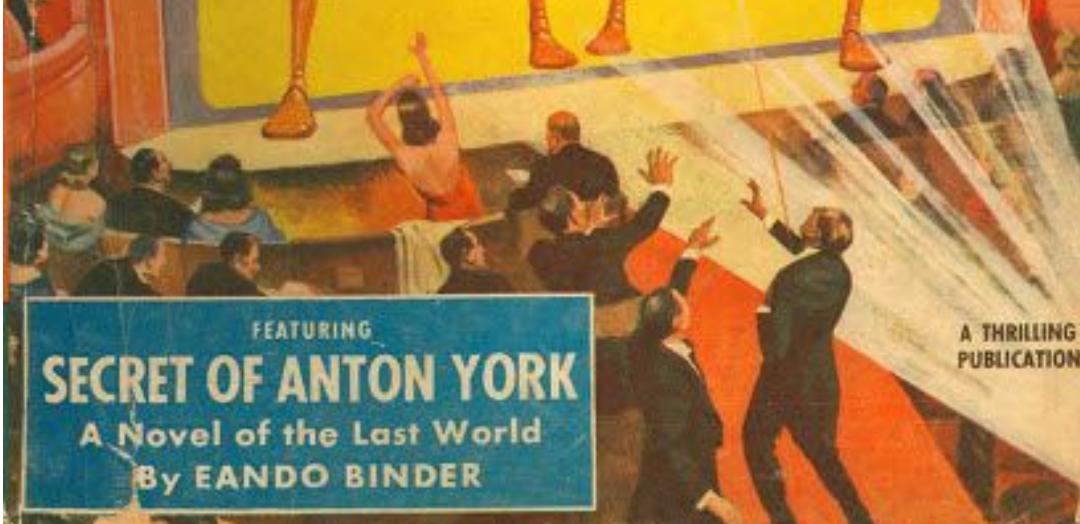


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SECRET OF ANTON YORK
A Novel of the Last World
By EANDO BINDER

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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Title: Ice Over America

Date of first publication: 1940

Author: Ray Cummings (1887-1957)

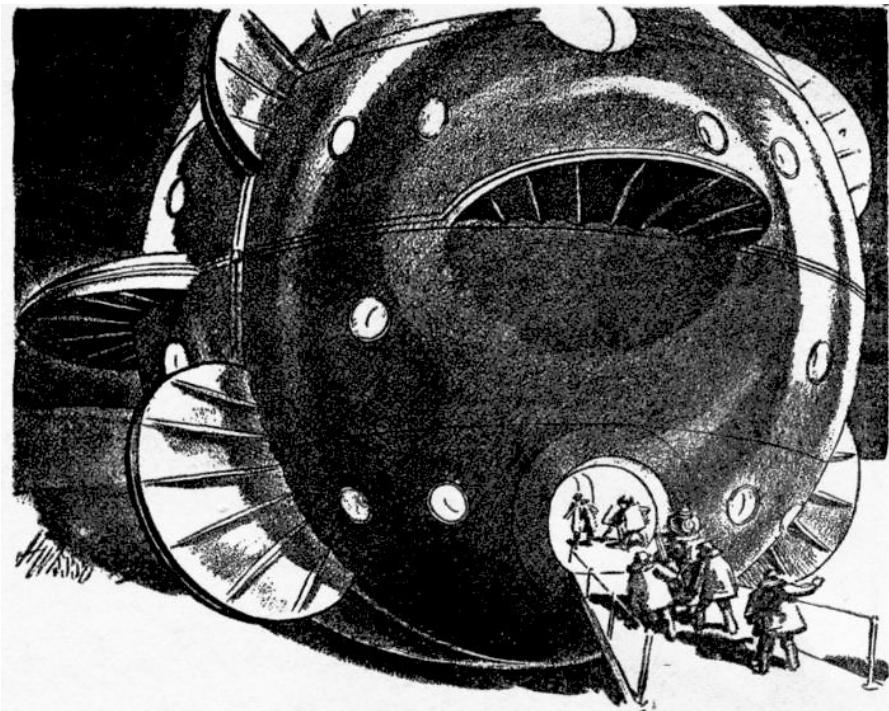
Date first posted: Feb. 19, 2022

Date last updated: Feb. 19, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220247

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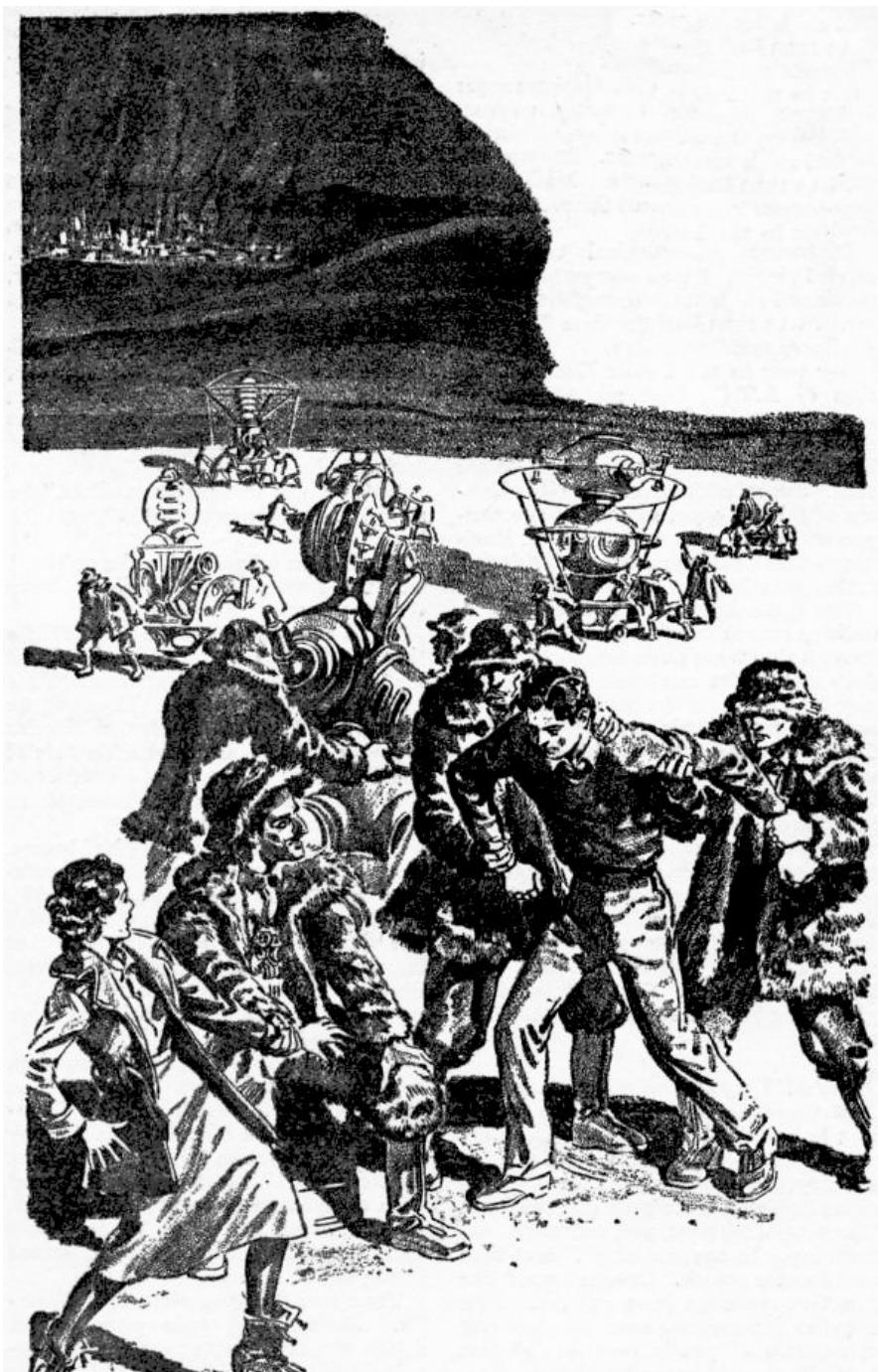
A Complete Novelet of the Great Chaos

By
RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Great Adventure," "The Man Who Saw Too Much," etc.

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, August 1940.

*From Out of the Cold Abyss of Outer Space Hurts an Unknown Asteroid—Bringing
With It a Freezing Death!*



Martin sprang forward at the grinning, triumphant Tarrago

CHAPTER I

The World Is Doomed

For me and my family, the first event of the Great Chaos came in October, 2009. Though connected with Public Events Division of the American Television Co., I was living with my grandfather, Dr. Elias Murdock, in Lake Placid. Grandfather was retired, but he still maintained an active astronomical observatory there.

My brother Martin Murdock, two years older than myself, was instructor of mathematics in the Georgia University for Girls. One morning, Martin televised us.

"Take a look at the palm trees," he said.

A sort of startled awe was in his voice. He swung the tele-lens so I could see out his windows. The palms that lined the College Gardens were drooping, blackened, shriveled by the freezing cold that had descended upon Savannah during the night.

That was the start. Within a week the world was ringing with amazement. A blizzard covered New York City in October. London was frozen. Snow buried Paris. February weather, in October, froze the whole Northern Hemisphere! We had thirty below zero on the mountaintop above Lake Placid, where Grandfather's observatory was stolidly perched.

From the Southern Hemisphere came contrary reports of amazing, unprecedented heat. Buenos Aires sweltered at the start of its summer. Rio was engulfed in furnace blasts. Melbourne, Cape Town—all suffered the same fierce heat.

Disturbed meteorological conditions caused violent storms everywhere. Old-fashioned ships were brought to disaster. More than half the time the great air-liners were grounded.

My post in the Public Events Division of A.T.C., kept me abnormally busy that weird October. I commuted from Lake Placid to New York City. The temperature averaged well below zero. Snow, with which the city cleaners could not cope, blanketed the canyon streets to a three-foot depth. Business was disorganized. Vehicular traffic was largely abandoned.

But there was, at first, no terror. A holiday aspect transformed the city, as though this were some far-north Canadian settlement celebrating an ice carnival. Crowds welcomed an enforced holiday from their working routine. They thronged the lighted streets, where darkness came in mid-afternoon. Old-fashioned horse-drawn sleighs made their appearance. Clothing stores waxed momentarily prosperous, with picturesque clothing hastily imported from Canada. Girls, in the vivid costumes of Northern carnival time, trudged the city ramps in snowshoes, where the snow was frozen like a Quebec mountain-side. A million laughing girls must have tried skiing for the first time.

Every agency of news dissemination rang with the possible causes. But nobody—at first—cared.

By November, though, terror began striking. Food supplies in the big cities had long since been disorganized. The people laughed, and submitted unthinkingly to the hardships. But then real hunger struck. Crimes leaped like fire that feeds on pure oxygen. Fuel supplies were giving out. Government censorship of public disasters at last broke down and was withdrawn. People began listening—then sat at their instruments, shocked and frightened by what really was transpiring.

I saw little of Grandfather during those hectic weeks. I came home only to sleep. Grandfather and his ten assistants were feverishly busy. His huge refracting electro-telescope, one of the largest in the world, was suddenly taken over by the U. S. War Department. Itself an Emergency Department now, it was trying with all its resources to cope with the new conditions.

One night in November, Grandfather confronted me. A thin old man, with a great mane of snow-white hair, he was still vigorous and spry. But he wore an unusual haggard, frightened look.

"We've got to tell them, Dale," he said. "The Government agrees it's best."

"Tell them what?" Like the public, I was too immersed in details to have thought much of the cause.

"This catastrophe to the world!" His thin old fingers trembled as he rifled his sheet of mathematical data. "This exodus to the tropics. It must be stopped. How can we crowd Earth's teeming millions into the little belt of the Equator? Disease will break out. Death will come, not by thousands as now, but by millions."

The world exodus already had begun. For weeks every agency of transportation had been overloaded. Florida, southern Texas, California teemed with the rich. When the snow struck that far down as though a dam had burst, the people rushed to the crowded lowlands of Mexico. The heights there were snow-buried.

The exodus now was a rout—by ship, by aero, by snow-car. Every hidden road southward was thronged. Thousands trudged on foot through the few hours of daylight and the eighteen-hour Arctic night. The roads were littered with abandoned household goods that the terrorized people no longer could carry. And frozen bodies lay neglected in the snow. . . .

That was the true picture of America. Europe and Asia were worse. South of the Equator was a weird reversal—blazing days brought shade temperatures of 110° and 120°, through which the people tried to stagger northward.

"I know the cause of all this, Dale," Grandfather was saying. "If the people understand it, we may hold them steady to fight this out. Running away won't solve anything."

Government agencies had been saying that for a month. But the London Government offices were now in Malta. The Washington staffs were spread from Miami to Tampa.

I sat with Grandfather all that night in his little study under the observatory tower. The bleak blue-black night pressed ominously against our storm windows. Martin had come by Government aero from Savannah. A score or more ace newscasters and Government officials joined our conference to prepare tomorrow's momentous broadcast. We sat listening to Grandfather's solemn voice.

"I don't want to be technical, gentlemen. What I say, you will have to put into even more popular language that no one can misunderstand. This rout toward the tropics must stop. It is true that what we used to call the Torrid Zone is becoming the only temperate portion of Earth. But it will be overcrowded. Sanitation cannot be maintained. Disease may kill everyone."

"But what is the alternative, Dr. Murdock?" a newscaster asked.

"We can fight better in our accustomed environment. We in this room are all alive. This winter will be more frigid than any since the Ice Ages. But summer will come again. A blazing summer is better than dying on a frozen road."

He steadied himself.

"The thing is an astronomical catastrophe, gentlemen, that I hope may be only temporary. An asteroid is near Earth. A small metal world, bleak and barren, it is only five hundred miles in diameter. But it is so dense that it has almost the mass and gravity of Earth. I observed this asteroid twenty years ago. The Royal Astronomical Society named it Zanthos. Its narrow elliptic orbit carries it at high speed around the Sun and out almost to Neptune. Its first appearance was twenty years ago. By what cosmic chance it came then, no one knows."

We had all had fragments of this information for weeks, of course. We knew that twenty years ago little Zanthos had come and gone. By chance it had not passed close to any of our planets of the Solar System.

But now it was visible to the naked eye. A new star, it blazed like Venus with reflected sunlight. Its mass had disturbed Earth.

The inclination of Earth's axis was shifting!

"In another month," Grandfather was saying, "our normal twenty-three and a half degree inclination will have increased. Our South Pole will be pointing almost directly at the Sun—"

He described the intricate astronomical change. My mind strove to picture the blazing Southern Hemisphere, with a summer that was months long, while the Northern Hemisphere was just a gelid, frigid night.

"But it's temporary," Grandfather said vehemently. "Our Earth continues in its orbit. Spring will come, then blazing summer here in the North, and frigid winter in the South."

Days and nights were all to be changed.

The whole accustomed order of everything would be flung into chaos. This was the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world!

"Tell them to stay where they are," Grandfather stated. "They must stay where they are and help us fight it through!"

The broadcast went over every air-channel in the world, that next day. Over and over, through the brief Northern daylight hours, through the endless day in the South latitudes, it was repeated. Who heard it? Of the terrorized billions, who stopped to ponder the intricate astronomical facts from doddering scientists?

Each man feels he is the center of the Universe.

Everybody knew that in the Equatorial belt lay relief, and few thought of more than that.

We were a world at bay, in the midst of the Great Chaos. But the crowning terror still was to come.

I was in my office in New York City that day—the first of December—when the broadcast was flung. I was the only one of my immediate staff who entered that cold, bare office of empty desks, with a silence like shuddering death upon it. It was ten o'clock in the morning, but outside the windows, frosty stars gleamed in a purple Arctic sky.

The St. Lawrence River for weeks had been frozen solid. The Mississippi was solid, with an ice bridge that had broken in the South and drowned thousands. The Hudson, from Troy to New York, was solid. Even the Savannah River was impassable, choked with ice flows.

That black morning I stared at my own little segment of the myriad weird scenes of the giant Earth-arena. The New York street was a dark and almost empty canyon. Earth's greatest city was so abandoned that I felt as though I were alone in a frozen tomb. The street was choked with snow. Vandals had smashed windows. Merchandise was scattered on the street, frozen, half buried.

As I was sitting there, my news-audiphone blared forth the sudden terror that stiffened me.
All that had gone before had not been enough. Now we must have something worse!

Even in our modern twenty-first century world, no successful space ship had yet been built. But now my televizor showed the frozen plains of Southern Georgia, a few miles outside the crowded city of Savannah. Some news-gatherer was flying over the neighborhood, giving out the image from his television transmitter.

On the naked Georgia plain, I saw a huge, weird looking metal ball. A space ship!

Men, who were painted by a purple light-glow, were pouring from it. Though they seemed human, they were dragging out fantastic mechanisms which they were hastily erecting.

Earth was beaten down, harassed by the menacing forces of an outraged Nature.

Now it faced a new attack!

CHAPTER II

Visitor from Zanthos

As I stared, all my blood seeming to be freezing in my veins. A great circle of violet light, half a mile in diameter, spread like a curtain up into the sky! It glowed, blurring the invaders camped behind it.

Close to the televizing aero came another news plane. It approached too close to the purple barrage. Abruptly a segment of the curtain billowed outward, caught the plane. There was a tiny speck of light, a tiny puff. The plane was gone, dissolved into nothingness!

Horrified, I watched the weird beings from some other world who had come to attack us. That was my conviction. Then one of my receivers picked up a broadcast.

"I am here," the ironic voice was saying. "José Tarrago. You remember me. Twenty years ago you sentenced me and my comrades to death. You, the whole world, are sentenced to death now! I shall say nothing more. My actions will speak. José Tarrago will get his revenge at last!"

The wave-channel died in dread silence. . . .

I was only an infant, twenty years before, when the case of José Tarrago and his band of criminals agitated the world. Grandfather explained it to me that day the invaders landed in Georgia. We were in his study at Lake Placid.

In the summer of 1990, twenty years ago, there had been a middle-aged man named Paolo Collette. A man of forty. Whatever his grievance was against his fellow men, no one knew. A scientific genius of independent wealth, he worked alone in a barred laboratory which later was found to be one of the best equipped on Earth.

Perhaps he was mentally unbalanced. Gradually his isolation was broken. He gathered around him a group of men—scientists, some of them; criminals, all of them. In 1990 it was discovered that Collette had perfected the burning death, an electronic projector capable of hurling a directional, non-radiating heat beam a tremendous distance.

With such a weapon, the world could easily be devastated. And Collette and his band were perhaps planning just that.

"Collette's plot failed," Grandfather said. "He and all his band—some five hundred in number—were captured and sentenced to death. How did they escape? Well, that was suppressed by Government order. Most of us scientists believe someone smuggled in to Collette a machine that enabled him to melt his way through the jail walls."

"None of the five hundred was recaptured. In Collette's laboratory they were surrounded. And then, too late, it was discovered that Collette had built a space ship. It wavered up through an opening in the laboratory roof, vanished into the starlight. I saw it in this same reflector."

My grandfather gestured to the giant, double-barreled, stereoscopic telescope in the observatory over us.

"I watched it leave Earth's atmosphere and head into space. It actually seemed to be wavering. No one thought then that Collette had really built a practical interplanetary vehicle. It would come to grief, of course."

"But evidently didn't," I said.

"No," he agreed. "Evidently not. At the time it left—twenty years ago—Zanthos was crossing Earth's orbit, outward bound. I can understand it now. Those escaped criminals must have landed on Zanthos. And now they have returned."

"But who was José Tarrago?" I asked. "You've been talking about Collette."

"Tarrago? He was a Spanish-American adventurer, Collette's lieutenant. He had been wanted for several previous murders."

My grandfather's grim voice abruptly stopped. At our study window, a pallid face had suddenly appeared. It pressed against the outer pane, its luminous dark eyes staring in at us.

"Dale, what's that?" Dr. Murdock gasped.

We leaped to our feet. The face vanished. I rushed to the door, opened it. The frigid Arctic cold struck at me in a blast. The silvery moonlight disclosed a figure crumpled on the snow under our window. I shoved my grandfather back.

"It's fifty below. You'll freeze!"

Within a few seconds I turned over a limp body, stared at its white face framed in a fur hood, the slim, boyish figure clad in a furry jacket and trousers.

As I dragged the body back to our doorway and tumbled it inside, I was aware of the queerness of the fur. It was long, shaggy, greenish hair, with queer little animal heads like epaulettes at the shoulders.

"Is he dead?" Grandfather asked anxiously.

The boy's eyes were closed, but he was breathing. He moaned as I laid him out on the warmth of our floor. Then his eyes opened. Dark luminous eyes, with long lashes, widened at us.

I pulled off the parkalike, furry hood that framed his face. Long black tresses tumbled out.

It was a girl! She had fallen from exhaustion, but the warmth of our room and restoratives soon revived her.

We got her out of the furry garments. Small, slim and dark, she was clad in a strange garment. It was woven of shining blue metallic threads that were drawn to such hairlike fineness that it was soft, shimmering fabric. She wore a long-sleeved waist with a collar that clasped her slender throat and flared in queerly futuristic fashion. Metal strands crossed her bosom, descended and bound her slender waist. A brief, flaring skirt disclosed her satinlike legs.

It was a strange costume. But the girl herself, with great masses of black hair cascading to her waist, her beautiful face pale and strained, was human and normal in every way. We could see that she understood us, as we revived her.

"What's your name?" I said. "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Just looking at her made my heart pound.

"Eve Collette," she murmured at last.

My grandfather and I sat by her, ministering to her, as we listened in amazement to her murmured words. The daughter of Paolo Collette, she was born on Zanthos seventeen years before. Her mother was an Earth girl who had married Collette. When he and his band were captured, jailed and sentenced to death, his young wife had smuggled the heat mechanism to him. She helped him and his men in their sensational escape and joined them in the space ship.

I need not detail what Eve told us of her life on Zanthos. She lived on that barren little world all its twenty-year journey out to Neptune and back. She told us of its savage, primitive

natives, hardly a hundred thousand in number. Weirdly unlike Earth people, the inhabitants lived mostly underground to combat the frigid cold of outer space and the blasting heat as they rounded the Sun.

With his ingenious scientific apparatus, Collette greatly improved conditions on Zanthos. The natives were his willing slaves.

"My father was not a villain," Eve insisted earnestly. "When he was a young man, he lived under another name here in New York. He was sent to prison for fifteen years for a crime he did not commit. Then he was pardoned. He married my mother, but nobody could give him back those fifteen years. It made him bitter. He wanted revenge upon the world—"

"Where are your father and mother now?" I asked. "What can you tell us about this fellow, José Tarrago?"

She shuddered. Her eyes, glowing with the bluish tube-light of our room, somberly regarded me. There was the fire of hatred and fear in her dark gaze.

"José Tarrago murdered my mother and father last year. They had come to see things differently. They were sorry for their actions here on Earth. They were planning, when Zanthos got close, to come back to Earth. They wanted to offer their scientific apparatus to help Earth, not to harm it."

Then she told us how José Tarrago had been plotting his return to Earth on a murderous mission. When Collette punished him for trying to make love to Eve, he murdered her father and mother, talked the men into joining his plot against Earth.

"But what is he after?" I demanded. "Does he want to devastate the Earth, murder its people, destroy property, just for revenge?"

Eve's luminous eyes stared at me. Her fingers were twisting nervously. Then I noticed that she was toying with a big ring, a queer looking circlet of bluish metal on one of her slender fingers. Its prongs clasped a big flat jewel, like a man's old-fashioned seal ring. But this stone or jewel was apparently translucent. It looked like a lens. . . .

"What does Tarrago want on Earth?" Eve broke her silence. "I do not know. Revenge, yes. I wanted to warn you of that. He will kill with Father's electronic heat beam, kill ruthlessly—"

"But there is something else he is after."

"Yes. I think so. I do not know what it is." She held out her hand. "That night we found Father and Mother, Father was just dying. He gave me this ring. He told me things that were very strange."

I exchanged a glance with Grandfather. Here was some mystery that vitally concerned the welfare of the world.

"What did he tell you, child?" Grandfather urged.

"He told me then that I—I have an older sister here on Earth. Her name is Wanda. My poor mother had to leave her infant girl with a friend on Earth. With whom, I don't know. If Wanda is still living, she would be about twenty-one years old now."

"But what has that to do with Tarrago?" I asked. "Or your ring?"

"I do not know, but there must be some connection. Before he died he told me he had left a sealed message with Wanda. It was to be opened only after Father had died—or if the world was facing disaster."

"And your ring?" I persisted.

"He told me to keep it always. He had left one just like it with Wanda, to be used in some way with his sealed message. He—he was almost gone then—" Her voice broke off, but she

steadied herself. "He was trying to tell me, but it all got incoherent. Something about the message disclosing his scientific secret. He begged me never to let Tarrago know any of this. If ever I got back to Earth, I was to find Wanda and give his secret to the Earth. Then he died."

Grandfather and I blinked several times.

"How did you get here?" I asked softly.

Tarrago had brought her on his expedition, she told us. She was terrified by his desire to impress her with his greatness. This morning the ship of the invaders had passed high over frozen New York State and had dropped on the Georgia plain. Eve had escaped in a small lifeboat to avoid Tarrago and to warn Earth. In her descent she had seen our observatory. Her little vehicle was smashed in landing. All day she had wandered in the snow, trying to get to us.

"The authorities must be told all this," Dr. Murdock said. "I'll contact them now. The British and American Emergency Departments will help us. This mystery must be solved. Tarrago and his band must be annihilated—"

Grandfather started for his transmitter. The harrassed world governments, in these few hours that had passed, certainly did not realize the power, the deadly menace of Tarrago. No concerted action was as yet under way against that Georgia encampment.

But suddenly one of our audiphones shrilled with an emergency call. I plugged it in. It was our secret oscillating, code-wave instrument. Only audible connection could be made. We heard the voice of my brother Martin, from the girls' college just outside Savannah.

"Dale! Dale—" Horror was in his tense, strained voice.

"Yes," I gasped. "I'm Dale. What is it, Martin?"

"Attacked! If I—am killed—you must know. North Latitude thirty-six degrees, forty-two minutes, eleven seconds. West Longitude seventy-six degrees, nine minutes, forty-nine seconds, then a hundred and ten feet—"

"Martin, what does that mean?" I cried as Grandfather copied down the figures.

"I don't know, Dale. You must go there quickly. A great thing of science to benefit the world. If I—they're coming!"

I was so helpless, so many miles away! I heard a girl's scream, a gasp from Martin. Then silence . . .

"Martin!" I shouted. "Martin!"

But the code air-channel was dead.

In the silence of the little observatory room, white-faced Eve and my grandfather were staring blankly at me. Then another audiphone began buzzing. I jumped to it and plugged in the connection.

"Dale Murdock?" a voice exclaimed. "The attack is beginning—"

It was a Government official who had been at our conference the previous evening. He was in an observatory aero, hovering near Savannah. Our mirror-grid lighted with the image of what his finder was seeing. It was a ghastly vision. To this day I shudder with the memory of it.

The frozen red clay of the empty Georgia plain glistened with frosty moonlight. The purple barrage of Tarrago's encampment was a great circular curtain, from the ground high into the sky. The curtain was shrinking now, and in a few minutes it vanished. Tarrago's shining, ball-like vehicle was revealed. It was rising, floating upward. An aura of purple

hovered around it. In a single minute it was half a mile high, leveling off, heading northward at incredible speed. Then presently it came back, circling over the city of Savannah.

From it a spreading violet beam stabbed down, illuminated a circle of several hundred feet upon the ground.

Eve, Grandfather and I sat holding our breath, watching the shifting image on our mirror-grid. Across the city of Savannah, with its teeming millions of refugees, the purple beam cut a wide swath. Metal and stone houses melted under the giant blast. The three hundred foot pathway was a black trail of death, in which nothing was left but blackened ground with a fused litter that glowed red.

The beam snapped off as Tarrago's ship swept over the river and toward the sea. Then in a moment he was back. The beam again darted downward.

Our telescopic enlargement gave a brief glimpse of one of the city streets. It was a turmoil of milling, terrified people, a silent image, but my horrified mind echoed with their shouts of terror, the thudding tramp of their feet. In the shelter of a portico I saw a young mother crouching. Her children were gathered at her knees, her arms protectingly around them. Her face was livid with the terror of a female animal ready to fight for her young

The circle of the beam came almost slowly down that crowded street. The houses melted into a bubbling viscous mass, first white-hot, then orange, finally red. The struggling blobs that were human beings dissolved in the glare—just flaming gas in the horrible conflagration.

Tarrago's murderous ship weaved back and forth over the doomed city. Then he dropped back to his former encampment and again flung up his protective barrage.

And the city of Savannah, save for a few smoking, tottering buildings, had vanished. There was only a giant spread of glowing embers, a vast firepit of death. Lurid, green-yellow smoke rolled up in a cloud, dissipating itself into the frosty moonlight.

Long after that horrible night I gained possession of Martin's diary transcript, which he had recorded on tape with the intention of sending it to me. It would have cleared up much that remained a mystery for so fearfully long. But its position in this account belongs at this point.

This girls' school down here in Georgia is like everything else on Earth. It has been disorganized, but the effect of the Great Chaos has been to increase rather than decrease the number of people in it. Despite the turmoil of the world, most of the original hundred girls are still here. Some of their parents have come here, since Georgia is preferable to the northern states. The rest of the girls can't locate their families.

When the invading space ship landed near here, the school was thrown into a panic. But nobody abandoned it, because there was nowhere to go. We got the terrified girls to help us barricade the place.

Tonight I was sitting alone in my study when one of my mathematics students burst into my room. I recognized the tall, serious, brown-haired girl. Wanda Gregg is twenty-one, the oldest girl in the school. She is taking a post-graduate course in astronomical mathematics. I've always been interested in her, mainly because of her difference from the other girls. She lives here all the year, since she was the ward of the school's headmistress, who died last year.

I looked up, noticed at once her great distress. Everyone else, of course, is panic-stricken, but this was different.

"What is it, Wanda?" I asked. "You should be upstairs."

"Mr. Murdock," she cried. "I must tell you something."

In frantic haste she closed the door.

"All evening I've been trying to decide. I've got to tell you now. Your grandfather Dr. Murdock is a Government scientist. There is something you must tell him. I was given a secret that I can reveal only when my father dies or disaster comes to the world. Well, I think my father is dead. And something horrible is certainly happening to the Earth"

I sat listening to her strange disclosures. We've always known her as Wanda Gregg, but her real name is Wanda Collette. Her father, the notorious scientist, had left her at the school when she was an infant, and gave the headmistress enough money to care for her all her life.

"This little cylinder was left with me," she blurted. "And a ring. A queer looking ring with a white translucent stone. I don't know what the ring is for. The instructions for using it are in the cylinder."

She showed me the cylinder, which was about the size of a finger. I soon found that it was sealed. But I saw the inscription of almost microscopic writing on the bit of paper clipped to it.

"It contains a message from my father. His secret to help the world if anything terrible happens to it. A scientific treasure—"

"And the ring?" I asked.

"I—I lost it five years ago. When we open that cylinder, we'll know what the ring was for. Oh, I was so horrified when I lost it. I didn't know what to do. . . ."

I stared at the tiny cylinder before I could manage to unclip the folded paper. What sort of mystery was this? Naturally, I had heard of Collette, and I knew he was not a practical joker. That was why I hesitated. The inscription was so small that I had to find a magnifying glass to read it. When I held the glass close, I read:

North Latitude, thirty-six degrees, forty-two minutes, eleven seconds. West Longitude, seventy-six degrees, nine minutes, forty-nine seconds, then a hundred and ten feet. My secret treasure can be located at that latitude and longitude. That treasure is described inside this cylinder. It can be located by Wanda's ring.

"Located by your ring?" I cried. "What did he mean? But the ring is lost—"

"I know," she moaned. "I know."

"I'll give this information to my grandfather," I said.

I handed back the cylinder to her after shoving the paper into my pocket.

"We must open it now," she said hastily. "There is no time to lose. This means the safety of the world. . . ."

She must have been intuitive at that moment, for the school's siren began wailing madly. Everybody in the building seemed to be rushing around without direction.

I don't like action or danger in any form, but I believe I have the salvation of the world's billions of people. Menace is striking here. I might not have time to tell you everything, Dale, so I'm talking at the recorder, and I'll go on talking while calling you on the audiphone's secret wave-channel.

"Dale! Dale—attacked. If I am killed, you must know—North Latitude, thirty-six degrees, forty-two minutes, eleven seconds. West Longitude, seventy-six degrees, nine minutes, forty-nine seconds, then a hundred and ten feet—"

"Martin, what does that mean?"

"I don't know, Dale. You must go there quickly. A great thing of science—to benefit the world. If I—*They're coming!*"

Wanda was grabbing my arm, turning me around. The violet light that streaked through the window and destroyed the audiphone came from a murderous devil wearing furs. The whole school is ringing with running footsteps and the sounds of a weird attack.

I can't go on talking, Dale. The beam of purple light is melting the metal casement. There goes the glassite pane, crashing into the room. Two fur-clad men are climbing in.

"Wanda, get behind me!"

"There she is—that's Wanda, all right. Wallop the prof on the head, Lugo. I'll take the girl. We got to get out of here—"

"Get back, damn you. Get back or I'll heave this big book at you!"

"Ow! You dirty rat. Here's a clout on the skull for you—"

CHAPTER IV

Extract from Martin's Diary

Dizzily, I opened my eyes on a weird scene of glaring purple light. I was inside Tarrago's encampment, fifteen miles from devastated Savannah. Nearby stood the huge, gleaming, silvery interplanetary ship, ball-like, with circular aluminite fins. A quarter of a mile away, the violet curtain of light reached far into the sky, a strange blockade wall that enclosed the entire camp.

In that glaring light I saw the figures of men moving about. The place was littered with apparatus, which was being loaded into the space ship. There were two kinds of men. Some wore peculiar furs that did nothing to transform their savage features. Those were the members of Tarrago's villainous crew. Then there were squat, powerful dwarfs, toiling like a group of misshapen gnomes. For garments they wore only a short fur covering that exposed their gray, hairy skin, under which their muscles rolled in great, ugly knots.

I was lying on the ground. Suddenly I sat up, my attention caught by a group near me.

Tarrago sat on a keg. He was a giant of a man, clad in skins from which dangled ornaments of beaten metal to denote his leadership. Despite his coal-black hair, which hung over his ears, and the neatly trimmed mustache that did not soften his hawklike face, he was undeniably handsome. His appearance, his bearing—everything about him bespoke his forceful authority.

He was grinning with sardonic triumph at the terrified Wanda, who stood before him.

"So you're Eve's sister," he taunted. "Well, well."

"Eve?" Wanda asked uncertainly. "I'm Eve's sister?"

"Don't try to fool me. You know you have a sister named Eve. She escaped from me this morning. Did she communicate with you?"

"No," Wanda replied in bewilderment.

He stared at her with his piercing black gaze.

"You may be lying," he said. "We shall see. I must get her back."

He rose from the keg, swaggered toward the girl as she retreated before him.

"Do not be afraid of me," he said. "You are not as beautiful as Eve." Suddenly his grin faded. A grim tenseness stiffened him. "Your father left a secret with you—a little metal cylinder. You were to wear it upon you always. Give it to me."

Wanda had it now, clipped to a chain beneath her high-necked brown dress.

"I lost it," she said. She drew herself up. Despite her inward terror, her brown-eyed gaze held level.

"You lie." His black-bearded face twisted in fury. "No one dares lie to me, Wanda." Suddenly his huge hand darted out, seized her by the wrist. "Your father gave you a ring, always to be worn. Where is it?"

"I lost it," she repeated steadily.

I staggered dizzily to my feet. My head was roaring.

"You let her alone," I said.

Tarrago swung around and grinned broadly.

"Oh, I thought you were dead. Why those fools brought you along, I don't know."

"I thought maybe he knew the secret, too," Lugo put in.

Tarrago shrugged. Again he gripped Wanda. With a muttered oath I lurched forward. But Lugo and another man caught me.

"Give me the cylinder," Tarrago said. His hand reached for the neck of her dress.

"No—" she gasped.

I was struggling with my captors, but I kept my wits.

"Give it to him, Wanda," I said.

"The lens-eyed teacher has sense," Tarrago laughed. "Obey him, Wanda."

Silently she drew out the little chain, unclipped the cylinder. With a muttered oath of triumph, Tarrago seized it. Within a moment he had broken it open. A tiny scroll was inside. He smoothed out the oblong of parch-paper some four inches by eight.

"Give me more light, Lugo."

The paper was covered with microscopic writing, photographed down to this miniature. Tarrago was given a magnifying glass, and was staring at the tiny scroll. But still he could not read it. The writing was blurred, out of focus, undecipherable.

"Queer." He sat baffled. Then his wrath rose. He strode over to me. "You know the secret of this!" he blazed.

"I do not," I insisted.

Tarrago shouted at one of his fellows.

"Get me the electronic wire. What these two know, I'll whip out of them."

"We don't know anything," I said. "You can't get from us what we don't know."

"Search him, Lugo." The puzzled Tarrago swung upon Wanda. "By God, you'll tell me now." He cuffed her face.

"Stop it, you damned coward!" I shouted.

Lugo was searching me. Suddenly I recalled that the little paper inscription was in my pocket. I struggled to get it out, got it to my hand, trying to jam it into my mouth and swallow it. But Lugo seized it. Two other men rushed in. With wildly flailing fists I went down under their weight.

Tarrago read the tiny slip of paper.

"North Latitude thirty-six degrees, forty-two minutes, eleven seconds. West Longitude seventy-six degrees, nine minutes, forty-nine seconds. Then a hundred and ten feet."

Evidently it meant much to him.

"Got it, Lugo!" he shouted. "The location! By God, we have it at last." Then his commanding voice rang out. "Load up. We start in an hour."

Wanda and I were thrust into the silvery vehicle. Presently it was loaded, with the hundred men of Tarrago's band crowding it. The barrage curtain had faded. The gleaming ball rose into the air, with its little aura of protective barrage surrounding it. At five thousand feet it leveled off, floating at high speed northward through the frosty moonlight.

What had happened to Martin down there in the college, Grandfather and I could not find out. We had sent emergency calls to the nearest authorities, but in the chaos in Georgia no information could be obtained.

The mysterious data, which Martin had given us, Grandfather wanted to turn over at once to the War Department. But I could see no use of that. The location given was in North Carolina, on the dunes near the coast. Curiously enough it was in the desolate Kitty Hawk region where the Wright Brothers made their first efforts at flying.

I looked it up on our coastal chart. It was the location of Collette's laboratory, from which, in his hidden space ship, he had escaped from Earth. The entire region had been deserted since the Great Chaos.

What was the meaning of this mysterious message from Martin? I determined to find out—alone, without Government forces rushing in like bulls in a china shop.

Fur-clad, I left the observatory. As I crossed the moonlit snow toward the heated stage where my little flat-cabin aero was racked, I heard a sudden commotion behind me. Eve, with her fur suit on her, was in the doorway, struggling like a little wildcat with Grandfather. Then she broke away from him, came dashing at me.

"Dale, I'm going with you."

"Oh, no, you're not. Go back, Eve."

"But I am." She seized me. "That message from your brother—How could he have learned it except from my sister, Wanda?"

That was true enough, I had to admit.

"I can help you," she urged. "I may know something about what we find. And this is my affair even more than yours."

Certainly I did not anticipate any emergency or danger in this trip. And with the world in chaos, danger was common enough to be a habit with everyone.

"All right," I said. "Come on."

As we got near the stage, a few hundred feet away, something black was lying in the snow. We stared, then ran to it. The thing was a tiny smashed vehicle. A tangled litter of metal wreckage had crashed here.

Eve recognized it as a lifeboat like the one in which she had escaped this morning. There was no sign of a body, no trail. The sharp wind was blowing the surface snow over any possible tracks. We had no time for any lengthy search.

Presently we were in my aero, rising into the moonlight.

It was a good two-hour trip, but the north wind was behind me and I could make speed. In the small vaulted cabin, dimly lit, I sat with Eve.

Under us, as we swept down from the nearly deserted Adirondack region, the vast panorama of the Great Chaos was unrolling. Deserted, snow-bound cities, tomblike, had been wrecked by the unnatural storms which had lashed them. Frozen rivers, broken bridges—desolation lay everywhere

Farther south we saw the trudging refugees, little blobs on the frozen roads. We never descended close enough to see the sick, the maimed, dropping exhausted into the snowdrifts, to be numbed to death by the cold.

The audiphone in my cabin was droning its news. Savannah was in smoking ruins. Martin's college seemed to have been spared. Tarrago's raiding ship had dropped back to its former encampment. The United States War Department was sending its armed forces for an attack. Britain, from its base at Malta, had dispatched a fleet of warplanes, heading toward us over the tumultuous Atlantic.

In all the chaos, I knew that there would be more talk than action.

Suddenly our audiphone blared with a new disclosure. The Tarrago barrage had suddenly vanished. The silvery ball had risen, swept into a bank of clouds above the ocean, and vanished. The newscaster optimistically assured his listeners that the invaders were doubtless heading back into space. The menace from them was over

Our mirror-grids were giving us wide-flung glimpses of the harried world. Melbourne was in flames—spontaneous combustion, perhaps, in the furnace blast of heat. A typhoon raged over Tokyo. Buenos Aires—most beautiful city of the western world—lay abandoned, a shimmering city of the dead, smothered in the heat. Tierra del Fuego at last justified its name. It glared yellow-red, with myriad craters that abruptly had burst alive.

"Death everywhere," Eve moaned. "My mother hoped some day to find peace on Earth."

We sat silent, staring. Then behind us I heard a sudden sound. From the blue-lit shadows behind my motor, a fur-clad man rose up. A stowaway! A knife came whizzing past my head. I ducked and shoved Eve behind me to the floor. The controls of the car locked as I dropped them. I sprang and met the fellow in the center of the little cabin.

He was leveling a weapon. My fist struck it aside. But it discharged with a sizzling blue flash that sent a shower of sparks from the cabin ceiling.

Then we came to grips. He was a huge, bearlike fellow in his furs. I caught a glimpse of his heavy face.

"I've got you!" he yelled.

His arms pinned my hands to my sides. I could not draw a weapon. We swayed against the chart table, crashed it over. Then we went down. Tarrago's man could not hold me. I broke away, leaped erect. As he rose, I nailed him with a jab under his chin. It lifted him backward and crashed his head against the motor as he fell.

That was the end of him. I shoved Eve behind me so she did not see his broken skull while he lay twitching. Then I threw a motor cover over him.

It was after midnight when we circled above the huge metal building that had been Collette's laboratory. A high metal wall, which once had been electrically wired, surrounded the spacious grounds. For twenty years the place had lain neglected until it had become a shambles. Now the blasts of abnormal winter had wilted the vegetation. The whole place was silent, snow-covered.

We landed on the snow a dozen yards from the main laboratory building. My mind flung back to Martin's agonized message. My conviction was that he had given his life to deliver that vital message. The authorities, twenty years ago, had searched this building and found nothing. What was the meaning of that specification—a hundred and ten feet? The answer to that was a secret, I felt sure.

Eve and I advanced to the main front door. It was locked. I found a broken window through which we climbed into the dark, frigid interior of a frozen metal corridor. We saw nothing, heard nothing. We started along the corridor.

Abruptly a light beam sprang up, clung to Eve. From behind the lights, furred figures came leaping!

CHAPTER V

The Final Blast

The attack caught me unprepared. The roof of the laboratory building was meant to open like the dome of an observatory. Once Collette had effectively used it. Now Tarrago had lowered his ship into the huge room where it had been built, and closed the roof again.

The coming of my aero had been observed by Tarrago's outer guards. He darkened and silenced the place, with his men waiting to trap us.

When the attack came, in the corridor, I tried to get to Eve, who had been to one side of me. The attack had come so wholly without warning that I could not draw a weapon. The bulk of a plunging fur-clad man struck me. We went down. As we scrambled, I was aware that I had been thrown with my antagonist through a doorway.

I had a glimpse back to the eerie corridor, with its swaying torch beams. Milling figures were overwhelming Eve. Then one of them surged against the broken wooden door. It slammed. The corridor lights went out. The rushing men were carrying her away. Seemingly no one out there had seen me in the darkness, or realized that one of their men had attacked me. This unseen antagonist and I fought on the floor. Then I got away from him, jumped erect. In the eerie silence of that black room I could hear him panting. Moving backward, I stumbled over something. The sound brought him with a triumphant oath upon me. Because of a sudden plan, I was trying to be silent. Instead of firing my drawn weapon, I tried to crash it on his head. But I missed. I only struck his arm.

Fate, if you will, did not want me to die. A knife in his hand grazed my face. I caught his wrist, twisted and got the knife. My jab with it was only a guess. But it went into his throat. With a weird gurgle of blood, he tottered and fell.

For a moment I stood panting over him, alert for a movement that did not come. There had been no alarm. There was only silence and blank blackness. Within a minute I had taken off my furs and clad myself in his, letting the big hood shroud my face. I did not dare to light a torch.

Cautiously, in almost solid blackness, I groped along the corridor until the moonlight that straggled through broken windows helped me. I heard voices from up a staircase, where a light-glow was visible.

At the staircase head, I peered into a room. Collette's huge laboratory was spread before me. Tarrago's vehicle stood here. In the shifting glare of hastily erected tube-lights his men were standing, apparently inactive. And in the center of them, Tarrago confronted Eve, Martin and a tall, brown-haired, beautiful girl.

"Well," Tarrago was saying, "this is luck for me, getting you back, Eve. This secret treasure of your father's—where is it? What did he mean by a hundred and ten feet? From where? In which direction?"

Eve was very pale. The other girl stood terrified, with her arm around Eve's waist. Two men were holding Martin back.

"I don't know what you mean," Eve said. "I told you I know nothing. I've told you that all the way from Zanthos."

"I know you did." Baffled, Tarrago leaped savagely at her. "By God, you and your sister, you're both alike. You don't know anything. Do you think you can trick me?" His huge hands

suddenly gripped her slender throat. "I told you I loved you," he rasped. "Well, that is true. But I am a man—no woman can stop me. Where is that ring your father gave you?"

"I—I gave it away," she gasped.

That was true enough. She had handed it to me in the Lake Placid Observatory. I had it in my pocket now.

"You lie," Tarrago raged. He twisted her slender arm so furiously that she winced. "You want more?" he demanded. "I'll break your arm—"

Martin was struggling, shouting.

"Stop it, you damn coward!"

All my plans for masquerading fled from me. I leaped forward. As I came into the light, I cast off my hood.

"Here's the ring," I said. "You let her alone. Do you bully only women?"

A dozen men rushed at me, seized me, slammed me against the wall. They searched me and took my weapons.

Presently the commotion quieted. Tarrago was concerned only with his quest. Scrutinizing Eve's ring and the blurred microscopic writing from the cylinder, he sat pondering.

Abruptly, I understood. The microscopic writing had been photographed down from a larger original, and simultaneously thrown out of focus! The ring was a magnifying lens—a matched focus that would sharpen the blurred script.

Though a queer method for code, it was not original with Collette. I learned later that it was an Austrian device, perfected in 1987.

Would Tarrago fathom it? He did, a moment after I reasoned it out. With a cry of triumph, he inserted the rolled slip of paper in the circlet of the ring and gazed through the lens. He read the message, slowly, word by word, while he moved the rolled paper under the tiny eyepiece. A triumphant grin contorted his swarthy face.

"Listen to this, all of you," he shouted. "We have no secrets here among us. Did I not tell you all that what Tarrago goes after, he gets? The location of the *isotrope* is given here! We'll have it loaded in our ship within an hour." He chuckled. "We go back to Zanthos. The Earth will be glad to have us go." He thumped his brawny chest. "Outraged nature—and outraged Tarrago. Savannah is the monument to my power. Nature and I have just about wrecked the Earth. I want no more revenge."

The cylinder explained the principles upon which Collette's space ship was built, and gave an explanation of the heat-light beam. Those were Collette's gifts to Earth. His beam, the message said, could be projected a hundred miles or more, in a mild, diffused form. A gentle warmth could heat Earth's polar regions and make them habitable. Perhaps, with his undoubted scientific genius, Collette had calculated the present Earth disturbance caused by Zanthos. He might have wanted his heat beam to mitigate the chaos.

But none of this information was what Tarrago was after. He knew all that. Both of Collette's inventions were based upon a new element which he had named *isotrope*. It was here, a hundred and ten feet under a certain spot in one of the laboratory corridors. Centuries ago, a giant meteorite had fallen here, buried itself deep in the ground. Collette had found it, built his laboratory over it, with a secret tunnel leading down to it.

We soon found the tunnel. The triumphant Tarrago, with several of his picked men, entered it. His vanity at his own astuteness made him take Eve, Wanda, Martin, and me, that

we might watch and envy him as he seized his valuable treasure.

"I am Emperor of Zanthos," he gloated. "With the diffused heat-light I have made my little world habitable, even when we are out beyond Neptune."

And the *isotrope* was his fuel. His supply of it on Zanthos was almost exhausted. Without it, Zanthos was not habitable for Earth people. It was a weird substance, this *isotrope*. Tarrago chuckled ironically as he explained it to me. With Collette's apparatus, the titanic power of its atoms was harmlessly harnessed. But under different conditions, it could wreck a planet as well as do it benefit. Of unstable atomic cohesion, under any electronic bombardment its atoms disintegrate in an instant expansion.

A star composed of *isotrope* had sometime gone up in cosmic explosion, throwing off this impure meteorite. Collette had refined it, returned it to its original atomic instability.

In Collette's underground workshop, I stood beside Tarrago, gazing at the glistening brown slabs which had been cut from the buried meteorite and refined by Collette. They were foot-long bricks of enormous atomic weight. A single explosion of one of those little slabs could rock the world!

We stood silently while Tarrago's men carried most of them up to the ship. Suddenly I heard Martin address Tarrago.

"What are you going to do with us? Will you turn us loose or take us to Zanthos?"

"You?" Tarrago's black gaze swung to the four of us. "Eve goes with me, of course. But the rest of you?" He laughed with grim irony, gestured to his portable tube-light which stood on a table. "If that, by chance, smashed against a block of *isotrope*—I think I will tie you here. You can watch a fuse that I will rig. And after we are gone, how the Earth will rock! What a giant hole will be blown here as you are hurled to perdition!"

I stood by the table, stiffened. Was that to be our end? Was the world to lose these momentous inventions of Collette's? Was I to let Tarrago take Eve to Zanthos?

I do not recall planning anything. But suddenly I had seized that tube-light, poised it. Tarrago and his three remaining men were across the room. I leaped to one of the brown *isotrope* slabs, with the tube-lamp poised close over it.

"Put that down!" Tarrago gasped. "You fool, you'll destroy us all!"

"What's the difference?" I grinned. "We'll go either way. I like your company."

Both the girls screamed. Martin cried out with horror. Tarrago and his men shouted terrified oaths. Had I suddenly gone, mad? No one moved. For that second there was only a stricken tableau of helpless people. . . .

"Don't—" Tarrago whispered. "Careful, you fool."

"Why not?"

The tube-lamp in my hand was only a foot above the brown slab. I had only to drop the fragile lamp. Its short-circuited, released electrons would bombard the *isotrope*.

"Take your hand from your weapons," I ordered Tarrago. "If you kill me I still can drop this lamp. Martin, seize him. Disarm them all."

"You—you're insane," Tarrago groaned. He took a sideward step away from the advancing Martin.

"Just one more move like that," I said.

I meant it. In that moment of frenzied desperation, I was capable of the act. Tarrago could see it was no bluff. As I stood like a statue, tensed, holding the lives of us all in my poised hand, he and his three men let Martin disarm them and back them to the wall. "Good," I said.

My plan was crystallizing now. There was an adjacent cavelike storeroom, with a door that could be barred on this side. I would force Tarrago to summon his men from upstairs. One by one I would have Martin imprison them—

But I had no need to go further with my desperate strategy. From overhead the sounds of a sudden turmoil floated down . . . shots . . . thudding footsteps . . . shouts of command . . . We heard the sound of fighting, the men screaming as they died.

It was an attack by the emergency forces of the Norfolk Army base. My grandfather, Dr. Murdock, had notified them when I had left. Like bulls in a china shop, as I had known they would behave, they were charging the laboratory building. For a moment we listened. The turmoil was quickly over. Tarrago's little band went down to defeat, all of them killed or captured.

Then suddenly the soldiers' voices sounded in the tunnel near at hand. Tarrago, with the despairing knowledge of his defeat, jumped past Martin and hurled himself at me.

I flung the lamp then—not at the *isotrope* but at Tarrago's head. It caught him full. He went down. I was holding him, while Martin held the three other men under his leveled weapons, when the soldiers burst in upon us. . . .

I have no more to add to this brief narrative. You who read it have had the true tale of what has been called my heroism. I need not detail here how Zanthos rounded the Sun and was gone—we hope forever. Or how, through Collette's genius, the era of space-flying has begun in practical form. Nor need I picture what we all know. The diffused *isotropic* heat-light beams are bringing a grateful warmth to Earth's frozen northern wastes.

Astronomers tell us now that Earth's axis, like a pendulum, will sway back and forth. But the swings will lessen until, in a year or two more, it will stabilize at its former position.

The Great Chaos is nearly over. And I am reminded, as I write this, of what a philosopher once said:

"Out of every evil, an equal good must come, to maintain a balance in the Universe."

I know that is true. The Great Chaos gave me Eve, and gave Martin his Wanda.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Note there was no Chapter III.
[The end of *Ice Over America* by Ray Cummings]