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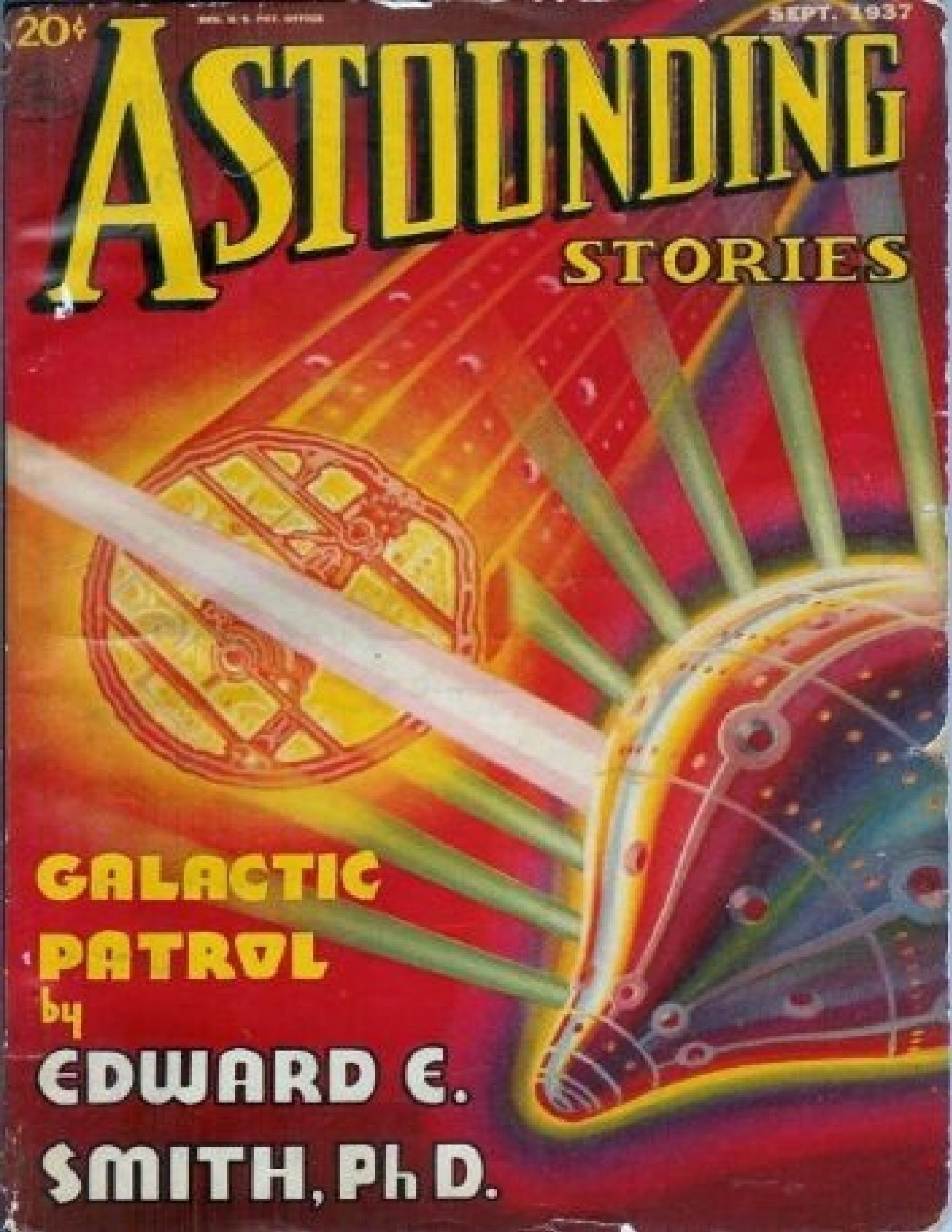
ASTOUNDING STORIES

GALACTIC

PATROL

by

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Title: Past, Present and Future

Author: Schachner, Nat [Nathan] (1895-1955)

Date of first publication: September 1937

Date first posted: 2 November 2016

Date last updated: April 18, 2017

Faded Page ebook#20170467

This ebook was produced by Al Haines

Publisher's Note: As part of the conversion of the book to its new digital format, we have made certain minor adjustments in its layout.

Past, Present, and Future

by Nat Schachner

Kleon stood on the edge of the jungle, stared out at the bright-blue bay. The great trireme, with its steeply pitched banks of oars, burned furiously. Fire and smoke crackled up to the tropic sun, licked like running tongues around the poop, swirled with final fury over the god Poseidon, whose wooden beard and pointing trident adorned the high-beaked prow.

As the god tottered and fell, charred beyond recognition, into the briny waters, Kleon bowed his head, uttered the classic prayer of Homer. It was an omen, a sign to him that never again would he see his native vines and twisted olive trees, that never again would he discourse with the philosophers or hear the godlike Alexander shout the Macedonian charge against the Persian hosts.

Slowly the embers died, slowly the sound of the crackling timbers ceased. Behind him, framed against a tangle of festooned trees and outlandish blooms, cowered his crew. They were not of his race; they were swart Egyptian sailors from Thebes, impressed by the mighty Alexander for his fleet against Arabia and the Indian potentates.

They held their spears uneasily, bracing themselves against the terrible wrath of their young commander, knowing that they had been guilty of foulest treachery, yet not sorry withal for what they had done. Their eyes feasted hungrily on the women by their sides—whom they had found inhabiting this incredible land where strange stars glowed overhead and the earth teemed with food and shelter and sustenance for the taking. These women were tall and light and straight, with copper-colored skins and laughing eyes that were a delight to sailors who had seen not even a mermaid for many moons.

Why should they leave these newfound delights, this gentle race of friendly people who called themselves Mayas in their own liquid tongue, to embark once more on restless Oceanus and steer back toward the setting sun? That was tempting the gods too much. This time, they were sure, their bones would molder in the sunless caverns of the fathomless seas, or their ship sweep over the rim of the world into the maw of old Chaos.

No, they had had enough of tempting the spirits of the waters. Only Isis and Osiris had saved them thus far, since the great wind had sprung up in the Indian Ocean and separated them from the fleet of Nearchus, admiral of Alexander, as it skirted the hostile coasts. They would stay here, with the people who thought them and their blond young commander, forsooth, gods from across the sea. Had they not kneeled and worshiped Kleon when the trireme had sailed into the fantastic bay? Had they not cried on him and called him by some outlandish name, as though he had been long expected? Quetzal—that was it.

Yet Kleon, in his Greek obstinacy, had ordered them, after a month of soft surrender to the balmy airs, after replenishment of food and water casks, to the oars again, to brave once more the perils they had so miraculously escaped. His mouth had set in a grim, hard way to all their protestations.

So they had burned the ship! It would be impossible for Kleon, for all his Greek learning, for all the magic arts he had learned among the wizards of the Persians, the Hindus, and the one-eyed Anthropophagi who lurked in caves on the Roof of the World, to force them to breast the waves again.

Yet, because he was their commander and they were but Egyptian slaves, because he wore bright armor and knew how to wield with slashing strokes the Macedonian short sword at his side, they cowered and were uneasy—though they outnumbered him an even hundred to one.

And still the Greek, terrible in his armor like the young sun god, made no move. The trireme was a dead-black hulk on the silent waters. The Mayas, black-haired, tall, stared at the stranger they had hailed as Quetzal, with fixed adoration. Even the raucous birds of many hues, who seemed to mock them from the trees with human cries, were still.

Hotep, the steersman, approached him timidly. "You are not angry with us, noble Kleon," he pleaded. "We have done only that which seemed best. Here, among these people, we are as gods. Why breast the floods to suffer hunger and thirst and hideous monsters, and perchance, the outraged edges of the world, to return once more to—slavery and backbending toil and the hewing of fierce weapons?"

Kleon turned slowly. "You have done best for yourselves, no doubt," he said evenly. "You are slaves, Egyptians. You will mingle with these dwellers beyond the flood and find no demeanment in it. You will teach them what you know of the arts and be content. But I am a Greek and these are barbarians. I will not waste my life among such as these—and you. Life is a precious depositary for the *noumena*, the metaphysical thought, or it is nothing. On the farther side of the world mighty Alexander marches to new triumphs, and the Grecian culture marches with him."

Here is stagnation, minds that know not science or noble philosophy. What have I, a Greek, to do with these—or with you, for that matter, O Hotep?"

The Egyptian bowed humbly. He was not offended. In the elder days his race had been mighty, but the world had gone topsy-turvy, and the old gods had yielded to new. That was why he and his comrades were content to remain in this new land the balance of their days.

"What do you wish from us, great Kleon?" he asked.

The Greek stared at him speculatively, turned his gaze from the ocean, from the charred husk of the trireme, slid past the trembling crew, past the copper-colored natives, flung inland over the impenetrable jungle to the blue rise of ground that marked the backbone of the interior. Smoke curled lazily from a cone-shaped top. His blue eyes glinted; a strange luster crept into their being. When he spoke he seemed to commune with himself rather than hold conversation with Hotep.

"When Alexander left Persepolis and marched for dreadful months through strange Asian lands and stranger peoples to the Indus, we passed over the very top of the world. There we came upon a race of learned holy men, so old, so wasted with time's attritions, that verily they seemed in sooth what they maintained—survivors from an elder day, when earth was clad in ice and Zeus himself had not been born.

"I spent some time with them, O Hotep, and they opened their minds to me, a curious seeker after knowledge. They told me of the days before the ice came, when the world was young and the bleak hills were covered with strange verdure and mighty cities; they spoke with the air of participants in great civilizations long since buried. In full sooth their knowledge was beyond that of Aristotle himself. They averred that when the frozen waters pressed inexorably southward from the northern pole their civilization died, but such was the secret science of their priests that some few were able to immure themselves in caverns, there to repose for long centuries in immortal inanition, to awake at a predetermined time when their science taught them the ice would have ebbed back again to the frozen Boreal regions.

"I was skeptical, as the Sophists had taught me to be, but they took to me sealed caverns, into which I was able to peer through a strange instrument that made transparent the solid rock, and behold, I saw some of their sleepers still. These, they averred, had set their awakening for a later era than the rest, desiring to taste the farther future. A thousand more years must elapse before these would stir and breathe again."

"It is incredible," murmured Hotep politely.

The face of Kleon was a contemplative mask. "They taught me the secret," he mused. "The sight of yon mountain, where the Titans rumble underground and the Cyclopes forge thunderbolts, reminded me of the tale."

He squared his shoulders suddenly. His voice lashed out as it was wont to do when he had led a phalanx into battle. "Hotep, slaves, listen to me!"

They jumped at his clarion tones, forgetful that he was but one and they were an even hundred. "Yes, gracious lord," they chorused.

"You have done a foul deed. You are cattle, and this idle land and idler folk will satisfy your limited desires. But I am a Greek, and must blaze always with a bright, clean flame, or life is valueless. I do not intend to rust away my remaining days among barbarians. Therefore, if you seek my forgiveness, you must follow my will in the exactest degree."

Hotep moved stealthily back to the mass of his comrades, firmed his grip on his spear. Did the Greek, perchance, have some mad notion of building a new trireme from the heavy forest trees, and blunder toward the west? Rather would he——

Kleon did not seem to see the hostile gestures of his men. "I, too, shall brave the future," he declared. "The present is an empty amphora for my spirit; I wish to fill myself with the bright wine of days that are yet unborn. I shall immure myself in a cavern, even as those priests who inhabited the Roof of the World, and do thus and so as they had taught me. I shall set a time for my awakening—let me see—yea, ten thousand years. Who knows what strange and marvelous visions will greet my eye in that tremendous span of years!"

Spears dropped with dull thuds from nerveless fingers; black beards gaped in ludicrous astonishment, confused voices called on Horus and Ammon-Ra. The copper folk, all unwitting, knowing not the meaning of the god, Quetzal, nevertheless, prostrated themselves in fear before his flashing eye, the sound of his speech that surged like the many billowed sea.

Hotep burst out in gasping words. "Lord, have you in sooth gone mad? These tales of magic have addled your brain! They but mocked you. It is impossible——"

"It is enough," Kleon broke in sharply, "that I command it." He fingered his sword significantly.

A wave of hasty assent rose like incense from the crew. Why should they not do the mad Greek's bidding? Even so, would they be freed from ever-present dread of their treachery and meditated vengeance. They would live their lives among these gentle folk, take their women for wives, and loll in ease and security after much buffettings. Let the Greek be immured, if he wished, in the bowels of the earth, let him wait for that fantastic future he described.

It took almost a year to perform the task. But Kleon drove his crew and these pliable folk, who called themselves Mayas, relentlessly. Now that the die was cast, now that he had pondered on it nights and days, he was eager for that future which the gymnosophists of the Roof of the World had promised him; indeed, he was very eager.

He required a volcano; for the gases generated in the smithies of the Cyclopes were necessary for his entombment. He found the blue cone from which the smoke eternally wisped some fifty stadia inland. He caused its base to be cleared, and there the Egyptians built for him a small pyramid, patterned according to the one of Cheops, on which the copper-colored Mayas toiled willingly like submissive beasts of burden. Underneath the tapering stone they inclosed a chamber, rough-hewn, built against the millenniums, air-sealed against all outer contamination. From the chamber they led vents of stone to the bowels of the fire-breathing mountain, so that, by ingenious tappets, the swirling gases of brimstone and sulphurous pungency might be inducted in due proportions.

Then they withdrew and Kleon busied himself in secret. From his leather jerkin underneath the armor he drew a leaden globule. This had been given him by the gymnosophists with appropriate instructions. Within its hollow shell was a lustrous, ever-burning substance—a substance that burned, yet consumed itself only after thousands and thousands of years.

Kleon handled the pellet gingerly, prepared its mechanism so that, at a pressure, tiny openings would appear, so regulated as to emit the radiations of the interior element in specified amounts, and cease completely after ten thousand years. He, a Greek, of course, did not know that he held in his hand an ounce of pure, elemental radium, the secret of whose isolation from its salts had been known to that preglacial civilization, and had been since lost to the new-born world.

Then, as he had been taught, he arranged a comfortable niche in which to spread himself, saw to it that certain hinged stones devised by Hotep fell swiftly and smoothly into place on swinging pivots to cut off all entrance and exit, placed over a secret spring that controlled the pivots a tiny disk of laminated, fluorescent substance, likewise furnished by the ancients from the Roof of the World. On this was trained the perforations from the pellet of radium.

The potent radiations from the sacred element, they told him, would disintegrate each lamination of the disk in exactly one thousand years. Therefore, Kleon peeled off the excess layers and left but ten to withstand the steady buffets of the radium. As the bombardment finally pierced the last fluorescent layer, the unobstructed rays would then impinge on the naked spring that actuated the mechanism of the pivoting stones. They would turn smoothly in their sockets; air would rush in from outer vents, whiff away the preservative gases, and he, Kleon, would then awake as though from a short, dreamless nap, ten thousand years into the future.

They had tried to explain to him the exact interaction of pure, elemental radium with the special mixture of sulphurous oxides, hydrochloric acid, sulphocyanides and hydrocarbons of which volcanic gases are compounded, but chemistry was not a science of which the Greeks had any knowledge. It was sufficient for Kleon that the products of the interaction had certain effects on body tissues and organs. They acted as an arrester of vital processes, a bath in which all life remained suspended indefinitely with blood uncongealed and flesh both fresh and firm.

At last the day arrived. Kleon felt his heart beat unduly fast. Suppose the gymnosophists had been but playing on his Greek credulity, suppose they were magicians whose feats were illusions; suppose, instead, he would die within this tomb and never emerge. He laughed, and the sound of his laughter was hollow in his ears. He did not fear death, yet—

They were within the pyramid, within the sacred chamber—only Hotep and he. Outside, guarding the entrance, was his crew, spears uplifted in reverence in accordance with his strict instructions. Beyond, covering the cleared space around the pyramid, flat on their faces in adoration, lay the Mayas. Quetzal, the blond white god, it had been announced to them, intended to sleep. He was weary of the wickedness of the world. But some day, refreshed, mighty, he would arise and bring to his children, the Mayas, eternal life, peace and unexampled prosperity.

"I think," Kleon told Hotep with a grim smile, "that will be sufficient to protect me from harm." He looked shrewdly at the Egyptian. "I think also," he continued, "that you will find it profitable to perpetuate the legend."

Hotep grinned slyly in his beard. "You have an all-penetrating eye, noble Kleon. I shall make myself high priest of Quetzal, and my children after me."

"I didn't doubt it," Kleon commented dryly. Then his face became an expressionless mask. He tested the vents, the ensealing stone. "It is time, O Hotep. Do you retire and swing the stone into place behind you. Then, as you value your life and the honor of your approaching priesthood, seek no more entrance to my abode."

The Egyptian struggled for utterance in his black beard, bowed suddenly, and retired. The huge, rough-hewn stone clicked softly into place. The chamber was sealed.

Kleon, as one already dead, went about his preparations. A smoky torch was all his illumination. The laminated disk swung into position over the spring. The lead pellet fitted snugly into its niche. A touch of the mechanism and infinitesimal holes in the lead trained on the disk. A curious stream of radiance leaped out into the chamber. The fluorescent material of the ten-laminated disk glowed with a fiery bombardment. Kleon felt a strange tingling of his skin, as though innumerable atoms were popping into oblivion. He had been warned against the deadly effects of the unobstructed radium.

Half aghast at what he was about to do, he completed his preparations. Very carefully he laid himself down on his prepared pallet, hewn out of the solid wall, stretched himself out. By his side he laid his sword, and a keen-edged javelin. He was a fighting man, a leader of a phalanx. Who knew what manner of men he might meet in that remote, unimaginable future. In a corner of the chamber were sealed potteries, filled with dried food and water against his hunger and thirst on awakening.

He grimaced. Would he indeed awaken? His sinewy fingers held on the tiny metal lever at his side. A downward pressure and the smooth-shaped stones that sealed the vents from the volcano would open. After that—

The torch flickered smokily. Soon it would go out. The air in the inclosure was being fast used up. Breathing was becoming laborious. The stream of fiery radiance across the gloom seemed timeless; the disk pricked out in pin points of flame. The dry tingling of his skin increased. He gritted his teeth, swung down on the lever.

Three great stones moved noiselessly on their sockets; three smooth holes appeared suddenly in the wall. There was a faint rumble, a sucking sound. Gas billowed in, thick, yellow.

It swarmed through the underground chamber with clammy, twining tentacles. It beat around his head with acrid, suffocating vapors. The torch flickered, plunged into darkness. His body twitched; his lungs labored for air. The gas sucked in, stung and smarted.

But already a faint luminescence glimmered through the yellow, clogging surge. It spread. Fireflies glittered and danced. There was a crackling sound, new pungent odors. Chemical transformations beyond his knowledge were taking place.

Kleon felt a sudden release from the burning sensations. He tried to breathe, couldn't. He tried to move his limbs. They refused all action. The pounding of his heart slowed, died. A vast drowsiness assailed him. He was slipping. Time slipped with him.

This, then, was death. The chamber revolved slowly around him. His thoughts drifted through soft obstructions. Never again would he see his native vines, his gnarled olives—Athens—Alexander—comrades—

The chamber underneath the pyramid was very still. The vents to the volcano had closed automatically. The transformed gases laved the motionless body in their bath of inanition. The radium poured forth its ceaseless glow. The laminated disk glittered under the impact. All was silence. Time had ceased—

II.

Sam Ward wiped the sweat from the palms of his hands along the rough khaki of his trousers, and stared. He was tired, perspiring, bitten by stinging insects, broiled by the hot Guatemalan sun, and more than a bit disappointed. He had been led to expect more.

"There eet ees," the half-breed Indian pointed his grimy finger with half-triumphant, half-fearful gesture. "Juan nevaire lies. Now señor will pay heem the fifty dollars Mex he promise. Juan do not weesh to stay. There ees dangaire."

Sam did not answer. He took in the scene with practiced eyes. It was a find, all right, but there were innumerable higher and more elaborate ruins within the Yucatan Peninsula. There would be nothing here of startling importance.

Sam had done many things in the few years since he had left college. China and the war lords, diggings in the Mesopotamia coupled with certain unheralded brushes with the Bedouins, an unregulated, unauthorized stay with the Harvard excavations at Chichen-Itza in Yucatan. Then, finally, this comparatively tame, but well-paid assignment to investigate the inner jungles of Guatemala for possibilities of banana plantations on behalf of a New York syndicate.

At San Felipe, off the Pacific Coast, he had met Juan. A dirtier, frowsier, more drink-sodden half-breed did not exist. But Sam found him almost his sole source of information.

The whites were courteous, but vague. They shrugged expressive shoulders. The steamy jungles that rolled interminably inland up to the gaunt ramparts of the Sierra Madre were places most assuredly not to be visited. They were impenetrable, malarial, full of ticks and yellow fever, quaking with bottomless bogs, inhabited only by poisonous snakes and fierce animals, and, said his informants expressively, the Indians would not like it.

Sam Ward grinned at this latter bit of news. He felt perfectly competent to take care of himself. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with lean, hard muscles that rippled smoothly as he walked. He had been in jungles before, and he had faced men wilder than any beast or snake. A holster flapped carelessly at his side, and it housed a six-chambered revolver. It was fully loaded and Sam had used it with effect and deadly accuracy on certain necessary occasions. There were more bullets in his cartridge belt. No, Sam Ward did not much worry about the dislike of the Indians. He had a job to do for which his employers had paid liberally, and it would be done.

"But why," he asked carefully, "would the Indians not like it?"

His informant shrugged again. He was the mayor of San Felipe, short, stout, and a trifle asthmatic. "They do not tell, señor," he acknowledged. "They are Mayas, descendants of a stiff-necked race. Those jungles are sacred to them. There have been men gone in there, señor, but they never come out. So——"

Sam tried the Indians. They were tall and straight and handsome in a copper-colored way. No señor! They would not guide him into the jungle, not even for twenty dollars Mex. Why? The god Quetzal would not like it; he was asleep, biding his time.

It was then he found Juan, outcast from white and red alike, vainly trying to cadge another drink of the fiery *tequila* from a flinty-hearted tavern keeper. Sam set him up, promised more, *mucho* more, for guidance into the forbidden territory. Juan babbled confusedly in terror, but yielded after a few more drinks skillfully applied.

Then came hours of hacking through thorny jungles, hours of slogging through bogs and fighting ticks and mosquitoes. It was a hell hole. Yet there were certain areas where the trees might be planted, if only the natives could be cajoled into work. A gamble any way you looked at it, Sam thought. He was ready to turn back.

Juan saw his gesture of disappointment. He thought fast. He knew how these fool Americans paid generously to be shown bits of stone in the jungle. His drink-colored brain had lost all fear.

"Maybe I show the gracious señor where Quetzal he sleep? Maybe eet ees worth fifty dollars Mex, huh, señor?" he said hopefully.

Sam pricked up his ears. "Quetzal? Nonsense! Every guttersnipe in Central America will show you where that fabulous god sleeps, for a consideration. I've seen enough unnecessary stones in Yucatan to last me a lifetime. Besides, the old Mayas built no cities on the Pacific side."

"Thees ees different," Juan persisted. He had noted joyfully that there had been no objection to the fifty dollars, and in his greed he lost all sense of superstitious fear. "Thees—what you call it—real theeng. I listen once to priests making talk in time of full moon."

Sam considered. The Sierra Madre loomed jagged and high a bare half dozen miles farther east. A smooth, symmetrical cone plumed lazy smoke into the air, tiredly, as though it had been doing so for incredible ages.

"Done!" Sam decided suddenly. Bananas had not worked out very well. Perhaps archaeology might. Another Chichen-Itza? "But remember —no Quetzal, no money."

And now he stood, disappointed, staring at the smooth flanks of the volcano, and at the half overgrown, very low, plain pyramid that was almost lost in its shade. Mayan ruins, no doubt, and in a virgin territory. But he had seen hundreds of similar ruins which had yielded nothing of particular importance.

"Quetzal in there," Juan insisted. "Please, señor, geeve me the fifty dollars Mex and let Juan go queekly. Quetzal maybe get angry."

Sam shook his head. "No sale," he grunted. "Show me Quetzal and I'll double it."

But he was talking to thin air. For the half-breed had swung suddenly on his bare heel, let out a startled yell, and dived headlong into the tangled jungles that inclosed them.

"Here, what the devil!" Sam cried and jerked at his gun.

Then he stopped, and his mouth set in a grim gash. He had seen certain gliding forms slip noiselessly through the thorn bushes and vanish. Mayas! They had been on his trail for hours, dogging his crashing progress through the jungle. Juan, he decided, would never get back to San Felipe. The odds were against Sam Ward's return, either, he thought quietly.

Slowly, he backed up to the overgrown pyramid, gun trained for the slightest movement in the encompassing jungle. There was none. If he could climb the ruin's crumbling, vegetation-covered slopes, he might be able to orient himself, find a way through the trackless forests.

His foot caught in a depression; he stumbled. He jerked around, nerves tense. There, at the base of the slope, practically screened from view by a mat of creepers, was a black hole. His foot had crashed through the tough lianas, burst them asunder.

Still wary, expecting every moment to hear the whistle of a blowpipe dart through the air, he bent to examine it. Luckily, he had a flashlight. He sprayed it down. The questing light illuminated a passage, steeply slanting, straight, stretching fathomlessly.

Feverishly, Sam clawed away the remaining creepers. He forgot even the lurking Mayas, waiting to slay this invader of their ancient secrets. Maybe the drunken half-breed had been right, after all. For this passage was squared by human hands, and in a fashion different from those of the Yucatan pyramids. Vague familiarity rugged at his brain, exploded into sudden knowledge. He had seen passages just like this in Egypt, at the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

He knelt, sniffed at the air. It was cold and dank with the must of the underground, but it was breathable. He took a swift glance backward. There was not a rustle in the jungle, not even a bird cry. He smiled grimly. The Mayas were waiting patiently. Time was of no particular value to them. Well, let them wait. He also had plenty of time to die.

Meanwhile, the pyramid tugged at him, flooded him with eagerness. Its very shape, overgrown as it was, showed Egyptian influences. If he could prove that thesis, then the whole problem of the Mayas might be solved. If! He laughed harshly. He had no illusions. The chances of his breaking through to San Felipe were mighty slim. Then he shrugged, even as the mayor had shrugged, even as a certain Kleon had shrugged over two millenniums before. His life was in the lap of the gods. In the meantime——

He ducked quietly into the passageway. Rocks and loose dirt slithered in after him. The echoes were like muffled thunder. Carefully, he picked his way along, always down, spraying the flash before him. The walls were rough-hewn, but neatly jointed, bare of all carving. It was cold and the air somewhat foul. Which meant that there was no other exit to the tunnel to create a ventilating draft.

Down, down he went, cautiously, watchful. Behind him were the Mayas, resentful of his desecration of their secrets; before him was—what?

He found out fast enough. He was staring blankly at a solid, barring wall. The tunnel had ended abruptly. He flashed his light carefully over its surface, and his heart leaped. Very faintly, almost smudged by obliterating time, he noted thin, straight cracks. A final capping stone had been heaved into position, incredible ages before. That meant there was a chamber within, sealed by long-forgotten men.

Juan had talked of Quetzal. So had the frowning Mayas. That, of course, was ridiculous. Quetzal was a myth, like—like—Zeus and Poseidon and all the Greek Pantheon.

Nevertheless, he must get in, even if he never lived to disclose to the world what he had found. But how? The great stone must weigh over a ton, and there was no way even to get a fingerhold in that thin line of division. It would require patient drilling with high-powered drills. He laughed at that. He might as well as ask for the moon.

Then his eyes narrowed. There had been tales, in Egypt, of cunning artifices, of secret springs that moved stones smoothly. He had never seen one, nor had any one else with whom he had talked. Always it was some vague other, third or fourth removed from the narrator, who had vouched for such finds.

Nevertheless, his sensitive fingers strayed and tapped and probed. With a lilt of exultation he edged a forefinger into a tiny, shallow concavity, discernible only to pressure, not to sight. He jabbed.

The wall seemed to disappear smoothly in front of him. He had not even seen the great stone turn on its pivoting axis. Light glowed beyond.

He jerked through the opening, swung his flash eagerly around. A short exclamation throttled his throat, died queerly on his lips. He was in a rough-hewn chamber, walled with blocks of solid stone. A strange radiance streamed from a tiny niche in the opposite wall, danced past him in a direct beam toward the way he had entered. This was in itself exciting enough. But in the farther corner, dimly illuminated by the queer, crackling luminance, ensconced in a recess carved out of the solid rock, a figure stretched motionless.

Dead, of course, but queerly lifelike, queerly fresh and untouched by the countless years of immurement. He seemed as if he were merely asleep, awaiting some last trump.

Sam pressed forward. His limbs were strangely sluggish, his breathing heavy. There was a curious yellow smoke within the chamber, glowing with an inner light, that stirred clammily about him. Sam paid no attention, attributing his thudding heart to the excitement of his find.

For the man on that bed of rock was blond of hair and white of skin. His features, composed in the embalmment of death, were regular, classical, as if chiseled on a medallion. Armor encased his limbs, still untarnished, still bright.

Unbidden, wild theories flashed through Sam. This was no swarthy Maya chieftain. This was—Quetzal? The legend of that bright, blond god who had come out of the Pacific, blue-eyed, bringing civilization to the Mayas. Could it possibly be——

Then, and then only, did Sam Ward feel the choking sensation in his throat, the nightmare clogging of his limbs, the electric prickling of his skin. The gas! An embalming gas, whose secret had been lost in the mists of time, whose preservative influence was doubtless responsible for the incredible condition of the blond-haired mummy. He must get out quickly—give it a chance to dissipate——

The cry that welled from his lips was strangely thin. The pivoted stone through which he had come had disappeared. In its place was a solid, blank-seeming wall. He had not heard it close behind him. Yet he could have sworn there had been a guttural chuckle, the stealthy pad of naked feet. The Mayas had crawled soundlessly after him, had immured him for all eternity!

He stared at the fluorescent disk that glowed uncannily on the stone. His thought processes were becoming curiously fogged. He tried to laugh. The sound was dull, far-off. Irony! He had made the greatest find of modern times, and he could not shout it from the housetops. Quetzal had taken his revenge. Perhaps, in some future rime, remote archaeologists would break into this chamber, find an incredible sight. A fair-haired

god in bright armor—and another mummy, dressed in rough khaki, obviously of the twentieth century. He could envisage their bewilderment, their learned explanations.

The flash dropped from his paralyzed fingers; his limbs swayed pendulously. He tried to breathe, couldn't. His heart no longer pounded. He was floating on a huge, yellow sea. His brain fought on a moment, failed. He fell, sprawled out on his back.

The flash sent its aimless beam along the stone floor, died out eventually. But the glow from the leaden pellet persisted, as it had for more than two thousand years before. Time ticked on wearily in the outside world. Civilizations rose and fell; wars decimated the earth; incredible events took place.

But within the chamber silence reigned and the radium clock burned on with ceaseless energy. Two figures lay, side by side, motionless, untouched. Outside, storm and sun and air-carried seeds built up over the low pyramid layer on layer of soil. The Mayas were forgotten. The last priest, descendant of one Hotep, prayed for the last time with bleared, hopeless eyes. Juan rotted into mother earth, a tiny poisoned dart between his shoulder blades. Sam Ward, too, was forgotten. For a few weeks there had been a flurry in San Felipe. But the search was halfhearted, and there was no way to determine where he had been lost in the jungle.

Kleon—a Greek—and Sam Ward—an American—heirs of different ages, united eternally in subterranean death, while the world wagged on to a fantastic future!

III.

Tomson was curiously near to the vulgar emotion of anger as he stepped into the conveyor tube that would drop him to the lowest subterranean level of Hispan. He did not like to leave his cubicle on the middle level. There was home, his laboratory, his equipment, his calculation chamber. The atmospheric pressure was carefully attuned to his delicate body; the temperature did not vary by a hundredth of a degree from the warmth that was best adapted to the efficient working of his mind. In all the fifty years of his life he had not stirred more than half a dozen times from his level, and never this far down to the lowermost diggings of the Worker caste.

Why should he? He held his ordered niche in the system of Hispan. It had been fixed from birth, was comfortable, unalterable. Any other mode of existence was inconceivable. There had always been Olgarchs, there would always be the need for his class, the Technicians; and as for the Workers—well, no one paid much attention to them. They worked out their lives in the bowels of the earth, tended the mighty machines that made Hispan possible, dug and bred and died in humble anonymity.

Tomson dropped steadily down the conveyor tube that ran the vertical length of Hispan. A field of force hummed always in the tube. Travelers regulated the speed of ascent or descent by resistor packs attached to their belts. A slight shift to the right or left of the rheostat lever and positive or negative resistance to the field of force built up quickly in the required degree, and determined the speed and direction of flight.

Tomson passed the secondary levels of the lesser Technicians and his bald, bulging forehead wrinkled. It had been Harri who had respectfully but insistently begged his presence in the subterranean diggings. Damn the fellow, with his twitching face and excitable gesticulations of hands and legs. Why couldn't he have handled this alleged new situation himself and not have disturbed Tomson's intellectual concentrations? Didn't he know how highly organized and easily disrupted the delicate body and brain case of a chief Technician was? Down here in the Worker levels were crude pressures, fit only for hulking creatures, and temperatures that fluctuated by as much as a whole degree either way.

He shivered as he dropped, was tempted to return to his quarters and let Harri struggle with the problem himself. But Harri was obviously floundering, frightened even; and if anything went wrong the Olgarchs would hold him, Tomson, responsible. He sighed, and sped up the tempo of his fall.

The levels flashed by with clicking signals, tier on tier of them. Each one held its ordered niche in the society of Hispan. He had passed the ten sections of the lesser Technicians, dropped through the storage levels, the incubator tiers, the subsidiary power units; then he fled past the myriad swarming cells of the Workers, down through the factories where the food pellets were synthesized, past the levels of the intricate machines, and the eternal flames of the atom crushers.

There were others rising and descending in the force field of the conveyor tube. All greeted him as he flashed by, some with the decent nods of equals, others with respectful salutations in nice gradations of humbleness according to the level of abode. He returned them with the proper bend of head and twist of hand—and suddenly bent his slight form almost double.

A young man had just stepped out on the platform of the Workers' eating level, twisted his resistor pack, was rising in the conveyor tube. He was tall and well-formed, not spindly and bulging of forehead as Tomson, nor clumsily heavy as the Workers. He moved with a quick, calm grace, and his tawny hair was almost radiant. His features were aristocratic, high-bred, and were saved from superciliousness only by a frank,

careless smile which he flashed on Workers, Technicians and equals alike, much to the scandal of his fellow Olgarchs.

He returned Tomson's respectful genuflection with the same grin, and was gone, a tawny portent, flashing upward to the highest Olgarchic tier. Tomson straightened out, so startled that he forgot the proper meticulous nod to the next Worker who humbly saluted him.

What was Beltan, an Olgarch, doing in the Worker levels? It was not, of course, the province of a Technician, even a chief, to question the goings and comings of the Olgarchs; but very rarely, and only for serious reasons, did any of the ruling caste deign to leave their parks and palaces. Tomson realized that Beltan was different from his fellows. With the others, like Gano, the dark, saturnine head, he knew his place and was at ease. Not so with Beltan.

The yellow-haired young Olgarch was forever poking his nose into nooks and corners of all the levels, had sought certain technical and scientific information from Tomson about which his fellows had never bothered, had actually, on occasion, spoken to a Worker. This in itself was an unheard-of-thing, and Tomson disapproved of it strongly. Let each man order his actions in conformity with custom and station—even an Olgarch.

The bottom of the great shaft shot up to meet the Technician. In his bemusement he had barely time to switch the lever and come to a floating halt. He had reached the end of his three-thousand-foot drop.

He shivered, drew his scanty garment close around his thin shoulders. He coughed slightly. His sensitive skin detected the unforgivable variation of temperature in these depths. Why, it was surely a degree and a half below blood heat, the equable bath in which his body was wholly at ease.

Harri was waiting for him at the bottom of the conveyor tube. His sharp-nosed features betrayed his mingled anxiety and relief at the sight of the chief Technician. Now all responsibility was lifted from his own shoulders. Harri, like all lesser Technicians, was able to sustain only a minimum of such an onerous commodity as independent thought and action. He was of the caste who contacted the Workers directly, engineered their operations, directed their activities. They were the administrative branch, whereas the chief Technicians performed executive duties only; planned, experimented, made scientific discoveries.

"What is the meaning of this?" Tomson asked sharply. "Must a chief be disturbed from his important meditations simply because you are too lazy to think your problem out?"

Harri suffered from a nervous tic. A good many Technicians of both classes were thus afflicted. The neural system was overdeveloped compared to the muscular and vascular supports. His nearsighted eyes blinked rapidly; his arms and legs jerked uncontrollably. "I am sorry, Tomson," he declared humbly, "for breaking in upon your meditations. But a situation has arisen. You see, you gave instructions for a crew of Workers to blast new areas from the underlying rock. I was placed in charge."

"I know—I know!" Tomson grumbled impatiently. "We need more fuel for the atom crushers. Get on with your story."

"It is simply this, Tomson," Harri hurried. "In accordance with proper procedure, I turned on the penetra ray before I gave the order to blast. It sometimes happens there are materials embedded in the rock stratum we could otherwise use. I declare, my heart almost ceased its necessary functions at what the ray disclosed. I stopped all work, hastened to contact you at once. This represents a problem not in my sphere of action."

"What," demanded Tomson, "did you see that scared you into the loss of all faculties?"

"You shall determine for yourself. Look!"

They were standing below the lowermost level. During the course of thousands of years, as Hispan required more and more power for its purpose, the solid rock that underlay the city had gradually been penetrated to greater and greater depths. The rock was blasted with shattering electro-dissonances, the resulting powder fed into the atom crushers, and there, in shielded furnaces, the electrons burst from the atom shells, flashed into annihilation, and furnished energy for all the mighty machines that powered the city.

Within the still unfinished cavern, blasted from glistening quartzite, stood twoscore Workers. They were powerful, husky men, towering over the intellectualized Technicians, and their bodies were knotted and twisted with muscles. They stood by the boring machines and blasters, immobile, waiting patiently for the end of the conference of their chiefs. If they waited for hours it did not matter. Nothing mattered. It was all routine. They worked their shift, and they returned to the eating level, ate their pellets in silence in long community barracks, shifted to the mating quarters, performed their necessary acts, ascended next to the recreation level, where, for a few precious hours, they talked, quarreled, jested, saw selected audio visions of innocuous comedy at which they roared unthinkingly, and by signal, shifted to the final sleeping unit, there to be awakened by further signal to continue the endless round.

Harri's finger jittered toward the control mechanism of the penetra ray, switched it on. The machine hummed with blue light. The solid rock seemed to dissolve in front of it, to become transparent as the clearest glass. Tomson stared, started violently in spite of himself. It was not proper for a chief Technician to show vulgar surprise in front of inferiors.

The vague outlines of a mathematical pyramid glimmered beneath, surrounded by encrusting pressure strata. Within its tapering body a passage showed, clogged with sediment and crumbled stone. At the farther end it opened into a shadowy chamber. He stepped quickly forward, adjusted the depth of the ray to bring its contents into bold relief.

Two bodies lay sprawled—one outstretched within a niche, clad in shining metal, the other twisted on the stony floor as if he had fallen unawares. Neither was a man of Hispan, in lineaments or dress. They seemed strangers from another world—preserved in every detail as if they had just fallen asleep, yet obviously dead. A yellowish gas, slightly iridescent, filled the chamber.

Tomson wrinkled his vestigial nose. The delicate instrument next to the ray apparatus was fluctuating violently. Powerful radiations were filtering through the layers of rock. He permitted himself a most unseemly exclamation of astonishment. Within a corner of the immuring chamber he saw the shadow of a pellet, through whose eyelets thin shafts of radiance were streaming. Metallic radium, its atoms breaking down through countless centuries, emitting ceaseless packets of alpha, beta and gamma rays!

"What shall we do?" Harri asked worriedly.

For the moment Tomson's shoulders sagged. He would have wished not to have the responsibility of a decision. Should he call on Gano, head of the Olgarchs, for his orders in this emergency? Then he straightened his frail body. No! This was his province; he must handle it himself.

He tried to keep his voice from quavering as he issued what he thought were crisp commands. "Blast away the outside layers of rock, Harri, then the inner wall of the chamber. But be careful not to harm anything within. We must examine the bodies of these strange beings who have been buried, for who knows how long, under the very foundations of Hispan."

Harri gave orders. The Workers obediently moved into action. The borers hummed and bit through the hard stone like so much melted butter; the blasters whiffed the surrounding layers into impalpable dust, which was instantly sucked into vacuum conveyors and whirled aloft to the atom crushers for conversion into power.

"That's enough." Harri gestured.

The borers stopped, the blasters died, and the last thin layer was gone. The chamber lay exposed to their view.

The thin yellow gas swirled out, dispersed into scattering particles. The air rushed in, laved the silent figures. At a word, a Worker lumbered over to the radium pellet, thrust it into a leaden receptacle, sealed the top. It did not matter if his hand were burned by the deadly radiations in the process.

Harri gulped. His eyes almost bulged out of his head; the skin twitched over his face with rapid jerks. "Look, Tomson," he gasped feebly. "They're alive!"

Tomson felt the perspiration start out on his bald brow, in spite of the fact that the temperature was more than a degree below his accustomed normal. The Workers looked uneasy. Alarm gaped on their lowering faces. The chief Technician had sufficient presence of mind to order them sharply to their quarters, though their shift had still some time to go. It was unprecedented, but so was the situation in which he found himself.

The Workers went hastily, shuffled into the conveyor tube, lifted swiftly to empty eating quarters, chattering at what they had seen.

Tomson and Harri were left alone to face those risen from the dead.

IV.

Sam Ward was the first to return to the interrupted processes of life. He had been under the retardant influences a lesser period than Kleon. As the preservative gases fled, and fresh, clean air took their place, he opened his eyes. He yawned; he stretched unwittingly. He did not know what had happened. It seemed, for the first few seconds, that he had merely aroused from a particularly deep and healthful sleep.

Then he blinked. Was he dreaming? What the devil was this place? Who were those curious creatures who stared at him as if he were a new species of insect? His eye fell on the outstretched figure of the man in armor. The figure was moving, was sitting up!

With an exclamation, awareness flooded Sam. San Felipe, Juan, the jungle, the pyramid, the Mayas, the stumbling into this cave, the entrapment, then—blankness——

He jerked to his feet swiftly. The gun whipped out of its holster, leveled. "All right," he said harshly. "What is this masquerade about?" His question was directed to the two outlandish figures before him. This jungle was spewing forth more and more strange things. They were not

Mayas, but neither were they members of any human race he had ever come across. And those intricate machines that filled the background of the cavern. He was sufficient of a physicist and engineer to realize that they were far in advance of the year 1937.

Tomson shook his head sagely. This was indeed a matter for Gano. His brain clicked keenly. After all, he was a chief Technician. He knew something of the history of the world in the dim days before it died, and Hispan was isolated in a protective film. These were primitives of those earlier eras, somehow immured in this underground chamber, overlaid with the rocky accretions of centuries. The radium pellet, the gas that had dissipated, had kept life intact, through static.

It did not surprise him either that the stranger spoke an archaic variant of the tongue of Hispan. There had been a universal language on earth before it died. As for the curiously fashioned bit of metal in his hand, that was obviously a weapon. Doubtless solid pellets issued from its orifice. He was not afraid. Fear had been bred out of the Technician class. Besides, one touch of the blaster inset at his side, and stranger, weapon and all, would go to feed the energy units of the atom crushers.

"Masquerade?" he repeated slowly. "That is a word I do not know. But you require much explanation—you, your comrade, and this place in which you have laid as one dead. The questioning I shall leave to Gano."

Sam Ward lowered his gun. Surprise at the clipped, curious syllables of this little man with the high, bald forehead and single belted garment of lustrous material gaped his jaw. It was English, in a sense, and understandable, but—

At this instant Kleon rose lithely to his feet, caught up his short Macedonian sword. He seemed like a god among mortals—his fair blond hair, his calm blue eyes that took them all in with one sweeping glance. This, then, was the future, ten thousand years ahead. The gymnosopists from the Roof of the World had not lied. He was disappointed, a bit contemptuous. Were these the beings of the future? Could a Greek of Alexander's day, steeped in Aristotle and Aeschylus, find meet companionship with these spindly, feeble creatures who stood before him?

Then his eyes met those of Sam Ward. Ah, this was a different manner of man. He took in, approvingly, the tall, well-shouldered body, the evidence of power and muscular development, the steady gray of eyes, the level brow. Here was a man who could fight as at a frolic—and judge wisely—a healthy mind in a healthy body.

Sam was bewildered. Quetzal had come to life. These others—— It was getting damned confusing, nightmarish even.

He whirled on Kleon. "And who the devil are you—Quetzal, Maya, or what?"

Kleon stared quietly. This was a language strange to him, a bit barbarous, if the truth must be told, with its harsh consonants and lack of mellifluous vowels. Yet there were two words—Quetzal, Maya. He understood them. Those copper-colored Cimmerians on whose far shore his trireme had been driven had called themselves Mayas, and they had termed him Quetzal, and bowed down in worship.

"Your tongue is unknown to me, my friend of a future that is now," he said calmly. "But I recognize the words Quetzal and Maya. The barbarians called me Quetzal; why, I do not know. But I am Kleon of Athens, who had journeyed far with mighty Alexander, and whose ship had been driven to a strange coast. There was no return; Hotep and the Egyptian slaves burned the ship. It was not meet for a Greek to rust out his life with barbarians. I therefore availed myself of a certain magic taught me by the gymnosopists and slept into the future, hoping then to meet beings fitter to converse with an Athenian. Ten thousand years should have elapsed. I confess I am taken with your presence, stranger, but these two others are beneath my notice. Are they perchance your slaves?"

Sam Ward did not even know he had slid his gun back into its holster. This was becoming entirely too incredible. First two weakling creatures who spoke a distorted English, yet were obviously of an advanced civilization. Now the god in shining armor, risen from the dead, speaking in ancient Greek, avowing matters beyond all possibility. For Sam had studied Greek at college and recognized the long surges, the mighty flow of that noblest of all languages.

He shook his head violently to clear his addled brain. Ten thousand years ahead! That meant eight thousand years for him. Good Lord! Had he slept that long? Were these others representatives of that far-distant future? He opened his mouth to speak, fumbling for the dimly remembered Greek.

But Tomson had decided that enough time had been wasted. He had understood the tongue of the man in the coarse-fibered clothes, but not this other in shining metal.

"Enough," he interrupted peremptorily. "These are matters for Gano, the head of the Oligarchs, to settle. You will come with me."

Sam was slowly regaining his poise. His pulses even leaped at the incredible adventure that was opening its doors to him. "O.K.," he said. "Lead on to this Gano."

But Kleon did not move. He had not followed Tomson's words, but the gesture was unmistakable. He took no orders from a slave.

Sam read his mind and grinned. "It's all right, friend Kleon, alias Quetzal," he translated haltingly into Greek. "These men are from that future you told me about. They are not my slaves. I am from another time myself, some two thousand years after you. Sam Ward is my name, and my country America. It did not exist in your day. I stumbled into your pyramid, and slept along with you. I don't think they mean us any harm."

Kleon's face lighted with gladness and a certain astonishment. "You speak Greek, Sam Ward, yet you speak it as a barbarian would. The

accents are false and the quantities wrong." Sam grimaced wryly at that. His professors at college had been most careful in calculating those accents and ties. They represented the true Attic Greek in all its purity, they had averred.

"As for fear of harm"—Kleon straightened himself proudly, gestured significantly with sword and javelin—"these, my good weapons, are sufficient protection against such puny things as these men of the future."

Sam knew better. He had a hunch that even his own six-chambered revolver, with its fleet spew of death, might not be able to cope with the unimaginable weapons available to the year 10,000 A.D. Brawn, cold steel, meant little in such a case. But, of course, Kleon knew of nothing beyond the sword, the spear and bow.

Nevertheless, they followed the pair. Tomson and Harri, in spite of appearance, radiated a certain power, a certain feeling that it would be wise not to resist. They came to the great conveyor tube. Sam looked up its circular orifice, stretching almost five thousand feet aloft, and wondered. Were they expected to climb those smooth, coldly glowing walls?

Tomson jerked resistor packs from an emergency kit, strapped them on the two strangers. "Do as I do," he said, "and do not fear."

Sam moved the lever over obediently. Kleon understood and followed suit. Sam Ward could not repress a startled cry; Kleon called upon Hermes, the god of swiftness. They were catapulting upward at breath-taking speed.

Sam caught glimpses of a mighty civilization as he fled smoothly up: platforms which led into levels crowded with swarming humanity; huge machines that glowed and blasted and spun and gyrated; endless quarters; glittering miles of strange sights; laboratories; enormous sectors of fiery tumult, tier on tier, until he grew dizzy.

Then, new levels—a different world. Underneath lay teeming life, sprawling vastness, machinery, technique. Here were soft green patches shimmering under dewy artificial luminance; flowers of strange blooms and stranger fragrance; a soft, lapping interior lake, blue as cobalt, warmed and perfumed; multicolored buildings, spaciously set, gracious with curves and melting outlines; noble figures who gazed through transparent sections at their upward rush with incurious eyes and returned to their dalliance.

Then, suddenly, the mighty shaft ended. Tomson gestured and switched the lever to neutral. Sam and Kleon did likewise. Harri had quit them at the level of the lesser Technicians. Only the chief Technicians could converse with the Olgarchs.

They glided to a halt, whipped over to a landing platform. For an awful moment Sam thought he was slipping, would plummet downward the five thousand feet he had journeyed. The solid stance felt grateful to his muscles.

Tomson beckoned them on. A frescoed panel opened. They went in.

A simultaneous exclamation burst from ancient Greek and middle-period American alike. Sam blinked. At first it seemed as if they had come out upon a sky of lambent hue. Above them stretched a vault like that of heaven itself, with glowing stars, a silver moon that swung in slow orbit from side to side. Then he realized what it was. A very cunning and magnificent representation, on a vaulted dome, of an ancient sky, projected by invisible mechanisms, even like the planetariums of the twentieth century. Which meant that this building, or city, or world, whichever it might be, was wholly inclosed from the rest of earth—a cosmos self-contained, unitary.

He had not long to speculate. Tomson beckoned them into a tear-drop conveyance of white metal. They got in. A pressure on an inset and they darted off, rising low in the air, skimming over the level at a speed that Sam estimated at five hundred miles per hour. Yet there was no motor, no gears, no whirling propeller. Nor did the wind whip through them as it should. Sam could only figure that somehow the strange vehicle carried its own shell of air along with it.

Kleon pressed close to him, gripped his sword fiercely. This was magic beyond his knowledge. Sam grinned encouragingly at the Greek. "Something like this was in my time also," he told him. "It is better than horses or chariots."

An understanding had arisen between the two. They felt closer akin to each other than to Tomson, who represented the future. And Sam, however lamely, could speak the Grecian tongue.

Sam leaned over the side, breathless. It was paradise over which they were skimming. Everywhere, up to the dim slope of the domed horizon, were white-glowing dwellings, noble parks, artificial lakes, limpid, pellucid; skimming cars like their own, carrying commanding figures, tall as themselves, nobly proportioned, quite unlike the Technician who guided them. Nowhere was there any sign of machinery, of activating power, of the teeming swarms of the lower levels.

"Something tells me," Sam gritted between his teeth, "I'm not going to like this."

But there was no time for further observations. The conveyor car dipped, glided to the ground in front of a building gleaming in blue and

gold. They were in a great park. Fountains splashed; music played softly; trees festooned with bright orange blossoms waved in an invisible breeze.

They got out quietly. Tomson stepped upon an oblong section of red metal; bowed toward the blank walls of the building with low genuflection. Sam watched him with narrowed eyes.

Kleon nodded with a pleased smile. "I knew he was but a slave," he said to the strange companion with whom he had been thrust into this future. "Only a slave would bend so humbly. Soon we shall meet his lord. I, a free Greek, am the equal of any one."

A voice issued from the building. "Enter, Tomson. You have done well." The wall seemed to roll back on itself. They went in. The wall retracted behind them.

V.

Tomson said nervously, "Forgive this unusual intrusion, head of the Olgarchs. But this is a problem which only you can solve."

Sam and Kleon stood a little apart, both straight and proudly erect. Of an equal height, the Greek was blond and blue-eyed, chiseled of feature; the American darker-hued, weather-tanned, keen of eye, firm-chinned. Two thousand years of civilization separated them; yet they were both men, in the sense that Tomson, for all his trained knowledge and intellectuality, was not.

Blue eyes and gray gazed steadily at Gano, head of the Olgarchs, apex of the city of Hispan. Gano did not resemble much the other Olgarchs of whom they had caught fleeting glimpses. He was thickset, sturdy of body and limb, with a massive head and craggy features. His hair was midnight black and his nose boldly jutting. But his eyes were decisive, penetrating, yet unpenetrable themselves. He sat on a low divan, his long, thin fingers idling over a desk panel before him on which colored squares glowed and darkened in irregular succession. A signal board, Sam rightly decided.

Gano nodded. "I know, Tomson," he said brusquely, as one too busy to waste precious moments. "I have received visor-signals of your find and of your coming." He turned, surveyed the two men of an older day keenly from under shaggy brows, said, "One speaks the language of Hispan, in a fashion. The other does not. We must remedy that." He raised his voice slightly. "Beltan, take these creatures whom the foundations of our city have yielded and teach them the proper speech, so that we may converse at ease."

From a corner of the long, simply furnished room a figure arose. Sam had not noticed him before. He came toward them casually. He smiled and his whole face lighted with the brightness of his smile. Sam warmed to him at once. "This chap is more like it," he told himself.

Beltan was an Olgarch, one of the ruling class, but he did not seem to take his position seriously. He even grinned at Tomson. It made the Technician uneasy. It was not proper. He knew his place in the scheme of things, and Beltan should likewise. But Kleon relaxed his grip on his sword. He, too, recognized a man in this Olgarch of the future, a man after his own heart.

"Strange," thought Sam, watching the pair, "how alike they are! Proud poise of head, bright, tawny hair, clean-cut, classical features, a certain arrogance of those who never knew superiors. They'll hit it off pretty well—even if ten thousand years separate them. As for me"—he shrugged his shoulders—"this Beltan looks all right. But Gano, the others, the whole set-up, I'm afraid that——"

Beltan said with a certain light mockery. "Come with me, you two who have survived from some remote past. Let me teach you the nice intricacies of our proper tongue. Then you may judge if it were wise for you to leave your own time for the noble hierarchy that is Hispan."

"At times," Gano cut in sharply, "your nonsense bores me, Beltan."

The young Olgarch bowed. There was a twinkle in his eye. "At times it bores me, too, noble Gano. That is one of the penalties of having been born an Olgarch."

Gano frowned, turned abruptly to the Technician. "Return to your duties, Tomson."

The chief Technician muttered submissive words, fled from the room. There was a shocked expression on his face. Sam grinned. Tomson, he felt, had a good bit of a Mid-Victorian Philistine in his make-up.

Kleon muttered aside to the American. "What do they say?"

"They say," Sam told him, "they will teach us their tongue. I know something of it already. But for you it may be hard."

Beltan took them out of the council chamber, into a side room on whose walls abstract figures were stamped in gold.

"How," inquired Sam, "do you expect to make much headway with my very recent friend, Kleon? He is a Greek before my time, and knows nothing of English."

"English?" repeated Beltan with raised eyebrows. "Ah, you mean Hispana. He will learn as fast as you who have a smattering. Perhaps you are not familiar with the Inducto-learner." He waved toward a metal helmet suspended at the end of a long, transparent tube, whose other end entered the ceiling and disappeared.

Sam shook his head. "Never heard of it," he confessed. "In my day we spent half our life learning things and the other half in forgetting them."

Beltan laughed. "We Olgarchs waste no time in achieving knowledge. It comes to us ready-made. The Technicians toil and we garner the fruits. It is simple enough. An Olgarch on birth, or you, for that matter, place your head within the reception chamber. Short waves, oscillating at high speeds, and automatically attuned to the wave length of your particular brain, pulse through the tube. The latter leads to the cubicles of the chief Technicians. At the signal, the proper Technician adjusts his own sending unit. He concentrates on the subject of which knowledge is desired. His thoughts, converted into current, are transmitted inside your skull, make the necessary impress on your neurone paths. Behold, you have learned, well and painlessly."

Sam was impressed. "And the Technicians, do they learn the same way?"

Beltan looked surprised. "Of course not. This is for the Olgarchs only. But do you enter, Sam Ward."

Sam hesitated, grinned and placed his head boldly within the helmet. Beltan made the necessary adjustment. Then he pressed buttons on an instrument board.

At first Sam felt only a gentle tingling, a slight massage of his skull. Then words began to flow into his consciousness, thoughts which he had not originated. His mind was no longer his own; alien speech beat upon him—words that were the same as those to which he had been accustomed, yet strangely distorted, clipped, shorn of unnecessary syllables. Subtly, the feeling grew that this was right and proper, the older speech an anachronism, not fit for present use.

When Beltan gestured for the removal of the helmet Sam was speaking Hispana, the English of the ninety-eighth century. "There, you see," remarked the Olgarch approvingly. "It is all very simple. And now, Kleon, who have been called the Greek, do you likewise."

Kleon was a very brave man, otherwise he would not have thrust his head without hesitation into the inclosure. This was powerful magic, he was certain, more powerful even than the incantations of the gymnosopists. Aristotle, Zeno, would never have approved of these barbarous practices. But he went—

VI.

Back in the council chamber the four men sat again—Gano, Beltan, Sam Ward and Kleon. They understood each other now, spoke the same tongue. But their thought processes were wholly different. Nor could this be helped. Heredity, environment, custom, the training of a lifetime, slow evolutionary molding could not be changed in a moment, not even by the marvelous science of Hispana.

Gano was courteous, if condescending. He listened patiently, first to the story of the Greek, then to the supplemental tale of the American. To him they were primitive savages of an elder day, interesting because of that, but wholly inferior to the Olgarchs and Technicians of Hispana. But Beltan listened with quiet eagerness to their respective pictures of earlier civilizations, of the glory of Greece and the march of Alexander into Asia, of the literature and drama of that ancient conglomerate of city states. It is true that he smiled at the naive scientific conceptions that Kleon brought forth, but the concepts of the Grecian philosophers struck him forcibly.

To Sam's story of the world of the twentieth century he listened more skeptically and with a certain fastidious distaste. The particular glory of that era—the march of science—he dismissed as mere halting steps toward the future. But the story of war and greed and human conflict, of waste and incredible futility, of shorn forests and mineral resources, of the World War and the League of Nations, of concentration camps and the Spanish madness, brought grimaces to his lips.

"No wonder," he said slowly, "the whole world died not long after your time. Your twentieth century represented a retrogression, a relapse into futile barbarism from the rather noble era of Kleon."

Sam bristled at that. No man likes to hear his own century impugned, and another cried up in its place, especially by the member of a third epoch. "Perhaps," he said heatedly, "I have been a bit more honest in my descriptions than Kleon. For example, he told you nothing of the slavery that existed in his day, the very fundamental upon which his civilization was based."

"I see nothing wrong in that," Kleon declared with dignity. "It is only right that those whose brains are dull and whose backs are strong should support in leisure those who can bring forth large thoughts and meditations. Has not this Hispana likewise its slaves—its Technicians and Workers—to bring the flower of Olgarchs like Gano and Beltan into being?"

Gano relaxed not a muscle of his face, but Beltan threw back his head and laughed. "By the hundred levels of Hispan, even in that early age the Greeks had learned the art of flattery. You are not quite right, friend Kleon. These are no slaves; these are but fixed castes of society, each with its duties firmly ordered. Hispan could not long exist without such strict, efficient subdivisions. Neither Workers nor Technicians are other than content with their lot." He smiled bitterly. "That is left only as the last privilege of the Olgarchs."

"Rather," Gano interposed calmly, "it is your peculiar privilege, Beltan. No one else of our class feels the necessity for such a primitive emotion. Sometimes I think you are a sport, a mutant, not a true Olgarch."

Sam turned to the head of the Olgarchs. "What," he asked with a certain irony, "is the true function of the Olgarchs in this society of Hispan? The Technicians, I understand, supervise and create the scientific mechanism by which the city lives; the Workers lend their brawn and muscle to its functioning; but the Olgarchs?"

Gano frowned. "We live," he answered sharply. "We are the reason for the creations of the Technicians, the labors of the Workers. We are the flower to which they are the roots and stems and leaves. They work, so that we may enjoy."

Kleon nodded approvingly. "Hispan is not far apart from Athens," he said. "There is much good in your system."

Sam set his teeth. "That," he declared, "has always been the rationalized justification for slavery, even to this future time. Has it ever occurred to you that the slaves—call them Technicians, Workers, Helots, what you will—would also like to live?"

"They are content, happy," Gano answered softly. "Ask Tomson, if you will, whether this is not the best of all possible worlds."

Beltan leaned forward. "Have you already forgotten, Sam Ward," he mocked, "what you have told us of conditions in your own world? What were the Workers then if not slaves? Slaves who worked at the beck of others, who toiled far longer hours than the Workers of Hispan, who starved in times of depression and starved only more slowly while employed, who went to war to fight and kill for the benefit of others. Did you not have also your Technician class who toiled in laboratories and created new inventions for the benefit of your wealthy, your Olgarchs?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Sam admitted unwillingly. "But at least they were free to work or not to work."

"To starve, you mean." Then, suddenly, the irony was gone from Beltan's voice, and a certain fierce sincerity took its place. "It isn't the plight of the Workers and Technicians that matters. They are well taken care of in Hispan; they do their work and are happy and content. No, it is the plight of the Olgarchs, the lords of Hispan, that matters most profoundly.

"Gano, here, at least has the illusion that he is performing a necessary function. The chief Technicians listen respectfully to his orders, obey them. But the city would flourish just the same if Gano never gave an order. As for the rest of us, we haven't even that poor illusion. We sit and dawdle and wrap ourselves in fine garments, listen to fine music, eat delicate fare, strut and stroll and discuss in noble-sounding, empty phrases. We are parasites, aimless, unnecessary. We are excrescences on the body politic. The city could see us vanish and continue its course without a single jar."

Gano was on his feet, his black brow clouded. "Beltan," he said sharply, "even an Olgarch may go too far."

Beltan's nostrils quivered. There was defiance in his gaze. Then he subsided with a quizzical smile. "You are right, Gano," he murmured. "Even an Olgarch may go too far."

Kleon was puzzled. He was mightily taken with Beltan, but he did not understand his dissatisfaction. "If the uses of philosophy fail," he interposed, "as they sometimes do, there is always the heady pursuit of war against the barbarian, the stranger."

The young Olgarch said sadly: "There are no barbarians or strangers, unless it be you two. The city of Hispan is all that remains of the world."

Sam gasped. "Do you mean that New York, London, Paris, the great countries, have been wiped out? How? Why?"

Beltan did not seem to see Gano's frown, or seeing, paid no heed.

"The story," he replied, "is not often told, and then only to Olgarchs. But since you already know about the once external world, there is no harm in telling it to you. Not long after your time, Sam Ward, in about the twenty-seventh century, the nations then existing had withdrawn more and more into their own boundaries. It was the logical, if mad development of tendencies in your own era. Nationalism, self-sufficiency, I believe, were the watchwords.

"The process accelerated, so our records report," Beltan continued. "Soon even the national borders grew too large. The nationalistic tendencies, the patriotisms, grew fiercer, more local. Each nation, cut off from intercourse with other nations, bounded by impregnably fortified frontiers, dependent only on itself for its economy, found quarrels arising within its own confines. The fires of localism, of hatred for aliens, of

patriotic fervor, finding nothing outside to feed upon, gnawed at their own vitals. Men of one community, a subdivision, a State, a city, decried the men of other communities, boasted of their superiority. They began to fight in internecine warfare.

"New nationalisms sprang up—nationalisms and hates based on smaller units. The countrysides became deserted, as the undefended farms and villages were devastated by the armies of opposing cities. The people collected in the towns, where there was a measure of protection. Soon the cry arose: New York for New Yorkers; London for the men of London; Paris for the Parisians!"

It was now Kleon's turn to nod. Evolution, he reflected, was but an eternal recurrence. For what was this Olgarch of the future describing but Greece in the time of Pericles and the Peloponnesian War?

"Soon," Beltan went on, "earth was broken up into a vast number of self-contained, heavily fortified cities. The old national boundaries were gone; newer and smaller ones took their place. Science advanced. Food was synthesized from inorganic elements; the secret of atomic power was discovered. The units grew smaller and smaller, drew away from each other. They fought, but the defenses were impregnable. The unfortified countryside became wholly deserted, unnecessary. It grew in the course of years into a tangle of wild forests, of desert stretches. All intercourse ceased. The cities rose vertically instead of horizontally along the earth, inclosed themselves in impassable barriers.

"Generation on generation added to these barriers, improved them with new methods of science. Such a one incloses Hispan, once a colony of your United States, now the sole survivor of all the teeming cities that once populated earth. A shield of neutron metal, impassable by any means known even to our science, was built up, layer on layer, around our city. No one knows how unimaginably thick it may be. No one has ever tried to penetrate its width."

Sam was appalled. He tried to grasp the story entire. It was logical, he admitted, up to a certain point. The forces involved were already at work in his own time. But to think that all the world had died, except for this enshrouded city of Hispan! "What happened to the others?" he insisted.

He saw the quick, warning glance that Gano flashed. He noted Beltan's hesitation. "On that," the latter admitted reluctantly, "the records are somewhat garbled. It seems there was a cataclysm some time in the forty-first century. A celestial body from outer space, traveling at high speed, smashed into the earth, destroyed a goodly part, laid waste all the cities but Hispan."

"Why Hispan alone?"

"Because our city was the only one inclosed with neutron walls. Not even the impact of millions of tons could penetrate its solidity."

"And no attempt was ever made to explore outside, to investigate conditions?"

Gano rose suddenly. "There is no way out," he said smoothly, "and there have been questions enough. We have been patient with your rather primitive ignorance, but it is time to call a halt. And remember," he finished meaningfully, "these tales which Beltan, who should have known better, has told you must go no further. Only the Olgarchs know of these, and Tomson, the chief Technician, the Workers, the other Technicians even, have no faintest idea that there is a world, a universe beyond this city of Hispan. To them there never was a sun or moon or stars, or earth or other cities and peoples. This is the round entire, the circumscription of their destinies. See to it that they hear no other."

"I see," Sam answered grimly. He was beginning to understand. It was only by a tremendous effort that he held back the rising wrath within him. But Kleon, child of an earlier, franker era, held no inhibitions. "I am a Greek," he declared proudly, "and bow to no man. My speech is my own, and subject to no restrictions."

Sam nudged him sharply. The brave fool was making trouble for them both.

Gano surveyed them thoughtfully, then nodded to Beltan as though he had not heard. "We shall decide on our course later," he said evenly, "when the council meets. In the meantime let these two be held in your quarters. You will take care of them."

Kleon's hand strayed to his sword. Sam's mouth set in a straight line. Very casually, his fingers touched the butt of his revolver. He knew what Gano meant. They were prisoners. The Greek, by his defiance, had brought this upon them. Yet he liked the headstrong warrior all the more for his folly. He was a man!

Beltan said with peculiar intonation, "Please come without delay."

Sam relaxed. He sensed the warning against resistance in the Olgarch's voice. Gano's delicately veined forefinger rested on a green square on the signal board. Intuitively, Sam felt that the slightest pressure would release blasting death against them.

"O.K.," he said laconically, in the elder speech. "Let's go, Kleon."

VII.

In silence the three entered a waiting car; in silence they sped over the noble park lands to a small, blank-walled building near the center of the level. In silence Beltan escorted them inside, the slide panel clicking smoothly behind them.

Sam cast a swift glance around. The walls were bare and smooth, the furnishings simple. There were no windows or doors other than the way they had entered. "We are prisoners, are we not?" he demanded.

Beltan looked at them with a certain pity. "I am afraid worse than that," he admitted. "Your presence in Hispan will give rise to talk, to questionings. You must eventually come in contact with the other castes. You know things of which they have no knowledge. Discontent may arise, dissatisfaction. The ordered peace and security of Hispan may be broken. You especially, Sam Ward, have subversive ideas. You do not like our distribution of functions?"

"I do not," Sam answered emphatically.

Beltan sighed. "I thought as much. As for you, Kleon, you are more sympathetic. But you spoiled it with your defiance of Gano. Still," he meditated, "if you would but admit your hastiness of speech, perhaps an exception might be made in your favor."

Kleon gazed at him with candid blue eyes. "Would that mean I must desert Sam Ward?"

"I'm afraid so."

The Greek stood poised like a young god. "Then I remain with him."

"Even if it means death?"

"Even so."

Beltan turned swiftly to the American. "And you," he inquired, "would you be willing to give an oath that your tongue would always remain submissive to the Olgarchs? Remember," he added hastily, "an answer to the contrary will mean a quiet dissolution. I am but one against many. In any event I shall plead your cause in the council, but my fellow Olgarchs will feel as Gano does."

Sam swallowed hard, but there was no tremor in his voice. "Kleon was right," he answered steadily. "We are not slaves. We can give no such promises."

Beltan sighed again. There was regretful admiration in that sigh. "You are both brave men," he said. "It seems that elder, more primitive day bred sturdier frames than now. Yet you must die. I see no way out."

Sam fingered his gun. He glanced significantly at Kleon. "At least," he remarked evenly, "we'll go out fighting."

Kleon rattled his sword. "By Zeus and Ares," he swore, "you speak sooth, friend Sam. We'll take a goodly number of these Olgarchs to the lower realms along with us."

"You won't have the chance," Beltan assured them. "Gano controls your fates literally at his finger tips. A pressure on the proper square before him and lethal rays sweep through this structure."

Somehow Sam's gun was in his hand, its cold muzzle pressed against the Olgarch's ribs. "I'm sorry to have to do this," he said crisply, "but we don't give up very easily. You, Beltan, will show us a means of escape, or you die along with us."

The Olgarch looked at the two desperate men. Kleon's sword was out, its keen point pressed against his other side. He shook his head slowly. "I am not afraid to die," he answered with simple dignity. "I am weary of this aimless dalliance to which I am bound. Slay, if you will."

Sam stepped back, sheathed his gun. Kleon raised his sword in salute. "You, too, are a man," the American approved. "We three, I think, given the chance, could conquer the universe."

A slow, unaccustomed red spread over the Olgarch's aristocratic features. "Believe me," he spoke earnestly, "I am your friend." Then he made a despairing gesture. "But there is no escape. I cannot help you. No nook or cranny of Hispan is remote from the search screens of the Olgarch council."

"I wouldn't stay here if I could," Sam declared harshly. "Your city of Hispan is a stench in my nostrils, with its brutal caste system, its limited round. Me—I prefer freedom and space and a bit of anarchy even, where men are human beings and not mere soulless cogs in a hierarchic society, no matter how efficient. There must be a way to get out."

"There isn't," Beltan replied somberly. "The neutron walls are impassable. And outside, besides wild desolation in which no man may live, there are lethal gases: Cyanogen, carbon monoxide, phosgene, products of the collision. The atmosphere has been destroyed. We do not

even know what, if anything, remains of earth, of the sun itself."

"That," Sam retorted with a grin, "is mere propaganda. Your Olgarchic ancestors must have been singularly adept at that sort of thing. Something tells me they foisted that tale even on themselves, in order to keep their position intact. If ever Workers or Technicians or even mutant Olgarchs like yourself came in contact with other forms of civilization, with other methods, there might be comparisons not at all favorable to Hispan."

Beltan's tone was sharp, quick. "Have you any proof of that?"

"None whatever," Sam admitted. "Call it intuition if you like, or merely the memory of somewhat similar propaganda methods in my own twentieth century."

The flame that lifted in Beltan's eyes died. "In any event," he said dully, "there is no way of ever finding out. The neutron walls cannot be pierced."

Kleon had been singularly silent. His fair brow was furrowed; he seemed plunged in profound thought. Now he raised his head suddenly. "Is there," he demanded, "a mountain, within the confines of Hispan where the Titans are wont to groan uneasily?"

Beltan stared. "I do not understand."

"He means," explained Sam, "a volcano."

"No; there is not."

"Then," shouted Kleon, "by the one-eyed Cyclopes, there is a way of escape."

"What the devil——" Sam cried.

"Listen to me," the Greek said fiercely. "The pyramid Hotep built for me to sleep into this stupid future lay close to the flanks of such a volcano."

"That's true," Sam averred. "I remember it. But what of it?"

"This! According to the formula of the gymnosophists I required the gases from the smoking mountain for my chambered sleep. I drew them in by cunning vents which pierced the central fires. These opened to the day at the top of the mountain. Stones, nicely pivoted, sealed the vents after the gases poured into the chamber. Only I know the secret of their presence, of the springs by which they may pivot once more. The pyramid is within the city; the burning mountain is without. We shall escape by means of those passages which lead far underground from one to the other."

Sam pounded the Greek's shoulder. "Kleon, you are a genius." Then a thought struck him, clouded his joy. "Out of the frying pan into the fire." He grimaced. "Your passages lead to the central fires, you say. That means to the inner crater. We'd suffocate or frizzle to death."

"The mountain may have ceased its complaining long since," Kleon answered calmly. "And brave men die but once."

"Right!" Sam chuckled. "We start at once. We still have the gadgets that Tomson gave us. They'll drop us down the shaft." He stuck out his hand to Beltan. "Good-by," he said. "Thanks! You were the one bright spot in Hispan."

The Olgarch's eyes were inscrutable. "Warnings of your descent down the conveyor tube will be signaled back to Gano from every level," he said. "You'll never reach your buried pyramid."

"We'll chance it," Sam retorted.

"I won't permit such chances."

Sam looked at him incredulously. "You mean you're backing down? I thought you were our friend."

"I mean," Beltan replied quietly, "I am going with you. The levels will respect my presence."

"You're a good egg," Sam said with feeling. "But it's no go. You'd only get into a mess of trouble when you come back."

"I'm not coming back," the Olgarch retorted patiently.

"Huh! What's that?"

"I mean I'm going out into the strange new world with you." He smiled quizzically. "Didn't you say a little before that we three, given the

chance, could conquer the universe?"

"But—but—" Sam spluttered. "Why, damn it, you can't do this. The chances of our getting through, or of survival even if we do, are a thousand to one. Why should you give up everything—"

"Because I am tired of this life; because in rawness and chaos I may find again that soul you spoke of; because—I am your friend."

The three men, products of three different ages, stared at one another with level brows. Sam felt an unaccustomed lump in his throat, spoke gruffly. "Then we'd better get started—before Gano gets on our trail."

VIII.

It was easier than they had anticipated.

Under Beltan's guidance they darted in his conveyor car for the tube, bailed into the great shaft with swiftness and dispatch. Down five thousand feet they catapulted, meeting Technicians and Workers on their way, getting humble salutes because of the Olgarchic presence, curious glances as they whirled ever downward.

Then the final excavation, the still-yawning chamber which the blasters had laid bare. Harri, back on the job, looked up in alarm at this unprecedented invasion of an Olgarch. But Beltan took the trouble to explain. The sleepers, he said, were going to disclose to him the method by which they had slept intact these many ages. In the meantime, it was unnecessary for Harri and his corps of Workers to remain. And they were, he added with authority, to hold their tongues.

In seconds the final level was clear.

"Now"—Sam grinned—"strut your stuff, O Kleon." He had noted Beltan's anxious glances at the visor screen implanted in the upper shaft.

It was an even more anxious moment before the Greek found what he was looking for. A tiny, almost imperceptible depression in the ancient wall. A simultaneous exhalation of withheld breath burst from three pair of lips as the section of the wall turned on itself, disclosed a dark hole within. Sam, remembering his former experience, would have held back to determine if hot, volcanic gases would belch forth. But the Olgarch had cried out sharply. "Quick, run! We're discovered!"

They dived headlong into the baleful opening. Kleon flung around, thrust his shoulder against the massive stone. It swung smoothly and soundlessly back into position. They crouched, panting, in utter darkness.

Just in time, too! For at that moment there was a low, humming sound that rose swiftly to an unbearable scream. "Gano has turned on the blasters," said Beltan with a groan. "They'll shear through this thickness of rock in two or three seconds."

But the scream of rushing power gave way to a mightier roar. There was a huge crash, a tumbling, grinding noise. The solid rock swayed crazily underfoot. Then there was silence.

"The pyramid has fallen," Kleon told them shakely. "There must be a hundred feet of earth and rock and stone behind. All return is blocked."

"Then the answer is *forward*," Sam responded with a cheerfulness he did not quite feel. If the volcano was still active, if, in the course of long centuries, the crater had become clogged with lava——

It was a long, steep, arduous climb in total darkness—silent, except for grunts and low curses as they bumped blindly into jagged edges. Up, always up, in fetid, clammy atmosphere——

Then the path widened suddenly and they were at the bottom of a huge bowl. Sam looked up fearfully, then let out a great shout that brought the echoes tumbling about them. "The stars! I see the stars!"

High overhead, framed in limited blue, were tiny pin points of light, peering down incuriously upon them. There followed a mad scramble, a clawing and backward slithering in crumbling, weathered lava flows of an ancient epoch. The volcano was extinct. The air was foul but breathable.

Then they were out, staring with avid eyes upon the enveloping scene. It was night and the fresh breeze stirred their hair, ruffled their clothes. Three men, of different civilizations, clad in different habits, united only in a common bond of escape, emerged into an incredible world!

To one side, framed by the heights of the Sierra Madre, reared a vast, light-quenching surface. Five thousand feet it sprang, massive, somber, swinging over the plain to either side as far as the eye could reach. The neutron-walled city of Hispan!

To the other side, past the mountains, a great wilderness stretched interminably without end, without beginning. There was no sign of life, of human habitation, of anything but tangled, savage-crowding trees. There wasn't a light, an airplane, not even a boat on the tideless darkness of the ocean beyond. Even the stars were strange, the old configurations gone.

Sam shivered. It was cold, but it was not that which made his flesh crawl. Suppose the tale of Hispan had been true? Suppose there were no other cities, no other human beings in that shoreless jungle? Suppose——

He turned to the others, grinned. "At least one thing is certain," he said lightly, "the air is good. If deadly gases once existed, they have long since been dissipated or made chemically harmless." He raised his voice, "Forward, comrades, to whatever destiny awaits us!"

"Forward!" cried Kleon, the Greek.

"Forward!" spoke Beltan, the Olgarch.

The three men turned their faces resolutely toward the East, toward the home of the rising sun. Slowly, they descended the mountain.

[End of *Past, Present and Future*, by Nat Schachner]