

SOMETHING FROM ABOVE

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1

In themselves, the events had all the horror of a nightmare but a nightmare can be explained so that it ceases to oppress one's mind. The incidents at Norton in western Minnesota were different, for now they may never be completely explained. It is not so much the things we know that terrify us; it is the things we do not know, the things that break all known laws and rules, the things that come upon us unaware and shatter the pleasant dream of our little world. The occurrence at Norton was of such a kind, a horror so appalling and incredible a nature that no one concerned will ever be able to forget the day of madness.

Everything that might have any bearing on the explanation is included in the following narrative in order that the truth may not be overlooked through omission. It may be that some facts have not yet come to light, and perhaps there have been included a few details that do not really pertain to the affair. The incidents themselves may not be in the right order. If further information should be possessed by any one, the narrative will gladly be corrected, for anything that may help to explain will be eagerly welcomed by scientists and public alike. We walk in darkness with phantoms and specters we know not of, and our little world plunges blindly through abysses toward a goal of which we have no conception. That thought itself is a blow at our beliefs and comprehension. We used to content ourselves by thinking we knew all about our world, at least; but now it is different, and we wonder if we really know anything, or if there can be safety and peace anywhere in the wide universe.

2

The phenomena with which we are here concerned began with the blotting out of the stars, an astronomical riddle which was observed by three watchers: Professor Grill of Harvard; his assistant, Mr. Thorndyke; and an amateur astronomer in California, Mr. Nelson. An odd feature of the

observation is that the two Easterners swear the blotting out occurred far down on the western horizon, whereas Mr. Nelson reported that it took place near Saturn. Are we to believe that one observation was inaccurate, that there actually were two simultaneous phenomena in different parts of the heavens? In the light of former and after events, the latter conclusion seems more likely. Furthermore, Mr. Nelson's observation, made on the night of March 28, is apparently connected with one he had made on the preceding night. According to a note he had sent in to the Mount Wilson Observatory, he had been idly examining the planet Saturn on the night of March 27. The atmosphere was exceptionally clear, the observation perfect. The rings were so plain and the planet so impressive in its peculiar way that he stayed on watching it minute after minute. Thus it was that the un-expected happened even while he watched. Shortly after one o'clock, there appeared on its surface a spot of such blinding, dazzling radiance that he thought his vision must have been strained and he was merely seeing things. He looked away for a minute; when he resumed his watch at the eye-piece of his telescope, he discovered that where the spot of incandescent brilliance had been was now a dot of blackness. As he watched it in curiosity, he saw it grow lighter and lighter until finally the planet presented its normal appearance. Mr. Nelson might have ignored the matter altogether if he had not had sufficient scientific training to respect the cardinal principle of never overlooking any fact or data. Thus it was that he wrote down his observation and duly sent it in.

The blotting out of the stars on the night of March 28 was an even stranger phenomenon. In the act of training his telescope on Saturn again to look for a reappearance of the radiant spot, Mr. Nelson noticed a star suddenly flicker out and return, another vanish and shine bright again an instant later. He thought at first that he must be the victim of an optical illusion, but he kept on observing, and saw that the stars which disappeared and shone again were in a straight line which he computed to lie in the general path between Saturn and the Earth. It was a curious spectacle to watch, according to Nelson. It was just as if you were strolling down a street at noon, and stopped to look at a diamond on a black plush cushion in a jeweller's window; and then all at once the diamond wasn't there, even while you were looking at it; and then suddenly there was the diamond again, sparkling as

ever. It was not as if a solid body had come between you and the diamond, but rather as if something invisible had crossed your field of vision, something you could not see but which intercepted light-rays. The observation of the two Harvard astronomers duplicated Nelson's, but they said that the blot-ting out took place down on the western horizon, far away from Saturn. Odder still is their statement that the stars vanished in a straight line that progressed in the general direction of the Earth.

No wide attention was paid to these unusual observations, and even the three watchers did not have much more than idle curiosity. For that reason because every one was unprepared, the terror at Norton stalked out of night like a hideous dream, as overwhelming as madness itself. Perhaps the rest of the story should be told through the eyes of Lars Loberg, a stolid Norwegian farmer living some three miles from Norton, for it was around his farm that the terror centered, and he himself was a first-hand witness until he went insane and committed suicide.

He arose early as usual on the morning of March 30. It was cold in the farmhouse and he stepped outside to chop an armful of kindling wood. It was already light and snow was falling when he opened the door. He started to go through, then stopped just beyond the threshold and looked around with a blank, puzzled expression on his face. He carefully traced his steps to the room he had just left, and stood there, looking across the farmyard and open fields.

"Helga!" he called in a curious tone to his wife. "Come here!"

His wife came, and the two stood in the doorway looking at a sight such as they had never before seen. The whole air seemed to be oozing blood. Not a breath of wind was stirring, not a cloud hung in the sky, but a fine mist was falling, a substance that was neither snow nor dust nor blood but that had something of the nature of all three. The snowdrifts around the farmhouse that were not yet fully melted in the spring thaws were already covered with a mantle of brownish-red, and minute by minute, as the strange stuff kept falling from the sky, the layer on the ground grew thicker. The two of them stood there in the quiet of dawn with awe and a little fear, looking at the unusual downfall and a world that was bloody-red. There was a queer odor in the air, almost a stench. It reminded Lars of a two-days-dead cat he once stumbled on, and of a pig he had bled to death recently.

Lars stretched his arm out and caught some of the falling stuff in his hand. "See!" he said simply to Helga. The stuff melted. It did not run off like water. It stayed in little oily globules of a color like old blood. Instead of having the fresh, earthly smell of snow or rain, it gave off an unpleasant odor that offensive-ly suggested something dead.

Helga was superstitious. She shivered and drew back from Lars' outstretched palm. "Red snow!" she said uneasily. "It—it ain't natural—I don't like it. Oh. Lars, shut the door!"

Lars looked out somberly for a minute. "Yeah—red snow. Maybe it means bad year for the crops." Then he shrugged his shoulders and half smiled at Helga. "But it's probably only dust in the air that got mixed up with the snow. Nothing to get scared about, and—"

"Listen!" broke in Helga sharply.

Lars left unfinished what he had started to say. Up to the house from the pig-sty drifted an uproar of grunting and mad squealing such as he had never heard. In the barn, the horses were neighing and whinnying shrilly, and he heard the wild clatter of trampling hooves. Above the racket of the frightened animals he heard the mournful, whimpering howl of Jerry, the Scotch collie.

Lars tore out of the house on a run. "You stay here!" he shouted back as Helga started to follow him. "I'll see what's after 'em and quiet 'em down!" The red snow was still falling. Lars raced to the barn first but there were no tracks of any intruder around it in the new-fallen snow, nor could he find any evidence that man or beast had been prowling around the pig-pen. Lars ran back to the barn, slid open the doors, and did his best to quiet the plunging horses. Something had badly scared them, but he had little time to speculate on what it was. For the first time in his life, the animals paid hardly any attention to his efforts to calm them, and Lars became more puzzled and bewil-dered every moment. Then he heard Jerry howling nearer, the patter of racing feet came across the yard, and the dog leaped through the open door, shaking itself and tumbling around at his feet. "There, Jerry, there, Jerry," Lars crooned, bending over to pat the dog. His hand came away wet with the snow, and then it struck him that the animals were afraid of the weird downfall.

There was nothing much he could do till the snow stopped, so he walked

around among them talking to them and patting them until they became a little more quiet. About seven o'clock, the snow ceased falling. The horses were still nervous, but gradually ended their crazy bucking and whinnying. Lars decided it was safe to leave them now, and walked back to the farmhouse, mopping his brow.

Over bacon and eggs and steaming coffee, Lars and Helga discussed the phenomenon, but with these homely breakfast items before them and a warm feeling inside, the strange snow became less mysterious and alarming to them.

"No wonder the pigs and hosses was scared!" said Lam, half in jest. "I guess anybody'd feel funny to see red snow instead of white. But it ain't anything to worry about. It's probably just dust in the air like I said."

"Maybe so," Helga answered doubtfully. "But where's there any red dust around here?"

The question stumped Lam. He knew Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, and Nebraska, but in none of those states was there anything with the peculiar color of the snow.

"I wish you'd stay around here today," Helga kept on slowly. "I don't feel right somehow. Things ain't natural like they ought to be."

"No need to worry," Lars answered briefly. "Everything's all right."

As if in mockery of his words, the whole house shook, the coffee slopped across the table, and a terrific crash burst on their ears from nearby.

Without a word Lars made another run for the door. Helga, with superstitious fear clutching heavy at her heart, stayed behind to straighten out the table. Some intuition warned her that something was wrong with the world. The red snow, and now this explosive crash—what could they mean? She heard Lars and Jerry walking around the farmhouse as they searched for the cause of the disturbance, but when Lam re-entered the house ten minutes later, the frown on his face showed the futility of his search.

"What was it?" Helga asked.

"Nothing that I could find," he replied, puzzled and irritated. "Sounded like a tree or something fell on the barn, but there wasn't anything the matter. I guess maybe we're hearing things that ain't."

It was poor comfort. The two finished their breakfast in silence. At the conclusion of the meal, Lars said briefly, "I'm going up to the forty-acres to

see how the ground's coming along. If you want me, shout and I'll hear you. Helga made no answer in spite of her fears—she knew the futility of arguing with Lars.

Her husband called Jerry and the two set off. The sun was up and the sky fairly clear. It was rapidly getting warmer. The red snow already looked soggy and the air had a bad smell, malodorous and stale.

A path led from the rear of the farmhouse down past the chicken coops and barn, cut across the hog-run, then ran across an open field and finally up a small hill, on the other side of which lay the forty-acres, a tract used for wheat. Lars walked down the path past the barn and across the hog-run. As they started across the open field, Jerry suddenly bristled. Lars heard him growl savagely. He looked around, but nothing unusual was in sight. "C'mon, Jerry," he called and walked on. The dog lagged behind him, growling and whining. Then Lars stopped abruptly in surprise. Some ten yards ahead of him was a great gash in the wet earth. It must have been freshly made, for the earth bulged around its edges, and there was as yet no pool of water in it.

As Lars continued striding toward it after his momentary pause, Jerry set up a furious barking that ended in a lone whining howl, and refused to advance. "Stop that fool barking and come along." Lars swore irritably. His nerves were becoming frayed. But the collie absolutely would not come, and Lars went on, thinking that the dog would follow him if he took the lead.

He was a few feet from the edge of the gash when something he had not seen caught his ankle and he tripped forward. In one mad second of horror the pit of hell seemed to open up before him. Something else he could not see hit him a great blow on his forehead, and his outstretched arms were bruised on a hard substance. He was leaning forward at a forty-five degree angle over the deep gash. He looked straight down, and saw its bottom a dozen feet below him, but he did not fall. He might have been resting on a steel platform, but there was absolutely nothing in sight.

A great bubbling of sweat broke out on him. The blood from the bruise on his forehead dripped down, but hung suspended in midair a few inches from his face. His eyes glazed with terror, Lars slowly pushed himself upright and stood trembling a moment. He put out his hand again, and his fingers felt the same stuff, hard as steel, colder than ice, with knobs here and there and

strange grooves. There was one depression on the solid surface into which he put his fist, and the hand vanished from sight.

At that, sheer fright gripped him and he turned and ran with all his strength while Jerry whined along at his heels. The terrific crash remained a mystery no longer—would to God that it had! Something that never was of this earth had fallen in the midst of an open field, whether by accident or purpose. As the old folk-lore and witch legends of his race surged into his thoughts to increase his panic. But he thought of Helga too as he ran, and decided that he would say nothing which might alarm her more.

He stopped for a minute outside the farmhouse to get his breath. Then he walked in, trying to be his usual self.

"That you, Lars?" Helga called out. A moment later she entered the kitchen. When she saw him, she ran forward. "Why, Lars, your face is bleeding!"

"Yes, I—I tripped and fell."

Helga looked into his eyes that were yet wild and dilated, and the truth of intuition leaned into her heart.

"Lars! That crash—you know what it was! There was something in the field!"

"No," he answered deliberately, "no, there was nothing in the field."

It was a solemn pair that sat down at midday for lunch.

The oppressive weight of mystery and fear hung over the table, and stopped even the small talk that Lars and Helga ordinarily indulged in. By tacit consent, they said nothing further about the incidents of the morning.

Toward two o'clock, the sky began to cloud up, and it grew cooler outside; but the red snow had all melted in the warmth of the late morning, and around the farmhouse hung a putrid smell, stale and nauseating, the odor of a charnel-house or the grave.

Lars pattered around the kitchen and basement, doing odd jobs to pass time. He did not leave the house. His nerves were on the ragged edge, and he did not know what might happen next. The red snow and the thing in the field lay heavy on his heart. Nature had gone all wrong this day, the security and trust of a lifetime had vanished in a brief hour. What could he do in the presence of a mystery that seemed to have no explanation, and things that went against the laws of life he had relied on? As the great masses of leaden clouds piled up overhead, and gusts of chill wind whined around the yard

and the house, the indefinable fear of the unknown hung over his thoughts. He had only one ray of hope: that the paper which the rural postman would leave in the afternoon would give some explanation of the mysterious snowfall. The thing in the field he vainly tried to put out of mind by pretending that it must be a new kind of comet.

It was about four o'clock when Lars, who was upstairs fixing a broken window-sash, heard the postman's whistle. He put down his hammer and nails, then walked down a short passage to the head of the stairs. From there, looking across the front bedroom and out its window, he could see the mailbox on its post where the country road ran by some ninety or a hundred yards in front of the house. There the familiar horse and buggy of the postman were halted. To his surprise, Helga with the mail in her hand was standing there too, talking with him but evidently on the point of returning to the house. She must have seen him coming down the road and gone out to meet him.

The sight of Helga made him curiously uneasy. He wished she had waited to let him go after the mail. As he started to descend the flight of steps, he decided he would ask her to stay inside for the next day or so. But all thoughts were driven from his head and black terror overwhelmed him in a sickening rush when he was half-way down.

For there came to his ears a sound that was yet many sounds. There was a strange, long zing-g-g, the mad whinny of a horse, and the sudden, piercing shriek of a woman. And then there came again that long, strange zing-g-g, and the noise of a great wind.

Lars cleared the rest of the steps in one leap and stumbled on a twisted ankle around the corner and to the front door and so outside. The blind fear which he had felt as he hung over the pit that morning suspended by a thin thread which he could not see was as nothing to the surge of horror that swept upon him now.

For there was no one in sight. The mail-box was deserted. The road stretched away to the left, bare of any human traveler for three-quarters of a mile, and to the right, just as empty for a half-mile. And in the field that stretched away on the other side of the road, not a living creature was to be seen. Helga and the postman with his horse and buggy had vanished as though they had never been.

But there was a curious thing: all around was gray from the clouds that obscured the sky, except in a round patch of blue perhaps a hundred yards in diameter through which sunlight was pouring above the mailbox. Lars mechanically looked up. High above was the single rift in the cloud-banks, rift that the surging clouds were rapidly filling again. Even as he looked, some white things fluttered toward earth—letters and papers. Lars picked up a handful like one dazed or mad and stumbled back into the house. He was hardly conscious of the sudden roar of wind that came up, or the wall of sleet that drove in a wild slant from the clouds. In the same mechanical, irresponsible way, he turned again and went out into the half-darkness with the hopeless hope that his eyes and ears had played him a trick. He walked down the road in either direction, searched across the field, called and shouted till his voice was hoarse, but not a thing did he find, and no one answered his vain cries. Then at last when the sleet turned to a fine drizzle which ceased shortly, he went back to the farmhouse, still in that numbing daze.

The letters were lying on the floor where he had dropped them, and he automatically picked out of them the paper that he had thought might contain a news item of explanation. But he could not concentrate his thoughts, and they were only disjointed phrases that his eye picked out here and there. "Red snow falls—volcanic dust in upper atmosphere—dust clouds from western prairies—curious unknown organism puzzles scientists—chemist asserts he found traces of a substance like blood—" were the paragraph's explanations and comment that ran in a jumble through his thoughts; and somewhere else on the page, a few other phrases: "Strange display of Northern Lights—beams of red, green, violet, yellow—phenomenon observed over Norton—university astronomer offers no explanation—"

By nightfall of that day of madness, it was again partly clear outside. In the east still hung a low bank of clouds, but overhead and to the west, the stars were coming out.

Lars sat by a window looking dully into the night, as he had been sitting for the last three hours. His mind had become calmer while he brooded over mysteries he could not fathom, but there was a light in his eyes that had never been in them before. Only the stolidity of his race had thus far kept

him from going mad. In his ears still rang that medley of sounds, and his horrified eyes held before them yet the vacant roadway, and the letters fluttering down. It was in-credible, unthinkable; yet all his thoughts wound up with the explanation that was no explanation at all: somehow, the postman and Helga had been whirled up from the surface of earth. He had thought of a tornado, but nothing else had been disturbed and he had seen no telltale whirling in the sky. What was it that could reach down to earth in a brief second or two and instantly vanish skyward with its prey? The cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Once as a child he had wondered how he would feel if he saw an apple fall from a tree and, instead of dropping to earth, sail toward the heavens. Now he knew that dreadful sensation, the feeling that nature had suddenly gone askew.

He stared again into the sky directly above, where the stars shone bright and cold, vainly hoping that he might draw a solution out of those fathomless deeps. Minutes ticked by. The Milky Way blazed out in its mysterious beauty, and the night was quiet with no wind.

When it was that he became conscious of something new, he could not say. But in back of his futile thoughts, a forgot-ten phrase groped for expression. Northern Lights—phenom-enon—red, green, violet

Then he knew. High above him, so faintly that at first he could not be sure, beams of many-colored light stabbed and shot and pulsed across the stars. And it struck Lars with sur-prise and something of a new fear growing upon him that nowhere else was the display to be seen. In the past, he had frequently watched the Aurora Borealis creep down from the north, flaming brighter till streamers and cataracts of weird radiance played across all the northern sky. But he had never before seen it confined to so small a spot in the heavens. These flashing beams of green and violet, red and yellow did not seem as remote as the Northern Lights usually were, and it was strange that they occurred in so small an area, an area which looked no larger than a plate, though he knew it must be immensely larger out there in space. Some-times only two beams would dance around each other, some-times a beam would be gone, then a minute later rays of different colors leaped out against the starry velvet of night. And the strangest part of the display was the clearness and straight-ness of the beams; there was none of the vagueness and change and slow merging into other patterns and colors that

the Aurora had; this resembled more the snapping on and off of giant flashlights.

For several minutes, Lars looked at the queer lights with the dullness of a mind dazed by too many shocks. And even as he watched them, he became aware of something yet newer: he seemed to see one or two black specks in the air between him and the lights, like the dancing specks before the eyes of some one who has been struck on the head; and there came to his ears a rush of wind, and two objects hurtled furiously past him to smash on the ground. A moment later, he thought he heard a thud down by the road and another from somewhere afar, but perhaps they were only echoes that he heard, or his ears may have been playing him tricks. He could not be sure, for he looked at the two in the farmyard and his eyes went wide and glary.

Like a run-down

automaton he rose and stumbled downstairs out into the chill, quiet night. There was something oddly familiar in that nearest object, and he went up to it with a far-away buzzing in his ears, and a wild swirl of insane dreams in his mind. He bent over the still form; a scorch odor came to his nostrils, he recognized the poor, broken body of Helga, the hideously white skin, he —crooned a word of grief and bent over to stroke the lifeless clay. And then he snatched his hand back again, for it burned like the fire of a furnace, but he knew it was no fire that he touched, nor any heat, but the biting; absolute cold of outer space. As Helga had vanished, in mystery and terror, so had she returned, but the horror for her was over. For him it kept on. The night was all silent, but that maddening buzz was louder in his brain. He shook his head to get rid of it, and his eyes fell upon the other object.

For a second that was as long as eternity, time and space and the world stood still for Lars. No eyes could look un-changed on that slimy blob of liquid flesh and fungus and ichor, With its loathly tentacles and beaks, its blackness of corruption, its monstrous mixture of all that was obscene in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and more horrible still, the thing's metallic core like brown quicksilver that still moved feebly with an appalling parody of life; and in its center a sickly, rotten bulb of a dead, blind eye that glared foully at Lars with its dying light.

The buzzing in his ears swelled to a grating, shrill din, something snapped, his teeth champed together, and the madness was upon him. He muttered

crooning endearments to Helga, shrieked blasphemies at the slimy thing from above, burst out into peals of mirthless laughter and rasping sobs. His crazed mind went off on another tangent, and he stopped his muttering and shrieking as suddenly as he had begun; instead, he chuckled with insane cunning as though he had thought of a way to cheat his enemy. He backed slyly to the farmhouse, was gone for a minute, reappeared with a great armful of kindling wood. He returned to fetch another, till a heap of it lay on the ground. He made a rude pyre out of it, except for an armful or two; he dragged the body of Helga onto it though his hands burned as if in a white-hot furnace; he ran back, reappeared with a can, poured kerosene on the pyre. He lighted it with tears of madness and grief running down his face. Then fury entered his heart, and he threw the rest of the kindling on the obscene thing, and drenched it with the kerosene. As the flames flared up, he danced around with grief and hatred and insanity alternately writhing across his features. He ran back to the woodshed for more fuel. He was about to return with a load of cordwood when he heard the roar of a small explosion, saw a fountain of sparks and burning wood spew into the air. He stood agape for a second, then ran madly to the fires. The obscene monstrosity was no more—something in it or something it carried had exploded, and in two or three places burning chunks smoldered on the farmhouse roof. But Lars paid no attention to them or to the flames that were beginning to lick at the eaves, for some half-forgotten thing was pounding at the back of his thoughts.

The thing in the field! The thing in the field! The phrase sang through his head like a chant, and he burst out into another wild peal of maniacal laughter. He scarcely looked at the black smoke that surged up from Helga's funeral pyre, or the flames that consumed, as he turned and sped back to the pile of wood. He picked up all he could carry of the three-foot lengths and stumbled down the path, staggering under the weight. When he reached the gash in earth, faintly illuminated by the red glare that began to come from the burning roof of the farmhouse, he tossed his whole armful onto the invisible thing, and shouted madly again as the wood hung suspended in air over the gap. He returned again and again until all the wood was strewn around and over the thing that could not be seen. On his last trip, he brought two one-gallon cans of kerosene and poured them on as much of the wood

as was within reach, then tossed them to the top of the pile and lighted the mass. A tongue of fire leaped out and raced over the pile, and a volume of thick black smoke issued up. The field around him was already made bright by a lurid glare from the farmhouse that was now entirely ablaze. Like a nec-romancer uttering his ritual of incantation and dark sorcery, Lars leaped and danced and howled around the great bonfire he had built. A tower of black smoke from the kerosene mounted almost straight up in the air from the flames, the wood crackled, the heat became scorching and blistering. And under the metamorphosis of fire, Lars saw a last, strange riddle shape itself before his eyes. There were outlines form-ing, the suggestion of a vast structure imbedded deeply in earth. He gibbered to the stars as he saw planes and angles and cubes that looked like spheres and the geometry of an-other dimension. His maniacal laughter rang out again as he looked through the glowing, transparent walls and saw objects he could not name, strangely mounted mechanical devices, fantastic articles that no mind on earth could have imagined or shaped. And lying around them were dozens of those hell-ish slimy things that were neither animal nor vegetable nor matter, but partook loathsomely of the nature of all three. He shouted in mirthless glee as he glimpsed briefly still other things—weird, gaseous substances on the floor that held their shape as rigidly as dead bodies. There came a hiss like a great sigh, a rumble of warning, and Lars insanely flung his arms wide apart as if to embrace the cleansing fire. It was his last gesture, for earth and sky and life trembled and were blasted before the titanic explo-sion that wiped out the thing in the field.

3

On the afternoon of March 30, shortly after two P.M., Larry Greene took off from the Twin City flying-field with a special consignment of bank dispatches for Seattle. His 'plane was last seen at Elk Forks, twenty miles east of Nor-ton, at approximately four o'clock. When nothing more was seen of him for several hours and no report was received, the importance of his cargo caused a searching-party to be sent out. Early in the morning of March 31, his airplane was found near the burned Loberg farmhouse. It was completely smashed, but the pilot's body was nowhere around. The

searching-party continued to scour the area. An hour later, the missing flyer was picked up, wandering in a dazed condition through a field near Norton. His account of what had happened was so singular and fantastic that his sanity was questioned. When, however, he was discovered to be suffering from insanity, he was taken to the Twin Cities for medical attention. All efforts to save his life were unavailing. He died of gangrenous infection several days later. Among his effects were found two significant items: a black object, and the following extraordinary communication, which was apparently written sometime during the first days of his confinement for medical care:

"To others I leave the task of deciding whether I have been the victim of insanity or hallucinations. Already I self doubt the testimony of my own eyes and ears. If it were not for the disk which I brought with me, I would believe the entire adventure to be a delusion or a dream, but unless the disk proves to be a figment of a deranged imagination, can not doubt the truth of what I have to say and the reality of what I saw.

"At two-ten P.M. on March 30 I took off from the Twin City flying-field with a bundle of bank dispatches for Seattle. I headed due west. Weather conditions were fair for the first hour and I kept at the relatively low flying level of two thousand feet. At this point, somewhat less than one hundred miles from the Twin Cities, I was nearing a region for which sleet or snow storms were forecast. Cloudbanks were piling up ahead, so I immediately began to climb for altitude. The last town I saw was Elk Forks. After that, the clouds below me obscured everything.

"I had climbed to six thousand feet, then seven thousand five hundred, and was now keeping to an altitude of nine thousand feet. I estimated that I must now be nearing Norton.

"Without a word of warning, the terror came.

"My plane was suddenly enveloped in a greenish light. The motor and propeller droned, but my progress was at a complete standstill. My altimeter showed eleven, thirteen, fifteen thousand feet so rapidly that I could hardly follow it. Nothing I could do had any effect on the plane or its incredible rise. The sensation was sickening. I had the motor wide open, but not a foot did we advance. Instead, the plane rose straight up like a balloon. I scarcely had time even to adjust my oxygen tank and turn on the current for the airtight electrically heated suit that I always wear in cold weather flying.

The altimeter soared to forty thousand feet, then froze.

"Everything had happened so instantly that I was almost stunned. A few seconds at most could have elapsed between the moment the greenish light came and the altimeter froze.

"Through my suit, I began to feel an intense cold. I had no knowledge of how high I now was, but I knew that if my strange ascent were not quickly halted, I would perish in the absolute or almost absolute zero of the upper atmosphere. The motor now froze and went dead. Instead of falling, the airplane remained in its unnatural suspension, still bathed in green light. The sky above me had become so dark that I was certain I must be near the outer edge of earth's atmospheric blanket. The cold was more piercing than ever.

"At this moment, I thought I heard two faint clicks closely following each other. A few seconds later, they were repeated. The green light disappeared. Overhead, the stars went out. The effect was precisely as if I were looking through an invisible pane of glass but could see nothing. And only a few feet away from my 'plane there had suddenly appeared the bodies of a dead man and a woman. The intense cold rapidly lessened in severity, but had it been a thousand times as icy as it was, it could not have been as numbing as the strange horror of all that had happened to me in a brief minute. I was in the midst of a hellish nightmare infinitely more titanic and brain-shattering than any I had ever had. The terror and fear of nauseating mystery were upon me, I hardly knew whether I was dreaming awake, alive or already beyond the borderland of death. And those two corpses hanging in the air near, me—their appearance was as ghastly as it was inexplicable.

"The whole thing was like a delirious vision. I felt as if I were confined, the terrific cold had ceased, yet there was not a star in the sky above me nor could I see the earth beneath. If it were not for the airplane and the two bodies, I would have believed that I had gone blind.

"I had hardly understood—or rather, realized my situation since I did not understand it at all—when there came to me again a faint click, from above and I automatically looked up.

"I do not know what I expected to see, except anything or nothing. But it was no answer to any of the thousand questions in my mind that I saw, but

mystery darker and deeper. There was cloud vapor a dozen feet above me—or was there? I have never before seen a gaseous substance hold its form and shape rigidly, but I did then, and with a sick, faint feeling, I realized that the cloud-like thing was alive. I had an impression of eyes burning into mine, but there were no eyes visible in it. My brain received a command, but my ears heard no sound. In some way that I could not comprehend, the monstrous living substance above me had put into my thoughts a picture of myself climbing from the cockpit, and ascending. "Climb from the cockpit of an airplane heaven knows how many miles above earth? It was madness, suicide. I fought with all my strength to retain my seat. But I was powerless, and slowly I climbed over the side into empty space.

"I should have fallen, down, down like a dead weight. But I was standing upright as if solid ground were beneath my feet. Where was the ultimate cold that should be freezing me? Why did I not fall? What was the meaning of all the eerie events of the past few minutes? I was trembling violently, hot and cold sweat broke out on me, a deadly fear gnawed at my heart for the first time in my life.

"Then I thought I must have entered some queer, hypnotic state, for a sudden feeling of peace came over me, and in answer to another silent command I mounted what seemed to be a short ladder, and stepped off a moment later to another invisible floor. The gaseous thing retreated as I advanced, and now hung a few yards away from me. But I scarcely noticed it, for my eyes were bewildered by the sight around me, and a dim light of comprehension began to clear away the fog over my thoughts.

"Masses of intricate, gleaming machinery and delicate mechanism were everywhere about me, together with elaborate dials, controls, and other devices whose purpose I could not even conjecture. Around each device and control were grouped scores of the gaseous things. I dreamed for a moment that I was in an airship of some new kind, but there were no enclosing walls and I could see no floor beneath me. Yet the sky was devoted to stars.

"All this I noticed in a brief instant before my captor mutely commanded me to walk forward a few paces and seat myself. Too stunned and overwhelmed to offer any resistance, I did so. The thing drifted toward me and hung a

few feet away. I looked at it, and again I had an impression of burning eyes that I could not see. But there came over me again that odd sensation of peace.

"How can I describe the strange terror and fascination of the scene, or what followed? Surely no man was ever before so suddenly jerked from the habits and thoughts of a lifetime as I was then. Without my realizing it until afterward, I must have been placed again under hypnotic or mental control for the mechanism and gaseous shapes surrounding me suddenly faded away into blankness, and then, while I had the disembodied feeling of one who dreams, a succession of fantastic images and pictures were imposed on my imagination by the thing before me. No word passed between us, for neither could have understood the language of the other. By a kind of mesmeric thought-transference, I was made to understand all that had happened to me, and some things I had not known about, and some of which I shall probably never have any further knowledge to certify their truth.

"As I had begun to suspect, I was now in a space-flyer of utterly new type and construction to me. The being who hung a few yards away was Relelpa, director of an expedition from Saturn on a mission that meant existence or death to the solar system.

"For thousands of years, civilization had been progressing there until the inhabitants were now as far ahead of us as we are ahead of jungle apes. The life force which is persistent everywhere in an infinite variety of organisms produced on Saturn opaque, gaseous substances like Relelpa. Many years before our meeting, these eery inhabitants of Saturn had discovered deep in the bowels of their planet one of the rarest elements in all the universe. Saturn itself contained only a few thousand tons of the ore from which this element, Seggglyn, was extracted.

"Seggglyn resists cold even to absolute zero, but if exposed to sufficient heat it explodes. Its most curious and most valuable property is its imperviousness to gravitation. For instance, a lump of the pure element isolated under an open sky is immediately hurled skyward by the centrifugal force of the spinning planet, since gravitation has no effect on it. Until it finally breaks up into atomic particles, it hurtles forever through the universe, rebounding anew from any gravitational pull which it may chance to come near.

"In extracting the element and in experimenting with it, the Saturnian not only discovered how to control it but obtained by-products of inestimable value. Seggglyn is completely transparent, but nothing beyond it is visible—as if you looked through a pane of glass but could see nothing beyond. Perhaps I can make this clearer by saying that it is like a blind spot. If you put two black dots on a cardboard, hold the cardboard at arm's length, focus your eyes on one dot, and then draw the cardboard toward you, one of the dots will disappear when the cardboard is about a foot and a half from your eyes. Well, Seggglyn acts like a blind spot at any distance from the eye of the beholder.

"In extracting the element, the Saturnians found that the last impurity removed had the effect of counteracting the element; that is, until the impurity was taken out, Seggglyn was held by gravitational attraction. Thus, by putting the impurity back in, or coating Seggglyn with it, the element had only normal mineral properties.

"There was only a limited amount of the stuff on Saturn, and no trace of it was ever found in the spectrum of any star. What should be done with it? The Saturnian considered every possible use, and finally decided that it would be most valuable as an offense and defense against any danger; and so they built this vast space-flyer, and armed it with all their weapons and rays of destruction. The flyer could not be seen, nor its location guessed unless it crossed a star and shut out the light.

"On the outside of the flyer at one tip were placed dozens of thin plates of the impurity. These were, controlled by radio from inside the ship. They could be adjusted to any position on the outside, so that the ship's speed could be regulated, and just enough gravitational pull shut off or turned on to let the ship rise and land safely.

"With their space-flyer, the Saturnians had explored the solar system hundreds of years ago, and had even ventured out into the galaxy beyond, for there was apparently no limit to the speed which it could attain. If its rate of speed were constant when it left the gravitational influence of Saturn, it would keep on going at that rate. But if its speed were controlled so that it was constantly increasing at the point where it passed beyond Saturn's influence, its acceleration would continue at the same rate, and if it were worth the risk, a speed of hundreds of thousands of light-years per

second could be reached.

"After their early explorations and experiments, the Saturn-ians kept the flyer idle, but always in readiness for any danger. They had discovered many disquieting matters on their trips, but so long as nothing happened, they preserved their policy of waiting in readiness.

"And out of night with no warning had suddenly come the one cataclysmic danger that they had not anticipated. From their great central observatory, the Saturnian kept up a constant survey of the heavens for astronomic and protective reasons. One week the observation had shown a normal view of the region of the evening star. And the next week, stars were disappearing momentarily in a straight line that travelled toward the solar system.

"They could not believe the explanation, but there was only one explanation possible. Some star or world beyond the reach of their farthest telescope had possessed the rare ore, and a space-ship made from Seggglyn, whether a scouting party or an expedition of invaders, was hourly leaping colossal stellar distances toward the solar system. Their surprise turned almost into panic when they discovered that instead of one, there were three space-flyers hurtling on-ward!

"So short was the warning that desperate measures had to be taken. Hasty calculations showed that the invaders were heading toward Earth first, perhaps to reconnoiter or to use Earth as a ricochet for reaching Saturn. Relelpa was summoned to lead the party. The need of reaching Earth before or not later than the invaders was desperate. It could not be accomplished even with the normal acceleration of the Saturnian space-flyer. In the crisis at the moment when the nullifying plates were stripped from the outside of the flyer, Saturn's most powerful explosive was used to hurl it off in a blinding flash to give it the initial acceleration required.

"Over Earth, they met; and before the invaders realized that their coming was known, the red annihilation ray of the Saturn flyer stabbed out and the first ship from outside dissolved into brownish dust that drifted down. The red ray stabbed out again but missed; the second ship which used some other means than black plates of using gravitational pull as the first and this also did had dropped suddenly to escape the deadly ray; but the ship behind it had also dived and crashed into the tip of its own comrade, and as the bitter cold of space mowed down its occupants, the second ship hurtled to

Earth. Some of its occupants spilled out into space, and from one of these who was instantly caught and swept to the Saturn-flyer by the green magnetic ray, the story of the invaders was found out.

"Where they came from is unknown, for their world lies beyond any galaxy or nebula known to astronomers of the solar system. They too had discovered Seggglyn on their world, and had discovered it at the last moment, for their world was dying and had almost reached its end. With their super-telescopes, they had found traces of Seggglyn in the spectrum of Saturn long before it was isolated on their own world. Time was priceless to these gruesome plant-animal--mineral creatures from the spaces beyond. They had built three ships, but these were not enough to transport all the inhabitants of their world before the end came. If they could obtain the ore from Saturn and build two more ships or even one great flyer, they would be saved.

"And so the three flyers started out, each loaded with a thousand of the loathly creatures. One ship was to land on the most habitable of the planets of Earth, and wipe out all life on it with the violet ray of terrific heat and the yellow ray that blasted anything it touched. The other two were to disgorge on Saturn, and while one band destroyed the inhabitants, the other would extract Seggglyn from the ore and build as many ships as possible. As soon as the three flyers had landed, they were to return to their world, empty except for the crews to man them, in order to bring back other thousands of the loathsome, obscene things.

"And their hellish plan would have succeeded if they had not neglected one possibility: they thought that the Saturn-ians were unaware of the property of Seggglyn, and that the ore was still unmined; or that in any case, their own three space-flyers would prove to be invincible. And so, all unprepared in the very moment of their triumph the strength of the invaders was cut down by two-thirds.

"But now the third ship was warned; and all this day the Saturn-flyer had been engaged with it in a struggle on which the fate of worlds depended. If the Saturnians were defeated, Earth and Saturn were doomed, even though the invaders were unable to save all the inhabitants of their own world by transporting them across space.

"Relelpa showed me a great, metallic disk, on which the heavens were

mirrored; since those inside the flyer could see nothing outside, television was necessarily employed for guidance. And there, close to the center of the disk which marked our position, I saw stars blotted out where the invaders hung.

"What can I do? Why do you want me? were the two silent questions that I asked Relelpa; and the answer came back, there was nothing I could do up here. Relelpa had sight-ed my airplane and ordered it picked up by the green ray. He had told me all he wanted to, and I was now about to be released to warn the people of my world in the event that the Saturnians were defeated. "I had no willpower of my own beside this mental giant, I merely followed his directions. It would we been fatal to try using my airplane at this height, my parachute would probably have ripped from my shoulders with the force and speed of my fall when it finally opened. Relelpa gave me a curious black disk when he read my thoughts, and again by mental imagine showed me how to use it.

"Suddenly he flashed me the image that the final, desperate battle was near. At the same instant, he thrust me toward the outer chamber through which I had originally entered. I saw his strange, cloudlike form for the last time, I felt him wish me good luck as I in turn wished him success, and then the door clicked behind me. I held the disk over my head, manipulating it as he had explained, so that parts of the black covering slid off the Seggglyn. I heard another click, and then all at once I dropped, and my airplane twisted past me hurtling downward and after it the bodies of the two people who had been on earth in the path of the green ray when its magnetic power picked me up sped by me, and behind them the hideous monster which the Saturnians had captured.

"As I fell slowly, still feeling as if I had dreamed a horrible nightmare, I looked above me; and my eyes went wide when I saw red and green ray flashing against yellow and violet beam. Surely it was the strangest and most important battle ever witnessed by man! Sometimes all four rays darted and flamed out, sometimes only one or two; or both rays of one flyer would vanish only to reappear suddenly in another spot.

"I heard the wind whistle past me, I looked at earth far below, and a great fear took hold of me; but I was falling no faster than I would be with a parachute, and the mental picture of Relelpa came back to reassure me.

Once more I looked upward. I saw only the red and the green rays leaping madly across the sky. . . .

"The doctor tells me that gangrene has set in. I guess I was more seriously frozen than I thought in those upper spaces. They think I am crazy and they won't believe what I tried to tell them last night. Maybe I am crazy, but I swear that I saw all the things I have written of as plainly as I see now my hospital cot or the skylight above me or the black disk under my pillow, Well, that ought to convince them if nothing else does.

"Larry Greene."

Underneath the pillow of the cot on which Larry Greene had died, a small disk was found. The nurse who discovered it looked at it in some curiosity, puzzled as to its purpose and wondering what to do with it. Finally she called the doctor who had vainly tried to save the pilot's life.

"What is it?" he inquired brusquely.

"I don't know."

The doctor took the object and scrutinized it closely. It was a black disk, slightly oval in shape, and approximately a foot in diameter. It was perfectly flat, with an unvarying thickness of a half-inch. On two sides it was indented, and at each indentation was a row of tiny knobs.

"H'mm," mused the doctor. "I've never seen anything quite like it." He fingered the knobs meditatively.

There was a faint click, and the black covering of the disk somehow seemed to slide off or collapse. And all at once, he found himself with nothing in his hands. He heard a sudden wind, the crash of shattered glass, a sound like the rush of air.

The dumfounded doctor looked at an amazed nurse, as bits of glass from the broken skylight dropped around them. The black disk which they had been examining a few seconds ago had vanished.