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THE DEVOURING TIDE

By

John Russell Fearn

writing under the pseudonym
Polton Cross

First published in *Thrilling Wonder
Stories*, Summer 1944.

*Convinced of His Own Power, Scientific Wizard Richard Carr Takes Muriel Clegg into
Outer Space, Ready to Create New Universes Beyond the Horizons of Civilization!*



The invaders had come suddenly and caught Earth unprepared. Moving at the speed of light their approach had been invisible. They came in thousands—monstrous vessels whose occupants gave no warning and issued no ultimatum. Total annihilation of Earth's inhabitants seemed to be their sole objective.

The instant they crossed the sensitive etho-electric barrier, flung in a network from the far flung outposts of the System, the Earth alarms had sounded and men and women moved instantly to their stations to handle disruptive screens, the gigantic atomic force guns, the radio-vibration barrages. Others dispersed to control hurtling armadas by remote teleradio.

The unknowns were clearly beings of a higher mental order than Earthlings. They used weapons which drew on the ether for supply. They hurled walls of shattering vibration down upon the defenses. In places the protective screens of the Earthlings smashed and buckled. Beneath these gaps whole

cities rocked and split up amid a million thunders. Tens of thousands of gallant defenders died in the onslaught. Those who did survive surged to other points to reinforce their desperately pressed comrades.

Deep down in the bowels of the earth shining armies of robots marched to the tune of the Armament Master, robots which carried an unceasing flow of materials and ammunition to the battling Earthlings on the surface. If the onslaught could only be stemmed there was a chance—a slim but still a real one—that Earth might yet survive. . . .

In a still-quiet room, buried a mile below the carnage of the surface, Lester Carr worked silently, undisturbed. Though fully aware of the danger threatening the world, it was not to his task to deal directly with it. As First Phycist to the Governing Council he had his especial duties to perform. Right now he was bending over a series of tubes and dials, in the center of which reposed a grayish looking mass not unlike flesh.

Silently a woman entered. Lester Carr did not look at her even though he was aware of her presence.

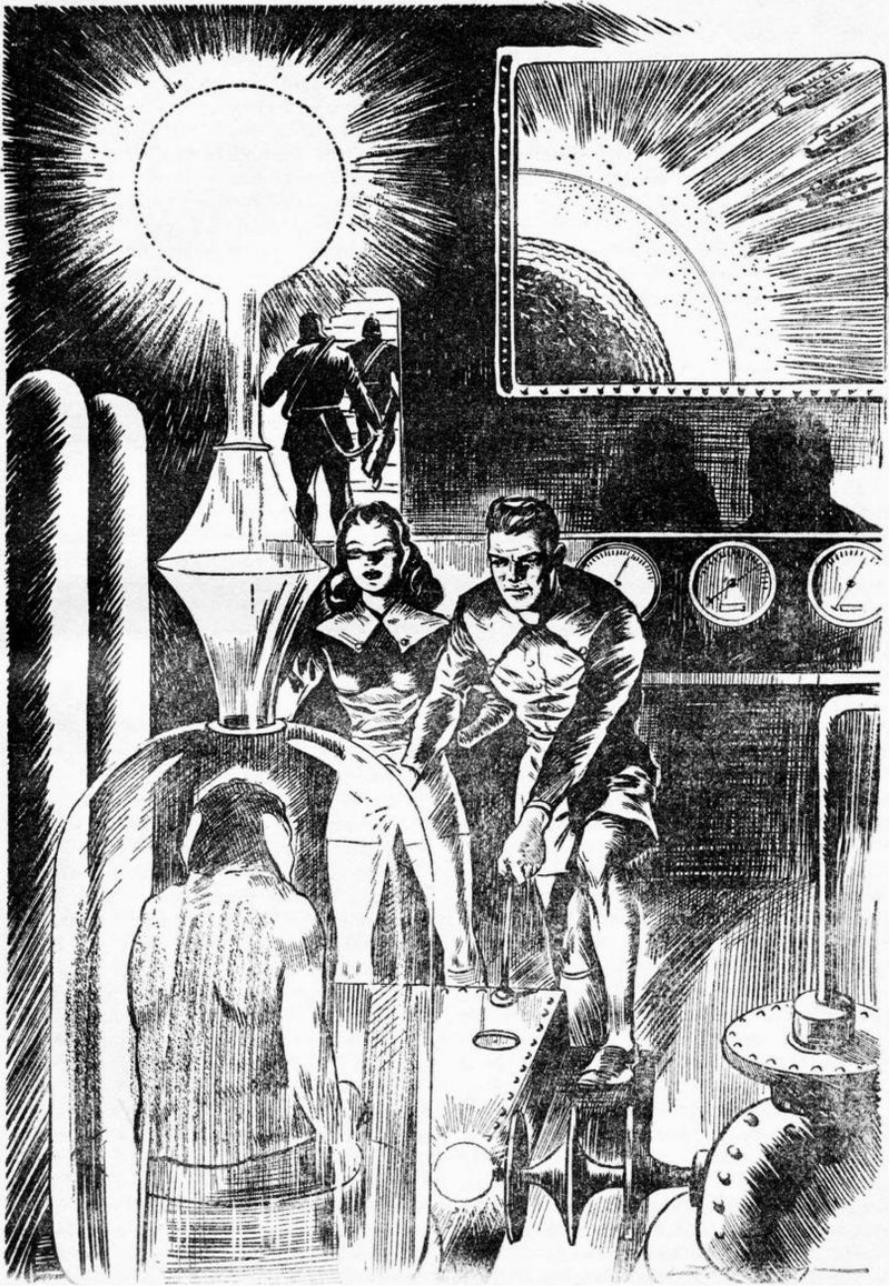
“Catalyst Seventy-X-E,” he ordered, regarding the substance on the testing plate. “Quickly, please!”

It was handed to him. He held the phial over the intake valve of his strange instrument. The stuff mingled instantly with the fleshy mass. It fumed saffron yellow, emitted a choking discharge. Carr closed a petcock and looked up with a grim smile.

“It may interest you to know, Freda, that our enemies are from a planetary system which has Morcas-Eighteen as its sun.”

The girl started. “But that’s a colossal distance away. As far as our present day telescopes can penetrate.”

“It still remains a fact,” Lester Carr said. “We know the contents of Morcas-Eighteen, and since the planets of a particular sun take on the qualities of the primary, or parent, there can be no mistake. This piece of flesh from one of the invaders contains elements which are only applicable to Morcas-Eighteen.”



Carr soon had the brain frequency amplifier at work on the creature

“But why should they pick on Earth for such an assault?” the girl demanded angrily. “Why not Mars, or Venus, or even some of the planets nearer to their own System? What have we done?”

“Just nothing,” Carr shrugged. “The only explanation is that they chose Earth because they felt our science would not be able to master them, a fact which they were perhaps uncertain about in regard to planets near their own home. Why they should travel so far afield I can’t imagine—yet.”

There was silence for a moment. Then with a smile Carr suddenly relaxed. The stern scientific authority of his still young face melted into affectionate lines.

“In the stress of duty one would think us strangers,” he murmured. “Forgive my brusqueness, dearest.”

“At such times as these, Les, I forget too that we are married, certified A category, and have a perfect son designated by the Eugenics Council as Super-X-A.” The girl gave a little shrug of her white-coated shoulders. “After all, duty must come first. But seriously, how do you think we will make out?”

“We’ve got to survive, Freda. For nearly two centuries we have built up an ordered civilization of science and progress, and the inhuman senselessness of war—even from the void—must not be allowed to destroy it.” Carr clenched a lean fist and beat it vexedly on the bench. “What beats me is the senselessness of this particular attack. Why did they pick on us? The only explanation seems to be that they were driven from their own world. And a power that can drive out master-scientists en masse must be something serious indeed. That is a solemn thought.”

He turned suddenly and switched on the visiplates connected to the pick-up stations on Earth’s surface. Somberly he and the girl watched the sky thick with the hurtling hordes from Morcas-Eighteen, hurling forth their battering rams of scientific destruction.

“Unless I am much mistaken,” Carr said at length, a touch of exultation in his voice, “we’re holding our own. That new Clark-Andrews multi-dimensional ray is our salvation. A bit longer and we may definitely turn the tide—”

He turned as the door opened again. It was the Second-in-Command of the Defense Force who entered. With him came two heavily armed guards holding between them with magnetic attractors a squirming, putty-gray being whose shape utterly defied all human standards. He seemed to be composed of one jellylike body, a protuberance for a head, in which were two vast hate-filled eyes. He moved with clumsy slowness on blocky legs.

“Perfect specimen of the enemy here, Carr,” the S-in-C said briefly. “Find out what you can from him and report back to headquarters.”

Carr nodded and motioned the guards aside. In thirty minutes he had the brain-frequency amplifier at work on the creature and exchange of thought waves began.

“Do you come from a planet which has what we call Morcas-Eighteen for a sun?” Carr demanded, indicating the spot on a cosmic map.

The jellyhead gave grudging acknowledgment.

“Then why have you attacked us? What are you seeking? Why such a wholesale flight into the void?”

“Why not?” vibrated the sullen inquiry. “It was done before us. Ages ago, when the Black Infinity threatened to engulf Miras, our nearest neighbor, the inhabitants of that planet also fled into space seeking safety. Wisely, they avoided our planet knowing that within a few thousand years it too would be engulfed. They came to Earth, vanquished the inhabitants, lived for awhile in comfort— Then, with their scientific resources built up again after the

conquest, they moved on once more. Always traveling, always trying to escape the inevitable maw of the Black Infinity.”

Carr stood puzzling for a moment. “This Miras you speak of. How far away was it from you?”

“Possibly as far as Sirius is from you—that is on the side away from Earth.”

“Not far from the rim of the universe, then?”

“Just so. But that rim overtook and threatened to destroy Miras. Hence the exodus. Nor was there any warning because the Black Infinity moves faster than light and hence gives no warning of its approach. Finally it will engulf all planets, even this one.”

Carr asked thoughtfully. “Just how long is it, in Earthly time, since the Miras scientists vanquished the Earth?”

“It would be about the middle of your Mesozoic Era.”

Carr meditated over another question as the radiophone to the surface buzzed for attention. He listened, gave a grim smile, then switched off.

“It may interest you to know, my friend, that your invasion has failed,” he announced. “The news has just come through.”

All the assurance and power seemed to evaporate from the man of far-away.

“For me,” came his thoughts, “there is nothing left!”

And with sudden, stupefying force his center of consciousness built up to a brief anguishing concentration. Literally he destroyed his fleshly cage with the force of his own thoughts!

Carr and his wife stood astounded by the occurrence for a moment. Then Carr sighed gloomily.

“A pity he had to do that. There was so much more I wanted to ask.”

“What does it matter now?” Freda cried, her eyes dancing. “We’ve won. We’ve smashed the invasion. Don’t you see what it means?”

“Yes,” Carr said slowly, with unwonted grimness. “I think I do.” He became suddenly alert. “We’d better hurry to headquarters and get the news first hand.”

The return of peace and the chance to rebuild the damage done occupied the attention of practically every scientist—except Lester Carr. In hours of duty he had, of course, to do the work assigned him by his superiors. But for him the real work began when the city synchro-buzzers announced the time for recreation.

In his own modest laboratory, adjoining his city apartment, he spent a great deal of time weighing up the things he had heard and learned from the invader with whom he had communicated.

“There’s no doubt,” he said one night to Freda, who had followed his investigations with never-flagging interest, “that something real and deadly is going on, way out in the Universe—something defying our telescopes because it moves faster than light can travel. It is something so remote that it would take whole generations of spacemen ever to reach it and return with a report. Those beings of Morcas-Eighteen were not flesh and blood. Their power to annihilate by thought proved that. Possibly they were a form of crystalized thought, hence able to move at a speed far in excess of light. That’s the only explanation for them attacking us so suddenly and without warning.”

Freda watched him for a moment.

“But what does it matter?” she insisted. “The danger is over and done with.”

"I don't think it is," Carr interrupted grimly. "In these past months I've spent a lot of time studying the newly found records of Atlantis and Mu, produced by the Lang Expedition of Twenty Thirty-five. You will remember that they added to earlier findings of the Twentieth Century, wherein—even that long ago—it was postulated that some cataclysm or other wiped out Atlantis and other early civilizations. The cataclysm was not one of Nature, however, but an invasion like the one we've just defeated."

"Are you sure of that?" inquired Freda.

"There are countless evidences," Carr went on restlessly. "There are samples out of the sands and ruins themselves to prove that inhabitants of another world had been present. Most of the samples, according to my tests, coincide with the elements one would expect to find from invaders inhabiting such a world as Miras must have been. And the time coincides. Our captured friend said Earth was conquered in the mid-Mesozoic Era, which was approximately the time of the Atlantis tragedy. Obviously Atlantis was submerged by attack from space and the invaders became masters over the remainder. Then the invaders moved on, farther and farther away from—the Black Infinity."

Carr's words trailed off as he lost himself in speculation.

"This Black Infinity seems to suggest a hole in space—some overwhelming force beyond science to master," he resumed. "Miras was overtaken first. More recently a planet, infinitely nearer to Earth, was abandoned for the same reason. It requires no imagination to see that this unknown horror will finally reach here, too."

"But what is the Black Infinity?" Freda demanded.

"We don't know for certain. But we can assume that it is vastly destructive, since whole populations flee from it. There may be other invasions yet, as successively nearer systems to Earth are overwhelmed."

Carr straightened up suddenly. "We're facing danger from two sources, Freda. Future invasions by races using Earth as a stopping place—and the menace of the Black Infinity itself. We shall have to prepare against the one and master the other. I must try and get a scientists' convention arranged."

"Dearest, wait a moment," Freda caught his arm. He turned in surprise and her voice was serious. "How long do you think it will be before this Black Infinity reaches us?"

"How can I say when I don't know what it is? As a rough guess, estimating the distances between Miras and the Morcas-Eighteen System, I'd say perhaps two hundred years. But this unknown thing may—and probably will—increase its speed. Why?"

"Just that I'm wondering what you can do about it. What can any of us do about it? We've not solved eternal life. As generation follows generation—especially if no more invasions come—the peril of the Black Infinity will no longer seem to be a real menace as it does to you right now. We know of it, but it is to posterity that we must hand down the knowledge. And unfortunately peril loses its sharpness with time."

Carr frowned. "There has got to be a way to hand it on," he muttered. He reflected, pacing agitatedly up and down. "And I'll find the way somehow," he said finally. "Now I must go."

The governing council, however, refused Lester Carr his application for a convention. He was listened to, purely out of courtesy, and his whole earnest speech was recorded—but that was all. Politely but firmly the council made clear to him that he was chasing rainbows.

At first he was bitter, disconsolate. Then new ideas took hold of him. For months he worked in secret. Then, one day, he returned home with his son from the State-creche.

Carrying him in his arms Carr motioned his wife to follow him into his laboratory. For the first time she saw the machine on which he had spent so much time and energy.

"This," he said eagerly, settling the child down, "is a special improvement on the Telepath we have at the laboratory—the one with which I communicated with that invader. You see, Freda, study has shown me that it is actually the particular qualities of a certain brain which produces genius, the ability of the brain that is to adapt itself uniquely to the incessant thoughts flowing in from space."

"Space!" Freda ejaculated, astonished.

Carr nodded. "Jeans of long ago referred to a mathematical God. He also referred to space itself being a mathematical abstraction. Later scientists in our own time have averred that space, if not pure thought itself, is certainly close to it. Therefore our brains simply become the transformers by which these inflowing thought waves are transformed into activities of greater or lesser intellectual power, according to the brain which receives them."

Freda nodded slowly, pondering.

"Those brains better suited than others become geniuses for that reason," Carr finished. "Such a brain has Richard here. Our Richard!" he went on proudly, rubbing the boy's curly hair. "By ordinary standards alone—according to his State grade-card—he would grow up into an extremely clever man. But I intend to make him a superman—one who will be able to carry the vast scientific responsibility which will one day be his!"

Freda's voice revealed anxiety for the first time.

"Les, just what are you going to do?"

"Use the device you see here. This machine of mine will stimulate Richard's brain with extra energy every time he is allowed to be with us at vacation period. Thus, even as a battery is sharp when freshly charged, so will his brain assimilate State lessons with consummate ease, as well as absorbing the new, untold thoughts from the void itself. He will realize where he fits in the great pattern of mortal evolution. I shall teach him what I wish him to know during the vacation periods, and I believe he will understand and retain all that I shall impress on him, thinking about those things until next vacation time comes round."

Carr stopped talking and placed the leather helmet of the device on the child's head, then stood back to survey it critically. Freda bit her lip anxiously, for the first time wavering in her trust of her husband's scientific skill. A thousand foolish yet forgivable thoughts welled in her mother's soul. They reached an agony of apprehension when Carr closed a switch dispassionately and listened attentively to the humming of the small engines embodied in the machine.

To Freda's intense relief Richard went on playing unconcernedly with the tool he had picked up. Carr watched him hawkishly, glanced at a gage, then at last switched off.

"That'll do for this time," he commented, to Freda's satisfaction. "Now let's get him out of here and start in to teach him a few simple facts. This for us is our supreme experiment—indeed our sacrifice, and for it generations as yet unborn may have cause to be devoutly thankful. Come on."

Weeks passed into months—and months into years, but Lester Carr never once let up in his extraordinary experiment. By carefully graduated doses, timed to match the boy's age, he instilled into the young, razor-keen brain the whole story of the invasion from Morcas-Eighteen, together with the threat of the Black Infinity. Richard Carr absorbed it all silently, then discussed it. At the age of ten he had the wits of a fully-grown, clever man.

At twenty Richard Carr was certificated as Double Grade-A, a degree of brilliance usually assigned only to those who were acknowledged masters of one or many sciences. At twenty-five he reached the sacrosanct region of Chairman to the Supreme Scientific Council. It seemed inevitable that he would finally become the elected ruler of the new generation.

Lester Carr had every reason to feel proud of his experiment, and indeed Freda too. They felt content now to stay in the background and watch full fruition—but this was denied them. A fault on the Tenth Traffic Parallel hurled the pair of them to death one summer evening. When he heard the news Richard Carr realized that he was alone in the world, the sole custodian of his father's grim warning of disaster to come.

To the surprise of everybody when it came to the Presidential nominations Richard Carr refused to stand. He pleaded important work in research and sought retirement to study out the problem wished on him by his far-seeing but much less brilliant father. Money he had aplenty from his scientific inventions.

Muriel Clegg, his one assistant, though a Grade-A student in astrophysics and mathematics, found Richard Carr an utterly complicated and rather arid being. He was emotionless, coldly precise, with a wizardry over science and its mysteries that was somehow godlike. In appearance he was handsome, and to hear him talk was to be aware of a calm, self-centered ego which was little short of exasperating. He treated the pretty brunette Muriel as a well precisioned machine, utterly blind to the admiration—slowly deepening to affection—which she had for him.

In his laboratory one evening he seemed to forget that the girl was even present and talked half to himself.

“There is only one explanation for the Black Infinity. The Universe, as we know it, began from the explosion of a gigantic primal atom, its matter rushing outwards from the central core to form the expanding universe. We, of the Universe, and all other matter in it, are the parts of the initial explosion. But outside of the Universe—and inside it, the central core from which the primal atom exploded—there is nothing. A non-space time . . .”

Carr stopped, meditating, and then went on. “The Universe is expanding—that is already acknowledged. But mathematics postulate that there must come a time when the inner explosion will overtake the outward expansion. That means that the inner core of non-space time will overtake the exploded matter at colossal speed. Faster than light, therefore faster than matter itself can move. Matter itself is being engulfed by non-space-time! And this non-space-time expansion, moving with resistless, awful speed will eat through all matter until it joins the equal state of non-space-time existing outside the universe.

“Nothing,” Carr finished hopelessly, “can stop it. Now we know why those scientists fled. They could no more defeat the laws of celestial mechanics than I can. Soon the others will flee the devouring tide. Betelgeuse, Sirius, Alpha Centauri. They will use Earth as a temporary haven no doubt, and vanquish us if they can. Then again they will flee as Earth itself comes into the danger line. The whole Universe must ultimately be swallowed up. It will be forced back into the state of non-space-time that existed before matter was.”

Muriel Clegg stared at him, the immensity of his conception slowly filtering into her mind. At length his burning eyes sought her own.

“How did it all begin?” he whispered. “Whence came this primal atom that now threatens us with destruction because its power is less swift than the non-space-time which bore it? If it began once, it can, perhaps, begin again.”

He broke off, and with characteristic suddenness said,
“That will be all for now,” he said. “I must see the Defense Council immediately.”

Carr had little difficulty in convincing the Defense Council of coming invasion once he had outlined his theory. And sure enough it came, two months later.

As on that other distant occasion the alarm shield gave the initial warning of imminent danger. Richard Carr answered it by issuing vital instructions. Weapons, terrible indeed, devised by his own brilliant mind, came into being. Then, satisfied that the invaders would get all they had asked for, he retreated to his laboratory, and took Muriel Clegg with him. Then he threw a switch which entirely inclosed the place in a shell of protective energy.

Even so the girl was somewhat fearful.

“What happens,” she asked, as Carr stood brooding over a sheet of equations, “if they succeed in breaking through the barrier weapons?”

“They won’t. They’re not dealing with material things, but with transfigurations.” Carr switched on the external screens and he and the girl stood watching fixedly as, without any sign of fire or blasting, the invading machines just vanished into thin air while trying to attack. It was an uncanny sight, as though they had been sidetracked into another dimension.

“The basic energy quanta of those ships,” Carr said, “is rendered void because the mathematical postulations making them up are being canceled out. My weapons are based on the probability waves of the electron, incorporating nine dimensions.”

He switched off again, pondered, and then saw the girl’s eyes were upon him. She asked a coldly logical question.

“If you’ve invented such a mighty barrier why surround this place with a force shield?”

“Because I’m not fool enough to expect an absolute exactitude in my mathematical barrier. I had to devise it hurriedly. It may not be an exact composite. The force shield here is to keep away all intruders. I’ve vital work to do.”

He swung to the bench, but at the identical moment the radio signaled sharply. He switched on. To his surprise Defense Controller Menrose’s face appeared on the teleplate, and it was worried.

“Carr, they’re getting through.”

Carr gave an incredulous gasp. “It’s impossible.”

“Fact remains that they are and we’ve got to drop back on our normal defense weapons. God knows how we’re going to hold out. You’d better figure out what’s wrong, if it isn’t too late.”

Carr switched off, and stared perplexedly before him for a moment. Then he gave a start at a thunderous roar from outside. A titanic invading machine swept low over the city, dropped a complete salvo of incredibly destructive bombs.

Through the window Carr and the girl watched the Fifth and Sixth Traffic Parallels blow out in cascades of tumbling metal. The laboratory window shook violently in its frame.

“It means,” Carr breathed, clenching his fist, “that these creatures are cleverer than I.” He stared at the horde of machines pouring through the gap in the invisible screen. “They have worked out a system of counter-mathematics to destroy the barrier. That means—”

“We face destruction because of their immense intellect?” the girl asked bitterly. “That’s the truth, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps.” Carr’s lips tightened. “But this Earth is ours, and knowledge was given to me to try and save it. Somehow I am going to— At least save those worth saving. Quickly, come with me.”

He pressed a button and a slide opened in the metal floor. Cold light gushed up from below. The girl followed Carr along a flight of steps to an elevator. Thence they traveled down into the bowels of the earth itself for nearly a mile. Finally they came out into an underground wilderness of science.

The girl had never been here before. She gazed round on glittering crystallike engines, mighty coils, banks of tubes, flat platforms, vacuum globes— She swung, speechless with amazement, as Carr closed the insulated slide leading to the surface elevator.

“We’re safe enough here,” he said. “The force shield protects the upper laboratory, and therefore this place down here. This laboratory is essential. Its machinery is valuable.”

He did not attempt to explain it there and then, however. Instead he looked at the girl with a meditative gaze.

“Muriel,” he said, “in a short time the invaders will beat us. Blood and toil will be offered by our people, yes—but final destruction is inevitable except for the few. And for them only a little while until the Black Infinity comes. I begin to see that I can never save Earth. But at least I can hope to create a better world on which the survivors can start again.”

The girl’s expression showed that she did not understand. He went on in a dead level voice.

“Once I realized what had gone wrong out there in space—that it was the encroachment of non-space-time, I set to work to determine what created the Universe in the first place. I was led to the absolute conclusion reached by Jeans long ago—namely, it was willed into being, perhaps by a super-scientist, or just as possibly by quite an ordinary being. In a sea of non-space-time thought would produce, tangible vibrations from which matter itself, would be born. A primal atom would be formed. You understand that?”

“I—I think so,” the girl hesitated. “But where does it get us? How does it stop the outflowing of—”

“It doesn’t. Nothing can. The Universe we know is doomed to extinction. When the inner core of non-space-time reaches the outer waste of non-space-time matter will cease to exist. But, if a Universe was created by thought back in the unimaginable past, so it can be again. By me!”

The girl was silent at that. She saw the light of intense ego burning in Carr’s eyes. Already he imagined himself a god.

“I have this apparatus to finish,” he concluded. “I shall complete it in time because I must. You cannot help me in its construction but you can attend to the lesser details—food, comforts, every report of the battle above our heads. I have to concentrate.”

When the certainty of defeat was finally realized a call for help reached the laboring, sleepless, superhumanly active scientist. He was in the midst of the final assembly of his queer and complicated machinery when Muriel Clegg reported a weak signal from somewhere about fifty miles away, underground. She made the announcement rather uneasily, fearful of disturbing Carr’s thoughts.

To her relief he nodded and hurried over to make full contact. Transmission was bad but just audible. The visiplate was out of action completely.

“Yes, yes, I know,” he said curtly, after listening to the doleful recounting of events on the surface. “We’re beaten—just as I expected we would be. Anytime now the victors will drive downward after us. That doesn’t concern me. What does concern me is that we can leave a doomed world to them and, instead, start to make a universe of our own.”

A voice squawked hysterical protests, and he paused, his face clouding as he listened.

“What kind of fools are you? I’m offering you the chance to be as gods. I am giving you the opportunity to create worlds at will—and you say such ideas usurp creation, destroy the power of the All Being who is acknowledged artisan of the whole universe.” Carr’s mouth hardened. “There isn’t such a being. It is a fallacy handed down through millennia. Heredity? Any man, if he be a scientific genius, can become a god. I can become a god!”

The transmitted reply became a little clearer.

“Your words are reaching us distinctly now, Carr. We are separated from you by fifty miles of solid rock. We have no tools to break our way out even if we wished. You cannot reach us, or we you—”

“I can reach you,” Carr interrupted. “If I want to.”

“If you want to!” echoed the voice. “You’ve got to! You must devise new weapons for us and recast your mathematical barrier. The Earth is ours and we still want to defend it.”

“Fools, the lot of you,” Carr retorted contemptuously. “No power can save Earth now. The outflowing core of non-space-time will in any event soon annihilate it. That is what I am fighting. Oh, why are you so blind? Don’t you see what I offer you? The chance to create another universe out of non-space-time. I know it can be done. If you are willing to come in on this last adventure—take over a world of your own creating within this as yet unborn universe—just say the word. I will find a way for you to get here to my machinery.”

There was a long silence, presumably while the views of the people were sought. Then the voice resumed.

“No, Carr, you speak of science beyond human reach. There are certain limits beyond which a man’s domination may not go.”

Furiously Carr snapped off the switch and stalked back to his apparatus.

“Imbeciles,” he breathed hotly, fingering his massive machine. “Clods! I give them omniscience, and they prefer to fight like moles against impossible odds. Was it for this that my father made me into a genius? That I should find a way out and have none with the wit to follow me?”

“Perhaps,” Muriel Clegg said slowly, “your father did not realize that you would reach so far.”

He relaxed slowly, staring at her. Savagely he caught her arm.

“Do you mean by that that you mistrust me, too?”

“No, I don’t mistrust you,” she answered frankly. “I know you to be the greatest scientist of this day and age. But I can still remember also that you are flesh and blood like the rest of us and not the omnipotent deity you would like to think yourself. Man cannot create universes, populate them, feed them, control them.”

“Equations don’t lie, woman,” he screeched.

“Perhaps not, but if you execute the sum total of those equations you’ll have a price to pay.” The girl’s voice was quiet. She faced his obvious fury without flinching. “Universes are the work of God, whom all obey and few understand. You propose to defy God, and that is something I don’t dare contemplate.”

Carr straightened up and released her arm abruptly.

“You’re as earthbound as the rest of them. You have no sense of real science. I am doing what I know to be right. I am perpetuating the glorious cause of Earthly science elsewhere, starting a universe afresh.”

“For what?” Muriel asked colorlessly. “A material universe will only evolve and then it will die, as this one is doing. It will leave everything unexplained, as this one has done. We will be blotted out before we even get a chance to understand it.”

The young scientist nodded in agreement.

“That is the point,” he cried, trying to infuse her with something of his own dynamic fire. “If however—I—or we—create a new universe we shall start from that point and work up. So we lay the foundation for a new and mightier upward climb.”

“I cannot believe it,” she said seriously. “What I have learned of physics tells me that, so long as you are material, so long as matter is in existence, you are bound to operate along false laws. You cannot start a Universe where another one left off. Cosmic cyclism insists that the chain is birth, maturity, death, and nothing—not even you—can ever alter it.”

“At least I shall try.” Carr breathed. “Don’t you see?”

She said nothing and so he turned back to his machinery. For perhaps another two hours he labored, unmindful of the girl. Then at a sudden series of vast concussions he looked up sharply.

“The invaders,” Muriel said quietly. “The last screen just went blank as they smashed surface contact. I saw them attacking the outer valves. Before long they’ll be down here.”

Carr hurried over to her, caught her shoulders.

“Muriel, I beg of you, come with me. I know I’m right. You have been so close to me through everything. You are the only one I feel I can trust. I have come nearer to loving you than anybody else I have ever known. I’ll give you— What will I not give you, if you’ll come . . .”

She shook her head slowly. “No. I feel that when everything is added up I’ll be higher up the ladder to salvation than you.”

“You blind, ignorant little fool!” he exploded. “Oh, why is it my lot to be cursed with numbskulls for associates? You choose death, like those other purblind idiots. Within an hour the invaders will be down here to destroy you—and I offer you eternal life. In any case doom is inevitable while you stay on Earth.”

For a second or two he saw the shadow of a doubt in her eyes.

“I won’t let you sacrifice yourself,” he cried. “I need you—even if only for the possibility of mating and starting a new race on a world as yet unborn. Science demands that you come.”

She gave a little gasp of alarm as his hold on her shoulders tightened suddenly. Without giving her the chance to reply he whirled her to the footplate of his giant machine. She clung to him helplessly, speechless. He gave that grim smile—that smile of rocklike assurance—and reached out to the controlling switches.

Even as he did so the noise in the outlet valves to the surface increased into terrific clangor. Then it was gone!

Blank nothingness fell upon Carr and the girl, a blankness born of the sudden blasting and total construction of all physical attributes. He no longer held the girl. Instead neither of them had bodies at all. Nothing was present except a sense of headlong motion as the faster-than-light postulations of his strange mathematical machine hurled them headlong through the infinite.

Within seconds, as it seemed to him, he was through the narrow limits of the woefully contracted Universe—hurtled out beyond into the formless space-time minus, where no matter was, where there was naught but the primal dark.

Since thought was no longer pinned by material incumbrances Carr realized that he was free.

He thought of Muriel Clegg and the fierce compulsion behind his wordless call brought her to him.

“Free thoughts in a free space,” his thoughts cried. “Nothing to hold us. To us falls the vast honor of creating a Universe. Think! Concentrate! Interlocking thought vibrations must bring matter into being. We will create the primal atom.”

Convinced of his titanic authority and power, he concentrated with all the scientific knowledge at his command. He felt too the weaker impact of the girl’s mind. Before them something formed out of the grayness, fashioned by thought itself impinging on non-space-time.

It grew, expanded outward, became the trembling primal atom of a new Universe. It exploded with bewildering impact, creating of itself mighty suns and nebulae . . .

The thought-entity which had been Richard Carr watched intently with omnipotent eyes—than as the matter formed into the gradual birth of an expanding Universe a strange fear tugged his mind. Memory was slipping! He was commencing to forget!

“Muriel!” he concentrated desperately. And he wondered why he felt comforted to find that she was near. “Muriel, something is wrong. We have created a Universe. When planets have cooled—no matter how long it may be—we could have gone to one of them, created a race of mighty scientists. But I am forgetting. Why? Why? What is wrong with my reasoning? Muriel, answer me!”

His intelligence was slipping so fast he could hardly grasp her reply.

“We have created the Beginning—not a new Beginning, as you had expected. Your thoughts and mine formed this Universe—and that was only possible in non-space-time. But now normal space time has again been created, all its laws are operative, too. And you and I are compelled to obey them. It is the eternal law of physics, Richard. All the upward climb you and I have made—all the climb through our ancestors from the primal amoeba counts for nothing. Death would have been so much easier. We would still have stood a chance. Here we have none, for we have gone back to the core of the Beginning. Here we shall remain, all knowledge stripped from us, all to be relearned as we slowly climb again.”

But her words had lost meaning for Richard Carr. Ego, masterful science, the longing to be a god, the ability to create and master a Universe—they had been grand dreams, all gone. Muriel had gone too, whirled back into a remote primality.

Now he had no other awareness beyond that of dull waiting. Waiting for the dawn of life when he could again begin to climb!

Like an echo from a lost infinity he seemed to remember something, a text had it not been?

No Other Gods Before Me!

But the rest was blotted out in the unknown.

[The end of *The Devouring Tide* by John Russell Fearn (as Polton Cross)]