

THE ULTIMATE SALIENT

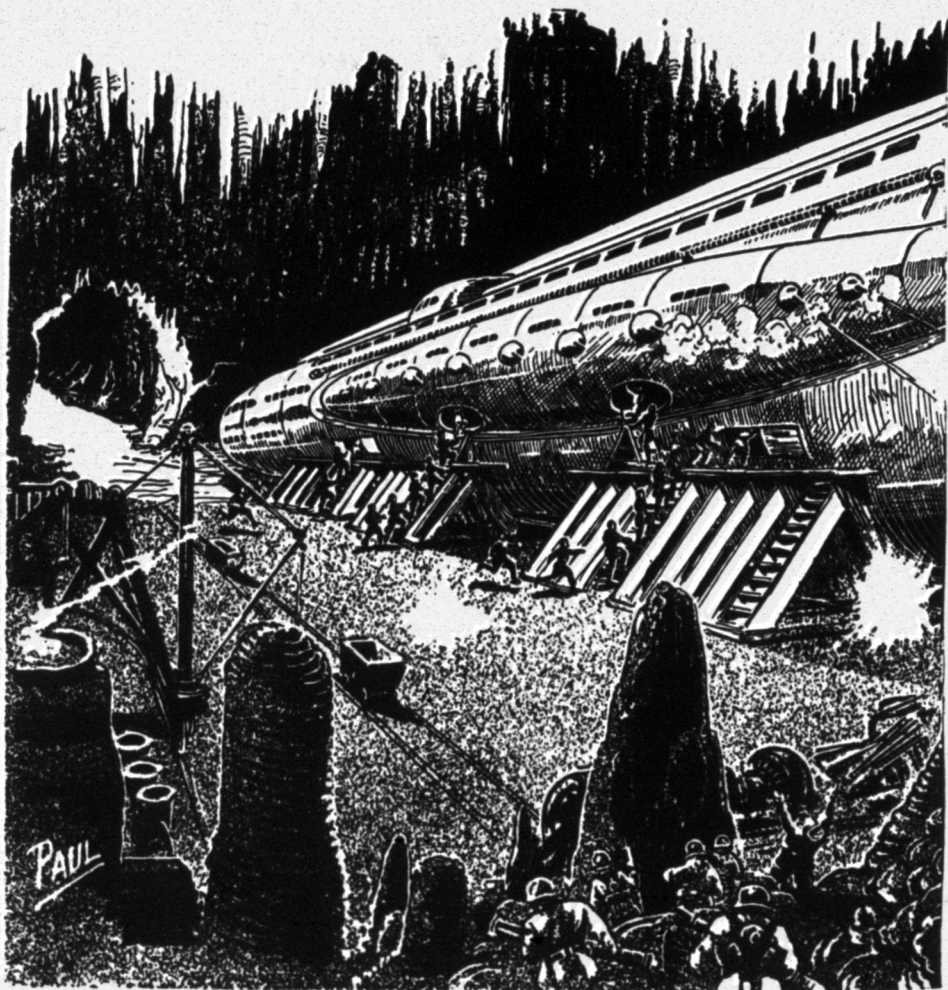
By **NELSON S. BOND**

Brian O'Shea, man of the Future, here is your story. Read it carefully, soldier yet unborn, for upon it—and upon you—will one day rest the fate of all Mankind.

***H**E glanced at me slowly, and a bit sadly, I thought. "I'm sorry, Clinton," he said, "but that won't do. It won't do at all. It will have to be writ-*

ten. You see—you won't be here then. . . ."

I thought at first he was the census-snoop, returning to poke his proboscis into





whatever few stray facts he might have overlooked the first time. My wife was out, and when I saw him coming up the walk, that bulky folder under his arm, I answered the door myself—something I seldom do—sensing a sort of reluctant duty toward the minions of Uncle Sam.

HE was a neat and quiet person. One of those drab, utterly commonplace men who defy description. Neither young nor old, tall nor short, stout nor slender. He had only one outstanding characteristic. An eager intensity, a *piercingness* of gaze that made you feel, somehow, as if his ice-blue eyes stared ever into strange and fathomless depths.

He said, "Mr. Clinton?" and I nodded. "Eben Clinton?" he asked. Then, a trifle breathlessly I thought, "Mr. Clinton, I have here something that I know will prove of the greatest interest to you—"

I got it then. I shook my head. "Sorry, pal. But we don't need some." I started to close the door.

"I—I beg your pardon?" he stammered. "Some?"

"Shoelaces," I told him firmly, "patent can-openers or fancy soaps. Weather-vans, life insurance or magazines." I grinned at him. "I don't *read* the damned things, buddy, I just write for them."

And again I tried to do things to the door. But he beat me to it. There was apology in the way he shrugged his way into the house, but determination in his eyes.

"I know," he said. "That is, I *didn't* know until I read this, but—" He touched the brown envelope, concluded lamely, "it—it's a manuscript—"

Well, that's one of the headaches of being a story-teller. Strange things creep out of the cracks and crevices—most of them bringing with them the Great American Novel. It was spring in Roanoke, and spring fever had claimed me as a victim. I didn't feel like working, anyway. No, not even in my garden. Especially in the turnip patch. Hank Cleaver isn't the only guy who has trouble with his turnips.

I sighed and led the way into my work-room. I said, "Okay, friend. Let's have a look at the masterpiece. . . ."

His first words, after we had settled into comfortable chairs, made me

feel like a dope. I suppose I'm a sort of stuffed shirt, anyway, suffering from a bad case of expansion of the hatband. And I'd been treating my visitor as if he were some peculiar type of bipedal worm. It took all the wind out of my sails when he said, by way of preamble, "If I may introduce myself, Mr. Clinton, I'm Dr. Edgar Winslow of the Psychology Department of—"

He mentioned one of our oldest and most influential Southern universities. I said, "Omigawd!" and broke into an orgy of apologies. But he didn't seem to be listening to me; he was preoccupied with his own explanation.

"I came to you," he said, "because I understand you write stories of—er—pseudo-science?"

I winced.

"Science-fiction," I corrected him. "There's quite a difference, you know."

"Is there?" He frowned. "Oh, yes. I see. Please forgive me. Well, Clinton—" The professorial stamp was upon him; quite unconsciously he addressed me as if I were one of his students. "Well, Clinton, I came to ask a favor of you. I want you to transmit a message to a certain man. I want you to write the message in such a form that it will not be lost—in the form of a fictional narrative."

It takes all kinds to make a world. I gazed at him thoughtfully. I said, "Don't look now, but isn't that doing it the hard way? I'll be glad to help you out. But putting a simple message into story form is—well, why not just let me *tell* the guy? By word of mouth?"

"I'm afraid," he said soberly, "that is impossible. You see, the person to whom this message must go will not be born until the year 1942."

"Nineteen—!" It worked. It threw me off balance for a minute. Then came the dawn. It *was* a gag, after all. My pal Ross being funny from out Chicago way, maybe? Or Palmer, deserting Tark long enough to joyride me over the well-known hurdles? I chuckled. I said, "That's all right, Professor. I'm young; I can wait. Just tell me the name of this unsprouted seedling, and I'll stick around till he gets old enough to talk to. Only the good die young; I expect to live to a ripe old age."

He glanced at me slowly, and a bit

sadly, I thought. "I'm sorry, Clinton," he said, "but that won't do. It won't do at all. It will have to be written. You see—you won't be here then. . . ."

YOU know, it should have been funny. Uproariously, screamingly funny. I should have laughed my crazy head off, given my obviously screwy visitor a smoke and a drink and a clap on the back and said, "Okay, pal. You win the marbles. Come clean, now. Who put you up to this crystal ball stuff? What's the payoff?"

But I didn't, because somehow it wasn't funny after all. There was a deadly seriousness to my visitor's manner; the knuckles of his hands were white upon his knees, his icy blue eyes burned with a tortured regret that was like a dash of water to my mirth.

"I'm sorry, Clinton," he said. "I'm really dreadfully sorry."

I lit a cigarette carefully. In as even a voice as I could muster, I said, "Perhaps you'd like to tell me more? Perhaps you'd better start from the beginning?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I think that would be best." He fingered the thick brown envelope nervously. "The story begins," he said, "and ends—with this manuscript. . . ."

"AS I have already told you," said Dr. Winslow, "my profession is teaching. Psychology is my field. Recently I have given much of my time to research into the lesser-known faculties of the human mind. Experimental psychical research such as that investigated by Prof. J. B. Rhine of Duke. You are undoubtedly familiar with his work?"

"Extra-sensory perception?" I nodded. "Yes. Most fascinating. The results are far from satisfactory, though. And some of his conclusions—"

"You make a common error," said my visitor gravely. "Dr. Rhine has not assumed to draw any conclusions—as yet. He offers only a few, and completely logical, presumptions."

"Dr. Rhine's studies to date, however, have been in the field of extra-sensory perception only. There are other fields of psychical research quite as untouched, and, I have reason to believe, even more important and—fruitful."

"It is in one of these companion fields that I have been laboring. I have been investigating the phenomenon you may know as 'telaesthesia.'"

"You mean," I asked, "telepathy?"

"There is a difference between the two. Telepathy, as defined by Myers in 1882, is 'the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of the recognized channels of sense.' It implies a deliberate, recognized contact between two minds existent at one time."

"Telaesthesia is a more complex meeting of entities. If A, let us say, reaches out and helps himself to the contents of B's mind *without* the knowledge or assistance of B, that process will be called 'telaesthesia.' Unlike telepathy, it knows no barriers of Time. There are hundreds of recorded case histories from which we learn of men of our time who have established telasthetic contact with former forgotten eras."

"And of days to come, as well!" Here Winslow's eyes literally gripped me. "But never, until now, has anyone succeeded in gaining more than a fleeting glimpse into the Time stream of the future. Never before has a man established a contact so deep, so strong, that he could read not one sentence or one paragraph of that which is to be—but an entire chapter, decades long. . . .!"

IT was spring in Roanoke. Outside, warm April sunshine poured down luxuriant gold upon the faint, green buds. My place, *Sans Sou*, lies in a quiet fold between two rolling hills. There was nothing to disturb that quiet now save the boastful warble of a redbird, "Purty! Purty!" and the petulant complaint of a chipmunk in the sycamore.

The sky was a pale, soft blue, cloudless and serene. There were no clouds, and even the delicate fronds of the weeping willow drooped motionless. So it could not have been a storm I heard. Yet as he spoke, a dark shadow seemed to scud across the sky, veiling the sunlight, and the gods made portent in the swell of distant thunder. I felt the short hairs stiffen on my neck, and despite the warmth I shivered.

I said, and why I spoke in a whisper I

cannot tell, "Never before . . . until . . . now?"

"Until now!" he repeated. And suddenly his fingers were swift with eagerness, he fumbled with the flap of the envelope while words raced from his lips. "Several months ago I began to experiment with automatic writing, one of the means by which telaesthetic contact is authenticated.

"At first the results were—as might be expected—faulty. From the autohypnotic synopses into which I was able to project myself, I woke to find nothing on the sheets before me but meaningless scribbles.

"And then, suddenly, I woke one day to find that in my period of subliminal usurpation I had achieved a definite result. I—or someone—had written four full pages. The first four pages of this manuscript!"

Here he handed the manuscript to me. I had time to notice that the writing was full-bodied, flowing. Then Dr. Winslow's words claimed my attention again.

"That was but the beginning. Once having established contact, it was as though I became the *alter ego* of this mysterious correspondent. From that time on, my experiments were graced with success. Whenever I resumed contact, pages were added to the manuscript. By the periodicity of these, I am led to believe that Brian O'Shea is a diarist, and that through some inexplicable phenomenon, it is given to me to be able to set down, telaesthetically, the very words he writes in his diary—"

"You said," I interrupted, "Brian—?"

"O'Shea," nodded Winslow. "Brian O'Shea. A soldier in the army of the Americas, Clinton—in the year 1963 A.D.! His diary is a history of the things to come!"

WHAT I would have said then, I do not know. Maybe I would have said something biting, scurrilous—which I most certainly would have regretted later. Or perhaps, as is most likely, I was momentarily stunned into speechlessness. But I was spared the necessity of speaking. Dr. Winslow had risen; eyes glowing strangely, he touched my shoulder.

"I am going to leave you now, so you may read this manuscript in peace. When you have finished, you will understand why

I came, and know that which must be done.

"You will find that the manuscript begins abruptly at the moment when first I 'contacted' O'Shea. It ends with equal abruptness. There are fragments missing; these may be filled in or rounded out as you consider necessary for the purpose of story-telling. I have made a few slight changes in spelling. Whether O'Shea was—or should I say 'will be?'—a poor scholar, I do not know. The spelling of some words may have changed over a period of trouble-swept decades. . . .

"But whatever surprises lie in store for you, whatever conclusions you draw from the manuscript you are about to read, I beg of you that you play the game of caution. If you end by doubting O'Shea's story, *still* you must convey to him the message the manuscript demands. It is the only way. We must take no chances. I will leave my address—" Here he scribbled a few words on his card; I noted subconsciously that his own handwriting was tiny, crabbed, angular. "When you have finished reading, get in touch with me. No, don't get up!"

For a long moment I stared after him. Is there any way I can tell you how I felt? I, who have written fantasies woven of thin air, now thus to be suddenly thrust into a fantasy beyond my own wildest imaginings? Even more important, is there a way I can make you believe that this is not merely another amusing tale, to be read today and forgotten soon?

The structure of this narrative is mine. I supplied the story form. But is there any way I can convince you that the words which follow are not my own? *I did not write this story!* It is the story of a man who is not yet born, who will not live these happenings for twenty years.

Here is the story of Brian O'Shea, soldier. . . .

II

—STUMBLED and pitched to his knees. I ran to his side and would have carried him, but he shook me off.

"It's too late, O'Shea," he said. "My number's up. Take over. And—" He hiccoughed convulsively and his lips drooled red. "And for Lord's sake, Brian, get the men out of this trap!"

His eyes glazed, then, and his head dropped forward to his chest. Someone tugged at my shoulder. It was Ronnie St. Cloud; he was screaming, above the splatter of shrapnel, "The hills, O'Shea! They've cut us off from the river. The hills are our only way out!"

Danny Wilson was beside him, and Knudsen, and a few more. About us milled a shrieking, terrified throng; it was impossible to tell soldier from civilian. Our uniforms were anything but uniform. We wore whatever serviceable garments we could salvage. I still had—though I suppose it was unrecognizable beneath a layer of caked sweat and mud—an old khaki campaign shirt, but my breeches were a corduroy pair I had found in a demolished farm house near Sistersville. St. Cloud wore the horizon-blue jacket of a *poilu* beside whom he had fought in Belgium. Knudsen looked least military of all in whipcord riding breeches commandeered from the tack rooms of the Greenbriar Inn at White Sulphur.

St. Cloud was right, of course; we might have known from the beginning we couldn't hold Huntington. It was open to the west, and that entire sector, from Chicago to Detroit and spearheading southward to Akron, Cincinnati, Zanesville, was occupied by von Schuler's Death's Head Brigade.

But Captain Elmon, who had whipped our tiny company into some semblance of order after the debacle at Pittsburgh and had brought us safely down the river through Parkersburg and Gallipolis, had believed we might be able to defend this West Virginia river town until reinforcements could reach us from the Fort Knox garrison.

THERE was a school here, a Marshall College, with a layout ideal for our purposes. The buildings were more than a hundred years old, sturdily built; there were dormitories, kitchens, private power plants for heat and light. The campus was encircled by a waist-high brick wall which, sandbagged, made a perfect first-line defense against infantry.

The rugged, mountainous terrain made it impossible for the Toties to bring up mechanized units. Nor could they bring pressure to bear from the Ohio River

which, here, was not only shallow but bedded with rubble from the locks and dams we had blown up.

But—the old, old story. They got us from the air. Their Messerschmitts and Junkers descended on us like a host of locusts, bombed the town ruthlessly; small pursuit planes strafed the fleeing populace with merciless persistence. We couldn't do anything about that, of course. Captain Elmon told me once—he saw volunteer service in Sweden before our country got into it—that in the early days of the war, aircraft confined its operations to military objectives. But I laughed; I knew he was just leading me on. He was a great one for joking, was the captain, even in the darkest hour.

Now Elmon lay dead at my feet; his final command had been that I take over. Get the men out of this trap. There was no time to waste in bootless grieving. Already the sharp bite of sidearms augmented the scream of shellfire . . . which meant the Toties were up to their old trick of parachuting an army of occupation into the beleaguered town.

I shouted swift orders to the others, bade them pass the word around to "take to the hills." There were viaducts under the railroad at 16th and 20th Streets; we used these as our ports of egress. It wasn't a matter of minutes. We gave ground slowly, fighting off the enemy advance from street to street, alley to alley, house to house.

By the old football stadium, now an ammunition dump, I found Bruce MacGregor, the Canadian, and the roly-poly Hollander, Rudy Van Huys. They had impressed the services of a dozen scared civilians, were loading trucks, vans, anything with our meager store of ammunition. MacGregor glanced at me sharply.

"Where's the Old Man, O'Shea?"

"Dead," I told him. "We're on our own. Mac, do you think you can handle this job alone?"

"Why?"

"I want Van Huys to forage. We're retreating to the hills. Use the 20th Street underpass, cut south to the Big Sandy, then west at Louisa. Rudy, get all the food-stuffs you can lay hands on. We're heading for hungry country."

They grunted understanding and I went

on. They were two good men. The chubby Dutchman could smell out provisions like a beagle. Our men wouldn't starve immediately, anyway.

That moment's delay was the only thing that saved my life. I was but a half block away from the underpass when a Totie bomber spotted the stream of refugees flooding out of the city through that viaduct. My ears sang to the screaming whine of his power dive, concussion threw me to the pavement as he loosed his entire rack full of bombs into the heart of the fleeing throng.

They never had a chance. Those who did not die instantly in the explosion were buried a split-second later in the tons of twisted steel and concrete that cascaded down upon them. There was one moment of dreadful cacaphony, hoarse screams of fear mingling with the thunderous roar of the explosion—then a dull, unearthly silence, punctuated only by the muted whimper of a few charred bodies that could not die and the grating slither of broken masonry filling the chinks of the funereal mound.

I ROSE, shaken, nauseated. Others had come up behind me; among them was Devereaux. There were tears in the young Frenchman's eyes. He lifted his head blindly toward the sky, shook an impotent fist.

"*Les sales cochons!* Will it never end, O'Shea, the triumph of these devils? Are honor and mercy dead? Is God dead? My country . . . all of Europe . . . now yours. . . ."

"They haven't taken America," I told him savagely, "yet! Come on. We're leaving town through the 20th Street viaduct. Is that you, Ronnie? What's the news?"

"They've consolidated position along Fifth Avenue, thrown a defense line from Four Pole Creek to the river, infantry advancing north along the river bank to the college. Thompson and a foray squad are trapped in the First National, no use trying to save them. We blew the Toties' brains out, though." St. Cloud grinned ghoulishly. "We had City Hall plaza groundmined. They chose that spot to set up general headquarters."

"Where's Frazier?"

"Dead. Blue Cross."

"Janowsky?"

"Same thing."

"Wilson?"

"He's all right. Or was. He went back toward the college. Said something about having an ace up his sleeve, whatever that means."

I didn't tell him. I didn't have to, for at that moment Danny came racing toward us. He waved his hand at me in a sort of vague salute or greeting, yelled, "If you're ready to get goin', *git!* There'll never be a better time."

"Why?"

"Because the Toties are goin' to have their hands full in a minute. With something too hot to handle. I just happened to remember that college we were bunked in had its own heating plant. A natural gas pipe-line. Since it was the Toties' objective, I thought maybe I'd warm house before they got there. Hold your hats, folks! There she goes!"

There came a sudden, terrific blast of sound. Even at that distance we felt the shuddering repercussion, felt a breath of superheated air fan our cheeks as the natural well Danny had set off let go with a thunderous detonation. Into the gathering dusk shot a writhing spiral of white-hot flame . . . the jagged outlines of oft-bombed houses looked black and ugly against the searing screen.

The flames leaped higher, higher, spread. An oily pall blotted the dying rays of the sun; from afar came to us the crackling agony of a city destroying itself. I watched, spellbound for a moment, then turned to the others.

"Danny is right. This is our chance. Let's go!"

MACGREGOR and Rudy Van Huys were waiting for us in the hills beyond the city. We paused to take stock of equipment, count noses, and plan our next move. Of our company—which had numbered six hundred before Pittsburgh, and had been one hundred and sixty-odd at yesterday evening's rollcall—now there remained but fifty-seven men. Twelve recruits joined us from the clamoring mob of civilian refugees. These were, of course, either graybeards, striplings, or men of dubious value as soldiers. All

men of fighting age and caliber had long ago been called to the colors by wave upon wave of government drafts.

We were a pitiful collection, poorly fed, inadequately armed, raggedly clad. Even so, the civilians were loud in their demand that we remain with them to "protect" them. But this I could not agree to do.

"You'll be safer," I told them, "hiding here in the hills than marching with us. We'll try to contact Preston's brigade at Fort Knox. You have food, water, radios, medical supplies. Hide out, keep living and—keep hoping!"

And so we left them. They must have numbered three thousand, mostly women and children. A few tried to follow, but I quickened the pace. The last weeping woman abandoned the pursuit after five miles; I saw her fall to earth, beating the insensate soil with weary, hopeless fists.

Beside me marched Danny Wilson. He was a reckless, devil-may-care lad, was Danny. Even in the thick of battle his ruddy features were habitually wreathed in a grin. But it had deserted him now. He said soberly, "Maybe we should have stayed with them, Brian, boy. It's a hard row to hoe."

"We can't fight a war in small detachments," I told him grimly. "You know that. Mexico tried it, and now their country is under Totie rule. Nova Scotia tried it, and now the swastika flies there. Our only hope is to concentrate, meet them somewhere in one decisive battle."

"I suppose you're right. We go to join Preston?"

"Yes. It's the general concentration point. Elmon got instructions by radio just before he went west. Jackson is bringing up his army from the Gulf, Davies is marching in from Springfield. They say three flights are taking off from Fort Sill; we'll have a small air force. If we can beat the Toties off at Louisville, we'll cut their communications line from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, hold the Ohio."

That night we slept along the Big Sandy. Before we bivouacked I broke our little company into six squads, each of eleven men, each headed by a veteran on whom I knew I could depend. I appointed Danny Wilson and Ronnie St. Cloud as my lieutenants. In arranging the squads, I tried to place the men according to na-

tionality under one of their own race.

Raoul Devereaux led one of the French squads, while Anatole LeBrun the other. That would have been funny a few years ago, when the army was still organized under the caste basis, because Devereaux used to be a captain and LeBrun a common private. But that old "officer and gentleman by Act of Congress" stuff had gone overboard a long time ago. Now we picked our leaders by their leadership ability.

Ian Pelham-Jones, the Britisher, and Bruce MacGregor headed two English-speaking squads; Rudy Van Huys commanded a group of Dutch and Belgians; the tall Norwegian, Ingolf Knudsen, led a collection of assorted Scandinavians. Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, Danes—Lord, there was a tough outfit!

And so we hit the trail. There's not much use telling about the days that followed. We marched and slept and ate and marched again. We were spotted once by a Totie spyplane; he came down to do a little plain and fancy strafing but we had the advantage of broken terrain. We took to cover and turned his crate into a colander before he decided he'd had enough. Lars Frynge, the Swedish sharpshooter, claims he punctured the pilot as well as the plane, but I wouldn't know about that. Though it's true that he did wobble as he flew away.

WE avoided Lexington, cutting south through Campton and Irvine. We picked up a railroad at Lancaster. Joe Sanders, a native of these parts, said it was a part of the old Louisville & Nashville. If it were in operation, he said, it would take us right to our destination. But that was like saying if we had wings we could fly. The rails were twisted ribbons of steel; in some places the roadbed had been so completely eradicated you would never know it had been there.

We saw people from time to time, but mostly in the small towns. They came out to cheer us as we marched through, offered us what little they had in the way of fresh water, barley bread, clothing that would never be used, now, by sons, husbands, brothers, who had fought their final battle. I got a fine new sweater in one village. In another we had an odd expe-

rience. A white-haired granddame insisted we accept a flag she had sewn for us. A funny-looking red flag with blue diagonal cross-bars and thirteen white stars. We used it later to bury Johnny Grant. He died of a delayed gas hemorrhage.

The larger towns were deserted. We saw only one man in Danville. A scrawny, long-haired weasel skulking through the ruins of what had once been an A & P supermarket. Bruce MacGregor took a shot at him, but I knocked his rifle up. The bullet whistled over the man's head, and he scurried away like a sick, desperate rabbit. I knew there was a G.O. to shoot all looters on sight, but the time had passed, I told Mac, to concern ourselves with such trivialities. Ammunition was too precious.

And, anyway, if he didn't find the buried provisions, maybe the enemy would.

The seventh night out, we camped in the woods north of Bardstown, just a few yards off what had once been a main highway. I was beginning to smell smoke. Tomorrow we would join the main garrison, get fresh clothing and equipment and be assigned our duties in the projected offensive. That is, I suppose, why I was sleepless.

We had stumbled across a deserted tobacco shed the day before. The brown leaves were old, parched, crumbling, but it was better than the hay-and-alfalfa mixture they had given us up North. I rolled myself a cigarette and was sitting by the side of the road when suddenly I heard it. The sound of an approaching automobile.

A moment later moonlight glistened on metal; I saw it picking its slow, lightless way over the cracked asphalt. My heart leaped. This must be a car from Louisville. I ran down to the road, stood waiting eagerly. It approached at a snail's pace, but in the gloom the driver must have had all he could do to watch the road without keeping an eye peeled for vagabond troops, for when, as it came beside me, I cried a greeting and reached for the door, there came a startled sound from within, the motor roared stridently, and the car leaped forward, almost wrenching my arm from its socket.

Somehow I managed to hold on, though the automobile bounced and jarred crazily

as it struck deep ruts in the roadbed. My head glanced metal and I saw whirling stars. "Hey!" I yelled. "What the almighty hell are you trying to do! Take it easy!"

Brakes squealed; the car jolted to a stop. And from the interior a voice, high-pitched with relief, cried:

"You—you're an American! Thank Heaven!"

Then a slim form collapsed suddenly over the wheel. I yanked the door open, dragging the unconscious driver from the cab. He must be, I thought, wounded. He must be—

But it wasn't a "he" at all. As the body fell back limply over my arm, a campaign hat tumbled earthward. Soft brown hair cascaded from beneath it. The driver was a girl!

I had ammonia tubes in my first-aid kit. I snapped one beneath her nose, jolted her back to awareness. And she proved her femininity by coming out of it with a question on her lips.

"Who—who are you?"

"O'Shea," I said, "commanding a detachment from the Army of the Upper Ohio. Marching to join Preston's brigade at Louisville. But never mind that. Who are you? Where do you think you're going?"

She said, "Louisville!" In the darkness her face was a white blur, drab, expressionless, but there was a touch of hysteria to her voice. "Louisville! But haven't you got a radio? Didn't you know—"

We hadn't. It didn't make sense. As she faltered, I snapped, "Know what? Go on!"

"Louisville has fallen. The Toties have taken Fort Knox. Our troops are destroyed, the government has fled, and the Army of the Democracies is in utter rout!"

I stared at her numbly. In the black of the woods a nightjar screamed a single, discordant taunt. . . .

III

THE commotion had roused most of the others. Quiet forms in the midnight, they had drifted to the road. Wilson spoke now. He said, "That's the end, then. If she's right, Brian, the war is over. And we've lost."

I said to the girl, "How about it?"

She shook her head.

"I'm afraid so. The last reports I heard, they had seized the Mississippi, cut all contact between our Eastern and Western armies. The Japs control California and Nevada. There was a terrific battle being waged at Albuquerque. The Russian navy holds the Great Lakes. Everywhere you hear the same story."

Pelham-Jones demanded harshly, "St. Louis? Did you hear anything about—?"

"Wiped out to a man. It was caught in a vise. The Germans from the east, the Italians from the north."

Pelham-Jones said, "I see," quietly. He turned away. His shoulders looked heavy. He had a younger brother at St. Louis. Van Huys looked at the girl suspiciously.

"How do we know she's telling the truth, O'Shea? It may be more lies. She may be a Totie spy."

I said, "You have your dent?"

She nodded and handed it to me. I flashed my light on it. It was authentic, all right. The picture on the tiny metal identification tag was an image of her; the name beneath was *Maureen Joyce*. She was tagged as a WAIF, a member of the Women's Auxiliary Intelligence Force. I gave it back to her.

"Very good, Miss Joyce. Sorry. We can't afford to take chances, though. You understand, I'm sure. But—" My curiosity made me exceed my authority. "But what are you doing here? Surely you wouldn't be attempting to escape the Toties in this direction? If they hold the east?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then, carefully, "I am acting under orders, Captain O'Shea. They were supposed to be *secret* orders. But in view of what has happened—" She made up her mind. "It would be better for more than one to know. In case—in case anything should happen to me.

"You've heard of Dr. Mallory?"

"Thomas Mallory?" I said. "The physicist? The one who pestered the daylighters out of the government about some crack-brained invention during the early days of the war? Is he the one you mean?"

"Yes. The government isn't too sure, now, that it acted wisely in refusing to listen to his plan. But you know how it was for a while. Miracle men flooded the

War Department with fantastic ideas for 'smashing the enemy.'

"Only, in this last extremity, the War Department decided to investigate Mallory's claim. As a last resort. I was commissioned to find him, bring him to Louisville. But now—" Uncertainly. "Now I don't know just what I ought to do. Even if he has a plan, and a good one, there is no one to whom we can communicate it."

SURPRISINGLY, it was Danny Wilson who interrupted.

"Except," he said suddenly, "us!" He turned to me. "Brian, it would be suicide for us to go on to Louisville—and there's no place else to go. We might as well make this our job. We have everything to gain, nothing to lose."

"Do you," I asked the girl, "know where Mallory is?"

"Only roughly. Somewhere in the hills of the upper Cumberland. I plan to comb the neighborhood—"

The Kentuckian, Joe Sanders, edged forward.

"Don't need to do no combin'," he drawled. "Reckon I c'n help. This yere Mall'ry—he a big man? White hair? Red complected?"

"Why—why, yes. I believe so."

"Mmm. Figgered it'd be the same one. I know him. Usta fish near his place when I was a colt. He come there in the summertime, big house in Cleft Canyon on Mount Rydell. I 'member we usta call him the 'devil Doc,' 'count of there was alluz queer goin's-on at his place. Well, Cap'n?"

He squinted at me. I weighed the chances briefly. It was probably a wild goose chase. On the other hand, it was useless, as Danny had pointed out, to throw our little force against the might of the Toties who now held Fort Knox. And there was a faint, insane possibility that Dr. Mallory had a 'plan'—an invention, maybe—that would enable us to form the nucleus of a new army that, reorganized, would sweep the invaders from our land. . . .

"We'll do it!" I said. "We'll march at dawn!"

We had to leave the car there on the road and strike out across country. It

was the shortest and safest way to Cleft Canyon. Now that the Toties had made a clean sweep of the East, the roads were no longer open to us. As in Mexico five years ago, as in Ontario, the Maritimes, the New England States year before last, as in Illinois last year, floods of Totie scavengers were pouring through the conquered land in a series of "mop up" operations.

Time and again aircraft droning over our heads sent us scurrying to cover. Once a flight surprised us in an open field. That's when we lost Johnny Grant and three other men. Nearby woods saved the rest of us.

Before we abandoned the car, I had the men strip it of everything we could possibly use. Upholstery, tires, all electrical accessories, including the televisé. It was this last that kept us going, kept our spirits aflame with determination, even when the trail was hardest. Wherever we spun the dial we found the ether crackling with the boasts of the enemy; each scene pictured on the plate was one calculated to tighten the already grim jaws of my men.

The Totie banner floated everywhere. It was a blood-red flag; in the center was a quartered circle. In each of these segments was a symbol of one of the four totalitarian states that had welded to form the Totie army. Swastika and crimson sun, side by side with the Italian fasces and Soviet hammer-and-sickle. The Big Four that, irresistibly combined, had ground the principles of democracy under foot.

It made me bitter, but it made me heart-sick, too. I could not help wondering how, or why, my father and those of his generation had been so blind as not to see the shadow of the inevitable creeping toward them.

Surely they must have known, as early as 1940, that Sweden would not be the last neutral to be drawn into the conflict? Even then there must have been rumblings in the Balkans, on the Mediterranean? Did they not guess that Italy and Russia were just waiting until the hour was ripe, that Japan's leisurely conquest of China was a mere military exercise to keep Nippon warmed up until the day should arrive for a blow at the Pacific Islands?

My own country was perhaps the worst

offender. Had it not been told by a wise man, centuries before that, "In Union there is Strength?" Yet America, like Switzerland and Portugal, Greece and Egypt, played ostrich. Hoping against all sane hope that each succeeding conquest would so weaken the Toties that the few actively fighting democracies could win out in the end.

I remember, as a child, the gleeful shouting in the streets of America when news reached us across the Atlantic that Hitler had been assassinated. I remember my father saying to a neighbor, "That's the last of the mad dogs. Stalin and Mussolini are gone; now Hitler. There'll be an armistice within a month. After that—"

I wonder if Dad ever thought of that when he fought with his regiment at Buf-falo. The true facts must have come to him as a series of staggering blows. The sudden collapse of the Franco-British union when Russia and Italy, selecting their moment with diabolic accuracy of timing, threw their support to Germany. The three mad dogs were dead, yes, but four younger, madder dogs took their place. Himmler, Ciano, Molotov, and Kashatuku. The crushing of India, the rape of Africa, the shadow of the crimson banner stretching across the Atlantic Ocean to touch Brazil.

It was too late then to evoke the Monroe Doctrine. Too late to throw defenses about our own shore line. Canada owned but a shell of its former man power, Mexico was a hotbed of Totie sympathizers. Our militia was unready, theirs fired for twelve years in the flaming crucible of war.

These were not pleasant memories I had as our small band marched toward Mal-lory's hide-out in the hills. But I could not escape them. I, myself, had witnessed the siege of New York, had seen Philadelphia blown to shards by the mighty Armada that swept up the Delaware, had heard the last, defiant cry of the defenders of Los Angeles—

UNFORTUNATELY, here a portion of the manuscript is missing. To Brian O'Shea the events mentioned must have been so commonly known as to render unnecessary the mentioning of specific dates. Dr. Winslow places the probable

date of the invasion of the United States after 1959, but this may vary as much as two years, one way or the other.

"—low!" warned Sanders. "I don't think he's seen us!"

Danny's eyes had widened; he was pointing eastward.

"He's not looking for us! There's what he's waiting for. Look! An American plane!"

I was soaked to the skin, cold and miserable. The damned Totie scout might, I found myself thinking unreasonably, have waited just five more minutes before sneaking up over the horizon. Five more minutes and we would have finished fording this stream, would be up the rise and through the tangle of elm that Joe Sanders claimed concealed the place that was our destination.

Beside me, Maureen sneezed. The poor kid was wet, bedraggled. I don't know how she contrived to still appear beautiful under such circumstances. Somewhere behind me, I heard the snick of a breech-bolt. I turned in time to find LeBrun raising his rifle. I slapped it down.

"No, you idiot!"

He looked sulky.

"He's low, O'Shea. I can lay one in his gas tank."

"And if you miss," I hissed, "you'll have the whole damned Totie army down around our ears. We've come this far without being caught. We'll take no risks now."

Still, I knew how he felt. It was rotten to crouch there, knee-deep in icy mountain water, concealed by a vault of foliage, watching one of our planes—one of what must be a very, very few of our planes—drive blindly into the path of a hedge-hopping Totie fighter that had spotted its prey and was now waiting for it.

Then, suddenly, there was the roar of motors. The American plane had come within range. The Totie plane broke from concealment, spun skyward in a swift, dizzying burst of motion. White puffs broke from its nose seconds before our ears caught the spiteful chatter of machine-gun fire.

It caught the American flyer off guard. Something broke from his left wing, flapped crazily in the wind, as he jammed his plane—more by instinct than anything

else—into a dive. The Totie was on his tail in an instant. And we stood there, helpless, watching a sweet, if one-sided, air battle.

The Totie plane was superior, of course. But our pilot was a master. Time and again he wriggled out from under the other's nose just as it seemed he would be riddled into fragments. Once he managed to climb high enough to try a few shots of his own, but the Totie Immelmanned, was back on his tail before he could even get his sights trained.

It ended as suddenly as it had begun. One minute they were spiraling for position, whirling around each other like a pair of strange, snarling dogs. The next there came a thin streamer of smoke from the tail of the American plane; a streamer that thickened to a cloud as we watched, became flame-shot black, choking, menacing.

The Totie fired a final burst into the damaged plane. It went into a spin. Something dark appeared from a gap over the fuselage, it was the pilot climbing free. For what seemed an endless moment he poised there, then he was a brown chip on the blue breast of the sky, a chip that hurtled headlong to earth. Beside me Maureen gasped; I felt her shoulder tense against mine.

Then a white mushroom blossomed suddenly; I choked a word of profanity that somehow I didn't mean to be profane. The parachute, bloated with air, zigzagged languidly to the ground. The pilot was halfway down when his plane crashed. Flames leaped in a wooded thicket across the rise. The Totie airman circled several times. Then, apparently content, he gunned his ship, disappeared northward.

MacGregor frowned. "They must be confident. First Totie I ever saw who didn't gun a parachuter."

WE left our hiding place, then; broke into the open where the caterpillar could see us. He was a good flyer. He sighted us, played his cords expertly, and landed less than an eighth of a mile from where we had gathered. A couple of our men helped him fight down the still-struggling chute; he kicked himself loose from the straps and approached me.

"Won't have any more use for that," he

said ruefully. "You're the leader here? My name's Krassner. Jake Krassner. Fourth Aerial Combat."

I introduced him around. Danny Wilson said eagerly, "Did you say the Fourth? I knew a guy flew with them. Name of Tommy Bryce. From Hoboken. You know him?"

Krassner shook his head. He had hard, black eyes, a little close. Crisp hair. Broad shoulders. He was a good-looking chap. A little haughty, maybe. But airmen are like that, especially to ground-huggers.

"I'm sorry. Our personnel has changed a lot. Lately," he added grimly. He looked at me. "I seem to have picked a hell of a place to get shot down, Captain. What on earth are you doing in this desolate spot?"

Van Huys chuckled, and Joe Sanders grinned.

"Don't look like much from topside, eh, Krassner? I figured it wouldn't. The old man's a fox. He spent more than twenty years givin' this hideout the damndest coat of natch'ral camouflage you ever seen."

"Old man?" said Krassner curiously. "Camouflage?"

Maureen touched my arm. She whispered, "Maybe you had better not tell him, Brian. It's our secret—"

I started to tell her what the hell. He was one of us, and there were mighty few of us left. We needed all the men we could get. And Krassner looked like a man. I didn't get a chance to say any of this, though. For as we talked, we had continued to follow Sanders. Joe was now picking his way confidently through an opening in the tangle of foliage.

Sunlight dimmed as we entered a huge, cleared space entirely roofed by an interwoven network of boughs. In this space was a wide, rambling, one-story house, adjoined by a number of inexplicable sheds. And on the veranda of the house stood a man I recognized instantly. It was Dr. Thomas Mallory.

IV

MALLORY made us welcome. More than that, he seemed positively delighted that we had come. He showed anxiety on only one point.

"No one saw you come here, Captain? You're sure of that?"

"Positive," I told him.

"Good!" He called, and assistants came from inside to lead my men to quarters. I was surprised, as well as a little shocked and disappointed, to discover the number of women attached to Dr. Mallory's household. There were a few men, but for the most part he seemed to have surrounded himself with girls. Not only that, but with young and pretty girls!

But this was no time to sit in judgment on a man's morality. We had an important mission. Maureen broached the subject as soon as we three were rid of the others.

"You must know why we're here, Dr. Mallory. We did not find this place by chance. We came because you are the last hope of our country. Too late, the government realizes it needs the invention you offered it five years ago."

Mallory shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, my child—"

"You can't refuse, Doctor!" I broke in. "Don't you understand? The Toties overrun all the Americas. Democracy is dead unless—"

He raised a weary hand.

"Then democracy is dead, O'Shea. Not even I can restore its life. I can say only one thing; I am glad from the bottom of my heart that the government refused to listen to me when first I approached the War Department with my plan."

"Glad? Why?"

"Because I was guilty of that which a scientist must ever dread. I jumped to a hasty conclusion, based on insufficient evidence. My conclusion was wrong, my plan—" He sighed, turned toward a door. "But come. I will show you."

HE led the way from his office into an adjoining room; a laboratory, spotless, white-gleaming. About the walls of the laboratory were a number of cages. In some of these were small animals; I saw monkeys, guinea pigs, a squirrel, rabbits. Some were active, eating, shuffling about, looking at us with bright, inquisitive eyes. Others lay apparently asleep.

But these I noticed with some remote part of my mind. For the focal point of attention was a glass-walled case in the

center of the room; a topless case in which lay the body of a man. Maureen started. She said, "Dead, Doctor?"

"He is not dead," replied Mallory somberly. "He is the result of my dreadful error of judgment. These others—" He nodded toward the cages. "—were the experiments that misled me. This man, one of my assistants who trusted me and was daring enough to become my first human experiment, sleeps. How long he will continue to sleep, I cannot guess. But it may be for one, two, or even more decades!"

"Sleeps!" I said. But Maureen, with a flash of that swift intuition I had seen before, guessed the answer. She said, "Anaesthesia! That was your plan, Dr. Mallory!"

"Yes, my child. That was my plan. I am a scientist, but five years ago I was sociologist enough to recognize that the United States could not match the power of the Totalitarians. I realized, even then, that the ending we have seen come to pass was inevitable. I set myself the task of finding a way to meet the impending menace.

"I found the answer in a new form of anaesthetic. I will not tell you its formula. It is a dismal failure—but that I did not know. I thought it was a great success. When I permitted small animals—those you see before you—to inhale some of the delicate granules—"

"Granules, Doctor?"

"Yes. It was a revolutionary means of inducing unconsciousness. When I permitted the animals to inhale these granules, they fell into a soft, deep, harmless slumber. I timed their periods of sleep carefully, discovered the anaesthetic rendered them senseless over periods ranging from one to two weeks.

"It was then, heady with success, I offered my plan to the government. It was, I thought, so simple. Our planes would scatter the granules over enemy terrain—" He laughed shortly, mirthlessly. "—and the enemy would fall into deep slumber. While they were thus incapacitated, our men, garbed in specially constructed suits, wearing protective masks, could walk amongst them, disarm them, imprison them. The war would be ended bloodlessly—"

I stared at him incredulously. I said, "But—but if it really works that way, Dr. Mallory, that is the weapon we need!"

"Yes, my boy. But it doesn't work that way. I have told you I made an error in judgment. I assumed that Man, being a higher animal than those on which I experimented, would experience the same, or a slightly less drastic reaction than that experienced by the animals. I did not take into consideration the fact that Man is also a more highly integrated animal. That he is weaker, in some respects.

"When Williamson, here, volunteered to become a human guinea pig, I accepted his offer. I exposed him to the granules. He breathed deeply, fell asleep—" Dr. Mallory shook his head. "And that was more than four years ago. He still sleeps!"

I SAID, "I understand now, Doctor, why you consider your plan a failure. But you speak as a scientist and a humanitarian who would shudder at seeing thousands of men sleep for a decade. I am a soldier. I have met War face to face, and have learned, by bitter experience, that there is no weapon too dreadful to use if the results are satisfactory.

"What if your granules *do* put the Toties to sleep for years instead of days? Isn't that better than seeing our countrymen die beneath the sword of the aggressor? Unless we act swiftly, this war is over. Freedom, liberty, equality of men, all the things we believe in, are doomed. But there is yet time to equip a few of our troops with the suits and masks you speak of, turn loose your slumber-granules to the winds.

"Even though thousands of our own men share the sleep of the enemy, we can go through with the disarmament program you planned. When our foes awaken, a decade hence, they will have lost their leaders and their war. When our friends waken we will take them, triumphantly, to the homes and cities we have rebuilt while they slumbered."

Dr. Mallory said, "I wish it were as simple as that, O'Shea. But there is one other thing you do not know. The granules that are my anaesthetic are more than mere granules. They are spores. Worse—they are self-propagating spores!"

He pointed to a trebly barred and locked door opening on one wall of the laboratory. For the first time there was nervousness in his voice.

"There is a storeroom beyond that door, O'Shea. In that storeroom, quiescent in sterile containers, lie spores. Countless thousands, millions of them. They are the granules I made for the government before I discovered their real nature. There lies beyond that door a weapon potent enough to end this war immediately—"

He paused suddenly. We had all heard it, the squeak of a worn hinge, the shuffle of a footstep. I motioned Mallory to silence, tiptoed to the office door and flung it open.

The aviator, Krassner, stood there. He was smiling. He said, "Ah, there you are, Captain! I was looking for you. I wanted to ask if—"

"How long have you been here?" I asked angrily.

"How long? Why—just a minute or so. I—"

"Were you listening to our conversation?"

He stiffened; a flush highlighted his cheek bones.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he said.

"Because, if you were—" Dr. Mallory was beside me, his hand was on my arm. I hesitated. There was no sense in being so violently suspicious. I said, "Well, never mind. Go back to your quarters, Krassner. I'll be with you shortly."

"Very good, sir!" He saluted, turned and stalked from the office, a picture of affronted honor and dignity. I felt somewhat ashamed of myself.

Mallory said, "It really doesn't matter whether he heard us or not, O'Shea. What I was about to say is, there lies beyond that door a weapon potent enough to end the war immediately—but it must never be used. For once loosed to the winds, those abominable spores would not only end this war, they would still all animal life on the face of Earth. I have said they were self-propagating. Each new generation of spores would deepen the slumber into which mankind had been soothed by the first—"

I said, "But why keep them, Doctor?"

"I don't quite know, O'Shea. Perhaps I have done so because I am, at heart, more

emotional than a true scientist should be. Perhaps I have a secret fear that there may come a day when I shall be forced to play God, give mankind its release from the chains of the tyrant."

Maureen shuddered.

"No, Doctor! You mustn't even think of that. Things look black now, but they can't go on like this forever. Right and truth and liberty will prevail in the end. There must be some other way to escape—"

"There is," said Dr. Mallory quietly. "There is another way. A plan I have been working on ever since the failure of my first. There is one last refuge to which they cannot follow us."

I said, "I don't understand, Doctor. Do you mean Antarctica?"

His grave eyes captured, held mine.

"No," he said. "A place more remote than even that. I mean, O'Shea—the moon!"

I KNEW, then, suddenly and with a great, overwhelming despair, that our journey to Cleft Canyon had been a vain one. As a last resort we had sought the hidden laboratory of one who had been a great scientist. We had found a madman.

I said, "Maureen—" and I suppose there was regret in my voice.

But Mallory stopped me. "A moment, O'Shea. I'm not insane. Nor is my plan—as you undoubtedly think—impossible. Did you ever hear the name of Frazier Wrenn?"

The name was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place it. Maureen could, and did. She said, curiously. "Isn't he the traitor who disappeared from Earth with a group of followers? Years ago? From a laboratory out west somewhere?"

"Yes, my dear. In 1939. From Arizona. But whether he and his tiny band were traitors is something future generations must decide. Wrenn hated war; foresaw what must come of Earth's second Armageddon. (He fled Earth, his destination was the planet Venus, his purpose to maintain, on that wild colony, a vestige of culture and civilization until Earth's feverish self-destruction should end.)"

Mallory sighed. "We do not know what has become of Wrenn's expedition. There

has been no remotest sign, no signal—”

I said, “Venus! But, Doctor, that means *spaceflight!*”

“Yes, Brian. I was to have been a member of that gallant party. But I was delayed in reaching their Arizona rendezvous, and their departure was hastened by an unexpected attack. They left without me. But, fortunately, Wrenn had confided in me the plans for his spaceship. For years, now, with what scraps of metal I could steal from a war-ridden, metal-hungry humanity, I have been secretly building a small duplicate of the *Goddard*.

“You wonder where it is hidden? Our Kentucky hills conceal great caverns, Brian. There is one beneath the hill on which this house stands. Below us—as I will show you shortly—is a gigantic cave. In it is my almost completed craft.”

I had not noticed that Maureen’s hand was in mine until I felt its soft whiteness tense within my grasp. She cried, “But why the moon, Dr. Mallory? Why not follow the Wrenn expedition—?”

“You ignore a major factor, my dear. Celestial mechanics. Wrenn’s flight was planned for a time when Venus and Earth were in conjunction. Such is not the case now. Earth approaches the Sun, while Venus is at aphelion. And my craft is, as I have said, but a small copy of Wrenn’s. Moreover, I have been able to collect only a small amount of fuel.

“There is only one body within our cruising range—Earth’s moon. It is my dream that we shall go there—”

I had been listening silently, stunned. Now I came to my senses.

“No, Doctor! I can listen to no more. You forget I am a soldier of the United States army.”

“The government has fallen; the last of the democracies is crushed beneath the conqueror’s heel, Brian, lad.”

“It will rise again. In the hinterlands—”

“—are Totalitarian troops.”

“There are still eighty million Americans—”

“And a hundred million aggressors!” He put a hand on my shoulder. “Don’t you see, Brian, this is how you can best serve your country? Make this flight with me. We will take your men and my fol-

lowers—two score men and the women you have already seen—and form a colony on the Moon.

“We will return, then, secretly, for more Americans. And more, and more. We will transfer our democracy to a new soil, there grow in strength and power and wisdom until some day we can reclaim our heritage.”

Despite my training, I could not help but be convinced. I said, shaken, “But astronomers tell us the Moon is a barren, lifeless world?”

“For the most part, it is. But the Caltech telescope indicates that air still lingers in the depths of the hollow craters. And in underground caverns. Water can be synthesized. It will be no easy existence, but it will be—”

“The ultimate salient!” breathed Maureen at my side. “The last line of defense for freedom’s children! Brian, Dr. Mallory is right! We must do this thing!”

He looked at me hopefully. “Well, Brian O’Shea?”

I took a deep breath. “When does our flight depart?”

V

AT Dr. Mallory’s suggestion, I did not tell my men too much about our plans. “With so much at stake, O’Shea,” he said, “the less they know the better it will be.”

But they did not ask to know much. They were good men; they trusted me. And if they chafed a little at the enforced idleness of the next week, the rest must have been a welcome surcease from months of fighting. Only one man failed to share their calm acceptance of my orders. Krassner. He told me, sulkily, “There’s something going on around here, O’Shea. And, damn it, I have a right to know what it is. As a fellow officer—”

“I respect your brevet, Krassner,” I told him somewhat curtly, “but for the present I must ask you to remember that you are attached to this division through courtesy only, and have no authority. In a few more days, now, I will be at liberty to explain everything.”

He had to be satisfied with that. Though it was the nature of the man to be snoopy; several times he was observed prowling

around the grounds, searching some clue as to Doctor Mallory's well-concealed secret.

He was chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, of course. A man might have searched for months without finding the entrance to Mallory's underground workshops. Mallory admitted Wilson and St. Cloud, my lieutenants, to his confidence. He took us to the cavern wherein was being constructed the spaceship.

The gateway to the depths was that which appeared to be a photographer's dark-room. Once inside, Mallory pressed certain carved ornaments, the entire farther wall slid back, and there stretched before us a smooth, well-lighted passage leading downward at a gentle incline.

We must have followed this more than a half mile before we debouched into the main cavern; a mighty, vaulted chamber, a huge bubble of emptiness blown in the solid mountain centuries ago when Earth was in the travail of making.

But it was not this natural wonder that made me gasp. I had seen others; I had, indeed, once taken refuge for four weeks with the Ninth Artillery in Luray. That which brought an exclamation to my lips was the shimmering monster braced on an exoskeleton of girders in the middle of the chamber. A gigantic, tear-shaped rocket-ship, stern jets lifted some feet off the ground, streamlined nose pointing at the roof of the cave.

About it, in and around it, sweating men fretted, worried, labored, like so many restless bees. Here the brief chatter of a riveting machine woke snarling echoes as a final plate was welded into place; there a master electrician wove an intricate network of wires into some obscure purpose. In still another place, a strong-thewed gang trundled seemingly endless trains of supplies into the ship's capacious holds.

Dr. Mallory smiled at the expressions on our faces, and there was pardonable pride in his smile.

"There, my friends," he said quietly, "is the *Jefferson*."

"*Jefferson*?" repeated Maureen wonderingly.

"Named for him who, in our country's infancy, wrote down in blazing words the principles on which all democracy is based. The inherent right of men to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Once

his words showed us the way. Now his name shall lead us to a new civilization."

"Amen!" said Danny Wilson piously. Then, "Now can we have a look at her? I mean *him*, Doctor?"

Knowing every nook and cranny, berth and hold, turret and gun-chamber of the *Jefferson* as I do now, it is hard to remember my feelings on that day when first I strode her permalloy decks. Even so, I can recall the vast wonder that engulfed me as Dr. Mallory led us through the ship, pointing out the engines, the control-rooms, the Spartan simplicity of the living quarters, the well-equipped kitchen and compact storage bins. There was much I did not understand until long afterward. Permalloy itself was a novelty to me. The metal had been invented, Mallory said, by a German scientist. One of the old school. A Doktor Eric von Adlund.

"I do not know what has become of him. Perhaps he, like the other peace-loving great of his race, has long since been liquidated by the Totalitarians."

SO said Dr. Mallory sadly. And he tried to explain the operation of the small, inconceivably powerful, atomic motors, the invention of Frazier Wrenn. It was a concept so novel, yet so simple, that it staggered us all. But I could see how, without first having a knowledge of the heretofore unknown element *inektron* (the spelling of this important word seems to have confused Brian O'Shea. In the manuscript it is incomprehensibly scribbled. Dr. Winslow suggests the philological similarity of such words as "inertron" and "inactron"? NSB) man might never have discovered the long-sought power of the atom.

St. Cloud, frankly at sea as regarded scientific matters, was delighted with the military efficiency of the ship. I could see his fingers yearning for the lanyard of one of the rotor-guns installed in the fore and aft turrets. He liked, too, the foreman who came over to meet us.

"How many men have you working here below?" he asked.

Myers, the supervisor, told him twenty-three. "And there are twenty women topside," he grinned. "Doc says we're going to a brutal frontier. But if the women can stand it, we can. A man can do lots of impossible things with his wife at his side."

I understood, then, the number of girls I had seen above ground, and regretted my hasty judgment of Dr. Mallory's character. I might have realized that he did nothing without purpose. He had seen—as I saw now—that without something, *someone*, to fight for, the men of our little colony-to-be could easily lose heart. He was assuring our venture against all eventualities.

I was glad, suddenly, that Maureen was beside me. I wondered if she felt the same way.

Danny Wilson voiced a problem that had puzzled me.

"But this cavern, Doctor? Aren't you like the man who, in his spare time, built a yacht in his cellar? How are we ever going to get this monster out of here?"

Mallory said placidly, "When the hour comes, we will burst from this cavern like a moth from its chrysalis. You have not yet witnessed the power of our atomic beams.

"One thrust of blinding energy from the forward jets and we will shear an exit through the tons of solid rock and earth that now conceal us. Before we leave—" He looked at me significantly. "—we will destroy the buildings above ground. Including that one, sealed chamber that no man must ever open.

"The Totalitarians will have no way of guessing who we were, what we did here, or where we have gone. And even if they should guess, they would be powerless to follow us."

His voice was low, vibrant, anticipatory.

"Your men and mine, Brian O'Shea, we hundred odd will establish the first base on Luna. Then there will be other trips to Earth, gathering more converts to our cause. The day will come when we will match our conquerors in strength. And then—"

I said thoughtfully, "One more thing, Doctor. The *Jefferson* is supplied with water and provisions, yes. But if our number grows, we will need our own farms and granaries. How are we to grow food in the lightless grottoes of the moon?"

He nodded sagely.

"All that has been provided for, Brian, lad. I have overlooked nothing. Chemical culture is possible. Trust me to take care of that problem when it arises."

Danny Wilson coughed apologetically.

He said, "We do, Doc. But—but I think I know what's in the back of Brian's mind. Suppose something should—I mean—if anything might happen to you—?"

"That, too, I have considered. There is a complete scientific library in the aft turret. Science is no secret to the man who can read and think."

Danny's face lighted. He said beautifully, "A library! Golly! Books! I haven't seen a book for nigh onto fifteen years. Except Field Code manuals. There hasn't been much time for reading lately."

"And that," said Mallory darkly, "is perhaps the greatest catastrophe of this war. Reading men, thinking men, are happy men. They are not concerned with the lust for conquest of anything save the unknown. Yes, Wilson, there are books. And for those who seek light entertainment there are even volumes of fiction. Magazines for amusement."

"Magazines?" I said, puzzled. "Magazines for amusement? I don't see anything funny in an armament warehouse."

Mallory sighed.

"Forgive me, O'Shea. I had forgotten your youth. There was a time, when you were a toddling child, when 'magazines' were not always ammunition bins. Publishers used to issue monthly periodicals, printed on paper, bound in bright jackets, filled with stories. Exciting adventures in sports, the West, tales of crime and its detection, fictionized hazards as to the future of the world—

"Ah, but that was long ago. That was when paper was cheap and common. When the vast mills of Norway and Denmark and Canada poured endless rolls of pulp into our country."

Danny said eagerly, "I'd like to see some of these here 'magazines,' Doc. Could I?"

"You may. Myers will help you select some from the storage bin, Wilson. And now, my friends, if you are ready to return to the surface—?"

THAT, as I recall, was on the 29th day of July, 1963. Yes, I know it was that day, because that was the date of the fall of Santa Fé. We watched that battle through our televisions; it was triumphantly broadcast—a braggart deed in keeping with their boastful ways—by the Toties.

Albuquerque having fallen, General

Bornot, commander of the Army of the West, had withdrawn his forces to the old capital of New Mexico, there to make a last, desperate stand.

It was a valiant, but doomed, defense. The very fact that intimate details of the battle were televised shows how vastly superior the Totie forces were; their airplanes could fly without hindrance over our lines, spying out resources, reserves, and the pitifully weak remnants of our Army.

Like our own demolished Eastern army, the westerners were a motley crew. I saw French, English, Scandinavian and Canadian uniforms; loyal Sikhs from India fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with kilted Scots; swarthy refugees from Totie Mexico and Guatemala defending futile breaches beside blonde, fair-skinned Icelanders.

The main body of attackers stormed up from captive Albuquerque to the south; these were the trained warriors of Japan, the yellow horde that had ravaged California, Arizona and Utah and pressed eastward to meet Kievinovski's command. The Russians came down from the north, cutting off any avenue of escape through Taos. ("Once," Dr. Mallory told us sadly, "Taos was the artistic center of the United States. Now but one pigment flows there; the red of blood.") And Schneider's Army of the Mississippi had swept westward through Arkansas and Oklahoma, leaving nothing but waste and desolation behind them, to meet the other armies at this last defense post of democratic gallantry.

It was no battle at all, really; it was a slaughter. Our army had refortified old Fort Marcy, earthworks built by General Kearny more than a hundred years ago. Two divisions were quartered in the Garita, the old Spanish headquarters. Thus they lay, more than four thousand Democratic troops—waiting behind breastworks of earth and 'dobe for the attack of armies whose artillery was built to blast steel and concrete pill-boxes out of existence.

Even so, the gallantry of their defense turned the blood in my veins to electricity. They did not wait for the Toties to attack; they carried the fight to the enemy. With the first, tentative shot from the besiegers there came an answering blast from the besieged. Then the bedlam was on.

Stream upon endless stream, the Toties flooded into the city. As they did so, we—and the enemy—discovered that the spying televiser had not told the whole story. Windows opened to expose spitting, snarling machine guns. Doorways gaped to expose light fieldpieces that poured fiery death into the Toties. Fake walls split miraculously, from them charged concealed troops of Americans, faces grim, guns flaming, roaring, bayonets flashing.

Guerrilla warfare became the order of the day. At street barricades powder and flame were forgotten as men met face to face, looked with stark eyes upon dripping steel. Americans and their allies fell, but for each of them fell two, three, a half dozen of the invaders. The scream of explosives was deafening, the street pictured on the metallic screen before us was a shambles of blood; bodies lay asprawl like the forgotten toys of a careless child.

And—the televiser screen went blank!

Danny Wilson loosed a great cry of joy. "They're licked!" he roared. "The dog-whelped cowards are licked! I never knew of them to turn off a televised victory—"

For five glorious minutes we shared his hope. Then the broadcast was resumed, after a murmured comment about a "technical difficulty in transmission"—and when again our eyes looked upon the streets of Santa Fé, the picture had changed.

Once more it was aircraft that had won the day. In the face of impending disaster, the Toties had loosed the full power of their air armada against the beleaguered forces. It did not matter to them that their thermite bombs fell amongst their men as well as ours; that was a hazard their hirelings had been trained to accept. Burst after flaming burst rocked the streets of old Santa Fé, broken bodies were flung brutally against shattered walls, doorways and windows emptied—and there were no more defenders. Only fresh, unending troops of Toties filling the gaps left by their fellows.

I SAW the Garita fall, a flaming shambles; I saw an airplane swoop low over breastworks hastily flung up at the *Puerta de Los Hidalgos* and wipe out a company of Americans. I heard the biting rasp of machine gun fire, the staccato bark of anti-aircraft; once the visiplat before us

whirled giddily for an instant as the plane in which our broadcaster rode narrowly escaped disaster.

I saw the last great moment of Fort Marcy; the fall of the gates and the horde of snarling Toties that rushed in, bayonetting all before them; I saw the bayonet wielded that slashed the rope holding the American flag to the flagpost. I saw the man who turned and raced to that flagpost, grasped the ropes and held them taut as, for a moment longer, the tattered ensign whipped out through the smoke and flame.

Then I saw the bullet that found this unknown hero's breast; saw him cough and loose his grasp, slip earthward as the flag above him tumbled to the dirt. There was a look of hurt surprise in his eyes. Then I saw no more, because my eyes were wet. And Dr. Mallory said, "There is nothing more to see—"

And turned off the televiser.

YES, that was the 29th day of July, 1963. I remember it well. For it was after that I asked Mallory, "Do we go now? There is no reason to delay."

And he said, "We will leave in five days. By that time all will be in readiness. And the third of August will be a day of good omen. It was on that day, centuries ago, that a humble Portuguese sailorman with a great dream sailed westward to the Indies and found a new world.

"Like Chistofero Colon, we will select that date to set our course for New America—"

Maureen's hand tightened on mine. Krassner, who had been watching the televiser silently, gaped at us.

"New course? Go? Go where?"

"Skip it—!" I began. But Dr. Mallory stopped me. "No, I think it is well the men should be told now, O'Shea. My helpers know. Your men, who must be the fighters of our party, should be told where they are going."

And he told them. It came as a stunning blow. Some of them looked frightened; some, to be quite truthful, simply did not understand. Others were openly incredulous. Among these was Krassner. He epostulated, "But—but, O'Shea, this old fool must be insane! Flight to the Moon! Absurd!"

His eyes narrowed.

"There's more to it than that. This is a trick of some kind. I'll bet it's tied up with that mysterious invention you've got hidden in your closet—"

I grasped him by the shoulder, whirled him about.

"Then you *did* hear us that day?"

"Sure. I heard you. Is there anything wrong in that? I couldn't help hearing you say you had a weapon that would end the war. If that's what you've got, trot it out! That's a lot better than dying like rats on a fool's expedition to the Moon!"

"Luna! Pah! I, for one, won't have anything to do with it—"

I said hotly, "You damned fool, we can't open that closet. Don't you realize—?"

"Brian!" snapped Dr. Mallory.

I shut up suddenly. Krassner looked at me, then at the old man suspiciously. He snarled, "You reminded me once that I had no authority over your command, O'Shea. Well, now I remind you that you have no authority over me. I'm pulling out of here. I've had enough of this insane secrecy and—"

He started for the door. I said only one word.

"Lars!"

Lars Frynge, the towering Swede, had his revolver at Krassner's midsection. He said amiably, "Ay tank maybe you batter lissen to Captain, hey?"

Krassner's face purpled. He bellowed, "This is the last straw, O'Shea. Insulting an officer and an equal! By the gods, I'll—"

He was right. He was an officer and an equal. But I was determined of one thing. Go with us he would, whether he liked it or not. But in the meanwhile—

"All right, Lars," I said. "Krassner, I'm sorry. I wasn't just trying to throw my weight around. But think it over carefully, man. This means a lot to all of us. You're at liberty to do what you will."

He snorted and strode from the room. Danny Wilson cocked an eyebrow at me; I nodded. Danny followed him. Maureen said nervously, "He's a trouble-maker, Brian. I don't think we should trust him out of our sight."

"That's why Danny left us," I grinned.

"And when we go, we should leave without him."

"That," said Mallory, "is impossible.

When we go, there must remain no one behind to know where we have gone."

AND there were five days left in which to finish all that had to be done before our departure. Those were days of feverish excitement and activity for all of us. Having been let into the secret, my men were shown the way to the underground cavern. There they labored, side by side with Mallory's helpers, to load the cargo, put the last finishing touches on the *Jefferson*.

We stripped the house; we gathered all forage from the barns and silos and bins. We rolled cask upon cask of fresh spring water into the holds. We locked and sealed the holds, one by one.

Danny raised a fuss about that. He had found something new and wonderful—something I meant to investigate myself as soon as the opportunity permitted. The joy of reading fiction.

"It—it's swell, Brian!" he told me. "Boy, I wish I'd lived in them days when magazines was common. You ought to read some of them stories. Sports and detective stories and—" He looked sort of sheepish. "The ones I like best are science stories. Gosh, you'd be surprised, Brian. Them old writers guessed sometimes pretty near what was going to happen.

"There was a guy named Bender, or Binder, or something like that, who guessed 'way back in '40, at the start of this war, that we'd get into it. And there was another guy named Clinton who said the same thing—he was nuts, though. He said the women would bust loose from the men and set up their own government.

"And those others, they predicted things like the spaceship we'll soon be riding in. And television, and—"

I said, "Those magazines must be plenty old."

"They are. Ancient. But they're still fun. Brian, can't I sneak a few of them into my berth instead of sealing them up in the library? Do you think Doc would mind?"

"I guess not," I told him. So he did just that. By the time he'd finished robbing the library, it looked moth-eaten and there was scarcely enough room in his berth for him to turn around in. . . .

Those were full days and exciting ones, but pleasant. It is hard to realize that we were living on the bright edge of grave calamity. Nor did we know it until the eve of the day on which we were to take off.

It started with a thin, high droning to the north. The familiar drone of aircraft. As always, under these circumstances, Dr. Mallory sounded the "Take cover!" signal, and everyone scurried to the shelter of the camouflaged grove, there to wait until the danger should pass.

But it did not pass. The droning came nearer, deepened in tone. And we saw, through the leafy veil that concealed us, that it was not a single plane that was approaching, nor a single flight—but a solid phalanx of enemy aircraft!

Even then we did not guess the dreadful truth. It was not until they had come directly over us, swung into an involute loop and began concentrating upon us, that we knew what was happening. Then we saw something dark and ominous loose itself from the rack of one bomber; a thin screaming filled the air—and in the woods to our right there came a frightful blast!

Earth shook beneath us, Maureen screamed needless words in my ear.

"They're bombing us, Brian! They've found our refuge!"

VI

THERE was only one thing that spared all of us in those next few minutes. That was the fact that the Toties did not know *exactly* where we were. Somehow they had learned the approximate location of Dr. Mallory's mountain hide-away, but not in vain had the aged scientist spent twenty years nurturing plant life to form a perfect barricade of concealment about the dim, squat buildings. From above, the wooded dell that hid his laboratory must have looked like one of thousands such.

Therefore they scattered their shots. One bomb exploded a quarter mile from Mallory's house; I learned afterward that it killed two workmen who had been laying in cordwood. Others exploded as far as five miles away as the hive of lethal wasps eddied back and forth, bombing the entire countryside with abandon.

A thousand questions seethed through my brain, but there was no time now to ponder the answers. No time to ask why, or how, the Toties had learned of this place. I seized Maureen's elbow, half-led, half-dragged her toward the laboratory. Above the crashing din I howled in her ear, "To the cavern! That's the only safe—"

The rest was lost in an ear-splitting thunderbolt. But she knew what I meant.

We were not the only ones who fled to the security of the house. The lab was the lodestone toward which all we tiny, helpless motes gravitated. By the time we reached it, the shaking walls were jammed with soldiers, workers, women, who had sought refuge there.

A few of these were itching for action. Such a one was Danny Wilson. He was pleading with Mallory, "How about it, Doc? Just one of them anti-craft guns? We can get it up here in no time."

"No. They don't know just where we are, Wilson. A shot would locate us definitely. We must remain silent and take our chances against a lucky placement."

Krassner, his handsome face oddly pale, clutched at Mallory's arm.

"This cavern you were talking about, Mallory. Take us there! We'll all be blown to bits—"

Joe Sanders' nose wrinkled, he looked at the airman disgustedly, and spat. Mingled with my own contemptuous reaction to Krassner's demand, I felt a warming glow of pride in my men. Each of them had realized, as had Maureen and I, that the only safe place was the underground shelter. But each of them had wanted, before we took to that refuge, at least one vengeful poke at the enemy. Quivering capitulation like this rubbed them the wrong way.

But Mallory, serene as ever, had already led the way to the secret entrance. He pressed the knobs, the door swung open. I was beside Krassner as he did so; I saw the look of surprise on the aviator's face as he saw the long tunnel that fed to the depths beneath. I couldn't restrain the taunt.

"Thought Mallory was insane, eh, Krassner? Does this look like the work of a madman?"

He muttered something incoherent. Then Pelham-Jones, whose squad had been quartered farthest from the main house, burst into the room excitedly.

"They're landing foray parties, Brian! How long will it take to get everyone out of here?"

I glanced at Mallory. He said, "Fifteen or twenty minutes, at least."

"And to get the *Jefferson's* motors started?"

"Another ten."

"Then," I snapped, "you'll need protection for a half hour. That's what we're here for. Bruce, Rudy, Raoul, split your squads. Send half below; have the others throw a cordon about the laboratory. If they're dropping infantry, they'll have to stop bombing. By the time they find us, the others will be below. Then we'll take to the cavern—"

"Very good, sir!" They sprang into action.

THE women continued to file singly into the small darkroom, pass through the doorway into the tunnel. Maureen clutched my arm.

"Brian, you don't have to stay up here. You're too important. You're the leader. You've got to—"

"—to stay with my men!" I told her quietly. And I did what I had been wanting to do, but had never before dared. I took her, unresisting, into my arms; kissed her. Her lips were warm against mine. Then I pushed her toward the doorway. "Get down there. Don't worry about us. If we hold our fire it will take them a long time to locate us. Danny, where did Krassner go?"

Danny grimaced.

"That yellow mutt? Don't ask me. He's probably down there by now, hugging a stalactite."

"Well, to hell with him. Let's get going. And don't forget—don't fire a shot unless they actually see us. We don't want to give our position away."

Mallory said quietly, "I'll herd them below as fast as I can, Brian. When you hear the signal, bring your men on the double. But before you leave the laboratory, you know what must be done?" He nodded significantly toward the inner room, toward the trebly-barred door that

contained a world's fate. I nodded. "I know."

The steady evacuation continued. I went outside again. As Pelham-Jones had reported, the Toties were parachuting infantry to the ground. More planes had reached the scene; the sky swarmed with them. And a mass occupation was in progress; from each transport tumbled a steady stream of dark figures that, like strange, winged insects, plunged out of their humming cocoons, hurtled headlong toward Earth for a moment—then suddenly grew filmy, white umbrellas that lowered them gently to the ground.

It was a random, haphazard occupation for the Toties *still* had not solved the secret of our exact location. But many—too many—were dropping near our sheltered grove. It would not take them long, I knew, to find us.

Happily, the aerial bombardment had ceased with the dropping of the infantry. That was good. No chance explosion would find the heart of our refuge, destroy the lab and cut us off from the underground cavern.

Approximately twenty of us remained above ground as defenders. I told Mac-Gregor, "Encircle the house. Defend it at all costs until you hear Mallory's call—then hightail it for the tunnel. I've got something to do inside."

I went back to the door beyond which were concealed the lethal anaesthetic spores. There were two barrels of oil there; we had placed them there for the purpose I now carried out. I broke them open, spilled their contents every which way. Now a single match would set the house ablaze, destroy forever the danger Mallory had feared. I would strike that match just before ducking into the tunnel myself—

A single, explosive crack sounded outside! A rifle had spoken!

THAT ripped it! With that shot there came a moment of macaber silence; then the air was alive with an answering volley from the hills and woods surrounding us. I raced out of the house, found Rudy Van Huys. I roared angrily, "Who fired! Why? Good God, man, don't you realize—"

His pink, chubby cheeks shook with

anger to match my own. He said, "I don't know, Brian. They hadn't spotted us until then. But now—"

He didn't need to point to the forest; I could see the grey-green uniforms sifting through the trees, closing in on us. The *spang!* of a Wentzler shrilled in my ears, spent lead splattered against the wall behind me. All about us, now, rifle fire rasped and spat; I saw an advancing Totie soldier stop short in his tracks, stagger, spin, and fall, clutching his stomach with red hands that clawed. I heard a grunt from one of the men beside me, saw his mouth form an astonished O and an ugly, purple-black third eye appear magically in the middle of his forehead. The back of his head. . . .

Then came a welcome sound, a cry from Mallory.

"All clear, O'Shea! Bring your men!"

They came on the double. Not all of them. Half of them, maybe. Those few minutes of gunfire, raking our fearfully exposed position, had cost us. Mac-Gregor, huge bear of a man, staggered around an ell of the house carrying a still figure. Danny Wilson. I cried, "Mac, is he—?"

"Bad, Brian! Mighty bad." Mac-Gregor lumbered into the house with his burden; the rest of the men followed him, lingering to throw last shots into the advancing force before they disappeared.

There remained, still, my most important task. Now the Toties had apparently brought up several pieces of light artillery, for mingled with the snap of musketry I heard the familiar coughing bark of ordnance. Once the house shuddered and quaked, concussion deafened my ear drums as a shell found us. But I sped down the empty corridors toward the lab. Time was precious. All too soon the Toties would close in on the house; before that I must toss my flame, race back to the tunnel entrance.

I burst into the room, at last, and—

—and stood aghast! I had only presence of mind to throw a shielding arm across my face, hold my breath. For no longer was the closet sealed. The bars had been smashed inward, the lock was a shard of broken metal, the door a heap of splinters. The gods of chance had tossed a die for our enemies. That shell I had

heard—had found its way into the granary of death!

I had a momentary glimpse of the inside of the closet. I saw grey, fungoid granules sifting through the broken door; a cloud whirled and eddied toward me. To breathe that cloud meant oblivion. Beating at my clothes, my hair, with suddenly frenzied fingers, I turned and fled from the room.

In the hallway I stopped, ignited the box of matches I carried, tossed the blazing brand onto the oil-soaked floor. Flame licked hungrily along those stained boards; the bright fire-flower grew before my eyes. Even so, I knew my effort was in vain. The shell had entered through the walls of the house, and even now I could see those spores of slumber sifting out to float with the winds.

An agonized cry brought me to my senses. Mallory's voice, "Brian! Brian, lad—where are you!"

I turned and fled toward the secret portal. I made it just in time. The aged doctor and I were the last to enter the tunnel as the first Totie set foot in the laboratory. Stumbling, panting, we raced down that smooth slope to where the *Jefferson* awaited us. A dull throbbing wakened echoes in the hollow depths; eager hands helped us into the air-lock.

I heard Mallory gasp, "Take off! *Now!*" The humming deepened to a frightful roar, the Niagara of powers beyond comprehension. I was dimly aware of a cascade of broken rock smashing down about the *Jefferson's* permalloy casing, of an unearthly sheet of flame mirrored through quartzite windows. Then a tremendous tug pulled me to my knees, my lungs strained for precious air, blood danced before my eyes and there was agony in my bones. . . .

VII

EARTH was a tremendous disc, swaddled in lacy veils of gleaming white, when next I looked upon it from the control turret of the *Jefferson*. I did not look for long. I had, when I turned my gaze upon it, some vague idea of being able to determine (if nothing else) broad continental outlines of the sphere from which we were roaring at a speed which

Mallory had told me was approximately 25,000 miles per hour.

But the sheen was so terrifically blinding that I had to shut my eyes. Dr. Mallory, no longer so intent over his instruments now that he had checked his course and found it satisfactory, noticed the movement, reached over and turned the pane through which I had been looking a quarter-turn in its grooved frame. Immediately the burning radiance dimmed into murky grayness.

"Earth-shine, Brian," he answered my unspoken query. "Our mother planet is a great reflecting body. At this distance it is even more painful to look upon with the naked eye than is the sun."

Maureen said, "But the moon, Doctor? We don't seem to be moving toward it?"

"We aren't. It's moving toward us. Or perhaps I should say both it and we are moving toward a mutual point in space where our paths will intersect in—" He glanced at a chronometer and at his calculations. "In a little less than eight and a half hours.

"Before that, however, Brian," he turned to me seriously, "there will be a few minutes that I am afraid will be rather uncomfortable for our party. The period of absolute weightlessness when we reach the 'dead spot'; the spot where the gravitational forces of Earth and its moon are completely nullified by each other.

"You might go below and warn everyone that this is to be expected. Bid them not to be alarmed."

Someone coughed apologetically at the turret door. It was St. Cloud. His face was granitelike, but his eyes were haggard. He said, "Brian—"

"Yes?"

"It's Danny."

"Danny? Is he—?"

He nodded. "I'm afraid so. He'd like to see you."

I FOLLOWED him swiftly down the ramp, through the corridors, and into the sick bay. There were a half dozen of the men in there receiving first aid treatment from one of Dr. Mallory's assistants. Wilson was in one of the private wards off the main hospital room.

He turned his head slowly as I entered, essayed a grin that froze, suddenly, as

a spasm shook him. But he said, in a low, husky voice, "Hyah, Cap!"

I said, "Hayah, yourself, soldier!" and motioned the others to get out. The door closed softly behind them. "Got a blighty one, did you?" I said.

He said laboriously, "You wouldn't kid a guy, would you, Brian? I got a west one this time." His hands plucked at the sheet covering him, drew it down. Even the bandages had not been able to staunch that slow, staining seepage. I drew the cover back again.

"You're tough, Irish," I told him. "You'll get over that one before breakfast."

But I had a hard time saying it; the words rang false from my lips. I was lying, and he knew it as well as I. He shook his head.

"I don't much give a damn, Brian. I got the guy who done it, and a couple others for good measure. There's only one thing I'm sorry about."

"Yes, Irish?"

"That story. It was about a guy named Kinniston. A Lensman. He was in a hell of a jam. I'd like to have known if he got out." He said plaintively, "I can't lift my hands, Brian, boy. They're so damned weak. . . ."

I said, "One of those magazines? Where is it?" He nodded to the chair beside his bed. I picked the thing up, found the place where he'd left off. I started reading to him the story that had captured his fancy. It wasn't easy. I hadn't read much of anything since I left military training school at the age of thirteen. A lot of the words were unfamiliar, and I guess I made pretty heavy weather of it.

But he seemed to be enjoying it. He lay back on the pillows, breathing hard, so intent on the adventures of this "Gray Lensman," printed in an old and yellowed fiction book, that he almost forgot the icy fingers closing in upon him.

He only interrupted me once. That was to say suddenly, "Brian—it was Krassner, you know."

"What?"

"He fired . . . the shot."

The shot that had betrayed us! I was reminded, forcibly, that I hadn't seen Krassner aboard ship. I didn't know

whether he'd made it or not. But if he had—

"Go on . . . Brian. Get him out of trouble before. . . ."

So I read on. It was weirdly strange, sitting there reading a story of spaceflight adventure written twenty years ago. While we, ourselves, soared the void in a craft bound for Earth's satellite. But I read on. And it must have been ten minutes before I sensed something wrong. At first I couldn't figure what it was. Then, suddenly, I realized. It was the fact that Danny's breathing no longer rasped beside me. . . .

I rose and closed the magazine. I hope that somehow he knows, now, how the Lensman fought his way out of that jam.

I WENT back to the turret, then. But on the way I sought out Ronnie and Mac and Rudy. I asked them about Krassner. They hadn't seen him.

"But we will! If he's aboard this ship, we'll dig him out!"

They were gathering their squads into search parties as I left. In the control room, Dr. Mallory had just completed another check-up and minor course revision. He was jubilant because the *Jefferson* was reacting so beautifully. "Another six hours, Brian, and we'll be there. I've been teaching Maureen to operate the ship. She's an apt pupil."

Maureen flushed with pleasure. Mallory continued, "I'm glad we have another pilot. Now she can make the next trip back to earth, pick up more colonists while we build our Lunar colony—"

I started, and looked at him swiftly. Then he didn't know! I said, "Doctor—those spores. How swiftly do they propagate?"

"With drastic swiftness, Brian, lad. That's why I kept them in a sealed, sterile chamber. Had they ever been loosed, within two month's time all Earth would have succumbed to their somniferous power. But why do you ask—?" A sudden look of fear swept his features; his voice rose.

"Brian! You destroyed the spores? I saw flames leaping before you entered the tunnel—"

And then I told him.

It took him a good while to speak again.

And when he spoke, his voice was deep with sorrow. He glanced at the dim shadow of earth outlined on the polaroid window, and his hands made a yearning gesture.

"That which I feared most has come to pass. We are powerless to prevent it. We might have time for two, three, a half dozen trips to Earth to save a few refugees from the sleep to come—but even that is unsafe. Were a single spore to get into the ship, be borne back to Luna, our colony, too, would be stilled in centuries, aeons of slumber. You're *sure* the spores escaped, Brian?"

"I'm sure."

"Then soon we will be the last of Earth's waking children. Our responsibility is graver than ever. Now must we not only keep alive the spirit of liberty, but all man's dreamed-of future is in our hands."

Maureen cried desperately, "But the responsibility is too great, Dr. Mallory. Surely you, who invented the spores, know some way to counteract their action? Isn't there some way to effectively destroy them?"

"None, my dear. None . . . except . . ." His eyes dimmed uncertainly. "I don't know. Maybe. There's a faint, far possibility. Once, as I was experimenting, I happened to expose certain of the spore-plasm to synthetic chlorophyll. A reaction took place, a sloughing of the spore cell. I was not interested in that at the time, so I didn't pursue the experiment. But it is remotely possible . . ."

"We must try, then," I told him. "As soon as we get to Luna, you must try that experiment again. Try it on your sleeping assistant, Williamson. Better he should die now than slumber on forever in his glass coffin."

"And if the antidote works, we'll be in a position to reclaim Earth. Sweep away the plague, and while doing so, end the war in the very fashion you once planned."

"I'll do it!" he cried excitedly. "Chlorophyll must be the answer! As soon as we reach—"

He stopped abruptly. Footsteps were pounding up the runway; breathless men were tumbling into the room. Big Mac was at their head, his brow was red with unbridled rage. He yelled at me, "Brian!

We've found him! We've found the dirty, skulking rat!"

"Krassner, you mean?" I thought again of Danny, and of those others who had died because of Krassner's revealing gun shot. My anger flared to match MacGregor's. "Where is he? Bring him in!"

"We've got to take him. He's barricaded himself in the aft storage compartment and threatens to blow the ship to hell if we make a move!"

VIII

FOR a moment, everything before my eyes was outlined in crimson. As from afar I heard my own voice gritting, "Get your men together! Follow me—"

Then Dr. Mallory's sharp command, "No, Brian! Don't move hastily. He has the upper hand. He can do just what he threatens. Those aft storage bins are loaded with explosive, inflammable substances. Maybe we can reason with him—" He turned to Maureen. "Hold the ship to its course, my dear. I will be back in a few minutes."

We moved aft. Mallory and myself, MacGregor and Ian Pelham-Jones, Dev-ereaux. We passed through the bulkhead that sealed the forward from the aft portion of the ship, hurried down a long corridor, and came to the carriage lock beyond which lay the storage bins, the engineers' berths, the recreation room and the library.

This door was closed; before it, tense, nervous, uncertain, hovered a dozen of my men. Van Huys headed them; he looked up at me, his pale blue eyes troubled.

"He's in there, Brian. I think the man's gone mad!"

Mallory raised his voice, called mildly, "Krassner?"

There was a shuffling sound from behind the lock. A moment's silence, then Krassner, suspiciously, "Well?"

"What's the matter, my friend? You mustn't act like this. What is it you want?"

"Turn the ship back to Earth!"

"But we can't do that." Mallory's voice was soothing, persuasive. "We've set our course. We can't return."

"You must, damn you!"

I couldn't restrain myself any longer. I brushed by Mallory, cried, "Krassner,

you're acting like an idiot! Come out of there immediately!"

Again there was a brief instant of stillness. Then Krassner's tone altered subtly, became half-mocking. "Is that you, O'Shea?"

"Yes."

"The gallant captain of a drag-tailed company. You want to save your command, don't you, Captain? Then make the old fool turn this ship back, and do it *now!*"

Wrath inflamed me; I stepped forward and hammered on the metal door. There came the sound of swift, frightened movements inside. Krassner yelled sharply, incisively, "Don't try to come in here, O'Shea. I can blast this ship to shards, and by the Banner, I'll—"

He stopped abruptly, aware that in his excitement he had finally given himself away. But if he was startled, I was even more so. Suddenly, now, it all made sense. I wondered why I had not guessed the truth before. But I am not a clever man; I am just a soldier. And we had met Krassner under circumstances that favored his deceit.

I said slowly, "So you're not one of us, after all, Krassner? You're one of them?"

He had recovered his aplomb. He laughed stridently. In my mind's eye I could see his face, thin lips drawn in a tight smile, those too-close eyes lifted at the corners with mockery. His voice was a taunt.

"Congratulations, O'Shea, on having played the dupe so long and so excellently. Allow me to introduce myself in my proper character. Captain Jacob Krassner of the Imperial German Army—at your service!"

It was all too clear, now. I remembered the day we had met Krassner, seen him "shot down" by an enemy plane. I remembered MacGregor's comment at the time. "Damned funny. First Totie I ever saw who didn't gun a parachuter."

And that day I had caught him listening to us from Mallory's outer office. His restless wanderings around the laboratory grounds; now I knew he had been seeking the hideaway of the *Jefferson*. And the betraying rifle-shot—

"You Americans are a naïve race," Krassner was saying amusedly. "It never occurred to you, did it, O'Shea, that I

might have concealed on me a portable transmitter? It was I who exposed the location of the laboratory to our gallant forces. We had suspected for some time that strange things were brewing near Cleft Canyon. That is why I—shall we say 'dropped into the picture'? To learn the meaning of certain things that puzzled us."

He was a braggart, like the rest of them. Now that he had given himself away—only Toties swore "by the Banner"—he was gloating triumphantly. And he held the upper hand. We could not even tell him that which we knew; that Earth was doomed, that already hundreds of thousands of his compatriots as well as ours by quiescent in dreadful, sleeping undeath. If he discovered the Totie cause was lost—well, they were ever ones for the heroic, the vainglorious gesture. And his hand controlled forces that would blast us all into nothingness.

I GLANCED about me nervously. The faces of the men mirrored my anxiety, Mallory's brow was heavy with fear, Van Huys gnawed his full lower lip savagely. Only the gleaming metalwork of the corridor was impassive; that and the heavy door that barred us from a traitor and an enemy. A grilled square, high in the walls of the corridor, was like a great, fanged, laughing mouth. I stared at it.

"Mallory!" I whispered the name. "What is that?"

"Eh?" He followed my glance. "Oh—that? Part of the ventilation system. But, why—?" Then he grasped the reason for my sudden eagerness. "Yes, Brian. It feeds into every chamber. We'll give you a hand. Bruce—"

Krassner's voice came to us, suspicious. "What are you whispering about out there? I warn you, don't attempt to enter this room. If you do, we'll all die together!"

Mallory somehow managed to keep his tone steady.

"Krassner, you're an intelligent man. Listen—"

"Keep him talking, Doctor!" I whispered. I nodded to MacGregor; his huge hands cupped to give me a hand-up to the grill. My fingers tore at the four studs that bolted it into position. One came out. Another. All eyes were upon me as I

lifted the heavy grill from its position, lowered it into the outstretched hands. Only Mallory continued talking, pleading, arguing, reassuring. Stalling for precious time.

I nodded, MacGregor's shoulders heaved, and I was scrambling into the smooth bore of the ventilating system. It was narrow, but not too narrow; the air was cool, clean-smelling. I crept from the opening, was lost in darkness.

A native sense of direction, keen-edged by years of guerrilla warfare, aided me in threading that black labyrinth. How long the creeping journey took, I had no way of knowing. It seemed endless, for I moved slowly, cautiously, dreading the revelatory scrape of clothing upon metal, the sound that might send Krassner suddenly into action.

A turn, a rise, a descent, and another turn. Then before me loomed a networked square of light. And the sound of Krassner's voice was no longer muffled; it reached my ears loudly. "—fine organization, O'Shea, where the soldiers address their 'captain' by his first name. But we will teach you obedience, you Yankee upstarts! We—"

I was at the grill. There was no way to unscrew it from the inside. What could be done must be done—and in a single, sure move—from here.

Krassner stood a few yards from the barred and bolted door. He had not been bluffing. He had prepared the way for the destruction of the *Jefferson* in the event his demands were refused, his scheme went awry. The end of a coiled fuse lay beside him, he toyed nervously with an electro-lighter as he talked. But now his patience was wearing thin. He said, "But enough of this conversation! Are you, or are you not, going to turn about? Your answer now, or by the Banner—"

Mallory answered reluctantly, "Krassner, once more I beg of you to listen to reason."

"The time for reason is past. I want action. You, O'Shea! Speak to me! Are you going to turn the ship?"

Silence. I eased my revolver from its holster with infinite slowness. I saw a puzzled look appear on Krassner's features, turn to a look of sudden doubt.

"O'Shea! Where are you? Speak to me!"

My gun spoke for me.

KRASSNER never suffered for the misery he brought on others. He never knew what struck him. My shot crashed into his brain like a Jovian bolt. Without a word, a whimper, a groan, he collapsed where he stood, his lips still parted in the question he had been hurling at the door upon which, now my comrades were battering.

But even in death, Krassner was destined to throw a last blow amongst us. My cavernous eyrie echoed with a roaring blast; when my deafened ears could hear again they heard a sizzling crackle. The stench of burning powder stung my nostrils.

I craned to look down through the grill; saw there that which damped my forehead coldly. Krassner's weapon had been the hand flame-thrower of our enemy. The stricken convulsion of his fist had shot a withering blast of flame upon the fuse. Now a charred line of fire was racing to the charge Krassner had prepared.

In frantic haste I screamed this knowledge to those beyond the door. "You've got to get in somehow! Stop that fuse!" Their efforts redoubled. I heard the ringing crash of metal upon metal which meant they had brought up a pry, then came a hissing sound, and at the doorjamb, by the hinges, metal warmed, turned orange, glowed cherry red. A blowtorch!

I could do no good behind this grill. It was the act of a contortionist to turn in that meager space, but somehow I accomplished it, scrambled desperately toward the corridor grill through which I had entered the air-duct.

It was just as I gained the opening that the hinges of the lock finally gave way, the door burst open. Even I was not prepared for that which appeared through the frame. The entire aperture was one solid sheet of flame. Despite their eagerness, no one could blame my men for falling back, horrified, from the scorching fingers that leaped out to grasp them.

All but one! And that one was Dr. Thomas Mallory. Perhaps it was because he alone realized the vital necessity of jerking that fuse from its charge before every-

thing ended in one coruscant moment. Arms locked before his face, head lowered, he dashed recklessly into that flaming hell!

I fell—or dropped, I know not which—from my outlet, found myself on my feet, heard myself bellowing, "Water! We've got to stop that fire before—"

But they knew that. Already someone had raced to the jets, another was tugging desperately at a reel of fire hose. I suppose what I did next was heroic. Either that or damned, blind foolishness. It could not have been deliberate heroism, for there was no time to measure the chances, weigh the consequences. I leaped through the doorway, followed Dr. Mallory. And even so, there was another figure at my side. That of burly Bruce MacGregor.

We found him at the same time. He lay face down on the floor, arms outstretched before him. But in one blistered hand was—the end of the fuse. Scant inches from its charred end stood piled boxes of Triple-X, most deadly of all explosives. The flames had not yet quite reached it, but in another moment—

Then the water came! Like a solid fist it caught me in the middle of the back, shot me, sprawling, forward. The breath shot from my lungs before that impact—but never had I been more grateful for a bruising blow.

MacGregor, a sorry sight with his blistered cheeks, scorched hair, spark-charred garments, bent his brute strength against the flood, roared directions.

"Here! On these boxes first! Soak them, ruin them! We can fight the fire later. . . ."

WE got Dr. Mallory out of that furnace. How long we battled the fire after that is hard to say. At least an hour. Krassner had planned his coup with deadly Teutonic thoroughness. Not only had he arranged the fuse and explosive charge; he had also soaked walls, drapes, furniture, with gasoline.

Against this, our water was useless. We had no sand. Men labored to drag the lethal crates of explosive out of the danger zone; after that we went back at the ever-spreading fire. Chemicals did the trick finally. The last blaze succumbed to the stifling blanket of carbon dioxide, a clean-up crew methodically swept up the last of the charred débris.

Thus died Krassner—but at what a cost! Ten of my men in the hospital, at least two of them seriously burned. Three whole bins of provisions gone forever, devoured by the hungriest of all foes. A binful of linens, clothing, blankets, burned to cinders. And every other room that had been in that aft section of the ship gutted!

All these disasters paled into insignificance when, bandaged, cleaned, reclad, I went to visit Dr. Mallory. One look at his face and I knew that here was the heaviest price we were to pay for the destruction of our last mortal foe. Only Mallory's eyes were visible under the swaddling mask of bandage, and these were raw and bloodshot. But the ghost of a smile lighted these fine old eyes, and his voice, sieved through a layer of gauze, said weakly:

"I . . . reached there in time . . . Brian, lad."

"You did that," I told him huskily. "You saved us all, Doctor."

"Not only us, but . . . mankind. We had to live, Brian. You must lead . . . our people . . . out of the wilderness."

I said, "Not I, Doctor. *You*. You are the only man who can save us, reclaim the sleeping world—"

He said, as though not hearing me, "It's a good . . . thing I showed Maureen . . . how to run the ship. Isn't it? Now she can take us to Luna."

"Brian, boy . . . find the notes . . . in my desk. They'll help you. I believe . . . you'll find the crater of Copernicus . . . the best place to land. There will be air there. Thin, maybe. But air. In the underground grottoes . . . should be . . . water. . . ."

A SPASM shook him; his eyes closed for a moment in pain, then opened again. They were febrilely bright.

"Most important of all . . . Brian . . . the spores. You must find a way . . . to destroy them. Go back to Earth . . . and awaken man . . . to a new, a peaceful, world."

He was silent so long that I cried out, "Doctor!" I couldn't say more.

But he spoke again, and for the last time. "I am sure now . . . Brian . . . you will find the answer . . . in chlorophyll. Keep after it. The fate of all . . ."

mankind . . . is in only your . . ."

And that was all. His eyes closed, then, as if they had finally found peace. I turned away. Maureen covered his face tenderly. She came to my side, and her voice was soft.

"He was right, Brian. You are our leader now. It is up to you to find the antidote for Earth's illness."

I stared at her long and bitterly. My voice must have been harsh.

"I! I, Maureen? Tell me—do you know the formula for chlorophyll? Do I? Does anyone aboard this ship, now *he* is gone?"

"Don't be upset, Brian. No, we don't—but there's no cause for despair. It, and everything else you need know, is at our disposal. That's why he went to such pains to provide a scientific library for the ship. All man's knowledge lies there, waiting for us to seek it out."

I took a deep breath. I said, "That's just it, Maureen. I couldn't bring myself to tell him. But—"

"But, Brian—?"

"The library is gone! The books that meant life or death for mankind are a pile of crumbled ashes!"

I SUPPOSE I should be grateful that we are here. I should be thankful that Maureen's quick intelligence made it possible for us to land here at the crater of Copernicus. I look from the window of my little shack. I see shanties like my own arranged in a crude circle here at the base of towering mountains.

Dr. Mallory was right. We have air here, and water. We have enough provisions to last us for years. By the time those are exhausted, we will be independent of our Earthly supplies, for already Sanders and Van Huys have set soil into cultivation; they claim, gleefully, that this thick, rich, Lunar soil flowers like a desert when watered. And we have set up plants for the synthesis of water.

Strange how quickly we have adapted ourselves. We even laugh sometimes, nowadays. There have been marriages; I suppose that means that in a little while there will be births. Imagine that! The first Earth child to be born on the Moon.

I, too, should be happy. At times I am—comparatively. For I have Maureen be-

side me; our love is a great, sustaining force in a desperate existence.

But I cannot be completely happy, for night or day I am reminded of the great, impossible burden that weighs my shoulders low. The Earth, a massive, glowing globe, lights our sky. Occasionally I think I can glimpse the gleaming ocean waters of Earth; once, on a clear night, the familiar outline of our lost homeland, America, was crystal clear to our eyes.

Yet all life on that nearby mother planet is, must be, now deep in everlasting sleep. Everlasting because I am powerless to interrupt it. Because Mallory's library is no more; because I am a stupid soldier, not a clever man.

Only recently there came a wan ray of hope. It was as we were transferring the last pieces of furniture from the *Jefferson* to our shacks. In the berth that had been Danny Wilson's—gay, laughing Danny!—I found pile upon pile of those amusing, colorful "magazines" that Danny loved.

They are old and ragged; many of them are coverless. But most of them—for such was Danny's preference—are the kind which Mallory once called "science fiction." Dreams of the world-to-be, pathetic in the face of that which now confronts us.

But it is my only ray of hope, these magazines. I brought them to my shack. I am culling them carefully, one by one. There is a faint, and oh! so faint, chance that . . .

Yet I fear it is a hopeless search. There is so much of fancy in these little books, so little simple fact. Had but *one* of those imaginative writers of years ago thought to include in one of his stories that which must have been, to him, a commonplace formula—that for chlorophyll—I could yet do that which Mallory demanded of me. Here we are rich with ores, the soil teems with every element known to man. We have a well-equipped laboratory, we could synthesize *anything*. But we cannot create this "chlorophyll" because we do not know what it is, nor what elements combine to form it.

Hope dwindles as I read. There remains but one more slim pile of magazines before me. If the answer is not in one of them, then we must perish. I turn pleading eyes to the past, to the year 1940,

before I was born. But there is no one to hear my plea. Unless, in one of these remaining—

(Here the manuscript ends.)

POSTSCRIPT

COMMON SENSE tells me there can be little doubt but that this "manuscript," purported to be written by one Brian O'Shea, a soldier in the Army of the Democracies in the year 1963, A.D., is a deliberate and painstaking hoax.

Who is responsible for it, I cannot begin to guess. Somehow I can't bring myself to believe that Dr. Edgar Winslow (whom I have investigated and found to be exactly what he claimed, a fellow in the psychology department of one of our nearby Southern universities) would lend himself to such a fantastic trick.

But it is hard to believe, also, that Winslow could and did achieve the perfect telepathetic rapport evidenced by the foregoing pages.

But—there was an earnestness about Winslow that stirred me strangely. He did not have the air of a man perpetrating a fraud. He asked me, you will remember, to "play the game of caution," even if I did not believe that which I found in the manuscript.

I should, perhaps, dismiss the whole thing with a shrug; heave the "story" back at Winslow with the advice that if he wants to become a science-fiction writer

he should do so honestly, not try to insinuate his way into print on the byline of another.

Yet—it is a queer manuscript. It is quiet here in Roanoke today. As I write, I look from my office windows to see the rolling hills, now sweet-breasted with fresh green, misted with the soft white of dogwood. The sky is blue and clear, the sun a warm beneficence. Still, the morning papers tell of the desperate plight of the Allies. Again they have lost ground to a grim, mechanized Totalitarian army. Finland, Norway, Belgium, Holland,—the list grows.

Mussolini has sent his restless legions to battle; Japan makes overt gestures toward the Indies. Russia, the patient bear, crouches in the north, watches . . . and waits. . . .

I don't know. I honestly don't know. The manuscript is probably a hoax. And yet . . . and yet . . .

Anyway, here it is, Brian O'Shea. Here is what you asked for. You'll find it on the cover of this magazine. If this magazine is one of those through which you still have to search, the world you mourn may yet blossom anew.

And because covers, like man's freedom and dreams and hopes, too often crumble into dust, the formula you want is printed here again, man of the future.

$C_{55}H_{70}O_6N_4Mg$ is the empirical formula for chlorophyll, Brian O'Shea!

$C_{55}H_{70}O_6N_4Mg!$



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