

# VARGO STATTEN

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*New Worlds to Conquer*

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# THE OTHERS

by

John Russell Fearn

writing under the pseudonym

Volsted Gridban

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The inter-phone buzzed insistently for the fifth time in an hour. Douglas Milton, resident surgeon of the Karoneth Hospital for Nervous Diseases, reached out a claw of a hand and snapped the switch.

“Well?” His voice was brusque; his dark eyes tired. He had been so overworked recently he felt as though he could do with a course of treatment himself.

“Have you a moment, Douglas?” It was the voice of Dr. Meadows in the loudspeaker, and Meadows was one of the specialists in neuronc ganglia.

“No,” Milton answered briefly. “Not even for you, Harry. I’m up to the eyes in this case of Joseph Baxter. I think that he’s—”

“Joseph Baxter has nothing on this, Douglas! It’s the most amazing thing that ever happened. A woman totally different from all the women I’ve ever seen.”

“Oh?” Milton neither sounded nor looked impressed. “What’s so unique about her?”

“Well, her blue hair for one thing.”

“That isn’t unique. Women will do anything these days.”

“But it isn’t dyed! She has *genuine* blue hair—and there is something odd about her eyes too. Just as though she’s wearing contact lenses. She isn’t, though. Frankly I’m out of my depth. All my specialised knowledge doesn’t apply.”

Milton reflected, his interest becoming slowly aroused. After a moment he asked a question: “Where does she hail from?”

“No idea. She doesn’t talk English. A passer-by found her fainting in the gutter and sent for an ambulance. General Hospital couldn’t make head nor tail of the business and decided she might be a nervous sufferer, so sent her here. I think you should have a look—as resident surgeon.”

“All right,” Milton sighed. “I’ll come.”

“Ward Four. You’ll find me there.”

Milton switched off, surveyed the notes upon which he had been immersed, then murmuring things about women in general and this blue-haired one in particular, he left his sanctum, to arrive a few moments later in the spacious cleanliness of Ward Four. Here and there a patient acknowledged his tall, spare frame as he strode actively down the main aisle-way between the beds. His response to the acknowledgments was brief—as usual. He knew his job but his bedside manner had never been very remarkable.

Observing Harry Meadows’ white-coated figure standing beside a distant bed, Milton headed in that direction. Meadows was a rotund, genial, extremely thorough man and it more than surprised Milton to know that he was, for once, at a loss.

Meadows did not speak as Milton reached him. He merely pointed to the young woman lying motionless in the bed. Milton eyed her fixedly, unable to avoid staring at that mass of

blue hair; then he lifted the graph at the bed-end and studied it.

“Nervous exhaustion; partial blindness,” he murmured, half aloud, then slurred the professional references into a jumbled undertone. “Mmmm—unique enough, Harry.”

“No doubt of it!”

Moving forward, Milton leaned over the young woman, studying her. He was not given to emotion; it rarely found expression on his cold, sardonic face—but this time there was certainly a light of profound amazement in his eyes as he scrutinised the extraordinary sky-blueness of that bushy hair, startlingly contrasted by the white pillow.

The girl’s eyebrows and long lashes were the same shade. The face in itself was heart-shaped with a sensitive mouth and well-bred nose. Unusual too was her skin—the colour of dull bronze, as though she had been exposed continuously to ultra-violet or else intense sunlight.

“Very peculiar,” Milton confessed, puzzled; then he stood erect as the girl seemed suddenly to become aware of his presence and opened her eyes. Now here *was* a shock, and it sent all Milton’s medical knowledge into jeopardy—for here was the unexplained. The girl’s eyes were not those of a normal human being.

In colour they were aluminium-grey, surprisingly beautiful somehow and yet utterly devoid of pupils! The effect was of huge, diamond-bright irises, reflecting multicolours from infinitesimal points, just as if they were prismatic or else made up of finely powdered diamond-dust.

“I told you her eyes were peculiar,” Meadows remarked, as Milton stood like an eagle and gazed fixedly. “I don’t think she can see very well. At first I thought she had some queer form of cataract, but now I— Well, I don’t know *what* to think!”

“No; I shouldn’t think you do! She’s without parallel in medical history— What about the rest of her? How does she check up on female anatomy?”

“Normal, except for the bronze skin. I think it may be that shade because of her low ebb of health. Her height is five feet four and her weight seven stone six. Her language is foreign, as I told you.”

“What country?”

“None I can place and I speak twelve languages.”

Milton frowned, then looked back at the girl and spoke in his peremptory voice.

“What is your name, young woman? Where have you come from?”

Her response, though weak, was extremely quick—so much so it seemed hardly possible that her tongue could form the words so rapidly. Her strangely beautiful face changed in expression with sensitive quickness as she talked, passing through all the stages from complete bewilderment to hopeless despair. Milton kept thinking all the time that her speech sounded exactly like spoken shorthand.

“I don’t understand you,” he said at length; and then he tried vainly to look professionally unconcerned as he turned to Meadows. “She’d better be removed to a private room until she is completely recovered. I’ll make her my own special charge. Ask Sister to step over here, will you?”

Meadows nodded and raised a finger to the night-Sister two beds distant. . . .

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With care and attention the blue-haired girl returned gradually to normal health. After several weeks she was able to be left almost to her own devices in the quiet, sunny room

which had been assigned to her. Her only companion was the poker-faced Nurse Dixon, who privately regarded her as a painted hussy.

This viewpoint was probably born of jealousy, however, for in returning to health the beauty of the unknown girl became something to wonder at. The dull copper of her skin changed to a satiny yellow. This, coupled with her perfect features and well brushed hair—to say nothing of the strange eyes—lent an effect which was breath-taking.

For hours at a time she would try to convey some kind of message, moving her expressive hands quickly, her wide, intelligent forehead wrinkling in despair as Nurse Dixon only shook her white-capped head and stared with level blue eyes.

This went on until Milton, by now at his wits' end to know what to do with his queer charge, hit upon the idea of taking her to his friend Hugh Nelson, scientist and mathematician. The razor-brained Nelson might be able to throw some light on the situation since most of his life was spent in dabbling in scientific matters off the beaten track. Since money was no object with him he could spend his time doing exactly as he liked.

So one morning the girl found herself led into the untidy laboratory at the rear of Nelson's London home, Douglas Milton towering up beside her. Whether she could see or not was still a moot point, but she certainly appeared to be watching the figure of a young man in shirtsleeves as he slid from before a paper-littered desk and came quickly forward.

As he beheld the blue-haired girl he stopped abruptly, then with an effort at composure he glanced towards Dr. Milton. The girl watched him with her extraordinary eyes.

"Mr. Nelson will be with you in a minute. Doctor. . . . Have a chair. . . ."

The young man produced two chairs from amidst the general untidiness and pushed them forward. Milton nodded an aloof thanks. He had little patience with this blonde young man. He seemed altogether too self-assured to be a good assistant to a scientist.

"I'm Eric Temple," the young man volunteered, looking at the girl. "I've heard plenty about you, through the papers and on radio and television. So I—"

"I am afraid," Milton put in coldly, "that you are wasting your time, Mr. Temple. This girl cannot understand your language. Maybe you'd better confine yourself to your work. . . . I assume Nelson knows we're here?"

"Certainly, and he'll be here at any moment." With which Eric Temple muttered something about "frozen sawbones" under his breath and then returned to his task at the desk.

Several times he glanced up in thought and found the girl's eerie eyes fixed immovably upon him from under the brim of her big hat. He found his mind straying away from his mathematics to the far pleasanter contemplation of her beauty. Girls like this did not drop into the rather drab Nelson laboratory every day! He did his best to look casual as he noted the perfect symmetry of her young body, the golden hue of her face and slender hands. . . . Then catching the sardonic eyes of Milton fixed upon him he coughed slightly and continued with his work, only to pause presently in irritation.

"Definitely it matches up to forty-five degrees," he muttered, scratching his head. "That makes it—" He broke off with a snort of disgust, bunched the paper up and hurled it on the floor. Then he went on again, executing quick mathematics.

"Something wrong," he told himself out loud. "That figure can't fit there because—"

His sentence trailed off and he jerked up his head in astonishment at the sudden sound of crisply rustling paper. The girl had risen from her chair and was studying the creased figuring closely. If it did not prove anything else it at least showed that her eyesight was normal enough—in this respect anyhow.

Dr. Milton sat watching in interested silence. Eric Temple himself drew back sharply as the girl suddenly came towards him. She took the pencil from his hand and began to figure rapidly on the half blank sheet in front of him.

“What the—” He watched in amazement, then his eyes really began to goggle as he saw figures and mathematical symbols piling up on the paper before his gaze, the pencil held firmly in the girl’s golden fingers. She was figuring and computing with the speed and skill of a mathematical genius. In two short minutes she had not only worked out the angle which had been bothering him, but also the entire construction of a machine about which she could not have had the least advance knowledge. The design was there, sure enough, in figures: the only thing was that the figures were peculiar in their manner of totalling.

“Great heavens!” Milton ejaculated, gazing over the girl’s shoulder as she tossed the pencil down. “This is positively uncanny! She may not be able to talk our language, but she certainly knows what figures stand for.”

“Uh-uh.” Eric nodded weakly and glanced at her exquisite smiling face so close to his own. “Hell’s bells, you’re beautiful,” he blurted out, and was rewarded by a puzzled frown and a quick shrug.

Milton glanced at his watch impatiently. “How much longer is Nelson going to be, do you suppose? It’s about—”

“Still as short-tempered as ever, eh Milton?” enquired a chesty, good-humoured voice—and Milton turned to see a short, stumpy figure advancing from the laboratory’s exterior door. It was Hugh Nelson, attired as ever in an untidy navy suit, a row of different-coloured pens clipped to his breast pocket.

His podgy little hand endeavoured to flatten a stray wisp of hair on his semi-bald head as he advanced. His round, good-tempered face tried to look unconcerned as the girl turned from Eric Temple to study him.

“Well, you old buzzard, what’s on your mind?” Nelson asked haltingly. “You sounded pretty worried over the ’phone.”

“Kindly do not refer to me as a buzzard!” Milton retorted. “I have a reputation to maintain, even if you haven’t. I wish to consult you professionally concerning this young lady here. In a way she’s my—er—ward. I’m providing everything for her at the moment, purely out of interest in her case.”

“Don’t blame you,” Nelson said, studying her thoughtfully. “Where does she come from?”

“That’s what I want you to find out. In my capacity as resident surgeon—”

“Oh, stop being high-hat, man! One would think we’d never been college mates. I’m a busy man, Milly. . . .” And, as Milton winced, “What do you want me to *do*?”

“Find out all about her,” Milton replied. “You can see for yourself that she isn’t a normal girl. She doesn’t even look Earthly—not about the eyes and hair anyway. And in these days of flying saucers and space-travel-just-around-the-corner she might have come unnoticed from another planet—”

“If she’s a sample of the people on another planet, count me in for the first journey!” Eric Temple enthused, only to cool off again at Milton’s stony look.

“With your many accomplishments, Nelson,” Milton presently continued, “you might find out something. You’re a mathematician, linguist, general scientist.”

“True, but I’m not a detective—”

“Look here,” Eric Temple interrupted, thrusting the sheet of calculations into his employer’s hand. “She worked this lot out in two minutes! That’s faster than an adding

machine!”

“She did, eh?” Nelson frowned and shrugged. “Well, maybe she is a good mathematician in her own land, wherever that is, but she is all wrong here. These figures are not the same in meaning as ours, though the principle is similar.”

“But she’s worked out every detail of that air pressure machine we’re working on!” Eric insisted. “All from a waste sheet of figures which I threw on the floor!”

“Yes, I suppose that does represent supreme mathematical skill,” Nelson admitted, musing. “At least we know we have something in common to commence with, anyhow.”

He turned to look at her and found her smiling.

“Figures? You understand them?” he asked slowly, jabbing a fat index finger to the crumpled paper—but she only raised and lowered her slim shoulders.

“Her language and ours are completely different,” Milton said. “I told you that over the ’phone. What suggestions have you?”

“The only obvious ones. Leave her with me: she can stay with my housekeeper. I’ll diagnose her thoroughly, test her mental power in every way I can, and try to get to the bottom of her origin. She obviously is highly intelligent, and certainly very beautiful. Soon as I get an angle I’ll ’phone you. How’s that?”

Milton nodded. “Do splendidly; but take care you keep a close watch on her. Colour movie men and theatre scouts have been trying to grab her for weeks.”

“Can you wonder!” Eric exclaimed, gazing at her. “She’s got all the film beauties laid out deader than mutton. . . .”

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Hugh Nelson, absorbed by the unusual problem entrusted to him, promptly abandoned all other scientific dabbings in the days which followed and subjected the strange girl to all the tests he could conceive. Also he examined her physically with the numerous ordinary and extraordinary instruments he had in the laboratory.

X-ray plates revealed that her physical formation was the same as any woman’s. Eye tests showed that she could see with perfect clearness in some lights, but hardly at all in others. Also, she seemed to mistake various objects for something totally different, as though she were suffering from some curious visual refraction.

Most difficult of all was the language problem. Nelson, despite being a capable linguist, found himself stumped when it came to understanding her swift, fluid speech. The only thing he discovered was that her name was Onia. Finally he adopted the only course and taught her English, becoming gradually amazed at the speed with which she mastered it. Her memory was uncannily retentive and accurate. Once she made a mistake—which was rare—she never repeated it.

In a week she had mastered small sentences; in a fortnight she could talk haltingly and intelligently in a clear, bell-like tone, always to the accompaniment of pretty gestures. Highly satisfied with his progress to date, Nelson ’phoned Milton to come over and hear for the first time whatever story of origin the girl might have to tell.

The girl herself sat coiled up on the library chesterfield as Nelson, Milton, and Eric Temple sat quietly about her. She studied them for awhile, and then began—

“You have all been very kind to me, and for that I want to thank you. I find myself faced with so many difficulties that I perhaps appear vague at times. I assure you that is only because of my surroundings. They are so different from my own.”

“Do you know where you are, Onia?” Nelson questioned, and her head, with that amazing blue hair, nodded quickly.

“Yes. From what you tell me I am in a city called London, in Great Britain.” Her face clouded a little. “I cannot properly remember how I got here, but I think it was my own folly which caused it. I did something wrong: I was too venturesome. My father was experimenting with atoms and molecules, converging them on to a mosaic screen. I remember that there was a misty gap in that screen and I walked through it. My father tried to call me back, but . . . Well, I was too self-willed and disobeyed him. Next thing I knew I was wandering around in a strange land—half buildings and half trees. I think I must have wandered for many hours, then fatigue overcame me and I collapsed, waking up in the hospital.”

“I gather that you know what atoms and molecules are?” Nelson asked quickly.

“Only from the language you have taught me. We have other names for them—”

“This is getting us nowhere!” Milton interrupted, glancing at his watch. “I’ve a major operation to perform tonight and I want to hear everything before I go. . . . Where is this place you came from, Onia? Is there a race of people like you?”

“Why, naturally!” She looked surprised. “Tens of millions of them! And it is on this planet, too. There was no spacial projection: that I *do* know. One moment I was in my father’s laboratory, and then I was here. Just as though I’d. . . . I’d fainted,” she finished vaguely.

“Fourth dimension?” Eric volunteered, thinking—but Nelson shook his head.

“No; Onia isn’t a fourth-dimensional being. If that were the case only part of her would be visible. Besides she conforms in anatomy to any other woman on Earth, except for the eyes. Tell us, Onia, what do you see?”

“That’s hard to explain! You build in such a queer fashion. You have walls where there should be emptiness; you have nothing hardly anywhere to block the lavender glare of ultra-violet rays. I can see those—and infra red. And they’re painful! Then again you have many forests in this city where ought to be buildings. . . . To me it’s all such a hopeless confusion!”

“Forests?” Nelson repeated, astounded. “*Forests?*”

Onia nodded slowly and Milton gave a snort of disgust.

“This gets ridiculous! The girl’s a practical joker!”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” Nelson told him. “There are more things in heaven and earth, my friend. . . .”

Apparently struck by a sudden thought, he got to his feet and from a table nearby raised a dried shrub in its art pot. Taking it over to the girl, he allowed her to study it.

“What,” Nelson asked seriously “is *this?*”

“A piece of queerly fashioned stone. And that is something I can’t understand. Why do you people have so many stones inside your homes, and in places of prominence, too? I’ve even seen them inside big buildings, but with the plant underneath and the stone on top, mysteriously defying the pull of gravity.”

“Inverted vision,” Milton decided brusquely. “Not uncommon by any means.”

“Inverted nothing, Milly,” Nelson told him. “She is describing exactly what she sees. She describes this shrub as a queerly fashioned stone. Also she fully believes that the palms and things we have in public buildings have the pot on top and the plant underneath. We’ve got to find out *why!*”

Nelson returned the shrub to the table and then wandered back to the girl. He asked a question very deliberately:

“Onia, what do we look like to you?”

A merry smile curved her lips. “Very funny! Your blue hair and animal skin clothes are most unusual!”

“What!” Milton gasped, shaken. “You—you mean to say our hair looks like yours? That we dress in *pelts*?”

“Hair like *mine*!” Onia echoed. “Why, that’s absurd! I—”

“Wait a minute—wait a minute!” Nelson waved his podgy hands fiercely. “Let’s get some order. What colour are our skins, Onia?”

She hesitated a little. “I—I don’t know the word for it, but I should say like—*that*!” Her hand swung and pointed to a massive brass shield hanging on the panelled wall.

“Golden—like hers!” Eric cried in amazement. “Has she got a looking-glass mind, or what?”

“Nothing like that.” Nelson shook his head slowly. “The first thing we have got to realize is that she belongs to a different space from ours, yet for some reason we look like her—to her, that is—and vice versa. One last thing, Onia; do cities and buildings and furniture and clothes look *like* those things to you?”

“Sometimes,” she replied uncertainly. “At first I had a terrible task to accommodate myself. For instance, in the hospital you covered me with hide instead of cloth. You never used sheets. And that nurse in her vivid pink animal skin—”

“This,” Milton broke in sourly, “is a cheap hoax! Pink animal skin indeed! Hide sheets! Young woman, what sort of a joke do you think you’re perpetrating?”

“It’s anything but a joke!” she declared passionately. “Just look at this skin you have made me dress in!” And her slender hand pulled at the soft silken gown she was wearing.

“This is an affront!” Milton shouted. “That gown is of the finest silk money can buy. I ought to know!” He relapsed into simmering silence for a moment, then suddenly started. “By Jove, I wonder! That passer-by who found her referred vaguely in his statement to the animal skin this girl was wearing—”

“I know,” Nelson said calmly. “I’ve had that pedestrian under cross examination, and I also have the skin in which Onia made her debut. Meadows obtained it for me.”

“Oh, he did!” Milton looked ominous.

“Don’t start flying off the handle, Milly. You’re a busy man and so I didn’t bother you.”

“All right—and don’t call me *Milly*!”

“That skin,” Nelson proceeded, “belongs to some animal quite unknown to us, but to Onia it probably represented the finest fabric. Am I right, Onia?”

She nodded quickly, her face brightening with dawning understanding.

“Quite right. It was similar in texture to all the garments worn by the younger women of my race. And it was *not skin*!” Onia finished indignantly, pouting at Milton.

“I give up,” Milton growled. “She must be insane. Perhaps a severe case of reversed conception—a kind of egocentric belief that everything is different from what it really is. Really most interesting. She must be examined by the greatest brain specialists in the land. Amnesia producing contrary conception! Never been anything like it!”

“Amnesia be damned,” Nelson said politely. “Whoever heard of amnesia producing supreme mathematical ability, even if the figures *are* queer? For instance, Onia, what is the fourth dimension?”

“A property that is to volume what volume is to area,” she replied promptly. “It is entirely theoretical, cannot be mastered, and cannot be travelled. Nor is it Time.”

“It isn’t?” Nelson asked quickly.

“Time is a state or condition of thought—nothing more. My father is a master mathematician and he has definitely proved that fact. Since Time is a mental concept it cannot be travelled physically; that is obvious. If you are thinking that I perhaps have come from some other Time-state you are quite wrong. The date in my world corresponds exactly with the one I discovered here when I arrived, so the two Time-states were—and are—in existence synchronically. The only thing that *can* be travelled is the space existing between atoms. That, I think, is how I came here. It’s all very strange,” Onia finished wearily, relaxing amidst the cushions. “I wish I could find the way back.”

“You will,” Nelson promised, smiling. “We’ll help all we can . . .”

With that he turned aside and looked at the puzzled Milton and thoughtful Eric Temple.

“I believe I have it, Milly!” he exclaimed. “And you listen to this as well, Onia: it’s right up your street. You, my dear girl, are the living proof of Positivism!”

“What the devil’s that?” Milton growled. “Talk English, man! And time’s getting on!”

“Positivism,” Nelson said slowly, “was discovered and explained by August Comte in eighteen-twenty-four. It is probably the most important and yet the most neglected ramification of the pure scientific thinker. It asserts that there is no other source of knowledge except within the range of our limited senses. It even states that the external world does not exist at all—except through sensory impression.”

“Far fetched!” Milton decided brusquely.

“On the contrary! Take one Positivist example as laid down by the famous scientist Max Planck: It asserts that a tree is nothing but a complex series of sense impressions. We see it grow; we hear the rustle of its leaves; we inhale the perfume of its blossom. Take away all those sensory impressions which flow together to suggest a tree and what is there? Nothing! *There is no tree!*”

“In the same fashion,” Eric put in, “as a blind man builds up a world of his own impressions and sometimes gets the shock of his life if sight is regained?”

“A good simile, Eric. You have it exactly. Further, the Positivist outlook cannot be accused of logical inconsistency because when we come to apply it as the exclusive foundation on which scientific research is built, we find that all science is nothing more than an inference from sensory experience. Our entire creation, our entire world, is built up of certain lines of sensory impression which have endured since the dawn of Time. We have learned to call a stone a stone—and we do. Our very brains have been moulded that way through interminable generations. Here and there one goes wrong and we call him—perhaps unjustly—a lunatic. Others do not interpret colour wavelengths correctly and are called colour blind. Definite proof of Positivism!”

“Then—this girl—?” Milton hesitated and looked at her as she leaned forward interestedly.

“I think,” Nelson said, “that she comes from a place fairly identical to our own, only with a Positivist outlook which is totally different. She proves that an external world is only sensory impression. Her race has schooled itself into believing that a certain aggregate of atoms and molecules represent a stone instead of a plant, a skin instead of a fabric. To them it is real: to us it is false. Onia’s conceptions of colour are different from ours. She has an added advantage of being able to see beyond the limits of the spectrum . . . In other words, a different evolution entirely but, in its own way, just as accurate as ours.”

“But where *is* this place?” Milton insisted. “Never mind the Positivist conception! Let’s have facts!”

Nelson shook his head dubiously. “We can’t get at that all in a few minutes, Milton. It may take a long time—may even mean opening up fields of science hardly suspected. You can take it for granted, though, that I’ll find Onia’s world if it’s the last thing I ever do. With her knowledge of mathematics it may be an easier job than it looks.”

“Which means another delay,” Milton sighed, rising to his feet. “Still, I appreciate the circumstances. Let me know the moment you discover anything . . . And now I must be getting along.”

He bowed formally to the thoughtful girl and took his departure, leaving three independent minds wrestling with a most complex problem.

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It was one thing to attempt to mathematically trace the origin of Onia and distinctly another to do it practically. Though her mathematics were without flaw, evidencing the high scientific knowledge of her race, she was constantly at a disadvantage because her outlook was so completely different.

Distances, colours, aspects of time, underwent variations which placed them hopelessly out of true with normal conception—or at least so-called normal conception. She toiled with a tireless energy, spurring both Nelson and Eric to achievements in figures which surprised even themselves.

Even a line of self-analysis was tried, tracing back in the true Positivist fashion into the girl’s own history, determining which particular incidents in her life had led her to certain convictions and actions—but none of them led anywhere. Her world was too much at variance to provide a convincing basis.

At the end of a fortnight of feverish endeavour, with nothing to show for it except a mass of brilliant but useless calculations, Nelson was decidedly irritated. He paced his laboratory, abstractedly fingering the row of pencils in his breast pocket and scowling at the floor.

Eric and the girl were both seated in thought, all lines of reasoning temporarily exhausted.

“You are sure your father used some sort of mosaic?” Nelson demanded at length, halting. “It really *was* a device that somehow altered the paths of atoms and molecules?”

“Of course,” the girl replied quietly. “That is why I cannot understand why my figures do not work out correctly. I know most of the metals he used and all their specific atomic weights—yet all we get out of it is a mathematical jigsaw! It’s all so completely—”

“Say, wait a minute!” Eric exclaimed suddenly, his face brightening. “Suppose you are right, Onia, and we are wrong? Suppose you have been working on the figures of *your* atoms and molecules—not ours. The figurative basis is different in our respective worlds.”

“What are you driving at?” Nelson asked curtly.

“I’m suggesting that the Positivist outlook has been letting us down. Onia has tried to work from her viewpoint in *this* world. That’s all wrong. She’s not been educated to understand our atomic bases. We’ve got to undergo a complete reconstruction of figures and find the corresponding ones. Translate her figure conceptions into our meanings.”

“I believe you’re right,” the girl herself said. “I also begin to think that my world and this one exist in the same place.”

“That’s impossible!” Eric protested. “Two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time.”

“Why not?” Onia asked. “Between the atoms of apparent solids there are spaces as comparably vast as those between this world and the nearest galaxy. How do we know that my world or your world are the only ones? Suppose Nature has ordained it that the atoms of

countless worlds fit exactly into the spaces which are left between? A great interlocking process.”

Nelson’s face was beaming with delight. “Indeed, why not! Rutherford and Nils Bohr have both proved that solids are, paradoxically, all space! If we assume that other atoms fit into the spaces in flawless mathematical symmetry it means that there is no space at all in the Universe—only one vast composite of solids.”

“But oughtn’t we to be able to see the aggregate effect of those other atoms?” Eric asked, puzzled.

“Anything but it!” Onia exclaimed, taking up the scientific thread with sudden eagerness. “The very fact that your world seems insane to me—that I look incredible to you—is because our outlooks are so utterly at variance. That very fact proves that we are limited to the fundamental conceptions of our particular worlds. We only see that which sensory impression directs: beyond that we cannot go. I could no more see this world from my own than you can see mine from here. The whole outlook is changed; that’s why . . . If we do start to work by transposing my figures into your own mathematical principle we may be able to get somewhere.”

“No question about it!” Nelson declared, and snatching out a green pencil from his pocket he began to compute rapidly, to be presently joined by Eric with the girl herself as exponent of the examples . . .

From that moment onwards the former difficulties were entirely absent. Equations began to balance, though Nelson and Eric could only guess at their ultimate meaning. Their task was solely to transcribe the girl’s calculations into normal meaning. Once this was done she continued her own activities, ultimately producing the basis of a machine which she averred was identical with the one her father had constructed.

The actual assembly of the strange machine took two months’ time in which Dr. Milton bobbed fitfully in and out, usually snorting impatiently and demanding to know how much longer. He could see neither sense nor object in the oddly fashioned metal apparatus growing in the laboratory, nor did a gigantic oval of composite metals—a flawless mosaic—convey anything to him. Not that Eric or Nelson were much the wiser either until the machine was finally finished and linked up to the control panel. Then Onia took it upon herself to explain.

Milton, taking a morning off from the hospital in order to be present, stood in critical silence, too independent to admit he was completely at sea. Nelson was dusty and sceptical; Eric thoughtfully interested. He was perfectly satisfied in his own mind that Onia could not do anything wrong.

“Through this mosaic we can, I think, gain entrance to my world,” the girl explained slowly, walking round it. “It is a replica, as far as my memory serves me, of the device my father made. If we accept the theory of our worlds being interlocked it is obvious that we can only cross from one to the other by repatterning the atomic configurations existing between. This mosaic is made up of the basic elements of my world, all of which exist here but under different mathematical meanings. A field of force passed through the mosaic will cause the various metal atoms to change their configurations into the order existing in my world.”

“Why?” Milton asked bluntly. “How do you know that will happen?”

“Because the force will be mathematically predetermined in both effect and efficiency to duplicate the force used by my father. Force is the same in any space; only the method of using it is different. Now we have our figuring straightened out the matter presents no complexity. These mosaic atoms will be compelled to undergo great changes.”

“Then what?” Nelson questioned.

“Then, unless I’m tremendously out in my reckonings, we shall be able to step from one plane to the other. The barrier between will be temporarily broken down.”

“Sounds rather too good to be true to me,” Eric commented. “Besides, if that really be the case, how is it that your own particular mosaic wasn’t visible to you when you came through it? Surely it ought to have been? Like a doorway in the air?”

Onia’s face clouded a little. “That is the part I cannot quite understand,” she confessed, her voice troubled. “Of course, I got here through an accident of my own making. The machine might have been destroyed. On the other hand . . .” She stopped and shrugged, as though afraid to say what she really thought. “I have often considered it rather strange that my father did not build another mosaic and try to find me.”

There was an awkward silence; then Milton coughed himself into being noticed.

“This—mosaic,” he said, wandering round the skilfully constructed oval, suspended by shining metal brackets to the main framework of the contrivance. “When exactly do you intend to use it?”

“Now,” Nelson replied promptly. “Why else do you think we summoned you so urgently? Onia’s mind is made up and everything is set to go. Isn’t it?” He glanced at her enquiringly.

“Everything,” she agreed, hovering before the switchboard, and she indicated a haversack of provisions, water flask, and revolver on a nearby chair. “I’m all prepared, you see. There is no knowing how far I may have to travel when I get to the other side. Granting I ever do, that is.”

“You are quite sure you wouldn’t prefer us to come with you?” Nelson urged.

“Not until I have proved that my figures are right, otherwise I might plunge you into some kind of atomic chaos from which there would be no escape. Once it is definitely established that we can pass between worlds without trouble—or at least between planes—the great step will have been made . . . Now let us see how things are.”

Her hand closed the switch which started the generators. The massive gauge tubes on top of the switchboard suffused with a curious multicoloured energy, predominated by twisting streaks of vermillion. With a dull crackling roar the intricate wiring of the amazing mosaic came into life, setting each little facet glowing with different colours as the atomic construction underwent sudden and extreme changes.

In complete silence the four watched, their gaze fixed to the amazing display as colour interwove with colour in a fashion both beautiful and incredible. The heavy smell of ozone began to permeate the electrically-charged air.

“It’s melting!” Milton ejaculated suddenly, his bony face outthrust.

“Not melting,” Onia corrected him. “Just changing its composition.”

Again silence fell. Nelson stood tightly clutching the pencils in his pocket, perspiration glistening on his bald head. Eric was all eyes, half crouching.

The multicolours swirled and twisted off into apparent vapours. From the extreme diamond-pointed centre of the mosaic the queer effect spread in a rippling circle through every facet, leaving finally a misty oval with a perfectly solid frame around it. And beyond that oval there was no sign of the laboratory fittings—only a blank, incomprehensible grey, uninviting and mysterious.

“Is *that* your plane?” Milton jerked out at last, glancing towards the girl.

“My world—my plane—lies beyond that mist,” Onia replied soberly. “Or at least *I hope* it does. Beyond the mist should be the daylight of my own plane. Since it is morning here it will

be morning there. The times correspond.”

She turned about suddenly and slipped the haversack and flask over her shoulder. Then she took up the revolver into her right hand.

“Well, I’m going to try it!” She said the words quite simply, as though she were trying to disguise a certain deep-felt regret. “I can only repeat my eternal thanks to you for the help you have been to me. You won’t go unrewarded if this works out right, believe me . . .”

With a faint smile she turned and moved towards the oval, only to pause as Eric jumped forward and gripped her arm. She turned in surprise.

“Listen, Onia, I can’t let you walk out just like this!” Eric’s voice was quiet but determined. “It’s meant something so different to me to have you around and— Well, I can’t picture myself going on working once you have gone!”

“Silly!” she chided, colouring a little.

“I mean it, Onia! I want to come with you . . . Suppose you should walk into a world which isn’t your own? Just think what you might be up against! You might need a man beside you who can tackle things.”

“I had never thought of the possibility of *not* finding my own plane, Eric, but now you mention it—”

“Look, Eric, I don’t agree with this at all!” Nelson strode forward, his face concerned. “There’s a lot of work to be done once Onia’s gone. You just can’t walk out on me.”

“I’m afraid I can, even though I apologize for it. Laboratory assistants are ten a penny, sir, and there’s only one Onia. That’s how I look at it. If there are dangers I want to share them with her. If there are not—well, all the better for both of us.”

Milton laughed shortly. “Great heavens, the man’s in love! Better let him go, Nelson. The scientist who lets romance upset his emotions won’t be a scrap of use.”

Nelson said nothing. He thrust his hands in his jacket pockets and looked at the two young people moodily. They looked back at him, then at the sardonically smiling Milton.

“Ready?” Eric asked finally, taking the gun from the girl’s hand. Her response was to step forward into the oval, and instantly she disappeared. Eric did not hesitate a moment. He strode forward into the unknown—following her, and at that same moment he found himself punched and pummelled with unknown forces. They sent him staggering helplessly forward, to finally pull up short and discover the girl was only a yard or so away.

Her beautiful face was distraught, pale with worry, as she surveyed the rocky, unfamiliar wilderness into which they had come. The sky was green, to Eric anyway, and the morning sun bluish.

Eric turned stupidly. To the rear there was no sign of the mosaic through which they had come. They had irrevocably burned their bridges behind them.

“Is—is this your plane?” Eric whispered at last, his arm about the girl’s shoulders.

She shook her head in dismay. “No! No such wilderness as this is in my plane. Somewhere there must have been an error— It means,” she continued, thinking, “that there must be others!! Maybe tens of millions of planes all parallel in the spaces between the atomic aggregates, and to find one amidst them all would perhaps take a lifetime. Perhaps, even, it can *never* be accomplished!”

Eric was silent. Then he tried to smile. Onia gave him a hopeless look.

“No way back, Eric. Only forward! No chance of trying again for my own plane unless we find mathematicians in this plane.”

“We have no choice but to try,” he murmured, holding her against him. “We’re in this together. Onia. We’d better *see* what we can find.”

They began moving and overhead the blue sun blazed down in impartial brilliance. . . .

[The end of *The Others* by John Russell Fearn (as Volsted Gridban)]