

THE SANDS OF TIME

by
P. Schuyler Miller

CONTENTS

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Suppose archaeological research uncovered extraterrestrial traces in the Cretaceous? Adventure in the age of the dinosaurs.

1

A long shadow fell across the ledge. I laid down the curved blade with which I was chipping at the soft sandstone, and squinted up into the glare of the afternoon sun. A man was sitting on the edge of the pit, his legs dangling over the side. He raised a hand in salutation.

"Hi!"

He hunched forward to jump. My shout stopped him.

"Look out! You'll smash them!"

He peered down at me, considering the matter. He had no hat, and the sun made a halo of his blond, curly hair.

"They're fossils, aren't they?" he objected. "Fossils I've seen were stone, and stone is hard. What do you mean— I'll smash 'em?"

"I mean what I said. This sandstone is soft and the bones in it are softer. Also, they're old. Digging out dinosaurs is no pick-and-shovel job nowadays."

"Um-m-m." He rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "How old would you say they were?"

I got wearily to my feet and began to slap the dust out of my breeches.

Evidently I was in for another siege of questions. He might be a reporter, or he might be any one of the twenty-odd farmers in the surrounding section. It would make a difference what I told him.

"Come on down here where we can talk," I invited. "We'll be more comfortable. There's a trail about a hundred yards up the draw."

"I'm all right." He leaned back on braced arms. "What is it? What did it look like?"

I know when I'm beaten. I leaned against the wall of the quarry, out of the sun, and began to fill my pipe. I waved the packet of tobacco courteously at him, but he shook his head.

"Thanks. Cigarette." He lighted one. "You're Professor Belden, aren't you? E. J. Beldan. "E" stands for Ephratah, or some such. Doesn't affect your digging any, though." He exhaled a cloud of smoke. "What's that thing you were using?"

I held it up. "It's a special knife for working out bones like these. The museum's model. When I was your age we used butcher knives and railroad spikes—anything we could get our hands on. There weren't any railroads out here then."

He nodded. "I know. My father dug for 'em. Hobby of his, for a while. Changed over to stamps when he lost his leg." Then with an air of changing the subject. "That thing you're digging out—what did it look like? Alive, I mean."

I had about half of the skeleton worked out. I traced its outline for him with the knife. "There's the skull; there's the neck and spine, and what's left of the tail; this was its left foreleg. You can see the remains of the crest along the top of the skull, and the flat snout like a duck's beak. It's one of many species of trachodon—the duckbilled aquatic dinosaurs. They fed along the shore lines, on water plants and general browse, and some of them were bogged down and drowned."

"I get it. Big bruiser—little, front legs and husky hind ones with a tail like a kangaroo. Sat on it when he got tired. Fin on his head like a fish, and a face like a duck. Did he have scales?"

"I doubt it," I told him. "More likely warts like a toad, or armor plates like an alligator. We've found skin impressions of some of this one's cousins, south of here, and that's what they were like."

He nodded again—that all-knowing nod that gets my eternal goat. He fumbled inside his coat and brought out a little leather folder or wallet, and leafed through its contents. He leaned forward and something white

came scaling down at my feet.

"Like that?" he asked.

I picked it up. It was a photograph, enlarged from a miniature camera shot. It showed the edge of a reedy lake or river, with a narrow, sandy strip of beach and a background of feathery foliage that looked like tree ferns. Thigh-deep in the water, lush lily stalks trailing from its flat jaws, stood a replica of the creature whose skeleton was embedded in the rock at my feet—a trachodon. It was a perfect likeness—the heavy, frilled crest, the glistening skin with its uneven patches of dark tubercles, the small, webbed forepaws on skinny arms.

"Nice job," I admitted. "Is it one of Knight's new ones?"

"Knight?" He seemed puzzled. "Oh—the Museum of Natural History. No—I made it myself."

"You're to be congratulated," I assured him. "I don't know when I've seen a nicer model. What's it for—the movies?"

"Movies?" He sounded exasperated. "I'm not making movies. I made the picture—the photograph. Took it myself—here—or pretty close to here. The thing was alive, and is still for all I know. It chased me."

That was the last straw. "See here," I said, "if you're trying to talk me into backing some crazy publicity stunt, you can guess again. I wasn't born yesterday, and I cut my teeth on a lot harder and straighter science than your crazy newspaper syndicates dish out. I worked these beds before you were born, or your father, either, and there were no trachodons wandering around chasing smart photographers with the dt's and no lakes or tree ferns for 'em to wander in. If you're after a testimonial for some one's model of Cretaceous fauna, say so. That is an excellent piece of work, and if you're responsible you have every right to be proud of it. Only stop this blither about photographing dinosaurs that have been fossils for sixty million years."

The fellow was stubborn. "It's no hoax," he insisted doggedly. "There's no newspaper involved and I'm not peddling dolls. I took that photograph. Your trachodon chased me and I ran. And I have more of the same to prove it! Here."

The folder landed with a thump at my feet. It was crammed with prints like the first—enlargements of Leica negatives—and for sheer realism I have never seen anything like them.

"I had thirty shots," he told me. "I used them all, and they were all beauties. And I can do it again!"

Those prints! I can see them now; landscapes that vanished from this planet millions of years before the first furry tree shrew scurried among the branches of the first temperate forests and became the ancestor of mankind; monsters whose buried bones and fossil footprints are the only mementos of a race of giants vaster than any other creatures that ever walked the earth; there were more of the trachodons—a whole herd of them, it seemed, browsing along the shore of a lake or large river, and they had that individuality that marks the work of the true artist they were Corythosaurs, like the one I was working on—one of the better-known genera of the great family of Trachodons. But the man who had restored them had used his imagination to show details of markings and fleshy structure that I was sure had never been shown by any recorded fossils.

Nor was that all. There were close-ups of plants—trees and low bushes—that were masterpieces of minute detail, even to the point of showing withered fronds, and the insects that walked and stalked and crawled over them. There were vistas of rank marshland scummed over with stringy algae and lush with tall grasses and taller reeds, among which saurian giants wallowed. There were two or three other varieties of Trachodon that I could see, and a few smaller dinosaurs, with a massive bulk in what passed for the distance that might have been a brontosaurus hangover from the Jurassic of a few million years before. I pointed to it.

"You slipped up there," I said. "We've found no traces of that creature so late in the Age of Reptiles. It's a very common mistake, every fantastic novelist makes it when he tries to write a time-traveling story. Tyrannosaurus eats brontosaurus and is then gored to death by Triceratops. The trouble with it is that it couldn't happen."

The boy ground his cigarette butt into the sand. "I don't know about that," he said. "It was there—I photographed it—and that's all there was to it. Tyrannosaurus I didn't see—and I'm not sorry. I've read those yarns you're so supercilious about. Good stuff—they arouse your curiosity and make you think. Triceratops—if he's the chunky devil with three horns sticking out of his head and snout—I got in profusion. You haven't come to him yet. Go down about three more.

I humored him. Sure enough, there was a vast expanse of low rolling plains with some lumpy hills in the distance. The thing was planned very poorly—any student would have laid it out looking toward the typical Cretaceous forest, rather than away from it—but it had the same startling naturalness that the others had. And there were indeed Triceratops in plenty—a hundred or more, grazing stolidly in little family groups of three or four, on a rank prairie grass that grew in great tufts from the sandy

soil.

I guffawed. "Who told you that was right?" I demanded. "Your stuff is good—the best I've ever seen—but it is careless slips like that that spoil everything for the real scientist. Reptiles never herd, and dinosaurs were nothing but overgrown reptiles. Go on—take your pictures to someone who has the time to be amused. I don't find them funny or even interesting."

I stuffed them into the folder and tossed it to him. He made no attempt to catch it. For a moment he sat staring down at me, then in a shower of sand he was beside me. One hobnailed boot gouged viciously across the femur of my dinosaur and the other crashed down among its brittle ribs. I felt the blood go out of my face with anger, then come rushing back. If I had been twenty years younger I would have knocked him off his feet and dared him to come back for more. But he was as red as I.

"Damn it," he cried, "no bald-headed old fuzzy-wuzzy is going to call me a liar twice! You may know a lot about dead bones, but your education with regard to living things has been sadly neglected. So reptiles never herd? What about alligators? What about the Galapagos iguanas? What about snakes? Bah—you can't see any farther than your own nose and never will! When I show you photographs of living dinosaurs, taken with this very camera twenty-four hours ago, not more than three or four miles from where we're standing—well, it's high time you scrap your hidebound, bone-dry theories and listen to a branch of science that's real and living, and always will be. I photographed those dinosaurs! I can do it again—any tune I like. I will do it."

He stopped for breath. I simply looked at him. It's the best way, when some crank gets violent. He colored and grinned sheepishly, then picked up the wallet from where it had fallen at the base of the quarry cut. There was an inner compartment with a covering flap which I had not touched. He rummaged in it with a finger and thumb and brought out a scrap of leathery-looking stuff, porous and coated with a kind of shiny, dried mucous.

"Put a name to it," he demanded.

I turned it over in my palm and examined it carefully. It was a bit of eggshell—undoubtedly a reptilian egg, and a rather large one—but I could tell nothing more.

"It might be an alligator or crocodile egg, or it might have been laid by one of the large oviparous snakes," I told him. "That would depend on where you found it."

I suppose that you will claim that it is a dinosaur egg—a fresh egg."

"I claim nothing," he retorted. "That's for you to say. You're the expert on dinosaurs, not I. But if you don't like that—what about this?"

He had on a hunting jacket and corduroy breeches like mine. From the big side pocket he drew two eggs about the length of my palm—misshapen and gray-white in color, with that leathery texture so characteristic of reptile eggs. He held them up between himself and the sun.

"This one's fresh," he said. "The sand was still moist around the nest. This other is from the place where I got the shell. There's something in it. If you want to, you can open it."

I took it. It was heavy and somewhat discolored at the larger end, where something had pierced the shell. As he had said, there was evidently something inside. I hesitated. I felt that I would be losing face if I took him at his word to open it. And yet—

I squatted down and laying the egg on a block of sandstone beside the weird, crested skull of the Corythosaur, I ripped its leathery shell from end to end.

The stench nearly felled me. The inside was a mass of greenish yellow matter such as only a very long-dead egg can create. The embryo was well advanced, and as I poked around in the noisome mess it began to take definite form. I dropped the knife and with my fingers wiped away the last of the putrid ooze from the twisted, jellylike thing that remained. I rose slowly to my feet and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Where did you get that egg?"

He smiled—that maddening, slow smile. "I told you," he said. "I found it over there, a mile or so, beyond the belt of jungle that fringes the marshes. There were dozens of them—mounds like those that turtles make, in the warm sand. I opened two. One was fresh; the other was full of broken shells—and this." He eyed me quizzically. "And what does the great Professor Belden make of it?"

What he said had given me an idea. "Turtles," I mused aloud. "It could be a turtle—some rare species—maybe a mutation or freak that never developed far enough to really take shape. It must be!"

He sounded weary. "Yes," he said flatly, "it could be a turtle. It isn't but that doesn't matter to you. Those photographs could be fakes, and none-too-clever fakes at that. They show things that couldn't happen—that your damned bone-dry science says are wrong. All right—you've got me. It's your found. But I'm coming back, and I'm coming to bring proof that

will convince you and every other stiff-necked old fuzz-buzz in the world that I, Terence Michael Aloysius Donovan, have stepped over the traces into the middle of the Cretaceous era and lived there, comfortably and happily, sixty million years before I was born!"

He walked away. I heard his footsteps receding up the draw, and the rattle of small stones as he climbed to the level of the prairie. I stood staring down at the greenish mess that was frying in the hot sun on the bright red sandstone. It could have been a turtle, malformed in the embryo so that its carapace formed a sort of rudimentary, flaring shield behind the beaked skull. Or it could be—something else.

If it was that something, all the sanity and logic had gone out of the world, and a boy's mad, pseudoscientific dream became a reality that could not possibly be real. Paradox within paradox—contradiction upon contradiction. I gathered up my tools and started back for camp.

2

During the days that followed we worked out the skeleton of the Corythosaur and swathed it in plaster-soaked burlap for its long journey by wagon, truck, and train back to the museum. I had perhaps a week left to use as I saw fit. But somehow, try as I would, I could not forget the young, blond figure of Terry Donovan, and the two strange eggs that he had pulled out of his pocket.

About a mile up the draw from our camp I found the remains of what had been a beach in Cretaceous times. Where it had not weathered away, every ripple mark and worm burrow was intact. There were tracks—remarkable fine ones—of which any museum would be proud. Dinosaurs, big and little, had come this way, millions of years ago, and left the mark of their passing in the moist sand, to be buried and preserved to arouse the apish curiosity of a race whose tiny, hairy ancestors were still scrambling about on all fours.

Beyond the beach had been marshes and a quicksand. Crumbling white bones protruded from the stone in incalculable profusion, massed and jumbled into a tangle that would require years of careful study to unravel. I stood with a bit of crumbling bone in my hand, staring at the mottled rock. A step sounded on the talus below me. It was Donovan.

Some of the cocksure exuberance had gone out of him. He was thinner and his face was covered with a stubbly growth of beard. He wore shorts and a tattered shirt, and his left arm was strapped to his side with bands of some gleaming metallic cloth. Dangling from the fingers of his good hand was the strangest bird I have ever seen.

He flung it down at my feet. It was purplish black with a naked red head and wattled neck. Its tail was feathered as a sumac is leafed, with stubby feathers sprouting in pairs from a naked, ratty shaft. Its wings had little three-fingered hands at the joints. And its head was long and narrow, like a lizard's snout, with great, round, lidless eyes and a mouthful of tiny yellow teeth.

I looked from the bird to him. There was no smile on his lips now. He was staring at the footprints of the rock.

"So you've found the beach." His voice was a weary monotone. "It was a sort of sandy spit, between the marshes and the sea, where they came to feed and be fed on. Dog eat dog. Sometimes they would blunder into the quicksands and flounder and bleat until they drowned. You see—I was there. That bird was there—alive when those dead, crumbling bones were alive—not only in the same geological age but in the same year, the same month—the same day! You've got proof now—proof that you can't talk away! Examine it Cut it up. Do anything you want with it. But by the powers, this time you've got to believe me! This time you've got to help!"

I stooped and picked the thing up by its long scaly legs. No bird like it had lived, or could have lived, on this planet for millions of years. I thought of those thirty photographs of the incredible—of the eggs he had had, one of them fresh, one with an embryo that might, conceivably, have been an unknown genus of turtle.

"All right," I said. "I'll come. What do you want?"

He lived three miles away across the open prairie. The house was a modernistic metal box set among towering cottonwoods at the edge of a small reservoir. A power house at the dam furnished light and electricity—all that he needed to bring civilized comfort out of the desert.

One wing of the house was windowless and sheer-walled with blower vents at intervals on the sloping roof. A laboratory, I guessed. Donovan unlocked a steel door in the wall and pushed it open. I stepped past him into the room.

It was bare. A flat-topped desk stood in the corner near the main house, with a shelf of books over it. A big switchboard covered the opposite wall, flanked by two huge DC generators. There were cupboards and a long worktable littered with small apparatus. But a good half of the room was empty save for the machine that squatted in the middle of the concrete floor.

It was like a round, lead egg, ten feet high and half as broad. It was set in a cradle of steel girders, raised on massive insulators. Part of it stood open like a door, revealing the inside—a chamber barely large enough to hold a man, with a host of dials and switches set in an insulated panel in the leaden wall, and a flat bakelite floor. Heavy cables came out of that floor to the instrument board, and two huge, copper bus bars were clamped to the steel base.

The laboratory was filled with the drone of the generators, charging some hidden battery, and there was a faint tang of ozone in the air.

Donovan shut and locked the door. "That's the Egg," he said, "I'll show it to you later, after you've heard me out. Will you help me with this arm of mine, first?"

I cut the shirt away and unwrapped the metallic gauze that held the arm tight against his body. Both bones of the forearm were splintered and the flesh gashed as though by jagged knives. The wound had been cleaned, and treated with some bright green antiseptic whose odor I did not recognize. The bleeding had stopped, and there was none of the inflammation that I should have expected.

He answered my unspoken question. "She fixed it up— Lana. One of your little playmates—the kind I didn't see the first time—wanted to eat me." He was rummaging in the bottom drawer of the desk. "There's no clean cloth here," he said. "I haven't time to look in the house. You'll have to use that again."

"Look here," I protested, "you can't let a wound like that go untreated. It's serious. You must have a doctor."

He shook his head. "No time. It would take a doctor two hours to get out here from town. He'd need another hour, or more, to fool around with me. In just forty minutes my accumulators will be charged to capacity, and in forty-one I'll be gone—back there. Make a couple of splints out of that orange crate in the corner and tie me up again. It'll do—for as long as I'll be needing it."

I split the thin boards and made splints, made sure that the bones were set properly and bound them tightly with the strange silvery cloth, then looped the loose ends in a sling around his neck. I went into the house to get him clean clothes. When I returned he was stripped, scrubbing himself at the laboratory sink. I helped him clamber into underwear, a shirt and breeches, pull on high-top shoes. I plugged in an electric razor and sat watching him as he ran it over his angular jaw.

He was grinning now. "You're all right, professor," he told me. "Not a

question out of you, and I'll bet you've been on edge all the while. Well—I'll tell you everything. Then you can take it or leave it.

"Look there on the bench behind you—that coiled spring. It's a helix—a spiral made up of two-dimensional cross sections twisted in a third dimension. If you make two marks on it, you can go from one to the other by traveling along the spring, round and round, for about six inches. Or you can cut across from one spiral to the next. Suppose your two marks come right together—so. They're two inches apart, along the spring—and no distance at all if you cut across.

"So much for that. You know Einstein's picture of the universe—space and time tied up together in some kind of four-dimensional continuum that's warped and bent in all sorts of weird ways by the presence of matter. Maybe closed and maybe not. Maybe expanding like a balloon and maybe shrinking like a melting hailstone. Well—I know what that shape is. I've proved it. It's spiraled like that spring—spiraled in time!

"See what that means? Look—I'll show you. This first scratch here in the spring, is today—now. Here will be tomorrow, a little further along the wire. Here's next year. And here is some later time, one full turn of the coil away, directly above the first mark.

"Now watch. I can go from today to tomorrow—to next year—like this by traveling with time along the spring. That's what the world is doing. Only by the laws of physics —entropy and all that—there's no going back. It's one-way traffic. And you can't get ahead any faster than time wants to take you. That's if you follow the spring. But you can cut across!

"Look—here are the two marks I just made, now and two years from now. They're two inches apart, along the coiled wire, but when you compress the spring they are together—nothing between them but the surface of the two coils. You can stretch a bridge across from one to the other, so to speak, and walk across—into a time two years from now. Or you can go the other way, two years into the past.

"That's all there is to it. Time is coiled like a spring. Some other age in earth's history lies next to ours, separated only by an intangible boundary, a focus of forces that keeps us from seeing into it and falling into it. Past time—present time—future time, side by side. Only it's not two years, or three, or a hundred. It's sixty million years from now to then the long way around!

"I said you could get from one coil of time to the next one if you build a bridge across. I built that bridge—the Egg. I set up a field of forces in it—no matter how—that dissolve the invisible barrier between our time

and the next. I give it an electromagnetic shove that sends it in the right direction, forward or back. And I land sixty million years in the past, in the age of dinosaurs."

He paused, as if to give me a chance to challenge him. I didn't try. I am no physicist, and if it was as he said—if time was really a spiral, with adjacent coils lying side by side, and if his leaden Egg could bridge the gap between— then the pictures and the eggs and the bird were possible things. And they were more than possible. I had seen them.

"You can see that the usual paradoxes don't come in at all," Donovan went on. "About killing your grandfather, and being two places at once—that kind of thing. The time screw has a sixty-million-year pitch. You can slide from coil to coil, sixty million years at a time, but you can't cover any shorter distance without living it. If I go back or ahead sixty million years, and live there four days, I'll get back here next Tuesday, four days from now. As for going ahead and learning all the scientific wonders of the future, then coming back to change the destiny of humanity, sixty million years is a long time. I doubt that there'll be anything human living then. And if there is—if I do learn their secrets and come back—it will be because their future civilization was built on the fact that I did so. Screwy as it sounds, that's how it is."

He stopped and sat staring at the dull gray mass of the Egg. He was looking back sixty million years into an age when giant dinosaurs ruled the earth. He was watching herds of Triceratops grazing on the Cretaceous prairie— seeing unsuspected survivors of the genus that produced Brontosaurus and his kin, wallowing in some protected swamp—seeing rat-tailed, purple-black Archaeopteryx squawking in the tree ferns. And he was seeing more!

"I'll tell you the whole story," he said. "You can believe it or not, as you like. Then I'll go back. After that—well, maybe you'll write the end, and maybe not. Sixty million years is a long time!"

He told me: how he hit on his theory of spiraled time; how he monkeyed around with the mathematics of the thing until it hung together—built little models of machines that swooped into nothingness and disappeared; how he made the Egg, big enough to hold a man, yet not too big for his generators to provide the power to lift it and him across the boundary between the coils of time—and back again; how he stepped out of the close, cramped chamber of the Egg into a world of steaming swamps and desert plains, sixty million years before mankind!

That was when he took the pictures. It was when the Corythosaur

chased him, bleating and bellowing like a monster cow, when he disturbed its feeding. He lost it among the tree ferns, and wandered warily through the bizarre, luxurious jungle, batting at great mosquitoes the size of horseflies and ducking when giant dragon flies zoomed down and seized them in midair. He watched a small hornless dinosaur scratch a hole in the warm sand at the edge of the jungle and ponderously lay a clutch of twenty eggs. When she had waddled away, he took one—the fresh one he had showed me—and scratched out another from a nest that had already hatched. He had photographs—he had specimens—and the sun was getting low. Some of the noises from the salt marshes along the seashore were not very reassuring. So he came back. And I laughed at him and his proofs, and called him a crazy fake! He went back. He had a rifle along this time—a huge thing that his father had used on elephants in Africa. I don't know what he expected to do with it. Shoot a Triceratops, maybe—since I wouldn't accept his photographs—and hack off its ungainly, three-horned head for a trophy. He could never have brought it back, of course, because it was a tight enough squeeze as it was to get himself and the big rifle into the Egg. He had food and water in a pack—he didn't much like the look of the water that he had found "over there"—and he was in a mood to stay until he found something that I and every one like me would have to accept.

Inland, the ground rose to a range of low hills along the horizon. Back there, he reasoned, there would be creatures a little smaller than the things he had seen buoying up their massive hulks in the sea and marshes. So, shutting the door of the Egg and heaping cycad fronds over it to hide it from inquisitive dinosaurs, he set out across the plain toward the west.

The Triceratops herds paid not the slightest attention to him. He doubted that they could see him unless he came very close, and then they ignored him. They were herbivorous, and anything his size could not be an enemy. Only once, when he practically fell over a tiny, eight-foot calf napping in the tall grass, did one of the old ones emit a snuffling, hissing roar and come trotting toward him with its three sharp spikes lowered and its little eyes red.

There were many small dinosaurs, light and fleet of foot, that were not so unconcerned with his passage. Some of them were big enough to make him feel distinctly uneasy, and he fired his first shot in self-defense when a creature the size of an ostrich leaned forward and came streaking at him with obviously malicious intent. He blew its head off at twenty paces, and had to duck the body that came clawing and scampering after him. It blundered on in a straight line, and when it finally collapsed he cooked

and ate it over a fire of dead grass. It tasted like iguana, he said, and added that iguana tasted a lot like chicken.

Finally, he found a stream running down from the hills, and took to its bed for greater safety. It was dry, but in the baked mud were the tracks of things that he hadn't seen and didn't want to see. He guessed, from my description, that they had been made by Tyrannosaurus or something equally big and dangerous.

Incidentally, I have forgotten the most important thing of all. Remember that Donovan's dominating idea was to prove to me, and to the world, that he had been in the Cretaceous and hobnobbed with its flora and fauna. He was a physicist by inclination, and had the physicist's flair for ingenious proofs. Before leaving, he loaded a lead cube with three quartz quills of pure radium chloride that he had been using in a previous experiment, and locked the whole thing up in a steel box. He had money to burn, and besides, he expected to get them back.

The first thing he did when he stepped out of the Egg on that fateful second trip was to dig a deep hole in the packed sand of the beach, well above high tide, and bury the box. He had seen the fossil tracks and ripple marks in the sandstone near his house, and guessed rightly enough that they dated from some time near the age to which he had penetrated. If I, or some one equally trustworthy, were to dig that box up one time coil later, he would not only have produced some very pretty proof that he had traveled in time—his name and the date were inside the cube—but an analysis of the radium, and an estimate of how much of it had turned into lead, would show how many years had elapsed since he buried it. In one fell swoop he would prove his claim, and give the world two very fundamental bits of scientific information: an exact date for the Cretaceous period and the "distance" between successive coils in the spiral of time.

The stream bed finally petered out in a gully choked with boulders. The terrain was utterly arid and desolate, and he began to think that he had better turn back. There was nothing living to be seen, except for some small mammals like brown mice that got into his pack the first night and ate the bread he was carrying. He pegged a rock at them, but they vanished among the boulders, and an elephant gun was no good for anything their size. He wished he had a mousetrap. Mice were something that he could take back in his pocket.

3

The morning of the second day some birds flew by overhead. They were

different from the one he killed later—more like sea gulls—and he got the idea that beyond the hills, in the direction they were flying, there would be either more wooded lowlands or an arm of the sea. As it turned out, he was right.

The hills were the summit of a ridge like the spine of Italy, jutting south into the Cretaceous sea. The sea had been higher once, covering the sandy waste where the Triceratops herds now browsed, and there was a long line of eroded limestone cliffs, full of the black holes of wave-worn caves. From their base he looked back over the desert plain with its fringe of jungle along the shore of the sea. Something was swimming in schools, far out toward the horizon—something as big as whales, he thought—but he had forgotten to bring glasses and he could not tell what they were. He set about finding a way to climb the escarpment.

Right there was where he made his first big mistake. He might have known that what goes up has to come down again on the other side. The smart thing to do would have been to follow the line of the cliffs until he got into the other valley, or whatever lay beyond. Instead, he slung his gun around his neck and climbed.

The summit of the cliffs was a plateau, hollowed out by centuries of erosion into a basin full of gaudy spires of rock—with the green stain of vegetation around their bases. There was evidently water and there might be animals that he could photograph or kill. Anything he found up here, he decided, would be pretty small.

He had forgotten the caves. They were high-arched, wave-eaten tunnels that extended far back into the cliffs, and from the lay of the land it was probable that they opened on the inside as well. Besides, whatever had lived on the plateau when it was at sea level had presumably been raised with it and might still be in residence. Whether it had wandered in from outside, or belonged there, it might be hungry—very hungry. It was.

There was a hiss that raised the short hair all along his spine. The mice that he had shied rocks at had heard such hisses and passed the fear of them down to their descendents, who eventually became his remote ancestors. And they had cause for fear! The thing that lurched out of the rocky maze, while it didn't top him by more than six feet and had teeth that were only eight inches long, was big enough to swallow him in three quick gulps, gun and all.

He ran. He ran like a rabbit. He doubled into crannies that the thing couldn't cram into and scrambled up spires of crumbling rock that a monkey would have found difficult, but it knew short cuts and it was

downwind from him and it thundered along behind with very few yards to spare. Suddenly he popped out of a long, winding corridor onto a bare ledge with a sheer drop to a steaming, stinking morass alive with things like crocodiles, only bigger. At the cliffs edge the thing was waiting for him.

One leap and it was between him and the crevice. He backed toward the cliff, raising his rifle slowly. It sat watching him for a moment, then raised its massive tail, teetered forward on its huge hind legs, and came running at him with its tiny foreclaws pumping like a sprinter's fists.

He threw up the gun and fired. The bullet plowed into its throat and a jet of smoking blood sprayed him as its groping claws knocked the rifle from his grasp. Its hideous jaws closed on his upflung left arm, grinding the bones until he screamed. It jerked him up, dangling by his broken arm, ten feet in the air, then the idea of death hit it and it rolled over and lay twitching on the Wood-soaked rock. Its jaws sagged open, and with what strength he had left Donovan dragged himself out of range of its jerking claws. He pulled himself up with his back against a rock and stared into the face of a second monster!

This was the one that had trailed him. The thing that had actually tasted him was a competitor. It came striding out of the shadowy gorge, the sun playing on its bronze armor, and stopped to sniff at the thing Donovan had killed. It rolled the huge carcass over and tore out the belly, then straightened up with great gouts of bloody flesh dribbling from its jaws, and looked Donovan in the eye. Inch by inch, he tried to wedge himself into the crack between the boulders against which he lay. Then it stepped over its deceased relative and towered above him. Its grinning mask swooped down and its foul breath was in his face.

Then it was gone!

It wasn't a dream. There were the rocks—there was the carcass of the other beast—but it was gone! Vanished! In its place a wisp of bluish vapor was dissipating slowly in the sunlight. Vapor—and a voice! A woman's voice, in an unknown tongue.

She stood at the edge of the rocks. She was as tall as he, with very white skin and very black hair, dressed in shining metal cloth that was wound around her like bandage, leaving her arms and one white leg free. She was made like a woman and she spoke like a woman, in a voice that thrilled him in spite of the sickening pain in his arm. She had a little black cylinder in her hand, with a narrowed muzzle and a grip for her fingers, and she was pointing it at him. She spoke again, imperiously, questioning

him. He grinned, tried to drag himself to his feet, and passed out cold.

It was two days before he came to. He figured that out later. It was night. He was in a tent somewhere near the sea, for he could hear it pounding on hard-packed sands. Above its roar there were other noises of the night; mutterings and rumblings of great reptiles, very far away, and now and then a hissing scream of rage. They sounded un-real. He seemed to be floating in a silvery mist, with the pain in his wounded arm throb, throb, throbbing to the rhythm of the sea.

Then he saw that the light was moonlight, and the silver the sheen of the woman's garment. She sat at his feet, in the opening of the tent, with the moonlight falling on her hair. It was coiled like a coronet about her head, and he remembered thinking that she must be a queen in some magic land, like the ones in fairy tales.

Someone moved, and he saw that there were others— men—crouched behind a breastwork of stone. They had cylinders like the one that woman had carried, and other weapons on tripods like parabolic microphones—great, polished reflectors of energy. The wall seemed more for concealment than protection, for he remembered the blasting power of the little cylinder and knew that no mere heap of rock could withstand it. Unless, of course, they were fighting some foe who lacked their science. A foe native to this Cretaceous age—hairy, savage men with stones and clubs.

Realization struck him. There were no men in the Cretaceous. The only mammals were the mouselike marsupials that had robbed his pack. Then—who was the woman and how had she come here? Who were the men who guarded her? Were they—could they be—travelers in time like himself?

He sat up with a jerk that made his head swim. There was a shimmering flowing movement in the moonlight and a small, soft hand was pressed over his mouth, an arm was about his shoulders, easing him back among the cushions. She called out and one of the men rose and came into the tent. He was tall, nearly seven feet, with silvery white hair and a queer-shaped skull. He stared expressionlessly down at Donovan, questioning the woman in that same strange tongue. She answered him, and Donovan felt with a thrill that she seemed worried. The other shrugged—that is, he made a queer, quick gesture with his hands that passed for a shrug—and turned away. Before Donovan knew what was happening, the woman gathered him up in her arms like a babe and

started for the door of the tent.

Terry Donovan is over six feet tall and weighs two hundred pounds. He stiffened like a naughty child. It caught her off guard and they went down with a thud, the woman underneath. It knocked the wind out of her, and Donovan's arm began to throb furiously, but he scrambled to his feet and with his good hand helped her to rise. They stood eyeing each other like sparring cats, and then Terry laughed.

It was a hearty Irish guffaw that broke the tension, but it brought hell down on them. Something spanged on the barricade and went whining over their heads. Something else came arching through the moonlight and fell at their feet—a metal ball the size of his head, whirring like a clock about to strike.

Donovan moved like greased lightning. He scooped the thing up with his good hand and lobbed it high and wide in the direction from which it came, then grabbed the woman and ducked. It burst in midair with a blast of white flame that would have licked them off the face of the earth in a twinkling—and there was no sound, no explosion such as a normal bomb should make! There was no bark of rifles off there in the darkness, though slugs were thudding into the barricade and screaming overhead with unpleasant regularity. The tent was in ribbons, and seeing no reason why it should make a better target than need be, he kicked the pole out from under it and brought it down in a billowing heap.

That made a difference, and he saw why. The material of the tent was evanescent, hard to see. It did something to the light that fell on it, distorted it, acting as a camouflage. But where bullets had torn its fabric, a line of glowing green sparks shone in the night.

The enemy had lost their target, but they had the range. A bullet whined evilly past Donovan's ear as he dropped behind the shelter of the wall. His groping hand found a familiar shape—his rifle. The cartridge belt was with it. He tucked the butt between his knees and made sure that it was loaded, then rose cautiously and peeped over the barricade.

Hot lead sprayed his cheek as a bullet pinged on the stone beside him. There was a cry from the woman. She had dropped to her knees beside the tent, and he could see that the ricochet had cut her arm. The sight of blood on her white skin sent a burning fury surging through him. He lunged awkwardly to his feet, resting the rifle on top of the wall, and peered into the darkness.

Five hundred yards away was the jungle, a wall of utter blackness out of which those silent missiles came. Nothing was visible against its

shadows—or was that a lighter spot that slipped from tree to tree at the very edge of the moonlight? Donovan's cheek nestled against the stock of his gun and his eyes strained to catch that flicker of gray in the blackness. It came—the gun roared—and out of the night rang a scream of pain. A hit!

Twice before sunup he fired at fleeting shadows, without result. Beside him, the oldest of the four men—the one he had seen first—was dressing the woman's wound. It was only a scratch, but Donovan reasoned that in this age of virulent life forms, it was wise to take every precaution. There might be germs that no one had even heard of, lurking everywhere. The others were about his own age, or seemed to be, with the same queer heads and white hair as their companion's. They seemed utterly disinterested in him and what he was doing.

4

As the first rays of the sun began to brighten the sky behind them, Donovan took stock of the situation. Their little fortress was perched on a point of rock overlooking the sea, with the plateau behind it. Salt marshes ran inland as far as he could see, edged with heavy jungle. And in the no-man's-land between the two was the queerest ship he had ever seen.

It was of metal, cigar-shaped, with the gaping mouths of rocket jets fore and after and a row of staring portholes. It was as big as a large ocean vessel and it answered his question about these men whose cause he was championing. They had come from space—from another world!

Bodies were strewn in the open space between the ship and the barricade. One lay huddled against a huge boulder, a young fellow, barely out of his teens as we would gauge it. Donovan's gaze wandered away, then flashed back. The man had moved!

Donovan turned eagerly to the others. They stared at him, blank-faced. He seized the nearest man by the shoulder and pointed. A cold light came into the other's eyes, and Donovan saw his companions edging toward him, their hands on the stubby cylinders of their weapons. He swore. Damn dummies! He flung the rifle down at the woman's sandaled feet and leaped to the top of the wall. As he stood there he was a perfect target, but no shot came. Then he was among the scattered rocks, zigzagging toward the wounded man. A moment later he slid safely into the niche behind the boulder, and lifted the other into a sitting position against his knee. He had been creased— an ugly furrow plowed along his scalp—but he seemed otherwise intact.

Donovan got his good shoulder under the man's armpit and lifted him

bodily. From the hill behind the barricade a shot screamed past his head. Before he could drop to safety a second slug whacked into the body of the man in his arms, and the youth's slim form slumped in death.

Donovan laid him gently down in the shelter of the boulder. He wondered whether this would be the beginning of the end. Under fire from both sides, the little fortress could not hold out for long. A puff of vapor on the hillside told him why the fire was not being returned. The damned cylinders had no range. That was why the enemy was using bullets—air guns, or whatever the things were. All the more reason why he should save his skin while the saving was good. He ducked behind the rock, then straightened up and streaked for the shelter of the trees.

Bullets sang around him and glanced whistling from the rocks. One whipped the sleeve that hung loose at his side and another grooved the leather of his high-top boots. All came from behind—from the hill above the camp—and as he gained the safety of the forest he turned and saw the foe for the first time.

They were deployed in a long line across the top of the ridge behind the camp. They had weapons like fat-barreled rifles, with some bulky contraption at the breach. As he watched they rose and came stalking down the hillside, firing as they came.

They were black, but without the heavy features of a Negro. Their hair was as yellow as corn, and they wore shorts and tunics of copper-colored material. Donovan saw that they were maneuvering toward a spur from which they could fire down into the little fortress and pick off its defenders one by one. With the man at the barricade gone, they would be coming after him. If he started now, he might make his way through the jungle to a point where he could cut back across the hills and reach the Egg. He had a fifty-fifty chance of making it. Only—there was the woman. It was murder to leave her, and suicide to stay.

Fate answered for him. From the barricade he heard the roar of his rifle and saw one of the blacks spin and fall in a heap. The others stood startled, then raced for cover. Before they reached it, two more were down, and Donovan saw the woman's sleek black head thrust above the top of the rocky wall with the rifle butt tucked in the hollow of her shoulder.

That settled it. No one with her gumption was going to say that Terry Donovan had run out on her. Cautiously, he stuck his head out of the undergrowth and looked to left and right. A hundred feet from him one of the blacks lay half in and half out of the forest. One of the outlandish-looking rifles was beside him. Donovan pulled his head back

and began to pry his way through the thick undergrowth.

The Donovan luck is famous. The gun was intact, and with it was a belt case crammed with little metal cubes that had the look of ammunition. He poked the heavy barrel into the air and pushed the button that was set in the butt. There was a crackling whisper, barely audible, and a slug went tearing through the fronds above him. He tried again, and an empty cube popped out into his palm. He examined it carefully. There was a sliding cover that had to be removed before the mechanism of the gun could get at the bullets it contained. He slipped in one of the loaded cubes and tried again. A second shot went whistling into space. Then, tucking the gun under his arm, he set out on a flanking trip of his own.

He knew the range of the weapon he was carrying, if not its nature and he knew how to use it. He knew that if he could swing far around to the east, along the sea, he might come up on the ridge behind the blacks and catch them by surprise. Then, if the gang in the fort would lend a hand, the war was as good as over.

It was easier said than done. A man with one mangled arm strapped to his side, and a twenty-pound rifle in his good hand, is not the world's best mountaineer. He worked his way through the jungle into the lee of the dunes that lay between the cliffs and the beach, then ran like blue blazes until he was out of sight of the whole fracas, cut back inland, took his lip in his teeth and began to climb.

There were places where he balanced on spires the size and sharpness of a needle, or so he said. There were places where he prayed hard and trod on thin air. Somehow he made it and stuck his head out from behind a crimson crag to look down on a very pretty scene.

The ten remaining blacks were holed upon the crest of the ridge. They were within range of the camp, but they didn't dare get up and shoot because of whoever was using the rifle. That "whoever"—the woman, as Donovan had suspected—was out of sight and stalking them from the north just as he was doing from the south. The fighting blood of his Irish ancestors sizzled in his veins. He slid the misshapen muzzle of his weapon out over the top of the rock and settled its butt in the crook of his good arm. He swiveled it around until it pointed in the direction of two of the blacks who were sheltering under the same shallow ledge. Then he jammed down the button and held on.

The thing worked like a machine gun and kicked like one. Before it lashed itself out of his grip one of the foe-men was dead, two were flopping about like fish out of water, and the rest were in full flight. As they sprang

to their feet the woman blazed away at them with the elephant gun. Then the men from the barricade were swarming over the rock wall, cylinders in hand, and mowing the survivors down in a succession of tiny puffs of blue smoke. In a moment it was over.

Donovan made his way slowly down the hillside. The woman was coming to meet him. She was younger than he had thought—a lot younger—but her youth did not soften her. He thought that she might still be a better man than he, if it came to a test. She greeted him in her soft tongue, and held out the rifle. He took it, and as he touched the cold metal a terrific jolt of static electricity knocked him from his feet.

He scrambled up ruefully. The woman had not fallen, but her eyes blazed with fury. Then she saw that he had not acted intentionally, and smiled. Donovan saw now why the blacks wore metal suits. Their weapons built up a static charge with each shot, and unless the gunner was well grounded it would accumulate until it jumped to the nearest conductor. His rubber-soled shoes had insulated him, and the charge built up on him until he touched the barrel of the rifle, whereupon it grounded through the steel and the woman's silvery gown.

They went down the hillside together. Donovan had given the woman the gun he had salvaged, and she was examining it carefully. She called out to the men, who stood waiting for them and they began to search the bodies of the blacks for ammunition. Half an hour later they were standing on the beach in the shadow of the great rocket. The men had carried their equipment from the camp and stowed it away, while Donovan and the woman stood outside bossing the job. That is, she bossed while he watched. Then he recalled who and where he was. Helping these people out in their little feud was one thing, but going off with them, Heaven knew where, was another. He reached down and took the woman's hand.

"I've got to be going," he said.

Of course, she didn't understand a word he said. She frowned and asked some question in her own tongue. He grinned. He was no better at languages than she. He pointed to himself, then up the beach to the east where the Egg should be. He saluted cheerfully and started to walk away. She cried out sharply and in an instant all four men were on him.

He brought up the rifle in a one-handed swing that dropped the first man in his tracks. The gun went spinning out of his hand but before the others could reach him he had vaulted the man's body and caught the

woman to him in a savage, one-armed hug that made her gasp for breath. The men stopped, their ray guns drawn. One second more and he would have been a haze of exploded atoms but none of them dared fire with the woman in the way. Over the top of her sleek head he stared into their cold, hard eyes. Human they might be, but there was blessed little of the milk of human kindness in the way they looked at him.

"Drop those guns," he ordered, "or I'll break her damned neck!" None of them moved. "You hear me!" he barked. "Drop 'em!"

They understood his tone. Three tapering cylinders thudded on the sand. He thrust the woman forward with the full weight of his body and trod them into the sand.

"Get back," he commanded. "Go on. Scram!"

They went. Releasing the woman, he leaped back and snatched up the weapon she had dropped. He poked its muzzle at her slender waist and fitted his fingers cozily about the stock. He jerked his head back, away from the ship.

"You're coming with me," he said.

She stared inscrutably at him for a moment, then, without a word, walked past him and set off up the beach. Donovan followed her. A moment later the dunes had hidden the ship and the three men who stood beside it.

5

Then began a journey every step of which was a puzzle. The girl—for she was really little more—made no attempt to escape. After the first mile Donovan thrust the ray gun into his belt and caught up with her. Hours passed, and still they were slogging wearily along under the escarpment. In spite of the almost miraculous speed with which it was healing, the strain and activity of the past few hours had started his arm throbbing like a toothache. It made him grumpy, and he had fallen behind when a drumming roar made him look up.

It was the rocket ship. It was flying high, but as he looked at it, it swooped down on them with incredible speed. A thousand feet above it leveled off and a shaft of violet light stabbed down, missing the girl by a scant ten feet. Where it hit the sand was a molten pool, and she was running for her life, zigzagging down like a frightened rabbit, streaking for the shelter of the cliffs. With a shout Donovan raced after her.

A mile ahead the ship zoomed and came roaring back at him. A black

hole opened in the face of the cliff. The girl vanished in its shadows, and as the thunder of the rocket sounded unbearably loud in his ears, Donovan dived after her. The ray slashed across the rock above his head and droplets of molten magma seared his back. The girl was crouching against the wall of the cave. When she saw him she plunged into the blackness beyond.

He had had enough of hide and seek. He wanted a showdown and he wanted it now. With a shout, he leaped after the girl's receding figure and caught her by the shoulder, spinning her around.

Instantly he felt like an utter fool. He could say nothing that she could understand. The whole damned affair was beyond understanding. He had strongarmed her into coming with him—and her own men had tried to burn her down. Her—not him. Somehow, by something he had done, he had put her in danger of her life from the only people in the entire universe who had anything in common with her. He couldn't leave her alone in a wilderness full of hungry dinosaurs, with a gang of gunmen on her trail, and he couldn't take her with him. The Egg would barely hold one. He was on a spot, and there was nothing he could do about it.

There was the sound of footsteps on the gravel behind them. In the dim light he saw the girl's eyes go wide. He wheeled. Two men were silhouetted against the mouth of the cave. One of them held a ray gun. He raised it slowly.

Donovan's shoulder flung the girl against the wall. His hand flicked past his waist and held the gun. Twice it blazed and the men were gone in a puff of sparkling smoke. But in that instant, before they were swept out of existence, their guns had exploded in a misdirected burst of energy that brought the roof crashing down in a thundering avalanche, sealing the cave from wall to wall.

The shock flung Donovan to the ground. His wounded arm smashed brutally into the wall and a wave of agony left him white and faint. The echoes of that stupendous crash died away slowly in the black recesses of the cave. Then there was utter silence.

Something stirred beside him. A small soft hand touched his face, found his shoulder, his hand. The girl's voice murmured, pleading. There was something she wanted—something he must do. He got painfully to his feet and awaited her next move. She gently detached the ray gun from his fingers, and before he knew it he was being hustled through utter darkness into the depths of the cave.

He did a lot of thinking on that journey through blackness. He put two and two together and got five or six different answers. Some of them hung together to make sense out of a nightmare.

First, the girl herself. The rocket, and Donovan's faith in a science that he was proving fallible, told him that she must have come from another planet. Her unusual strength might mean that she was from some larger planet, or even some star. At any rate, she was human and she was somebody of importance.

Donovan mulled over that for a while. Two races, from the same or different planets, were thirsting for each other's blood. It might be politics that egged them on, or it might be racial trouble or religion. Nothing else would account for the fury with which they were exterminating each other. The girl had apparently taken refuge with her bodyguard on this empty planet. Possession of her was important. She might be a deposed queen or princess—and the blacks were on her trail. They found her and laid siege—whereupon Terry Donovan came barging into the picture.

That was where the complications began. The girl, reconnoitering had saved him from the dinosaur which was eating him. Anyone would have done as much. She lugged him back to camp. Donovan flushed at the thought of the undignified appearance he must have made—and they patched him up with the miraculous green ointment. Then the scrap began, and he did his part to bring them out on top. Did it damn well, if any one was asking. Donovan didn't belong to their gang and didn't want to, so when they started for home he did likewise. Only it didn't work out that way.

She had ordered her men to jump him. She wanted to hang on to him, whether for romantic reasons, which was doubtful, or because she needed another fighting man. They didn't get very far with their attempt to gang up on him.

That was where the worst of the trouble began.

Grabbing her as he had had been a mistake. Somehow that act of touching her—of doing physical violence to her person—made a difference. It was as though she were a goddess who lost divinity through his violence, or a priestess who was contaminated by his touch. She recognized that fact. She knew then that she would have short shrift at the hands of her own men if she stayed with them. So she came along. Strangely enough, the men did not follow for some time. It was not until they returned to the rocket, until they received orders from whoever was in that rocket, that they tried to kill her.

Whoever was in the rocket! The thought opened new possibilities. A priest, enforcing the taboos of his god. A politician, playing party policy. A traitor, serving the interests of the blacks. None of these did much to explain the girl's own attitude, nor the reason why this assumed potentate, if he was in the rocket during the battle, had done nothing to bring one side or the other to victory. It didn't explain why hours had passed before the pursuit began. And nothing told him what he was going to do with her when they reached the Egg, if they ever did.

The cave floor had been rising for some time when Donovan saw a gleam of light ahead. At once the girl's pace quickened, and she dropped his arm. How, he wondered, had she been able to traverse that pitch-black labyrinth so surely and quickly? Could she see in the dark, or judge her way with some strange sixth sense? It added one more puzzle to the mysteries surrounding her.

He could have danced for joy when they came out into the light. They had passed under the ridge and come out at the foot of the cliffs which he had climbed hours before. The whole landscape was familiar; the gullies in the barren plain, the fringe of swamp and jungle, and the reefs over which the oily sea was breaking. There, a few miles to the north, the Egg was hidden. There was safety—home—for one.

She seemed to know what he was thinking. She laid a reassuring hand on his arm and smiled up at him. This was his party from now on. Then she saw the pain in his eyes. His arm had taken more punishment than most men could have stood and stayed alive. Her nimble fingers peeled away the dressing and gently probed the wound to test the position of the broken bones. Evidently everything was to her liking, for she smiled reassuringly and opened a pouch at her waist, from which she took a little jar of bright-green ointment and smeared it liberally on the wound.

It burned like fire, then a sensuous sort of glow crept through his arm and side, deadening the pain. She wadded the dirty bandages into a ball and threw them away. Then, before Donovan knew what was happening, she had ripped a length of the metallic-looking fabric from her skirt and was binding the arm tightly to his side.

Stepping back, she regarded him with satisfaction, then turned her attention to the gun she had taken from him. A lip of the firing button and an empty cartridge cube popped out into her palm. She looked at him and he at her. It was all the weapon they had, and it was empty. Donovan shrugged. Nothing much mattered anyway. With an answering grimace

she sent it spinning away among the rocks. Side by side, they set off toward the coast and the Egg.

It was the sky that Donovan feared now. Dinosaurs they could outwit or outrun. He thought he could even fight one of the little ones, with her to cheer him on. But heat rays shot at them from the sky, with no cover within miles, was something else again. Strangely enough, the girl seemed to be enjoying herself. Her voice was a joy to hear, even if it didn't make sense, and Donovan thought that he got the drift of her comments on some of the ungainly monstrosities that blemished the Cretaceous landscape.

Donovan had no desire to be in the jungle at night, so they took their time. He had matches, which she examined with curiosity, and they slept, back to back, beside a fire of grass and twigs in the lee of a big boulder. There was nothing to eat, but it didn't seem to matter. A sort of silent partnership had been arrived at, and Donovan, at least, was basking in its friendly atmosphere.

6

Every road has its ending. Noon found them standing beside the leaden hulk of the Egg, face to face with reality. One of them and only one could make the journey back. The Egg would not hold two, nor was there power enough in its accumulators to carry more than one back through the barrier between time coils. If the girl were to go, she would find herself alone in a world unutterably remote from her own, friendless and unable to understand or to make herself understood. If Donovan returned, he must leave her alone in the Cretaceous jungle, with no food, no means of protection from man or beast, and no knowledge of what might be happening sixty million years later which would seal her fate for good.

There was only one answer. Her hand went to his arm and pushed him gently toward the open door of the Egg. He, and he alone, could get the help which they must have and return to find her. In six hours at the outside the Egg should be ready to make its return trip. In that six hours Donovan could find me, or some friend, and enlist my aid.

Fortune played into his hands. There was a patter of footsteps among the fallen fronds, and a small dinosaur appeared, the body of a bird in its jaws. With a whoop, Donovan sprang at it. It dropped the bird and disappeared. The creature was not dead, but Donovan wrung its scrawny neck. Here was proof that must convince me of the truth of his story—that would bring me to their aid!

He stepped into the machine. As the door swung shut, he saw the girl

raise her hand in farewell. When it opened again, he stepped out on the concrete floor of his own laboratory, sixty million years later.

His first thought was for the generators that would recharge the batteries of the Egg. Then, from the house and the laboratory, he collected the things that he would need; guns, food, water, clothing. Finally, he set out to fetch me.

He sat there, his broken arm strapped to his side with that queer metallic cloth, the torn flesh painted with some aromatic green ointment. A revolver in its holster lay on the desk at his elbow; a rifle leaned against the heap of duffel on the floor of the Egg. What did it all mean? Was it part of some incredibly elaborate hoax, planned for some inconceivable purpose? Or—fantastic as it seemed—was it truth?

"I'm leaving in ten minutes," he said. "The batteries are charged."

"What can I do?" I asked. "I'm no mechanic—no physicist."

"I'll send her back in the Egg," he told me. "I'll show you how to charge it—it's perfectly simple—and when it's ready you will send it back empty for me. If there is any delay, make her comfortable until I come."

I noted carefully everything he did, every setting of every piece of apparatus, just as he showed them to me. Then, just four hours after he threw that incredible bird down at my feet, I watched the leaden door of the Egg swing shut. The hum of the generators rose to an ugly whine. A black veil seemed to envelop the huge machine—a network of emptiness which ran together and coalesced into a hole into which I gazed for interminable distances. Then it was gone. The room was empty. I touched the switch that stopped the generators.

The Egg did not return—not on that day, nor the next, nor ever while I waited there. Finally, I came away. I have told his story—my story before—but they laugh as I did. Only there is one thing that no one knows.

This year there were new funds for excavation. I am still senior paleontologist at the museum, and in spite of the veiled smiles that are beginning to follow me, I was chosen to continue my work of previous seasons. I knew from the beginning what I would do. The executors of Donovan's estate gave me permission to trace the line of the ancient Cretaceous beach that ran across his property. I had a word picture of that other world as he had seen it, and a penciled sketch, scrawled on the back of an envelope as he talked. I knew where he had buried the cube of

radium And it might be that this beach of fossil sands, preserved almost since the beginning of time, was the same one in which Terry Donovan had scooped a hole and buried a leaden cube, sealed in a steel box.

I have not found the box. If it is there, it is buried under tons of rock that will require months of labor and thousands of dollars to remove. We have uncovered a section of the beach in whose petrified sands every mark made in that ancient day is as sharp and clear as though it was made yesterday; the ripples of the receding tide—the tracks of sea worms crawling in the shallow water—the trails of the small reptiles that fed on the flotsam and jetsam of the water's edge.

Two lines of footprints come down across the wet sands of that Cretaceous beach, side by side. Together they cross the forty-foot slab of sandstone which I have uncovered, and vanish where the rising tide has filled them. They are prints-of a small queerly made sandal and a rubber-soled hiking boot—of a man and a girl.

A third line of tracks crosses the Cretaceous sands and overlies those others—huge, splayed, three-toed, like the prints of some gigantic bird. Sixty million years ago, mighty Tyrannosaurus and his smaller cousins made such tracks. The print of one great paw covers both the girl's footprints as she stands for a moment, motionless, beside the man. They, too vanish at the water's edge.

That is all, but for one thing; an inch or two beyond the point where the tracks vanish, where the lapping waters have smoothed the sand, there is a strange mark. The grains of sand are fused, melted together in a kind of funnel of greenish glass that reminds me of the fulgurites that one often finds where lightning has struck iron-bearing sand, or where some high-voltage cable has grounded. It is smoother and more regular than any fulgurite that I have ever seen.

Two years ago I saw Terry Donovan step into the leaden Egg that stood in its cradle on the floor of his laboratory, and vanish with it into nothingness. He has not returned. The tracks which I have described, imprinted in the sands of a Cretaceous beach, are very plain, but workmen are the only people beside myself who have seen them. They see no resemblance to human footprints in the blurred hollows in the stone. They know, for I have told them again and again during the years that I have worked with them, that there were no human beings on the earth sixty million years ago. Science says—and is not science always right?—that only the great dinosaurs of the Cretaceous age left their fossil footprints in the sands of time.