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**WE SHALL  
COME BACK!**

by C. H. Liddell

**THE BLACK  
ALARM**

by George O. Smith

**THE BELT**

by Wallace West



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# WE SHALL COME BACK

By

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym C. H. Liddell.

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay.

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Dim were the memories of Man's greatness in this latter day, when humanity had returned to the sea for refuge. But Ran knew there was hope, if he could fulfill his mission—if he could keep his tribe men . . .

Speaking epigrammatically, there are two remarkable qualities about humans, and sometimes it is difficult to decide which is the more amazing—man's brain, or his reluctance to use it!



*Man: An individual at the highest level of animal development, mainly characterized by his exceptional mentality. The human creature or being as representing the species.*

—*American College Dictionary*

*Man is the highest type of animal existing or known to have existed.*

—*Webster's New International Dictionary*

The first soundless death scream, from far away, when the killing fires struck, exploded in red echoes in every listening mind. The little clan of humans in headlong flight down the undersea current broke for an instant into a scattering hysteria, until Ran's monitoring thought shot out to halt them.

The flurry quieted. The clan drew together, sleek, pale silver, shuddering above their shadows on the green sand of the sea-bottom. Huddling close, they heard and saw with keener senses than sight or hearing the massacre of that other, kindred tribe. The same death might be their own before evening, and they knew it.

They waited, trembling as the water rocked them, while far-off fountains of fire rained down upon the distant clan, killing wherever it touched. Without vision they could see colored stars arrowing to their targets, and the screams of the dying burst scarlet in every hearer's inward ear. Echoing dully, like a knell beneath those cries, sounded the iron heart-beat of the Destroyer. The tribe wavered when they heard it—even Ran wavered—on the edge of a threshold Ran alone had recognized long ago.

Blind, brainless animal panic urged them to scatter and run until they dropped. Instinct urged them. Reason said wait.

Then something moved tremendously through the waters—a vast, calm pulse that beat once, twice, a third time—and ceased. It was one of the “Thoughts of the Deep”, impersonal as the Gulf Stream, and as mighty. The little clan was tossed for a moment upon it as if upon a wind that blew under the ocean.

Something deep in Ran's mind took courage from its calm, and drew back from the dark threshold upon which the whole tribe poised, the mindless threshold between instinct and reason, when instinct shouts so loudly and reason's voice is so cold and quiet that only a man could hear it. Not a beast—a man.

The old knowledge of duty roused itself wearily in Ran's mind again and he turned in the water, gathering in the minds of the clan. His duty was not only to his people, but to something beyond them all, beyond himself, in that unguessable future of which he knew only the legend and the promise.

*He must keep them men.*

They stood on the very threshold of the sea-beast, at the bottom of the long slope down which their whole race had been driven for so many milleniums, back into the waters from which they first sprang, back to the mindless unreason of the beast. And the drivers, the hunters, the killers, pressed them inexorably toward that last, low door.

Ran rose upright in the water and called the clan together, mind touching mind without words. "It's all right," he told them patiently. "They haven't found us yet. We must run; if we can reach the city we'll be safe. Don't scatter! Follow me, and keep together, and we'll all be safe."

It was, perhaps, a lie, and all but the most foolish knew it, but there are times when lies may be both more comforting than truth and more useful.

Sanctuary was where the sunken city lay, where a man might flash in and out of windows a hundred stories above the pavement, and with luck hide safely even from the bright Destroyers from the Air.

There was another kind of safety there, too, though not even Ran could name it. Somehow, in the sunken cities which their own kind had built so long ago—in another element, the tribe seemed less close to that fatal threshold. Somehow the recurrent, almost irresistible waves of impulse toward mindless action were less strong there than in the open sea.

Ran's people, in this long, dim twilight of the planet, were very near to the point where they would lay humanity aside forever. Ran himself knew, as well as any, the strong urgencies of sheer instinct in the face of danger. But he knew his responsibility, too, and he felt it strongest in the undersea cities. He had even dreamed, rocking in the darkness of the ocean nights, about such fantastic feats as turning in flight before a Destroyer and facing it resolutely as it sank through the waters toward him. Dreams in which he was not entirely Ran, but perhaps the whole tribe too, perhaps, somehow, a part of the sunken cities and Champion of the race of man.

Nothing on earth had ever faced a Destroyer—nothing that hoped to live. Yet Ran dreamed, since there was no harm in dreaming, even if sleep were a thing man could control.

Heavily he cast out the net of his thought and gathered in the tribe, interposing his own mental images between theirs and the far-off massacre reddening the waters and the listening minds. He goaded his people into motion and hurled them in an arrowing swarm down the long slope of the undersea forest, away from that distant focus of danger. His mind touched the minds of the whole group simultaneously with firm, swift, reassuring images that had no shape, being only the clan symbols for ordered flight.





The thoughts of his tribe flickered against Ran's like the touch of cold, unsteady fingers. Terror; exhaustion; the trembling thought of a silver-furred woman who had never run so long or felt such fear before; the quaver of a furry child; the wild, scattered thoughts of the foolish. And behind all these the steady, uncomplaining firmness of the older clansmen, supporting Ran's thoughts without question because they had chosen him for their leader and knew they had chosen well.

"Hurry," he told his tribe. "Don't lag. Hurry! We can reach the city by noon if we hurry. Run, run, run! I know we're tired. When we reach the White Cleft where the mussels grow we can rest for a moment. You can make it that far; we'll rest, at the White Cleft. Run!"

The words meant nothing. He was using them as a shield to blank out the cries of the distant tribe from which no sane thoughts came, now. There were only mindless flashes, screaming with panic—the silvery arcs of sea-folk darting wildly and the fiery arcs of the stars pursuing, against which no defence could stand—and the bursts of color, and the dying. Ran got no flash from their leader, if he lived; surely, he thought, all need not have died if the leader had been wise. Surely a few might have been directed into hiding, or the strongest and the children sent on ahead while the rest drew the Destroyer's fire. But these were beyond all reasoning, beyond all reach of the mind; it was sea-beasts, not men, whose deaths exploded in the thoughts of the listeners.

So Ran's tribe fled, for the best and oldest of reasons, through a clear undersea dawn that was beginning to glow green with the filtering of early sunlight from far above, where the Aliens lived and ruled the world. They knew nothing of the Air and the Aliens, except that from them the implacable iron Destroyers came down. They knew nothing of what lay in the Great Deeps out of which the slow, calm "Thoughts" arose. They knew only their own water-world, how to hide in it, how to run for their lives when the Destroyers drove them. How, if they were lucky, to save a few when the Destroyers found them. That other tribe had not been lucky.

No thoughts came through at all, now.

Then in a flurry of churning waters, sending his message screaming ahead of him in mindless panic, a blue-silver body swept down toward them through the swaying jungle, tearing the brown leaves as he passed, blind with fear and shrieking, "*Run! Run! Run!*"

The clan broke its formation and spun wildly apart, searching in all directions for the danger. Ran sent his perceptions fastest and farthest and keenest, probing backward along the wake of the fugitive for an iron, torpedo-shaped thing slipping silently toward them.

There was nothing; the Destroyers were here, but not close, and none of them seemed yet to suspect the presence of the fleeing clan. This tumult might very easily summon them. Ran



ruffled out his fur to test the water, smoothed it sleek again and turned strongly in his course, rising to meet the newcomer.

It was a man, big, with a blue sheen to his fur, and half-insane thoughts running like a rip-tide from him through the receptive listening minds of the tribe, too frightened and exhausted to be under much control. Ran felt them shaking the calm reins he had laid upon them, and fought back his own anger, because that too would only inflame them more. "Silence!" he ordered them all sternly, but the newcomer most. "Silence! Follow us, but don't speak."

The man whirled in the water and saw him. He flashed downward with quick, jerky strokes, carrying with him upon his fur the indefinable taint of blood that no one could mistake. The two hung a few feet apart, measuring each other.

And so Ran met Dagon, leader of the lost tribe, now leader of no tribe.

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Ran did not like what he saw in that dark mind that had held unquestioned power for so long. There was strength latent there, and courage of a sort, but there was no discipline at all, and so the courage had crumbled before the Destroyers. *And when courage left mankind*, Ran thought wearily, *what remained? Only blind ferocity, like the shark's*. For an instant he saw the gleaming bodies of his people as he saw a shoal of fish, mindless, taking the last fatal step down the descending path into the darkness of the race.

Out of Dagon's mind thoughts of panic and flight and death spun in a whirlwind that caught even Ran himself, a little, in its dangerous spiral. It would be so easy to give way to terror, so easy to abandon the tribe and fly in senseless, unreasoning panic until the Destroyers found them all.

It was easy to do what Dagon had done. But, of course, when a man sees his whole tribe destroyed in one bursting barrage of stars—

"Join us," he said as calmly as he could. "We'll find a shelter; we know a sunken city not very far away—"

But Dagon was used to rule, not to accept commands. His thoughts burst out in a strong shriek, wild with terror, urging disorganized flight—each for himself. A few of the younger and less stable of Ran's tribe flashed sidewise in the water, beating their arms in panic, churning froth and brown weed-leaves, ready to fly the instant they saw a shelter to hide in.

Ran lowered his head, gathered his exhausted muscles strongly, and with all his power drove a measured blow of his bulky shoulder into Dagon's neck between shoulder and head. He had fought often enough before; he knew where to strike.

Dagon's frantic thoughts broke off into blankness for a moment—a brief but all important moment. Into that blankness Ran sent his own mind, radiating the familiar clan-patterns of unity and control.

The scattered tribe rallied a little, wavered, hesitated and then drew together, waiting. Dagon's thoughts took form again after that instant's stunned silence. But he was hesitant, unsure. Reason was not in him, and Ran had won—for the moment.

"Come," Ran said, and doubled his legs in a strong beat that carried him to the head of the hovering clan. "Quiet! Follow me and keep your ranks. You know the way to the cleft."

Suddenly Dagon swung around and swam after the obedient tribe. His thoughts were tinged with red, but he came.

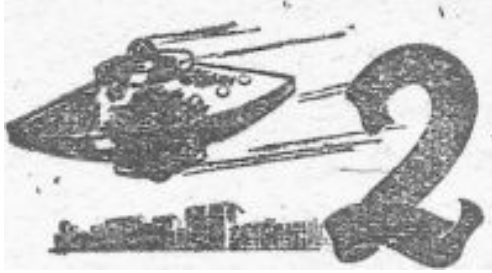
Something moved through the waters. Not the iron pulse that told of the Destroyers. A vast, calm pulse that beat through all ocean curved out in a slow and powerful tide—and ceased. They had heard again the "Thought of the Deep."

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In its dawn, and in its twilight, a race may be able to sense such pulses. Something like this may once have moved through misty fern-forests, when the beat of creation itself had not yet faded into silence. Furred primates, not yet men, may have listened and sniffed the wind when those unbearable pulses moved through the milky air, above the booming of the mastodon's feet and the cry of the carnivores. Man cannot very clearly sense the heart-beat of the world; but those who came before man may have known—and those who came after man know, too. Man wearing fur once more and drawing nearer and nearer to the close of his long circle of planetary life, here in the seas that bore him, heard the beat.

It was part of the sea, as Ran was. It had always been there; man did not question the unfathomable. Memory of it was mixed with Ran's earliest memories, the dark, cool, quiet remembrance of his first years alive and the "Thought of the Deep", mighty, unknowable, moving through all ocean on such a subtle plane that not a frond of seaweed stirred, though there was power in that mighty pulse to turn a tribe aside if it swam cross-current of the slowly furling "Thought." Ran did not question, any more than he questioned the tides themselves.

He knew it rose out of the Great Deeps. What lay there no man knew. No man had ever gone down into the Deeps and returned.



Destroyers were behind them now, rolling through the shallow seas a terrifyingly short distance away. Ran could feel their tremendous dark bulk, trembling with latent power, gleaming when sunlight filtered down through the ripples to strike submarine fire from their sides.

The clan did not know it. The clan, like all clans, was too ready to let their leader do the watching for trouble, too ready to believe what their lax minds were eager to believe—that safety was closer than danger, food closer than death, a rest upon sandy clearings closest of all. He would not tell them how near the Destroyers were.

Once, as they fled across an open savannah among the sea-forests, a shadow from high above floated monstrously over the pale green sand, and the clan broke ranks without waiting for the command, a flurry of silver bodies flashing this way and that into the shelter of the weed.

Everything in the submarine world fled for cover when those shadows passed. They were not Destroyers—in a sense. They came from the Aliens, as Destroyers came, but these killed all things, including man. Even the shark and the barracuda hid, and the dark seal-people who spoke a half-human tongue so softly. Not only mankind had altered in body and mind in the long milleniums since men first took shelter in the ocean, but the warm-blooded altered most. The seal-clans and the dolphin tribes filled the underwater with soft murmurs of their primitive talk. They had nothing to fear from the Destroyers; the mission of the Destroyers was the extermination of man alone.

But that shadow was something unknowable which the Aliens themselves rode. Ship, perhaps. No one dared look up to see if a keel printed the dimpling surface or rode high up in Air. That sort of ship carried hunters who preyed on all lives alike. Even the majestic whale, about which nothing was known except his majesty, had all but vanished from the seas after those ships began to pass. All things hid when that shadow slid across the ocean floor, mankind shouldering fish and seal and dolphin alike for shelter among the rocks.

But it passed, and all of the ocean world but man was at peace again. Man fled on.

What were the Aliens? No one knew; no man had any mental picture at all of the inheritors of Earth. They only knew that whenever men met the Destroyers, wherever they met them, there they died. And shark and barracuda fed upon what the inheritors left of those whom Earth bore and those who had ruled her, once.

And might, again.

That was the legend, anyhow; that was what kept men like Ran still fighting, till flying before the Destroyers, still stubbornly welding their clans together and seeking out deeper and farther sanctuaries where their silver-furred children might grow to maturity and pass on to yet another precarious generation the heritage of man.

The Earth-Born shall inherit Earth.

That was the legend; that was the promise. It was all men like Ran had to hold to, and it was little enough. Ran could not even feel sure now that there were any other men left alive except his own fleeing tribe.

Once, it seemed to him, the Destroyers had killed much more casually, almost at random. That was in the old days he could barely remember, when the tribes of men had thronged the shallow, sunlit seas around every coastline. The oldest knew tales their grandfathers had told of a golden age, when men even dared to draw their silver-furred limbs up the beaches—loneliest beaches, of course—and bask in the direct warmth of the sun. Legend said they had even used their voices in these days; they had spoken and sung in air. The old ones remembered great sweeping choruses stronger than the beat of surf, rolling from beach to beach as the throngs of men sunned their silver pelts and joined their voices.

But the Destroyers put an end to it long ago. The great killings of the last few years had been systematic. The machines came down in their thousands, more silently than the shark, and far more deadly, and reaped the clans of ocean as men had once reaped grain in the old, old, forgotten days when the Earth-Born ruled the Earth.

Now the farthest extension of the senses found no quiver of human thought in the waters anywhere. Were these the last? Perhaps; perhaps not. Ran only knew they had come a long, long way down the warm roadway of the Gulf Stream which was mankind's favorite path undersea, and encountered only that one other clan whose deaths still made the memory shiver. Perhaps they were the last.



Ran swung them sharply in a racing spiral around a point of rock, the clan streaming out obediently in a silver ribbon and fleeing on down the long incline through upward-wavering weed. Ran could not stretch out his specialized senses in any direction very far without striking upon the numbing iron presences that prowled the sea-floors, testing the water for their prey.

Patiently he drove his clan along the tribe-ways toward sanctuary. Patiently he sent his promises of safety out. The “Thoughts of the Deep” moved now and then in vast tides through the shadowed water...

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There was going to be trouble with Dagon. Ran thought of it as he sank slowly through the long cloven shaft after the last of his people. At the foot of the shaft lay the sunken city. The walls of rock through which they reached it were colored dull red and iridescent blue-green from explosions that happened aeons ago. The floor of the cleft was fused green glass.

Ran slipped gently downward, watching the last tired clansmen struggle through weeds toward safety, catching Dagon's confused thoughts above the soft, twittering murmurs of the tribe. In the depths of Dagon's mind, under the confusion, lay something cold and ominous as a barracuda. Fear, mostly, and the potentialities for rage that was not quite human. There can be mutations on the downward path as well as the upward, and in Dagon's mind lay the clear seed of mankind's future.

"Are we fish?" Ran asked himself. "Are we nothing but fear and hunger?"

Dagon had fled as mindlessly as a fish when the Destroyer wiped out his tribe. He should not be swimming this strongly now; he should not be able to. The leader of a clan had no right to this much remaining energy, with his clan so lately wiped out after long flight. A tribe leader should not survive his clan at all.

Ran realized suddenly that he was a little afraid of Dagon—not physically afraid, but afraid in the mind, where reason dwells. Dagon's weakness was a failing the whole tribe was heir to, Ran with the rest. And Dagon's failure could be a foreshadowing of Ran's failure, when the hour of trial came. Would Ran's tribe scatter mindlessly, to be hunted down in the open, like Dagon's? Would Ran—

"No," he told himself resolutely. "We are men. I'll keep us men. As long as we stay alive."

---

He came last out of the shaft down which he had shepherded his people. They hung, panting and uncertain, in a cloud around the cleft-mouth, waiting for him. Dagon floated a little way apart, raking the city before him with keen, quick glances. He knew a good refuge when he saw it.

Here were rank upon rank of high stone towers aquiver with veils of weed. The canyons between the buildings were too narrow for a Destroyer to pass. And there was something in the construction of the towers which confused them a little when their quarry hid among the buildings. Ran connected it vaguely with the silvery gleam of metal that still showed bright when the moss was rubbed from it.

Heretofore the city had been safe; heretofore when the Destroyers crossed a clan's path and unloosed their glittering destruction upon their quarry, any who, by agility and speed could reach a hiding place in this city, or another like it, had survived.

The tribes knew they were cities, knew dimly, with an unthinking racial memory, that they were cities built by men. How, or when, nobody had ever wondered. It did not occur even to Ran that the cities might have been reared on dry land, or that the land had sunk. It was enough that there were cities here at all, to offer the sea clans refuge when they needed it.

Dagon's quick glances glittered with appreciation of the place Ran had guided them to. There was a broken dome a little way off which caught the eye first because of its size, and Dagon's whole silvery bulk twitched impulsively at sight of it. The dome was not a very good refuge, there was no metal remaining in it, and it was too conspicuous. Ran had another shelter in mind, but Dagon gave him no time to direct the clan there.

"Run!" Dagon flashed at the whole tribe, not controlling his thought but sending it out broadcast and scarcely knowing he had uttered the command at all. It was sheer instinct made audible. "Run for the dome! We can hide there while we rest. Everyone—follow me!"

The clan's common impulse toward flight, already keyed to a high, hysterical pitch, made them respond instantly and as unthinkingly as Dagon himself. Every sleek, shining body flashed simultaneously around and lined up for flight toward the polarizing goal of the dome.

Then reason—what reason remained to man—interrupted the impulse, and a few of the tribe paused shivering uncertainly, remembering that Ran's was the voice which commanded them, not Dagon's. Yet Dagon spoke so authoritatively, urged them toward the obvious shelter, speaking for the obvious need— Most of them darted forward, at Dagon's heels.

Ran galvanized his weary muscles and shot forward through the tribe, scattering it in all directions, breaking up the pattern of their flight before it had fully formed. Then he was at their front, wheeling in the water so abruptly that his fur streamed sidewise for a moment as he turned to face them. With all his authority he shouted, "No! No! Not the dome! You know our refuge! I'm your leader, not Dagon. The dome is too open to be safe; head for our tower!"

Blind panic made the foremost deaf to him. It was the foremost who had first responded to Dagon, and the too-quick response showed their hysteria. There was only one kind of order they would hear or respect now.

Ran hurled himself against the nearest, knocking him sidewise, cuffing a second across the face, shouldering a third hand. His thought was a roar in their minds, harsh with authority. "Head for the tower! Listen! Head for the tower!"

The disorganized flight paused, wavered, piled up into a milling cloud around the arrested forward plunge of the foremost. In a moment or two, Ran and Dagon were hanging in the center of a half-hysterical globe of clansmen, a globe that shifted and wavered furiously around the outer edges, while every eye watched what went on in the heart of the crowd, where Ran had brought himself up just short of Dagon.

Dagon swung himself heavily around in the water, letting his pelt loosen a little to increase his bulk. Anger suffused his face wherever human flesh showed through the fur, and his lip lifted over serviceable fangs.

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It was no time for fighting; Dagon should have known that. The least taint of blood in the water would certainly draw the killer sharks, and almost as certainly the Destroyers themselves. But it was no time for argument, either.

Ran drew his upper lip tight and let his own sharp canines flash. He did not speak directly to Dagon. "You know our refuge," he told his tribe, casting out the thought in his old, encircling way to enfold the whole group. "Follow me."

His thought was a command that moved before him, opening up a path through the hovering globe of clansmen. There was an instant when Dagon's snarl was a challenge to combat that could not be ignored.

But the combat never came.

A tremendous shadow moved across the sea-floor. When its edge touched the intent cloud of sea-people as they hung watching, thoughts interlocked with patternless violence, every silvery body started simultaneously, shivered, and looked up.

Far overhead, distorted by ripples between and hanging just under the surface, of the sea, a questing Destroyer sailed slowly, trailing its egg-shaped shadow across the sand.

Squarely above the edge of the cliff where the clan hovered it paused. No one stirred or spoke; no one even thought.

Then slowly, slowly the Destroyer began to sink, it was not sure of them, down there. The metal in the sunken city confused it. But built into its complex body were senses which told it

that something flickering below might be its prey...

Ran sent out a tiny, tentative whisper of thought, touching each mind simultaneously. “Steady,” he said. “It may pass over. Wait for the signal. When I give the word—scatter.” He said “scatter” very, very gently, knowing that even the sound of it in panicky ears might start a rout among his followers.

The clan quivered once in a mind-linked, instantaneous response from every individual agreeing as one. Even Dagon joined. And the Destroyer sank and sank, its shadow growing enormous on the sandy street, among the waver of weeds and the knotting and unknotting of ripple-patterns which sunlight cast from the distant surface.

Thoughts wavered and knotted with the same motion in Ran’s mind as he waited tensely, gauging the angles of possible flight, postponing to the last instant the explosion of speed that would scatter most of the tribe and would almost certainly sacrifice a few to the Destroyer while the rest found hiding places.

His thoughts were cold and bitter, like the water. In a part of his mind he was counting over to himself the slowest and the weakest who must be abandoned first if he hoped to save the others. The choice was hard, but he had to make it.

Another part of his thought was tuned to the finest and keenest pitch of listening for some hint of other clans, near or far in the cold, green, glassy world around him. He found nothing. No whisper of human thoughts or human life anywhere, in all the vast silences of ocean. Only the faint clang, far off, of his own thought striking harshly against some ranging Destroyer. Far and near—terribly, fatally near—he could sense the encircling enemy. But by every evidence of human senses, this clan alone remained alive of all the clans of ocean.

*This is still sanctuary*, he reassured himself, watching the gigantic shadow grow upon the street, rippling across the angles of buildings, spreading like a vast thundercloud above them. *We can hide here, and they’ve never yet caught us when we could hide. But if this last refuge should fail—what then? What then?*

Majestically through the water, from deep, deep down in the abysses which no man knew, a long “Thought” of the sea moved like a slow heart-beat, once, twice, three times, and was gone.

The vast dark bulk of the Destroyer hung like Leviathan above them now. Ran drew in his breath to utter the command for flight, but he held it, waiting, watching. The water between the terror-frozen humans and the hovering machine wavered until the machine itself seemed insubstantial, a shadow the waves could dispel. But it was no shadow; and there was no defense but flight.





By their very existence the Aliens who made those machines and sent them into the depths of ocean to hunt down mankind, broke one of Earth's oldest laws—the law of balance. On Earth every creature has its opponent. But nothing under the sea or above it had ever stood against the iron Destroyers. It seemed to offer proof, if proof were needed, that the Aliens came from outside Earth, usurping man's heritage.

It seemed a faint hope now that the Earth-Born might still inherit. The clear light of intellect had already dimmed too much, guttering down in such instinctive urges as drove Dagon. But stubbornly still Ran clung to the ancient legend. *The Earth-Born shall inherit the Earth.* He had to cling to it. If he gave it up before he could pass it on to the next in line after him, what was the use of struggling at all?

The Destroyer was close over the tower-tops now. It paused there, probing the weed-clogged streets for the throb of warm-blood hearts down here among the cold-blood hearts. Warm and cold alike cowered in the shelter of the weeds and the ruined buildings, instinct and reason together counseling the silence of death itself.

"When it passes that dome," Ran told himself, "we must scatter. But not until it passes. There's still a chance—it may not find us—"

The tension was growing unbearable, but there was still a chance—

Among the brown weeds a silvery human shape convulsed into an explosion of sudden terror. The weakest mind here snapped at the breaking point between instinct and reason.

"*Run! Run! Scatter and run!*" Dagon shrieked in one wild red burst of blind frenzy.

It was too much for the tribe. The Destroyer might have passed over but for this; now it knew. Ran's people exploded from their hiding-places like the fragments of some exploding bomb in the streets of the long dead city. The water rang with the shrilling of their incoherent terror.

The Destroyer heaved itself up a little in the water, sending down strong ripples as it moved.

There was one totally unreasoning moment when Ran hung in the water motionless, fighting back his rage at Dagon and remembering his dreams in which he turned to face the Destroyers. Dagon, the animal, had called it down upon them. Ran, the man, lingered perilously, in brief, impotent defiance of the enemy. Why? He did not know; perhaps there was in his mind some foolish longing to prove to the machines that not all men were beasts yet, or creatures who worked by instinct only. But he could prove nothing. The Destroyers did

not operate by thought, either; they were like machines, obeying an impulse to exterminate, one built into their fire-fountaining bodies. Only man thought—and not all men.

Then the suicidal moment passed and Ran remembered his tribe. “The tower!” he roared above the wild shrieks of despair, whirling in the water as he called. “Hide! Run! But meet me at the tower when you can. Run! Run!”

He did not know if they heard. He was already diving deep into the shadows, a strong, compact silver streak flashing deeper into the thick stems of the seaweed, burrowing among their smooth, hollow trunks and the shelter of the rocks. He sought out metal instinctively, hugging the exposed antique ribs of a ruined building and sliding along its cold rail with half-intuitive, half-reasoned confidence that this would most confuse the enemy if it followed.

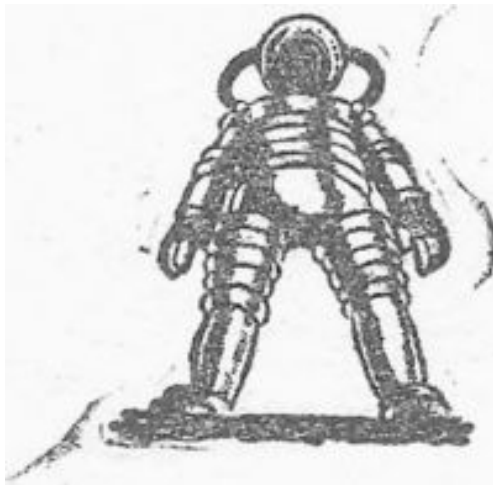
Behind him, with other senses than sight, he was aware that the fountains had begun to burst among his people—as they had burst among Dagon’s, such a short while ago, and for a reason so like this—Dagon’s hysteria, Dagon’s animal witlessness in the face of danger. A good leader would have sent a few out, and then a few more; and the Destroyer would have followed them, far off, beyond the buildings, before the bulk of the tribe scattered for safety. But then a good leader would have remembered Dagon’s weakness, too; the fault was Ran’s.

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Colored stars soared and rained down over the city, flowering in blue and amber, crimson and gold. He heard the death-cries of his clan, counted the names to himself as he lost them one by one, and then by twos and threes and groups. He heard, and closed his hearing, shutting his mind to their last importunate appeals because he could not answer the cries from that last threshold of human experience.

It was the living to whom he must dedicate his strength, to keep them alive while he could. For the dying he could do nothing; Ran closed his ears and hugged the metal rail, swimming hard.

With a very small part of his mind he realized that Dagon still survived. Many were dying all around them, but Dagon, with the strength no leader should retain whose clan has so lately died under his control, still radiated strong, mindless cries of panic and swam for shelter like the rest.



There was no way to measure how long the fountains of colored stars arched and burst into bright splashes among the weed-shadowed streets. During all that while the sea-people screamed silently and died wherever a star-pointed light flowered.

At last the fountain began to fade; one by one the slow and the unlucky were picked out and pinned by the crimson and silver and cold blue stars.

But Dagon survived; and Ran, hugging the shining rail, survived. The luckier, the wiser, the more agile among the clan survived, too. They were safe now among the inner streets where the Destroyers had never yet been able to follow, and in the hidden places underground where the metal rails ran thickest.

They thought they were safe.

They were beginning to murmur to one another with soft, uncertain touchings of the wind, beginning to converge tentatively toward their place of meeting....

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It was then, with the first long, terrible, rending shriek of metal upon stone, that the last chapter of man's history undersea began.

The tribe paused stark still, hanging stunned upon the water, questioning their own minds vainly for a clue to this terrifying sound they had never heard before.

Another deafening scream of metal and stone grinding together was all the answer that came. But it was answer enough. Ran, rising to an opening among the brown stems, saw the beginning of the end take place before him. It was so close the dim underwater vision of the unaided eyes could see it clearly, and so loud that the underwater hearing was stunned by it. The undersea is a noisy place at best, and sound carries a long way; this sound stunned the mind as well as the senses.

For man's last refuge was going down; the Destroyer was moving deliberately now against the city itself.

As Ran watched it set its blunt prow against a tower's base and the fearful shriek of steel and metal sounded again, a long, rending noise magnified by the water, as the tower shivered and leaned outward farther and farther, all its weed-banners streaming away from it; A cloud of fish darted from the shaking windows.

When the tower disintegrated, it gave way all at once, the crown still intact, though the base dissolved and the whole of it crashed down in slow fragments over the humped shoulders of the Destroyer, burying it, hiding it.

For one irrational moment Ran hoped—but it was impossible, and he knew it. Nothing could destroy the Destroyers. When the clouded water cleared he saw the dark bulk rise, shaking off the mantle of stone which the tower had laid upon its shoulders without so much as denting the impervious armor.

Before it was quite clear of the debris, another, remoter scream of protesting masonry struck their ears in the receptive medium of the water. A rumble as of earthquake rolled down the canyon streets and some unseen tower crashed terribly to ruins upon the shoulders of some unseen Destroyer.

The machine before them swung ponderously around and laid its blunt nose against the next building. The high walls groaned, cracked across, began to lean outward with slow and frightening dignity.

So the last city which had given shelter to man upon man's own planet gave way to the enemy, surrendering up street by street the harvest of man's last clan.

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It was a small, stunned gathering that clustered around Ran in the shelter of the rock-cleft through which they had come to this futile refuge. No one spoke as they hung there in the water between the iridescent walls, above the fused green glass of the floor. Exhaustion and despair silenced all thoughts in their minds. They could only cluster around Ran and wait numbly for death.

Methodically, far away, the Destroyers were working over the city, ruin by ruin, searching out the last of the race of man. The city, three times destroyed, went down finally, tower by tower. No one could even imagine, now, what name it had once borne. Illium, Constantinople, Chicago, London, Perle—who remembered now? Once it had known destruction by fire, as the discolored walls still showed. (The shadows of those who fled that destruction in vain were still printed darkly upon the stones here and there by the strongest fire of all, but there was nothing left in the sea who knew what those shadows were, or who had cast them.) Once the city knew destruction by water. And now...

Calmly, untroubled by any shadow of these conflicts of the upper world, the “Thoughts of the Deep” moved now and then through the water. The machines paid no heed to them. Perhaps the machines had no senses to catch those deep surges of power. Slow and inexorable as the tides themselves, the vast “Thoughts” unfurled and moved past the falling towers, the huddling people, and then obliviously furled themselves again and vanished.

The last men of Earth were too stunned to pay them any heed at all.

Even Ran, who knew what they would have to do next—what final, desperate danger he must lead them into—scarcely recognized the majestic tide of the “Thought” that passed them.

The clan was nearly a clan of sea-beasts now. Ran hung exhausted and mindless as the rest, sending out no messages. Dagon cowered under an overhang of rock, too awed and terrified even to radiate his fear. This was the last defeat. Intelligence had failed them; cunning had failed them. The mindless things of ocean, surviving through the inflexible dictates of instinct, were safer than mankind, and toward their level man was sinking fast.

To think was so difficult, so terribly difficult. It was easier to stop thinking, to swim in shoals, to follow whatever leader screamed loudest the urgencies they all felt. Running was easier. The old, old mechanisms of the body could save them the trouble of reasoning. There need be no tomorrow for the reason to forecast, only an endless today—if they survived at all. If the Destroyers did not find them and burst through the solid rock to exterminate them.

Something deep in Ran’s mind quivered and came reluctantly to life again. The old knowledge of responsibility still drove him, not only duty to the tribe, but to something beyond the tribe in that intangible future of which he knew only the legend and the promise. To save their lives was not enough. He must save their future, too. And most urgent of all, *he must keep them men*. Dagon’s way was easy—back to the mindlessness of the beast...

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Ran put out delicate, tentative touches of the mind, testing his huddled people. The whole clan shivered at that scarcely perceptible call to life, a summons to take up the burden again which they had so nearly laid down forever.

Some of them shrank away from the touch, rejecting it, closing their minds determinedly; thinking was too painful. Awareness of self was too painful. There were among the clan those who in that moment ceased to acknowledge ego at all. They renounced it for the easier way, and in the choice became sea-beasts.

But there were others who turned trustfully to Ran, opening their minds for orders.

He had no orders to give—only one, and that too dangerous unless it were the last thing mankind could do. He stretched his thoughts a little toward the elders of the clan, asking for suggestions, hoping fervently that the burden of choice need not be wholly his alone. One by one he questioned them urgently.

Out of the sea a slow, unfurling surge of “Thought” moved by them like the beat of powerful music. Ran shivered when he felt it pass, knowing the choice he must make. For the elders could give him nothing.

“We do not know,” their minds said passively. “You are our leader. Guide us. Save us if you can.”

From Dagon nothing came at all. The sea-weeds that trembled around them in the water were no more silent than he.

Ran listened for a moment to that slow beat of the Thought, his mind drawing after its tidal motion. Reluctantly he spoke. “There is,” he told them, “one last refuge. It may mean death, but anything else means certain death. Not even the upper seas are safe for us now. Only one way remains.” He hesitated, and said, “There are the Deeps.”

Dagon’s explosion of fear led all the rest. “The Deeps! Not the Deeps! We must run, but not into the Deeps!”

A chorus of terrified negations burst all around Ran. “No, not the Deeps! No man knows what lies down there. The ‘thoughts’ rise out of the Deep. What thinks the ‘Thoughts?’ No man knows.

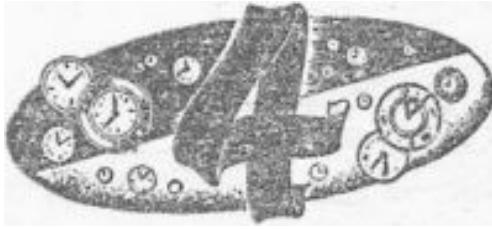
“No man dares know. Not the Deeps!”

Feebly from Dagon came a tentative suggestion. He seemed to think it to himself, but he radiated it involuntarily to them all. Dagon was losing the ability to think his own private thoughts, which is another mark of the sea-beast.

“We can run,” he said. “We can run very fast. Perhaps faster than the Destroyers. Perhaps we can find some other city to hide in. We must run—”

Rising in the water a little, Ran shook out his fur and tightened his weary muscles for action. “We’re too tired to run,” he said. “The Destroyers are faster than we. They can level every city as they leveled this one. While they are still busy here, we may have a little time to escape. I am going down into the Deep. What lies there, no man knows. It may be death, but it is certain death here. Now, you may choose. I am going—now; you may follow if you will.”

They followed, reluctantly, uncertainly, full of terror of the unknown—but they followed. Dagon came last.



Here was the edge of the world.

Behind them lay the open seas they were leaving forever. Clear green water netted with filtered sunlight, floored with sand tinted green by the color of the sea. Behind them rose jungles of swaying weed whose deep roots clutched the rocks and whose crowns floated upon the surface of the water. These were familiar places. As the seafolk looked longingly back, even the Destroyers seemed familiar by contrast with the unknown.

Before them was the edge of the world. The Great Deep fell away here into infinities too vast for human probing. A sheer cliffside vanishing into darkness, and beyond it only the bottomless sea that turned purple and then deep blue and then an unfathomable midnight far down.

Out of it, the great beats of “Thought” came slowly.

Ran shut his mind to the concept of what might lie below. He swam out over the verge of the cliff and hung there for a moment, casting his senses resolutely downward, testing the depths. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing at all. Only silence, and the leisurely upward rolling of a vast, incomprehensible “Thought” now and then. It might be the planet itself “thinking”.

“Follow me,” Ran said, and shutting his fur together, let himself sink....

The cliff was two miles high.

They went down slowly, cautiously, a long, wavering ribbon of silver shapes moving against the face of the cliff deeper and deeper into darkness. Light failed them early in the descent, but since vision was not a sense upon which they depended much, they missed it only subtly. Light meant warmth, familiarity, safety. Light meant the heritage of man, though of course they had no idea of that. They only knew the dark frightened them, even when they could explore it with their undersea senses and knew no tangible danger lurked in hiding.

The feel and the taste of the water changed intangibly as they went down and down. Now they were in foreign territory, and anything might happen. Nothing did, except that those vast “Thoughts” wavering upward strengthened until the descending humans were tossed this way and that, as if upon powerful currents, whenever they strayed into the course of an upward-flowing stream. They seemed to be filtering down between and among the “Thoughts”, sinking toward the root of all thinking.

By the time they realized this was a trap into which they sank, it was too late to turn back. At first Ran knew only that at some little distance away another rock wall facing the cliff rose paralleling their course. The walls drew together slowly. Ran decreased the rate of his sinking, stretching out senses in the dark to explore the closing rock walls, wondering if he should turn back.

Caution warned him to, and yet—and yet— No, there was something here in the Deep that shaped his course. He thought, *Go on, go a little farther, there's something here...*

The buttresses of the world were narrowing to a crevasse, a funnel down which the last tribe of man sank gently, following Ran with unthinking trust.

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Just when the first Destroyer found their track none knew; not even Ran had been aware of stalkers behind them. In that duty he had failed. Or was even failure, now, only one strand of the enormous pattern in which they were enmeshed?

At any rate, someone glancing back the way they had come presently sent out a soundless cry of terror, and every mind leaped to see the cause. Above them, silhouetted against the remote light of day, which mankind was now forever leaving, an oval shape of darkness descended slowly, trailing long tendrils of perception that tested the water for the fleeing tribe.

Panic welded them all into an instant, furry huddle that englobed Ran. He spread his thoughts out like encircling arms to give what reassurance he could.

"They were sure to find us, sooner or later," he said. "But down here, see how slow they are? Perhaps they're too big to sink as far as we can. See? They're frightened, too. They don't know the Deep. Look—that 'Thought' made them waver. Swim now—follow me. I think we can escape them yet. I think—*think*—there is sanctuary somewhere below us. Swim!"

Now the passive sinking was ended. They heeled over and churned the water with urgent feet, burrowing heads down toward the heart of the planet. Above them a second Destroyer, and then another and another, loomed into shadowy substance from the upper waters.

Mankind sank, and the machines of the Alien sank after them. The rock walls closed until Ran's expanded senses touched them everywhere, honeycombed rock overgrown with deep-sea creatures that were half-animal and half-plant, veils of dim sentience wavering in the caves and along the cliff-sides. From just such dim flickers mankind may have risen in his long climb toward mastery of the air and the planet. Now, deeper and deeper, past the forgotten steps that made his species' past, Ran led mankind backward and downward toward the circle's close.

The vast "Thought," majestically rising, shook them all, ignored them all.

The heirs of Earth, diving down toward the fountainhead of their world, plunged headlong into the trap of their own choosing, and things that were not of Earth, things that ruled it, pursued them to their death. Mankind's last champion could only lead his people into oblivion. For how could the Earth-Born now cherish any illusions at all about the heritage of Earth?

Panic shook Ran as he felt rock walls close slowly in and knew there was no escape. And yet, beneath the panic, something held him steady; something hinted to him through senses too remote to name that defeat was not yet certain, that a purpose lay behind their coming—that somehow man's ending was not quite yet.

The heritage remained. He must hold the tribe together, and hold them human, until the heritage could be passed on. The children, or the children's children, might still rise and inherit Earth....

Now the rock walls narrowed almost to an end, and below them something vast moved majestically in the water.

The "Thoughts of the Deep" were rising stronger and stronger up this narrowing funnel of rock as they struggled down. In the seas above, they passed like a summer breeze, but here they rose straight up the shaft in powerful currents that tossed the swimmers like chaff when



their minds strayed into the heart of the flowing columns. Even the Destroyers wavered. And now, down in the darkness, something tangible moved...

The clan faltered and began to draw out behind Ran in a lengthening column. Dagon, who had swam so far in a daze full of flickering anger and flickering terror, now came almost to a stop and said irresolutely, "There's danger down below. I saw something move. I'm not going any farther—"

Voices echoed him. Ran could have named before they spoke exactly those who would always echo Dagon.

"Yes, something moved... I can't make it out... it's too big... shall we run? Shall we hide?"

Dagon's mind cast out wildly, searching the cliff-sides. "This is a trap," he said. "But there are caves here. We could hide in the caves. Shall we run? I think we should run—"

Only Ran hung silent, paying no attention. He was searching the Deep for the outline of that vast, dark, moving shape below. He said softly, "Wait here. All of you—wait. I must go down alone to find what this is. Watch the Destroyers, but don't run until I give the word. There's plenty of time yet. No matter what happens to me, I'll have time to give you the word. Elders, keep the clan together..."

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The tremendous columns of "Thought" rolling upward buffeted him from side to side as he sank. The funnel of rock narrowed. But it did not narrow to a close. Now he could feel and taste and sense fresh currents of seawater flowing gently upward past him, from some farther open space below.

This was not a dead end, after all. That much of his conviction was proved. It occurred to him uneasily, as he strained all his senses downward toward the vast shape below, that in his last, desperate fight to preserve mankind as a rational, thinking species, he had led them here by the blindest of instinctive convictions.... That was a gateway in the rock, far down. His questing senses found the opening. But the gateway was blocked; something hung there, rolling a little in the waters.

He could see now the dark, gigantic outlines of the "Thinker."

Stilling his thoughts, hugging the wall, Ran slipped quietly downward. But he need not have troubled to be quiet. The thoughts rolled upward, ignoring him as they ignored the dim lives of the sea-plants, and the lifeless rock itself. Serene as the planet they unfurled and rose, moving as majestically through water as the planet through space.

This was the guardian. It hung brooding in the gateway, thinking its own mighty thoughts and ignoring all things human and inhuman.

But it was alive. And Ran's senses, testing the water delicately, told him that it was warm-blooded life, like his own. Also if it ignored him, at least it did not threaten. But it blocked the gateway, and the machines were sinking inexorably.

He did not want to go forward. His heart was thumping with awe and terror—terror of the unknown and awe for the sheer size of the "Thinker," and for its majesty. He knew it, now.

But he had to go forward. He made himself sink, until the bulk of the "Thinker" rose like a mountain above him. Its head was a sloping cliff; the "Thoughts" rose unwaveringly out of its deeply-hidden "mind," out of the infinitely deep and complex convolutions of its "brain"—so much deeper than man's ever was, even in his greatest days.

It had no face at all. Leviathan has never had a face. Like his thoughts, he has always hidden his face. There has been only the vast, enigmatic, smooth brow with the eyes set on opposite sides, looking far out into separate fields of vision. Leviathan fronts two ways.

Ran sank until he hung level with the quiet eye set low down on the cliff-side of the head. He hesitated there, searching the silence of the unwinking gaze. If it saw him, it did not heed. With the nearer vision it regarded the water and Ran and the rocks as one, disinterestedly. With that farther eye, who could guess what unfathomable deeps Leviathan brooded upon?

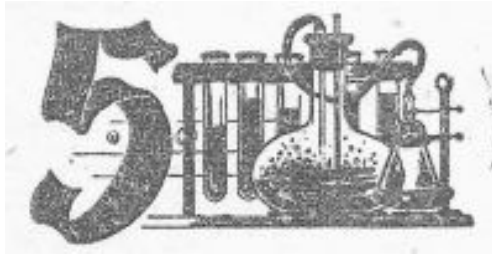
Earth is a very old planet.

There are chronicles that relate creation's story, and name Leviathan the first of all created beings. *God created whales, and every living creature.* Long ago, when the chronicles were new, Leviathan was the most awesome of all living things. *His eyes, say the chronicle, are like the eyelids of the morning. His heart is as firm as a stone. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.* And that was long ago. Mankind had changed greatly since then.

So had the whale....

Ran hung humbly before Leviathan, at the gateway to Leviathan's hidden realm, looking up without hope into that unheeding eye in the mighty cliff of the brow.

*He swam the seas, said Melville, before the continents broke water.... In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark, and if ever the world is to be again flooded like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive....*



There was a sudden tumult above, where the tribe waited. Ran laid all his senses backward and upward for a moment, as an animal lays back its ears without turning. Dagon's strong, terrified cry came loudest. "They're coming! They've cornered us! Look—when they pass that rock they'll sight us. We must run! Run! What are you waiting for? Run, I tell you, run!"

A confusion of thoughts boiled up in answer to him. No one was sure, now, why they did not run; not even the elders could see escape, upward or downward, whether they ran or waited. Their leader had not offered them any hope they could recognize. Only Dagon's urge to wild flight made very clear sense at this moment. Flight, at least, is easier than standing still while death comes closer and closer.

"The caves!" Dagon screamed. "Hide in the caves!"

Ran gathered himself in the water, turned and shot upward with powerful strokes, the surge of the mighty "Thoughts" bearing him buoyantly with them. The clan scattered wildly as he drove a headlong course into their center.

"The Destroyers!" they babbled at him. "Look up! When they pass that rock—" The thought dissolved into sheer wordless terror, but other minds look up the clamor. "Where can we go? What can we do? Tell us quickly, before we die!"

"We go down," Ran said, making his thought as calm and powerful as he could, unconsciously trying to model it upon the strong tide of Leviathan's "Thoughts" that tossed them all as they hung there. "Down. Follow me."

Without waiting, he turned over in the water again and drove himself down with strong, determined strokes. He had no plan at all; he went by instinct as unreasoning as Dagon's. He was sure of one thing only—this was the last choice left for man. While responsibility was his he must fulfill it, and his duty was keep the clan together, to keep it human, to hold stubbornly the burden of man's heritage.

Waveringly the clan came after him, Dagon last, all their minds dim with terror but ready to seize upon even this frail hope until it proved quite futile.

The dark, tremendous "Thinker" still hung quietly in its gateway, one brooding eye turned toward them, one hidden in its other facade, gazing upon realms they could not even imagine. If the whale has a double mind to guide its double fields of vision, then neither mind dwelt even for an instant upon the exhausted little band of fugitives whose kind had once ruled the world.

They hung there, shivering in the water.

Ran swam forward, looked up grimly into the eye. He gathered together what power of the mind remained to him in his weariness and his fear. If he could only penetrate that vast abstraction, speak to Leviathan as one reasoning being to another...

“Our enemies drive us,” he told Leviathan in simplicity and directness. “May we pass?”

Leviathan’s eye did not change. The gigantic “Thought” rolled upward, unheeding.

Dagon screamed at it, a wild, shrill, animal cry. “Let us by! Let us by!”

He might have been a barracuda or a moray, for all the answer Leviathan gave.

The clan took up the screams, filling the water with a welter of incoherent, terrified thoughts, cries for help, cries for an open path, simple cries that were mindless with the fear of death. But they spoke to no listening ear. Leviathan had heard sea-beasts scream before.

So there was no escape. The clan could not go forward, and it could not go back. They could only hang there seething and shrieking in the trap to which Ran had led them, until the first of the Destroyers sank past the rock that hid them...

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When Dagon caught his first glimpse of that terrible shape above, his shriek drowned out every other cry. He whirled in the water, beating a froth of bubbles, darting wildly for the honeycombed wall.

“Run!” he screamed. “Hide! Hide!”

That command made clear sense to the tribe. Ran’s had not. They exploded after him, scattering in all directions, mindlessly bumping against rocks, against each other, shrilling their terror without even knowing they shrilled. The panic of all driven things was on them, and they ran straight into the jaws of their pursuer.

Only Ran lingered, gathering up all the strength of his mind and all his urgent feeling of responsibility for the clan which he had so stubbornly led to their destruction, following an instinct he had never known before.

The power of his mind was tiny, contrasted with the tremendous latent power of the whale’s. But it was all he had. He drew every ounce of it into one point of urgency and hurled it against Leviathan. He tried to frame no words, no appeals. He was simply seeking to pierce that vast abstraction, to force Leviathan to recognize the operation of another thinking mind in another warm-blood brain.

Ever so slightly Leviathan stirred in the water. Its “Thought,” rising in a tremendous column like coiling smoke, wavered minutely sidewise, toward Ran. He felt the touch of it, burning with a power so mighty his whole mind reeled away from that scorching contact. He could not even be sure whether deep down in the incredible bulk the hidden “Thinker” turned slightly, contemptively, toward Ran.

“Help us!” Ran said silently and with all the violence he could command.

The eye, like a window set low in the cliff-side of flesh, seemed to waken just a little. Ran could not guess if it saw him, or if it heeded what it saw. He knew it would not matter in a moment or two, for he could judge by the tumult above how close destruction was.

He hurled one last thought of violence and entreaty at the bulk which blocked the gateway. “Help us now!” he cried. “Help us now!”

Then he doubled in the water, drew his legs strongly beneath him and shot upward after his fleeing tribe. His shouting thoughts raced ahead of him, reaching feverishly for all the minds that could still hear him and obey.

“Come down!” he called. “Follow me! Come down!”

How could they hear him, with death so close above them? Dagon's wild, strong shrillings of despair were easier to follow, high up the shaft near the level of the machines. Dagon was beyond reach now; Dagon had passed the threshold and laid humanity aside. But the clan—or much of it—could still be salvaged.

Ran hurled himself upward in a final burst of effort shouting his commands.

To the clansmen they were senseless commands; he ordered them to die, not to escape. Some made no reply at all, only fled blindly upward and away. Others wailed protest, whimpered in terror.

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Ran paid no heed to their cries. He had to get them down to Leviathan, and he had to do it by sheer physical force, since there was no other way. They would not strike him no matter what blows he dealt, for he was—or had been—their leader. But they would not obey, either.

What followed was homeric, in its way. The welter of silver bodies struggling and screaming in the cold, black water, the tremendous buffets that sent them reeling downward one after another, shrieking, against their wills—all of it was like a struggle in a nightmare. Ran grappled with the young and strong and broke their defences and hurled them headlong toward the depths. He cuffed the protesting sidewise and down. He sent the aged staggering. He snatched children from their mothers' clasps and flung them shrieking into the dark, hurling the mothers after them.

By now the stars were beginning to fall, farther out, in the open water. Now and then, they found a goal, sometimes in a reeling fugitive whom Ran himself had cast to meet destruction. He could not help that; he did not think of it. Nothing mattered now but to face Leviathan with his clan before him, and take whatever came.

High overhead he heard Dagon's diminishing, inhuman screams and the animal cries of frantic terror from those who fled upward, shaping no thoughts in minds that had ceased to be the minds of men.

Ran spared no heed for them. Perhaps they would win a way past the Destroyers, some few of them. It didn't matter, now; they would not be human who fled so mindlessly, even if they won their way to the doubtful freedom of the upper seas. They had left humanity behind them, here in the deeps with Ran and his terrified remnant of the tribes of man. If any destiny remained to mankind, it awaited them below.

Strongly Ran drove his people downward toward the gateway and Leviathan.

The cowering clan that was all of humanity now hung shivering and whimpering before the guardian of the gate. Ran pushed through their swarm, sent out a strong, encircling thought to reassure them if he could, and then rose before the great eye in the cliff of flesh.

And this time it saw him; it heard, and saw.

For when Ran's enfolding thought went out, it had touched other thoughts than men's. Thinking mind brushed upon thinking mind, and with one facet of the serene, majestic brain Leviathan looked into the face and the mind of man. With its other side and the farther field of its vision, it looked at what no man could guess, then or ever.

A shower of stars fell glittering among the clan as man's last leader hung facing the guardian of the gateway to the world's foundation. For an interminable instant nothing happened.

Then with infinite majesty the whale stirred. Like a moving mountain it rolled forward, the displaced water surging in tremendous backward rivers as it rose out of the gateway.

Slowly, slowly an opening showed in the walls of rock it had guarded. Here was a gateway to the farther deeps. Now mankind could hide.

Leviathan rose tremendously in the water, and under it, into the refuge of the planet's deepest foundation, the little shuddering clan of humans darted, one by one. Ran came last.

The whale was a floating fortress above them. Ran gave one deep sigh, knowing his duty done at last and all his responsibility ended. He had kept his people men. He had not failed; the instinct which brought him here was wiser than reason, after all, but it was not the instinct of the beast. Here a door was opened and a circle closed, but not upon man's failure. What came next was beyond Ran's knowledge, but he knew he had not failed.

Now he was free to lay the burden of his heritage down forever.

He bent his head and lowered his shoulders, stooping under the mighty bulwark of the whale as he followed the last men of earth downward into the dark.

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When they were gone, Leviathan swung ponderously in the water, contemplating the showers of stars which the Destroyers still rained down into this gulf where the last humans had vanished.

The stars stung upon the gigantic brow out of which the "Thoughts of the Deep" had risen and beaten for such infinite aeons. Before mankind, there was the whale. Patiently, through eternity, until now, Leviathan had bided his time. Conquerors rose and fell upon the continents, but three-quarters of the world is water, and the whale could wait.

Now at last the conflict moved downward, into Leviathan's own world.

More of the Destroyers came into range, sinking slowly, testing a little upon the currents of "Thought" that rolled up undisturbed through the dark water. The lethal showers rained down which had made every native thing upon Earth and under the waters of Earth cower and die when the stars touched them.

Leviathan wrinkled his majestic brow and shook the stars off.

Then the Earth-Born turned slowly and powerfully in the water of his native deeps—turned and faced the Alien.

[The end of *We Shall Come Back* by Henry Kuttner (as C. H. Liddell)]