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Title: Shadow Gold

Date of first publication: 1936

Author: Ray Cummings (1887?-1957)

Date first posted: Aug. 8, 2013

Date last updated: Aug. 8, 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130817

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

**THRILLING
WONDER
STORIES**



The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

SHADOW GOLD

By RAY CUMMINGS

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

VOL. 8, No. 2

OCTOBER, 1936

CHAPTER I

The Unknown

Johnny Hall sat alone, and with trembling fingers opened the letter. Nearly a hundred pages were here in this communication from his dead father which had been lying in the Trust Company for fifteen years. He scanned the top page.

Johnny Hall Boards the
Transition Express for Bhana,
the City Beyond Space, Where
Treasure Is Cheap as Dirt and
Enemies Lust for Power!

Weird, incredible message! So many things of mystery in his own boyhood memories of his father now were being explained. That night, for instance, when as a little boy he had joined his father in the mysterious workshop. Three milky, fluorescent beams of light converging on a little screen. Then the screen had turned into a dim yellow vista of darkness; and then things were to be seen. As though from a height, he had gazed far down upon a placid landscape, alive with shimmering yellow water.

A glimpse into another realm. But his father never would explain it. And then, a week later, that horrible scene of his father's death.

Johnny, six years old then, had awakened in the night; had sneaked into the laboratory room to find his father. Sight most horrible! His father was lying on a couch. He was wearing some kind of headgear; a sort of bathing suit; and there were wires running down his arms and legs. Not dead; his eyes were open, and one of his hands was fumbling at his chest. His whole figure was dissolving. A ghost shimmering there. It seemed drifting slowly down through the bed. And then it was gone!

Weird, never-explained mystery. But this letter was explaining it now:

When you read this, Johnny, I will have been gone into a new Time-realm, for what of your life will be fifteen years—a different state of matter, because it has a different Time-dimension. The same Space as that which our own world occupies, but held separate by that mysterious stream we call Time. The two realms—ours and this Unknown—are swept close together now. It is my opportunity. Another such proximity will come shortly after your twenty-first birthday. If I am not back with you before then I may have perished. Or I may be alive—but unable to return.

I want you to come and join me, Johnny. The trust fund will give you four thousand dollars. In a vault at the bank you will find, and now must claim, a small metal casket. No one but us two know what is in it. Take it to a place as near the couch in the laboratory of our old home as you can manage. The casket contains two transition mechanisms. At midnight of the tenth day after your birthday, from this designated place, I want you to come after me. I will have kept track of your Earth Time-flow if I possibly can—and if I am still alive I will meet you. Come to me, son. A great adventure....

There followed ten busy days for Johnny. The old frame house of his boyhood was still standing; empty of furniture now, shabby and decrepit. He got a temporary rental of the premises. By night he brought in the metal, coffinlike box. He put it in his father's laboratory room, with a board table and chairs. He worked almost entirely at night studying his father's technical instructions.

Then came the last night. Ten o'clock. Johnny was ready; he sat waiting for midnight. There was only one person here on Earth, whom Johnny was leaving with any pang of regret. Anne Johnson. He had just come back from saying good-by to Anne. Swearing her to secrecy, he had told her what he was about to do. His six-foot bulk had towered over her as she stood suddenly shrinking against him. Then she was crying—and he had torn away and run from her home.

A knock sounded at the front door of the house! It startled Johnny so that he sat transfixed, frozen. It came again; insistent. Johnny padded into the dark front hall. He called gruffly through the barred door:

"Who is it? What you want?"

"Johnny! Johnny, dear—"

Anne's voice! He flung open the door. She scurried in like a dark little shadow, and he banged the door closed and barred it again.

"I was so afraid I'd be too late—"

She was breathless, pallid, tense; beautiful little dark-haired girl—but she was disheveled, wildly excited now. She held

a small bundle under her arm, enveloped by her blue cloak.

"I came—to go with you, Johnny."

"Anne, you're crazy—" But the thing set his heart pounding.

He said at last, "All right—you win. You go in there. Put on one of the suits. Call me when you're ready."

He stood waiting.

"All ready, Johnny."

She stood in a sleek black bathing suit; her clothes lay in a little heap at her feet. Admiration for her swept him. Slim, sleek little Diana. She shivered a little as he buckled the heavy wire mesh belt around her slim waist. The adjustable headgear slipped over her coiled black hair and strapped under the chin. Wires connected it with a flexible necklace; wires were strung down her arms to bracelets; and others down her legs, fastened at the knees and ankles.

His own equipment was similar. And then they sat down to wait until midnight. Johnny found himself queerly breathless. Soon he and Anne would be gone from this room. Vanished. Yet, scientifically, mathematically, they would still be here. The same dimensions of length, breadth and thickness. But a different factor of Time. No two material bodies may occupy the same Space at the same Time—

He thought, "We're explorers of the shadows—" It was like dying. He shook off the thought. This was a scientific thing; a change of bodily density—a different quality of Matter, altered by the mysterious electronic current of the mechanism. A change of Time-flow. Not a change of time, like yesterday compared with today or tomorrow. An alteration of the *flow of Time*—so that his human existence would move forward to its destination of death at a different rate.

A factor so fundamental, so vital, that its alteration altered every quality of Matter itself, to create another realm of existence. A scientific thing—frightening to do only because he had never done it before.

Midnight. Johnny shook himself into alertness. Anne's face was pale and grim; her dark eyes stared at him.

"Over there on the floor—lie down there," he said. He gestured. "That's where father's couch stood. He started from there. I'll blow the light out now."

He lay down beside her. It seemed that with the puffing out of the light they had cut themselves off from the world. She was clinging to his hand. He said, "I'll tell you when to throw the switch on your belt. To the first intensity only—we've got to start slowly—avoid any great shock. Understand?"

"Yes." He could hear her quickened breathing.

"Move your switch—just a little—"

She did it. He heard the hum of the circulating current, her gasp, and in the darkness he saw the silvery glow of her mechanism. Instantly he moved his own switch.

A tingling thrill shot through him. His senses reeled.

In a moment Johnny's senses steadied. The network of wires on him tingled his flesh. They were vibrating with an oscillation, tiny, infinitely rapid. It seemed, all in that instant, that the vibration communicated to his body. It brought a thrill. A sense of excitement. But it was more than that. His whole being seemed tingling. It was a physical vibration, so that every tiny cell within him seemed quivering.

They were drifting downward. It was a sensation utterly strange. Weightless bodies hovering in a soundless void. The world above was gone now. The outlines of the room had flickered, tenuous as a wisp of smoke above them—and vanished.

He murmured, "We'd better try the higher intensities of the current. Ready now! We must keep together. Second! Third! Fourth!"

It swept them into an intensification of all the weird sensations. The humming within them increased.

An interval of Time passed. Time? A blurred, queer interval—Time of a new quality—a new rate of flow, coming into

their being now. Johnny saw clouds whirling toward them—imponderable clouds through which they passed and could feel nothing. It was a grey scene, not empty now but filled with shadowed shapes, blurred and indefinite. A monochrome of grey. Then presently a little color was coming to it. A distant yellow glow.

He remembered his father's detailed directions. The first color would be yellow. A golden tinge. "We've got to slow down," he said. "Third ... Second ... First! Stop there!"

They were no longer in a void of emptiness. Distant shapes were taking form. The faint golden light was a blur overhead, but beneath them now were shapes of apparent solidity.

Off to one side, something solid—huge as a great golden mountain—reared itself up. And things were moving here in the air. Was that a slowly swaying human shape, off there not far away? He heard Anne suck in her breath as she saw it. The thing was a blob, with swaying arms and legs. It was human. A man. The daylight gleamed golden upon him.

The surface was steadily rising. It was only fifty feet under them now as they wafted gently down. Off in the distance there was a broad spread of water, rippled by a breeze. A mile or so away was a golden-glowing city, set back from the lake shore.

From the ground came a dim, red beam. The signal! His father's letter had arranged it.

Johnny cried, "He's alive, Anne! We're arrived! Normality!"

They turned their switches. Normal now to this new environment. They had arrived in the new realm. It was day. Not sunlight. The sky everywhere was flooded with a bright but diffused golden light. The red signal beam was extinguished. The figures by the fern-clump scattered as Johnny and Anne drifted down. Solid ground touched Johnny's feet. He scrambled, clutched at Anne, and they stood erect, swaying.

Strange, weightless bodies! It struck Johnny with a sudden mental shock. Gravity was hardly apparent here. He stood balancing, swaying as though the gentle breeze would waft him away. His body weighed hardly more than a few pounds.

"Johnny! Thank God you're safe!"

His father's voice. Familiar timbre, out of the memories of his childhood. And he saw a man's figure come with rhythmic swaying arms and legs in a glide through the air toward him.

CHAPTER II

Strange New World

Night had come. Through the big oval open windows of the Government Castle where they were having their first meal in this strange new world, Johnny could see the golden daylight fading into a golden twilight; and then into night.

A dozen people of this world sat with Johnny and Anne and Hall senior. Some of them spoke English, which Hall had taught them. And Johnny listened to his father's account of this adjacent realm, to Earth, and the strange menace impending here. This was not the convex surface of a globe, but the concave inner surface of a void. A small realm. A void no more than a hundred or so Earth miles in diameter, with a thin layer of atmosphere hardly a mile in depth clinging to the concave surface. The light was inherent to the air—like a phosphorescence, yet waxing and waning to give an alternating day and night somewhat longer than the corresponding Earth interval.

Only one race of people were here—and this, the city of Bhana, was their largest settlement. A scientific realm, perhaps the equal of Earth, yet so different that there could be no basis of comparison.

Tenuous, giant structures loomed upward, so that the city seemed as high as it was wide and long. Giant flowers and trees growing in gardens on the rooftops. Weird lack of gravity! The whole city was a tangled metal maze of trellises, balconies, rooms, windows, doorways.

Johnny stared around the dinner table now. Strange food; strange people. He saw his father no older. But he was thinner, almost ill-looking. His thin figure now was encased in a glistening mailed garment that could have been woven blue metal.

New world to Johnny. But the same jealousy, greed and the lust for gain characterized it. Johnny sat tense, eagerly listening.

Some twenty years ago—before Hall arrived—it was decided here in Bhana not to jail but to banish all important men criminals. A city in the distant forest was established for them. Hall was saying:

"There is a colony out there now. Several hundred. No one from here had ever tried to visit it—until recently. And now we find that it's fortified! Some unknown leader, with a ghastly, diabolical plot—we have not enough gold-gas available to combat it—"

Taro said, "Your father must tell you the science of our world—"

This Taro was a young scientist. Hardly young, perhaps, for though his face was unlined, his bearing and poise of manner gave him the aspect of a man nearly forty. His position undoubtedly was important; Johnny could not miss the note of command about him. Like these other men, his skin was bronzed. A hawklike face, with high-bridged nose, a wide, firm mouth, and a queerly pointed chin. His eyes were dark under heavy black brows. Weapons hung at his belt.

When Hall first came he had worked with the scientists, adding his Earth knowledge to theirs. He found this air heavily charged with a new atomic type of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon dioxide; and also "heavy" with a strange, gaseous form of several of the familiar earth minerals. Gold, in particular. A free electron type of gold was inherent to this air. Unmeasurable pounds of Earth's normal heavy-atom solidly congealed mineral gold were here expanded millions of times in volume and diffused through this atmosphere, forming its gold-content, and giving to it the golden light.

Shadow Gold! "Yellow gas-light," Johnny's father called it. And in this air it was as vital to human life as oxygen is in the air of Earth. It held, indeed, a very similar position, for without the gold-gas this air was vitiated; the yellow glow was gone; and all living organisms, breathing such air, would die.

For the first few years after Hall's arrival this had been, as always, a very peaceful realm. He had voluntarily stayed; studying it. He saw very clearly that only harm could come from any close connection between it and Earth. So he had said that his transition mechanism was broken. He was marooned here—but there would be a time when his son would come.

Someone of this realm must have stolen the mechanism—for it vanished after a year or two. The plot of this unknown

villain must have had its inception then; and possession of the transition mechanism made his plan possible of fruition.

Of them all at this dinner it was a youth named Nido who most had engaged Johnny's attention. A slim, graceful figure—a young man certainly of not over twenty. His single clinging garment covered him from shoulders to knees. His skin was smooth and bronzed, curiously sleek. His face was slim, yet firm of chin—a face foreign to anything Johnny had ever seen on Earth.

Nido said, "A thousand of our people have been killed."

"Yes," Hall agreed. "These banished criminals for ten years now must have had spies here in Bhana. This diabolic apparatus which they have built is hidden in the heart of the forest. Nido saw it. He flew there by night a week ago. He got in—but he could do nothing—and he barely escaped with his life."

Year by year other criminals must have clustered in the forest stronghold, lured by the scheme. And now this plot was at its culmination. In the criminal Forest City colony there were established now giant absorbers, condensers, for the isolation of gold. They were withdrawing the gold-content from the air, doubtless for transportation to Earth. Disaster to this little realm here. There were natural air currents here, unalterable save for occasional infrequent storms. Hall likened them to trade winds—a steady drift circulating over the concave curvature of this inner globular surface. And the prevailing drift was from the Forest City stronghold, toward Bhana and its neighbor settlements. The condensers would vitiate the air—steal the gold from it. And the empty, poisonous air would drift on down to these populous cities, bringing lethargy and death.

It had already come. Three times now in the past two weeks. Dark, goldless air. It had not lasted long—as though the criminals still were perfecting their apparatus. But it was enough to strike death here. The aged, the sick and the very young were all who had died thus far.

Johnny demanded, "Is there no cure for this terrible, deathly sickness?"

"Oh, yes," Taro said gravely. "There is a cure—but we cannot apply it."

"It is like being slowly asphyxiated on Earth," Hall said. "You die, breathing air that is impure. The cure here? On Earth we would say air with more oxygen. Here it is air with more gold-gas. We can expand mineral gold into gas. There is no metal, here or on Earth, which cannot be rendered gaseous. But we are faced with a gold-mineral shortage.

"Our power is the expansion of the electro-atoms of gold mineral back into gold-gas. You've already seen our rocket engines. We take small quantities of the gold from the air—and put it back with the exhaust of our engines. The reverse of Earth. Every engine on Earth exudes poison. But here—our rocket streams are the very essence of life."

Nido said, "It is the vapor from our gold fuel which can cure the sickness—nothing else, of course."

"Why haven't you sent an army to round up these criminals?" Johnny asked.

"In three weeks?" Hall retorted. "Again, gold is at the crux of it. Our weapons, too, use gold-gas. And now we have no real weapons—"

"We can make an army ready," Jeoh, the governor, said.

Hall said, "We sent a ship through the air to the Forest City—and it was assailed by a gold-bomb. The first explosive weapon ever used in this world. With unlimited gold now, these criminals have devised a bomb—an ultra-rapid expansion of the mineral into the gas."

The meal was finished, but the discussion went on. The Forest City criminals were still experimenting—or waiting for something. Or, at least, not running the giant apparatus continuously. But at any moment they might start. And Hall believed, by what was vaguely known of their equipment, these giant absorbers running at full power might in a few days—or even hours—vitate all the air of this little void.

The vague beginnings of a plan were coming to Johnny. Plans he wouldn't dare mention to his father—or to any of these grave officials. But tomorrow he would tell them to this young fellow, Nido; who had already been to the Forest City. If he and Johnny could get there secretly—make away with some of that gold mineral which the criminals had already extracted from the air—and bring it back here—

Johnny's thoughts were stricken from his mind by a newcomer to the room. A woman entered. She came with a glide graceful and sinuous as a panther.

She joined the group. What her position was no one told Johnny, but he saw that Jeoh was obviously fascinated by her.

And well he might be, Johnny thought. A woman who seemed to be beyond thirty. A figure sleek of hips, full-breasted—an indefinably foreign face framed by platinum-white flowing hair with black strands intermingled. It was a heavy face, full-lipped, sensuous, reckless.

The woman did not join in the discussion; she just sat with confident poise, listening. And she stared often at Johnny, regarding him with dark eyes.

In a small bedroom on the second level of his father's house, adjacent to the Government Castle, Johnny lay in a metal bed, with a soft fabric covering on it.

He lay drowsing. Suddenly he awakened. He started up on one elbow and the bed creaked with his movement. The sharp sound brought him to full alertness....

The sense that someone was here in the room with him came strongly. Obvious! It was a waft of perfume. And then he saw, down by the floor under the window portière, something white. An ankle!

Johnny still had on his suit, and his clasp knife was at his belt. He lay, propped up on one elbow, and the fingers of his other hand silently drew out the knife and opened it.

He said softly, "Come out of that. I see you."

The portière moved aside. The woman, Rua, stood smilingly before him.

"What do you want?" Johnny demanded, and through an interval he returned her gaze. Her hair, with its black strands, was coiled and piled now on her head—a headdress like a great cone.

"I wanted to talk with you." Her voice was a full, rich contralto. Then she said with sudden directness: "About what your father told you about the Forest City—I heard your questions. I could guess you act for yourself when you have plans. And you are daring. Do I guess right?"

His heart leaped. Had he been so transparent, back there during the supper? He said, "Act for myself? Perhaps." And a caution swept him. He added, "Speak out. Don't talk riddles."

She seemed to reach a sudden decision. "What I tell—you will keep in your own heart?"

Johnny shifted in his chair. "You mean, not repeat what you say?"

"Yes. Do not talk so loud. I—find you very interesting." She seemed breathless. "I go tonight on a journey. To him who is leader in the Forest City—they call him the Master." At Johnny's start, she said: "I go to the Forest City. I used to have—influence over this Master. I think to use that influence now. He has not seen me—a long time. And I think to make him stop the sending these clouds of sickness."

Johnny asked: "You can get there?"

"I can get there," she said. "I have a flying boat. It is here now—not far from here. Not even hidden—it is at your father's dock."

Johnny was leaning forward toward her. "You're offering to take me?"

Outside the window there was a sound. And Rua heard it. With a swift, silent swing she was at the casement, and Johnny drew himself beside her. But the garden outside seemed empty.

"How long will this journey take?" Johnny demanded.

"Not long."

"I'm ready," he said.

They left by the window, wafting themselves with a leap down through the leafy foliage to the ground. Rua glided

cautiously, keeping within the heavy shadows of the shrubbery. The lake shore was near by. At Hall's long dock an open boat was lying moored. Its stern was decked over for a few feet into a tiny cabin, with the little engine amidships, and a control set in the bow.

They sat in the bow, with Rua at the controls. The boat started smoothly, almost silently. Exhilarating, weightless flight. An hour passed and it seemed to Johnny presently that the wind was increasing.

Another cloud of death coming from the Forest City.

Before Johnny could voice his startled question there came a sharp sound. Back along the dark canoe interior an upright figure showed, just emerging from the shadows of the little cabin at the stern. A third passenger; a stowaway!

It was Anne!

"Well, we're going back," Johnny declared grimly.

"Suits me," Anne said. She sat on one of the cross seats, still in her tunic, with a dark garment of gossamer fabric, which evidently she had taken from her bedroom in Hall's home, thrown over her.

So that was the noise they had heard at the window of Johnny's room! Anne had heard them talking of this trip—heard Rua say her boat was at the dock. And she had preceded them through the garden and hidden herself there.

Rua sat silent, regarding the girl with a smoldering flush.

How to handle this situation puzzled Johnny. He sat silent, trying to plan; but soon whatever plans he could guess at making were swept from his mind. The gale was blowing directly from the Forest City, back toward Bhana. And the normal yellow night glow in the air was steadily darkening. The giant condensers were operating at full capacity. That was obvious now.

The darkness of the air steadily intensified as Rua's vehicle darted like a soaring bird forward into it. They were flying now some five hundred feet above the top of a gigantic forest—a dark, tangled, matted jungle. Another interval. Had Johnny dozed? Or was this damnable vitiated air making him lose consciousness? Rua said, "I can fix that." She opened a little valve in one of the glowing conduits which ran along the inside of the gunwale—conduits which carried the gold-gas from the engine to the several rocket-stream exhausts. Some of the engine exhaust streamed out. It was like inhaling whiffs of pure air in a room which had been stifling.

Ahead of them now the river widened and divided into two narrow channels with an island between them. The island was about a mile long and six or eight hundred feet at its widest.

And here on the island was the Forest City of criminals. There were a few metal landing stages down among the trees. But no sign of human habitation. Then, from a closer viewpoint, Johnny saw mound-shaped earthen buildings, like little forts, at intervals along the island shore—a cliff shore, with the river some fifty feet lower.

"The Master and his men live underground," Rua was saying. But Johnny hardly heard her. His attention was focused to the center of the island, where there was a hundred-foot circular pit. It was a glare of yellow fluorescence. Two great conduits rose from it, one forking toward Bhana, the other in the opposite direction. They were two hundred feet high at least, widening into great round funnels, held by skeleton framework and guy ropes.

The pit sheltered the mechanism of the huge condensers. The funnel away from Bhana was the intake of pure air; the other was pouring out its black, polluted stream. The hum and throb of the giant mechanism was audible.

They were almost over the island now. He saw Rua fumbling with her instrument panel. From the bow, a light flashed. On and off. Puffs of intense red glare. It was her signal to the men below—the identification that this was not an enemy ship.

But Rua had been too distracted in piloting her craft; she had delayed the signal too long. From one of the forts came a puff of yellow light. A golden cylinder mounted upward. A gold-bomb. It burst before it reached its mark.

There was a dazzling yellow glare. The explosion was some forty feet away, but the air-pressure struck like a solid wall. One of the wings of the vehicle was torn away. They were falling and turning end over end—falling more rapidly

than normal to this realm, drawn down doubtless by some sucking air current.

Then there was a rending crash. Johnny's senses slid into an abyss of black empty silence, with only the consciousness remaining that he was holding Anne in his arms.

CHAPTER III

"I Can Conquer the Earth!"

Johnny did not quite lose consciousness. He was aware of returning sounds, and that fragments of the wrecked craft were lying on him. He called, "Anne! Anne, where are you?"

Agonizing until he heard her voice. "Here, Johnny."

Then he heard Rua's voice. None of them killed. The light gravity had saved them. They scrambled up.

The top surface of the island showed now in the yellow nightlight—a rocky area, with trees, small landing platforms, and little metal kiosks leading down underground.

Rua murmured, "Don't move—they might fire on us!"

They stood motionless, docile, while men came up and surrounded them. None seemed to speak English, and imperiously Rua talked in her own language. Then the men took them through the kiosk entrance, down a dimly-lighted metal incline and along a length of tunnel. And then into a draped and padded grotto apartment.

Then the Master appeared before them. He came through a rift high up on the side of the grotto. They saw his figure stoop at the low entrance; then he straightened and came walking slowly down a narrow steep slope of rock.

It was Taro, the soldier-scientist, trusted as a friend by the officials in Bhana—he who had sat with Johnny and the others at the dinner only a few hours ago. Strange commanding figure, this Taro. His expression had a queer Satanic cast, the peak of hair in a triangle on his forehead, his slightly upturned eyebrows and narrow, pointed chin.

"So? You come to visit me, young Johnny?" His mailed garment was of black and white metal. One of his hands toyed at his belt where weapons were hanging. He was ironically polite. "Sit down. We will talk."

"Thanks," said Johnny. He gestured to Anne and she sat beside him on a padded bench. Taro remained standing before them, swaying slightly forward and backward. His gaze swung to Anne, and for a moment clung. Then he turned to Rua, who was standing here. "You did well, Rua, to bring him. And this girl, Anne—"

"I bring not her," said Rua. "She came of herself."

Taro's gesture dismissed her. He swung his arm, from which a string of ornaments hung clinking. "Enough. Go, Rua. Soon I will send this girl Anne to your care." He watched her as she slowly left the apartment. A guard moved aside to pass her, and a heavy metal door swung open and closed.

And Johnny stared. Prisoners?

He saw now that the woman Rua had tricked him. Where was her vaunted power over Taro? Johnny had at least half believed what she said. In reality, it was obvious now, she was no more than one of Taro's spies, ordered to bring Johnny here.

"Now we will talk," Taro was saying. He was still smiling faintly. He swung all his body as though it were pivoted at the waist and knees, and addressed Anne.

"What is your name?"

She found her voice. "My name is Anne Johnson."

Her tone was low and steady. Strange little Anne, with courage not to show her fear. Johnny saw admiration leap into Taro's eyes.

"And what are you to him? His friend?"

"Yes—his friend."

"You are the first Earth woman I have ever seen. I think I like you." He turned to Johnny. "I have to talk of—my plan to go to your Earth, very soon. Your father, he thinks to send an army against me." He laughed harshly, sardonically. "I

work with your father when I am young. Rua knows him since a little girl—he make good his job to teach us your language. But he is an old man—a fool to help everyone and not himself. But you, perhaps—"

"You want help from me?" Johnny said quickly.

"I tell you. On Earth I will be very rich—perhaps richest of any man in your world. That brings great power—not so?"

"Yes," Johnny agreed. "Just about."

"I understand that." His grin came again. He lowered his voice a little. "We are over two hundred of us here. I have always tell my men I take them with me. I can conquer the Earth! That is true. But I do it alone."

His face was intense. "I—Taro—how could I ever be powerful here? Gold means nothing here. Your great Earth—who shall say, with all this gold, what Taro may do?"

He checked Johnny's interruption.

"You listen—you ask my plans—I tell to you. My condensers here, I will run them until all the gold in this little world is mine. Are you rich on Earth?"

"No," said Johnny.

"That is good. You will be, living with me. I need you. I am a fellow practical. I will get to Earth with much gold. What then? I look strange. I need clothes. I need a house. I need—" Again his gaze swept Anne. "I need a woman to keep my house. I need my raw gold changed into money to buy what I want."

Johnny nodded. Then he said abruptly, "Did you steal the transition mechanism my father brought here, fifteen years ago?"

"Yes," Taro smiled. "And I fool them all in Bhana that I have to make many journeys to other cities on government business."

He paused; then he said, "And here I have a surprise for you—" He called to one of his men. The fellow came with the black sack Johnny had left in the wreckage, laid it at Taro's feet and went back to his post.

Taro opened the sack and took from it the two mechanisms which had transported Johnny and Anne from Earth! Johnny understood now. And Anne gasped, and stared. Rua's midnight visit to Hall's home—to get Johnny—had also been to get these mechanisms.

"How did that accursed woman know where father hid them?" Johnny demanded.

It made Taro laugh. "She explain to me—your father, naturally he tell a thing like that to Jeoh, the governor."

And Johnny remembered Jeoh's fatuous look at Rua when she had come to the dinner.

Taro added, "We have now three of the mechanisms here. This realm is doomed. Everyone here will die—except myself—and you and this girl. You do not want to die? You will go gladly to Earth—out of death here."

"Yes," Johnny agreed. "Why wouldn't I?"

He added cautiously, "I would like on Earth to share your gold. I can certainly help you."

"Of course," Taro smiled. "And I will have this Earth girl."

With two backward sweeps of his arms, he wafted himself closer to Anne, who had moved a few feet away. Every muscle in Johnny was tense for a leap.

Taro added, with his slow smile, "You will find me a man you can like very quickly. I know how to please women. Are you afraid of me? Do not be."

She had lost her cloak; she was garbed only in her suit. His fingers brushed lightly over her neck and throat. She did not shrink, but suddenly a cry burst from her. And Johnny leaped, head first, like a diver taking a plunge. His head struck Taro's shoulder; the force of Johnny's leg-thrust against the rocks knocked both their bodies half a dozen feet from Anne.

Johnny floundered, clutching at his adversary. He felt his fingers reach Taro's belt; but Taro's hand caught his wrist, twisted it with surprising strength. They struck the rock floor.

But this was Taro's natural environment. He jerked loose. His hand was at his belt. A weapon came out. Anne screamed again. A guard from outside was sailing across the apartment in an arc.

In Taro's hand was a small cylinder. A coiled wire sprang from it, struck Johnny's chest, and, uncoiling, wrapped itself around him, pinning his arms. And in another second Taro fired again. Another wire struck his knees. Lashed them. And Taro, pouncing, lifted and flung him. Helpless, all in those few seconds, bound by the tightening wire into an inert bundle, Johnny's body sailed backward across the grotto.

And then the guard, with a black stone knife in his hand, came like a giant bird and pounced, but did not strike, for Taro shouted a command.

The grotto was in an uproar. Other guards hurtled through the air and landed on Johnny. Then they lifted him; held him balanced erect on his feet.

And Taro was standing now, grinning. He called: "I would not hurt you—this time. We will talk again when you have less foolish anger."

The men carried the bound Johnny away into a dim, cavelike cell. They unbound him. The metal door closed; clanked with outer bars. The voices faded.

Johnny was left alone, with only the steady distant hum of Taro's giant condensers breaking the silence.

Johnny could find no way of getting out of here. He shoved at the door, but it was unyielding. A tiny glow of reflected light came from the vaulted ceiling, and he could presently see that he was in a small eroded cave whose walls, ceiling and floor were patched with metal. A small ventilator grid, breast high, admitted a stream of pure air.

In a corner of the cell there was a small metal bed, with a fabric mattress. Johnny lay down. He was bruised and tired. And both hungry and thirsty. He supposed someone would come, eventually.

He drifted off into restless slumber, and was awakened by a voice. He started up, confused. There were faint murmured words, in English.

"Johnny! Johnny Hall! You in there?"

It was coming through the small ventilator grid which was only a few inches wide; it seemed some four or five feet away.

"Johnny—I'm waiting—trying to get you out." There were other sounds. Other, more distant voices. The murmuring voice said hurriedly, "I come again—" It stopped.

The heavy barred door moved inward. Rua came through, with a metal platter of food and drink.

"Thanks," Johnny said. "Look here, have you been with Anne?"

"Yes. She is all right. She ask me about you. Taro, he was pleased that I bring you. He will take us all to Earth—"

"Good," said Johnny. "Tell him the sooner I get out of here, the better."

She leaned forward. "Once I love Taro very much. But you—I think I like better. You are angry that I trick you?"

He shoved her violently off. "Get out of here!"

She swayed to her feet. "No man has ever said that to me before."

Fury of a woman scorned. Upon her heavy face was a look of smoldering anger. "You love that pale Earth girl. Yes—you love her, love her!"

He grinned. "Go on—beat it. Get out!"

She moved through the doorway, and was gone. The men swung the door closed. Johnny went on eating. And then cold fear struck at him. What a fool he was—what an accursed fool! He had sent Rua away in a vengeful fury—and it was she

who had charge of Anne. And whose voice was it which he had heard through the ventilator? A friend here—

Then at last Taro came. He stood in the doorway with the guards behind him. He smiled. "You feel more with reason now?"

"Oh yes," Johnny agreed. "Is Anne safe?"

He held his breath. "But yes," said Taro. "I have to go and inspect my condensers. You hear that they still operate? I was thinking to take you now to see them. We must plan how best we are to transport the gold to Earth. The time is almost here—"

It made Johnny's heart leap. A chance—

"I'd like that very much." He was standing, with Taro facing him; and he saw that Taro was alert to his least move.

Johnny grinned. "I'm not fool enough to jump on you again."

"You are a fellow I like," Taro responded. "We shall have no trouble. There are many details to arrange. Come now."

They went up an ascending passage. It seemed not more than fifty feet until they stood in the shelter of a metal kiosk on the island surface. A guard was here. The giant forked funnel towered overhead. The luminous pit under it hummed and throbbed.

Taro and Johnny were clinging to a low railing. It led from here across the rocks to the lip of the condenser-pit.

"Hold tight," Taro murmured. "You could blow away so easily."

They edged along the railing; and now three dark-robed men with goggles followed after them. Johnny felt now the impurity of this tumbling air—eddies of the poisonous cloud of death overhead which were swept down here. Taro was telling his plans for transporting the gold to Earth. They would begin that soon, and meanwhile keep the absorbers steadily running.

"We'll need the transition mechanisms handy," Johnny said.

Taro chuckled. "I have them safe."

"Where?" said Johnny. He tensed for the answer; but Taro only laughed.

"Suit yourself." Johnny said. "Where is Anne? Let's take her now and show her the gold. Tell her our plans."

"She is coming," Taro said readily. "Rua brings her."

They started again along the railing. It joined a similar rail at the lip of the pit. And edged black against the glare, were the figures of two women. In a moment Johnny and Taro—and the three guards—joined them. Johnny was aware of Anne's quick anxious glance, and a smoldering gaze from Rua.

Taro said, "The wind is very strong. My condensers make a disturbance world-wide."

The light from the pit was so intense that Johnny could not look into it. He edged over to Anne; he put his arm around her. The three guards had approached. Taro and Rua were donning goggles. One of the three guards handed a pair to Anne, and then one to Johnny—goggles with dark lenses to dim the glare. Then the black-robed, goggled man swayed away from him, gripping the railing. But his body brushed Johnny—and his hand, just for an instant, gripped Johnny's arm. A warning? A signal? Was this the mysterious friend? A friend here, masquerading as one of Taro's men? Johnny was alert.

With the goggles, Johnny could see comfortably into the glare. A metal incline led over the lip of the pit, and then a few feet down to a railed platform. It was in a back-eddy of the wind, partly sheltered. And from there they gazed down at the strange, forbidding scene spread below them.

The pit was circular; about a hundred feet in diameter. It was, in effect, a giant cone, set point downward into the ground. The two overhead forked funnels came down, narrowed into twenty-foot conduits which branched into a system of small tubes and pipes. They stretched like tangled pythons over the steeply sloping inner surface of the great cone whose central bottom point, Johnny judged, was a full hundred and fifty feet below him.

Metal handrails on the cone's inner surface were strung between the vats and conduits. But Johnny saw no men down there. He leaned toward Taro.

"Where do you control this?"

Taro answered the question readily. The control house was up on the island surface. Fifty men were there; and all the others were spread at various points along the channel bluff, manning the island's defense weapons.

"The gold—" Taro added; and he gestured down toward the bottom of the pit, where the conduits led to smaller vats and converged at last into one. And there, the gold was visible. Mineral gold. It came sliding like yellow sand, through a grid, down a little chute and into an open container. The narrow yellow stream gleamed and sparkled in the light.

Taro was saying, "I will show you the volume of our treasure. For the transportation to Earth—"

A goggled man came plucking at him. They talked excitedly in their own language. Then in English, Taro exclaimed:

"One of my men found killed! His clothes and weapons taken! There is a spy lurking here—"

He moved a few feet away, talking with several other excited men who had joined him. Johnny stood tense, with a hand on Anne's shoulder. The original three guards blocked the nearby exit from the balcony ledge, though they moved a little from it to listen to what Taro and the others were saying.

Suddenly a swish of air sounded. Rua's body came sailing head forward and struck both Anne and Johnny together. They had been standing clinging to each other. Rua's jealousy! It flared now to an uncontrolled frenzy. Her onslaught knocked Johnny away from Anne. He fell sideward; he saw Anne fighting the older woman's clutch, and a knife blade glint in the yellow light. He shouted wildly.

"Anne! Look out—her knife—"

In that second Johnny gripped a handrail, and with a pull of his arm, flung himself at Rua. He saw the black glinting blade over Anne's breast; he caught Rua's wrist; twisted it; the knife fell—and they sank in a struggling heap.

And in that second, the commotion had spread. Taro came lunging upon Rua. Johnny glimpsed his face, distorted by a wild fury. He had a knife, and with a sweep plunged it into the whiteness of Rua's breast and left it there. Johnny jerked free of the mêlée; his hand had snatched Rua's knife from the floor. He gained his feet, holding Anne under his arm. But in that second half a dozen bodies struck him. He saw knives coming at Anne; he warded them off, and suddenly yielded.

He relinquished Anne as Taro drew her upright. Rua's body lay inert on the ledge. Limp, dead thing, stained now with crimson. Sensuous, heavy face, beautiful once, but now with staring eyes and fallen jaw.

On Taro's face was a cold contempt. "The end—for her." He steadied himself on his feet; he lifted Rua's body and heaved it violently upward past his head. It rose above the nearby vats, sailed upward and outward.

An eddy of wind caught it; then an outgoing circular rush. It was sucked up; dwindled by distance—a little oblong blob. The draperies waved; the head and long hair dangled. It was sucked up; dwindled by distance, whirling end over end. Then it lunged into the upper gale of rushing wind—a dot, and it was gone.

Taro was smiling. He turned his grim smile upon Johnny. "She was right when she think you and Anne are lovers. Not so? Well—she is out of my way, now."

And, for the same motive as Rua's, would he not dispose of Johnny? The thought was knocked from Johnny's mind. There came a distant shout from Taro's men overhead.

Sudden, startling news; so startling that it rang with a turmoil over all the fortified little island. From off in the direction of Bhana, the fluorescent comet-tails of oncoming flying ships were visible—a great luminous crescent across the golden sky!

CHAPTER IV

Combat in the Giant Cone

Anne and Johnny were being shoved upward from the cone-interior. Taro left them clinging to the upper railing with a group of goggled men guarding them. And Taro himself darted away to take command of the island's defenses.

What a different scene was here now! The great forked funnel still belched its foul cloud into the dimly golden sky. A haze was off toward Bhana, blurring now the great fiery crescent which marked the line of distant oncoming vessels. They were flying high; still many miles away. To Johnny it seemed that there must be a hundred or more of them.

But Hall and Jeoh had tricked Taro with a surprise. Ahead of this main squadron a smaller fleet had secretly come and landed in the nearby forest. The ships were hidden, but the men from them had already sallied forth to the attack.

Across the channel there was a radiance of light a mile away. The nearer forest was dark; and from the darkness on the opposite river bank, human figures were rising, like human birds in this realm of so little gravitational force. A few came at first; then a flock of them. Men impelled individually by small rocket engines. They lunged up into the wind. They were flung away by crazy wind-eddies; but struggling, they mounted over the channel.

Taro's little forts were in action now. From some, small golden projectiles mounted, and burst among the fluttering aerial figures. Puffs of intense golden glare illumined the night. The sizzling little thunder-cracks mingled with the roar of the wind and the humming throb from the cone-pit. The rising, struggling figures were blown and scattered by the raking bombs. But some survived, struggled higher, got above the channel, then over the island and were fluttering down.

From the dark forest, every instant, more were rising. And the crescent of Bhana ships swept nearer, sank to the forest to reinforce the others which were already there.

A desperate, frenzied attack. From one of Taro's forts, a jet of black goldless air was now hissing up into the struggling enemy figures. It swung back and forth. It seemed to cut a swath through them, so that hundreds of them, limp like dead birds, were hurled away by the wind. But there were too many now. They began landing upon the island; floundering down, mailed men with glinting swords, fluttering to the island surface. Scrambling; gaining their feet; struggling toward the forts where in a moment hand-to-hand fighting was in progress.

The goldless air jet came down, wavered and for a moment raked the island surface. Johnny caught a stifling whiff of its fumes, which the wind tore away. Then the jet went up into the air again. A bomb, badly directed, burst near at hand.

A hundred or more men of the Bhana forces seemed to be on the island now.

And still more every moment were dropping from the cloud of them overhead. The bombs from Taro's forts were wavering. The interiors of many of the little stone buildings now were engulfed by hand-to-hand combat. There was a low squat building a hundred feet away. Johnny thought it perhaps the control room of the giant absorbers. The Bhana men were massing in front of it, but horizontal air jets were tossing them back, frustrating their attempts.

Then Taro again was here. He came between Johnny and Anne. The golden glare painted his face and there was no mistaking its grimness. He said, "I had no thought they would attack with suicide desperation like this. I kill ten to every one who lands here—"

Yet more were steadily coming. A little group of them fluttered down and caught a railing near at hand. A tiny gold-bomb flung horizontally, burst and scattered them. Its air pressure tore at Johnny; its light dazzled him. He turned confused, and his heart leaped wildly. He was alone here! Taro and Anne were gone!

Then a mailed, goggled figure was struggling with him. One of Taro's guards. He fought. He called, "Anne! Anne, where are you?"

"Johnny!" This man he was fighting, murmured, "Johnny! Wait! Don't—"

Not fighting him! Holding him—trying to ward off Johnny's blows. His antagonist's goggles came off. "Johnny—I could not get to you. Only just now—"

A familiar voice. The voice through the ventilator. The glare now showed Nido's face—Nido, the young man whom Johnny had so liked in Bhana.

"Your father was so worried over you, Johnny. You and Anne—and Rua's boat gone. Always, we have suspected Rua. So I came here—landed in the river. I got down here, killed a guard—"

Johnny gasped, "Anne is gone! Anne and Taro—"

"Yes. I saw them. Into the cone, just a minute ago." He pulled at Johnny. "This way; watch that the wind does not blow you."

They drew themselves from the island surface. It was only a few steps to the glowing cone-rim. They plunged down into it. There seemed no following figures. The invaders were all assailing Taro's forts and the control house.

Nido plunged ahead, with Johnny after him. They passed the metal ledge where before Johnny had gazed down into the cone. No one here. They scrambled down a metal stair incline. They were on the steep inner surface now, sliding, floundering, clinging to the metal handrails.

Johnny gripped his companion. "The transition mechanisms—he would keep them by the gold. Take her to Earth—"

Taro's getaway. Abandoning everything—escaping with Anne.

Nido was panting: "The gold—near the bottom. Let me lead you."

The confusion, the dazzling glare, the plucking wind, made it difficult for them to keep their feet. They were sliding, half falling down the narrow railed pathways between the vats. It was eerie here.

Then Johnny found that they were by the open vat of the gold-mineral. There was less wind here, and less glare. A great pile of yellow sand, and the trickle from the metal chute steadily adding to it. He felt Nido thrust a long metal bar into his hands; and saw Nido scramble and wrench another from the apparatus nearby.

Then they saw Taro! He was perched on a ledge partly behind a nearby vat. Taro and Anne. He had already forced her to don one of the transition mechanisms. He was starting to put one on himself. His clothes were bulging, bloated with the gold-sand which he had stuffed into pockets and pouches of a garment in which now he was robed. Anne was crouching, terrified. Then she saw Johnny and Nido come plunging.

She lunged, but Taro caught her; cuffed her face. He was reaching for the transition switch at her belt. Then suddenly he must have realized his own peril. Anne was desperately fighting him; and abruptly he seized a knife from his belt. Its blade flashed over Anne's breast.

All in a second or two. Nido was in advance of Johnny as they hurtled their bodies through the air. And Nido, more skillful, was plunging with truer aim. His body struck between Anne and Taro, and twisting, he caught the knife in his own breast and sank down, partly on top of Anne, still trying to shield her.

Taro was erect, swaying, fumbling for another weapon to meet Johnny's plunge. Johnny struck him. They rolled and bounced on the ledge, kicking, scrambling. Taro had another knife in his hand; it slashed Johnny's shoulder and then was gone—knocked away in the struggle though Johnny tried to catch it. Taro's fingers clutched at his throat, then shifted, gouging at his eyes, knocking away the goggles.

"No you don't!" Johnny panted. "Give me that!" Taro was now clutching from his belt a strangely-fashioned cylinder weapon. They struggled for possession of it. Johnny was the stronger. He found himself with the heavy, sharp-pointed cylinder in his hand. He had no idea how to use it, save to stab with its point.

Taro was wildly squirming, lunging his body, twisting his head. Johnny saw that his grin had faded, and a wild terror was in his eyes. The stabbing cylinder struck his forehead. There was a sizzling flash that seared Johnny's hand. Taro's forehead had cracked like the shell of an egg. The cylinder had exploded.

There was only a gruesome headless thing writhing in Johnny's arms. He cast it away. He lunged for Anne. "You wait, Anne—I'll be back in a moment."

A frenzy was on Johnny. He remembered that iron bar which Nido had thrust at him—and Nido's purpose then had been

to smash all this damnable mechanism.

The bar was where Johnny had dropped it. He seized it; whirled and plunged for a great, coiling pipe which was white with snow and ice congealed upon it. The coil smashed under his blows. It seemed that all the world here was bursting into light. Then he was pounding a vat, with a vast hissing roar and glare engulfing him. The vat exploded with a great upflung sheet of yellow light; and Johnny staggered back, crouched and leaped again to his task.

But soon he saw his efforts were not needed. Deranged mechanism. The derangement now was spreading of its own momentum. The broken icy coil hissed with yellow vapor. Another vat went up into a sheet of flame. The pythonlike conduits were bursting. The heat momentarily was blistering, but the wind sucked it away.

Black smoke swirled, turgid, rushing upward in the wind, and Johnny still could breathe. There was an instant when he saw the headless body of Taro sucked upward into the maelstrom, ironically following Rua, a dark blob; then it vanished.

Through the chaos of electric glare Johnny fought his way back to Anne. She was bending over the body of Nido; she seemed oblivious to the inferno around her. She gasped:

"He's alive, Johnny, but he's—"

Nido's glazing eyes saw Johnny; his bloodless lips parted into a faint smile. His faint words were audible as Johnny and Anne bent low over him.

"You did it, Johnny. Saved my world—that's good. And I saved Anne for you. She is—she is very beautiful."

His gaze clung to Anne's face—the last thing he wanted to see as the eternal darkness closed in upon him.

Anne and Johnny crouched together, over the shell of what had been Nido, with the chaos of glare and roaring, blasting tumult of sound bursting around them. Then the glare slowly died. A puff of light here, then another far away, dimmed by the smoke.

The throb of the condensers was gone. The diabolical mechanism at last was stilled. Darkness and silence came, with only the wind sucking and whining across the top of the giant cone.

CHAPTER V

Johnny's Treasure

For an interval Johnny and Anne crouched dazed, huddled together in the smoke-filled gloom at the bottom of the cone-pit. Then they became aware that the air was clearing; the normal breeze across the cone-top brought a lessened pressure which continued to suck up the fumes. Lights and sounds were distinguishable up there now. A blurred turmoil.

And presently they climbed laboriously through the tangled smoking wreckage to the island surface. The golden night was brighter now; the giant branching funnels were still standing, but only a normal breeze was passing through them. The island-top, no longer gale-swept, was a turmoil of lights and men, with a last remnant of the fighting still in progress, so that Johnny and Anne crouched in hiding, fearful that the victorious Bhana forces might kill them before they could proclaim their identity.

Bhana ships had landed here on the island now, disgorging fighting men. Overhead, others were circling, zooming past with the glare of golden rocket-tails.

Then the fight was over. The strewn bodies everywhere here were mute evidence of its brief but savage fury. One last spurt of goldless air-jet leaped from the nearby control building where a last remnant of Taro's men still were fighting; and then the Bhana warriors, massed here on the rocks, swarmed forward and engulfed them.

The confusion was passing. Men came and peered into the wrecked cone. Then they climbed down into it to get Taro's gold—to bring it up and transport it to Bhana, where all the available engines, running full, would put it back as fast as they could into the polluted atmosphere.

Normality to this realm. Taro's menace was past. Then Johnny and Anne disclosed themselves. They were taken to Jeoh, and then to Johnny's father, who had come here with the Bhana forces.

The gold-sand was strangely light, almost weightless. There was only its bulk to handle. Johnny watched the men carrying and loading it. On Earth, it would be fabulous wealth.

"Yes," Hall said. "And we are going back to Earth now—without it. Contact with our Earth can bring nothing but harm here."

"You did magnificently, Johnny. Poor Nido—he deserved to live to see all this triumph." Hall sighed. "I just want to get back to Earth now, Johnny. Destroy my damnable transition mechanisms."

He seemed like a man utterly tired, at the end of a task which abruptly was finished.

They stood watching while the gold-sand was loaded into a Bhana ship. All the Bhana craft were still exuding golden streams, circling off over the forests and back. Johnny had secured the transition mechanisms from the cone-pit. Anne had been wearing one of them; Johnny and his father donned the others. The flight to Bhana was a few hours' trip down a steady wind. Triumphant, returning fleet. Johnny did not see the main sections of Bhana itself.

The city, damaged by the storm, was dark, with all its lights cut off—its transportation system stilled by lack of gold fuel. The ships took some of the gold there now. The lights winked on. The city emerged from darkness and impending death. The thousands of stricken people were treated by small exhaust-jets, as on Earth, oxygen tents are used.

Hall, from his own home, had gathered just a few trinkets, mementoes of his years here in this world. He felt that he could not stand saying good-bye to his friends here. Hastily, he, Johnny and Anne got into Hall's little car, to go to that spot outside the city where Johnny and Anne had landed. They would leave from there.

And in the car, they found Hall's little serving maid. Her name was Neena. Johnny had met her when he first came; he had hardly noticed her. Nido's sister. A feminine duplicate of the gentle Nido. The same bronzed glistening skin; the same patrician aspect of delicately moulded features. Johnny stared at her now and thought he had never seen so quaintly beautiful a girl anywhere.

She had been crying; the shock of losing her brother; and now, to lose Hall, her master. Hall said gently:

"It's best for us to go, Neena. Our Earth must never know of your little world. I came here, but I brought you nothing but tragedy and death."

She just sat staring. Hall piloted the car out over the golden lake. The light was growing with the coming dawn. Johnny told himself he had never seen so beautiful a sight as this glorious golden landscape.

Hall landed near the clump of giant ferns, a mile or so outside the golden-glowing city.

"You can fly the car back, Neena," he said. "You'll explain for me? Tell everyone I always knew they were my sincere friends."

Neena gulped and nodded. "You—won't ever come back?"

Hall suddenly said, "I won't ever let anyone else on Earth have the secret of the transition. But maybe—sometime—we might come."

Neena turned abruptly, and from the car produced a small sack which she had hidden there. And under her arm was a rolled bundle of fabric. With a quaint, pathetic smile, she gazed at Hall as she unrolled it.

"My brother Nido had planned with me to do this when you left. He—he is not here, but I am doing it for him. These clothes from your house—they are yours."

She handed Hall two metallic robes, fashioned with many pouches and pockets. Hall took them, surprised but smiling.

"Why yes, Neena, thank you." He was puzzled. He said, "I made them years ago, Johnny, anticipating your coming. I was collecting a little gold-fuel I had forgotten, and I used all of it since, in rocket engines."

But Neena was lifting the small white sack. "A present from our world; you were very good to us always. Nido gathered it from the little engines. It is not much. Our world will not miss it—or need it."

Little golden treasure. Johnny was standing with his arm around Anne. He glanced down and met her glowing misty eyes, shining with the happiness of her love. Treasure so much more precious than all the gold of all the realms in all the Universe.

"I thank you," Hall was saying gently. "We all thank you very much, Neena."

Then presently they were ready to start. Neena's quaint little figure, waving farewell in the growing golden dawn-light, was the last thing they saw as they swept away into the transition.

[The end of *Shadow Gold* by Ray Cummings]