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DECEMBER, 1952

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CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON

by S. J. BYRNE

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CHRONOTRON**

by S. J. DUNE



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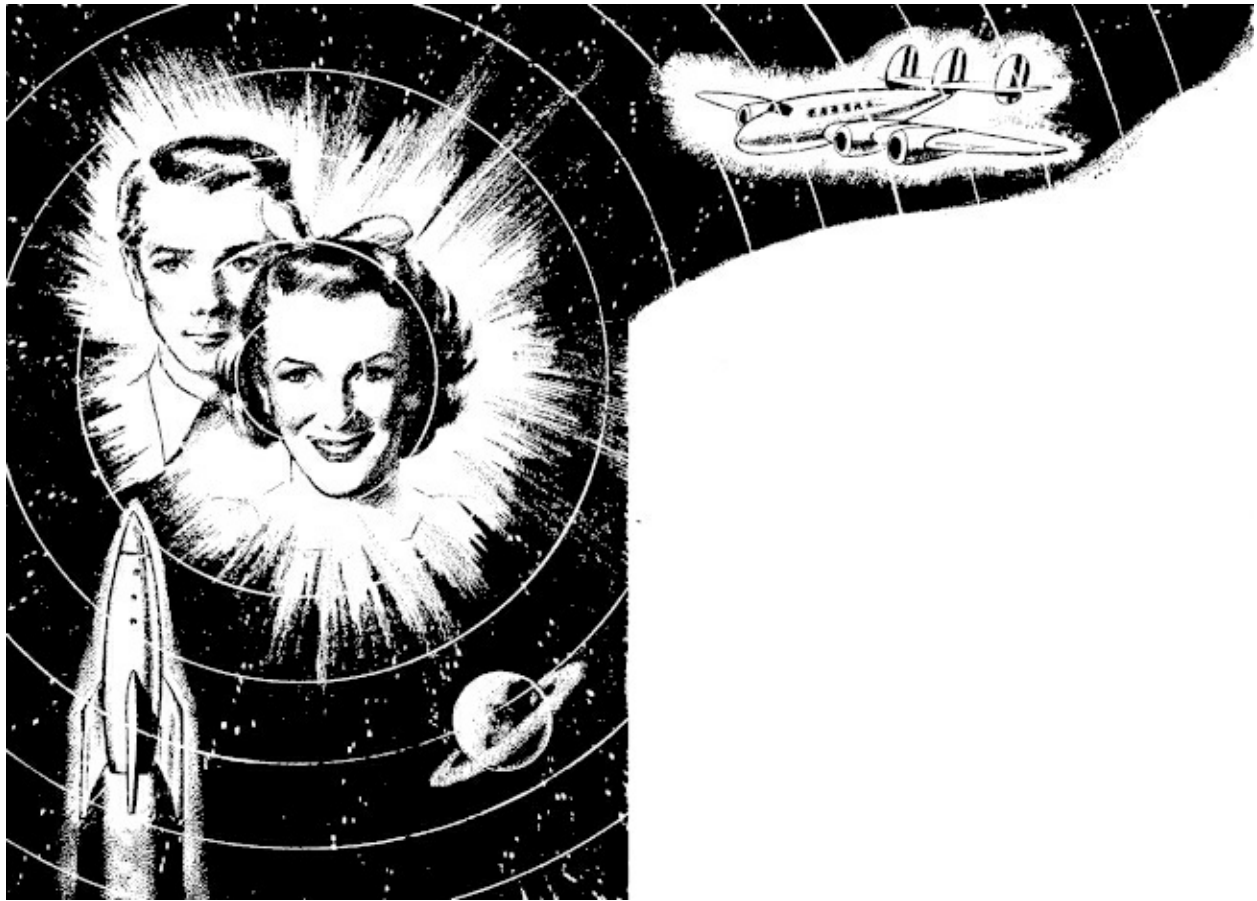
**Facing destruction, Earth's last immortals
sent an emissary through time to alter history.
Thus, he appeared in 1952, searching for the—**

CHILDREN of the CHRONOTRON

By S. J. Byrne

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When their sun began to wane, the Xlarnans at first retreated underground to hoard the heat and life-supporting energies which their nuclear generators could supply. But as their world grew colder, century after century, they devised a means of creating a substitute for the ionosphere—a protective layer of radioactive gases in the upper reaches of the sky which could warm them by means of its slow, controlled reaction, give them eternal light, and yet absorb its own harder radiations.

Thus—a planetary cell of life, isolated from the universe, independent of solar heat. And the Xlarnans at last emerged from their subterranean cities to take up life anew in a tropical Paradise that knew neither nightfall nor

seasons. They missed the starlit night skies of old, the sunrises and sunsets, and most of all the stupendous celestial rainbow, the Great Ring, which some of them believed to be formed of the particles of a large satellite that had encircled their world back in the dim Beginning.

But the time arrived when they knew they were losing control of their reaction sphere in the sky. The hard radiations increased inexorably in spite of all the coolants they could generate and send aloft. They had to admit that the day would come when they would be destroyed by the very instrument that had given them an extra hundred millenniums of life.

At the end of time—the Xlarnans, pressed against a wall, the reaction sphere, from which came hard radiations, burning them. The ethnic urge to survive in the face of swiftly approaching death. Necessity mothering invention. And then—

The Chronotron....

Electronic envelopes speeding faster than light. Three dimensional nature rejecting the envelope. Only in Time can anything be in two places—along the duration line.

The Chronotron—planting new Cause in the beginning of Effect. And there is alternate time.

Large numbers of Xlarnans, through the Chronotron, back to the beginning of the reaction sphere era, an already advanced race with the course of another hundred thousand years to run before facing the threat from the sky once more.

The first cycle ends, and at the last extremity of alternate time veritable super beings achieve immortality. With immortality, less procreation. And at last, sterility.

Still the deadly threat above them. The daily promise of sudden and complete devastation. Now there are rockets at last, but certain techniques and necessary discoveries in the fields of chemistry and metallurgy elude them. Attempted space flights end in collisions with meteors or death due to radiations in the outer void—but escape velocity never achieved.

Then came—THE THEORY....

Very vague and unidentifiable fossils discovered in astoundingly deep strata.

Nothing definite, but a bothersome hint of high development. Hypothesis evolved into theory; Xlarn had known a complete geological cycle before the Beginning, perhaps when the Great Ring around the planet had been a moon! Granted this previous cycle, one might assume a complete evolutionary development. If such a world had existed on Xlarn previously then perhaps some highly intelligent race had evolved. They might have been threatened by some cataclysm in their own time and found a means of getting away from the planet—perhaps even to another solar system!

Sheer desperation. Sterile immortals of Xlarn supercharging a greatly improved Chronotron. A single emissary, shot through Time's great darkness beyond Beginning....

A long wait at the end of time. The remaining immortals wondered at the futility of it all. Theirs was the only life in the universe, in all space and time. Or was it? Would their emissary actually substantiate the theory of a world beyond Beginning?



"Extrapolation!" exclaimed the nuclear physicist, with an air of strained indulgence. His keen, blue eyes also told young Henry that the scientist was vastly amused. And he resented it. "Sonny, if you'd keep out of unabridged dictionaries until you were of age your mind might have a better chance of catching up to itself *and* the world around you!"

Henry closed his science fiction magazine with as much of an indignant "bang" as was possible with a well-worn pulp and turned his back on the intruder. He tried not to listen to him as he went on arguing with Uncle Andy. He tried to concentrate on the wisps of clouds straggling low over the gray Atlantic Ocean ten thousand feet below. He watched the giant nacelles of the right wing engines as the double-decked strato-cruiser droned monotonously onward toward New York. But he could not shut off his ears....

"Really, Dearden, you ought to watch that," the physicist was saying to the kindly man who had adopted Henry. "A bright, adolescent mind driving itself into the pit of self-delusion! Get him interested in something more realistic than science fiction. Lord knows the world needs some *practical* minds these days!"

"Just now I could quote Henry in a lot of appropriate ways," Uncle Andy replied. "He's very serious about this business of extrapolation. He thinks it is a new perspective, a seventh sense, as it were, that Man ought to develop. Furthermore, as long as you're interested...."

Good old Uncle Andy, thought Henry. A brilliant man, a leading technological specialist, yet as old-fashioned and unassuming as—as—Well, who was like Uncle Andy nowadays?

In his mind's eye he could see him, while he listened to his quiet conversation. Going on forty-five and looking the part, without pretense—graying at the temples, balding, and with a front upper plate in his mouth that was inoffensive but also no secret. He was a little heavy, and as out of condition, physically, as was considered to be average. But he had a good-looking, strong, kind face, clear gray eyes and a restful, reassuring manner. The strongest impression one gathered, outside of the fact that his pipe tobacco was abominable, was that he was the turtle that outran the hare. The reliable type, *sans* heroism, fanaticism or hysteria. A swell guy.

But what was that nosey Doctor Edwards putting in his two cents for? I am *none* of his business!—Henry decided abruptly.

"Doctor Edwards!" he interrupted, suddenly getting back into the argument, "did it ever occur to you that orthodox scientists are *not* the top of the intellectual pyramid?—that they are, in fact, the robotic servants of those who *dare* to think *originally*?"



Dr. Edwards, also a balding man in his middle forties, but rueful of the fact, managed a thin smile, and Henry perceived that a tender spot had been probed. "I'll overlook a rather unbecoming lack of respect for your elders," retorted the scientist, "but go ahead! As an 'original thinker,' Henry, you should be sufficiently philanthropic to at least drop us groveling orthodox scientists a crumb of pure thought from the overwhelming Cornucopia of your banquet table." His eyes narrowed suddenly with disciplinary sternness. "To put it plainly—"

"You needn't paraphrase the innuendo," Henry cut him off. "And I'll just *toss*

you a crumb!"

"Now Henry," chided Uncle Andy, tamping more tobacco into his pipe, "come down off your Pegasus, boy!"

"No, let him go ahead," insisted Edwards. "This will be a good measurement for both of us!"

Three men in the triple seat behind Henry were poking each other. He could hear what they were saying.

"Get this kid!" one of them grunted. He was the slick, heavy-bearded fellow in the powder blue suit, the one with the mean looking scowl caused by a bright scar on one side of his mouth. But he was not being critical. He was genuinely interested.

"Yeah. Smart alec!" a second man muttered.

"There's about eighty people on board," said the third. "Gotta be at least one genius amongst 'em!" That was the big construction stiff from the base where Uncle Andy had worked—in French Morocco.

Henry squared his mental shoulders, stuck out his sixteen-year-old chin and thought—This is it!

"All right!" he said aloud, "how about a good hypothesis on novae, arrived at by extrapolation?"

Dr. Edwards slapped his knee in mock enthusiasm. "Just the information the world has been waiting for!" he exclaimed. "Go ahead!"

"I shall attempt to demonstrate that lightwaves produced by any given nova were produced long before their appearance, regardless of astronomical proximity to the observer, and that those waves actually were propagated through Time, along the Fourth Coordinate," Henry began, emphatically.

But there was an interruption.

"Well *really*!" exclaimed the Englishwoman, turning around to stare back at Henry, as if the emotional and physical expenditure required to deliver those two words were sufficient to handle the situation. She turned abruptly to a resumption of her magazine reading, while the plump, middle-aged governess beside her snored softly.

Henry's rather lean face lengthened as he contemplated the back of her persnickety-looking hat, which he thought was a ridiculous assembly of straw, lace and painted berries. He was blushing slightly as he looked back at Uncle Andy and Dr. Edwards, who wondered if he was going to ignore the lady's protest. When Henry looked at the three men behind him and noticed the all too knowing smirks on their faces, he gave up.

"Aw, skip it!" he said, and he got up, making his way to the aisle.

"Wait, Henry—!" Dr. Edwards started to say.

"Let him go," interrupted Uncle Andy. Those were the last words Henry caught as he hurried away down the aisle toward the stairway leading to the lower deck and the observation lounge and commissary.

It was all on account of Martia, he thought sullenly. She was the daughter of that stuck up English woman. He didn't like people like that, with her airs and the big pretense she put up trying to appear to be still the great lady, with her hatboxes and her governess. Lady Dewitt his foot! Everybody knew that such anachronisms were on their last legs now, with war economies eating away the foundations of landed wealth in England. If Martia weren't merely fifteen years old or so, Henry would have accused Lady Dewitt, in his mind, of coming to New York to catch her daughter a wealthy American husband. Actually, she was just another English evacuee. They were coming to Canada and the States by the tens of thousands, on the eve of war, inasmuch as World War Three's version of the V-2 was expected to be atomic—and England was becoming a glorified foxhole.



Martia had seemed to reflect her mother's snobbishness, in a way, but she was strikingly pretty and had the biggest, bluest—However, it wasn't the color of her eyes that had made Henry fall all over himself at the airport in London. He could not define it, but it was a powerful thing that had made him seem not to care what anyone thought. Martia, with her smug chin, pug nose, brunette bangs and patrician attitude, had some indefinable something about her that he *knew* he could never find again—in his entire life. And which was vitally important to *him*, alone.

So from that moment on, many of the passengers had been aware that he was "that way" about the English girl, in spite of the Lady Dewitt's determination to place all possible barriers in his path. She had lost no time in investigating Uncle Andy and discovering that he was, according to the passenger list, a mere construction engineer, and that Henry was an adopted orphan whose genealogy had been lost in one of the many obscurities resulting from World War II.

Heck!—thought Henry. I don't want to *marry* the little snob! I just wanted to —"Oh, excuse me!" he exclaimed, bumping into someone at the head of the staircase.

He turned around and was surprised to discover that no one was in the aisle. Yet he *had* bumped into someone!

"What for?" asked a young G.I. seated at his elbow.

Henry looked at the friendly, round face of the soldier. He looked at the other soldiers next to him, and at those in the seat ahead of them. They were all looking at him strangely, but not belligerently. He thought: They're coming home from U.N. duty. Troop rotation. Maybe soon they'll have to go back and really use their guns. Uncle Andy said that if by next spring, in 1960—

A strange ringing sound was in Henry's ears and he felt vaguely airsick.

"I thought I bumped into somebody," he answered, lamely. And he still looked at the soldiers.

There were three who looked like Texans, all buddies, sitting in one seat and playing rummy. Buddies. What buddies had *he* ever had? Never had there been much in common between him and his adolescent associates, either in the war orphanage in France or after Uncle Andy had adopted him. All kids were like—well, in a world apart. Except that girl, Martia. He hadn't even talked to her—and yet the two of them knew something. Something important concerning just themselves. But what?

"You feel all right, kid?" asked the same soldier again.

Kid! Henry was sixteen. The other was only twenty. Where did he get off at —

The ringing in his ears was more insistent. He swayed, dizzily, catching the stair rail for support.

One of the soldiers was a negro, one of those dark ones that almost looked blue-black. But he was the friendliest of all. He even got up to see what he could do.

"Man, you look like you're all mixed up," he said, smiling. "Are you airsick, or constipated?"

The others laughed. Henry blushed again and ran down the narrow, circular staircase, this time actually crashing into a large man in a dark suit who looked like the ads in Esquire concerning "Men of Distinction." He had gray at the temples and a ruddy, confident face with penetrating gray eyes.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Henry, and went on. He had recognized the man. He had been pointed out earlier as Congressman Burley, attached to some world-touring congressional committee on something or other. Sure were a lot of big shots on board, he reflected, as he came down onto B deck.

There were many of them here in the observation lounge—heavily braided officers, some of them high-ranking women in the Service; scientists, international businessmen, newspaper correspondents, entertainers—and foreigners. Henry was especially impressed with the Prince from India who wore thousand dollar turbans and beautiful jewelry. And the Swedish movie star, a beautiful blonde who was anything but dumb. Uncle Andy had been especially interested in her, as well as that young air hostess over there talking to the bald-headed man by the magazine rack.



Suddenly, he saw Martia Dewitt at the commissary counter. There were also two young women with year old youngsters in their arms, buying suckers to keep them from yowling. But he was interested only in Martia. This time he had caught her alone.

The girl was dressed neatly in a blue, pleated skirt, red jacket and lacy blouse with a velvet tie and a yellow straw hat, red bobby socks and black shoes; but there was a home-spun look about her clothes that hinted at a struggle to maintain appearances.

When Martia spotted him, she lowered her eyes and attempted to hurry past, but he caught her, gently, surprised at his own boldness. "We might as well

talk about it now," he said to her quickly. "There won't be another chance."

She held her eyes averted, strained slightly to be released, then relaxed. Her large, clear blue eyes found his and his head swam.

"All right," she answered, simply.

They could not find a seat by the observation panels, which was to be expected, so they stood near the drinking fountain and looked at each other's feet.

"Then it's true," said Henry. "We have something to talk about, don't we?"

"Yes," she replied, glancing quickly at him and then looking down again.

"Well—what is it?" he asked.

"I—I don't know. I thought you—"

Henry swayed, his ears ringing insistently. To his surprise, she grasped his arm seeking support. Her face paled.

This time their eyes really met. It was unnecessary for her to tell him her ears were ringing too. He knew it.

"I'm scared!" she exclaimed. "What is it?"

"It—it isn't quite like ringing," he told her. "It's more like—"

"Like very high flutes going up and down a scale."

"Yeah—in a weird kind of way."

The small tots in the young mothers' arms were shrieking unaccountably now, in spite of the suckers they had been allowed to taste.

Henry looked at them curiously. "Their ears are ringing, too," he said.

Martia did not question how he knew this, because she was also sure the babies were hearing the eerie ringing of the flutes. And that no one else heard—none of the adults on board....

"Your name is Henry," she said, irrelevantly.

"Yes, and yours is Martia. I feel like something is going to happen."

"That's why I'm scared."

She pressed against him and held on to him, shuddering in nameless terror, as hysterical screams and shouts suddenly emanated from A deck, above them. He held her, equally frightened, while the babies screamed—and while the people on B deck began to shout and scurry about in all directions.

"What in God's name—!" a man yelled, getting up from his seat by the windows.

"Something's happened on A deck!" exclaimed the commissary steward.

"What the hell! It's a fight!" shouted a grizzled construction worker.

"Come on!" cried another, excitedly anticipating something to write home about.

"Stay where you are! Don't panic!" shouted a newsman, fumbling frantically with the straps of his camera carrying case.

No one could ascend the spiral staircase because a panic stricken mob from A deck was descending, with the G.I. negro sliding down over their heads. The whites of his eyes glistened in unreasoning terror. Screams of women and the angry shouting and cursing of men filled the staircase, while outside the muffled roar of the great engines continued unabated.

"*All right! All right!*" came a tense voice over the P.A. system. "*Passengers will remain seated and refrain from panic. Do not crowd B deck as it changes the load factors and we'll not be able to trim if you don't stay put!*" It seemed to Henry that the announcer wanted to say more but was interrupted by the sudden press of the emergency, whatever it was.



Henry caught sight of a young woman wearing the uniform of a WAAC nurse sliding down upside down under the feet of the mob, her face bloodied, eyes rolled upward into her head. Either she had fainted or been knocked unconscious. Or she was dead. Grown men, frothing at the mouth and shrieking curses, struck at each other with intent to kill. It was blind panic riding on the animal instinct to survive.

Far from regarding the scene calmly, Henry was visited by an instinctive desire to run through that crowd and find Uncle Andy, who always knew the

answer when the chips were down. But the quivering girl beside him detained him, and her presence also made him fight to control an incipient trembling of his chin. It was as though he could smell events and the events there in the lounge had a stench of disaster, of death, of tragic newspaper headlines. You couldn't really smell such things, but Henry had no name for the strange sense that gave him a vivid impression of the total human element surrounding him.

The air hostess maintained a clear head. She ran to two high-ranking officers, one an Army Colonel and the other a Major of the Air Force.

"*Do something!*" she exclaimed.

Which was sufficient to arouse them from their momentary paralysis. With a look at each other, a few hurried words and quick nods of agreement, the two officers sprang into action.

"All men on B deck!" yelled the Colonel, suddenly brandishing a Service automatic. "Converge on the staircase and pull the passengers out—women first where possible!"

Henry stared curiously at the gun. He knew it did not contain ammunition. Although this ship was a MATS charter, ammunition was not allowed for sidearms on such flights.

The Major and two Army non-coms were already at the staircase, working fast.

"Come down single file, those of you on the staircase!" yelled the Major. "All others remain on A deck! No fighting, you! Move!" He was also waving a gun in the air.

When one man struck out wildly at another who was in his way, the Major reached up and hit him over the head with his weapon—under the sudden brilliance of the newsman's flash bulb. The man slumped, and a number of B deck men heaved at him, pulling him through.

Henry wondered if Uncle Andy was playing it safe, staying in his seat. Couldn't be a fire. No smoke. Something much different, more dangerous, he sensed. He recalled the ringing in his and Martia's ears. Then he also remembered having bumped into someone in the aisle upstairs—someone that he could not see.... A prickly sensation crept down his spine.

They had the unconscious WAAC nurse stretched out on a seat under the observation windows. The air hostess was calling to the commissary steward to break out the first aid supplies, and the Swedish actress ran to get them for her. The Indian Prince had lost his turban and, being quite bald, was trying to wrap it around his head again, while his eyes stared in fright at the milling crowd and he cowered in the farthest corner muttering prayers in Hindustani.

"What the hell's happening up there?" asked the Major of one male passenger from A deck who seemed to be more rational. Henry remembered that this was the scar-faced man who had sat behind him and Uncle Andy. On his hardened face was an expression of deep concern, and his forehead glistened with sweat.

"It's a—a man," he stammered.

"A man! Well what the—"

"A *monster!*" cried a woman, her hair disheveled, her dress and shoes gone and her petticoat half ripped off. "Oh God help us!"

"Mother!" shrieked Martia, suddenly. She broke away from Henry and ran toward the crowd at the staircase.



Henry ran after her and caught her by the wrist. "You'll get yourself killed trying to get up there!" he yelled at her. "Stay here!"

"Mother!" she cried out again, sobbing hysterically and struggling frantically to break away from him.

"Shush, girl!" commanded the Colonel. The P.T. speaker was blaring.

"This is co-pilot Nelson speaking for Captain Merman," came the same, tense, male voice they had heard previously. "All passengers are to remain where they are. There is nothing wrong with the ship, except we've got to keep trimming against that load in the lounge. I repeat, there is nothing wrong with the ship. B deck passengers are advised that we have been boarded, in some undetermined way, by a sort of—man. He has made no move to harm anyone although he appears to be armed. Captain Merman is trying to communicate with him. In the meantime you are advised that we are

under emergency conditions affecting the rules of international travel. The Captain's orders will be followed to the letter, by all nationalities represented on board, regardless of rank or position. I repeat, this is an emergency. But there will be no panic. Violators will be placed under arrest by any male member of the crew or by any male commissioned personnel on board. All male commissioned military personnel in the service of the government of the United States are hereby deputized to make arrests and hold in custody any offender. That is all. Stand by!"

The two small children, Henry noted, were still crying, uncontrollably.

"Vot does he mean?" queried a bearded Russian at Henry's elbow. "Vot iss a sort of man?" It was a rhetorical question, with no answer expected.

But Henry said, "Well, the Captain is *trying* to communicate with him. That would mean he does not speak our language, perhaps none of the languages represented on board. It would mean he is not equipped with equivalent articulatory organs." Several adults near Henry turned their attention upon him. The negro G.I., whose bulging eyes had been staring alternately at the staircase and the Indian Prince, now turned, trembling, to gaze upon this new wonder. And Henry continued. "The co-pilot said he *appears* to be armed. This means he carries some apparatus on him which is unrelated to current technology. That this creature represents an alien intelligence and is capitalizing on the utilization of an alien science is further demonstrated by his having made an appearance on board a transoceanic stratoliner in mid-flight. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that we have with us either an extra-terrestrial or a time-traveling superman out of some future age—or both."

"*Proklaty!*" ejaculated the Russian. "*Ya nye ponye*—" He adjusted a pair of heavy-lensed spectacles and stared at Henry in myopic amazement. "I haf turned on a walkie-talking!"

"Ye gods!" exclaimed an American businessman, a fat man with a florid, sweating face, blue-veined jowls and pale yellow hair that strove unsuccessfully to cover a sunburned scalp. "Here's a quiz kid! Let *him* talk to the monster!"

"Poppycok!" snorted a lean, tweedy Englishman in his early forties. "The child is a precocious egotist. This is a serious matter! It is certainly not a time

for youngsters to be heard at all—particularly when they appear to be addicted to the utterly fantastic! Extra-terrestrial, indeed! My poor, misguided child," he said to Henry, "you must face reality! This is either some manifestation of a Communist plot or—what would be worse—a perverted form of American advertising that has come close to endangering the lives of all of us! A rank publicity stunt! A hoax! A criminal *adulteration* of propriety!"

"What's immorality got to do with it?" queried the negro, fearfully. "Ah don't care if dis kid is a Republican or a vampire. Ah's worried about dat *In-Between* dey got upstairs!"

"Henry!" Martia, huddling close in the protective circle of his arm, was whispering to him. "I think the same as you!" She was trembling.



By this time, the Colonel, the Major, the non-coms and the air hostess, with the help of the commissary steward and the Swedish actress, had restored some semblance of order—at gunpoint. Over two dozen cowering, babbling, questioning passengers were lined up along both sides of the observation lounge. The newsman was still taking flash-photos. The staircase was deserted, because the Major stood there threatening to shoot any unauthorized persons attempting to get down to B deck. Henry wondered how many realized the gun was not loaded.

The now all important P.A. system sputtered, and all faces turned toward it in nervous anticipation. The co-pilot's voice came slowly and quietly now, but tensely. "*Everybody remain exactly where you are. The—stranger—is moving down the aisle.*"

Someone in the observation lounge started to cry out in alarm—one of the women carrying a baby—but the Colonel said, "Quiet!" so vehemently that she stopped, staring at the staircase with round glassy eyes.

"*Attention on B deck!*" came another voice over the P.A. speaker. "*This is Captain Merman. I believe Colonel Rogers is among you. If so or in his absence if there is any other commissioned member of the Service present, you will immediately move all women and children out of harm's way and*

organize the men to take up a position which will enable you to ambush the intruder! He will not identify himself and I consider him to be dangerous. By your combined efforts you are authorized and directed to capture him, dead or alive. This is an official order. Passengers are reminded that disobeying an order at this time will be mutinous and subject to arrest and imprisonment. Stand by!"

This was followed by general silence. Henry and Martia listened for sounds of activity from A deck. Had they heard screams or the sound of mortal conflict above them they could not have been more terrified than they were by this absence of any noise other than the muffled roar of the engines outside. It was as though A deck were totally devoid of human occupants and the ship were being piloted by phantoms.

Colonel Rogers silently motioned to everybody, herding the women and children over to one side of the lounge, next to the drinking fountain where Henry and Martia stood. The Major and the non-coms lined up the men. There were whispered arguments.

"What the hell does he think he's doing?"

"Yeah, there's more guys on A deck! Why don't they pile him?"

Some of the men, by their facial expression and obvious emotional condition, were considered inadequate for the task before them and were excused. The scar-faced man, however, quietly followed instructions. Henry wanted to go to him and ask him about Uncle Andy, but he could no longer move against the press of the crowd.

"He has stopped now at the head of the staircase," Captain Merman announced in a low tone. *"He is looking down into the lounge."*



Men and women pressed closely against the two adolescents. Henry could sense their accumulated tenseness. He could hear grown men panting and he could observe the dryness of their tightly compressed lips, the animal-like flaring of nostrils, the hunted look in their staring eyes. He saw one woman grip her husband's hand until he winced. Martia pressed her face against his shoulder and would not look at the staircase.

They waited. And Henry watched the Major.

He was a short, stockily built man with a clear, youthful face and brown, wavy hair. On his chest were campaign ribbons and one small medal of some kind. Henry saw his Adam's apple move as he swallowed nervously. His blue-grey eyes never wavered from the staircase.

The scar-faced man stood slightly apart from the crowd, watching the stairs with a quiet, expressionless intentness. About a dozen men waited tensely on either side of the stairs, trying to remain out of a direct line of sight from above.

"He's coming down!" said Captain Merman.

There was an audible drawing of breaths as they saw the alien intruder descend the stairs. He came down to the second step from the bottom and stood there surveying the scene before him.

He was taller than men, by about a head. His shoulders, arms and musculature were not human. He was almost four feet across his sloping shoulders, with ponderous arms and six-fingered hands that reached below his thick knees. There was a thumb, in addition to the taloned fingers, a prehensile, calloused extension of the heel of the hand. A second set of three, prehensile appendages writhed slowly about just above his multi-jointed wrists. His large, almost circular chest was split by a multiple lipped orifice that slowly opened and closed like a sea anemone as he breathed. He wore only a meager harness and loin cloth, the plastic-like straps supporting a heavy instrument box at his waist and a pack of apparatus on his back. His skin was leathery, almost brittle appearing, as though he were partially exoskeletal, and of mottled colors ranging from dark red to purple, like a mass of birth-marks that left no room for normal pigment. His face was small, chinless and devoid of nose or nostrils, but he had a round mouth the lips of which were like the beak of a blow-fish. His cranium was large, hairless, and heavily veined. Under absurdly accentuated, hairless brows, a single, monstrous insect's eye with a thousand gleaming facets rotated about, examining them balefully.

Martia could not see the alien. Henry could. She felt him shudder.

Three women quietly passed out, but no one paid them any attention. Colonel Rogers and the Major stood there looking back at the creature in the same

attitude of momentary shock paralysis as the others. The non-com soldiers and male passengers constituting the ambush on either side of the staircase were all white-faced, staring. "Scarface" stood apart, more or less facing the intruder.

Then—the alien spoke. The little beaks of his mouth moved, and a rather high-pitched voice spoke, laboriously, in a language which was guttural, vaguely familiar, but nonetheless incomprehensible.

No one moved, but the men tensed, as though for action.



Henry recognized the menace of this creature, but he could not refrain from reflecting, during those brief, weirdly timeless seconds of inactivity, that to communicate with it might be worth a thousand Rosetta Stones. A single, intelligible conversation, and Man might conquer the stars! But this was the Unknown. Man, in his egotism, abhorred the Unknown as Nature abhorred a vacuum. Man had to reduce the Unknown to the level of his own understanding. "The only good Injun is a dead one!" This superman from out of space or time, this harbinger of wonders yet to be discovered, this mute, alien vessel of perhaps incalculable knowledge—was suspect, and condemned to be taken, dead or alive. Henry was aware of no sympathetic sentiments around him. He knew that the mass reaction was for violence. The judgment: Death!

Suddenly, the newsman took a picture and the flash bulb caused the alien to start and move one of his amazingly dextrous hands toward the control box at his waist.

The two babies screamed, and the stranger turned his cyclopean eye upon them for the first time. He moved down to the floor and started toward them.

It was then that Scarface whipped out a gun and fired, point blank. The loud report in that tensely silent place stimulated involuntary muscular reactions and the crowd seemed to jump as one body.

The bullet made a round, neat hole to the right of the chest orifice, and the alien stopped. Nobody wondered why Scarface happened to be carrying a loaded gun. They merely sensed relief when he fired the shot. A known

element had entered the picture. Man had met the Unknown with a gun, and the gun could do harm. It was effective.

The alien looked at Scarface briefly, then turned dials at his waist, even as Scarface pumped three more shots into him in very rapid succession.

Nobody was quite sure of what happened after that. Everyone's vision blurred. There was a tumultuous ringing in the ears, a giddiness, and a tendency to black out.

When their vision cleared, the alien had disappeared. And with him the two babies....



Henry, Uncle Andy, Dr. Edwards, Scarface, the G.I. negro and the Swedish actress were all shoulder to shoulder in the lounge, looking down at the world.

Martia had been "rescued" by her mother, the Lady Dewitt, and the governess, whose dough-like face had acquired red emotional splotches similar to hives.

First aid was being administered to the injured and the hysterical—including the two mothers whose babies had been stolen.

In spite of the overwhelming enigma below him, where the Atlantic Ocean should have been, Henry kept remembering Martia—the look she had given him when she had started back to A deck with her mother and the governess. Her eyes had revealed a composite expression of sadness, puzzlement and urgency. With them she had transmitted a message: *Something unknown binds us together. I will see you again.*

More important than that, it seemed to be imperative that he discover *what* it was that bound them together. Just the two of them. No one else in the world.

Why? Why? *Why!*

"Well, Henry," said Uncle Andy, whose pipe had gone out, "after all that's happened, and in view of the landscape below us, I imagine you are about ready to extrapolate."

"He's got company!" ejaculated the negro G.I. "Ah's about ready to lose control, myself! Dat Monster Man done burned up mah nervous system, but dis here country we's flyin' over is gonna make me exasperate all over if somebody don't tell me where we is at!"

Dr. Edwards was not concerned with him, just now, Henry noted. Instead, he studied the unknown country below them—and the peculiar sky—as though orthodox authority were at a loss for an opinion. The Swedish actress, known by the name of Valerie Roagland, looked at Henry, her brilliantly blue eyes searching him curiously.

"When will they tell us?" she asked, with just the pleasant trace of a liquid accent.

"I don't think the Captain or the Navigator are going to be able to come up with much," said Uncle Andy, noting with appreciation that Valerie Roagland's hair was naturally blond and wavy. "Unless they are equipped with a crystal ball."

"What I'd like to know," said Dr. Edwards, "is *how* this happened. A weird creature like that, suddenly appearing on board and stealing two babies, then disappearing into thin air. And when it's all over—" He shrugged and pointed below.

Henry looked again at the terrain over which they were flying. The ship was in descent, and their present altitude of some three thousand feet gave him a close view.



Distant seas, land locked tropical harbors, islands, and the great land mass below with its rivers and lakes and jungles and very low, pagan looking hills. Here below them was an apparently uninhabited Eden—a Paradise that continued endlessly. No ship, sailboat or canoe could be discerned on any visible body of water. No city, town or village. No highways, country roads or footpaths. There were only brilliant flowers, on the ground and in the trees, and a few birds.

Nothing more—except the sky.

The sky was blue, but without a sun, although the brilliance of the day was equivalent to that of high noon. It was as though a curtain had been drawn across the heavens—as though they were adventuring within a shell that encircled the world.

"The absence of the sun," said Henry, "is one basis for conjecture. The absence of inhabitants is another. But the last announcement they made over the P.A. system gives us the most conclusive evidence of all."

Dr. Edwards looked at him quickly. "That announcement merely revealed the fact that no radio contact has been made with anyone," he said. "What does it prove?"

"It was not announced that the radio is not functioning properly," replied Henry. "Given a radio that is in working order, and no reception; given a primitive looking country such as this one below us, with no signs of inhabitants, plus a bright blue sky without a sun—and the answer is obvious."

"I wish it were as obvious to me," said Valerie Roagland. "What do you make of it, Henry? What is the answer?"

"Man, you's got more complications!" protested the negro G.I. "Come on! It's a impossibility to scare me any futher, 'cause I got goose pimples clear out on my fingernails! Let's have it!"

Henry looked expressionlessly through the observation panels and wondered, as he had wondered all his life, how he knew, *a priori*, what it took those around him so long to figure out.

"This is another world," he said. "If it is not another planet—"

"Oh, Henry, for the love of God!" exclaimed Dr. Edwards. "You and your extrapolations! How could this be another planet? What inhabitable planet would not reveal a sun in its sky? And how could we be transported there in the twinkling of an eye?"

"The planet, Venus, is surrounded by clouds of some sort," said Henry. "We have never seen its surface. Perhaps it would be Nature's way to protect such a world from the brightness and heat of a nearer sun by surrounding it with some sort of protective layer that only *looks* like a sky. But I don't think this is Venus."

"Well, that's very nice to know," said Dr. Edwards, sarcastically.

"What *do* you think it is, Henry?" asked Uncle Andy, puffing again at his pipe.

"Earth—incalculably removed into the distant future. We have been hurled into future Time."

Dr. Edwards snorted, straightened up, and left the group without a word.

"Look at the low hills," said Henry to the others. "We've been flying over this country for several hours. Here we have a small continent, a comparatively major land mass—but no mountains. That would be indicative of great geologic age. Furthermore, you will note that the islands we saw, though tropical, are not the result of coral growth. They are the tops of low hills. At one time this was a greater land mass, but it has since been inundated."

The P. A. system blared. "*All passengers and crew, prepare for landing....*"

"Say, Henry," interposed Scarface for the first time, "how did we get here?"

"The—alien—took himself back to where he came from, along with the two babies. I believe he made a mistake and transported us, too."

Scarface raised one black brow quizzically. "Then you mean—we have come to the place where that geek went to with the kids?"

"Perhaps. But if we followed him accidentally through time we might have been dropped off somewhere along the Continuum, either prior to his own time or far beyond his era."

Scarface looked at Valerie Roagland and Uncle Andy. They expected him to grin in amusement, but he did not.

"We better take seats," he said. "I think I need one, landing or no landing."

Valerie Roagland cornered Uncle Andy and flashed him a smile that brought him to a staggering halt. "This is all a little beyond me," she said. "What do *you* think has happened?"

He looked at her in silence a moment before answering. Then he gently patted her shapely shoulder. "The most practical thing I can say," he answered, "is to relax. No matter what has happened—we're here. Let's face it and wait for developments."

Suddenly she tucked her arm in his. He looked down at her arm, then into her

eyes. After that, they walked up to A deck together.

Henry, following them, knew the answer. Far from being romance, it was an expression of the present situation. They were confronted with the Unknown. Their own world with its mores, complexities and inhibitions was behind them. Beneath that veneer, in real people, lay a human frankness, and a gregarious instinct. If rough waters lay ahead, Valerie Roagland preferred to have a man like Uncle Andy around. No strings. No innuendos.

But what lay beneath the civilized veneers of other people on board?

Take Scarface, for example. Why was he carrying a loaded gun?



"Well, it didn't take us long, did it?" Uncle Andy cast his line once more into the swelling waves and squinted against the eternal light of day.

"What do you mean?" queried Henry. His shoes were off and he wriggled his toes in the warm light of the sky as he sat precariously on the edge of the great rock that jutted out from the land ten feet above the sea. He looked at Uncle Andy's fishing rod and thought: That's all we got out of the survival gear. Everybody just *grabbed*.

"I mean—" Uncle Andy wound in fast. "It's only been two weeks since our crash landing, and our little human colony has divided itself into separate groups." The fish hook was empty—of fish, and of bait.

Henry handed him another "bush worm"—a two-inch long greenish thing with tentacles all over it. It squirmed but was harmless otherwise.

"It's like a glass jar they showed us once at the orphanage," he answered. "There were big pebbles, little pebbles, and sand. You shook the jar awhile and pretty soon you had each size and type seeking its own level. That's like people."

Uncle Andy smiled around the edges of his pipe stem and cast out again, with the fresh bait. "You always hit the nail on the head, Henry. You're an unusual human being. I wish I knew more about your actual parentage. They told me a story about you. You were a year old child when they found you naked on the Normandie beach. You're probably French, all right. But who your

parents were will probably never be known—especially now."

"And you skip around a lot," retorted Henry. "We were talking about the people back at the camp." He had built up a wall of inhibition against the pain of not knowing about his parents. He resented any probing into that isolated cyst of longing.

"Yes, I know." The line was taut now, and Uncle Andy was fighting a catch. "Take the English clan—that Cyril Rollins or whatever his name is, and your Lady Dewitt and the governess and the two Crispin sisters and that old retired sea captain, Langham. Colonization is a tradition with them. By God, if they had a flag they'd unfurl it in the name of the Queen! They can't quite swallow the concept of complete severance with the world they knew. It's a sort of mental defense mechanism, I guess. And no criticism, either. Merely a sign of their own particular character as a people. But that's just an example of the grouping that's going on."

The catch came in—a two foot lizard, glaring scarlet with blue and yellow gills and black eyes that pierced one with a deadly stare of murderous hate.

"Hm-m-m. That biologist, Doctor Singer, will have to see this." Uncle Andy held it beneath his foot studying it. "This certainly is a different type of world. Entirely different evolution. All the fauna and flora we've seen yet are different than anything we've known. Hundreds of millions of years—maybe much more. I'd swear we're still on Earth. It *feels* like Earth. But what happened to our own time? Did the world start over again, somewhat unthinkably long ago? Where are we? At the dawn or at the end of Creation?"

Henry reflected that there were five mental cases back in camp—all raving idiots. They, too, had tried to find an answer, but their minds were not as well balanced as others. He pinned his faith on minds like Uncle Andy, his own—and Martia's. He couldn't see Martia yet—not alone, that is. Sooner or later, though, after the Lady Dewitt extracted herself from her delusions—

"You're talking to yourself," he accused. "We were discussing the people. One group I don't like is that Tommy Weston gang. They are the crude pebbles in the glass jar—and they are trouble makers. The incident about the women last night is just one indication of what's ahead. Here we are in Paradise and some are reverting to animals already."

Night was only an arbitrary period of rest. In this world there was no actual

night. Daylight apparently continued forever.

"Look!" exclaimed Uncle Andy. "Here comes Valerie and Pee Bee!"



Henry turned in time to see the Swedish actress and the negro G.I. climbing up the rock behind them. Pee Bee, the negro, carried a bonafide picnic basket under his arm. The basket seemed incongruous, but Henry knew it was one of half a dozen that had been woven recently by several women who had found an unlimited supply of rushes for the purpose. There was a medical doctor in camp who had told everyone they had better keep busy and be industrious if they wanted to avoid cracking up. The baskets were one of the results of his advice.

Pee Bee, who had been nick-named "Powder Blue," or P.B., by his fellow servicemen, flashed them a toothy smile and helped Valerie up the incline of the rock.

"We figured you fishermen would be starvin' for lack of fish," he called out, "so we done brought you all a lunch!"

"K-rations again," put in Valerie, smiling at both of them. "They found some more near the wreckage. But they really are the last. Good Heavens! What is that!" She pointed at the scarlet lizard under Uncle Andy's foot.

"That," he answered, "is *lacerta litoralis satanus*, or the swimming devil lizard."

Pee Bee's eyes bugged out. "Ah got just one question. Do we eat *it*, or does it eat *us*?"

Everybody laughed, and Uncle Andy did not try to avoid taking in all of Valerie with his eyes. She wore light blue slacks, beach sandals and a white shirt, the tails of which were tied in a knot under her breasts, making it an appropriate midriff outfit. Her voluminous blond hair floated cleanly in the salty breeze and her face and neck were already deeply tanned. She looked up at him and caught his eyes and their smiles faded—slowly.

Words between them would have been superfluous. Inevitably, their companionship in this lost world had developed into a much closer

relationship.

The four of them sat there on the rock, bare legs dangling over, and ate K-rations. In the reassuring warmth and sunlight before the comprehensible aspect of the ageless sea, they felt little need for conversation. They were content with the awareness of *not* being alone.

Henry watched a printed wrapping from the K-rations float on the waves below, and he thought it far more incongruous than the picnic basket. K-rations—a million years removed from their source. Along these shores were empty tin cans and bottles and old newspapers and magazines lying among the seaweeds and flotsam.

Man had come to Paradise....



After lunch they fell into the usual discussion. Where were they? How had they come here? What was the alien's purpose of taking the two babies? Was the alien here, in this world, or in some other one? What would be the possibilities of exploring this world and what might they discover—if anything? Were they doomed to stay here forever?

Uncle Andy expressed the opinion that, until something better developed, it would be the sanest course to get their little colony organized under a recognizable form of government. Dwellings had to be built. Sources of food had to be secured. Exploration parties must be sent out.

"In substance," he said, "that's what the big meeting tonight is all about. We have to get organized and come to decisions regarding the future."

"Look!" said Henry. "There's Tommy Weston and some of his gang." He pointed back toward the jungle.

All four of them looked shoreward and discerned six bare-chested men standing there about a hundred feet from them, just under the shade of the flowering trees. Four of them were construction men, led by the big man who had sat with Scarface in the seat behind Henry, Uncle Andy and Dr. Edwards back when—things were normal. This two hundred and forty pound package of trouble was Tommy Weston, heavy chested, big fisted, tattooed, square

jawed, bewhiskered, and with a brooding tawny-eyed stare. His crinkly hair, on his head, chest and brawny arms, was a dark, rusty red. And he was heavily freckled.

He stood there talking to his men and gesticulating toward the group on the rock. Henry recognized two of the men as the only two cooks belonging to the camp. One was an ugly hulk of a man who in his youth might have been more than a match for Weston. He was a garrulous, argumentative Pole, pale-faced, perspiring, and wearing a battered, black felt hat. The other was young, probably only twenty, but squarely built and already notoriously hot-tempered, having been in three fistfights since the crash landing. His hair and lashes were pure white. Hence the obvious name, Whitey.

"They're coming up here," said Valerie. "I wish they wouldn't. It was so peaceful."

"Relax, honey," Uncle Andy replied. "Maybe they only want to borrow my fishing gear."

"Man, de only thing dat big boy wants to borrow 'round here is trouble!" put in Pee Bee. "Ah wish ah was back home playin' pool on Central Avenue now!"

Henry merely watched the men climb the rock. He saw their ugly grins as they looked at Valerie, and he thought of the separation of the sand and pebbles in the jar again. Uncle Andy got to his feet and held up the devil lizard for them to see. It was a disarming neighborly gesture, but Henry felt it was somehow pathetic. He had a distinct feeling of being cornered. He knew Uncle Andy felt that, too, but he didn't show it.



Camp was almost a mile distant and completely out of sight behind two jungle covered headlands. The six men came up onto the rock and stood there grinning at them.

"It probably isn't even edible," said Uncle Andy, still referring to the devil lizard. "But this sea is teeming with life."

Tommy Weston looked down at Henry and saw his box of worms. "You ain't

doin' so hot, then," he answered. "Lemme try that pole. Gimme some of them worms, Henry."

Both Uncle Andy and Henry complied, while Valerie kept very much to herself. She still sat on the edge of the rock, with her back toward them, and looked down into the swirling water. Pee Bee was a powder blue study in self-effacement. He kept his eyes on the water as though he wished he were a fish.

Weston hooked on his bait and cast far out. "We been makin' the rounds," he said. "We're checkin' up on everybody's ideas about the meeting tonight."

"Well, now, that's a pretty sure sign we're all going to survive," remarked Uncle Andy, but not as naively as he sounded. "I didn't know anyone was actively concerned about it. I'm glad you fellows think the meeting is that important."

"Sure it's important!" exclaimed the big, Polish cook with the felt hat. "Vot you t'ink ve goink around for a valk only for our healt'?"

"Shut up, Sceranka!" said Weston, reeling in the line. "You see, we don't like the set-up. There's too many government boys who think naturally they got the say-so around here. They still recognize Captain Merman as the head man. And it seems they sort of got things set up their own way." The other five men, if they were not watching Valerie, were watching Uncle Andy for his reactions as Weston spoke.

The fishline came in empty. Weston baited again.

"I can see your point," said Uncle Andy. "You favor a more democratic method of setting up the colony, now that the emergency is over and we are peacefully established on land. The rules governing international flights do not apply here. Since there is no government, or any contact with one, the people must elect one. Is that what you're getting at?"

Weston looked at him in surprise. "Yeah! That's the idea!" he exclaimed. "The democratic system!"

But Uncle Andy and Henry did not like the grins on the other men's faces.

"Now take me, for instance!" Weston continued, casting out his line again. "I'm up for election!"

This time, Valerie had to turn and stare at him in astonishment. He looked down at her as he reeled in the line and gave her a smile that revealed gold-capped teeth.

"What's the matter, beautiful? Wouldn't I make a good candidate? I got a platform already. No red tape. No promises. And no taxes. Just do as I say and we'll all get along."

"Obviously," said Uncle Andy, "that's a brand of politics that belongs to gangsters. What can you possibly hope to gain even if you are the Boss of this outfit?"



The hook came in empty, so Weston threw the pole down on the rock. He faced Uncle Andy and gave him that twany-eyed, brooding look of his. "I got this to gain," he said. "None of us knows what's gonna happen. Maybe our chances of gettin' back to civilization are slim. But if things get tough I ain't going to be breakin' my back under nobody else's whip. I don't go for this gold braid and paper baloney. I think half the camp is made up of a helpless mess of blubber as far as *men* go. Of course, as far as the women go we don't mind them bein' helpless! We'll take care of them, but first they gotta come down off their pedestals and get some sense into 'em!" He and all his men looked at Valerie. "We might never get back home," he said, pointedly, "and in that case things have got to be a lot different around here. And me and my boys have just got the guts to make the necessary changes!"

Uncle Andy stiffened, but he held his temper. "Tommy," he said, "what is it you want? How does this visit of yours apply to the meeting tonight?"

"We're going to force the issue on voting in a new leader. I'll be a candidate. If you know what's good for you, you'll vote for *me*!"

Uncle Andy wanted to ask him why they should vote at all as long as Weston had decided how the voting was going to go, but instead he said, "How about giving us time to consider it? Until tonight."

"Sure! Just so you decide by tonight. You can't vote before then!"

"Yeah but what about the dame?" Whitey blurted out. "You know what you

said."

Instinctively, Valerie sprang to her feet and drew close to Uncle Andy. Just as instinctively, he put an arm around her, protectively.

Tommy Weston hooked his thumbs into his pants and drew close to Uncle Andy. "Now there's another point I'd like to bring up," he said. "Just who elected you the fair haired boy with blondie, here? You may have to get used to some different ideas before long."

"So it might as well be now!" put in Whitey, coming shoulder to shoulder with Weston.

The other four men closed in also. The big Pole with the hat was sweating more profusely now, and his eyes grew large as he stared at Valerie.

"So we've come to this," said Uncle Andy, actually stalling for time.

"Let's face it!" exclaimed Weston. "We always *been* here!"

"Yes," Henry broke in. "You're right! There was a thin, fake covering called civilization, once. But now at the end of time the covering comes off and we find nothing has changed since the Stone Age!"

Tommy Weston sneered. "So the young genius has to put his two-bits in, too! Well, boys, the conference is over!" He reached out for Valerie's shirt, just as Pee Bee suddenly got to his feet in a crouching position, ready to uncoil.

Uncle Andy's fists were coming up when another man shouldered his way between the construction men. Action froze on all sides as they looked at the newcomer. He stood there in shirt, trousers and tan sport shoes. It was Scarface, wearing a very handy looking shoulder holster. From the holster, the butt of a black automatic protruded.

"Any trouble up here?" he queried, nonchalantly, as though he were asking if the fish were biting.



Tommy Weston's already tanned face darkened, as did Whitey's. The other men backed away, slightly. In addition to having a respect for the gun, they respected the man. None of them knew who Scarface was, actually, but they

remembered he had had the nerve to shoot it out with the alien.

"So the little gun boy is going to take sides!" sneered Weston.

Scarface raised his brows and spoke unsmilingly through his teeth. "I've got news for you," he said. "As a trouble maker you're an amateur. I'm professional, but please don't ask for a demonstration today. Now I want all you hairy-chested little girls to climb back on your kiddy cars and toddle home, because there's no more Mickey Mouse today."

"If you didn't have that goddam gun I'd swedge your sassy yap shut!" threatened Weston, looming over him and fuming.

Scarface's eyes flashed. "I said get the hell out of here!"

Weston brought himself under control and tried another tack. "What's in this for you, Scarface?" he asked. "You don't strike me as the Sunday School type. You know what the score is around here. So why don't you put in with us or sit out?"

"Your business and what you do is none of *my* business," said Scarface, "as long as you leave my friends alone. These are my friends, so lay off!"

"Look out!" screamed Valerie, and Uncle Andy jerked Scarface out of the way just in time to avoid Whitey's lunge.

Whitey lunged again, for the gun, and as Scarface turned toward him, Weston threw an arm around his neck that looked like the root of an oak tree. Scarface kicked out at Whitey, making him lose his balance, and Pee Bee bowed his back as Whitey went over him. When Pee Bee straightened up, two things happened. His head collided solidly with the big Pole's chin, knocking him out, and Whitey sailed beautifully into the crashing waves below. His terrified yell was drowned by foaming seawater. Simultaneously, Uncle Andy snatched the gun from Scarface just as the latter broke loose by scraping his heels down Weston's shins, almost breaking his arches, and at the same time nearly pulling the other's ears off.

Weston broke free of the ear grip while Uncle Andy held the other men at bay. As Scarface turned on Weston, the latter swung at him ponderously. Scarface ducked and gave him a swift jab into the stomach. As Weston doubled, he received a two-fisted uppercut, and as he toppled he was aided on his way by a double blow across the left temple. He came down like a brick

chimney and lay there in a heap.

Pee Bee stood there rubbing his head and looking down at the prostrate figure of the Polish cook.

"Get Whitey!" cried one of the construction men, pointing at the ocean. "He'll drown!"

While Uncle Andy still held them at bay, they all looked at the man in the water. Whitey was screaming and flailing wildly about, while the undertow and the incoming waves alternately dragged him outward and dashed him against the rocks.

"What's the matter?" asked Scarface, rubbing his knuckles. "Can't he swim?"

"He can swim," said the same man, "but something's got him!"

As they watched, the water darkened around Whitey.

"It's blood!" cried Valerie. "Oh my God, the poor man!"

"Look!" cried Henry. "Those are devil lizards! Hundreds of them!"



Like a voracious swarm of piranhas, the scarlet little monsters converged on Whitey and tore him apart. As the blood filled the water, other "things" were attracted. There were glimpses of finned, serpentine backs and vast, amorphous shadows beneath the churning waves. To those who watched, the eternal light above them seemed deceptive. Subjectively, they were aware of the dark Unknown. The very dark *Unknown*.

Where were they?

One of the construction men ran away screaming. Pee Bee, carrying the lunch basket, took Henry's arm and also started to lead the way, gently but firmly. Uncle Andy handed the gun back to Scarface. He led Valerie down the rock, wordlessly. And Scarface stood there looking back at the bloodied water for a full minute.

Then he followed the others. Weston and Sceranka, he decided, would have to come by themselves and find their own way back to camp.

The fishing pole lay there, abandoned....

The camp was similar, in effect to a military beachhead prior to organization. There was one tent, salvaged from the survival gear that the plane carried. This was used by the women for the purpose of changing their clothes, as well as a sort of "safety deposit vault" for valuable articles such as the ship's log, medicinal supplies and various instruments—plus short wave sending and receiving gear, now quite useless owing to a lack of power source and an absence of activity on the wave bands.

Beyond the tent lay confusion. Small huts constructed of branches and giant leaves, or square areas enclosed by sheets or towels, suspended on crude frameworks rigged together with poles. Here and there a more presentable structure of branches indicated the work of construction men. Between these were scattered both small and large heaps of luggage and personal belongings—suitcases, pullmans, hatboxes, overnight bags, small trunks, packing cases—even an aluminum cage in which reposed a bewildered Pekingese dog. A very lonely dog. The only dog in the universe.

Inevitably, there were clotheslines displaying underwear, shirts, socks, silk stockings, bras—and a man's pair of black silk monogrammed pajamas. These latter belonged to the Englishman, Sir Cyril Rollins. And there was a hammock strung between two straight-boled trees without leaves which bore a weird fruit that looked like pomegranates. The hammock was shared by the three soldiers from Texas. Just now the hammock was empty except for a ukelele and a million year old copy of Life Magazine.

Farther up the endless beach was the plane, lying crumpled on its belly, with wings drooping dejectedly into the sand and water. One of the landing gears had burst up through a nacelle. The great, swift, mechanical bird of another age was a useless thing—and a painful reminder of what once was their own familiar world.

Altogether there were in camp sixty males and twenty-four females, representing three races and eight nationalities. A cross section of the human race. Seemingly, all there was left of it.



When Henry returned with the others to camp, Martia was the first to greet him. She had suddenly lost the last vestige of her patrician affectations, because she ran to him abruptly. Or rather, their thoughts seemed to meet between them even before they drew together. He squeezed her hand warmly as she drew him to one side, excitedly.

"Mother is lost!" she exclaimed. Her eyes were slightly reddened from crying.

"Lost! How do you know?"

"She and Sir Rollins and that Mr. Langham and the Crispin sisters and those two mothers who lost their babies went exploring for spring water. They've been gone all day and nobody can find them! Henry, I'm so worried! Can you speak to your Uncle and ask him to organize a real search party. There's no night here. We can start right away!"

"But the meeting—"

"Please!" she insisted.

"What I mean is, no search party can be organized during the big meeting, and that's about ready to get under way—after everybody eats supper." They could see the fires along the beach where men and women were cooking. Either they were cooking small game caught in traps or certain species of edible crustacea, or a potato-like fruit that was abundant in this region. The food from the plane was long gone. "Why doesn't your governess do something about it? What does she think?"

"Emily? She made a few soldier boys go with her to search—those three Texas boys—and I think three of those WAACs went along. But they've disappeared, too!"

"All right," said Henry. "Let's go see Uncle Andy."

They found him, with Valerie Roagland and the air hostess, Peggy Hollenbeck, engaged in a group discussion that included Captain Merman, several high-ranking U.S. Army officers and the five congressmen led by Burley. Also, there were a few businessmen and scientists present, including Dr. Edwards. Most of them stood around a charcoal fire boiling small chunks of meat on long wires and drinking "Beachcomber's Tea," made from the leaves of a giant vine that someone had discovered. A chemist and a doctor

had collaborated on its analysis and found it to be healthful.

"We still represent the United States," Congressman Burley was saying, "and Colonel Rogers here says that the servicemen are on our side. Also, we can count on the English to be with us, if necessary, and the three Norwegians. I don't think Weston has a chance of making trouble. Now here is a list compiled today showing the number of men—"

Congressman Burley stopped talking and followed the gaze of all the others. He saw Henry and Martia standing by the fireside, holding hands and looking very impatient.

"All right!" he said. "You kids will have to clear out. We're having a conference."

"That," said Henry, "is somewhat obvious. But I—"

"Now look here! Don't you get sassy!" Burley glared at Henry impatiently, but Uncle Andy walked over to the boy and put an arm around his shoulders. He placed his other arm around Martia.

"Just a minute!" he interrupted. "I'm afraid you don't know Henry. He would never have intruded if he did not have something important to say."

"Always pampering the kid," commented Dr. Edwards to Captain Merman. "Thinks he's a genius and he's only a pest!"

"Your English allies have gotten themselves lost," said Henry. "Lady Dewitt, Sir Rollins, the Crispin sisters, Langham, Emily Duncan, several other women and three servicemen."

"Please!" Martia cried. "It's always daylight here. Can't a search party be sent right away?"

Some of the men looked at Captain Merman. He was a tall, lean man in his late thirties, still wearing the pants and shirts of his uniform, as well as the cap. His paleness and the redness of his eyelids, thought Henry, were probably due to a hyperthyroid condition.

"My orders," said Merman, "were that no explorations would be conducted

without proper authorization. They went on their own, principally because of Lady Dewitt's refusal to use the river water and because our distilled water can't be rationed in her favor. I don't see why—"

"You are engaged here in an emergency conference," said Henry, "to determine what can be done about Tommy Weston's gang. If you're worried, why don't you stall for time by organizing the whole camp into a search party—including Weston's men? The physical action and the adventure of it will be tantamount to a psychological weapon against anarchy."

Martia beamed at Henry in pride and gratitude, but most of the men guffawed.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed one of the other congressmen. "That sounded like it was going to be a filibuster! Talk about lobbying! This kid is Capitol material!"

"But it isn't getting us anywhere," said Burley.

"Just a minute," said a small, dark-complexioned man wearing a black shirt, white slacks and dark glasses. "I've heard, second-handedly, some interesting ideas from this boy." Henry had learned that this was Dr. Jules Bauml, a noted astro-physicist attached to the Mount Palomar Observatory. "He thinks we have been transported through time and that it is futile to try contacting our own civilization unless we avail ourselves of a time machine. Of course that is a pessimistic view, but owing to observations of my own I should like to hear his reasons for arriving at such a conclusion."

"Oh hell!" ejaculated one of the businessmen present. "We're probably down in the Caribbean somewhere!"

"No, by God!" said another one. "That wouldn't explain the permanent daylight and no sun!"

"A freak of Nature," insisted the first one. "You've heard of the Land of the Midnight Sun. What's so different about this?"

"Everything!" said Henry.

They all looked at him, startled, including Uncle Andy.

Henry addressed Dr. Bauml. "As an astronomer you will understand the nature and importance of the ionosphere," he said, amidst raised eyebrows all around. "It is that layer of the atmosphere which protects us from the dangerous short radiations from the sun. These quanta, striking atoms of oxygen, create ionized oxygen and ozone, forming the ionosphere. Such atoms are necessarily in such rapid motion that they would be lost in space were it not for the magnitude of Earth's gravitation. That is why Earth bears—or *bore*—a high form of intelligent life whereas Mars must continue to lose its ionized oxygen into space and could therefore not support a high form of life."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Bauml, impressed. "But what has that to do with the present?"

"Venus does not have an ionosphere," continued Henry. "Otherwise it would have shown up in spectrographs. Its atmosphere is caused largely by violent volcanic action. Volcanoes, incredibly heated storms and no ionosphere, spells no oxygen and no life. Therefore, conclusion number one: We are still on Earth."

Several congressmen snorted. "Who said we weren't?"

"Go on!" encouraged Bauml, while Dr. Edwards began to listen in some surprise. "I agree so far! This is Earth, but where do we go from here?"

"Let us disregard, for the moment," said Henry, "that there is no night. Just concentrate on the fact that we can't see the sun at *any* time, clouds or no clouds. Ergo, the ionosphere has changed its composition. It would take millions of years to do that, just as it took billions of years to build it up in the first place. I submit that the sun has cooled and the ionosphere is much thicker than it was before, thus acquiring different characteristics of refraction which reflect light back to Earth. It is almost like a mirror. Just as it once reflected radio waves back, it now shuts out the shorter wavelengths, including light, itself. I submit further, that if the sun were still bright we should notice a difference in relative brightness between day and night. Inasmuch as there is no difference, I say that the sun is now grown dim and feeble, and that we have traveled perhaps a billion years into the future."

"Hey!" cried out another civilian. "I thought there were only five psychos in camp! One billion years! What the—"

"Yes," put in Dr. Edwards, with an impatient scowl, "this business of extrapolating is next to nothing, as it leads nowhere. By the boy's own argument I could give the rebuttal that if a billion years have passed then Venus may have had time to finally develop an ionosphere and thus be able to support the higher forms of life. Behold! I submit that we are on Venus!" This was followed by sympathetic laughter all around.

"Wait now," insisted Dr. Bauml. "Give the boy a chance! Henry, you *have* let me down into mere hypothesis, but we might as well have all of it. Let me ask you a question. If the sun has cooled, why are we surrounded by all this evidence of lush, tropical life? We should be freezing!"

Henry replied immediately. "Either the ionosphere has developed a sustained reaction that provides us with heat and the regular, life sustaining quanta, while absorbing the hard radiations, or—" He paused, groping suddenly for words.

"Or what!" demanded Dr. Edwards.

"Or *someone* has set up nuclear heating plants all over the planet, or their equivalents. Wait!" He held up his hand as Dr. Edwards joined half the others in derisive laughter. "Go back to that alien creature who stole the babies. Just before he disappeared, precipitating us into our present environment, he spoke to us in a guttural language that was vaguely familiar. You were present, Doctor Bauml, when he spoke. I understand you recognized that language. What was it?"



Dr. Edwards sobered. He and Merman and Burley and the others stared at the diminutive astronomer. The latter looked embarrassed.

"I—am German, as you know," he said. "As such I was naturally familiar with Middle High German, owing to my educational background. That is what this alien spoke. I only caught a few words, which were to the effect that no harm would come to any of us if we did something or other."

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" queried Merman. "If that freak spoke German—"

"Wait!" interrupted Henry. "Middle High German is a dead language. It came into use in the dark ages before the Renaissance and it died out with Martin Luther in the Sixteenth Century of our own era. The fact that this alien spoke that language indicates that he is a time traveler. He has been in our era before and I'll tell you where, when and why!"

"*That* is a tall order," put in Dr. Edwards.

Uncle Andy turned to Valerie Roagland and the air hostess. "This is the tallest extrapolating I've ever heard from Henry."

By this time, many other people were gathering around to listen, including servicemen and a number of Tommy Weston's men.

"All right!" said Merman. "Let's have it! Where, when and why?"

"The place?" said Henry. "Westphalia, Germany. The time? Twelve eighty-four A.D. The reason? To kidnap children. Oh, I forgot to mention the town...."

"Hamelin!" exclaimed Dr. Bauml, astounded. "You mean—"

"Yes," said Henry. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin—no legend. An actual fact!"

"What is this?" asked one of Weston's construction stiffs. "A booby hatch? Let's get on with the meeting. Weston'll be here any minute!"

"Wait!" said Henry again. "Analyze it for yourselves. What does *pied* mean?"

"Mottled color," someone offered.

"Exactly!" Henry exclaimed. "But it was no clown suit worn in a fairytale. Our alien's skin was definitely mottled. And he was a piper, too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Dr. Edwards.

"I heard it, Martia heard it, and the two children who were kidnapped heard it. I believe only younger ears can hear it owing to a greater sensitivity of the hair cells in the spiral cochlea. The sound, of course, has nothing to do with flutes. It was a phenomenon produced by his equipment."

"Hold on, screwball!" said another one of Weston's gang. "I know all about that Pied Piper yarn. What about the rats in Hamelin? How did he get rid of those?"

"Legends," said Henry, "are twisted from the truth because people who inherit such stories must always reduce the Unknown to the level of their own understanding, just as the people of our own time insisted that the flying saucers were everything from beer bottle tops to weather balloons. People in following generations could not accept the original story, so it degenerated gradually into a nice little bedtime story. But the fact remains, this Pied Piper is a time traveler who needs children for some purpose of his own. He represents a very advanced science. It is possible that he is here, somewhere, and *if* he is, we might have a chance of getting him to send us all back to where we came from!"

Suddenly, the Indian Prince broke into their midst. His turban was slightly awry, his eyes were large with anxiety, and he was sweating. "Please!" he exclaimed, in a thick accent, wringing his fat hands in supplication before Henry. "You are an older soul! You have a vision beyond us all! I believe only you can save us! If you can bring me back to my own world I will pay you anything! I am rich! My fortune is yours if you will do it!"

This led to general confusion, but it also led to something else. One of Weston's men separated himself from the crowd and went to find his leader. Weston and Sceranka were back in camp, eating supper and licking their wounds. But they were gratified by one salient fact. Scarface was conspicuous by his absence. There would be no interference from him tonight....



When the meeting took place, Weston and Sceranka came to it alone. The rest of the gang, numbering about thirteen, were nowhere in sight. Merman and Burley told him about the missing people and suggested a postponement.

"To hell with that!" he told them. His mouth, though bruised by Scarface's fists, grinned at them in a way that was not at all reassuring, and his tawny eyes met theirs with a new confidence born of secret knowledge. "We can send a search party later. Right now we're concerned with—"

"In other words," Burley broke in, unsmilingly, "you insist on having the meeting?" About fifteen officers and servicemen silently closed in around the periphery of the group, but this did not appear to bother Weston, although

Sceranka kept looking at them nervously.

"Yes," Weston answered. "Let's have the meeting!"

"Then you are out of order!" snapped Burley. "We will follow those rules of order which are befitting to a deliberative assembly. Captain Merman is our Chairman. We have an agenda for discussion, which will be introduced in proper sequence. Anyone wishing to speak will first recognize the Chair."

"Oh can it!" fumed Weston. "That's why I'm here—to tell you we're going to cut all the red tape and get down to facts—"

At a sign from Merman, two M.P.s stepped forward and tapped Weston on the shoulder. Each carried a club. They smiled through their teeth.

"We are the Sergeants at Arms," said the largest of the two, who was at least within twenty pounds of Weston's brawny mass. "Do you want to be nice or be made to stand in a corner?"

Weston appeared to swell like a toad. When his eyes met Sceranka's, over the M.P.'s shoulder, he nodded almost imperceptibly. Whereupon Sceranka threw his hat into the air.

Within three seconds, six G.I.s on the outside of the circle yelled in pain and fell to the ground. Protruding from their backs were crude but sturdy arrows. Standing on the beach sand just outside the jungle were twelve bowmen, all from Weston's gang. Two were Spaniards. One was a Filipino law student who had flunked out of Oxford. One was a pale, continental type, a non-descript foreigner traveling on a French passport whom Merman had suspected of being a Communist spy. The rest were American construction stiffs—not the ordinary kind who signed up on a year's contract to save up and come home again, but the camp drifters who had roamed the world since adolescence, men actually without a country, uneducated, but capable of running heavy equipment for American tax dollars. It was strictly a "cost-plus" crew, thought Burley.

Women screamed. Men cursed. And there were cries of "Murderers!" "Assassins!"

Weston and Sceranka ran to a position in front of their men, who handed them the only two axes in camp.

"All right!" Weston shouted. "I thought this party would turn out this way.

From now on, *I'll* run this show! You're going to shut your traps and listen to *me!*"

The remaining officers and servicemen, plus many of the older male civilian members of the camp, were gathering swiftly into a sullen crowd, facing Weston's bowmen.

"When we charge 'em," whispered one officer, "throw sand in their eyes and let 'em have it!"

"Just a minute," said Uncle Andy to all the members of his own group. "All this happened because we failed to recognize the man's ignorance. Let him talk! Talk is cheaper than human lives. Let's hear what he has to say!"

"Well, Dearden," shouted Weston, "You're getting smart!—even if you are insulting. But I'll take care of you later!"

"All right!" agreed Burley. "Let him jabber!"

"Spill it, Weston!" shouted Merman. "We've got plenty of time around here. All our lives!"

"No we ain't!" Weston answered. "We ain't got no time at all. We think there's a way of gettin' back to where we came from! Hey, Mohammed!" he yelled at the Indian Prince. "You willing to come on my side and pay off like you said if I get you back home?"

The Indian Prince, though frightened, separated himself from the crowd. He stood there, hesitantly, looking first at Weston, then back at Henry. "I will go with anyone," he said, "even assassins, if they lead me home! And I will pay! But young Henry here—he's the one who—"

"Sure!" grinned Weston. "Henry's the boy with the answers! You didn't think we were going to leave *him* out, did you? He's going to help us find that big, bad bogeyman who stole the babies. And then when we find him we're going to sort of talk him into sending us back—that is, those who are on my side!"

"What's the matter with you, Weston!" shouted Burley. "We all have the same goal. If you had taken time to listen—"

"Pipe down! We been listening to you government guys all our lives and never got nowhere. We don't want this party to turn into another Korean truce talk. We want action!"

In that moment, Weston saw action, but of a totally unimagined kind.

Very suddenly, the world about them changed. Geologically, it was the same. The same, eternal daylight sky was above them. Before them lay the same, mysterious ocean with its plethora of unknown life forms. The low hills, the jungles, the flowers, the colorful birds—almost all the same.

But the jungle had been cleared away for several miles, and in its place stood a modern city with tall, well-designed buildings, electric power facilities, and motorized traffic. On the sea lay a fleet of gray battleships and cruisers. In the sky were at least a hundred jet aircraft, of strangely futuristic design, black and delta-shaped. The latter were attacking the warships with bombs and rocket fire, and their ears were assailed by the staccato reports of guns answering from the ships—and from the land.

The city defenses were aimed also at the strange, black aircraft. Ack-ack was all over the sky. Bombs and planes screamed through the air, and the ground shook with the shock of explosions.

The castaways, including Weston's gang, stood on a great pier before the sprawling city—a pier which lay half demolished around them, smouldering from several recent hits. Nearby, out in the water, lay a commuter vessel, semi-capsized, its crew and uniformed personnel leaping overboard and attempting to swim back to shore.

Armed troops were all around the castaways, rushing to set up new defenses on the pier, to repair loading derricks and put out fires with portable equipment.

"Hey!" shouted one of the castaways. "It's just like back home!"

"Civilization!" shouted another. "That screwy Garden of Eden was all a bad dream! We're back—thank God!"

Henry reasoned it was not the scene of battle they were welcoming. It was rather the transition from an unknown situation to a comprehensible one that they hailed with such relief.

"What is it?" queried Martia, close beside him. "What's happening? Where are we?"

"We're *not* back home," he said. "Still in the future—but an alternate one. Keep your eyes open and we'll know very soon."

This was a pointed remark, inasmuch as an officered detail of troops had turned its amazed attention on the heterogeneous group. Weston's gang, especially, looked like a bunch of anachronisms with their crude bows and arrows and their stupidly gaping mouths.

"Look!" cried Doctor Bauml, pointing over the heads of the approaching soldiers. "On that distant hill!"

When everybody looked, they saw, unmistakably, a towering space ship, its slender nose pointing skyward. Men swarmed over it like ants, removing scaffolding. Some of the attacking planes were concentrating on this point and were being met with the most determined counter-fire observable in any part of the city.

"That rocket ship," said Uncle Andy, "seems to be the main issue of the battle."

"Andy!" exclaimed Valerie Roagland. "Are all of us insane?"

"I say there!" cried the officer in charge of the detail surrounding them. His accent was unmistakably British. "Who are you and whence came you?"

"That would be a better question if we asked it," replied Burley. "What the devil is this!" He waved his hand in an all-inclusive gesture.

The officer's eyes narrowed. "Why do you evade the question?" he almost growled. "You are certainly not of New Bretania. Therefore, you are Texanian spies! You are under arrest!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Henry, turning pale. "Oh no!"

"What, Henry? What is it?" insisted Martia. Uncle Andy, Valerie, Miss Hollenbeck and Pee Bee crowded close, listening to the two and watching their captors at the same time.



Burley drew himself up and addressed the officer. "I am an official representative of the government of the United States of America," he said. "I demand—"

"My dear sir," flamed the officer. "You are not in a position to make demands. You will follow me promptly and obey orders under penalty of death! Can you not understand that we are under martial law here?"

"Git on wi' ye!" said one soldier nearby, prodding Weston and Sceranka with a double-barreled, automatic rifle. "Or ye'll git a puck in the lug!"

"Let's go, everybody," said Colonel Rogers. "Inasmuch as this is a military situation I'll take charge of our group and be the spokesman. When we're presented to the authorities for questioning we'll have time enough to tell our story."

"And who would believe it?" asked Dr. Edwards, pessimistically.

"Who would believe *this!*" retorted Colonel Rogers.

They all marched along with their captors, including Weston and company, simply because there was no alternative.

In a subterranean staff headquarters somewhere in the center of the city, they faced an impatient Major in the service of Her Majesty, Helena III, Empress of New Bretania.

"What is all this!" he complained, over an unprocessed pile of urgent communiques, even as two visiphones on his desk glowed red call signals simultaneously. "Who are you? I can't be bothered at a time like this—"

"We don't wish to bother you," interrupted Colonel Rogers. He could appreciate the indescribable urgency of war and knew it would be best not to antagonize the officer with too much verbage. "Our presence here is not of our choosing and it would take too long to explain, although we are perfectly

wiling to do so at your convenience. Suffice it to say, we are neither New Bretanians nor Texanians. So I suggest you place us in protective custody for the time being, and if you need volunteers for some of the manual work in the city you may call upon us to help."

The Major ignored the visiphones and glared at Colonel Rogers. "I said—who are you?"

"I am Colonel Rogers, attached to the Infantry of the United States Army, and these are—"

"United States!" exclaimed the Major. "That's a myth! What in the devil are you trying to say?"

Henry shook his head sadly, but with a grim expression of conviction on his aquiline face.

Martia's eyes were wide as she drew closer to him. "Henry!" she whispered. "I think I *know*!" Tears came to her eyes, and she said, "Mother! I'll never see her again."

For answer, Henry pressed her hand, wordlessly, and continued looking at the Major.

"Please!" said Dr. Bauml, pressing forward. "What is this battle all about? What is that space ship for?"



The Major sprang to his feet, motioning to the guard detail that had brought them in. "These strangers are some type of Fifth Column!" he exclaimed. "They are obviously attempting to camouflage their true identities and their purpose under a blanket of innocence! But no one could be *that* innocent of the facts!" He leaned forward, addressing Dr. Bauml. "My dear sir, in case you have been reposing under a rock somewhere, I'll bring you up to date! Earth is dying! The ionosphere is shifting toward critical mass. Our race—the human race—is becoming sterile under the hardening radiations. It is imperative that we transport some of our kind to another world—Venus, to be specific! Or hadn't you heard that Hardesty and Williams discovered an atmosphere there under the upper dust strata? The Texanians could not build

an ark such as ours—so they want it!" His dark eyes blazed angrily. "You want it! You are Texanians and you want our ship, but you're not going to get it! Take them away! They are spies!"

"Irons, sir?" asked the officer in charge of the detail.

"Irons be damned! Execute them! This is war!"

They stood in a bleak prison yard, sixty-nine passengers of MATS flight 702, London to New York. But where they were just now did not matter. A ganged battery of machine guns faced them, with one operator seated apathetically at a bank of controls.

"Ready—!" cried the officer in charge.

Some of the women screamed, while others prayed. Uncle Andy had an arm around Valerie Roagland, as well as Henry and Martia. Sceranka was swearing in Polish. Pee Bee was hiding behind as many people as he could find, shivering.

"Aim—!"

Henry thought: This is all impossible! I can't let it happen! But who am I to—

Something began to happen inside his head. It felt like he had had a cold and his ears were clearing up. But it was purely a mental sensation. Suddenly, he saw everything with a new clarity. And in the same instant he began to utilize that new faculty.

But before the word, "Fire!" could be given, a new change occurred with the abruptness of an explosion....



They were back again at the old campsite on that timeless shore, with the jungle all around them. The city was gone, as were the warships and the planes and the soldiers—and the space ship. There stood Weston and Sceranka as before, in front of their calloused bowmen.

And Weston was saying, "We want action!"

Both Henry and Martia looked at their companions in growing amazement, *because the others acted exactly as if there had been no interlude*

whatsoever! Yet Henry and Martia, when they looked into each other's eyes, knew that *they* remembered!

"Wait!" cried Henry. Everyone looked at him, including Weston and his gang. "Something has happened! Doesn't anybody remember?"

"Remember *what!*" exclaimed Weston, impatiently.

"The city! All those warships and planes!"

They all looked at him, blankly, and he and Martia returned their stares, anxiously.

"The Major who called us Texanian spies! The space ship! The firing squad—I mean, those machine guns!"

Again, the blank, uncomprehending looks.

"The kid's cracking up!" said Weston. "Let's get on with this! Now I'm running things and I'll tell you what we're going to do!"

Just then Martia and Henry grasped each other's hands, their eyes wide with consternation.

"Henry, do you—"

"Yes!" he hissed, cautioning her to silence. "I hear it!"

The ringing was in their heads.

"Henry," said Uncle Andy, "what in the world were you saying about a city?—and about this—er—space ship?"

Henry grasped his uncle's arm and signalled to Valerie, and Peggy Hollenbeck. "Follow me quickly!" he said.

The two young women looked at Uncle Andy and he studied Henry and Martia gravely. Then he turned to them and nodded. They all followed. Henry and Martia both put their fingers to their lips, admonishing them to silence.

They were about fifty feet away from the group when Weston yelled at them. "Hey! Where you think you're going?"

Henry grabbed Martia's arm and told her to scream and flail about, which she did instantly.

"The girl's out of her head!" answered Uncle Andy, catching on. "Psycho! We'll be back in a minute!"

"Well—hurry it up!"

When they gained a clump of verdure that cut off their view of the others, Henry motioned them into the woods. They all ran in to hide, only to be overtaken by Pee Bee.

"What done happened to dat girl?" he asked, panting.

"Nothing," said Henry.

"Then why are we here?" asked Peggy, the air hostess.

Henry looked at them squarely. "It's that alien," he said. "He is close by."

"The alien!" exclaimed Valerie. "How do you know?"

Pee Bee went bug-eyed again. "You mean dat Missing Link is back? Man, where's mah feet!"

"Stay here!" said Henry. "I believe he is searching for the main group. We can go back through the jungle and watch from hiding."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Pee Bee. "Dis am de point of no return! Ah just lost mah reversin' equipment and can only head straight for the no'th pole!"

But they all went back and looked.



Just as they arrived at their hidden point of observation, a bedlam of sound smote their ears. Screams, yells, swearing—the sound of running feet.

"Wait a minute!" they heard Weston shouting. "Hold on, all of you! I'll handle this!"

The sound of running stopped. The bedlam subsided.

They saw Weston making gestures at his bowmen to take up a new position. With tense motions and sober faces, the men obeyed, fixing arrows to their bowstrings while the rest of the camp watched them—and something else that stood just on the edge of the jungle.

There, towering a head above the tallest man, was the alien, staring at all of them with his one, baleful eye. Across his chest, near the breathing orifice in the middle, he wore several patches of something that looked like plasters, or bandages, where Scarface had shot him. He looked weak. His shoulders slumped, and his arms dragged almost to the ground.

"What's the matter, Merman?" yelled Weston.

Merman had been one of the first to run. Now he stood at a considerable distance from the group, looking back.

"You were willing to have a small bunch of guys tackle this freak in the lounge on board the plane," Weston shouted. "But now when you're face to face with him you run! Don't go yellow, Merman! I said I was taking charge, and I *am*!"

Weston looked at the crowd of castaways and grinned, contemptuously. "This was our 'common goal,' wasn't it? Now I've got it my way! If it was up to you guys, you'd all put on your best ties and sit down to have a conference. Not me! I say—*get* him!"

Whereupon, he led his men toward the alien, axe in hand.

"No, wait!" cried Dr. Bauml. "Don't harm him or we'll never know!"

When the alien saw Weston and his gang approach, he did nothing. He only stood there and watched them come. He still wore the same pack of apparatus on his back and the controls at his waist. The tendrils around his double wrists flicked nervously. And many there were who wondered what had become of Scarface—the man with the gun.

Weston stopped in front of the alien, about five feet from him, which was approximately just beyond the other's reach.

"Now talk, damn you!" he said. "You got us into this and you're going to get us out of it!"

But the alien gave no answer. Nor did his single, multi-faceted eye move from its fixed focus upon the man who addressed him. It glared in its concentration, indefinitely.

Weston turned to his men. "He's dead beat," he said. "Those bullet wounds made him weak. We gotta capture him, but don't mess him up too much.

We'll just get him down and tie him up. Somebody get some rope!"

Confidently, Weston dropped his axe temporarily and hitched up his trousers. As he did so, his arms and chest bulged and glistened massively in the eternal light of the sky. Sceranka hulked ponderously behind him, his ham-like paws ready for action. Five more of Weston's best huskies closed the semi-circle before the alien.



Henry could feel the pulse in his arteries, and he saw a pink spider making a web in front of him, in the timeless, geometrical design that all such spiders made. Beside him, he could feel Martia's tenseness. Down by the beach, the waves rolled peacefully across the sands, sighing with the eternal voice of the sea. The jungle smelled of damp rot and sickly sweet flowers. And he sweated.

Weston, grinning somewhat tensely now, slowly lifted up his axe again, with the blunt end toward the alien. He took one swift step forward, but that was all. The alien emitted a blood-curdling, monstrous roar and waded into the gang, just as Weston reversed his axe and struck him a blow in the neck. It was an interrupted blow, because the alien's great arms flew up and sent Weston sailing unconscious through the air. He then grabbed Sceranka, oblivious to three arrows in his side and four men climbing onto him, striking, punching and tearing at him. Sceranka's rib case popped audibly as he was instantly crushed and mangled. Then the alien turned and tore one man's arm off and sent another of his attackers flying after Weston, headless. The others turned and ran.

But they did not get far.

He paralyzed them with some invisible force controlling it from his waist. Others did not need this treatment, because they had fainted.

Then he released them from the paralysis sufficiently for them to walk, but not to run. He motioned to all of them, making it quite plain that they were his prisoners and were to follow him into the jungle.

Without a murmur, they obeyed like somnambulists. The alien leaned over the ones who had fainted and did something else with the controls at his

waist. These also revived, in a state of trance, and obeyed his silent commands. In single file they went—Merman, Nelson, the navigator, the commissary steward, Congressman Burley, Dr. Bauml, Dr. Edwards, Dr. Singer, Colonel Rogers, the women, the servicemen—all of them blindly following a trail into the Unknown.

Henry and Martia turned to look at their companions. There were Uncle Andy and Valerie and Peggy. But Pee Bee had gone. His trail of sudden departure was marked cleanly through the otherwise impenetrable underbrush on their right. Sizeable branches looked as though they had been shorn clean.

Silently, these five watched their friends and enemies depart—all of those who had not been killed—and excepting Weston, who seemed also to be dead. He lay face down in the sand, arms pointing toward the jungle, feet awash in the surf. He had been thrown thirty feet.

Henry felt Martia shudder.



It was decided that to trek aimlessly through the jungle unaware of what they were looking for would be futile. Instead, they chose to follow the well delineated trail of the captives in order to determine where the alien was taking them.

Uncle Andy and Henry provided the two women with bows and arrows which had fallen from the hands of some of the alien's attackers.

"Do you know how to use them?" he asked.

"Yes," said Valerie Roagland, "but I hope it will not be necessary." The arrow heads were tipped with sharpened pieces of aluminum rod taken from the plane. In fact, some of the arrows were made entirely of aluminum rod.

"We don't know what may be in that jungle," said Uncle Andy, picking up Weston's axe for himself. He carefully examined the blade of the axe. There were traces of very dark blood on it. "Our Pied Piper was wounded in the neck by Weston's blow. I wonder if he'll survive. After all, bullet wounds, arrow wounds—and a chomp in the neck with an axe!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Peggy Hollenbeck. "That ought to spell curtains

even for Superman!"

"But—" Martia started to express herself, then her eyes widened in alarm as the full implication of her thought struck her. "He is the only one who knows what this is all about!" she exclaimed. "He's the conductor, the engineer and the crew! He knows how we got here and how to get us back to where we came from—if that is possible. If he dies now—!"

They all looked at each other in shocked silence, except for Henry. He merely experimented with one of the bows.

"She's right," he said. "Whether friend or enemy, we've got to make sure that creature does not die until we learn what we need to know. But I'll tell you one thing that may be encouraging...."

Peggy Hollenbeck's chin began to tremble and her eyes misted suddenly. "Henry, if you can say *anything* encouraging about this whole business, for the love of God let's have it before I crack up!" Valerie put her arms around her and the other burst into a fit of crying, which was a delayed reaction from what she had witnessed fifteen minutes before.

Martia might have joined her, but the secret knowledge she shared with Henry helped to sustain her.

"Somewhere in that jungle," said Henry, "is a time machine...."

He calculated that the shock of that statement would bring Peggy out of her semi-hysteria, and it did. She looked at him over Valerie's shoulder, her tearful eyes suddenly wide with surprise and wonderment. Valerie and Uncle Andy both turned slowly to stare incredulously at the two adolescents, both of whom appeared to share the same conviction.

And Uncle Andy thought: *What incredible thing is it these two children share in common?*

But he asked, "What makes you think so?"



It was then that both Henry and Martia launched themselves into a detailed and vivid account of that strange interlude in time which they, alone,

remembered. The other three listened, with both mixed emotions and mixed opinions relative to the youngsters' sanity.

"The reason we're giving you such a wealth of details," Henry concluded, "is because therein lies the proof that there is a time machine in the jungle."

Uncle Andy shook his head, bewildered. "I'm afraid I'm hopelessly lost," he said. "I can't see where it fits in. And if it happened, why wouldn't the rest of us remember it? You say we were there, too."

Henry cast a covert glance at Martia, and only she could understand what that look meant. Impulsively, she grasped his hand and held on to it.

"Let's skip your lack of memory for a minute," Henry answered. "Instead, try to remember the fact that certain people were missing in this camp before the meeting took place."

"That's right!" said Valerie. "The English people—" She looked at Martia. "Your mother, Lady Dewitt! She went away and got lost!"

"And Sir Rollins!" put in Peggy.

"Now it comes back," said Uncle Andy. "They had gone out to look for springwater and had not returned."

"To make a long story short," said Henry, "there were two separate groups. First, the English group, consisting of Lady Dewitt, Cyril Rollins, the Crispin sisters, the two mothers who lost their babies, and Mr. Langham. The second group consisted of Mania's governess, Emily, three WAACs, and the three Texas GIs.

"Now as I see it, here's what happened. The first group found the time machine and entered it, possibly without knowing what they were doing. They were transported back in time perhaps several thousands of years. Stranded there and with no other recourse but to survive, they set up their own type of colony, and their descendants established the Empire of New Bretania."

Peggy looked at Valerie, and both found a common conviction in their eyes. They were sadly understanding and patient as they looked back at Henry and Martia. Uncle Andy only refilled his pipe with the last of his tobacco and watched Henry intently.

"Now wait a minute!" put in Martia. "Henry's not as crazy as you think! Let him continue!"

"We're listening," replied Uncle Andy.

"Having benefitted by some knowledge of modern technology on the part of their original ancestors, this race soon attained a degree of civilization equivalent to our own, though with fewer numbers. Their science enabled them to detect the unbalanced nature of the ionosphere, so they knew they had to get off the planet in order to survive. By some means unknown to us, they were able to make observations through the ionosphere and detect livable conditions on Venus, after all. In other words, after a billion years beyond our time, Venus must have had sufficient time to build up an atmosphere containing a life-sustaining percentage of oxygen. This discovery spurred the building of their space ark, which was to take a representative number of their kind to the new world.

"Now in the meantime let's go back to the second group that was lost—Emily, the WAACs and the Texans. They, too, went through the time machine and built up a civilization contemporaneous with that of New Bretania. Hence the origin of the country, Texania. These latter people were trying to get the ark of space from the New Bretanians.

"Don't you see how it all fits in? When those two groups went through the time machine, we found ourselves in an alternate time, a world changed by their effects on two or three thousand years of the immediate past."

"Then how did everything get back to where it was originally?" asked Uncle Andy. "What got rid of that alternate time so abruptly?"

"The alien," Henry replied. "I think we arrived here, in the first place, by accident and without his knowledge. As a time-traveler, he was no doubt gone from this world for long stretches of time. Perhaps a gap of several thousands of years means nothing to him. But somewhere along that alternate time he returned. He probably proceeded at once to trace down the sources of New Bretania and Texania. This could have led him not only back to Lady Dewitt and the Texans but forward, again, to this present time, to the moment when they were about to go into the time machine in the first place. Taking them prisoner thus prevented that alternate time from occurring. So it was all a lost interlude and Weston went right on talking at the meeting as though

nothing had happened. Yet all the while the alien was now aware of our presence, and so he came to take us into custody."

"That is the most astounding tale I have ever listened to," said Uncle Andy. "Now tell me, Henry, why is it that only you and Martia remember that alternate time experience and we do not?"

Again—that strange, knowing look between Henry and Martia.

"Look!" cried Peggy, pointing toward the beach.

When they all turned and looked they saw the same, eternal sea as before, its lazy surf glistening in the forever light of the sky. But there was one, subtle difference. Weston lay there no longer. The whole beach was a scene of desolation—deceivingly peaceful, ominously deserted.

"Come on!" said Uncle Andy, with sudden sternness. "We can talk about all this later. Just now we'd better try to keep one step ahead of Weston."

They took *all* of the available weapons with them....



The trail of the captives led them gradually upward toward the summit of the low range of hills. They soon discovered that the nature of the jungle near the seashore was much less spectacular than the aspect of it inland. It began to appear as though Nature had dumped all her experiments into one bottle and mixed them together.

They passed through "groves" of trees that were mostly roots, all intertwined like some giant vine. Their bark was like shaggy hair and their fine, web-like branches sprouted foliage that looked like feathers. Among these feathered branches crawled brilliant orange and red land crabs, some of them as much as two feet in diameter.

In a swampier region just at the base of the hills they observed flat, leathery looking discs oozing along over the swamp mud, some of them reaching three feet in diameter. They could not imagine what they were until they saw one of them uncover a six foot, scaly worm. The latter fought ferociously, but the leathery disc wrapped itself around its body and the worm's mouth very much like that of a snapping turtle, was incapable of penetrating that leathery

hide.

"Those are gigantic leeches," observed Uncle Andy.

And so they went on, following the trail upward, beyond the swamp. They discovered carnivorous plants, huge insects, gigantic birds, but always any mammalian species they saw was small and in the minority.

Finally, they came to an abrupt halt, because the trail ended. There were no more footprints, no more tell-tale marks such as trampled weeds and underbrush or broken branches. No matter where they searched, they could not find a further continuation of the trail. It ended in the center of a meadow, half way up in the jungle clad hills.

"You don't suppose they could have been taken away in some kind of an airship, do you?" asked Uncle Andy.

"No," said Henry. "There are no marks here showing that any such vessel has been sitting here. Moreover, if the alien had come in an aircraft, why would he land it here and walk so far?"

"Hey! Get yo'selves off'n dat place!"

When they all looked, startled, behind them, they saw Pee Bee standing on the edge of the meadow.

"Pee Bee!" exclaimed Valerie, relieved to see something that was both familiar and harmless in this place. "How did you get here?"

"Get off'n dat place you're standin' on!" shouted Pee Bee. "It goes down into de ground where all dose other folks's went!" His eyes were wide with superstitious terror. "Man, ah had mah suspicions dat Missin' Link was de debbil, an' ah don't need no further convincin'! He's *it*! He done took dem folks t'*his* place! Dat's where dey are!" he yelled, hysterically. "Dey's done gone to de hot place! Get off'n dat ground!"

"Poor Pee Bee!" said Peggy. "Now he's going crazy on us!"



Pee Bee ran back and forth at one edge of the meadow, helplessly wringing his hands but not daring to approach his friends.

"Look at this," said Martia. "It's a cairn!"

They had not noticed it before, because it was small and half concealed by weeds.

"Who could have put that there?" asked Peggy.

"Perhaps one of our captured friends," said Uncle Andy, squatting down to examine it.

"*Get off'n dat ground!*" shouted Pee Bee, at the top of his voice.

Uncle Andy removed the top rock from the cairn and uncovered a metal pipe with a screw cap on it. "Oh, oh!" he said. "Booby trap!"

"Unscrew it!" Henry urged him.

"Do you think you'd better?" asked Valerie.

"What else can we do?" put in Martia. "We can't just sit down here and form a colony of our own!"

Uncle Andy looked at the two women and their faces colored. "You asked for it!" he said, abruptly, and unscrewed the cap.

Beneath the cap were two tiny light bulbs embedded in a small panel, in addition to a red button. One of the lights glowed red.

"Well! Civilization at last! Shall I press the button?"

"I think Pee Bee may be right," said Henry. "They probably all went down under the ground and this is the control operating the hidden opening."

Uncle Andy looked up at him. "But if we go rushing in we're liable to end up captives too...."

In that moment, however, the decision was made for them. They discovered that the cairn marked the exact center of an area that was about fifty feet in diameter. This area suddenly sank downward.

"Run!" shouted Uncle Andy, springing to his feet.

But it was too late.



The walls of the pit into which they descended were twenty feet high before they could reach the edge of the circular area. As they continued their descent, the walls grew higher—fifty feet, seventy-five, a hundred....

Pee Bee threw himself on the trampled jangle grass and beat at his head in blind frustration.

"Ah told 'em!" he cried out. "Ah done told 'em t'stay off'n dat debbil ground! Now dey done gone 'n left me all alone—'n where am I?"

He sat up, abruptly, more bug-eyed than ever before. He listened.

The still, hot air brought him only the sound—and the smell—of the pristine jungle surrounding him. A giant bird with a black back and brilliant yellow belly soared over-head and squawked at him hostilely. Somewhere down the hill something small and warm-blooded squealed in terror. He heard a tremendous threshing about in the underbrush and remembered the vines that made a net for their prey—then clutched it inescapably and mashed it into pulp before devouring it. The eternal sky that never turned dark and cool, that sky up there that beat its itchy heat down on him and was making a rash creep up on his skin—it wasn't God's blue sky.

But it was *his* sky—Pee Bee's! All Pee Bee's world now.

He sprang to his feet and screamed, "Dey can't leave me alone in dis place!"

But when he looked at the big, round, gaping hole in the center of the meadow he had to admit the reality of the situation. He *was* alone!

So he threw himself down on the musty smelling grass again and sobbed uncontrollably. How had he gotten himself into this? By being in the Army in the first place. He didn't make the wars and all the trouble in the world, but they dragged him off to Europe to hold a bayonet in the people's faces—at a boundary line. He didn't make those boundaries! God made the world, but he didn't make no boundary lines. Man made the boundaries. Man made shoes for me to shine.

Shine, *shine*?

All God's chillun got shoes....

"Pee Bee!"

Was that somebody calling him? Sure! Hank Thomas, standing there by his newspaper stand at 12th and Central. The traffic light was red. *Was red. Was red.*

When? A *billion* years ago! That's what Henry said.

"Pee Bee!"

That was *Henry* calling!

Pee Bee sat up again and looked out onto the meadow. The hole was gone, all filled in. In the middle of it stood Henry, alone, beckoning to him.

"Come on, Pee Bee! It's all right!"

Pee Bee jumped to his feet and started to run. Then he stopped, abruptly.

"Oh no!" he said. "Ah done heard about *my*-rages before! Sometimes it's a lake in de middle of de desert or one of dem oh-wayseses, but you ain't gonna fool Pee Bee! Ah's stayin' right here an' if Gabriel's still got wind left after all dis time t'blow dat beat-up ol' horn o' his he's gonna have t'play a solo fo' jist little ol' me—'cause I ain't leavin' dis spot! No debbil's gonna git me. No animulated bush is gonna git me! An' no *my*-rage is gonna git me! Ah's jist gonna sit here an' wait fo' me, only kind of pick-up dat pays off—when Gabriel blows dat horn!"

Henry approached him and took him by the arm. "It's all right, Pee Bee. It's me in the flesh. Now come on! There's no time to lose."

As the circular slab of meadowland lowered itself once more into the ground, Pee Bee remained on his knees, clutching Henry to him for dear life. At the bottom of the pit he fell into Uncle Andy's and Valerie's arms, sobbing. They patted him and consumed several minutes in reassuring him.

All the while, the others shared one thought in common that they felt it would be inopportune to express to Pee Bee. The place they had reached appeared to be empty. Yet someone had operated controls to let them in—those button controls right there in the passageway.

The question was: *Who?*

They were in a subterranean city, or palace, or laboratory. It was difficult to determine the purpose of everything they saw. Light apparently without a source followed them automatically wherever they went. The walls, ceiling and floor seemed to be made of a translucent substance that was as soft as rubber yet tougher than steel. Now Henry's billion year theory made more sense to the others. In all that time some high form of civilization had to evolve. And this was indisputable evidence that it had.

But why was it hidden so cleverly under the ground? This fact allowed them to presuppose the existence of an enemy. What, in the outer world, could oppose the race that had built this?

Or more logical still—what, in outer space?

"Perhaps," said Uncle Andy, "it's the ionosphere. This is another answer to the danger of hard radiations."

"But not for long," said Henry. "When the critical moment comes there'll be no more atmosphere. What will they do without air?"

"The place is empty," observed Peggy. "Where did the others go?"

That was the principal question.

Twenty minutes later, they stood in a circular room which was roughly forty feet in diameter. In one wall was a mirror, ten feet high. It shimmered like molten silver. They had been in the room twice already.

"What do we do now?" asked Valerie. "Go back to some of those control rooms and start pulling levers?"

"Wait!" exclaimed Martia. "Listen!"

In another moment they could hear the sound of their own breathing. Then—unmistakably—they heard slow, hesitant footsteps.

Valerie and Peggy paled, remembering only too vividly the one-eyed towering creature that had thrown Weston thirty feet through the air. Henry appropriated Valerie's bow and arrow. Uncle Andy, his jaws clamped on a pipe that had long since burned out, took a firm grip on his axe. Pee Bee stood rooted to the floor, unable to do anything but stare in the direction of

the curving passageway from which the sounds of the footsteps emanated.

"Weston tried violence against him," whispered Martia to Henry. "Maybe if we—"

"Shh!" From Uncle Andy. He raised his axe and braced himself.

The automatic, progressive light of this place advanced into view and blended with their own light aura as the owner of the footsteps approached.

Once more, Henry's mind began to awaken into that strange condition of ultimate clarity, as it had in alternate time, in New Bretania, before the machine guns.

"Hold up!" he said, lowering his bow.

"Yes!" exclaimed Martia. "It's a friend!"

At that moment, Scarface stepped into view, gun in hand. And Peggy almost swooned with relief.

Pee Bee wiped his forearm across his moist brow and said, "Man! Dat's de finest lookin' *my-rage* ah seen today!"

Uncle Andy could not refrain from studying the two adolescents again in amazement. They had definitely known beforehand that Scarface would appear instead of the alien.

"I've been doing some checking," said Scarface, without smiling, and without preamble. "There's only one place they could have gone."

"Did you let us in here?" asked Uncle Andy, irrelevantly.

"Yes. There's some kind of viewer that shows who's upstairs. When I saw you out there I pressed the entrance button. But I've been busy since. I think I know the next step."

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Henry.

Scarface glanced at Martia, then at the shimmering mirror behind her. "Trying to trace down missing persons," he answered. "I was topside in the jungle when One Eye brought in his prisoners. So I came down here to pick up the trail, and it ends in front of that mirror."



As all of them turned to look at the shimmering mirror, Scarface advanced toward it to show them something that had, until now, escaped their notice. He mounted two steps of a raised dais on which the mirror stood. Then he halted before it and pointed at its base.

"Look at that!" he said.

Protruding from the strange substance of the mirror was a small branch. He kicked it outward with his foot, and more of the branch emerged into view.

"One of the bunch that was captured dropped that as he went through. Look!" He shoved his hand into the mirror up to his elbow, then pulled it out again. "No pain at all," he said.

"A teletransporter!" exclaimed Henry.

Scarface looked at him quizzically. "I knew *you'd* have a name for it," he said. "But come again?"

"A teletransporter. I get more of the picture now," said Henry. "Underground stations like this may be scattered all over the planet. Transportation between them is accomplished instantaneously by this means. Perhaps, with the proper setting of controls, one could walk around the world, through various stations, in a few minutes!"

"Whoa!" said Uncle Andy. "When did you ever see a teletransporter?"

"I didn't, but their possibility may be extrapolated from a set of known facts in our own era of time. One premise is that energy may be propagated at the speed of light through the ether, in various pulsation patterns that can be used for the reintegration of sound or light in receivers. Another premise is that matter is energy. Therefore, it lies within the realm of possibility to reduce matter to its basic energy components, broadcast the energy in a representative pattern sequence—perhaps on multiple wavebands—and reintegrate the same form of matter at the other end. On the other hand, new principles may have been discovered after our own time, such as the manipulation or use of hyper-space or ether warp of some kind. But I'm sure this is a bonafide teletransporter. We have only to step through it, the way it is adjusted now, and be where our friends are. Since Scarface is armed, I think we need not fear being surprised by the alien."

Scarface raised his brows and looked at the others. "It's simple when you

know how," he said, wryly. "But there's an easier way of analyzing this contraption. I'll walk through it. If I don't come back, you can decide for yourselves if you want to follow or take up camping in that jungle outside for the rest of your lives. Here goes!"

"Wait!" cried Uncle Andy.

But Scarface walked into the mirror and disappeared.

They waited. Five minutes. Ten minutes. And Scarface did not return. Finally, Pee Bee offered a solution.

"Ah sees it like this," he said, breaking an oppressive silence. "Ah feels safe when ah's on de right side of dat gun. Now if we goes through dat mirror an' finds Scahface, we's better off than we is here. If we goes into dat mirror an' gets snuffed into nothin'—then dat means Scahface an' all de rest is probably big, flattened out blobs of nothin', too. So we might as well join 'em instead of hangin' around here. Ah's sick of it, an' ah's ready!" Before they could stop him, he hurled himself into the mirror and disappeared.

The remaining castaways looked at each other in silence for almost thirty seconds.

Then Uncle Andy said, "I think we'd better try it."

Valerie grasped his hand and Martia's. "Let's all go through together," she suggested, quietly.

They drew close to each other, held hands, and formed a straight line of five as they walked through the mirror together—just as the corridor behind them filled with light again and a pair of bloodshot eyes noted their departure....



This was definitely a tremendous, subterranean city, or the beginning of one. But its only inhabitants, other than the alien, seemed to be the survivors of MATS flight 702. They were still in a state of hypnosis, standing there on the pillared mezzanine that overlooked the vast room below and beyond them. Other mezzanines were visible on the far side of that tremendous chamber, and beneath them a dozen or so tunnel entrances indicated that there was much to be seen further on.

Among the people who stood out there on the mezzanine were Pee Bee and Scarface, also in a trance, as well as the Texas GIs, the missing WAACs, Martia's governess, Emily, the two mothers, Mr. Langham, Sir Rollins—and Lady Dewitt.

Martia might have cried out and run to her mother were it not for the fact that the alien, himself, confronted them.

They stood in an alcove that was half filled with banks of controls and instruments. The alien stood before these controls and glared at them purposefully as they came through the teletransmitter. His neck was dark with dried blood, and the three arrows still protruded from his side. His stooping posture gave more evidence than before that he was growing weaker.

As they came through and caught sight of him and the others, one of his hands moved on the control panel, then paused.

Don't do that!—came a sharp command into his mind.

He straightened up suddenly, his single eye brightening in shocked surprise as he looked first at Henry, then at Martia.

Valerie, Peggy and Uncle Andy watched the alien, white-faced, uncomprehendingly, as he slowly turned to face them squarely, his eye fairly glittering with inner lights of its own. Then—without warning—he uttered a few unintelligible words, groaned, and fell on his face.

"Quick!" said Uncle Andy. "The gun!" He ran, himself, to pluck it out of Scarface's nerveless fingers.

"But what happened!" exclaimed Valerie. "Is he dead?" She and Peggy did not follow Henry and Martia as they went over to look at the alien.

"Henry," whispered Martia. "What *are* we? I know what you did!"

Henry paused to look at her. "Martia, Lady Dewitt is not really your mother—is she?"

Martia colored.

"You know there are no secrets between us," he insisted.

"No," she answered. "I am an orphan, like you."

"An orphan equipped with photographic memory and extra-sensory perception," he said, rapidly. "Also, other things, like extended perception in time. You have lately come to sense that your mind was 'fixed,' long ago, to keep you from using your full powers and to prevent you from knowing who or *what* you were, but these recent experiences have started an awakening process—"

"Yes!" she agreed. "Henry, what—"

His eyes bored into hers, his nostrils flaring in his tense excitement. "Shall I tell you where you were really born?" He turned his head and looked down. "Wait! He's beginning to stir! *He* can give us the final answer!"

As the alien stirred, one of the tendrils on his wrist twirled a control on the panel at his waist. Martia swayed, but Henry stood his ground, blocking that telepathic signal and showing Martia how to do it at the same time. But Valerie and Peggy and Uncle Andy dropped to the floor, unconscious.

The alien rose slowly to his feet, and Henry turned, instinctively, to get the gun that Uncle Andy had dropped. Then he and Martia, as well as the alien, stiffened in surprise as Scarface smilingly picked up the gun and leveled it.

"Everything is going to be all right," he said, confidently. "I think I have all the answers now. It was not the impossible coincidence I imagined it to be, his coming upon all three of us on board that plane. I think that he—"

"Look out!" screamed Martia.

Out of the mirror had come an unexpected figure, hurling itself upon Scarface's back. Scarface went down and the gun was torn from his fingers, even as the alien reached for his controls on the instrument panel behind him.

"No you don't!" yelled Tommy Weston.

He stood there, his clothes half torn off, supporting himself on one good leg and painfully trying not to bring pressure to bear on the other, which appeared to be sprained.

"I'm *still* running the show!" he yelled, hysterically.

Quick!—came a thought from Scarface to the two adolescents. *Through the teleporter!*

As they literally threw themselves into the silvery mirror in back of them,

they heard Weston firing shot after shot into the alien....

Back in the subterranean chamber where they had come upon their first teleporter, Scarface reached behind the mirror and adjusted something, whereupon the sheet of silvery substance took on a bluish sheen.

"You see, I knew all along what this was," he said. "But if I had told you that it would probably lead you right into Mlargn's hands you would not have dared follow. You needed one more shock to bring you out, and I waited there for you, waiting for my final proof." He smiled. "In his weakened condition, it was too *much* of a shock to Mlargn. I didn't quite expect him to pass out like that—the poor beast! Well, anyway, Weston has taken care of him, and this adjustment will keep him from following us."

"Wait, please!" interrupted Henry. "You're assuming too much knowledge on our part. We—"

"Just one more detail," said Scarface, as he made a last adjustment behind the mirror. By now it was a shimmering pink. "Follow me," he directed. And without further explanation he stepped *back* through the teleporter.

Under ordinary circumstances, Henry and Martia would have reacted emotionally to this new development, and fear would have restrained them. But this was a very special circumstance because they had had an awakening. A calm logic told them that Scarface would not have directed them to follow him if it would do them any harm. One of the premises of that logic was that they had "read" at least his attitude. He was definitely an ally—and the ultimate answer to their mutual enigma.

So they followed him.

They found themselves in a great, domed citadel which covered the entire top of a small island. Some miles away was a long stretch of jungle-covered land and low hills easily recognizable as the country where they had first camped. They could even make out the silvery glitter of the wrecked plane.

They remembered having seen this island from the shore, but it had looked like a flat-topped, barren rock protruding from the sea. Then it came to them

that the citadel on top was invisible from the land.

Scarface sat at the console of a tremendous instrument panel. On his head was an elaborate headpiece equipped with silvery anodes that clamped against his skull. His eyes were closed. His fingers made delicate adjustments on the console while strange, almost ultra-sonic tones emanated from a battery of glowing tubes on the wall.

Martia and Henry sensed that they were not to disturb him. So they walked around inside the dome and looked at the sea, and the old, old land. Their minds were awakening to new perspectives and powers, and slowly they caught glimpses of a billion year pattern of destiny that dazzled their thoughts. So they barred these perspectives, holding them breathlessly at the threshold of soaring consciousness—waiting for experienced guidance.

At length, Scarface finished his task and came over to them. "While I am waiting for results," he said, "I will tell you what you want to know...."



He told them that somewhere in the era of time in which they had been raised, a cataclysm had occurred which had destroyed all life on Earth. Oceans had come over the land and the whole, slow, geo-biological process of regeneration had begun once more. Evolution through hundreds of millions of years had at last arrived at a dominant, intelligent species of which Mlarn, the "alien," was the last survivor.

He told them the story of Xlarn, of the cooling of the sun, of the reaction sphere, and of the Chronotron. And he described the developments which finally led to Mlarn's time journey in search of life before the Beginning.

"Actually, Mlarn made two trips into Earth time. On his first trip he must have arrived somewhere in an earlier century than the one you knew—"

"The thirteenth century," interrupted Henry.

Scarface looked at him in wonderment. So both Henry and Martia told him the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

For almost a minute, the other was silent. Then he said, "So that's where the ancestors of Galactic Civilization came from...."

"Galactic Civilization!" Martia exclaimed.

Scarface grinned at them. "Yes," he said. "We call it that, because we have inhabited at least a dozen solar systems and are still growing. Let me continue the story...."

Mlarn had chosen a group of children because he knew they could be trained and conditioned easier. When he returned through the Chronotron to his own time, the Xlarnan immortals considered the human captives to be unimaginable, short-lived, soft-skinned bipeds, but amazingly advanced mammalia from the evolutionary viewpoint. And they could think, in a primitive fashion. Moreover, they proved to be incredibly fertile.

Only slightly encouraged, the Xlarnans threw them into a Chronotron cycle of five hundred thousand years. The resultant race and alternate time proved to be something for which they were totally unprepared. Since the continuum between Cause and Effect was a simultaneous structure in time, there it was, complete from beginning to end—a superman civilization that encompassed great stretches of the galaxy. An alien brand of intelligence. Virile resourcefulness and aggressiveness, far outstripping the sterile civilization of Xlarn.

Astounded and frightened, the Xlarnans sought to trace the beginnings of this alternate time, through the Chronotron, and throttle the totally unexpected development at its source. However, this was foreseen by the civilization which had sprung from the Chronotron—and there was war. The Xlarnans were eliminated, except for one, who swore vengeance.

This unsuspected immortal was he who had brought back the ancestors of the star men from beyond Beginning, from the world where the moon was young. This was Mlarn, himself.



Although the star men had abandoned the dying solar system of their origin, it was inevitable that a few of their number should be left behind—castaways who finally organized themselves, built a citadel of their own, and sought to build a small star ship in which to escape the threat of the reaction sphere. But the specialized science that had developed the hyper-space drive eluded

them and they struggled in vain, while Mlargn besieged them, jealously endeavoring to discover what they were accomplishing. He applied his warfare so vigorously that one day only Kimnar was left, with two youngsters. In fact, they were babes.

In desperation, Kimnar gained access to the Chronotron. Hoping to create another alternate time, he hurled himself and the two children into further depths of time than he intended.

And Mlargn followed him. Aware of his own immortality and equipped with controls that could reverse his course in time because they were interlocked with the Chronotron, he was determined to spend centuries, if necessary, to find those two advanced children and use them to his own advantage....



Henry shook his head to clear it. "Just a moment," he said. "I might extrapolate from all this that you are Kimnar."

"I am," smiled Scarface. "I arrived with you two in the human era, in Earth's calendar year nineteen hundred forty-four A.D., on June 6th, to be exact. The country was France. The place—Caen...."

There was a stunned moment of silence. Then Martia's eyes widened. "But that was—!"

"Yes," said Kimnar, smiling grimly. "The Allied invasion of Normandie. I landed right in the middle of D-Day."

"What happened?" asked Henry. "I mean—to you?"

"I was injured by shrapnel. That's how I acquired the scar on my face. I woke up later in a hospital and have been looking for you two ever since."

"Kimnar," said Henry, "are Martia and I sister and brother?"

Martia's mind leaped out to find the answer in Kimnar's thoughts before he could speak. "No!" she cried, happily. "We're not!" Henry suddenly found her in his arms.

"She's right," Kimnar confirmed.

"You two were survivors of Mlargn's attack in those days when Jirahn was

alive—but you were not of the same family."

"Who was Jirahn?"

Kimnar waved a hand toward the great instrument panel. "It was he who invented that hyper-space transceiver. Or rather, he re-invented it, remembering much of the science of our kin, the star men. Just before Mlargn's powerful attack, in which he utilized a deadly radiation that killed everybody in the citadel, I believe Jirahn succeeded in contacting the star men. But I could not be certain, as I had been away from the citadel when the attack came. Upon my return, I found my friends dead, and Jirahn sat slumped over those controls with the head gear attached to him. Certain lights were signalling to me from the board, but I could not decipher them. Moreover, I feared that Mlargn would find the right teleporter frequency to tie his system in with ours, and that he might surprise me at any time. So I removed the bodies, dumping them into the sea, and prepared, generally, to 'abandon ship.' Just as I was about to leave, I found you two halfway down the cliffs on a covered terrace that your parents had been in the habit of using. They had left you there for your naps. It was then that I conceived the idea of finding the Chronotron and trying to create a new alternate time based on your descendants."

"But Kimnar," persisted Henry. "What about that transceiver? You worked it when we first arrived here, and I remember you mentioned something about 'waiting for results.'"

Kimnar shrugged. "I tried the thing, and to the best of my knowledge I was transmitting through hyper-space at full power. So far, there has been no response. I have the receiver wide open."

"Do you mean—it is conceivable that some of the star people might return for us?"

Kimnar smiled in a puzzling sort of way. "I tossed them the bait," he said. "I think they'll consider the risk worth while—if they received my message."

"What risk is there now? I'm quite sure Weston finished Mlargn off."



Kimnar raised his eyes heavenward. "Remember? The reaction sphere could go any time. Fortunately, most of the harder radiations are expending themselves convexly, into outer space, and what is shooting towards us still has many miles to travel. But it's getting very unhealthy around here. When the sphere blows, it will take the Great Ring with it—the ring that used to be the moon."

Simultaneously, Henry and Martia thought of something else. The other passengers, their original companions. What of them—and Weston, with his gun?

"We can't leave them here to die," said Henry. "What about the Chronotron? Can't we send them all back?"

Kimnar shook his head. "The Chronotron is not that accurate at such long range. Only a few people at a time can go through, and they might land anywhere, from Earth's prehistoric ages to Xlarn's eras of development antedating the generation of an oxygen content atmosphere. Moreover, Mlargn changed the location of the Chronotron. I have not been able to find it. That was what I originally went back to look for when I left you on the beach after that fight with Weston."

"Wait a minute!" cried Martia. "But my moth—I mean, Lady Dewitt and those others found it!"

Kimnar looked at both of them wonderingly. Briefly, they told him about the alternate time episode involving New Bretania and Texania, which Mlargn successfully nipped in the bud.

"I must have been underground somewhere at the time," said Kimnar, "traveling through various teleporters. Otherwise, had I been on the surface, I have enough temporal perspective, myself, to have been able to remember that alternate time experience." He frowned. "If Weston ever finds the Chronotron—"

"Well, why not?" asked Martia. "You couldn't blame them for going back—or trying to!"

"I see what he means," said Henry. "If any of them should go back to the approximate time from which we started and do anything to circumvent that moon experiment—"

"*What* moon experiment?" asked Martia.

"I forgot to tell you, I guess. Kimnar knew because he read it in Uncle Andy's mind. Uncle Andy as Andrew Dearden, is one of the world's greatest rocket specialists. He was just returning from Africa on that plane after having supervised all preparations for firing a rocket at the moon."

"That *is* amazing," said Martia, "but—oh!" She read the rest in Henry's mind. The rocket carried the world's first D-C bomb, which letters represented the word, "de-cohesion." In detonation, the bomb was supposed to liberate the cohesive forces of the proton. They were going to observe its effects on the moon.

"I believe," said Henry, "that it produced a sustained reaction in stable matter, and the moon blew to fragments, thus creating the Great Ring. The thermal effects plus orbital perturbations of the Earth destroyed all life on the planet. And I deduce that the free oxygen and hydrogen in our atmosphere made some kind of critical mixture and went *foom!* The result was H₂O, oceans of it. And so time began again, biologically speaking, anyway."

"If Andrew Dearden or any of his kind get back there and manage to abolish the 'D-C' bomb," said Kimnar, "then Xlarn will never have been, and neither you nor I nor Galactic Civilization, with its myriad worlds and metropoli and billions of star people and all their science and culture, shall have ever evolved. And there you have a difficult question. Is it better for us to relinquish our existence for the sake of a civilization that might have continued, or to preserve a greater one that actually exists *now*?"



Before they could bring much concentration to bear upon this weighty problem, a new situation diverted their attention. Inasmuch as the three of them were standing by the transparent wall of the citadel and facing shoreward, they could not help seeing the small industrial city that suddenly sprang into being there. Again, up on the hill, was a great black rocket, its nose pointing toward the threatening sky.

But this was not New Bretania. Nor was it Texania. Nor was there the slightest evidence of any type of conflict or preparations for defense, except

in the design of the rocket, itself.

"That's a different alternate!" said Henry, instantly. "The city is different—more heavily industrialized. See the steel mills? It's even futuristic. Those insulator towers and antenna, for some kind of power transmission—"

"And that rocket is different—more efficient looking," observed Martia. "It seems to carry armament. You can see the firing cupolas."

"You're both very calm about it," said Kimnar. "Somebody has found the Chronotron. Come on!"

A moment after they had stepped through the teleporter, leaving the island citadel deserted, the hyper-space receiver began to react to signals. Lights flickered rapidly for several minutes. Then a human voice boomed into the empty dome. It spoke in a strange language, rapidly, urgently. But there was no operator there to reply....

When Kimnar, Henry and Martia stepped through the teleporter, they arrived in the circular room they had first visited in the subterranean world of Xlarn.

"There's somebody down here," said Henry.

"They're in that room with the vision screens," added Martia.

Kimnar frowned. "You're right, and I sense that one of them is Weston. Let's have a closer look!"

But already, it seemed, detectors had discovered their presence. In three seconds they heard running footsteps and they saw the tell-tale progression of light advancing toward them along the curved passageway.

Two men came into view, to be followed by a man on crutches who shouldered his way in between them.

"Weston!" exclaimed Martia.

"Dr. Edwards!" Henry cried out. Edwards was the man with the gun—the same gun that Kimnar had used against Mlargh.

The other member of the trio was the Indian Prince, his precious turban now much disheveled and awry.

"Aha!" cried Weston, grinning and leaning on his crutches with a derisive air. "So the wanderers have returned!"

The Indian Prince ran forward and kneeled before Henry, wringing his hands in supplication. In his fat, brown face and his wide, brown eyes was registered an expression of terror and desperation.

"Henry!" he exclaimed. "Only you can give me the answer—it is all so mixed up that I cannot understand. Only you can tell me if it's true!"

"If *what* is true?" asked Kimnar.

"Shut up, Mohammed!" yelled Weston. "Edwards knows what he's doing! Tell them, Edwards!—before you plug 'em!"

Since Edwards held the gun, he took time to explain. In his eyes was a wild sort of triumph.

"I don't know where you three have been," he said, "but in your absence a great deal has happened. Since young Henry, here, has always exhibited his great intelligence so willingly, perhaps he would corroborate my own deductions—by doing some fast extrapolating!" He said this last word through his teeth. There was a smile on his lips, but not in his dark and wearied eyes.

As he went on rapidly with his story, his three listeners were scanning his mind for the rest of it, putting the whole picture together even before he had finished.

When Weston killed Mlargn, he managed to manipulate controls that finally released all the others from their mental paralysis. He made Lady Dewitt and the Texans show him the location of the Chronotron, and under directions from the various scientists at his command a series of experiments was conducted. Various power settings were utilized, and test groups volunteered or were assigned to be sent back through time. Some, they knew, might arrive in a place where conditions would not be suitable for life. Others might perish in a world populated by carnivorous monsters, or they might freeze, or drown in shoreless oceans. But most of them seemed willing to risk it.

It was Uncle Andy's group that produced the alternate time that the three had witnessed from the citadel. This group had consisted of Andy, Dr. Bauml, Dr. Singer, Valerie Roagland, Peggy Hollenbeck, and several other men and women. Pee Bee, it developed, had been in the first "group," which had

consisted only of himself—as he had apparently been in a suicidal mood and was desirous of giving the dice a roll for double or nothing.

Andy's group, it appeared, had only been thrown back about a thousand years, because the "civilization" they founded was small and still dedicated to the same goals which had been in the minds of the basic group when they entered the Chronotron. These descendants remembered their ancestors and carried some of their theories to the point of physical application.



In the meantime, only Weston, Edwards and the Prince remained below. The alternate time civilization, which referred to itself as "Little America," had appropriated the Xlarnan underworld facilities for itself, and the three observers had found it necessary to conceal themselves. To their dismay, the "Little Americans" had destroyed the Chronotron in order to make certain that none of their group would ever be tempted to snuff them out with a superimposed alternate.

Far from abandoning the idea of returning to the world and time of their ancestors' origin they had concentrated on time-travel theories of their own, with the intention of evolving a more accurate method so that they could be sure of where they were going.

"You said something to me and your Uncle Andy on board the plane before all this happened," Edwards remarked to Henry. "Something about novae and super fast light rays being thrown along the Fourth Coordinate. That must have started them on the road to their present discoveries and development, because there's a ship out there now that only uses rockets for take-off and navigational purposes. Once out in deep space it is supposed to operate on Cosmic energy, or so we have heard. It will go out faster than light. The idea is that when that happens it will be rotated out of three dimensional space and be forced to expend its extra velocity along the Fourth Coordinate, emerging in another time when it again slows down to the speed of light. But this isn't all. These scientists have worked out some new kind of mathematics and seem convinced they have been able to determine the direction and the rates of acceleration and deceleration necessary to deliver them into any given era of time, past or future. And their flight equation calls for the time we came

from. Of course, they'll not hit it in the first attempt, but all subsequent time-jumps will be like vernier adjustments, focussing them down into the twentieth century—even that specific part of it they're aiming for."

"You can't let them do it!" exclaimed Kimnar. Weston, Edwards and the Prince stared at him in mild astonishment.

"I don't know what your objections may be, Scarface," said Edwards, "but as a matter of fact we *don't* intend to let them get away with it!"

Weston grinned sadistically, his gold-capped teeth glistening. "You see—we are going instead! Of course we'll cop their pilot, and he'll do what we tell him. And here's another little point. I'm not so sharp with the science, so Edwards will tell you that, too. Tell them about Africa, Doc!"



The three listeners tensed. They saw it coming. The "Little Americans" were well aware of Andy's connection with the D-C bomb. Andy, too, had been able to deduce, largely from the lack of ocean tides in this world of Xlarn, that it could have been the bomb that had brought the world of Xlarn into being by the destruction of the moon. The most sacred admonishment to his descendants in alternate time had been to find a way of getting back to the twentieth century and prevent the bomb from being launched. That single act would enable the original Earth civilization to continue, and Xlarn would cease to exist.

"It's all a nice, neat package," said Weston, "because don't forget I worked that French Morocco project, too, and I know how to sabotage that damned rocket! Then to make the whole story turn out real pretty with a happy ending, we have Mohammed here to pay off like he said, for getting him back home!"

The Prince still looked at Henry, his turban almost down over his eyes. "You have heard!" he cried out. "Tell me, Henry! Can it be done?"

"There's just one little technicality," said Henry. "How do you propose to capture that Cosmic drive rocket outside?"

Weston grinned again, and Dr. Edwards explained. "Our friends upstairs

never suspected our existence. They probably assumed we got lost somewhere in the Chronotron. Having had no one to defend themselves against, they have produced no weapons of any description, with the exception of those they have installed on the rocket, for use when they get back to the twentieth century, if necessary, to force the issue concerning the D-C bomb. So they are quite vulnerable to a surprise attack. This gun should do the trick easily enough. It is fully loaded."

"What of their superior numbers?" asked Kimnar. But he read the answer before it was voiced.

"The poor devils were quite aware of the reaction sphere," Edwards answered. "There isn't much time left, you know. They chose their pilgrims, and the rest—"

Martia paled. "All dead!" she exclaimed.

Edwards shrugged. "Euthanasia. Tragic, perhaps, but very convenient. We only have six men to contend with."

"I don't want to appear too forward about all this," said Kimnar, slipping back into the sarcastic dialect of Scarface, "but we'd like to ride in that star buggy, ourselves. Maybe you can use another hand in your surprise attack?"

Henry and Martia looked at him quizzically, then their brows furrowed in deeper puzzlement as they read the weighty thing that was in his mind.

"To hell with you," yelled Weston. "I owe you something for that lousy deal you gave me on the rock. On second thought, maybe a bullet would be too easy. Maybe you should wait and see the sky blow up. You and the kids wouldn't want to miss all the pretty fireworks, now would you?"

The Prince sprang into action. Swiftly, he took up a position in front of Henry, Martia and Kimnar. Trembling, and with arms outspread, he cried out, "If you leave them, you can leave me, too! Shoot me—anything! But Henry and his friends are sacred! They go, or I stay!"

Dr. Edwards grimaced, looked at his gun, then at Weston. The latter glowered at the Prince, menacingly.

Finally, he muttered an oath that made Martia's face turn crimson. And he added, "What's the difference! We'll take you as excess baggage, but on condition you'll follow orders. Edwards here is going to be awful nervous on

that trigger, so don't try anything."



The surface world was very warm and the sky was sickeningly bright. Vegetation drooped, dried up, dead or dying, and the plant stench of rot was in the degenerating air. In the mind of every sweating human left on Xlarn was one thought:

It can happen any second now....

Driven by the deadly threat of the sky, Weston and Edwards did not waste time on strategy. They approached the rocket base directly, out in the open, in the glaring light. The pilot and one other man was inside. Four others met them, in mild astonishment, but there was very little time for conversation.

When Weston let them know his intention, and when they looked at Dr. Edwards' gun, they smiled, resignedly.

"What is life or death to us now?" said the spokesman, a somewhat older man than the others. "The main consideration is our common purpose. You, too, want to stop the *bomb*. And if Doctor Edwards here is, as you say, a prominent authority known to that time, his influence would be greater than ours. As long as you intend to take Kennedy, the pilot, our efforts and sacrifices shall not have been in vain. Go—before it is too late!"

Once at the ladder Weston threw the crutches away and practically pulled himself up to the airlock with his powerful arms. Edwards followed close behind with his gun, and then came Martia, Henry and Kimnar, who gave the Prince a helping hand as he climbed.

The four on the ground watched silently for five minutes.

Then they saw their colleague, Mark Thixton, climb down out of the rocket. That left Kennedy alone—with those others.

Thixton walked over to his waiting friends. "Seven of them," he said. "The two youngsters will have to share an acceleration sling together." After a long moment he added, "Pray God they make it in time!"

The others said nothing. They only hoped Kennedy would take off fast

enough to get through that raving pile in the sky. The radiation insulation was excellent in that ship, but they still wondered if escape would be possible.

It can happen any second now....

When Martia pulled out of the blackness that she had fallen into during acceleration, she began to cry. Henry could read the thought in her mind. Those brave, kind men back there—left to die.

Then came a disturbing thought from Kimnar who lay in the sling above them: *You realize that we are through the reaction sphere. If they succeed in their purpose, you and I cease to exist. But what really matters is Galactic Civilization! That, too, will evaporate and be non-existent!*

Henry and Martia were too weak to think back at him. But they thought to themselves. Earth, as they had known it, with its teeming billions of people and its cities and sciences and cultures.

And its wars and nationalisms and ideologies and greed and corruption!—interposed Kimnar's thought, vehemently.

But its beaches under the blue skies and a real, normal sun, with the children bathing and laughing, and its theatres and arts, its churches and universities and—Paris! Think of Paris! If they could stop the bomb, all that would continue to be—

I can show you six thousand cities greater than Paris! And if you consider Earth, then think of solar systems—dozens of worlds greater than Earth—more advanced, benevolent, civilized, where men cannot lie and cheat because they know each other's hearts and minds! Weigh all that against one world!

No—thought Henry, at last. *Consider Earth's own future expansion, if saved from cataclysm. Think of its own possibilities of reaching for the stars and also establishing a Galactic Civilization!*

Kimnar did not respond.

Suddenly, Kennedy came out of his straps and yelled. He was looking out the great vision port, from which the radiation shielding had been removed. Everybody sat up and stared into outer space.

In the lower part of their field vision was the Great Ring that had once been the moon, and below it was the glowing reaction sphere that covered Xlarn. It looked like an incandescent Saturn, with the mighty star-walls of Infinity rising behind it. But even this tremendous spectacle was insignificant in its effect when compared with ten other prominent objects out there.

"Space ships!" shouted Weston. "Where the hell—"

Ten great spheres, with rods at top and bottom and thick rings around their "equators," as though they were space-flying gyroscopes. They were converging slowly upon the rocket.

"Shall I tell you what they are?" asked Kimnar enthusiastically. "They are in the hands of Fate!"

"If you know what they are, don't get corny, Scarface!" roared Weston, climbing out of his sling and grabbing the gun from Edwards. "Spill it!"

Calmly but swiftly, Kimnar told the story, and he explained the issue that hung in the balance—Earth's alternate future against this already existing Galactic Civilization.

"Here and now," he concluded, "Fate can decide. Perhaps it is not in our own hands, after all."

Dr. Edwards stared at him aghast, the whole explanation of Henry's and Martia's precociousness striking him at last. Then he looked again at the approaching spheres.

"Do they know what we represent?" he asked.

"Yes," smiled Kimnar. "I communicated the message to them some time ago. I thought I was lying to them then, or doing some wishful thinking, merely to make them come for us—but now it's no longer a lie. You *can* stop that moon bomb and strike a new alternate across a billion years of space and time! But if you do, I and my friends and a Galactic Civilization will cease to exist!"

All this time, the pilot, Kennedy, had been like a man coming out of anesthesia. He was a tall, gaunt young fellow with heavy, forward jutting brows and far seeing eyes. His long chin was way out as he watched everything and listened, with his wiry right hand lying inertly beside the simple bank of the ship's main controls.

"Kennedy!" yelled Weston. "What kind of guns are in those blisters?"

The pilot stared at him. "They fire one pound projectiles—nuclear bombs."

"*That* is for me! Come on, Edwards! To your station!" Before anyone could stop him, he was swinging lightly away, from support to support, under the gravity free condition of free fall.

"Better strap in tight!" called Kennedy, coming to life at last. "If I'm going to maneuver out here, you're going to feel some Gs!"

"Let's go!" they heard Weston reply, from his blister. And Edwards was already on his way to the other position.

Grimly, the pilot shifted into emergency flight position and strapped himself in, while Kimnar and Henry and Martia watched him. They heard the Indian Prince stuttering through his prayers again.

"Kennedy," said Kimnar, half rising in his sling. "Don't do it!"

"You better stay strapped," replied the other. Even as he spoke, a great weight pressed upon them and the firmament outside began to revolve, sweeping Xlarn and the star ships momentarily out of sight.

"Kennedy!" persisted Kimnar, doggedly, in spite of the mounting pressure "Think this over! One world—Earth—cannot be worth twelve civilized solar systems! Let me contact those star men for you! You could continue to live —"

Everybody came close to blacking out as the rocket swept down over the row of globular ships and shook with recoil from Weston's and Edward's firing. A horrifying scene of exploding spheres swept by the observation panels, and Martia screamed in her mixed despair. Kimnar sweated profusely. Henry tensed his mind, preparing to paralyze Kennedy. It was an irresistible impulse, not quite tied to logic.

No!—came Kimnar's thought to him. *I have decided against that kind of*

coercion. There's something bigger out here than we. Call it Fate, if you will. And that power alone will have to decide! We can only propose!

It was in that moment that Fate cut the cord. An eye-searing light filled the cabin, and Kennedy shrieked—"The reaction sphere!"

The planet once known as Earth burst into a minor nova, blasting its Great Ring into spiraling shreds and tatters of celestial tinsel. In the face of that swiftly advancing flame, the star ships that had survived the rocket's first onslaught flicked safely into hyper-space, and Kennedy *tried* to stand enough Gs of acceleration to keep ahead of it. He barely made it.

But Weston and Edwards did not. At first they were blinded, utterly, by the blast, unprotected as they were in the blisters. Then, as a very small fraction of that searing wave licked out at the rocket, the hull resisted but the blisters fused and exploded. An airlock sealed the gun compartments off from the rocket's cabin, but the remains of the two gunners drifted into the turbulent ether.

There was one other decisive effect of the holocaust. Certain delicate apparatus connected with the collection and storing of Cosmic energy was also fused and made useless, before it had hardly begun to store up for the intended work ahead.

"That does it!" panted Kennedy. "We're licked!"

"No we're not," said Kimnar, nodding toward the observation panel. His tear-flooded eyes were struggling out of the momentarily induced blindness and he saw that the rocket had turned so that the glare of the explosion was not visible.

Instead, there was the towering, eternal firmament, and in it had suddenly materialized one of the star man spheres, glistening brightly in the light that their eyes were now being spared. Kennedy watched it helplessly as it approached.

Henry and Martia became aware of minds probing them gingerly and communing with Kimnar—minds of the star men, who had not struck back

immediately because they had been hoping to rescue some of their own kind and take them home....



While a bewildered but grateful man named Kennedy and a wide-eyed Indian Prince followed Kimnar, Henry and Martia into a scintillating civilization in far off space and time, a secret rocket experiment was being concluded in French Morocco. In the nose of the rocket was a D-C bomb, which was to be detonated on the surface of the moon.

No one who had entered the Chronotron, at Weston's insistence, had succeeded in reaching the twentieth century and altering the future by a hair. But Pee Bee had shot far behind the line, landing somewhere in the 8th century B.C. No change in original Cause can ever fail to precipitate an equal degree of change in final Effect. Yet the world that existed between the 8th century B.C. and the twentieth century A.D. was not greatly shaken by having a few lines of print changed here and there in various histories, reference books and encyclopedias. It seemed that there never had been such a word as billiards. There was an ancient game known as pool (Egypt.—puul), the origin of which was not England, but in the glorious imperial days of Ethiopia, when Egypt was one of its provinces and a famous emperor referred to later by Roman historians as Pibeus, invented it to amuse his harem of two hundred wives....

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CHILDREN OF THE
CHRONOTRON ***

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