

VARIOUS

ASTOUNDING STORIES
OF SUPER-SCIENCE
JANUARY 1931

Various
Astounding Stories of
Super-Science January 1931

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The Dark Side of Antri

By Sewell Peaslee Wright

Commander John Hanson relates an interplanetary adventure illustrating the splendid Service spirit of the men of the Special Patrol.

An officer of the Special Patrol Service dropped in to see me the other day. He was a young fellow, very sure of himself, and very kindly towards an old man.

He was doing a monograph, he said, for his own amusement, upon the early forms of our present offensive and defensive weapons. Could I tell him about the first Deuber spheres and the earlier disintegrator rays and the crude atomic bombs we tried back when I first entered the Service?

I could, of course. And I did. But a man's memory does not improve in the course of a century of Earth years. Our

scientists have not been able to keep a man's brain as fresh as his body, despite all their vaunted progress. There is a lot these deep thinkers, in their great laboratories, don't know. The whole universe gives them the credit for what's been done, yet the men of action who carried out the ideas – but I'm getting away from my pert young officer.

He listened to me with interest and toleration. Now and then he helped me out, when my memory failed me on some little detail. He seemed to have a very fair theoretical knowledge of the subject.

“It seems impossible,” he commented, when we had gone over the ground he had outlined, “that the Service could have done its work with such crude and undeveloped weapons, does it not?” He smiled in a superior sort of way, as though to imply we had probably done the best we could, under the circumstances.

I suppose I should not have permitted his attitude to irritate me, but I am an old man, and my life has not been an easy one.

“Youngster,” I said – like many old people, I prefer spoken conversation – “back in those days the Service was handicapped in every way. We lacked weapons, we lacked instruments, we lacked popular support, and backing. But we had men, in those days, who did their work with the tools that were at hand. And we did it well.”

“Yes, sir!” the youngster said hastily – after all, a retired commander in the Special Patrol Service does rate a certain amount of respect, even from these perky youngsters – “I know

that, sir. It was the efforts of men like yourself who gave us the proud traditions we have to-day.”

“Well, that’s hardly true,” I corrected him. “I’m not quite so old as that. We had a fine set of traditions when I entered the Service, son. But we did our share to carry them on, I’ll grant you that.”

“Nothing Less than Complete Success,” quoted the lad almost reverently, giving the ancient motto of our service. “That is a fine tradition for a body of men to aspire to, sir.”

“True. True.” The ring in the boy’s voice brought memories flocking. It was a proud motto; as old as I am, the words bring a thrill even now, a thrill comparable only with that which comes from seeing old Earth swell up out of the darkness of space after days of outer emptiness. Old Earth, with her wispy white clouds and her broad seas – Oh, I know I’m provincial, but that is another thing that must be forgiven an old man.

“I imagine, sir,” said the young officer, “that you could tell many a strange story of the Service, and the sacrifices men have made to keep that motto the proud boast it is to-day.”

“Yes,” I told him. “I could do that. I have done so. That is my occupation, now that I have been retired from active service. I –”

“You are a historian?” he broke in eagerly.

I forgave him the interruption. I can still remember my own rather impetuous youth.

“Do I look like a historian?” I think I smiled as I asked him the question, and held out my hands to him. Big brown hands they

are, hardened with work, stained and drawn from old acid burns, and the bite of blue electric fire. In my day we worked with crude tools indeed; tools that left their mark upon the workman.

“No. But –”

I waved the explanation aside.

“Historians deal with facts, with accomplishments, with dates and places and the names of great men. I write – what little I do write – of men and high adventures, so that in this time of softness and easy living some few who may read my scribblings may live with me those days when the worlds of the universe were strange to each other, and there were many new things to be found and marveled at.”

“And I’ll venture, sir, that you find much enjoyment in the work,” commented the youngster with a degree of perception with which I had not credited him.

“True. As I write, forgotten faces peer at me through the mists of the years, and strong, friendly voices call to me from out of the past...”

“It must be wonderful to live the old adventures through again,” said the young officer hastily. Youth is always afraid of sentiment in old people. Why this should be, I do not know. But it is so.

The lad – I wish I had made a note of his name; I predict a future for him in the Service – left me alone, then, with the thoughts he had stirred up in my mind.

Old faces ... old voices. Old scenes, too.

Strange worlds, strange peoples. A hundred, a thousand different tongues. Men that came only to my knee, and men that towered ten feet above my head. Creatures – possessed of all the attributes of men except physical form – that belonged only in the nightmare realms of sleep.

An old man's most treasured possessions: his memories. A face drew close out of the flocking recollections; the face of a man I had known and loved more than a brother so many years – dear God, how many years – ago.

Anderson Croy. Search all the voluminous records of the bearded historians, and you will not find his name. No great figure of history was this friend of mine; just an obscure officer on an obscure ship of the Special Patrol Service.

And yet there is a people who owe to him their very existence. I wonder if they have forgotten him? It would not surprise me. The memory of the universe is not a reliable thing.

Anderson Croy was, like most of the officer personnel of the Special Patrol Service, a native of Earth.

They had tried to make a stoop-shouldered dabbler in formulas out of him, but he was not the stuff from which good scientists are moulded. He was young, when I first knew him, and strong; he had mild blue eyes and a quick smile. And he had a fine, steely courage that a man could love.

I was in command, then, of the *Ertak*, my second ship. I inherited Anderson Croy with the ship, and I liked him from the first time I laid eyes upon him.

As I recall it, we worked together on the *Ertak* for nearly two years, Earth time. We went through some tight places together. I remember our experience, shortly after I took over the *Ertak*, on the monstrous planet Callor, whose tiny, gentle people were attacked by strange, vapid Things that come down upon them from the fastness of the polar cap, and —

But I wander from the story I wish to tell here. An old man's mind is a weak and weary thing that totters and weaves from side to side; like a worn-out ship, it is hard to keep on a straight course.

We were out on one of those long, monotonous patrols, skirting the outer boundaries of the known universe, that were, at that time, before the building of all the many stations we have to-day a dreaded part of the Special Patrol Service routine.

Not once had we landed to stretch our legs. Slowing up to atmospheric speed took time, and we were on a schedule that allowed for no waste of even minutes. We approached the various worlds only close enough to report, and to receive an assurance that all was well. A dog's life, but part of the game.

My log showed nearly a hundred "All's well" reports, as I remember it, when we slid up to Antri, which was, so far as size is concerned, one of our smallest ports o' call.

Antri, I might add, for the benefit of those who have forgotten their maps of the universe, is a satellite of A-411, which, in turn, is one of the largest bodies of the universe, and both uninhabited and uninhabitable. Antri is somewhat larger than the moon, Earth's satellite, and considerably farther from its controlling

body.

“Report our presence, Mr. Croy,” I ordered wearily. “And please ask Mr. Correy to keep a sharp watch on the attraction meter.” These huge bodies such as A-411 are not pleasant companions at space speeds. A few minute’s trouble – space ships gave trouble, in those days – and you melted like a drop of solder when you struck the atmospheric belt.

“Yes, sir!” There never was a crisper young officer than Croy.

I bent over my tables, working out our position and charting our course for the next period. In a few seconds Croy was back, his blue eyes gleaming.

“Sir, an emergency is reported on Antri. We are to make all possible speed, to Oreo, their governing city. I gather that it is very important.”

“Very well, Mr. Croy.” I can’t say the news was unwelcome. Monotony kills young men. “Have the disintegrator ray generators inspected and tested. Turn out the watch below in such time that we may have all hands on duty when we arrive. If there is an emergency, we shall be prepared for it. I shall be with Mr. Correy in the navigating room; if there are any further communications, relay them to me there.”

I hurried up to the navigating room, and gave Correy his orders.

“Do not reduce speed until it is absolutely necessary,” I concluded. “We have an emergency call from Antri, and minutes may be important. How long do you make it to Oreo?”

“About an hour to the atmosphere; say an hour more to set down in the city. I believe that’s about right, sir.”

I nodded, frowning at the twin charts, with their softly glowing lights, and turned to the television disc, picking up Antri without difficulty.

Of course, back in those days we had the huge and cumbersome discs, their faces shielded by a hood, that would be suitable only for museum pieces now. But they did their work very well, and I searched Antri carefully, at varying ranges, for any sign of disturbances. I found none.

The dark portion, of course, I could not penetrate. Antri has one portion of its face that is turned forever from its sun, and one half that is bathed in perpetual light. The long twilight zone was uninhabited, for the people of Antri are a sun-loving race, and their cities and villages appeared only in the bright areas of perpetual sunlight.

Just as we reduced to atmospheric speed, Croy sent up a message

“The Governing Council sends word that we are to set down on the platform atop the Hall of Government, the large, square white building in the center of the city. They say we will have no difficulty in locating it.”

I thanked him and ordered him to stand by for further messages, if any, and picked up the far-flung city of Oreo in my television disc.

There was no mistaking the building Croy had mentioned.

It stood out from the city around it, cool and white, its mighty columns glistening like crystal in the sun. I could even make out the landing platform, slightly elevated above the roof on spidery arches of silvery metal.

We sped straight for the city at just a fraction of space speed, but the hand of the surface temperature gauge crept slowly toward the red line that marked the dangerous incandescent point. I saw that Correy, like the good navigating officer he was, was watching the gauge as closely as myself, and hence said nothing. We both knew that the Antrians would not have sent a call for help to a ship of the Special Patrol Service if there had not been a real emergency.

Correy had made a good guess in saying that it would take about an hour, after entering the gaseous envelope of Antri, to reach our destination. It was just a few minutes – Earth time, of course – less than that when we settled gently onto the landing platform.

A group of six or seven Antrians, dignified old men, wearing the short, loosely belted white robes that we found were their universal costume, were waiting for us at the exit of the *Ertak*, whose sleek, smooth sides were glowing dull red.

“You have hastened, and that is well, sirs,” said the spokesman of the committee. “You find Antri in dire need.” He spoke in the universal language, and spoke it softly and perfectly. “But you will pardon me for greeting you with that which is, of necessity, uppermost in my mind, and in the minds of these, my

companions.

“Permit me to welcome you to Antri, and to introduce those who extend those greetings.” Rapidly, he ran through a list of names, and each of the men bowed gravely in acknowledgment of our greetings. I have never observed a more courteous nor a more courtly people than the Antrians; their manners are as beautiful as their faces.

Last of all, their spokesman introduced himself. Bori Tulber, he was called, and he had the honor of being master of the Council – the chief executive of Antri.

When the introductions had been completed, the committee led our little party to a small, cylindrical elevator which dropped us, swiftly and silently, on a cushion of air, to the street level of the great building. Across a wide, gleaming corridor our conductors led us, and stood aside before a massive portal through which ten men might have walked abreast.

We found ourselves in a great chamber with a vaulted ceiling of bright, gleaming metal. At the far end of the room was an elevated rostrum, flanked on either side by huge, intricate masses of statuary, of some creamy, translucent stone that glowed as with some inner light. Semicircular rows of seats, each with its carved desk, surmounted by numerous electrical controls, occupied all the floor space. None of the seats was occupied.

“We have excused the Council from our preliminary deliberations,” explained Bori Tulber, “because such a large body is unwieldy. My companions and myself represent the executive

heads of the various departments of the Council, and we are empowered to act.” He led us through the great council chamber, and into an anteroom, beautifully decorated, and furnished with exceedingly comfortable chairs.

“Be seated, sirs,” the Master of the Council suggested. We obeyed silently, and Bori Tulber stood before, gazing thoughtfully into space.

“I do not know just where to begin,” he said slowly. “You men in uniform know, I presume, but little of this world of ours. I presume I had best begin far back.

“Since you are navigators of space, undoubtedly, you are acquainted with the fact that Antri is a world divided into two parts; one of perpetual night, and the other of perpetual day, due to the fact that Antri revolves but once upon its axis during the course of its circuit of its sun, thus presenting always the same face to our luminary.

“We have no day and night, such as obtain on other spheres. There are no set hours for working nor for sleeping nor for pleasure. The measure of a man’s work is the measure of his ambition, or his strength, or his desire. It is so also with his sleep and with his pleasures. It is – it has been – a very pleasant arrangement.

“Ours is a fertile country, and our people live very long and very happily with little effort. We have believed that ours was the nearest of all the worlds to the ideal; that nothing could disturb the peace and happiness of our people. We were mistaken.

“There is a dark side to Antri. A side upon which the sun never has shone. A dismal place of gloom, which is like the night upon other worlds.

“No Antrian has, to our knowledge, ever penetrated this part of Antri, and lived to tell of his experience. We do not even till the land close to the twilight zone. Why should we, when we have so much fine land upon which the sun shines bright and fair always, save for the two brief seasons of rain?

“We have never given thought to what might be on the dark face of Antri. Darkness and night are things unknown to us; we know of them only from the knowledge which has come to us from other worlds. And now – now we have been brought face to face with a terrible danger which comes to us from that other side of this sphere.

“A people have grown there. A terrible people that I shall not try to describe to you. They threaten us with slavery, with extinction. Four ara ago (the Antrians have their own system of reckoning time, just as we have on Earth, instead of using the universal system, based upon the enaro. An ara corresponds to about fifty hours, Earth time.) we did not know that such a people existed. Now their shadow is upon all our beautifully sunny country, and unless you can aid us, before other help can reach us, I am convinced that Antri is doomed!”

For a moment not one of us spoke. We sat there, staring at the old man who had just ceased speaking.

Only a man ripened and seasoned with the passing of years

could have stood there before us and uttered, so quietly and solemnly, words such as had just come from his lips. Only in his eyes could we catch a glimpse of the torment which gripped his soul.

“Sir,” I said, and have never felt younger than at that moment, when I tried to frame some assurance to this splendid old man who had turned to me and my youthful crew for succor, “we shall do what it lies within our power to do. But tell us more of this danger which threatens.

“I am no man of science, and yet I cannot see how men could live in a land never reached by the sun. There would be no heat, no vegetation. Is that not so?”

“Would that it were!” replied the Master of the Council, bitterly. “What you say would be indeed the truth, were it not for the great river and seas of our sunny Antri, which bear their heated waters to this dark portion of our world, and make it habitable.

“And as for this danger, there is little to be said. At some time, men of our country, men who fish, or venture upon the water in commerce, have been borne, all unwillingly, across the shadowy twilight zone and into the land of darkness. They did not come back, but they were found there and despoiled of their menores.

“Somehow, these creatures who dwell in darkness determined the use of the menore, and now that they have resolved that they shall rule all this sphere, they have been able to make their threat clear to us. Perhaps” – and Bori Tulber smiled faintly and terribly

– “you would like to have that message direct from its bearer?”

“Is that possible, sir?” I asked eagerly, glancing around the room. “How – ”

“Come with me,” said the Master of the Council gently. “Alone – for too many near him excites this terrible messenger. You have your menore?”

“No. I had not thought there would be need of it.” The menores of those days, it should be remembered, were heavy, cumbersome circlets that were worn upon the head like a sort of crown, and one did not go so equipped unless in real need of the device. To-day, of course, your menores are but jeweled trinkets that convey thought a score of times more effectively, and weigh but a tenth as much.

“It is a lack easily remedied.” Bori Tulber excused himself with a little bow and hurried out into the great council chamber, to appear again in a moment with a menore in either hand.

“Now, if your companions and mine will excuse us for a moment...” He smiled around the seated group apologetically. There was a murmur of assent, and the old man opened a door in the other side of the room.

“It is not far,” he said. “I will go first, and show you the way.”

He led me quickly down a long, narrow corridor to a pair of steep stairs that circled far down into the very foundation of the building. The walls of the corridor and the stairs were without windows, but were as bright as noonday from the ethon tubes which were set into both ceiling and walls.

Silently we circled our way down the spiral stairs, and silently the Master of the Council paused before a door at the bottom – a door of dull red metal.

“This is the keeping place of those who come before the Council charged with wrong doing,” explained Bori Tulber. His fingers rested upon and pressed certain of a ring of small white buttons in the face of the door, and it opened swiftly and noiselessly. We entered, and the door closed behind us with a soft thud.

“Behold one of those who live in the darkness,” said the Master of the Council grimly. “Do not put on the menore until you have a grip upon yourself: I would not have him know how greatly he disturbs us.”

I nodded, dumbly, holding the heavy menore dangling in my hand.

I have said that I have beheld strange worlds and strange people in my life, and it is true that I have. I have seen the headless people of that red world Iralo, the ant people, the dragon-fly people, the terrible carnivorous trees of L-472, and the pointed heads of a people who live upon a world which may not be named. But I have still to see a more terrible creature than that which lay before me now.

He – or it – was reclining upon the floor, for the reason that he could not have stood. No room save one with a vaulted ceiling such as the great council chamber, could offer room enough for this creature to walk erect.

He was, roughly, a shade better than twice my height, yet I believe he would have weighed but little more. You have seen rank weeds that have grown up in the darkness to reach the sun; if you can imagine a man who had done likewise, you can, perhaps, picture that which I saw before me.

His legs at the thigh were no larger than my arm, and his arms were but half the size of my wrist, and jointed twice instead of but once. He wore a careless garment of some dirty yellow, shaggy hide, and his skin, revealed on feet and arms and face, was a terrible, bloodless white; the dead white of a fish's belly. Maggot white. The white of something that had never known the sun.

The head was small and round, with features that were a caricature of man's. His ears were huge, and had the power of movement, for they cocked forward as we entered the room. The nose was not prominently arched, but the nostrils were wide, and very thin, as was his mouth, which was faintly tinged with dusky blue, instead of healthy red. At one time his eyes had been nearly round, and, in proportion, very large. Now they were but shadowy pockets, mercifully covered by shrunken, wrinkled lids that twitched but did not lift.

He moved as we entered, and from a reclining position, propped up on the double elbows of one spidery arm, he changed to a sitting position that brought his head nearly to the ceiling. He smiled sickeningly, and a queer, sibilant whispering came from the bluish lips.

“That is his way of talking,” explained Bori Tulber. “His eyes, you will note, have been gouged out. They cannot stand the light; they prepared their messenger carefully for his work, you’ll see.”

He placed his menore upon his head, and motioned me to do likewise. The creature searched the floor with one white, leathery hand, and finally located his menore, which he adjusted clumsily.

“You will have to be very attentive,” explained my companion. “He expresses himself in terms of pictures only, of course, and his is not a highly developed mind. I shall try to get him to go over the entire story for us again, if I can make him understand. Emanate nothing yourself; he is easily confused.”

I nodded silently, my eyes fixed with a sort of fascination upon the creature from the darkness, and waited.

Back on the *Ertak* again. I called all my officers together for a conference.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “we are confronted with a problem of such gravity that I doubt my ability to describe it clearly.

“Briefly, this civilized, beautiful portion of Antri is menaced by a terrible fate. In the dark portion of this unhappy world there live a people who have the lust of conquest in their hearts – and the means at hand with which to wreck this world of perpetual sunlight.

“I have the ultimatum of this people direct from their messenger. They want a terrible tribute in the form of slaves. These slaves would have to live in perpetual darkness, and wait upon the whims of the most monstrous beings these eyes of mine

have ever seen. And the number of slaves demanded would – as nearly as I could gather, mean about a third of the entire population. Further tribute in the form of sufficient food to support these slaves is also demanded.”

“But, in God’s name, sir,” burst forth Croy, his eyes blazing, “by what means do they, propose to inforce their infamous demands?”

“By the power of darkness – and a terrible cataclysm. Their wise men – and it would seem that some of them are not unversed in science – have discovered a way to unbalance this world, so that they can cause darkness to creep over this land that has never known it. And as darkness advances, these people of the sun will be utterly helpless before a race that loves darkness, and can see in it like cats. That, gentlemen, is that fate which confronts this world of Antri!”

There was a ghastly silence for a moment, and then Croy, always impetuous, spoke up again.

“How do they propose to do this thing sir?”, he asked hoarsely.

“With devilish simplicity. They have a great canal dug nearly to the great polar cap of ice. Should they complete it, the hot waters of their seas will be liberated upon this vast ice field, and the warm waters will melt it quickly. If you have not forgotten your lessons, gentlemen, you will remember, since most of you are of Earth, that our scientists tell us our own world turned over in much this same fashion, from natural means, and established for itself new poles. Is that not true?”

Grave, almost frightened nods travelled around the little semicircle of white, thoughtful faces.

“And is there nothing, sir, that we can do?” asked Kincaide, my second officer, in an awed whisper.

“That is the purpose of this conclave: to determine what may be done. We have our bombs and our rays, it is true, but what is the power of this one ship against the people of half a world? And such a people!” I shuddered, despite myself, at the memory of that grinning creature in the cell far below the floor of the council chamber. “This city, and its thousands, we might save, it is true – but not the whole half of this world. And that is the task the Council and its Master have set before us.”

“Would it be possible to frighten them?” asked Croy. “I gather that they are not an advanced race. Perhaps a show of power – the rays – the atomic pistol – bombs – Call it strategy, sir, or just plain bluff. It seems the only chance.”

“You have heard the suggestion, gentlemen,” I said. “Has anyone a better?”

“How does Mr. Croy plan to frighten these people of the darkness?” asked Kincaide, who was always practical.

“By going to their country, in this ship, and then letting events take their course,” replied Croy promptly. “Details will have to be settled on the spot, as I see it.”

“I believe Mr. Croy is right,” I decided. “The messenger of these people must be returned to his own kind; the sooner the better. He has given me a mental map of his country; I believe

that it will be possible for me to locate the principal city, in which his ruler lives. We will take him there, and then – may God aid us gentlemen.”

“Amen,” nodded Croy, and the echo of the word ran from lip to lip like the prayer it was. “When do we start?”

I hesitated for just an instant.

“Now,” I brought forth crisply. “Immediately. We are gambling with the fate of a world, a fine and happy people. Let us throw the dice quickly, for the strain of waiting will not help us. Is that as you would wish it, gentlemen?”

“It is, sir!” came the grave chorus.

“Very well. Mr. Croy, please report with a detail of ten men, to Bori Tulber, and tell him of our decision. Bring the messenger back with you. The rest of you, gentlemen, to your stations. Make any preparations you may think advisable. Be sure that every available exterior light is in readiness. Let me be notified the moment the messenger is on board and we are ready to take off. Thank you, gentlemen!”

I hastened to my quarters and brought the *Ertak's* log down to the minute, explaining in detail the course of action we had decided upon, and the reasons for it. I knew, as did all the *Ertak's* officers who had saluted so crisply, and so coolly gone about the business of carrying out my orders, that we would return from our trip to the dark side of Antri triumphant or – not at all.

Even in these soft days, men still respect the stern, proud motto of our service: “Nothing Less Than Complete Success.”

The Special Patrol does what it is ordered to do, or no man returns to present excuses. That is a tradition to bring tears of pride to the eyes of even an old man, in whose hands there is strength only for the wielding of a pen. And I was young, in those days.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour when word came from the navigating room that the messenger was aboard, and we were ready to depart. I closed the log, wondering, I remember, if I would ever make another entry therein, and, if not, whether the words I had just inscribed would ever see the light of day. The love of life is strong in men so young. Then I hurried to the navigating room and took charge.

Bori Tulber had furnished me with large scale maps of the daylight portion of Antri. From the information conveyed to me by the messenger of the people of darkness – the Chisee they called themselves, as nearly as I could get the sound – I rapidly sketched in the map of the other side of Antri, locating their principal city with a small black circle.

Realising that the location of the city we sought was only approximate, we did not bother to work out exact bearings. We set the *Ertak* on her course at a height of only a few thousand feet, and set out at low atmospheric speed, anxiously watching for the dim line of shadow that marked the twilight zone, and the beginning of what promised to be the last mission of the *Ertak* and every man she carried within her smooth, gleaming body.

“Twilight zone in view, sir,” reported Croy at length.

“Thank you, Mr. Croy. Have all the exterior lights and searchlights turned on. Speed and course as at present, for the time being.”

I picked up the twilight zone without difficulty in the television disc, and at full power examined the terrain.

The rich crops that fairly burst from the earth of the sunlit portion of Antri were not to be observed here. The Antrians made no effort to till this ground, and I doubt that it would have been profitable to do so, even had they wished to come so close to the darkness they hated.

The ground seemed dank, and great dark slugs moved heavily upon its greasy surface. Here and there strange pale growths grew in patches – twisted, spotted growths that seemed somehow unhealthy and poisonous.

I searched the country ahead, pressing further and further into the line of darkness that was swiftly approaching. As the light of the sun faded, our monstrous searchlights cut into the gloom ahead, their great beams slashing the shadows.

In the dark country I had expected to find little if any vegetable growth. Instead, I found that it was a veritable jungle through which even our searchlight rays could not pass.

How tall the growths of this jungle might be, I could not tell, yet I had the feeling that they were tall indeed. They were not trees, these pale, weedy arms that reached towards the dark sky. They were soft and pulpy, and without leaves; just long naked sickly arms that divided and subdivided and ended in little

smooth stumps like amputated limbs.

That there was some kind of activity within the shelter of this weird jungle, was evident enough, for I could catch glimpses, now and then of moving things. But what they might be, even the searching eye of the television disc could not determine.

One of our searchlight beams, waving through the darkness like the curious antenna of some monstrous insect, came to rest upon a spot far ahead. I followed the beam with the disc, and bent closer, to make sure my eyes did not deceive me.

I was looking at a vast cleared place in the pulpy jungle – a cleared space in the center of which there was a city.

A city built of black, sweating stone, each house exactly like every other house: tall, thin slices of stone, without windows, chimneys or ornamentation of any kind. The only break in the walls was the slit-like door of each house. Instead of being arranged along streets crossing each other at right angles, these houses were built in concentric circles broken only by four narrow streets then ran from the open space in the center of the city to the four points of the compass. Around the entire city was an exceedingly high wall built of and buttressed with the black, sweating stone of which the houses were constructed.

That it was a densely populated city there was ample evidence. People – they were creatures like the messenger; that the Chisee are a people, despite their terrible shape, is hardly debatable – were running up and down the four radial streets, and around the curved connecting streets, in the wildest confusion, their double-

elbowed arms flung across their eyes. But even as I watched, the crowd thinned and melted swiftly away, until the streets of the queer, circular city were utterly deserted.

“The city ahead is not the one we are seeking, sir?” asked Croy, who had evidently been observing the scene through one of the smaller television discs. “I take it that governing city will be farther in the interior.”

“According to my rather sketchy information, yes.” I replied. “However, keep all the searchlight operators busy, going over every bit of the country within the reach of their beams. You have men on all the auxiliary television discs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Any findings of interest should be reported to me instantly. And – Mr. Croy!”

“Yes, sir?”

“You might order, if you will, that rations be served all men at their posts.” Over such country as this, I felt it would be wise to have every man ready for an emergency. It was, perhaps, as well that I issued this order.

It was perhaps half an hour after we had passed the circular city when, far ahead, I could see the pale, unhealthy forest thinning out. A half dozen of our searchlight beams played upon the denuded area, and as I brought the television disc to bear I saw that we were approaching a vast swamp, in which little pools of black water reflected the dazzling light of our searching beams.

Nor was this all. Out of the swamp a thousand strange, winged

things were rising: yellowish, bat-like things with forked tails and fierce hooked beaks. And like some obscene miasma from that swamp, they rose and came straight for the *Ertak*!

Instantly I pressed the attention signal that warned every man on the ship.

“All disintegrator rays in action at once!” I barked into the transmitter. “Broad beams, and full energy. Bird-like creatures, dead ahead; do not cease action until ordered!”

I heard the disintegrator ray generators deepen their notes before I finished speaking, and I smiled grimly, turning to Correy.

“Slow down as quickly and as much as possible, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. “We have work to do ahead.”

He nodded, and gave the order to the operating room; I felt the forward surge that told me my order was being obeyed, and turned my attention again to the television disc.

The ray operators were doing their work well. The search lights showed the air streaked with fine siftings of greasy dust, and these strange winged creatures were disappearing by the scores as the disintegrator rays beat and played upon them.

But they came on gamely, fiercely. Where there had been thousands, there were but hundreds ... scores ... dozens...

There were only five left. Three of them disappeared at once, but the two remaining came on unhesitatingly, their dirty yellow bat-like wings flapping heavily, their naked heads outstretched, and hooked beaks snapping.

One of them disappeared in a little sifting of greasy dust, and the same ray dissolved one wing of the remaining creature. He turned over suddenly, the one good wing flapping wildly, and tumbled towards the waiting swamp that has spawned him. Then, as the ray eagerly followed him, the last of that hellish brood disappeared.

“Circle slowly, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. I wanted to make sure there were none of these terrible creatures left. I felt that nothing so terrible should be left alive – even in a world of darkness.

Through the television disc I searched the swamp. As I had half suspected, the filthy ooze held the young of this race of things: grub-like creatures that flipped their heavy bodies about in the slime, alarmed by the light which searched them out.

“All disintegrator rays on the swamp,” I ordered. “Sweep it from margin to margin. Let nothing be left alive there.”

I had a well trained crew. The disintegrator rays massed themselves into a marching wall of death, and swept up and down the swamp as a plough turns its furrows.

It was easy to trace their passage, for behind them the swamp disappeared, leaving in its stead row after row of broad, dusty paths. When we had finished there was no swamp: there was only a naked area upon which nothing lived, and upon which, for many years, nothing would grow.

“Good work,” I commended the disintegrator ray men. “Cease action.” And then, to Correy, “Put her on her course again, please.”

An hour went by. We passed several more of the strange, damp circular cities, differing from the first we had seen only in the matter of size. Another hour passed, and I became anxious. If we were on our proper course, and I had understood the Chisee messenger correctly, we should be very close to the governing city. We should —

The waving beam of one of the searchlights came suddenly to rest. Three or four other beams followed it – and then all the others.

“Large city to port, sir!” called Croy excitedly.

“Thank you. I believe it is our destination. Cut all searchlights except the forward beam. Mr. Correy!”

“Yes, sir.”

“You can take her over visually now, I believe. The forward searchlight beam will keep our destination in view for you. Set her down cautiously in the center of the city in any suitable place. And – remain at the controls ready for any orders, and have the operating room crew do likewise.”

“Yes, sir,” said Correy crisply.

With a tenseness I could not control, I bent over the hooded television disc and studied the mighty governing city of the Chisee.

The governing city of the Chisee was not unlike the others we had seen, save that it was very much larger, and had eight spoke-like streets radiating from its center, instead of four. The protective wall was both thicker and higher.

There was another difference. Instead of a great open space in the center of the city, there was a central, park-like space, in the middle of which was a massive pile, circular in shape, and built, like all the rest of the city, of the black, sweating rock which seemed to be the sole building material of the Chisee.

We set the *Ertak* down close to the big circular building, which we guessed – and correctly – to be the seat of government. I ordered the searchlight ray to be extinguished the moment we landed, and the ethon tubes that illuminated our ship inside to be turned off, so that we might accustom our eyes as much as possible to darkness, finding our way about with small ethon tube flashlights.

With a small guard, I stood at the forward exit of the *Ertak* and watched the huge circular door back out on its mighty threads, and finally swing to one side on its massive gimbals. Croy – the only officer with me – and I both wore our menores, and carried full expeditionary equipment, as did the guard.

The Chisee messenger, grimacing and talking excitedly in his sibilant, whispering voice, crouched on all fours (he could not stand in that small space) and waited, three men of the guard on either side of him. I placed his minore on his head and gave him simple, forceful orders, picturing them for him as best I could:

“Go from this place and find others of your kind. Tell them that we would speak to them with things such as you have upon your head. Run swiftly!”

“I will run,” he conveyed to me, “to those great ones who

sent me.” He pictured them fleetingly. They were creatures like himself, save that they were elaborately dressed in fine skins of several pale colors, and wore upon their arms, between their two elbows, broad circlets of carved metal which I took to be emblems of power or authority, since the chief of them all wore a very broad band. Their faces were much more intelligent than their messenger had led me to expect, and their eyes, very large and round, and not at all human, were the eyes of thoughtful, reasoning creatures.

Doubled on all fours, the Chisee crept through the circular exit, and straightened up. As he did so, from out of the darkness a score or more of his fellows rushed up, gathering around him, and blocking the exit with their reedy legs. We could hear them talking excitedly in high-pitched, squeaky whispers. Then, suddenly I received an expression from the Chisee who wore the menore:

“Those who are with me have come from those in power. They say one of you, and one only, is to come with us to our big men who will learn, through a thing such as I wear upon my head, that which you wish to say to them. You are to come quickly; at once.”

“I will come,” I replied. “Have those with you make way – ”

A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder; a voice spoke eagerly in my ear:

“Sir, you must not go!” It was Croy, and his voice shook with feeling. “You are in command of the *Ertak*; she, and those in her need you. Let me go! I insist, sir!”

I turned in the darkness, quickly and angrily.

“Mr. Croy,” I said swiftly, “do you realize that you are speaking to your commanding officer?”

I felt his grip tighten on my arm as the reproof struck home.

“Yes, sir,” he said doggedly. “I do. But I repeat that your duty commands you to remain here.”

“The duty of a commander in this Service leads him to the place of greatest danger, Mr. Croy,” I informed him.

“Then stay with your ship, sir!” he pleaded, craftily. “This may be some trick to get you away, so that they may attack us. Please! Can’t you see that I am right, sir?”

I thought swiftly. The earnestness of the youngster had touched me. Beneath the formality and the “sirs” there was a real affection between us.

In the darkness I reached for his hand; I found it and shook it solemnly – a gesture of Earth which it is hard to explain. It means many things.

“Go, then, Andy,” I said softly. “But do not stay long. An hour at the longest. If you are not back in that length of time, we’ll come after you, and whatever else may happen, you can be sure that you will be well avenged. The *Ertak* has not lost her stinger.”

“Thank you, John,” he replied. “Remember that I shall wear my menore. If I adjust it to full power, and you do likewise, and stand without the shelter of the *Ertak’s* metal hull, I shall be able to communicate with you, should there be any danger.” He pressed my hand again, and strode through the exit out into the

darkness, which was lit only by a few distant stars.

The long, slim legs closed in around him; like a pigmy guarded by the skeletons of giants he was led quickly away.

The minutes dragged by. There was a nervous tension on the ship, the like of which I have experienced not more than a dozen times in all my years.

No one spoke aloud. Now and again one man would matter uneasily to another; there would be a swift, muttered response, and silence again. We were waiting – waiting.

Ten minutes went by. Twenty. Thirty.

Impatiently I paced up and down before the exit, the guards at their posts, ready to obey any orders instantly.

Forty-five minutes. I walked through the exit; stepped out onto the cold, hard earth.

I could see, behind me, the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak*. Before me, a black, shapeless blot against the star-sprinkled sky, was the great administrative building of the Chisee. And in there, somewhere, was Anderson Croy. I glanced down at the luminous dial of my watch. Fifty minutes. In ten minutes more —

“John Hanson!” My name reached me, faintly but clearly, through the medium of my menore. “This is Croy. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I replied instantly. “Are you safe?”

“I am safe. All is well. Very well. Will you promise me now to receive what I am about to send, without interruption?”

“Yes,” I replied, thoughtlessly and eagerly. “What is it?”

“I have had a long conference with the chief or head of the Chisee,” explained Croy rapidly. “He is very intelligent, and his people are much further advanced than we thought.

“Through some form of communication, he has learned of the fight with the weird birds; it seems that they are – or were – the most dreaded of all the creatures of this dark world. Apparently we got the whole brood of them, and this chief, whose name, I gather, is Wieschien, or something like that, is naturally much impressed.

“I have given him a demonstration or two with my atomic pistol and the flashlight – these people are fairly stricken by a ray of light directly in the eyes – and we have reached very favorable terms.

“I am to remain here as chief bodyguard and adviser, of which he has need, for all is not peaceful, I gather, in this kingdom of darkness. In return, he is to give up his plans to subjugate the rest of Antri; he has sworn to do this by what is evidently, to him, a very sacred oath, witnessed solemnly by the rest of his council.

“Under the circumstances, I believe he will do what he says; in any case, the great canal will be filled in, and the Antrians will have plenty of time to erect a great series of disintegrator ray stations along the entire twilight zone, using the broad fan rays to form a solid wall against which the Chisee could not advance even did they, at some future date, carry out their plans. The worst possible result then would be that the people in the sunlit portion would have to migrate from certain sections, and perhaps

would have day and night, alternately, as do other worlds.

“This is the agreement we have reached; it is the only one that will save this world. Do you approve, sir?”

“No! Return immediately, and we will show the Chisee that they cannot hold an officer of the Special Patrol as a hostage. Make haste!”

“It’s no go, sir,” came the reply instantly. “I threatened them first. I explained what our disintegrator rays would do, and Wieschien laughed at me.

“This city is built upon great subterranean passages that lead to many hidden exits. If we show the least sign of hostility the work will be resumed on the canal, and, before we can locate the spot, and stop the work, the damage will be done.

“This is our only chance, sir, to make this expedition a complete success. Permit me to judge this fact from the evidence I have before me. Whatever sacrifice there is to make, I make gladly. Wieschien asks that you depart at once, and in peace, and I know this is the only course. Good-by, sir; convey my salutations to my other friends upon the old *Ertak*, and elsewhere. And now, lest my last act as an officer of the Special Patrol Service be to refuse to obey the commands of my superior officer, I am removing the minore. Good-by!”

I tried to reach him again, but there was no response.

Gone! He was gone! Swallowed up in darkness and in silence!

Dazed, shaken to the very foundation of my being, I stood there between the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak* and the towering

mass of the great silent pile that was the seat of government in this strange land of darkness, and gazed up at the dark sky above me. I am not ashamed, now, to say that hot tears trickled down my cheeks, nor that as I turned back to the *Ertak*, my throat was so gripped by emotion that I could not speak.

I ordered the exit closed with a wave of my hand; in the navigating room I said but four words: "We depart at once."

At the third meal of the day I gathered my officers about me and told them, as quickly and as gently as I could, of the sacrifice one of their number had made.

It was Kincaide who, when I had finished, rose slowly and made reply.

"Sir," he said quietly, "We had a friend. Some day, he might have died. Now he will live forever in the records of the Service, in the memory of a world, and in the hearts of those who had the honor to serve with him. Could he – or we – wish more?"

Amid a strange silence he sat down again, and there was not an eye among us that was dry.

I hope that the snappy young officer who visited me the other day reads this little account of bygone times.

Perhaps it will make clear to him how we worked, in those nearly forgotten days, with the tools we had at hand. They were not the perfect tools of to-day, but what they lacked, we somehow made up.

That fine old motto of the Service, "Nothing Less Than Complete Success," we passed on unsullied to those who came

after us.

I hope these youngsters of to-day may do as well.

The Sunken Empire

By H. Thompson Rich

Concerning the strange adventures of Professor Stevens with the Antillians on the floors of the mysterious Sargasso Sea.

“Then you really expect to find the lost continent of Atlantis, Professor?”

Martin Stevens lifted his bearded face sternly to the reporter who was interviewing him in his study aboard the torpedo-submarine *Nereid*, a craft of his own invention, as she lay moored at her Brooklyn wharf, on an afternoon in October.

“My dear young man,” he said, “I am not even going to look for it.”

The aspiring journalist – Larry Hunter by name – was properly abashed.

“But I thought,” he insisted nevertheless, “that you said you were going to explore the ocean floor under the Sargasso Sea?”

“And so I did.” Professor Stevens admitted, a smile moving that gray beard now and his blue eyes twinkling merrily. “But the Sargasso, an area almost equal to Europe, covers other land as well – land of far more recent submergence than Atlantis, which

founded in 9564 B. C., according to Plato. What I am going to look for is this newer lost continent, or island rather – namely, the great island of Antillia, of which the West Indies remain above water to-day.”

“Antillia?” queried Larry Hunter, wonderingly. “I never heard of it.”

Again the professor regarded his interviewer sternly.

“There are many things you have never heard of, young man,” he told him. “Antillia may be termed the missing link between Atlantis and America. It was there that Atlantean culture survived after the appalling catastrophe that wiped out the Atlantean homeland, with its seventy million inhabitants, and it was in the colonies the Antillians established in Mexico and Peru, that their own culture in turn survived, after Antillia too had sunk.”

“My Lord! You don’t mean to say the Mayas and Incas originated on that island of Antillia?”

“No, I mean to say they originated on the continent of Atlantis, and that Antillia was the stepping stone to the New World, where they built the strange pyramids we find smothered in the jungle – even as thousands of years before the Atlanteans established colonies in Egypt and founded the earliest dynasties of pyramid-building Pharaohs.”

Larry was pushing his pencil furiously.

“Whew!” he gasped. “Some story, Professor!”

“To the general public, perhaps,” was the reply. “But to

scholars of antiquity, these postulates are pretty well known and pretty well accepted. It remains but to get concrete evidence, in order to prove them to the world at large – and that is the object of my expedition.”

More hurried scribbling, then:

“But, say – why don’t you go direct to Atlantis and get the real dope?”

“Because that continent foundered so long ago that it is doubtful if any evidence would have withstood the ravages of time,” Professor Stevens explained, “whereas Antillia went down no earlier than 200 B. C., archaeologists agree.”

“That answers my question,” declared Larry, his admiration for this doughty graybeard rising momentarily. “And now, Professor, I wonder if you’d be willing to say a few words about this craft of yours?”

“Cheerfully, if you think it would interest anyone. What would you care to have me say?”

“Well, in the first place, what does the name *Nereid* mean?”

“Sea-nymph. The derivation is from the Latin and Greek, meaning daughter of the sea-god Nereus. Appropriate, don’t you think?”

“Swell. And why do you call it a torpedo-submarine? How does it differ from the common or navy variety?”

Professor Stevens smiled. It was like asking what was the difference between the sun and the moon, when about the only point of resemblance they had was that they were both round.

Nevertheless, he enumerated some of the major modifications he had developed.

Among them, perhaps the most radical, was its motive power, which was produced by what he called a vacuo-turbine – a device that sucked in the water at the snout of the craft and expelled it at the tail, at the time purifying a certain amount for drinking purposes and extracting sufficient oxygen to maintain a healthful atmosphere while running submerged.

Then, the structure of the *Nereid* was unique, he explained, permitting it to attain depths where the pressure would crush an ordinary submarine, while mechanical eyes on the television principle afforded a view in all directions, and locks enabling them to leave the craft at will and explore the sea-bottom were provided.

This latter feat they would accomplish in special suits, designed on the same pneumatic principle as the torpedo itself and capable of sustaining sufficient inflation to resist whatever pressures might be encountered, as well as being equipped with vibratory sending and receiving apparatus, for maintaining communication with those left aboard.

All these things and more Professor Stevens outlined, as Larry's pencil flew, admitting that he had spent the past ten years and the best part of his private fortune in developing his plans.

“But you'll get it all back, won't you? Aren't there all sorts of Spanish galleons and pirate barques laden with gold supposed to be down there?”

“Undoubtedly,” was the calm reply. “But I am not on a treasure hunt, young man. If I find one single sign of former life, I shall be amply rewarded.”

Whereupon the young reporter regarded the subject of his interview with fresh admiration, not unmingled with wonder. In his own hectic world, people had no such scorn of gold. Gee, he'd sure like to go along! The professor could have his old statues or whatever he was looking for. As for himself, he'd fill up his pockets with Spanish doubloons and pieces of eight!

Larry was snapped out of his trance by a light knock on the door, which opened to admit a radiant girl in creamy knickers and green cardigan.

“May I come in, daddy?” she inquired, hesitating, as she saw he was not alone.

“You seem to be in already, my dear,” the professor told her, rising from his desk and stepping forward.

Then, turning to Larry, who had also risen, he said:

“Mr. Hunter, this is my daughter, Diane, who is also my secretary.”

“I am pleased to meet you, Miss Stevens,” said Larry, taking her hand.

And he meant it – for almost anyone would have been pleased to meet Diane, with her tawny gold hair, warm olive cheeks and eyes bluer even than her father's and just as twinkling, just as intelligent.

“She will accompany the expedition and take stenographic

notes of everything we observe,” added her father, to Larry’s amazement.

“What?” he declared. “You mean to say that – that – ”

“Of course he means to say that I’m going, if that’s what you mean to say, Mr. Hunter,” Diane assured him. “Can you think of any good reason why I shouldn’t go, when girls are flying around the world and everything else?”

Even had Larry been able to think of any good reason, he wouldn’t have mentioned it. But as a matter of fact, he had shifted quite abruptly to an entirely different line of thought. Diane, he was thinking – Diana, goddess of the chase, the huntress! And himself, Larry Hunter – the hunter and the huntress!

Gee, but he’d like to go! What an adventure, hunting around together on the bottom of the ocean!

What a wild dream, rather, he concluded when his senses returned. For after all, he was only a reporter, fated to write about other people’s adventures, not to participate in them. So he put away his pad and pencil and prepared to leave.

But at the door he paused.

“Oh, yes – one more question. When are you planning to leave, Professor?”

At that, Martin Stevens and his daughter exchanged a swift glance. Then, with a smile, Diane said:

“I see no reason why we shouldn’t tell him, daddy.”

“But we didn’t tell the reporters from the other papers, my dear,” protested her father.

“Then suppose we give Mr. Hunter the exclusive story,” she said, transferring her smile to Larry now. “It will be what you call a – a scoop. Isn’t that it?”

“That’s it.”

She caught her father’s acquiescing nod. “Then here’s your scoop, Mr. Hunter. We leave to-night.”

To-night! This was indeed a scoop! If he hurried, he could catch the late afternoon editions with it.

“I – I certainly thank you, Miss Stevens!” he exclaimed. “That’ll make the front page!”

As he grasped the door-knob, he added, turning to her father: “And I want to thank you too, Professor – and wish you good luck!”

Then, with a hasty handshake, and a last smile of gratitude for Diane, he flung open the door and departed, unconscious that two young blue eyes followed his broad shoulders wistfully till they disappeared from view.

But Larry was unaware that he had made a favorable impression on Diane. He felt it was the reverse. As he headed toward the subway, that vivid blond goddess of the chase was uppermost in his thoughts.

Soon she’d be off in the *Nereid*, bound for the mysterious regions under the Sargasso Sea, while in a few moments he’d be in the subway, bound under the prosaic East River for New York.

No – damned if he would!

Suddenly, with a wild inspiration, the young reporter altered

his course, dove into the nearest phone booth and got his city editor on the wire.

Scoop? This was just the first installment. He'd get a scoop that would fill a book!

And his city editor tacitly O. K.'d the idea.

With the result that when the *Nereid* drew away from her wharf that night, on the start of her unparalleled voyage, Larry Hunter was a stowaway.

The place where he had succeeded in secreting himself was a small storeroom far aft, on one of the lower decks. There he huddled in the darkness, while the slow hours wore away, hearing only the low hum of the craft's vacuo-turbine and the flux of water running through her.

From the way she rolled and pitched, he judged she was still proceeding along on the surface.

Having eaten before he came aboard, he felt no hunger, but the close air and the dark quarters brought drowsiness. He slept.

When he awoke it was still dark, of course, but a glance at his luminous wrist-watch told him it was morning now. And the fact that the rolling and pitching had ceased made him believe they were now running submerged.

The urge for breakfast asserting itself, Larry drew a bar of chocolate from his pocket and munched on it. But this was scanty fare for a healthy young six-footer, accustomed to a liberal portion of ham and eggs. Furthermore, the lack of coffee made him realize that he was getting decidedly thirsty. The air,

moreover, was getting pretty bad.

“All in all, this hole wasn’t exactly intended for a bedroom!” he reflected with a wry smile.

Taking a chance, he opened the door a crack and sat there impatiently, while the interminable minutes ticked off.

The *Nereid’s* turbine was humming now with a high, vibrant note that indicated they must be knocking off the knots at a lively clip. He wondered how far out they were, and how far down.

Lord, there’d be a riot when he showed up! He wanted to wait till they were far enough on their way so it would be too much trouble to turn around and put him ashore.

But by noon his powers of endurance were exhausted. Flinging open the door, he stepped out into the corridor, followed it to a companionway and mounted the ladder to the deck above.

There he was assailed by a familiar and welcome odor – food!

Trailing it to its origin, he came to a pair of swinging doors at the end of a cork-paved passage. Beyond, he saw on peering through, was the mess-room, and there at the table, among a number of uniformed officers, sat Professor Stevens and Diane.

A last moment Larry stood there, looking in on them. Then, drawing a deep breath, he pushed wide the swinging doors and entered with a cheery:

“Good morning, folks! Hope I’m not too late for lunch!”

Varying degrees of surprise greeted this dramatic appearance. The officers stared, Diane gasped, her father leaped to his feet with a cry.

“That reporter! Why – why, what are you doing here, young man?”

“Just representing the press.”

Larry tried to make it sound nonchalant but he was finding it difficult to bear up under this barrage of disapproving eyes – particularly two very young, very blue ones.

“So that is the way you reward us for giving you an exclusive story, is it?” Professor Stevens’ voice was scathing. “A representative of the press! A stowaway, rather – and as such you will be treated!”

He turned to one of his officers.

“Report to Captain Petersen that we have a stowaway aboard and order him to put about at once.”

He turned to another.

“See that Mr. Hunter is taken below and locked up. When we reach New York, he will be handed over to the police.”

“But daddy!” protested Diane, as they rose to comply, her eyes softening now. “We shouldn’t be too severe with Mr. Hunter. After all, he is probably doing only what his paper ordered him to.”

Gratefully Larry turned toward his defender. But he couldn’t let that pass.

“No, I’m acting only on my own initiative,” he said. “No one told me to come.”

For he couldn’t get his city editor involved, and after all it was his own idea.

“You see!” declared Professor Stevens. “He admits it is his own doing. It is clear he has exceeded his authority, therefore, and deserves no sympathy.”

“But can’t you let me stay, now that I’m here?” urged Larry. “I know something about boats. I’ll serve as a member of the crew – anything.”

“Impossible. We have a full complement. You would be more of a hindrance than a help. Besides, I do not care to have the possible results of this expedition blared before the public.”

“I’ll write nothing you do not approve.”

“I have no time to edit your writings, young man. My own, will occupy me sufficiently. So it is useless. You are only wasting your breath – and mine.”

He motioned for his officers to carry out his orders.

But before they could move to do so, in strode a lean, middle-aged Norwegian Larry sensed must be Captain Petersen himself, and on his weathered face was an expression of such gravity that it was obvious to everyone something serious had happened.

Ignoring Larry, after one brief look of inquiry that was answered by Professor Stevens, he reported swiftly what he had to say.

While cruising full speed at forty fathoms, with kite-aerial out, their wireless operator had received a radio warning to turn back. Answering on its call-length, he had demanded to know the sender and the reason for the message, but the information had been declined, the warning merely being repeated.

“Was it a land station or a ship at sea?” asked the professor.

“Evidently the latter,” was the reply. “By our radio range-finder, we determined the position at approximately latitude 27, longitude 65.”

“But that, Captain, is in the very area we are headed for.”

“And that, Professor, makes it all the more singular.”

“But – well, well! This is indeed peculiar! And I had been on the point of turning back with our impetuous young stowaway. What would you suggest, sir?”

Captain Petersen meditated, while Larry held his breath.

“To turn back,” he said at length, in his clear, precise English, “would in my opinion be to give the laugh to someone whose sense of humor is already too well developed.”

“Exactly!” agreed Professor Stevens, as Larry relaxed in relief. “Whoever this practical joker is, we will show him he is wasting his talents – even though it means carrying a supernumerary for the rest of the voyage.”

“Well spoken!” said the captain. “But as far as that is concerned, I think I can keep Mr. Hunter occupied.”

“Then take him, and welcome!”

Whereupon, still elated but now somewhat uneasy, Larry accompanied Captain Petersen from the mess-room; started to, that is. But at a glance of sympathy from Diane, he dared call out:

“Say – hold on, folks! I haven’t had lunch yet!”

When young Larry Hunter reported to the captain of the *Nereid*, after this necessary meal, he found that the craft had

returned to the surface.

Assigned a pair of powerful binoculars, he was ordered to stand watch in the conning-tower and survey the horizon in every direction, in an effort to sight the vessel that had sent out that mysterious radio, but though he cast his good brown eyes diligently through those strong lenses, he saw not so much as a smoke tuft upon the broad, gray-blue surface of the hazy Atlantic.

Gradually, however, as the afternoon wore away, something else came in view. Masses of brownish seaweed, supported by small, berry-like bladders, began drifting by. Far apart at first, they began getting more and more dense, till at last, with a thrill, he realized that they were drawing into that strange area known as the Sargasso Sea.

Shortly after this realization dawned, he was ordered below, and as the tropic sun was sinking over that eery floating tombstone, which according to Professor Stevens marked a nation's grave, the *Nereid* submerged.

Down she slid, a hundred fathoms or more, on a long, even glide that took her deep under that veiling brown blanket.

In the navigating room now, Larry stood with the captain, the professor and Diane, studying an illuminated panel on which appeared a cross of five squares, like a box opened out.

The central square reproduced the scene below, while those to left and right depicted it from port and starboard, and those to front and rear revealed the forward and aft aspects of the

panorama, thus affording a clear view in every direction.

This, then, was the television device Professor Stevens had referred to the previous afternoon, its mechanical eyes enabling then to search every square inch of those mysterious depths, as they cruised along.

It was the central square that occupied their attention chiefly, however, as they stood studying the panel. While the others represented merely an unbroken vista of greenish water, this one showed the sea floor as clearly as though they had been peering down into a shallow lagoon through a glass-bottomed boat, though it must have been a quarter of a mile below their cruising level.

A wonderful and fearsome sight it was to Larry: like something seen in a nightmare – a fantastic desert waste of rocks and dunes, with here and there a yawning chasm whose ominous depths their ray failed to penetrate, and now and then a jutting plateau that would appear on the forward square and cause Captain Petersen to elevate their bow sharply.

But more thrilling than this was their first glimpse of a sunken ship – a Spanish galleon, beyond a doubt!

There she lay, grotesquely on her side, half rotted, half buried in the sand, but still discernible. And to Larry's wildly racing imagination, a flood of gold and jewels seemed to pour from her ruined coffers.

Turning to Diane, he saw that her eyes too were flashing with intense excitement.

“Say!” he exclaimed. “Why don’t we stop and look her over? There may be a fortune down there!”

Professor Stevens promptly vetoed the suggestion, however.

“I must remind you, young man,” he said severely, “that this is not a treasure hunt.”

Whereupon Larry subsided; outwardly, at least. But when presently the central square revealed another and then another sunken ship, it was all he could do to contain himself.

Now, suddenly, Diane cried out:

“Oh, daddy, look! There’s a modern ship! A – a freighter, isn’t it?”

“A collier, I would say,” was her father’s calm reply. “Rather a large one, too. *Cyclops*, possibly. She disappeared some years ago, en route from the Barbados to Norfolk. Or possibly it is any one of a dozen other steel vessels that have vanished from these seas in recent times. The area of the Sargasso, my dear, is known as ‘The Port of Missing Ships.’”

“But couldn’t we drop down and make sure which ship it is?” she pleaded, voicing the very thought Larry had been struggling to suppress.

At the professor’s reply, however, he was glad he had kept quiet.

“We could, of course,” was his gentle though firm rebuke, “but if we stopped to solve the mystery of every sunken ship we shall probably see during this cruise, we would have time for nothing else. Nevertheless, my dear, you may take a short memorandum

of the location and circumstances, in the present instance.”

Whereupon he dictated briefly, while Larry devoted his attention once more to the central square.

Suddenly, beyond a dark pit that seemed to reach down into the very bowels of the earth, rose an abrupt plateau – and on one of its nearer elevations, almost directly under then, loomed a monumental four-sided mound.

“Say – hold on!” called Larry. “Look at that, Professor! Isn’t that a building of some kind?”

Martin Stevens looked up, glanced skeptically toward the panel. But one glimpse at what that central square revealed, and his skepticism vanished.

“A building?” he cried in triumph. “A building indeed! It is a pyramid, young man!”

“Good Lord!”

“Oh, daddy! Really?”

“Beyond a doubt! And look – there are two other similar structures, only smaller!”

Struggling for calm, he turned to Captain Petersen, who had taken his eyes from the forward square and was peering down as well upon those singular mounds.

“Stop! Descend!” was his exultant command. “This is my proof! We have discovered Antillia!”

Swiftly the *Nereid* dropped to that submerged plateau.

In five minutes, her keel was resting evenly on the smooth sand beside the largest of the three pyramids.

Professor Stevens then announced that he would make a preliminary investigation of the site at once.

“For, otherwise, I for one would be quite unable to sleep tonight!” declared the graybeard, with a boyish chuckle.

He added that Diane would accompany him.

At this latter announcement, Larry’s heart sank. He had hoped against hope that he might be invited along with them.

But once again his champion came to his aid.

“We really ought to let Mr. Hunter come with us, daddy, don’t you think?” she urged, noting his disappointment. “After all, it was he who made the discovery.”

“Very true,” said her father, “but I had not thought it necessary for anyone to accompany us. In the event anyone does, Captain Petersen should have that honor.”

But this honor the captain declined.

“If you don’t mind, sir, I’d prefer to stay with the ship,” he said, quietly. “I haven’t forgotten that radio warning.”

“But surely you don’t think anyone can molest us down here?” scoffed the professor.

“No, but I’d prefer to stay with the ship just the same, sir, if you don’t mind.”

“Very well” – with a touch of pique. “Then you may come along if you care to, Mr. Hunter.”

If he cared to!

“Thanks, Professor!” he said with a grateful look toward Diane. “I’d be keen to!”

So he accompanied them below, where they donned their pressure-suits – rubber affairs rather less cumbersome than ordinary deep-sea diving gear, reinforced with steel wire and provided with thick glass goggles and powerful searchlights, in addition to their vibratory communication apparatus and other devices that were explained to Larry.

When he had mastered their operation, which was rendered simple by reason of the fact that they were so nearly automatic, the trio stepped into a lock on the floor of the ship and Professor Stevens ordered them to couple their suits to air-valve connections on the wall, at the same time admitting water by opening another valve.

Swiftly the lock flooded, while their suits inflated.

“All right?” came his vibratory query.

“Right!” they both answered.

“Then stand by for the heavy pressure.”

Wider now he opened the water-valve, letting the ocean in, while at the same time their suits continued inflating through their air-valve connections.

To his surprise, Larry found himself no more inconvenienced by the pressure than he had been from the moment the submarine dove to its present depth. Indeed, most of the air that was coming into his suit was filling the reinforced space between its inner and outer layers, much as the *Nereid* held air under pressure between her two thick shells.

“All right now?” called out the professor’s vibrator.

“Right!” they called back again.

“Then uncouple your air-valve connections and make ready.”

They did so; and he likewise.

Then, advancing to a massive door like that of a vault, he flung back its powerful clamps, dragged it open – and there beyond, its pressure equaled by that within the lock, loomed the black tide of the ocean bottom.

Awed by this solemn sight, tingling with a sense of unparalleled adventure, Larry stood there a moment, peering out over the threshold of that untrodden world.

Then he followed Diane and her father into its beckoning mystery...

Their searchlights cutting bright segments into the dark, they proceeded toward the vast mound that towered ahead, pushing through a weird realm of phosphorescent fish and other marine creatures.

As they neared it, any possible doubt that it was in fact a pyramid vanished. Corroded by the action of salt water and covered with the incrustations of centuries, it nevertheless presented unmistakable evidence of human construction, rising in steps of massive masonry to a summit shadowy in the murk above.

As Larry stood gazing upon that mighty proof that this submerged plateau had once stood forth proudly above the sea, he realized that he was a party to one of the most profound discoveries of the ages. What a furore this would make when he

reported it back to his New York paper!

But New York seemed remote indeed, now. Would they ever get back? What if anything went wrong with their pressure-suits – or if they should become lost?

He glanced back uneasily, but there gleamed the reassuring lights of the *Nereid*, not a quarter of a mile away.

Diane and her father were now rounding a corner of the pyramid and he followed them, his momentary twinge of anxiety gone.

For some moments, Professor Stevens prowled about without comment, examining the huge basal blocks of the structure and glancing up its sloping sides.

“You see, I was right!” he declared at length. “This is not only a man-made edifice but a true pyramid, embodying the same architectural principles as the Mayan and Egyptian forms. We see before us the visible evidence of a sunken empire – the missing link between Atlantis and America.”

No comments greeted this profound announcement and the professor continued:

“This structure appears to be similar in dimensions with that of the pyramid of Xochicalco, in Mexico, which in turn approximates that of the “Sacred Hill” of Atlantis, mentioned by Plato, and which was the prototype of both the Egyptian and Mayan forms. It was here the Antillians, as the Atlanteans had taught them to do, worshipped their grim gods and performed the human sacrifices they thought necessary to appease them. And

it was here, too, if I am not mistaken, that – ”

Suddenly his vibratory discourse was broken into by a sharp signal from the submarine:

“Pardon interruption! Hurry back! We are attacked!”

At this, the trio stood rigid.

“Captain Petersen! Captain Petersen!” Larry heard the professor call. “Speak up! Give details! What has happened?”

But an ominous silence greeted the query.

Another moment they stood there, thoroughly dismayed now. Then came the professor’s swift command:

“Follow me – quickly!”

He was already in motion, retracing his steps as fast as his bulky suit would permit. But as he rounded the corner of the pyramid, they saw him pause, stand staring. And as they drew up, they in turn paused; stood staring, too.

With sinking hearts, they saw that the *Nereid* was gone.

Stunned by this disaster, they stood facing one another – three lone human beings, on the bottom of the Atlantic ocean, their sole means of salvation gone.

Professor Stevens was the first to speak.

“This is unbelievable!” he said. “I cannot credit it. We must have lost our senses.”

“Or our bearings!” added Diane, more hopefully. “Suppose we look around the other side.”

As for Larry, a darker suspicion flashed through his mind. Captain Petersen! Had he seized his opportunity and led the

crew to mutiny, in the hope of converting the expedition into a treasure hunt? Was that the reason he had been so willing to remain behind?

He kept his suspicion to himself, however, and accompanied Diane and her father on a complete circuit of the pyramid; but, as he feared, there was no sign of the *Nereid* anywhere. The craft had vanished as completely as though the ocean floor had opened and swallowed her up.

But no, not as completely as that! For presently the professor, who had proceeded to the site where they left the craft resting on the sand, called out excitedly:

“Here – come here! There are tracks! Captain Petersen was right! They were attacked!”

Hurrying to the scene, they saw before them the plain evidences of a struggle. The ocean bottom was scuffed and stamped, as though by many feet, and a clear trail showed where the craft had finally been dragged away.

Obviously there was but one thing to do and they did it. After a brief conference, they turned and followed the trail.

It led off over the plateau a quarter mile or more, in an eastward direction, terminating at length beside one of the smaller pyramids – and there lay the *Nereid*, apparently unharmed.

But her lights were out and there came no answer to their repeated calls, so they judged she must be empty.

What had happened to Captain Petersen and his crew? What

strange sub-sea enemy had overcome them? What was now their fate?

Unanswerable question! But one thing was certain. Larry had misjudged the captain in suspecting him of mutiny. He was sorry for this and resolved he would make amends by doing all in his power to rescue him and his men, if they were still living.

Meanwhile his own plight, and that of Diane and her father, was critical. What was to be done?

Suddenly, as all three stood there debating that question, Professor Stevens uttered an exclamation and strode toward the pyramid. Following him with their eyes, they saw him pass through an aperture where a huge block of stone had been displaced – and disappear within.

The next moment they had joined him, to find themselves in a small flooded chamber at whose far end a narrow gallery sloped upward at a sharp angle.

The floor and walls were tiled, they noted, and showed none of the corrosion of the exterior surfaces. Indeed, so immaculate was the room that it might have been occupied but yesterday.

As they stood gazing around in wonder, scarcely daring to draw the natural inferences of this phenomena, there came a rasping sound, and, turning toward the entrance, they saw a massive section of masonry descend snugly into place.

They were trapped!

Standing there tense, speechless, they waited, wondering what would be the next move of this strange enemy who held them

now so surely in his power.

Nor had they long to wait.

Almost immediately, there issued a gurgling sound from the inclined gallery, and turning their eyes in the direction of this new phenomena, they saw that the water level was receding, as though under pressure from above.

“Singular!” muttered Professor Stevens. “A sort of primitive lock. It seems incredible that human creatures could exist down here, but such appears to be the case.”

Larry had no desire to dispute the assumption, nor had Diane. They stood there as people might in the imminence of the supernatural, awaiting they knew not what.

Swiftly the water receded.

Now it was scarcely up to their waists, now plashing about their ankles, and now the room was empty.

The next moment, there sounded a rush of feet – and down the gallery came a swarm of the strangest beings any of them had ever seen.

They were short, thin, almost emaciated, with pale, pinched faces and pasty, half-naked bodies. But they shimmered with ornaments of gold and jade, like some strange princes from the realm of Neptune – or rather, like Aztec chieftains of the days of Cortes, thought Larry.

Blinking in the glare of the searchlights, they clamored around their captives, touching their pressure-suits half in awe and chattering among themselves.

Then one of them, larger and more regally clad than the rest, stepped up and gestured toward the balcony.

“They obviously desire us to accompany them above,” said the professor, “and quite as obviously we have little choice in the matter, so I suggest we do so.”

“Check!” said Larry.

“And double-check!” added Diane.

So they started up, preceded by a handful of their captors and followed by the main party.

The gallery seemed to be leading toward the center of the pyramid, but after a hundred feet or so it turned and continued up at a right angle, turning twice more before they arrived at length in another stone chamber, smaller than the one below.

Here their guides paused and waited for the main party.

There followed another conference, whereupon their leader stepped up again, indicating this time that they were to remove their suits.

At this, Professor Stevens balked.

“It is suicide!” he declared. “The air to which they are accustomed here is doubtless at many times our own atmospheric pressure.”

“But I don’t see that there’s anything to do about it,” said Larry, as their captors danced about them menacingly. “I for one will take a chance!”

And before they could stop him, he had pressed the release-valve, emitting the air from his suit – slowly, at first, then more

and more rapidly, as no ill effects seemed to result.

Finally, flinging off the now deflated suit, he stepped before them in his ordinary clothes, calling with a smile:

“Come on out, folks – the air’s fine!”

This statement was somewhat of an exaggeration, as the air smelt dank and bad. But at least it was breathable, as Diane and her father found when they emerged from their own suits.

They discovered, furthermore, now that their flashlights were no longer operating, that a faint illumination lit the room, issuing from a number of small crystal jars suspended from the walls: some sort of phosphorescence, evidently.

Once again the leader of the curious throng stepped up to them, beaming now and addressing Professor Stevens in some barbaric tongue, and, to their amazement, he replied in words approximating its harsh syllables.

“Why, daddy!” gasped Diane. “How can you talk to him?”

“Simply enough,” was the reply. “They speak a language which seems to be about one-third Basque, mixed oddly with Greek. It merely proves another hypothesis of mine, namely, that the Atlantean influence reached eastward to the Pyrenees mountains and the Hellenic peninsula, as well as to Egypt.”

Whereupon he turned and continued his conversation, haltingly it is true and with many gestures, but understandably nevertheless.

“I have received considerable enlightenment as to the mystery of this strange sunken empire,” he reported, turning back to

them at length. "It is a singular story this creature tells, of how his country sank slowly beneath the waves, during the course of centuries, and of how his ancestors adapted themselves by degrees to the present conditions. I shall report it to you both, in detail, when time affords. But the main thing now is that a man similar to ourselves has conquered their country and set himself up as emperor. It is to him we are about to be taken."

"But it doesn't seem possible!" exclaimed Diane. "Why, how could he have got down here?"

"In a craft similar to our own, according to this creature. Heaven knows what it is we are about to face! But whatever it is, we will face it bravely."

"Check and double-check!" said Larry, with a glance toward Diane that told her she would not find him wanting.

They were not destined to meet the test just then, however, for just at that moment a courier in breech-clout and sandals dashed up the gallery and burst into the room, bearing in his right hand a thin square of metal.

Bowing, he handed it to the leader of the pigmy throng, with the awed word:

"Cabiri!"

At this, Professor Stevens gave a start.

"A message from their high priests!" he whispered.

Whatever it contained, the effect produced on the reader was profound. Facing his companions, he addressed them gravely. Then, turning from the room, he commanded the captives to

follow.

The way led back down the inclined gallery to a point where another door now stood open, then on down until finally the passage leveled out into a long, straight tunnel.

This they traversed for fully a mile, entering at length a large, square chamber where for a moment they paused.

“I judge we are now at the base of the large pyramid,” the professor voiced in an undertone. “It would naturally be the abode of the high priests.”

“But what do you suppose they want with us?” asked Diane.

“That I am not disposed to conjecture,” was her father’s reply.

But the note of anxiety in his voice was not lost on Diane, nor on Larry, who pressed her hand reassuringly.

Now their captors led them from the room through a small door opening on another inclined gallery, whose turns they followed until all were out of breath from the climb.

It ended abruptly on a short, level corridor with apertures to left and right.

Into the latter they were led, finding themselves in a grotesquely furnished room, lit dimly by phosphorescent lamps.

Swiftly the leader addressed Professor Stevens. Then all withdrew. The aperture was closed by a sliding block of stone.

For a moment they stood there silent, straining their eyes in the gloom to detect the details of their surroundings, which included several curious chairs and a number of mattings strewn on the tiled floor.

“What did he say?” asked Diane at length, in a tremulous voice.

“He said we will remain here for the night,” her father replied, “and will be taken before the high priests at dawn.”

“At dawn!” exclaimed Larry. “How the deuce do they know when it is dawn, down here?”

“By their calendars, which they have kept accurately,” was the answer. “But there are many other questions you must both want to ask, so I shall anticipate them by telling you now what I have been able to learn. Suppose we first sit down, however. I for one am weary.”

Whereupon they drew up three of those curious chairs of some heavy wood carved with the hideous figures of this strange people’s ancient gods, and Professor Stevens began.

Their sunken empire, as he had surmised, had indeed been the great island of Antillia and a colony of Atlantis. A series of earthquakes and tidal waves such as engulfed their homeland ages before had sent it down, and the estimated archaeological date of the final submergence – namely, 200 B. C. – was approximately correct.

But long before this ultimate catastrophe, the bulk of the disheartened population had migrated to Central and South America, founding the Mayan and Incan dynasties. Many of the faithful had stayed on, however, among them most of the Cabiri or high priests, who either were loath to leave their temples or had been ordered by their gods to remain.

At any rate, they had remained, and as the great island sank lower and lower, they had fortified themselves against the disaster in their pyramids, which by then alone remained above the surface.

These, too, had gradually disappeared beneath the angry waters, however, and with them had disappeared the steadfast priests and their faithful followers, sealing their living tombs into air-tight bell-jars that retained the atmosphere.

This they had supplemented at first by drawing it down from above, but as time went by they found other means of getting air; extracting it from the sea water under pressure, by utilizing their subterranean volcanoes, in whose seething cauldrons the gods had placed their salvation; and it was this process that now provided them with the atmosphere which had so amazed their captives.

But naturally, lack of sunshine had produced serious degeneration in their race, and that accounted for their diminutive forms and pale bodies. Still, they had been able to survive with a degree of happiness until some ten or a dozen years ago, when a strange enemy had come down in a great metal fish, like that of these new strangers, and with a handful of men had conquered their country.

This marauder was after their gold and had looted their temples ruthlessly, carrying away its treasures, for which they hated him with a fury that only violation of their most sacred deities could arouse. Long ago they would have destroyed him,

but for the fact that he possessed terrible weapons which were impossible to combat. But they were in smouldering rebellion and waited only the support of their gods, when they would fall on this oppressor and hurl him off.

That, though it left many things unexplained, was all the professor had been able to gather from his conversation with the leader of their captors. He ended, admitting regretfully that he was still in ignorance of what fate had befallen Captain Petersen and the crew of the *Nereid*.

“Perhaps this fellow in the other submarine has got them,” suggested Larry.

“But why weren’t we taken to him too?” asked Diane. “What do you suppose they want with us, anyway, daddy?”

“That, my dear, as I told you before,” replied her father, “I am not disposed to conjecture. Time will reveal it. Meanwhile, we can only wait.”

As before, there was a note of anxiety in his voice not lost on either of them. And as for Larry, though he knew but little of those old religions, he knew enough to realize that their altars often ran with the blood of their captives, and he shuddered.

With these grim thoughts between them, the trio fell silent.

A silence that was interrupted presently by the arrival of a native bearing a tray heaped with strange food.

Bowing, he placed it before them and departed.

Upon examination, the meal proved to consist mainly of some curious kind of steamed fish, not unpalatable but rather rank

and tough. There were several varieties of fungus, too, more or less resembling mushrooms and doubtless grown in some sunless garden of the pyramid.

These articles, together with a pitcher of good water that had obviously been distilled from the sea, comprised their meal, and though it was far from appetizing, they ate it.

But none of the three slept that night, though Diane dozed off for a few minutes once or twice, for their apprehension of what the dawn might hold made it impossible, to say nothing of the closeness of the air in that windowless subterranean room.

Slowly, wearily, the hours dragged by.

At length the native who had brought their food came again. This time he spoke.

“He says we are now to be taken before the high priests,” Professor Stevens translated for them.

Almost with relief, though their faces were grave, they stepped out into the corridor, where an escort waited.

Five minutes later, after proceeding along an inclined gallery that wound ever upward, they were ushered into a vast vaulted chamber lit with a thousand phosphorescent lamps and gleaming with idols of gold and silver, jewels flashing from their eyes.

High in the dome hung a great golden disc, representing the sun. At the far end, above a marble altar, coiled a dragon with tusks of ivory and scales of jade, its eyes two lustrous pearls.

And all about the room thronged priests in fantastic head-dress and long white robes, woven through elaborately with

threads of yellow and green.

At the appearance of the captives, a murmur like a chant rose in the still air. Someone touched a brand to the altar and there was a flash of flame followed by a thin column of smoke that spiraled slowly upward.

Now one of the priests stepped out – the supreme one among them, to judge from the magnificence of his robe – and addressed the trio, speaking slowly, rhythmically.

As his strange, sonorous discourse continued, Professor Stevens grew visibly perturbed. His beard twitched and he shifted uneasily on his feet.

Finally the discourse ceased and the professor replied to it, briefly. Then he turned grave eyes on Larry and Diane.

“What is it?” asked the latter, nervously. “What did the priest say, daddy?”

Her father considered, before replying.

“Naturally, I did not gather everything,” was his slow reply, “but I gathered sufficient to understand what is afoot. First, however, let me explain that the dragon you see over there represents their deity Tlaloc, god of the sea. In more happy circumstances, it would be interesting to note that the name is identified with the Mayan god of the same element.”

He paused, as though loath to go on, then continued:

“At any rate, the Antillians have worshipped Tlaloc principally, since their sun god failed them. They believe he dragged down their empire in his mighty coils, through anger

with them, and will raise it up again if appeased. Therefore they propose today to – ”

“Daddy!” cried Diane, shrinking back in horror, while a chill went up Larry’s spine. “You mean – mean that – ”

“I mean, my poor child, that we are about to be sacrificed to the dragon god of the Antillians.”

The words were no more than uttered, when with a weird chant the Cabiri closed in on their victims and led them with solemn ceremonial toward the altar.

In vain did Professor Stevens protest. Their decision had been made and was irrevocable. Tlaloc must be appeased. Lo, even now he roared for the offering!

They pointed to the dragon, from whose nostrils suddenly issued hissing spurts of flame.

Larry fumed in disgust at the cheap hocus-pocus of it – but the next moment a more violent emotion swept over him as he saw Diane seized and borne swiftly to that loathsome shrine.

But even as he lunged forward, the professor reached his daughter’s side. Throwing himself in front of her, he begged them to spare her, to sacrifice him instead.

The answer of the priests was a blow that knocked the graybeard senseless, and lifting Diane up, half-swooning, they flung her upon the altar.

“Mr. Hunter! Larry!” came her despairing cry.

She struggled up and for a moment her blue eyes opened, met his beseechingly.

That was enough – that and that despairing cry, “Larry!”

With the strength of frenzy, he flung off his captors, rushed to her aid, his hard fists flailing.

The pigmies went down in his path like grain before the scythe. Reaching the altar, he seized the priest whose knife was already upraised, and, lifting him bodily, flung him full into the ugly snout of that snorting dragon.

Then, as a wail of dismay rose from the Cabiri, at this supreme sacrilege, he seized the now unconscious Diane and retreated with her toward the door.

But there spears barred his escape; and now, recovered from the first shock of this fearful affront to their god, the priests started toward him.

Standing at bay, with that limp, tender burden in his arms, Larry awaited the end.

As the maddened horde drew near, she stirred, lifted her pale face and smiled, her eyes still shut.

“Oh, Larry!”

“Diane!”

“You saved me. I won’t forget.”

Then, the smile still lingering, she slipped once more into merciful oblivion, and as Larry held her close to his heart, a new warmth kindled there.

But bitterness burned in his heart, too. He had saved her – won her love, perhaps – only to lose her. It wasn’t fair! Was there no way out?

The priests were close now, their pasty faces leering with fierce anticipation of their revenge, when suddenly, from down the gallery outside that guarded door, came the sharp crash of an explosion, followed by shouts and the rush of feet.

At the sound, the priests trembled, fled backward into the room and fell moaning before their idols, while the quaking guards strove frantically to close the door.

But before they could do so, in burst a half dozen brawny sailors in foreign uniform, bearing in their hands little black bulbs that looked suspiciously like grenades. Shouting in a tongue Larry could not distinguish above the uproar, they advanced upon the retreating guards and priests.

Then, when all were herded in the far corner of the room, the sailors backed toward the door. Motioning for Larry and Diane to clear out, they raised those sinister little missiles, prepared to fling them.

“Wait!” cried Larry, thinking of Professor Stevens.

And releasing Diane, who had revived, he rushed forward, seized the prostrate savant from amid the unresisting Cabiri, and bore him to safety.

“Daddy!” sobbed Diane, swaying to meet them.

“Back!” shouted one of the sailors, shoving them through the door.

The last glimpse Larry had of that fateful room was the horde of priests and guards huddled before their altar, voices lifted in supplication to that hideous dragon god.

Then issued a series of blinding flashes followed by deafening explosions, mingled with shrieks of anguish.

Sickened, he stood there, as the reverberations died away.

Presently, when it was plain no further menace would come from that blasted temple, their rescuers led the trio back down those winding galleries, and through that long, straight tunnel to the smaller pyramid.

Professor Stevens had recovered consciousness by now and was able to walk, with Larry's aid, though a matted clot of blood above his left ear showed the force of the blow he had received.

The way, after reaching the smaller pyramid, led up those other galleries they had mounted the night before.

This time, undoubtedly, they were to be taken before that mysterious usurping emperor. And what would be the result of that audience? Would it but plunge them from the frying pan into the fire, wondered Larry, or would it mean their salvation?

Anyway, he concluded, no fate could be worse than the hideous one they had just escaped. But if only Diane could be spared further anguish!

He glanced at her fondly, as they walked along, and she returned him a warm smile.

Now the way led into a short, level passage ending in a door guarded by two sailors with rifles. They presented arms, as their comrades came up, and flung open the door.

As he stepped inside, Larry blinked in amazement, for he was greeted by electric lights in ornate clusters, richly carpeted

floors, walls hung with modern paintings – and there at the far end, beside a massive desk, stood an imposing personage in foreign naval uniform of high rank, strangely familiar, strangely reminiscent of war days.

Even before the man spoke, in his guttural English, the suspicion those sailors had aroused crystallized itself.

A German! A U-boat commander!

“Greetings, gentlemen – and the little lady,” boomed their host, with heavy affability. “I see that my men were in time. These swine of Antillians are a tricky lot. I must apologize for them – my subjects.”

The last word was pronounced with scathing contempt.

“We return greetings!” said Professor Stevens. “To whom, might I ask, do we owe our lives, and the honor of this interview?”

Larry smiled. The old graybeard was up to his form, all right!

“You are addressing Herr Rolf von Ullrich,” the flattered German replied, adding genially: “commander of one of His Imperial Majesty’s super-submarines during the late war and at present Emperor of Antillia.”

To which the professor replied with dignity that he was greatly honored to make the acquaintance of so exalted a personage, and proceeded in turn to introduce himself and party. But Von Ullrich checked him with a smile.

“The distinguished Professor Stevens and his charming daughter need no introduction, as they are already familiar to me through the American press and radio,” he said. “While as

for Mr. Hunter, your Captain Petersen has already made me acquainted with his name.”

At the mention of the commander of the *Nereid*, all three of them gave a start.

“Then – then my captain and crew are safe?” asked the professor, eagerly.

“Quite,” Von Ullrich assured him. “You will be taken to them presently. But first there are one or two little things you would like explained – yes? Then I shall put to you a proposal, which if acceptable will guarantee your safe departure from my adopted country.”

Whereupon the German traced briefly the events leading up to the present.

During the last months of the war, he had been placed in command of a special U-boat known as the “mystery ship” – designed to resist depth-charges and embodying many other innovations, most of them growing out of his own experience with earlier submarines.

One day, while cruising off the West Indies, in wait for some luckless sugar boat, he had been surprised by a destroyer and forced to submerge so suddenly that his diving gear had jammed and they had gone to the bottom. But the craft had managed to withstand the pressure and they had been able to repair the damage, limping home with a bad leak but otherwise none the worse for the experience.

The leak repaired and the hull further strengthened, he had

set out again. But when in mid-Atlantic the Armistice had come, and rather than return to a defeated country, subject possibly to Allied revenge, he had persuaded his crew to remain out and let their craft be reported missing.

What followed then, though Von Ullrich masked it in polite words, was a story of piracy, until they found by degrees that there was more gold on the bottom of the ocean than the top; and from this to the discovery of the sunken empire where he now held reign was but a step.

They had thought at first they were looting only empty temples – but, finding people there, had easily conquered them, though ruling them, he admitted, was another matter. As, for instance, yesterday, when the priests had interfered with his orders and carried his three chief captives off to sacrifice.

“Where now, but for me, you would be food for their gods!” he ended. “And if you do not find my hospitality altogether to your liking, friends, remember that you came uninvited. In fact, if you will recall, you came despite my explicit warning!”

But since they were here, he told them, they might be willing to repay his good turn with another.

Whereupon Von Ullrich launched into his proposal, which was that Professor Stevens place the *Nereid* at his disposal for visiting the depths at the foot of the plateau, where lay the capital of the empire, he said – a magnificent metropolis known as the City of the Sun and modeled after the great Atlantean capital, the City of the Golden Gates, and the depository of a treasure,

the greedy German believed, that was the ransom of the world.

The professor frowned, and for a moment Larry thought he was going to remind their host that this was not a treasure hunt.

“Why,” he asked instead, “do you not use your own submarine for the purpose?”

“Because for one thing, she will not stand the pressure, nor will our suits,” was the reply. “And for another, she is already laden with treasure, ready for an – er – forced abdication!” with a sardonic laugh.

“Then have you not enough gold already?”

“For myself, yes. But there are my men, you see – and men who have glimpsed the treasures of the earth are not easily satisfied, Professor. But have no fear. You shall accompany us, and, by your aid, shall pay your own ransom.”

Von Ullrich made no mention of the alternative, in case the aid was refused, but the ominous light Larry caught in his cold gray eyes spoke as clearly as words.

So, since there was nothing else to do, Professor Stevens agreed.

Whereupon the audience terminated and they were led from the presence of this arrogant German to another apartment, where they were to meet Captain Petersen and the crew of the *Nereid*.

As they proceeded toward it, under guard, Larry wondered why Von Ullrich had even troubled to make the request, when he held it in his power to take the craft anyway.

But after the first joyful moment of reunion, it was a mystery no longer, for Captain Petersen reported that immediately upon their capture, the commander of the U-boat had tried to force him to reveal the operation of the *Nereid*, but that he had steadfastly refused, even though threatened with torture.

And to think, it came to Larry with a new twinge of shame, that he had suspected this gallant man of mutiny!

That very morning, while Professor Stevens and his party were still exchanging experiences with Captain Petersen and the members of the crew, Von Ullrich sent for them and they gathered with his own men in the small lock-chamber at the base of the pyramid.

There they were provided with temporary suits by their host, since their own – which they brought along – could be inflated only from the *Nereid*.

Beside her, they noted as they emerged in relays, the U-boat was now moored.

Entering their own craft, they got under way at once and headed swiftly westward toward the brink of the plateau. Most of Von Ullrich's crew were with them, though a few had been left behind to guard against any treachery, on the part of the now sullen and aroused populace.

Slipping out over the edge of that precipitous tableland, they tilted her rudders and dove to the abyss below.

Presently the central square of the illuminated panel in the navigating room showed three great concentric circles, enclosed

by a quadrangle that must have been miles on a side – and within this vast sunken fortress lay a city of innumerable pyramids and temples and palaces.

The German's eyes flashed greedily as he peered upon this vision.

“There you are!” he exclaimed, quivering with excitement. “Those circles, that square: what would you judge they were, Professor?”

“I would judge that originally they were the canals bearing the municipal water supply,” Martin Stevens told him quietly, suppressing his own excitement, “for such was said to be the construction of the City of the Golden Gates; but now I judge they are walls raised on those original foundations by the frantic populace, when the submergence first began, in a vain effort to hold back the tides that engulfed them.”

“And do you think they are of gold?”

“Frankly, no; though I have no doubt you will find plenty of that element down there.”

Nor was the prediction wrong, for modern eyes had never seen such a treasure house as they beheld when presently the *Nereid* came to rest outside that ancient four-walled city and they forced their way inside.

Though the walls were not of gold, the inner gates were, and the temples were fairly bursting with the precious metal, as well as rare jewels, the eyes of a thousand idols gleaming with rubies and emeralds.

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