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STORIES

STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS
—THE UNIVERSE OF FUTURE CENTURIES

20c

BEYOND LIGHT

TOMORROW'S ADVENTURE
IN THE OUTER VOID

by
NELSON S. BOND



**ONE THOUSAND
MILES BELOW**

by
EANDO BINDER

**PHANTOM
OF THE
SEVEN STARS**

by
RAY CUMMINGS

THORNTON AYRE • ROSS ROCKLYNE • LEIGH BRACKETT

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TWILIGHT OF THE TENTH WORLD

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thronton Ayre.

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They came without warning from a place no man could discover. People in different parts of the earth sent through hurried reports that they had seen the invaders floating ten miles above them, stationary and presumably watching. Watching for what?

Was it war? War by interplanetary invaders? Possibly. Different countries bristled at the ready, but nothing happened. Giant telescopes were turned on the interlopers but the mirror-screens merely reflected back tapering gray ovoids catching the light of the sun. No sign of any living things aboard them—no sign of anything, in fact. Damned mysterious!

Bookworms took to reading “Wars of the Worlds” again; the leading dailies came over all Martian and went the limit of their imaginations depicting glorified bugs descending on earth. Funny how they always thought of bugs.

Stratomen braved the greatest reaches of the atmosphere, but came nowhere near the interlopers because they rose out of range. There was something indescribably irritating about the way they floated there, a dozen of them. London saw them first, then Paris. Report came in from Vienna, Ceylon, Leningrad, Antwerp, Toronto—and at length, New York.

It was as though the twelve gray vessels were conducting a very minute examination.

New Yorkers were exasperated, but not frightened any more. No damage had happened anywhere else, so why here? Mount Wilson verified the European astronomers’ reports as the things had passed high over California.

To Walt Danning of the New York Transcontinental Airways, the things were just a pain in the neck. Twice he had been up to get near them, and they had gently receded. Now he stood on the tarmac outside the messroom door and stared up at them with angry eyes as they hung like blood-red cigars in the westerling sunlight.

“Blasted cheek!” he observed at last, rubbing his upstanding thatch of red hair. “What in heck do they think we are? Specimens?”

“If they do they’re probably right.”

It was Lance Dugan, the Airways’ chief physicist, who answered. He had come out to get a breath of fresh air away from the eternal smells in which he lived and moved and had his being. He stood now with his long-legged, narrow-shouldered frame propped against the door jamb, cigarette in mouth. His lean face was elevated upward, his dark eyes slitted.

“We’re not specimens!” Walt snorted. “Least I’m not! I’m a man on two legs, American, and proud of it. I’m no bug!”

“To those things up there we’re all bugs,” Lance sighed. “Just like real insects are nothing more than insects to us. Matter of intelligence rating. Those up there are cleverer than us down here, so we’re right below their interest. That’s why they haven’t attacked us. We don’t go about slaughtering insects wholesale because they’re beneath our range of intelligence.

“So what?” Walt muttered. “Anyway, I don’t like being stared at.” He broke off, his blue eyes narrowing. Suddenly he shot out his leather jacketed arm and pointed. “Will you look?”

he shouted. "A sort of red flash up there! Middle ship!"

Lance shot suddenly erect, staring fixedly. The pair of them gazed at that red spot as it glinted momentarily, then they searched the empty sky questioningly as a faint, rising hum crept into the evening stillness.

"It's a bomb!" Walt yelled abruptly. "I'd know that sound any place! It's a war!"

The sound reached a high-pitched scream. For a moment something was visible dropping against the rosy western sky; then the object dropped beyond horizon range. There was no resultant explosion; no concussion.

"It *must* be war!" Walt gulped, uncertain. He stared up again, his gaze not unmingled with astonishment when he saw the vessels suddenly move away. Gathering momentum they fled toward the west, vanished within seconds.

Lance turned suddenly, raced through the messroom into the general radio department. The men in control were already sitting listening to the first reports intoned over the main loudspeakers.

". . . curious type of shell dropped by invaders upon open ground near Bridgeport, Connecticut. No full details yet. Apparently a new-type bomb. It just hisses, without causing any explosive damage. Nobody injured. More reports later."

Walt relaxed a little scratching his head. "Say, Lance, where's the sense in dropping a bomb that doesn't do anything but just hisses?"

Lance crushed out his cigarette as he shrugged his smocked shoulders. Though he made no answer his dark eyes showed he was grappling with some complex inner thought.

The Bridgeport shell was the first in a series. Flying westwards during the evening, the unknown invaders dropped similar shells, always on open ground where nobody was hurt, near Cincinnati, St. Louis, Kansas, Denver, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco. A jittery American people heard the hasty reports of analysts over their radios.

The bombs were apparently harmless, fizzed in their holes like a kid's rocket. No reason to suppose that they would explode with any violence, but it was unsafe to try and extinguish them in case that very act started them onto something really nasty. That was what the analysts said: in solemn conclave by themselves they admitted they *couldn't* stop the darned things anyway. The holes were invincible.

So the holes fizzed, and America waited.

It was during the next day that reports came in from London, Paris, and other great cities of the earth that bombs had been dropped in their countries too. Why? Nobody could imagine. Attack these interlopers? Some hopes!

Amazing thing! After they had left their donations in various parts of the earth the unknowns just scrambled out of the skies to places beyond conjecture, no longer remained to haunt the earth. But those bombs still fizzed and nobody knew what to do about them.

In grave files the scientists of various countries, together with their respective heads of ballistics, went out to conduct investigations. The only thing they could figure out was that the original bombs had now vanished and given place to a hole that fizzed like hell, like water into which a white hot iron is plunged.

Trouble was, the holes were getting bigger everywhere!

Nobody outside of the scientists worried unduly. What were a few holes, anyway? So long as the invaders had gone that was all that counted: whatever legacy they had left behind did not signify. Or did it? One or two newspaper editors with more scientific leader writers than

others prattled gaily about atomic force and said it might work out like Wells' "World Set Free." So the bookworms changed their volumes and browsed afresh.

Only it was not atomic force either!

"In fact," Lance told Walt, when they were together in their apartment in the city, "nobody knows what the hell it is! I was down at the Bridgeport hole with Saunders and the rest of the gang today but we got no place. We tried acids, explosives, X-rays, and Heaven knows what on that bomb hole, but it made no difference. And the ground was just eating itself out like an apple stuffed with caustic. I tell you, it's nasty!"

Walt crossed his feet against the mantlesheaf. "Don't tell me you envisage ever-expanding holes! What would road menders do for a living?"

"Listen, Walt, this is serious!" Lance faced him grimly. "There are roughly twenty-four growing holes in different parts of the world; they are spreading at the rate of several feet a day; later on they may go even faster. Those invaders dropped something that is unknown to us, something eats away matter completely. It consumes rock, soil and metal—yes, even tungsten! We used tungsten bars to experiment and they evaporated like fizz-water in a couple of minutes. Tungsten, which we can't melt under three thousand Centigrade! Think that over!"

Walt turned. "But hang it, man, you must have some sort of theory. You're a physicist, and a darned good one. If it isn't atomic force, what is it?"

Lance smiled a little. "You forget I'm not a big-shot scientist; it doesn't matter to anybody what I think. Doc Saunders does all the talking. But, privately, I think it's done by polarizing gravitation. The spectrum analyses we made, and my own calculations, led me to that revolutionary theory. But I daren't say anything about it to the higher ups because it might cost me my job."

"Polarized gravitation! What on earth's that?"

"Just this—the best of us can't explain what gravity is. Enstein favors the etheric rumple theory; other scientists say magnetism, or a sort of force. Modern scientists favor the view of electrical energy. If that is so it must be an energy inherent in atoms, in the electrons and protons that go to make them up, because everything is made of atoms. Right?"

"So I've always understood."

"Right. Now, if there are forces which can block sound and light—which there are of course—there may be similar forces that can block gravitative influence, only our science isn't up to understanding them yet. Because of that it does not say they cannot exist. Suppose the shells that dropped released a counter-gravity force upon impact: do you see what would happen? The gravitational laws operative in an atom, just as much as in a solar system, would cease to exist! Electrons would fly away from the degravitated proton, the molecule itself would collapse, and it would be *progressive*! Because as one molecule became degravitated the one next to it would automatically become unstable and behave the same way. So it would go on—will go on! The original shell that released the energy would disappear, but that wouldn't matter. The thing would be done then. And of course there is no noise or concussion; just the slow degravitation process."

"In that case—" Walt stared in front of him. Suddenly he lowered his feet and shot upright. "My Lord, *anything* can happen! Anything will give way. Anything with molecules—and there isn't anything without 'em!"

"I'm pretty sure I'm right," Lance went on moodily. "When it catches up on cities . . ." He left his sentence unfinished.

“But the science back of such an idea!” Walt whistled. “Who in heck would want to start these holes anyway? What’s it all about?”

“Don’t ask me! But we do know—at least I do—that we’re facing a situation that’s going to get mighty desperate as time goes on. Mighty desperate!”

II

When Lance had envisaged trouble ahead he had only guessed the half of it, for more alarms muscled in from a totally different angle, one that neither he nor anybody else could have anticipated. It all started the following morning when the newspapers reported that Henry Hyson, the level-headed, emotionless chief of Hyson's Chain Stores had thrown himself out of his bedroom window seventy-two stories up.

Naturally Henry was not beautiful when he struck the sidewalk. It was tragic, of course, and the public was dutifully shocked, but nobody knew why Henry Hyson had risen from bed and taken a death leap.

In itself it would have been inconclusive, but reports drifting in during the day from scattered parts of America, England, and Europe revealed, that hundreds of people had committed suicide during the night. It suddenly became a matter of international importance. What had happened to them in the night, anyway? The psychologists went broody, but they hatched nothing. Nothing to hatch!

That was only the start. During the day there was the case of the man in the New York subway train who dozed on his way to work. He woke up suddenly, according to witnesses, screaming—"They're burning through me!" Then he smashed his way through the train window and jumped, killing himself instantly on the live rail outside.

He was one instance. In all there were twenty cases of people awakening from sleep to instantly go mad and kill themselves. It was horrible, unreasonable. The shadow of a tragic blot cast itself on an already troubled world.

Though Lance Dugan was primarily a physicist, the psychological aspect of the new riddle interested him not a little. Much to the surprise of the staff, and even more so to Walt, he went to the trouble of carefully noting down all the wild statements uttered by those who had afterwards committed suicide. Not that they made sense—yet. And besides, there was this business of expanding holes beginning to obsess the public mind.

To New Yorkers the Bridgeport hole was the main concern. Headlines got larger and larger, matching the hole. It had now spread to Yonkers and New Haven. The waters of Long Island Sound were rising incessantly over Long Island itself, sending monstrous ship-smashing disturbances through New York's harbors. And the water pouring into the hole just went out into nothing like everything else.

Evacuation orders were put into effect. People poured from the stricken hole areas in thousands, were either looked after by relatives or installed in hastily arranged Government camps. From a mystery, the holes had changed to a menace. Not only America, but each country was getting eaten into nothing by nothing. It was idiotic—a merciless paradox.

Congress in America limited itself to arranging evacuation; the President ordered scientists to investigate. Then before a solemn convention of scientists in New York Lance Dugan's turn came to make suggestions. He took a chance and unwrapped his pet theory.

"I realize, gentlemen, that it is a far cry from holes in the earth to the end of the world," he said quietly, looking round on the grave faces; "but that is what I unhesitatingly predict unless science finds a way round the problem. I have outlined my theory to you—and I have no ideas on how to defeat the scientific menace which I believe is threatening us."

“End of the world!” snorted Dr. Saunders contemptuously, his popeyes arrogant. “Sheer fantasy, man! Same as your ideas of polarized gravitation! There isn’t such a thing!”

“Not that we know of, and that’s why we’re licked,” Lance retorted. “Either we find out how it’s done, or perish.” He stared moodily in front of him, thumped his fist on the table top. “Gentlemen, I know I’m right!” he went on desperately. “Laugh at me if you will, but in a few weeks you’ll see for yourselves. And I also believe there is something more behind all this—that there is a connection between people who have leapt to death and the mystery of the holes.”

“I suppose,” Saunders said, with measured acidity, “you infer that these holes give off some brain-disturbing element?”

“I had thought of that, yes, but my own private experiments show that to be incorrect. There is no connection. It’s something deeper, something that embraces the whole field of psychology. For instance, have you gentlemen noticed that these people were *asleep* before killing themselves?”

“You mean that they dreamed about something that made them want to commit suicide?” Saunders demanded.

“I do, yes.”

Lance stood in grim, flushed silence at the laughs round the assembly table. He was still glaring when the speaker’s mallet brought order. The speaker himself spoke through his nicotine-tinted whiskers.

“After all, Mr. Dugan, we are scientists, not spinners of fairy tales! Either confine yourself to logical analysis or retire from the debate.”

For a brief instant Lance hesitated, then he glanced at Saunder’s big, grinning face.

“You’ll have my resignation in the morning, sir,” he stated briefly. “Since I cannot convince the best brains in science of the most obvious facts I may as well work alone. Thank you for listening, anyway.”

He walked out of the room silently and closed the door.

“Dreams!” echoed Saunders, amidst the uncomfortable hush. “Good Lord, what next? These young men, you know,” he went on paternally. “They mean well, but—damned fanciful! Now, about these holes. . .”

While the scientists vaped the holes spread. In two weeks the Bridgeport hole had swallowed half of Long Island. A semicircle of hissing, spluttering nothing, reaching down into abysmal dark, began to encroach on New York’s harbors with relentless power, merged toward the city.

Normal activity by millions of New Yorkers was hastily abandoned. There could be no commerce or civilized activity in a city threatened with ruthless extinction. From the eastern buildings that spreading maw could be distinctly seen, creeping ever nearer.

In other devastated areas of the world the same conditions of wild panic existed. With the threat of extinction now so palpably near at hand, humans changed from ordered pursuit to animalistic fury, trampled on the weaker ones in their frantic efforts to reach a possible land of safety. But there wasn’t one; the unknown invaders had cunningly seen to that.

Every country had its holes, and in some of the countries the holes had gone downward far enough to touch and open volcanic seams. In consequence volcanic eruptions and earthquakes were rife, blanketing the shuddering world in dense overhead smoke through which daylight only reached with great difficulty.

It was Walt Danning's particular task in this world maelstrom to fly until he dropped from exhaustion, carrying refugees out of New York to parts westwards where they might find temporary surcease while a harried Government wrestled with the problem.

Lance Dugan, his work with the Airways finished in any case, even had he not given in his resignation, still remained in New York. In fact he had the run of the whole apartment building: all other tenants had bolted to join the general exodus. Not so him. He remained where he was, unmindful of the view of destruction from the window, working all his waking hours on complicated notes and stewing over hefty volumes.

It was to Walt that he unburdened himself. Walt listened, lying flat on the bed, snatching a few hours relief before starting off again on his superhuman work of evacuating the still struggling thousands at the airports.

"While everybody else has kept track of the holes I've kept track of the suicides," Lance said slowly, flourishing his notes in the light of the oil lamp. "By dint of sheer damned hard work I've managed to grab witnesses of several suicides and got the dying man or woman's last words. Every night for the past two weeks some fifty or more people have died. Here are a few of the things they've said before succumbing. Listen! 'They're burning through me!' 'The force shields are weakening!' 'On the tenth gangway!' 'They've come back!' 'They're visible against the stars!' Now, what do you figure to that lot?"

"Nuts—same as you!" Walt gave an enormous yawn.

"A person who's nuts doesn't refer to force-shields," Lance snapped. "The particular person who referred to them was a truck driver, with no more idea of force-shields than a Hottentot. Force-shields represent something in a science beyond our range. Again—'They are visible against the stars.' The 'they' referred to probably meant space ships. That couldn't have meant the space ships *we* saw because they left long ago, so why did the dreamer still see them? And why against the *stars*? Perhaps because—because it's a dark world. No sunshine."

"Oh, heck!" Walt snorted. "Let a guy sleep, can't you?"

He coiled himself up on the bed, pulled the cover over his ears to deaden the eternal rumble of collapse from the doomed metropolis. Lance turned to the window, looked out on the advancing tide of ruin two miles away. People were scurrying through the streets. Night, hardly distinguishable from day, had closed down on the unlighted city. But there was light enough from fires.

Lance frowned, glanced again at his notes.

"Another world, affecting *ours*!" he breathed. "Affecting the minds of earthly people! Why?"

A deep snore from the bed answered him. Impatiently he turned back to the table, then swung round sharply as Walt suddenly awakened with a fiendish yell. He sat bolt upright, red hair standing on end, stared fixedly at the bedrail.

"He'll get me!" he whispered, rubbing his forehead absently. "He'll—"

Instantly Lance dived for him, seized his arms in a grip of iron.

"Walt, snap out of it! What's the matter?"

For answer Walt tore himself free and dashed for the window, holding his head as he went. Like lightning Lance twirled after him, seized him as he reached the sash. Bringing up his right he planted a terrific blow under Walt's jaw, sent him spinning heavily across the room to collapse on the rug.

"Take it easy, Walt! Get a grip on yourself, man!"

Walt's face was suddenly taut and perspiring. Slowly he got to his feet, fingered his jaw reflectively. At last he gave a sheepish grin.

"Th-thanks," he stammered. "I guess you did more than you know of, socking me like that. I—I was going to jump out of that window."

"Because of something you dreamed?" Lance demanded, clutching him.

"Yeah." Walt shook his head fiercely. "Gosh, it was the maddest dream ever, and then some! Sort of thing you read about in imaginative stories. Men with machines mowing us down, great cigarlike ships flashing across the stars, halls of engines, galleries, men and women sweating and struggling— Curious people, big headed, like people that'll be here in the future, if any! Listen, Lance, it was so real it was positive anguish when a black-skinned guy with a head like a strato-balloon came shooting for me with a thing like a searchlight. It hurt! Hurt like hell! So real. . . ."

"It *was* real!" Lance stated quietly.

"Huh? Now look here—"

"Listen, can't you? If every one of those other folks who'd committed suicide had had somebody like me to knock the sense back into them they might not be dead now! You dreamed of an attack upon you—it upset your brain mighty hard. Think back on those other death-leapers, and what they said before leaping. You said 'He'll get me!' You know what *they* said. And remember the one who said 'They are visible against the stars.' You've just said yourself you saw ships flashing across the stars."

"I know, but— Hang it, it was only a dream! Those invaders still on my mind, I guess."

"The black guy who went for you was one of the invaders in person," Lance murmured. "I'm sure of it. You said a hall of engines. How many engine gangways, or aisles, were there?"

Walt screwed his eyes in thought. "Ten," he said. "So what?"

"One man died screaming 'They're on the tenth gangway!'"

"Hell!" Walt was startled. "Look, do you think—"

"I'll tell you what I think. We've stumbled on the most amazing thing that ever happened—mental contact with somewhere unknown. Does it not seem to you that if a dream can be so savage as to cause actual physical agony, enough to make suicide seem the only way out, it points to the fact that the mind is *linked* to the actual circumstances?"

"Maybe; but how? How come that only a few people have these awful dreams, and not everybody?"

"The few that have died from suicide actually died elsewhere at the same time! Double entity. A bit involved."

"I'll say!" Walt echoed incredulously. "Why was it that I did not jump to death as I wanted to?"

"Because in that other state you *didn't* die. Something happened to save you. You can't defeat Destiny and the laws of Nature. Had you died there you would also have died here, and there's an end of it."

Walt scratched his head, then he glanced up sharply as the phone rang. Lance whirled the instrument up impatiently.

"Lance Dugan speaking, yes. Who's calling? Huh? Oh—Dr. Saunders!" Lance glanced significantly at Walt. Walt stood watching, saw Lance's face change to grim hardness by degrees.

“ . . . a ghastly dream, eh? What? Oh, you tripped and knocked yourself out. All right when you recovered? Sure I was right! I told you that at the Convention. I’ll be right over. I think I’ve got onto something important.”

Lance dropped the receiver and dived for his hat and coat.

“Plane outside?” he asked briefly, and nodded quickly as Walt jerked his thumb toward the roof. “Good! We’re hopping out to Washington—the Mark Bolton Hotel. Old Saunders scrambled out there when the Bridgeport Hole started hitting N. Y. C. Seems the phone wires are O. K. to Washington. Near as I can figure out Saunders has had a dream too. He tried to commit suicide but stunned himself accidentally before he could do it. Anyway he’s at last decided there must be something in what I told him. He’s rounded up some of the scientists and is ready to listen. Let’s go!”

“I’m due back at the Evacuation station in thirty minutes.”

“To blazes with that. There’ll be nothing left to evacuate at all soon, anyway.”

Walt shrugged and whirled after his friend as he strode out into the corridor. In five minutes they were on the roof, took off over the dark, fire-ridden city. From the air they could see the flare of arcs at the airports and railway stations, the dim surging dark tides that betokened desperately struggling thousands trying to gain safety from the black half moon that yawned invincibly to the east.

“Devilish,” Walt muttered. “What chances are there of things getting back to normal, Lance?”

“None!” Lance sat tight lipped, staring into the darkness ahead. His face was like a mask in the dashboard light.

“None! But surely—”

“Shut up; I’m thinking. Figuring out this dual personality angle. If I’ve got the right hunch we. . .” Lance relapsed into silence, biting his underlip.

There was not much sign of trouble as they passed over Philadelphia. From Baltimore, however, there were droves of airplanes leaping into the sky, scurrying to collect more refugees from the Cincinnati regions. The moon was out here, shed its pallid light upon roads black with automobiles and tramping people. Country roads, city roads—they were both blocked alike. The lights of temporary campfires winked like cigarette ends in the night.

III

It was 10:30 when Walt and Lance touched Washington, landing right outside the city on deserted ground. To make the blocked airport would be madness. They lost an hour getting to civilization and a taxi, thence were whirled to the Mark Bolton Hotel in the city center. In room 26 on the 7th floor Dr. Saunders was waiting, around him standing a group of grave-faced men.

Lance walked in quietly, Walter behind him; then they both stopped as a tall, dignified figure turned slowly to face them.

“Mr. President!” Lance gasped, and immediately came to attention.

“Please be at your ease, Mr. Dugan,” the President said quietly, smiling rather anxiously. “My visit here was upon my own initiative. As a matter of fact, Dr. Saunders here contacted several scientists, who in turn relayed certain information to me. I felt it prudent to cut time to a minimum by coming straight here.”

“I understand, sir,” Lance moved forward slowly, glanced at Saunders. The big, red-faced scientist cleared his throat.

“In this room, Dugan, are most of the scientists who were present at the Convention. You told us that time would prove your point: I realize now that we all owe you a sincere apology. So far, all scientists in every country are at a deadlock. It becomes increasingly clear that you are the one man who knows anything at all, outlandish though your theory seems to be. You mentioned a dream connection, Dugan. I told you over the phone of my experience.”

Lance looked at the plasters on Saunders’ forehead, asked shortly.

“Just what did you dream about? The tiniest detail is important.”

“I dreamed that a vast machine of some kind was breaking right over my head. It was steel, I think—some kind of metal anyway. A ray, pink in color, was turned onto it and it started to break up. I was right underneath it!” Saunders paused to mop his brow; his bulgy eyes went brighter with the fear of his remembrance. “Dugan, the mental horror of those moments was something incredible—paralyzing! I imagine a man standing facing a runaway auto would feel the same. The relentless certainty of death! I woke up suddenly—I went to bed with a headache, by the way—to find my mind in a turmoil. I wanted to do something to ease the awful agony in my brain. I rushed for the window, stumbled over a chair and struck my head on the dressing table . . . When I recovered I found I was calm again. Then I rang you up.”

Lance stroked his eyebrow. “Hmmm . . . Do you remember if you saw a hall full of engines?”

“I certainly did! Multitudes of engines and people, men and women, all trying to do something. I can recall there were about nine islands of engines in one great hall.”

“Nine islands mean ten gangways,” Lance broke in. “That’s all I wanted to know. I definitely believe I’ve got it! But it’s the most incredible thing. I feel I’m right because otherwise hundreds of people could not leap to suicide for the same identical reason . . .” Lance paused a moment, went on slowly, “Mr. President—gentlemen—I believe that we of Earth are dual identities, that the entities we possess as human beings are only a *part* of our real selves—experimental offshoots of our real selves. Our real selves are situated on another planet, maybe far, maybe near. I don’t know yet.”

Saunders tried to strangle his look of disbelief. The President's keen eyes narrowed a little.

"Can you substantiate this rather—er—uncommon theory, Mr. Dugan?"

"I think I can, yes. Some time ago Duke University of North Carolina made elaborate researches into the mysteries of mental telepathy. They made more than 100,000 separate experiments, and their results showed that human beings not only can read thoughts and transmit them, but that thought—as opposed to any other known force—does not weaken with distance! Instead it grows stronger the further away it goes! Bear that in mind, gentlemen, for I feel it explains the reason for the intensity of recent dream-experiences."

"You mentioned dual personality," Saunders murmured.

"Exactly. There is, says Dunne, who wrote that masterpiece 'An Experiment with Time,' increasing evidence that the threshold of perception not only shifts when we sleep, but that we are given, through dreams, access to a different range of apprehension, a range the waking consciousness can never command, and from age to age that threshold *changes*! I believe it changes because the world we view in dreams naturally progresses and therefor alters its outlines."

The scientists glanced at one another in surprise, turned back to Lance with renewed interest.

"Consider what dreams represent," he went on deliberately. "Sometimes they forecast an event long before it happens. I could quote thousands of instances in the possession of the Society for Psychical Research. Now, we use at best only a fifth of our brain capacity. Were we to use *all* our capacity we would be able to foresee coming events very easily because of our tremendous mind force, which would project along the time-continuum and foresee any eventuality, even as we could comb the past."

"Possible," Saunders mused.

Lance gave a little shrug. "My theory, I admit, now takes a leap across all known laws of science. Is it possible that we of Earth are *experiments*? Nobody can explain the beginning of life very satisfactorily. The egg-to-man theory doesn't fit too well because there is an inexplicable gap between man and saurian. I submit that saurians were the real denizens of Earth and that man is a glorified experiment from elsewhere! Consider the human brain for a moment—a fifth of it works fairly well: we accomplish quite reasonable achievements. We have the power to reason, but the remaining part of our brain as any surgeon will tell you is just waste material. We say it is the subconscious region, that it is there for future evolution; wonderful theories are contrived to explain it. But it still remains *waste*! And why? Because it represents the section that should be filled in with active brain material if we were *complete*!"

The scientists were silent, clearly moved.

"Suppose we were sent to Earth long ago," Lance resumed. "Suppose that in our real state we were superhumanly clever? So clever we knew that by parting with a small portion of our brains we could be little the worse? Suppose, then, a chosen number of us made synthetic human beings, into whose skulls was placed a small section of our giant brains? These synthetic bodies were fired to earth to mature, to become the object of careful watching by those who had sent them. . . .

"Do you not see that a mental kinship would always remain with the creator of us? Even as the child has kinship with the mother, as twins have kinship, as species have kinship? Mind force does not weaken in the journey across space. The remains of memories, the only door to our real selves, can be reached only through what we call the subconscious region. In daily waking life we cannot utilize it, but in sleep we can wing our way to the unknown—back,

gentlemen, across space *whence we came!* In snatches, we live again through our kinship selves in the cosmos, our tiny brain linking into the space removed from our master brain. Now do you understand?"

"Amazing!" whispered Saunders, fascinated.

"There are other points. The children of the experimenters would be born like their parents, minus a fifth of their brains. I believe that by the law of Nature, when a man or woman dies on that other world the corresponding twin dies here. Think of the multitude of sudden deaths that occur for no apparent reason. Likewise, when a creature is born on that world the corresponding lesser-intelligent twin is born here. It is inevitable. For untold ages the process has gone on, but now comes a change to that unknown world.

"Invasion! What happens? The minds of our creators are tortured with doubts and fears, and our minds being linked to theirs are turmoiled as well! The greater always affects the lesser. That is why thousands have dreamed and died. They experienced the death agony of their particular creator and died when he, or she, did. In your case, Dr. Saunders, some accident in that other world saved your creator from death; a corresponding preventative occurred here and saved you. The same thing happened to Walt Danning here. Something saved him. We live and move in two places! We're sundered beings! The intense mental strain of our creators is reflected through us, stirs some of us to a pitch of mad hysteria. If our creators die, we must die too!"

"Unquestionably," said the President slowly, "you have jumped over all of the frontiers of mind science, Mr. Dugan. And I for one believe you. There is so much evidence within our experience. But tell me, how are we to ever actually prove conclusively that you are right?"

"I have ideas that may work."

"Excellent! And whom do you imagine the invaders of this other world are?"

"The same ones that came here first and dropped polarized gravity shells!" Lance snapped. "And I begin to see why, too! Our creators deliberately deprived themselves of a fifth of their intellect to make us an experimental race. When they were their complete selves they were probably equal to, if not superior, in knowledge to the beings who are now invading them. But *now*, with their power lessened, our creators are at the mercy of the invaders. To make doubly sure the fifth-power could not be regained the invaders came here first and set about making our planet drop to bits beneath our feet. That will give them domination, just as it will mean our destruction. If our creators die, we die. And even if they survive our world collapses anyway. Don't ask me who these invaders are or what they're driving at. Our problem is to discover how to save ourselves and those who created us—even how to regain our wholeness so that we can perhaps overcome these invaders. We know that so far they have held out, though our innumerable suicides point to the death of hundreds in the struggle."

"And what will finally happen to this world of ours?" the President asked gravely.

"It is doomed, sir," Lane answered in a quiet voice. "I do not like admitting defeat, but we have no scientific means of defeating this relentless menace. Our world is corroding, smashing up. We have not even the secret of space travel whereby we could move a few of our people to another planet. All we can do is hang on as long as possible and try and establish contact with our creators on their world. Then we shall have to see where the fates lead us."

The President tightened his lips. "I understand. You can rest assured that full co-operation will be given you in whatever scheme you may have. Just what have you in mind?"

“I propose to create a mind-explorer. In other words, try and explore this unknown world by means of mind. Since mind does not weaken with distance, there is no reason why we cannot get perfectly lucid views of this other world. We know of two people here—Walt Danning and Dr. Saunders—who have established direct contact through the medium of dreams. It is possible that that contact still remains because the counterparts will still be in pretty poor shape, maybe injured, or at any rate recovering from shock. I propose we use Walt as the subject, mainly because he is the younger and tough enough to stand anything.”

“What do you figure on doing?” Walt asked shortly.

Lance smiled briefly.

“Inducing you to sleep. You will dream, and your dream can be recorded and carefully examined. You can become a free mental explorer of the unknown. If on awakening you get notions of suicide we can master that. Unless actual death happens on that other world, then we’re powerless. But that would happen anyway, no matter what we tried to do. See?”

“Kind of,” Walt muttered, scratching his head. “O. K. by me, of course, but how do you think you’re going to record a dream?”

“By enlarging on the system used by one Captain Englefield of England in 1930,” Lance replied. “He invented a thought-reading device. At the back of the subject’s head is a semicircular metallic plate of electrically reflective substance. Thoughts flowing outwards from the brain are reflected back from this plate and trapped in a series of condensers and transformers. Being electric in basis the mental vibrations can be stepped up. Englefield used a system of headphones for listening to thoughts—but that was long ago.

“In the light of present science we can transform those vibrations into visible pictures! The brain will experience sensations, and a specially devised screen will pick them up and remould them scene for scene, just like television. I have Englefield’s original designs: I hunted for them the moment I suspected dreams were directly connected with our troubles. The rest is mainly a matter of improvement and construction. Given two weeks and the run of the best laboratories still remaining in the country I think I can get somewhere. If we can contact a brain creator we may even get scientific knowledge enough to save our world. It’s worth trying, anyway.”

“The whole of the country’s resources are open to you, Mr. Dugan,” the President said. “I will see to it that staffs are recalled, doubled and trebled where necessary. Whatever you want, if it is within my power, will be obtained. Make Dr. Saunders here your go-between. While you work I will get what co-operation I can from other countries. At least we’re safe for a time here in Washington. Our nearest centers of destruction are Cincinnati and Bridgeport.”

“While I work here, have another series of laboratories prepared in a less threatened area, sir,” Lance said quickly. “If I get hard pressed I can move on and continue there. Now, gentlemen, let us see how we can arrange things.”

The scientists moved forward quickly. Automatically, Lance Dugan had become their leader.

IV

Lance Dugan did not have to work alone. The President's urgent radio appeal to the world for expert scientists to pool their knowledge for the common good of humanity elicited response from all quarters. English, French, and Russian scientists flew immediately from their crumbling countries to lend aid to the solitary man in all Earth's millions who had the unquestionably right idea.

The Russians in particular were valuable. For years they had pursued brain experiments on similar lines to Englefield; their methods of trapping and reproducing thought-waves went a great way toward knitting Lance's fragmentary conceptions into solid, permanent fact.

So while humanity milled and swept uselessly about slowly shattering countries, while yawning craters crept with pitiless steadiness toward Washington from Cincinnati—having already swallowed up most of the states of West Virginia and Ohio—there grew in the laboratories of Washington a curious five-foot high contrivance of rotating spheres, designed to pick up thought-wave impacts; curved receiving plates, electronic tubes of giant size, a projector, and a mineral base screen.

Lance had been too optimistic in allowing two weeks. It was a month before the machine was finished, a testimony to the untiring work of the scientists, engineers, truck drivers and factory men engaged on the job. Lance had a special time set for the experiment—11:30 in the evening—in the hope that Walt would be fairly sleepy from natural causes at that time.

He was. The exertions of the past days had seen to that. But it was essential none the less that he be drugged. Without a murmur he relaxed his powerful body on the receiving table. Surrounded by the numberless, eager scientists Lance adjusted the headplates quickly on the slide rollers, glanced once more over the controls.

Turning, he switched off the lights. Only his capable hands were visible in the subdued spotlights over the control board. A heavy quiet dropped on the laboratory, broken only by two sounds—the deep breathing of Walt and the slowly rising music of the generators in the neighboring power room.

Slowly the giant screen came to life. All eyes studied it; all hearts beat faster at a sudden sense of sweeping motion, of bottomless falling through infinity. Scudding whirlpools of light seemed to leap out of the screen and then sweep to extinction. Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus. They vomited out of the cosmos toward the screen and were swallowed up. Headlong, ghostly falling.

"The falling dream," Lance murmured. "This time pursued right to its limit. Usually we awake before we can complete it. For the first time we shall perhaps see where the fall really *ends!*"

In the background behind him the astronomical experts kept careful check of the planets revealed on the screen. Only from their charting would it be possible to locate the position of the unknown world.

In several seconds, accomplished with incredible speed—a speed only possible to untrammelled thought—the fall stopped. The view underwent crazy lurchings and resolved suddenly into a view of a switchboard, gigantic and meaningless. But beyond it were other things . . .

A hall of machines, endless machines, stretching away into a distance that was blurred. Nine islands of machinery; titanic balance wheels that spun with soundless power, snaking cables, bridges and networks, ladders and catwalks. Ten gang ways. And over it all a doming roof of transparent material, evidently not glass—unless it was unimaginably tough—for upon it there constantly spattered the fragments of shells and the savage glow of deadly beams of force.

Fascinated, the assembled scientists waited. Lance spoke tensely.

“We’re seeing through the eyes of the creator of which Walt is a part. He’s controlling that switchboard; that’s obvious.”

He broke off. The view had changed slightly to encompass a vision of the entire roof. Sweeping over it in droning thousands were cigar-shaped machines identical to the dozen that had visited Earth and left their cargo of horror. That the invaders were one and the same was now beyond dispute. But they were making little headway. It became apparent by degrees that, though parts of this giant hall were shattered from enemy attack, the roof and the majority of the tenants within were still sticking it out.

Earthly looking they were, but developed in craniums far beyond all earthly standards. Their heads were big, bald, and revolting.

“Something else is explained,” Lance whispered. “Since we were created by them we naturally resembled them physically. Our heads are a fifth the size of theirs, which fits exactly . . .”

“But what do we do?” asked Saunders’ impatient voice from the gloom. “How far is this thing getting us? How—”

“I sense a mental contact!”

Saunders broke off astounded. Those last words, uttered with the colorless deliberation of a subject under hypnosis, had come from Walt! Numberless eyes stared at him in the switchboard glow.

“Did he—?” began Voravski, leader of the Russian scientists; then Walt resumed his talking.

“I sense a contact between myself and that distant other being who, by the law of birth and experiment conducted down the ages, now has the fifth of a brain that *I* should have!”

“A contact!” Lance yelled, in the ensuing silence. “That clears the way for us. That being’s supersensitive brain must be aware of our own efforts on Earth here. He senses Walt’s fifth-brain mixed up with his own. Walt’s brain is in sympathy and he understands his creator’s thoughts. Creator by heredity, that is. When this other being was born Walt was born too: same thing applies to everybody. Naturally Walt talks in English because it’s the only language he knows. Thought takes no heed of language bar.”

“I feel a vague return to the full complement of my brain,” Walt’s mechanical voice went on. “But there is something between. Now I think I understand! Projected thought! Somehow you of Earth have projected thought across space, have solved the riddle of your kinship with us. That is sheer genius. Can it be that Providence has come to our aid in the time of need? That the experiments the Jurians sought to destroy can even yet save us?”

There was a quality of breathless wonderment, of new born hope, in those words. Again that breathless silence as thoughts flowed and interflowed across the gulf of space.

“If my belief is true that this *is* a mental contact, you may perhaps receive this message through my minor duplicate. There are a hundred scientists here. There were two hundred, but

our numbers are now halved by battle. Scores have also died in the city itself. Our city is below the surface of our planet. It means extinction for all of us unless succor comes quickly. The Jurians are our sworn enemies. Many generations ago they came from their planet in the first galaxy and tried unsuccessfully to conquer us in an effort to take over this then very prosperous world. We defeated them—we thought for all time; but news leaked through interplanetary spies that we had parted with a fifth of our brains in order to test experimental reasoning life on a distant world. We hoped later to take over this world—your world—when our planet finally gets too old to support us. Let me make it clear that it was our ancestors who made this experiment; we, always short of a fifth of our rightful brain heritage, have grown up since.

“Hearing of our shortage of brain material, knowing we could not be as brilliant as our ancestors, the new generation of Jurians tried again. But this time, with diabolical cunning, they decided to wipe out our experiments first so we could never regain our natural full brain capacity and so defeat them. And defeat them we could if only we were complete. In this city is a vast hall, locked by our ancestors, inside which is a purely automatic armament system—a terrifying mass of defensive secrets that could wipe the Jurians out of existence if only we had the full knowledge of *how to unlock those doors* and start the machines!

“We presumed the Jurians had destroyed you. Our telescopes revealed a world covered in smoke. Hope at that end seemed dead, but this new mental surge makes me realize otherwise. You can perhaps still save us. On Earth there must be a hundred duplicates of we hundred scientists here—that is if that hundred have escaped earthly disasters. But surely there will be seventy-five percent of the total. If there is, there is one chance! Just one!”

“Find all men who are scientific, gather them together. Later you will be able to identify their kinship with us by their aura numbers—that is, the frequency of electrical radiation their bodies give off. Each human being has a different frequency, like fingerprints. The apparatus is simple to make, and the electrical frequencies exactly duplicate our own in each case. I cannot give you details now; matters are too urgent. All I hope is that you understand me; if so, try and contact me again when you have gathered your possible hundred. . .”

The view on the screen swung from the switchboard as the owner of the brain in question stepped down into the hall. Lance reached out his hand and stopped the experiment. Lights gushed back into being, set the scientists blinking. Simultaneously Walt stirred a little and sat up.

“I—I dreamed about—” he began slowly, but Lance cut him short.

“We know exactly what you dreamed about,” and he reeled off a detailed account. Finally he swung back to the scientists. “Well, gentlemen, we know where we stand. We’ve got to find the hundred if they’re alive. They won’t reside in the masses of the people, that is evident; in fact it is probable that most of them are here amongst us. What we have to do is find as many scientific minds as we can, rope them in, then we stand by for further orders. Walt here has become our agent. Once we know how to work this frequency detector and have the list of frequency numbers we shall know where we stand. In the meantime. . . .”

Lance turned quickly and went over to the astronomical experts.

“Well, what’d you find out,” he asked shortly. “Where is this unknown world, anyway?”

“Near as we can figure out, Mr. Dugan, it’s about twenty million miles beyond the orbit of Pluto—a tenth planet. We’ve thought for a long time there might be one but have never found

anything. We can try again now we have this data. The planet must have a mighty low albedo since we've never sighted it in the 400-incher at Mount Wilson."

"O. K., hop to it and see what you can find out," Lance said briskly. "We've got other work to do, Walt. You're in charge of the flying around here: see that a dozen fast, roomy planes are prepared, with pilots. We're going to start a world-wide toothcombing for men of science. We'll get at them by every possible means—radio, airplane, personal contact, word of mouth. Everything hinges on it. Let's get the wheels moving. Time's precious!"

"And if our distant friend tries to communicate and finds no medium?" Walt asked.

"He won't, dumbbell. He knows when your mind's tuned up with his. Come on, will you?"

To find the remaining men on earth with scientific minds, get into touch with them by radio or bring them personally to Washington by plane, was a gigantic task, rendered all the more difficult by the almost total collapse of normal existence in every country.

In fact it never could have been done had it not been for the untiring efforts of the heads of different countries, the courage of the intelligence service, the vigilance of police, army and air force, who clung to their appointed posts and accepted orders without question. Never had discipline been so necessary. Here, in a world fast smashing in pieces, as holes ate down into its bowels and released appalling storms over the racked planet, obedience was the only guarantee of safety.

In that week of searching dozens of scientists, amateur and professional, reported to the nearest Evacuation Stations, were picked up and transported back to Washington by the fastest route. Walt Danning had the time of his life tearing back and forth across the world, pitting his aeronautical skill and the strength of his heavy liner against sweeping tempests, dense fogs, and incredible rains. Time and again he descended into cities that were corroded, plague-ridden, filled with starving, struggling thousands who surged for his liner the moment it landed.

Police, shoulder to shoulder, held back the masses with leveled machine guns. If a rush was made they fired, ruthlessly. To destroy the few was the only possible way to save the many. If once the master scientists of the tenth world could get the upper hand they would beyond question have ways and means to impart whereby the earth-rot could be stopped. On that Lance was backing everything. If the master scientists were wiped out, and their people with them, every soul on earth would automatically die also, the world smash in pieces under their corpses. It was a grim desperate race the few chosen Earthlings were running. . .

On his journeys back and forth to Washington Walt saw things he could never have deemed possible. Those fizzing holes from Bridgeport to San Francisco had become miles wide and no man knew how deep. The St. Louis and Kansas craters had joined together now, wiping out the State of Missouri in its entirety and replacing it with a volcanic crater that belched forth cotton-woollike masses of yellow fumes. From Northern Wisconsin to Louisiana people floundered and fought and died in this choking fog, aware all the time of the rumble of approaching doom ever following them up.

Between Salt Lake City and San Francisco holes there was a belt of land two miles wide, flanked on each side by impassable smoking gulfs. Shuddering thousands waited on that narrow strip, hour by hour finding it getting smaller. Behind and before their horrified eyes yawned death in the earth's furious, molten interior.

The same tale could be told of every part of the world. England was doomed, so was Europe and the East. Even the poles had not escaped. The whole world was turning into a smoldering rock sponge, must finally smash in pieces by its very disintegration.

It was against this deadly element of time that Lance had to work with such feverish energy. Washington now was for the most part inundated by the boiling waters of Chesapeake Bay, spouted overland across the Potomacs by the Bridgeport hole's advance into the sea. Fortunately that hole had spread more to the north than the south and Washington still lay out of the main track. Reports showed the destructive line was still 150 miles distant—a matter of perhaps a month before it caught up. But in other directions Massachusetts and Vermont had gone into the forever, sweeping tens of thousands to destruction.

But at last all the scientists had been gathered together. About the same time the astronomers of Mount Wilson completed their final studies, just before the combined Frisco and Salt Lake City holes caught up with them and reduced the whole mountain range to an avalanche of crumbling rock.

Lance stood in the Washington laboratory reading the reports of the men who had died that they might be made. The reports were brief, but to the point.

“Tenth planet positively exists. Revolution 10 hrs. 6 mins. Solar revolution about 400 years. Approximately 3,800,000,000 miles from sun. Small—densely packed. Gravity will be about same as Earth's. Many Plutonian characteristics. Low albedo, probably due to black rock and distance from sun. No air. Orbital inclination of—”

On that the record tragically ended. Lance turned slowly to the assembled scientists packing the great expanse.

“At least we know where the tenth world is,” he said quietly, after reading the report out. “Small wonder it hasn't been seen before. Don't forget it took the Lowell Observatory astronomers fifteen years to find Pluto. This would have been even more difficult without astronomical mathematics to go on. Well, I think we're ready to see if our friend has anything more to tell. Ready, Walt?”

“And waiting!” He lay down on the experimental table. As before the opiate was administered; he relaxed gently into slumber. The lights dimmed; the screen glowed as the engines came to life. The ultimate view was different this time. It seemed to be from a considerable height, portrayed a city which had no doubt once been wrought with delightful artistry. Now most of it lay in ruins, its towers splintered, its streets littered with debris. Far above, now *inside* the transparent roof, were dozens of attacking ships.

“So they got in,” Lance breathed in a bitter voice. “Wonder how they did it—”

Walt spoke suddenly.

“I sense mental contact again. That satisfies me that you got the last communication. Today I am in my own apartment looking over the city that is slowly being conquered unless you can help us. The Jurians got through one of the valve-shafts, which we have now closed. It was an unfortunate mistake for us to make. However, I am hoping you have gathered together some of your scientific minds in the hope that among them will be the hundred we need. Here are the frequencies they must register in order to tally with ours.”

Instantly adding machines began to click in the gloom.

“As to the detector itself you can construct it within a few hours. It is merely a voltmeter of extreme sensitivity, registering the exact aura of everybody on whom it is tested. When it registers the tally numbers you have one of the hundred we need. Here are the construction details.”

The army of technicians scribbled under their spotlights. The others stood watching the attack and defense going on in that distant world.

“I may not be able to speak again. We are lining up for our last great stand against these invaders. Listen carefully. When you have found as many as possible of the hundred construct a space machine and bring them here. In appearance it will resemble the gray ships you have seen. For power you will use rockets. There are other ways, but too involved for explanation here. You have hesitated so far to use rockets for space travel, not knowing what results you might get. If you follow out these directions implicitly you will have no trouble reaching us. For fuel you will use your most powerful explosive: atomic force is not within your province. Once you get here, radio a signal. One of us will pick it up and give further orders. You *must* get here! If only one of us can get a full brain these invaders are finished. Only a full brain can unlock the doors of our sealed arsenal. Now, here are the details of space travel, and some useful weapons.”

For an hour and a half the details followed, were taken down by voice recorders word for word. The last words had desperation in them.

“The rest is your task! You must come, if a mighty science is to be saved from the ruthless domination of an alien foe! *Hurry!*”

With that Walt ceased speaking. Lance looked at him in the resumed lights, glanced at the scientists. He gave a heavy sigh.

“If only we were able to ask questions,” he muttered. “We might have found a way to stop our crumbling world. As it is, I can only foresee the survival of perhaps a hundred or so on another world. Well— There it is. The peoples of Earth must never know, gentlemen.”

He became silent for a moment, grim faced, then went on, “For tonight we rest. We have got to do so: we have worked at mind-numbing speed recently. Tomorrow we will follow out these directions. Engineers must get to work immediately, what remaining metal foundries still exist must be pressed into service.”

“Just what excuse will you make to the world?” asked Saunders quietly. “We’re on a doomed planet, Lance—that’s perfectly clear now. At the end of our work only a few of us will take off to this tenth world. How do we excuse ourselves? What promise do we give in order to get help?”

Lance set his jaw. “We promise those who work for us that they are going to a better land,” he answered grimly.

“Deception—plain and simple!” Saunders said slowly.

“I know it. The better land is death—at least it can’t be worse than life is at present. They’ll think we mean that we are taking them to a better land.”

“I don’t like it,” Walt growled, sitting up. “It’s barefaced treachery, Lance.”

He nodded slowly. “I know it is—but look at it my way. If we do not go into space, what happens? Our world smashes in pieces, every soul will die and us included. That distant world will be ruled by an infinitely merciless race. In the far future other planets will have them to reckon with. Now the other way. We cannot save the rest of humanity anyway, but if *we* go we can still perhaps save the tenth planet scientists, preserve their ideals. They are our creators,

and for that we owe them a certain debt. Take your choice, gentlemen; the issue's too mighty for one man's shoulders."

There was a long silence. The way out was plain.

"We'll go," said Saunders quietly. "Guess you're right at that!"

While the Washington laboratory technicians went to work the next day to build the aura-detector, Lance went into conference with the President. Out of that came a call throughout America to throw open factories for the sole purpose of casting the moulds for one mighty space machine. Engineers, promised a better land in return for their services, came into action to follow out the plans. Areas still escaping the devouring holes were assigned and surrounded by police and army reserves to keep away the screaming multitudes, whose sole object now, knowing all of them could not be accommodated, was to destroy the chances of survival for the luckier ones. It was human nature, understandable, but it was met with merciless opposition.

The construction of that space ship and the arms for it could well be described in blood instead of ink. It brought out the most bestial elements in man as he fought a losing battle in a world gone mad. The red flares of titanic blast furnaces belched into the drifting, acrid fogs; great tractor lorries carrying the castings rumbled over an eternally quaking countryside, lorries mounted with armed guards whose job it was to defeat the wild, bearded incendiaries lurking in the fields and hedges.

In Washington's mighty engineering sheds themselves the cast moulds were assembled amidst a glare of floodlight that shone through the darkness now almost eternally present. The whole world was wrapped in confusion, horror, destruction.

In the armament factories men and women worked ceaselessly on the production of weapons such as earth had never known before. They utilized basic forces which could only be tapped in free space, were designed to make use of the destructive radiations—the most dominant being cosmic—forever networking the void. On earth they were useless because of Earth's atmosphere.

And the space ship grew by degrees, five hundred feet long, with enough accommodation for the now chosen hundred and some few promised ones, including the President, Lance himself, and Saunders, found they had twins among the hundred scientists of the tenth planet. Not that it was any surprise to them. As they had expected, most of the hundred had been found among the scientists who had arrived at the outset of the adventure.

Walt, his twinship already determined, had elected to become pilot of the machine, spent his time learning the intricacies of the master control-board. He made numberless journeys to the sheds where the monster was being prepared, saw it finally reach completion.

It was toward the close of this hurricane of activity which had its center in Washington that the first cataclysmic disasters reeled across the world, shook the crumbling planet to its depths. Several of the European craters, now miles wide, had bored clean through the earth to neighboring holes on the opposite side of the world. The outcome was incredible—overwhelming in its vastness.

Monstrous portions of the eastern world roared with a million thunders into the transplanetary bore, sweeping countless millions to instant death. Unguessable square miles of land flashed into nothing or tore off into space. A globe, pock marked and scarred, filled with scurrying myriads of antlike humans, was deprived of a quarter of its mass. It rocked and swung in the grip of earthquakes; tidal waves swamped inwards. To the west of America the

Pacific poured inwards as far as the St. Louis hole, and there, Providentially, the hole stopped it by canceling it out. Washington still stood, a somewhat shaken, fissured city, one of the last metropolises of a dying world.

It was no longer safe to delay. Lance gave the immediate order for the spaceship to be tenanted by the chosen ones. That demanded a trip through flood, fire, and falling buildings. It demanded escape from maddened revolutionaries; it was necessary to run the gauntlet of steel and fists. But it was done.

By degrees the hundred and fifty, scientists and preferred ones, entered the ship. The massive valves were relentlessly closed upon the surging, screaming myriads in the yellow fog outside. Faces mouthed entreaties for assistance, fists hammered futilely on belying curves of invincible metal.

"It's tough, betraying them like this," Lance muttered, staring outside. For a long moment he hesitated, then his face set like a rock. "But we've got to do it!"

He glanced round on the enormous length of ship as the assembly took up their various positions, Walter at the far end and in the seat before the master control board.

"O. K.," Lance said quietly. "Let her go!"

Instantly the engines roared, hurling their power to the mammoth rocket tubes. The ship quivered, hung in breathless motionlessness for one pent second, then with an ever-increasing whining shriek it tore upwards in a vast, spark-encrusted arc. Up through the yellow, scudding rack—up with a velocity that held the last men of earth rooted to the metal floor.

In fifteen minutes they had shot through the last vestige of atmosphere, gazed back in morose silence on a smoking, plumed cinder that had been a planet. That in a few hours would be a planet no more.

But within the first three days a new, grim problem arose. By degrees, first in ones, then in twos and threes, death stalked through the space ship! Sometimes it happened by suicide after dreaming; at others one of the picked scientists just dropped dead from apparent heart-failure. Their bodies were promptly cremated in the rocket tubes' inspection chambers, incinerated instantly.

Lance became increasingly worried. By the time the vessel had passed the orbit of Jupiter the numbers in the ship were reduced to sixty-five!

"It is perfectly obvious what is happening," he said, gazing round on the taut, grave faces. "Any of us may die instantly when our master twin is destroyed on the tenth planet. It is also obvious that our masters are getting the worst of it. The best scientists on Planet Ten are being exterminated. We have that danger of extermination to face also—but if only *one* of us gets through it can save the situation. One scientist, we were told through Walt, can unlock the doors of that vast, sealed automatic armament section. For the sake of that world's science *one must finish the course!* I am telling you this because—because each of us must realize the issues at stake."

Heads nodded in silent agreement. Lance turned to Walt.

"Increase the speed to absolute maximum, Walt. If the acceleration plays hell with us we'll have to stand it. Get going!"

Walt nodded briefly. Thereafter the vast ship tore with crushing, numbing speed through the deeps, drawing ever nearer and nearer the distant outposts of the solar system—but by the time Pluto's orbit had finally been passed another twenty five were ashes in the rocket chambers. The remainder waited, grim-faced, realizing that now must come the final struggle.

They worked with a total disregard for the fate hovering over them, carefully checked with the position of the tenth planet, swung the ship toward it, at last sighted it as a densely dark world far beyond Pluto. And the nearer they came to it, their speed now reduced, the more they became aware of multitudes of flashing shapes swarming around the dark surface.

Through the telescopes the planet was clearly pockmarked with gleaming domes, presumably the protection against the airless exterior; and the darting shapes were undoubtedly the invaders.

“This,” said Lance tensely, as they came within a million miles, “is where we really go to town. All set on those weapons, boys?”

The scientists nodded, each at his post, each silently marveling at the mechanisms which could absorb and retransmit the energies of the void for such destructive purposes.

Lance turned aside and switched on the radio. To his relief there was an immediate answering call.

“Within a million miles,” he stated briefly. “What now?”

“From your present position you will see five protective domes. The fifth one is marked with a cross. At the moment it is shielded by force energy to deflect the invaders. Below the fifth dome there are no people: what few there are left of us are collected in the first hall. Here is what you must do—drive through the fifth dome! We will stop the force shield as we see you approach: drive straight on! You will have a fifteen hundred foot drop below the dome, enough to enable you to break your fall. The instant you are through the force will resume over the gap. We dare not swing aside the valves: we did that before and some invaders got through . . . Hurry!”

“Right!” Lance switched off and glanced round keenly. “O. K. Walt, let’s go!”

Walt set his teeth, sighted the fifth crossed dome directly in line with the forward window, then eased in the power once more. Like a bolt out of infinity the ship dived downwards. But it was not so easy as all that. Several of the invaders caught sight of the vessel, swung round from their harrying attacks. Instantly the void was ablaze with nameless forces. Rays of unknown quantity criss-crossed the path down which the machine was hurtling.

“Fire!” Lance bellowed frantically, and simultaneously the weapons lined round the ship’s walls blazed forth their own mysterious energies. What they were the earth men did not know, but they realized that without them they could never have made it. Though they did not make any effect on the invaders’ ships themselves, they at least hetrodyned their powers.

For a moment or two in that breathless million-mile drop the ship had the advantage, but the task of sheer accuracy was too exacting. Three invader beams seared free of neutralization, sliced against the vessel with shattering impact. The walls turned white hot, then cooled again, but the damage was done. The infinite cold fissured the metal. Vital air began to escape in a singing tide.

“Quick! Space suits!” Lance screamed.

He foundered across to the area where they were kept, only to fall back with a gasping scream as the rays got through again. As though slashed with a razor the ship sliced clean in two! For one wild instant Lance was aware of himself open to the void in half a ship, with the stunned scientists around him. Far away in the opposite half of the ship, hurtling with terrific speed, was Walt—alone.

Lance knew no more than that. The universe was cold, dark—void.

Walt twisted his head around as he sensed the sudden tentacles of space bite through the vanishing air. For a breathless second he stared at the half ship in which he was marooned, back at the black planet and crossed dome hurtling to meet him. Something, a remembrance, blazed through his brain.

“One must finish the course!”

Relentless agony warped his muscles, coiled up his lungs. He was a dying, tortured wreck as he clung to the switches, staring through dimming eyes at that widening cross. Blood suddenly gushed from his nose. With blinding impact he tore toward the dome, fell helpless over the switches that fired the last charge into the forward tubes to break the fall. His senses reeled and rebounded amidst rioting, catastrophic noise.

To Walt the events that followed were little better than the figments of a weird dream. In half conscious fashion he was aware of robots carrying him, of his arrival in a titanic surgery lit with blazing lights. Things happened to his head that he could not figure out—but through it all one clear realization crept to him. He was able to look on his own body! A wrecked, shattered ruin of a body that was irrevocably dead.

Thereafter things changed. He knew he went to doors of stupendous size, sat for hours before complex controls, unraveling intricate combinations and interlocking devices—until at last the doors swung wide. What happened then he was none too sure; but he had an idea of seeing countless thousands of tiny space ships buzzing like hornets through the underground city’s airlocks, of seeing them discharge such staggering forces of war upon the invaders that the invaders’ ships simply crumbled and splintered and mushroomed into nothing under the onslaught.

Through days, through weeks, Walt knitted his sensations together. He was aware of other scientists, big headed, like the ones he had seen in his dreams. He saw thousands of people at work repairing the damage of the invasion. Everybody seemed to pay him great respect. Gradually he crept out of his detached sense into full understanding. His brain leapt the gaps.

At last it was crystal clear! He had, automatically, become the master of the entire race. The former master was dead: as the only man with intelligence enough to unlock the doors of the arsenal his supreme power was unchallenged. Of course! He had his full brain now; the fifth section that had been owned by Walt Danning had been grafted onto his own. The body of Walt Danning had been smashed to atoms in that final heroic dive, but this brain had escaped immediate injury, had been removed in the nick of time.

And now? Now he understood. Strange how he forgot Walt Danning. Now he was conscious of only being the supremely brilliant master of this already brilliant race. Now that he had a complete brain he could provide ways and means for the others to gain their full brain power too. Synthesis, forces of life— He toyed with ideas that only a complete brain could toy with.

Lance Dugan, Saunders, and the others? They were the last of the experiment—that ghastly, mighty experiment in life that had come to an end. The servants had saved the masters.

He *was* the Master! He turned slowly and gazed on the activity. Mighty ideas pounded again through his vast dome case, and with them a certain conclusion. Never again must a scientist part with a vital portion of his brain or body. That way lay destruction, and because of it a world of struggling bipeds had been wiped out.

Never again! *He*, especially, must stay as he was—complete. The supreme Master!

PS's Feature Flash

Flashing you the highlights on the men you've met in the preceding pages—those cosmic-minded writers and illustrators who help to nourish Planet Stories.

Concerning Mr. Ayre—

We feel pretty certain that Thornton Ayre's provocative story, "Twilight of the Tenth World," will fascinate you as much as it did us. Since reading it, our brains have been toying with cosmic possibilities far beyond any possible editorial scope. We've been doing our work in an aureate haze of tempting telepathic possibilities. Thought transference, we find (Mr. Ayre to the contrary) does not get out magazines. So, a bit wistfully, perhaps, we've thrown in the sponge and pass the problem on to you.

All of which is merely a leading up to the following letter from Mr. Ayre concerning the source of his unusual plot.

"I owe this entire plot to an article in a leading English daily paper of a year ago, headed *Sixth Sense Tested!* I have tried for a long time to work out something both possible and adventurous to fit the theory expounded in the article—and 'Twilight of the Tenth World' is the result.

"After all, I'm no new explorer into dreams: men have tried to get to the root of them for ages. I've simply tried to work out another way, which—though I say it myself—I don't consider to be so very unlikely. The hardest part about this story was knitting up the essentially scientific statements of the theory to the fast pace I tried to maintain throughout the yarn itself. I hope I have managed it without any undue sagging. . . .

"The conception of polarizing gravity is, I hope, one that has the rudiments of possibility. If light can be polarized—and we certainly know it can—why not gravity? And if such a thing were to come about I think we'd find ourselves facing something pretty similar to what I've depicted in the story.

"Maybe some readers will be surprised to find that not a single feminine character appears in the yarn—which is, I suppose, something of a departure after the murky ladies who have pervaded my last few novelettes. Reason? To get a fresh angle; to see if it were possible to change the system and achieve the same effects. Don't imagine I'm going to drop my mystery females entirely. No: I don't think a story is properly balanced without them—a story relying entirely on character, that is. This one does not rely on that, but on new theories and action.

"That, for this time, covers what little I have to say of the background of 'Twilight of the Tenth World.' I hope you will enjoy it."

THORNTON AYRE,
Lancs, England.