

HE WHO SHRANK

by

Henry Hasse

Years, centuries, aeons have fled past me in endless parade, leaving me unscathed: for I am deathless, and in all the universe alone of my kind. Universe? Strange how that convenient word leaps instantly to my mind from force of old habit. Universe? The merest expression of a puny idea in the minds of those who cannot possibly conceive whereof they speak. The word is a mockery. Yet how glibly men utter it! How little do they realise the artificiality of the word!

That night when the Professor called me to him he was standing close to the curved transparent wall of the astrono-laboratory looking out into the blackness. He heard me enter, but did not look around as he spoke. I do not know whether he was addressing me or not.

“They call me the greatest scientist the world has had in all time.”

I had been his only assistant for years, and was accustomed to his moods, so I did not speak. Neither did he for several moments and then he continued:

“Only half a year ago I discovered a principle that will be the means of utterly annihilating every kind of disease germ. And only recently I turned over to others the principles of a new toxin which stimulates the worn-out protoplasmic life-cells, causing almost complete rejuvenation. The combined results should nearly double the ordinary life span. Yet these two things are only incidental in the long list of discoveries I have made to the great benefit of the race.”

He turned then and faced me, and I was surprised at a new peculiar glow that lurked deep in his eyes.

“And for those things they call me great! For these puny discoveries they heap honours on me and call me the benefactor of the race. They disgust me, the fools! Do they think I did it for them? Do they think I care about the race, what it does or what happens to it or how long it lives? They do not suspect that all the things I have given them were but accidental discoveries on my part — to which I gave hardly a thought. Oh, you seem amazed. Yet not even you, who have assisted me here for ten years, ever suspected that all my labours and experiments were pointed toward one end, and one end alone.”

He went over to a locked compartment which in earlier years I had wondered about and then ceased to wonder about, as I became engrossed in my work. The Professor opened it now, and I glimpsed but the usual array of bottles and test-tubes and vials. One of these vials he lifted gingerly from a rack.

“And at last I have attained the end,” he almost whispered, holding the tube aloft. A pale liquid scintillated eerily against the artificial light in the ceiling. “Thirty years, long years, of ceaseless experimenting, and now, here in my hand — success!”

The Professor’s manner, the glow deep in his dark eyes, the submerged enthusiasm that seemed at every instant about to leap out, all served to impress me deeply. It must indeed be an immense thing he had done, and I ventured to say as much.

“Immense!” he exclaimed. “Immense! Why — why it’s so immense that — . But wait. Wait. You shall see for yourself.”

At that time how little did I suspect the significance of his words. I was indeed to see for myself.

Carefully he replaced the vial, then walked over to the transparent wall again.

"Look!" he gestured toward the night sky. "The unknown! Does it not fascinate you? The other fools dream of some day travelling out there among the stars. They think they will go out there and learn the secret of the universe. But as yet they have been baffled by the problem of a sufficiently powerful fuel or force for their ships. And they are blind. Within a month *I* could solve the puny difficulty that confronts them; could, but I won't. Let them search, let them experiment, let them waste their lives away, what do I care about them?"

I wondered what he was driving at, but realised that he would come to the point in his own way. He went on:

"And suppose they do solve the problem, suppose they do leave the planet, go to other worlds in their hollow ships, what will it profit them? Suppose that they travel with the speed of light for their own life time, and then land on a star at that point, the farthest point away from here that is possible for them? They would no doubt say: 'We can now realise as never before the truly staggering expanse of the universe. It is indeed a great structure, the universe. We have travelled a far distance; we must be on the fringe of it.'"

"Thus they would believe. Only I would know how wrong they were, for I can sit here and look through this telescope and see stars that are fifty and sixty times as distant as that upon which they landed. Comparatively, their star would be infinitely close to us. The poor deluded fools and their dreams of space travel!"

"But, Professor," I interposed, "just think —"

"Wait! Now listen. I, too, have long desired to fathom the universe, to determine what it is, the manner and the purpose and the secret of its creation. Have you ever stopped to wonder *what* the universe is? For thirty years I have worked for the answer to those questions. Unknowing, you helped me with your efficiency on the strange experiments I assigned to you at various times. Now I have the answer in that vial, and you shall be the only one to share the secret with me."

Incredulous, I again tried to interrupt.

"Wait!" he said. "Let me finish. There was the time when I also looked to the stars for the answer. I built my telescope, on a new principle of my own. I searched the depths of the void. I made vast calculations. And I proved conclusively to my own mind what had heretofore been only a theory. I know now without doubt that this our planet, and other planets revolving about the sun, are but electrons of an atom, of which the sun is the nucleus. And our sun is but one of millions of others, each with its allotted number of planets, each system being an atom just as our own is in reality.

"And all these millions of solar systems, or atoms, taken together in one group, form a galaxy. As you know, there are countless numbers of these galaxies throughout space, with tremendous stretches of space between them. And what are these galaxies? Molecules! They extend through space even beyond the farthest range of my telescope! But having penetrated that far, it is not difficult to make the final step.

"All of these far-flung galaxies, or molecules, taken together as a whole, form — what? Some indeterminable element or substance on a great, ultramacroscopic world! Perhaps a minute drop of water, or a grain of sand, or wisp of smoke, or — Good God! — an eyelash of some creature living on that world!"

I could not speak. I felt myself grow faint at the thought he had propounded. I tried to think it could not be — yet what did I or anyone know about the infinite stretches of space that must exist beyond

the ranges of our most powerful telescope?

"It can't be!" I burst out. "It's incredible, it's monstrous!"

"Monstrous? Carry it a step further. May not that ultra-world *also* be an electron whirling around the nucleus of an atom? And that atom only one of millions forming a molecule? And that molecule only one of millions forming —"

"For God's sake, stop!" I cried. "I refuse to believe that such a thing can be! Where would it all lead? Where would it end? It might go on — forever! And besides," I added lamely, "what has all this to do with — your discovery, the fluid you showed me?"

"Just this. I soon learned that it was useless to look to the infinitely large; so I turned to the infinitely small. For does it not follow that if such a state of creation exists in the stars above us, it must exist identically in the atoms below us?"

I saw his line of reasoning, but still did not understand. His next words fully enlightened me, but made me suspect that I was facing one who had gone insane from his theorising. He went on eagerly, his voice the voice of a fanatic:

"If I could not pierce the stars above, that were so far, then I would pierce the atoms below, that were so near. They are everywhere. In every object I touch and in the very air I breathe. But they are minute, and to reach them I must find a way to make myself as minute as they are, and more so! This I have done. The solution I showed you will cause every individual atom in my body to *contract*, but each electron and proton will also decrease in size, or diameter, in direct proportion to my own shrinkage! Thus will I not only be able to become the size of an atom, but can go down, down into infinite smallness!"

II

When he had stopped speaking I said calmly: "You are mad."

He was unperturbed. "I expected you to say that," he answered. "It is only natural that that should be your reaction to all that I have said. But no, I am not mad, it is merely that you are unacquainted with the marvellous propensities of 'Shrinx'. But I promised that you should see for yourself, and that you shall. You shall be the first to go down into the atomic universe."

My original opinion in regard to his state of mind remained unshaken.

"I am sure you mean well, Professor," I said, "but I must decline your offer."

He went on as though I hadn't spoken:

"There are several reasons why I want to send you before I myself make the trip. In the first place, once you make the trip there can be no returning, and there are a number of points I want to be quite clear on. You will serve as my advance guard, so to speak."

"Professor, listen. I do not doubt that the stuff you call 'Shrinx' has very remarkable properties. I will even admit that it will do all you say it will do. But for the past month you have worked day and night, with scarcely enough time out for food and hardly any sleep at all. You

should take a rest, get away from the laboratory for a while.”

“I shall keep in contact with your consciousness,” he said, “through a very ingenious device I have perfected. I will explain it to you later. The ‘Shrinx’ is introduced directly into the blood stream. Shortly thereafter your shrinkage should begin, and continue at moderate speed, never diminishing in the least degree so long as the blood continues to flow in your body. At least, I hope it never diminishes. Should it, I shall have to make the necessary alterations in the formula. All this is theoretical of course, but I am sure it will all work according to schedule, and quite without harm.”

I had now lost all patience. “See here, Professor,” I said crossly, “I refuse to be the object of any of your wild-sounding experiments. You should realise that what you propose to do is scientifically impossible. Go home and rest – or go away for a while –”

Without the slightest warning he leaped at me, snatching an object from the table. Before I could take a backward step I felt a needle plunge deep into my arm, and cried out with the pain of it. Things became hazy, distorted. A wave of vertigo swept over me. Then it passed, and my vision cleared. The Professor stood leering before me.

“Yes, I’ve worked hard and I’m tired. I’ve worked thirty years, but I’m not tired enough nor fool enough to quit this thing now, right on the verge of the climax!”

His leer of triumph gave way to an expression almost of sympathy.

“I am sorry it had to come about this way,” he said, “but I saw that you would never submit otherwise. I really am ashamed of you. I didn’t think you would doubt the truth of my statements to the extent of really believing me insane. But to be safe I prepared your allotment of the ‘Shrinx’ in advance, and had it ready; it is now coursing through your veins, and it should be but a short time before we observe the effects. What you saw in the vial is for myself when I am ready to make the trip. Forgive me for having to administer yours in such an undignified manner.”

So angered was I at the utter disregard he had shown for my personal feelings, that I hardly heard his words. My arm throbbed fiercely where the needle had plunged in. I tried to take a step toward him, but not a muscle would move. I struggled hard to break the paralysis that was upon me, but could not move a fraction of an inch from where I stood.

The Professor seemed surprised too, and alarmed.

“What, paralysis? That is an unforeseen circumstance! You see, it is even as I said: the properties of ‘Shrinx’ are marvellous and many.”

He came close and peered intently into my eyes, and seemed relieved.

“However, the effect is only temporary,” he assured me. Then added: “But you will likely be a bit smaller when the use of your muscles returns, for your shrinkage should begin very shortly now. I must hurry to prepare for the final step.”

He walked past me, and I heard him open his private cupboard again. I could not speak, much less move, and I was indeed in a most uncomfortable, not to mention undignified, position. All I could do was to glare at him when he came around in front of me again. He carried a curious kind of helmet with ear-pieces and goggles attached, and a number of wires running from it. This he placed upon the table and connected the wires to a small flat box.

All the while I watched him closely. I hadn't the least idea what he was going to do with me, but never for a moment did I believe that I would shrink into an atomic universe; that was altogether too fantastic for my conception.

As though reading my thought the Professor turned and faced me. He looked me over casually for a moment and then said:

"I believe it has begun already. Yes, I am sure of it. Tell me, do you not feel it? Do not things appear a trifle larger to you, a trifle taller? Ah, I forgot that the paralysing effect does not permit you to answer. But look at me — do I not seem taller?"

I looked at him. Was it my imagination, or some kind of hypnosis he was asserting on me, that made me think he was growing slightly, ever so slightly, upward even as I looked?

"Ah!" he said triumphantly. "You have noticed. I can tell it by your eyes. However, it is not I who am growing taller, but you who are shrinking."

He grasped me by the arms and turned me about to face the wall. "I can see that you doubt," he said, "so look! The border on the wall. If you remember, it used to be about even with your eyes. Now it is fully three inches higher."

It was true! And I could now feel a tingling in my veins, and a slight dizziness.

"Your shrinkage has not quite reached the maximum speed," he went on. "When it does, it will remain constant. I could not stop it now even if I wanted to, for I have nothing to counteract it. Listen closely now, for I have several things to tell you.

"When you have become small enough I am going to lift you up and place you on this block of Rehyllium-X here on the table. You will become smaller and smaller, and eventually should enter an alien universe consisting of billions and billions of star groups, or galaxies, which are only the molecules in this Rehyllium-X. When you burst through, your size in comparison with this new universe should be gigantic. However, you will constantly diminish, and will be enabled to alight on any one of the spheres of your own choosing. And — after alighting — you will continue — always down!"

At the concept I thought I would go mad. Already I had become fully a foot shorter, and still the paralysis gripped me. Could I have moved I would have torn the Professor limb from limb in my impotent rage — though if what he said was true, I was already doomed.

Again it seemed as though he read my mind.

"Do not think too harshly of me," he said. "You should be very grateful for this opportunity, for you are going on a marvellous venture, into a marvellous realm. Indeed, I am almost jealous that you should be the first. But with this," he indicated the helmet and box on the table, "I shall keep contact with you no matter how far you go. Ah, I see by your eyes that you wonder how such a thing could be possible. Well, the principle of this device is really very simple. Just as light is a form of energy, so is thought. And just as light travels through an 'ether' in the form of waves, so does thought. But the thought waves are much more intangible — in fact, invisible. Nevertheless, the waves are there, and the coils in this box are so sensitised as to receive and amplify them a million times, much as sound waves might be amplified. Through this helmet I will receive but two of your six sensations: those of sound and sight. They are the two major ones, and will be sufficient for my purpose. Every sight and sound that you encounter, no matter how minute, reaches your brain and displaces tiny molecules there that go out in the form of thought waves and finally reach here and are amplified. Thus my brain receives every impression of sight and sound that your brain sends out."

I did not doubt now that his marvellous 'Shrinx' would do everything he said it would do. Already I was but one-third of my original size. Still the paralysis showed no sign of releasing me, and I hoped that the Professor knew whereof he spoke when he said that the effect would be but temporary. My anger had subsided somewhat, and I think I began to wonder what I would find in that other universe.

Then a terrifying thought assailed me — a thought that left me cold with apprehension. If, as the Professor had said, the atomic universe was but a tiny replica of the universe we knew, would I not find myself in the vast empty spaces between the galaxies *with no air to breathe*? In all the vast calculations the Professor had made, could he have overlooked such an obvious point?

Now I was very close to the floor, scarcely a foot high. Everything about me — the Professor, the tables, the walls — were gigantically out of proportion to myself.

The Professor reached down then, and swung me up on the table top amidst the litter of wires and apparatus. He began speaking again, and to my tiny ears his voice sounded a deeper note.

'Here is the block of Rehyllium-X containing the universe you soon will fathom,' he said, placing on the table beside me the square piece of metal, which was nearly half as tall as I was. 'As you know, Rehyllium-X is the densest of all known metals, so the universe awaiting you should be a comparatively dense one — though you will not think so, with the thousands of light-years of space between stars. Of course, I know no more about this universe than you do, but I would advise you to avoid the very bright stars and approach only the dimmer ones. Well, this is good-bye, then. We shall never see each other again. Even should I follow you — as I certainly shall as soon as I have learned through you what alterations I should make in the formula — it is impossible that I could exactly trace your course down through all the spheres that you will have traversed. One thing already I have learned: the rate of shrinkage is too rapid; you will be able to stay on a world for only a few hours. But perhaps that is best, after all. This is good-bye for all time.'

He picked me up and placed me upon the smooth surface of the Rehyllium-X. I judged that I must be about four inches tall then. It was with immeasurable relief that I finally felt the paralysis going away. The power of my voice returned first, and expanding my lungs I shouted with all my might.

'Professor!' I shouted. 'Professor!'

He bent down over me. To him my voice must have sounded ridiculously high pitched.

'What about the empty regions of space I will find myself in?' I asked a bit tremulously, my mouth close to his ear. 'I would last but a few minutes. My life will surely be snuffed out.'

'No, that will not happen,' he answered. His voice beat upon my eardrums like thunder, and I place my hands over my ears.

He understood, and spoke more softly. 'You will be quite safe in airless space,' he went on. 'In the thirty years I have worked on the problem, I would not be likely to overlook that point — though I will admit it gave me much trouble. But as I said, 'Shrinx' is all the more marvellous in the fact that its qualities are many. After many difficulties and failures, I managed to instil in it a certain potency by which it supplies sufficient oxygen for your need, distributed through the blood stream. It also irradiates a certain amount of heat; and, inasmuch as I consider the supposed sub-zero temperature of space as being somewhat exaggerated, I don't think you need worry about any discomfort in open space.'

III

I was scarcely over an inch in height now. I could walk about, though my limbs tingled fiercely as the paralysis left. I beat my arms against my sides and swung them about to speed the circulation. The Professor must have thought I was waving good-bye. His hand reached out and he lifted me up. Though he tried to handle me gently, the pressure of his fingers bruised. He held me in his open hand and raised me up to the level of his eyes. He looked at me for a long moment and then I saw his lips form the word "Good-bye"; I was terribly afraid he would drop me to the floor a dizzy distance below, and I was relieved when he lowered me again and I slid off his hand to the block of Rehyllium-X.

The Professor now appeared as a giant towering hundreds of feet into the air, and beyond him, seemingly miles away, the walls of the room extended to unimaginable heights. The ceiling above seemed as far away and expansive as the dome of the sky I had formerly known. I ran to the edge of the block and peered down. It was as though I stood at the top of a high cliff. The face of it was black and smooth, absolutely perpendicular. I stepped back apace lest I lose my footing and fall to my death. Far below extended the vast smooth plain of the table top.

I walked back to the centre of the block, for I was afraid of the edge; I might be easily shaken off it if the Professor were to accidentally jar the table. I had no idea of my size now, for there was nothing with which I could compare it. For all I knew I might be entirely invisible to the Professor. He was now but an indistinguishable blur, like a far-off mountain seen through a haze.

I now began to notice that the surface of the Rehyllium-X block was not as smooth as it had been. As far as I could see were shallow ravines, extending in every direction. I realised that these must be tiny surface scratches that had been invisible before.

I was standing on the edge of one of these ravines, and I clambered down the side and began to walk along it. It was as though laid by a ruler. Occasionally I came to intersecting ravines, and turned to the left or right. Before long, due to my continued shrinkage, the walls of these ravines towered higher than my head, and it was as though I walked along a narrow path between two cliffs.

Then I received the shock of my life, and my adventure came near to ending right there. I approached one of the intersections. I turned the sharp corner to the right. I came face to face with the How-Shall-I-Describe-It.

It was a sickly bluish white in colour. Its body was disc-shaped, with a long double row of appendages — legs — on the underside. Hundreds of ugly looking spikes rimmed the disc body on the outer and upper edges. There was no head and apparently no organ of sight, but dozens of snake-like protuberances waved in my face as I nearly crashed into it. One of them touched me and the creature backed swiftly away, the spikes springing stiffly erect in formidable array.

This impression of the creature flashed upon my mind in the merest fraction of time, for you may be sure that I didn't linger there to take stock of its pedigree. No indeed. My heart choked me in my fright, I whirled and sped down the opposite ravine. The sound of the thing's pursuit lent wings to my feet, and I ran as I had never run before. Up one ravine and down another I sped, doubling to right and left in my effort to lose my pursuer. The irony of being pursued by a germ occurred to me, but the matter was too serious to be funny. I ran until I was out of breath, but no matter which way I turned and doubled the germ was always a hundred paces behind me. Its organ of sound must have been highly sensitive. At last I could run no more, and I darted around the next corner and stopped, gasping for breath.

The germ rushed a short distance past me and stopped, having lost the sound of my running. Its dozens

of tentacular sound organs waved in all directions. Then it came unhesitatingly toward me, and again I ran. Apparently it had caught the sound of my heavy breathing. Again I dashed around the next corner, and as I heard the germ approach I held my breath until I thought my lungs would burst. It stopped again, waved its tentacles in the air and then ambled on down the ravine. Silently I sneaked a hasty retreat.

Now the walls of these ravines (invisible scratches on a piece of metal!) towered very high above me as I continued to shrink. Now too I noticed narrow chasms and pits all around me, in both the walls at the sides and the surface on which I walked. All of these seemed very deep, and some were so wide that I had to leap across them.

At first I was unable to account for these spaces that were opening all about me, and then I realised with a sort of shock that the Rehyllium-X was becoming *porous*, so small was I in size! Although it was the densest of all known metals, no substance whatsoever could be so dense as to be an absolute solid.

I began to find it increasingly difficult to progress; I had to get back and make running jumps across the spaces. Finally I sat down and laughed as I realised the futility and stupidity of this. Why was I risking my life by jumping across these spaces that were becoming wider as I became smaller, when I had no particular destination anyway – except down. So I may as well stay in one spot.

No sooner had I made this decision, however, than something changed my mind.

It was the germ again.

I saw it far down the ravine, heading straight for me. It might have been the same one I had encountered before, or its twin brother. But now I had become so small that it was fully fifteen times my own size, and the very sight of the huge beast ambling toward me inspired terror into my heart. Once more I ran, praying that it wouldn't hear the sound of my flight because of my small size.

Before I had gone a hundred yards I stopped in dismay. Before me yawned a space so wide that I couldn't have leaped half the distance. There was escape on neither side, for the chasm extended up both the walls. I looked back. The germ had stopped. Its mass of tentacles was waving close to the ground.

Then it came on, not at an amble now but at a much faster rate. Whether it had heard me or had sensed my presence in some other manner, I did not know. Only one thing was apparent: I had but a few split seconds in which to act. I threw myself down flat, slid backward into the chasm, and hung there by my hands.

And I was just in time. A huge shape rushed overhead as I looked up. So big was the germ that the chasm which had appeared so wide to me was inconsequential to it; it ran over the space as though it weren't there. I saw the double row of the creature's limbs as they flashed overhead. Each one was twice the size of my body.

Then happened what I had feared. One of the huge claw-like limbs came down hard on my hand, and a sharp spur raked across it. I could feel the pain all through my arm. The anguish was insufferable. I tried to get a better grip but couldn't. My hold loosened. I dropped down – down –

IV

“This is the end.”

Such was my thought in that last awful moment as I slipped away into space. Involuntarily I shut my eyes, and I expected at any moment to crash into oblivion.

But nothing happened.

There was not even the usual sickening sensation that accompanies acceleration. I opened my eyes to a Stygian darkness, and put out an exploring hand. It encountered a rough wall which was flashing upward past my face. I was falling, then; but at no such speed as would have been the case under ordinary circumstances. This was rather as if I were floating downward. Or was it downward? I had lost all sense of up or down or sideways. I doubled my limbs under me and kicked out hard against the wall, shoving myself far away from it.

How long I remained falling – or drifting – there in that darkness I have no way of knowing. But it must have been minutes, and every minute I was necessarily growing smaller.

For some time I had been aware of immense masses all around me. They pressed upon me from every side, and from them came a very faint radiance. They were of all sizes, some no larger than myself and some looming up large as mountains. I tried to steer clear of the large ones, for I had no desire to be crushed between two of them. But there was little chance of that. Although we all drifted slowly along through space together, I soon observed that none of these masses ever approached each other or deviated the least bit from their paths.

As I continued to shrink, these masses seemed to spread out, away from me; and as they spread, the light which they exuded became brighter. They ceased to be masses, and became swirling, expanding, individual stretches of mist, milky white.

They were nebulae! Millions of miles of space must stretch between each of them! The gigantic mass I had clung to, drawn there by its gravity, also underwent this nebulosity, and now I was floating in the midst of an individual nebula. It spread out as I became smaller, and as it thinned and expanded, what had seemed mist now appeared as trillions and trillions of tiny spheres in intricate patterns.

I was in the very midst of these spheres! They were all around my feet, my arms, my head! They extended farther than I could reach, farther than I could see. I could have reached out and gathered thousands of them in my hand. I could have stirred and kicked my feet and scattered them in chaotic confusion about me. But I did not indulge in such reckless and unnecessary destruction of worlds. Doubtless my presence here had already done damage enough, displacing millions of them.

I scarcely dared to move a muscle for fear of disrupting the orbits of some of the spheres or wreaking havoc among some solar systems or star groups. I seemed to be hanging motionless among them, or if I were moving in any direction, the motion was too slight to be noticeable. I didn't even know if I were horizontal or vertical, as those two terms had lost all meaning.

As I became smaller, of course the spheres became larger and the space between them expanded, so that the bewildering maze thinned somewhat and gave me more freedom of movement.

I took more cognisance now of the beauty around me. I remembered what the Professor had said about receiving my thought waves, and I hoped he was tuned in now, for I wouldn't have had him miss it for anything.

Every hue I had ever known was represented there among the suns and encircling planets: dazzling whites, reds, yellows, blues, greens, violets, and every intermediate shade. I glimpsed also the barren blackness of suns that had burnt out; but these were infrequent, as this seemed to be a very young universe.

There were single suns with the orbital planets varying in number from two to twenty. There were double suns that revolved slowly about each other as on an invisible axis. There were triple suns that revolved

slowly about one another – strange as it may seem – in perfect trihedral symmetry. I saw one quadruple sun: a dazzling white, a blue, a green, and a deep orange. The white and the blue circled each other on the horizontal plane while the green and the orange circled on the vertical plane, thus forming a perfect interlocking system. Around these four suns, in circular orbits, sped sixteen planets of varying size, the smallest on the inner orbits and the largest on the outer. The effect was a spinning, concave disc with the white-blue-green-orange rotating hub in the centre. The rays from these four suns, as they bathed the rolling planets and were reflected back into space in many-hued magnificence, presented a sight both beautiful and weird.

I determined to alight on one of the planets of this quadruple sun as soon as my size permitted. I did not find it hard to manoeuvre to a certain extent; and eventually, when I had become much smaller, I stretched alongside this solar system, my length being as great as the diameter of the orbit of the outermost planet! Still I dared not come too close, for fear the gravity of my bulk would cause some tension in the orbital field.

I caught glimpses of the surface of the outer, or sixteenth, planet as it swung past me. Through rifts in the great billowing clouds I saw vast expanses of water, but no land; and then the planet was moving away from me, on its long journey around to the other side of the suns. I did not doubt that by the time it returned to my side I would be very much smaller, so I decided to move a little closer and try to get a look at the fifteenth planet which was then on the opposite side but swinging around in my direction.

I had discovered that if I doubled up my limbs and thrust out violently in a direction opposite that in which I wished to move, I could make fairly good progress, though the effort was somewhat strenuous. In this manner I moved inward toward the sun-cluster, and by the time I had reached the approximate orbit of the fifteenth planet I had become much smaller – was scarcely one-third as long as the diameter of its orbit! The distance between the orbits of the sixteenth and fifteenth planets must have been about 2,500,000,000 miles, according to the old standards I had known; but to me the distance had seemed but a few hundred yards.

I waited there, and finally the planet hove into view from out of the glorious aurora of the suns. Nearer and nearer it swung in its circle, and as it approached I saw that its atmosphere was very clear, a deep saffron colour. It passed me a scant few yards away, turning lazily on its axis opposite the direction of flight. Here, too, as on planet sixteen, I saw a vast world of water. There was only one fairly large island and many scattered small ones, but I judged that fully nine-tenths of the surface area was ocean.

I moved on in to planet fourteen, which I had noticed was a beautiful golden-green colour.

By the time I had manoeuvred to the approximate fourteenth orbit I had become so small that the light of the central suns pained my eyes. When the planet came in sight I could easily see several large continents on the lighted side; and as the dark side turned to the suns, several more continents became visible. As it swung past me I made comparisons and observed that I was now about five times as large as the planet. When it came around again I would try to effect a landing. To attempt a contact with it now would likely prove disastrous to both it and myself.

As I waited there and became smaller my thoughts turned to the Professor. If his amazing theory of an infinite number of sub-universes was true, then my adventure had hardly begun; wouldn't begin until I alighted on the planet. What would I find there? I did not doubt that the Professor, receiving my thought waves, was just as curious as I. Suppose there was life on this world – hostile life? I would face the dangers while the Professor sat in his laboratory far away. This was the first time that aspect of it occurred to me; it had probably never occurred to the Professor. Strange, too, how I thought of him as 'far away'. Why, he could merely have reached out his hand and moved me, universe and all, on his laboratory table!

Another curious thought struck me: here I was waiting for a planet to complete its circle around the suns. To any beings who might exist on it, the elapsed time would represent a year; but to me it would only be a number of minutes.

At that, it returned sooner than I expected it, curving around to meet me. Its orbit, of course, was much smaller than those of the two outer planets. More minutes passed as it came closer and larger. As nearly as I could judge I was about one-fifth its size now. It skimmed past me, so close that I could have reached out and brushed its atmosphere. And as it moved away I could feel its steady tugging, much as if I were a piece of metal being attracted to a magnet. Its speed did not decelerate in the least, but now I was moving along close behind it. It had "captured" me, just as I had hoped it would. I shoved in closer, and the gravity became a steady and stronger pull. I was "falling" toward it. I swung around so that my feet were closest to it, and they entered the atmosphere, where the golden-green touched the blackness of space. They swung down in a long arc and touched something solid. My "fall" toward the planet ceased. I was standing on one of the continents of this world.

V

So tall was I that the greatest part of my body still extended out into the blackness of space. In spite of the fact that the four suns were the distance of thirteen orbits away, they were of such intense brilliance now that to look directly at them would surely have blinded me. I looked far down my tapering length at the continent on which I stood. Even the multicoloured light reflected from the surface was dazzling to the eye. Too late I remembered the Professor's warning to avoid the brighter suns. Close to the surface a few fleeting wisps of cloud drifted about my limbs.

As the planet turned slowly on its axis I of course moved with it, and shortly I found myself on the side away from the suns, in the planet's shadow. I was thankful for this relief — but it was only temporary. Soon I swung around into the blinding light again. Then into the shadow, and again into the light. How many times this happened I do not know, but at last I was entirely within the planet's atmosphere; here the rays of the suns were diffused, and the light less intense.

Miles below I could see but a vast expanse of yellow surface, stretching unbroken in every direction. As I looked far behind the curving horizon it seemed that I caught a momentary glimpse of tall, silvery towers of some far-off city; but I could not be sure, and when I looked again it had vanished.

I kept my eyes on that horizon, however, and soon two tiny red specks became visible against the yellow of the plain. Evidently they were moving toward me very rapidly, for even as I looked they became larger, and soon took shape as two blood-red spheres. Immediately I visioned them as some terrible weapons of warfare or destruction.

But as they came close to me and swerved up to where I towered high in the thin atmosphere, I could see that they were not solid at all, as I had supposed, but were gaseous, and translucent to a certain extent. Furthermore, they behaved in a manner that hinted strongly of intelligence. Without visible means of propulsion they swooped and circled about my head, to my utter discomfiture. When they came dangerously close to my eyes I raised my hand to sweep them away, but they darted quickly out of reach.

They did not approach me again, but remained there close together, pulsating in mid air. This queer pulsating of their tenuous substance gave me the impression that they were conferring together; and of course I was the object of their conference. Then they darted away in the direction whence they had come.

My curiosity was as great as theirs had seemed to be, and without hesitation I set out in the same direction. I must have covered nearly a mile at each step, but even so, these gaseous entities easily out-distanced me and were soon out of sight. I had no doubt that their destination was the city – if indeed it were a city I had glimpsed. The horizon was closer now and less curved, due to my decrease in height; I judged that I was barely five or six hundred feet tall now.

I had taken but a few hundred steps in the direction the two spheres had gone, when to my great surprise I saw them coming toward me again, this time accompanied by a score of – companions. I stopped in my tracks, and soon they came close and circled about my head. They were all about five feet in diameter, and of the same dark red colour. For a minute they darted about as though studying me from every angle; then they systematically arranged themselves in a perfect circle around me. Thin streamers emanated from them, and merged, linking them together and closing the circle. Then other streamers reached slowly out toward me, wavering, cautious.

This, their manner of investigation, did not appeal to me in the least, and I swept my arms around furiously. Instantly all was wild confusion. The circle broke and scattered, the streamers snapped back and they were spheres again. They gathered in a group a short distance away and seemed to consider.

One, whose colour had changed to a bright orange, darted apart from them and pulsated rapidly. As clearly as though words had been spoken, I comprehended. The bright orange colour signified anger, and he was rebuking the others for their cowardice.

Led by the orange sphere they again moved closer to me; this time they had a surprise for me. A score of streamers flashed out quick as lightning, and cold blue flames spluttered where they touched me. Electric shocks ran through my arms, rendering them numb and helpless. Again they formed their circle around me, again the streamers emerged and completed the circle, and other streamers reached out caressingly. For a moment they flickered about my head, then merged, enveloping it in a cold red radiance. I felt no sensation at all at the touch, except that of cold.

The spheres began to pulsate again in the manner I had observed before, and immediately this pulsating began I felt tiny needlepoints of ice pierce my brain. A question became impinged upon my consciousness more clearly than would have been possible by spoken word:

“Where do you come from?”

I was familiar with thought transference, had even practiced it to a certain extent, very often with astonishing success. When I heard – or received – that question, I tried hard to bring every atom of my consciousness to bear upon the circumstances that were the cause of my being there. When I had finished my mental narration and my mind relaxed from the tension I had put upon it, I received the following impressions:

“We receive no answer; your mind remains blank. You are alien; we have never encountered another of your organism here. A most peculiar organism indeed is one that becomes steadily smaller without apparent reason. Why are you here, and where do you come from?” The icy fingers probed deeper and deeper into my brain, seeming to tear it tissue from tissue.

Again I tried, my mind focusing with the utmost clearness upon every detail, picturing my course from the very minute I entered the Professor’s laboratory to the present time. When I finished I was exhausted from the effort.

Again I received the impression: “You cannot bring your mind sufficiently into focus; we receive only fleeting shadows.”

One of the spheres again changed to a bright colour, and broke from the circle. I could almost imagine an angry shrug. The streamers relaxed their hold on my brain and began to withdraw – but not before I caught the fleeting impression from the orange one, who was apparently addressing the others: “– very low mentality.”

“You’re not so much yourself!” I said aloud. But of course such a crude method as speech did not register upon them. I wondered at my inability to establish thought communication with these beings. Either my brain was of such a size as to prevent them from receiving the impression (remember I was still a four or five hundred foot giant on this world), or their state of mentality was indeed so much higher than mine that I was, to them, lower than the lowest savage. Possibly both, more probably the latter.

But they were determined to solve the mystery of my presence before I passed from their world, as I would surely do in a few hours at my rate of shrinkage. Their next move was to place themselves on each side of me in vertical rows extending from far down near the ground up to my shoulders. Again the luminous ribbons reached out and touched me at the various points. Then as at a given signal they rose high into the air, lifting me lightly as a feather! In perfect unison they sped toward their city beyond the horizon, carrying me perpendicularly with them! I marvelled at the manner in which such gaseous entities as these could lift and propel such a material giant as myself. Their speed must have exceeded by far that of sound – though on all this planet there was no sound except the sound of my body swishing through the air.

In a very few minutes I sighted the city, which must have covered an area of a hundred miles square near the edge of a rolling green ocean. I was placed lightly on my feet at the very edge of the city, and once more the circle of spheres formed around my head and once more the cold tendrils of light probed my brain.

“You may walk at will about the city,” came the thought, “accompanied by a few of us. You are to touch nothing whatever, or the penalty will be extreme; your tremendous size makes your presence here among us somewhat hazardous. When you have become much smaller we shall again explore your mind, with somewhat different method, and learn your origin and purpose. We realise that the great size of your brain was somewhat of a handicap to us in our first attempt. We go now to prepare. We have awaited your coming for years.”

Leaving only a few there as my escort – or guard – the rest of the spheres sped toward a great domed building that rose from a vast plaza in the centre of the city.

I was very much puzzled as to their last statement. For a moment I stood there wondering what they could have meant – “we have awaited your coming for years.” Then, trusting that this and other things would be answered in the due course of their investigation, I entered the city.

It was not a strange city in so far as architecture was concerned, but it was a beautiful one. I marvelled that it could have been conceived and constructed by these confluent globules of gas who at first glance seemed anything but intelligent, reasoning beings. Tall as I was, the buildings towered up to four and five times my height, invariably ending in domed roofs. There was no sign of a spire or angle as far as my eye could see; apparently they grated harshly on the senses of these beings. The entire plan of the city was of vast sweeping curves and circular patterns, and the effect was striking. There were no preconceived streets or highways, nor connecting spans between the buildings, for there was no need of them. The air was the natural habitable element of this race, and I did not see a one of them ever touch the ground or any surface.

They even came to rest in mid air, with a slow spinning motion. Everywhere I passed among them they

paused, spinning, to observe me in apparent curiosity, then went on about their business, whatever it was. None ever approached me except my guards.

For several hours I wandered about in this manner, and finally when I was much smaller I was bade to walk toward the central plaza.

In the circular domed building the others awaited my coming, gathered about a dais surmounted by a huge oval transparent screen of glass or some similar substance. This time only one of the spheres made contact with my brain, and I received the following thought: "Watch";

The screen became opaque, and a vast field of white came into view.

"The great nebula in which this planet is but an infinitesimal speck," came the thought.

The mass drifted almost imperceptibly across the screen, and the thought continued:

"As you see it now, so it appeared to us through our telescopes centuries ago. Of course, the drifting motion of the nebula as a whole was not perceptible, and what you see is a chemically recorded reproduction of the view, which has been speeded up to make the motion visible on the screen. Watch closely now."

The great mass of the nebula had been quiescent, but as I watched, it began to stir and swirl in a huge spiral motion, and a vast dark shadow was thrown across the whole scene. The shadow seemed to recede — no, grew smaller — and I could see that it was not a shadow but a huge bulk. This bulk was entering the nebula, causing it to swirl and expand as millions of stars were displaced and shoved outward.

The thought came again: "The scene has been speeded up a million-fold. The things you see taking place actually transpired over a great number of years; our scientists watched the phenomenon in great wonder, and many were the theories as to the cause of it. You are viewing yourself as you entered our nebula."

I watched in a few minutes the scene before me, as these sphere creatures had watched it over a period of years; saw myself grow smaller, gradually approach the system of four suns and finally the gold-green planet itself. Abruptly the screen cleared.

"So we watched and awaited your coming for years, not knowing what you were or whence you came. We are still very much puzzled. You become steadily smaller, and that we cannot understand. We must hurry. Relax. Do not interfere with our process by trying to think back to the beginning, as you did before; it is all laid bare to us in the recesses of your brain. Simply relax, think of nothing at all, watch the screen."

I tried to do as he said; again I felt the cold probing tendrils in my brain, and a lethargy came over my mind. Shadows flashed across the screen, then suddenly a familiar scene leaped into view: the Professor's laboratory as I had last seen it, on the night of my departure. No sooner had this scene cleared than I entered the room, exactly as I had on that night. I saw myself approach the table close behind the Professor, saw him standing as he had stood, staring out at the night sky; saw his lips move.

The spheres about me crowded close to the screen, seemed to hang intent on every motion that passed upon it, and I sensed great excitement among them. I judged that the one who was exploring my mind, if not all of them, were somehow cognizant not only of the words the Professor and I spoke in those scenes, but of their meaning as well.

I could almost read the Professor's lips as he spoke. I saw the utter amazement, then incredulity, then disbelief, on my features as he propounded his theory of macrocosmic worlds and still greater macroscopic worlds. I saw our parley of words, and finally his lunge toward me and felt again the plunge of the needle into my arm.

As this happened the spheres around me stirred excitedly.

I saw myself become smaller, smaller, to be finally lifted onto the block of Rehyllium-X where I became still smaller and disappeared. I saw my meeting with the germ, and my wild flight; my plunge into the abyss, and my flight down through darkness, during which time the entire screen before me became black. The screen was slightly illuminated again as I travelled along with the great masses all around me, and then gradually across the screen spread the huge nebula, the same one these sphere creatures had seen through their telescopes centuries ago. Again the screen cleared abruptly, became transparent.

"The rest we know," came the thought of the one who had searched my brain. "The rest the screen has already shown. He — the one who invented the — what he called 'Shrinx' — he is a very great man. Yours has indeed been a marvellous experience, and one which has hardly begun. We envy you, you lucky being; and at the same time we are sorry for you. Anyway, it is fortunate for us that you chose our planet on which to alight, but soon you will pass away even as you came, and that we cannot, and would not, prevent. In a very few minutes you will once more become of infinitesimal size and pass into a still smaller universe. We have microscopes powerful enough to permit us to barely glimpse this smaller atomic universe, and we shall watch your further progress into the unknown until you are gone from our sight forever."

I had been so interested in the familiar scenes on the screen that I had lost all conception of my steady shrinkage. I was now very much smaller than those spheres around me.

I was as interested in them as they were in me, and I tried to flash the following thought:

"You say that you envy me, and are sorry for me. Why should that be?"

The thought came back immediately: "We cannot answer that. But it is true; wonderful as are the things you will see in realms yet to come, nevertheless you are to be pitied. You cannot understand at present, but some day you will."

I flashed another thought: "Your organism, which is known to me as gaseous, seems as strange to me as mine, a solid, must seem to you. You have mentioned both telescopes and microscopes, and I cannot conceive how beings such as yourselves, without organs of sight, can number astronomy and microscopy among the sciences."

"Your own organs of sight," came back the answer, "which you call 'eyes', are not only superfluous, but are very crude sources of perception. I think you will grant that loss of them would be a terrible and permanent handicap. Our own source of perception is not confined to any such conspicuous organs, but envelops the entire outer surface of our bodies. We have never had organs and appendages such as those with which you are endowed so profusely, for we are of different substance; we merely extend any part of our bodies in any direction at will. But from close study of your structure, we conclude that your various organs and appendages are very crude. I predict that by slow evolution of your own race, such frailties will disappear entirely."

"Tell me more about your own race," I went on eagerly.

"To tell everything there is to tell," came the answer, "would take much time; and there is little time left. We have a very high sociological system, but one which is not without its faults, of

course. We have delved deep into the sciences and gone far along the lines of fine arts – but all of our accomplishments along those lines would no doubt appear very strange to you. You have seen our city. It is by no means the largest, nor the most important, on the planet. When you alighted comparatively near, reports were sent out and all of our important scientists hurried here. We were not afraid because of your presence, but rather were cautious, for we did not know what manner of being you were. The two whom you first saw were sent to observe you. They had both been guilty of a crime against the community, and were given the choice of the punishment they deserved, or of going out to investigate the huge creature that had dropped from the sky. They accepted the latter course, and for their bravery – for it was bravery – they have been exonerated.”

VI

I would have liked greatly to ask more questions, for there were many phases that puzzled me; but I was becoming so very small that further communication was impossible. I was taken to a laboratory and placed upon the slide of a microscope of strange and intricate construction and my progress continued unabated down into a still smaller atomic universe.

The method was the same as before. The substance became open and porous, spread out into open space dotted with the huge masses which in turn became porous and resolved into far-flung nebulae.

I entered one of the nebulae and once more star-systems swung all around me. This time I approached a single sun of bright yellow hue, around which swung eight planets. I manoeuvred to the outermost one, and when my size permitted, made contact with it.

I was now standing on an electron, one of billions forming a microscopic slide that existed in a world which was in turn only an electron in a block of metal on a laboratory table!

Soon I reached the atmosphere, and miles below me I could see only patches of yellow and green. But as I came nearer to the surface more of the details became discernible. Almost at my feet a wide yellow river wound sluggishly over a vast plateau which fell suddenly away into a long line of steep precipices. At the foot of these precipices stretched a great green expanse of steaming jungle, and farther beyond a great ocean, smooth as green glass, curved to the horizon. A prehistoric world of jungles and great fern-like growths and sweltering swamps and cliffs. Not a breeze stirred and nowhere was there sight of any living being.

I was standing in the jungle close to the towering cliffs, and for a half mile in every direction the trees and vegetation were trampled into the soil where my feet had swung down and contacted.

Now I could see a long row of caves just above a ledge half way up the side of the cliff. And I did not doubt that in each cave some being was peeking furtively out at me. Even as I watched I saw a tiny figure emerge and walk out on the ledge. He was very cautious, ready to dash back into the cave at any sign of hostility on my part, and his eyes never left me. Seeing that nothing happened, others took heart and came out, and soon the ledge was lined with tiny figures who talked excitedly among themselves, and gesticulated wildly in my direction. My coming must surely have aroused all their superstitious fears – a giant descending out of the skies to land at their very feet.

I must have been nearly a mile from the cliff, but even at that distance I could see that the figures were barbarians, squat and thick-muscled, and covered with hair; they were four-limbed and stood erect, and all carried crude weapons.

One of them raised a bow as tall as himself and let fly a shaft at me, evidently as an expression of contempt or bravado, for he must have known that the shaft wouldn't reach half the distance.

Immediately one who seemed a leader among them felled the miscreant with a single blow. This amused me. Evidently their creed was to leave well enough alone.

Experimentally I took a step toward them, and immediately a long line of bows sprang erect and scores of tiny shafts arced high in my direction to fall into the jungle far in front of me. A warning to keep my distance.

I could have strode forward and swept the lot of them from the ledge; but, wishing to show them that my intentions were quite peaceful, I raised my hands and took several backward steps. Another futile volley of arrows. I was puzzled, and stood still; and as long as I did not move neither did they.

The one who had seemed the leader threw himself down flat and, shielding his eyes from the sun, scanned the expanse of jungle below. Then they seemed to talk among themselves again, and gestured not at me, but at the jungle. Then I comprehended. Evidently a hunting party was somewhere in that jungle which spread out around my feet — probably returning to the caves, for already it was nearing dusk, the sun casting weird conflicting streaks across the horizon. These people of the caves were in fear that I would move around too freely and perhaps trample the returning party underfoot.

So thinking, I stood quietly in the great barren patch I had levelled, and sought to peer into the dank growth below me. This was nearly impossible, however, for clouds of steam hung low over the tops of the trees.

But presently my ears caught a faint sound, as of shouting, far below me, and then I glimpsed a long single file of the barbarian hunters running at full speed along a well-beaten game path. They burst into the very clearing in which I stood, and stopped short in surprise, evidently aware for the first time of my gigantic presence on their world. They let fall the poles upon which were strung the carcasses of the day's hunt, cast but one fearful look up to where I towered, then as one man fell flat upon the ground in abject terror.

All except one. I doubt if this one, who burst from the tangle of trees last of all, even saw me, so intent was he in glancing back into the darkness from which he fled. At any rate, he aroused his companions with a few angry, guttural syllables, and pointed back along the path.

At that moment there floated up to me a roar that lingered loud and shuddering in my ears. At quick instructions from their leader, the hunters picked up their weapons and formed a wide semi-circle before the path where they had emerged. The limb of a large tree overhung the path at this point, and the leader clambered up some overhanging vines and was soon crouched upon it. One of the warriors fastened a vine to a large clumsy-looking weapon, and the one in the tree drew it up to him. The weapon consisted merely of a large pointed stake some eight feet long, with two heavy stones fastened securely to it at the halfway point. The one in the tree carefully balanced this weapon on the limb, directly over the path, point downward. The semi-circle of hunters crouched behind stout lances set at an angle in the ground.

Another shuddering roar floated up to me, and then the beast appeared. As I caught sight of it I marvelled all the more at the courage of these puny barbarians. From ground to shoulder the beast must have measured seven feet tall, and was fully twenty feet long. Each of its six legs ended in a wide, horny claw that could have ripped any of the hunters from top to bottom. Its long, tapering tail was horny too, giving me the impression that the thing was at least partially reptilian; curved fangs fully two feet long, in a decidedly animal head, offset that impression, however.

For a long moment the monstrosity stood there, tail switching ceaselessly, glaring in puzzlement out upon the circle of puny beings who dared to confront it. Then, as its tail ceased switching and it tensed for the spring, the warrior on the limb above launched his weapon — launched it and came hurtling down

with it, feet pressed hard against the heavy stone balance!

Whether the beast below heard some sound or whether a sixth sense warned it, I do not know; but just in time it leaped to one side with an agility belied by its great bulk, and the pointed stake drove deep into the ground, leaving the one who had ridden it lying there stunned.

The beast uttered a snarl of rage; its six legs sprawled outward, its great belly touched the ground. Then it sprang out upon the circle of crouching hunters. Lances snapped at the impact, and the circle broke and fled for the trees. But two of them never rose from the ground, and the lashing horned tail flattened another before he had taken four steps.

The scene took place in a matter of seconds as I towered there looking down upon it, fascinated. The beast whirled toward the fleeing ones and in another moment the destruction would have been terrible, for they could not possibly have reached safety.

Breaking the spell that was on me, I swung my hand down in a huge arc even as the beast sprang for a second time. I slapped it in mid air, flattening it against the ground as I would have flattened a bothersome insect. It did not twitch a muscle, and a dark red stain seeped outward from where it lay.

The natives stopped in their flight, for the sound of my hand when I slapped the huge animal had been loud. They jabbered noisily among themselves, but fearfully kept their distance when they saw me crouched there over the flattened enemy who had been about to wreak destruction among them.

Only one had seen the entire happening. He who had plunged downward from the tree was only momentarily stunned; he had risen dizzily to his feet as the animal charged out among his companions, and had been witness to the whole thing.

Glancing half contemptuously at the others, he now approached me. It must have taken a great deal of courage on his part for, crouched down as I was, I still towered above the tallest trees. He looked for a moment at the dead beast, then gazed up at me in reverent awe. Falling prone, he beat his head upon the ground several times, and the others followed his example.

Then they all came forward to look at the huge animal.

From their talk and gestures, I gathered that they wanted to take it to the caves; but it would take ten of the strongest of them to even lift it, and there was still a mile stretch of jungle between them and the cliffs.

I decided that I would take it there for them if that was their want. Reaching out, I picked up the leader, the brave one, very gently. Placing him in the cupped hollow of my hand, I swung him far up to the level of my eyes. I pointed at the animal I had slain, then pointed toward the cliffs. But his eyes were closed tightly as if his last moment had come, and he trembled in every limb. He was a brave hunter, but this experience was too much. I lowered him to the ground unharmed, and the others crowded around him excitedly. He would soon recover from his fright, and no doubt some night around the camp fires he would relate this wonderful experience to a bunch of sceptical grandchildren.

Picking the animal up by its tapering tail, I strode through the jungle with it, flattening trees at every step and leaving a wide path behind me. I neared the cliffs in a few steps, and those upon the ledge fled into the caves. I placed the huge carcass on the ledge, which was scarcely as high as my shoulders, then turned and strode away to the right, intending to explore the terrain beyond.

For an hour I walked, passing other tribes of cliff dwellers who fled at my approach. Then the jungle ended in a point by the sea and the line of cliffs melted down into a rocky coast.

It had become quite dark now, there were no moons and the stars seemed dim and far away. Strange night cries came from the jungle, and to my left stretched wide, tangled marshes through which floated vague phosphorescent shapes. Behind me, tiny fires sprang up on the face of the cliffs, a welcome sight, and I turned back toward them. I was now so much smaller that I felt extremely uneasy of being alone and unarmed at night on a strange planet abounding in monstrosities.

I had taken only a few steps when I felt, rather than heard, a rush of wings above and behind me. I threw myself flat upon the ground, and just in time, for the great shadowy shape of some huge night-creature swept down and sharp talons raked my back. I arose with apprehension after a few moments, and saw the creature winging its way back low over the marshes. Its wing spread must have been forty feet. I reached the shelter of the cliffs and stayed close to them thereafter.

I came to the first of the shelving ledges where the fires burned, but it was far above me now. I was a tiny being crouched at the base of the cliffs. I, an alien on this world, yet a million years ahead of these barbarians in evolution, peered furtively out into the darkness where glowing eyes and half-seen shapes moved on the edge of the encroaching jungle; and safe in their caves high above me were those so low in the state of evolution that had only the rudiments of a spoken language and were only beginning to learn the value of fire. In another million years perhaps a great civilisation would cover this entire globe; a civilisation rising by slow degrees from the mire and the mistakes and the myths of the dawn of time. And doubtless one of the myths would concern a great god-like figure that descended from the skies, levelled great trees in its stride, saved a famous tribe from destruction by slaying huge enemy beasts, and then disappeared forever during the night. And great men, great thinkers, of that future civilisation would say: "Fie! Preposterous! A stupid myth."

But at the present time the godlike figure which slew enemy beasts by a slap of the hand was scarcely a foot high, and sought a place where he might be safe from a possible attack by those same beasts. At last I found a small crevice, which I squeezed into and felt much safer than I had out in the open.

And very soon I was so small that I would have been unnoticed by any of the huge animals that might venture my way.

VII

At last I stood on a single grain of sand, and other grains towered up like smooth mountains all around me. And in the next few minutes I experienced the change for the third time — the change from microscopic being on a gigantic world to a gigantic being floating amid an endless universe of galaxies. I became smaller, the distance between galaxies widened, solar systems approached and neared the orbit of the outermost planet. I received a very unexpected, but very pleasant, surprise. Instead of myself landing upon one of the planets — and while I was yet too large to do so — the inhabitants of this system were coming out to land on me!

There was no doubt about it. From the direction of the inner planets a tapering silvery projectile moved toward me with the speed of light. This was indeed interesting, and I halted my inward progress to await developments.

In a few minutes the space rocket ship was very close. It circled about me once, then with a great rush of flame and gases from the prow to break the fall, it swooped in a long curve and landed gracefully on my chest! I felt no more jar than if a fly had alighted on me. As I watched it, a square section swung outward from the hull and a number of things emerged. I say "things" because they were in no manner human, although they were so tiny that I could barely distinguish them as minute dots of gold. A dozen of them gathered in a group a short distance away from the space ship.

After a few moments, to my surprise, they spread huge golden wings, and I gasped at the glistening beauty of them. They scattered in various directions, flying low over the surface of my body. From this I reasoned that I must be enveloped in a thin layer of atmosphere, as were the planets. These bird creatures were an exploring party sent out from one of the inner planets to investigate the new large world which had entered their system and was approaching dangerously close to their own planet.

But, on second thought, they must have been aware – or soon would be – that I was not a world at all, but a living, sentient being. My longitudinal shape should make that apparent, besides the movements of my limbs. At any rate, they displayed unprecedented daring by coming out to land on me. I could have crushed their frail ship at the slightest touch or flung it far out into the void beyond their reach.

I wished I could see one of the winged creatures at closer range, but none landed on me again; having traversed and circled me in every direction, they returned to the space ship and entered it. The section swung closed, gases roared from the stern tubes and the ship swooped out into space again and back toward the sun.

What tidings would they bear to their planet? Doubtless they would describe me as an inconceivably huge monstrosity of outer space. Their scientists would wonder whence I came; might even guess at the truth. They would observe me anxiously through their telescopes. Very likely they would be in fear that I would invade or wreck their world, and would make preparations to repulse me if I came too near.

In spite of these probabilities I continued my slow progress toward the inner planets, determined to see and if possible land upon the planet of the bird creatures. A civilisation that had achieved space travel must be a marvellous civilisation indeed.

As I made my way through space between the planets by means of my grotesque exertions, I reflected upon another phase. By the time I reached the inner planets I would be so much smaller that I could not determine which of the planets was the one I sought, unless I saw more of the space ships and could follow their direction. Another interesting thought was that the inner planets would have sped around the green sun innumerable times, and years would have passed before I reached there. They would have ample time to prepare for my coming, and might give me a fierce reception if they had any more of the space ships such as the one I had seen.

And they did indeed have many more of them, as I discovered after an interminable length of time during which I had moved ever closer to the sun. A red-tinged planet swung in a wide curve from behind the blazing green of the sun, and I awaited its approach. After a few minutes it was so close that I could see a moon encircling the planet, and as it came still nearer I saw the rocket ships.

This, then, was the planet I sought. But I was puzzled. They surely could not have failed to notice my approach, and I had expected to see a host of ships lined up in formidable array. I saw a host of them all right, hundreds of them, but they were not pointed in my direction at all; indeed, they seemed not to heed me in the least, although I must have loomed large as their planet came nearer. Perhaps they had decided, after all, that I was harmless.

But what seemed more likely to me was that they were confronted with an issue of vastly more importance than my close proximity. For, as I viewed the space ships, they were leaving the atmosphere of their planet, and were pointing toward the single satellite. Row upon row, mass upon endless mass, they moved outward, hundreds, thousands of them. It seemed as though the entire population was moving *en masse* to the satellite!

My curiosity was immediately aroused. What circumstances or condition would cause a highly civilised

race to abandon their planet and flee to the satellite? Perhaps, if I learned, I would not want to alight on that planet …

Impatiently I awaited its return as it moved away from me on its circuit around the sun. The minutes seemed long, but at last it approached again from the opposite direction, and I marvelled at the relativity of size and space and time. A year had passed on that planet and satellite, and many things might have transpired since I had last seen them.

The satellite swung between the planet and myself, and even from my point of disadvantage I could see that many things had indeed transpired. The bird people were building a protective shell around the satellite! Protection – from what? The shell seemed to be of dull grey metal, and already covered half the globe. On the uncovered side I saw land and rolling oceans. Surely, I thought, they must have the means of producing artificial light; but somehow it seemed blasphemous to forever bar the surface from the fresh pure light of the green sun. In a manner I felt sorry for them in their circumstances. But they had their space ships, and in time could move to the vast, unexplored fields that the heavens offered.

More than ever I was consumed with curiosity, but was still too large to attempt a contact with the planet, and I let it pass me for a second time. I judged that when it came around again I would be sufficiently small for its gravity to ‘capture’ me and sufficiently large that the ‘fall’ to the surface would in no means be dangerous; and I was determined to alight.

Another wait of minutes, more minutes this time because I was smaller and time for me was correspondingly longer. When the two spheres hove into view again I saw that the smaller one was now entirely clad in its metal jacket, and the smooth, unbroken surface shimmered boldly in the green glare of the sun. Beneath that barren metal shell were the bird people with their glorious golden wings, their space ships, their artificial light, and atmosphere, and civilisation. I had but a glance for the satellite, however; my attention was for the planet rushing ever closer to me.

Everything passed smoothly and without mishap. I was becoming an experienced ‘planet hopper.’ Its gravity caught me in an unrelenting grip, and I let my limbs rush downward first in their long curve, to land with a slight jar on solid earth far below.

Bending low, I sought to peer into the murky atmosphere and see something of the nature of this world. For a minute my sight could not pierce the half gloom, but gradually the surface became visible. First, I followed my tapering limbs to where they had contacted. As nearly as I could ascertain from my height, I was standing in the midst of what seemed to be a huge mass of crushed and twisted metal!

Now, I thought to myself, I have done it. I have let myself in for it now. I have wrecked something, some great piece of machinery it seems, and the inhabitants will not take the matter lightly. Then I thought: the inhabitants? Who? Not the bird people, for they have fled, have barricaded themselves on the satellite.

Again I sought to pierce the gloom of the atmosphere, and by slow degrees more details became visible. At first my gaze only encompassed a few miles, then more, and more, until at last the view extended from horizon to horizon and included nearly an entire hemisphere.

Slowly the view cleared and slowly comprehension came; and as full realisation dawned upon me, I became momentarily panic stricken. I thought insanely of leaping outward into space again, away from the planet, breaking the gravity that held me; but the opposite force of my spring could likely send the planet careening out of its orbit and it and all the other planets and myself might go plunging toward the sun. No, I had put my feet on this planet and I was here to stay.

But I did not feel like staying, for what a sight I had glimpsed! As far as I could see in every direction were huge, grotesque metal structures and strange mechanical contrivances. The thing that terrified me

was that these machines were scurrying about the surface all in apparent confusion, seemed to cover the entire globe, seemed to have a complete civilisation of their own, and nowhere was there the slightest evidence of any human occupancy, no controlling force, no intelligence, nothing save the machines. And I could not bring myself to believe that they were possessed of intelligence!

Yet as I descended ever closer to the surface I could see that there was no confusion at all as it had seemed at first glance, but rather there was a simple, efficient, systematic order of things. Even as I watched, two strange mechanisms strode toward me on great jointed tripods, and stopped at my very feet. Long, jointed metal arms, with claw-like fixtures at the ends, reached out with uncanny accuracy and precision and began to clear away the twisted debris around my feet. As I watched them I admired the efficiency of their construction. No needless intricacies, no superfluous parts, only the tripods for movement and the arms for clearing. When they had finished they went away, and other machines came on wheels, the debris was lifted by means of cranes and hauled away.

I watched in stupefaction the uncanny activities below and around me. There was no hurry, no rush, but every machine from the tiniest to the largest, from the simplest to the most complicated, had a certain task to perform, and performed it directly and completely, accurately and precisely. There were machines on wheels, on treads, on tracks, on huge multi-jointed tripods, winged machines that flew clumsily through the air, and machines of a thousand other kinds and variations.

Endless chains of machines delved deep into the earth, to emerge with loads of ore which they deposited, to descend again.

Huge hauling machines came and transported the ore to roaring mills.

Inside the mills, machines melted the ore, rolled and cut and fashioned the steel.

Other machines built and assembled and adjusted intricate parts, and when the long process was completed the result was – more machines! They rolled or ambled or flew or walked or rattled away under their own power, as the case might be.

Some went to assist in the building of huge bridges across rivers and ravines.

Diggers went to level down forests and obstructing hills, or went away to the mines.

Others built adjoining mills and factories.

Still others erected strange, complicated towers thousands of feet high, and the purpose of these skeleton skyscrapers I could not determine. Even as I watched, the supporting base of one of them weakened and buckled, and the entire huge edifice careened at a perilous angle. Immediately a host of tiny machines rushed to the scene. Sharp white flames cut through the metal in a few seconds, and the tower toppled with a thunderous crash to the ground. Again the white-flame machines went to work and cut the metal into removable sections, and hoisters and haulers came and removed them. Within fifteen minutes another building was being erected on the exact spot.

Occasionally something would go wrong – some worn-out part ceased to function and a machine would stop in the middle of its task. Then it would be hauled away to repair shops, where it would eventually emerge good as new.

I saw two of the winged machines collide in mid air, and metal rained from the sky. A half dozen of the tripod clearing machines came from a half dozen directions and the metal was raked into huge piles; then came the cranes and the hauling machines.

A great vertical wheel with slanting blades on the rim spun swiftly on a shaft that was borne forward on treads. The blades cut through trees and soil and stone as it bore onward toward the nearby mountains. It slowed down, but did not stop, and at length a straight, wide path connected the opposite valley. Behind the wheel came the tripods, clearing the way of all debris, and behind them came machines that laid down long strips of metal, completing the perfect road.

Everywhere small lubricating machines moved about, periodically supplying the others with the necessary oil that ensured smooth movement.

Gradually the region surrounding me was being levelled and cleared, and a vast city was rising – a city of meaningless, towering, ugly metal – a city covering hundreds of miles between the mountains and sea – a city of machines – ungainly, lifeless – yet purposeful – for what? What?

In the bay, a line of towers rose from the water like fingers pointing at the sky. Beyond the bay and into the open sea they extended. Now the machines were connecting the towers with wide network and spans. A bridge! They were spanning the ocean, connecting the continents – a prodigious engineering feat. If there were not already machines on the other side, there soon would be. No, not soon. The task was gigantic, fraught with failures, almost impossible. *Almost?* A world of machines could know no almost. Perhaps other machines did occupy the other side, had started the bridge from there, and they would meet in the middle. And for what purpose?

A great wide river came out of the mountains and went winding toward the sea. For some reason a wall was being constructed diagonally across the river and beyond, to change its course. For some reason – or unreason.

Unreason! That was it! Why, why, why, I cried aloud in an anguish that was real; why all of this? What purpose, what meaning, what benefit? A city, a continent, a world, a civilisation of machines! Somewhere on this world there must be the one who caused all this, the one intelligence, human or unhuman, who controls it. My time here is limited, but I have time to seek him out, and if I find him I shall drag him out and feed him to his own machines and put a stop to this diabolism for all time!

I strode along the edge of the sea for five hundred miles, and rounding a sharp point of land, stopped abruptly. There before me stretched a city, a towering city of smooth white stone and architectural beauty. Spacious parks were dotted with winged colonnades and statues, and the buildings were so designed that everything pointed upward, seemed poised for flight.

That was one half of the city.

The other half was a ruinous heap of shattered white stone, of buildings levelled to the ground by the machines, which were even then intent on reducing the entire city to a like state.

As I watched, I saw scores of the flame-machines cutting deep into the stone and steel supporting base of one of the tallest buildings. Two of the ponderous air machines, trailing a wide mesh-metal network between them, rose clumsily from the ground on the outskirts of the city. Straight at the building they flew, and passed one on each side of it. The metal netting struck, jerked the machines backward, and the tangled mass of them plunged to the ground far below. But the building, already weakened at the base, swayed far forward, then back, hung poised for a long, shuddering moment, and then toppled to the ground with a thunderous crash amid a cloud of dust and debris and tangled framework.

The flame-machines moved on to another building, and on a slope near the outskirts two more of the air machines waited …

Sickened at the purposeless vandalism of it all, I turned inland; and everywhere I strode were the machines, destroying and building, levelling to the ground the deserted cities of the bird people and building up their own meaningless civilisation of metal.

At last I came to a long range of mountains which towered up past the level of my eyes as I stood before them. In two steps I stood on the top of these mountains and looked out upon a vast plain dotted everywhere with the grotesque machine-made cities. The machines had made good progress. About two hundred miles to the left a great metal dome rose from the level of the plain, and I made my way toward it, striding unconcerned and recklessly amidst the machines that moved everywhere around my feet.

As I neared the domed structure, a row of formidable looking mechanisms, armed with long spikes, rose up to bar my path. I kicked out viciously at them and in a few minutes they were reduced to tangled scrap, though I received a number of minor scratches in the skirmish. Others of the spiked machines rose up to confront me with each step I took, but I strode through them, kicking them to one side, and at last I stood before an entrance-way in the side of the huge dome. Stooping, I entered, and once inside my head almost touched the roof.

I had hoped to find here what I sought, and I was not disappointed. There in the centre of the single spacious room was The Machine of all Machines; the Cause of it All; the Central Force, the Ruler, the Controlling Power of all the diabolism running riot over the face of the planet. It was roughly circular, large and ponderous. It was bewilderingly complicated, a maze of gears, wheels, switchboards, lights, levers, buttons, tubing, and intricacies beyond my comprehension. There were circular tiers, and on each tier smaller separate units moved, performing various tasks, attending switchboards, pressing buttons, pulling levers. The result was a throbbing, rhythmic, purposeful unit. I could imagine invisible waves going out in every direction.

I wondered what part of this great machine was vulnerable. Silly thought. No part. Only it – itself. It was The Brain.

The Brain. The Intelligence. I had searched for it, and I had found it. There it was before me. Well, I was going to smash it. I looked around for some kind of weapon, but finding none, I strode forward bare-handed.

Immediately a square panel lighted up with a green glow, and I knew that The Brain was aware of my intent. I stopped. An odd sensation swept over me, a feeling of *hate*, of *menace*. It came from the machine, pervaded the air in invisible waves.

“Nonsense,” I thought; “it is but a machine after all. A very complicated one, yes, perhaps even possessed of intelligence; but it only has control over other machines, it cannot harm me.” Again I took a resolute step forward.

The feeling of menace became stronger, but I fought back my apprehension and advanced recklessly. I had almost reached the machine when a wall of crackling blue flame leaped from floor to roof. If I had taken one more step I would have been caught in it.

The menace, and hate, and imagined rage at my escape rolled out from the machine in ponderous, almost tangible waves, engulfing me, and I retreated hastily.

I walked back toward the mountains. After all, this was not *my* world – not my universe. I would soon be so small that my presence amid the machines would be extremely dangerous, and the top of the mountains was the only safe place. I would have liked to smash The Brain and put an end to it all, but anyway, I thought, the bird people were now safe on the satellite, so why not leave this lifeless world to the machines?

It was twilight when I reached the mountains, and from a high, grassy slope — the only peaceful place on the entire planet, I imagined — I looked out upon the plain. Tiny lights appeared as the machines moved about, carrying on their work, never resting. The clattering and clanking of them floated faintly up to me and made me glad that I was a safe distance from it all.

As I stood out toward the dome that housed The Brain, I saw what I had failed to see before. A large globe rested there on a framework, and there seemed to be unusual activity around it.

A vague apprehension tightened around my brain as I saw machines enter this globe, and I was half prepared for what happened next. The globe rose lightly as a feather, sped upward with increasing speed, out of the atmosphere and into space where, as a tiny speck, it darted and manoeuvred with perfect ease. Soon it reappeared, floated gracefully down upon the framework again, and the machines that had mechanically directed its flight disembarked from it.

The machines had achieved space travel! My heart sickened with sudden realisation of what that meant. They would build others — were already building them. They would go to other worlds, and the nearest one was the satellite — encased in its protective metal shell —

But then I thought of the white-flame machines that I had seen cut through stone and metal in a few seconds —

The bird people would no doubt put up a valiant fight. But as I compared their rocket projectiles against the efficiency of the globe I had just seen, I had little doubt as to the outcome. They would eventually be driven out into space again to seek a new world, and the machines would take over the satellite, running riot as they had done here. They would remain there just as long as The Brain so desired, or until there was no more land for conquest. Already this planet was over-run, so they were preparing to leave.

The Brain. An intricate, intelligent, mechanical brain, glorying in its power, drunk with conquest. Where had it originated? The bird people must have been the indirect cause, and no doubt they were beginning to realise the terrible menace they had loosed on the universe.

I tried to picture their civilisation as it had been long ago before this thing had come about. I pictured a civilisation in which machinery played a very important part. I pictured the development of this machinery until the time when it relieved them of many tasks. I imagined how they must have designed their machines with more and more intricacy, more and more finesse, until only a few persons were needed in control. And then the great day would come, the supreme day, when mechanical parts would take the place of those few.

That must indeed have been a day of triumph. Machines supplying their every necessity, attending to their every want, obeying their every whim at the touch of a button. That must have been Utopia achieved!

But it had proven to be a bitter Utopia. They had gone forward blindly and recklessly to achieve it, and unknowingly they had gone a step too far. Somewhere, amid the machines they supposed they had under their control, they were imbued with a spark of intelligence. One of the machines added unto itself — perhaps secretly; built and evolved itself into a terribly efficient unit of inspired intelligence. And guided by that intelligence, other machines were built and came under its control. The rest must have been a matter of course. Revolt and easy victory.

So I pictured the evolution of the mechanical brain that even now was directing activities from down there under its metal dome.

And the metal shell around the satellite — did not that mean that the bird people were expecting an invasion? Perhaps, after all, this was not the original planet of the bird people; perhaps space travel was

not an innovation among the machines. Perhaps it was on one of the far inner planets near the sun that the bird people had achieved the Utopia that proved to be such a terrible nemesis; perhaps they had moved to the next planet, never dreaming that the machines could follow; but the machines had followed after a number of years, the bird people being always driven outward, the machines always following at leisure in search of new spheres of conquest. And finally the bird people had fled to this planet, and from it to the satellite; and realising that in a few years the machines would come again in all their invincibility, they had then ensconced themselves beneath the shell of metal.

At any rate: they did not flee to a far-away safe spot in the universe as they could have very easily done. Instead, they stayed; always one sphere ahead of the marauding machines, they must always be planning a means of wiping out the spreading evil they had loosed.

It might be that the shell around the satellite was in some way a clever trap! But so thinking, I remembered again the white-flame machines and the deadly efficiency of the globe I had seen, and then my hopes faded away.

Perhaps some day they would eventually find a way to check the spreading menace. But on some other extreme, the machines might spread out to other solar systems, other galaxies, until some day, a billion years hence, they would occupy every sphere in this universe …

Such were my thoughts as I lay prone there upon the grassy slope and looked down into the plain, down upon the ceaseless clatter and the ceaseless moving of lights in the dark. I was very small now; soon, very soon, I would leave this world.

My last impression was of a number of the space globes, barely discernible in the dusk below; and among them, towering up high and round, was one much larger than the others, and I could guess which machine would occupy that globe.

And my last thought was a regret that I hadn't made a more determined effort to destroy that malicious mechanism, The Brain.

So I passed from this world of machines – the world that was an electron on a grain of sand that existed on a prehistoric world that was but an electron on a microscope slide that existed on a world that was but an electron in a piece of Rehyllium-X on the Professor's laboratory table.

VIII

It is useless to go on. I have neither the time nor the desire to relate in detail all the adventures that have befallen me, the universes I have passed into, the things I have seen and experienced and learned on all the worlds since I left the planet of the machines.

Ever smaller cycles … infinite universes … never ending … each presenting something new … some queer variation of life or intelligence … Life? Intelligence? Terms I once associated with things animate, things protoplasmic and understandable. I find it hard to apply them to all the divergencies of shape and form and construction I have encountered …

Worlds young … warm … volcanic and steaming … the single cell emerging from the slime of warm oceans to propagate on primordial continents … other worlds, innumerable … life divergent in all branches from the single cell … amorphous globules … amphibian … crustacean … reptilian … plant … insect … bird … mammal … all possible variations of combinations … biological monstrosities indescribable …

Other forms beyond any attempt at classification … beyond all reason or comprehension of my

puny mind … essences of pure flame … others gaseous, incandescent and quiescent alike … plant forms encompassing an entire globe … crystalline beings sentient and reasoning … great shimmering columnar forms, seemingly liquid, defying gravity by some strange power of cohesion … a world of sound-vibrations, throbbing, expanding, reverberating in unbroken echoes that nearly drove me crazy … globular brain-like masses utterly dissociated from any material substance … intra-dimensional beings, all shapes and shapeless … entities utterly incapable of registration upon any of my senses except the sixth, that of instinct …

Suns dying … planets cold and dark and airless … last vestiges of once proud races struggling for a few more meagre years of sustenance … great cavities … beds of evaporated seas … small furry animals scurrying to cover at my approach … desolation … ruins crumbling surely into the sands of barren deserts, the last mute evidence of vanished civilisations …

Other worlds … a-flourished with life … blessed with light and heat … staggering cities … vast populations … ships plying the surface of oceans, and others in the air … huge observatories … tremendous strides in the sciences …

Space flight … battles for the supremacy of worlds … blasting rays of super-destruction … collision of planets … disruption of solar systems … cosmic annihilation …

Light space … a universe with a tenuous, filmy something around it, which I burst through … all around me not the customary blackness of outer space I had known, but light … filled with tiny dots that were globes of darkness … that were burnt-out suns and lifeless planets … nowhere a shimmering planet, nowhere a flaming sun … only remote specks of black amid the light-satiated emptiness …

How many of the infinitely smaller atomic cycles I have passed into, I do not know. I tried to keep count of them at first, but somewhere between twenty and thirty I gave it up; and that was long ago.

Each time I would think: “This cannot go on forever – it *cannot*; surely this next time I must reach the end.”

But I have not reached the end.

Good God – how can there be an end? Worlds composed of atoms … each atom similarly composed … The end would have to be an indestructible solid, and that cannot be; all matter divisible into smaller matter …

What keeps me from going insane? I want to go insane!

I am tired … a strange tiredness neither of mind nor body. Death would be a welcome release from the endless fate that is mine.

But even death is denied me. I have sought it … I have prayed for it and begged for it … But it is not to be.

On all the countless worlds I have contacted, the inhabitants were of two distinctions: they were either so low in the state of intelligence that they fled and barricaded themselves against me in superstitious terror – or were so highly intellectual that they recognised me for what I was and welcomed me among them. On all but a few worlds the latter was the case, and it is on these types that I will dwell briefly.

These beings – or shapes or monstrosities or essences – were in every case mentally and scientifically far above me. In most cases they had observed me for years as a dark shadow looming

beyond the farthest stars, blotting out certain star-fields and nebulae … and always when I came to their world they welcomed me with scientific enthusiasm.

Always they were puzzled as to my steady shrinking, and always when they learned of my origin and the manner of my being there, they were surprised and excited.

In most cases gratification was apparent when they learned definitely that there were indeed great ultramacrocosmic universes. It seemed that all of them had long held the theory that such was the case.

On most of the worlds, too, the beings – or entities – or whatever the case might be – were surprised that the Professor, one of my fellow creatures, had invented such a marvellous vitalised element as ‘Shrinx’.

‘Almost unbelievable’ was the general consensus of opinion; ‘scientifically he must be centuries ahead of the time on his own planet, if we are to judge the majority of the race by this creature here’ – meaning me.

In spite of the fact that on nearly every world I was looked upon as mentally inferior, they conversed with me and I with them, by various of their methods, in most cases different variations of telepathy. They learned in minute detail and with much interest all of my past experiences in other universes. They answered all of my questions and explained many things besides, about their own universe and world and civilisation and scientific achievements, most of which were completely beyond my comprehension, so alien were they in nature.

And of all the intra-universal beings I have had converse with, the strangest were those essences who dwelt in outer space as well as on various planets; identifiable to me only as vague blobs of emptiness, total absences of light or colour or substance; who impressed upon me the fact that they were Pure Intelligences, far above and superior to any material plane; but who professed an interest in me, bearing me with them to various planets, revealing many things and treating me very kindly. During my sojourn with them I learned from experience the total subservience of matter to influences of mind. On a giant mountainous world I stepped out upon a thin beam of light stretched between two crags, and willed with all my consciousness that I would not fall. And I did not.

I have learned many things. I know that my mind is much sharper, more penetrative, more grasping than ever before. And vast fields of wonder and knowledge lie before me in other universes yet to come.

But in spite of this, I am ready for it all to end. This strange tiredness that is upon me – I cannot understand it. Perhaps some invisible radiation in empty space is satiating me with this tiredness.

Perhaps it is only that I am very lonely. How very far away I am from my own tiny sphere! Millions upon millions … trillions upon trillions … of light-years … Light years! Light cannot measure the distance. And yet it is no distance: I am in a block of metal on the Professor’s laboratory table …

Yet how far away into space and time I have gone! Years have passed, years far beyond my normal span of life. I am eternal.

Yes, eternal life … that men have dreamed of … prayed for … sought after … is mine – and I dream and pray and seek for death!

Death. All the strange beings I have seen and conversed with have denied it. I have implored many of them to release me painlessly and for all time – but to no avail. Many of them were possessed of the scientific means to stop my steady shrinkage – but they would not stop it. None of them would

hinder me, none of them would tamper with the things that were. Why? Always I asked them why, and they would not answer.

But I need no answer. I think I understand. These beings of science realised that such an entity as myself should never be … that I am a blasphemy upon all creation and beyond all reason … they realised that eternal life is a terrible thing … a thing not to be desired … and as punishment for delving into secrets never meant to be revealed, none of them will release me from my fate …

Perhaps they are right, but oh, it is cruel! Cruel! The fault is not mine, I am here against my own will.

And so I continue ever down, alone and lonely, yearning for others of my kind. Always hopeful – and always disappointed.

So it was that I departed from a certain world of highly intelligent gaseous beings; a world that was in itself composed of a highly rarefied substance bordering on nebulosity. So it was that I became even smaller, was lifted up in a whirling, expanding vortex of the dense atmosphere, and entered the universe which it composed.

Why I was attracted by that tiny, far-away speck of yellow, I do not know. It was near the centre of the nebula I had entered. There were other suns far brighter, far more attractive, very much nearer. This minute yellow sun was dwarfed by other suns and sun-clusters around it – seemed insignificant and lost among them. And why I was drawn to *it*, so far away, I cannot explain.

But mere distance, even space distance, was nothing to me now. I had long since learned from the Pure Intelligence the secret of propulsion by mind influence, and by this means I propelled myself through space at any desired speed not exceeding that of light; as my mind was incapable of imagining speed faster than light, I of course could not cause my material body to exceed it.

So I neared the yellow sun in a few minutes and observed that it had twelve planets. And as I was far too large to yet land on any sphere, I wandered far among other suns, observing the haphazard construction of this universe, but never losing sight of the small yellow sun that had so intrigued me. And at last, much smaller, I returned to it.

And of all the twelve planets, one was particularly attractive to me. It was a tiny blue one. It made not much difference where I landed, so why should I have picked it from among the others? Perhaps only a whim – but I think the true reason was because of its constant pale blue twinkling, as though it were beckoning to me, inviting me to come to it. It was an unexplainable phenomenon; none of the others did that. So I moved closer to the orbit of the blue planet, and landed upon it.

As usual, I didn't move from where I stood for a time, until I could view the surrounding terrain; and then I observed that I had landed in a great lake – a chain of lakes. A short distance to my left was a city miles wide, a great part of which was inundated by the flood I had caused.

Very carefully, so as not to cause further tidal waves, I stepped from the lake to solid ground, and the waters receded somewhat.

Soon I saw a group of five machines flying toward me; each of them had two wings held stiffly at right angles to the body. Looking around me I saw others of these machines winging toward me from every direction, always in groups of five, in V formation. When they had come very close they began to dart and swoop in a most peculiar manner, from them came sharp staccato sounds, and I felt the impact of many tiny pellets upon my skin! These beings were very warlike, I thought, or else very excitable.

Their bombardment continued for some time, and I began to find it most irritating; these tiny pellets could

not harm me seriously, could not even pierce my skin, but the impact of them stung. I could not account for their attack upon me, unless it be that they were angry at the flood I had caused by my landing. If that were the case they were very unreasonable, I thought; any damage I had done was purely unintentional, and they should realise that.

But I was soon to learn that these creatures were very foolish in many of their actions and manners; they were to prove puzzling to me in more ways than one.

I waved my arms around, and presently they ceased their futile bombardment, but continued to fly around me.

I wished I could see what manner of beings flew these machines. They were continually landing and rising again from a wide, level field below.

For several hours they buzzed all around while I became steadily smaller. Below me I could now see long ribbons of white that I guessed were roads. Along these roads crawled tiny vehicles, which soon became so numerous that all movement came to a standstill, so congested were they. In the fields a large part of the populace had gathered, and was being constantly augmented by others.

At last I was sufficiently small so that I could make out closer details, and I looked more intently at the beings who inhabited this world. My heart gave a quick leap then, for they somewhat resembled myself in structure. They were four-limbed and stood erect, their method of locomotion consisting of short, jerky hops, very different from the smooth gliding movement of my own race. Their general features were somewhat different too – seemed grotesque to me – but the only main difference between them and myself was that their bodies were somewhat more columnar, roughly oval in shape and very thin. I would say almost frail.

Among the thousands gathered there were perhaps a score who seemed in authority. They rode upon the backs of clumsy-looking, four-footed animals, and seemed to have difficulty in keeping the excited crowd under control. I, of course, was the centre of their excitement; my presence seemed to have caused more consternation here than upon any other world.

Eventually a way was made through the crowd and one of the ponderous four-wheeled vehicles was brought along the road opposite to where I stood. I supposed they wanted me to enter the rough box-like affair, so I did so, and was hauled with many bumps and jolts over the rough road toward the city I had seen to the left. I could have rebelled at this barbarous treatment, but I reflected that I was still very large and this was probably the only way they had of transporting me to wherever I was going.

It had become quite dark, and the city was aglow with thousands of lights. I was taken into a certain building, and at once many important looking persons came to observe me.

I have stated that my mind had become much more penetrative than ever before, so I was not surprised that I could read many of the thoughts of these persons without much difficulty. I learned that these were scientists who had come here from other immediate cities as quickly as possible – most of them in the winged machines, which they called ‘planes’ – when they had learned of my landing here. For many months they had been certain that I would land. They had observed me through their telescopes, and their period of waiting had been a speculative one. And I could now see that they were greatly puzzled, filled with much wonderment, and no more enlightenment about me than they had been possessed of before.

Though still very large, I was becoming surely smaller, and it was this aspect that puzzled them most, just as it had on all the other worlds. Secondly in their speculations was the matter of *where* I had come from.

Many were the theories that passed among them. Certain they were that I had come a far distance. Uranus? Neptune? Pluto? I learned that these were the names of the outmost planets of this system. No, they decided; I must have come a much farther distance than that. Perhaps from another far-away galaxy of this universe! Their minds were staggered at that thought. Yet how very far away they were from the truth.

They addressed me in their own language, and seemed to realise that it was futile. Although I understood everything they said and everything that was in their minds, they could not know that I did, for I could not answer them. Their minds seemed utterly closed to all my attempts at thought communication, so I gave it up.

They conversed then among themselves, and I could read the hopelessness in their minds. I could see, too, as they discussed me, that they looked upon me as being abhorrent, a monstrosity. And as I searched the recesses of their minds, I found many things.

I found that it was the inherent instinct of this race to look upon all unnatural occurrences and phenomena with suspicion and disbelief and prejudiced mind.

I found that they had great pride for their accomplishments in the way of scientific and inventive progress. Their astronomers had delved a short distance into outer space, but considered it a very great distance; and having failed to find signs of intelligent life upon any immediate sphere, they leaped blindly and fondly to the conclusion that their own species of life was the dominant one in this solar system and perhaps – it was a reluctant perhaps – in the entire universe.

Their conception of the universe was a puny one. True, at the present time there was extant a theory of an expanding universe, and in that theory at least they were correct, I knew, remembering the former world I had left – the swirling, expanding wisp of gaseous atmosphere of which this tiny blue sphere was an electron. Yes, their ‘expanding universe’ theory was indeed correct. But very few of their thinkers went beyond their own immediate universe – went deeply enough to even remotely glimpse the vast truth.

They had vast cities, yes. I had seen many of them from my height as I towered above their world. A great civilisation, I had thought then. But now I know that great cities do not make great civilisations. I am disappointed at what I have found here, and cannot even understand why I should be disappointed, for this blue sphere is nothing to me and soon I will be gone on my eternal journey downward …

Many things I read in these scientists’ minds – things clear and concise, things dim and remote; but they would never know.

And then in the mind of one of the persons, I read an idea. He went away, and returned shortly with an apparatus consisting of wires, a headphone, and a flat revolving disc. He spoke into an instrument, a sort of amplifier. Then a few minutes later he touched a sharp, pointed instrument to the rotating disc, and I heard the identical sounds reproduced which he had spoken. A very crude method, but effective in a certain way. They wanted to register my speech so that they would have at least something to work on when I had gone.

I tried to speak some of my old language into the instrument. I had thought I was beyond all surprises, but I was surprised at what happened. For nothing happened. I could not speak. Neither in the old familiar language I had known so long ago, nor in any kind of sound. I had communicated so entirely by thought transference on so many of the other worlds that now my power of vocal utterance was gone.

They were disappointed. I was not sorry, for they could not have deciphered any language so utterly alien as mine was.

Then they resorted to the mathematics by which this universe and all universes are controlled; into which mathematical mould the eternal All was cast at the beginning and has moved errorlessly since. They produced a great chart which showed the conglomerated masses of this and other galaxies. Then upon a black panel set in the wall was drawn a circle – understandable in any universe – and around it ten smaller circles. This was evidently their solar system, though I could not understand why they drew but ten circles when I had seen twelve planets from outer space. Then a tiny spot was designated on the chart, the position of this system in its particular galaxy. Then they handed the chart to me.

It was useless. Utterly impossible. How could I ever indicate my own universe, much less my galaxy and solar system, by such puny methods as these? How could I make them know that my own universe and planet were so infinitely large in the scheme of things that *theirs* were practically non-existent? How could I make them know that their universe was not *outside* my own, but *on my planet*? – superimposed in a block of metal on a laboratory table, in a grain of sand, in the atoms of glass in a microscopic slide, in a drop of water, in a blade of grass, in a bit of cold flame, in a thousand other variations of elements and substances all of which I had passed down into and beyond, and finally in a wisp of gas that was the cause of their ‘expanding universe.’ Even could I have conversed with them in their own language, I could not have made them grasp the vastness of all those substances existing on worlds each of which was but an electron of an atom in one of trillions upon trillions of molecules of an infinitely larger world! Such a conception would have shattered their minds.

It was very evident that they would never be able to establish communication with me even remotely, nor I with them; and I was becoming very impatient. I wanted to be out of the stifling building, out under the night sky, free and unhampered in the vast space which was my abode.

Upon seeing that I made no move to indicate on the chart which part of their puny universe I came from, the scientists around me again conversed among themselves; and this time I was amazed at the trend of their thoughts.

For the conclusion which they had reached was that I was some freak of outer space which had somehow wandered here, and that my place in the scale of evolution was too far below their own for them to establish ideas with me either by spoken language (of which they concluded I had none) or by signs (which I was apparently too barbaric to understand)!! This – this was their unanimous conclusion! This, because I had not uttered any language for them to record, and because the chart of their universe was utterly insignificant to me! Never did it occur to them that the opposite might be true – that I might converse with them but for the fact that their minds were too weak to register my thoughts!

Disgust was my reaction to these short-sighted conclusions of their unimaginable minds – disgust which gave way to an old emotion, that of anger.

And as that one impulsive, rising burst of anger flooded my mind, a strange thing happened:

Every one of the scientists before me dropped to the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

My mind had, indeed, become much more penetrative than ever before. No doubt my surge of anger had sent out intangible waves which had struck upon their centres of consciousness with sufficient force to render them insensible.

I was glad to be done with them. I left the four walls of the building, emerged into the glorious expansive night under the stars and set out along the street in a direction that I believed would lead me away from the city. I wanted to get away from it, away from this world and the people who inhabited it.

As I advanced along the streets, all who saw me recognised me at once and most of them fled unreasonably for safety. A group of persons in one of the vehicles tried to bar my progress, but I exercised my power of anger upon them; they drooped senselessly and their vehicle crashed into a building and was demolished.

In a few minutes the city was behind me and I was striding down one of the roads, destination unknown; nor did it matter, except that now I was free and alone as it should be. I had but a few more hours on this world.

And then it was that the *feeling* came upon me again, the strange feeling that I had experienced twice before: once when I had selected the tiny orange sun from among the millions of others, and again when I had chosen this tiny blue planet. Now I felt it for a third time, more strongly than ever, and now I knew that this feeling had some very definite purpose for being. It was as though something, some power beyond question, drew me irresistibly to it; I could not resist, nor did I want to. This time it was very strong and very near.

Peering into the darkness along the road, I saw a light some distance ahead and to the left, and I knew that I must go to that light.

When I had come nearer, I could see that it emanated from a house set far back in a grove of trees, and I approached it without hesitation. The night was warm, and a pair of double windows opened upon a well-lighted room. In this room was a man.

I stepped inside and stood motionless, not yet knowing why I should have been drawn there.

The man's back was toward me. He was seated before a square dialled instrument, and seemed to be listening intently to some report coming from it. The sounds from the box were unintelligible to me, so I turned my attention to reading the man's mind as he listened, and was not surprised to learn that the reports concerned myself.

“– casualties somewhat exaggerated, though the property damage has reached millions of dollars,” came the news from the box. “Cleveland was of course hardest hit, though not unexpectedly, astronomical computators having estimated with fair accuracy the radius of danger. The creature landed in Lake Erie only a few miles east of the city. At the contact the waters rose over the breakwater with a rush and inundated nearly one-third of the city before receding, and it was well that the greater part of the populace had heeded the advance warnings and fled … all lake towns in the vicinity have reported heavy property damage, and cities as far east as Erie, and as far west as Toledo, have reported high flood waters … all available Government combat planes were rushed to the scene in case the creature should show signs of hostility … scientific men who have awaited the thing's landing for months immediately chartered planes for Cleveland … despite the elaborate cordons of police and militiamen, the crowds broke through and entered the area, and within an hour after the landing roads in every direction were congested with traffic … for several hours scientists circled and examined the creature in planes, while its unbelievable shrinkage continued … the only report we have from them is that, aside from the contour of its great bell-shaped torso, the creature is quite amazingly correct anatomically … an unofficial statement from Dr. Hilton U. Cogsworthy of the Alleghany Biological Society, is to the effect that such a creature *isn't*. That it cannot possibly exist. That the whole thing is the result of some kind of mass hypnotism on a gigantic scale. This, of course, in lieu of some reasonable explanation … many persons would like to believe the ‘mass hypnotism’ theory, and many always will; but those who have seen it and taken photographs of it from every angle know that it does exist and that its steady shrinking goes on … Professor James L. Harvey of Miami University has suffered a stroke of temporary insanity and is under the care of physicians. The habitual curiosity seekers who flocked to the scene are apparently more

hardened … the latest report is that the creature, still very large, has been transported under heavy guard to the Cleveland Institute of Scientific Research, where is gathered every scientist of note east of the Mississippi … stand by for further news flashes …”

The voice from the box ceased, and as I continued to read the mind of the man whose back was toward me, I saw that he was deeply absorbed in the news he had heard. And the mind of this person was something of a puzzle to me. He was above the average intelligence of those on this world, and was possessed of a certain amount of fundamental scientific knowledge; but I could see immediately that his was not a scientifically trained mind. By profession he was a writer – one who recorded fictitious ‘happenings’ in the written language, so that others might absorb and enjoy them.

And as I probed into his mind I was amazed at the depth of the imagination there, a trait almost wholly lacking in those others I had encountered, the scientists. And I knew that at last here was one with whose mind I might contact … here was one who was different from the others … who went deeper … who seemed on the very edge of the truth. Here was one who thought: “– this strange creature, which has landed here … alien to anything we have ever known … might it not be alien even to our universe? … the strange shrinking … from that phenomenon alone we might conclude that it has come an inconceivable distance … its shrinking may have begun hundreds, thousands of years ago … and if we could but communicate with it, before it passes from Earth forever, what strange sights might it not tell us!”

The voice came from the box again, interrupting these thoughts in his mind.

“Attention! Flash! The report comes that the alien space-creature, which was taken to the Scientific Research Institute for observation by scientists, has escaped, after projecting a kind of invisible mind force which rendered unconscious all those within reach. The creature was reported seen by a number of persons after it left the building. A police squad car was wrecked as a direct result of the creature’s ‘mind force,’ and three policemen were injured, none seriously. It was last seen leaving the city by the north-east, and all persons are ordered to be on the lookout and to report immediately if it is sighted.”

Again the report from the box ceased, and again I probed into the man’s mind, this time deeper, hoping to establish a contact with it which would allow for thought-communication.

I must have at least aroused some hidden mind-instinct, for he whirled to face me, overturning his chair. Surprise was on his face, and something in his eyes that must have been fear.

“Do not be alarmed,” I flashed. “Be seated again.”

I could see that his mind had not received my thought. But he must have known from my manner that I meant no harm, for he resumed his seat. I advanced further into the room, standing before him. The fear had gone out of his eyes and he only sat tensely staring at me, his hands gripping the arms of the chair.

“I know that you would like to learn things about myself,” I telepathed; “things which those others – your scientists – would have liked to know.”

Reading his mind, I could see that he had not received the thought, so I probed even deeper and again flashed the same thought. This time he did receive it, and there was an answering light in his eyes.

He said “Yes,” aloud.

“Those others, your scientists,” I went on, “would never have believed nor even understood my story, even if their minds were of the type to receive my thoughts, which they are

not.”

He received and comprehended that thought, too, but I could see that this was a great strain on his mind and could not go on for long.

“Yours is the only mind I have encountered here with which I could establish thought,” I continued, “but even now it is becoming weakened under the unaccustomed strain. I wish to leave my record and story with you, but it cannot be by this means. I can put your mind under a hypnotic influence and impress my thoughts upon your subconscious mind, if you have some means of recording them. But you must hurry; I have only a few more hours here at the most, and in your entire lifetime it would be impossible for me to record all that I could tell.”

I could read doubt in his mind. But only for one instant did he hesitate. Then he rose and went to a table where there was a pile of smooth white paper and a sharp pointed instrument – pen – for recording my thoughts in words of his own language.

“I am ready,” was the thought in his mind.

* * * *

So I have told my story. Why? I do not know, except that I wanted to. Of all the universes I have passed into, only on this blue sphere have I found creatures even remotely resembling myself. And they are a disappointment; and now I know that I shall never find others of my kind. Never, unless –

I have a theory. Where is the beginning or the end of the eternal All I have been traversing? Suppose there is none? Suppose that, after traversing a few more atomic cycles, I should enter a universe which seemed somehow familiar to me; and that I should enter a certain familiar galaxy, and approach a certain sun, a certain planet – and find that I was back where I started from so long ago: back on my own planet, where I should find the Professor in the laboratory, still receiving my sight and sound impressions! An insane theory; an impossible one. It shall never be.

Well, then, suppose that after leaving this sphere –after descending into another atomic universe – I should choose *not to alight on any planet*? Suppose I should remain in empty space, my size constantly diminishing? That would be one way of ending it all, I suppose. Or would it? Is not my body matter, and is not matter infinite, limitless, eternal? How, then, could I ever reach a ‘nothingness’? It is hopeless. I am eternal. My mind, too, must be eternal, or it would surely have snapped long ago at such concepts.

I am so very small that my mind is losing contact with the mind of him who sits here before me writing these thoughts in words of his own language, though his mind is under the hypnotic spell of my own and he is oblivious to the words he writes. I have clambered upon the top of the table beside the pile of pages he has written, to bring my mind closer to his. But why should I want to continue the thought-contact for another instant? My story is finished; there is nothing more to tell.

I shall never find others of my kind … I am alone … I think that soon, in some manner, I shall try to put an end to it …

I am so very small now … the hypnosis is passing from his mind … I can no longer control it … the thought-contact is slipping …

EPILOGUE

National Press-Radio Service, Sept. 29, 1937 (through Cleveland *Daily Clarion*): – Exactly one

year ago today was a day never to be forgotten in the history of this planet. On that day a strange visitor arrived – and departed.

On September 29, 1936, at 3:31 P.M., that thing from outer space known henceforth only as ‘The Alien’ landed in Lake Erie near Cleveland, causing not so much destruction and terror as great bewilderment and awe, scientists being baffled in their attempts to determine whence it came and the secret of its strange steady shrinkage.

Now, on the anniversary of that memorable day, we are presenting to the public a most unusual and interesting document purported to be a true account and history of that strange being, The Alien. This document was presented to us only a few days ago by Stanton Cobb Lentz, renowned author of ‘The Answer to the Ages and other serious books, as well as scores of short stories and books of the widely popular type of literature known as science-fiction.

You have read the above document. While our opinion as to its authenticity is frankly sceptical, we shall print Mr. Lentz’s comment and let you, the reader, judge for yourself whether the story was related to Mr. Lentz by The Alien in the manner described, or whether it is only a product of Mr. Lentz’s most fertile imagination.

“On the afternoon of September 29 a year ago,” states Mr. Lentz, “I fled the city as did many others, heeding the warning of a possible tidal wave, should The Alien land in the lake. Thousands of persons had gathered five or six miles to the south, and from there we watched the huge shape overhead, so expansive that it blotted out the sunlight and plunged that section of the country into a partial eclipse. It seemed to draw nearer by slow degrees until, about 3:30 o’clock, it began its downward rush. The sound of contact as it struck the lake was audible for miles, but it was not until later that we learned the extent of the flood. After the landing all was confusion and excitement as combat planes arrived and very foolishly began to bombard the creature and crowds began to advance upon the scene. The entire countryside being in such crowded turmoil, it took me several difficult hours to return to my home. There I listened to the varied reports of the happenings of the past several hours.

“When I had that strange feeling that someone was behind me, and when I whirled to see The Alien standing there in the room, I do not presume to say that I was not scared. I was. I was very much scared. I had seen The Alien when it was five or six hundred feet tall – but that had been from afar. Now it was only eleven or twelve feet tall, but was standing right before me. But my sacredness was only momentary, for something seemed to enter and calm my mind.

“Then, although there was no audible sound, I became aware of the thought: ‘I know that you would like to learn things about myself, things which those others – your scientists – would have liked to know.’

“This was mental telepathy! I had often used the theory in my stories, but never had I dreamed that I would experience such a medium of thought in real fact. But here it was.

“‘Those others, your scientists,’ came the next thought, ‘would never have believed nor even understood my story, even if their minds were of the type to receive my thoughts, which they are not.’ And then I began to feel a strain upon my mind, and knew that I could not stand much more of it.

“Then came the thought that he would relate his story through my subconscious mind if I had some means of recording it in my own language. For an instant I hesitated; then I realised that time was fleeing and never again would I have such an opportunity as this. I went to my desk, where only that morning I had been working on a manuscript. There was paper and ink in plenty.

"My last impression was of some force seeming to spread over my mind; then a terrific dizziness, and the ceiling seemed to crash upon me.

"No time at all had seemed to elapse, when my mind regained its normal faculties; but before me on the desk was a pile of manuscript paper closely written in my own longhand. And — what many persons will find it hard to believe — standing upon that pile of written paper upon my desk top was The Alien — now scarcely two inches in height — and steadily and surely diminishing! In utter fascination I watched the transformation that was taking place before my eyes — watched until The Alien had become entirely invisible. Had descended down into the topmost sheet of paper there on my desk …

"Now I realise that the foregoing document and my explanation of it will be received in many ways. I have waited a full year before making it public. Accept it now as fiction if you wish. There may be some few who will see the truth of it, or at least the possibility; but the vast majority will leap at once to the conclusion that the whole thing is a concoction of my own imagination; that, taking advantage of The Alien's landing on this planet, I wrote the story to fit the occasion, very appropriately using The Alien as the main theme. To many this will seem all the more to be true, in face of the fact that in most of my science-fiction stories I have poked ridicule and derision and satire at mankind and all its high vaunted science and civilisation and achievements — always more or less with my tongue in my cheek, however, as the expression has it. And then along comes this Alien, takes a look at us and concludes that he is very disappointed, not to mention disgusted.

"However, I wish to represent a few facts to help substantiate the authenticity of the script. Firstly: for some time after awakening from my hypnosis I was beset by a curious dizziness, though my mind was quite clear. Shortly after The Alien had disappeared I called my physician, Dr. C.M. Rollins. After an examination and a few mental tests he was greatly puzzled. He could not diagnose my case; my dizziness was the after-effect of a hypnosis of a type he had never before encountered. I offered no explanation except to say that I had not been feeling well for the past several days.

"Secondly: the muscles of my right hand were so cramped from the long period of steady writing that I could not open my fingers. As an explanation I said that I had been writing for hours on the final chapters of my latest book, and Dr. Rollins said: "Man, you must be crazy." The process of relaxing the muscles was painful.

"Upon my request, Dr. Rollins will vouch for the truth of the above statements.

"Thirdly: when I read the manuscript, the writing was easily recognisable as my own free, swinging longhand up to the last few paragraphs, when the writing became shaky, the last few words terminating in an almost undecipherable scrawl as The Alien's contact with my mind slipped away.

Fourthly: I presented the manuscript to Mr. Howard A. Byerson, fiction editor of the National Newspaper Syndicate Service, and at once he misunderstood the entire idea. "I have read your story, Mr. Lentz," he said a few days later, "and it certainly comes at an appropriate time, right on the anniversary of The Alien's landing. A neat idea about the origin of The Alien, but a bit farfetched. Now, let's see about the price; of course, we shall syndicate your story through our National Newspaper chain and —"

"You have the wrong idea," I said. "It is not a story, but a true history of The Alien as related to me by The Alien, and I wish that fact emphasised: if necessary, I will write a letter of explanation to be published with the manuscript. And I am not selling you the publication rights; I am merely giving you the document as the quickest and surest way of presenting it to the public."

“‘But surely you are not serious? An appropriate story by Stanton Cobb Lentz, on the eve of the anniversary of The Alien’s landing, is a scoop; and you –’

“‘I do not ask and will not take a cent for the document,’ I said; ‘you have it now; it is yours, so do with it as you see fit.’

“A memory that will live with me always is the sight of The Alien as last seen by me – as last seen on this earth – as it disappeared into infinite smallness there upon my desk – waving two arms upward as if in farewell …

“And whether the above true account and history of The Alien be received as such, or as fiction, there can be no doubt that on a not far off September, a thing from some infinite sphere above landed on this earth – and departed.”

The End