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MYSTIC

MAGAZINE

January 1954

35¢

THE DEVIL'S EMPIRE

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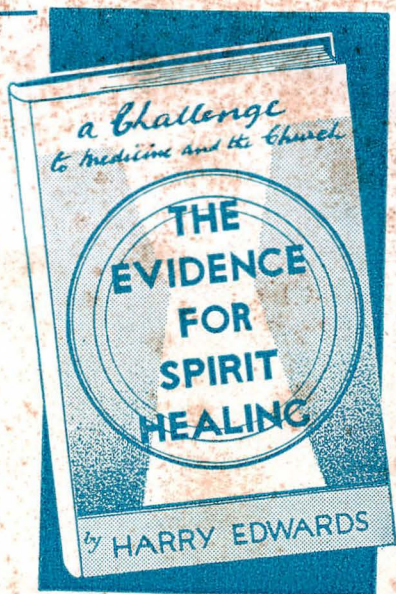
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MYSTIC Magazine

Issue No. 2

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Editorially Speaking...

MARK TWAIN was very much interested in mysticism. In his own life there were many instances, the most famous being a vision he had of a coffin and a red flower, a pre-vision of death which came true. The story has been told many times so we won't repeat it here. But there are a few things about Mark Twain which tie up directly with the magazine you are now reading. How so, you ask? After all, this is a brand new magazine, just in its second issue, and Samuel Clemens has been dead quite some time. . . .

Mark Twain was born under a comet. It was Halley's comet, and by some strange coincidence he died under the same comet when it returned. He was born in 1835 and died in 1910. Halley's comet returns to earth every 75 years; it will return to earth again in 1985.

Mark Twain is probably one of the most famous of all American writers. His name will live as long as literature is a part of our American scene. He is part and parcel of America, and part and parcel of the art of good story telling. He was, speaking literally, born under a star; in this case a more spectacular kind of star, a comet.

A comet comes sweeping in out of the mystery of the "great

deep," having traveled untold billions of miles into reaches unknown to man, and through adventures whose magnificence would make us feel very humble if we but knew what they were. Some comets visit us but once, then vanish into the limbo from which they came, due to the nature of their orbit which does not return upon itself. Others, like Halley's comet, are faithful, returning on schedule to our system to pass by the earth in majesty and mystery. How this happens no one knows, for as the comet journeys in the far beyond for 75 years, the earth is speeding on through space at many miles per second, away from the previous rendezvous, and yet, when the comet comes back it meets the earth at its new position. Think of the distance the earth travels in 75 years, at speeds of 18 miles per second! Truly it is a significant thing to be born under such a star as this—a comet that comes and goes on such an awe inspiring voyage.

In 1910, as Halley's comet blazed across the skies and a great writer went into the unknown along with the comet with which he had originally arrived, your editor was born. Even before he was out of grade school, your editor wanted to be a writer. He knew nothing of Mark Twain, as a man, but he did

know his stories; Huck Finn was a bosom companion. Perhaps it was no accident that he did become a writer. Perhaps there is something about Halley's comet . . .

But no. That is silly superstition. It just happened that way. But do you know, like Mark Twain we would like to be around to see again the comet of our birth come blazing into the solar system with its message: "There's mystery out here; more to life than you imagine! And I am evidence of it!" Your editor would like, as did Twain, to keep a rendezvous with his star!

Meanwhile, like Mark Twain, we have lived a life filled with strange occurrences. We've come to ask many questions of existence, and we've found some answers. But we want to know more. Ever more and more, because we have a strange feeling that it is important to know more; perhaps because there is a significance to a comet that we don't understand . . . yet. All the things we've experienced, the questions we've had answered, the questions yet to be asked, we want to share with many people. That is one of the whys behind MYSTIC Magazine.

We've written more words than Mark Twain, and had more of them published; but we've never written half so well. We only wish we could! But like him, we want to write what we like to write—and we like to write the sort of thing that you will find in this magazine.

That is another why behind MYSTIC.

The third reason is a peculiar one: We believe very much in the power of the spoken word. There is a tenet in mystic lore which states that there is power in a word uttered aloud. It is the basic behind prayer. A prayer said silently is said to have much less power than one uttered aloud. There is something in the actual creation of the sound waves which aids in bringing about the event prayed for. There is also an old saying: "The word is father to the deed." All these beliefs, of course, come from before the time of printing. We have a feeling that the power of the printed word is even greater than that of the spoken. The printed word has more permanence, and when read, by many it is spoken aloud. Its effect is therefore cumulative. It must indeed be a powerful way of speaking.

Perhaps what we say in MYSTIC, if said in earnestness, in sincerity, and with thought, may have some good effect on this world of ours. Certainly we can strive, if not for the greater things, at least for the lesser. And who can say whether the entertainment of many by means of the storyteller's art is a lesser thing? Therefore, the fundamental basis for the creation of MYSTIC is to give you pleasure.

Some of you may find your pleasure
(Continued on page 43)

INVASION of the



DARK ONES

By
HAL
ANNAS



MYSTIC

We have always been afraid of the dark. Even when we know there is nothing there that wasn't visible in the light. It is because it is much easier to see, with our imagination, the Dark Ones that we suspect might be there, but obviously are not when we can see with our eyes. Is this because the Dark Ones are there? That half-seen thing out of the corner of your eye — was it really not there? Here is a story that dwells on a great truth: that there are dark corridors in our own minds where exist creatures more real than we realize — and a story of how these Dark Ones can come forth to attack!

THE world had gone mad. Ed Driscoll had no doubt about it. His orders were insane. They instructed him to become the bodyguard of a beautiful girl who had supernatural powers, to accompany her to the presence of the gods, observe a few miracles, and then—

That was the part he didn't like. He had gambled, brawled, had his share of demimondaines. He had never sunk to crime. Now he had to commit what he considered the lowest crime imaginable short of treason or attacking a child. He had to kidnap the girl. Not only that, he had to deliver her to an underground room near the White House in Washington. And his orders had come from Sam Millbro who in turn received them from a special committee appointed by members of the United Nations to cooperate with the gods from space.

Gods! Not little green men from

Mars, but gods who could and had endowed an Earthling with extraordinary powers. That was the clincher. The girl herself, he had been told, could perform miracles, could kill him with a gesture.

He didn't believe it. Everybody was nuts but him. Of course the public in general knew nothing about what was going on. Secularity!

He punched the bell button with vigor. The door swung open. The girl stood there, one hand on the knob, the other pressed in the hollow between her pointed breasts. Her features were just as they had been described to him, including the autumn-brown eyes and flame-colored hair, but he wasn't prepared for sight of her amazing figure.

"Come in."

His grey eyes swept her from head to foot. Through the translucent wrap her pink flesh seemed

constantly in motion as though her body were reflected in crystal clear water with smooth wavelets on its surface. He drew a deep breath, moistened his lips with his tongue, entered, dropped his hat on the table and turned.

"I'm Ed Driscoll." He withdrew a hand from an inner pocket. "My identification."

From beneath half-closed lids the brown eyes measured him, seemed to judge his strength. "I'm Vivi van Veck." Her voice was soft, soothing. "You fit the description." She looked down at his hand. As she gently shook her head her hair seemed to flame in reality. "Identification papers mean nothing. In a moment you will accompany me to the gods. Then we will know."

As she moved gracefully to the adjoining room he watched the light play through her garment, realized it was refracted, possibly curved by the material, giving the illusion that the flesh beneath danced in rhythm with her breathing. The sight was disturbing.

Seating himself on the lounge, he glanced about the room. It was large and luxuriously furnished. In addition to an open passage, it had two doorways. He had entered through one; the girl had departed through the other.

She returned in less than three minutes. A red and yellow dress hugged her curves and the high-heels made her at least five feet nine inches tall. The top of her

flamelike head was still a trifle above his shoulders when he rose.

"Close your eyes," she said softly.

"Huh?" He blinked. "Why?"

"Close them and count five—please!"

Driscoll stirred uneasily. He didn't like to be off guard. As though understanding, the girl advanced. Her hand found his. The touch was like velvet.

"Now," she said, "close your eyes and count five."

His fingers closed firmly over her hand. They would let him know, he knew, if she made the slightest move. His lips tolled off the count slowly.

"Open your eyes," she breathed.

He blinked, stared. For a long moment he stood as though rooted, holding his breath.

"You're hurting my hand," the girl said.

He hadn't realized that every muscle in his body had involuntarily contracted. He tried to relax and take in the scene.

It resembled nothing of the girl's apartment in which he had stood while counting. It was a hall acres in area and at the same time no larger than a closet. It had two sets of furniture, one gigantic, the other doll-size, and yet they were both the same. He couldn't grasp it.

"It's the perspective," the girl whispered. "I should've warned you. It has two perspectives. One is near and one is far and they blend and actually are the same.

Call it another dimension if you wish. But prepare yourself. The gods are coming."

Where they came from was not clear. One moment he and the girl were alone and then the gods stood before them. They were like humans in appearance. He tried to count them, failed, felt confused. They were the size of men and they were the size of dolls. The perspective. It was like looking at men and women several blocks away and the same men and women close at hand.

He heard talk in a strange language, and it, too, was close at hand and a distant echo without a time lag.

His mind whirled. Unearthly thoughts intruded as if probing and sorting the components of his mental make-up. Some of the thoughts were unpleasant. They seemed to seize upon his sense of reality and shred it and refashion it in a new pattern.

What appeared to be an aged man stood directly before him. His words were meaningless echoes from beyond evoking pictures and concepts in Driscoll's mind. He had no trouble translating the concepts and pictures.

"Doubt is the beginning of wisdom," said the god. "It is Uncertainty seeking Truth. The Believer closes the door to new knowledge. In every Certainty there is room for Doubt. So long as it remains, Doubt will seek Truth. Cease now to believe in mental limitations

bounded by physical science."

Driscoll realized it was true that the boundaries of man were his beliefs.

"Darklings hold the minds of your planet," the god went on. "They make you believe that war, disease and trouble are man's lot. In another millennium you might overcome them unaided. But the Darklings have led astray one of us. On this planet walks a god influenced by all the things you call Evil. We have come to find him. The mortal woman with you has been chosen to aid us. You have been chosen to protect her. Your fidelity will determine whether the planet shall be rid of the Darklings."

Driscoll had not moved. His mind had stopped whirling and come to a focus. There was a rational explanation for all of this, he believed. He was conscious of the girl at his side, her hand scarcely an inch from his. Out of the corner of an eye he saw the look of intense concentration on her features. She too, he thought, sought an answer.

"In due course you will learn all things that you need to know," the god added. "We have entrusted to the woman at your side two objects of great power. They will enable her to locate and recognize the lost god. Guard her well. Should harm befall her, or should you betray her, your life shall be forfeit."

There was a pause. Then; "Close your eyes. Count five."

Driscoll hesitated. The girl's hand crept into his. He closed his eyes. When he opened them he was back in her apartment and what had happened seemed a trifle vague as if he had dreamed it.

"I'll get you a drink," she said, withdrawing her hand.

He needed it more than he dared admit. And as he fingered the vial in his pocket he remembered the warning. He also remembered his orders. Included in them was the information that reliable intelligence about the gods was vital to the United Nations. The security of the planet was at stake. It was hoped that much could be learned by questioning the girl under drugs.

Driscoll didn't like it. He liked least of all the role he had to play. He understood the difficulty of obtaining intelligence about beings who could whisk mortals out of their presence at the count of five. But he didn't want to betray the girl. The warning that it would cost his life was not his sole objection. Of that he was not entirely convinced. His other reason was not well defined, but was connected with his sense of honesty as well as with some deep-rooted drive stirring in his subconscious.

"Where," he asked when she returned with the drinks, "are the gods located?"

"In this building. With the exception of this apartment, they have this entire floor."

"How did they convince the au-

thorities?"

"They convinced some scientists and they in turn convinced the members of the United Nations. I don't believe they've been accepted as gods. But they obviously aren't ordinary humans, and I think the general idea is to cooperate and study them."

"You believe in them?"

She nodded. "I believe facts. Call them gods or superscientists, it alters nothing. They can do things contrary to natural laws as we understand them. That makes them supernatural."

"You communicate with them mentally?"

She bent forward, parted her thick hair. Close against her scalp was a tiny diadem. "Touch it if you wish," she said. "But don't pull it loose."

Her hair was like silk to his touch. "Is that how you communicate with them? Through that thing?"

"I don't really communicate with them. They communicate with me. I feel a faint prickling under that little crown which, you'll admit, is a nice piece of jewelry. I obey the thought that comes at that moment."

"Then the gods must read your mind?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Do you think they can read mine?"

"Yes."

"Then they know I'm getting ready to kidnap you? They know

I've emptied a vial in your drink and that in another moment you'll be unconscious."

There was a long moment of tense silence. The autumn-brown eyes gazed steadily into his. Then she said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know why I switched our drinks. But you've drunk only half of yours. Maybe I can get enough coffee into you—" She seized his hand. "Hurry!"

Confused and with dimming awareness, he followed her to the kitchen. She asked questions: "Where were you to take me? When? And what is to happen there?" And he answered to the best of his ability.

The coffee helped, but his eyelids became heavier and heavier. A soothing lassitude stole over his body. His muscles refused to obey his commands. He felt her tugging at him as his head sank toward the table.

HE was in the underground room near the White House, not knowing how he got there, watching, while the girl counted herself down into drugged automatism. She stopped counting at thirteen. She was neither asleep nor awake.

The huge man in the white smock withdrew the needle. The horse-faced nurse glanced at the younger and more comely nurse who held a second syringe in case it was needed. Two muscular and alert men sat one on either side of

Driscoll on the second couch. In a straight chair, nervous and fidgety, and keeping his eyes on the wire-recorder on the table, sat a thin bespectacled man.

The man on Driscoll's right looked at the man in the smock. "How about it, Doctor?" he said.

The doctor lowered his voice. "I advise that you refrain from unnecessary comments," he said. "You might implant suggestions. Confine yourself to questions. And no talking at all aside from questioning the girl."

The man rose from beside Driscoll and stood over the girl. His voice was even and well modulated.

"Tell us what happened at your apartment," he said.

The doctor touched his arm. "Questions," he said. "Not positive statements."

The man nodded. "What happened in your apartment?"

The girl's voice was hoarse and a trifle thick. "I tried to revive Mr. Driscoll. Then the thought came that he was suggestible and would obey commands."

"Did the thought seem to be stimulated by the diadem?"

"Yes."

"What happened then?"

"I began to understand that I must come here and allow you to question me."

"Why?"

"Because you might otherwise cease to cooperate with the gods and that would mean the planet was doomed."

"You made this concession solely to get cooperation?"

Again the doctor touched his arm and repeated, "Questions. Phrase them as questions, not statements."

"Why did you make this concession?" the man corrected.

"I made no concession," the girl said. "Neither did the gods. They gave me to understand you are children and must be humored."

"What do the gods want on Earth?"

"They must find one of their own who has been led astray by the Darklings."

"What will happen if they don't find the lost god?"

"I don't know. I gather that it's a test of power between them and the Darklings. The thought that the Darklings might win gives me a feeling of terror and gloom. I get a vision of chaos, murder, pillage, insanity and unimaginable destruction."

"What is your task?"

"I am to find the lost god. I will receive instructions as to what to do."

"How about Mr. Driscoll? Do you feel that he has betrayed you?"

"No. Neither do the gods. He was bound by his orders. He had to empty the vial in my drink. To do anything less would have been betrayal to his superiors. That proved him trustworthy. But he must not again be bound by orders. He must be free to carry out the task the gods have given him."

"And that task is to protect you?"

The doctor again placed a hand on his shoulder, but the man shook it off.

"Yes," said the girl. "He must prevent my being killed before I find the lost god. After that, what happens to me will cease to be important. He must then return the god to the beings from space."

"And you're in danger?"

"Yes."

"From what?"

"The Darklings. They may be in this room at this moment."

Driscoll felt a prickling along his spine. He glanced about apprehensively. He noted that, with the exception of the doctor and nurses, the others did likewise.

"Can you tell us anything," the man went on, "of how you're going about finding the lost god?"

"Only this: tomorrow you must have a long-range jet stratoliner ready to fly on a moment's notice. It must have sufficient fuel to cross the continent with a stop in Death Valley."

"But you can't get into Death Valley. That's where the spaceship landed. Some sort of field of force keeps planes from coming near."

"I know nothing of that. I know only that you must have the jet-plane ready."

"We'll check with Sam Millbro. Anything else you can tell us?"

"Only this: I knew all your questions in advance. I knew what I was supposed to answer. You must cease now. I am in danger. I

must recover quickly from the drugs."

The two men, who had sat beside Driscoll, looked at each other. The one who had done the questioning turned to the doctor.

"Can you give her some sort of countershot?"

The doctor was slow about replying. "Might make her nervous. Best to let the drug wear off of itself."

"But she said she was in danger."

The doctor put on his bedside manner. "She's tired. Her fear probably comes from nagging questions and having so many people about her. It's a plain case of Messiah Complex with a touch of paranoia. I advise that she be confined in an institution and given proper treatment."

The man turned to Driscoll. "Take her back to her apartment and stay on guard."

The doctor said, "I shall send two nurses. If she suffers hallucinations during the night they will call me."

"I don't think you should do that."

"I know what's best for the patient."

The man shrugged, said to Driscoll, "You two must've come here in a taxi. My car is parked near. I'll drop you off at the apartment. And I'll leave two men downstairs."

THE warning seemed to come from a distance and at the same

time from the room in which the girl lay sleeping. It hammered inside of Driscoll's head. But he could not force himself awake.

He lay on the sofa a few steps away from the bedroom. The deep carpet between him and the door seemed depressed in two places as though an invisible being stood there. The rose light about him shimmered as if sparkling dust had been sprayed into it. The entire room seemed unreal to his sleep-fogged mind.

Turning sluggishly, as if a great weight restrained him, he felt of the sofa, the silken pillow, of his own clothes, and with great effort forced himself up from the unreal depths, sought to drive back the fog of illusion.

His mind would not come clear. Inside his head the hammers of alarm bells seemed to throb; the carpet remained depressed; the air shimmered; the unreality became real.

The depressions in the carpet moved. The nap in one of the depressions sprang erect as though a foot had been lifted. Four feet away it depressed again. This repeated twice, thrice as though an invisible person walked. The footsteps stopped before the door behind which the girl slept.

A gland in Driscoll's neck throbbled, poured a stimulant into his bloodstream. Slowly but definitely he came awake, despite something which still pressed down and sought to hold him in the

foggy depths.

"The Darklings!"

The words echoed silently through his mind. They seemed to have no point of origin, but to belong to a former life or to something apart from here and now.

"Darklings!"

The single word brought a warning to his heart, caused it to hammer furiously, and the warning raced through his body in the wake of the stimulant that came from the gland.

With a final mighty effort he shook himself free of the clutching fog and came up from the sofa like a steel spring. In a single leap he was across the room, before the door that led to the sleeping girl. His hands swept the space above the imprints, felt nothing.

Like a man in a crazy house confused by mirror illusions, he drew back, studied the imprints, tried to orient his thoughts, to separate imagining from reality. He kneeled and felt the impressions. The nap was crushed down precisely as though a person stood there. Nothing was visible directly above.

Cautiously he rapped on the bedroom door. A moment passed and the knob turned and the dark head of a young nurse appeared.

"Is everything all right?" he asked anxiously.

She smiled, said, "You're lonesome?"

He swore under his breath. "Is everything all right?" he repeated.

"I'm all right," she smiled.

"Let me look again at the patient and then I'll leave the door open and come out and sit with you."

The nurse withdrew, leaving the door open. He continued staring into the room. Seconds passed before his eyes became adjusted to the shaded light so that he could see the shape of the girl outlined by the silken coverlet. She lay on her right side, facing him, left hand on top the cover, her hair spread in an unmoving flame across the pillow.

And then he saw, as though from the depths of a dream and at the same time with startling clarity and reality, the imprints march into the room and to the bed.

It came to him like the first sharp pain from the lancet as the surgeon cuts out a piece of imbedded matter that whatever it was had tricked him into getting the door open.

He hurried into the room. The nurse turned startled brown eyes on him. Vivi sighed in her sleep. He watched the coverlet sink at one point as though a hand rested there while someone leaned over the bed.

Indecision lasted but a second. He placed a hand on Vivi's shoulder, shook.

"No," the nurse cried. "She's taken something. She won't wake."

He glared at the nurse. "Do you see that?" He pointed at the imprint.

The nurse frowned. "A beauti-

ful young girl in bed asleep. I suppose it does stir something in such robust men as you. But you'd better get out. I'm taking good care of her."

"I must take her out of here," Driscoll said.

"Don't be silly," the nurse replied. "What you need is a sedative. Go outside and I'll come and keep you company."

Driscoll watched the second imprint appear as though a second hand had been placed on the bed to enable whoever or whatever it supported to lean closer. He turned to the nurse to learn if she had seen. She was staring at him.

"Look!" he said, pointing.

She glanced at the bed, back at him. "She hasn't got anything that I haven't. Go on out. I'll fix you a drink."

Driscoll moved to the wall, pressed the light switch, blinked. The nurse blinked and watched him.

"Something is standing there leaning over her," he said, pointing at the imprints in the carpet.

The nurse placed a hand on his arm, smiled, "The doctor would call it wishful fantasies. Come along with nursie and get a nice big drink and she'll let you lean over her."

"Don't you see those imprints?"

"Spots in front of your eyes, huh? I'll call the doctor and he'll come right away. I have his unlisted number. He thought I might need to call him."

"Where's the other nurse?"

"Sleeping in the next bedroom. There wasn't any reason for both of us to stay awake at the same time. I'll call her and she'll make coffee."

"I must get Miss van Veck out of here."

"You mustn't touch her. And we mustn't talk in here. You must go outside."

Driscoll leaned over the bed, shook Vivi.

The nurse seized his arm, pulled. "Don't disturb the patient. If you don't get out I'll have to call someone to help me."

Ignoring the nurse, Driscoll carefully worked his arms underneath Vivi, lifted, bedclothes and all. The nurse gasped, snatched open the door to the adjoining room, screamed, "He's attacking the patient! He's attacking the patient!"

Carrying Vivi, he went back to the room he had quitted, made certain the imprints were still in the bedroom, and drew the door shut. He placed her gently on the sofa, glanced about, saw no sign of the imprints.

Both nurses stormed from the bedroom, leaving the door open. Driscoll leaped to close the door, and as he did so he saw the imprints come marching into the room.

"Don't you see those things?" he said to the nurses.

They didn't even look down. One picked up the telephone while the

other bent over Vivi.

Driscoll pushed the nurse aside, again picked up the sleeping girl, carried her back to the bedroom, closed the door after him. Before he could place her on the bed the younger nurse came in, leaving the door open. The imprints came behind her.

"Dammit!" Driscoll swore. "If you'd leave the door shut I wouldn't have to move her again."

The older nurse came into the bedroom. "Don't dare touch that patient again," she warned peremptorily. "You may be important in your own business, but that patient is in our charge, and in a moment someone will be here to restrain you."

Driscoll knew the futility of trying to explain. He picked up Vivi, shook the nurses off, went into the second bedroom, drew the door shut and held it. He ignored the screaming and pounding on the door, and as soon as they stopped carried the girl to the bed and gently lowered her.

A second door opened and the older nurse stormed through the doorway, came to the side of the girl, leaned over her. Driscoll hurried to close the door, saw no imprints, but before he could accomplish his purpose and return to the bed the door to the first bedroom opened and this time the imprints came in with the younger nurse.

"Goddamn people who won't close doors!" he snarled. "I'm taking the girl back into the other

bedroom."

"You're doing no such thing," the older nurse snapped.

"Maybe we'd better humor him," said the other.

"Keep quiet a minute," Driscoll ordered. "I'm taking her back. You may come in there if you'll close the door before those imprints get through the doorway."

The nurses looked at one another, nodded knowingly as though to say, "A violent obsession. Sidetrack it till help comes."

"We'll take her in there," the older said. "You stay here. Somebody will come soon to keep you company."

And then Driscoll saw another phenomenon. The imprints moved toward the door to the first bedroom as though to take advantage of whatever decision was made.

He held up a hand to stop the nurses. They were already lifting the girl between them. He knew he had to outwit both the nurses and the thing pursuing the sleeping girl. He would not get any help or cooperation. And somebody soon would come to see that he didn't accomplish his purpose.

Watching the imprints, he placed himself across the doorway. The nurses, carrying the girl, started toward him.

"Through the other doorway," he ordered.

Instantly the imprints turned to go in that direction.

"Go on before I kick you," Driscoll snarled at the nurses.

They hurried through the other doorway. He was right behind them, slammed the door. The imprints were still here, now turned back toward the first bedroom. He didn't reach that door in time to close it, but went through the doorway with the imprints, hurried to the second door, slammed it.

"Put her on the sofa," he called to the nurses. "And if either of you opens another door I'll lift your skirt and take your pants down and tan the broadest part of your body."

He turned back to the imprints. "Now," he said, "goddamn your tricky shadow! Come up to visibility or I'm going to set you afire."

AND all the time he was carrying me back and forth," said Vivi, "I was trying to scream, 'Fire. Threaten to burn it.' But I couldn't make my lips move, my tongue work."

"What gave you an illusion like that?" asked the doctor.

The man who had questioned Vivi in the underground room pushed the doctor aside, said, "Has she recovered from the effect of the drugs?"

The doctor nodded. "Possibly some complication—"

"Then get out and get those nurses out of here," the man interrupted. "We'll ask the questions without further supervision."

"But that patient—"

"Is no longer a patient. Get out

and take the nurses with you."

The doctor and the nurses neither hurried nor delayed. Instead of taking offense, the doctor seemed tolerantly amused, but the nurses kept their noses in the air, secure in their own thoughts that everyone in the room was crazy except them. They left the door open as they departed.

Driscoll closed the door and returned to Vivi's side.

"Now," said the other man, "can you tell us what made you want to scream 'Fire'?"

The girl parted the red hair above her forehead, revealed the diadem. Driscoll bent over her as did the other man.

"Did they shave part of your head?" the man asked.

"No," Vivi said. "They didn't remove a hair. But it rests against the scalp."

"How is it fastened?"

"Pull on it. Wait! Let Edward—I mean, Mr. Driscoll. He has a very light touch, and it mustn't come loose."

"What holds it?"

"It has some attraction of its own. I've had it off once, but have been warned not to remove it more than three times. It breaks some sort of connection. Do you want me to remove it now?"

The man shook his head. "I'd rather not do any tampering. Do you know what that invisible creature was after?"

"Not exactly. I know it terrified me. When it leaned over me the

first time I thought Edward would never get there. I thought I was going to suffocate."

"You think something would have happened if he hadn't brought you out?"

"I'm positive of it. Something horrible."

"Do you think that creature influenced the nurses and later the doctor?"

"I don't know. I got the impression everyone but Edward was doing what it wanted."

The man turned to Driscoll. "What happened after you threatened to burn it?"

"It became visible."

"You saw it? What was it?"

Driscoll weighed his words carefully. "Just a dark outline. The point is it took on substance when it became visible. When I swung at it, it leaped back and knocked the table over."

"Did you manage to get in a blow at all?"

"I landed all right. When I got it pinned against the wall and let it have one my fist sank up past my wrist. It was like hitting something inflated with air."

"Did it fight back?"

"Not in the way a human would. Something like air pressure kept striking me. Not light blows. They were enough to knock me off balance. And it seemed to be sucking the breath out of my lungs."

"Did you think it was winning—that it would wear you down?"

"I felt that it was weakening,

especially after I got it against the wall. I can't be positive I was hurting it before that because it was just like hitting into a stream of compressed air."

"But when you got it against the wall you nailed it?"

"Pretty hard. I thought it had been riding with my blows and I knew I had it where it couldn't back up and so I uncorked a couple."

"Did you feel you had hurt it bad?"

"That was the impression I got. I thought it was slumping and the thing that stood out in my mind was to get out my lighter and burn it."

"Then what happened?"

"That was when the doctor came in with those nurses. They all grabbed me."

"Couldn't they see this thing?"

"Apparently not. When I nailed it against the wall it stopped being visible. That's the reason I wanted to burn it, to make it become visible again."

"And the doctor and nurses jumped on you?"

"They thought I'd lost my mind. Wanted to keep me from hurting myself."

"I'm glad you didn't uncork one at the doctor."

"So am I. But I was boiling and I did rough them up a little. If you hadn't come at that moment someone might've got hurt."

"No harm done. I think the doctor was proud he could stand up

to a man like you. But to get back: that was the last you saw of that thing?"

"Yes. And there are no imprints about. I've been waiting to ask if you left the door open when you came from the corridor."

"No. But I know how it got open. One of the nurses ran to the door to scream for help when you were roughing up the doctor. That's probably when the thing escaped."

"We still don't know how it got in."

"I think we do. There are two entrances to this apartment. Two nurses were on duty. They watched in turns. One went back to the second bedroom where she would be within call. Maybe she decided to step out for something, cigaret, drink, anything. That's the way it figures."

"Did you ask them?"

The man shook his head. "No use to put them on the spot. They don't know what it's all about. Nothing has been explained to the general public."

"What do we do now?"

The girl broke in, "I don't know what you two have in mind, but I'm going back to the kitchen and cook breakfast. Shall I make it for three?"

Driscoll nodded. The other man grinned. "From this moment on," he said, "I cease to be simply a government man. Call me Boxer. The last name is Winslow."

"Boxer?" Vivi lifted an eyebrow.

"Comes from Boxley. My par-

ents had a dog named Boxer. It got killed by a car. They named me Boxley after the dog. They even liked me as well as the dog and soon began calling me Boxer. It's been both a handicap and an asset. Had it been different I might have been treated like any child and not received the special treatment a dog gets. I might have turned out to be average."

"You aren't average?" Vivi asked.

"No more so than Driscoll. You can't be average and hold our jobs. There's no point in concealing it longer. We're both Intelligence Operatives in the State Department of the United States Government. I suppose you know what that means?"

"No. What does it?"

"Our job is to keep the State Department informed well in advance of enemy action."

"Dangerous?"

"Not a bit of it. A spy is promptly executed except in this country. All we have to do to remain alive is never make a mistake. We aren't going to make one with you. I'm on this job with Driscoll now."

"Spying on me?"

"By no means. We're convinced you're sincere. Our job is to help you."

"In that case I'll fix breakfast for three."

They followed her to the kitchen.

Boxer stopped suddenly. "Would you know if that thing is near?"

"Not unless I was fighting it."

"I think I would," Vivi said. "If it threatened me—" She paused, stood in a listening attitude. The color drained from her features. Then: "Hurry!" She raised her voice. "Something terrible is closing in on us. She seemed to listen again. "We must get to the plane. We haven't a moment to lose."

Driscoll turned in a circle, studying ever niche in the room. Boxer stared at the girl. She trembled.

"Okay," Boxer said. "I've a car downstairs and a good man at the wheel. If you say go—we go."

Driscoll brought up the rear, reluctant to leave the apartment. He felt a tingling in his body and an itching in his palms. His hands involuntarily knotted into fists. He noticed that Boxer had unbuttoned his jacket and that his left shoulder hunched forward. It meant that he was cleared for action, that he could get to that shoulder holster in a split second.

Nothing visible followed them, but Driscoll experienced the uneasy feeling that their every move was watched by some alien presence awaiting a propitious time to strike. Nor did the feeling leave him as the heavy car carried them to Bolling Field.

THE jetplane rose on multiple plumes of vapor, preceded its sound across the sky, almost held its own in a westward race with the sun.

Boxer leaned across the aisle

and spoke to Driscoll. "Forget about orders for a moment. They're flexible and we can use our own judgment. The thing to keep in mind is what we're going to see."

"The spaceship?" Driscoll said. "Why haven't men seen it already?"

"Some sort of light-distortion field." Boxer nodded toward the girl. "She thinks they'll drop it when we approach. But she doesn't know what's going to happen. That's the question. Why do they want us at the spaceship?"

Driscoll studied briefly. "She said she got the impression something important is to take place there."

"Yes. But what? I don't like to walk into something blind. I trust the girl, but not enough information is coming through. We don't know what the gods are planning and we don't know what the United Nations is going to do. We're pawns in something gigantic, the biggest thing ever to happen on the planet. That means we are expendable."

"You forgot to mention the Darklings."

"Yeah. It's because they don't seem real to me. I'm not doubting your word, but I haven't bumped up against them. I get a cold feeling that maybe they are hallucinations or some mental smoke-screen to cover up something else."

"They're real to me."

"Yeah. But can you be certain you weren't under hypnosis?"

Driscoll looked out the window. Fleecy vapor flashed past near at hand. In the distance great banks of clouds drifted slowly. Miles below, the earth seemed unmoving.

Turning back, he said, "I can't be sure of anything. There's nothing to get a grip on. I'm beginning to understand why the public hasn't been informed. What we're doing is insane. We aren't functioning as rational people. And the thing goes all the way to the top. The world has suddenly gone mad."

"And you and I are pawns moved by madmen."

"That's how it seems. But we're trying to bring some sanity into the thing. We're learning a little with each effort. We may be pawns and expendable, but in time we should be able to put the pieces of this thing in order. Our job is to collect data and protect the girl. I confess I'm looking forward to each new step, especially to seeing that spaceship."

Boxer remained silent. The girl dozed or sat in silent meditation in the seat ahead. Driscoll looked at her from time to time. A faint uneasiness stirred in his chest. She had not taken time to dress. With a white silken wrap about her, she was still in pajamas. The shoulder-length fiery hair had not been brushed. She was a picture of primitive abandon. The thought was disturbing.

The plane seemed to move silently, but left thunder in its wake.

A hand touched Driscoll's shoulder. "That round ball," Boxer said. "It's more than a hundred miles away. Look just under the inboard motor. It looks green from here, like a small planet."

Driscoll studied the sphere as it grew in size. His breathing became labored.

"A planetoid!" he exclaimed. "An artificial planetoid. Why haven't we thought of that? Earth itself is a spaceship. Why not make one like it in a small way?"

"But how would you keep the atmosphere from escaping?"

"It probably has a tremendous amount of artificial gravity. And maybe they have some means of pulling the atmosphere inside when they come within reach of a planet. Think of it? A planetoid. They can travel forever in space."

"But how's it powered?"

"Who knows? The idea is terrific. With dense atmosphere to reflect their own manufactured heat and light, they have a closed system, independent of a sun, and with power can go anywhere."

"Maybe you're right. Maybe we've been going at the spaceship idea the hard way. Our planet is a perfect model, but chained to the sun by gravity and our need for sunrays to sustain life. We'll learn something down there."

"Don't get your hopes up. This jet job sets down at well above a hundred and needs a runway. No

place down there to land."

At that moment the speaker in the forward bulkhead blared: "Pilot to Mr. Winslow. The control surfaces have ceased to cut. The radio has stopped working. We're in a long glide headed straight for that sphere. We can't pull up. We're idling the motors."

Vivi turned round in her seat. "Tell him not to fight the controls," she said. "I'm in contact. Our descent is controlled from the spaceship."

It was the strangest landing ever made by an airplane on Earth. Of that Driscoll was certain. The plane lost flying speed, but didn't fall off and go plunging out of control. It held steady, and in the last seconds came down vertically on top of the sphere which appeared to be two thousand feet in diameter.

The bulkhead to the pilot's compartment opened and the pilot appeared breathing hard. "I've been holding my breath," he gasped. "We're down on our belly, but don't ask how we did it. I don't know."

The trio unbuckled their straps. Vivi spoke, "Everybody must stay in the plane except Edward and me. We must go outside."

Boxer said, "I don't like it." He brought a hand from beneath his arm, thrust a heavy automatic at Driscoll. "If you get in trouble fire two shots. I don't know what I can do, but will try to do something. I've another gun and both

the pilot and co-pilot are armed."

Driscoll preceded the girl out of the plane, waited. Her hand crept into his and then he knew she was trembling.

"This way," she said, leading him round the nose of the plane.

They went ten more paces and froze to a halt. To them it seemed they were on top of a hill two thousand feet in height. Underfoot seemed to be ordinary grass-grown earth. The thing that brought them to a stop was the realization that the hill grew steeper and steeper and finally vertical. They could not walk far, they realized, before they began sliding.

At that moment the heads of creatures like humans appeared above the horizon. Shoulders and bodies came into view, and then Driscoll understood. To them the center of gravity was the center of the sphere. They didn't lean forward to come uphill, but walked upright as though on level ground.

Then the double perspective went into effect and the illusion of being on top of a hill vanished. They seemed to be on level ground—on another planet. And this time Driscoll got the illusion that he himself was a giant and at the same time a midget. By imagining he was on a planet he felt that he was a midget. By imagining he was on a planetoid he felt that he was a giant.

From inside his head came the order, "Close your eyes." Vivi's hand came up to touch his eyelids,

and the next he knew he was inside a room with a turquoise motif and lighted by a golden glow which had no visible source. He knew he was inside the spaceship, but didn't know how he knew.

From beside him Vivi spoke, "I know now that this is the final preparation. Here we will be given new powers and knowledge. Please don't rebel. Let yourself be guided. The gods come."

Precisely what happened was not clear. The beings came from somewhere and from then on Driscoll moved as in a dream. It seemed that he was powerless to govern his own actions.

Vivi was led away and he was surrounded by dreamlike creatures, ethereal until he concentrated on one, and then that one became startlingly real and sentient. The others did not vanish but remained dreamlike until his attention shifted to one or more of them. It was as though he were among shimmering shadows which took on substance in coordination with some whim of his mind. But he could not direct the process consciously.

They danced about him and his surroundings changed to a vast garden, fragrant and beautiful, in the center of which was a sparkling pool. He was nude and swimming in the pool, feeling that he was one with the nymphs about him, and the sense of his flesh was one of exhilaration without the confusion of desire.

And then he was sleepily lying on a couch and it seemed that something was cutting into the side of his neck. His temples itched. His body was without volition and he could not so much as move an eyelid of his own will.

Terrified screams shrieked about him. His involuntary senses informed him of the proximity of horror and madness, but strive as he would he could not move. Inside him a terrific tension, an accumulation of chained energy, built up until it seemed he would burst.

How long he remained paralyzed was a question he could not answer. Time seemed suspended. The identical horror seemed to go on and on interminably. Then he was free and it seemed that he had been free all the time but unable to make the decision to act. He acted now.

Leaping off the couch, he plunged through a curtained archway into a room of grotesque shadows. A new and more terrifying shock came. Vivi was there, supine on a high table. A man stood over her with a knife raised and ready to plunge into her throat.

Driscoll's movements never paused from the moment he left the couch until he swung with all his might at the man standing over Vivi. The blow, he knew, should have broken the man's jaw and neck. But the man simply melted away.

Vivi leaped up. "It was a test,"

she cried. "They were testing your new powers."

He knew then that he would be warned when she was in danger. The warning would come with a cutting pain in his neck, increasing the adrenalin flow, and an itching in his temples to stimulate wakeful sensitivity. He knew now that he was attuned, mentally and physically, to the girl.

The thought troubled him, brought new unrest, for he had already been drawn toward Vivi more than he had ever been drawn toward another, and it required both mental and physical energy to resist the attraction, to keep his thoughts on the task ahead, and to remain alert. He became dynamically eager to get the job done.

They returned to the plane which was then launched as strangely as it had landed. It lifted vertically five thousand feet and then went westward on its own motors.

AT the airport near Los Angeles they took a taxi to midtown. In the shop district Vivi instructed the driver to halt. "I want to get some clothes," she said. With Boxer on one side and Driscoll on the other, she started toward an entrance. Halfway there Driscoll felt a sharp cutting pain in his neck, and itching in his temples.

Twisting his neck, he tried to look in every direction, saw no

sign of danger. He was reassured by the sight of a police officer who was giving them more than ordinary attention, but the pain increased in intensity and the itching became an annoying irritant.

The sudden movement of the officer galvanized Driscoll's energy. He swung Vivi behind him, rushed the officer as the gun came out of the holster. There was a sudden clap of close thunder and then he had the officer's arm in a powerful grip. He broke it at the elbow.

Other officers appeared; a crowd gathered. Driscoll demanded, "Why did you try to shoot me?"

The officer shook his head as in a daze. "I wasn't trying to shoot you. I was trying to shoot that monster behind you." He pointed at Vivi.

The other officers shook their heads, took down the names of witnesses. Boxer showed his identification and vouched for Driscoll and Vivi.

Vivi said, "They're closing in again. The Darklings! They grip the minds of the crowd. They'll turn into a mob in a moment. We must get away."

They hurried back to the taxi. The driver was standing on the sidewalk. He refused to carry them farther. "There was a shot fired." He pointed at Driscoll's jacket. "It clipped you under the right arm. Stay out of my cab. You're on the spot. I'm a married man with children. I don't want to get mixed up in nothing."

As Driscoll looked back the mob surged toward them. He turned to Boxer, nodded. Boxer rammed his own gun against the driver's side, said, "Get in and drive."

"Are you hurt?" Vivi asked as Driscoll seated himself beside her.

"Don't think so."

She probed the ripped and scorched place in his jacket until she was certain he had not been wounded.

Looking back from the front seat, Boxer demanded to know where she wanted the driver to take them.

"Toward Hollywood," she said. "I don't know the exact place yet."

Sometime later she told the driver to turn left and stop in front of the tabernacle. As they got out Boxer handed the driver a ten-dollar bill and then another. "For the wife and kids," he said.

Driscoll pointed to the assemblage before the tabernacle. "I don't like it," he said.

"Neither do I," Boxer put in. "Another mob. And that guy in the robe is performing miracles. Look! That old lady. A minute ago she could hardly hobble and looked as if she were dying. Now she's standing up straight. And that expression on her face! As if she'd received a divine revelation."

As Driscoll watched, the miracles went on and on. There was nothing really remarkable about them. They were the kind of miracles any seasoned emotion monger could perform among the

devout. A stiff knee, rheumatism in the joints, and like ailments, Driscoll knew, could be banished with an emotional upsurge. It happened every day in cult-ridden Los Angeles. He couldn't understand why Vivi was interested.

She was staring at the setting of a ring on her right thumb. Earlier he had thought it was an opal. Now its center glowed. A figure took shape within the glow. It had two perspectives.

Driscoll gasped. "It's alive," he breathed. "It's the same as the man in the robe."

Vivi nodded. "We've found the lost god. We must work closer."

He followed apprehensively as she worked through the gathering and approached the man in the robe. Boxer went ahead of her and opened a path. A hymn that evoked memories was being sung. The miracles went on with machine-like regularity. The god seemed never to fail.

As Vivi drew near, the eyes of the god lifted, burned brightly. He studied her as though struck by her remarkable beauty.

The itching began in both of Driscoll's temples. The cutting pain throbbed in his neck. His vision flashed from one to another in the gathering in effort to single out the one or many who threatened the girl. Nowhere did he see a person who looked as though he might offer harm.

The warning persisted with maddening intensity.

Vivi moved still closer under the watchful eyes of the god. The crowd fell back, to get a look at Vivi, to look where the eyes of the god looked.

A hush came over the gathering. There had been singing and murmuring and breathing and now there was no sound. A tomb could have given forth no more silence. A pause in the midst of a play could not have been more dramatic. The god and the multitude looked at Vivi, and there was stillness.

Driscoll stood in agonized quiet, nerves alert, muscles quivering.

The god lifted a fine artistic hand and pointed. He could not have made a more startling gesture. His hand stretched toward Vivi. An accusing finger pointed with an air of condemnation.

"Behold! My betrayer!"

The words, in a fine rich tone, were like a voice from beyond. They hung in the air as music, vibrant with accusation, but lacking in indignation or any of the small emotions common to men who have been wronged.

"Behold! They have come armed as against a thief."

It was then that Driscoll understood that he was among the accused. The pointing finger included him and Boxer.

Terrible doubt came into his mind. It flowed with the flood of adrenalin through his body. It brought a moment of total and

nearly fatal indecision. Almost too late he turned his back to Vivi, faced the gathering. He knew Boxer had done the same on the other side.

Murmuring ran through the crowd. Those behind pushed forward; those near at hand remained in indecision. And then the mob cry broke:

"Kill them!"

The action, for which Driscoll's body ached, came swiftly. Smashing right and left with more than ordinary strength, he knocked three men down, one after the other, and cleared a space about him. He might have plunged into the gathering itself had not Boxer followed his own training in dealing with mobs. The echoing of Boxer's gun as he fired into the air brought a cessation of hostilities.

"Cops!" somebody yelled, and others took it up.

At the sound of those frantic words the mob dispersed. The faithful deserted their god as other faithful had done two millennia in the past.

On the way to the police station Driscoll experienced shame. Peaceful people had been gathered together and he and those with him had brought among them strife, had no doubt shaken their faith.

Boxer had no difficulty arranging for their freedom, but it required more time to arrange to take the god in charge. Communi-

cation with Washington finally accomplished it.

"What now?" Driscoll asked of Vivi.

"We return to Washington."

AS they drove in the police car to the airport, Driscoll wondered. The man they had taken seemed harmless. He had not been disturbing the peace or doing anything wrong in curing his flock of their minor ailments. The thought came that he, Boxer and Vivi were making a mistake in delivering him to the beings from space.

This brooding seemed contagious. In the plane, Vivi showed signs of nervousness. Across the aisle from Driscoll, she continued twisting to look at the god who sat quietly beside Boxer. Driscoll kept one eye on her while the other tried to close.

She continued squirming. And each time her autumn-brown eyes flashed toward the god they paused to study Driscoll's features. And each time she seemed as though she were going to lean toward him and confide something.

Driscoll remained troubled. He couldn't banish from his thoughts the longing she evoked and could envision no safe opportunity to fan the flame of that longing. He knew he had to concentrate on the task ahead, or someone might die for his neglect.

When she turned toward him again he closed his eyes and opened

them. It seemed that not more than two seconds could have elapsed in the interval. She had been sitting across the aisle. When he opened his eyes she was standing over him, a look of terror on her features.

"Are you all right?" she gasped.

Boxer came forward, said, "What's the trouble?"

Driscoll stared from one to the other. "What's coming off?" he demanded.

"Something happened to you," Vivi said. "While you were asleep."

"I haven't been asleep."

"You must've been asleep," Vivi insisted. "I shook you. Your face was black. It seemed all the light had gone out of you and something come in its place."

Driscoll studied her eyes. "Are you sure you weren't suffering hallucinations?"

Vivi appealed to Boxer. "Wasn't he asleep?"

Boxer shrugged. "I saw you shaking him. I couldn't see his face at the time. He looks all right now."

"I haven't been asleep," Driscoll said.

Vivi and Boxer exchanged a look. "Okay," Boxer said. "You weren't asleep. Just had your mind on something. It took her a couple minutes to shake you out of it."

"How long?"

"A minute, anyway. She'd been standing over you over a minute before I decided to come up and

find out what had happened."

Driscoll glanced out the window, back at Vivi, at Boxer. "Do you think something could be monkey-ing up our minds?" he asked. Then: "Where's the god?"

Boxer whirled, turned back slowly. "It's all right," he said. "You can't walk off from an airplane in flight. He's probably gone to the washroom. I'll give him a minute and then stroll back."

"Learning anything about the guy?" Driscoll asked.

"Not much. Seems like a nice guy and I don't want to badger him. I call him Jesse. They booked him as J. Jesse in L. A."

"He may be dangerous," Vivi said.

Boxer grinned. "With me and Driscoll here, what difference does it make? He can get as dangerous as he wants. We'll take care of it."

"But something happened to Edward."

"You've been through a lot," Boxer said. "Try to relax."

"It isn't that. It's Edward. I'm worried about him."

Boxer turned to Driscoll. "Maybe you'd better sit beside her. She's nervous about something. We used to call it woman fears."

"It isn't woman fears," Vivi flared.

"But it's a good idea for me to sit beside you," Driscoll said. "I've been wondering how to make the suggestion myself. You sit next to the window."

"No. I want to sit next to the

aisle."

"He can make you feel safer if he's next to the aisle," Boxer said.

"No." Vivi shook her head. "I want him to sit next to the window."

A grin broke over Boxer's features. "You aren't afraid for yourself? You're actually afraid of what might happen to him. You want to sit on the aisle side so that it will happen to you instead?"

Vivi's hands trembled. "Don't make it so difficult," she said.

Boxer shrugged, turned away. Driscoll moved so that she could sit near the aisle.

"Slide down," she said. "Let me get my arm round your shoulders."

"Huh?"

"Something's going to happen. It may be that my powers can stop it."

"What powers?"

"One that hasn't been tested. If I lower my head until the diadem is directly in line with something, and then hold a certain thought in mind—Well, we'll see."

Driscoll slumped down in the seat, waited, hoping that what was going to happen would happen soon. With her arm about him, her soft body so warm and close, he had difficulty keeping his mind on the task ahead.

She began to tremble.

"I like the snuggling," he admitted. "If it wasn't for the job I'd demonstrate how much I like it. But I can't do things halfway.

If I let myself go I won't think about anything but you. It's the way I'm built. You do something to me and I'm flesh and blood. You understand? And I'm supposed to concentrate solely on protecting you."

"I don't care what happens to me," she breathed. "Something is going to happen to you and I must try to prevent it."

Rising, he lifted her to her feet. "We both need a drink," he said. "There's a bar in the back. Maybe we can get it open."

"No! Please! Don't move around. Something is closing in."

He searched the cabin with his eyes, noticed nothing unusual. "I'll find out what's keeping Boxer."

"No," she said. "It isn't safe to go back there."

He concentrated on his temples and the sensitive place in his neck. Not the vaguest hint of danger came to him. Nothing was out of order. They were sailing four miles above the ground in one of the smoothest flights he had ever experienced. The plane was as nearly perfect as man could make it. The possibility that something could go wrong was remote.

"You've been keyed up for some time," he said. "It's become hysteria. I know the remedy for that." He picked her up and carried her toward the bar.

Halfway there he felt something like a cold breath against the back of his neck. He didn't pause, didn't turn to look, but felt the

girl's arms tighten about him as if she were resisting something that would tear them apart.

At the bar he placed her on her feet. She trembled, almost fell, swayed against him, clung.

"I'll jiggle up a drink," he said softly and reassuringly.

Something beyond her drew his attention. The shock came then. He had consciously to will his heart not to jump, to will his hands to be steady, to keep himself from shouting.

In the archway opening into the washroom were two shoes with ankles protruding from them. They were suspended in mid-air. Whatever was attached to them was invisible behind the facing of the arch.

He drew Vivi close to him, held her attention. With consciously controlled and labored movements, he mixed a drink, extended the glass to her. Her hands shook so that she couldn't hold the glass. He pressed it to her lips.

The shoes and the ankles hung there as a hint of dreadful things, a portent of horrors to come.

Vivi's teeth clicked against the glass. He placed a hand behind her head and held her steady. She closed her eyes and seemed to drink against some inner resistance. Halfway through, she opened her eyes, lifted a hand to her face, cringed back. Her eyes were wide and staring—straight at him.

Then she screamed.

Stunned and uncomprehending, he held her close. For a moment it seemed that she would faint. Her eyes came open again, wide and staring.

Again she screamed with all her might.

Mouth open, stark horror in her features, she cringed back, her body quivering like a leaf. She backed away from him. And then with another piercing shriek she turned and fled to the distant end of the cabin.

Suspended between the demand to investigate the thing in the washroom and the overwhelming need of the girl, he remained a moment in indecision. The need of the girl won. He plunged after her.

Then he saw that she was trying literally to push her way through the bulkhead into the pilot's compartment. Her eyes mirrored dazed horror; her features were dreadfully distorted. Her lips shaped the word "Darkling" and she slumped in a dead faint.

The truth struck Driscoll like a flash of the sun in his eyes. For a moment he was blinded. Then the full impact smote his body. It was like a sledgehammer against his solarplexus.

It was physical as well as mental, a true pain-drive. He recognized it as the hot lances moved along nerves, touched with the cutting edge to make him understand that he must obey; that he must kill the girl and remove the dia-

dem, or have his own body destroyed by unbearable agony.

He hesitated. The pain lashed through his body like a length of barbed wire swung by a brute. It cut to the quick. Had it been solely physical he would have passed into unconsciousness, he knew. But a pain-drive could keep him conscious far beyond the last threshold of physical pain.

Shrinking from the girl brought the pain anew with nerve-shattering force, but as his fingers bent into claws to throttle her the pain eased.

It was a phenomenon known to psychologists and those in high places who seek to break the will of others.

Driscoll knew. He knew also that flesh has a peak for pain. Beyond that point the mind blanks out. But there is no peak when the mind can't blank out. The agony then becomes mental.

As his hands touched the girl's neck the pain eased and he felt almost elated. The relief brought a counter-surge, the will to struggle again to resist. Again the pain in every nerve. And then came the cutting in his neck, the itching in his temples, to warn him the girl was in danger—danger from him.

The warning would not come, he knew, if there was not a high probability the pain would overwhelm him and drive him through madness to the relief that would be offered upon the death of the girl.

He resisted as he would have resisted death itself, and the pain flamed anew, cutting deeper, reaching into the nerves of the brain and torturing the source of reason itself.

Hate came, distorting his features, bringing a chaotic will to violence, bending his thoughts to the shape of madness. He spun toward the depths of insanity.

Something else bobbed dimly on the fading horizon of clear reason, a wisp of light, elusive as an *ignis fatuus*. It hung there, a faint beacon, offering hope, a way out.

But he did not look. Two alternatives stood out more clearly: he could kill himself and cheat the pain; he could succumb to the pain and kill the girl and find relief. This last, he knew, was madness. But it was all that remained.

Again the light bobbed dimly from the final evanescent shade of reason. This, he knew, was his last chance. The light would not return. He must look now or what he would see afterward would be a true will-o-the-wisp of the mind. It would not be a beacon showing the way out. The body and mind could endure but so much. Beyond that all things were distorted.

In obedience to the will to survive, he turned and twisted through the pain-racked corridors of his mind, searched for the light. In every conceivable direction he mentally turned until he saw it, ages old, but bright as the day the first sentient creature used it.

A physical body makes its own pain to call attention to damage or threat. When the mind conceives damage or threat it likewise conceives pain compatible with the condition.

He suddenly realized that no pain could exist within him except that he himself furnish the energy to sustain it. He knew now that his mind had been tampered with. The knowledge gave him the will to fight.

He would never kill Vivi. As his hands went about her neck he knew without doubt that nothing could ever drive him to harm her.

A sense of exaltation came. He had defied the necromancy of the gods or Darklings and found it to be a mortal phenomenon long known to men. He believed now that he was dealing with advanced science, not supernatural things.

LIFTING the girl's relaxed body, he started toward the washroom, then remembered. In the confusion he had lost the thread of events. Now he found it again in all of its awesome mystery and terror. Doubt crept back to challenge his newfound conviction.

After strapping the girl in a seat, he approached the washroom cautiously, advancing at an angle that would give him a clear view. He studied the archway. The shoes and ankles were now moving, drawing out of sight behind the facing.

He heard a groan.

Still cautious, he advanced and looked in. Flat on the couch provided for air-sick passengers Boxer lay and groaned. Of Jesse there was no sign.

He probed Boxer's body, found no injuries. He filled a paper cup with water and hurried back to Vivi. Lowering himself beside her, he held the cup to her lips. She made no response. He moistened his handkerchief and touched her temples. She stirred.

Seconds passed before full awareness surged back into her body. Her glazed eyes rolled and a frown of puzzlement brought back the lines of tension. Her eyes discovered him, held steady briefly, then went wide.

She shrieked.

The strap held as she tried to break free, and it was he himself who drew back. She watched him as a cat will watch a dog of doubtful intention, and terror trembled through her being.

"Vivi," he said softly.

She screamed again.

Confused, and yet understanding her terror, he put out a hand—very gently—to comfort her.

With her shriek this time came a jolting weight on his back. A powerful hand spun him about. He failed to see the blow coming in time to block it. It caught him on the jaw and was dynamic evidence of Boxer's training.

Pushing himself off the floor, he stared from Boxer to Vivi and back. He shook his head, got his

feet under him.

Boxer came in again, his long left out, his right cocked. The left seemed to move not more than six inches, a light jab, just enough to make him blink, and then the right exploded against his jaw.

Again he worked his feet under him. There was no time to think. As he straightened his legs and stood erect he got his own left up. There was still no time to think, to reason the thing out, for Boxer came boring in again. It was Driscoll's own training, rather than thinking, that made his own left jab in rhythm with the swaying of his body, made his right drive out, twisting down, from the shoulder.

Boxer now struggled to his feet. He shook his head, as Driscoll had done, and came in more cautiously, in a half-crouch. There was no doubt about his intention. Driscoll rolled with the jab, waited for the right. It came lower this time, curving upward, and instead of countering, Driscoll blocked it with the palm of his right hand. It still jarred him, drove him back, and he barely managed to get under the curving left that followed with such force that it carried Boxer with it as it missed and momentarily unbalanced him.

Driscoll struck upward, left, right. Both blows landed under Boxer's chin. His legs sagged. Driscoll started the left for the body, the blow that would snap Boxer's

head forward and in range of the right, but never finished it. He somehow managed to pull the punch before it landed against the soft flesh of Vivi. She had leaped between them.

"No," she cried. "No!" She stared at Driscoll, then turned to Boxer. "It's Edward," she said. "Look! His face is changing. It's becoming its natural color. The blackness is going away. It's Edward."

Boxer wiped the blood from his mouth. "Good God! I thought—"

Before he could say what he thought, the plane rocked and they were flung back and forth in the aisle.

The speaker hummed, grated, "Fasten your straps, please!"

The rocking eased, but the pilot's warning carried a note of urgency. They lowered themselves into seats, buckled the straps.

Again the plane rocked. Boxer grabbed the headphone, plugged it in under the window, said, "Win-slow to pilot. What the hell's happening?"

"We don't know," the speaker replied. "Keep your straps fastened. We're going down."

"Where's Jesse?" Driscoll demanded.

"That's what I'd like to know," Boxer said. "I found him in the washroom. And guess what?"

"I'm not in a mood for guessing," Driscoll said.

"What?" Vivi asked. "Don't keep us in suspense."

Boxer looked from one to the other. "He was running water into the basin and turning it into wine."

Driscoll frowned.

Vivi said, "This is no time for joking."

"I wish it was a joke," Boxer admitted. "But it isn't. He ran water into a cup and handed it to me and I tasted it. It was wine."

"You must've stopped at the bar," Driscoll said. "I saw your feet sticking out from the end of the couch. It was so out of the ordinary, especially for you, I thought something had happened."

"Something did happen. I took a sip of that wine and that's all I knew until I woke up aching as if I'd been in a brawl."

"Is that all you remember?"

"All except when I came out here and saw—"

"Saw what?" Driscoll prodded.

Boxer looked at Vivi, said, "You tell him. I don't want to hurt his feelings."

"He saw you," Vivi said. "But you didn't look as you do now."

"How did I look?"

Pain came into her features. "Don't make me tell you."

"Brace yourself," Boxer said. "If ever I have to imagine a ghoul I'll think about how you looked as you leaned over her."

"Your features had turned black," Vivi put in.

"And you had two long tushes coming down over your lower lip," Boxer added. "I've never seen a more gruesome brute."

Driscoll shook his head. "You two were imagining things. And we're not getting anywhere. We ought to round up Jesse."

The speaker hummed. The voice was low, tense, restrained. "Keep your straps fastened. Descent will be faster now. The reason we haven't told you what's happening is that we couldn't believe our eyes. But both of us see the same thing. A man keeps stepping in front of the plane and we have to maneuver to keep from hitting him."

"That tears it," Boxer groaned. "The pilot and co-pilot have gone nuts. If you can fly this crate, Ed, get on up there."

"I've never checked out on a jet," Driscoll said. "Explain to them they're just imagining they see something. Same thing happened to you when you were back there imagining water was turning to wine."

"I wasn't imagining. It happened just like I told you."

The itching came in Driscoll's temples. His neck throbbed. "Tell the pilot to fly straight and level regardless," he said, unfastening his strap. "I'm going to find Jesse."

"Hold on!" Boxer spoke into the headphone, then turned back. "You're not supposed to leave the girl. I'll find that guy. And this time he won't get a chance to do anything to me."

Driscoll said, "Better let me look for him. I've a hunch I can beat him at his own game."

Before he could rise he was crushed deeper in his seat. He heard a gasp from Vivi, an expletive from Boxer.

"Get into your parachute gear," the speaker ordered. "We're in a spin."

Vivi made a sound that was half gasp and half scream. Her features drained of color. She pointed through the window.

Driscoll looked. His breathing became difficult; his senses reeled. He turned to Boxer, made sure he was looking and that his expression told the same story.

"Is it real?" Vivi gasped.

"Looks real to me," Boxer said, picking up the headphone. His voice rose, became brittle. "Do you guys in the pilot's compartment see what we see?"

The speaker replied: "We see a man on the wingtip. He's running through the air and making the plane spin. His robe is fanning out like wings. If one of us is crazy, both of us are. We both see the same thing."

"Are we going to be killed?" Vivi cried, trying to rise. "Edward, are we going to die?"

"Don't try to stand," Driscoll warned. "Too much centrifugal force."

Boxer said, "Maybe we can shoot that guy off the wingtip."

Driscoll frowned. "Anybody who can stand out in open air and twist an airplane won't likely be bothered by bullets. But I'm in favor of trying a shot at him."

Check with the pilot on the altitude. If we smash a window in thin atmosphere the pressure in here will escape."

"Wait!" Vivi said. "Let me try something." She stared at the wingtip.

Driscoll alternately looked at her and through the window.

A sense of twisting was present as well as a crushing downward force. Clouds seemed to move downward on one side of the plane and upward on the other. The centrifugal force varied as in a car taking an unevenly banked curve.

Driscoll saw Vivi bow her head toward the figure on the wingtip. He saw the diadem among the waves of the flame-colored hair. It seemed to him that it suddenly sparkled, sent out rays. But he was more interested in the movement of Vivi's lips. The words that came forth were soft: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

The figure vanished from the wing as though it had never been there. The spinning ceased, but the downward pressure increased, became unbearably heavy.

"The pilot's pulling out of it," Boxer said. "It will take some time to level off because we're diving at terrific speed. We may black out. Bend forward and contract your stomach muscles."

AT length the pressure ceased and the plane was again in level flight.

The speaker sounded: "Don't

know what happened, but we're under control again. Keep your chutes on and straps buckled. Something else might happen."

It did—at that moment.

Jesse appeared leaning against the forward bulkhead. It was as though he had been there all the time. His features were sharp, softened somewhat but a fine down of blond beard. His fine hands were clasped in prayer and his fiery blue eyes were turned upward.

Boxer whipped out his gun, aimed.

"Don't shoot," Driscoll warned. "That's a high-velocity gun. The bullet would go through him and the bulkhead. Might kill the pilot."

"Right," Boxer acknowledged. "I ought to carry a lighter gun."

"This has to be done another way," Driscoll said, moving forward.

"Wait!" Vivi cried. "Don't harm him."

"I won't unless he brings it on himself."

Driscoll advanced toward Jesse who seemed unaware that he was not alone.

"Bring him back here," Boxer called. "We'll strap him down and tie his hands with his shoelaces."

"His feet are bare," Vivi exclaimed. "Look! They're visible below the robe. They're as fine as his hands."

Boxer snorted. "He had on shoes when we brought him aboard. Bring him back here, Ed. We can

cut strips from that nightgown and tie him with them."

Driscoll was hesitant about touching a man who was manifestly praying. He waited in the hope that he would finish. And as he waited, Jesse moved. He took one step to the left and stood before the door to the pilot's compartment.

There was nothing strange about that part of it. The strange part was that he left, in the position he had been standing, a dark outline.

Driscoll heard the word "Darkling" murmured with awe, knew the sound had come from Vivi. Again Jesse moved and again left a dark outline where he had stood. He advanced in halting steps toward Driscoll, and after each pause left a dark outline.

Driscoll became aware that he was backing away as the man advanced. Boxer had come to his side, and he, too, backed before the advancing figure.

There was something awe-inspiring about the halting way Jesse came on, leaving dark outlines wherever he paused. The outlines remained immobile as though awaiting a signal.

"Good God!" Boxer breathed.

A faint sound escaped Vivi. It was not intelligible but was suggestive of the awe that came from Boxer. Driscoll himself could not escape the feeling.

Abreast of the seat in which Vivi sat, Driscoll stopped. Glancing at

her, he experienced a moment of indecision, but held his ground.

Not knowing what to expect and trying to decide on a course of action, he felt in his pocket for his cigaret lighter. As though reading the thought behind the action, Jesse halted.

There was quiet. Everyone in the cabin of the plane, including the outlines, remained in tense expectancy.

Outside, the distant clouds floated lazily by; the nearer ones flashed, vanished. Hardly a tremor could be felt in the smooth flight of the plane. The jets in the wings expelled their heat with an even pulsing, their thunder always far behind. Bright sunlight came through the windows. To anyone on the ground it would have appeared a commonplace west to east passage.

Inside the cabin the drama went on.

The co-pilot's voice sounded through the speaker: "Think it's safe to remove your chutes now. Perfect weather. We're climbing steadily to pick up a tailwind. Everything checks normal. We must've been dreaming a while back. It may be a good idea to forget what happened unless you want to get us all psychoed. We'll report that we went into a spin, no explanation, and came out of it okay. They'll check the plane and find out what caused it. Probably something jammed the controls and worked loose as we went down.

The controls are working perfect now. Nothing is wrong, not a solitary thing, and the scare is over. Relax and take it easy."

Tension mounted with each passing second. Nerves ached, twanged signals to body-control centers for screams that would bring relief. One center responded, sent a scream echoing about the cabin. Vivi had endured, now wisely released the pressure. Nothing so simple for Driscoll and Boxer, but the shriek acted as a signal and their built-up tension drove their limbs to action.

Shoulder to shoulder, they advanced. And just as they had retreated earlier, now retreated Jesse. He backed into the outline behind him, and as he went on the outline went with him. As he had left outlines in his advance he collected them in his retreat.

For the third time Boxer breathed, "Good God!" Had Driscoll been of a mind to speak he would have echoed the words in equal awe. The seeming unreality was more than the mind could take in without associating it with the supernatural.

The doubt which had assailed him in front of the tabernacle in Los Angeles returned and rode him like a brutal master. It confused his effort to decide what to do, forced indecision upon him.

That Boxer and Vivi experienced the same was evident. Boxer hesitated. Vivi strained forward in the seat, eyes on Jesse.

With the doubt came another curious sense to Driscoll: that Jesse was in no way afraid. Slight though he was, he looked strong, and in his eyes burned the light that must have burned in the eyes of martyrs in the past.

In Driscoll's inner being was a sense that he was committing a grave sin in stalking a supernatural creature. He recalled the words the man had uttered as Vivi approached the spot where he performed miracles:

"Behold! My betrayer!"

Then he had included Boxer and Driscoll: "They have come armed as against a thief."

The question arose: "If the gods quarrel, what will happen to mortals?"

Then clearer thought came and drove all other out. Sympathy for Jesse, Driscoll concluded, had been induced to confuse his captors. Clear reason told him it was not a matter of dealing with gods; it was a matter of advanced science.

"Jesse!" It was the voice of Boxer. "You will have to sit down and give your word not to try any tricks, or I'm going to plant my fist in your face."

Jesse remained as though in meditation.

"I don't think we'll get anywhere that way," Driscoll said. "I'd like to know what happened to his shoes."

"If we work him over," Boxer suggested, "maybe he'll tell us."

Driscoll shook his head. "I

wouldn't mind—if he started it. But I don't want to smack him just yet."

"I've done a lot of things I didn't want to do," Boxer argued. "We're in a position where we can't be nice. The guy is dangerous."

"How do you know he's any more dangerous than the others?"

"The beings from space?"

"Yes. How do we know he's not the one holding them in check? How do we know the moment we deliver him they won't cut loose with something we aren't expecting? The whole setup is wrong. We're working in the dark."

"We have our orders," Boxer said stubbornly.

"Yes. But how do we know our orders won't mean the death of mankind?"

"Edward!" It was the voice of Vivi. "Knock the god unconscious! I'm in contact. Something terrible is closing in. Knock him out! Quick! We're in danger."

"You're not in danger," Driscoll returned. "I'd know."

Vivi came out of the seat. "You've changed again, Edward. Your features aren't black, but something is wrong. You're influenced by outside forces."

"It's you and Boxer who're being influenced," Driscoll maintained. "And there's no way of knowing it isn't leading us to disaster."

Tension mounted in Vivi's features. "Edward, I know we're right

in cooperating with the beings. Any other course will bring ruin."

"They shouldn't keep us in the dark. If we can't be trusted to know what's going on, it must be something we wouldn't like."

"Edward!"

Driscoll turned to face her. Of one thing he was certain: he didn't want anything to happen to her, not even the grief that was coming over her now.

The speaker said, "Remain in your seats and buckle your straps."

Boxer worked round to where he could see Driscoll's face. Jesse seemed lost in holy meditation.

"Remain in your seats and keep your straps fastened," the speaker repeated. "We're coming in for a landing."

Jesse moved. Slowly he turned his back to the trio, faced the pilot's compartment, lifted fine hands high.

"Stop that!" Boxer roared.

There was a sudden jolt as though the plane had struck something. Vivi seized Driscoll's shoulders to keep her balance. Boxer moved forward, hesitated.

Out of the tips of Jesse's fingers flowed something like rays of sunlight. The plane started a roll, fell off, righted itself.

As Driscoll struggled to remain upright and support Vivi, he saw Jesse turn toward the window and point in that direction. And then Jesse became twins. A second Jesse stepped out of the first, passed through the closed window and

vanished from sight as though to go underneath the plane.

The first Jesse turned back toward the trio, slowly, meditatively, as if summoning power from a distant realm. He brought his beautiful hands up, pointed them.

There was hardly an itching, hardly a hint of pain in Driscoll's neck. It was as though his flesh had been deadened against pain. But he didn't need the warning nor the stimulus. He launched himself.

It was too late to stop when he realized the truth of what had happened. His shoulder should have struck Jesse at the hips. It should have smashed him against the bulkhead with enough force to drop him unconscious.

Driscoll managed to contract the extensor muscles in his arms a moment before he struck. He passed through the vision where Jesse had stood, crashed against the bulkhead. The shock ran up his arms and into his shoulders before his head struck.

Stunned but conscious, he sat up—saw Jesse standing at the distant end of the cabin.

"The diadem," he yelled. "Vivi! The diadem!"

Vivi responded, bowing toward Jesse.

And then, as a flash of sunlight, the second Jesse leaped back into the plane through the closed window and merged with the body of the first.

"I think we can handle him

now," Driscoll said, striding toward the man.

Jesse held up a restraining hand. A thousand conflicting thoughts flamed in Driscoll's mind, caused him to hesitate.

The speaker said, "We ran into rough air at Bolling Field. We're going to the National Airport. A couple minutes more. Stay in your seats. Keep your straps fastened."

With grim purpose, Driscoll advanced on Jesse. Halfway there he became aware of dark outlines appearing about him. His breathing became difficult. In reach of an outline, he smashed out with his fist, felt it strike something like an inflated balloon.

Boxer's grunting told him that he was similarly engaged. Vivi's gasp and cry of terror brought confusion.

But he didn't stop. His purpose was unwavering. He drove the outlines before him, eager for the time when he would get one against a bulkhead.

The plane was in smooth flight. Through the windows the ground appeared close.

Grimly Driscoll smashed right and left whenever in reach of an outline. And now the god gave ground, backed toward the washroom.

Vivi's cry rang in Driscoll's ears: "Your lighter, Edward! Throw me your lighter."

He paused long enough to bring out the lighter and toss it in her direction. He didn't see whether

she caught it, but in the moment his eyes were turned in that direction he saw Boxer uncork that terrible twisting right. From experience he knew the power behind it.

Again he faced Jesse, advanced, mouth working. "Monkey up minds, will you?" he growled. "Some sort of mental energy ordinary people don't know about. We'll see how your mental energy stands up to a right-cross."

An outline blocked his passage. He got it against the bulkhead behind the last seat and nailed it with both fists. He could feel the blows going clear through. The outline sagged, vanished. He maneuvered to trap another, but it eluded him, moved toward Boxer and the girl.

His breathing was becoming more and more labored. And the snorting of Boxer and gasping of Vivi told him they were in trouble. But he couldn't stop.

He nailed another outline against the bar. Then he faced Jesse.

"Now," he said, "see if you can stop this!"

His short left was followed by a piledriver right.

DRISCOLL reached down and lifted the unconscious god. But no Darklings came to its aid. The Darklings had vanished.

Boxer got one hand on the body. Driscoll watched Vivi reach for Boxer's other hand. He was dimly

aware that her other hand crept into his.

A moment passed. There was something like an overlapping as happens in dreams. The surroundings seemed to fade into other surroundings. There was nothing frightening about it. As in a dream, it seemed natural.

They were in the presence of the gods, exactly as they had, in the overlapping moment, stood in the plane.

An aged man, with long white hair, stood before them. He took the unconscious god from Driscoll and Boxer. He passed it to his companions who bore it off.

"You have done well," the aged god said. "In a moment I will give you the secret of our power, of Creation itself, of the ultimate knowledge. You must resolve now not to keep it to yourself. You must spread it broadcast across your planet. For it will enable you to rid yourselves of the Darklings. They exist solely because they are able to draw power from your minds. You will soon understand."

"Here is the secret of power, of Creation, of knowledge. How you use it will depend upon your mental development. Not all Earthlings will be able to use it. And yet it is comparably simple, so simple it is hidden from the learned and wise and revealed to children."

"The universe is composed of two things. They are energy and

a converter. Time is not a thing but a concept. Space is energy because it is part of the universe. Mass is energy at a retarded rate of motion. Everything is energy and energy is motion. The knowledge of how to convert energy into another form of energy or into mass, in its manifold forms, is the knowledge of Creation.

"You already have a glimmer of it. You have accomplished transmutations with uranium, plutonium and other substances. You release energy in dividing the atom and in many other ways. But you have overlooked the natural converters. They are life which convert sunlight, carbon, water and other things. The greatest among these converters is the mind. It has conceived the converters of energy of which you make mechanical use.

"But that is little. Without your realizing its potential, it converts sunlight, water and any form of edible into life and thought and endless ideas, which in turn convert other things. Thus far in life you have done this haphazardly. You could not be trusted with the secret of Creation and knowledge of your potential. But now you must accept.

"Use it wrongly and you will destroy yourself and your planet. Use it well and the whole universe is open to you. For the universe is energy. And you are the converter. The knowledge itself is the first step toward development of your

potential.

"Live like gods, for you are not less than us. Rid yourselves of the Darklings, for they are but the superstitions you have brought into reality with your eternal wars and hatred and greed. You cannot sustain a belief, a grief, a desire, a fear, a pain—except that you yourself furnish the energy of it. Thus you can destroy yourself or achieve your destiny, as you will.

"Clasp hands. Conceive time as a concept of motion in relation to motion. Conceive the apartment of the woman to be your surroundings. Conceive it first as an overlapping, blending with this, and then . . ."

DRISCOLL looked at Vivi. She was withdrawing her hand from Boxer's. Her features were pale. The diadem was no longer in her hair.

Boxer coughed, said, "We haven't eaten since yesterday. Do you still think you could cook something for three?"

Driscoll said, "You'd better call Sam Millbro and tell him to reassure the pilot and co-pilot of that jet. They must've got a shock when they entered the cabin and saw we'd vanished. Maybe you'd better make the call outside. You can get something to eat while you're out."

Boxer nodded. "Yeah. I should've thought of that. Love! Well, it's a striving toward creation which seems to be the most important

thing in the universe. I wonder why we ever thought we were less than gods."

Driscoll and Vivi watched him draw the door shut as he departed, then turned to each other. Driscoll said, "Food isn't important.

I'm beginning to understand things I never did before. Let's use our understanding together."

"Yes," Vivi breathed. "I don't know whether I want the power of the gods, but I'm sure we can develop it if we do."

END

Editorially Speaking...

ure in the story itself, in the deeds of the characters, in their loves, hates and accomplishments; in their failures, their problems, their solutions. Others of you may find pleasure in seeking to learn vicariously from these fictional depictions; experience by proxy the adventures and the thrills and the emotions of the people you are reading about. Still others may read between the lines, sense the things that we will often leave unsaid—for in no bit of fiction can we avoid some measure of truth, just as no truth can be said to be absolute. Relatively speaking, there is no such thing as fiction or fact, truth or falsity, a liar or truthful person.

Lastly we have always been iconoclastic. Into our civilization some peculiar superstitions have grown—and more peculiarly, they seem to have become labeled as axiomatic, scientific, accepted, and as quite respectable. They are none of these. They are rank superstition, not of the credible, fool's variety, but of a more serious kind; for their ef-

fect is insidious, detrimental, and leading toward that disaster of all disasters so ably expressed by Shakespeare: "Alas all thinking!" Or did Shakespeare say that? No matter, the important thing is that it was said, for it points up just what we want to say—that the condition that could engender such a saying is a dangerous one, a despairing one. Today, when we say something that is contrary to "accepted fact," we are forced either to recant, or to retire to disgrace labeled with the cognomen "crackpot." We cannot go counter to the downward current of the stream of thought. We cannot even indulge in political philosophy, for today, in any country in the world, an opinion contrary to the form of government in operation is "subversive."

We do not propose to indulge in such serious things, however. This is not a magazine devoted to the "crusade." Rather it is a magazine where we will speak freely of the things not generally regarded as

(Concluded on page 57)

The Strange Case of Monica Lilith

By ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-Dor." *1 Samuel, 28:7*. Thus says the Bible, the book of Truth. Although Saul had put away all those with familiars out of the land, it should be obvious that he did not eliminate all such breed. As in those ancient days, so too, in modern times, the same must exist. Here is a story that deals with a modern phenomenon, the lovely, weird Monica Lilith.

Illustrated by Michael Becker

IT was an extraordinary event that occurred at Lake Lodge in the Tahoe region, on July 12th of last year. When one of the West's most prominent vacation resorts is in a state of complete panic for twenty-four hours; when a majority of its employees walk out in a body afterward, and at least a third of its best-paying guests cancel reservations and follow them—it is certainly obvious that something of a most unusual nature must have taken place. The wild rumors spread about the entire area for weeks

thereafter, reaching even as far as Reno.

But even had the full facts been known, it is doubtful whether they would have been accepted, in this day and age. For what occurred, on that placid July day was simply unbelievable, by modern standards! For it seemed to hint unpleasantly at the possibility of truth in certain beliefs and superstitions that have long been discarded by our scientific era; that are regarded only as quaint and fantastic delusions of forgotten Middle Ages. Yet the singular



business of Mrs. Lilith, at Lake Tahoe, in the ultra-modern and streamlined year of our Lord, 1953, seems to be explainable only as witchcraft!

Not, let it be hastily added, that there was anything whatever 'witchlike' about the lady in question! Anyone further from the conventional old crone of folklore would be hard to imagine. Monica Lilith was a beautiful, wealthy and singularly attractive young woman; no more than in her early thirties. She did her flying about, not on a broomstick, but in a low-slung Jaguar roadster with leopard skin upholstery; and the only spells she was known to cast were on susceptible males! As for being wicked—well, that word is rather outmoded, nowadays. The modern term is 'glamorous.' Mrs. Lilith certainly was that. But there was nothing sinister about her personality; and as regards the supernatural, none of her friends and associates dreamed that she could even spell it! Except for that extraordinary name, there was absolutely nothing to set her apart from the rest of the wealthy and carefree set that gather each year to drink, dance and gamble away the summer at one of the West's most famous resort-hotels.

You know Lake Lodge, of course, if you know the Tahoe country at all. Not even 'Cal-Neva' is more famous. Its enormous log bulk, topped by that curious

and distinctive cupola, is on all the postcards, and dominates the entire Nevada side of the Lake itself. But though you've certainly seen the place, or pictures of it; you've probably never been inside it. The average tourist, in his jalopy, does not drive up to its stately portals for a week-end's lodging, as he does to other resorts and motels in the area. Reservations at the Lodge must be made at least six months in advance. And one could easily rent the 'Presidential suite' of the largest San Francisco hotel for less than one of its not particularly modern or elaborate rooms would cost him.

Built in the '90's, it is all under one roof; though a few small guest cottages have been added recently, as a concession. Its architecture is 'rustic'; though only if it is assumed that our pioneer ancestors built their log cabins on the scale of the Pyramid of Cheops! The building is at least a city block in length, and three stories high; the third floor being the most expensive, and desirable. Though its exterior and verandas are of log-sheathing; inside it contains elevators, neon, chrome and all the trappings of a first-class hostelry. It has its own private beach, with piers for speedboats and launches, its own gambling casino, its own ballroom, with 'name bands' imported from Reno; and, of course, that famous dining room with live redwoods

growing in it, and a troutstream running through, from which ambitious guests can catch fish for their own breakfasts.

In short, it is quite an establishment! Cuisine, standards and service are all on a par with big-city hotels, in the heart of rusticity. A staff of approximately a hundred, mostly college students working for vacations, ministers to the comfort of its patrons. It even has its own resident physician, Doctor Hugo Gresham; once a prominent Reno surgeon, but with a slight penchant for the bottle, who finds the gay life of the resort more congenial than private practice. He is always available to minister to such ailments as the expensive clientele may have, or think they have.

They are a curious lot, the resort 'regulars.' They come from all over America, and even foreign countries; many of them are famous, and all of them rich. Their general average is surprisingly youthful; since the tone of the place is a bit too lively to be congenial to oldsters. There is an atmosphere of gayety and pleasure seeking, of gambling and recklessness, unusual even in far from conservative Nevada! There have been scandals, suicides, even one or two murders. But the super-expensiveness of the Lodge manages to cloak all in respectability. . . .

In this small, gay and cosmopolitan world, Monica Lilith held

high place. For the last three summers she had been there, occupying an entire suite on that exclusive third floor. She was universally known and well-liked; though not even her enemies knew too much about her, or where she came from. The Lodge was apparently her only home; one gathered that she spent her winters in travel, mostly in obscure parts of Europe. She always spoke of herself as an American; but there was an occasional trace of accent in her strangely sweet voice, and a slight dark overcast to her exquisite skin, that seemed to hint of origins outside our shores. In a community made up so largely of divorcees, she passed as one; though it was by no means certain that she had ever been married, or that there had ever been a 'Mr. Lilith' at all. But she was undoubtedly single, now. Though her life was more or less a constant procession of men, none of them ever lingered long enough to consider himself in any way important!

She seemed to have no other purpose in life but to enjoy herself; and she certainly seemed to have all the facilities to do it with, both physical and financial. The source of her wealth was as mysterious as her background. Certainly it did not come from her male friends; she was almost unique, in that environment, in her complete disdain for 'gold-digging.' Yet she had been known

to drop as much as five thousand at a single evening's baccarat at the Lodge Casino without turning a blonde hair!

As for the physical charms, they were much in evidence, too; though perhaps not quite as much as might have been expected. In a climate which seems to inspire its feminine personnel to try to 'outstrip' each other constantly, down to the last ultimate Bikini, Mrs. Lilith was oddly on the conservative side! Her dinner gowns, though all exclusive Parisian creations, were curiously enveloping on their upper portions; so that no one had ever seen her shoulders and upper arms exposed. And though her playsuits revealed the usual (and, indeed, often unusual!) expanses of nether limbs, she always seemed to wear jackets or sweaters with them even on the hottest days. As for bathing suits, she never wore them; since she could not be induced to swim and seemed, indeed, to fear the water. Though she spent much of her time in sunbathing on the beach, beside the lake, she seldom ventured out on its placid blue expanse even in canoes or sailboats.

There were other eccentricities, too. Despite her visible wealth, she had no personal maid; and assumed the complete care of her belongings, and rooms, entirely by herself. Chambermaids and charwomen were admitted to the suite only when Mrs. Lilith

herself was there, and even then their only duty was to make the beds and change linens. Everything else was always in apple-pie order. Exactly how she accomplished this was baffling; since she was seldom there, day-times; and was definitely not the 'housewifely' type! Yet the fact remained; the large suite was always immaculate, without even a speck of dust.

Nor was her aversion to having anyone in her apartment confined to Room Service; it extended also to her friends. She never did any entertaining there, and did nothing to encourage visitors. I do not mean to imply that she always spent her nights alone; the contrary has been stated! Yet none of her lovers was ever able to boast that he had spent a night in Mrs. Lilith's bedroom. Mrs. Lilith always went to his; involving herself in much difficulty, and even a few small scandals; which need not concern us here. That she was willing to go to such lengths, when all she had to do was leave her door ajar, seemed very odd indeed. It was almost as if the rooms held some secret that she dared not chance anyone seeing.

Yet the only living thing that was there, apart from Mrs. Lilith herself, was the pet animal she always kept with her. And there was no particular secret about this pet; everyone in the hotel knew about it. It arrived

with her each June, in a neat traveling case, with open ventilation end; and was carried up by the bellboys, with her other luggage, before the eyes of the entire lobby. The case stood open in a corner of her bedroom, thereafter; and it had the run of the entire apartment during her absences. The resort management ordinarily frowned on pets; but this one had never made any trouble, it had become almost an institution.

Yet though servants and friends alike knew that it was there, and had even caught glimpses of it; none of them had ever seen it at close hand, or had any idea of what it was. It was just something small and whitish, that moved quickly, with a sort of hopping motion. It was generally assumed to be of some rare species; tamed by its owner, but timid with outsiders. It would always withdraw into its leather case when anyone came in, and could not be coaxed forth. "Poor little thing! It's so shy!" Mrs. Lilith would explain. "It loves only me; I just can't get it to have anything to do with other people!" And she cautioned everyone against going too near the case, warning that the creature might attack or bite if it were touched.

But the warning was quite unnecessary, in the majority of cases. For there was something about the thing, small as it was, that

seemed to create a disinclination in most people to go near it, or even remain in the same room with it! Perhaps it was its silence; for it never made the slightest sound, never moved or rustled, as animals do in a box. And yet there was the constant feeling that it was there, and watching; you could never forget its presence.

"It frightens me." More than one of Mrs. Lilith's women friends complained, afterward, "It's just not *natural*, somehow! It gives me goosepimples. I can't think how Monica can stand having it around her!"

But there was no question that Mrs. Lilith was devoted to her pet. She always referred to it as 'my beloved,' or 'my precious one'; she spent long hours closeted with it, and could be heard talking to it, or crooning to it in the dead of night. She assumed full charge of its care, and feeding, herself. There was, indeed, some curiosity as to what she might be feeding it, since she was never seen to carry anything up from the resort dining room, and was never known to purchase packaged or prepared animal foods during her frequent trips to Reno and Carson City. If it could have been ascertained just what the creature ate, it would have been easier to tell what it was . . .

Then came the twelfth of July, and the accident that precipitated such startling consequences.

THE manner of it was curious, and requires some explanation. The day was extremely hot, and most of the resort's population was either in the water, or out on it. Even Mrs. Lilith had succumbed with the rest; she had ventured out in one of the Lodge canoes, and was paddling moodily about, some distance from shore. She was wearing a distinctive red sharkskin playsuit (tightly buttoned up, as usual) and was plainly visible from the beach.

Exactly what happened will probably never be known. But suddenly there were screams; the canoe was seen to be overturned, and Mrs. Lilith was struggling in the water.

The four extremely able Lake Lodge Life Guards (the two handsomest were rumored to be among those whose rooms she visited) all dived in, instantly, and raced toward the scene; as did approximately a dozen other men, all expert swimmers. Several of her friends who were cruising about in various craft quickly swung them in her direction; and even a small hydroplane swung down on its pontoons. There was a sort of converging on the spot, within two minutes; and it seemed simply impossible that none of them reached her before she went down for the third time. Indeed, she probably had *not* gone down, the body was still floating when the rescuers reached it and lifted

it to the deck of a launch. But the lungs were full of water, and there was no trace of pulse.

Artificial respiration, attempted while the boat raced back to shore, was without avail. The expert ministrations of Dr. Hugo Gresham, when the body was carried into his office, likewise proved futile. Mrs. Lilith had drowned, there was no doubt about it. Though how she could have done so without sinking beneath the waves was quite inexplicable.

The body lay in state for some two hours on Dr. Gresham's examination table, while sorrowing friends filed past, and was then removed to the most expensive undertaking establishment in Reno. The sharkskin playsuit had become disarranged by water, and it was now apparent why Monica Lilith, in life, had never permitted her bare shoulders to be seen. There was a birthmark on one of them; a curious blemish that no amount of powder could have covered up. It was round and puffy, and looked oddly like a third nipple! The Doctor examined it several times, with deep interest.

"Never saw anything like it before, in my life!" he muttered, to the resort Manager. "It's more than just a mark. There's a suggestion of glands, beneath; and a swelling—you'd almost swear the thing was functioning! Extraordinary!" One suspected that he would have liked to dissect it, and was deterred only by the prom-

inence of the victim.

The ambulance arrived at length and the body was taken away. There remained only the matter of winding up Mrs. Lilith's affairs, and of the mysterious pet, now bereft of its owner. It was Doctor Gresham who volunteered to take charge of the creature for the time being, since none of her friends seemed over-anxious to assume the responsibility. He departed upstairs on the errand. A few minutes later the Manager, now back in his office, had a call from him on the house phone.

"You'd better come up here," he said, in rather a peculiar voice. "There's something odd . . . I need your advice!"

CURSING all women and all pets under his breath, the Manager hurried for the elevators. Arriving at the third floor, he found Doctor Gresham standing in the middle of Mrs. Lilith's suite, fingering his greying moustache perplexedly. The animal must have escaped, he declared. There was absolutely nothing alive in the whole place; he'd searched thoroughly. The woman who had the adjoining rooms had told him that she'd heard a series of shrill, piping cries about two hours before; and, shortly afterward, a sound like the opening of a transom. It must have gotten out into the corridor, and was perhaps now roaming the resort, look-

ing for its mistress. Though it seemed too far-fetched to suppose that it could know that something had happened to her . . .

The Manager listened to this rambling account with impatience. He was a testy little man with gold-rimmed spectacles, whose life was one long series of irritations. "All right! All right!" he broke in, finally. "So it's escaped! Does it matter? The thing's bound to turn up, sooner or later. It can't get out of the building. And even if it does, and escapes into the woods—what then? We've got more important things to worry about than a confounded animal. I'll pass the word along to the staff to be on the lookout for it, if you like. What is it, by the way? If you've examined the case it lived in, you must have formed some idea."

Doctor Gresham looked at him, quizzically. "The case?" he repeated. "H'm, yes. That's another thing I'd like your opinion on. It's in here; have a look at it for yourself, will you?"

He led the way into the bedroom. Fretfully, the Manager followed; and peered into the traveling case, whose top now stood open. Then he said "Good Lord!" and almost dropped his spectacles.

The case was a large one; almost as wide as a suitcase, and rather higher. It contained, not the sawdust and litter of an animal's quarters, but what seemed to be a complete set of doll furni-

ture! The Manager's bewildered eyes made out a tiny four-poster bed, with sheets; two chairs, a small table, and other objects equally incredible. It looked almost like one of the hotel's rooms, reduced down. There was even a miniature altar at one end, with tiny 'birthday' candles, and an exquisitely carved little ivory crucifix. Possibly through the Doctor's handling, the latter had become loosened, and now dangled head downward.

The Manager straightened, after a moment, and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Well!" he said, a little shakily. "This doesn't tell us much about the animal. But it certainly tells us something about Mrs. Lilith! She was crazy; mad as a March Hare! There's no doubt of it. Imagine furnishing a pet's case, like that. I've heard of doting owners; there was that dame with the perfumed Pekingese, last year. But this—well, it beats the lot! Even a 'prie-dieu'; of all the impossible—I suppose the beast said its prayers, before it! Whew! And to think we had the woman in the Lodge for three whole summers, and never suspected she was mentally off."

Dr. Gresham rubbed his chin, noncommittally. "H'm, possibly," he murmured. "I only hope it's that simple. Still, you'll notice that the case is immaculately clean, and there's no trace of animal odor. The thing seems to have

been an excellent housekeeper! I certainly hope it turns up; I'd like to have a look at whatever sort of animal it is that lives in a furnished room, like a person."

The Manager turned toward the door. "Well," he said, vaguely. "I'll pass the word along to the staff—"

THERE was little need for that as events turned out. Less than fifteen minutes later there was a disturbance on the floor below. Wild shrieks brought everyone within earshot running; and one of the chambermaids was discovered in a state of almost complete collapse. Dr. Gresham managed to get her away from the crowd and into his office before she could stammer out her full story. But virtually all the employees heard it downstairs, later.

She had, she said, gone to the second floor linen closet to obtain some fresh towels. And, when she opened the door, something had swung out at her off the crossbar inside. She had the vague impression of a shape like a monkey, only smaller, and whitish. It had landed on her shoulder, tiny clawed hands clutched at her throat, and a shrill, venomous piping filled her ears. She fell back before the onslaught, screaming from fright, and covering her eyes to protect them. When she opened her eyes again, the thing was gone and a crowd of people were surrounding her. But no crowd could make

her feel safe; she still trembled and cowered, afraid of every shadow. She insisted that she was leaving immediately, without waiting to collect her belongings or salary; or even allowing the Doctor to treat several small but vicious gashes on her face and neck, one of which had narrowly missed the jugular vein. She was really in no condition to travel. But leave she did, by the next bus. Her departure marked the beginning of the later exodus of Lodge people.

"Well," the Manager declared, later. "It could have been worse! At least we know approximately where the little brute is hiding. And we know what it is. Some sort of marmoset, obviously; from her description."

But Dr. Gresham only shook his grizzled head. "Marmosets are timid little things," he declared. "They don't attack human beings. And they don't have claws, like this thing. There's something wholly unnatural about it. I've a notion we haven't seen the last of it, yet!"

His words were prophetic. For within half an hour, he was called on to treat a second victim. This time it was harder to hush up, for it was one of the guests. An elderly dowager, also on the second floor. She had been in the crowd that had gathered about the fallen maid; and had been so upset that she had returned to her rooms, and phoned for stimulants from the Bar downstairs. A few minutes

later there had been a tapping on her outer door, and thinking it was the bell-boy, she opened it. Something had flown into her face, from the dim corridor. 'Flown' was precisely the word she used; she insisted that there had been a whirring, as of wings. The thing had circled her head, flapping and piping shrilly. She'd slapped at it, slammed the door before it could get in, and then collapsed, like the maid. There were no wounds; but she was completely hysterical, and it took the Doctor some time to calm her and give her a sedative.

He was, in fact, still with her when the third incident occurred. It was on the third floor, this time; and involved a young couple named Simpson. They had just returned from driving to Carson City for the afternoon, and so had missed all the excitement. Going straight up to their suite to change for dinner, they were astonished to hear sounds of smashing and splintering inside it, as if someone were running amok in there. They flung open the door, expecting to see some human intruder. They were quite unprepared for what actually came out, scuttling between their legs and down the hallway. Mr. Simpson never saw it at all; or had only the vaguest glimpse of something small and pallid. But his wife saw it clearly and was able to describe it to the Manager, when that harrassed official answered her tearful summons. But her description only

added to the confusion. For she was under the impression that the creature was some sort of lizard! At least, it ran on its hind legs, and had a body covered with scales, and a thick, dragging reptilian tail.

The room it left behind was a veritable shambles; almost everything breakable in it smashed, and belongings ripped and scattered horribly. The Manager, completely bewildered that one small being could have accomplished so much destruction, could only promise that the resort would pay for everything as soon as the damage could be assessed.

Then he hurried off to direct his hunt, which from then on assumed a rather frantic quality. Confronted by what seemed a whole Zoo of creatures, all berserk, a small army of searchers had been enrolled. They spread through the whole three floors of Lake Lodge, questing in every nook and corner. And yet it was in the middle of all this that the fourth incident occurred. A fire was discovered in a corridor, blazing merrily!

A pile of chips and rubbish had been heaped clumsily together, and the whole set ablaze. It took only a few seconds work with an extinguisher to put it out and the Manager was inclined to discount it. "Probably only coincidental," he declared. "Animals don't start fires; that's certain!"

But Doctor Gresham only picked up a handful of the chips, indicat-

ing their extreme tiny-ness. "Nobody knows what this damned thing is able to do," he said, grimly. "We've got to catch it; that's all there is to it! It'll have the whole building down about our ears if we don't. It's obviously out to avenge its mistress' death, crazy as that sounds. And as for its powers—well, I'm beginning to believe almost anything . . .".

BY now, of course, the whole of Lake Lodge was aware that something serious was amiss. Clusters of guests, routed unceremoniously out of their rooms by the searchers, gathered in bewildered groups in the downstairs lobby and lounges, speculating in awed tones, and listening to the sounds and babble of voices that drifted from the upper regions. There was no pretense at serving dinner, the Bar and the Casino remained closed; even the reception desk was temporarily unmanned. Every available male employee had been enrolled in the small army of hunters that were spread out all over the huge structure; combing it corridor by corridor, room by room and almost inch by inch. They were armed with sticks, canes, golf clubs, and even a few sporting rifles. The Manager had a revolver, which he flourished; and Doctor Gresham was carrying an old frog gig; a curious affair with three barbed tines and a wooden handle.

For a long time the search went on. But at length most of its parti-

cipants reached the top floor corridors; and the Doctor leaned on his improvised spear and sighed bewilderedly. "No luck!" he said. "It beats me! We've covered the whole place, from top to bottom; there's nowhere else to look. Unless it's given up, and cleared out altogether—" He broke off, sniffing. "Oh, Lord! I smell smoke again! It seems to be coming from above."

The Manager gasped. "The Cupola! The old ornamental tower on top of the Lodge. It's the only place we haven't looked. There's a trapdoor along here, somewhere." He led the way down the hall, midway, and pointed up. "But nobody's been up there in years. There's no way, except by a ladder. The thing can't be in there; it's impossible—"

"Oh, is it?" The Doctor chuckled, grimly. Smoke was plainly curling, in little wisps, down around the trapdoor's outline. "Ever hear of rat-tunnels, my dear fellow? This old building is full of 'em. It could get up there, all right. And if it has, we've trapped it. Hurry!"

A stepladder was brought and raised. The Doctor mounted it stiffly, and cautiously raised the creaking old door. There were several outcries as he did so; for it was a little like looking into Hell. A red light danced and flickered, where there should have been darkness; and a gigantic shadow, winged and horned, seemed to tower in menace. It was a moment

before they realized that such a shadow could only have been thrown by something quite small on the floor where the fire was.

"Yes, sir. That's our little friend!" the Doctor exulted. "He can't slip back into his hole in time. Boost me up, somebody."

He squeezed his bulk through the opening and disappeared from their sight. They heard him say "Well, let's have a look at you!" And then, "Good God Almighty!" in tones of utter unbelief and horror.

Ensued then a great trampling and scurrying, shrill piping cries, and then a high shrieking, like that of a stuck pig, that died away in moans. Finally the Doctor reappeared in the opening and looked down at them. He had the air of a man who has been through some overwhelming experience; his shoulders sagged, and his face was white and drawn. But all he said was, "Some of you better come up and put this fire out. It doesn't amount to much, but it'll need an extinguisher."

There was a rush up the ladder at that. The blaze, which had only caught a couple of rafters, was quickly brought under control; but there was much chopping and squirting of chemical foam. When they'd got it out and looked around, there was nothing else to be seen. Only the broken handle of the old frog-gig lying in a corner, and a few splotches of blackish blood. Then it occurred to the searchers

that Doctor Hugo Gresham was no longer with them. He had climbed down the ladder rather hurriedly, those below reported; and he seemed to be carrying something small under his coat, something that still appeared to be struggling and moaning feebly. Then he had hurried off downstairs. They went in search of him; but he was locked in his office by that time and would not answer even the Manager's knocks. He shouted out that he was making an important dissection, and could not be disturbed . . .

THAT is really all that is positively known about the strange happenings at Lake Lodge. The rest is only gossip, and speculation. It was started principally by one of the bellboys; not one of the college help but a rather illiterate Nevada youth. He had been poking about the trashbins behind the resort, the following day, and he had come upon certain curious fragments, or remains, that bothered him. The nature of these fragments was utterly anomalous; for not only had they been cut and hacked into incredibly small bits (in such a manner as to suggest that something other than dissection was the motive) but decomposition was curiously far advanced in most of them.

Nothing was identifiable save a small fragment of membrane, that looked like part of a bat's wing; a strip of skin about three inches

square, covered with overlapping shiny scales, like a fish's; and part of a foreleg, with a hand or paw attached. It was this latter object that frightened the bellboy, and set him to talking wildly to anyone who would listen. For he swore that not only did it look uncannily (despite being covered with scales, and having talons on the tiny fingers) like a human baby's hand, but that the thing was *still spasmodically closing and unclosing as it lay there on the dump!*

And thus came about that exodus of Lake Lodge employees. They seem to have left almost in a body; and been replaced by others brought from long distances away. Since most of the guests who left at the same time have not returned this season, it is virtually a new Lodge that confronts the visitor; one from which the very memory of the whole occurrence has been elaborately erased, as one sponges off a slate . . .

But old Doctor Gresham is still the Lodge physician; and should you ever stay at the place and have occasion to visit his office to be treated for sunburn or some such specious ailment—if so, I suggest that you pay particular attention to a picture that now hangs in one corner of his office.

It is a reproduction, that the Doctor picked up in an Art store in Reno, of a painting by Hieronymus Boesch, that mad old Dutch master who specialized in depicting the mythical demons of medie-

val Hells. There are hundreds of them in this picture, of all sizes and shapes, with every confused blending of human and beast and bird and insect and whatnot that the diseased fancies of bygone superstition could invent. Around one of these creatures the Doctor has drawn a circle in red ink. It is the most 'plausible' of the lot; almost human in appearance save for its bat-wings, scaled body and reptilian tail, its horned head, and the expression of concentrated malevolence on its tiny face.

Below it, also in red ink, is scribbled what appears to be a Biblical quotation from the first book of Samuel. "*And his servants saith unto Saul: 'Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar, at en-dor'.*"

But that there is any connection between this and a certain Mrs. Monica Lilith at Lake Tahoe, in the year of Eisenhower, television sets and three-dimensional movies—I, of course, should not care to put myself on record as even hinting!

End

Editorially Speaking...

"scientific" or as "accepted." We will not even criticize the man who says: "When I am dead, that is the end." But we will defy the man who says: "You fool!" when we conjecture as to the possibility of death not being the end. We will say to him: "Go peddle your fish; being dead, they stink!"

Truly the breath of life is sweet in our nostrils, and we hope the breath of thought in these printed words will be sweet in your sight. Let it be known that all that is said in these pages is in answer to that ancient command: "Be fruitful, possess the earth, for it is yours. Pursue the happiness that I have set ever before you as a goal."

MYSTIC is for your enjoyment. It is our delight. We hope that we

will share it with you for many years.

As we write this, letters are beginning to come in regarding our first issue, and many are the opinions being advanced, most of them of a highly complimentary nature. However, we do note one request which has come up a number of times, and that is for more stories of the True Mystic Adventure type. So we want to ask you to write us and give us your ideas on how far we are to go in this department? How much of the content of MYSTIC do you want to be fiction, and how much fact? Do you like the fact article, or the fact story. Do you like us to leaven our fiction with yarns from actual people? Whatever you want, you will get!—Rap.



DOPPELGANGER

By

LYN VENABLE

Old German legends tell us of weird "twins"
that travel with some of us wherever we go.

WILL Hazlitt guided his ancient jalopy along the muddy ruts of a sinuous hill road better suited to mules than the mechanical contrivances of man. One thought only burned through his mind, "Get the doc, get the doc to Marcy in time . . ."

Dimly through the dark he saw the doc's house ahead. But no yellow square of light turned away the night, no smoke issued from the cold chimney, no footstep answered his frantic pounding at the silent door. In the mud

hands. Panic threw his thoughts into turmoil, and out of the depths of his despair came a name.

Effie! Ol' daft Effie was what they called her now, but she had brought him into the world, and Marcy too. Now she was old, incredibly old, and they said she never left her tiny cabin on the hill, not since the doc came. Will glanced back at the dark and empty windows of the doc's house. Effie was his only hope.

The rotting boards of her ca-

Your editor once knew a man in Chicago who told him of a weird thing that happened to him and a friend of his. It seemed the friend had seen and talked to him in the street the previous day, and on the second day, remarked on the coincidence of meeting him by accident again so soon. There was one catch—the man your editor knew had not been in the city the previous day! Was this incident once again an example of the weird phenomenon of the "doppelganger" of ancient superstition; the identical "double" who sometimes appears to complicate our lives?

were the tracks of the doc's car. The doc was out. And there was no telling when he'd be back.

Will sat down numbly on the sagging front steps and buried his face in his hands. He thought of Marcy back home in the cabin, and the brave, pain-tightened smile she'd given him as he left.

"Hurry, Will," she'd whispered.

A tight and terrible ache tore at his throat as he looked helplessly down at his big, rough

bin, from which the last speck of paint had long since flaked away, sagged dizzily, and filthy rags hung in the cracked windows. For a moment Will feared that Effie was gone, but a dim light flickered from within and a dragging footstep responded to his knocks and shouts. The splintered door swung back a few inches on protesting hinges.

"Effie! I'm Will Hazlitt. My wife—she needs help quick, and

the doc's away. I—we need you!"

A voice as dry and sere as blowing leaves in the autumn came from behind the door. "Hah! Need me, do ye? When the young doc came to the hills, folks decided they didn't need ol' Effie anymore. She wasn't good enough for 'em. So Effie stays here in her cabin an' don't go out for nobody. Go away, Mister."

Will, in desperation, pushed against the door. "Effie, listen, you brought me into this world, and I remember my mother saying you were gentle and kind as an angel. You wouldn't let Marcy and her baby die because of want of help."

The old voice was softer now. "No, Will Hazlitt. I—I don't reckon I could."

But new doubts tortured Will during the ride to his cabin, as time after time Effie pulled a pint bottle from her old carpet bag and drank deeply. He'd forgotten; folks had talked about that too, but he'd forgotten. But there was no one else to turn to, no one else but this ancient crone with the dirt encrusted beneath her broken fingernails and the sour smell to her stringy hair.

He saw Marcy's eyes widen in horror as he led Effie through the door. He tried to make his voice reassuring. "The doc was away darling, so I—I brought Effie here to help you."

"Oh, Will . . ."

"No time for talk now," inter-

rupted Effie. "Will Hazlitt, you find somethin' out in the barn to keep you busy—for a long time."

WILL sat on the floor in the barn with his back against a bale of hay and waited. He listened to the silence, broken only by the occasional soft neighing of a horse, or the thump of a hoof against the straw-covered floor. He waited while the moon rose high in the sky and he waited while it descended again toward the horizon.

In the cold grayness of the dawn there was the sound of the barn door scraping open, and blinking against the light, Will saw the humped figure of Effie in the doorway. She stood there silently, and something about the stark tenseness of her body frightened him. When his eyes became enough accustomed to the light so that he could see into hers, he was certain. Something was wrong, and wrong in a way that showed in the old woman's eyes not as sorrow or defeat or even fear, but as a brittle, sparkling terror.

Will leaped to his feet. "Effie, what is it? Is Marcy . . . ?"

"She's all right, Will Hazlitt," the old voice trembled, "she's wore out, poor little thing, for it was a long time a' bornin'. But she's sleepin' sound now, and she'll be all right."

Will slumped with relief. It must be the baby then, but at least Marcy, his Marcy, was all

right. He tried to make himself ask, "Well, then . . . ?"

"They—they're all right too but . . ." her voice trailed off as though she were withholding something.

"They? You mean twins?"

"Alike as two peas in a pod they are, the one I delivered and . . . the other one."

Then Effie sprang toward him and placed her gnarled and dried up hands against his chest as though in supplication. He felt her foul old breath in his face as the words babbled up out of her.

"Will Hazlitt, listen to old Effie. I'm old and my mind has grown misty like the fog that hangs over the valley in winter, and too much gin runs strong in my veins too. Them that says I'm daft may be right, but Will, when you brought me here to-night, an' I seen the poor little thing needin' me so bad, I came as sober an' sane as you. After a while the fog'll come back, but now my head's as clear as yours, and listen to me Will, I only delivered *one* baby. Delivered it and wrapped it and put it in the cradle you made with your own hands, and then I stepped into the kitchen for a moment, and when I came back there was two of 'em there. Two of 'em asleep in that cradle alike as two peas in a pod. Call me daft, Will, but I'm tellin' you this because I have to, because," her voice sank to a terrified whisper, "because what it is, that

other one, an' where it came from I don't know and don't dare speculate."

"I want to see them," said Will carefully, stunned because he could not set aside the ravings of an old woman folks called daft, a crazy old woman he had seen sucking heavily at the gin bottle a few hours before. Will was a simple man and he understood simple things, the green things growing in the spring, and the miracle of a wet and leggy colt nuzzling its mother, and the warm rain on his upturned face. And in his time the world had come to the hills, the automobile and the radio and the wisdom of doctor and teacher and clergyman, but somewhere in him lurked half-forgotten memories of the old beliefs too. His great-grandmother sitting with the firelight casting grotesque shadows on her face, telling the old tales, of changelings who took human form at birth and . . . "Come on Effie, hurry!" Fairly dragging the old woman after him, he ran up the path toward the cabin.

WILL stood over the cradle, looking down at the two tiny, pink faces. Pride and joy swelled within him in great waves, and then crashed on the rocks of uncertainty and fear.

"They're so alike Effie, you're certain . . . ?" One look into her eyes told him there was no need to complete the question. "How

can we tell, Effie? Which one? Which one is the—the other one?"

"The old ones said that a doppelganger has no soul, and casts no reflection in a glass. Here's a glass, Will." She held it out to him, and the trembling of her hands made the stained and cracked mirror cast shimmering shadows upon the wall.

There was only one reflection. Will looked at the cradle, at the two tiny forms in the blanket, and back at the mirror, down . . . and back. Down . . . and back. It was like the new pictures he'd heard about, where there were two pictures on a screen, but when you looked through glasses you only saw one.

With a sudden cry of pain and fury, Will flung the offending mirror against the wall where it shat-

tered with a high thin tinkling. His eyes met Effie's and they exchanged a long, long look. Then they did what they had to do, silently, without exchanging a word. Once, on the bed, Marcy cried out in her sleep. And then there was only one tiny figure in the cradle, and old Effie slunk out of the door with a strange, shapeless lump concealed in the dirty folds of her shawl.

Will drew a chair close to the cradle. Marcy was resting quietly again, she would never know. In the cradle, a little pink hand flailed the air, and the tiny eyes opened. Will smiled happily and touched the minute fingers. It was all right now. This was his, his flesh and blood. Already the other one was but a memory, and he was beginning to forget.

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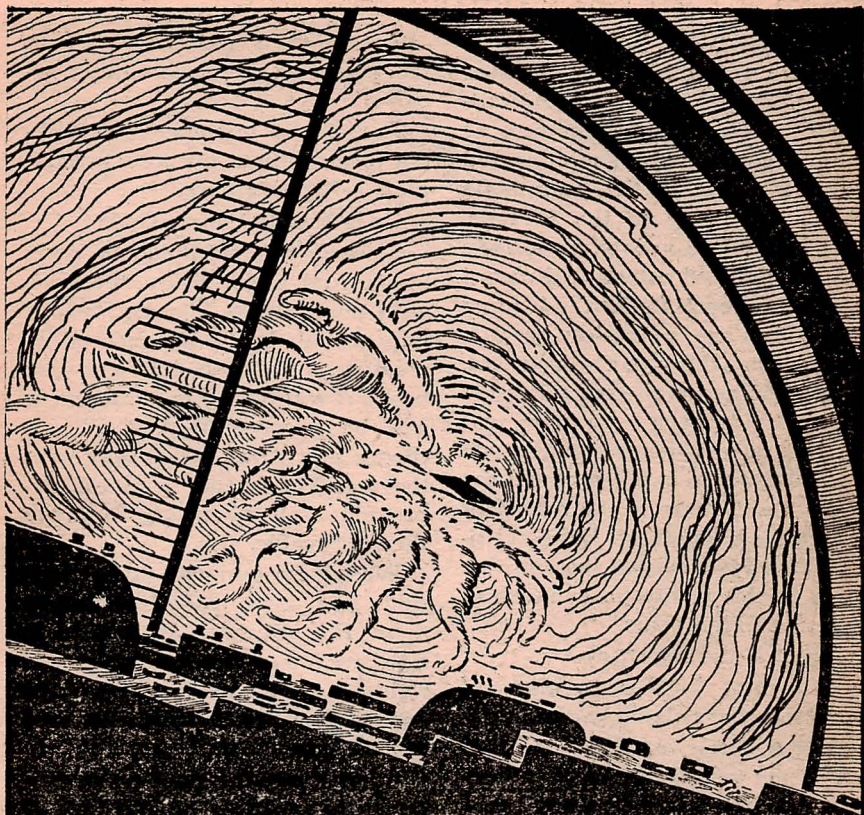
ARE YOU

?





Lucifer peered into the blazing inferno that was the sun.



The
DEVIL'S EMPIRE

By
Ray Palmer

FOREWORD

HOW ANCIENT is Man? This is a question that has been debated hotly for many centuries. According to Usshur's interpretation of biblical chronology, Man appeared on this planet in the year 4,004 B. C. According to the Chinese, that is too late a date, since they have a civilized calendrical record which goes back farther, indicating that Man's age is certainly greater, considering the pre-civilized era. Geologists and archeologists thrust Man's tenure back even more, and they tentatively place him as much as 25,000 years in the past. On the other hand, there is the school of thought among these same scientists that Man existed in primitive form on this planet for as much as several million years.

What is the real truth?

The best answer to that, of course, is that nobody knows.

But a better question, one that fulfils the varied phases of our actual research better than any other, is this: What is a man?

Is he the descendant of an ape? Is evolution a true explanation for our presence here today? Is the ape a descendant of a fish? Is the fish a descendant of an original single-celled form of life in the ancient seas? Is that single-celled animalism an accident; a fortuitous circumstance of a combination of carbon-base elements and heat and sunlight, and possibly the impact of cosmic rays?

Are we just chance beings?

Are we *alone* in the cosmos, with the exception of possible other accidents?

Is the total universe void, without form, without purpose, without plan, a *happenstance*?

Or is Man the son of God?

Scientifically speaking, we don't know. And scientifically speaking, we'll never know. The accident is unprovable. If we *do* succeed in creating a living cell in our test tubes, *it will not be an accident*. It will be purposeful! And all our theory of chance will topple with the act. Yet science goes on disproving itself by trying to prove the unprovable.

We have begun with an assumption: we have called ourselves *men*! But are we? If science is right, we are *animals*! If the bible is right, we are the descendants of the sons of God. Then, in neither case are we true *Men*.

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose. And Jehovah said, My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever, for that he also is flesh: yet shall his days be a hundred and twenty years. The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them: the

same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown." Genesis 6.1-4, Amer. Standard Ver.

According to Genesis, then, originally there were the "flesh" life forms of earth, the Adamic race; there were also the "sons of God" (both flesh and spirit?) who came in unto the daughters of the Adamic race; and further, there were the Nephilim, who were in the earth. It was these latter who were the "mighty men of old, the men of renown."

Three kinds of men! The Adamic race; the half-breed offspring of the sons of God and the Adamic race; and the mysterious inhabitants of the (interior?) of the earth, the Nephilim.

Of which breed are we?

According to the bible, it was shortly after the sons of God mated with the daughters of Adam that "Jehovah repented that he had made man on the earth because his heart was only evil continually."

During 1944 through 1947, the author of this story, who was then editor of the science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, published a series of stories by Richard S. Shaver which came to be known collectively as The Shaver Mystery. Shaver claimed it to be a true account, and certainly its reception was the most amazing in all the twenty-seven years of *Amazing Stories'* history. LIFE magazine called it, in its May 21, 1951 issue, a "celebrated rumpus." Following

is what LIFE further said about it, and about your writer:

"The Shaver business mainly concerned a race of malformed, sub-human creatures called 'deros' (from 'detrimental robots') who inhabited a vast system of underground cities all over the world. The original name of their habitat was Lemuria, and they had once been slaves of a Lemurian master race. But this master race had long since disappeared from the earth, leaving the ignorant and malicious deros in control of the great cities and wonderful machines it had built. Since then the deros had occupied themselves mainly in persecuting the human race who lived on the crust of the earth above them.

"The deros were responsible for all the evil in the world. All the catastrophes, from shipwrecks to sprained ankles, were directly attributable to their influence. They often appeared on the surface of the earth and were sufficiently human in appearance to pass unnoticed in a crowd. But they performed most of their harassments by telepathy, rays and other remote-control devices from their subterranean homes. Their underground cities communicated with the surface through various caves which were extremely dangerous for human beings to enter.

"The deros first came to light in a story called 'I Remember Lemuria,' published in 1945 in *Amazing*

Stories. The story was purportedly the work of a Pennsylvania welder named Richard Shaver who, it was alleged, had a 'racial memory' capable of recalling events that had happened to mankind since the beginning of time. The 'racial memory' idea, it turned out later, was an editorial device thought up by Raymond Palmer, editor of *Amazing Stories*, to lend verisimilitude to Shaver's account of Lemuria.

"The device proved unnecessary. Practically everybody seemed to remember Lemuria. The deros were apparently as familiar to *Amazing Stories* readers as they were to Shaver. Letters to the editor poured in at 10 times their usual volume. The letters stated that Lemuria still existed, that the ground beneath dozens of American cities was honeycombed with dero communities. Some identified their neighbors as deros; others reported or hinted at personal encounters with deros carried out under conditions of incredible danger. The deros were referred to as 'the fifth column from Hell.'

"For heaven's sake drop the whole thing!" wrote an excited ex-Air Force captain. 'You are playing with dynamite. My companion and I fought our way out of a cave with submachine guns. I have two 9-inch scars on my left arm . . . My friend has a hole the size of a dime in his right bicep. It was seared inside. How, we don't know. But we both believe we know more about the Shaver mystery than any other

pair . . . Don't print our names. We are not cowards, but we are not crazy.'

"Editor Palmer expressed skepticism over these letters but confessed with an appropriate show of reluctance that the mounting evidence of the existence of the deros seemed overwhelming. Circulation zoomed. In the interests of science Palmer went to visit Shaver in his home and came away hinting darkly at strange happenings.

"... somebody . . . convinced his publisher . . . that the theories of Shaver and Palmer were in flat contradiction to Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity. This, obviously, was too much. The Shaver stories were discontinued; Editor Palmer, still affirming his faith in the existence of deros, resigned his job."

LIFE's story, as are all stories hastily covered by individuals whose research effort is scanty, and whose information sources are heresay, (besides being written with tongue in cheek) is largely erroneous. The true story will be told later in a book being prepared which will cover the Shaver Mystery in every detail. However, the basic idea is correctly presented.

Many people have asked this writer (who did not resign [to go into business for himself] until two years after the Shaver Mystery, and who never affirmed any belief one way or the other regarding deros) what he actually thought of the cave people. They might ask

him what he thinks of the bible, with its Nephilim, its sons of God, its Adamic race. The answer would be the same: he *does* think of them!

Here, then, is a story based on what he thinks. It cannot be said to be truth; but neither can it be said to be fiction. It is the result of *thinking* about the things just outlined. Specifically its theme is the coming of evil into the world, with its development dictated by the conditions and kinds of men who lived in those days. The writer believes you will find it entertaining, thought-provoking, and even exciting reading. Let us go back, then, many thousands of years—how many no living man can tell with accuracy, for all memory of that ancient civilization save for scattered references in the bible and other religious writings, has perished. But it was long ago. . . .

* * *

*"Satan, with vast and haughty
strides advanced,
Came towering, armed in adamant and gold."*

—John Milton

LIKE a comet, trailing a fiery tail thousands of miles long, the great ship *Star of the Morning* flashed through space. On one side it was black as ink, but on the side nearest the sun (and the sun was *very* near) the vessel's shiny metal skin blazed with brilliant gold. Never had the morning star been as bright!

To an observer unknowing of the existence of such ships as this the *Star of the Morning* would indeed have seemed to be a comet, so fiery was it and so long its tail of ionized gases. But there were no such observers, for in all the Sol System none were so ignorant. The *Star of the Morning* was well-known, but no more so than its lovable master, the Arch-Angle Lucifer, Son of the Morning.

Best loved was Lucifer in his homeland, Mu, the Continent of the Morning, on the third planet of Sol's family. The Angles of Mu had originally been blond and blue-eyed, but some time in the past Lucifer's bloodline had been crossed with a dark race of space. Dark was Lucifer—and handsome. Daring, dashing, fiery. He was ruler of Mu, and in addition, a Monitor Angle (Arch-Angle) in charge of the whole system of inner planets under their supreme head, their ruler and representative in the God Council—Elder Angle Aph. When Lucifer went forth his ship was literally a star, ruling the heavens, visible to the outermost limits of his domain. When he monitored, all obeyed his command.

Visible he was now, at distances greater than he knew, for as the *Star of the Morning* blazed past Sol within a million miles of its fiery corona, almost licked by the topmost flames, its image was duplicated in a great crystal sphere floating majestically in the center of a great council hall on a far, dark

world belonging to no sun's system. It was the God Council, and seated in the monitoring position before the great crystal globe was Elder Angle Aph. He turned now to face the others of the Council.

"Need we more evidence than that?" he asked, sweeping a hand toward the scene in the monitoring globe. "Would the Son of the Morning be so foolish as to brush the sun's surface in the face of our warning if the detrimental effects had not already taken hold of his judgment?"

None of the Council spoke, some nodded, but on the faces of all was certainty and agreement.

"Then we must act," said Aph. "Honorable Orion Sethantes, I yield to you. Speak your mind."

The leader of the Council regarded the shining, speeding ship in the monitor crystal gravely a moment, then he spoke, "I am Orion over you, commissioned to provide for many sun systems. It is

¹The symbol S means Sun. The name of our sun is Sol, a combination of the symbols for Sun, Origin and Life. The sun is the originator of life on this planet, as all who have waited for the Spring have discovered. In the designation of the gods, our planet is known as a "Sin" planet, because it is a planet "in the sun(light)" and derives its animal and vegetable life from the sun's energy. We are all "sinners" because we live in the light of the sun. It is no fault in us, but merely our location and derivation. Today we have a belief that sinners go to hell because of distorted memories of that day, long gone, when the Sinners were removed from this planet and taken to a dark world named Hel, not under the rays of a Tainted sun.

my will that Lucifer be arrested, brought to a place of cure, and that his peoples be evacuated to a safer world. There is great urgency: although protected to some extent from immediate serious mental damage by the ionic layers of the planet Sin, degeneration is inevitable and cannot be halted as long as Sol's heavy metals blaze. Let the Sinners¹ be taken to a dark world—such as the new planet, Hel, which is unpopulated."

"So be it!" As one man the Council voiced its approval of the edict.

* * *

ON the great ship, *Star of the Morning*, Lucifer sat before the visi-screens, his handsome dark eyes slit-lidded as he peered into the blazing inferno of light that was the sun pouring its rays into the control room and bathing all in a fiery incandescence almost impossible to bear. He laughed aloud.

"A brilliant sight, but harmless!"

He turned to his Lieutenant. "What say the indicators, Karmatt? Are we in danger of our lives, as we have been warned?"

"There is some radiation, Sire, but no more than one would experience from a normal x-ray. Certainly no heavy particles to lodge like bullets in our bones and burn our blood, turning us into hopeless idiots."

Lucifer frowned. "Then what do you say is the true meaning of the warning from the Council that Sol

is on the verge of becoming a D-type sun, and that its rays are already dangerous to the point of preparing for evacuation of the planets?"

"The sun," said Karmatt, "is a flaming ball of carbon. If it has any heavy elements in it they are far beneath the surface, prisoned by their own weight. Not for millions of years will they become ignited and produce atomic explosions which will cast radioactives over the System. We have always been taught that, and our readings have ever indicated that it is true. Those readings have not changed, if our trip is any proof. If any considerable amount of radiation were present, we would know it now."

"What you are saying," observed Lucifer, "is that more lies beneath the warning than mere helpfulness?"

Karmatt shrugged. "Why leave a world that is a jewel of perfection as far as inhabitation goes?"

"Unless somebody else wants it . . ."

Karmatt grinned. "There will, in any event, be sufficient time to evacuate the planet if the warning comes true—perhaps hundreds of years—and then that someone can have the planet if they so desire. But until we find more danger than this, it would be foolish to succumb to so obvious a trick."

"My sentiments exactly," said Lucifer. "Therefore, I shall inform the Council that all proper steps are being taken to safeguard the

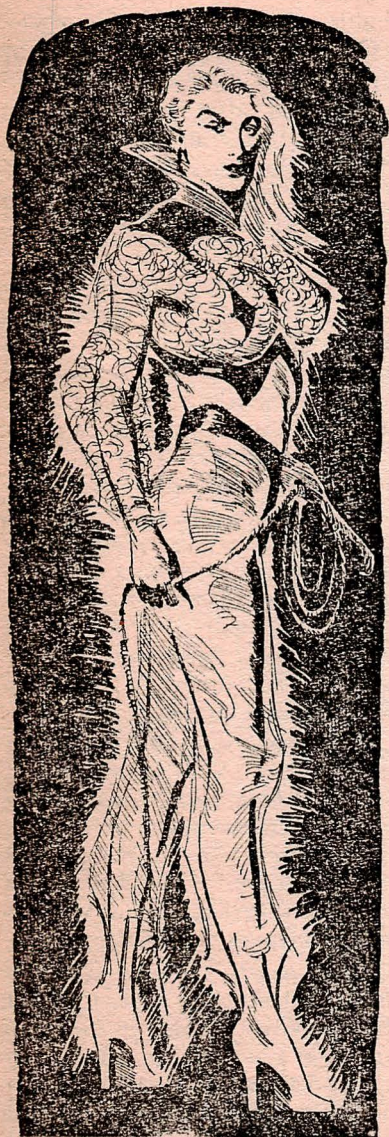
people of Sin, and especially of Mu, and that their best interests will be served to the utmost of my ability."

"A good decision," approved Karmatt. "After all, you are Arch-Angle of the inner planets. And if that is not the course desired, then they will show their true hand ere long."

Under Lucifer's guiding hand the *Star of the Morning* turned from its skirting of the sun's surface and headed back outward into the void in the direction of its home planet. As he rode, Lucifer pondered deeply—and shook his head in irritation. It was clear that there was some plot here, some threat to his leadership (which he suddenly regarded with new highness, and with ambition toward the future of even greater leadership) but why could he not put his finger on it? Why could he not divine it instantly, brilliantly and correctly?

He thought of Lilith. Ah, there was a woman! A fitting mate for a god, even though she was a daughter of man. He would go to her with his suspicions and his plans—and place them before her. She would tell him, with her woman's intuition, just where the fallacy lay.

Lilith was the daughter of the Chief Justice of the capital city of Mu, the fairest woman in the land, with hair the color of silver and eyes of a blue that rivaled the waters of the southern sea. It had been said that countless men had cast themselves into that sea after looking into her eyes and failing to



Lilith

win their attention. But Lilith had no eye for a common man—she had set her bird of paradise-feathered cap for a god, no less—and she had gained her objective. In Lucifer she found her rare beauty striking rare fire. In Lucifer she saw herself raised to the status of goddess, more than mere mortal, and destined to mother a superior race. And for these children she hoped to have, she planned—the mastery of the world of Sin. Ambitious beyond all measure was Lilith, daughter of Ra-Mon, Chief Justice of all Mu!

In Lilith, Lucifer had recognized the perfect foil for his own ambition. And also the perfect realization of his own plans to expand his greatness until it encompassed more than just a System Monitor. An Orion, no less, did Lucifer aspire to be. His ambition was new-found, growing upon him unaccountably in the few short years since he had been made Monitor Angle and had taken his monitoring ship *Star of the Morning* out into the brilliant light of Sol. He had taken to turning to Lilith to discuss his work, and it had been upon her advice that he had gone upon this unprecedented approach to Sol—to check the fact or the fallacy of the sun's newly-reported dangerous radiation. That report had come from the God Council, from the depths of space so far away that none living on Sin had ever seen its place.

To Lilith the far-off authority represented a stumbling block to

her own ambitions, and a possible source of frustration. No one ever knew just what edicts would come from the Council, and whether they would serve the immediate interests of those who came under them. Therefore she had decided to put to a test the doubts that had grown in her mind. She dared to question the latest edict; and had been filled with exultance when Lucifer had revealed that he shared her opinion.

"It is as though I have just begun to see clearly!" he had exclaimed "True, I have been made an Arch-Angle, but is that not a sop to prevent more lofty ambitions? Aph I have seen, but an Orion I have not seen. I know not if there is one, and Aph but holding out an illusion to enforce his own appropriated authority. If there is an Orion, I would be one!

"These worlds love me. They know not the distant gods. I will give them a god they can see!"

Lilith had placed her finger on his bold lips. "Softly," she had murmured. "No authority is gained by noisy outpourings. It is deeds you must perform; deeds you do not forecast to every idle ear."

Memory of all this was in Lucifer's mind as he landed his ship at last on the surface of his home planet. And almost at once he began to put into operation a brilliant plan that had come upon him even as the bright rays of the sun had poured upon him in space. But first he went to Lilith and took her to

him, for she was very fair.

Thus came to fruition the secret ambition of Lilith.

* * *

ON all Sin had never been any war—therefore there were no armies, no fleets, no engines of destruction. All had been ruled by the symbol of integration, the T. The ancient sign of the cross, universal over all the cosmos, insignia of the gods. On the star maps Sol bore a T beside it; but now, superimposed in red was an ominous D. D, the symbol of destruction, of disintegration, of death!

Lucifer did not know it, but that red D was now also inscribed beside his name in the Book of Judgment. Upon Lucifer's mind had fallen the Taint.²

Accordingly, Lucifer now began to put into operation his plan—the first idea for the application of force ever conceived on Earth. In short, Lucifer had invented the concept of War. And with it he had

²The symbols of T and D are the most important in all the languages of Earth. It is no accident that the cross is the symbol of Christ, nor is it an accident that the Devil's name begins with D. He is D-evil! Christ is the Cross-T. T is the incoming value; D is the departing value. The vortex that constructs matter ever whirls inward upon itself; the disintegration that dissolves matter spreads ever outward into nothing. A rather humorous (to us today) note is found in the word Taint. Literally it is slang, T-ain't. And there was no T in Lucifer now that his mental powers had been set into destructive rather than creative channels. The current of his life-force had been reversed.

invented the tools of war, weapons that could accelerate the process of D to a tremendous extent.

Lucifer knew full well the science of T and D. But because of his Taint, he was unable longer to distinguish true construction from destruction. As he labored to build his weapons, he labored in the mistaken, reversed idea that he was *building*, not tearing down. He saw only in his work the formation of objects, not the potential for the ultimate destruction they would certainly cause. The D in them was hidden from him by his sun-blinded insight.

He was building a D-fence behind which to establish his personal Empire. But a defense is not designed to hold things in, only to keep them out. And thus the cancer growing within his mind was destined to spread beyond his expectations. For war is the most virulent of spreading cancers.

Thus it was that his intentions (which were basically good insofar as he conceived them) were misinterpreted by his neighbors, and they, too, began to prepare for war. The first armament race in history was on.

Fired by his enthusiasm the people of Mu fell in behind their beloved leader. Brought into even closer communion by the marriage of Lilith to Lucifer it became an easy thing to form a mighty army to wield the arms Lucifer was building.

All through his building, Lucifer

had held to Lilith's advice to refrain from bespeaking his acts; and so it was that other races of the planet did not understand his motives. They did not know that Lucifer aspired to be an Orion and to rule the Sol System, even the Polaris Galaxy, in beneficence and benevolence. All they could see was the mighty preparation for offense; for that was the only way the preparations could be construed, as nowhere was there any menace visible which might be an attacking force against which these weapons and army could be used as defense. Being only men, they knew nothing of the God Council, and the regulations of T by which they ruled.

Then came the day when Lucifer first tested his new-built power. A great new battleship rose from its cradle in Mu and headed out over the ocean toward a tiny deserted island. . . .

* * *

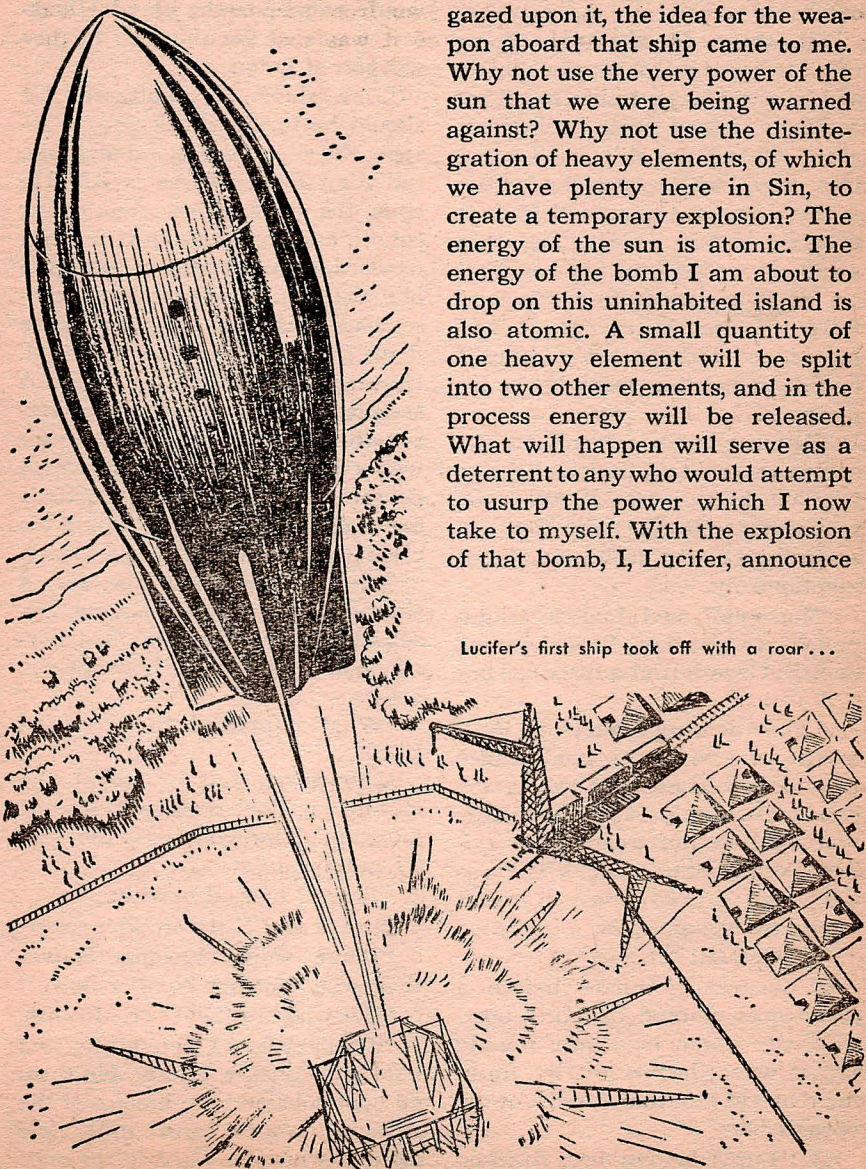
"NOW we shall see!" exulted Lucifer, seating himself beside the monitoring crystal in his palace. He glanced lovingly at his wife, who smiled back at him with pride in him. On the other side of the room sat Karmatt, watching the crystal sphere intently. In it was mirrored the tiny island, an emerald jewel in a blue sea.

"What is it that we are about to see?" he asked.

Lucifer smiled proudly. "Remember when we went to the sun

to see if it were really D? While I gazed upon it, the idea for the weapon aboard that ship came to me. Why not use the very power of the sun that we were being warned against? Why not use the disintegration of heavy elements, of which we have plenty here in Sin, to create a temporary explosion? The energy of the sun is atomic. The energy of the bomb I am about to drop on this uninhabited island is also atomic. A small quantity of one heavy element will be split into two other elements, and in the process energy will be released. What will happen will serve as a deterrent to any who would attempt to usurp the power which I now take to myself. With the explosion of that bomb, I, Lucifer, announce

Lucifer's first ship took off with a roar...



myself Orion over the Polaris Galaxy!"

All three in the monitoring room became intent on the sphere, and as the great warship raced toward the island their excitement grew. At last the ship itself came into view, hurtling straight for the island. It passed over, and from it dropped a tiny object. The ship went on swiftly on its original course at top speed to get beyond range of the destruction it had loosed, and within a few minutes it had dwindled to a speck in the far distance.

Then the bomb went off. On the screen there was a flash of light as brilliant as the sun. It filled the monitoring chamber with fiery incandescence and Lilith cried out involuntarily.

"You see!" said Lucifer triumphantly to Karmatt. "It is the same energy. Harmless at a distance, but . . ."

A gigantic mushroom cloud leaped up now, and the incandescence died down. They watched as the cloud rose, and for a half-hour they marveled at the tremendous evidence of power unleashed. Then, as the cloud drifted away, Karmatt loosed an exclamation.

"The island! It's gone!"

It was true. Where before a green gem of land had protruded from the water, now only muddy brown waves lashed angrily, forming a horrid blot in the midst of the ocean's blue.

But Lucifer's eyes were fixed on

the far horizon. He had known what would happen to the island. His interest was in the ship, his mighty weapon of D-fence.

"The ship," he muttered. "It should be turning back now to inspect the site of the island and take radiation tests. Where is it?" He spun the dials of the monitoring sphere and the scene in it jumped forward at great speed, crossing the blue water in the direction the vessel had gone. For several minutes it quested onward, then it slowed. Under Lucifer's guiding hand it seemed to descend toward the water where a column of black smoke was rising. Then as it swooped down to a close-up view, Lucifer's fist crashed down on the arm of his chair and he uttered a great oath.

There, sinking into the sea, a shattered wreck, was the great vessel; and even as they watched, horrified, it disappeared beneath the waves.

"What happened to it?" cried Lilith.

Grim-faced, Lucifer swept the monitoring device onward, toward a distant shore looming in the east. Then he pointed.

"There!" he said harshly.

Now it was Karmatt who swore.

"Three ships! Fleeing. It was they who shot our bomber down!"

"But who are they?" cried Lilith.

"That's what I intend to find out," said Lucifer grimly. He turned his knobs and the images of the three ships grew larger until they filled the screen. Then all at once

they seemed to be inside the ship in the rear.

"Black men," said Lucifer. "The Atlans! They are making war on us!"

But he was wrong. The Atlans had but defended themselves against what had seemed an attack headed toward their shores—and after having witnessed the potency of that attack, they had rushed out to forestall it.

That they had succeeded stung Lucifer to the quick. With a gesture of rage he snapped off the monitoring ray and rose towering to his feet.

"If it's war they want . . .!"

He rushed from the room, followed by Karmatt.

* * *

DEEP beneath the surface of Mu, where no monitoring ray had ever penetrated, lay a great system of caverns. No one, not even their inhabitants, knew their extent, but it was vast beyond belief. And in one of the caverns, the most ornately furnished and magnificent of many ornate and magnificent caves, sat a man (or was he a man?) named Neph. At the moment he was listening to a report from his Chief of Intelligence.

"If what you are telling me is true, Zho-bab, it is a serious matter."

"Yes, Lord Neph, it is. If the Council ever orders a search of the planet, we will be sure to be discovered, and although I believe we

are impregnable here, we may be bottled up and our future plans for emergence into the galaxy throttled."

"And they *will* discover us!" said Neph emphatically. "Even now their instruments must be recording the atomic explosion Lucifer has set off. When they arrive to arrest him—you say the order has been given?—they will know that the concept was never his own, but was planted there while he was off guard in the sun's ion-field."

"Perhaps they will not suspect the deed was done from here, as it occurred so far from this planet. . . ."

"They are not fools. And also, they are thorough. They will scan the whole System, if necessary, and even the galaxy. Unless. . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless we can somehow step up the activity of the sun, so that more D will be thrown out than they anticipate. If we can affect the minds of the arresters, perhaps we can mislead them."

"We might. They will come prepared for a calculated amount of radiation, and perhaps before they realize the danger is more potent, we can infect them with the Taint."

"Exactly. Meanwhile we must not make ourselves known to Lucifer and yet enlist ourselves in his cause."

Zho-bab smiled. "Wisely said, and with an element of humor. I am sure he would not enlist in *our* cause, even if he knew we existed.

His vanity is beyond compare! Imagine his ambition to become an Orion!"

"As well attempt to eat the sun!" agreed Neph with an answering smile. "But sometimes great ego can be a potent weapon, in the right hands."

Zho-bab turned to go, but Neph interrupted him. "What of ourselves, if we accelerate the D activity of Sol? Are we safe here?"

"Perfectly so. Since we installed the air purifiers we are no longer exposed even to the contaminated atmosphere of the surface. And no particle, no matter how active, can penetrate four miles of solid rock or water."

"Good! Then we Nephilim will be safe even if Lucifer fails in the mission we have set him."

"That we will be."

Zho-bab left the chamber, and Neph sat silently staring after him. As he sat, he thought deeply, and he made an awesome sight as he sat there in contemplation. Neph, like all the Nephilim, was a big man, more than eight feet tall, and bulking in proportion to his height. Originally he had not been named Neph, but when he had become the ruler, the name went with the position.

He was thinking now of his plans (the plans his predecessors had developed before him) of acquiring the entire galaxy for the Nephilim, undisturbed by the god-race whose half-breed offspring they were, sons of a planet now but

shattered remnants in an orbit beyond the fourth planet of the Sol System.

Supposedly all his ancestors had been destroyed with the planet that had been their birthplace, but the gods had reckoned without the original Neph, who had made a great discovery, and found a strange and wonderful hiding-place inside the planet on whose surface the gods had placed the seed of a new Adamic race.

For long centuries (hundreds of them) the Nephilim, as they called themselves, had prepared for their emergence again into the System, and ultimately into the galaxy. Great was their science, derived from the original discovery of a secret of nature by the original Neph. It had been the present Neph who had brought the sun into premature radioactivity, knowing that it would mean abandonment of the System and quarantine for many milleniums. Yet, the amount of Taint was too little to move his plans along at the pace he desired, and he had hit upon the idea of creating an illusion of greater radioactivity than actually existed to accelerate the evacuation of the System and thereby leave it free to the activities of the Nephilim until their larger plan took shape. And Lucifer was the core of that illusion. If the God Council believed that the Taint was so great as to bring the evil of war upon the galaxy, they would quarantine the System. Then Neph could prepare

the great invasion that would destroy the control of the Council in the galaxy, and give it into the hands of the Nephilim.

"No, Lucifer, you will not fail. Your arm will be mightier than you know. You will never become Orion, but you will not fail!"

He smiled grimly, and in that smile was little of kinship with man. . . .

* * *

BUT sometimes the plans of mighty men go astray. For, although Lucifer had great ego, so that he was even blinded to the actual strength of his own right arm, not so Lilith, who, most beautiful of all women, was also most crafty—and most curious.

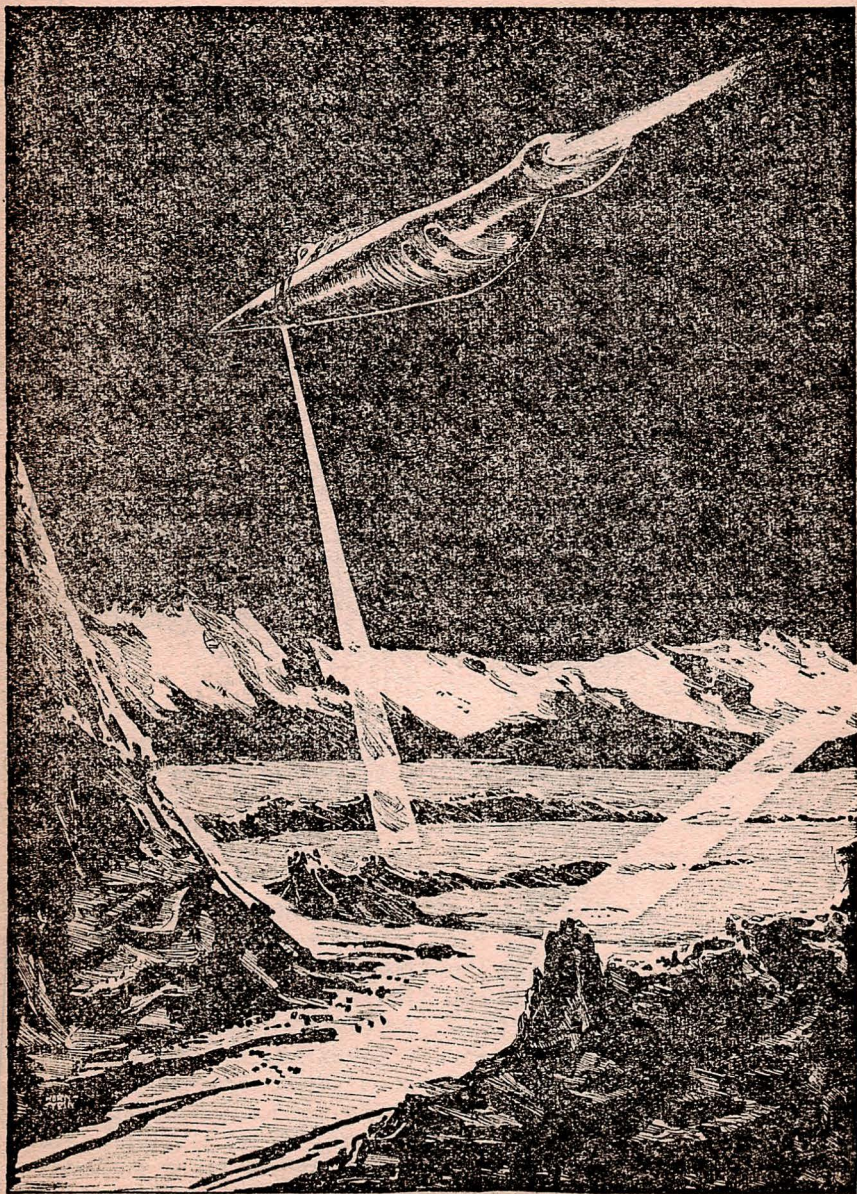
Thus it was that when Lucifer embarked with his great fleet toward the shores of Atlan, she sat constantly before the monitoring globe, scanning the whole affray in all its detail. For all her inner hardness, Lilith was of delicate sensibilities. No woman of such beauty can be oblivious to the factors of beauty. She knew the value of her white skin, of her silvery hair, of her incredibly blue eyes. And her clothing always was of exactly the correct hue to accentuate and complement her natural coloring. Even the color of the sunlight on any given day played a part in her selection of attire. An artist was Lilith.

When Lucifer's crimson rays lashed down at the topless towers

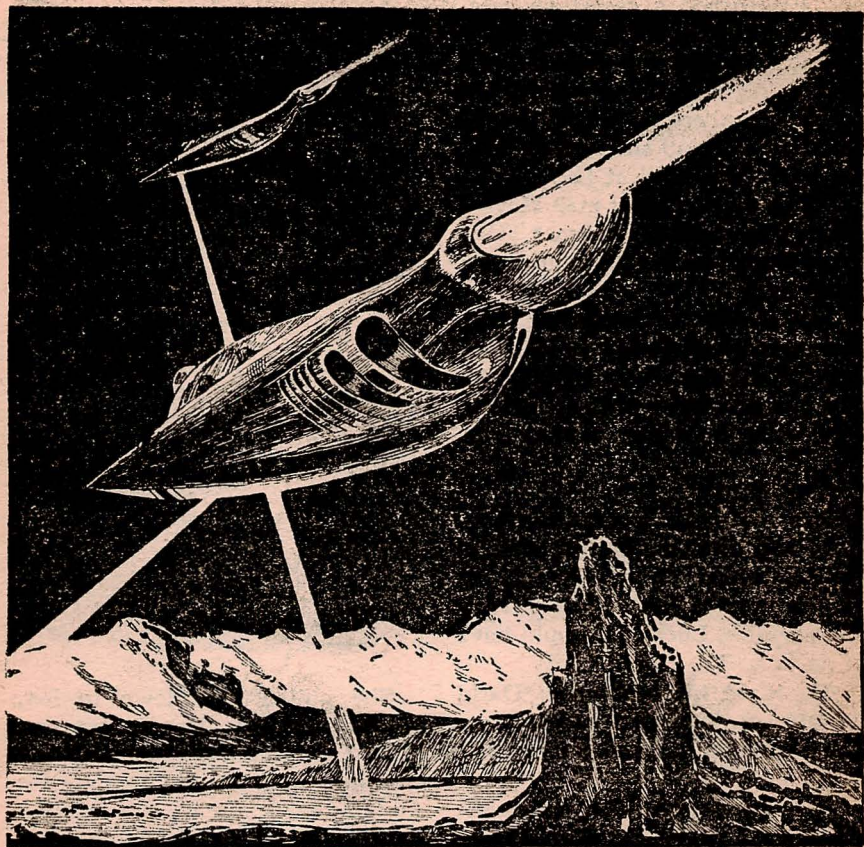
of Atlan, sending them tumbling into ruin, smashing the power of the planet's second greatest race, she was aware of the grim beauty of the colorful scene as it came to her over the monitoring ray. For a time she watched it, even picturing the vivid hue of the red ray as the hue of a new gown—and rejecting it because it would dominate her own more delicate coloring—until she sensed an off-hue quality to the rays; something blue and cold that gave them the slightest of purplish tinge. Her intent eyes searched and analyzed, and then she drew a sharp breath. There, visible plainly now that she sought for them, were separate, superimposed rays on those of Lucifer. And as she watched the unaccountable might of her husband's avenging fist, she began to seek for the source of the cause.

Slowly she moved the knobs of the monitoring ray. Nearer came the scene of conflict. Downward dipped her field of vision. Then with a gasp she snapped off the ray. A moment she sat, motionless as white marble, then rose to her feet, her mind a purposeful blank. Her lips were tight so that no breath whatever might pass them lest she utter inadvertently one word of what she had learned.

Lilith had discovered still another potential menace to her ambitions. And Lilith had come too far now to be thwarted. There would be no noisy outpourings from her, even to Lucifer. But there



Lucifer's ships lashed rays down at Atlan.



would be deeds. . . .

* * *

LUCIFER returned from Atlan master of the planet. And he returned to the acclaim of his people, drunk with their first taste of power, and convinced they had destroyed a treacherous attacker. Justice was on their side, and justification. And if among them had been

doubters, now they saw that Lucifer was their protector and champion. And in a great oration, Lucifer gave them the peace of the planet, and a promise of perpetual safety from any further attacks such as they had suffered. Born into the world was propaganda, although in all truth, not even Lucifer knew that it was propaganda. But its success was obvious to him,

and he learned a secret he catalogued carefully for future use.

But his triumph was short-lived, for that night, in the privacy of the palace chambers, he sought to take Lilith to him and she resisted him. Amazed, he looked at her.

"Why do you shun me? Have I given you cause for rancor? Have I not given you the beginnings of a great empire?"

She shook her head, her deep blue eyes mysteriously veiled. "My Lord, I am supremely happy with the gift you have brought me today. And I would reward you, but..."

"But what?"

She motioned toward the window and the brilliant moonlight that streamed through it, making of the room a fairy place. "Draw the curtains, Lucifer. I would have it dark..."

He lifted his eyebrows. "Dark! Would you hide your beauty from the moonlight that sets it off so perfectly?"

She dropped her head demurely. "Tonight I prefer the dark. Sometimes when one cannot see, one can feel much more..."

Lucifer rose to his feet and laughed. "Ah but you are the coy one. I had thought you had suddenly gone shy, as is not your wont." He strode to the window and drew the golden curtain that shut out the moonlight. Then in the dark he groped his way back to her.

"And now..." he said.

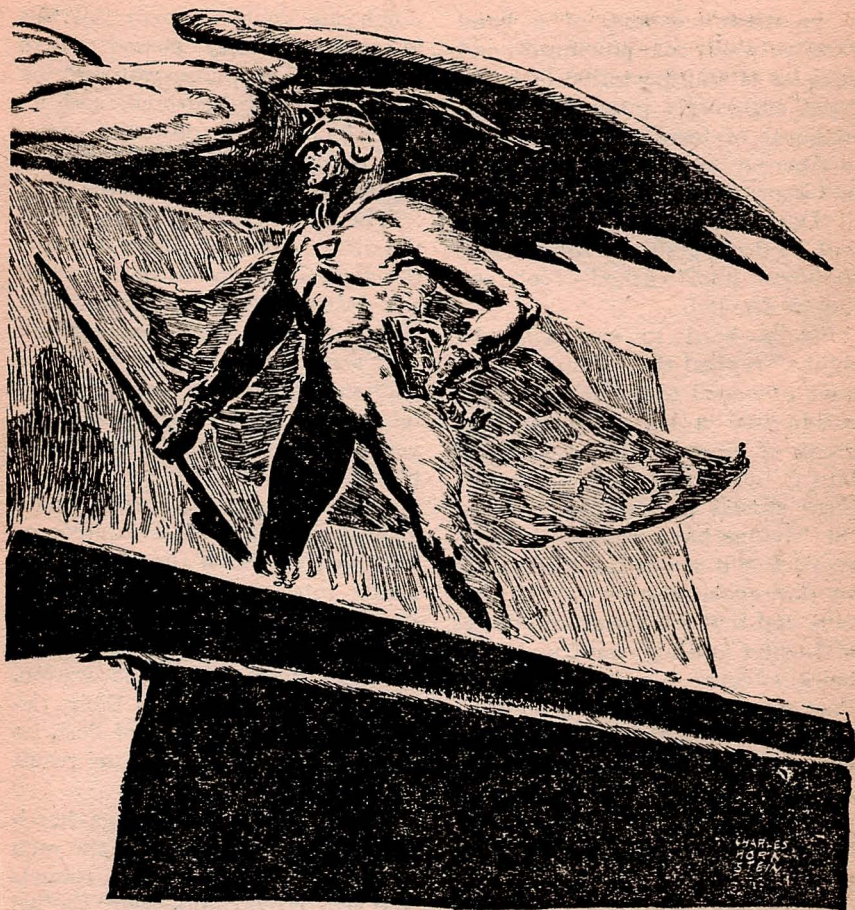


... And now Atlan lay
conquered at Lucifer's feet.

She pulled him down to her, placed her lips close to his ear. "... I must tell you something," she whispered. "Hold your caresses for a moment, for we are in great danger. Only listen, make no utterances, and if I cease speaking, know that I have a reason, that I avoid others hearing. I wanted it dark so that I could see any listening monitor ray."

Then she poured into his incredulous ear the secret she had learned—and the solution.

So it was that the Nephilim remained unaware that their hiding place had been discovered, and an enemy forewarned whose power



they were bound to underestimate, for they knew nothing of the wiles of woman.

* * *

NOW that the Atlans had been vanquished, Lucifer's warlike preparations took on an accelerated pace until it seemed he was

preparing feverishly for something tremendous. And indeed he was, but to the Nephilim watching from their hideaway far beneath the surface of the earth it was as inexplicable as to the surface inhabitants of Mu, who were themselves engaged in the vast undertaking.

Countless weapons of a hand variety were manufactured, and vehicles of transportation of many types apparently intended for the roughest of terrain. Foot soldiers numbering millions were trained and kept in readiness.

"Does he think the God Council will send a gigantic invasion force to arrest him?" asked Neph one day of Zho-bab.

"It is hard to say what he thinks," replied the Nephilim. "We have managed to disturb the sun's equilibrium a bit more by hundreds of atomic bombs dropped into it by remote control, causing great storms on its surface. Even the Muians have noticed the sun-spots. But it seems the effect is as we desired, saturating the Sol System, and that the mental processes of Lucifer and his countrymen are being affected even more strongly than we expected they would."

"Then when the God Council's arresting emissaries arrive, they may find it difficult to reason correctly," said Neph with satisfaction. "Our plans are going very well indeed!"

But Neph's plans were not going well, and he was to learn a new meaning of the word saturation before many more months had passed.

At last the day came when Lucifer was ready. While he worked, Lilith had been busy spying and ferreting with the monitoring ray, and the Nephilim would have been surprised indeed to know how

much she knew of them. All this information Lilith passed on to Lucifer in the innocent-seeming privacy of her bedroom, and always in complete darkness where the phosphorescence of a spying ray would betray its presence.

The first indication Neph had of the disaster that was upon him was the gigantic explosion that marked the destruction, deep beneath the surface, of the main power plant that armed his weapons. That one brilliant stroke, accomplished by loosing an atomic bomb into the ventilating shafts of the power plant, made the battle an even one of arms against arms, muscle against muscle. And as millions of men poured down the ventilating shafts into every Nephilim city, hundreds of thousands of giant Nephilim learned, with their leader, the meaning of the word saturation. For Lucifer saturated their defenses with the weight of flesh he hurled against them. The result was inevitable.

The Nephilim worked a horrible holocaust of death on the men of Mu, until ventilating tunnels and access corridors were choked with corpses. But ever the piles of human corpses overlay the bodies of the slain giants.

No longer were there giants in the earth, only death and foul corruption and the end of a centuries-long dream of conquest.

Neph himself was taken prisoner and brought before Lucifer and Lilith, who sat upon the throne he

himself had occupied for so long. He faced Lucifer, utterly crushed, confused, beaten.

"How did you know we existed?" he asked. "How did you discover all our secrets? How did you prepare this mighty attack?"

Lucifer smiled at him, but there was no mirth in his smile. "Perhaps you, like the God Council, have been mistaken about the sun. Perhaps there is no deadly radiation twisting the mind of man into faulty thinking channels. Perhaps the faulty thinking is in the degeneration of old age that has set its senile fingers on your own minds. For know that it was a mere woman, a daughter of man, who utterly destroyed you. I but followed her bidding, acknowledged her craft, placed might behind her plotting."

Neph turned to look at Lilith and for a moment he stared at her. Then he nodded. "Yes. That would be true. You are still not as mad as your husband, whose mind is almost beyond repair through exposure to the full force of Sol's D emanations. It would be your mind, still clear and bright, that could carry out this amazing thing without being detected by us. We placed no estimation on the men of Mu, fearing them not, and even less upon its women. That there was one woman among them all whose mind-power ranked with that of the god-race, was our undoing."

"You are a fool!" said Lucifer.

"You yourself are mad, to call me mad. I have been to the sun's very edge, with instruments, and the danger you say exists is a figment of imagination, or perhaps more truly, a lie for a purpose I have suspected from the beginning."

Neph looked at the Arch-Angle reflectively. He seemed now to have recovered some of his composure, resigned himself to the end of his dream, expected nothing more from life but death. "What is it that you have suspected?" he asked.

Lucifer waved a hand aloft. "This is a fair world, and a fair System. It is the jewel of a galaxy that is most perfect. From far beyond, doubtless from much less fair regions, comes a warning without foundation. It can be for only one reason, to rob us by stealth of our birthright, so that, abandoned, it may be picked up without struggle."

Neph looked at Lucifer steadily. "Perhaps even in defeat I am to have my revenge. But not being vindictive, I am going to offer you instead the only hope of salvation you have. Listen to me now, Lucifer, for I speak words of wisdom far beyond your science to comprehend. I only hope that your mind is not too badly affected to accept the truths I am about to reveal to you. But if it is, then I will base my statements upon proof which I can produce in due time, if given the opportunity. And unless you slay me on the spot, that

opportunity cannot fail me."

"I slay no defenseless man," said Lucifer angrily.

"I am not exactly a man," returned Neph. "My ancestors, like yours, were both man and god. On a world now destroyed. Let me tell you of it, briefly, that you may lend proper weight to my words."

"Tell on," said Lucifer, interest lighting his eyes.

"The same thing happens on all worlds. The seed of life is planted by the god-race, and grows until by evolution it has reached the status known as human. A Human is something less than a Man. Perhaps it is a man without a soul—I do not know myself. But Human dies, and Man does not. But without the gods, there can be no men. It is when the gods mate with the humans that Man is born into the worlds. That new half-breed can rise to greater spheres, progressing ever onward. Unless he has a blight. Unless he is Tainted. If the Taint is not too great, he can be cured. If he cannot be cured, he is quarantined. We, the Nephilim, were mighty men of old, of renown and power. But when our science reached the point where we loosed the Taint on our own planet, we builded a fire that we could not put out. It remained to the god-races to extinguish it. This they did by utter destruction, and by so drastic a means only because they said they wished to save the remaining planets from a like fate. They cut us out like a cancer, and

although we might have been cured, there was no time. Except for one family, the family of Neph.

"Neph had discovered a great secret, and it had led him deep into one of the moons of his planet where he was safe from the madness that overtook his fellows. Luckily, being sane, he kept safeguards, and thus it was that he learned of the approaching expedition of gods to destroy the cancer that had been introduced on his planet, and he escaped to this world. Here he used his secret, the secret of eternal life in the flesh, and lived in secret in the caverns. And for many ages we have planned to come forth, to take what we need to live as the gods we really are. For what better is a god born to eternal life, than a man who has attained the same goal by his own science? Indeed, is not the Man superior to the God, by reason of Intent over Chance?"

Lucifer frowned. "Already your story is false. You say you are immortal, yet observe how you Nephilim have died."

"By accident, yes. By force, yes. But naturally, no. Given the means to continue our science, we can renew our flesh eternally. But let that go—I have more important things to say to you. Perhaps better would it be if I showed you the record and said nothing, allowing you to draw your own conclusions."

Neph stepped forward to the monitoring globe that occupied the

center of the room and snapped on the switch. "We will play back the record of the past few months . . ." he said.

As an image began forming in the crystal sphere, Lucifer and Lilith leaned forward and stared intently. It was the God Council they saw . . .

"You see," observed Neph. "Even our monitors are better than yours. Never had yours such range."

Before them Lucifer saw the enactment of the scene in which his arrest was decreed.

"Why have they not yet come?" he asked.

"It takes time to prepare a fleet of vessels sufficient to remove the whole population of a world."

But now the scene had changed, and Lilith uttered a cry of dismay as she saw the giant ships, as big as satellites, speeding through space toward them.

"The ships have been built," said Neph. "Even now they approach the limits of the Sol System. It may be that as you emerge upon the surface, they will have arrived. Your arrest is near."

"They will never arrest me!" said Lucifer arrogantly. "Even those huge ships I can destroy."

But Lilith looked at him. "No, Lucifer, that would not answer the problem. Destroy them, and more would come . . ."

"Perhaps not," said Lucifer, still with flaming eyes. "The God Council, if its own words be true, never

wages war. Rather would they quarantine the System than fight."

"Wrong again," said Neph. "First, your weapons would be impotent against them. They come in a manner you know nothing of. There are dimensions unknown to you, wherein atom bombs are to no avail. When they come, you will be arrested and your people taken from the planet. There is only one way you can be saved . . ."

Lilith laid a hand on Lucifer's arm as he started to rise angrily to his feet. "And what way is that, Lord Neph?" she asked.

"It may be that even a few days in the Tainted System may cloud their judgment. It may be that they can be caused to reason falsely, be swayed to an argument. Certain it is that the God Council has always advocated the principle of free will, when that will is proven to be untainted. Convince them that you have not been seriously affected by the Taint, and avoid detention."

"How can that be done, and what will be gained by it?"

"Go out to meet them. Welcome them with joy. Prepare the evacuation of the peoples of Sin with all possible speed, then abandon the planet."

"You are mad!" gasped Lucifer. "Come, Lilith, let us listen no longer to this madman."

But Lilith retained her grasp on his arm. "I see that you have not finished speaking, Lord Neph," she said gently. "Say on."

"I will speak briefly and simply," said Neph, a peculiar look in his eyes. "Leave your armies here in the caverns, where they are. Go swiftly to the surface and send down the women who are wives to these men, and their children. These caverns will hold ten million. And support them. Then return to the surface, allow the rest to be evacuated, pretending to aid in the process. Then contrive some seeming accident in space that will make the God Council believe you perished and return to the caverns, there to build for the conquest you plan. The System will be quarantined, the sun's rate of D will subside, for it is we who have accelerated it, and you will be safe, uninfected, and in peace to perfect your plans. There is no other way to carry them out, for once the God Council works its will on you, your dream will die forever, as has mine."

Lilith looked at him reflectively. "I see, and what is your part in this plan?"

Lucifer jerked his arm away from Lilith and he stood erect. "That is easy to see," he said with a snarl. "Did he not say he might have his revenge even in defeat? He has some trick in mind . . ."

"Nay," said Neph, a strange tragedy in his voice. "The revenge I spoke of was two-fold. On you I would visit the future fate that has fallen on me, by bequeathing my fallen empire to you; and on the God Council I would gain my

revenge for my destroyed race by presenting them with a potential problem that may conceivably overwhelm them, even as you plan, in this galaxy. In this chamber you will find the secret of eternal flesh life to aid you. As for myself, I take the death of my fathers!" And so saying, he drew a dagger from his tunic and stabbed himself through the heart.

"By the gods!" gasped Lucifer. "What manner of man . . .?"

"Said he not that he was something other than man?" whispered Lilith. "But one thing he *has* proved . . ."

"What is that?" asked Lucifer.

"By his death he has proved his sincerity. Only one interpretation can now be placed on his plan as he outlined it to us . . ."

Lucifer looked wonderingly at her. "You are right!" he exclaimed. "It is the answer to a problem otherwise insoluble. For the time my empire is here, in the Nether Regions of the Nephilim."

"Yes," said Lilith. "Here we shall be bound for a time, but the bonds will be of our own making. One day the time will come when we will strike them from us and be masters of a galaxy forever free of the influence of gods we want not."

She stepped from the throne. "Come, Lucifer, we have work to do, in haste."

* * *

IF the preparations prior to the invasion of the Nether Regions

had been conducted in secret, the carrying out of Neph's plan was even more secret, and in the dead of night millions of the inhabitants of Mu were singled out, rushed to what were designated as embarking points to those who remained. In reality they disappeared into the shafts leading to the caverns and their loved ones, husbands and soldiers.

Meanwhile Lilith kept close watch for the appearance of the on-coming ships of the God Council, and it was nearly a week before she first detected the giant ship in the lead. Instantly she gave the warning to Lucifer, and under cover of the remaining few nights, Lucifer sealed up the openings and concealed them from observation.

At length all was in readiness and Lucifer and Lilith embarked in their own ship to go out to meet the vessels of the Council, now well within the orbit of Jupiter.

"Do you think we have fooled them thus far?" asked Lucifer.

"I think so, my Lord. I have watched their monitors closely, and none seem to have detected anything unusual. In fact, they have kept only a superficial watch, seeming confident of what they will find when they arrive."

Lucifer smiled. "Then they will find nothing. Even the factories where our arms were manufactured have been destroyed. They will think that we have disarmed, once the menace of the Atlans, who went mad, was removed. They will be-

lieve our story of our love for peace."

Soon they were able to see the approaching ships of the God Council with the naked eye, and Lilith gasped as she saw the actual size of the ship in the lead.

"It is as large as a world!" she exclaimed. "Well it is that we decided not to resist them. Our bombs would have made but pin-pricks on the skin of such a ship!"

"Perhaps not," said Lucifer. "If we had time to prepare, to do more research into atomic energy, we could find a way to create a contagious reaction. Then, once started, the disintegration would grow until it engulfed even a ship like that, making of it an artificial sun."

"Our plan will give us time to create such things," said Lilith.

They approached the huge ship now, and as they neared, a voice spoke to them in their control room. "Welcome Son of the Morning, and Daughter of the Red Star. The heart of Aph is filled with joy that you come out to greet me."

"Welcome to the Sol System Great Aph!" said Lucifer in ringing tones. "That you have arrived in time is our great delight. Long have we hoped, and hard have been our labors to prepare for your coming. Even though we could not know when you would arrive, yet with the faith in our hearts, we prepared, knowing that the great Orions who govern the galaxies would take all suitable measures. I sent you a message that I was at

work."

"We received your message, and delighted in it," came the voice. "In order that we may now carry out our plans with the greatest efficiency, what have you accomplished?"

"I have checked the radiation of Sol and found it even more dangerous than your warning indicated. Therefore, I have prepared the people of my continent for evacuation, trusting that you would bring suitable ships to convey them from this world. Many ships have I built to aid, but insufficient is my knowledge to know what is truly necessary, and how far we must journey. But this I know—we must leave the planet in all haste. Our minds fail us, and my own brain whirls with D. Rescue us, Oh Aph, before it is too late!"

"You have done well," said Aph. "Be not too concerned, for it is obvious that the Taint has not yet become so serious as to be incurable. We can cure the people of Mu once we have removed them to Hel, a dark world safe from radiation."

The two ships were very near now, and as Lucifer's vessel plunged on an opening appeared in the ship of Aph and took Lucifer's vessel into it as a cloud would engulf a mote.

Once inside Lilith and Lucifer stared in wonder at the magnificence of the scene before them. Here in this gigantic vessel were lakes, rivers, forests, a miniature

sun, and cities, orderly and well built and waiting for occupancy. They landed their ship at a place to which Aph directed them verbally, and stepped out.

Before them now appeared Aph, clad in white gown, bearded and majestic in appearance. He took Lucifer's hand in his and drew the Arch-Angle to him, kissing him. Lucifer kissed him back fondly, then stepped aside as Lilith came forward.

"Is it meet that a daughter of man kiss a god?" she asked shyly.

Aph smiled at her, and took both her hands in his. "Think you that even a god is blind to the beauty of the daughters of men? Nowhere in all the universe, my child, is there more beautiful than you. Indeed, my daughter, your embrace would be most pleasurable."

And Lilith, radiant and misty-eyed, lifted her lips to those of Aph and kissed him as a child would kiss a grandparent. As she drew back in shyness and disengaged her hands, a strange light glowed for an instant in Aph's eyes, then it was gone. Lilith noted it, and for a moment she was troubled. But she concealed her perturbation and turned to Lucifer with an ecstatic clapping of her delicate hands.

"Oh let us inspect this wonderful vessel! How great indeed are the gods, and how wonderful will be our lot under their care! To be rescued from the awful danger that threatens the planet Sin! Lucifer,

I could weep for joy. . . ."

And Aph smiled down at her fondly.

* * *

IT was dawn when the great rescuing fleet of the Council landed on the broad plains of Mu, where already millions of the people of Mu were encamped, awaiting evacuation. So splendid was the scene as the brilliant ships, shining with a gold color that set the sun to shame, that the populace was caught up in an ecstatic fervor that literally lifted their souls from their bodies with joy.

Hundreds of thousands of gods came from the ships and mingled with the people, and a day of recreation was declared. Together men and gods consorted, and watched spectacles of such magnificence that the inhabitants of Mu were rendered speechless with wonder. Musicians played music never before heard on the planet, and triumphant songs echoed through the air as though from the clouds themselves. Colored banners unfurled through the sky like the northern lights magnified a hundred-fold. And that night, none on Mu slept, nor felt the need for sleep as beneficial and soothing rays and emanations played on them from the ships, restoring them to such vigor and well-being as they had not realized possible, mute evidence of the poisons that had been on them for years from the Tainted sun.

But Lucifer and Lilith sensed it not, intent on playing their parts. And cleverly they did it, so that Aph, who seemed intent on bestowing them with his every font of love and tenderness, seemed completely pacified from doubt or suspicion.

At last came the end of the celebration, and the beginning of the great task of embarking all the people of the continent aboard the ships. For two weeks the job went on, and more than sixty-four million people left their homes and entered the cities built inside the great ships. As each ship was filled, it took off into the sky and began the long trip out into the void where sailed the dark world, Hel, waiting them to become their foster-planet.

"What is the planet like?" asked Lilith in curiosity as she sat with Aph, watching another of the great ships take off.

Aph took her hand in his and said, "Close your eyes, my child, and I will show you."

Wondering, Lilith did as she was bid, and strangely, before her inner vision, a scene began to unfold. At first she saw nothing but millions of stars, brighter than she had ever seen stars before. Then she saw a vast looming bulk before her. As it engulfed the whole heavens, she saw it was a sphere, a world unlit by any sun. Dimly mountains loomed, eternally frozen and dark, except for starlight.

"How can we live here?" she

murmured, startled.

"See on," said Aph.

Onward her inner sight went, until it passed through the crust of the planet, and burst through it into an inner world, vast beyond belief, and brilliantly lit by a flaming red sun that hung at its exact center like a glowing coal.

"That is a pure carbon sun, and it warms the interior of this world," came Aph's voice. "It is a light and heat entirely suitable to men, although gods would find it unbearably dark."

"What is the light of the gods like?" asked Lilith.

"You could not bear it, especially in your condition," said Aph softly.

Abruptly Lilith opened her eyes and stared into those of her guide. For a long moment their gaze held, then Lilith turned hers away.

"Your love for Lucifer is very great," said Aph gently. "And I say to you that it will **not** be in vain. Aye, many thousands of years will pass, but you will not lose that love. It will grow stronger until it shall be your salvation, for only in love is there sanity and the cure of insanity. Only one power in the universe can overcome the Taint, and that is Love. The love in your heart will be the seed that will ultimately grow to conquer the Taint in Lucifer."

Lilith was trembling. "I don't know what you mean," she whispered.

Aph drew her to him and kissed

her on the cheek. "Nay, but your heart does. Bless you my child, and cherish what I have told you. It will be your comfort in dark hours, and your hope unto the day of release."

He rose and left her sitting there.

* * *

WHEN the people of Mu had been taken into the last great ship, Lucifer and Lilith readied themselves for departure in their palace. Aph came to them and spoke to them warmly. "The work is nearly completed, my children. I go now to survey the planet, to see what men remain on other continents. I will take them up, and depart. Go now, and I will see you hence."

Once more he kissed them, and as he did so, a deep sleep fell upon them both. For a moment Aph looked down at them with pity in his eyes, then he turned and hurried to his own vessel.

When Lucifer awoke, he looked about him dazedly. Beside him Lilith still slept, and he shook her to waken her.

"Why have we slept?" he asked. "We must be off, or we will arouse suspicion."

Lilith sat up and looked about her. Then she went hastily to the monitoring sphere and switched it on. Lucifer watched it as she turned the knobs. At length she found what she wanted, then Lucifer gasped. It was the ship of Aph, already far beyond the orbit of Nep-

tune, and before them was the face of Aph, smiling back at them sadly. And even as they watched, he raised a hand in farewell. Then the scene faded from the crystal, and although Lilith sought to recapture it, the sphere remained blank. Nor could she longer make it penetrate the barrier that seemed to surround the Sol System.

"What does it mean?" asked Lucifer in bewilderment.

Lilith turned to face him. "No fool is Aph. He read our hearts, and must have guessed our plan."

Lucifer paled. "You mean he knows what we . . . ?"

"No, not that. I am sure he does not suspect what we have hidden in the Nether World, but I believe that he thinks we have chosen to remain on Sin—and because we have done so, we have been granted our wish. Harmless are we to the galaxy, he believes; and quarantined to the Sol System."

Lucifer's eyes lit with exultance. "Then we have fooled him! He will not return nor spy upon us. Our empire is safe!"

Lilith looked at him, and her eyes began to kindle with his enthusiasm. But still she remained strangely troubled. "Let us descend swiftly to our caverns and our people," she said. "Let us build our empire in the dark—lest the monitors of the God Council discover our work, and move to thwart it. From this day on, we must work in secret, ever remaining in the Nether World."

"You are right," said Lucifer, rising to his feet and taking her by the hand. "We will govern this world from our hiding place, and build for the day when we shall emerge in full power to extend our sway to the galaxy. Let us go and begin to enjoy the fruits of the secret that is now ours, the secret of immortality in the flesh."

As they went, there was a strange sad happiness in Lilith's heart and her fingers tightened around those of her Lordly husband. In her mind remained now but one all-consuming ambition, and it has ever been the ambition of woman—to comfort the man she loves.

Whither thou goest . . .

And thus it was that Lucifer was cast down from heaven by the gods, gently for he was the Son of the Morning. And after the darkness there is always the dawn.

For although living in Sin under the sun he was to become the Prince of Evil, yet to be evil is only to live backward. Only the spirit is immortal, and though the flesh is tainted, it shall return to dust from whence it came. The heavy elements shall become inert lead. And ever the promise of Aph has rung in Lilith's ears, her comfort and her hope for her mad husband:

"... I will see you hence . . ."

And it remains today the hope of all Sinners!

THE END

This isn't a new story, but one that has been told many times before. Yet this time it is told in a very effective fashion, with a cold sensation that runs up and down your spine from the moment you first suspect the thing that is going to happen until it does happen. When you finish, you will ask yourself: "Do things like this really happen? And how do they happen?" Yes, they do happen. Any psychiatrist can assure you that it is not only possible, but rather frequent, among the more primitive races of the earth. Many of them claim that results depend on the knowledge by the victim of what is being done. Your editor would rather not be so sure!

HENDERSON strode impatiently down the narrow street, threading his way past patient, pannier-laden donkeys; angry, spitting, eternally incensed llamas and crowds of bare-foot Indians balancing enormous baskets on their heads.

He entered the open door of a flat-roofed adobe house, hurried through a single room to the patio beyond and crossed this inner court to another half-darkened adobe structure.

As his shadow fell across the threshold, a decrepit Indian woman who resembled nothing so much as a mummy appeared in the doorway.

Henderson's tired eyes sought her face. "How is he?"

The woman shifted her cud of

coca leaves and shook her head. "Last night the freezing; today again the fever."

He pushed past her into the room, pausing a moment until his eyes became accustomed to the shadowy interior.

In one corner of the room a paraffin lamp spluttered ineffectually and next to it on a homemade cot Larrifer tossed and moaned as he had done for three days. He was light-headed and feverish, given to hallucinations, and he did not recognize the man who had been his close associate and business partner for half a decade.

A week before he had enjoyed vigorous good health and spirits; today he was half alive, a muttering, sleepless bundle of parchment-like skin and protruding bones.

DEATH IN PERU

By

Joseph Payne Brennan



The Wizard

Henderson stood by the cot, scowling, studying the wasted fever-racked form. At length he turned away, inwardly cursing his luck, cursing the business venture that had brought them to this inaccessible Peruvian village. It would be days, possibly even weeks, before the runner returned with the only white doctor in the vicinity. And Larrifer was getting worse almost by the hour.

He gave some brief instructions to the Indian woman, moved at a weary gait along the sun-steeped inner wall of the patio and bent through a narrow archway which gave access to the garden in the rear of the buildings. Angling off the grass-grown pathway, he reached the shade of a giant araucaria tree and sat down.

The setting suited his mood. In former more prosperous days the

garden had no doubt boasted delicate capuchin roses and gorgeous white trumpet flowers, but today it was the abode of dust-coated prickly pear, unsightly Indian figs and black creeping thorn thickets.

He surveyed the scene with distaste and tried to think.

At first he had assured himself that Larrifer had contacted some tropical ailment, something brought on by the food or the water, or by the climate itself. But Larrifer had spent years in the tropics. And the usual medicines did not help as they had in the past. And then there was the attitude of the native Indians.

Of course he knew what they were thinking—what they were whispering among themselves. They believed that Larrifer was bewitched.

THE story had had its inception two weeks before when Larrifer with his usual excess of animal spirits had become enamoured of the young daughter of a family of poor maize growers on the outskirts of the village. The girl was hardly more than a child to a white man's way of thinking, but Larrifer had experienced no great difficulty in satisfying his desires. The girl's parents, with that curious native blend of inbred fatalism and passivity, had at least outwardly consented, even if they did not inwardly approve. They were poor people and a little gold was like an immense fortune.

But it appeared that the girl had an admirer. He was a young lad, an Indian, who roamed like a vicuña in the nearby mountains and occasionally visited the village. Several days after Larrifer's little affair he had come down from the mountain with a sprig of blue snow flowers for the maize grower's daughter.

Of course he had soon learned what was on the tip of every gossip's tongue.

He had done nothing—nothing, that is, which to a white man would appear especially meaningful or sinister. He had merely loafed outside Larrifer's lodging until Larrifer appeared. Then he had fixed on Larrifer a strange concentrated gaze, turned on his heel without a word, and disappeared.

Larrifer had been annoyed, no more. But the next day he was ill. He had been sick ever since. And he was steadily growing worse.

Henderson hated to admit the fact even to himself—but actually he was half in agreement with the Indians. He had been the unwilling witness to more than one inexplicable event during his sojourn in the tropics. There were some things he would never admit, things he disbelieved with his mind but believed with another part of himself, with his heart, with his instincts, with some primitive elemental part of his being which did not reason but merely accepted without explanation.

That night his tired brain kept on speculating even in sleep. He

kept dreaming of Larrifer, Larrifer coming out of his adobe lodgings into the sun-flooded street and meeting the young Indian lad who lived like a vicuna on the mountaintops. He saw Larrifer's satisfied smile turn to a grimace of sudden irritation as the lad stared at him, saw the young Indian turn away meekly without uttering a single syllable and vanish in the crowd, saw a sprig of blue snow flowers lying unnoticed on the footstones, trampled by the throngs, withering in the sun.

THE next day Henderson paid a surreptitious visit to the town's reputed sorcerer, a centenarian sandal-maker who dealt in toads' hearts and condor claws and according to local legend made a yearly pilgrimage to a shrine of the elder gods, the lost Incan deities, deep in the mountains.

The gnarled peering ancient emerged from the rear of his shop like a reluctant spider, shading his eyes, as if the faint sunlight filtering through the dust-filmed windows was more than he could bear.

Haltingly, Henderson told his tale. He finished, hinted at the huge reward he was willing to pay for his friend's cure, and waited, hopefully.

The old man spoke at last, his voice as toneless and far-away as an evening wind rustling in distant guava trees.

"The sun burns the mountains by day; by night the mountains

freeze in the wind."

He started to turn away, then added, as if with an after-thought: "Take the llama trail that leads to the top of the mountain. At the end of the path, before the snow line, the earth has been broken. There you must dig."

Henderson paid him, somewhat furtively departed, and hurried back toward his own quarters. With many misgivings, he packed a light lunch, and after stowing it in a knapsack along with a few other items, set out for the mountains. He carried a small pick in his belt and under his left arm in a hidden holster a .32 caliber automatic pistol.

He did not like riddles, and as a matter of fact, had little real faith in the sorcerer's advice. He would never have admitted to any white man that he intended climbing to the top of a mountain on the suggestion of a Peruvian sandal-maker who worshipped the gods of the Incas and dealt in such items as toads' hearts and the preserved finger joints of suicides' hands. He would not quite admit the real object of his little jaunt even to himself. He assured himself that he needed fresh air and sunshine; he needed exercise too. And there would be a splendid view from the mountain.

He passed the maize fields on the outskirts of the village, and after crossing a dreary plain, barren save for patches of forbidding thorn thicket, began a gradual ascent of the mountain. The foothills

with their grass slopes and hidden song birds seemed especially inviting, but as he toiled upward the grass gave way to grey lichen and at length almost absolute silence prevailed.

THE llama trail led along ragged cliffs, skirting steep yawning gorges, so that prudence demanded his eyes remain ever on his feet and the better the view be-

growing sense of horror. He seemed to have entered another world, a world composed of soundlessness and space, a timeless world of brooding mystery where even the eons left hardly a sign.

He recalled the sorcerous sandal-maker with a feeling of dread and began to wish he had never consulted the hoary dispenser of charms.

At length, however, he reached



Wenderson

came the less he was able to enjoy it. Occasionally the rocks creaked in the colder air but this only accentuated the growing silence. Once a huge shadow dropped across the path and he whirled in momentary terror. The cold unswerving eyes of a passing condor stared down at him and then the majestic bird floated off across an adjacent gorge.

In spite of himself, he shuddered. He began to become conscious of a

the end of the llama trail, which was as close to the top of the mountain as all but a vicuna might get, and recalled the words of the wizard: "At the end of the path, before the snow-line, the earth has been broken. There you must dig."

Just ahead of him the fringe of a snow-field glittered in the sun. He began to inspect the ground. Although there was no sign of any recent trespasser, neither footprints nor hoof marks, he decided on a

systematic search. Watching the ground carefully, he started near the snow-field, pacing off parallel strips.

Finally his efforts were rewarded. About three yards from the edge of the snow-line he discovered a small patch of recently disturbed earth.

As he removed the pick from his belt and began to dig, the little hairs on the nape of his neck tin-

He gasped with astonishment as the thing came into view. It was a peculiarly repellent little doll, a kind of puppet about eight inches high, moulded out of some wax-like sticky substance which was probably llama fat mixed with maize meal. Although the point of his pick had rather seriously damaged its head, there was no mistaking the crudely-shaped features. The doll's face was undoubtedly



Larrifer

gled and lifted. There was something weird and uncanny about the business. How had a decrepit cobbler in the village known that at this particular spot on the mountain he would find a patch of freshly broken earth? How had he known that. . . .

He started as his pick struck into something that was not earth. Laying the implement aside, he carefully scooped away the loose dirt with his hands.

modeled after Larrifer's.

As he lifted it from its earthen bed he noticed several short hairs glued to the top of its head. Coarse, reddish-brown hairs. Larrifer's.

The sandal-maker's riddle suddenly rang in his ears with its full meaning. "The sun burns the mountains by day; by night the mountains freeze in the wind."

So that was it! Larrifer wracked by a raging fever during the day; Larrifer seized with fits of freezing

by night! A puppet made in Larrifer's likeness buried on the mountain, baked by the heat of the sun during the day, frozen by the frigid winds that swept over these peaks by night!

Of course, it was a coincidence, and yet . . .

CAREFULLY, he deposited the puppet in his knapsack, replaced the pick in his belt, and began to retrace his footsteps down the llama path. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was just after three o'clock. He suddenly felt very much alone and began to hurry in spite of the serious consequences which a misstep might entail. He almost wished for a glimpse of the condor even though it had frightened him before. He forgot completely the lunch which he carried. There was something eerie and terrifying about these mountains. Under different circumstances he might have gloried in their grim lonely grandeur, but that caricature of Larrifer staring up at him out of the freshly broken earth had shaken his nerve. He fingered the butt of his pistol and more than once glanced warily over his shoulder.

Once he reached the foothills however, his apprehension vanished. He felt ashamed of himself and smiled when he thought what an amusing little story he would someday tell at his own expense. The time a little wax doll had sent him scurrying down a mountain like a

frightened child!

He decided to go at once and look in on Larrifer. For some reason he felt optimistic. Perhaps today Larrifer had thrown off the usual fever and fallen into a quiet sleep.

The minute he crossed through the patio however, he knew that something was wrong. Nearly a dozen Indians stood clustered near the open doorway of Larrifer's room. They were silent and as he approached they stiffened in expectancy.

He hurried up, glancing from one to another. "What is it?"

The old coca leaf chewer who resembled a mummy looked fearfully into the room and made a sign to ward off demons. She began to mutter unintelligibly in her native tongue.

Henderson frowned in impatience, thrust her aside and hurried into the shadowy quarters.

THE paraffin lamp still spluttered in one corner of the room and as Henderson approached the cot there was revealed to him by its flickering light a spectacle which rooted him to the floor in a rush of sudden horror.

Larrifer lay dead on the cot, his skull ripped open as if by a savage blow, and on his face an expression of unspeakable terror. Blood saturated the cot and in the deathly silence Henderson could hear the drops which had soaked through drip into a pool on the floor.

At last he tore his eyes away from the ghastly scene, and gradually his initial horror and shock were replaced by gathering rage. He saw it all now! The cunning sandal-maker had deliberately tricked him! He had been sent on a charlatan's goose-chase up the mountain so that he would not be on hand to interfere when the revengeful young Indian lad crept in to kill Larrifer! No doubt the sorcerer had informed the lad soon after he left.

He rushed outside and began to shriek curses at the bewildered Indians. Clutching the aged Indian women who had been Larrifer's designated attendant, he accused her of aiding in his murder.

His rough grasp and accusations seemed to rouse the creature out of the daze which until now had locked her tongue.

Shaking off his hand, she vehemently denied any hand in the hideous business.

But Henderson was not pacified. Why, then, he demanded, had she left the premises? Perhaps if she

had remained in the room—as she was being paid to do—the terrible deed might never have occurred.

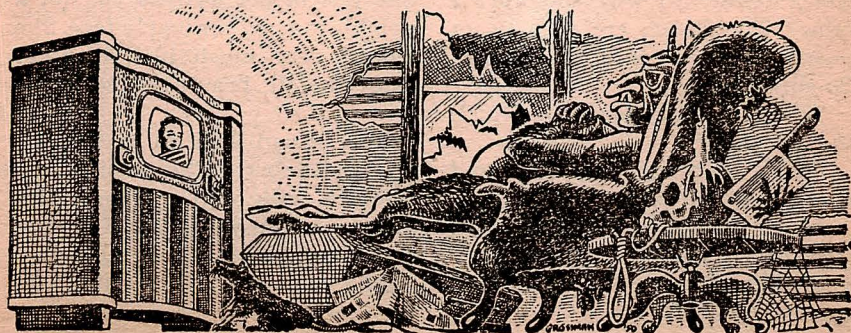
But again she shook her head. She was willing to swear a sacred oath by the gods of the Incas that she had been not more than two feet from the doorway when Larrifer screamed in his last dreadful agony. No one had entered the room before that last fearful shriek; no one had quitted it afterward.

Suddenly a wild insane thought struck Henderson and his voice shook as he asked the old Indian woman another question.

At exactly what time, he inquired, had that terrible last scream been heard?

She crossed herself. "It was just as the bells of the church were ringing three, señor."

He stared at her transfixed with horror, numb, sick, cold in the hot sunlight—for *Larrifer had screamed and died at almost the exact instant that Henderson's pick had crunched into the head of the little buried puppet up on the mountain!*



True **MYSTIC** *Adventures*

A BISHOP'S HUNCH

THE Rev. Battleberry paced the floor, hands locked behind his back. There was no doubt about it, he was worried.

Mrs. Battleberry sat in thoughtful mood. As he passed her for the thousandth time she smiled up at him. "Rennie, do you know who invented the thimble?"

Rev. Battleberry stopped in mid-stride.

"The thimble? For heaven's sake, Ella, who cares at this moment? I'm worried. The devil takes his vacation and lands in the lap of my banker and you sit there and ask me who invented the thimble!"

With a smile she went on. "I do so like interesting people, and whoever did invent the thimble had to be interesting. Anyway you're doing enough worrying for the whole family so why shouldn't I relax? The Dutch are such sweet people, don't you think so Rennie? So smart too."

"What on earth have the Dutch to do with it?"

"Why, darling, they invented the thimble in 1534."

Mrs. Battleberry arose and stretched. "Don't worry so. Where's your faith? Don't tell me that God doesn't an——"

The telephone sounded like it meant business so Rennie fled to its side. Shortly he called to Ella to hurry and get dressed because they had to go out on a call.

In the car he said: "That was Mrs. Delafield. You know she never calls us unless there is something really important on her mind."

It was a nine-mile run but with the Rev. Battleberry's accustomed heavy foot on the accelerator, they made it in sixteen minutes. Now and then Mrs. Battleberry cast a look over her shoulder, as though to make sure the guardian angel was invisibly seated on the back seat.

When they arrived the maid took them into the formal drawing room, Mrs. Delafield rose and greeted them as warmly as always. Mrs. Battleberry had never ceased to marvel at her ancient beauty. She was in her eighties yet not a wrinkle marred her lovely face. She looked very much like a child's beloved doll, beautiful and cared for.

She turned with an apology to Rev. Battleberry. "So good of you to come, both of you. I know how busy you must be, but I had a dream last night and as you know I am 85 years old. I just couldn't let the day pass and ignore what hap-

pened in that particular dream." She moved over on the quaint sofa and patted a place beside her. "Sit here, Mr. Battleberry, while I tell you about it." After they were comfortably seated she began.

"I think I told you when you first came here that the late Bishop Hanley and my husband were very close friends? He has been greatly missed since his death, so kind and understanding, and so few like that nowadays. He did not crave popularity, he craved his Lord."

Shyly she glanced at the Rev. Battleberry. "I hope you will not think me a fanciful old woman when I tell you about this dream?"

Rev. Battleberry smiled encouragement. "No, Miss Sallie. I believe in dreams."

Thus comforted she went on. "You do? That's fine. Last night Bishop Hanley came to me in a dream. He was worried about you, Rev. Battleberry."

The rector murmured, "About me?"

"Yes, he told me that you needed some financial assistance. He told me how much, too. I wrote out a check for what he told me to put down. If I misunderstood him and you don't need it, it is still all right. You and Ella can do as you please with it." She handed the rector an envelope. "Ring for Susie, will you please, Ella?"

Shortly the maid came in with coffee and cookies and the conversation swung in another direction. "I shall be going North soon for

the summer months, but you know, I always miss you two. You're different from the general type we have in the rectory. Anytime I can do anything at all for you, you will promise to let me know?"

"Miss Sallie, we appreciate that. We feel at home here and you will be greatly missed during your vacation. But now we must be going. Thank you again for your many kindnesses and for this." He held up the envelope. "We'll see you before you get off."

Some miles down the road Rev. Battleberry flipped the envelope into his wife's lap. "Open it and see what's in it, or shall we guess first? Rectors have so little given to them personally, it's nice to savor it for awhile."

However Mrs. Battleberry was not made of the same stern stuff. She ripped the envelope open and stared. "Rennie, this is uncanny..."

He stopped the car and took the check from her. "Exactly what I needed! Well, that's one Bishop who doesn't need pockets in his shroud!"—*Mrs. Lawton Riley.*

THE PURPLE LIGHT

I WAS visiting an elderly friend one February afternoon in a small town at the edge of the Maine wilderness. She was a devout Baptist and had little knowledge or interest in spiritualistic phenomena or anything pertaining to the supernatural. However, she had a neighbor, a childhood schoolmate,

who for many years had been a successful spiritualist healer in a large city but had retired to her birthplace. This woman was a very sane, practical-minded person. No one would have suspected her of supernatural powers. Her topics of conversation were typical of the average country housewife—a new apron pattern, the cake she had baked for the church supper, or how the price of eggs had fallen just as her hens had begun to lay. One dreary afternoon she dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat.

My friend complained of a pain in a foot that had been annoying her, and our neighbor kindly offered to give the painful extremity a healing treatment. I watched the procedure with mild curiosity. As nearly as I could gather, the foot was getting a thorough massage at the hands of a very competent operator, nothing more. The treatment ended and we leaned back in our chairs.

Then I was startled by a very beautiful purple light that appeared just over and slightly beyond my friend's head. My first thought was that it must be a reflection from somewhere. I glanced hastily around the room. The early darkness of a mid-winter afternoon had fallen. It had been a cloudy day. There was no sunset, no afterglow. There were no lights anywhere, and no stained glass windows or colored bric-a-brac that could have reflected light, if there had been any. No one was there but us. No

cars were passing and the nearest neighbors were out of town. The little village was cradled in the somber twilight of a northern latitude. Nowhere was there anything that could cause a reflection.

Our neighbor smiled, "You are seeing the purple light of the spirit realm. It often appears when I am healing, for I am only the medium through which the healing forces of the unseen world operates. Sometimes my patients are entirely encompassed with this strange, unearthly light, which is similar to that of the violet ray." In a few moments, the beautiful, mystic light gradually dimmed, but I shall always be grateful that I was privileged to catch a glimpse of its fleeting loveliness. I am convinced that we are surrounded at all times by a spiritual realm that is correlated with our own world. It isn't some far away heaven, but it is here, and now. Our loved ones are not dead. They are living near us, in the glory of the purple light.

—*Lulu Bradley Cram.*

THE TERRIBLE MOUSE

AT a cotton mill at Holden Bridge, Lancashire, England, a girl, on the 15th of February, 1787, put a mouse into the bosom of another girl, who was thereby thrown into convulsions, which lasted 24 hours. On the following day six other girls, who had witnessed these convulsions, were affected in the same manner, and on

(Concluded on page 123)



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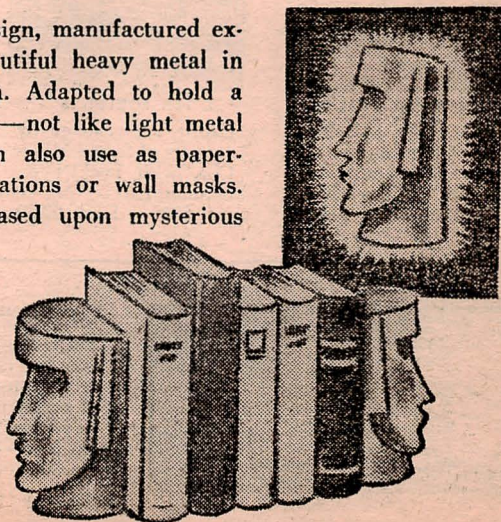
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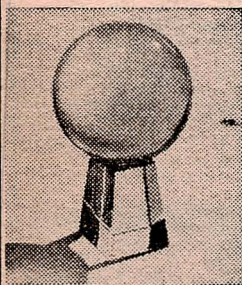
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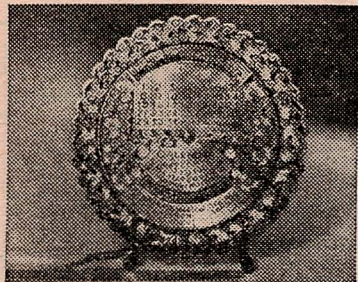
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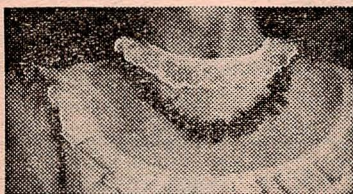
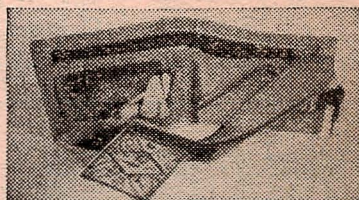
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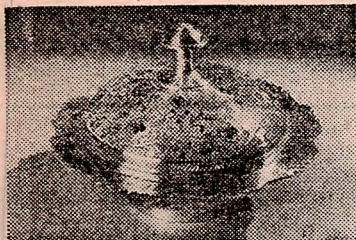
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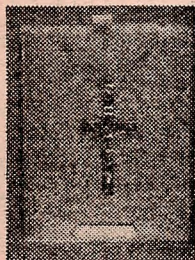
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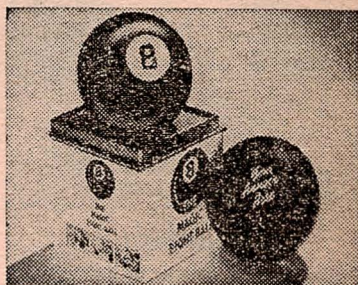
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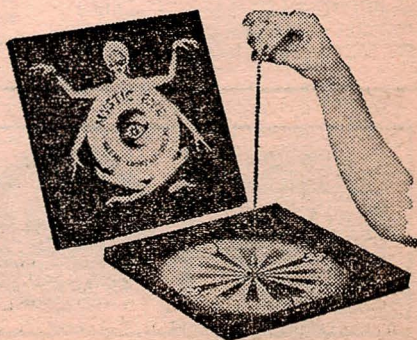


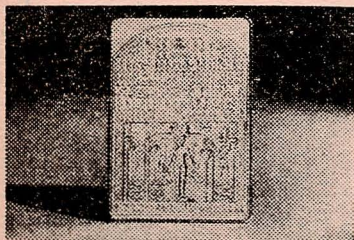
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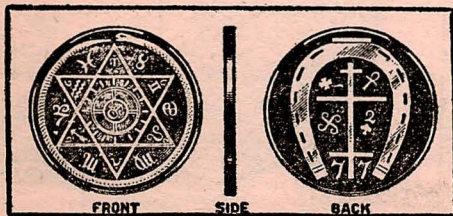
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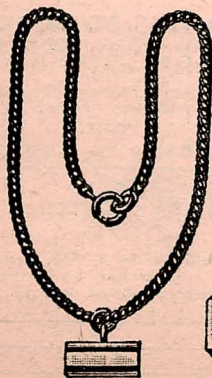
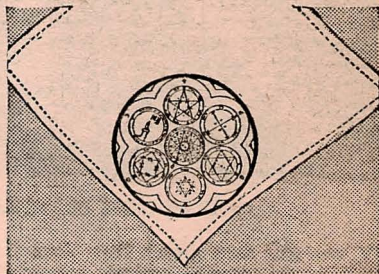
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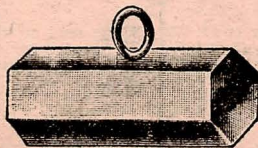
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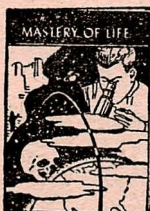
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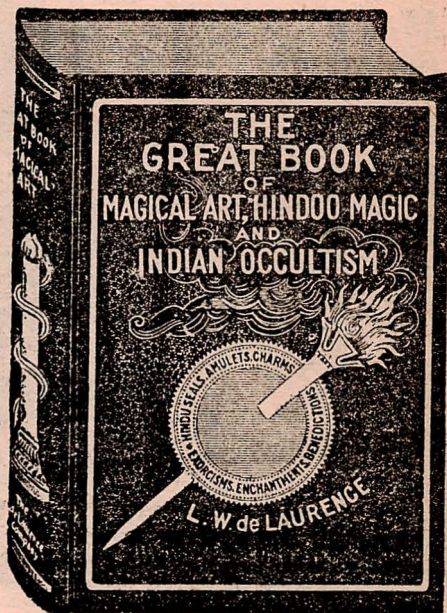
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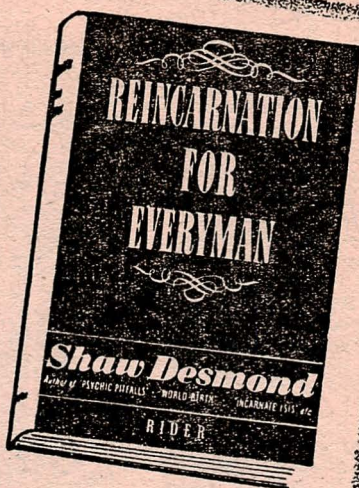
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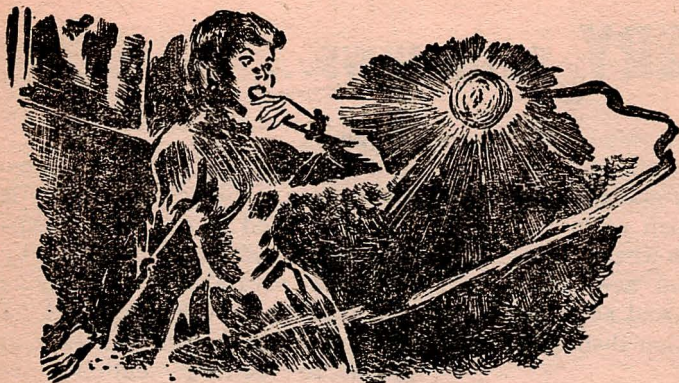
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MYSTERY IN THE NEWS...

OUR news this month comes from people we have talked to here and there, and you won't find much of it, if any, in newspapers. However, we feel it is more significant news than you'll get anywhere, and news deserving of more attention than it seems to be getting.

First, we now have the certain knowledge that Russia has, not only the A-bomb, but the dreaded hydrogen bomb. In fact, both types were detonated by the Russians during the month of August, 1953.

This country has been making ready for another series of tests, both in this country and in the Pacific. But as a result of the announcement by Russia, our atomic program is to be greatly stepped up.

What's mysterious about all this? Well, let's consider a few bits of news as they come to us from odd sources. First, we have a new rash of weird lights seen in the sky. Explained recently as a new type of photo-flash mechanism used for taking pictures from great heights. Nobody has explained just what the extensive photographic activity is about, but it's news, anyway, and mysterious news. Mysterious part of it is flashes when no planes were present. Flashes where there is nothing to photograph—such as over the

ocean.

Next we have a heated discussion about whether the weather is being affected by the bombs. During August this country was hit by the most severe heat wave in its recorded history. In 1950 and '51 we had record cold waves and snow. In the first-mentioned instance, the bombs were blown off on the opposite side of the north pole, and in the last-mentioned, they were blown off in the southwest portion of our own country and in the south Pacific.

It was pointed out in 1950 and 1951 that the tests created huge draft chimneys in the atmosphere that went on sucking hot air up into the stratosphere, and bringing in cold air from the polar regions. There was even talk of a congressional investigation, which did not come off, but it is newsworthy to note a half-dozen articles "proving" the atom did not affect the weather appeared at once and simultaneously in the nation's biggest periodicals.

In the Russian tests, the draft chimney worked again, and drew air off the pole—into Russia. But it also drew hot air up over America and into Canada, as part of the general air movement. Thus, our intense heat wave. If all this was coincidence, it is mysterious indeed.

Finally, through a number of physicians, it was brought to our attention that something was happening that was of medical importance. An abnormally large number of abortions (of a sort due to natural causes, not criminal) were occurring. The incidence was as much as five times the normal rate.

A news item of 1949 (old stuff) told us of how workers in atom plants were rotated—90 days on the job, 180 off. This was because it was dangerous, otherwise, to their sexual powers, their reproductive powers. This applied both to male and female workers. In the case of male workers, sterility would be the result of too much exposure, and in the case of female workers, first physical weakening of the ability to carry a foetus to its maturity, and next, sterility.

Has the atom bomb, and now the hydrogen bomb, loosed such tremendous quantities of atomic material into our atmosphere (another news item tells of the first atom cloud still capable of being tracked about the earth in its travels) that women the world over are having more spontaneous abortions? Mystery in the news, indeed! A mystery it would be well to delve into.

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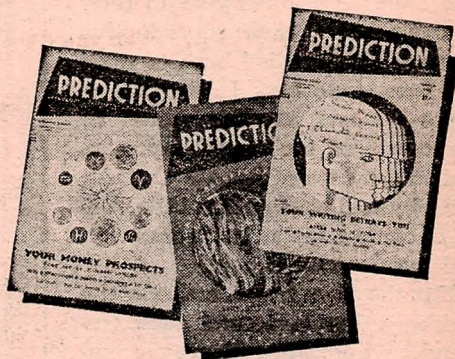
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WE have come into a new age of the birth of true freedom for all. The old ways will no longer work, and if continued, civilization as we know it today can no longer stand its ground. Fortunately, the ground work for the new age of freedom (freedom for all, each in his own way) has been laid. This foundation has been a gradual unfoldment of the mind of man, toward that which is for the highest good of all.

The few former strong minds are not able now to rule the many, and he who takes up the guns in battle (aggressive action) shall perish by his own wrong doing.

Those who have died on the battlefield of time have not died in vain. Forever remains with the world the memory of futility.

The United States of America was born and consecrated to the **FREEDOM PRINCIPLE**. Its ideals and aspirations were to create a **NEW WORLD**. Thus it was set down in the constitution that all men are created equal. Not equal in the sight of man, but equal in the sight of God. This has ever been so, yet man has, of his own free will, chosen to be lord

over man—nation over nation. The very laws set by God in the beginning were twisted about to fit the laws of the few.

Coming forth in the **NOW** is the real birth of a **NEW WORLD**, conceived in liberty and dedicated to **FREEDOM** for all. None but the good of the old ways will survive. The new birth in the scientific field of endeavor has grown to great magnitude. The old sword has become the atom of today. The potentials of this God-given power shall bring forth a new era for the good of all men. This great adventure in science has only begun to open the eyes of the great scientific men toward their ultimate purpose for good, in the scheme of the new brotherhood of men.

In the field of agriculture there has been a new birth of vital energy foods which shall be developed into a nourishing factor, and available to all. In the field of economics, a whole plan is evolving to bring forth a more stable and just system for all. A plan whereby no one shall suffer, and all shall benefit.

Those called politicians shall be only servers, to bring forth good to

the people of the world. No longer shall their fingers seal the destiny of what is to be. The people of freedom shall choose servers, and those not willing to serve in justice and humility, conscience-free of lust and greed, shall not be allowed position of free-governing ranks.

Inter-world and national exchange of commodities shall raise and sustain the standard of living for all. Henceforth all parts shall become equally important toward the good of the whole.

The brotherhood of man is at hand. The desire to live in freedom as individual expressions of what man IS was planted in the hearts of men and nations from the beginning of time. The seed is grown now, seasoned, and ready to bloom.

The word "war" will fade from the vocabulary of men, and will be laid down henceforth in the pages of time for future generations to ponder

—Anon.

TERRIBLE MOUSE (Concl.)

the 17th, six more. The alarm became so great that the mill was closed under the idea that a strange disease had been introduced in a bag of cotton. On the 18th, three more girls were seized, and eleven more went into convulsions the next day. The convulsions were so strong that four or five persons were required to hold the patients to prevent them from tearing out their hair and dashing their heads against the walls.

A most terrible mouse indeed!

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The SEANCE CIRCLE . . .

Letters from the Undead

Dear Sir:

I have gotten your first magazine from the newsstand and enjoyed it thoroughly, especially the true story, *I Traveled In A Flying Saucer*. I feel the author is telling the truth and would enjoy reading more stories of that nature.

Mrs. Glen Roberts,
Hertford, N. C.

You can be sure we'll have many more of these first-person accounts in MYSTIC.

* * *

Dear Mr. Palmer:

I recently purchased a copy of MYSTIC, your new baby. To say I was impressed is putting it mildly. Here's hoping you have the best of luck with it and that it lives to a ripe old age to fill a very special place in the world.

If you're wondering at the above good wishes unaccompanied by a subscription, I'll explain. I suppose it's necessary to include some of the flashier bits of sex business to acquire an audience, but it rather spoils the whole thing for me—much the same as the notorious covers on pocket books which turn out to be classics require a great stretch of the imagination to connect them with their pornographic covers. (I'm referring especially now to your lead story *The Hidden Kingdom*.)

In MYSTIC do you suppose we could have more stories like *The Hidden Kingdom* without the so-called sex interest? Aside from the erotic appeal, it's a beautifully written and well thought-out piece of work.

Lois D. Green,
Crete, Illinois.

Perhaps this will surprise you, but we didn't put the sex interest in The Hidden Kingdom to gather readers. We put it in because we are striving to make our stories hold up under the scrutiny of critics of the occult. There seems to be a widespread aversion to life after death conditions as pictured by many, because of the lack of realism in them. We've often heard it said: "If Heaven is a place where you sit on a golden throne and play a harp for Eternity, I'll have none of it." We try to picture other existences as much like our own, and in this story, there was the problem critics always bring up: does a person's clothing go to Heaven with him? We tried to show a logical way in which clothes do go to Heaven, as a mental condition, and how a lack of mental preparation—or a deliberate mental choice—may determine the existence or not of those clothes. As for sex's part in human love, we like to believe that we will still consider our

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loved ones beautiful in the after life, and how else would they be beautiful to us except as we know them: the same, except with little imperfections removed.

However, you can be sure we will have many stories in which this subject is not stressed.

* * *

Dear Ray:

Your editorial in the November issue of **MYSTIC** really sets me going. So much so that I couldn't even take time to hunt up one of my two always-missing pens and suitable stationery before answering!

In the first place, I agree wholeheartedly with you in the implications you make—in the little parable of the bat. "There are more things in heaven and earth..." etc., etc., and many of them have happened to me at one time or another. There have been so many authentic experiences which I've learned not to tell to others!

I leave rapport, however, when you remark in your editorial that "Perhaps if we knew the meaning of the word 'stition' we'd know what we mean by *superstition*." Now be serious, man! After all...! That boner makes me stop short, lose the silly, pleased, patted-on-the-head expression from my homely pan, and begin to wonder whether you're not, like so many condescending editors, being self-victimized by the unfounded journalistic tenet that all readers are utter morons. Hereafter, I wish you

would avoid that sort of smugness, or even the appearance of it. I mean the suggestion kindly; but really, you know, my *feelings* prompt me to buy certain magazines, and to avoid others as if they purveyed the seven-year itch! And after all is said, I do not regularly read material that insults my intelligence.

If you really were sincerely ignorant when you made the statement I question, let us get down to cases. You, a professional writer, should surely know your language meanings and derivations better than to be able to put yourself in such a silly position—call it semantics or whatever you will, this knowledge any writer should have.

We do know what "stition" means, so why be so mysterious about it? *Superstition* comes from the Latin *super* ("above" or "over") and *sto-stare-status* (the verb-form meaning "to stand" or "to be located"). Therefore, *superstition* means anything that stands above or is positioned in the air above solid ground—*superstition* thus being any airy, insubstantial belief or feeling not based on solid, observable facts or phenomena. Superstition is not pragmatically justified.

Did this contribute an item of value to your education? Pooh! I don't believe it! If you must be mysterious, please pick something that won't be so easily exposable. Webster's dictionary is available to everyone.



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But I forgive easily, and your mag. is still wonderful!

Tillman L. Martin,
St. Louis, Mo.

You still didn't define "stition," Tillman. So far as I know, there isn't a word, even in Latin, which is spelled that way. Sometime in the future, we're going to take up this language business in a book, but right now, we're interested in your definition. Why not take it literally? If superstition means "something located in the air above the ground," why not stop here and let our thinking processes dwell on the possible meaning of the word as it originally was coined? Why ration-

alize the actual definition into "insubstantial belief not based on solid, observable facts"? If there is "location" in the word, why cast it out? Why make anything "above" or "over" an "insubstantial" thing? Are we being pragmatic or "closed-mind"? Did you know one meaning for pragmatic is "meddlesome"?

No, Tillman, we aren't being smug, nor offending you. We are trying to be sincere. And we thank you for your kindness in giving us this information. It opens a whole new train of thought and justifies our belief that there is something in the air above us, recognized even by ancient Rome!

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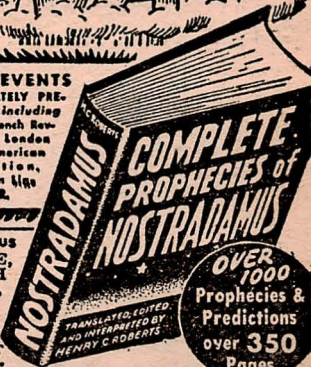
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Did you know that Mystic and Occult knowledge receives a slap in the face wherever it goes? That many such magazines as this have failed because of ridicule? We believe you can prevent that, this time! We think you'll answer this call, every one of you, for free insurance that it will not happen to this newest, bravest venture into the fight against ignorance. We're asking you to insure OUR future, at no cost to you, by subscribing. You'll even save 10c per issue.

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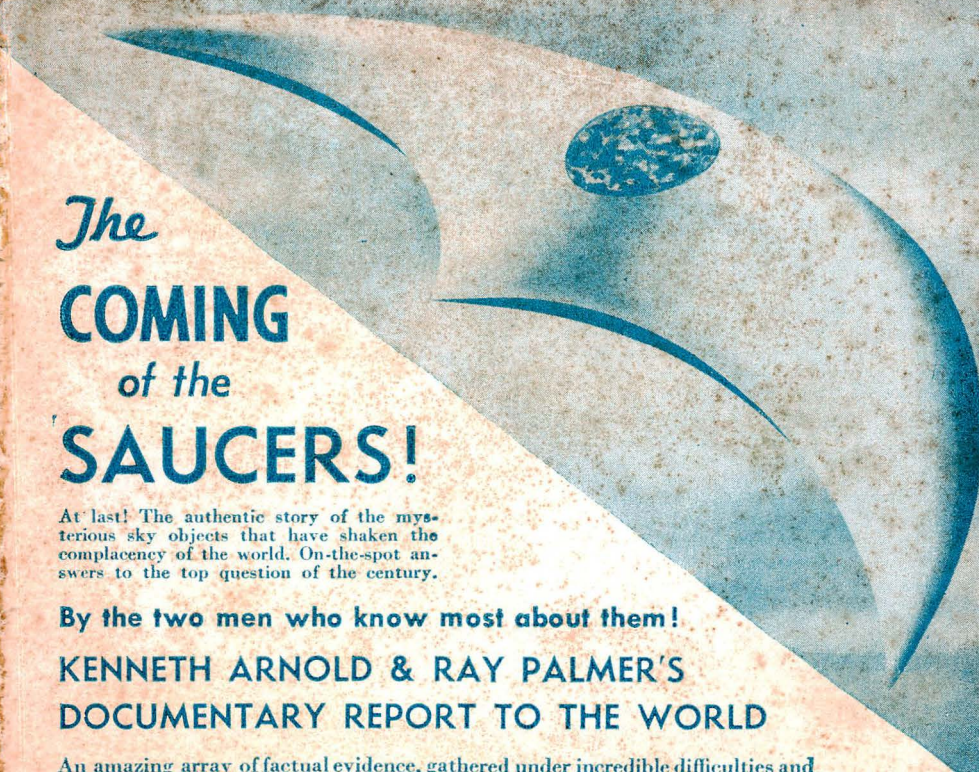
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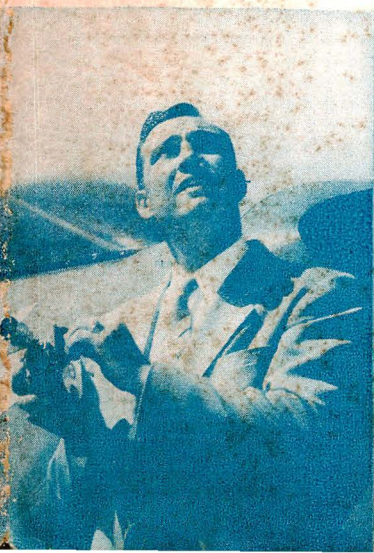
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