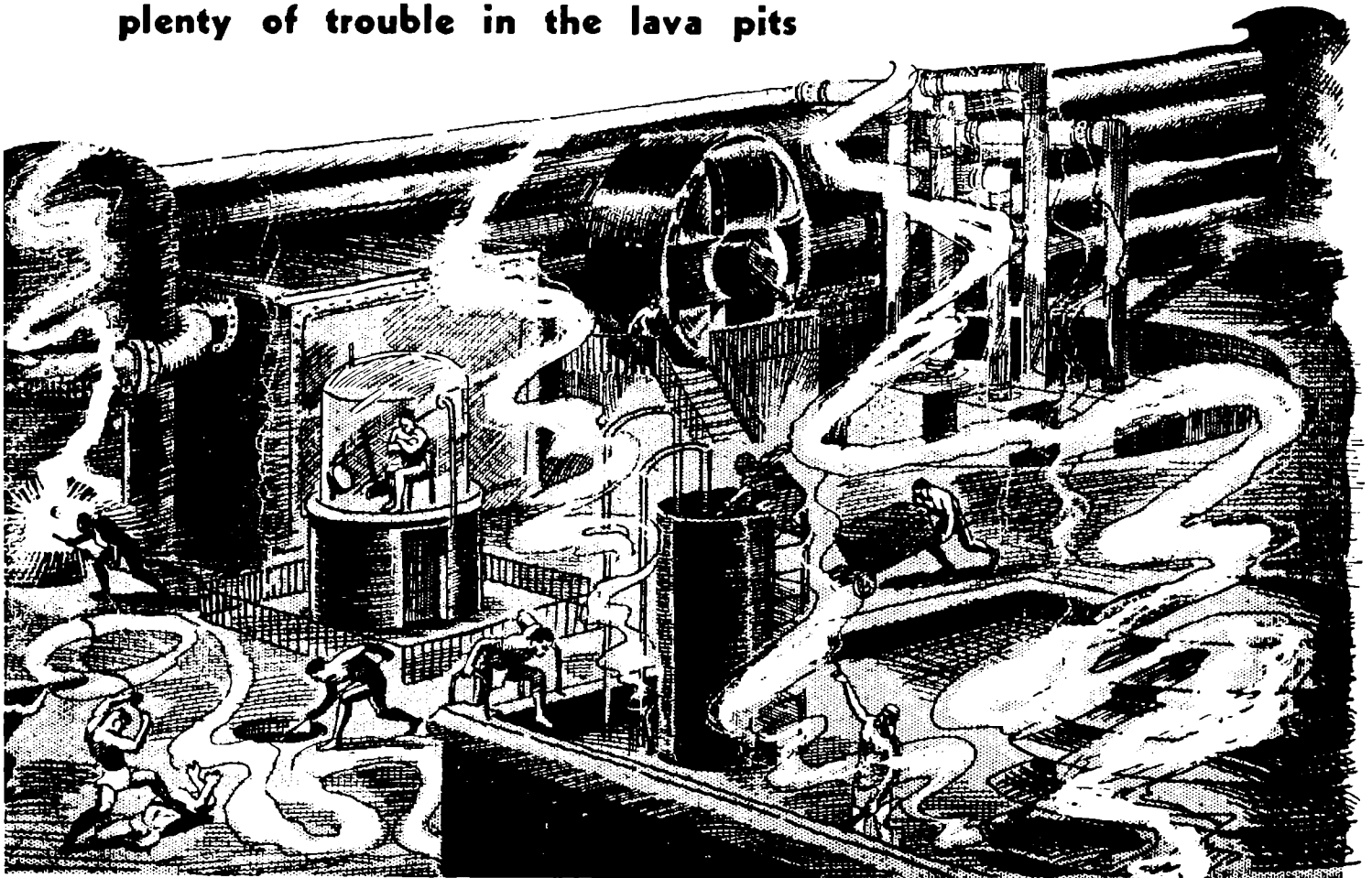
The American broke off, listening. A new sound echoed through the swirling white mists. A beat of oars, a crack of whips, a loud "ha!" as of oarsmen completing a stroke. This, he knew, was a war-galley; for peaceful traders used no whip-scourged slaves.

"Gods of Mu!" Memar, face pale, threw his weight upon the steering oar. It was too late. Like a phantom ship in the fog, a sleek black galley raced toward them, its decks crowded with warriors.

"Pirates of Cnef!" Memar muttered. "You will wear the rust from your blade this day, outlander!" Then, cupping his hands, "Out swords! Haste!"

At Memar's shout the rowers dropped their oars, reached for the weapons that lay beneath their benches. A flight of arrows from the oncoming galley sent half a score of them rolling to the floorboards. Kirk caught up a shield, a fierce light of battle in his blue eyes, braced himself for the shock.

Kirk, The Wanderer, comes to the ancient city of Cnef and finds an old legend waiting to give him plenty of trouble in the lava pits



It came with a rending, splintering crash. The war-galley's ram stove the trader's hull, and the latter staggered like a deer struck by a well-aimed arrow. Then from the attacking vessel poured a torrent of brass-armored warriors, swarthy, black-haired men, shouting fiercely, waving their curved swords.

The swiftness of the attack broke all opposition. The men in the merchant ship's waist offered only feeble resistance before throwing down their arms. Kirk and Memar, on the after deck, were quickly surrounded by a circle of gleaming swords.

With berserk rage the American whirled his axe, hewing through armor and bone. Behind him he could hear Memar gasping as he fought off the savage attacks. Three of the dark, grim men of Cnef leaped at Kirk, swords raised. In an arc of death the axe lashed out, splitting one of the three in twain. At the same instant, the heavy bronze shield swung wide with all the power of Kirk's knotted muscles; the snarling lion's head at its center crashed into the second man's face, sent him reeling to the deck.

All this in an instant, yet the third man had had time to strike. Kirk swayed away from the blow, but the sword-point ripped a bloody gash across his shoulder. Before the man could recover for a second thrust, however, a twist of the American's wrist drove the butt of his axe against the Murian's chin, toppled him from the poop.

"So, men of Cnef!" Kirk laughed. "Who is next to taste Heklos' kisses?"

They fell back, muttering in awed wonder, before this blond giant who laughed at death. The galley's captain, a powerful, black-bearded man, swore.

"At him, dogs!" he roared. "Will this outlander put the pack of you to flight?"

With a shout of rage they surged forward again. From the corner of his eye Kirk saw Memar go down under a hail of blows, leaving him alone to carry on the struggle. A hopeless struggle, he realized, against such odds. Yet if he could reach the rail, leap over it, he might be able to swim off into the foggy darkness, reach shore.

He sprang toward the rail, hacking a way through the press of men. Once, twice, three times, the red-

dened axe fell, and as many Murian warriors with it. Only the powerful, black-bearded captain stood between him and freedom. Kirk raised his blade with a deep-throated cry of triumph.

The leader of the men of Cnef made no motion to protect himself, giving only a short, grim nod. Kirk saw a flash of brass behind him, and the heavy hilt of a sword crashed against his temple. He dropped his axe, swayed, the world spinning before his gaze. One thought crossed his mind . . . that he would be the first man to die ten thousand years before he was born. The thought amused him, he smiled dazedly. Then the sword hilt struck his temple again and all went black.

THE doubtful distinction of dying a hundred centuries before the year of his birth was, however, not to be Kirk's. He awoke with a bitter, hacking headache to find himself, securely bound, on the foredeck of the Cnefian galley. Such of the merchantman's crew as remained alive were lying like roped cattle in the lee of the bulwarks. Beside him, Kirk saw the burly, black-bearded captain, peering into the thinning mists. As the American moved, his captor turned, grinning narrowly.

"Alive, outlander?" he said. "Good! I had hoped you might not die. You'll make a rare gift for our lord, Great

Amenes of Cnef. These" . . . he motioned to the other captives . . . "will do as workers in the Place of Fire. But a golden giant such as you can be only a king's slave. And in so giving, I, Hanath, will gain favor in our master's eye." He lifted the American's big bronze axe, swung it. "A weapon fit for the gods! It shall be mine, now, outlander! Slaves need no arms!"

Kirk shook his aching head. A slave of the men of Cnef! He remembered Memar's words of the great science, the cruelty of this, the mightiest kingdom of Mu. And the glowing red devils . . . were they part of this Place of Fire of which the captain spoke? He lay still, turning these thoughts over in his mind. Then came cries from the swarthy warriors . . . cries of joy and triumph. "Cnef! Cnef!"

With an effort Kirk swayed to his knees, gazed over the galley's gilded bulwark. Dawn had flung its pink mantle over the sea and in the pale light he could see

SINCE the first appearance of these stories relating the experiences of my friend Kirk Bradley in the fabulous land of Lemuria, I have been the recipient of many letters, some of them none too academic, demanding to know how it could be possible for an American of this, the 20th century, to go backward into the antediluvian era of Mu. And I am frank to confess that Kirk has never yet divulged his secret to those who are numbered among his friends. Indeed, it is not altogether certain that he himself understands the forces at his command. Moreover, he is not in the slightest interested as to whether anyone believes him or not.

If I were clever, I suppose, I should offer learned explanations of time-machines, secret drugs, or mental projection . . . explanations which, by the sheer weight of multisyllabic words would bludgeon the reader into a dazed acceptance. Unfortunately, Kirk is emphatic in his denials of any such rationalizations.

Once, to be sure, he made mention of the extra-dimensions, saying that it was generally accepted today that other worlds might exist coincidental with our own. And he went on to say that since time and space are relative, if not dependent upon each other, it was more logical to his way of thinking that the extra-dimensional worlds, instead of being peopled by bulge-eyed monsters, should be, instead, merely previous time-cycles, leading infinitely into the past until they meet, in some great Einsteinian circle, the infinite future.

Just what Kirk meant by this, I cannot hazard a guess. Perhaps some greater mentality than my own may unravel that skein of words . . . or perhaps, as some persons claim, Kirk Bradley is the most gifted liar since Ananias. Yet no matter what one's previously-formed conclusions may be, when one hears of the mighty civilization of Mu from Kirk's own lips as he stands leaning upon Heklos, his great bronze axe, with a far-away look in his eyes, it is impossible not to believe. A strange and fantastic picture it creates in one's mind, this big blond American striding like some legendary giant through that rich, exotic, and wonderful land which lies today lost beneath the ocean so ironically called the Pacific. And of all the tales Kirk tells, there is none, perhaps, so gripping as that of the fall of Cnef. I have passed it on to my good friend, Fred Kummer, Jr., who knows better than I how to set words to paper.—BRAD BURNBY.

land, not a half mile away . . . land, and a mighty city. Sight of it, looming through the morning mists, was an awe-inspiring spectacle. Cnef was cyclopean, its immense buildings towering above broad streets, green parks, and pleasure gardens. The work of Titans, it seemed, huge, sombre, implacable. Towers thrust like gaunt, spatulate fingers at the sky; an air of incalculable hoary age clung to the dull grey stone.

Vast as the city was, the mountain dwarfed it. Rising sheer, majestic, the peak stood like a menacing colossus, dominating the work of man. Waves from the sea washed its slopes, while rows of quays, with their tangle of masts and rigging, clung about its base. Smoke writhed in a sullen column from the cratered crest; on the land side Kirk could see what appeared to be gargantuan machines, cranes, derricks, and great wheels, with human figures moving like ants about them.

"The Place of Fire!" Hanath said, pointing toward the mountain.

"Place of Fire?" Kirk repeated. "What . . ."
Hanath laughed.

"You may learn, outlander, before long," he said. Then, turning, "Bend your backs, dogs! Row! We must make port at once!"

CHAPTER II

The Priest and the Prophecy

LUXURY, riches, Kirk had seen in the other kingdoms of Mu . . . but none of these could compare with the splendor of this palace of Cnef. Like some vast cathedral, it seemed, with its tall arched windows, its tessellated marble, its inlays of gold and ivory. On a throne of cunningly-wrought ebony Amenes sat, a withered, yellowish man with the marks of lechery and degradation about his thin lips. Tall guards in silver armor stood behind him, while near-nude girls lolled upon the steps of his dais, their bodies like polished alabaster in the warm sunlight that streamed through the vaulted windows. Great flagons of wine stood at hand, and a hot throbbing of lutes stirred the air.

Kirk, hobbled by ropes, glanced about the hall as Hanath told the story of his voyage. None of the faces of the assembled nobles of Cnef offered him encouragement. Cruelty, lust for power, decadence, and bestiality were stamped upon the features of men and women alike. Only one countenance held Kirk's gaze . . . that of the slim, proud girl standing in the shadow of the throne. Her dress was that of one of the dancing girls, but her eyes glowed with disgust, fierce hatred. Here was a girl, Kirk thought, who was worth more than all the gold and intagliated gems of this glittering pig-sty. He smiled, thought he caught an answering nod from her when Hanath twisted his captive's head about as one might twist the head of a show-horse to face the judges.

"Observe the color of his eyes, highness," he said. "Where has one seen such yellow hair and pale skin?"

And for all his size, he moves quickly, a lion in battle. Seven of my men fell before his axe."

"Seven!" Amenes' dulled eyes lit up. "Here then is one to give us sport! Who are you, outlander? Where is your homeland?"

"Kirk, I am called. And I come from . . . another world." The American replied. "A world far superior to this."

"So?" Amenes smiled thinly. "You will prove its superiority. Loose his bonds! Let him face three of my guardsmen!"

A space was cleared before the dais, and ringed with warriors. Three of these Cnefian fighting men, silver armor gleaming, spears raised, waited in the center of the circle. With a quick movement Hanath cut his captive's bonds, pushed him into the impromptu arena. Kirk drew a deep breath, glanced swiftly about. The huge hall, the wrinkled, dry-lipped Amenes, the rows of harsh, unfriendly faces. . . . Then he saw the dark-haired girl smiling encouragement at him and he turned to face the three warriors.

A shout rang through the hall as the spearmen advanced, their weapons poised. Kirk braced himself, crouching. Suddenly the javelin of the foremost warrior licked out like a striking cobra. Kirk ducked and the spear slid harmlessly over his shoulder. As he came up, his fist cracked against the Murian's jaw and the man crumpled limply to the floor.

No time now to snatch up the fallen spear; the other two men were upon him. Kirk leaped back to avoid their thrusts, then dove at the ankles of the smaller of the twain, sent him sprawling to the floor. Muscles standing out in great ridges, he surged to his feet, still gripping the fallen man's ankles. Then, remembering the wrestling matches of the 20th century, he began to whirl.

In an airplane spin the inert body circled about him, preventing the third warrior from getting in a thrust of his spear. All at once Kirk released his hold upon the victim's ankles; the warrior hurtled through the air, slammed into the third guardsman. Down went both, in a wild tangle of arms and legs. Before they could recover, the American had gathered up the three spears, snapped them over his knee, and tossed the pieces at the foot of the king's dais.

"Gods of Mu!" Amenes quavered, clawing at his sparse beard. "Here indeed is a warrior! The captivity of my guards might well be his!"

"Will you make a bull captain of your guards, then, highness?" A cadaverous man in sable robes strode before the throne of Cnef. "Better use for such brawn at the Place of Fire. He claims his race is superior to ours of Cnef. Let him prove it by besting the priests of the Fire as he has bested your guardsmen." The dark man whirled, eyes mocking. "Fetch a vase, a lute!"

SLAVES ran from the hall, returned bearing a glass vase of almost bubble-like thinness, a three-

stringed lyre. The priest set the vase carefully upon the floor, turned to Kirk.

"Can you shatter this vase," he demanded, "and yet touch it neither with your flesh nor some inanimate object nor yet fire?"

Kirk frowned. This was, he knew, some trick. Memar had warned him of the skill of the magi of Cnef. Yet to break the vase without touching it, heating it, or hurling something at it. . . . He shook his head.

The dark priest laughed. "Watch, then!" he cried, picking up the lyre.

Once, the necromancer struck the instrument, and a queer high note echoed through the hall. The dark man tightened the strings, struck again, producing an even higher note. At the third weird, shivering chord the vase suddenly shattered to bits.

A shout of wonder echoed through the hall. Kirk grinned. A trick, of course, but a good one. Certain notes could easily shatter fragile glass. He should have realized. . . .

"And now," the priest said softly. "Show us your skill, stranger of the superior race!"

Kirk glanced about the hall, troubled. With time, and a well-equipped laboratory he could show these Murians wonders aplenty. But to perform marvels on the spur of the moment. . . . Suddenly an idea struck him. He waved his hand contemptuously.

"A simple trick!" he said. "Can you make fire with water?"

"Fire with water?" The gaunt priest laughed. "No, outlander, nor can you!"

Kirk picked up a round-bellied glass flagon of wine, poured out its contents.

"Fill this with water," he demanded.

Slaves scurried to do his bidding. Kirk glanced about the great hall, noting once again the harsh face of the nobles of Cnef, the intent gaze of the pale, dark-haired dancing girl. His fate, he realized, depended upon the outcome of this trick. Very deliberately he approached one of the arched windows, held the flagon in the yellow sunlight. Adjusting it until the beams passing through it were concentrated in a single spot on the rich hangings, he waited, motionless. Within a few moments the silken hangings on the wall had begun to smoulder, smoke, under this natural burning glass, then to glow with flame.*

A shout went up from the crowds of spectators.

Quickly Kirk beat out the flame, turned to the priest.

"Have I made fire with water?" he asked, grinning.

"Aye!" the man cried, his voice quavering through the hall. "And you have done more! You have shown us who you are! Listen to me, great Amenes, and you, men of Cnef! Long ago the prophecy was made that one day would come a stranger with hair like sunlight, slaying armed men with his hands, draw-

ing fire from water, and making mock of the priests of the Fire! And it was prophesied that this outlander would bring about the downfall of Cnef! Heed, and beware!"

A look of superstitious fear crossed Amenes' thin face. "Downfall of Cnef?" he muttered. "Gods! If this be so . . ."

Then from the shadows of the throne stepped the dark-haired girl.

"Will the ruler of Cnef be frightened by this croaking raven?" she cried. "Priests are quick to prophesy doom . . . when they fear a rival may supplant them!"

"Eh?" The withered king glanced from the girl to the priest and back again. "There is truth in what you say, child. Yet a prophecy . . ." He toyed with the great emerald that hung about his neck. "We will consider this at length. Meanwhile let the stranger be confined. This talk of doom hangs like a cloud in my brain. Wine, music!"

One glimpse Kirk had of the sallow king draining a jeweled goblet, his haunted eyes on the writhing bodies of the slave-girls, then Hanath motioned to guards. Through shadowy passages they led the American to a small cell hewn from rock beneath the palace. The black-bearded noble locked the massive door, and, accompanied by his guards, left Kirk in his prison.

VERY carefully the American went over the room. No means of escape presented itself. Kirk ran a hand through his brassy hair. The whole series of events confused him. What did these men of Cnef intend to do with him? Would he be sent to the mysterious Place of Fire, as had the other prisoners from the galley? If so, what was there about the mountain that inspired such dread? And the dark-haired girl . . . why had she been so interested in his behalf?

Kirk thought of the huge machines he had seen on the slopes of the volcano. They spoke of a high degree of civilization in this strange land of Cnef . . . though what their purpose was, he could not guess. Certainly machines of some sort must have been used to construct this cyclopean city. Kirk turned these problems over in his mind until at length, worn out by the experience of the past few hours, he threw himself upon the floor and fell into a troubled sleep.

It was the grating of the lock, the creak of the door that awakened him. He sprang to his feet in time to see a cloaked figure advancing toward him through the shadows. More, in one hand the intruder held a naked sword. Kirk leaped back, suddenly aroused.

"Who . . ." he began, then broke off in amazement. As the shadowy figure let drop its cloak, he saw that it was the slim, proud dancing girl!

"Quiet!" The girl motioned for silence, handed him the sword. "Come!"

Kirk gripped the weapon; it was light compared to

*Many home fires have been caused by sunlight passing through glass goldfish bowls and striking curtains or rugs.—Ed.

"Fetch the worker Jarnac of Tanlis," she said imperiously. "My lord Hanath desires that the slave be brought to the palace . . . to provide sport for Mighty Amenes' guests."

"Sport?" The captain grinned. "He's too old to provide much amusement. A few touches of the lash and he dies. Yet it shall be as my lord Hanath commands. I myself will fetch the man. Wait here!"

The captain disappeared into a side-corridor. Kirk shot a smile at Mara.

"So far, so good," he murmured. "What's this Place of Fire all about, anyhow?"

"About?" The girl's eyes narrowed. "Judge for yourself!"

She moved toward the rear of the hall, pushed open a door leading onto a broad gallery. Kirk stepped out upon it, gave a sudden gasp.

The scene before them was incredible, even in this incredible continent of Mu. It reminded Kirk of a Doré illustration of some new and terrible inferno. Below lay a vast hall, all crimson flame and grotesque shadow; frightful heat and noxious gases rose in choking waves. At one side of the hall were vast pipes, white-hot, protruding from a wall of solid rock. Row upon row of them, stretching off in the distance until the great cavern curved out of sight. Pipes, Kirk realized, that tapped the molten lava of the volcano's core, faucets, with immense valves to regulate the flow of liquid stone.

Emerging from the wall, the glowing pipes circled about great boilers, to create the steam-power that drove the masses of gargantuan machinery. Here was the source of power which had enabled the men of Cnef to build their cyclopean city to run the great cranes and derricks outside, to stamp out the beams and girders that supported the great blocks of stone.* Power . . . and an escape valve, drawing off the excess lava which might have overflowed from the crater to engulf their city.

Nor was this all of the uses of the Place of Fire. As the lava circled the big turbines, it passed, ever cooling, through the pipes until it reached a great pit at the rear of the cavern. Here the molten stuff ran from the pipes into oblong moulds of sand to form the huge blocks of which the buildings, quays, and roadways of Cnef were made. Power, building material, and a means of checking the volcano's eruptions! Small wonder the men of Cnef held the Place of Fire sacred!

"You see?" Mara's voice was bitter. "For two years my father has labored here!" She pointed to the wretched, half-naked slaves, toiling in the inferno below; heat, exhaustion, and the overseer's lash had reduced them to dull-eyed robots, waiting only the release of death. "May the gods curse Amenes, and his land of death! May Kotheb and Narayana smite

this city until one stone remains not upon another! May their own fires consume them . . ."

"Quiet!" Kirk gripped her arm as footsteps sounded behind them.

THEY reentered the hall to find the captain and a bent, grey-haired slave standing there. The slave had not succumbed to the dull, animal-like passivity of his fellows; his eyes were keen, intelligent, and his mouth firm, though marked with pain. At sight of Mara he drew a quick, startled breath, but the girl interrupted him.

"That's the one," she said coldly. "We'll take him to Hanath at once. Small danger of his escaping this giant." Mara motioned to Kirk.

"As you wish, my lady." The captain bowed, turned to the lever that opened the massive gates. Jarnac shot an agonized glance at his daughter, was about to speak when Kirk stopped him.

"Quiet!" The American whispered. "Once we get outside . . ."

The massive bronze doors swung slowly open. Mara, Kirk, and the dazed Jarnac stood waiting. In another moment they would be free of the Place of Fire. It would be a simple matter to board one of the galleys in the darkness that cloaked the stone quays. Then with a favorable wind . . . Still gripping the old man's arm, Kirk strode toward the entrance . . . then suddenly froze in his tracks.

The doors of the Place of Fire had swung open . . . and there on the metal catwalk leading to them stood the lean, dark priest whose prophecy to Amenes had resulted in Kirk's imprisonment. At sight of the American, the priest's sallow face twisted with rage.

"The outlander!" he exclaimed. "Why is he here? And free?"

"This should explain!" Mara extended the carved gem. "Hanath's orders . . ."

"Hanath had lain in drunken stupor these three hours past!" the man cried. "Seize them! This is some trick!"

Kirk saw the captain hesitate momentarily, glance at his men as though undecided. Drawing his sword, the American plunged forward. Only the priest barred their way, and if they were swift enough, they might reach the darkness beyond the volcano's glare before the dazed captain set his men in pursuit. Motioning to Mara and her father to follow, he sprang toward the priest, sword raised. His opponent was unarmed, save for an iron-bound staff, but this he threw up to ward off the blow. With a crash the sword met the iron-ringed staff . . . and where the bronze axe Hanath had taken would have shorn through, the tempered blade snapped. Kirk gave a grunt of disgust, threw down the stump of the sword and hurtled forward, groping for his adversary's throat.

In that instant the priest's hand slipped beneath his robes, reappeared clutching a fistful of green powder. This, with a quick gesture he hurled into the Amer-

*This is not so fantastic as it seems. In Italy, at the famous Valley of Hell, the power of a volcano has been harnessed to run turbines.—Ed.

ican's face.

Kirk, expecting no such attack, plunged headlong into the cloud of greenish dust. A form of lye, it burned his eyes, blinding him. For a moment he groped in vain for his opponent, then the guards of the door seized him, bore him, blind, helpless, to the ground. Dimly he heard the priest's voice, harsh, mocking.

"I shall return Hanath's seal to him . . . and tell him how it has been used. Take the three of them to the pits below. The Place of Fire is a certain cure for rebellious spirits."

CHAPTER III

The Place of Fire

THE casting pit was a hell of heat and gas. Kirk, stripped to the waist, his body covered with a paste of soot and sweat, watched the molten lava ooze from the nozzle of the pipe into a square mould of wet sand. As the mould filled, there came a shout from the guards, a crack of a whip. Kirk took his place at the blistering hot chain, tugged with aching muscles upon it. Under the efforts of half a hundred slaves, Jarnac and Mara among them, the nozzle swung to another mould, poured its torrent of molten rock into it. By the time a dozen such moulds had been filled, the first block was cooled sufficiently to be dragged away, its mould of sand reshaped, and the process repeated.

As Kirk tugged at the chain, he glanced at Mara. The girl was exhausted, half conscious from the terrible heat. Her frail body was emaciated, marked by the red weals of the lash. Her father seemed crushed by the sudden failure of his hopes, the sight of his daughter in this place of horror. Kirk redoubled his efforts, seeking to lighten their labor.

Behind the toilers of the casting pits great masses of machinery roared and clanked. Fantastic shadows, cast by the red glow of the lava-pipes, sprawled upon the walls like grotesque demons. Huge dies pressed out beams, metal columns, bronze doors, myriad objects of metal, while tortured workers hammered and filed rough castings into shape. Amenes had decreed newer and greater towers, vaster fortifications, colossal walls and wharves . . . and there was no rest in the devil's workshop they called the Place of Fire.

At length a crashing of cymbals announced the end of the shift. Weary slaves staggered from the pit, while a new shift sprang to take their places. Kirk saw Mara slump, fainting, to the ground, Jarnac at her side. Quickly the American picked up the inert girl.

"This way," Jarnac muttered. "Gallery 28 is cool and none go there since it is believed a place of ghosts."

Kirk followed the old man through a maze of corridors, murky caves, and into a long slanting passage. At its end the air was cool, and only a faint reflected

light from the distant workshops reached them. Kirk placed the girl on the floor, straightened up, frowning. Somewhere he could hear a slow thud . . . thud . . . thud . . . like the beating of a giant heart. Jarnac, noticing his expression, smiled.

"Waves," he announced. "The sea lies beyond this wall of rock. But the legends of the slaves say it is the heart of Almuran, king of Zac, who died here, a captive. So they fear to enter this corridor. Ah, child" . . . he touched the girl's forehead as she moved slightly . . . "do you feel better now?"

"All . . . all right," Mara whispered. "So cool here . . ."

"Gods of Mu!" Jarnac's eyes were bitter. "The sight of you, toiling in this cursed place! And only because you tried to rescue me! My child . . . a slave!" He turned to Kirk, agonized. "They say you are a mighty warrior, skillful in the dark arts. Surely you must know some way to escape this hell! It does not matter about me . . . I am old, tired. But Mara, my daughter . . ."

Kirk shook a weary head. All his 20th century knowledge was of no use without chemicals, equipment. Here in these caverns he was as helpless as the most ignorant slave. There was no way . . .

"Think!" Old Jarnac pleaded. "There must be some secret, some unknown science of your world! If we could arm the other slaves, force open the gates . . ."

Kirk glanced at the pale girl, noted the whip-marks across her shoulders. She had risked her life to save him . . . He clenched his fists savagely. If only there were some way! But to overcome hundreds of armed guards, force the great doors . . . If only he had one gun, one grenade!

Suddenly Kirk stopped his pacing, stared at the wall of the corridor. In the faint light he could see brownish crystals adhering to it. Brownish crystals. All at once a thought crossed his mind. He had seen similar deposits in limestone caves, and the walls of ancient stone buildings. Saltpetre! Wall-saltpetre, or more correctly, lime saltpetre!* And sulphur was almost invariably found near the vents of volcanos! That left only charcoal, easily obtained by burning wood! Gun-powder!

Kirk straightened up, eyes blazing. If they could manufacture gunpowder, store it in this unfrequented corridor, they would have a force to overcome the warriors of Cnef. Bombs made of clay, in the hands of the slaves, would act as hand-grenades to disperse the guards, while a charge of powder would blow open the bronze gates . . .

"Jarnac! Mara!" he exclaimed. "There's a

*Wall-saltpetre occurs as an efflorescence on the walls of caves or old stone buildings, while volcanic sulphur is found as a sublimate around or on volcanic vents, as a result of the interaction of sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide. As mined it is always contaminated with limestone or gypsum, but heating melts off the pure sulphur. During the 16th century, in Italy, where sulphur abounds, crude gunpowder was made by raw sulphur, charred wood, and lime-saltpetre scraped from the walls of old buildings.—Ed.

chance . . . a slim, dangerous chance, but it may work! And if it does, we'll gain freedom!"

THE days that followed were a mad nightmare of toil for the three prisoners. When the others of their shift fell exhausted from the hours of labor at the casting-pits, they forced themselves to frantic efforts in collecting the ingredients with which to manufacture the explosive.

Saltpetre was scraped from the walls with pieces of stone, charcoal easily obtained by burning bits of wood stolen from the workshops. As he had expected around a volcanic vent, Kirk located a strata of sulphur ore in one of the passages. Digging it free, they heated it over the fire that produced their charcoal and obtained reasonably pure sulphur.

Days passed, and they became work-worn phantoms, forcing themselves on by sheer force of will. Twice they had almost been surprised by the guards at their work, but on each occasion they had beaten out their fire, lain still, scarce daring to breathe, until the sentries passed by the supposedly haunted gallery. None of the other captives were told of their plans, for fear of betrayal. When the time for the attempt came, things would happen too quickly for an alarm to upset their plans.

The store of gunpowder, placed in a great rude jar that Mara had made from clay, now amounted to several hundred pounds. Enough, Kirk realized, for their purpose. The next step was to fashion rough clay bombs with fuses of twisted, powder-impregnated cloth. When all was in readiness, Kirk would distribute them among the off shift, along with slivers of wood which, lighted, would serve to touch off the grenades. One swift rush, with bombs exploding on all sides, would, Jarnac said, send the guards into a panic, win them freedom.

The day on which they planned to commence the manufacture of the clay bombs, found the three captives toiling grimly in the casting pit, swinging the great nozzle back and forth over the moulds. Bodies seared with heat, eyes half-blinded by the flare, hands torn by the rough chain, they waited for the clash of cymbals that would mark the end of their shift. Above the roar of machinery, the hiss of steam, rose the plaintive chant of the slaves singing their melancholy, yearning melody as they worked. Then at last the clashing of the great gong and the song abruptly died away.

Kirk dropped the heavy chain, watched the slaves file off to the gloomy caves in which they ate and slept. The American, joining Mara and Jarnac, started to follow them. When they reached the vaulted doorway, however, a group of warriors wearing the silver armor of Amenes' bodyguard stopped them. Mara gave a sudden stifled scream. Hanath, a saturnine smile on his dark, bearded face, was approaching the three captives!

"Well met!" he grinned. "The big outlander and the clever dancing girl! Xuan, the high priest, ex-

ceeded his authority when he ordered you imprisoned here. Great Amenes has other plans for the two of you! Plans that will provide amusement for his court while teaching you the folly of disobeying his wishes!" He turned to his guards. "Bind them!"

Old Jarnac choked back a cry of horror.

"No!" he muttered. "Gods of Mu! They can't . . ." In sudden desperation he snatched up a hammer from an anvil beside him, struck down the nearest of the guards. As Jarnac's blow fell, Kirk leaped forward. Hanath groped for the axe . . . Kirk's axe, Heklos . . . that hung at his belt. Too late. The American's fist crashed against his chin, sent him unconscious to the floor.

The next instant Kirk had seized the great bronze axe, leaped with a shout of exultation toward the silver-armored warriors. Three crushing strokes and three of them fell; the remaining two, struck with panic by the sight of this soot-smeared, wild-eyed, berserk figure, took to their heels.

But if the effete palace guards were frightened, the hardened keepers of the Place of Fire were not. A score of them streamed down from the galleries above, brandishing swords and spears, wild figures in the red glare of the molten lava. No chance of winning the gates, Kirk realized. And to take flight into the maze of corridors below meant eventual capture, since there was no other means of escape from the Place of Fire. A few more days and their clay hand grenades would have been completed. But now . . .

Jarnac, eyeing the on-rushing soldiers, seized a torch, plunged into a corridor.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "We may be able to hide in one of the shafts!"

KIRK, with Mara at his side, followed. Small chance of concealing themselves; in time they must be found. Still, there was no other hope. Frantically they raced along the rocky tunnel. Behind them they could hear the clatter of armor, hoarse shouts from their pursuers.

Old Jarnac ran blindly, hoping to outdistance the guards, lose them in the network of passages. Kirk was grim, tight-lipped, Mara, a wan, frail spectre, eyes deep with despair. Suddenly the American realized that the passage was a familiar one . . . gallery 28, where their store of gunpowder lay! The stuff was useless, now, since there was no time to set a mine or manufacture grenades, fuses. And the gallery ended in a *cul-de-sac*! He shouted at Jarnac, but the old man had taken the familiar route unconsciously, without realizing it. Already the warriors behind them were shouting in triumph, realizing that they had the fugitives trapped.

All at once they were at the end of the shaft, where the great clay jar of powder lay. Jarnac groaned, at last aware of the trap into which he had led the others. In the torchlight Kirk could see the furious exultant warriors surging toward them, their swords flashing ominously.

"So!" The American raised the heavy bronze axe. "One last fight, then! They'll pay high for our lives! Heklos drinks her fill this day!" He laughed deeply; all the 20th century veneer had been stripped from him and he was suddenly as primitive, fierce as his Saxon forbears.

Old Jarnac shot a glance at the oncoming warriors, then at the big blond giant standing at his daughter's side.

"No!" he cried furiously, waving his torch. "Let the land of Cnef be destroyed by its own devils! Back behind that projecting rock, outlander! Quick!" Terrible in his anger the grey-haired slave stood above the jar of gunpowder, torch in hand.

"Good God!" Kirk made a movement to stop him, but already the torch was descending. In one desperate lunge the American seized Mara, leaped for the shelter of a projecting rock jutting from the wall of the rough-hewn corridor.

Then a roar, deafening, and a dazzling flash of light. The tunnel heaved like a ship at sea and it seemed to Kirk that an invisible hand struck him to the ground. As in a dream he saw the fierce, triumphant warriors swept down by a hail of flying rock, saw the few survivors fleeing in insane terror along the corridor.

Now another sound, a rushing, rumbling of water. Kirk picked up the stunned Mara, felt a foaming torrent strike his knees. The explosion had blown out the end of the passage and the sea was pouring through the jagged opening! For a split second Kirk stood frozen with horror, realizing what Jarnac had meant by the land of Cnef being destroyed by its own devils. Then, in mad desperation he plunged toward the opening.

ALL the fights Kirk had fought against men were as nothing compared to this struggle against the mill-race that boiled, shoulder-high, through the shattered opening. Weighed down by the unconscious girl, stunned by the force of the explosion, he clawed and dragged his way forward, until at length, exhausted, he gained the slope of the mountain at one side of the opening. Already ominous rumblings were audible below . . . and the tide was still rising!

"Mara!" Kirk shook the girl into consciousness. "Mara! We've got to reach the quays . . . quick!"

She nodded dazedly, swayed to her feet. Then they were running in desperate haste toward the great stone wharves.

The ground was trembling, and clouds of steam poured from the crater of the mountain. Great cracks were appearing in the walls of the cyclopean city, people were pouring into the streets. Wine-sodden men, painted women, fled screaming through the streets; debauched, saturnalian revels gave way to abject terror; cruel warriors, fierce, savage in battle, now were fleeing in panic.

Kirk and Mara, swaying drunkenly with the heaving land, raced along the stone docks. A small stout trading vessel, lying between two ugly war-galleys, caught the American's eye.

"Here!" he exclaimed, leaping onto its deck. A panic-stricken sailor offered feeble protest, but a blow from the flat of Kirk's axe sent him flying into the water. One stroke severed the rope fastened to a ring in the wharf and the blond giant pushed the ship off. Waving Mara toward the tiller, he hoisted the brilliantly-colored sail. The trim little vessel at once gained leeway, heading seaward under a full wind.

Behind them the pirate city of Cnef was a scene of terror. Flame, steam, and volumes of black smoke spouted from the Place of Fire, buildings were crumbling, falling to crush the fear-stricken thousands in the streets. Cnef the mighty was being shaken into a heap of rubble!

Kirk joined Mara at the tiller of the boat, his face drawn. If they could get far enough off shore before the steam generated within the passages and caverns of the Place of Fire . . .

And at that instant it came . . . a terrific, earth-shaking explosion that tossed the little vessel about like a chip, hurling Kirk and Mara to the deck. For long minutes they lay there clinging to the tiller post as huge waves swept their craft seaward. Now rocks were raining about them, churning up the water like shellfire. Kirk staggered to his feet, glanced back. The Place of Fire had split in two! The mountain was cloven as though by a gargantuan axe-stroke, and a torrent of molten rock swept inexorably toward Cnef! Through the clouds of steam and smoke Kirk could see a few terrorized figures struggling up the grassy slopes behind the crumbling city . . . the sole survivors of the mighty stronghold whose science and ruthless courage the rest of Mu had so long feared!

"Gods!" Mara shuddered as the white-hot lava engulfed the titanic city. "Destroyed! No longer need the merchants of Mu fear these coasts, no longer will threats of enslavement in the Place of Fire bow all men to the wishes of Cnef! Thanks to you, outlander . . . and to my father . . ."

Kirk turned his back on the terrible scene of destruction, shifted his gaze to the north-east. In that direction, he knew, lay Tanlis, Mara's home, the most remote of all the kingdoms of Mu . . . Tanlis, the land of mountains, where the little hillmen warred among the vast crags, and the wind howled through gorges a thousand feet in depth, and men whispered of the giant hairy things that lurked in the snowy passes. Kirk drew a deep breath of the keen salt air, gripped the handle of his great bronze axe.

"Wipe Cnef from your memory," he said, "as it has been wiped from the face of Mu! The far horizon calls, with new lands, new sights, new adventures!" Laughing exultantly, he tugged at the steering oar, swung the vessel's prow to the north.



»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Author of VOLCANO SLAVES OF MU

BORN March 27, 1913, at Catonsville, Maryland. Now a resident of Baltimore. Unmarried. Six feet tall, 190 pounds, grey eyes and brown hair. Hobbies . . . dogs, chess, table tennis, bridge, fishing, horses.

As for how I got into this writing game . . . well my father is one of America's better-known authors. I was brought up in an atmosphere of twist plots, second-act climaxes, clinch fade-outs, and furious typewriting. Strangely enough, this first hand knowledge of the ups and downs of the literary profession instilled within me a desire for security . . . a longing to sit behind a nice solid desk and dictate letters, confident of a weekly stipend forever and aye. As a result, upon graduation from high school I took a position in the cashier's office for a life insurance company, about the most secure job possible to obtain.

Well, after four years behind that nice solid desk I'd dreamed of, the monotony began to get me. Moreover, there was a venerable gentleman in our office who had been with the company for fifty years, and when one day I discovered his weekly wage to be twenty-five dollars I decided I'd better quit while I had the chance. Next morning big business and I parted, to the intense relief of both parties. I had come to the point where I saw columns of figures in my sleep and the insurance company began to view my cantankerous spirit with alarm. With mutually hollow wishes of success my employers and I went our respective ways.

When the first few weeks of glorious laziness had passed I decided I might as well try my hand at a story until something better came along. That first yarn, I blush to confess, won a True Story prize contest and I received a price of ten cents a word for it. I was hooked. Since then I have been a confirmed author.

After three years of writing confessions, love stories, humor, radio material, detective, adventure, juveniles, or what have you, I tried my hand at science-fiction, of which I had long been a reader. Success attended my first efforts in this most interesting of all fields and I hope to continue in it as long as I am able to turn out salable yarns. I still do historical, detective, and newspaper syndicate work as well, but don't get the kick out of them that I do from science-fiction.

Concerning my methods of work, I am the slow patient type of writer. I look with envy and awe at my friendly rivals who tell me how they "dashed off a novelet this morning" or "batted out a serial over the week-end." A five or six thousand word story is a week's work for me. One day to block out the plot, three days to write it in longhand, a day and a half to type and correct it. On the other hand, I believe my rejection ratio is lower than those of my more speedy friends.

I am extremely fortunate in having had a literary father to guide me in my early attempts. Since then, however, our styles have become as opposite as the poles, his emphasizing modern economy of

words and my own tending always toward color and more color . . . a hangover, no doubt, from several years study of portrait painting. In spite of this difference in style, however, we often discuss plots and ideas to mutual advantage. I also wish to doff a metaphorical hat to my younger brother, Joe, who, as a scientist, helps me with knotty scientific problems.

In response to your letters I bring back Kirk once more, and the long-lost land of Lemuria.

King Solomon, you will remember, was reputed to have at his command demons, whom he could confine within a metal container, and which could, if he so desired, perform miracles of work. Might that not be another way of saying he had the use of steam? Steam confined in a boiler, yet at the disposal of the inventor, and possessing the strength of hundreds of men? The men of Mu had a science far superior to that of known history and it is not impossible that survivors of the cataclysm might have taught Solomon the secret of the "demons."

Then, too, such demons are almost invariably supposed to reside in underground caverns, mountain caves, or similar places. Why is it impossible to suppose that the men of Mu might have utilized the heat from volcanos . . . with which their land abounded . . . to produce steam? More, the lava could be poured into moulds to cool into bricks or blocks that could be used in building, thus saving the labor of quarrying blocks of stone. And such a tapping of the molten rock would draw off excess lava, prevent it from overflowing the volcano's crater to destroy the surrounding land.

Thus, as I see it, the legends of demons prevalent throughout the postdiluvian world may very likely be memories of the great forces of the men of Mu, particularly since these demons or djinns are usually supposed to be at the beck and

call of man, once he knows the secret of their control. This control the warrior kings of Cnef have, in my story, but through Kirk's twentieth century knowledge the same force, steam, is used to destroy the dreaded pirate city of Lemuria.

I had thought, in writing this story, to destroy not only the pirate city of Cnef, but all of Mu as well. Friends of Kirk, however, persuaded me to stay my hand. And so, if you readers so desire, Kirk will follow new adventures in Mu. I hope your decision will be favorable, for I am fond of the blond axeman and enjoy writing about him.

It is my belief that science-fiction is the really big field of the future. New magazines popping up every day give proof of this fact. Western and detective types are beginning to wear a trifle thin, and with science taking an increasingly important part in its daily life, the public is beginning to look to the future instead of the past. So many marvels of science have occurred in recent years that the skepticism of the doubting Thomases is being shaken. No longer do we find the instant reaction: "It's impossible!" Instead they say: "Well I don't know—maybe it's true. It *could* happen." So many of the predictions of science fiction and fantasy writers have come true that no longer is the skeptic prone to veto any science fiction idea.—*Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., Baltimore, Maryland.*



FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.