

## DR CYCLOPS

by Henry Kutner

### CHAPTER I

#### Camp in the Jungle

BILL STOCKTON stood in the compound gate, watching Pedro drivino the mules down to the river pasture. The swarthy half-breed's face was split by a broad grin; he twirled his black mustache and sang loudly of a cantina in Buenos Aires, thousands of miles to the east.

"How the devil does he do it?" Stockton moaned, shaking the perspiration out of his eyes. "I can hardly drag myself around in this heat. And that guy actually sings—" Yet it wasn't only the heat, Stockton knew. There was more to it than that. A feeling of sombre menace—hung heavy above this wilderness encampment. During the weeks of jungle travel from the Andes, through tropical swamp and pest-infested jungle, the feeling had grown stronger. It was in the humid, sticky air. It was in the sickly-sweet, choking perfume of the great orchids that grew outside the stockade. Most of all, it was in the actions of Dr. Thorkel.

"He's supposed to be the greatest scientific wizard of the age," Stockton thought skeptically. "But for my money he's nuts. Sends a message to the Royal Academy demanding the services of a biologist and a mineralogist, and then asks us to look into a microscope. That's all. Won't even let us get inside that mud house of his!"

There was reason for Stockton's bitterness. He had been literally forced into this adventure. Hardy, the mineralogist, had been taken ill at Lima, and Dr. Bulfinch, his colleague, had sought vainly for a substitute. None was available. None, that is, save for a certain beachcomber who was going rapidly to hell with the aid of a native girl, bad gin, and rubber checks.

Bulfinch's assistant, Dr. Mary Phillips, had solved the problem. She had bought up the bad checks, threatened Stockton with jail if he refused to come along. Under the circumstances, the one-time mineralogist had shrugged and acceded. Now he was wondering if he had made a mistake.

There was menace here. Stockton sensed it, with the psychic keenness of a professional adventurer. Secrecy was all around him. Why was the mine yard generally kept locked, if the mine actually was worthless, as Thorkel contended? Why had Thorkel seemed so excited when Stockton had mentioned the iron crystals, crystals Thorkel had been unable to see because of his weak vision?

Then, too, there was the matter of the Dicotylinae—certain bones Mary Phillips had found. They were the bones of a native wild pig, but the molar surfaces had proved it a species of midget swine entirely unknown to science—four inches long at maturity. That was odd.

Finally, only an hour ago, Thorkel had blandly said good-bye, only twenty-three hours after the arrival of his guests. Bulfinch had, Stockton mused with a chuckle, thrown a fit. The goatish face had gone gray; the unkempt Vandyke had bristled.

"Are you attempting to intimate that you summoned me—Dr. Rupert Bulfinch—ten thousand miles just to look into a microscope?" he had roared.

"Correct," Thorkel had answered, and went back to his mud house.

So far, so good. But there was trouble ahead. Neither Bulfinch nor Mary would think of leaving, even though that meant defiance of Thorkel. And Thorkel, Stockton felt, was a dangerous customer, cold-blooded and unscrupulous. His round face, with its bristling mustache and bald dome, could settle into grim, deadly lines.

Moreover, from the first a quiet, unspoken sort of conflict had arisen between Thorkel and Baker, the guide who had accompanied the party from the Andes. Stockton shrugged and gave it up.

Dr. Bulfinch came up behind Stockton and touched his arm. There was repressed excitement in the biologist's goatish face.

"Come along," he said softly. "I've found something."

Stockton followed Bulfinch into a nearby tent. Mary Phillips was there, mounting the bones of the midget pig. She was, Stockton thought, much too pretty to be a biologist. A wealth of red-gold hair cascaded over her shoulders, and she had a face that belonged on the silver screen rather than in the lab. She also had a hell of a temper.

"Hello, beautiful," said Stockton.

"Oh, shut up," the girl murmured. "What's the matter, Dr. Bulfinch?"

The biologist thrust a rock sample at Stockton.

"Test this."

The younger man's eyes widened.

"This isn't hell, it can't be!"

"You've seen pitchblende before," Bulfinch said with heavy sarcasm.

"Where'd you get it?" Stockton asked, excited.

"Baker found it near the mine shaft. It's uranium ore," he said

quietly, "and it's a hundred times richer than any deposit ever

discovered. No wonder Thorkel wants to get rid of us!" Mentally

Stockton added, "And I'll bet he wouldn't stop at murder to shut us up

!"

"Good God!" Bulfinch whispered. "Radium! Think of the medical benefits of such a find—the help it can give to science!"

There was an interruption. A black streak shot into the tent, followed by a gaunt, disreputable dog, barking wildly. The two circled a table and fled outside again. There was the sound of a scuffle.

Hastily Stockton raised the tent-flap. Pedro, Thorkel's man-of-all-work, was holding the dog, while a cat retreated hastily into the distance.

The half-breed looked up with a flash of white teeth. "I am sorry.

This foolish Paco—" He pulled the dog's tail. "He does not know he can never catch Satanás. He just wants to play, though. Since Pinto went away, he is lonesome."

"Yeah?" Stockton asked, eyeing the man. "Who was Pinto?"

"My Little mule. Ah, Pinto was smart. But not smart enough, I suppose."

Pedro shrugged expressively. "Poor mule."

A man came out of the gathering twilight—a tall, rangy figure, with a hard-bitten, harsh face—a Puritan gone to seed.

"Hello, Baker," Stockton grunted.

"Bulfinch told you about the radium?" Baker said, without preamble.

"It's valuable, eh?"

"Yeah. Plenty valuable." Stockton's eyes narrowed. "I've been wondering about that. Wondering why you were so anxious to come along when you could have sent a native. Maybe you'd heard about this radium mine, eh?"

Baker's harsh face did not change, but he sent a glance of sheer black hatred toward the house.

"I don't blame you," he said under his breath. "It does look screwy.

But—listen, Bill, I had a good reason for wanting to come here. If I'd come alone, Thorkel would have been suspicious—shot me on sight, maybe.

I'd have had no chance at all to investigate—" "Investigate what?"

Stockton asked impatiently.

"I used to know a little native girl. Nice kid. Mira, her name was.

I—well, I thought a lot of her. One day she went off to act as Thorkel's housekeeper. And that was the last I ever heard of the girl."

"She isn't here now," Stockton said. "Unless she's in the house."

Baker shook his head. "I've been talking to Pedro. He says Mira was here—and disappeared. Like Pinto, his albino mule."

The swift tropic night had fallen. A bright moon silvered the compound.

And suddenly the two men heard the faint, shrill neigh of a horse, from the direction of Thorkel's house.

Simultaneously the figure of Pedro appeared, running from behind a tent. He cried, "Pinto! My mule Pinto is in the house. He has come back!"

Before the half-breed could reach the door of the house, it opened abruptly. Thorkel appeared. In the moonlight his bald head and gleaming, thick-lensed spectacles looked oddly inhuman.

"Well, Pedro?" he asked quietly, in a sneering voice.

The other jerked to a halt. He moistened his lips.

"It is Pinto, senor—" he whispered.

"You are imagining things," Thorkel said, with cold emphasis. "Go back to your work. Do you think I'd keep a mule in the house?"

A new voice broke in.

"Just what do you keep in there, Doctor?"

It was Bulfinch. The biologist emerged from the tent and approached, a lean, gaunt figure in the moonlight. Mary was behind him. Baker and Stockton joined the group. Thorkel held the door closed behind him.

"That is nothing to you," he said, icily.

"On the contrary," Bulfinch snapped, "as I told you, I intend to remain here until I have received an explanation."

"And as I told you," Thorkel said, almost whispering, "you do so at your own peril. I will not tolerate interference or prying. My secrets are my own. I warn you: I shall protect those secrets!"

"Are you threatening us?" the biologist growled.

Thorkel suddenly smiled.

"If I showed you what I have in my house, I think you would-regret it," he observed, a suggestion of subtle menace in his silky tones. "I wish to be left alone. If I find you still here tomorrow morning, I shall take ...

protective measures."

His eyes, behind the thick-lensed spectacles, included the group in one ominous glance. Then, without another word, he reentered the house, locking the door behind him.

"Still staying, Doc?" Stockton asked. Bulfinch growled.

"I certainly am!"

There was a brief pause. Then Pedro, who had been listening intently, made a commanding gesture.

"Come with me. I will show you something—" He hurried around the corner of the house, trailed by the dog Paco.

Bulfinch, his thin lips working, followed, and so did the others.

A tall bamboo fence blocked their way. Pedro pointed, and applied his eye to a crack. Stockton tested the gate, which had previously been open. It was barred now, so he joined Pedro and the others .

"Wait," the half-breed whispered. "I have seen this before."

They could see the mine-shaft, with a crude windlass surmounting it.

And then a gross, strange figure entered their range of vision. It resembled, at first glance, a man in a diving suit. Every inch of the stocky body was covered with the rubberlike fabric. A cylindrical helmet shielded the head.

Through two round eyeplates could be seen the heavy spectacles of Dr.

Thorkel.

"Uh-huh," Stockton whispered. "Protective suit. Radium's dangerous stuff."

Thorkel went to the mine and began to turn the windlass. Abruptly Stockton felt a hand touch his arm. He turned.

It was Baker.

"Come along," the other said softly. "I've opened the door. Cheap lock—and Mary uses hairpins. Now we'll be able to see what he's got hidden in that house."

"Si! The doctor will be busy in the yard for a long time—" Pedro said, nodding.

Silently the group retraced their steps. The door of the mud house was ajar.

From within came the sound of a shrill neigh, incredibly high and thin....

## CHAPTER II

### The Little People

THE ROOM was disappointingly bare. Across from the front door was another, apparently leading to the mine yard. Another door was in the right-hand wall, and a small mica window was let into it.

There were heavy wooden chairs, a work-bench, and a table bearing microscope and notebooks. On the bench were several small wicker baskets.

Littered carelessly about the floor were a rack of test-tubes, books, a beaker, two or three small boxes, and a dirty shirt or two.

Pedro pointed to the floor.

"Hoof prints—Pinto was here, yes!"

Mary bent over the microscope, while Bulfinch examined the notebooks.

"Thieves!"

Thorkel stood in the doorway leading to the mine yard, his eyes glaring behind the glasses. He was whitely livid with rage.

"So you would steal my discoveries. You have no right here! You are merely my employees whom I have discharged and instructed to leave!"

He saw the notebook in Bulfinch's hand, and his voice rose to a scream of rage.

"My notes!"

Stockton and Baker seized him as he sprang at the biologist. Bulfinch smiled coldly.

"Restrain yourself, Dr. Thorkel. Your actions are not reassuring. "

Thorkel relaxed, panting.

"I—you have no right here."

"You are behaving irrationally. For your own good, and for the benefit of science, I must demand an explanation. To leave you here in the jungle would be nothing short of criminal. You are grossly overworked.

You are not"—he hesitated—"not in a normal state mentally. There is no reason to be suspicious or to fear persecution."

Thorkel sighed, removed his glasses, and rubbed his blind eyes with a weary gesture. "I am sorry," he murmured.

"Perhaps you are right, Doctor. I—I am experimenting with radioactivity."

He went to the mica-paned door and opened it, revealing a small closet, plated with lead. From the ceiling hung a projector, resembling the type used medically to treat cancer by radium rays.

"This is my condensor," Thorkel said. "You may examine it, Dr. Bulfinch. I must trust you—I have shown this to no one else in the world."

Bulfinch entered the closet. The others were at his heels, intently scrutinizing the projector which seemed the heart of the mystery.

Pedro paid no attention. He was opening, one by one, the boxes on the bench. And, abruptly, he paused, transfixed with astonishment. His lips formed the word, "Pinto!"

A white mule was within the box. An albino mule, no more than eight inches high!

"Pedro!" Thorkel called sharply. The half-breed sprang up. His elbow overturned the box, which clattered to the floor.

The midget mule was flung out. Only Thorkel and Pedro saw the beast as it struggled up and raced across the floor.

The door was still ajar. The mannikin animal fled out into the night.

For a second Thorkel's eyes clashed with Pedro's.

"Come here," the scientist said tonelessly. "I want you to see this, too."

The half-breed went toward Thorkel, his face blank with amazement.

"What—what has happened to—" Thorkel smiled. He pointed to the closet where the others were still examining the projector. Pedro turned to look.

Thorkel moved with the swiftness of an uncoiled steel spring. He struck at Pedro. Caught unawares, the half-breed was hurled into the closet. The door

slammed shut behind him.

Thorkel locked it with a swift movement. His hand closed on one of the switches nearby; he pulled it down. Instantly there was a low hum, which rose swiftly to a sibilant crackling buzz.

Green light blazed through the mica window.

From a shelf Thorkel took a heavy helmet and donned it. He leaned forward to peer through the mica pane.

"Thieves!" he whispered. "I told you to go! I could not force you—but if you insist on staying, I must be sure that you will not interfere with my experiments or try to steal my secret. So you wished to help me, Dr. Bulfinch? Well, you shall—but not quite as you expected!" Thorkel's laughter rose above the crackling snarl of the condenser.

The infra-red lamp suspended from the ceiling sent down a rich, warm glow.

Beneath it was a glass dish, containing a colorless liquid that was boiling gently, warmed by an electrode. From the dish steamed a whitish vapor which shrouded the floor, almost hiding the dim outlines nearby.

One of these figures writhed and sat up, tearing away the silken wrappings that bound it. The swart face of Pedro appeared. He sprang up, knee-deep in the white vapor, coughing and choking for breath.

Beside him another form stirred. Bill Stockton rose shakily, breathing in great gasps.

"Air—air's better up here ... what the hell!" Discovering that he was naked save for the silk shroud, he adjusted it, looking rather like a Roman, with his hal sh eagle face and keen eyes.

Mary and Baker were the next to appear. Then came the grim face of Dr. Bulfinch. For a moment each was busy adjusting their makeshift garments.

"Where are we?" Pedro gasped. "I cannot see—" He choked and coughed.

"Calm down," Bulfinch said curtly. "We won't be asphyxiated." He sniffed and glanced at the light above. "Ozone, ammonia, humidity, temperature—calculated to revive consciousness."

"Where are we?" Mary asked. "In the mine?"

They could not see beyond the small circle of light. Stockton gripped Pedro's arm.

"You know this place better than we do. Where are we? What's Thorkel done?"

Suddenly horror grew in Pedro's eyes as he remembered something.

"Pinto," he gasped. "He has made Pinto—little!"

"Nuts," Stockton grunted. "Let's grab hands and feel our way around."

Come on!"

"He has made me little like my mule!" Pedro whispered.

Without warning the faint red glow of the lamp faded and died. It was almost utterly black. Stockton felt Mary's hand tighten in his own, and squeezed it reassuringly.

Light shafted in whitely. Instantly Stockton saw that they were in a cellar, at the foot of a flight of stairs that led up to an opening door.

On the threshold stood Dr. Thorkel, looking down at them. Satan, the cat, crouched by the scientist's feet.

"He has made us little!" Pedro screamed.

And it was true! Thorkel was—a giant! A thirty-foot titan towered over them! The cellar door seemed as big as a two-story house; Satan was a sabre-toothed tiger!

Bulfinch was chalk-white. He sprang back suddenly as Satan spat down at the tiny group. Thorkel hastily bent down and picked up the cat.

His voice was booming thunder.

"No, no—you must not frighten them," he told the cat. Thorkel stepped down into the cellar, and the others shrank from this colossus. Mary's voice rose in a scream.

"Good," said Thorkel. "Vocal cords unimpaired, eh? You have no temperature? Dr. Bulfinch, will you be good enough to take the pulse of your companions?"

Pedro broke and raced for the stairway. Thorkel nodded, smiling.

"Little creatures—their first instinct is to escape. Run if you like, then."

And the wee folk fled....

Climbing those stairs was a feat. Each tread came up to their breasts.

But, pushing, pulling, scrambling, the miniature humans swarmed up toward the light. Soon they were gone from sight. Thorkel put down the cat and followed, shutting the cellar door. He turned to glance around the room.

The little people had hidden themselves.

"Come out. You have nothing to fear," he said smoothly.

Thorkel waited, and then sank down into a chair.

"Where is your scientific spirit, Dr. Bulfinch?" He smiled. "Did you not wish to join me in my experiments?" He mopped perspiration from his bald head and slid the chair away from the patch of sunlight that slanted in through the window fronting the mine yard.

Bulfinch's head appeared cautiously from behind one of Thorkel's discarded boots. He walked toward the giant.

"Come closer," Thorkel urged.



Bulfinch obeyed, staring up at the other.

"What is the matter?" Thorkel said fearfully. "Can you not speak?"

The biologist's voice was thin and high.

"Yes, I can speak. What have you done—and why?"

Thorkel leaned forward, his huge hand reaching toward the tiny figure on the floor. Bulfinch retreated in alarm.

"I only wish to weigh and measure you," he said softly. He rose and settled back in his chair. "Come out. I won't eat you. As you can see, I have reduced your size."

His pale eyes, behind the thick glasses, watched intently as, emboldened, the others appeared one by one. Pedro had been hiding behind a chair leg; the others behind a stack of books on the floor.

They advanced until they were in a group with Bulfinch.

"You should be proud," Thorkel said. "You are almost the first successful experiment—Pinto was the first, Pedro. Too bad you let him escape. Again I thank you, Mr. Stockton, for identifying the iron crystals. They gave me the last clue."

He blinked down at then. "Till you came, I could reduce organic substances, but life could not be preserved in them. It is a matter of electronic compression of matter under ray bombardment. The radium in the mine gave me unimaginable power. Look." He lifted a sponge from the table and squeezed it in his fist. "That is it. Compression. But energy is required, rather than brute force—" Baker spoke up suddenly.

"Did you do this to Mira?"

"The native girl—my housekeeper? Why, yes. But I failed—she was reduced in size, but she was dead. How do you know of her?" Thorkel did not wait for an answer. He rubbed his eyes wearily. "I am very tired. It has taken days to reduce you, and I have not had one moment's sleep...." His voice trailed off wearily. Sleep smothered him.

Stockton was staring around.

"We've got to get out of here. Do you realize that this fiend intends to kill us all?"

Bulfinch looked a question. "That scarcely—" "He told us he murdered the native girl, didn't he? He's a cold-blooded devil."

Instinctively they glanced at the door. The bar that locked it from the inside was thrice the height of Stockton's head.

Human beings—scarcely more than half a foot tall!

On the floor nearby a book stood on end—Human Physiology, by Granger.

Stockton went to stand beside it. His head scarcely came to the top of the volume.

"Well?" he asked bitterly. "Any suggestions?"

Bulfinch nodded. "Yes. Books are handy things. If we can pile them up and reach the door-latch ..."

It took time, but Thorkel did not awaken. A pencil, used as a lever, opened the door a crack. And then the little people were outside in the compound. Strange sight! A cactus patch not far away was taller than the tallest tree. The camp tables were fantastically high. A chicken was moving jerkily in its quest for food-and its bobbing comb rose higher than Stockton's head!

If it saw them, it made no hostile move. Slowly the tiny group moved forward, toward Bulfinch's tent. Each box and crate was a mountain to be skirted. The rough ground hurt their bare feet.

Pedro was glancing around nervously. Abruptly he cried out and pointed.

Stockton whirled with the others, and he showed his panic.

Out of a crumbling hole in the mud hut's base Satanás, the cat, was crawling. The creature's eyes were intent on the little people.

More formidable than a tiger, it wriggled free and bounded toward them, sharp fangs bared!

### CHAPTER III

#### Death in the Jungle

STOCKTON SEIZED Mary by the hand and dragged her toward the shelter of the cactus clump. The others were not slow in following. Baker paused to hurl a pebble at the cat, but the gesture was futile.

Snarling, Satanás came on. The cacti were too far away for safety.

Hopelessness tore at Stockton as he realized that none of them could reach the clump. He could almost feel sharp fangs sinking into his flesh.

The cat spat viciously. There was an uproar of furious barks. As the little people miraculously found concealment amid the cactus spines, they turned to see Satanás fleeing from Paco, Pedro's dog.

"Whew!" Baker gasped. "That was a close one."

Bulfinch regarded him sombrely, tugging at his Vandyke. "There will be more 'close ones,'" he said with grim meaning. "Every creature larger than a rat is apt to be a deadly menace."

"What can we do?" Mary asked.

"First—food, weapons," Stockton said. "Then we'll deal with Thorkel and find some way out of this."

The day dragged on, and Thorkel still slept. Satanás did not reappear.

Mary engaged herself in making sandals, a difficult task at best, and worse when the knife is larger than you are.

As for Stockton, he managed to take the screw out of a pair of scissors, and one blade provided him with a serviceable weapon, about the size of a sword.

Thorkel's voice startled them when it came. He was leaning out the window, like a giant in the sky, regarding them.

"You are resourceful, my small friends," his voice boomed out. "But now come back. I must weigh and measure all of you."

The group drew together. Thorkel laughed evilly at them.

"I won't harm you. Come, Dr. Bulfinch," he said silkily.

"I demand that you restore us to our normal size," the biologist snapped.

"That is impossible," the other said. "At present, anyway. All my energies have been devoted to the problem of atomic shrinkage-compression. Perhaps, in time, I can find the antidote, the ray that will turn men to giants. But it will take months of research and experiment—perhaps years."

"Do you mean we must remain like this—" "I shall not harm you," Thorkel smiled. "Come—" He leaned forward.

Bulfinch drew back, and, with an impatient grunt, Thorkel disappeared from the window. His feet thudded across the floor. Bulfinch hastily fled back to the others.

"The cactus," he gasped, panting. "Let's hide!"

But already Thorkel was emerging from the door. His figure loomed gigantic. A few quick strides, and he had cut off the retreat of his quarry. He crouched down, spreading his fingers wide.

Escape was impossible. Mary and Baker were gathered up in one titan hand.

With the other Thorkel reached for the fleeing Bulfinch.

Pedro had secured a fork from somewhere, and held it like a spear. He thrust at the huge hand.

Chuckling, Thorkel brushed the weapon aside, knocking Pedro headlong.

Contemptuously he stood up, still gripping Mary and Baker.

"Dr. Bulfinch!" His voice was thunderous. "Listen to me!"

The biologist was peering out from the depths of the cactus. "Yes?"

"I wish to weigh and measure you. You are a scientist; your reactions will be more valuable than those of the others. I am conducting an experiment for Germany—my fatherland. If my reduction method proves successful, we will be able to reduce our armies to miniature size.

Our men will be able to steal into enemy territory, sabotage industrial centers. And no one will suspect the destruction due to—men in miniature. You will not be harmed. I promise you that. Will you come out?"

Bulfinch shook his head stubbornly. His whole being revolted at the ruthless plan outlined by this sinister genius. A plan that might mean the death of thousands of innocent civilians.

"No? Then, perhaps, if I apply a little pressure—a very little—to these tiny people I hold so gently in my hand—" The constricting fingers tightened. From

Baker's lips came a grunt of pain. Mary's voice rose in a scream.

"Oh, damn!" Bulfinch snarled. "All right, Thorkel. You win. Put them down." He emerged from the cactus as the scientist gently deposited Baker and Mary on the ground. They were unharmed, but so giddy from the rapid descent that they could scarcely stand.

Calmly, Thorkel picked up Bulfinch's tiny figure. The biologist made no resistance. The others were left staring as Thorkel walked back to the mud house; then, swiftly, they fled into the cactus. There was silence.

"He won't hurt him," Pedro said, without conviction.

Stockton stepped out from the protection of the cactus. "I'll just make sure. Wait here." He started toward the house, gripping his scissor-blade harder than was necessary.

It was minutes later when he reached the door, still slightly ajar. He peered through the crack, just in time to hear Bulfinch's cry and witness the murder of the biologist.

Thorkel was seated at his table. With one hand he gripped the tiny Bulfinch; with the other he pressed a wad of cotton down over his victim's face.

Then, swiftly, he dropped the limp body into a glass beaker. Stockton drew back, sick with horror, and his improvised sword made a noise against the door. Thorkel glanced down and saw the small watcher.

"So you would spy on me?" he asked quietly, and without haste picked up a butterfly net from the table. As he rose Stockton fled.

Thorkel got to the door just in time to see him disappear into the cactus.

Nodding, he found a shovel and followed his quarry.

It took ten minutes to clear and break down the cactus bed. And then Thorkel realized that he was looking at the outlet of a tile drain pipe that extended to and under the compound wall. He straightened, staring nearsightedly across the barrier.

"You had better come back!" Thorkel shouted. "You cannot live an hour in the jungle—and there is a storm approaching!"

Storm in the jungle—the greatest rain forest in the world. Bear, deer, and monkey fleeing from thunderbolt and unchained devils of the lightning.

The screaming of parrots clinging to their wind-buffeted perches.

The black hell of night closed upon the jungle.

Through that madness fled the little people. And, by sheer luck, they found a cave in which they cowered through the eternal, dragging hours of shaking fury, helpless, hopeless beings in a world of gigantic menace....

It was dawn. Chilled, dispirited, and shivering, the little people emerged from their refuge. In the dawn light they examined each other.

"We look like hell," Stockton said.

"I'm glad you include yourself," Mary told him, trying to adjust her tangled

hair. "I wish I had a few pins."

"They'd be as big as you are, about. What now?"

Baker had been talking to the half-breed. Now he turned to face the others.

"Pedro has an idea. If we can get to the river and find a boat, we can float downstream to civilization. There'll be help there."

"That's an idea," Stockton nodded. "Which way is the water, Pedro?"

The half-breed pointed, and without delay they set out, plodding through the rain-wet jungle. Once a monkey, larger to them than a gorilla, swung down uncomfortably close, and once the inconceivable ferocity of a bear crossed their path, luckily without seeing them.

They kept to a well-trodden path, but on all sides the monolithic trees stretched up, higher than skyscrapers. The weedy grass rose above their heads. It was a world of stark fantasy and lurking menace.

Once Stockton, lagging behind the others, saw Paco, the dog. He was frisking about an albino colt which was diligently cropping grass. For a second Stockton considered the idea of catching and riding the colt, but gave it up immediately. The beast was much too large. He shrugged and followed the rest of the band.

The river bank did not prove an insurmountable obstacle, though it took time to descend. They went upstream to a little cove, where Pedro, he said, had moored his canoe. Picking their way around a thick patch of weeds, they reached the craft. It was gigantic. Beached on the sand, it remained immovable no matter how they strained and pushed.

"Great idea," Stockton grunted. "It's like trying to move a steamship."

"Well, even that can be done," the girl told him. "If you use rollers."

"Isn't she smart?" Pedro said with naive admiration. "We can cut bamboo—" "Sure!" Baker joined in. "We can rig up a lever and windlass—it'll take time, but that's all right."

It took even more time than they had thought. With their crude tools, and the unexpected toughness of the plant-life to tiny hands, it took hours, and the morning dragged on with little accomplished.

Pedro lifted his head and dashed sweat from his dripping mustache. "I hear—Paco, I think," he said doubtfully.

"Never mind Paco," Baker told him. "Lend a hand with this windlass."

"But Paco—he is a hunting dog. Dr. Thorkel knows that. If he—" "Time to rest," Stockton decreed, and straightened, rubbing his aching back. Mary, who had been toiling with the rest, sank down with a groan. She tossed her red-gold hair back from her tired young face.

Stockton made a cup out of a tiny leaf and brought the girl water from the river. She drank it gratefully.

"No use to boil it," the man explained. "If there're any germs in the water, we can see 'em without a microscope."

Pedro and Baker flung themselves down full length on the sand and lay panting. "This is devil work," the half-breed observed with conviction. "If I live, I shall burn twenty candles before my patron saint."

"If I live, I'll kill twenty bottles," Baker said. "But there's one guy I'd like to kill first." His face darkened. He was remembering Mira, the native girl, whom Thorkel had murdered so casually. And poor Bulfinch.

"What about you, Bill?" Mary asked.

He glanced at her. "I know what you mean. Well—I wouldn't even make a good beachcomber now. I might go native with the field mice."

Abruptly Stockton turned to face her. "No. I didn't mean that. This is pretty terrible, but it's shown me something. All this—" He flung out an arm toward the towering grasses in the background. "Wonder and strangeness, which we never quite realize—until we're small. I—I was a good mineralogist once. I could be again. Remember those checks I tore up, Mary?"

I'm going to pay you back every cent they cost you. That's rather important to me now...." He frowned. "If we come out of this alive—" In the distance Paco barked again. Pedro stood up, shading his eyes with a calloused palm. "It is Dr. Thorkel," he stated. "He carries a specimen box, and Paco leads him."

"Damn!" Stockton snapped. "We've got to hide. Take to the water, to break the trail."

"No," Pedro said. "There are alligators." He nodded toward the tall patch of grass near them. "We can hide in—" He stopped, and horror grew in his eyes.

Mary, following his glance, gave a little gasp and recoiled.

For something was coming out of the high grasses. Dragonlike and hideous it slid forward, cold eyes intent on the little people. The sunlight gleamed on rough, warty scales.

Only a lizard—but to Thorkel's victims it was like a triceratops, a dinosaur out of Earth's ferocious past!

Stockton barely had time to snatch up his scissor-blade sword before the reptile rushed. He was bowled over by that blind charge. Gasping, still clinging to his weapon, he scrambled to his feet.

Mary was backed up against a tall weed-stem, her eyes abrim with fear.

Before her Pedro had planted his squat form.

He gripped a bit of wood, holding it like a cudgel—a matchstick in the hands of a mannikin!

The lizard came back, jaws agape, hissing. Baker had found a sharpened splinter of bamboo, and held it as a spear. He thrust, and the point glanced off the reptile's armored flank.

The barking of Paco was thunderously loud. A shadow fell on the group.

Something seemed to swoop down out of the sky—and the vast face of Dr.

Thorkel stared at them as the man crouched down.

"So there you are!" he boomed. "What is this? A lizard? Wait—" In his left hand he gathered the struggling forms of Mary and Pedro. They struck vainly at the huge, imprisoning fingers. He reached toward Stockton.

Simultaneously the lizard rushed again. Stockton drove his blade at the gaping jaws; Baker thrust at the wattled throat. The creature gave back, writhed aside. Thorkel's hand reached out. The reptile's jaws closed upon it! Thorkel screamed in pain as he jerked back, cursing with agonized fury. Mary and Pedro dropped unnoticed from the scientist's other hand.

Stockton fled toward them. "The bushes! Quick!"

Habit made him say that. Actually, they darted into the concealing stems of the high grasses, thicker than a forest of bamboo. Behind them they heard Thorkel cursing; then he fell silent.

Paco barked.

"That damn dog of yours," Baker growled. "He's a hunter, all right."

Thorkel's voice sounded. "Come out! I know you're in the grass. Come out or I'll fire it."

Stockton glanced at Mary's white face, and whispered an oath. Baker's thin lips were grim. Pedro rubbed his mustache.

"Paco—he will follow me," the half-breed said. "You stay here."

And he was gone, racing through the grass forest.

There was a moment of silence. Then Stockton, galvanized into activity, crept forward, parting the fronds till he could see Thorkel.

The scientist was holding a match-box in his fingers.

Blood dripped from the hand to the ground.

Paco's bark came from further away. Thorkel hesitated, looked around, and then extracted a match.

From downstream came Pedro's voice.

"Paco! Fuera! Fuera!"

Thorkel, lighting the match, looked up.

Abruptly he dropped it and snatched at the rifle he had laid down. He took steady aim.

The boom of the gun was deafening thunder.

Pedro screamed once. There was a faint splash from far away.

Sickness tugged at Stockton's stomach as he saw Thorkel go striding off.

He went back to the others.

"Pedro's done for. That leaves three of us."

"Damn Thorkel!" Baker ground out. Mary said nothing, but there was both pity and sorrow in her eyes. They heard Paco go racing past, to leap into the river and swim out.

Then the first coiling tendrils of smoke drifted through the grasses.

Instantly Stockton remembered the lit match that Thorkel had dropped.

He seized Mary's hand and urged her forward.

"Come on, Steve," he said urgently to Baker. "Me's trying to smoke us out.

We can't stay here—" "Come out!" roared the bellowing voice of Thorkel. "Hear me?" His huge boots stamped through the grass patch.

And the fire spread, remorselessly, hungrily.

Mary was gasping with strain. "I can't—go any further, Bill."

"That's right," Baker seconded. "If we come out in the open, he'll see us.

We're trapped."

Stockton stared around. The flames were closing in upon them. Black smoke billowed up. Abruptly Stockton saw something that made his eyes widen.

The specimen case!

Thorkel's box, lying at the edge of the grasses!

Without a word Stockton raced toward it. He still had his improvised sword, and, leaping to a rock beside the box, he used it as a lever to pry the lid open. Instantly the others saw his intention.

Awkwardly, frantic with the need for haste, they clambered in. The lid had scarcely fallen before a jolt and a sense of swinging movement told them that Thorkel had remembered his property.

Through the small ventilators, covered with copper-wire mesh, daylight slanted in vaguely.

Would Thorkel open the case? they wondered.

#### CHAPTER IV

The Cyclops IT WAS NIGHT before Thorkel gave up the search. Wearily he pushed open the door of the mud house, put the shotgun on a chair, and dropped the specimen case on the table.

"They must be dead," he groaned. "But I must be sure. I must!"

He polished his spectacles, peering at them vaguely. His watery eyes blinked in puzzlement. Then he went to the door of the radium room and peered through the mica panel. Something he saw there made him turn to the mine-yard door. He flung it open, switched on a floodlight, and went out, leaving the door ajar.



As soon as he had left, the lid of the specimen case lifted. Three tiny people emerged. Fearfully they clambered out, crossed the plain of the table-top, and leaped down to the seat of Thorkel's chair. They gained the floor, and went toward the open door.

"He's busy with the windlass," Mary whispered. "Hurry!"

Stockton halted suddenly. "Okay," he said. "But—I've stopped running. You two go on. I'm going to stay and—kill Thorkel, somehow."

The others stared at him. "But Bill!" Mary gasped. "It's impossible!

If we reach civilization—" Stockton laughed bitterly.

"We've just been fooling ourselves all along. We can never reach civilization. If we launched a boat, we could never get ashore. We'd starve to death, or crack up in the rapids. We're imprisoned here, as surely as though we were in jail. We can't get away."

"If we—" the girl began. Stockton cut her short.

"It's no use! We can't live long in the forest. Only luck has saved us so far. If we were savages—Indians, perhaps—but we're not. If we go out in the jungle again, it means death."

"And if we stay here?" Baker asked.

Stockton's smile was grim. "Thorkel will kill us. Unless we murder him first."

"All right, suppose we manage to kill Thorkel," Mary asked quietly.

"What then?"

"Then? We live." Stockton nodded, a queer look in his eyes. "I know.

The projector only works one way. We can't regain our normal size, ever. Even if we were large enough to operate the machine, if we could rig up some windlass or lever, it wouldn't help. Thorkel is, I think, the only man in the world who could work out the formula for returning us to our normal size. There's not much chance of his doing that."

Baker said slowly, "If we kill Thorkel, we'll have to remain—like this—forever?"

"Yeah. And if we don't—he'll get us, sooner or later. Well?"

"It's a—a hard choice," Mary whispered. "But at least we'd be alive—" Baker nodded, and pointed to where Thorkel's discarded gun lay across the chair.

It was aimed at the scientist's cot.

"By God!" Stockton grunted. "That's it!"

Having come to a decision, the three acted quickly. They climbed the chair,

and using books as props and the scissor-blade as a lever, adjusted the shotgun.

"Sight it at his pillow," Stockton told Baker, who was looking down the gun barrel. "Up a little ... there! Right at his left ear!"

Mary was tying a piece of thread to the gun. "Can you cock it, Bill?"

"Yeah." He was straining with the lever. "Okay." But, despite Stockton's apparent assurance, he was feeling slightly sick. The choice was—horrible!

To die at Thorkel's hands, or else to remain in this world of littleness forever....

"Thorkel's coming back!" There was panic in Mary's voice.

The three scurried to cover. Stockton managed to capture the thread's dangling end, and ran with it around a box, out of sight. Mary and Baker found shelter beside him.

The scientist's shadow fell across the threshold. He entered, yawning wearily.

Carelessly he scaled his hat on a corner and sat down on the cot, unlacing his boots.

Stockton's hand tightened on the thread. Would the titan notice the altered position of the shotgun?

Thorkel dropped his boots to the floor and started to lie down. Then, struck by a thought, he rose again and went to a cupboard, taking from it a dish of smoked meat and some cassava bread.

Placing this on the table, he drew up a chair and began to eat.

Apparently his eyes ached. Several times he polished his glasses, and presently discarded them entirely, substituting another pair which he took from a tray on the table. He ate slowly, nodding with weariness.

And at last he removed the new pair of spectacles and slumped down, pillowing his head in his arms.

He slept.

"Oh, damn!" Baker said with heart-felt fury. "We can't use the gun now. We couldn't prop it up at the right angle. It looks like the jungle, after all—unless maybe we can use a knife on him."

Stockton looked speculatively at the scissor-blade. "Wouldn't be sure enough. We've got to kill him, not disable him."

"Disable him—that's it!" Mary said suddenly.

"Bill, he's blind without his glasses!"

The three stared at each other, new hope springing to life within them "That's it!" Stockton approved. "We can hide them, and bargain with him, perhaps—" "We must be quiet," Mary warned.

But Thorkel slept heavily. He did not stir when the little people climbed up to the table, and, one by one, handed down the spectacles till they could be thrust out of sight through a hole in the floor.

"That's the last pair," Mary said with satisfaction, peering down into the depths. "He won't find them in a hurry."

"The last but one," Baker denied. "Bill—" He stopped. Stockton was gone.

They saw him back on the table-top, tip-toeing toward the sleeping Thorkel. He skirted the specimen box and approached the spectacles, gripped in the scientist's huge hand.

Gingerly he attempted to disengage them. Thorkel stirred. He mumbled something, and his head lifted, slow with sleep.

Fear tightened Stockton's throat. On impulse he jerked the spectacles from Thorkel's hand and fled behind the specimen box.

Blinking, Thorkel felt around for the glasses. His pale eyes stared unseeingly.

There was a little thud. Stockton, crouching at the table-edge, saw the spectacles hit the floor, without breaking. He did not see Thorkel rise and fumble toward the specimen box.

Mary's voice was ice-shrill.

"Jump, Bill, jump!"

Hastily, Stockton slipped over the edge, hung by his hands, and dropped. The floor rushed up to meet him. He landed heavily, but sprang up and fled before Thorkel could see the movement.

The scientist said, a curious tremor in his voice, "So you've come back.

So you are here, eh?"

There was no answer. Thorkel stumbled to the back door, closed it, and put his back against it.

And, for the first time, Thorkel knew fear.

Thorkel tugged at his mustache. His voice shook when he spoke.

"You would dare attack me? Well, that is a mistake. You are shut up in this room. And I will find you—" He whirled at a fancied movement or sound, glaring blindly, swinging his bald head from side to side with a slow, jerky motion.

"I will find you!"

Stockton pulled Mary back farther into their place of concealment behind a crate. "He's crazy with fear. Keep quiet!"

Thorkel began to stumble around the room, kicking aside apparatus, boxes, clothing.

He fell, and when he rose there was blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

His hand closed on the shotgun. He snatched it up, and stood silent, waiting.

Without warning Thorkel flung up the gun and fired. The crashing echoes filled the room. Stockton peered out, saw that there was a gaping, splintered hole in the bottom of the back door.

Thorkel waited. Then a grim smile twisted his lips. He felt his way to the table and sought for the tray of extra glasses. His hand encountered nothing. The room was utterly still.

"Then--this is war?" Thorkel asked slowly. With a sudden furious motion he broke down the shotgun and gripped the barrel, holding it like a club.

He dropped to hands and knees and felt beneath the table. Slowly he advanced. In a moment, Stockton realized, he would find the glasses where they lay.

Stockton's sandaled feet made no sound as he raced forward. Before Thorkel could react, the geologist had sprung beneath his nose, snatched up the glasses, and smashed them against the table-leg.

Thorkel swung viciously with the gun-barrel.

Stockton, perforce, dropped the glasses and fled. The huge metal club missed him by inches. He vanished into the shadows.

Crouching in their hiding-places, the three little people stared, frozen, as the titan form of Thorkel rose above the table-edge. He was donning his glasses. One lens was splintered and useless.

Blood-stained, dirt-smearred, and terrible, the giant towered there.

His voice rose in a shout of laughter.

"Now!" he roared. "Now you can call me Cyclops!"

Swiftly he strode forward. With methodical haste he began to search the room, overturning boxes, flinging the cot aside to examine some cases beneath it. Stockton made a peremptory signal. Mary and Baker dashed out from their hiding-place between Thorkel's discarded boots.

They followed Stockton swiftly toward the back door.

"Outside, quick!" he whispered. "He can't see us. The cot's in the way."

They clambered through the gaping hole the shotgun charge had made. It was not easy, and Mary's clothing caught on a sharp splinter.

The cloth ripped as Stockton jerked at it.

Footsteps thudded across the floor. The door was flung open. Thorkel switched on the floodlight.

His shadow momentarily hid the three as they raced forward. The mouth of the mine-shaft loomed up before them, a plank stretched across the pit.

"Down there!" Stockton gasped. "It's our only chance."

It was the only possible place of concealment. But Thorkel's one good eye did not miss the little people's movements as they scrambled over the brink and down the steep rock of the shaft-walls. Skirting the windlass, he fell to his hands and knees and crawled out upon the plank, steadying himself with one hand on the rope that ran down into black depths.

Stockton, clinging to a rock, realized that he still held his scissor-blade sword.

He lifted it in futile threat.

There was a splintering crack as Thorkel struck at his quarry. The gun-barrel clashed on rock. And, abruptly, the plank caved in and dropped.

Thorkel still gripped the windlass-rope with one hand, and that saved him.

For a second he swung wildly, while the echoing crash of the falling wood and the gun-barrel echoed up from the depths. Then his grip became surer.

Panting, he hung there briefly, his bald head gleaming with sweat.

He began to climb up the rope.

Stockton glanced around quickly. Mary was clinging to a sloping rock, her white face turned toward the giant.

Baker was looking at the mineralogist, and his gaunt gray features were twisted with hopeless fury.

Stockton made a quick gesture, pointed to his sword, and began to swarm back up to the surface.

Instantly Baker caught his meaning. If the rope to which Thorkel clung could be cut But it was thick, terribly thick, for a tiny man and a scissor-blade!

Thorkel pulled himself slowly upward. In a moment Baker saw, he would reach safety. The trader's lips drew back from his teeth in a mirthless grin; he abruptly rose and edged forward a few paces.

Then he sprang.

Out and down he went, and his clutching hands found Thorkel's collar.

Before the scientist could understand what had happened, Baker was clawing and snarling like a terrier at his throat. Thorkel almost lost his grip.

Gasping with fear and rage, he shook his head violently, trying to knock his assailant free.

"You dirty killer!" Baker snarled.

He was tossed about madly, once almost crushed between Thorkel's chin and chest. And then, suddenly, Thorkel was falling.

With a whine and a whir the windlass ran out as the rope was severed.

A long, quavering cry burst from Thorkel's throat as he dropped away into the darkness. Higher and higher it rose—and ended.

Stockton ran to the brink and peered over. Mary was clambering weakly up toward him. And, behind her, was Baker.

Bill was standing beside an upright book, a curious expression on his face. He looked around vaguely.

"The machine—" he told Mary. "Can you work it?"

Mary was poring over Thorkel's notebooks. She said despondently, "It's no good, Bill. The device is only a condensor. It can't bring people back to normal size. We'll have to remain this size the rest of our lives. And now, we've got to get back to civilization, somehow—" "As we are?" Baker's face fell. "That's impossible."

"Wait a minute," Stockton interrupted. "I've a hunch—do you remember when we first saw Thorkel, after he reduced us?"

"Yeah. So what?"

"He wasn't trying to kill us then. He just wanted to weigh and measure us. But after he examined Dr. Bulfinch, he turned into a vicious killer. Why do you suppose that happened?"

"He probably intended to kill us all along. For trying to steal his secrets," Baker suggested. "He was probably afraid that we would warn the Allies of his plans."

"Maybe. But he wasn't in any hurry at first. He knew he could dispose of us any time he wanted. Only after he examined Dr. Bulfinch he—found out something that made it necessary to get rid of us in a hurry."

Mary caught her breath. "What?"

"I saw a white mule in the jungle a while ago. A colt. Paco was playing with it. At first I figured it might be Pinto's colt, but mules are sterile, of course. That meant two albino mules here—which isn't very probable—or else it was Pinto. Remember, Pedro said the dog used to play with the mule."

"How big was the mule?" Baker asked abruptly.

"The size of a half-grown colt. Listen, Steve, when we first came out of the cellar I measured myself against that book—Human Physiology. It was just higher than my head. But now it only comes up to my chest!"

"We're growing!" Mary whispered. "That's it."

"Sure. That's what Thorkel found out when he examined Dr. Bulfinch, and why he tried to kill us before we grew back to normal size. I think it's a progressively accelerative process. In two weeks, or perhaps ten days, we'll be back to normal."

"It's logical," the girl commented. "Once the compressive force of radium power is removed, we expand—slowly but elastically. The electrons swing back to their normal orbits. The energy we absorbed under the ray will be liberated in quanta—" "Ten days," Baker murmured. "And then we can go back

down the river again!"

But it was a month before the three, once more normal in size, reached the Andean village that was their first destination. The sight of human beings, no longer gigantic, was warmly reassuring. Indians leaned against the huts, scratching lazily for fleas, Peering down the archway along the street, a ragged Bill Stockton turned to grin at Mary.

"Looks good, eh?"

Baker was absorbed in thought. "We've got to decide," he said, scratching his stubbled chin. "One way, we get our pictures in the paper and tanks of free pulqua But it's just as likely we'll end up in a padded cell if we tell the truth. If we don't tell the truth—" He paused, stiffening. A mangy cat had appeared from beyond the arch.

Baker's muscles tensed; his breath burst out in an explosive "Scat!"

as he sprang forward.

The cat vanished, shocked to the core.

Baker's chest inflated several inches. "Well," he said, with the quiet pride of achievement, "did either of you see that?"

"No," murmured Stockton, who was seizing the opportunity to kiss Mary.

"Go away. Quietly. And quickly."

Baker shrugged and followed the cat, a predatory gleam in his eye.