

# An Adventure in Futurity

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A survivor from the lost continents of Mu or Atlantis, appearing on our modern streets, would have seemed no stranger, no more different from others, than the man who called himself Conrad Elkins. And yet I have always found it difficult to define, even in my own thoughts, the many elements which served to constitute this strangeness.

It would seem (since we think mainly in words and are often dependent upon them for the clarification of our ideas) that the adjectives which would fitly describe Elkins were as yet non-existent in our vocabulary; that they could be found only in some unimaginably subtle, complex and refined language, such as might be developed through long cycles of elaborating culture and civilization on an older and riper planet than ours.

Even at first sight I was greatly struck—not to say startled—by the man's personality. Perhaps the thing which arrested me more than all else was the impossibility of assigning him to any known ethnic stock. It is my theory that no human being is so individual that he does not possess obvious ear-marks which place him immediately among the tribes of mankind; and I am prone to pride myself on a sedulously cultivated gift for analyzing off-hand the nationality and racial affiliations of any given person.

But Elkins baffled me: his extreme pallor, his fine hair and clear-cut lineaments were, in a general sense, indicative of Caucasian origin; yet I could not find the distinguishing features of any American, European or Asiatic branch of the white race. Also, I could not have told his age: he seemed young, when one considered the smoothness of his face; and yet there was a hint of something incalculably old in his expression.

His garb was modish and well-tailored, with nothing in the least unusual or eccentric. In this, as in all other things, he gave always the subtle impression of desiring to avoid notice. He was a little under medium height and of strangely delicate build; and his features, considered by themselves, were almost effeminate, apart from the great brow of uncorrugated ivory, which resembled the one that we see in the portraits of Edgar Allan Poe.

The small, intricately convoluted ears, the short, deeply curved lips, and the queer exotic molding of the sensitive nostrils all seemed to bespeak the possession of more highly developed senses than are normal to mankind. His eyes were very large and luminous, of an indescribable purplish color, and did not flinch, as I had occasion to observe, before the most intense light. His hands too were quite remarkable: in their extreme fineness, flexibility and vigor, they were the hands of a super-surgeon or a super-artist.

The man's habitual expression was wholly enigmatic. No one could have read his mind, and this not from any lack of mobility or expressiveness in the lineaments themselves, but rather, I felt sure, from the unknown character of his ideas and motivations. About him there was an aura of remote, recondite knowledge, of profound wisdom and aesthetic refinement. Assuredly he was a mystery from all angles; and any one who has gone into chemistry as I have is almost inevitably a lover of mysteries. I made up my mind to learn all that I could concerning him,

I had seen Elkins a number of times, on the streets and in libraries and museums, before the beginning of our actual acquaintance. Indeed, the frequency of our meetings in the multitudinous babel of New York was so phenomenal that I soon decided that he must have lodgings near mine and was perhaps engaged in similar studies. I made inquiries regarding him from librarians and curators, but learned nothing more than his name and the fact that he had been reading the works of Havelock Ellis and other modern authorities on sex, as well as many books in biology, chemistry and physics.

The motives which prompted his visits to the Natural History and other museums were seemingly of a general nature. But evidently he was seeking to familiarize himself with certain branches of modern science as well as archaeology. Being myself a student of chemistry, who had given nearly a decade of collegiate and post-graduate effort to the subject, and also several years of independent work and experimentation in my laboratory on Washington Square, my curiosity was touched with fraternal interest when I learned of Elkins' studies.

Others than myself, I found, had been struck by the man's appearance; but no one really knew anything about him. He was extremely taciturn, volunteering no information whatever regarding himself, though impeccably polite in all his dealings with others. Apparently he desired to avoid making friends or acquaintances—a far-from-difficult procedure in any large city. Yet oddly enough I did not find it hard to know him—which, as I later learned, was due to the fact that Elkins had somehow conceived an interest in me and also was well aware of my interest.

I came upon him one May afternoon as he was standing in the Natural History Museum before a case of artifacts from the Mounds of the Mississippi Valley. To all appearance he was deeply absorbed. I had made up my mind to address him on some pretext or another, when suddenly he forestalled me.

"Has it ever occurred to you," he said in a grave, finely modulated voice, "how many civilizations have been irretrievably lost, how many have been buried by deluge, glacial action and geological cataclysm, and also by profound social upheavals with their subsequent reversions to savagery?"

"And do you ever think that present-day New York will some time be as fragmentary and

fabulous as Troy or Zimbabwe? That archaeologists may delve in its ruins, beneath the sevenfold increment of later cities, and find a few rusting mechanisms of disputed use, and potteries of doubtful date, and inscriptions which no one can decipher?

“I assure you, this is not only probable but certain. The very history of America, in some future epoch, will become more or less legendary; and it would surprise you to know the theories and beliefs regarding the current civilization which will some day be prevalent.”

“You speak as if you had some inside information on the subject,” I replied half-jestingly.

Elkins gave me a quick, inscrutable glance.

“I am interested in all such things,” he said. “And by the same token, Mr. Pastor, I believe you are something of a speculative thinker yourself, along different lines. I have read your little thesis on the cosmic rays. Your idea, that these rays might become a source of illimitable power through concentration, appeals to me. I can safely say that the idea is quite ultra-modern.”

I was surprised that he knew my name; but obviously he had made inquiries similar to mine. Also, of course, I was pleased by his familiarity with a treatise that was generally looked upon as being rather advanced, not to say fantastic, in its theories.

The ice being thus broken, the growth of our acquaintance was rapid. Elkins came to my rooms and laboratory many times; and I in turn was admitted to his own modest lodgings, which as I had surmised were only a few blocks away from mine on the same street.

A score of meetings, and the development of a quasi-friendship, left me as fundamentally ignorant concerning Elkins as I had been at first. I do not know why he liked me—perhaps it was the universal human need of a friend, inescapable at all times and in all places. But somehow the half-affectionate air which he soon adopted toward me did not make it any easier to ask the personal questions that seethed within me.

The more I came to know him, the more I was overcome by a sense of impossible seniority on his part—by the feeling that he must be older, and intellectually more evolved than myself, in a fashion that could not be measured by tabulated or classified knowledge. Strangely—since such a feeling has been unique in my experience—I was almost like a child before him, and grew to regard him with something of the awe which a child conceives toward an elder who is seemingly omniscient. Nor was the awe conditioned at first by anything which he actually said or did.

The furnishings of his rooms were as noncommittal as the man himself. There was nothing to seize upon as indicating his nationality and antecedents. However, I saw at once that he

was a linguist, for there were books in at least four modern languages. One, which he told me he had just been reading, was a recent and voluminous German work on the physiology of sex.

“Are you really much interested in that stuff?” I ventured to ask. “There is, it seems to me, overmuch discussion and all too little knowledge regarding such matters.”

“I agree with you,” he rejoined. “One hears of special knowledge, but it fails to materialize on investigation. I thought that I had an object in studying this branch of twentieth century science; but now I doubt greatly if there is anything of value to be learned.”

I was struck by the tone of intellectual impersonality which he maintained in all our discussions, no matter what the subject. His range of information was obviously vast, and he gave the impression of boundless reserves, though there were certain avenues of science, generally looked upon as important in our day, to which he seemed to have given only a somewhat cursory and negligent attention.

I gathered that he did not think much of current medicine and surgery; and he startled me more than once by pronouncements on electricity and astronomy that were widely at variance with accepted ideas. Somehow, at most times he made me feel that he was discreetly curbing the full expression of his thoughts. He spoke of Einstein with respect and seemed to regard him as the one real thinker of the age, mentioning more than once with great approval his theories concerning time and space.

Elkins showed a tactful interest in my own chemical researches; but somehow I felt that he looked upon them as being rather elementary. Once in an unguarded manner, he spoke of the transmutation of metals as if it were already an accomplished everyday fact; explaining the reference, when I questioned him, as a rhetorical flight of imagination in which he had lost himself for the moment.

The late spring and early summer passed, and the mystery which had drawn me to Elkins was still unsolved. I did indeed learn from a casual remark that he was a native of North America—which failed to render his ethnic distinction any the less baffling. I decided that he must represent a reversion to some type whose lineaments have not been preserved in history, or must be one of those rare individuals who anticipate in themselves a whole era of the future evolution of the race. I will not deny that the truth occurred to me more than once; but how was I to know that the truth was a thing so utterly improbable?

Much as I had grown to admire and even revere him, Elkins was to me the most incomprehensible and alien being on earth; and I sensed in him a thousand differences of thought and emotion, and a world of unfamiliar knowledge which for some reason he was trying to withhold from my apprehension.

One day, toward the end of the summer, he said to me:

“I must leave New York before long, Hugh.”

I was startled, since hitherto he had made no reference to leaving or to the duration of his stay.

“You are returning home, perhaps? I hope it will at least be possible for us to keep in touch with each other.”

He gave me a long, unreadable glance.

“Yes, I am going home. But, odd as it may seem to you, there will be no possibility of future communication between us. We part for all time—unless you should care to accompany me.”

My curiosity seethed anew at his cryptic words. Yet somehow I was still unable to ask the questions that arose to my lips.

“If you mean that as an invitation,” I said, “I shall be glad to accept and pay you a visit sometime.”

“Yes, it is an invitation,” he rejoined gravely. “But before accepting, would you not prefer to know where you are going? Perhaps, when you hear the truth, you will not care to accept. And perhaps you will not even believe me.

For once, my inquisitiveness was stronger than my respect.

“Do you live on Mars or Saturn, then?” He smiled. “No, I am a denizen of the Earth; though it may surprise you, in the present infantile condition of astronautics, to learn that I have made more than one voyage to Mars. I realize your natural curiosity concerning me; and an explanation is now necessary. If, when you have learned the truth, you still care to accompany me as my guest, I shall be overjoyed to take you with me and to offer you my hospitality for as long as you wish to remain.”

He paused a moment. “The mystery that has troubled you will be fully explained when I tell you that I am not a man of your own era, but have come from a period far in the future—or what is known to you as the future. According to your notation, my proper time is about 15,000 A. D. My real name is Kronous Alkon—I have assumed the vaguely analogous one of Conrad Elkins, as well as the speech and garb of your time, for reasons which will be fairly obvious.

“At present I shall give you only a brief summary of the causes which prompted my visit to the twentieth century. It would require a long discourse to even offer you an adequate sketch of our social anatomy and problems; and I speak merely of one aspect.

“Humanity in our age is menaced with gradual extinction through an increasing overpreponderance of male children; and a method of sex-control, which would restore in some degree the balance of nature, is urgently desired.

“Your age, the first great mechanistic era, is a well-nigh mythical period to us, and less known even than certain earlier periods, because of the all-engulfing savagery to which man reverted at its end. There ensued long dark ages, through which only the most fragmentary records survived, along with a legendry of vast, uncouth machines which the superstition of peoples identified with avenging demons. Perhaps they were not without reason, since the abuse of machinery was one of the main causes of your débâcle.

“Also, there remained a widespread popular belief, accepted even now by many of our scientists, that the people of the twentieth century could determine at will the sex of their offspring; and that the secret of this determination was lost in the ensuing barbarism, along with certain minor secrets of chemistry and metallurgy which no later civilization has ever re-discovered.

“The former belief has no doubt arisen because the sexes are well known to have been numerically equal in your time; and because they have not been equal since. For many thousands of years after the rebuilding of an enlightened civilization on the ruins of yours, girl-children predominated; and the whole world became a matriarchy.

“The period known as the Amazonian wars, which were the most sanguinary and merciless wars in history, put an end to the matriarchy by wiping out all but a few hundred thousand of the human race. These reverted to the most primitive conditions: there were more dark ages, and then, slowly, the evolution of our present cycle of renewed culture, in which the male predominates both numerically and intellectually. But our difficulties were not over.

“It was to recover the fabled secret of sex-determination that I came back through the ages, and have lived among you for a full year of twentieth century time. It has been a fascinating experience, and I have learned many things regarding the antique world which are altogether unknown and unverifiable to my fellows.

“Your crude, cumbrous machines and buildings are not unimpressive in their way; and your science is not without a few inklings of our later discoveries. But obviously you know even less regarding the mysterious laws of biology and sex than we do; your supposed method of determination is truly fabulous, and I have no reason for tarrying any longer in an alien

epoch.

“Now to become personal. Hugh, you are the only friend I have cared to make in the epoch. Your mind is in some respects beyond the age; and though everything will seem different to you in our time, and much will be incomprehensible, I am sure you will find a surpassing interest in the world of 15,000 A. D. I shall of course provide you with a safe means of return to your own era whenever you wish. Will you go with me, Hugh?”

I could not reply for a moment. I was awed, astonished, bewildered even to stupefaction by the remarkable things that my friend had just told me. His statements were no less than miraculous—yet somehow they were not incredible. I did not doubt his veracity for an instant. After all, it was the only logical explanation of everything that puzzled me in Conrad Elkins.

“Of course I’ll go with you,” I cried, overcome and dazzled by the strange opportunity which he offered me.

There were a hundred obvious questions that I wanted to ask Elkins. Anticipating certain of these, he said:

“The machine in which I traveled through time is a vessel commonly used among us for space-travel. I will explain to you later the modification of the original mechanism which rendered possible a journey in that fourth-dimensional space known as time. I have reason to believe that the invention is wholly unique and has never been duplicated.

“I had nurtured for many years my project for visiting your period; and in preparation for this, I made a prolonged study of all available historic data bearing thereon, as well as the archaeological and literary remains of antique America. As I have said, the remains are fragmentary; but the language, being the root-stock of our own tongue, is fairly well-known to our scholars.

“I took pains to master it as far as possible; though I have since found that some of our pronunciations and definitions are erroneous; also, that the vocabulary is much ampler than we had supposed.

“I studied likewise the costumes of your period, of which a few plates are still extant, and made for myself habiliments which would enable me to pass unnoticed upon my arrival.”

Elkins paused, and went to his clothes-closet. He opened it and brought out a suit of some soft brown fabric. It was not badly tailored, though the cut was unfamiliar. Later, I found that the actual plate from which it had been designed belonged to the year 1940, ten years in advance of our own date.

Elkins went on. "My departure was carefully planned, and I am supposed to have gone on a voyage to the asteroids, several of which, notably Pallas, Vesta and Ceres, have been colonized by human beings for hundreds of years past.

"I made the actual time-journey in a state of unconsciousness. This, as you will soon learn, was inevitable because of the temporary abstraction from everything that creates or contributes to what we know as consciousness. I was prepared for it, and had made all the necessary calculations and adjustments beforehand, and had carefully synchronized the movement of the vessel in the time-dimension with the movement of the earth and the solar system in space. Geographically speaking, I would not move an inch during the entire trip.

"Rising to an elevation of thirty thousand feet above the earth, I started the time-mechanism. There was a period of absolute oblivion (a second or a million years would have seemed the same) and then, with the ceasing of the time-flight, I recovered my senses. Knowing that I was now in the twentieth century, if my calculations were correct, and not choosing to advertise my strangeness, I sought for a place where I could land quietly and without detection.

"The place which I selected after much circumnavigation and study was an inaccessible cliff in the Catskill Mountains, far from any settlement. There I descended at night and left my machine, whose presence was undetectable either from below or above. I finished my descent of the cliff by the use of an anti-gravitational device, and made my way from the wilderness.

"The next day I was in New York, where, for the most part, I have remained ever since and have carried on unobtrusively my studies of your civilization. For monetary needs, I had brought with me some disinterred coins of your period, and also a few small ingots of chemically wrought gold."

He showed me one of the coins—a silver dollar that was stained almost beyond recognition, like an ancient obolus, by the oxidation of untold centuries. Then he brought out another garment from the clothes-closet—a short flaring tunic of dull red with a long graceful mantle that could be detached at will, since it was fastened to the shoulders by two clasps of carven silver. The fabric, as well as the garment itself, was strange to me. Kronous also brought out a pair of sandals, vaguely resembling those of the ancients, though they were not made of leather but of some stiff, indestructible cloth.

"This," he said, "is the raiment in which I left Akameria, the America of 15,000 A. D. I will have a similar tunic made for you by some costume-tailor here in New York—and also sandals, though I suppose the sandals will have to be made of leather, since the material used in these is a chemical product of my own time. I am planning to leave the day after



tomorrow, and I hope that will not be too soon for you.

“Indeed it won’t,” I replied. “I haven’t many preparations to make—there’s nothing to do but lock up the laboratory and phone a few friends that I am leaving for a world-tour of indefinite length. I don’t imagine there’ll be any search-parties.”

Two days later, with an hour of daylight still before us, Elkins and I had reached the base of the unsurmountable cliff on which the time-machine was hidden. The last four hours of our journey had been on foot. We were in the wildest section of the Catskills; and staring up at the terrible mountain-wall, I felt an increased awe of my strange companion, who seemed to have no doubt whatever of his ability to scale it.

He opened a small satchel, whose contents he had not hitherto revealed to me, and took out the anti-gravitational device of which he had spoken. The thing was a hollow disk of some dull, unidentifiable metal, with chains of an equally ambiguous material which secured it to the body. Elkins showed me the simple operation of the mechanism which, he said, was electronic in its nature. Then he strapped it to his chest, set the apparatus running, and rose slowly in air till he reached the top of the precipice. There he disappeared from view; but a few moments later, the metal disk was lowered at the end of a long cord for my use in surmounting the cliff.

Following directions, I proceeded to adjust the mechanism and start it going. The feeling of utter weightlessness as I floated upward was a most unique experience. It was as if I were a feather wafted on an imperceptible air-current. Being unused to the apparatus, I did not understand the finer technique of movement beneath its influence; and when I came to the cliff-edge I would have continued to drift skyward if my companion had not reached out and stopped me.

I found myself standing beside him on a broad ledge overhung by another cliff which rose immediately above it. Certainly Elkins could not have chosen a safer hiding-place for this time-machine.

The vessel itself, whose door he now proceeded to unlock, was a long, spindle-shaped affair, evidently designed for swift movement in air or ether. It could not have carried more than three people. Inside, it was lined with lockers and machinery, and three great slings or cradles in which the driver and passengers were immovably suspended. This of course, was requisite during the loss of gravity and normal weight in ether-flight. Elkins said that he had found it equally convenient to strap himself into one of the slings during his voyage in time.

Both of us were still dressed in twentieth century attire. Elkins now donned the tunic and sandals of his own age, which he had brought along in the satchel together with the

duplicates that had been made for me by a somewhat mystified costumer. These Elkins directed me to put on. I obeyed, feeling like a masquerader in the odd garb.

“That is the last of Conrad Elkins,” said my companion, pointing to his discarded suit. “Henceforth you must call me Kronous Alkon. Your name will seem pretty outlandish among us; so I think I will introduce you as Huno Paskon, a young colonial born on Pallas.”

Kronous Alkon now busied himself with the machinery of the vessel. This, to my untrained eye, was awesomely intricate. He adjusted a series of movable rods that were set in a notched board, and seemed to be winding up a clock-like apparatus with a numbered dial and three hands. There were hundreds—perhaps thousands—of figures on the dial.

“That,” he said, “is to control within precise limits the extent of our forward movement in the time-dimension. We are all set for the proper year, month and day.”

He now fastened me, and then himself, in the complicated slings, and turned to a small keyboard with many knobs and levers, which seemed to be distinct from the rest of the machinery.

“These,” he said, “are the controls for atmosphere and ether-flight. Before turning on the time-power, I shall rise to a higher altitude and fly south for about fifty miles.”

He turned one of the knobs. There was a low, drumming sound; but I would not have been conscious of any movement, if a sudden sunset glow through the vessel’s ports had not shown that we were rising above the level of the cliffs.

After a few minutes, Kronous Alkon moved one of the levers; and the drumming ceased. “The power of space-flight,” he said, “is provided by atomic disintegration. Now, for the time-flight, I shall make use of a very different kind of power—a strange, complex energy derived from the repercussion of cosmic rays, which will transport us into what, for lack of a better name, is called the fourth dimension.

“Properly speaking, we will be outside of space, and, from a mundane view-point, will be non-existent. I assure you however that there is no danger. When the time-power shuts off automatically in 15,000 A.D., you and I will awaken as if from a deep sleep. The sensation of dropping off may prove rather terrific, but no more so than the taking of certain anaesthetics. Simply let yourself go and realize that there is nothing to fear.”

He seized a large rod and gave it a powerful jerk. I felt as if I had received an electric shock that was tearing all my tissues apart and disintegrating me into my ultimate cells and molecules. In spite of the reassurance of Kronous Alkon, I was overwhelmed by an

unspeakably confusing terror. I had the sensation of being divided into a million selves, all of which were whirling madly downward in the maelstrom of a darkening gulf. They seemed to go out one by one like sparks as they reached a certain level; till soon all were gone, and there was nothing anywhere but darkness and unconsciousness. . . .

I came to myself in a manner which was like the direct reversal of my descent into oblivion. First, there was that sense of remote and spark-like entities, which increased to a multitude, all of them drifting upward in cosmic gloom from an ultimate nadir; and then the gradual merging of these entities into one, as the interior of the time-machine resumed coherent outline around me. Then I saw before me the figure of Kronous Alkon, who had twisted about in his sling, and was smiling as he met my gaze. It seemed to me that I had slept for a long, long time.

My companion pressed a knob, and I had the feeling of one who descends in an elevator. It was not necessary for Kronous Alkon to tell me that we were sinking earthward. In less than a minute, trees and buildings were visible through the ports, and there was a slight jar as we landed.

“Now,” said Kronous, “we are on my country estate near Djarma, the present capital of Akameria. Djarma is built on the ruins of the city of New York, but is hundreds of miles inland, since there have been extensive geologic changes during the past 13,000 years. You will find that the climate is different too, for it is now sub-tropical. Weather conditions are pretty much under human control, and we have even reduced by artificial means the permanent areas of ice and snow at the poles.”

He had unstrapped himself and was performing the same service for me. Then he opened the door of the vessel and motioned me to precede him. I was met by wafts of warm, perfume-laden air as I stepped out on a stone platform adjoining a sort of aerodrome—a great, shining edifice in which were housed various air-craft of unfamiliar types.

Not far away was another building, marked by a light, graceful architecture, with many tiers of open galleries, and high, fantastic, Eiffel-like towers. There were extensive gardens around this building; and broad fields of vegetables that I did not recognize ran away on each side of the distance. Somewhat apart, there stood a group of long, one-storied houses.

“My home,” said Kronous. “I trust that everything is well. I left the estate in charge of my two cousins, Altus and Oron. Also, there is Trogh the Martian overseer, and a barracoon of Venusian slaves, who do all the agricultural labor. All our necessary menial and industrial tasks are performed by such slaves, who have been imported to earth for many generations, and are now becoming a problem in themselves. I hope there has not been any trouble during my absence.”

I noticed that Kronous had taken from an inner pocket of his tunic a small rod, vaguely resembling a flash-light and having a ball of red glass or crystal at one end. This he was carrying in his hand.

“An electronic projector,” he explained. “The current paralyzes, but does not kill, at any distance up to fifty yards. Sometimes we have to use such weapons when the slaves are recalcitrant. The Venusians are a low, vicious type and require careful handling.

We started toward the house, whose lower stories were half-concealed by tall trees and massed shrubbery. No sign of life was manifest, as we followed a winding path among fountains of colored marble, and palms and rhododendrons, and baroque, unearthly-looking plants and flowers that would have baffled a present-day botanist. Kronous told me that some of these latter were importations from Venus. The hot, humid air was saturated with odors which I found oppressive, but which Kronous appeared to inhale with delight.

Rounding a sharp turn in the path, we came to an open lawn immediately in front of the house. Here an unexpected and terrific scene revealed itself. Two men, attired like Kronous, and a huge, barrel-chested, spindle-legged being with an ugly head like that of a hydrocephalous frog, were fronting a horde of bestial creatures who would have made the Neanderthal man look like an example of classic beauty in comparison.

There must have been a score of these beings, many of whom were armed with clubs and stones, which they were hurling at the three who opposed them. Their brown-black bodies were clothed only with patches and tufts of coarse, purple hair; and perhaps half of their number were adorned with thick, bifurcated tails. These I learned later, were the females—the males, for some obscure evolutionary reason, being undistinguished in this respect.

“The slaves!” cried Kronous, as he ran forward with his projector leveled. Following him, I saw the fall of one of the two men beneath the impact of a large stone. A dozen of the slaves were lying senseless on the lawn; and I could see that the persons they were attacking were armed with projectors.

Our approach had not been noticed; and Kronous made deadly use of his weapon at close range, stretching slave after slave on the ground. Turning, and apparently recognizing their master, the remainder began to disperse sullenly. Their rout was completed by the heavy-chested giant, who hurled after them with his catapult-like arms much of the ammunition which they had dropped on beholding Kronous.

“I fear that Altus is badly hurt,” said Kronous as we joined the little group on the lawn. The other man, whom Kronous now introduced to me as his cousin Oron, was stooping over the fallen figure and examining a hidden wound from which blood was streaming heavily amid

the fine black hair. Oron, who acknowledged the introduction with a courteous nod, had himself been cut and bruised by several missiles.

The introduction had been made in English. Kronous and Oron now began to talk in a language that I could not understand. Apparently some explanation was being made regarding myself, for Oron gave me a quick, curious glance. The giant had ceased hurling stones and clubs after the departing Venusians, and now came to join us.

“That is Trogh, the Martian overseer,” said Kronous to me. “Like all of his race he is extremely intelligent. They are an old people with an immemorial civilization that has followed a different trend from ours but is not therefore necessarily inferior; and we of earth have learned much from them, though they are highly reserved and secretive.”

The reddish-yellow body of the Martian was attired only in a black loin-cloth. His squat, toad-like features, under the high, bulging, knobby head, were impossible to read; and I was chilled by the sense of an unbridgeable evolutionary gulf as I looked into his icy green eyes.

Culture, wisdom, power, were manifest behind his gaze, but in forms that no human being was properly fitted to understand. He spoke in a harsh, guttural voice, evidently using human language, though the words were difficult to recognize as being in any way related to those employed by Kronous and Oron, because of an odd prolongation of the vowels and consonants.

Carrying among us the still unconscious form of Altus, Oron, Kronous, Trogh and myself entered the portico of the nearby house. Both the architecture and the material of this building were the most beautiful I had ever seen. Much use was made of arabesque arches and light decorative pillars. The material, which resembled a very translucent onyx, was, as Kronous told me, in reality a synthetic substance prepared by atomic transmutation.

Within, there were many couches covered with unknown opulent fabrics of superb design. The rooms were large, with lofty, vaulted ceilings; and in many cases were divided only by rows of pillars, or by tapestries. The furniture was of much beauty, with light, curving lines that conformed to the architecture; and some of it was made from gem-like materials and gorgeous metals that I could not name. There were scores of paintings and statues, mainly of the most bizarre and fantastic nature, and testifying to supreme technical skill. I learned that some of the paintings were first-hand depictions of scenes on alien planets.

We laid Altus on a couch. The man was indeed severely injured, and his breathing was slow and faint. In all likelihood he had suffered some degree of brain-concussion.

Kronous brought out a bulb-shaped mechanism ending in a hollow cone, which, he

explained to me, was the generator of a force known as osc—a super-electric energy used in the treatment of wounds as well as of illness in general. It was of sovereign power in restoring the normal processes of health, no matter what the cause of derangement might be.

When the generator was set in action by Kronous, I saw the emission of a green light from the hollow end, falling on the head of the wounded man. The pulse of Altus became stronger and he stirred a little, but did not awaken as yet. When Kronous turned off the green ray after a few minutes, he asked me to examine the wound; and I found that it was already beginning to heal.

“Altus will be perfectly well in two or three days,” said Kronous.

“The real problem,” he went on, “is the Venusians—and not only for me but for everyone else. It was a dreadful mistake to bring them to earth in the beginning; they are not only ferocious and intractable, but they breed with the most appalling fecundity, in opposition to the dwindling numbers of the human race. Already they outnumber us five to one; and in spite of our superior knowledge and weapons, I believe that they constitute our worst menace. All that they require is a little organization”

Evening had now fallen. Trogh had retired to his own quarters, presided over by his Martian wife, at some distance from the house. A meal consisting mainly of delicious fruit and vegetables, most of which were new to me, was served by Oron. I learned that one of the vegetables was a species of truffle imported from Venus. After we had eaten, a strong, delicately flavored liqueur, made from a fruit that vaguely resembled both the peach and the pineapple, was brought out in deep, slender glasses of crystal.

Kronous now spoke at some length. He told me that he had already the truth concerning his time-voyage and myself to Oron. “The reason I did not want my trip to be known,” he said, “is because of the mechanical principle involved, which might be stolen or duplicated by some other inventor. And I am dubious of its value to mankind in general.

“We of the present era have learned not to abuse mechanical devices in the gross manner of earlier generations; but even so, it is not well that man should know too much. We have conquered space, and the conquest has entailed new perils. On the whole, I think it would be better if the conquest of time should remain an isolated exploit. I can trust Oron, and also Altus, to keep the secret.”

He went on to speak of various things which he felt that it was necessary for me to know. “You will find,” he soliloquized, “that our world is motivated by desires and ambitions very different from those which are most prevalent in your own. The mere struggle for existence, for wealth and power, is almost alien to our comprehension. Crime is extremely rare among

us, and we have few problems of administration or government. When such occur, they are submitted to the arbitration of a board of scientists.

“We have infinite leisure; and our aspirations are toward the conquest of remote knowledge, the creation of rare art-forms, and the enjoyment of varied intellectual and aesthetic sensations, aided by the long life-span, averaging three or four hundred years, which our mastery of disease has made possible. (I myself am 150 years old, as it may surprise you to learn.)

“I am not sure, however, that this mode of life has been wholly to our advantage. Perhaps through the very lack of struggle, of hardship, of difficulty, we are becoming effete and effeminate. But I think we will be put to a severe test before long.

“Coming as you have from a commercial age,” he went on, “it will no doubt interest you to be told that half of our own commerce is interplanetary. There are whole fleets of ether-craft that ply between the earth, Mars, Venus, the moon and the asteroids. However, we are on the whole not a commercial people. Apart from those of us who have chosen to live in cities, the remainder are mostly the owners of large plantations where everything necessary is produced or manufactured by slave-labor. It is, of course, only our dwindling numbers that have made this system possible.

“We possess the power, if we so desire, of manufacturing everything through a mode of chemical synthesis. However, we find that natural food-stuffs are preferable to the synthetic kind; and we make less use of our knowledge in this regard than you might suppose. Perhaps the chief use of our mastery of atomic conversion is in the making of fabrics and building-materials.

“There is much more that I might tell you; but you will see and learn for yourself. Tomorrow morning, Oron and myself will begin to instruct you in our language.”

Thus began several quiet weeks of life on Kronous’ estate. I made rapid progress in the language, which bore about the same relation to English that English bears to Latin. I was given access to a fine and extensive library filled with the latest scientific works, with fiction and poetry of the latter-day world, and also a few rare items dating from periods which, though long subsequent to our own time, were nevertheless buried in the dust of antiquity. On several occasions Kronous took me through his laboratory, in which he could perform the most incredible marvels of atomic transformation, and feats of microscopic analysis that revealed a whole world in the electron. I realized that the science of our time was child’s-play compared with that of the era into which I had been transported.

One day Kronous showed me a cabinet full of objects that had been recovered from the ruins of New York and other antique cities. Among them were porcelain dinner-plates,

Masonic emblems, pearl necklaces, China door-knobs, twenty dollar gold-pieces, and spark-plugs. The sight of them, and the realization of their extreme age, combined with their homely familiarity, aroused in me the most violent nostalgia—an intolerably desperate homesickness for my own period. This feeling lasted for days; and Kronous did not show me any more ancient relics.

Altus had recovered fully from his wound; and I heard of no more insubordination from the slaves of Kronous. However, I could not forget the terrible scene which had formed my initiation into life on the estate. I saw many times the savage-looking Venusians, who went about their agricultural labors with a sullen air of mindless brooding; and I was told much concerning them.

Their ancestors were inhabitants of the deep and noisomely luxuriant jungles of Venus, where they lived under the most primitive conditions, in perpetual conflict with terrible animals and insects, and also with each other. They were cannibalistic by nature, and their habits in this respect had proven hard to curb. Every now and then on the plantation one of their number would disappear surreptitiously.

The slave-trade had flourished for several centuries, but had languished of late years, since those brought to earth had now multiplied in excess of the required quota. The original Venusian slaves were mostly, though not all, the captives of tribal raids and wars; and they had been purchased very cheaply by terrestrial traders in exchange for alcoholic liquors and edged weapons.

However, the Venusians had been willing to sell even members of their own tribes. Apparently there was little attachment or loyalty among them; and their instincts were those of wolves and tigers.

The Martians had come to earth mainly as traders; though their services were sometimes procurable for such positions as the one held by Trogh. They were taciturn and aloof; but they had permitted certain of their chemical and astronomical discoveries to be utilized by human beings.

They were a philosophical race, much given to dreaming, and were universally addicted to the use of a strange drug, known as gnultan, the juice of a Martian weed. This drug was more powerful than opium or hashish, and gave rise to even wilder visions, but its effects were physically harmless. Its use had spread among human beings, till a law was passed forbidding its importation. It was still smuggled both by Martians and Terrestrials, in spite of all the efforts made to stop it; and addiction to the drug was still fairly common among humanity.

By means of radio and television, both of which were now employed in vastly simplified and



improved forms, Kronous and his cousins were in hourly touch with the whole world of their time, and even with the earth-stations on Mars, Venus, the moon and the larger asteroids. I was privileged to see in their televisors many scenes that would have appeared like the maddest visions of delirium back in 1930.

We were posted on all the news of the world; and with my growing mastery of the language, I soon came to the point where I no longer required the interpretation of Kronous to understand the announcements. Much of this news was not reassuring, but served to confirm the prophetic fears that had been voiced by my host.

There were daily outbreaks on the part of Venusian slaves all over the planet; and in many cases much damage was inflicted before they could be subdued. Also, these outbreaks were beginning to display a mysterious concertion and a degree of mentality of which the Venusians had not hitherto been believed capable.

Acts of sabotage, as well as personal assaults, were increasingly common; and the sabotage in particular often showed a rational intelligence. Even at this early date, there were those who suspected that the Venusians were being aided and incited by the Martians; but there was no tangible proof of such abetting at the time.

One day, from Djarma, there came the news of that bizarre minerals plague known as the Black Rot. One by one the buildings in the suburbs of Djarma were being attacked by this novel disease, which caused their synthetic stone and metal to dissolve inch by inch in a fine black powder. The Rot was the work of a micro-organism which must some how have been introduced from Venus, where its ravages had been noted in certain mountain-ranges. Its appearance on earth was a mystery, but had all the air of another act of sabotage. It was capable of devouring half the elements known to chemistry; and off-hand, nothing could be discovered to arrest its progress, though all the Akameriaian chemists were at work on the problem.

Kronous and I watched in the televisor the working of the Black Rot. Somehow, it was inexpressibly terrifying to see the slowly spreading area of silent and utter devastation, the crumbled or half-eaten buildings from which the occupants had fled. The thing had started on the outskirts of Djarma, and was steadily devouring the city in an ever-broadening arc.

All the best-known scientists of Akameria were summoned in conclave at Djarma to study the Rot and devise if possible a means of retardation. Kronous, who was a renowned chemist and microscopist, was among those called upon. He offered to take me with him, and of course I accepted with the utmost eagerness.

The trip was a matter of no more than forty miles, and we made it in a light air-vessel belonging to Kronous—a sort of monoplane run by atomic power.

Though I had already familiarized myself with many of the scenes of Djarma by television, the city was a source of absorbing fascination to me. It was far smaller than New York and was widely spaced, with many gardens and exuberant semi-tropical parks meandering through its whole extent. The architecture was nearly all of the same open, aerial type that I had seen in Kronous' home. The streets were broad and spacious and there were comparatively few large buildings. The whole effect was one of supreme grace and beauty.

The streets were not overcrowded with people, and no one ever seemed to be in a hurry. It was strange to see the grotesque Martians and bestial Venusians mingling everywhere with humans of the same type as Kronous. The stature and build of Kronous were above the average and it was rare to see a man who was taller than five feet six inches. I, of course, with my five feet eleven, was very conspicuous and attracted much attention.

The conclave of savants was being held in a large edifice, built expressly for such meetings, at the heart of Djarma. Entering, we found that about two hundred men, some of whom were extremely old and venerable, had already gathered in the council chamber. Much general discussion was going on; and those who had ideas to suggest were listened to in respectful silence. Kronous and I took seats amid the gathering. So intent were all these men on the problem to be solved, that few of them even vouchsafed me a curious glance.

Peering at the faces about me, I was awed by an impression of supreme intellectuality and wisdom—the garnered lore of incalculable ages. Also, on many of these countenances I perceived the marks of a world-old ennui, and the stamp of a vague sterility, an incipient decadence.

For some time, Kronous and I listened to the discussion that was in progress. Pondering the various data brought forward, I was struck by the fact that all the elements assailed by the Black Rot belonged at the opposite end of the scale from radium in regard to their atomic activity and explosiveness.

Sotto voce, I commented on this to Kronous. “Is it not possible,” I suggested, “that radium might be of some use in combatting the plague? I believe you have told me that radium, like any other element, is easily manufacturable nowadays.”

“That is a striking inspiration,” said Kronous thoughtfully. “And it might be worth trying. With our chemical mastery we can make all the radium we need at will in our laboratories. With your permission I am going to broach the idea.”

He arose and spoke briefly amid the attentive silence of the assembly. “Credit for the idea,” he announced as he ended, “must be given to Huno Paskon, a young colonial from Pallas, whom I have brought to earth as my guest.”

I felt myself abashed by the grave, unanimous gaze of these erudite and revered savants, who all eyed me in a manner that I could not fathom. Somehow, it seemed unthinkable presumptuous to have made any suggestion in their presence.

However, there appeared to me much serious debate going on—a widespread discussion in which the proposed use of radium was manifestly meeting with great favor. At last a venerable savant named Argo Kan, who was spokesman of the assembly, rose and said:

“I vote for an immediate trial of the method suggested by Kronous Alkon and Huno Paskon.”

Others, one by one, stood up and cast similar verbal votes, till the motion had been approved by nearly everyone present.

The meeting then dispersed, and I learned from Kronous that work was being immediately begun in local laboratories for the preparation of radium on a large scale and its utilization in the most effective form.

In less than an hour, several chemists were ready to visit the area of destruction with portable machines in which radium was disintegrated and used as a fine spray. It was magical in arresting the Black Rot which had been eating its way continuously into the city, creeping from house to house along the crumbling pavements. The whole affected area, which now covered several square miles, was soon surrounded by a cordon of men equipped with the radium-machines; and, to the vast relief of the people of Djarma and Akameria, the plague was pronounced under control.

During our stay in Djarma, Kronous and I were guests in a fine building set apart for the use of visiting scientists. I was amazed at the sybaritic luxury developed by this people—a luxury which, though illimitably and unimaginably resourceful, was at no time in excess of the bounds of good taste.

There were baths that would have been the envy of a Roman emperor, and beds that would have reduced Cleopatra to beggary. We were lulled by rich, aerial music from no visible source, and were served with food and with all other necessities as if by intangible hands, at the mere verbal expression of a wish.

Of course, there was a mechanical secret to such wonders; but the secret was cleverly hidden, and the means never obtruded itself. Humbly I realized how far ahead of ourselves were these men of 15,000 A.D., with their quiet and consummate mastery of natural laws—a mastery which none of them seemed to regard as being of any great value or importance.

I was somewhat embarrassed by the honor paid to myself as the originator of a means of retarding the Black Rot, and could only feel that my inspiration had been merely a fortunate accident. Compliments, both written and verbal, were showered upon me by scientific dignitaries; and it was only through the intercession of Kronous, who explained my aversion to publicity, that I was able to avoid numerous invitations.

Finding that he had certain business to transact, Kronous was not ready to return to his estate for several days. Since he could not devote all of his time to me, I formed the habit of going for long walks on the streets of Djarma and through its environs.

Walking slowly amid the changing scenes of a metropolis has always been a source of unending fascination for me. And of course, in this unfamiliar city of the future, where all was new and different, the lure of such wanderings was more than doubled. And the sensations of knowing that I trod above the ruins of New York, separated from my own period by 13,000 years with their inconceivable historic and telluric vicissitudes, was about the weirdest feeling that I had ever experienced.

It was a strange spectacle through which I sauntered. Vehicles were used, of a light, noiseless, gliding type without visible means of propulsion; and there were many air-vessels which flew deftly and silently overhead and discharged their passengers on the roofs or balconies of the high buildings. And the landing or departure of great, shinning ether-ships was an hourly occurrence. However, it was the throng of foot-passengers which engaged my attention most.

Both sexes and all ages were attired in gaily colored costumes. I was impressed by the practical absence of noise, tumult and hurry; all was orderly, tranquil, unconfused. From the scarcity of women in the crowd, I realized how true were the racial fears expressed by Kronous. The women whom I saw were seldom beautiful or attractive according to 20th Century standards; in fact, there was something almost lifeless and mechanical about them, almost sexless.

It was as if the sex had long reached the limit of its evolutionary development and was now in a state of stagnation or virtual retrogression. Such, I learned from Kronous, was indeed the case. But these women, because of their rarity and their value to the race were shielded and protected with great care. Polyandry was prevalent; and romantic love, or even strong passion, were unknown things in this latter-day world.

A horrible homesickness came over me at times as I roamed amid this alien throng and peered into shop-windows where outlandish food-stuffs and curiously wrought fabrics from foreign planets were often displayed. And the feeling would increase whenever I approached the Martian quarter, where dwelt a considerable colony of these mysterious outsiders.

Some of them had transported their own many-angled and asymmetrical architecture to earth. Their houses defied the rules of geometry—one might almost say those of gravity; and the streets about them were full of exotic odors, among which the stupefying reek of the drug gnultan was predominant. The place allured me, even though it disturbed me; and I strolled often through the tortuous alleys, beyond which I would reach the open country and wander among luxuriant fields and palmy woods that were no less baffling and unfamiliar than the scenes of the City.

One afternoon I started out later than usual. As I passed through the city, I noticed that there were few Venusians in the throng and overheard rumours of fresh revolts. However, I paid little attention to these at the time.

Twilight had overtaken me when I turned back from the open country toward the Martian quarter. The sylvan wilderness, in which I had never met many people, was quieter than usual. I was following a narrow path bordered with thick shrubbery and palmettoes; and I began to hurry with a vague apprehensiveness, remembering the rumors I had heard. Heretofore I had been unafraid; but now in the thickening twilight I was aware of some indefinable menace; and I remembered that I had foolishly forgotten to arm myself with the electronic projector which Kronous had given me to carry in my wanderings.

I had not seen anyone in the neighborhood. But now, as I went along, I scrutinized the deepening shadows of the shrubbery on each side of the path. Suddenly I heard a sound behind me that was like the scuffling of heavy naked feet; and turning saw that seven or eight Venusians, several of them armed with clubs, were closing in upon me. They must have been crouching amid the leafage as I passed.

Their eyes gleamed like those of ravenous wolves in the twilight; and they uttered low, snarling, animal noises as they hurled themselves upon me. I avoided the viciously swinging weapons of the foremost and laid him out with a neat upper-cut; but the others were at me in a moment, using indiscriminately their clubs and dirty talons. I was aware of claws that tore my clothing and slashed my flesh; and then something descended upon my head with a dull crash, and I went down through reeling flame and whirling darkness to utter insensibility.

When I came to myself I was conscious at first only of my pain-racked head and limbs. The crown of my head was throbbing violently from the blow I had received. Then I heard a mutter of thick unhuman voices, and opening my eyes, beheld the flame-lit faces and bodies of a score of Venusians who were dancing around a great fire. I was lying on my back; and it required only a tentative effort at movement to tell me that my hands and feet were bound. Another man, similarly bound and perhaps dead or dying, was stretched on the ground beside me.

I lay still, deeming it inadvisable to let the Venusians know that I had recovered consciousness, and watched the lurid scene. It was something out of Dante's Inferno, with the red reflection that ran bloodily on the uncouth, hairy limbs and hideous, demoniacal features of the interplanetary slaves. Their movements, though they had a semblance of some rude, horrible rhythm, were nearer to the capering of animals than they were to the dancing of even the lowest terrestrial savages; and I could not help but wonder that such beings had mastered the art of lighting a fire.

The use of fire, I was told, had been unknown to them in their own world till the advent of men. I remembered hearing also that they sometimes employed it nowadays in their cannibalistic revels, having acquired a taste for cooked meat. Likewise it was rumored of late that they were not averse to human flesh and that more than one unfortunate had fallen a victim to their practices.

Such reflections were not conducive to my peace of mind. Also, I was oddly disturbed by a large sheet of metal grating, lying near the fire and having a grotesque resemblance to a giant gridiron, which was visible at intervals between the whirling figures. At second glance I recognized it as a sort of perforated tray which was used in the dehydration of various fruits. It was about eight feet in length by four in width.

Suddenly I heard a whisper from the man beside me, whom I had supposed unconscious.

"They are waiting for the fire to die down," he said, almost inaudibly. "Then they will broil us alive over the coals on that sheet of metal."

I shuddered, though the information was far from novel or unexpected.

"How did they get you?" I enquired, in a tone as low as that of my interlocutor.

"I am, or was, the owner of these slaves," he answered. "They caught me unaware this time; but I believe, or hope, that my family has escaped. I made the mistake of thinking the slaves were thoroughly cowed from punishments that I inflicted not long ago. I gather that there has been a concerted revolt this afternoon, from what the savages themselves (whose speech I understand) have let drop. They are not so unintelligent as most people believe them to be; and I have a theory that the terrestrial climate has served to stimulate their mentality."

"They possess secret means of communication among themselves over the most unbelievable distances that are no less efficient than radio. I have long suspected, too, that they have a tacit understanding with the Martians, who are covertly abetting them. The micro-organism that caused the Black Rot was no doubt smuggled from Venus by the Martians in their ether-vessels; and there is no telling what sort of plague they will loose next. There are some queer and frightful things on those alien planets—things that are

deadly to terrestrials though harmless enough to the natives. I fear that the end of human supremacy is near at hand.”

We conversed in this fashion for some time; and I learned that the name of my fellow-captive was Jos Talar. In spite of our dire and seemingly hopeless predicament, he showed no evidence of fear; and the abstract, philosophical manner in which he viewed and discussed the situation was truly remarkable. But this, as I had occasion to observe, was characteristic of the temper of mankind in that era.

A full half hour must have passed, as we lay there bound and helpless. Then we saw that the huge fire was beginning to die down, revealing a vast bed of glowing coals. The light grew dimmer on the antic figures around it and the beast-like faces of the Venusians were more loathsome than ever in the lowering gloom.

The dancing ceased, as if at an unspoken signal; and several of the dancers left the circle and came to where Jos Talar and myself were lying. We could see the gloating of their obscene eyes and the slaverling of their greedy mouths, as they dug their filthy talons into our flesh and dragged us roughly toward the fire.

In the meanwhile others had stretched the huge metal tray upon the bed of coals. All of them were eyeing us with a hyena-like avidity that made me shiver with sickness and repulsion.

I will not pretend that I was able to regard with any degree of complacency the prospect of becoming in the near future a Venusian *pièce de résistance*. But I nerved myself to the inevitable, reflecting that the agony would soon be over. Even if they did not knock us on the head beforehand, there would be a swift though terrible death on the bed of coals.

Our captors had now seized us by our feet and shoulders, as if they were about to fling us upon the improvised gridiron. There was an awful moment of suspense; and I wondered why the Venusians did not complete the expected action. Then I heard from their lips a low snarling, with an unmistakable note of alarm, and saw that all of them were watching the starlit heavens. They must have possessed keener senses than those of humanity, for at first I could neither see nor hear anything to justify their attention. Then, far-off among the stars, I perceived a moving light such as was carried by the Akamerian air-vessels.

At first I did not connect the light with any idea of possible rescue; and I wondered at the perturbation of the slaves. Then I realized that the light was flying very low and was descending straight toward the fire. It drew near with meteoric rapidity, till Jos Talar and myself and the cowering savages were illuminated by the full beams of the bluish searchlight. The vessel itself, like all of its kind, was almost noiseless; and it slid to earth and landed with preternatural speed and dexterity, within twenty paces of the fire.

Several men emerged from its dim bulk and ran toward us. The slaves had loosened their hold on Jos Talar and myself; and growling ferociously, they crouched as if ready to leap upon the advancing figures.

The men were all armed with tubular objects, which I supposed were the usual electronic projectors. They levelled them at the Venusians; and thin rays of flame, like those from acetylene torches, issued from them and stabbed across the gloom. Several of the savages screamed with agony and fell writhing to the ground.

One of them dropped among the coals and howled for a few instants like a demon who has been taken in some pitfall prepared for the damned. The others began to run but were followed by long slender beams that searched them out in their flight, dropping several more. Soon the survivors had disappeared from view in the darkness, and the fallen had ceased to writhe.

As our rescuers approached, and the glow of the dying fire illumed their faces, I saw that the foremost was Kronous Alkon. Some of the others I recognized as scientists whom I had met in Djarma.

Kronous Alkon knelt beside me and severed my bonds with a sharp knife, while someone else performed a like service for Jos Talar.

“Are you hurt?” asked Kronous.

“Not severely,” I replied. “But you certainly came just in the proverbial nick of time. A moment more, and they would have thrown us upon the fire. Your coming is a miracle—I cannot imagine how it happened.” “That is easily explained,” said Kronous as he helped me to my feet “When you did not return this evening, I became alarmed; and knowing the usual directions of your wanderings I studied this part of the environs of Djarma very closely with a nocturnal televiser, which renders plainly visible the details of the darkest landscape.

“I soon located the Venusians and their fire and recognized one of the bound figures as being yourself. After that, it required only a few minutes for me to collect several companions, arm them, charter an air-vessel, and seek the spot indicated by the televiser. I am more than thankful that we arrived in time.

“There has been,” he went on, “a world-wide revolt of the slave during the past few hours. Two of the continents, Asia and Australia, are already in their hands; and a desperate struggle is going on throughout Akameria. We are no longer using the electronic projectors, which merely stun. The weapons we used tonight are heat-ray generators, which kill. But come—we must return to Djarma. I will tell you more afterwards.”



Our flight to Djarma was uneventful; and Kronous and I were landed by our companions on the roof of the building in which we had been housed. Here we said good-by to Jos Talar, who went on with the rescuing scientists to find certain relatives and to learn if possible the fate of his family.

Kronous and I descended to our rooms, where we found Altus, who had just arrived from the estate. He told us that Oron had been killed in a terrific combat with the slaves that afternoon. Trogh had mysteriously disappeared; and Altus himself had been compelled to flee in one of the air-vessels belonging to Kronous. A truly horrible state of affairs.

My bruised head and lacerated body required attention, and Kronous gave an application of the green ray, which marvelously relieved all my pain and soreness. Altus, miraculously, had escaped injury this time in his hand-to-hand fighting with the slaves.

We sat for hours while Kronous told us the events of the day and while fresh reports continued to arrive. The world-situation had indeed become serious; and apart from the universal revolt of the slaves, many new and unlooked-for perils had disclosed themselves.

In the actual conflict the Venusians had suffered more heavily than the Terrestrials, and thousands of them had been slain and others compelled to flee before the superior weapons of mankind. But to counterbalance this, a number of new and baffling plagues had been loosed by the savages, who, it was now universally felt, were being assisted in this regard by the Martians. In the western part of Akameria great clouds of a vicious and deadly Martian insect had appeared—an insect which multiplied with the most damnable rapidity.

In other sections gases had been freed in the air that were harmless to both Venusians and Martians but deleterious to human beings. Vegetable moulds from Venus, which fed like malignant parasites on all terrene plant-forms, had also been introduced in a hundred places; and no one knew what else the morrow would reveal in the way of extra-planetary pests and dangers. I thought of the prophecy of Jos Talar.

“At this rate,” said Kronous, “the world will soon be rendered uninhabitable for man. With our heat-rays and other weapons we might wipe out the revolutionists in time; but the plagues they have brought in are a different problem.”

There was little sleep for any of us that night. We rose at early dawn, to learn the appalling news that the whole of Europe was now subject to the interplanetary slaves. The bacteria of a score of awful Martian and Venusian diseases, to which the outsiders had developed more or less immunity, were decimating the human population, and those who survived were unable to cope with their conquerors. Similar diseases were appearing in Akameria; and all the other plagues were spreading with malign celerity.

“We must go to my estate immediately and retrieve the time machine, which I left in the aerodrome,” said Kronous to me. “You can then return to your own age—it is not fair to ask you to stay longer in a world that is nearing ultimate ruin and chaos. We, the last remnants of mankind, will fight it out as best we can; but the war is not yours.”

I protested that I had no desire to leave him; that I would remain to the end; and also that I had implicit faith in the power of humanity to overcome its extra-terrestrial foes.

Kronous smiled, a little sadly. “Nevertheless,” he persisted, “we must recover the time-machine. Thus your means of escape will be assured, no matter what happens. Will you go with me? I intend to make the trip this very forenoon.”

Of course, I could not object to this; and I was eager to accompany him. Apart from any use which I myself might make of it, the time-machine was too rare and valuable a thing to be left at the mercy of Venusian vandals, who might well destroy it in their campaign of nationwide sabotage.

Kronous, Altus and myself made the brief trip in the same light air-vessel that had been used for the journey to Djarma. The fertile, luxuriant countryside with fronded woods and tall, airy spires of embowered mansions above which we had flown less than a week before was now patched and blotched with devastation. Many of the houses had been gutted by fire; and the ravages of the vegetable mould from Venus had blighted many fields and forests, whose grass and foliage rotted beneath it to a nauseous grey slime.

Approaching the estate of Kronous, we saw that we should arrive none too soon. The Venusians had fired the house, and even their own quarters, and columns of smoke were arising from the doomed edifices. A dozen slaves were nearing the aerodrome with the obvious intention of trying to set it on fire, or of destroying or damaging the vessels which it contained.

The features of Kronous were deadly pale with anger. He said nothing as he steered the atomic monoplane directly toward the slaves, who had now seen us and were running headlong in a futile effort to escape. Several of them had been carrying lighted torches, which they now dropped. We swooped upon them, flying only a few feet above the ground in the open space that surrounded the aerodrome.

Two of the slaves were caught and mangled by the sharp prow of the flier; and Altus and myself, using heat-ray projectors, accounted for five more as we passed them. Only three remained; and wheeling the vessels around in a sharp curve, and steering with one hand, Kronous himself dispatched them with his heat-ray.

We landed near the entrance of the aerodrome. Kronous went in; and a minute later, the time-vessel flew gently forth and settled on the platform. Kronous opened the door and called to me.

“You and I, Hugh, will return to Djarma in the time-ship; and Altus will take charge of the monoplane.”

No more of the Venusians were in sight; though we saw enough of their handiwork as we circled above the plantation before starting for Djarma. Kronous sighed at the ruin that had been wrought, but otherwise gave no evidence of emotion, and maintained a stoical silence.

Half an hour later we were back in our apartments at Djarma; and the time-machine was securely housed in an aerodrome nearby. Since it had all the appearance of a small interplanetary flier, no one but ourselves ever dreamt of its real nature and use.

Every hour brought fresh news of the national damage inflicted by the planetary aliens and their plagues. The Martians had now declared open hostility. Their first movement had been to destroy all the human embassies and trading-stations on Mars and to seize a vast amount of ether-shipping; but before these overt actions were generally known, they had also assumed the offensive everywhere on earth.

They possessed a frightful weapon, the zero-ray, which could penetrate animal tissue in an instant with fatal frost-bite. This weapon had been kept a secret; its invention and mode of operation were obscure to human scientists; and it was no less lethal and effective than the heat-ray. A battle was now going on in the Martian quarter of Djarma; and the Martians were holding their own.

Air-vessels had tried dropping explosives on the quarter; but this was found to be more dangerous to humanity than to the Martians; for the latter were using some sort of unknown ray which detonated the explosives in mid-air, or even while they were still on board the air-vessels.

I was forced to marvel at the equanimity shown by the people of Akameria in the face of all these dire problems and dangers. Everywhere, scientists were coolly endeavoring to combat the new pests and were seeking to devise more efficacious weapons for use against the outsiders. No fear or alarm was exhibited by anyone. Probably the secret of this calm, imperturbable attitude lay in the lofty mental evolution and philosophic detachment that had been universally attained by the human race through the past ages.

Knowing how insecure and impermanent was their tenure of existence among the inimical forces of the cosmos, men were prepared to meet their doom with resignation and dignity.

Also, the race had grown old; and many, perhaps, were tired of the quotidian sameness of life and were ready to welcome anything, no matter how hazardous, in the nature of change.

Djarma was now full of refugees from the outlying plantations; and more were arriving hourly. But, gazing on the calm, unhurried throng, no one could have guessed the parlousness of the general situation. There was no evidence of strife or peril or apprehension; and even the war in the Martian quarter was conducted silently, since the weapons employed were all noiseless. Some of the Martian buildings, however had been fired by heat-rays; and a pall of black smoke was rising and mushrooming above the ruddy flames.

Djarma had suffered less, so far, than most of the other Akameriaian centers. The whole country was in disorder, and all communication was becoming seriously deranged. However, a few hours after the return of Kronous, Altus, and myself, there came from southern Akameria the warning of a new and more lethal plague than any which hitherto appeared.

A tiny venusian micro-organism, a sort of aerial algae, which spread and increased with phenomenal celerity, had been turned loose and was rendering the air unbreathable for human beings over a vast and ever growing area. It was harmless to the Venusians themselves, for the thick, vaporous air of their native jungles was full of it; and though it was deleterious to the Martians, the latter had prepared themselves beforehand and were all equipped with respiratory masks and atmospheric alters.

But men were dying of slow asphyxiation, marked by the most painful pneumonic symptoms, wherever overtaken by the strange pest. It was visible in the air, which displayed a saffron color when invaded by the organism. For this reason, it soon became known as the Yellow Death.

Beyond the manufacture and distribution of air-masks on a large scale, nothing could be done by savants to combat the new plague. The saffron cloud was rolling northward hour by hour—a noiseless and irresistible doom; and the situation was indeed desperate. A conclave of scientists was called; and it was soon decided that humanity must evacuate the regions menaced by the deadly aerial scourge. The only resource was for men to retreat toward the Arctic circle and entrench themselves in dominions where the organism could not penetrate, since it thrived only in warm, tropical air.

“This,” said Kronous to me, sorrowfully, “is a preparatory step toward our final abandonment of the earth. The planetary aliens have conquered, as I knew they would. The cycle of human domination has completed itself; and the future belongs to the Venusians and Martians. I venture to predict, however, that the Martians will soon enslave the

Venusians and rule them with a far stricter hand than we humans.”

He went on. “Hugh, the hour of our parting will soon arrive. You could leave us at any rate, as you know; but perhaps you will wish to see the drama to its end.”

I pressed his hand but could say nothing. There was a tragic pathos in the swift doom which threatened the final remnant of the race. Remote and alien as these people were in many of their customs and ideas and feelings, they were still human. I admired their stoical courage in the face of irretrievable disaster; and for Kronous himself, after our long association and mutual vicissitudes, I had conceived a real affection.

All of Djarma was now astir with preparations for the northward flight. Every air-vessel or space-craft available was mustered for use; and more were being built with miraculous expedition. There were great air-liners and freighters in which personal belongings, food-supplies and laboratory equipment were transported; and the skies were thronged with their departure and their return for new cargoes. Perfect order and organization prevailed, and there was no trace of hurry or confusion anywhere.

Kronous, Altus and myself were among the last to leave. An immense bank of smoke was looming above the Martian quarter, and the weird, hydrocephalous inhabitants were being driven forth by the flames and were invading the deserted streets of the human section when we rose above the city in the time-vessel and steered northward. Far to the south, we could see a saffron cloud that had covered the horizon—the micro-organic plague that was smothering the whole of Akameria.

Beneath the guidance of Kronous, our vessel rose to a lofty elevation where more than the ordinary atmospheric speed was possible. Flying at seven hundred miles per hour, we soon neared the realms of perpetual winter and saw the sheeted ice of the polar regions glittering far below us.

Here humanity had already entrenched itself; and whole cities were being reared as if by magic amid the eternal wastes of snow. Laboratories and foundries were erected, where synthetic foods and fabrics and metals were prepared in immense quantities. The polar domains, however, were too inhospitable, and the climate too rigorous for a warmth-loving race, to form more than a way-station in the flight of humanity.

It was decided that the larger asteroids, which had long been successfully colonized by man, would form the most suitable cosmic refuge. A great fleet of space-vessels was soon assembled in readiness for departure; more were built amid the ice and snow; and each day was marked by the arrival of ships from mid-ether, plying among the planets, which had been warned by radio of existing terrestrial conditions and had come to assist in the universal Hegira.

In those days, before the ultimate farewell, I came to know Kronous better than at any previous time. His altruism and imperturbable fortitude aroused my deepest admiration. Of course he had cast in his lot with the people of his own era, and official posts on one of the ether-liners had already been assigned to Altus and himself. Those who displayed any interest in the matter were informed by Kronous that I, Huno Paskon, intended to return alone in a small ether-vessel to Pallas my supposedly natal asteroid. Even between ourselves, we seldom mentioned the real nature of my journey.

Kronous gave me careful instruction regarding the mechanism, both spatial and chronological, of the time-machine; but to avoid any error, he himself arranged all the controls in preparation for my flight through backward time. All that I would have to do was to turn on the power of the cosmic rays; and the machine would land me in 1930. Then after it landed, an automatic device would shoot it back to his own day.

The day of departure came, when vessels were ready for the inter-cosmic transportation of the world's remaining people. It was an awful and solemn moment. Ship by ship and fleet by fleet, from the ice-founded platforms on which they had been resting, the long bulks of glittering metal upon the Aurora Borealis and disappeared in the chill, dreadful gulfs of outer space. The ship to which Kronous had been assigned was one of the last to leave; and he and I stood for a long while beside the time-vessel and watched the soaring of those skyward flocks Altus had already said a farewell to me and had gone aboard the great ether-liner.

For me, the hour was full of infinite sorrow and a strange excitement, in the realization that man was abandoning his immemorial home and would henceforward be an exile among the worlds. But the face of Kronous was a marble mask; and I could not surmise his thoughts and feelings.

At last he turned to me and smiled with an odd wistfulness. "It is time for me to go—and time for you also," he said. "Good by, Hugh—we shall not meet again. Remember me sometimes, and remember the final fate of the human race, when you are back in your own epoch."

He pressed my hand briefly and then climbed aboard the spaceliner; and he and Altus waved to me through the thick crystal of a sealed port as the huge vessel rose in air for its flight upon the interplanetary void. Sadly, regretting almost that I had not insisted upon accompanying them, I locked myself in the time-vessel and pulled the lever which would begin my own flight across the ages.

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