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MAGAZINE

AVENGEERS of  
SPACE  
thrilling science novel

HENRY KUTTNER

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# DICTATOR OF THE AMERICAS

By  
JAMES HALL

First published *Marvel Science Stories*,  
August 1938.

*Could John Stone and that lovely green-eyed Aphrodite free themselves from the mad Dictator who ruthlessly ruled the Americas of 2503 A.D.—with every fiendish scientific device of that generation at his hellish call?*



*Somehow Stone got to his feet, in time to see the girl dragged into the beast's embrace*

The Pleasure Garden was a riot of colorful, sensual brilliance. Rainbow-hued fountains tinkled softly; warm lights glowed on the ivory flesh of half-clad girls who lounged on the velvety turf, their slim arms caressing the men beside them. Incense and heady wine flamed through the brain of John Stone as he sprawled on silken cushions, idly watching the bacchanale.

Yet deep in Stone's heart was a chill, deadly warning. He knew what lay behind this saturnalia, held at the order of Vail Nestor, Dictator of the Americas. Another night of red love to make Stone forget that he was rightful ruler of the land, that Nestor had killed Stone's father two years before and assumed control of the government. Not for the first time the young man felt rage rising within him, hatred for the tyrant who had brought his army of Vandals to Washington in 2503 A. D.—and who now held the country in a grip of iron!

A white hand caressed his cheek, drew his head down to the ready lips of a blonde girl, her softly rounded shoulders and breasts scarcely hidden by gauzy draperies. But Stone pulled free—and paused, staring at the open clearing before him.

In the violet glow of a spotlight a woman danced—and Stone's eyes widened at sight of her. Slim as a naiad, yet her alabaster body set the man's pulses pounding. She danced, languorously at first, and then faster, wildly swaying and whirling to the throbbing beat of unseen musicians. Laughing, she posed before Stone, flaunting the alluring beauty of her form, revealed by a translucent skirt and golden breastplates. She darted forward as the music swelled to a crescendo, and her lips brushed Stone's ear. Her breath was an exotic perfume as she whispered,

“Come! Come with me . . .”

The girl beside Stone tried to hold him back, but he rose and let the dancer tug him into the shadow of the trees. She led him through the garden till the revelry was a far, faint hubbub in the distance. Then she paused, and Stone drew her close—set his lips against hers, feeling the pliant warmth of her body against his own. His throat was dry, and the flaming passion of the girl's kiss was liquid fire racing through his veins.

She drew back. Glancing around quickly, she said, “Wait, John Stone! I bring a message.”

“Eh?” She was a gleaming statue in the moonlight, a statue of sensuous madness, and at first Stone did not understand. Then his eyes widened. “A message? What—”

“From the Scientists. Vail Nestor has ruled the Americas for two years now, keeping you a prisoner here. But all over the country men are getting ready to march on Washington, aided by the weapons the Scientists have made. The rising will come next week, and then—if we succeed—you'll be restored to power. The people loved your father, and they know you—trust you. Nestor they hate. So—”

“Nestor's making America into a nation of slaves!” Stone growled. “But this is good news! I've tried to escape, Lord knows! But Nestor's powerful.”

The girl nodded. “I know. But he didn't dare kill you, for then all America would rise and crush him. He wanted to drug you with pleasures, making you his tool, obedient to his wishes. He'd kill you now if he could get rid of your body without leaving traces—but that's impossible in these times. He could ray you to ashes, dissolve the ashes—but the Scientists would detect what had happened.”

“Well?”

“Hold yourself ready. We've learned that Nestor's discovered how to break the space-time continuum—how to break down the wall that surrounds this universe. He's found out how to open a gate into another dimension, and such a device will be a terrible weapon in his hand.

So the revolt will come in a week. You must be ready.” The girl glanced up as an aircraft droned overhead, its lights glowing against the stars. “I’m called Dorna. If I send you a message—”

And then, without warning, came—the inexplicable!

All light vanished.

Instantly utter darkness blanketed Stone and Dorna. The man whispered an oath, his hand going to his belt for a weapon that was not there. The starlight overhead, the distance searchlights—all had flashed out and disappeared in one jet-black curtain. Very faintly a distant humming sounded.

“Dorna!” Stone said sharply. There was no response. He made a movement toward the girl

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He could not stir! Some amazing paralysis held him fettered. His body was numb and devoid of feeling—and a strange lassitude was creeping up and overwhelming his mind.

The humming grew louder. A cold gray radiance began to grow, and in its light Stone saw Dorna beside him, her slim, half-nude body stiff and rigid. But, aside from her, Stone could see nothing. The sky was invisible; in its place was a gray ceiling of radiance.

Above him something swam into view. A platform, hanging unsupported in empty air, about which shimmering streamers of light played. Somehow it hurt Stone’s eyes to look at that platform; there was a strange vibration about it that made it a thing half-real, half-solid—and transparent at times in a ghostly fashion. It floated down slowly. On it stood Nestor, Dictator of the Americas—and a girl.

Clean-shaven, ruggedly handsome, wearing the unornamented gray uniform of the Vandal army, Vail Nestor smiled down at Stone. The girl—

*This was Aphrodite. . . .*

No earthly woman could have such beauty, Stone thought. Cool green eyes, faintly mocking, watched him intently, and curved lips twisted into a smile. Her rounded breasts pushed out the sheer green robe she wore, a garment that clung to her thighs and lyric hips, outlining them and the tapering columns of her legs. Aphrodite, risen from the sea. . . .

Nestor pointed, turned to his companion—and the girl nodded. She lifted her hand, which held a shining metallic device. And a curious feeling began to oppress Stone—a feeling of weightlessness. His feet seemed to have difficulty in resting on the ground. A strong pull was dragging him up toward the platform.

He could not move, could not stir a muscle to break the strange fetters that bound him. He felt himself lifted, felt himself moving up with increasing speed. At his side Dorna kept pace. They were on the platform, and Nestor’s low laughter was in Stone’s ears.

“So we are ready, Marsalaya,” he said. “It was not difficult—” His hand went out, touching studs on a low keyboard near by. A wrenching jar shook Stone. He lay full length on the platform, rigid and motionless, watching with wide eyes. Beside him was Dorna, a silent statue.

The grayness changed. A sense of frightful vertigo clutched Stone. He seemed to be falling vertically, and at the same time slipping sideways with tremendous speed. For an amazing moment he was conscious of two selves, coexistent, hanging on the borderline between two sectors—one the edge of the space-time continuum—between dimensions!

Swiftly Nestor kicked at Dorna’s body. The green robed woman cried out, tried to stop him—but too late. Dorna rolled from the platform, and Stone caught a glimpse of her face

twisted with horror. Then sheer madness came.

As the girl fell from the platform, something seemed to rip her form apart, shredding it instantly into its component atoms, rending the atoms, tearing, whirling—

Nestor murmured, “She exists in two dimensions now, Stone. Her body, her mind, her ego are split and destroyed down to the least electron. For you—” The jutting jaw thrust forward — “I have other plans!”

The sense of vertigo gripped Stone again. Grayness seemed to close in upon him, blotting out his senses. . . .

He awoke slowly, vaguely conscious of dim red light all around. The girl whom Nestor had called Marsalaya stood above him, the metallic weapon in her hand. She leveled it at him.

Painfully he tried to leap to his feet, to roll away. He could not. From the corner of his eye he saw little green patches of grass all around, and, in the distance, curiously regular tiny mounds of stone. Amazement struck through the man. Incredibly tiny creatures were moving all around him—

Human beings—fantastically small!

From the girl’s weapon a ray of green light sprang out, struck his breast—flowed all over his body, bathing him in weird fire. But there was no pain. Merely a curious shrinking sensation—and again he noticed the little men, grown somehow larger. And the grass—surely it was a forest, steadily increasing in size. He saw above him, through an emerald veil, Marsalaya, a towering giant. Abruptly realized what was happening. The power of the green ray was reducing his body to infinitesimal size.

Stone lost consciousness, but not completely. Dimly he was conscious of being guided through winding corridors . . . and there came a time when he lay staring up at a black shining ceiling, realizing that he was once more in control of his faculties.

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Painfully he crawled to his feet. The paralysis had left him. The room in which he stood was a square of polished blackness, with a window through which dim red light crept. He went to it.

It was no earthly landscape at which he gazed! A dull, red sun, thrice the size it should have been, hung over a world of jungle gone mad. A tremendous green sweep of forest lay from horizon to horizon far below, giant trees towering hundreds of feet into the air, huge vines writhing and twisting like serpents. They seemed to move as though alive—and with a dreadful certainty Stone knew that they were living things. Plant-beings, coiling and darting up as though striving to reach him. He shuddered in the cold wind that blew across this alien world.

A low voice said something in a language that was certainly not English. Yet, amazingly, Stone understood. The words seemed to form in his brain, as though by thought-transference.

“You are awake? How do you feel?”

The girl, Marsalaya, stood nearby as he turned—still Aphrodite, with the tender body of a goddess and cryptic eyes of emerald. With a stride Stone reached her, gripped her arms, the soft flesh denting beneath his fingers. Involuntarily he felt a little thrill at the girl’s nearness, at the exotic fragrance that crept out from her long auburn tresses.

He fought it down, glared at her savagely. “Where the devil am I? Where’s Nestor?”

Marsalaya laughed at him. Again the unfamiliar syllables rippled from her red lips—and again his mind understood the meaning of the strange words. “But you do not ask that. You ask, ‘Will she understand my tongue?’ I read your mind, John Stone.”

“Yeah? Then, if you can understand me—take me back to Washington! I’m needed there. Take me to where Nestor is!”

Green eyes mocked him. “Washington? It has never existed in this universe. Another dimension—another time-sector—why, this Washington of yours may have been dust for a million years! Or it may not have yet sprung from the soil of your planet. No—you must obey me. You cannot do otherwise.”

“That so?” Stone grunted. He prisoned the girl’s wrist, swung her about and bent her arm up behind her back. She fought savagely, writhed free, clawed at his face with her nails. But Stone was too strong for her.

He bent the girl back easily, prisoning her hands with one of his own. “Where’s Nestor?” he growled.

“Gone back to your planet! He—when he came through the dimensions, he told me certain things. In return he asked me to destroy you.”

Stone looked down at that alluring face so close to his own. “Well?”

“I—I agreed—but I had no wish to slay you. Let me go! Please!” Her lips were twisted in pain.

Stone released her warily—and swung about abruptly as a shadow darkened the room. Behind him Marsalaya’s voice came, soft, urgent.

“Do not move! As you value your life! He may pass. . . .”

Something flitted past the window, a black formless object that sent a shudder down Stone’s back, though he could not have said why. He waited, but the thing did not return. “What was that?” Stone asked the girl.

For a long time she did not reply. Then she went quickly to the window and peered out. “The Beast,” she said without turning. “It was seeking its prey. I agreed to Nestor’s proposal, Stone, because I wanted aid to slay the Beast.”

“Couldn’t Nestor kill it for you?” Stone asked. “What is it, a bird of some kind?”

“Nestor would not,” Marsalaya said bitterly. “Nor would he leave me a weapon with which to fight it.”

“And he’s gone back to earth. Well, I don’t see why I should fight this beast of yours. I owe you nothing. Can you take me back to my own world?”

“I cannot,” she said, and lifted herself to her full height. “I command you—”

Stone smiled.

The green eyes grew baleful. “Some power have I, Stone. I can cause you great pain. . . .”

“I can cause you a little, too.”

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The girl’s hand flashed down, lifted with a shining weapon gripped in it. “You fool!” she whispered—and from the device a red ray lanced out. It struck Stone’s body—held the man motionless in paralysis.

And agony lanced into every muscle. Frightful pain tore at his nerve ends, till sweat burst from every pore, and made him groan with the grinding pain. The red ray flickered out. Stone fought to remain erect, though his legs seemed turned to water. Nausea dug into his stomach.

“Now—will you obey?”

Stone made a desperate attempt to leap at the girl, but she sprang back alertly, her weapon lifted. “Stay where you are,” she cautioned.

“Go to the devil!” Stone snarled. “If you think—”

The green eyes were puzzled. Suddenly Marsalaya tossed the gun aside. "I do not wish to hurt you," she said softly. "Not even to save my people—but you must slay the Beast. You must!"

Stone shook his head doggedly.

"I will give you anything—even—" Marsalaya's face was suddenly pale. She said very softly, "Even myself."

And quickly her hands went up, slipping the emerald-green gown from her shoulders. It rippled down past the ivory globes of her breasts, the flat smoothness of her stomach, the delicate contour of her thighs, to fall in a crumpled ring about her feet.

"Even myself," the girl murmured.

Blood pulsed hotly through Stone's veins. The girl's nude body held a flame of unearthly beauty that drew him like a magnet. Involuntarily he took a step forward.

And then Marsalaya was in his arms, her breasts cushioned against his chest, her white form clinging to him. Her lips found his, and her perfumed breath was an exotic madness, clamping Stone's throat with the mad surge of passion. Aphrodite, indeed!

Goddess of love, all ecstasy and all delight! She strained against Stone, her fingers caressing his hair, and his hands slipped down, caressing a body that was like flame. His mouth found the soft hollow of her throat. . . .

She drew back. She whispered, "Will you slay the Beast—for such a reward?"

Sanity came coldly to Stone. He battled the red surge of passion that drove him toward the girl's white body; he said hoarsely, "No! Unless you return me to my planet—"

Marsalaya burst out, "I tell you—" She stopped, frowning. "Perhaps—yes! Perhaps I can do even that. Not by myself, but with Nestor's aid."

Stone laughed unsteadily. "Not much chance of that."

Swiftly the girl bent, the white cones of her breasts dancing and swaying, and recovered her robe; she slipped into it hurriedly. "Wait. He won't give his aid willingly, but we'll take it nevertheless. Nestor will return here."

"How d'you know?"

"I saw it in his mind. I read his thought, but he didn't know that. He will return to make sure you're dead. Then—I swear by the Silent Watchers—you will return to your planet!"

Stone grunted. "I must gamble, I suppose. My only chance, anyway. Well, granted that you're right—what then?"

"You must slay the Beast."

"So that's the bargain, eh?"

"Yes. It may not be a fair one, but—what can I do? I must save my people and my throne."

"What is this Beast of yours?" Stone asked.

"Listen. We know something of science in R'han, but not much. We know the secret of invisibility, and of size-change—"

"The green ray?" Stone broke in.

She nodded. "It is that which caused the trouble. One of my subjects—a murderer, condemned to death—was used as a subject by a scientist, as is our custom. The scientist was experimenting with atomic warp. He was trying to do what Nestor did successfully—open a gate to another dimension. But he took the wrong path. He used his rays on this subject's body, attempting to transport the man into another dimension by working directly on the atoms of his body—and he failed. But a change occurred—"

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Horror grew in the girl's eyes. "The murderer's atomic structure was changed—frightfully! He is a monster, with the strength of a giant. And when he realized his power he escaped and seeks to rule R'han. He is no longer human—we call him the Beast. He can even fly, by attaching wings to his arms—huge wings, thrice as long as his body—and manipulating them. Strength can be a horrible thing when misused."

"Now I understand," Stone said, nodding. "All but one thing. Why do you think I can kill this Beast if you can't?"

"We have few weapons. We are not a warlike race. Our arms are based on the vibration principle, and because of the Beast's atomic change, vibration has no effect on him. So he seeks to make me his mate, and to rule R'han. But you can slay him, for men of your planet are far stronger than our men. When your body shrank, you retained all the muscular power you had on earth, compressed into a body a hundred times smaller. So you are at least as strong as the Beast, if not stronger.

"Our strength is slight," the girl said. "But yours—" She turned, pressed her hand against the wall. A panel slid aside revealing a hollow. Marsalaya murmured soft syllables into it. With a gentle click the bottom of the niche fell away, lifted again. On it now was a glowing, pale stone fist-large, cut into a dozen facets that reflected Stone's face as he looked at the gem.

"It is the *rogthlya* jewel," Marsalaya said. "One of the hardest elements on our planet. Only the strongest hammers can crush it. Squeeze it in your hand, Stone."

He took the gem, compressed his fingers tentatively about it. It shattered like celluloid, trickled from his clenched fist in a stream of fine dust and coruscating fragments.

"So," the girl murmured. "Your strength is sufficient. Will you fight the Beast?"

Stone hesitated. "If that's the only chance I have of getting back to earth, I suppose I must—yes. But you'll keep your part of the bargain—help me fight Nestor?"

She nodded. "Come."

Stone followed the girl up a winding corridor of black metal that ended in a square of blue sky overhead. They emerged on a roof-top. Advancing toward the edge, Stone saw incredibly far beneath the shining minarets and towers of a city. A few pinnacles stabbed up almost to the dizzy height where they stood. The streets beneath were almost deserted. A few foreshortened people moved about quickly, furtively.

Stone turned to see Marsalaya standing alone in the center of the roof. Her head was lifted proudly, and from her red lips came a shrill, fierce crying. Summoning the Beast! Using herself as bait, to draw the monster-man to battle!

Stone hurried to her. "Can you give me a weapon?" he asked. "A sword—a club, even?"

She turned mocking green eyes to him. "The Beast is invulnerable to our weapons—they shatter on him. Many of our warriors have died proving that." The color drained swiftly from her face, leaving it strained and pale. "The Beast comes! May the Silent Watchers guard you, Stone!"

The whirl of beating pinions sounded. As the man turned he saw a frightful and incredible form rise above the edge of the black tower's roof.

It was the Beast.

The human aspects of the thing made it more horrible than any merely animal traits would have been. The very atoms of the creature's body had been insanely warped, and in the change had come sheer horror. The thing was short and squat, seemingly boneless, with a huge cylindrical head set on humped, broad shoulders, from which spread great wings of thin metal. The monster's flesh shimmered with changing colors, and somehow a perpetual shudder of

tiny movement seemed to shake the framework of the gross body. Gigantic glowing eyes watched Stone, flicked past him to the girl.

The creature rasped out an angry, triumphant cry. It grated unpleasantly on Stone's eardrums, reinforcing his impression that this monster was utterly inhuman—utterly unnatural. It should never have existed in a sane world. It was a living blasphemy, and its snarl, as it moved forward, seemed to shrill up and up beyond the pitch of audible sound, sending a lancing pain through Stone's head. But he moved forward, conscious of a fear and repugnance he could not suppress.

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But he was unprepared for the Beast's power. The monster charged and sent Stone crashing down on his back, helpless under a heavily oppressive weight. For a second the thing hovered over Stone—and then raced on. From Marsalaya came a cry of knife-edged horror.

Somehow Stone got to his feet, in time to see the girl dragged into the Beast's embrace. She slipped away, but a taloned claw darted out, pulled her close again. The girl's gown was ripped into shreds, and long red scratches sprang out on her bare flesh as the monster fought to subdue her. Abruptly Marsalaya went limp, her white body in strange contrast to the hideous gleaming hide of the Beast.

The monster's face came down, nuzzling the girl's bare throat. And with a hoarse shout Stone sprang forward, madness of crimson rage flaming within his brain at sight of that blasphemous desecration.

The Beast dropped Marsalaya callously and turned to meet Stone. For a second he felt sick and giddy with the malefic hatred that blazed from the huge eyes; talon-like paws reached out; obviously the monster expected to crush this presumptuous opponent easily. The claws dug into Stone's shoulders, dragging him forward.

This would be the testing. Was the creature too strong? Would Stone's body be smashed and broken in that frightful grip?

Stone sent a sledgehammer punch, with all his strength, at the inhuman mask so close to him. And he saw amazement leap into the staring eyes of the Beast. Flesh gave beneath the man's fist; yet the monster did not seem to be harmed. Its wings smashed and crumpled as it rocked back and forth; it released one paw, tore them free, flung them aside. It closed with Stone, roaring.

The feel of the thing's body was loathsome. It seemed to crawl and give beneath Stone's hands. A foul breath was hot in the man's nostrils as he drove vicious blows at the writhing, seemingly boneless body. The two reeled toward the roof's edge.

Smash and rip and tear, with sick horror mounting slowly within Stone. Could the thing be invulnerable? Could he even hurt it? He was aching from the Beast's mauling, blood dripping from a dozen wounds. Yet he had made no impression on the glistening, vari-colored hide.

To his ears came Marsalaya's voice, urgent, warning. "Stone—Nestor returns! Kill the beast swiftly or I cannot aid you!" Over the monster's humped shoulder he saw the girl, nude save for the tattered remnant of the gown about her hips, standing with arms outstretched. A surge of strength raced into Stone's body.

He bent low, lifted the Beast on his shoulders, felt a great talon rip into the muscles of his chest. He tore it away, staggered toward the roof's edge, reeling beneath the monster's weight. Bellowing, the Beast fought, almost writhed free.

Though Stone could not actually hurt his opponent, his strength was slightly greater—just enough to turn the tide of battle. The two, man and monster, staggered and wrestled on the

roof's edge, until at last Stone flung himself flat on the black surface, his head cracking sickeningly against the stone.

The smooth blackness gave! It cracked and crumbled and powdered, and Stone felt himself slipping forward into nothingness. The Beast, across his shoulders, clawed at him, rearing. He thrust it away with desperate blows. And suddenly—

It fell. It slid over the brink and dropped, its death cry skirling up and fading as it plummeted down. Stone almost followed it, but managed to roll aside and fling himself back in time, with the hands of Marsalaya aiding him. The girl was at his side, her eyes wide and exultant.

She cried, "Wait! Wait here, Stone!" And she raced into the black opening that led down into the tower. Gasping, weak with reaction, Stone stood silent till Marsalaya returned a minute later. In her hand was a small, shining crystal and an instrument of silvery metal. She thrust the crystal at Stone.

"Quick—Nestor is here. Squeeze the gem—gently. But not until I tell you—"

---

Marsalaya's fingers tightened on the metal object she held. From it a green ray flicked out, bathed Stone. Through a shimmering emerald nimbus he saw the towertop shrinking, dropping away beneath him. The city grew tiny below, only the white form of Marsalaya remaining the same as she kept pace with Stone's growth.

"You've slain the Beast," she said softly. "My gratitude will not be in words. Squeeze the jewel. It's the secret of invisibility—"

Stone tightened his grip on the gem, and instantly was in utter blackness. Faintly came the girl's voice.

"Through the jewel . . . look through it."

He obeyed, lifting it to his eyes, and saw as through a glass Marsalaya's face and green-veiled ivory body beside him. He took the gem from his eyes and was in blackness; replaced it, and saw the green jungle, the black city, already tiny and indistinct below.

"Keep silent till I give the word," the girl said. "You'll be invisible to Nestor. Keep the gem close to you, or you'll become visible again. When I tell you, jump onto the platform."

Stone dared not answer. For, swiftly shrinking as he grew, seemingly coming down from incredible largeness as it dwindled, was the dimension platform, and upon it stood Nestor, handsome face grimly alert. He leaned forward as he saw Marsalaya, and his lips tightened. Stone held his breath, waiting for Nestor to see him, but the Dictator looked only at the girl. Exultation flooded Stone; he was invisible to his enemy!

The growth stopped. Marsalaya, Stone, Nestor, were all approximately the same height, the girl perhaps half a head shorter than the others. She said softly, "Nestor, you've come back."

The Dictator eyed her warily. "Yes. Is Stone dead?"

Marsalaya nodded. "The Beast killed him. Will you give me weapons now that I've done as you wished?"

Nestor looked startled. "I said nothing—oh, you read my mind, eh? The devil with you, Marsalaya! No, I'll give you no weapons—but you'll come back to earth with me. Stone's dead, where the Scientists can never prove his death, and you'll join him, after I've had my pleasure of you!"

Roaring laughter, the Dictator swept out a thick arm, gripped the girl, dragged her onto the platform. Her bare shoulders dented under the pressure of Nestor's fingers.

“You’re beautiful!” the man whispered hoarsely. “When I first saw you I wanted you. But I needed your aid first. Now things are changed—” Nestor’s thick lips found Marsalaya’s soft ones, and the girl cried out as the Dictator bent her back.

“Stone! Help me—”

With a bound Stone sprang onto the platform. A frightful shock made him dizzy for a moment, and the gem dropped from his suddenly relaxed fingers. Nestor gasped an oath. Stone, no longer invisible, knew that his enemy saw him plainly.

The Dictator swiftly whirled, let his fingers dance over the keyboard beside him. And instantly grayness was all about them, save for a little square of humming vibration above the platform. They were plunging through the dimensions, flung into alien space by the weird power of the Dictator’s machine.

Now Nestor saw that he had been too slow, that Stone was charging forward, eyes cold and deadly. The Dictator’s hand flashed down to his hip; his gun came up and bellowed death in one incredibly fast movement.

A thin pencil-ray of heat charred Stone’s shoulder. He smashed against Nestor, who went reeling back, clutching at nothingness. He dropped over the edge of the platform, screaming like a lost soul. And instantly his body vanished—torn asunder, wrenched apart like clouds in a gale, as Dorna, the spy sent by the scientists, had vanished, slain by Nestor. The same fate had overtaken the Dictator!

Vertigo consumed Stone; he reeled back, clutched at the keyboard to steady himself. Remembering how Nestor had guided the platform, he bent forward, examining the half dozen keys that lay before him.

Four were depressed; one of the others was black, the remaining key white. Stone felt the touch of Marsalaya’s hand on his arm. The girl murmured, “Can we—get back?”

“I don’t know,” Stone said sombrely, and, guessing, depressed the white key. Immediately he knew that he had been wrong.

The platform hesitated, turned, began to topple, sliding down sideways as though into some immeasurable abyss. The girl’s body crashed against his; as Stone lost his balance he jabbed out wildly, touched the black key—

Instantly the platform became level. It sank down through fading gray clouds. The mists dissipated and vanished completely as Stone felt a jar that almost sent him to his knees.

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He was back in the Pleasure Gardens! A low moon hung over the trees, painting the lawn around them with warm brilliance. It was very silent; the fountains still tinkled in the distance, but no voices sounded, and the music was silent. Hastily Stone leaped from the platform, and caught Marsalaya as she followed him. He held her in his arms, the fragrance of her hair a remembered ecstasy that made him draw the girl’s slim body close.

“Marsalaya,” he whispered. “Nestor’s gone. America’s free again, and—” Stone hesitated. “Our scientists will figure out how the dimension platform works. They’ll find a way to take you back to your planet.”

The green eyes were very tender. “Will they? But my people are safe now, since you killed the Beast. They do not need me.”

“You—you mean you’ll stay? On earth—here with me?” Stone’s voice was incredulous.

Though Marsalaya did not speak, her lips answered him.

[The end of *Dictator of the Americas* by Henry Kuttner (as James Hall)]