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THE MAN WHO
SOLD THE EARTH

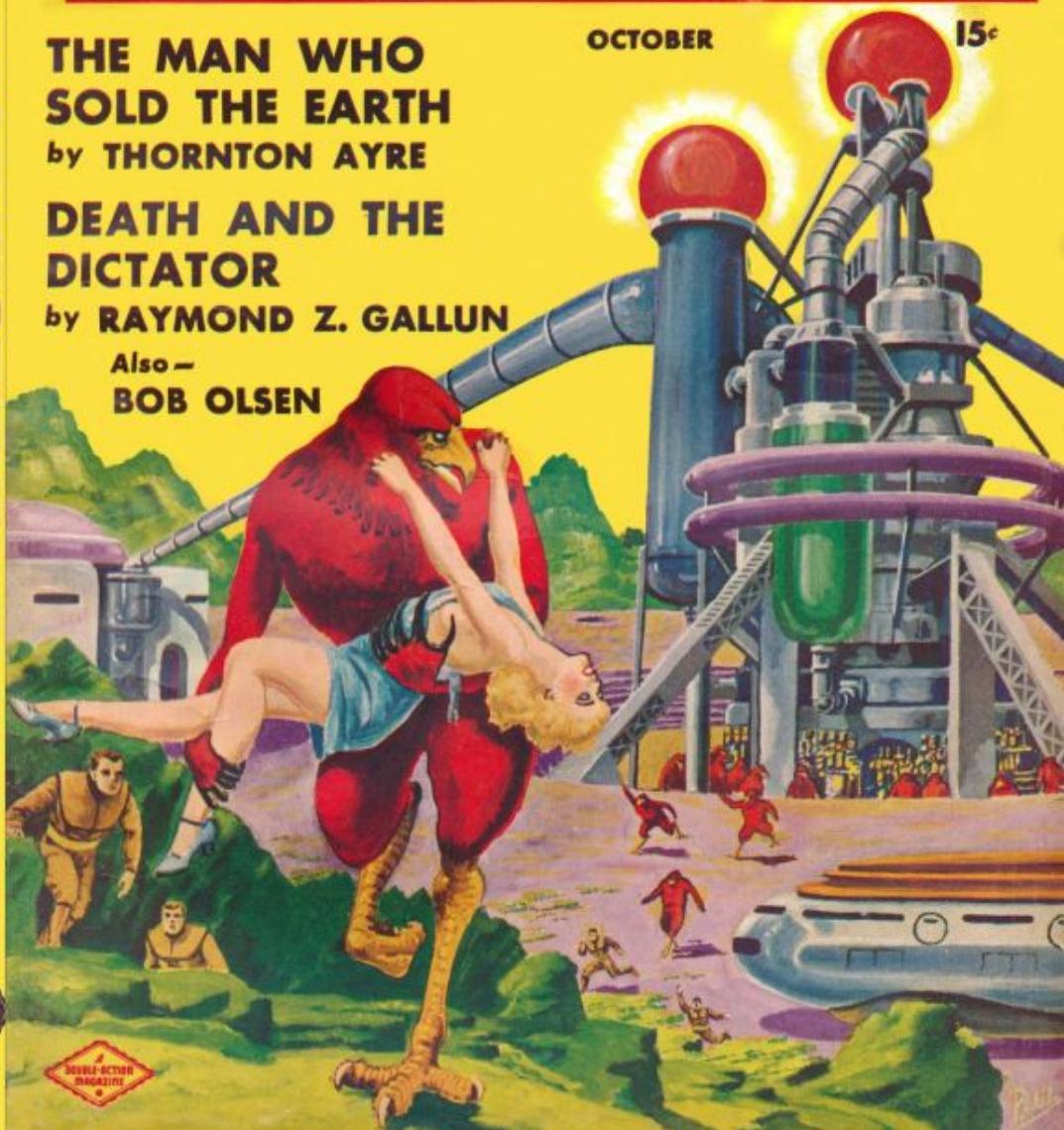
by THORNTON AYRE

DEATH AND THE
DICTATOR

by RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

Also —

BOB OLSEN



THORNTON AYRE

RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

BOB OLSEN



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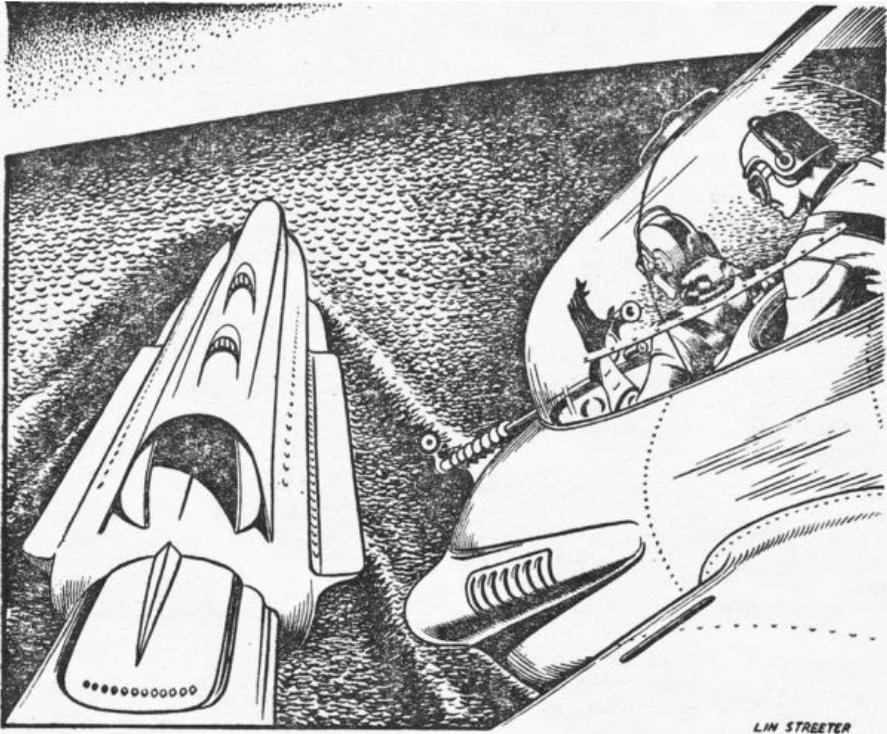
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After one frightful moment, a portion swung aside!

THE MAN WHO SOLD THE EARTH

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Science Fiction*, October 1940.

Jacob Mastervil, money-master of the world, carefully planned his masterdeal—the sale of an entire world! But a primeval race of super-scientists, long thought to be vanished from the surface of the Earth, aids Bruce Calthrop in revealing the true identity of the world-seller—leading to a shocking climax of a battle between the science of an ancient Earth and that of another planet!

CHAPTER 1

THE POWER OF MONEY

Jacob Mastervil had the world in his grip. Ten short years had seen incredible changes in the rugged, ox-like financier who in 1970 had apparently been quite content with feats of monetary wizardry. Suddenly he had altered his methods. A brief vacation alone at his holiday shack in the Alleghenies, then he had returned full of ruthless notions for world power.

He had no schemes for war or conflict, no ideas of bloodshed. He proposed to use a far mightier weapon—money! And he had succeeded. From 1970 to 1980 he had waged bloodless war, had cornered markets, juggled stocks and shares and international securities, altered and deflated values with bewildering skill—until at last, in mid 1980, it dawned on the world that he was the master of the planet by virtue of financial eminence. Destroy him, and one would destroy the basic rock of civilization! He had reared himself up as the greatest financial wizard of the age, dictator of the earth.

The majority of nations were content to accept his ruling. He had brought prosperity, advanced science considerably, improving conditions of living in many directions. Some said that the improvement was merely natural progress and had nothing to do with Mastervil. Plenty averred that he was in truth a black-hearted scoundrel. Those closest to him said that he was midway between cruelty and generosity—a man coldly disdainful of humanity itself, yet interested in its progress. Certainly he had only one god—power!

There was only one man who ever dared to question his methods—his private secretary, Bruce Calthorp. Thirty-five years old, keen in manner, red-haired and blue-eyed, he had been a member of the Mastervil organization ever since the big fellow had been content to play around with normal finance.

Calthorp did not like Mastervil. Ten years ago he had done so, but since his relentless climb to power, he had grown to hate him. There was a supercilious arrogance about the financier that got on Bruce's nerves. There was black inhumanity in the stare of Mastervil's cold gray eyes; there was invincibility in the broad, powerful back he so often showed as he stood at the window staring out over New York, usually dictating a letter at machine-gun speed.

He was dictating in this fashion one morning, staring down over the metropolis, when he suddenly swung around and regarded Calthorp with a baleful stare.

"Calthorp, you don't like me, do you?" he asked, and his voice was very soft, with the vaguest hint of a sneer.

Bruce slowly looked up from his notebook. His lean face never had been easy of expression. It was invariably taut and inflexible.

"Aren't you descending to personalities, sir?" he asked briefly. "If you had asked me that question outside business hours, I'd have answered it truthfully. As it is, I've no answer to give."

Mastervil sat down slowly, clenched his powerful hands on the desk.

"So you've nothing to say? I wonder if you'll stay dumb when you hear that Miss Dodd has consented to marry me?"

"I don't believe it," Bruce said flatly. "She was almost engaged to me, and now—" He stopped, his jaw squaring. "You're saying this, Mastervil, to try and get me annoyed."

Mastervil grinned, a huge unpleasant grin that bared his rows of powerful teeth.

"I've asked Miss Dodd to come over and verify it," he remarked, then snapped on the deskphone and barked, "Send in Miss Dodd."

"Right away, Mr. Mastervil."

Bruce turned slightly to face the mahogany and chromium door as Muriel Dodd quietly entered. She was tall and dignified, blonde in coloring, with a pair of very large and serious hazel eyes. Slowly she walked across the office, a statuesque figure in her trim costume of black and white.

"So here you are, my dear!" Mastervil got to his feet and cupped her shoulders in his great hands. "Tell Calthorp here that we're going to be married—soon. He doesn't want to believe it. . ."

The girl looked away for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"Yes, Bruce, it's true. . . ." She turned to him, trying to smile; but it was only with her lips. Her big eyes were filled with a haunted light, a silent plea which Bruce could not fail to notice.

For several seconds he sat in perfect silence, then glanced up as Mastervil started to laugh. It was a thick, chesty laugh, full of lusty complacency for the thing he had done. He slapped his hand on the desk.

"Darn me if I ever saw a man so surprised!" he exploded at last. "Dammit, Calthorp, you look as though I'd handed you an atomic bomb, or something."

"What a pity you didn't; I might have found a use for it. . . ." Bruce's face was as hard as granite as he rose to his feet; he carefully folded his notebook and dropped it on the desk. "From now on, Mastervil," he said, "I'm no longer in your employ. That gives me certain rights to say exactly what I want. In the first place, Miss Dodd did not consent to marry you of her own free will. You forced her into it, mainly as a lever to make things between us impossible. You want to be rid of me—and you picked the right way to do it!"

The financier chuckled mirthlessly. "Go on!" he invited.

"You did it to spite me because ever since you came into power you've hated me like poison. You know I know every one of your moves; if I were so minded I could lead a campaign against you and bring you to the ground. From now on I shall be so minded!"

"Very interesting!" Mastervil dusted his coat lapels idly.

"Not a soul in the world realizes you are planning greater conquests," Bruce went on deliberately. "For instance, the recent successful space-voyages to Venus. Space-travel was born ten years ago—today it is an institution. Matters between Earth and Venus are at the best peculiar. You imagine you know all the answers—but you don't. You spread propaganda recently that Venus and Earth are the closest of friends. What you didn't say was that you were planning with a certain ring of Venusian experts to sell the Earth!—yes, sell the Earth, with humanity as the stock in trade. Without a qualm, you plan to sell your fellow men and women into something approaching slavery and make yourself the master of both Earth and Venus. . . . Then what? More conquests, I suppose? Onwards—always onwards."

"I mastered this world, and I can master another," said the financier coldly. "You know too much, Calthorp—"

"But, you don't really mean you intend to sell humanity into slavery, do you?" broke in Muriel, seizing Mastervil's arm. "You can't mean to do that! Surely Bruce has got the facts wrong?"

“No; he happens to be right—but the matter was confidential.” Mastervil looked at the anxious girl quickly. “And why should you worry, anyway?” he demanded. “What does it matter what happens to the fools that make up a world? If they haven’t intelligence enough to defeat me, they deserve to suffer.”

He swung around to Bruce.

“As for you,” he breathed, “you know exactly what will happen to you if you breathe one word of confidential matters outside this office. Now collect your due from the cashier and get out.”

Bruce gave the girl one glance, then turned to the door. He closed it quietly, stalked through the busy outer offices and stopped for a moment with the cashier. Then he was on his way again, walking steadily down the granite main corridor.

Half way down the stairs to street level, Muriel suddenly caught up with him, breathless from running.

“Bruce, please! Just a minute! I made an excuse to Mastervil.”

He turned and took her arm gently as they went down together.

“Of course he forced you into that marriage idea?” he asked slowly.

She nodded bitterly. “Not because he wants me, but to spite you. . . . In a way, though, I think he *does* want me. Not for love or anything, but the sheer joy of possessing a woman that belongs to another man. . . . Oh, Bruce, you were a fool to let him know how much you really know.”

“Mebbe.” Bruce’s lips were tight.

“You can’t do anything against him. He’s too powerful. . . .”

Bruce stopped. They had come to the busy street level.

“Bruce, dear . . .” Muriel gripped his arm, gazed at him earnestly. “Bruce, we love each other—but surely our lives are more valuable to us? If we cross Mastervil in any way, he’ll finish the pair of us. You know that.”

“Yeah . . .” Bruce meditated for a moment, then he smiled.

“You go right ahead, honey, and do nothing,” he said gently. “Do everything he tells you; don’t put yourself in a position to be shot at. As for me— Well, I’m going to fight him!”

“But you can’t! You haven’t the power or the money!”

“I’ll find some way,” he said doggedly. “If somebody doesn’t start to oppose him mighty quickly, he’ll go through with his Venusian deal and put an end to the liberty of humanity. He has neither soul nor conscience. Ten years ago he was human and decent, but today—”

“But, Bruce—”

“Muriel, I’ve *got* to fight him!” he insisted. “I know so many things; I’ve got to act upon them. Don’t worry, I can look after myself; and I’ll find some way to free you, too. . . .”

He paused and kissed her gently, regardless of the people passing up and down.

“Be brave,” he murmured. “Trust in me.”

She stared at him dumbly, then he turned suddenly and headed off into the crowd, was rapidly lost to sight.

CHAPTER II

A ONE-WAY TRIP

Bruce gained his apartment fifteen minutes later, settled himself down to think.

"Easy to talk big," he muttered. "Easy to promise all those things to Muriel—but by no means so easy to put them into practice. How is it possible to get at Mastervil? Where is his weak spot? He just hasn't one. Steal a space-ship and try to smash the Venusian merger from the other end? It might be done; but it wouldn't be so easy. It would still leave Mastervil, and he'd probably get me before I got him . . ."

He got to his feet and paced worriedly up and down.

"If only I had some scientific apparatus! If only I had the machinery, the time, and the necessary secrecy—"

He looked up sharply at a knock on the door, demanded to know who was there.

"Message for you, Mr. Calthorp."

He flung the door wide, realized in an instant that the voice of a telegraph boy had been mimicked. Slowly he stepped back into the room, raising his hands before a steadily leveled revolver. He recognized the two men who moved towards him as Briggs and Mason, Mastervil's strong-arm experts.

"Well?" Bruce demanded. "What the devil do you want?"

"You!" Briggs answered shortly. "The boss told us to pick you up. You're going to hop an Atlantic plane, Calthorp—and what's more, you're not coming back. You know the boss; he hates people who know too much."

Bruce looked desperately about him. He had expected something of the kind, but hardly so swiftly. Inwardly he cursed himself for having said so much in Mastervil's office.

"Get your hat," Briggs ordered laconically. . . . "Now—move! And don't try anything, else you'll go west before your time."

"That might be preferable!" Bruce snapped, but he obeyed orders just the same. As long as he had life, he still had opportunity.

In ten minutes the three of them had reached the enormous transatlantic airdrome. Bruce found himself pushed into a single-seater express machine, struggled fiercely as he was bound to the seat with tough, thin cords.

"You don't have to worry about driving; this one's on us," Briggs commented genially, snapping on the robot control. "We'll be right behind you in that other big plane, doing everything for you. . . ."

He started up the engine, then slammed the door and clambered into the plane immediately to the rear. Mason sank down beside him at the controls . . . In a few minutes both machines were in the air, heading eastward at gathering speed.

Bruce struggled desperately with his cords as his plane flew onwards. Below him were the rolling gray waters of the Atlantic; far ahead, as time passed, he could distinguish the first signs of the islands of the Azores. He seemed to have been flying with whirlwind speed, the controls moving of their own accord under the radio wave influence of the machine a mile to the rear. . . .

Then suddenly he realized that his plane was dipping. The engine had gone dead. The Atlantic was hurtling up to meet him—

He tried to scream, but the terrific downward rush choked the utterance in his throat. His plane struck the water with shattering force. The window of the cabin splintered; water came roaring in on top of him, deluging him, smothering him. . . . The plane slowly settled, weighted by its all metal body. . . .

For nearly an hour Briggs and Mason circled low over the spot where the plane had finally sunk. Beyond that last vortex of bubbles, nothing disturbed the waste of water. At last Briggs gave a sigh, lifted his small radio telephone and switched on the private contact.

Jacob Mastervil raised the receiver of his office radiophone.

“Hello? Yes, Mastervil speaking. . . . What? Well, poor Calthorp! So he committed suicide? You chased him as far as the Azores and tried to stop him? Dear, dear! It’s quite a shock. . . . Thanks, Briggs. You know, I rather thought he seemed depressed when he left me this morning. . . . Too bad. Good-bye.”

He put the receiver back on its hook, smiled into space.

“Private radiophones have spies,” he murmured. “One can never be too sure. . . . So Calthorp was going to start a campaign against me, was he? At least, he had ambition. . . .”

He shrugged, went on calmly with his work.

Skillful tapping of the private radiophone by newshounds forever on Mastervil’s track soon brought the news of Calthorp’s “suicide” into the bulletins and evening papers. Muriel Dodd was the first caller in Mastervil’s office.

She raged at him with all the fury of a woman whose dearest possession has been taken from her, all of which he took with a sardonic smile.

“If it’s the last thing I ever do, Jacob Mastervil, I’ll expose you!” she finished desperately. “I’ll do what Bruce intended to do. I’ll open the eyes of the world to the fact that you’re a monster—”

“And go the same way as Bruce?” Mastervil asked softly, smiling up from his desk. “My dear Muriel!”

“Then you admit he was murdered!” she cried triumphantly.

“I didn’t say that. He committed suicide. You might do the same if you start saying too much. If you’re the sensible woman I think you are, you’ll hold your tongue and make preparations to become Mrs. Mastervil in a few weeks. . . . And now, my dear, please leave me. I have a lot to finish tonight.”

The girl slowly nodded. “All right. . . . I’ll go.” Her voice was much quieter now. “I’ll see you again when you’re not so busy.”

She went out thoughtfully, paused in the corridor and meditated.

“So he did have Bruce killed,” she muttered. “And he thinks he is invulnerable and can get away with it. . . . But maybe if I give way to him at every turn, if I learn his innermost secrets by pretending to agree with him, I can lull him into false security and one day trap him. Maybe I can do what Bruce could not do!”

She turned suddenly, her mind made up.

CHAPTER III THE WEAKNESS OF THE MASTER

The prompt despatch of Bruce Calthorp brought Jacob Mastervil a problem in its train. He was without a private secretary, nor could he find anybody who came up to his requirements. A man like Bruce Calthorp, absolutely efficient, was difficult to find. One by one, through several weeks, Mastervil tested one after the other of his immediate staff, found each applicant deficient in some respect or other.

Then one morning, practically a month after the murder of Calthorp, there was shown into the office a quiet, dark-eyed man with coal black hair and a very pallid face. His attire was neat, his manners faultless. Quietly he sat down before Mastervil's great desk.

"Rankin Dyall, I believe?" Mastervil said, glancing at the card before him. "Something I can do for you?"

"On the contrary, there is something I can do for you . . ." Dyall's voice was as smooth as his manner. "You are looking for a private secretary, I understand? You need look no further. Until now I have been with Rayburn and Clay, the Chicago bankers. You know them?"

"I own them!" Mastervil snorted. "What were you? President?"

"Chief confidential secretary. Telephone the president and you can verify it. I left voluntarily to take a vacation and study the angles of science and finance I knew you would need. When I felt proficient, I came on here."

"Hmmm . . . What are the present market figures on Interplanetary?"

"Forty-six seven-eighths."

"And Wallerby's Rocket Fuel Shares?"

"Twenty and three-quarters."

Mastervil nodded approvingly. "At least you know more about those two markets than any applicant yet. Now for a few other details—" and he reeled off a string of highly complicated tests which ranged from high finance to complex science. Without the least hesitation Dyall gave every answer correctly.

The financier took up the phone at last, contacted long distance and spoke briefly to Rayburn and Clay. Finally he looked across at Dyall and nodded slowly.

"O.K., Dyall, I'll take you on. If you come up to expectations, I'll gradually work you into my private routine. Bank 47B will attend to your salary. Report tomorrow morning."

Dyall nodded composedly and got to his feet.

"Thank you, sir; you'll find me quite efficient."

He moved to the door, stood aside as it opened at the identical moment to admit Muriel. She glanced at him curiously as he bowed slightly and went on his way.

"Who's that, Jacob?" she asked, moving to the desk.

"New secretary—smartest man I've ever seen. Dyall's his name."

"Dyall . . . Oh!" The girl relapsed into thought, then started as Mastervil's voice boomed on her again.

"Anything the matter?"

"Eh? Oh—no! Sorry, Jacob, I was just thinking he'll have to be smart to keep up with you. . . . You know, sometimes I wonder why on earth I was content with a mere secretary when I can have you. . . ."

“Now you’re talking!” Mastervil leapt up and seized her hand, failed to notice the faint trace of contempt in her smile. “Keep by me, Muriel, and I’ll put you on top of the world! Incidentally, how are those dolts carrying out my orders for the wedding arrangements?”

“Quite well,” she murmured. “Four more weeks and we’ll be married.”

“And then,” Mastervil breathed, “we’ll show these fools how far we can go. My Venusian deal comes off just after our marriage. We’ll be king and queen of two worlds, and then—”

“I came,” Muriel said slowly, “to ask for money. I’ve run out.”

“Money!” Mastervil laughed heavily, tugged out one of his cards and scribbled on the back of it. “Here—take this. Order what you want, where you want. My name is enough. . . .”

He drew himself up and stared out over the wilderness of the city.

Rankin Dyall fitted into his position of confidential secretary with an ease and assurance that delighted Mastervil. By the time the financier had married Muriel Dodd at an enormous function, Dyall was definitely a far better and more secretive secretary than Calthorp had ever been—nor did he seem to have any of Calthorp’s scruples. He carried out orders with a certain soulless efficiency that was equal only to Mastervil himself. As time passed, he even arrived at the place where he could make suggestions and receive consideration.

“I believe, sir,” he remarked one morning, “that your deal with the Venusians takes effect from September 9 onwards? That is, in two more weeks? I believe also that you have signed the merger with your Venusian colleagues?”

“Correct,” Mastervil nodded. “Anything wrong?”

“No, but . . .” Dyall paused, eyed the financier steadily with his coal black eyes. “Just how much have you told your wife?”

“Only as much as it is good for her to know. Why?”

“Did it not ever strike you as strange that she should be so suddenly willing to marry you after the way you disposed of my predecessor?”

“What the hell do you know about it?” Mastervil demanded.

“As your private secretary I have access to all your files; the death of Bruce Calthorp is fully recorded. I’ve placed my own construction on his suicide.” Dyall smiled frozenly. “I don’t blame you, sir; he asked for it. What I’m getting at is that I cannot believe Muriel Dodd—or I should say Muriel Mastervil—could so easily forget the incident. I believe she only married you so willingly because she thought she saw a way to learn some of your secrets. She might even have hopes of undermining your entire organization. . . .”

Mastervil clenched his fists. “By God, if I thought for one moment that—”

“I’ve taken the liberty of having her watched,” Dyall went on smoothly. “I have seen several suspicious things. I have seen her lingering at nights around the office. She is trying, I feel convinced, to find a way to stop this Venusian deal of yours. Perhaps, like Calthorp, she has queer ideas about saving the human race.”

“I’ll crush the truth out of her,” Mastervil breathed, his face venomous. “I’ll—”

“I rather think there is a better way.” Dyall moved forward and spoke softly. “Suppose, until the Venusian deal is over, you send your wife away from here altogether? To Paris, say? Let me go with her. You can be sure I’ll keep her out of harm’s way. I’d be happy to make the arrangements. . . .”

Mastervil slowly nodded. “You’re the kind of man I’ve always dreamed about, Dyall—clever, and observant. You’re granted an indefinite vacation in Europe, during which time you will watch my wife ceaselessly, see that she knows nothing of my plans. When the Venusian

deal is finished and I have the control of both worlds, you can return. . . . There'll be a big position for you," he finished, smiling grimly.

Dyall did not seem to hear the promise. He said thoughtfully, "It would help a great deal if you remained an absentee from Paris."

"You may be sure I will. I won't give Muriel the chance to get near me. I trust you implicitly, Dyall, to keep guard over her. . . ." Mastervil debated a moment, then nodded. "O.K. My wife will meet you at the transatlantic airport in three hours. Bank 47B will fix your expenses. I'll leave it to you to arrange for a plane. . . . Stay at the Lafayette Hotel in Paris in case I want you suddenly."

"Very good. . . ."

Dyall bowed himself out, walked slowly to his own office and, once within it, stood smiling bitterly, staring pensively in front of him. . . .

Muriel's eyes were anxious as she met Dyall at the airport three hours later. He bowed gravely to her, made the necessary arrangements for her baggage, then took her arm and led the way to a two seater plane already waiting with the engine ticking over.

"I—I thought we'd be taking an ordinary liner," she exclaimed, halting. "Really, Mr. Dyall, I don't understand all this! Why have I got to go to Paris? What's behind it all?"

"I have been entrusted with the task of keeping you out of possible danger," Dyall replied gently. "Please get into the plane."

She hesitated a moment, then shrugged. He helped her to her seat, then nodded to the mechanics and settled down beside her at the controls. She gazed at him in amazement.

"So you're a pilot as well as a secretary!"

"Obviously," he answered briefly—and within a few minutes had the machine in the air. He climbed rapidly over the low ceiling of clouds—then instead of heading eastwards across the Atlantic, he turned directly west.

"But this isn't the way to Europe!" Muriel cried staring through the window.

"It's the way to Pennsylvania and the Allegheny Mountains," Dyall said briefly. "We may never get to Europe, Mrs. Mastervil—but that won't matter. I've made all the necessary arrangements for an alibi at the Lafayette Hotel. . . ."

"You—you mean you're kidnaping me?" she gasped in horror.

He shook his black head. "No. We're going to the Alleghenies because Mastervil's holiday shack is still there. And it's not the only thing that's there! I want you to see something very interesting. . . ."

Muriel started to say something, then fell silent. She did not know which way to take Dyall, could not fathom whether he was working for or against Mastervil. On the chance that he might be trying to trick her into explaining her own motives, she kept silent, said no word until Dyall at last brought the airplane sweeping down through the clouds.

Ultimately he landed in a deserted tableland portion of the Allegheny Range. For a moment, they both sat staring out on frowning, rugged rock, the mountainsides sweeping upwards to the clouds. In the near foreground was Mastervil's rest shack; but when Dyall clambered out of the plane, he did not move in that direction. Instead he helped the girl to alight and motioned her to follow him towards a sunken cleft half a mile to their rear.

"There," Dyall said at length. "Look for yourself."

The girl held onto her hat as the wind blew up the gulf. Perhaps a hundred feet below was an egg-shaped mass of crushed metal, its sides battered and broken, its glass portholes long

since shattered.

“Why, it’s one of our own very early type space-ships!” she exclaimed, turning to look at Dyall. “What’s it doing here?”

“Originally,” he said, “it was covered with earth and rock. I found it with the help of some scientific friends of mine, whom I’m hoping you’ll meet later on. Notice the nearness of this ship to Mastervil’s cabin. . . . Now come down and see one or two other things.”

He helped her down the slope, and at length they reached the twisted airlock of the thing. Dyall led the way into the gloomy interior, switching on a pocket-torch.

Muriel balanced herself on the slanting floor and gazed around in bewilderment. She knew exactly how an old-type space-ship ought to look—but this one was fitted with extra details she had never encountered before. There were the usual driving engines, rusty and old now, but there were also other machines that were beyond her, apparently electrical in nature. . . . Then she gave a little start at the sight of a powdery mass on a long table by the further wall. Not all of it was yet decomposed out of all shape. The thing was the corroded remains of a skeleton, and no ordinary skeleton, either.

Dyall smiled twistedly from the shadows. “That,” he said slowly, “is the almost vanished skeleton of a Venusian. Around you, you behold very advanced but long disused automatic surgical devices. . . . I’ve had time to piece together this business while I’ve been in Mastervil’s employ—and the truth is rather surprising. . . .”

Muriel said nothing, waited for him to continue.

“When the first trips to Venus were made, an ambitious Venusian stole one of our space-ships when it landed on his planet. He came to earth alone to put a plan into action. Whether he hit this spot by accident or design, we shall never know—presumably it was by accident, judging from the condition of the ship. . . . He was badly injured. If he was to carry his plan through, he had got to act fast. There was only one earth being within miles, and that being was Jacob Mastervil.

“Mastervil was overpowered and his brain was destroyed—but Mastervil’s body still lived with the Venusian’s brain inside it! Automatic surgery did it all. The real Jacob Mastervil entered this ship under force; only his body came out. The Venusian, a master of science, soon found that chance had given him the body of a famous financier. He developed that one line to an incredible degree and became dictator of the world. . . .”

Dyall stopped and shrugged. “So, Mrs. Mastervil, your husband is a Venusian in brain and an Earthman in body.”

“Somehow, I’m not surprised,” Muriel muttered, gazing around. “I suppose I ought to be, but somehow—well, it sort of explains his cold lack of all human emotion and his utter disregard for humanity, his extraordinary wish to make a deal with Venus—”

“For a very good reason,” Dyall broke in. “Believe me, Mrs. Mastervil, he has his plan worked out to the last detail. On Venus, judging from what I’ve unearthed from the Venusian ambassador, the man who poses as Mastervil was a rebel. He tried to force his own ideas on his people and got life imprisonment for his pains. He escaped. When space-travel came in, he evidently saw his chance. By gaining a hold over Earth, where the majority of beings are less intelligent than Venusians, he could also gain control over his own planet, with the help of a ring of Venusian scoundrels like himself—master two planets and dictate to both. That is his scheme.”

“And of course you agree with it?” Muriel asked coldly.

“No.” Dyall eyed her steadily. “I have only led Mastervil to believe that I do. . . . Tell me, have you ever found Mastervil give anything away? Is there anything he is afraid of?”

“Not that I know of.” Muriel sighed. “I hoped I might find something that would trip him up. Apparently he has no fears of any kind—save one. And that isn’t worth mentioning.”

“What is it?”

“He’s afraid of ghosts.”

“Ghosts!” Dyall started to laugh. “Well, of all the— But wait a minute,” he broke off pensively. “Maybe there’s a reason for that, too. Taking into account that he is actually a Venusian, he must be mighty puzzled by the interest of some earthly beings in things supernatural. Such things don’t obtain on Venus; superstition is stone dead. But not here. . . . So a science of legend and occult alarms him, does it? That’s his weak spot. . . . The last thing I’d have thought of.”

“But it’s so childish!” Muriel protested. “He’s ordered all ghost books in New York to be burned; he’s banned all plays that deal with the supernatural. He even flies at me if I happen to say such and such a thing hasn’t the ‘ghost of a chance. . . .’ As for being afraid of broken mirrors and number thirteens—! I never knew a man like him.”

“No—because he’s met up with one science dating from the past that isn’t in his scope,” Dyall breathed. “Good Lord, only you could have found that out!”

“Suppose,” the girl said slowly, “you tell me how you know so much about Mastervil’s past? How can you be sure?”

Dyall started out of preoccupation. “I’m sure because all the events check up. I’ve seen them happen.”

“But—but how? You’re a secretary, not a thought-reader. I’m sure you didn’t get much time to run about these mountains while you were with Rayburn and Clay—especially ten years ago.”

“I used science to make my discoveries . . .” Dyall smiled faintly. “I have friends who are masters of science, who are working with me against Mastervil. I’ve always had a great contempt for him; if I go right ahead I may be able to defeat him.”

Muriel looked her bewilderment. “But Mr. Dyall, all the science that there is in the world belongs to Mastervil! He’s taken control of it.”

“His science is of the present; mine is of the past,” Dyall answered simply. “Maybe I can make it clearer in a while. Come along back to the plane.”

CHAPTER IV

SCIENCE FROM THE PAST!

Once they were back in the driving cabin, Dyall forced the machine to the higher altitudes at terrific speed, flew back over New York at sufficient height to be unobserved, kept steadily onwards out over the Atlantic.

Muriel, slumped in her seat and trying to figure things out, finally glanced at him. She felt at last that she could trust him.

“Where are you going?” she asked. “Paris?”

“No—not Paris. You’ll see.”

He kept his eyes on the controls, drove steadily on and on, until at length the islands of the Azores loomed up on the far horizon. Dyall shifted his cuff slightly, adjusted something like a wrist watch and spoke into it.

“Calling Zan Alfo. Rankin Dyall calling. . . .”

He switched the thing off, added casually, “Private microphone to my friends. . . .” Then he suddenly sent the airplane into a dive, brought the girl’s heart bounding into her mouth as the pall of clouds below swept up like a blanket. They vanished and were above as the flyer plunged through them.

“Who—or what—is Zan Alfo?” she panted, staring down.

Instead of answering he said keenly, “There, down there! See it? That’s where we land.”

The girl stared through the port and caught her breath in surprise at the vision of a thousand foot length of gray metal floating just clear of the ocean surface.

“A submarine!” she cried, as Dyall swept towards it. Then she added in puzzlement, “But it can’t be! Submarines became extinct years ago—”

“It’s a space-ship,” Dyall broke in curtly. “And a monster one, too. Hang on. . . .”

For one frightful moment, Muriel thought the plane was going to crash into the midst of that mass of gray, then at the last second a portion of it swung aside and the flyer dropped into a long, floodlit tunnel, came to a gentle halt. Overhead, the section swung back into place and automatically sealed itself.

Muriel stared incredulously down the softly lit metal vista; then as Dyall nodded to her, she opened the door and slowly climbed out, awe-struck with the internal immensity of the place. Under her feet she could feel the metal plates throbbing to the beat of distant mighty engines.

“Big enough ship?” Dyall asked dryly.

“Big enough!” she echoed. “Why, it makes our space-liners look like toys by comparison. Who owns it? What’s it doing on the surface of the Atlantic?”

“At the moment it is well below surface and descending rapidly into the depths. It only came up long enough to admit me. . . .” Dyall turned aside and pressed a sunken switch in the wall. The girl steadied herself as a square of the floor started to sink gently downwards like an elevator. It dropped perhaps forty feet, then stopped. A portion of the wall slid away. . . . Muriel found herself gazing into another bewildering, floodlit vista of metal, this time housing a variety of vast and glittering machinery.

She glimpsed men in curious garb moving to and fro about the machines, tending them with extreme care. Here and there were also women, some blonde and others brunette, lithe

and graceful— Then Dyall nudged her arm at the appearance of a grave-faced individual of uncertain age, attired in clothes that seemed to be made of red velvet. His hair was gray, bushing over the top of a remarkable forehead. Keen, unwavering gray eyes peered from under shaggy brows.

“Welcome back,” he said quietly, extending his hand to Dyall; then he glanced at Muriel. “This, I suppose, is Mrs. Mastervil?” He smiled at her, and it was surprising how his strong face lit up.

“Yes—yes, I’m Mrs. Mastervil,” Muriel acknowledged, “but—er— Who are you?”

“Zan Alfo,” said Dyall quietly. “A direct descendant of the fugitives of Mu. If Mu doesn’t convey anything, try Atlantis.”

“Atlantis!” the girl cried in wonderment. “You don’t mean—”

Alfo laughed a little, took her arm gently.

“My dear lady, it isn’t so queer as it sounds,” he murmured. “And forgive me if my English is not too good, won’t you? We have not had much time in which to learn it. You see, we are the direct descendants of the people of Mu. When Mu was destroyed in a cataclysm and hurled into the depths of what is now the Atlantic Ocean, our ancestors escaped into the void in a space-ship. . . . Oh, yes, space-travel was one of many accomplishments. They traveled far—out beyond the solar system into the vast Galaxy, eventually found a planet which suited them. We are the descendants of the original Murians. Back on our planet are the others of our race—a very happy and contented people seeking nothing but scientific accomplishment. . . .”

Alfo paused, said quietly, “You understand, my dear?”

“I understand so far—but not how you come to be here. What are you doing? Planning a conquest of earth?”

“We have made our conquests,” Alfo replied gravely. “Nor have we any wish to return to Earth. Our only reason for being here is because certain records came to light recently at home which revealed that our ancestors, in their hurried departure from Mu, had left behind several valuable scientific secrets, sealed at the last moment in indestructible globes, and which now lie at the bottom of the Atlantic amidst the ruins of buried Mu. We are busy on salvage work, have already recovered three of the five globes. We came without fuss, and at the depth we maintain we know no earthly craft can detect us. . . .”

“And—and Dyall is really an Atlantean?” Muriel hazarded. “Trying to defeat Mastervil?”

The scientist hesitated and glanced at Dyall quickly. Then he turned back to Muriel.

“That will be easier to explain later on,” he said, clearly on the defensive. “For the moment, I think we had better have a meal. Both of you must be tired. . . . Come this way. . . .”

He turned, led the way between the machines to an adjoining apartment of delicate light. A long table, amply filled, graced the center of the room. Smiling women took the girl’s heavy traveling coat and hat. She sat down slowly, in dubious wonderment, trying to accustom herself to the perfect, ordered routine aboard this monster of the void. Dyall sat opposite her, smiling enigmatically, and Zan Alfo took up his position at the head of the table.

Soundproof doors closed, and the meal began.

“In this ship,” Alfo said slowly, eating idly as he talked, “is the man who originally belonged to the Rayburn and Clay Bank. He is being treated with every courtesy. He did leave Rayburn and Clay of his own accord, and he did take a vacation—but he did not go to

Mastervil. We—that is, several of our numbers—became ordinary citizens of Chicago for the purpose of a kidnaping, which was smoothly and efficiently done. . . .”

“You made that move of your own accord?” Muriel asked in amazement.

“We did it at the request of a very gallant Earthling—one Bruce Calthorp. . . .”

The clang of the girl’s fork to her plate echoed in the sudden silence. Alfo’s piercing eyes were nearly hidden under his brows. He watched her trying to mouth words; finally they came in a rush.

“But—but Bruce died! They drowned him deliberately, wrecked his plane and pretended it was suicide. They even circled around for an hour to be sure he didn’t appear again. . . .”

“I know,” Alfo said gravely. “But Bruce Calthorp lives today. He is seated right opposite to you now. . . .” He said the words very slowly, avoiding all possible chance of shock. But even so, Muriel passed a hand over her forehead for a moment, sank back weakly in her chair. For a moment the room was swaying before her, then both Dyall and Alfo were before her, gripping her hands.

“*You—Bruce!*” she whispered, staring into Dyall’s face.

He nodded very slowly. “I was a fool, Muriel. I should have told you sooner, only I wanted Alfo to do it. I knew you’d believe him. It all seems so incredible—”

“At the time Bruce’s plane crashed into the sea, we were near the surface taking in a fresh air supply,” Alfo broke in quickly. “We got him out of the plane, but he was dead. We restored him to life. Such a feat was not difficult to our science. It was merely a matter of ejecting all the water from him, then starting the heart and circulation going again. Since he had received no organic injury, this was quite possible. . . .”

“But—his appearance!” Muriel cried, sitting up and taking a hold on herself.

“That was done at his own request. He suggested we aid him in defeating Mastervil, and we agreed. He asked for a prominent man to be detected and detained here. That was done, and it seemed that Dyall’s circumstances exactly suited the occasion. We remodeled Bruce to resemble Dyall, changed the pigment in his eyes and hair, altered the blood circulation of the face to present a white pallor. . . . All of it was painless and simple.”

“Then,” Bruce went on, “we went to work to find out all we could about Mastervil. These Atlanteans have devices which can trap light waves from space after they have been traveling ten years; after that they are hard to reassemble. Anyway, I went with Alfo himself to the Mastervil shack—both of us looking like ordinary Americans on tour. We took portable apparatus with us and reconstructed the incidents that had happened around the shack ten years before. We saw exactly what happened—the trapping of Mastervil, everything. It was easy to find the space-ship, carefully covered with rock and earth. Then I went on to New York to apply for the job of secretary, having been well versed in science and finance by the Atlanteans beforehand. . . .”

“My reason for doing it was both to try and trip up Mastervil and get you out of his clutches, Muriel. I managed it at length by suggesting to him you were a spy. He fell for the idea of my taking you away. . . .”

“And suppose he goes to the Hotel Lafayette in Paris?” she broke in quickly. “What then?”

“We have him constantly under observation by long-distance television,” Alfo remarked quietly. “He is not aware of it, of course. If he sets out for Paris, you and Bruce will leave immediately and beat him to it by several hours.”

“And suppose he telephones?”

Bruce chuckled. "He can only use the submarine cable and Alfo has it tapped already. If, on the other hand, he radiophones, the apparatus here will instantly know of it. . . . In either event, the call will be intercepted and the answer made from here. Simple, isn't it?"

"It's marvelous!" Muriel sat in complete silence for a moment, then she said slowly, "But what is the purpose behind it all? You can't destroy Mastervil without upsetting the finance of the whole world. He doesn't just control money; he is money!"

"That has been our main problem up to now," Bruce said slowly, "but you, Muriel, happened to find the one thing he is afraid of. Ghosts!"

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Alfo in astonishment.

"Apparitions;—phantoms—the occult . . ." Bruce gave a slow smile. "Alfo, doesn't that suggest something to you?"

The scientist pondered for a few moments, then his rugged old face broke into a grin. He turned suddenly to the girl.

"So you found the one vulnerable spot," he breathed. "And you'll certainly see something for your trouble. . . . If we can only plan it right . . . Bruce, I believe we've got him!" he finished, his eyes gleaming. "The science of Atlantis can defeat the modern schemes of Mastervil! The past *can* defeat the present. . . . We have radio television; we can hear him and see him without him knowing it. We can—"

Alfo stopped suddenly. "We must start immediately," he said curtly. "Come with me . . . It's late evening already."

CHAPTER V

TWO WORLDS IN THE BALANCE!

Jacob Mastervil pushed aside the last of the world reports and lay back contentedly in his heavy chair. The day's work was finished, the great executive building was silent. Everything was running perfectly. He gazed pensively into the shadows and smiled to himself.

"Ten years ago I was an outcast on my own world," he muttered. "Today I am on the verge of the greatest conquest of my career—the merging of two worlds, the control of both. . . ."

He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again as a curious wave of tension passed over him; it felt for all the world like low-voltage electricity. He frowned a little, blinked, then stared across his desk. There was hardly any light there; all of it was concentrated into the circle on the blotting pad. . . .

Something was in those shadows—a form that stood motionless.

"Who's—who's there?" he snapped suddenly, half rising.

"Jacob Mastervil . . ."

Mastervil could not determine whether the deep voice made a statement or asked a question. Brusquely, he answered.

"I'm Jacob Mastervil, yes. What do you want? How'd you get in here? Come to the desk, can't you?"

The figure remained veiled in shadow, did not move. The calm bass voice spoke again.

"You are not Jacob Mastervil; you only own his body. *I* am Jacob Mastervil, the man you slew ten years ago! Slew, I say—that you might gain control over two worlds when you are worthy of neither. . . ."

Mastervil felt something prickling his scalp. Then suddenly he shot to his feet and depressed the light-switch. He took a startled step back as he stared at the transparent figure regarding him. The shadowy lips seemed to move slightly. . . . It was Jacob Mastervil—an image of himself, clothed as he had been ten years before.

"A—a ghost," Mastervil whispered, his forehead wet.

"You believed my death meant my complete destruction," the image said slowly. "You thought the removal of my brain finished me for all time. Such a thing might apply to your world, but it does not apply to Earth! There are certain things about this planet you can never know. Death on earth is not actual. You cannot destroy the mind even though you destroy the brain, and in time that mind re-forms another body, such as you see that I have now. . . ."

Mastervil stood quite motionless as he listened. He licked his dry lips slowly.

"Have you never noticed the intense interest of Earthlings in the afterlife?" the image asked. "Have you not seen their spiritualistic efforts, their struggles to prove they are reincarnated? Have you never heard of men being haunted, or of buildings housing spirits? That is a science peculiar to this one planet. Even as an Earthling knows nothing of the fundamental mysteries governing Venusian life, so you know nothing of earthly life. . . . I have come back to make certain demands. . . ."

Mastervil still stood staring. He did not know the basic laws of earthly life, hence his perpetual fear of the mystic science of occultism. . . . Even so, he had assumed that death meant death on any planet.

“So far,” the image went on, “you have gained your ends by mainly bloodless means. That is to your credit—except for the isolated cases of men like Bruce Calthorp. . . . Yes, I know all about him. He too did not really die! By the law of earthly reincarnation, he will return in time to confront you. Maybe sooner than you expect—”

“This is ridiculous!” Mastervil broke in suddenly, anger mastering his fear. “This is a trick—a damned silly trick to try and scare me—”

“It’s no trick. Search your entire scientific resources if you wish; you’ll find no trace of tampering. The cold fact remains that you are confronted with a mystery of earthly life which you never expected. . . . And another thing!—If your fellows from Venus come to Earth, they will find that all those whom they destroy—and they certainly will destroy because there will be war to the death—will begin to return as the years pass. Yes, return! One by one! Imagine it; a world of ghosts!—a world of the living-dead seeking their slayers as I have sought you. . . . That will be the outcome of the Venusian invasion. . . . Already you must have had proof of what I am saying. Have you not felt at times that you are not alone in a room? That somebody is right behind you? That is because Otherworlders are present. A normal Earthling can see those people and talk with them.”

“I—I don’t believe it!” Mastervil whispered.

“Bring your fellows here and you condemn them to a lifetime of uncertainty and terror. They will suffer as you are going to suffer, always haunted by the return of the dead. Return to the world you understand. Think it over. . . .”

Mastervil stared with dazed eyes as the image slowly faded. The room was empty. He was far more shaken than he cared to admit. Suddenly he grasped the telephone, contacted long distance and gave the number of the Lafayette Hotel.

“This you, Dyall?” he asked at last, and gave a sigh of relief at the voice’s calm assent at the other end of the wire.

“Say—listen!” Mastervil took a hold on himself. He dare not give away too much. “Have—have you ever felt that you’re being haunted? Oh, I know it sounds idiotic, but I have the oddest feeling that somebody’s trying to get at me from some other world. It’s worrying me, and you’re about the only person I can trust to answer truthfully. . . . Ever felt the same way?”

Dyall laughed softly. “Sure I have! I’ve talked with many of my dead friends in the evening. I’m surprised that this is your first experience in that direction. Maybe you’re not sensitive enough to feel those presences. Don’t you remember that one of the reasons why war stopped was because the dead started to come back?”

“Eh?” Mastervil blinked; then he said quickly. “Oh, yes—yes, of course. . . .”

“Who’s worrying you?” Dyall asked gently. “Bruce Calthorp?”

“No—no; just somebody. Guess I’ll have to take myself in hand.”

“Else get used to it. Now you’ve started off, it will most likely happen all through your life. . . .”

Mastervil slammed the receiver back on its hook, looked anxiously around him. Then it was true!—the dead on Earth *did* come back! So utterly unlike Venus. . . . He got to his feet hurriedly and scrambled into his hat and coat. . . .

But he got no rest that night. Time and again the image of Jacob Mastervil appeared in his great bedroom, stood guard at the end of the bed and spoke in that deep bass voice.

“You’ll gain nothing by this, Venusian! Return to your own world, otherwise you and your fellows are bound to perish by the utterly different laws governing the two planets. . . .”

Everybody in the executive building noticed the difference in Jacob Mastervil as the days slipped by. His former cold arrogance had given place to a hunted look. He had few words for anybody and kept to his office most of the time. He dare not ask anybody for any facts about earthly life, because in so doing he would arouse suspicion concerning his own identity. He wondered if, deep down, Rankin Dyall knew the truth. . . .

Time and again the image appeared, always in the evening when the staff had departed—and each time Mastervil realized he was fighting a losing battle to fear. Besides, if he did run his planet's inhabitants into a trap on the Earth, his own life would be forfeit. . . .

By degrees, so harassed did he become in his various fears, he let vital matters of finance slip, was warned just in time by his expert advisers.

"I'm—I'm ill," was his worried excuse. "Can't concentrate. Take care of it for me. . . ."

The experts agreed, wondering vaguely what had come over the master-mind. . . . And he was suddenly brought face to face with the realization that his iron control over all matters financial had disappeared! Money had taken different courses; with his own hands he had turned it over to lesser experts. He was only the figurehead now, no longer the controller.

He was debating this startling fact one of the evenings when the image reappeared before his desk.

"Venusian, you have turned over finance to capable hands," it said steadily; "leave it that way. You don't want to destroy your own fellows when they come here—so return to your planet and cancel that merger between worlds. Radiophone to your world and put the deal off."

Mastervil gave a bitter smile. "Why should I? I'm gradually becoming convinced that all this is a clever trick to defeat me. The dead return!" he exclaimed sourly. "You expect me to believe that?"

"Why not?"

It was another voice that asked that question. Mastervil looked in sudden alarm to the opposite corner of the room. Another shadowy figure came slowly into view.

"Calthorp!" he cried in horror. "Bruce Calthorp! No—no, you can't be! You were drowned. . . . I know you were!"

The apparition smiled winterily. "Mastervil has returned; why shouldn't I? I have as much reason to return as he has. Vengeance! That's what I seek—vengeance, for my death!"

Mastervil rubbed his eyes desperately. "Then—then it's true," he groaned, half to himself. "Earthly life can recreate itself. . . . What a planet! What a hideous form of life. . . .!"

"And this is only the beginning," said Bruce malevolently. "When your fellows come—"

"They won't come! They'll never come here!" Mastervil shouted hoarsely. "They'd kill me for daring to do it. A world of ghosts—a world of ghosts. . . ."

Visibly shaking, he clutched hold of the apparatus for spacial radio communication, swung the dials around desperately. Then as the tiny tubes flared into life, he panted words into the transmitter.

"Abandon Earth project! Keep clear of Earth. It's a hell planet. Can only mean your destruction. . . . Merger is—is cancelled. . . ."

Mastervil's voice stopped suddenly. The microphone fell out of his nerveless hands. Abruptly his heavy shoulders seemed to crumple up and his head drooped towards the desk. . . .

Zan Alfo removed a series of blades from their switch clamps and listened to the diminishing whine of electrical engines. The huge screen before him, Bruce and Muriel, dimmed and became blank. Slowly he turned.

“Heart failure,” he said shortly. “Death from extreme shock. Our idea was right, Bruce. . . . His intense fear of an unknown science finally killed him—”

“And it mightn’t have done it but for that final effort,” Bruce muttered. “First we projected an enlarged photographic image of Mastervil, taken from light-wave impressions of him ten years ago, and projected it on a carrier wave to New York, sending a voice on a second carrier wave. The molecules of the air itself were sufficient to form a receiver of light and sound. . . . That alone nearly did the trick, but I think he suspected something. My appearance clinched it. He got the shock of his life when I appeared over that second carrier wave.”

“Especially as an hour in the surgery brought you back to your former appearance.” Alfo chuckled. “Fortunately he canceled that merger at the last moment, and since finance has passed over to normal experts, I rather fancy Mastervil won’t be missed.”

“Nor—but there’ll be repercussions on Venus,” Bruce murmured. “He was in such a hurry, he didn’t use any private spacial wave; that message of his would be heard all over Venus. Those that were in league with him will be unearthed by the Venusian authorities and brought to justice. That’s a certainty. . . .”

He was right.

By the time Alfo and his colleagues had recovered all their globes from the Atlantic and were out in space on their homeward run, by the time the real Dyall had returned to Chicago under a willing oath of secrecy, and Bruce and Muriel had got back to New York, the news started to filter through.

The civilizations of both worlds were astounded, could hardly understand how they had escaped the ruthless plot to ensnare them both. There were talks of secret agents, all manner of amazing solutions—but the fact remained that Mastervil was dead and his colleagues were working out their sentences in the Venusian swamp-lands.

“Funny to think it was a game of bluff,” Bruce remarked to Muriel, a few days after their wedding. “Boiled down, it was precious little else—but it worked!”

[The end of *The Man Who Sold the Earth* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]