

WORLD Beneath Ice by Polton Cross

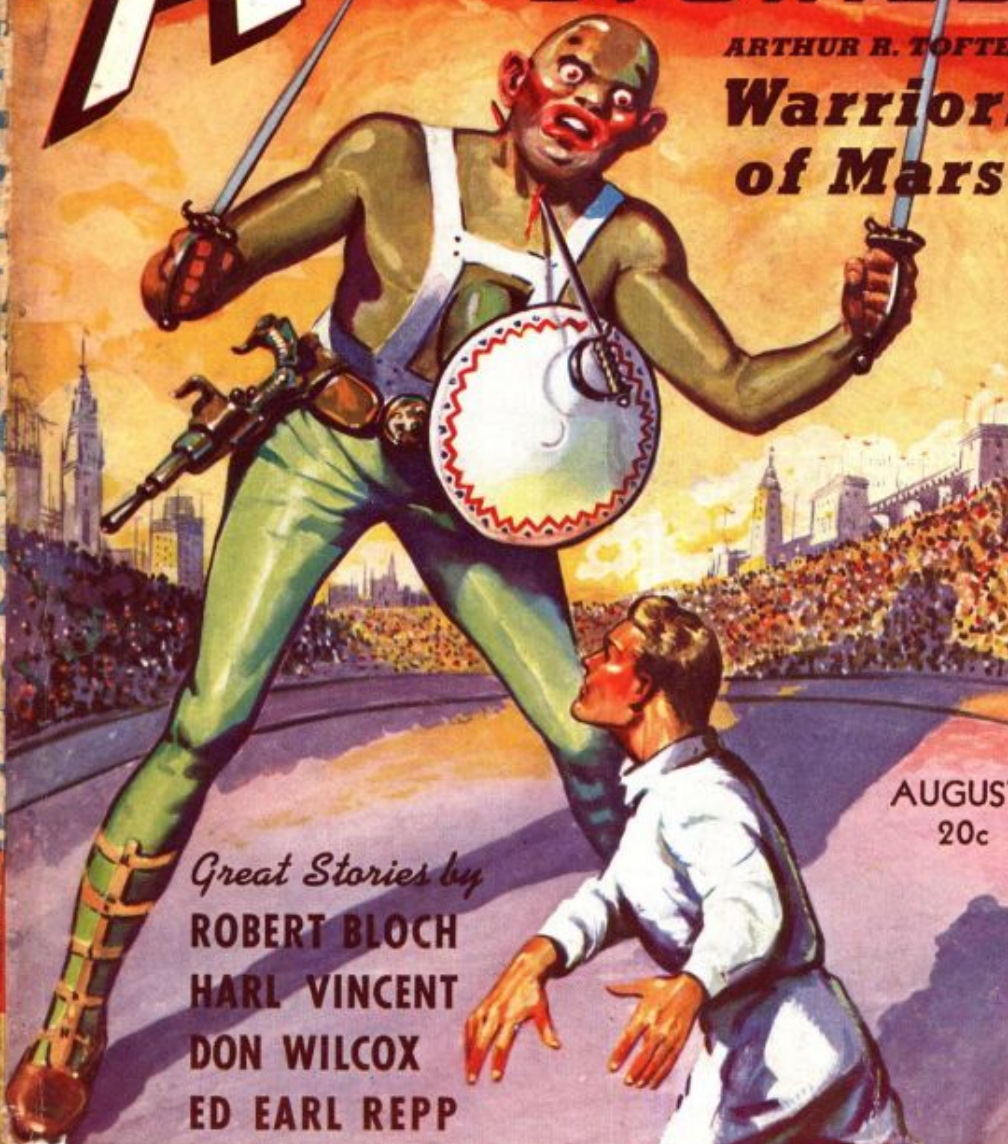
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# WORLD BENEATH ICE

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Polton Cross.

First published *Amazing Stories*, August 1939.

*From the distant reaches of space came a tiny planetoid, and the earth trembled. Then to Earth came an ice sheet of death.*

## CHAPTER I

### The Coming of Disaster

New York felt the initial tremor in the mid evening of January 6, 1990. It passed through the busy metropolis as a slight, creeping shudder: for a fraction of a second everything was a thirty-second of an inch out of true, then immediately righted itself again. Thousands failed to notice it, and those who did did not put it down to a temblor but to a physical disorder that had briefly thrown them out of key with their surroundings.

But the instruments at the Institute of Science were coldly impartial in their findings. There had definitely been an earth temblor across the whole American continent at 21 hours 14 minutes Eastern Standard Time—the period being registered from midnight to midnight. The curious thing was that the tremor was not one in the usually understood sense of the word, nor was there any traceable epicenter. Scientists looked at one another in baffled wonder, checked their seismographs again, then waited for reports to come in from their stations in various parts of the world.

An hour later they came through—and as they arrived it became perfectly obvious that not only America but all the world had experienced a temblor at almost the same time. And again there was the absence of a recognizable epicenter, presumably because the occurrence had been simultaneously world wide.

To the scientists the matter was one of profound interest, but to the world in general it meant nothing. The temblor had caused but little harm anyhow. Hardly a brick had been dislodged. Broken crockery seemed to be the only mishap, and that was relegated to the mysterious regions of domesticity. . . . So the people of the world in general and America in particular went on their way undisturbed.

Then, a week afterwards, the temblor came again! This time it was more violent. Several poorly constructed products of cheap labor in New York, fell down entirely. A vast apartment block in the process of construction buckled up in its entirety and killed two hundred workmen outright. In Britain and Europe, too, the effect had been unusually severe.

That started people noticing their newspapers and listening to their radio-television reports. With a typical sensationalism the papers carried a unanimous headline—

#### THE TEMBLOR STRIKES AGAIN!

Strange how editors and reporters got into the habit of regarding the thing from a human aspect. They plugged it for all it was worth, traced vague histories of past earthquakes with a certain pitiful fervidness. Scientists stood up before telescreens and spoke in deep, learned voices on the hundred and one causes of an earthquake. . . . But it was increasingly plain that all of them were hedging, did not really know what they were grappling with.

And the one man who could have explained the thing from A to Z remained silent, determined to have every fact before he published his opinions to a much bewildered world.

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The one man was Dr. Royston Shaw, with enough degrees after his name to fill half a column of type in “Who’s Who in Science.” Coldly eschewing all the benefits scientific bodies would have thrust upon him, he had retired at 50 to study out certain angles in science that still baffled his relentlessly analytical mind.

With a fortune at his disposal, a quiet home just clear of the busy whirl and din of New York City, a daughter of 25 whose heart was also given over to things scientific, and an understanding wife whose only vice was the rearing of goldfish in numberless bowls, he had little to do but pursue his sole interest in life. And pursue he did, to the virtual exclusion of all else.

Ann Shaw was the first to notice her father's sudden increase in endeavor at the arrival of the first earth tremor—but she could get little out of him as he sat like a gnome before his desk in the laboratory, gold rimmed glasses perched on his beaky nose, one hand incessantly clawing at the skimpy gray hair falling over his high forehead. With his free hand he made innumerable notes and drawings on a thick pad: then he would vanish into his observatory for hours at a stretch and come back to make more notes, or meditate.

Ann gave it up at last, she knew he would come out with the whole story when he was ready. Besides, there was nothing for her to do while he was in one of these moods; so, being a perfectly normal girl even if she was a brilliant scientist, Ann took herself off to the nearby city to catch up on some much needed shopping.

She was in the heart of the city when the third tremor came. In fact she was stepping out of a dress shop when a growling roar smote on her ears. The next moment her feet were shaken from under her and she went her length in the gutter on top of her parcels. For a few seconds the ground heaved horribly to the accompaniment of distant concussions and splintering glass. Then the world was still again.

Dazed, she started to get to her feet, found a strong hand on her arm assisting her. She glanced up in surprise to find a man of massive proportions in a big fawn overcoat and soft hat regarding her in concern.

“O.K.?” he asked, smiling, picking up her parcels.

“Yes—yes, thanks.” She brushed the dirt from her clothes with an impatient hand. “I—I guess I made an exhibition of myself.”

“So did the others,” he said quietly, and nodded along the sidewalk to the men and women picking themselves up. Police cars were already screaming down the thoroughfare answering emergency calls. The dress shop window was smashed and mixed with costly gowns which had been slashed to ribbons.

Ann rearranged her parcels carefully, taking a sly look at her acquaintance as she did so. He was younger than she had thought—perhaps in the early thirties. Blond too—handsomely blond. Ripples of fair hair showed at the side of his hat. His face was fresh complexioned, very strongly moulded, with a projecting chin, firm lips and straight nose. Even his eyes were arresting—of a bright blue usually associated with young children and china dolls.

Not that he was idle as he helped with the parcels. He had already taken account of Ann's trim, shapely figure, black hair, and level gray eyes.

“That's the third quake we've had now, isn't it?” Ann asked rather breathlessly, becoming aware of the mutual scrutiny when the parcels were no longer an excuse.

“Yeah. . . .” He still did not take his blue eyes off her. Then he suddenly grinned with the whitest of teeth. “I'm Radford Blake of the *Star*,” he volunteered. “Hope you don't mind?”

“Oh! A reporter?” Ann stiffened visibly.

“Sure—and a good one too. Ask the *Star*. I rate by-lines in my write ups, and that's something. Besides— Hey, just a minute!” He streaked after the girl as she suddenly turned away. Catching up with her he clasped her arm. “Am I that bad?” he asked in reproach.

“I just don’t like reporters, that’s all,” she answered sweetly. “Thank you for helping me—and now good by!”

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Again she turned away but by the time she had reached the subway entrance she was aware of his powerful, grinning face once more. He raised his hat politely and the blond hair came fully into evidence.

“Hallo there! Remember me?”

Ann stopped, her face set. “Now listen, Mr. Blake, you’re getting to be a nuisance! I suppose it’s the reporter in you that makes you behave like a bloodhound—but remember that picking a girl up after she’s fallen down doesn’t give you the right to follow her around. Anyway what *do* you want?” she demanded.

“Your name, and the date and place of our next meeting.”

“What!” Ann’s gray eyes opened wide.

“Sure!” he smiled. “Oh, be yourself, won’t you? This is 1990 and the age of self-expression. I think you’re all right, and I’d like to know more about you. In return I promise you a full history of my life from the cradle upward.”

“From the amoeba upward would be more apt!” she retorted.

He winced. “O.K.—you win. Well, where do we meet?”

For answer she brought her dainty heel down on his toe with savage vigor: it was the only alternative to a slap in the face she could think of. By the time he had finished hopping around amid the grinning people, the girl had vanished. In fact, she had already boarded the subway train for home and was sitting in a corner seat smiling to herself. It flattered the woman in her to have the blond giant’s name and occupation while withholding her own.

She was still smiling when she returned into the house—then as her mother came fluttering round with allusions to an earth tremor she suddenly forgot all about Radford Blake and recalled her experience in the city. Immediately she headed for the laboratory and found her father pacing slowly up and down in his tattered smock, thrashing back his gray hair impatiently.

“Well, about time!” He wheeled round irritably as she came in. “I was wondering where you’d gotten to, Ann. Your mother tells me you’ve been up town. How much damage was there?”

“Why, not much. It was only a tremor, after all. A few windows broken and one or two people hurt. I was thrown in the gutter. Nothing else so far as I could see at the time.”

Shaw’s brows came down over his cold eyes.

“Ann,” he said slowly, “the next tremor will be the last. And it will bring about the complete end of civilization! It will not be just a shiver, but a gigantic quake which will destroy in a few seconds everything man has built up.”

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The girl gave a faint, incredulous smile.

“Don’t believe me, eh?” her father asked, jamming his hands in his smock pockets and staring at her. “I’m surprised at you, Ann, I thought I had developed the scientific streak in you. Leave disbelief for the masses: that’s their job. All that I’m saying is true—unhappily. I’ve come to the end of my researches now, and I realize that at any moment the end may come. These recent tremors link up completely with the sudden distension of Jupiter’s Red Spot.”

Ann slowly sat down, frowning. “But, dad, how do—”

"I've been watching the planets for some time now," he interrupted. "First Uranus revealed an extensive white spot growing gradually larger: then Jupiter's Red Spot extended some thousands of miles beyond normal bounds—then we got temblors on earth here, each one more severe. Only one thing could cause the strange distensions on Uranus and Jupiter—namely, a tremendous gravitational field tugging from outer space, shifting the gummy half molten plasma of the Red Spot as a— a spoon would drag molasses. Understand?"

"Yes—yes, I think so. Go on."

"I explored space with my instruments." Shaw paced up and down now as he talked. "I couldn't find anything to account for a strong gravity field. Yet I knew it must be present *somewhere*. In the end I arrived at its position by mathematics."

He came to a stop, took a deep breath.

"Out in space, Ann, passing rapidly through our solar system, is a tiny piece of a white dwarf star—a black fragment, utterly invisible, detectable only by mathematics. Possibly it is a piece broken off a white dwarf in the far depths of space by some inconceivable disaster, and following a certain orbit it is passing through our part of the universe. I say it is tiny, but the packing of a white dwarf is something like two tons to the cubic inch. It has a density two thousand times greater than platinum. The substance is composed entirely of neutrons. There are no normal atoms at all—"

"In other words, the stuff is neutronium," Ann said quietly.

"Exactly—neutronium. Now, it is passing through our system. Its great gravity field is not strong enough to drag an entire planet out of its orbit: it cannot defeat the master field of the sun. But it does something else! Even as in the normal way the moon raises tides in the fluid oceans, so this neutronium chunk raises and shifts the plasma of the earth's surface, as a magnet would drag along steel filings. When it reaches its closest point, which may be any time now, all normal land surface will be shattered. Everything will collapse."

"But why, dad? Isn't that a bit sweeping?"

"Believe me, child, I wish I were wrong. But there it is, I'm not. In fact, the major earthquake would have come long ago were it not for the fact that the earth's surface is somewhat adhesive. Continents cling together by cohesion of molecules until at last the pull of the opposing gravity is too strong to be denied. Then rupture will come all at once. Three times so far the surface of the world has slipped simultaneously. The next time will be the last. As you probably know, the earth's surface is not solid: that's the trouble. It floats, as though it were heated tar or treacle."

"Isn't that the Wegener Hypothesis?" Ann asked, thinking.

"Yes. Wegener perished long ago in Greenland trying to prove the hypothesis that we now accept as fact—namely, that all continents and islands are really hardened scum or pumice floating on the hot viscid stuff that makes up earth's interior. And continents not only float: they drift. . . .<sup>[1]</sup> So when this strong gravitative field approached from outside the surface began to accelerate its rate of drift to the extent of finally ripping in pieces. That has yet to come. I am convinced nothing can stop it."

[1] The Wegener Hypothesis further assumes that the oceans are carried in heavy basins of basalt and that the continents are borne on wracks of granite. First glance at the map of the entire Atlantic reveals much in favor of this theory. Faced with those two coastlines it is not impossible to imagine that the West African coast and east South American coast once fitted up against each other. Turn the atlas further west. It is odd that both

North and South America should have a rumple of mountains—Rockies and Andes—rucking up along their western sides, as though the plains to the east of them had “crept” as tarmac creeps to the curb on a heated road. The general tendency it seems is for these gigantic rock floes to drift in a westerly direction, which may mean that Antarctica was once in a tropic zone. From Gerald Heard’s *Science & Life*.—Author.

Shaw fell silent, pondering, his eyes on the floor. At length Ann looked up sharply.

“I presume nobody else knows about this chunk of neutronium?”

“Don’t see how they can. It’s invisible—and I don’t know many who could compute the mathematics to find it as I have, even if they had the imagination to know what to look for in the first place.”

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The girl got to her feet suddenly, took hold of her father’s arm tightly.

“Dad, do you begin to realize what you’ve discovered?” she whispered. “Why—it means world catastrophe! And you just stand there and tell me! Everybody’s got to know about it as quickly as possible. Preparations have got to be made for defense against the disaster. Underground refuges, perhaps.”

“There isn’t time,” Shaw said moodily looking at her.

“There’s got to be time! It’s—unthinkable!” Ann swung round to the telephone and searched through the directory, finally dialled a number. Her father stood watching, meditating.

“Oh, is this the Star?” she asked at length. “Give me Radford Blake—and hurry!”

“Who’s Blake?” Shaw asked suspiciously.

“Reporter I know. He’ll start the ball rolling for the press, anyway: then we’ll contact the radio stations— Oh, hello! Is that Mr. Blake? Remember the girl you picked up from the gutter?”

Shaw’s eyes opened a little wider, but he said nothing, stood listening to his daughter’s words.

“. . . of course not. This is business! Come right away to Dr. Shaw’s home—East Dale, 79th Precinct. It’s desperately important. Eh? No, I am *not* kidding. Fifteen minutes? O. K.”

“Who exactly is this fellow?” Shaw demanded, as she put back the receiver.

“From now on he’ll be your mouthpiece for the press. I know you don’t like the general run of reporters, but Blake’s different. He’ll get everything fixed as it should be. Wait till you see him. . . .” Ann sighed a little. “You know, dad, I still can’t half credit this thing. Are you dead certain that the earth is about to end?”

He nodded slowly. “Yes, my dear, I am. I’ve thought of many ways for the world to end, but never this one.”

“This neutronium chunk— What will happen to it finally?”

“I’m not altogether sure, but so far as I can make out it will pass on its way through our solar system into the depths of space.”

Ann shrugged, went slowly to the window. Night had fallen now and she gazed across the intervening fields to the vision of New York with its lighted beacon summits scraping the cloudy sky. New York, the whole continent of America, every continent in the world, at the breaking point—waiting to obey the masterful urge of an invisible unthinkably heavy rock in the depths of space. Fantastic! Incredible! With everything so solid and impregnable. How was it possible for the creations of man to be razed to the dust?



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In that almost completely silent fifteen minutes Ann's mind went swiftly over Man's career—his laborious rise from slime to supremacy over the whims of Nature. Forever climbing upwards, slipping many a time, but now well on the road to sublime achievement. Only to meet up with this facet of nature that had no controller.

"Dad," she said slowly, gazing through the window still, "I wonder if this neutronium chunk has ever been near us before?"

"Does it matter?" he asked quietly.

"It might. For instance it might give a clue to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the reason for the Deluge, explain why the Sphinx and Pyramids are in the middle of inaccessible desert. A floating world surface attacked by neutronium drag in the past could explain all the transfers of land to parts unexpected and also might show why past civilizations came to such sudden endings. There might even have really been El Dorado, Inca people, and Heaven knows what."

"Maybe you're right," Shaw admitted, wrinkling his brow—then whatever he intended to say was not realized for at that moment the laboratory door opened to admit Radford Blake, preceded by the man-servant.

"Well, here I am—all of me!" Blake took off his hat and held out his hand genially as the girl went forward.

"Catch your subway train all right?" he asked naively.

"This is business, Mr. Blake," she returned curtly. "Meet my father, Dr. Shaw."

"Oh, yes—the scientist. Glad to know you, sir."

Shaw shook hands rather indifferently. It was plain he was still suspicious of reporters, and this massive specimen in particular.

"According to my daughter Ann, Mr. Blake, you will be interested in the positive certainty of world destruction, will you not?" he asked briefly.

"World destruction!" Blake's eyes opened wide and he gulped a little. "*Interested?* I'll say! Why, what's coming up? More earth temblors, or something?"

"Not a temblor, young man—a quake. *The* quake! Now, here are the main facts—"

"Wait a minute!" Ann broke in suddenly, her voice hard and tense. "Listen! What's that?"

The three of them stood motionless, aware of a deep rumbling roar from somewhere apparently far beneath their feet. The laboratory began to quiver with gradually increasing force. Glass instruments began to tinkle against their stands.

"Sounds like a subsidence of sorts," Blake breathed finally.

"It's the Quake!" Shaw snapped back, tight lipped.

Then Ann leaped to the window. Sheer amazement held her speechless for a moment, but she was aware of Blake and her father looking over her shoulders.

New York was falling! Shattering from top to bottom in a myriad blinding flashes of light as electricity became rampant and ripped along crumbling steel girders. Masonry, bricks, lights, flames—everything was a tumbling agglomeration to the accompaniment of a thundering growl like the onrush of an express train.

Within seconds the roar caught up with the laboratory. The floor heaved and pitched wildly. Instruments fell over. The light went out. Ann screamed hysterically as she felt herself flying into ebon darkness. She collided with something that sent a blinding pain through her arm and neck—

## CHAPTER II

### Reconstruction

Ann drifted slowly back to consciousness with the awareness of an excruciatingly hurtful arm and shoulder. She felt hot, feverish. Slowly she opened her eyes, realized that it was still night—but a night such as she had never expected to behold. The lowering, drifting clouds were painted with the flickering red of a million fires. The smell of burning drifted acridly to her nostrils: the heavy, strangely mournful silence was pierced in the far distance by a medley of hoots, siren screeches, desperate human cries and dull concussions.

She tried to move, could not for the agony of her arm. She moistened her dry lips and called weakly.

Immediately the tattered, blood-streaked figure of Rad Blake appeared beside her. She saw his strong face set into grim, hard lines. He was no longer the smiling and impudent reporter.

“Fa—father . . .” Ann faltered, staring up at him. “Where is he? And mother?”

He knelt down beside her, looked into her face with serious eyes.

“You may as well have the truth now as later, Ann,” he said quietly. “The laboratory came down in ruins. Somehow I got you out, but you’ve got a broken collar bone and arm— No, no, don’t try to move. I was waiting for you to recover consciousness before taking you to the city. Your father and mother and the servants— Well, they’re . . .”

“Dead?” the girl whispered, and her eyes misted with a hot flood of tears.

“There are the ruins,” he said moodily, nodding to a great pile of crumbled masonry. “All that’s left of the lab and house— It’s the end of the world. Ann—the end of everything man ever built up. We’ve got to face that as best we can.”

She did not speak, only burst suddenly into tears. A million thoughts were slamming through her tired, pain ridden brain. Catastrophe, colossal beyond all imagination had swept the earth. Her parents gone, her home shattered, civilization at an end. And the future?

She felt herself being lifted suddenly into Rad’s great arms. He held her tenderly, firmly, taking infinite care of her injured shoulder.

“Looks like you’re going to keep that date with me after all,” he said, grinning faintly through his sweat and dirt. “Take it easy, Ann: just rely on me. I’m tough enough to carry a dozen of your weight. I’m taking you to the city—or what’s left of it, anyway.”

Then he started to walk, steadily, his big blond head outlined against the crimson sky. Ann lay passive, biting her lip so that no utterance of pain should escape her. And little by little they began to near the smoking, flaming inferno that had been the pride of the Americas.

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Only an observer on another planet could possibly have gauged the extent of the disaster that had hit Earth in the space of a few short minutes.

The plasmic upper surface, drawn to breaking point by the invisibly neutronium fragment computed by the dead Royston Shaw had at last ruptured. In that horrible moment the whole surface of the earth was tugged round like a loose skin on a bladder. Cities dropped instantly all over the world. Mountains rolled down to the plains, new ones reared up amidst colossal thunders. Volcanoes roared their hellish augmentation to the horror. Tidal waves, drawn by the gravity of the invader at its closest approach, and spilled too by the vast surface changes, roared in solid hundred foot walls over shattered continents. It was the most frightful

onslaught the world had ever known. Within the space of perhaps an hour the population of the world was reduced to a third.

In the western hemisphere at least a cold gray dawn revealed a scene of incredible havoc. No war, no diabolical contrivance of man, could have been so all encompassing. Hardly a building was left standing in New York City. Ruins everywhere—crumbled, heart breaking ruins—with the survivors staggering about half demented in their midst.

But such an adaptable animal is Man there began to grow a certain order out of chaos. What had happened in other parts of the world it was then impossible to say: to Ann and Rad the world was New York. Through ways and means they could not afterwards quite recall they found themselves domiciled by troops in one of the few big buildings still standing. There, as best they could, they tried to exist, at least while Ann had medical attention.

Through the ensuing weeks she began to mend steadily. In fact she mended far more quickly once she realized that sorrow for her dead parents was a useless quantity. With a brave smile on her lips she turned to face the new, grim future that had been thrust upon her.

It was during the period of respite that she and Rad, along with everybody else, became the observers of a sudden cycle of terrific electrical storms. They came without rhyme or reason—hours of blinding lightning and stunning thunder. Then they would vanish with curious suddenness to reveal the blue sky. Nobody seemed to have the least idea what it was all about: even Ann with her scientific knowledge was at a loss, unless the storms were the outcome of the Quake.

When they finally ceased and the normal winter returned they were entirely forgotten. Ann and Rad moved on from their confined quarters in the big building and finally took over a solitary wreck of a house to the south of the city. It had no pretensions to comfort. It was mainly one old drawing room, the windows blocked up with boards, the door a little hole at the bottom of the wall. But it was a home—of sorts. And they had candles from the city, and a good supply of smashed beams to make a fire. Yes, it was passable.

“Funny thing, Ann,” Rad had said one day, as they sat eating the tinned food he had frisked with some difficulty from the city, “you and I are stuck here just as though we’re married . . . I’ve often wondered if you mind?”

The girl smiled a little, drew her tattered clothing more tightly round her against the cutting winter drafts.

“Circumstances alter cases, Rad. You’ve been wonderfully good to me and I appreciate it. I’m sorry now for the way I treated you when we first met.”

“Aw, forget it. I was fresh, anyway. . .”

---

She ate in silence for a while, thinking. Then, “What are the folks doing in the city? Anything?”

“Building,” he muttered. “That was bound to come. But there is something else with it that I don’t like. Out of a disaster like this there emerges a distinct tendency to go totalitarian, like so many of the European states before the Quake. It’s only natural. We’ve got to have a leader, and in their present state of mind the people are listening to Saxby West. And can he hand them words!”

“Saxby West!” Ann echoed. “The former big labor boss?”

“The same—and he’s still a labor boss, with more power than ever. Remember how he used to spout about the crumbling foundations of democracy? Well right now he’s having a

field day, and unless somebody opposes him he'll wind up as a dictator of the country . . . and his rule won't be exactly—pleasant.”

Ann meditated. As she well knew a man like Saxby West would inevitably become a tyrant if he gained control over the struggling country. That control he might easily achieve through the influence of his name alone. It had stood pre-eminently for labor and totalitarianism before the Quake. Right now, with the masses in his skilful hands . . .

“Suppose,” Ann said absently, “you oppose him?”

“Me!” Rad stared blankly. “Damn it all, Ann, what chance would I stand against—”

“Plenty of chances!” Her gray eyes became suddenly keen as she looked across the rough table. “You're a hundred per cent American, you have a commanding appearance, especially with that long blond hair and yellow beard. You've got the physical power to assert yourself; you can talk by the ream.”

“In fact, I'm a mighty nice feller,” he grinned.

“I'm not trying to flatter you, Rad: I'm just stating facts—checking up on your assets, if you prefer it. Another thing, you know what caused the Quake: I've already told you the story dad had no time to give. That will give you a starting point with the people. . . . You can also reassure them that the horror will never come again, that the invader, the neutronium, has gone on its way forever—as long as our lifetimes are concerned anyway. Last of all, you're a democrat, and as such you're closer to the heart of most Americans than Saxby West is.”

“Say, maybe you've got something there, Ann.” For a long time Rad sat pondering, tugging his square yellow beard. Then he looked up anxiously. “I suppose that neutronium chunk *has* gone forever? I'd be in a frightful spot if it came back after all my assurances.”

“But of course it's gone! Dad said it would pass right out of our system. If it ever does come back it will be so far in the future we don't need to worry over it.”

“Then—maybe—I could do something,” Rad mused. “Trouble is, I would need the dickens of a knowledge to take over a crumbled world.”

“Not a bit of it. You have plenty of ordinary knowledge—must have from your writing experiences. If you became dictator men in specialized fields would rally round you. And if it's science you need sometimes you always have me. I know a thing or two about it, remember. Rad, I'm sure you could do it—if you wanted.”

He reached out across the table, clasped her slim fingers in his big hand. “That's all I need,” he whispered. “If you believe in it to that extent it can be done. They'll make Radford Blake their leader, and like it!”

For a long time afterwards they sat making plans, forming new ideas. Somehow, the future no longer seemed so black.

---

Rad Blake's campaign gave both him and Ann something to live for in the slowly regrowing city of New York. Day by day, throughout that bitter winter, the girl accompanied him on his tours of the ruins, sat by him as he stood and talked to the people in the shelter of crumbled edifices and held forth on the advantages of democracy and the law of freedom for every individual.

And little by little he made headway. People began to take notice of the blond giant with the flowing beard, and of the quiet girl who rarely made a comment. He was obviously sincere—even to the point of using his sledgehammer fists where necessary. Besides, had he not formed numberless men and women's clubs, organized new relief systems, put down a great deal of the looting and rape and murder that had followed the Quake? Was he not, in truth, a

great warrior and pioneer breathing the spirit of the Americas? And did he not believe that every man, woman or child should have the right to pass an opinion?

Definitely! And Saxby West found his own campaign boomeranging upon him. His dictator ideals were not nearly so attractive as Rad Blake's democratic promises. West's fond dream of a totalitarian country and easy riches began to fade gradually. Despairing, he did away with fair methods and tried all underhand methods to be rid of Blake. But he failed: Blake watched and defeated every move.

By the early Spring of 1991, when New York was forming into a recognizable city again and other cities on the continent were starting to sprout from dead ashes, it became obvious that Radford Blake was going to be the undisputed master of America.

By the month of May he had achieved his ambition—gone far along the road from the drafty hovel where he and Ann had first debated the idea. In the intervening time his powers of speech had bound together the vast majority of people in a common loyalty: he had instituted laws for the country that were generally acceptable, had done away with all suggestions of a Congress. Certainly he was a dictator—but a democratic one, and therein lay the difference. He was the first in history. But history—and geography—had to be written anyway.

June, 1991, found him officially elected Dictator by an overwhelming majority over Saxby West. West took the defeat with a bitter smile on his lean, cruel face. Rad knew, deep down, that if the slightest chance ever arose he would be smashed from power with ruthless savagery. West still had a following: by a rigid campaign of mind poisoning he might finally swing the balance over in his favor. But that was in the future.

The occupation of a master building in the heart of New York, with Ann, now his wife, by his side, was by no means the end of the road for Rad Blake. Now he had gained the position he had to consolidate it, bend his own and the girl's knowledge entirely to the task of reconstructing the totally shattered scale of balances that had existed before the Quake—a scale that had been badly in need of leveling anyway.

He had the advantage of clever men and women with initiative as his immediate circle of advisers. They helped with the real eagerness of men and women anxious to see their country dominate the world again. They toiled and labored on the schemes of Blake and Ann, saw New York in the space of another year grow to something of its old giantism. Other cities were grown up again too. Roads networked the continent once more: radio stations were back: sanitation, power, railway, and air were once more commercialized. The contact with distant rebuilt parts of the earth began again.

Blake, still bearded, the massive and genial master of it all, had reason to be proud of his efforts, and of the slim, capable girl by his side—

Then came the shadow—out of a clear sky of progress.

## CHAPTER III

### The Ice Will Come!

It started with the curious coldness of the Spring of 1993, a coldness that dragged on until early June, with the consequence that the crops so necessary as staple foods for the needs of a newly organized mankind were far below par. Already America and other countries were beginning to feel the shortage. Nor was the summer, when it did finally come, particularly helpful. There were night frosts to add further ruination.

The reason was obvious enough. Blake and Ann had the astronomers on the job immediately and within a week they sent in their spectroheliograph plates and bolometer readings, together with masses of notes. Sunspots were at the back of the trouble—a rather abnormal number of them, just at the close of their usual 11-year cycle. Nothing to worry about, except that their unusual prevalence was blanketing the sun's radiation and creating abnormally cold weather.

Blake and Ann were both satisfied with the explanation for the time being—but the fall of 1993 brought not a cessation of the spots but an increase. Throughout America and the world there went a grumble of alarm. This was not according to astronomical law. . . Food was short. The land was getting frozen long before its time and a long deadly winter loomed ahead. What was to be done about it?

Saxby West was not slow to see the opportunity either. His agents went to work, stressed the fact that, as a scientist, Dictator Blake should have foreseen this cosmic trouble and made due preparation for it. Not much of an argument perhaps, but West was clever. He knew human psychology. The peoples of America, paying fantastic prices for their foodstuffs and heating materials were just in the mood to listen to the first honeyed breath of totalitarian promises.

Facing another set of plates and readings, wading through the mass of information supplied by the astronomers, Blake began to see he was facing something he had never bargained for.

"It's—it's so ridiculous!" he expostulated to Ann, as she stood at the great office window staring down over night-bound New York. "Why should the sun suddenly decide to have an extra supply of spots at this very time? And spots that continually grow larger?"

At that she turned. Her face was set and serious as though an inner thought was disturbing her. Her quiet gray eyes looked at the plates, at the unpleasant vision of the sun's photosphere blotched with cancerous dark markings, some of them even reaching to the solar poles.

"Rad," she said slowly, "I believe we're up against it in real earnest this time. Not only us—but all the world! It's the aftermath of that neutronium chunk. . . I've been thinking things over, and the points hang together so well it frightens me. Frightens me to think what is going to happen."

"I don't get you," Rad said shortly, glancing up at her.

"I believe," she answered pensively, "that that neutronium chunk did *not* continue into space as dad had expected: it fell *into the sun!* That would be when those electrical storms struck us. Remember? We couldn't figure out the reason for them. After all, it is quite logical to assume that that chunk would fall in the sun. It was not moving fast enough to achieve an orbit round the primary, so it was drawn into it instead. It would automatically fall to the

center. Since also it had not at any time the individual power to shift a planet, its gravity field added to that of the sun's would not make any planet alter its position in space. The sun's pull would be increased, yes—but not sufficiently to make any visible difference.”

“What’s all this got to do with sunspots?” Rad demanded.

“Everything. The presence of that white dwarf in the sun’s interior would produce drastic changes. For one thing the internal temperature would rise enormously, and that very happening would spell disaster. Our sun is a main sequence star of the G-type.<sup>[2]</sup> If, as now seems inevitable, the sun’s interior heat has enormously increased it means that atoms no longer exist—there is an ever spreading inner field of free electrons and nuclei. These will finally contract into a compressed mass—the state of—of a white dwarf.”

[2] A G-type star is one in which the atoms are still surrounded by their K-rings of electrons while the exterior rings have been shattered by the tremendous heat.—Author.

“You . . . you don’t mean *our* sun is turning into a white dwarf?” Rad asked haltingly.

Ann slowly nodded. “Yes, Rad—I do.”

“But—but why?”

“The sunspots are the visible sign of collapse—and the more they spread the nearer the disaster comes. All the time now, the sun, with its vastly increased internal heat, is contracting also. The radiation cannot get through the increasing density of solid matter piling up. The sun is slowly closing up, squeezing inwards on all sides, until ultimately the whole photosphere will be one colossal spot and will cave in. Then the sun will be a white dwarf.”

“For all time?” Rad whispered unbelievably.

“For all time.” Ann stood staring straight in front of her. For three minutes there was not a sound in the room save the relentless ticking of the electric clock.

“Strange,” Rad said at last, “that the astronomers have not come forward with the same theory. They *must* know. . .”

“You can be sure of it,” Ann nodded. “They probably do not know the cause because their knowledge of that neutronium chunk is rather limited—but they do know effects. All of them must realize in their innermost hearts that the sun is dying.”

Rad got suddenly to his feet, ran a hand through his thick hair.

“We must make preparations, Ann! People must go underground. The whole world must know what’s coming. We’ll have to start all over again.”

“It won’t be as easy as all that, Rad. Saxby West has been waiting for a chance like this to turn the people against us. Unless I judge him entirely wrong he will say that you got into power under false pretenses, knowing all the time that that neutronium would land in the sun and produce this trouble. . . Not only have we to keep the people beside us but we have to combat his totalitarian crusading as well. As the days grow darker and colder, so will his power increase.”

“Then what do we do? Keep quiet?”

“We can’t do that. Explanations are long overdue. No; we’ve got to trust to the loyalty of the people.”

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But loyalty has its limits, particularly when harried by increasing elemental terror and growing cold. With perfect frankness—but not a little inner uneasiness—Blake had the truth

about the sunspots published for America and all the world to see. How the rest of the world took it was not his concern: his immediate worry was his own country.

Men and women were stunned into disbelief at first, could not credit that they had escaped one world disaster only to walk into another of even greater and more durable magnitude. Most of them believed there was an error somewhere, that the sunspots would go. But they did not go.

By the mid winter of 1994 the sun had visibly lost its normal brilliance. The spots covered its disk in a brown, almost unbroken cloud. Cold such as mankind had never known descended on the earth. Evacuation from northerly latitudes began. Vast multitudes of refugees flocked into frost bitten America, struggling against blizzard hurricanes.

Rad Blake was facing a desperate situation. Food could only be brought to the Americans by men of superhuman strength and bravery, men who were willing to pilot their fast air machines over freezing oceans and through a deepening twilight. And even when the food came it was insufficient. More often than not the planes crashed. Food was a mighty problem, ranking equal with the task of building titanic underground shelters for the people that they might find a haven when the surface became unsupportable for life.

Possibly Rad's schemes would have succeeded had it not been for the activity of Saxby West. He rose to a sudden peak of campaigning genius and lectured to the frost bitten, starving millions. He denounced Rad Blake as a traitor, as a blunderer who should have foreseen this second disaster. He—West—had known all along that it was coming, could even now save the world if he were given power.

Weary and hopeless, the millions of America began to listen to him and his agents. He had the burning fervor of the idealist. There was rocklike resolution in every utterance he made.

And February 1994 found Rad Blake with a revolution on his hands just when he most urgently needed cooperation. True, there were thousands of loyal far seeing democrats who backed him to the last, stood shoulder to shoulder manning instruments of war in an endeavor to protect what they believed was the only possible form of government. But gallantly though they fought they were outnumbered by the hungry myriads under West's control.

Blood stained the fast deepening snows of the Americas. Cannon, ray gun, and bomb tore the approaching glaciers asunder. The democracy of Rad Blake smashed in a thousand pieces. He and Ann came out of a whirl of struggle and carnage to find Saxby West triumphant with a demoralized, gasping people at his heels.

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After a month in power, in which time he had formulated plans exclusively his own, West sent for Rad Blake and his wife. He couldn't resist a slow, gloating smile creeping over his hatchet face as they stood before his desk.

"I always knew it was wrong for you to have control, Blake," he said softly, leaning over the desk. "You're not the type—too soft hearted. The masses need an iron hand."

Rad shrugged. "I'm not concerned for myself right now, West: I merely did what I thought was right for the good of the people. And you must do likewise! They need help more than ever now. Our ideals are different, of course, but we're both motivated by a common purpose—that of housing mankind underground."

"I know that, Blake—but at least the people will not find my methods quite so expensive as yours! Your estimate of \$7,000,000 for each shelter was positively fantastic. I can do it for \$1,000,000 and with labor thrown in. In fact I'll conscript labor for the purpose."

Rad glanced quickly at his startled wife, then back to the coldly smiling Dictator.



“Say, wait a minute! What the devil are you going to use for the shelters for them to be that cheap?”

“Reinforced steel. That’s all that’s necessary. Unlike you, my friend, I do not propose to use a cheap alloy and call it a new discovery, thereby pocketing some five of the seven million dollars left from the estimates.”

Blake controlled himself with difficulty. He moved forward slowly, rested his clenched fists on the desk and stared into West’s sardonic eyes.

“Now get this, West— My estimate for those shelters was exact, and showed no profit. I was dealing with human lives, and the only way to make dependable shelters was to use *alcazite*, the new metal my chemists devised the moment we knew this trouble was coming. It is the only existent metal which will stand up to a pressure of four and a half million tons to the square inch—and that’s what the ice will weigh before we’re through. But the stuff’s costly. Don’t you realize, man, that reinforced steel will buckle up like plywood? You’ll kill everybody! You can’t do it!”

“I’ve been in the steel industry all my life, and I know what it can do,” West answered, with unshakeable calm. “I don’t need stuff like *alcazite*. Besides, your chemists were democrats—still are, I understand. That rules them out entirely.”

“What you really mean,” Blake said slowly, “is that you plan to use steel *in place of alcazite*. It looks identical anyway, and since all your engineers will be totalitarians they’ll keep quiet. You will betray every living soul into a series of death traps so you can pocket the profits. Naturally you will use steel at *alcazite* price and leave the figure unchanged. Then you and your overfat financial hordes will absorb the profits, all of you too damned dense to realize that you’re signing your own death warrants and that not a red cent will ever come your way.”

West shrugged. “What I choose to do, Blake, is entirely my own concern—not yours. I may as well tell you that I do not believe this rubbish about sunspots anyway. They’ll clear—I’m sure of it. And steel will stand up to the job for shelters. It’s been used for underground bores before—”

“But never under such terrific pressures!”

“And so it will stand up to this,” West went on, ignoring the interruption. “When the spots clear and the earth returns to normal only one thing will dominate the world—money! I shall have that. I can dominate the earth.”

“I tell you it means world death!” Rad shouted desperately.

“In any case it won’t concern you,” West retorted. “I have already made my plans for all democrats. Altogether there are some three thousand of them imprisoned here, taking up room. To kill them all would demand too much time and too much power. I have decided on the other method—exile. Exile to the polar wastes, there to die. . . . And you and your wife, as leaders of that party, will go first. Within a week. The rest will follow. You will send in remote controlled airplanes with insufficient fuel for a return trip—and no food. The airplanes will be useless for the future in any case, so they may as well serve a useful final purpose.”

Blake straightened up very slowly, smiling bitterly. He put a huge arm around Ann’s shoulder.

“All right,” he said at last. “It’s about what could be expected from scum like you anyway. Go ahead—We’ve been through too much to be afraid now. Eh, Ann?”

She nodded quickly, but not very convincingly.

“Such heroics,” West murmured dryly, and pressed the button at his elbow.

## CHAPTER IV

### Marooned in the Arctic

Saxby West carried out his ruthless plan to the full. Unable to raise a finger to help themselves, Rad and Ann, a week later, were lifted into the cabin of a powerful two-seater plane, were bound to their seats before the remote controlled switches. Nobody save the mechanics was present to see them off. The cabin door slammed shut upon them and within minutes the dimly lighted snow crusted expanse of New York began to recede from them.

Throughout most the journey northwards they sat tusselling and struggling with their bonds, were too much occupied in using their teeth on one another's knots to take much notice of the exterior. They only realized that a white, glimmer-lit world was speeding past below them.

By the time the plane finally landed on a colossal ice plateau a night of starlit darkness had apparently descended. Certainly they were free at last—but to what use? No fuel in the tanks, no food. Water yes—from the ice outside.

Rad gave a twisted smile as he checked over the instruments, rubbed his chilled hands. Finally he tugged open the door of the clothing locker and gazed in some surprise on two suits of Arctic furs.

"Well, evidently West has a sense of humor!" he commented dryly, pulling them forth and handing one to Ann.

"Or more likely the mechanics who sent us off have more humanity than he has," she answered, scrambling into the grateful, furry warmth. "Food they couldn't manage—too difficult, but suits would not present much of a problem. Not that I see much advantage, anyway. It's only postponing things, isn't it?"

"I guess so."

Wrapped to the eyes they stood looking at each other for a moment, surrounded by an all pervading, tomblike silence. When at last Rad gave a short laugh it sounded oddly noisy.

"I suppose I'm nuts," he said slowly, "but I have the oddest feeling that I want to get outside. I want to walk—and walk—and walk. Get away from this little prison."

"You're not nuts: I feel the same way," Ann said quietly. "A sort of—of urge to move. That it?"

He nodded, turned to the door and swung it open. In another minute he and Ann were together, glass helmets in position over their faces to shield them from the sword edged wind. They stood motionless for a while, aware of the fact that it was not actually night. The sun was shining—but what a travesty it was! It looked like a fire just about to die out, hanging low to the horizon in conformity with this northerly latitude. The stars gleamed in the ebony black sky with a brittle, inhuman grandeur. To the east, a moon looking as though it were in the umbra of total eclipse floated over the horizon. And then the titanic ice field itself, a perfect sample of the sheath that was bound sooner or later to encompass the world.

Neither Ann nor Rad spoke. In any case to do so meant raising their face helmets and consequent exposure to the wind. They turned and walked by common urge towards the west. Both of them were wondering exactly why they were doing this. They felt inevitably that they *must*. Sooner or later, they both realized, the cold already seeping through their furs would

overpower them. They would drop, fall asleep, never awaken again. That was what this walking meant.

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The idiotic, expiring sun remained exactly where it was as they moved. It seemed endless hours to Rad before they finally came to a halt. Ann was pointing her furred arm ahead with curious eagerness. He wiped his sleeve over his face glass and stared, puzzled.

A long thin black line was breaking the eternal monotony of the plateau. He glanced at the girl sharply.

“Crack of some sort,” he said, raising his helmet—and the breath froze instantly on his lips.

Ann nodded dumbly. They went on again at a somewhat faster pace, drawn now more by curiosity than expectancy. Probably only a gap where the ice field had parted anyway. And yet, in such cold?

They reached it at last, stood in awe struck amazement on the edge of a vast ravine some two hundred feet across. And down in its depths there was no ice! Despite the zero wind and all embracing cold not a trace of ice had formed. The thing was incredible.

After a moment or two Rad made up his mind, pointed into the chasm’s depths. Ann guessed his meaning and nodded. By slow degrees they began to descend from ice to a region of barefaced rock that had not even a vestige of snow. Baffled, Rad raised his face helmet experimentally—but the merciless blast of cold was absent. Down here the air was almost mild.

“Volcanic action?” Ann questioned, pulling away her own shield and staring around in the starlight. “Can’t be anything else, can it?”

He shook his head. “Dunno. I never heard of volcanic action in this part of the Arctic. More likely that the Quake opened up new seams in this quarter of the globe and this is one of them. Funny it being warm though.”

“Even funnier how we walked so conveniently to it.”

“Yeah—that’s right.” For a moment they stood looking at each other perplexedly. There was little doubt about the fact that some inexplicable urge had driven them hither from the airplane. Exactly why neither of them could understand.

“Well, let’s go lower,” Ann said at length. “Might as well finish the job now we’ve gotten this far.”

The warmth remained at the same temperature as they climbed slowly down into the dim gloom. They descended nearly three hundred feet before they finally touched bottom— And here was a curious thing. The bottom of the ravine contained a smaller crack along its entire length of no more than two foot width—but it was not rock, but metal, torn apart by the unimaginable force of earth concussions where the surface had slipped in the Quake.

“Metal—*here?*” Rad breathed in amazement, going down on his knees in the starshine. “And what a thickness!” He peered into the black depths. “Must be nearly six feet thick! Nothing but an earth slide *could* have broken metal like this.”

“That’s far more understandable than how it got here,” Ann said, frowning. “What do we do now? Go in?”

“May be bottomless. Just a minute. . .”

Rad reached aside, picked up a comfortably heavy stone and dropped it in the crack. Almost immediately afterwards there was a metallic response from the depths.

“Only about a twelve foot drop,” he muttered. “Might as well die in here as anywhere. Let’s go!”

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He dangled his feet over the edge of the crack, lowered himself until he hung by his hands, then let go. As he had guessed, the drop was not very considerable. A moment later the girl had fallen in his arms. In silence they stood peering round in the blackness. The warmth here was more noticeable than ever, flowing round in comforting waves.

“Well, for all the good we’ll do here we might as well be stone blind,” Ann grunted at length. “It’s warm, sure—but it must be volcanic action. We’d do better to try and get back to the cold and just fall asleep.”

“I’m not leaving here until I’ve found out what the hell this place is doing in the Arctic,” Rad answered stubbornly: then she heard him prowling around in the gloom. She stood waiting in moody silence, and more than once she could have sworn she felt the vibration of deeply buried engines somewhere beneath her feet—

Then with startling suddenness there was light! It gushed forth in blinding brilliance, made them cover their eyes for a moment. . . . When they could see clearly again they found they were standing in a small circular chamber like the safety compartment of a submarine. At one end it ended in sheer metal wall, but at the other there was a massive valve with a monstrous bolt thrust across it. No age, no sign of corrosion, had touched that strange metal.

“Well, where the devil does the light come from?” Rad demanded at length, gazing round. “Must be concealed between ceiling and wall. But who switched it on?”

Ann pointed significantly to the floor. “Maybe that vibration has something to do with hidden engines. Feel it?”

He nodded slowly, scratching his chin in bewilderment and staring up at the sundered roof. Then he swung round and went to the valve, started to work on the clamps and bars with Ann assisting him. Even so it took them an hour. Then it swung open slowly to reveal a softly lighted cavern that was in itself a wilderness stretching to infinity.

They stepped through the opening, glanced back sharply as the valve mysteriously closed again behind them. They had taken an irretrievable step.

But for the moment the view absorbed them. They stood gazing on buildings and machines in untold numbers. Between the buildings were fields of synthetic crops growing sturdily under the artificial light. No living thing tended those fields—only robots who used mechanical aids to efficiency. Here indeed was a miniature continent flawlessly designed to meet every possible need. There were even radio towers and strange forms of traffic, all robot driven. Somehow the place looked like a vast scale model operated by an unseen hand.

At last the dazed eyes of the two rose to the further side of the colossal place. They beheld metal wall, arching up to a tremendous height and ending at last in a gigantic circle. Nor was it a plain circle—it was a perfectly drawn replica of the moon! The markings were unmistakable, chiseled into the metal. The dead seas, the rills, the craters, the mountains—

“Map of the moon,” Ann breathed in wonder. “Can there be—be Selenites in this place?”

Rad looked round with mystified eyes. “Search me! Anyway, it’s shelter. Food too no doubt and—” He swung round sharply at a sudden sound, gave an exclamation of alarm. Four robots had approached silently from the expanse, driven by powers unknown.

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To dodge them was impossible: they moved too fast. Before either Rod or the girl had a chance to escape they were seized in the metallic arms, lifted irresistibly, and borne along

towards the heart of the vast mechanical expanse.

Finally they became passive and gave themselves up to looking about them as they were carried through the heart of the replete city to an ornamental looking building a little apart from the others. It was divided up in the fashion of a normal apartment block, but once they were inside its brightly lighted reaches they discovered as they passed that each room was far more perfectly conceived for comfort and service in a small space than any they had ever known.

Into one of the apartments they were finally taken, set down carefully on a divan, and left to themselves. The door closed gently, locked significantly.

“Now I know I’m dreaming!” Rad ejaculated at length, looking round on the softly lit walls of blue enamel, the quite normal looking furniture, the grateful warmth of the sunken heater. “Why, dammit, it’s better than a first class New York hotel!”

Ann was about to speak, then she looked up with a sudden start as a panel in the wall opened abruptly and shot forth a heavy, loaded tray filled with drink and foodstuffs. Softly the panel slid back into position.

“You’re right—it *is* a dream!” she said wryly. “We’re out in the ice fields right now, having delusions—thinking of all the things we’d like to have, and instead—”

“Eat, my friends!”

They swung round at that voice, but saw nobody. Then Rad gave a sudden start and pointed dumbly to the wall over their heads. A panel had come into life as a screen and was televising a picture of a man of apparently incredible age, his face a network of seams and wrinkles, his mouth toothless and sunken.

“Oh!” Ann gasped, horror stricken. “How—how *awful!*”

“Shut up—he’ll hear you!” Rad hissed.

Evidently her voice had carried through a concealed microphone for the faintest suggestion of a smile curved that old mouth. The almost hidden eyes peered out from sunken sockets.

“Don’t be alarmed, either of you. I am your friend. Eat, and while you do so I will explain.”

Slowly they stood up, tugged off their stifling suits, then moved to the table. The food was all they could have wished, and the light wine that went with it—but they were so busy looking up at the televised face they had hardly time to notice anything else.

## CHAPTER V

### City Beneath the Ice

"I am old," the face said wearily. "Unguessably old, but I have preserved my life by every means known to my science until such a time as this, when a worthy man or woman—or as it happens, both—could take over the results of my own and my dead colleagues' scientific achievements. That day is here.

"I know you, Radford Blake—and you, Ann. I watched your rise to power through televisual means. I watched your courage in the face of overwhelming odds, and I watched too your dethronement by the unscrupulously ambitious Saxby West. I had planned that I would send for you at one period, then I stayed my hand when I realized you were to be sent to the Arctic. It was inevitable that you should find the ice break—mental telepathy, amplified, forced you to find it. Maybe you felt an uncommon urge?"

"Yes," Rad acknowledged very quietly. "And you, sir—what are you, anyway?"

"I am a Selenite—the last of a mighty race of a world long since dead. I am a master of science, a ruler of mechanical aids to progress. Here in this deep underworld you behold scientific perfection and synthesis to the last degree—but not synthesis of life. That has forever eluded me. There was a time when my colleagues and I ruled the moon. At that period earthly life was crawling up the ladder. Volcanic eruptions and fast thinning air on our own world forced us to the mother world. We built numberless cities in various lands. In some cases my ancestors rose to dominance, but in other instances licentiousness and laziness brought an end of those early civilizations.

"We were a young race then, full of the follies of the young. But there came a time when a terrific earthquake shattered all our works. The entire surface of the globe slipped. Sobered, my forbears realized they had to start again. A weeding out began: the scientific was sorted from the useless. What remained of the cities were mere ruins, thousands of miles from their original position because of an earth-slip created through the passage of densely heavy material close to the earth."

"Neutronium?" Rad demanded. "The one we recently encountered?"

"The very same, but on that occasion it was far enough away to escape being drawn into the sun. It became evident to my people that the surest method of progress lay in going underground, in the least known quarter of the world—the Arctic. Down below the race would not interfere with normal mankind and could also be left in peace under a solid roof of pack-ice. Further, there was inexhaustible power supply to be gained from the earth's steady spin against the ether—enormous currents concentrated at the Pole, the surplus of which has sometimes been seen in the form of the Aurora Borealis, or else has been driven to the opposite pole to appear as the Aurora Australis.

"Down here, protected by a metal which can never be crushed by the mightiest of ice, given power that can never fail so long as the earth rotates—and therefore independent of the light and heat of the sun now so surely expiring—is a land for the chosen. And the chosen shall be those who tried to gain real government, and failed. Those whom you call democrats, and who will be bound to be exiled to these polar wastes before long. But as they come, my telepathic machinery will lead them here even as it led you. That they will be worthy remains undoubted. Particularly as you will again rule over them, Radford Blake."

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There was a long silence, then at last Rad said haltingly,  
“You—you mean you are handling this—this land over to me and my followers without knowing a thing about me?”

“I know all about you: I have intimated that much. I have followed your movements, understand your language, have debated all there is about you. I know you to be a young man of strength and just motives, with a wife who has useful scientific knowledge which can soon be augmented. I shall only die content when I know that this long empty land—save for me—has been handed over to worthy hands, representatives of the mother world, Earth. Down here, when the surface is frozen and dead, you and your followers will have nothing to fear. No amount of ice can ever smash this underworld. Nor will there ever again be an earth-slip. What damage could be done has been done—one compartment broke under the force of sliding ice above, but naturally the slip was by no means as noticeable at the pole here as it would be on the equator line. Fortunately the automatic sealing doors closed the broken compartment section for all time. I left it as it was, knowing you would eventually find it useful no matter in what manner you finally came here.

“In all your wildest dreams, Blake, you could never have made so perfect a haven for your followers. Not even with *alcazite*. I have done what I can to transform these buildings into earthly appearance for the coming of the others—but there is still much to do. I shall need help. Rest now, both of you, and later we will meet personally. You will then see the resources of this chosen land, learn what to do to take my place, master all details. And then—”

The face faded from the screen. The speaker became mute.

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Completely unaware of the strange events being enacted in the far North, sure within his own mind that the fading sun was only a temporary phase, Saxby West took advantage of his dictatorship with a ruthless disregard for human feelings, concentrated mainly on exactly how much he could make out of a deal with protective shelters.

Once he had seen all the democrats exiled to the Arctic—men, women and children sent forth in remote controlled planes without a single personal possession—beyond what they could smuggle along at the last moment—he felt ready to tackle more immediate matters. In vain, astronomers warned him that the sun was really dying. Being a totally unscientific man he did not place the slightest credence on what they said. He stifled all their reports, suppressed all news that might leak to his masses of followers—or when they got too inquisitive he had them done away with entirely through the medium of his relentless agents.

And as West’s armies of men burrowed into the earth with the best instruments at their command, the earth grew colder. The sun, after West had been in power for three months, had become a mere red ball that no longer gave forth heat at all. The moon, shining by reflected light, no longer appeared in the heavens.

Beholding these things West had to admit he was inwardly a little disturbed. Things had gone much worse: no sense in denying that. Nor was there much optimism in the news flashing to him across the frozen world of vast ice storms obliterating what few surface cities remained, killing millions of people in the very midst of their effort to drive underground.

West increased his efforts. Once he even regretted that he had exiled all the *alcazite* chemists to the Arctic. He had to rely on reinforced steel now whether he liked it or not. No matter, he was piling up millions for future control. Shelter after shelter, stocked with every

possible necessity to meet a long siege, was rushed through to final completion at fifty feet below the surface. West allowed no respite.

With his immediate associates he evolved a counter check system for the housing of the populace, but even at that he was forced to the realization that if millions could be sheltered, far more millions would perish. He suppressed the information hurriedly, worked out a system of survival for those whom he knew were rigid totalitarians.

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But that did not satisfy the people. They were becoming insane with panic as news of disaster after disaster radioed across the darkening, freezing world. They demanded shelter as the sun turned from red to a pale, dull glimmer, as they staggered helplessly in sub zero winds, or died horribly in their efforts to get justice for themselves.

And through it all crept vast ice pack from the oceans. Insomuch as water on freezing expands a twelfth of its volume, the frozen oceans began to crawl over the land in a solid, slow moving tidal wave, a white juggernaut that mowed down everything in its track invincibly. It came from out of the dismal, howling wastes of the north, closed down slowly towards the darkening equatorial regions like a mammoth hydraulic press of ice, waiting to join the other mountainous ice pack creeping up from the south polar regions.

Regardless of orders, of checking systems, frantic with the nearly instellar cold, and hunger, the lashed peoples of America made for the West shelters and fought their way in against troops and all the resources of the militia. This was the last chance of survival. And still they did not know the shelters were only steel. They had assumed that the impregnable *alcazite*, used by Radford Blake was being used by Saxby West also. Not yet did they know how utterly their demigod had betrayed them.

Huddled in the depths of the shelters they heard the last wild cries from other parts of the doomed world. In Europe, shelters of beryllium steel and concrete had smashed in like eggshells under the impact of spreading Atlantic ice.

The buried people of the Americas laughed hysterically. They had *alcazite*! They waited, confident— But Saxby West himself was stunned into speechlessness when the news of beryllium steel collapse—far stronger material than his own reinforced steel—came like a truncated cry from the wilderness. He sat in his own quiet shelter with his men around him—the men who had shared in the gain of profits from substituting steel for *alcazite*. Financiers, most of them, masters of labor, using the masses as pawns. And now they too faced death!

They sat in a little semicircle before the viewing screens connected with the surface, watched the milling myriads that had been locked out at the closure of the gigantic valves, watching them as they ran in mad fright before a vast wall of shining white crawling inevitably forward in the dim light of the stars. The surface metropolis was crumbling and rending. The ice reared up like a titanic arm of judgment—inevitable, relentless.

Jasper Gaylord, controller of more money than he could possibly imagine, turned his fat, greasy face to the silent West in sudden fright as the mass loomed nearer.

“West, what have you done?” he shouted hoarsely, leaping to his feet. “What have you done to all of us? Nothing can stand against *that*! Nothing! How are we supposed to survive to use the money we have made?”

Silly, trifling little cry in the face of all embracing doom. West knew it now, sat huddled in his chair, deaf to the chatter of his colleagues, his eyes fixed immovably on that screen. He was realizing in those agonizing seconds whither his totalitarian ideals and passion for money had led him— Into extinction.



He must die, and millions with him.

Perhaps it was minutes, perhaps hours. He did not know. But he realized that at last all the thunders of a crashing world descended upon him as the ice pack came right overhead. He had a momentary vision of steel walls crumpling up like sheets of thin tin, of hearing wild and frantic shouts from the depths of a crumbling hell.

Then blackness. . .

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The world was dead. The last trump had sounded. From end to end, from equator to Poles, there was a sameness. As the months had passed, ice leveling itself over mountain, plain and former sea, it had formed itself into one complete blanket. The atmosphere too was slowly solidifying. Life was extinct—except in the far north.

There, some two miles down under the ice, the democratic exiles had come—those who had been able to brave the blizzard winds and answer the telepathic impulses from the chosen land. Even so, many had died in the struggle. Now some fifteen hundred were present—men, women and children. The race would go on, under the ice, might one day even defeat their prison and escape to other worlds. But that was in the future. For the present, they were content, chained to a planet that had a white dwarf as its luminary, a faded, densely heavy star that had been the lord of day.

Truly, the end of the world had come. Yet to the buried people there was a certain richness in the situation. They had everything they had formerly had—and more. Their little universe was still expanding into the deeper quarters of the still hot earth. They were doing things denied on the surface because of tempest and flood. Many of their democratic ideals might reach a glorious fruition.

And they had Rad Blake and Ann as their leaders. Some day, perhaps, their children would take over control of the rising generation, and so it would go on.

But Rad and Ann at least knew whom to thank. There were times when they went into a little known quarter of the city and gazed in reverent silence on a small, weedy figure—stone dead, yet preserved at his own will by scientific processes.

The last man of the moon had died content. The knowledge of his peoples, the finer principles of a world wiped out by cosmic disaster, would live on—until the world itself became drifting dust.

[The end of *World Beneath Ice* by John Russell Fearn (as Polton Cross)]