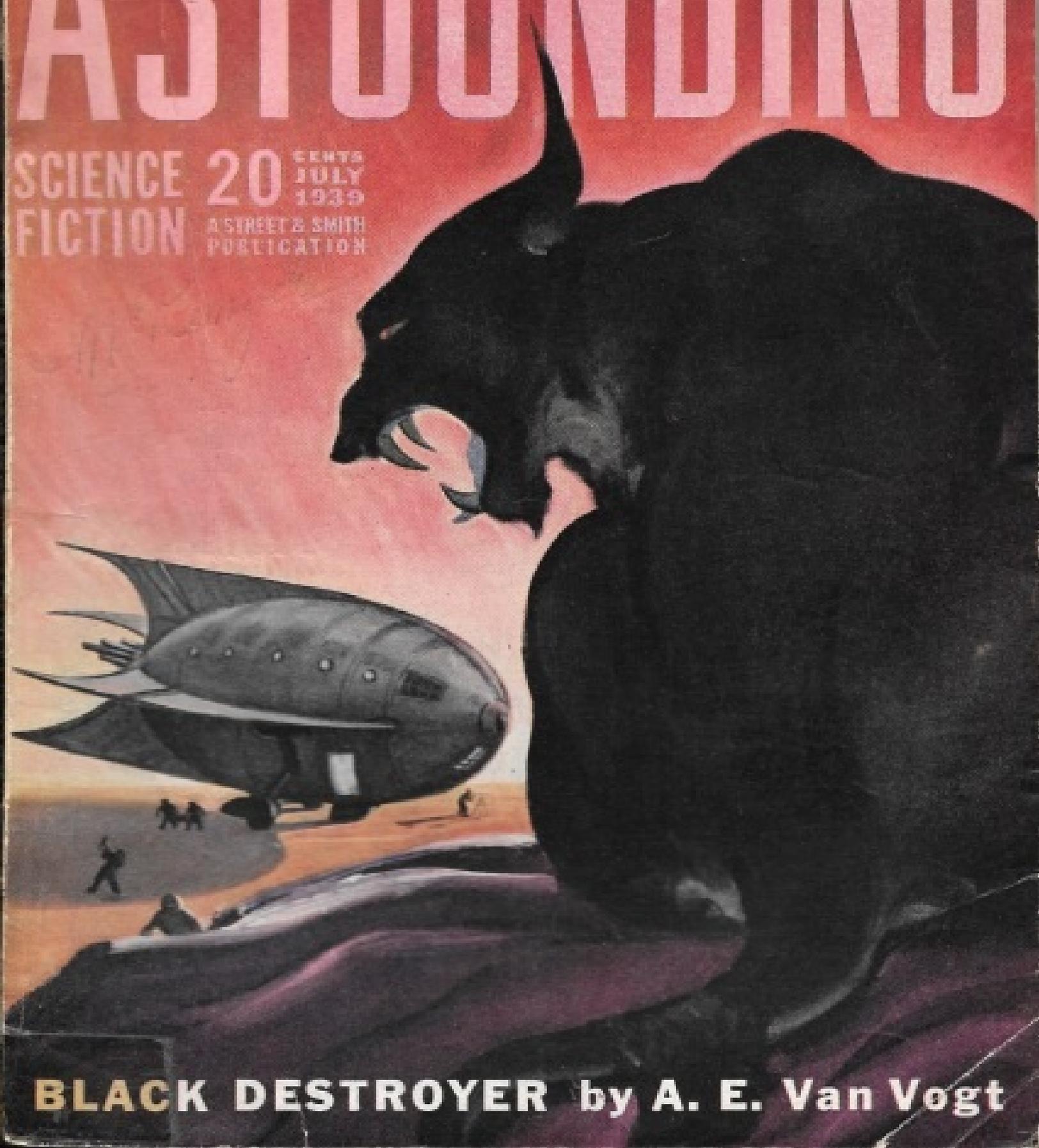


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BLACK DESTROYER by A. E. Van Vogt

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CITY OF THE COSMIC RAYS

Past, Present and Future back again! In another of the strange, and strangely isolated cities that survived an age of warfare, three adventurers from three ages bring trouble.

By Nat Schachner

The rocketship of Harg zoomed swiftly along. The thunder of its jets made a trailing whisper of sound. Far below, the blue Pacific receded to the east and the flat jungle of what had once been India made a dank smudge on the horizon. The three men—dissimilar in race as well as in time—peered down at that smudge with faint hope too long deferred.

Sam Ward—man of the twentieth century—said thinly: "In my day India teemed with countless millions. Surely some of them were left after the great holocaust to rebuild anew some manner of civilization."

Kleon, the Greek, clashed his tarnished shield with battered sword. His blue eyes gleamed with fierce luster. "By Zeus!" he exclaimed, "it was even here that we charged Porus and his mighty elephants, and won such a victory as even the great Alexander had never won before. Aye, and it was even from here that my trireme separated from Nearchus' fleet and sped eastward over the flood to the far Cimmerian shore where I became Quetzal and slept for nigh ten thousand years."

"And a very good thing it was, friend Kleon," nodded Beltan, Olgarch of Hispan. "Had it not been for your radium-induced slumber, I had still been an Olgarch in the neutron-walled city of Hispan, circumscribed by use and wont and unknowing of the outer world; nor," and his proud, aristocratic gaze softened as it rested on his two comrades, "would I have had the knowledge of two such rare spirits as you."

"Never mind the compliments," growled Sam, embarrassed. "If we don't hurry up soon and find some manner of people on this forsaken earth capable of making a stand against the rocket hordes of Harg and their new associate, Ras, our numbers are up. That fuel you manufactured back on the Island of the Individualists, Beltan, is almost gone."

The Olgarch looked back over the Pacific thoughtfully. "If we land, Ras will catch up to us. Even now, no doubt, the tentacles of his thought are tracing our patch."

"And if we don't land?" demanded the Greek.

"We crack up just the same." Sam forced a grin. "We're damned if we do; and we're damned if we don't."

Once more they stared down over the side of their ship. India rolled rapidly beneath them. Nothing broke the dark texture of the billowing vegetation; nothing that could even remotely be construed into any evidence of human life. Like all of North America, like most of South America except where the neutron-walled city of Hispan stood solitary and the underground kingdom of Harg had erupted its stellene-sheathed hordes. Asia seemed a desolate waste. Life had vanished in a plague of former wars, and none had remained to rebuild laboriously the upward strivings of the race.

Sam shivered suddenly. "Curious," he said with a swift, upward glance. "But I have a sensation as though a cloud just passed over the sun, cutting off its warmth."

Kleon shaded his eyes, blinked at the molten ball of fire that blazed overhead. "You are imagining, my friend," he stated. "There is not a single cloud in all the sky."

Beltan's tawny, proudly poised head flung back. A frowning look crept into his eyes. "Sam Ward is right," he announced. "Something is between us and the Sun, even though it is not visible. See; the Sun is now a yellowish-green—it is a color I have never seen before."

"It's getting deeper," puzzled Sam. "What does it mean?"

The Olgarch's frown deepened. "It means that both the ultraviolet and the infrared waves have been cut off, leaving only a restricted portion of the middle register. There is something—"

Kleon's blue eyes were keen as any hawk's. "There is a shimmer up above," he cried suddenly. "A dazzlement, as though the burnished shields of a Macedonian phalanx were pouring their blinding splendor into the enemy's eyes."

"Friend Kleon thinks always in terms of ten thousand years ago," Beltan said good-naturedly. "He—"

"He's right," Sam called out in a cracked voice. His long, lean arm pointed excitedly upward. "Only it looks like a bunch of mirrors—"

The prow of the rocketship tilted suddenly. The three strangely assorted men sprawled in a heap in the bottom of the hull. The steady roar of the tubes stuttered, stopped; then look up again their regular throb.

Sam fought his way to the controls, twisted desperately. His feet slid along the steep incline. Beltan untangled himself from the armored Greek and crawled toward the fuel tanks. "There's still enough fuel," he called. "What has happened?"

Kleon heaved precariously erect. "We're falling!" he shouted.

The muscles corded on Sam's arms as he twisted anew. "We're not," he cried. "We're rising. We're being pulled out into space."

The others clung unbelievably to the side. There was no mistake about it now. The rocketship was climbing at an almost perpendicular angle. Beneath, the blue sea curved into a convex arc. The flat jungles merged into an indistinguishable haze. The keen air grew swiftly cold. Breathing became difficult.

"I can't control the ship," Sam gasped. "I've shoved the forward rockets on; but we're going up faster."

Kleon's shout was a thin squeak. "Air! Air! I can't breathe."

Beltan groped with cold-stiffened fingers for a gadget. He pressed, and tumbled headlong to the bottom. But even as he fell, the glassene covering rolled swiftly overhead, and the oxygen tanks began their labored pumping.

Sam's fast-purple features subsided; his shallow gulping steadied to a normal pace. "You saved our lives, Beltan," he said, clinging to the steep-angled deck. "But for what? We're already ten miles up, and our speed seems to be accelerating. At this rate—"

Kleon's grip tightened on his sword. He brandished it threateningly toward the unclouded vault of heaven. "We'll fall straight up into the maw of the Sun God," he cried defiantly. "Know, Phoebus, that I, Kleon, a free Greek who walked with Aristotle and fought with Alexander, fear you not."

"I'm afraid," said Beltan with a little smile, "your Phoebus is too far away to hear your threats, my Kleon. There is some suction or whirlpool in space, perhaps, that sets at naught our earthly forces."

"The shimmer is getting more dazzling," Sam cried out. "The Sun is still there, but it's elongating; as though we're watching it through distorted lenses."

Helplessly they saw the great ball of Earth turn majestically beneath. All Asia was a convexity disclosed to their view. Far to the east, the island of Asto, from which they had escaped, showed as a burned-over cinder. A scatter of tiny specks, surrounding a black beetle, moved slowly over the cobalt sea.

"The rocket horde of Harg," groaned Kleon. "They're hunting for us."

"They'll never find us here," Sam laughed harshly. "Nor will anyone else." His jaws tightened as he stared at the altimeter. "Twenty-five miles up and still going strong. Perhaps we're heading for the Moon. Perhaps there is a race—"

There was no sign of fear on the Olgarch's calm, proud face. He seemed to be working out a mere intellectual problem. "Our angle is rather to the Sun," he decided. "Perhaps our Greek who walked with Aristotle is wiser than—"

The sky above blazed with sudden hues. Fierce, blinding light stabbed at their eyeballs. The floor of the ship pressed upward with crushing force against their legs. The craft quivered in every metal strut and leaped upward with insupportable acceleration. The Sun divided into a thousand separate balls of fire, each glaring down at the hapless travelers with malignant eye. Terrific heat slashed through the insulated glassene top. A fiery furnace vaulted all the heavens.

"Look out!" screamed Kleon. "We're going to crash. There's an island—"

The inferno of light and heat engulfed them. Sam moaned and flung slithering down the ways, unconscious. On top of him piled Kleon and Beltan. The craft shuddered, decelerated as swiftly as it had previously soared. There was a bump that tumbled the three unconscious men into an inextricable heap. Then there was silence.

Sam had been only momentarily stunned. The multi-gravity acceleration and the plethora of blazing light had distended his veins almost to the bursting point. But now, as blood crawled back to normal flow, and he sat up, blinking, a new inferno struck upon his ears. This time it was a curious babble of sound; of many voices raised in slurred elliptic speech that held a faint, yet recognizable resemblance to the once universal English.

Some of the voices were shrill, some were rumbling with deep bass tones; some cascaded in great cataracts of words, some were slow

and meditative. Some seemed harsh with overmastering anger, some were vibrant with warm sympathy. No two were alike—in pitch, or timbre, or intonation. A babel of noise, a hundred separate voices heedless of each other, totaling up to a fearsome concatenation of sound that almost burst Sam's eardrums.

Involuntarily his hands went to his ears in a vain attempt to shut out the senseless confusion. Had he by some strange mischance dreamed what had been, and actually fallen into the nether jungle of India, where a chattering band of monkeys had taken him in tow?

But monkeys didn't talk a modified English. And monkeys did not resemble the conglomerate of strange and different, yet undeniably human beings, on whom his astonished eyes had opened.

They surrounded him in a chattering, diverse horde. There were hundreds of them. Men and women by all the evidences; yet like nothing he had ever seen before. Back in Hispan humanity had been normal; albeit divided into Olgarchs, Technicians and Workers. Back in Harg, both fanatical leaders and militarized population had not offended his twentieth-century ideas. Even on the Island of Asto, where the Individualists had become huge, Overweighted brains bulging over spindly shanks and useless feet, he had not been too much surprised. In his own time, evolution had pointed the way toward such a possible goal.

But these people!

No two were alike. One was tall and willowy, with a tiny head that swayed like a fragile flower in a breeze. Another was short and squat—a powerful torso supported by stubby legs that moved with uncanny rapidity. One was an apple-green in color; another a deep vermilion. A huge yellowish beard swept the ground on one; next him was a woman with hairless, egg-shaped dome. There were those with a fine, down covering that made a feathery fluff of their bodies; and there were those whose skins seemed hard and chitinous. One man in particular had great, compound eyes that twirled their many facets round and round with swift dexterity. A half-grown girl—if girl she could be called—had shovel-like hands, without thumbs or fingers, and hollowed like scoops that could hold a good quart of water without spilling.

Only in one particular were they alike—an ineradicable curiosity that made them swarm gesticulating around the bewildered twentieth-century *homo* who had the strangely catapulted into their midst.

He staggered to his feet, filled with sudden fear. "Beltan! Kleon! Where are you?" he shouted to make himself heard above the uproar.

"Here!" returned a familiar voice. Then, through the screaming press, burst two figures, Beltan, the Olgarch, calm and unperturbed, though there was a raw bruise on his forehead; and Kleon, his short, thonged javelin raised threateningly against those who might have hindered him.

"Praise to Zeus!" greeted the Greek. "We had thought you dead, friend Sam. But what are these chattering apes into whose midst we have been flung?" He raised his javelin again. "Back!" he cried harshly to the small-headed man with the willowy arms. "Back, or I'll—"

Long, prehensile fingers darted out in a blur of movement. The fantastic being deftly wrenched the weapon from his hands, poised it delicately in the tips of his own. Kleon's face darkened with rage. Never before had any foe done that much to him. He lifted his shield, tugged viciously at his sword. Sam swore and reached for his seven-chambered gun. Only Beltan remained poised and proudly motionless. "It is better that we make no hostile gestures," he warned.

His words were not necessary. Kleon's hand seemed frozen to his sword. The nicked and rusted weapon was suddenly of a weight that bowed his powerful frame into a straining arc. The gun that Sam had drawn twisted like a live thing out of his hand and fell thudding to the glassy floor. His fingers tingled from the electric shock that had darted unseen against him.

Beltan's smile was steady. He faced the still-chattering crowd with calm gesture. "We have come in peace," he said. "We are strangers and do not know your customs. What manner of world is this?"

A fat individual waddled through the press toward them. He appeared the most nearly human of the lot, though his bulk and peculiar, ducklike gait would have been ludicrous under any other circumstances. His skin was of a chocolate hue, and two deep-blue eyes stared out at them with startling incongruity. A chin of ample dimensions wagged at them.

He stared at the three intruders with those blue, guileless-seeming eyes. Then he began to laugh. The laughter started in his chocolate paunch that shook like a jelly. The ripples traveled upward and almost submerged his eyes in deep rolls of fat. His mouth opened and gales of high-pitched, squeaking sounds poured forth. The tears rolled down his quivering cheeks. The others of that strange crew took up the laughter. Bedlam had broken loose.

Sam rubbed his still-tingling hand. Kleon's straining form wrenched mightily at the invisible force that weighed him down. Beltan's face went white. Never, since Hispan had immured itself behind impenetrable walls, had any living creature dared laugh at an Olgarch. His slim, aristocratic fingers crept toward the electro-blaster that dangled from his belt; paused. "What," he asked with careful restraint, "is so funny about us?"

The fat little man doubled up again with choked laughter; then he straightened and wiped the tears out of his eyes. "Sorry," he gasped, and his squeaky voice trailed off into titters, "but I couldn't help it. You ... you really look so ... so *monotonous*!"

"Monotonous?" echoed Sam angrily. His hand had regained its circulation. Imperceptibly his foot inched his fallen gun toward him. "What do you mean?"

The Buddhalike figure waved his pudgy arm weakly. "First let me release your triplet who was foolish enough to threaten us with his toy weapons."

The air seemed to shimmer toward Kleon. He straightened up suddenly, like a bent sapling from which the pressure had been released. Amazement gutted his clean-chiseled features—amazement, and considerable awe. Without a word, the small-headed, swaying creature returned to him his javelin.

The chocolate man said: "You draw words horribly, yet your speech appears like an earlier form of ours. Yet you do not understand a simple word. I meant that you are as alike as one electron is to another. Were it not for your curious garments the three of you would appear merely as a bad dream, thrice repeated. And your proportions!" The chuckle started irresistibly. "Pardon the rudeness; but if any artist among us should have painted creatures with heads and limbs and general color schemes such as yours, we should have thought him mad and thrust him headlong out of Dadelon."

A surge of bewildered wrath flooded Sam. What! These nightmare travesties, these zoological freaks, dared poke fun at such masterpieces of mankind as Kleon and Beltan—each the highest type of a particularized civilization? Modestly, he did not consider himself in his comrades' class: though his tall, lean form and firm-modeled face had evoked many a fluttering sentiment in the girls of a remote twentieth century. And as for likenesses—

Kleon forgot his amazement. His Greek ideal of symmetry was outraged. "Have you no eyes?" he demanded passionately. "See you not the profound differences between us?"

"No," the chocolate man said frankly.

Sam gulped; then started to grin. "Everything is relative," he said. "I remember that I had the same trouble back in our own time, differentiating one Japanese or Chinaman from another. We evidently furnished the same difficulty to this—uh—gentleman."

"Dag!" the chocolate-colored man obliged. He waved toward the willowy man. "He is Pol."

Beltan had regained his imperturbable poise. "I can see your point," he acknowledged. "You are so violently different from each other that we must naturally tend in your eyes toward a certain sameness, though we represent three distinct races both in space and time."

Dag looked astonished. "*Violently* different?" he echoed. "It is simply that we are individuals. Why shouldn't we look different? We are separate entities."

Sam gave it up. After all, there was something in what this funny-looking duck was saying. There was a certain sameness among the peoples of his time that did not correspond to their differing mentalities, viewpoints and sensations.

"O.K., Dag," he said agreeably. "But what is this place you call Dadelon, and why did you drag us up here as prisoners?"

For the first time he was able to view his quarters as a whole. The gesticulating horde had fallen back a bit, allowing them breathing space and room. Only Dag and the small-headed man called Pol were close to them.

They were in a huge central chamber whose walls were all of a transparent quartz. Through the gleaming walls they could see other chambers, mostly smaller, stretching for several miles in radius. Overhead were other tiers, likewise of the same transparent quartz. Outside was a deep, purplish space in which the sun, a reddish-yellow orb, poured its blinding brilliance. Its darting rays were only slightly impeded by the barriers of the floating city. Stars burned steadily in the purple depths, and a gibbous moon sailed serenely to the left.

Involuntarily Sam looked down. His knees wobbled, and he caught at Beltan to keep from falling. For the moment he had thought he was standing on nothingness. Incredible depths yawned below. Thirty miles of impalpable atmosphere in which tiny white clouds formed, dissolved and reformed. Earth was a vast orb, painted in brilliant hues, and seen through a blue-green ocean as once he had seen the famous subterranean gardens through a glass-bottomed boat off Bermuda.

That was it! He *was* viewing the Earth through a boat with a glass bottom—a great quartz city that floated by some scientific means unknown to him as yet in the rarefied reaches of the outer stratosphere.

Dag was pained. "You are not prisoners," he said. "It is true that Pol brought your curious craft into Dadelon by means of our magnetic vortex. But that was scientific curiosity only. Pol, you see, is a specialist in life forms. Poor fellow; there isn't much of strange and startling variants in Dadelon or in our sector of space. A few spores, some drifting bacteria, and that is all. Twice, in fact, he was lowered into the atmospheric ocean below and actually brought back with him most curious animals from the bottom. But such expeditions are hazardous—it was difficult to breathe, and he was almost smothered by the dampness and the pressure."

Sam thought there were enough curious life forms at hand without bothering about going elsewhere, but he was wise enough to keep it to himself. Pol was nodding his tiny head—not larger than a grapefruit—with a self-satisfied smile.

"As for Dadelon," continued Dag, "this is our city, our home. For the past thousands of years, since our remote ancestors fled to the skies to avoid the last plagues that wiped out all mankind, we have drifted steadily around the inimical orb below. Never until now have we seen vestiges of any supposedly intelligent life beneath. We thought we were all that were left."

"Your path evidently never intersected my city of Hispan," the Olgarch assured him. "Until recently, of course, the city of Harg was underground, and the Island of Asto was protected by an interlacing of thought screens."

Pol looked astonished. His elongated body curled itself almost into a question mark. "Do you imply that there are others besides yourselves down there on Earth?"

Kleon shook his javelin down toward the cobalt ocean. "Thousands!" he declared. "Hundreds of thousands! The rocket horde of Harg, fanatical, like a swarm of devouring locusts, led by their leader, Vardu, and that traitorous renegade from Asto, Ras. Twice we escaped from them, but they pursue. We had thought to find some race that could help us make a stand against them." His arrogant eyes surveyed the motley crowd with a certain contempt. "But I fear me there is little hope."

Beltan frowned disapproval at the hot-headed Greek. "I do not know, Kleon," he remarked. "Do you forget your former attitude of reverence when you thought to wield your sword?"

The little fat man waved that aside. "We have weapons of our own," he averred. "But tell me more of yourselves and these—ah—people of Harg."

It was in the privacy of his own quartz-enclosed chamber that they finished the story. Each of the thousand-odd Dadelonians had his or her own cubicle, into which no one else might intrude except by invitation. It could hardly be called privacy, however, in the twentieth-century idea of that word. Rather it was the privacy of the goldfish, immured behind transparent walls. But Sam noted that, once the first shock of their sudden appearance had passed over, the others paid no further attention to them, or to Dag or Pol.

The chocolate man wagged his huge head solemnly when they had finished their tale, and Pol's elongation swayed with sinuous movements.

"Your story is a strange one," said Dag. "For six thousand years we thought ourselves the sole survivors of an ancient humanity on this Earth; now we find there are others—curious creatures who cannot be told apart, spawning with regularity and a deadly sameness."

"What a pity!" sighed Pol. "The study of one is the study of all. A scientist would be bored among you."

Sam wanted to retort that a scientist would go crazy among the Dadelonians, but he had sense enough to suppress the retort. Instead he asked: "But how do you account for this—er—remarkable variance among you? You have inbred for over six millennia—you should by now have been far more homogeneous than your ancestors."

Pol smiled proudly. "That is because we have not been bound to the surface of the Earth, submerged under a veritable atmospheric ocean. Did you ever hear of cosmic rays?"

"Naturally!" answered Sam. Beltan nodded thoughtfully; but Kleon looked merely blank.

"Well, up here we get their full effect. There's practically no atmosphere above us to slow them down or scatter their drive. The quartz walls let them through as though they were sieves. Their intensity is over a hundred times greater than down on the surface."

"I get it now," Sam cried excitedly. "Back in our own time there had been experiments with the effect of rays on fruit flies. It was found that even X rays, much softer in effect than cosmic rays, created sports and mutants in tremendously greater numbers among the offspring."

Beltan nodded. "We didn't work with cosmic rays in Hispan, because the neutron walls were impenetrable to them. But we had other types, by means of which we changed small-animal heredity at will."

Dag's blue eyes were submerged in a chuckle. "We changed ourselves—or, rather, it was done for us without our will. The cosmic rays bombard our germ cells, and knock the genes of inheritance into strange new combinations. There is only one chance in a million that any two of us would be alike."

"That has never happened yet," Pol put in complacently. "It would be an insupportable disgrace for two of us to resemble each other."

Other times, other customs!—thought Sam. Back in the twentieth century the shoe was on the other foot. One who did not resemble his fellows would be termed a freak, a monstrosity.

"How," asked Beltan suddenly, "do you keep your city of Dadelon afloat?"

"I do not know," was the startling reply.

The three comrades stared. "In the name of Zeus, who does then?" Kleon exploded.

Dag shook his head vaguely. "Do you know, Pol?"—he turned to the willowy man.

Pol wrinkled his tiny forehead into puzzled lines. "I am not sure," he answered slowly, "but it may be Tek."

"And who in blazes is Tek?" Sam demanded.

"He is the one whose eyes are compound lenses," said Dag. "You see, no two of us are alike in our intellects or pursuits any more than we are alike in outward form. We do the things we personally desire to do, without regard to what any one else is doing. I, for example, am interested only in laughter and the incongruous." He started to chuckle again, and his fat paunch heaved. "That is why I took charge of you three."

Kleon's eyes flashed; his hand half raised the javelin. Beltan's arm bore down heavily on him. "Stop it, you fool!" he whispered fiercely. "You've had one lesson. That should have been enough."

Dag did not appear to see this by-play. "As for Pol, he is a biologist. I believe we have an astronomer now," he turned to Pol for confirmation.

The willowy man said: "Yes, that would be Arne. Some days ago I saw him fixing up a telescope."

"That's the way it goes," beamed Dag. "Each man and woman does what pleases them best. It is very rarely that the same pursuit pleases two at a time."

Sam felt his head bursting. Was *he* crazy, or were these amazing monstrosities lunatics as well. "Do you mean, then," he gasped, "that it is quite possible that at any given time there may be whole fields of knowledge without anyone who knows *anything* about them?"

They both nodded. "Surely. Why not?"

"But ... but," Kleon gasped, "suppose this flying city of yours should decide to stop flying?"

The two Dadelonians looked at each other blankly. *That* thought had never entered their heads. "But it *won't*," Dag retorted.

"You're quite right," Beltan said politely. "I believe I know why Dadelon has remained aloft these thousands of years. Its quartz walls are not true quartz. It is a synthetic product, fused under tremendous longitudinal stress. As a result the molecules have polarized themselves and form tiny magnets, of opposite sign to the magnetic flow of the earth beneath. At this particular height the two forces just balance each other, and the city drifts along. Inasmuch as the earth's magnetism is remarkably constant, no shift in the height has so far been necessary. What will happen in the future, of course, cannot be prophesied."

Pol permitted a glint of admiration to creep into his small, yellowish eyes. "Dag," he told his companion, "this stranger from beneath knows more than we gave him credit for. I remember now that Tek *did* say something of the sort."

Sam rose suddenly to his feet. He was becoming tired of all this palaver. They were wasting time. Below, Vardu and the mightier Ras were leading a countless horde of warriors to conquer all the Earth. Sooner or later they would discover the overhead city of Dadelon. There were weapons here—he remembered their recent experience ruefully—that, properly employed, might stop their irresistible march. But they must work fast.

"Look, Dag!" he blurted out. "And you, too, Pol. We've got to do something fast. The rocket hordes may be upon you any minute. Why don't you organize your people at once to resist?"

Dag smiled indulgently. "You ask an unthinkable thing. Dadelon *never* works as a unit. That is the method of slaves, or men without individualities—like your soldiers of Harg, for example. We each employ whatever method seems best for ourselves. I utilize a little mechanism that increases the gravitic pull of every molecule upon which it is directed." His blue eyes twinkled on Kleon. "The stranger Greek has witnessed its results. Pol relies upon the incredible swiftness of his hands. Tek has managed to concentrate through his many-lensed eyes the power of his will. An electric impulse of any desired strength flashes out upon his foe and numbs him to helplessness. Others have other methods of attack or defense. I do not know them all—it is not the proper thing to inquire."

"You are as bad as the Individualists on Asto," Kleon declared angrily. "They too had power enough to wipe out all Harg, but they would not employ their weapons in concert. Instead, *they* were wiped out. Only Ras, the renegade, had sense enough to act with others; and he was a traitor to his own."

Dag shrugged indifferent shoulders. "They do not bother us now. Until they do—"

Sam sat down abruptly. A sudden dizziness had assailed him. Tiny tentacles were groping in his skull, plucking at his brain, sucking it dry.

The Olgarch moved swiftly to his side, caught him by the arm. "What is the matter, Sam Ward?" he said, concerned.

Sam shook his head violently from side to side, trying to clear it of that strange, crawling feeling. "I ... I do not know," he gulped. "I can hardly think. My thoughts flow out; fingers are pulling—"

"By Poseidon!" exclaimed Kleon, paling. "I had felt the same way over the Island of Asto. Ras has come! Ras has found us out!"

Sam's head slumped. His eyes glazed; his breathing became heavy. They could hardly hear his thick, low stammer. "Yes ... it's ... Ras. He ... is—"

Pol's tiny yellow eyes were bright with scientific interest. His elongated body swayed toward the stricken man. "Curious manifestation," he observed. "Action at an immense distance. Even Tek can control by the force of his will only within the radius of his sight. Perhaps this primitive person is particularly susceptible."

Dag said with distaste, "Take him away. I hate to look at sick people. They are not amusing."

Beltan said nothing. His fine, aristocratic features were tense. His long, lean knuckles pressed down hard upon Sam's skull, twisted with peculiar motion over the temples. Back and forth, back and forth, interminably, while the Greek watched helpless, aghast. A magnificent fighting machine—the finest the world had ever seen—this form of warfare, this attack by an invisible foe, bewildered him. He could only clutch at his weapons and mutter fiercely.

For long minutes the Olgarch worked with desperation over the semiconscious man. Dag was obviously bored. He crossed his fat little legs and sat with pudgy hands folded over a gently breathing chocolate paunch. Pol, however, watched the three strangers with greedy eyes, sucking in their diverse sensations, tabulating them in his mind for future analysis.

At last Beltan's ministrations showed results. Or else Ras, having pumped his victim dry of the knowledge he wanted, withdrew his thought-impacts.

Sam groaned; sat up with a jerk. "Where ... where—" he started; then remembered. Fine droplets of perspiration beaded on his reddened temples. He looked up at his two friends. "Ras knows where we are," he said dully. "In a short while he'll lead Vardu and the rocket horde of Harg against this city in the sky. There is nothing we can do."

Laughter interrupted him. They swung around, blinking in amazement. It was Dag. He leaned back in his seat, and his whole body shook with mirth.

"What's so funny?" Sam snarled.

Dag wiped the tears from his eyes. "You three!" he gasped. "Our books speak vaguely of a curious trait called fear, that once was prevalent before Dadelon was built. But no one of us ever saw it truly in action. I find the sight of it in you the most mirth-tickling thing I have ever experienced." And again he rolled in his seat with huge laughter.

Kleon shook with fury. "By Ares, God of War!" he ground out. "I am a coward, am I?"

Beltan's voice held a rasp Sam had never heard in it before. "Ten thousand years ago men knew more of fundamentals than you do here in Dadelon. Truly I am ashamed of this new century of ours. Ashamed that a Greek of the time of Alexander and an American of the twentieth century—by all the laws of evolution, primitives—should see the depths into which we have fallen."

His words were cold, cutting, remorseless. "Surely we know more of science, of weapons of destruction. We know how to tame the atom, how to transport ourselves perhaps to the stars; we have solved the problem of space and of time; and have learned to project our thoughts with overpowering force. But to what end?"

His proud face was pale with an inner contempt. "To kill each other off the better; to conquer for the more lust of conquest; to ground our fellow men into the dust as slaves; to sit there, as you do, Dag, and seek food for silly mirth in the sufferings and despairs of strong men."

He whirled on Sam and Kleon. "I apologize to you," he said simply, "for the loathsome degradation of this ninety-seventh century. All the beauty, all the hope, all the aspirations of mankind have sunk into the mire. You, Kleon, had your Aristotle and Plato and Sophocles; you, Sam Ward, had your Einstein and Darwin and Shelley; but we—what have we to show? Gano of Hispan. Ras of Asto, Vardu of Harg, and now"—he indicated Dag—"this maudlin seeker of laughter."

"You forget, friend Beltan," interrupted Kleon, "there is yourself; one shining spot at least in this barbarous world of the future."

"Each age has its good and its bad," Sam observed wryly. "All ages lend to glorify the past, and call it golden. But in my time there were dictators and fanatical conquerors; there was war and starvation and cruelty: and friend Kleon could tell you some shocking stories, if he wished, of slaves and babes exposed on the hillsides to die, and the poison hemlock of Socrates. We have found the bad so far in your time, Beltan; but somewhere, I feel it in my bones, there exists a race, truly civilized, truly evolved."

The Olgarch smiled thinly. "Still dreaming that bright, implausible dream, Sam Ward. But now, I am afraid, even if such a race *does* inhabit some remote sector of this Earth, it is too late."

He pointed downward through the magneto-quartz base of the floating city. "See! There come the rocket hordes of Harg with the huge ship of Vardu and Ras in the lead."

The transparent quartz, acted as a magnifying lens. Far to the east, more than two hundred miles away, and thirty-odd miles below, the glassy Pacific seemed dotted with an immense swarm of tiny black specks, clustered in solid array behind a larger oval shape.

Even as they gaped, the lead ship swerved abruptly in its course, pointing its nose directly toward the shimmering city that hung in the heavens. Obediently, like a flock of marionettes pulled on a single siring, the myriad specks swung to follow. Faint streaks of red painted the blue of the sea underneath. A hundred thousand stellene-clad warriors, each in his individual sheath, each armed with a stellene weapon, hurtling in the wake of his leaders, fired with the lust to kill and burn and slay!

Sam whirled back on the chocolate-colored Dadelonian. "Well?" he snapped. "Now you can believe us. There they come, armed to the teeth with weapons as good or better than your own. And they are a unit—a hundred thousand powered by a single will; against your paltry hundreds who pride themselves on being different—each for himself and devil take the hindmost. They will crush your city and blast you out as sure as fate, unless you act at once."

Slowly Dag's chuckles subsided. Curiously enough, the flailing excoriations of the three men Pol had captured did not offend him. Nor had Pol paid any heed. They were armored in the tight impenetrability of themselves, impervious to all external shafts. Never, in the long history of Dadelon, had any man or woman presumed to tell another what to do. It was live and let live, with a vengeance.

The little fat man with the incongruous blue eyes arose. "I have not laughed like that in ages," he said weakly. "You three are the essence of comedy. It was not enough that your outward forms are absurd: but your minds jiggle from silly thought to sillier thought like aimless molecules in free gas. If those beneath who you seem to fear so greatly resemble you, we shall be rid of them in the twitch of an eyelash. Now go, please; I have certain preparations to make."

He waved his hand in careless gesture and Pol, like a wavering blade of grass, slid through the door that led out of the cubicle. Kleon scowled and followed, clutching his shield and fingering his javelin. Sam stared in amazement at the little man as he slumped back into his chair, closed his eyes, folded his hands and began to snore.

"What the—" he ejaculated; but the Olgarch's quick nod let him outside.

"Let's follow Pol," he whispered. "Perhaps we can do better with him alone."

They caught up with the elongated question mark without difficulty. His transparent cubicle was some three doors removed. He did not look up at their entrance. He was contemplating his long, flexible arms with a certain rapt interest.

"Pol!" Sam called his name very loud.

The small-headed man looked up then; but his gaze immediately returned to his hands.

"Now look," Sam said desperately. "You're a scientist. You ought to understand that destruction will be upon you in no time if you don't get busy. What good are your flexible hands against death at a distance?"

Pol said: "I know. That's what I'm sitting here thinking."

"Thinking?" echoed Kleon scornfully. "This is no time for thought; this is the time for action."

"Unless," added Beltan, "one can think with the same deadly effect as Ras."

"Get busy, then," Sam urged. "Get all your Dadelonians together, and plan a common defense. Among them there may be sufficient weapons."

Pol shook his head. "It is impossible," he stated. "We don't even think alike. How could we work together? We speak a common language, but that is all." He rose and stood swaying in a mournful sort of way. "No: each one of us must defend himself according to his own methods and capabilities. There is no other way."

"The price of civilization," Beltan murmured. "It evolves genius, and in the doing, the co-operative instinct is wholly lost. Back on Asto genius proved selfish, indifferent to all fate, even its own. Here genius has diverged so widely it has no common basis with one another, even if it wished."

Kleon said violently, "Let us leave these fools to their fate then. Let us get our rocket plane and escape."

"It is too late!" Sam pointed downward.

It was a magnificent sight. A hundred thousand stellene-sheaths, transparent as the quartz of Dadelon itself, each with a dark-visaged, fanatical Hargian within, clutching his stellene tube from which disintegrating death could blast at the touch of a knob, hurtling upward through the purple void at hundreds of miles an hour, converging in a huge swarm upon the embattled city in the sky. Red flame streaked backward from their rocket tubes, but no sound penetrated to the watchers. The air was too thin to carry even the lightest whisper.

On they came, growing swiftly on the vision. The great ship of Harg, inclosed against the vacuum of space, and holding in its hull the oddly assorted pair—Vardu and Ras—stood momentarily aloof.

"Come on," Sam shouted to his friends. "There's no use standing here and dying tamely."

He darted out of the cubicle and flung down the corridor, Kleon at his heels. Sam's automatic was in his hand; Kleon held his shield aloft and gripped his javelin at the hilt. The flame of battle illuminated his classic features, clean-cut as any medallion. Beltan unhooked his electro-blaster and followed at a slower pace. A thin smile flicked over his noble countenance. What good were their weapons here? Sword and javelin; bullet-emitting gun—outmoded weapons, incapable of piercing stellene tubes, even if within range. His electro-blaster, firing blue electric bolts, was far more deadly. But it was one against a hundred thousand.

As they pelted along the transparent passageway, they saw in each cubicle, calmly seated and seemingly unaware of approaching disaster, the strange and various population of Dadelon.

"The enemy is here," cried Sam. "For God's sake, wake up, you fools!"

But no one stirred; no one lifted his head as though he had heard. The quartz doors in fact had closed and hermetically sealed them in, each apart and separate from his fellows.

The three comrades came to the end of the road; to the crystal-clear, outer wall of the city. Kleon looked amazed, as though it had just dawned on him. "How can we get at them?" he asked, bewildered. "If we pierce the wall, we die. We fall out or suffocate from lack of air. We're in a trap."

Beltan nodded. "A trap," he said without a muscle quivering, "from which there is no escape."

A mighty simultaneous jet of furious flame burst from a hundred thousand tubes. It impacted on the magneto-quartz of Dadelon with a crash as of a hundred thousand thunderbolts. The three men hurled up their arms to shield their eyes from the blinding blaze; their involuntary cries unheard in the chaos of sound. They flung back, tumbling and staggering, from the terrific concussion.

Beltan was the first to recover his vision. "Look!" he cried. "The magneto-quartz is more resistant than I thought. It's only smashed in spots."

But those areas of destruction were serious enough. A half dozen cubicles sagged outward to the cold and semi-airlessness of space. The crystal walls were fused and spattered with the dust of destruction; their occupants dropped lifeless and bloated, accelerating as they fell, toward the distant earth.

"It's a miracle," groaned Sam, "but Dadelon can't stand another blast. The whole surface is pitted and scored. Here they come again."

Again they threw up their arms to shield their eyes from the coruscating outburst of power. In each of the remaining cubicles the survivors sat, motionless, seemingly unmindful of the fate of their fellows.

Again came the roar and thunder of sound. Again they were blasted back along the corridor by the bludgeoning blows of disintegration. Confused, stunned, unknowing how this time they were still alive, they staggered to their feet. Another five of the sealed cubicles had smashed, and spilled their human contents into the void.

But something else had happened as well. This time the attacking hordes had not escaped scatheless. Hundreds of the stellene sheaths drifted helplessly in space, colliding, smashing into each other, hurtling downward in a cataclysm of destruction.

In amazement they looked back into the city of Dadelon. They saw Dag, placid as ever, ensconced in his chair, fingering a tiny metal disk from which shimmering lines of force traveled out in long, arcing curves that converged again outside the walls. Wherever they met in single focus, in contact with a stellene tube, that tube and its occupant seemed weighted with an unbearable weight. In spite of belching rocket gas, in spite of all the frantic efforts of the Hargian within, the tube plummeted down through the miles of space like a stone cast into a well.

"The gravity-intensifier," said Beltan with detached interest.

"Look at that fellow with the eye of a bee!" exclaimed Kleon.

They saw Tek—standing in his crystalline chamber—his great, faceted eyes a gleam like photoelectric cells. The veins on his yellowish

forehead bulged with fierce concentration. Sparkles of light darted from the turning orbs. Wherever they impinged, a Hargian warrior stiffened in his sheath, numb and rigid. The stellene envelope, still firing in continuous flame, leaped onward undirected, unmanageable. Tens of runaway tubes, smashing into each other, exploding in a terrific cascade of blazing fuel, shards of metal and fragments of flesh.

The girl with the shovel hands was cupping a parabolic mirror in her capacious appendage. Light flashed outward. A hurtling soldier, compact with oncoming death, suddenly became vague and tenuous. The molecules of which he was composed seemed to be pried apart by the force of the beam. First he was a fast-moving gas, with shape still retained; then he spread into a gigantic cloud that dissipated insensibly into the limitless void.

A man—all legs and bulbous head, with but a slender torso in between—aimed and clicked a funnellike affair at the invaders. At each click a plunging Hargian exploded.

But meanwhile terrible toll was being taken of the beleaguered city in the air. More and more of the cubicles were vomiting forth their distorted, disintegrated contents; more and more the entire surface of the inclosing shell was crumbling into powder under the flaming conflagration.

Thousands of Hargians had died, but there were thousands on thousands more. Hundreds of Dadelonians had died; but there were only a few hundred left to ward off complete annihilation. Half of the floating magneto-orb streamed downward in ruining fall; in the other half the survivors sat calmly, using their diverse weapons with placid deadliness.

"It's magnificent; but it isn't war!" cried Sam. "If only the fools had gotten together in the beginning. Any one of those weapons, multiplied in numbers, in the hands of an organized and determined people, might have staved off the rocket horde of Harg. But as it is—"

Even as he spoke, a blast shook all the neighboring cubicles. Pol, still surveying his useless hands, making no effort to find another method of defense, catapulted suddenly outward from a wide-ripped chamber. Down he fell, through the surging mass of stellene tubes, his elongated, wave-ring figure ludicrously twisted into a great question mark, plummeting toward the tangled jungles of India far beneath.

It was a miracle that the corridor was still intact. A piercing dart at any point would send the prisoned atmosphere shooting out into the semi vacuum and bring swift suffocation to the three men who crouched there, helpless, unable to join the fight, unable to do anything but watch.

"It won't be long now," Sam declared bitterly.

Kleon shook his javelin in helpless fury. If only he could have met them on solid ground, his strong young legs well-balanced, his good sword thrusting. But here—

Beltan's steady gray eyes probed the screaming death that ringed them in. They clung thoughtfully to the rocketship of Harg that as yet drifted aloof on the edge of the fray.

"I wonder," he murmured, "if anything happened to Vardu and Ras, whether their robotlike soldiers would continue to fight."

Sam uttered an exclamation. "Of course!" he shouted. "You've hit upon the only possible chance, Beltan. Come on; Dag's our man!"

Hunched over, ducking involuntarily every time new disintegrating blasts smothered against the half-wrecked city, they sped back along the corridor. Sam's knuckles bruised themselves against the quartz door of the chocolate-colored man. "Let us in, Dag," he yelled.

But Dag could not hear. The clamor of explosive sound and the thickness of the walls prevented that. And his eyes, though they stared placidly at the gesticulating men, betrayed no awareness of their presence.

In a fury Kleon thrust his javelin against the quartz. It rebounded with a clang. Sam said exasperated: "The damn fool! It's for his own good as well as ours. He's mad!"

"Not mad," remarked Beltan. "He's just expressing his individuality. Hundreds of generations have inbred his traits." Very carefully he lifted his electro-blaster; very carefully he aimed it.

Blue bolts sizzled against the wall; cut through as though it were so much butter. As the segment fell inward with a crash, he stepped through.

Dag looked up without a quiver; calmly he turned his little disk. The Olgarch said just as calmly: "Do not touch that knob, Dag. First you must listen to what I have to say."

The little fat man stared unwinkingly at the electro-blaster, saw Sam Ward's gun trained square upon his paunch, observed Kleon's javelin poised for a mighty thrust—and sighed. "Why have you disturbed me? By this time I would have sent a hundred more crashing to the earth from which they sprang."

"Even if you killed ten thousand," Beltan pointed out, "there would be still enough left to disperse all Dadelon into its primal atoms. There

is only one possible way to defeat the horde."

"What is that?"

"Do you see the great ship that so far has taken no part in the attack?"

"Yes."

"On board are the two leaders and co-conspirators—Vardu and Ras. If you could turn your gravity-intensifier upon that ship, and send it weighted to destruction, the dismayed Hargians would scatter and flee."

Dag digested that. While he digested, a huge segment of Dadelon split off with a roar and went toppling and spinning down. Within that section were Tek and the shovel-handed girl.

"By Zeus!" Kleon snarled. "If you wake not from your dreams, I'll stir you with the javelin tip."

Dag paid no heed to the Greek. With the utmost deliberation he turned to Beltan. "There is truth in what you say. Please step from my path."

The Olgarch obeyed, but Sam held his gun warily on the man. There was no trusting these unaccountable eccentrics.

Dag turned the face of his disk toward the great rocketship. Lines of shimmering force sprang out in long, sweeping curves.

Sam whirled to see their effect. They hurtled through the quartz envelope, sped out into space, converging on the motionless ship.

Then he groaned. For even as they converged, an answering shimmer lifted outward from the craft.

"The thought screen of Ras!" he husked.

Swiftly the screen of interlacing thoughts, impalpable as finest gossamer, yet stronger than the strongest stellene, expanded to meet the converging menace of the multiple gravity.

There was impact!

At the point of impact, cherry-red glowed suddenly like a blazing nova. The hurtling, rocket-sheathed warriors swerved desperately from the interclash of titanic forces. The stage was cleared for a battle of giants.

But the battle was over almost as soon as it had started. Momentarily the thought screen had staggered as it hit the lines of force; then, slowly but surely, it moved outward. The flaring spot turned darker in color; spread and faded into oblivion.

Dag sat, staring. His pudgy hand pressed heavier and heavier on the mechanism. "His weapon is superior to mine," he said simply.

"I knew that all along," Sam snapped. His nerves were near the breaking point. "If you only had listened to advice, and armed your comrades with a hundred similar ones, you might have fought on equal terms."

"We can only die now," the Olgarch murmured, "without any possibility of fighting back."

The expanding shell of interwoven vibration was picking up speed. Within a minute or more it would envelop the wreckage of the floating city and whiff them all to extinction.

Dag folded his arms over his tubby paunch. He looked like a particularly ludicrous Buddha. There was no fear in his incongruous blue eyes. "Death is but another state," he remarked.

"Another state or no," shouted Kleon, "I do not resign myself to the gods without a struggle."

"What can we do?" the Olgarch asked gently.

The Greek whirled. His javelin lifted threateningly against the impalpable advance of Ras. "Do?" he echoed. "We can—"

Then his body stiffened; his javelin pointed like a setter. "Look!" he cried hoarsely. "Our rocketplane!"

They had been taken captive at the other end of the city of Dadelon. Three rows of cubicles had hemmed them off from their craft. But now, as they flung around at his cry, they saw what had happened. The whole side of Dadelon had blasted away. The crystal shells made jagged remnants on the edge of eternity. Half shielded in one of the ruining fragments, half hanging precariously out over the void, was the stolen ship of Harg. Only the retaining wall of the corridor blocked them from the craft—that, and a scramble of some twenty feet in near-vacuum over fused quartz and with thirty miles of nothingness beneath.

Exultation hammered in Sam's veins. It was one chance in a thousand, but it was worth taking. Already the weaving shimmer of Ras was perilously close.

"How about Dag?" he asked suddenly.

"He comes with us," the Olgarch said.

But the Dadelonian shook his head. "This is my city. I have lived here all my life; so have my ancestors for thousands of years. I shall not survive its destruction."

"Don't be a fool!" Kleon growled impatiently. "In another few seconds, we'll all be dead. You'll come, if I have to carry you."

"If you touch me," Dag declared, "I'll turn the gravity-intensifier on you. Besides," and for the first time since the appearance of the rocket horde he gave vent to a chuckle, "I find sufficient humor in the situation to justify my death. I have just discovered the supreme paradox. If I go with you, perforce I must swerve my weapon from that strange approach of visible thought: and we all die together. If I remain behind, and delay its progress, you may escape: but I do not. Three curious creatures, monotonous in their sameness, monstrosities, in fact—yet I die that they may live. A supernal jest!" And he laughed and laughed.

"Clowning even to the last!" Sam exclaimed in disgust.

"No," Beltan rebuked. "He lives, and dies, according to his philosophy. He is a great man, in his own way. Come, while there is still a chance."

They turned and fled down the crystal corridor. Dag still sat roaring and nodding over his own jest, but with his gravity-intensifier rocklike on the expanding shell.

At the end of the passageway the Olgarch flung up his weapon. Blue streams of force pumped out. A section of quartz fused and fell outward with a great crash.

"Take a deep breath," Sam shouted. "It's your last."

A blast of air swept down upon them, sucking them, sprawling and struggling for footing, out into the vacuum of space. Kleon tottered on the verge of the jagged wreckage, started to fall into the void. Sam's fingers clutched upon his sword belt, brought him back to safety. A shudder ran through him. Thirty miles was a little too far to drop.

They could not speak. There was no air to carry the sound. And every molecule of breath was necessary to carry them over that gap of twenty feet to the rocketship.

As they stumbled and ran, precariously skirting the edge of nothingness, thrusting every ounce of reserve strength into that last forward drive, Sam felt a medley of strange and frightening sensations.

He seemed to be bloating up; the tiny veins that lay underneath the skin were pressing and cracking. An inward pressure forced organs against ribs; brought suffocating nausea to him. His lungs pumped like bellows, seeking frantically for air that was not staled and heavy with carbon dioxide. He kept his lips tight compressed, and his nose pinched. Once they opened, the precious oxygen would whoosh out and collapse his laboring lungs.

Strangely enough, however, he did not feel cold, though the outer temperature was close to -200° F. That was, he thought with the corner of his brain not taken up with this race against time, because his body heat dissipated here only through the slow process of radiation. Back on earth, under a thick blanket of air, conduction and convection were responsible for quick cooling.

That twenty feet was a nightmare. He saw the Greek's agonized, purpling face, Beltan's distorted features. Once he slipped, and Kleon caught him in turn from terrible destruction. Twenty feet—a few steps—a matter of seconds—yet never in his life had Sam felt so close the presence of eternity.

His stiffened fingers caught the edge of the hull, and he tumbled over the side. Beltan and Kleon fell next to him, soundless in that frightful stillness, their bodies swollen with inner distention, their faces agonized with suffocation. Outside, space was a crisscross of stabbing flames, of swarming rocket shapes that dived and loosened new and mightier destructions. The tenuous shimmer of Ras was close to the ragged shell of the doomed city. In another second or so it would contact.

Frantically Sam groped for the button that sent the glassene covering rolling overhead and started the oxygen tanks to pumping. Beltan, his face puffed out of proportion, his eyes half-closed, crawled toward the controls. Kleon fell heavily on his shield, unconscious.

Preliminary flame spurted from the rear jets. The craft shivered in every strut, rolled rather than darted from the ledge on which it had been precariously perched.

Precious, life-giving atmosphere filled the hull. Sam gulped great, sobbing mouthfuls into his poisoned lungs. The terrible inner pressure relaxed. Throbbing veins sank back to normal. Sounds penetrated.

"Look out!" he yelled. "Ras has made contact."

Beltan glanced back swiftly; opened the jet wide. There was a roar of back-ward gases, a splash of yellow-blue exhaust; the craft lurched forward.

It was just in time. The thin webbing of expanding thought had touched the magneto-crystal structure of Dadelon. There was a terrific flare, an explosion that shattered the hapless city into a million tiny fragments. The outward sphere of incandescent matter swept after them as they fled, licking hungrily on the tail of their flight like bloodhounds on the trail.

The city of Dadelon, poised for millennia against the gravitic thrust of Earth, was no more. Once more the rocket horde of Harg—thanks to their new leader, Ras—had triumphed. Another sector of a lonely world had been wiped out beneath their thundering surge!

Kleon sat up, gulping and stammering like a fish out of water. He shivered. "Give me the solid Earth next time," he breathed hard. "I do not like this trespassing on the domain of the gods. I thought my heart was pushing through my skin."

They were not hurt much. Skin was broken in several places, some surface veins had ruptured, and faces were blotched and reddened; but their total sojourn in near-vacuum had actually been a matter of some five or six seconds—too short a period for disastrous effects.

Beltan, face still purple and puffed, had recovered his calm. He glanced in the visor screen. "Harg has discovered our flight," he said. "They're chasing us."

Dadelon was a minor sun, a congeries of incandescent fragments. A swarm of rocket tubes came like angry bees after them.

Sam grinned painfully. "This was their speediest craft. They'll never catch up to us."

Kleon rubbed his swollen face. "It wouldn't be the first time they tried it—and failed. But where to now?"

Sam Ward's eyes burned on the curving expanse of Asia and farther Europe that rolled dimly to the west. "On and still on!" he whispered through clenched teeth. "On, until we find at last that which we must find—a people truly democratic, truly tolerant and wise. Somewhere—I know it—they exist!"

The rocketplane sped on, carrying three men, of diverse races and times, seeking the Holy Grail of Sam Ward's vision.

[End of *City of the Cosmic Rays*, by Nat Schachner]